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Blackboard Unions

The AFT and the NEA, 1900–1980

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Iron Curtain in the Classroom

Shaken a bit by the turmoil over the ouster of the Communists, AFT leaders looked to the coming years as a time when the union could heal itself, while the war swept up the interests and enthusiasms of teachers everywhere. The postwar decades were marked by an important transformation of the union: from an emphasis on political pronouncements to a more pragmatic and collective-bargaining-oriented trade unionism. The AFT would build its strength to challenge the autocracy of the old superintendency that Margaret Haley had decried. In the NEA the conservative leadership of the Department of Superintendents continued to prevail, although the association would adopt a more activist response to attacks on academic freedom. Neither the AFT nor the NEA could focus on teachers' needs for long, however, as the red scare hit teachers with a force that had not been seen even in the frightening aftermath of World War I.

For most of the postwar era the schools faced a crisis of rapid population growth that overfilled classrooms, opened split sessions, doubled enrollments, and strained every school budget. Efforts to expand the educational budget, however, seemed to provoke an unprecedented negative response from real-estate interests and antitax organizations. This response was soon subsumed in an attack focused on fears of subversion in the classroom. Indeed, the red hunt dampened the teachers' ability to mobilize the community behind educational needs.

Both the NEA and the AFT were keenly aware of the growing crisis in education. During the immediate postwar period both organizations monitored the rising needs of educators while each organization pursued its own organizational agenda. For the AFT the most important issue was to recover a national image of educational responsibility in the wake of its "radical" past. The NEA on the other hand seemed to grow more concerned with teachers' rights while it groped toward a national program of federal funding.

The two organizations shared common interests but did not work together and often wound up frustrating each others efforts.

Shortages and Fiscal Nightmares: The Impact of the War

The first years after the expulsion of the three locals in the AFT were marked by terrific growth in membership, generating a new optimism.¹ Wartime AFT conventions reflected George Counts's analysis that without the threat of communism from within, the AFT could now flourish as the maturing liberal leader of democracy in the postwar years. Counts followed his triumph in the AFT by helping to establish the Liberal party in New York State. Lillian Hernstein, John Fewkes, and Paul Douglas, prominent AFT activists, left the union to assume important wartime posts. Eager to claim a leadership role in postwar reconstruction, the union organized a Commission on Reconstruction, which prominently featured Floyd Reeves, Roosevelt's own choice to head his Educational Advisory Committee in 1937. Perhaps overly conscious of the NEA's role in reconstruction planning after World War I, union leaders hoped to proclaim their own reconstruction policy and thereby usurp the traditional NEA role.

For the NEA the same years marked an era of wartime activity and a renewed push for federal funding. This was a period of wartime prosperity, of moves toward national child care, and of widely expressed concerns that the war might tear the family apart. In these circumstances, the prospects for federal aid to schools seemed promising. Executive Secretary William Givens also hoped the NEA's National Commission for the Defense of Democracy would give the association the same prestige that George Strayer had earned as head of the NEA's Emergency Commission on Education during World War I. In 1942 the NEA held a conference with the National Association of Manufacturers to alert businessmen to the teacher shortage. The Roosevelt administration remained cool to federal aid. The NEA noted that with the demise of the NYA and the WPA the federal government was spending less on education. The \$310 million spent by the federal government in 1942-43 went to war-training programs at the U.S. Military Academy, to agricultural extension schools, and to the traditional programs of vocational education.² Chester Bowles even advised as a wartime measure the temporary closing of schools to save oil.³

Eager to prove its ability to influence educational policy, the AFT announced a federal bill that differed little from the NEA's proposals. The

1. Kuenzli to Counts, 6 November 1947, AFT Collection, Series 3, Box 2; Executive Minutes, 11 April 1943, AFT Collection, Series 3.

2. National Commission for the Defense of Democracy through Education, *Defense Bulletin*, December 1941-47.

3. *Defense Bulletin*, 15 May 1944.

union bill required more money—\$300 million in the first year, with more to follow—and it earmarked some of the funds for upgrading teachers' salaries. It also hit at the problems of discrimination, carefully picking through the minefield of states' rights, segregation, and separation of church and state. Leaning heavily on the prestige of Floyd Reeves and the Commission on Reconstruction, the union worked for months to unveil its new proposal.

The NEA had its own bill addressing the shortage of teachers, substandard salaries in rural areas, functional illiteracy, and educational inequality. But again the NEA funding proposal would distribute funds through the states and would not fund private education. At first the AFT worked with the NEA and various Catholic organizations to organize a compromise bill. Then in February 1943, just as the AFT was about to present its version of federal aid to the Congress, the American Federation of Labor intervened and wrote a clause into the bill providing that federal money be distributed to all children, including parochial school students. The AFL's insistence on this clause instantly destroyed any possibility for the bill's passage. The old NEA compromise on this issue had been to let each state distribute its federal grant on the basis of its own laws. Heavily Catholic states that provided state funds to religious schools could do so. The AFL insistence on its platform pulled the rug out from under AFT leadership on the education bill. NEA leaders condemned Selma Borchardt for the failure of the bill, to which the AFT lobbyist replied that the NEA was just trying to get funds for school superintendents and segregated states. Even though the union tried the same bill again in 1945, it had no chance of passing Congress.⁴

Married Teachers and the Protection of Teachers' Rights

The war years saw more systematic attempts, especially by the NEA, to codify and defend the rights of teachers. Often the particular issue at stake was an effort by school authorities to prohibit married women, even those with tenure, from continuing in their jobs. Although the question of married women teaching had been a point of contention between young women teachers and school boards since the Progressive era, the dismissal of married women grew rampant during the depression. Frances Donovan found in a 1930 study that nearly one-third of large cities had laws prohibiting marriage for women teachers. "Since the depression," Donovan wrote, "largely for economic reasons, the trend has been against the employment of married women teachers, and many young schoolma'ams have refused to consider marriage for this reason." Many unmarried schoolteachers had to support relatives, especially widowed mothers; this Donovan added, encour-

4. Gilbert E. Smith, *The Limits of Reform: Politics and Federal Aid to Education, 1937-1950* (New York, 1982), pp. 125-65; *Defense Bulletin*, 15 May 1943.

aged spinsterhood. "The unmarried school ma'am is also expected to help out in all financial crisis that threatens the solidarity of the family," Donovan reported. Spinster teachers repaid their own education by helping younger brothers, sisters, nieces, nephews, and even cousins. The depression intensified the fiscal burdens of the unmarried schoolteacher. "The unemployed relatives of the unmarried schoolma'am frequently needed aid. Many teachers lost their savings in banks that closed." Even when the deteriorating economic climate failed to keep a teacher from marrying, new school rules appeared to keep school teaching a spinster's profession.⁵

Married women schoolteachers faced a new campaign to eliminate them just as the AFT crisis was heating up in 1938. A survey made that year indicated that of eighty-five cities 60 per cent had a policy—usually an unwritten one—against hiring and keeping married women. By 1939 at least thirteen states had ruled restrictions on marriage unlawful, but most often only tenured teachers came under protection; probationary teachers and prospective teachers had none. The 1938 ballot in Massachusetts carried a measure prohibiting married women in public service altogether, but before a law could pass, state supreme court justices ruled in 1939 that such a statute would deprive women as citizens of their constitutional guarantees.

Although both the NEA and the AFT had convention resolutions decrying the situation, it was the NEA, using the vast resources of its research division, that began to compile systematic coverage of the issue. The NEA Committee on Tenure had long been devoted to strengthening professionalism through the introduction of tenure laws, and state associations had been active, along with AFT local leaders, in sponsoring tenure bills in state legislatures. The first challenge to these bills came in the form of the dismissal of married women schoolteachers. The NEA limited its response, however, to issuing a report in 1940 from the Committee on Tenure. Citing several studies of married women workers, the committee concluded: "Married women who work are not doing anything new. They are making the same contribution to the real income of their families that they have made for centuries." Women were not taking men's jobs, the report noted, especially in view of the way industrialization had taken so much of women's work out of the home and given it to men. Working wives also created jobs for other women by hiring household help. Married women in other countries, with the exception of Hitler's Germany, were being encouraged to enter the work force. Finally the committee concluded, "If higher education necessarily involves celibacy or sterility, the seriousness of the situation for society cannot be exaggerated." The report list eight recommendations from the U.S. Women's Bureau that would strengthen the hand of the married working women, but the report carefully added that these incentives were not endorsed by the committee or by the NEA.⁶

5. *Defense Bulletin*, 30 October 1944, 19 February 1945, 16 April 1946, 11 March 1947.

6. *Defense Bulletin*, 31 January 1950; also Publications of the Committee on Tenure and Academic Freedom, 1911-49, vol. 1.

Another flurry of court cases followed the NEA report. In two Illinois cases courts upheld the dismissal of married teachers, but in Pennsylvania and Ohio the State Supreme Court protected the teachers. In December 1941 the newly created NEA National Commission for the Defense of Democracy began to take a more activist approach in teacher tenure cases. Announcing victories for married women teachers in a number of instances, the editor of the *NEA News Bulletin*, Donald DuShane, urged state associations to strengthen tenure laws by defending teachers in these cases.

The push against married women teachers slackened considerably during the war because of a growing teacher shortage as wartime demands attracted talented prospective teachers into more lucrative fields. DuShane's commitment to strengthening teacher tenure did not abate. Two reports on teacher conditions provided ammunition for his activist approach. In an analysis of school-board rules, published in 1938, the Committee on Tenure identified the main causes of teacher dismissal. Fourth in importance among these were marriage regulations for women teachers. Other infringements on teachers' personal lives included prohibitions on participating in electoral campaigns, engaging in politics at school, becoming a candidate, displaying a flag other than the American flag, giving interviews, incurring debts, attending parents' meetings, contacting parents without permission, tutoring for compensation, and taking more than six units of credit a semester. In the second report, issued in 1945, DuShane studied teacher oaths and found that teachers were asked not only to support the U.S. Constitution but to "discharge faithfully their duties," swear allegiance to the state constitution, the American flag, the state flag, law and order, the government, and all American institutions. In Georgia and Texas teachers took an oath promising to refrain from directly or indirectly teaching theories of government, economics, or social relations inconsistent with Americanism. DuShane became most active in the defense case of Kate Frank, a Muskogee, Oklahoma, high school teacher who was dismissed from her job, along with two other teachers, in 1944 because of her activities in the NEA's Department of Classroom Teachers. In less than three months, DuShane collected \$3,786.40 in voluntary contributions for Frank's case. Overwhelmed by the war chest and the NEA's challenge, the Muskogee Board of Education reinstated Frank in the fall of 1945. The war chest was then turned into a permanent fund for the defense of public school teachers and was named for Donald DuShane after his untimely death in 1945.⁷

The Baby Boom and the Financial Pinch

The baby boom was not so much a subject for academic discussion in the educational trade journals as it was an annual surprise, sending school

7. *Defense Bulletin*, 31 January 1950.

principals scurrying for more chairs while they sought to placate increasingly irate teachers. Demographers had casually predicted a small increase in population after the war and were unprepared for the millions who followed. In 1947 the number of children entering kindergarten had jumped 10 percent, and class size in elementary school edged upward from a low of 33.4 in the depression to 36.4. By the 1951–52 academic year schools braced for the baby-boom cohort that would expand elementary school enrollment by two-thirds in the decades from 1950 to 1970; class size rose to levels not been seen since the Progressive Era. The entering cohort of children born in 1946–47 was 38 percent larger than the cohort before it and brought with it into the elementary schools overcrowded classes, split sessions, and a boom in school construction. In the fifties, California opened one new school a week. With every sharp rise in the baby boom, the schools faced a new challenge of expansion and overcrowded classes. Education had become, as President Truman's new commissioner of education announced, "big business."⁸

The scarcity of teachers started in the war but continued throughout the fifties. The age cohort from which new teachers would have come in the late forties was an unusually small one; college enrollment would have shrunk in the early forties even without the war. Most colleges served the military in some capacity during the war just to stay afloat. The consequent scarcity of teachers helped drive up salaries, but a wartime salary increase of 11 percent was not enough to offset a 25 percent increase in the cost of living. Teachers could earn more money working in wartime factories than they could teaching school. In 1941 the average annual wage of a steelworker was \$1,580 a year and the average annual salary of a teacher was \$1,454. Many teachers switched to other occupations, and only a few returned to education after the war. Although salaries for teachers rose after the war, they did not rise fast enough to attract new teachers.⁹

In 1947 the NEA took the initiative in federal funding away from the AFT and managed to gain the surprise support of former federal-aid-opponent Robert Taft. (The Ohio senator was preparing his bid for the 1948 presidential race.) This time, however, the religious issue heated up, in part because of a Supreme Court ruling that affirmed the power of states to give aid to Catholic schools for the costs of busing children. As a consequence, the NEA moved more in the direction of restricting public aid to public schools only, while Catholic lobbyists held tightly to the commitment of the AFL to give support for all children. Torn by loyalty to the AFL and dedication to the ideal of separate public schools, teachers in the AFT fought bitterly at their 1947 convention: they decided at one point to insist that aid be limited to

8. Landon Y. Jones, *Great Expectations: America and the Babyboom Generation* (New York, 1980), pp. 57–58.

9. Floyd Reeves, "Commission on Reconstruction," *American Teacher*, 32 (December 1948); Irvin R. Kuenzli, "Company Unions and the School Crisis," *American Federationist*, 54 (February 1947), pp. 10–12; Joseph F. Landis, "The AFT Today," *American Teacher*, 32 (October 1948).

public schools, only to reverse themselves and stick with the AFL line. Federal aid became a political football before the 1948 election. Taft tried to seize the initiative from Truman, while Catholic pressure groups, alienated by Truman's leadership and yet unwilling to cross into the Republican fold, seized on the time-honored issue of communism in the public schools. It is not surprising that teachers failed to get a bill through the cost-conscious Congress of 1948, and by 1949 the chances for federal aid were even further reduced by the NAACP's demand that no bill get through Congress without an antisegregation rider. The New Deal was over, Truman's effort to launch his own Fair Deal had failed, and educators were still unable to overcome the original objections to federal aid for education. "The Congress will not enact any bills to provide general federal aid for education," Selma Borhardt announced in 1951. "In fact, we can now say that no Congress for some time to come will enact any bills to provide general federal aid for education."¹⁰

The fiscal problems of education continued unabated after the New Deal and the war. Cities and towns had grown more reliant on state aid to keep their schools afloat. Between 1932 and 1947, the states' share of total school funding went from 19.5 percent to 41 percent. Even so, in order to keep pace with the new generation of Americans in the baby boom, teachers had to campaign annually for local school bonds. At the federal level, as Washington grew more conservative and tax conscious, aid proposals went nowhere until the Soviet Union startled the world by launching the first space satellite, *Sputnik*, in 1957. Flooded with students and starved for funds, it is little wonder that, beginning in the immediate aftermath of the war, teachers grew more frustrated and militantly demanded higher wages.¹¹

Although the NEA's efforts to achieve federal aid were futile, they touched off a reaction that set the association back even further. The National Tax Conference and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce launched an offensive against the NEA's 1943 funding bill and set in motion a half dozen more radical antitax organizations. One of these, the Friends of Public Education, was headed by Major General Amos A. Fries, who charged that the NEA was "completely dominated by communists and fellow travelers." Shaken by the charge, the NEA responded by saying it had a provision in its bylaws prohibiting membership by "any person who favors revolutionary changes in our form of government." But the antitax lobby hailed General Fries's views and used him as a lobbyist against the NEA. He called the NEA a "less extreme group" than the AFT but still an organization of radical propagandists advocating "pure socialism." The famous red hunter Allen Zoll condemned the AFT wholeheartedly but joined in Fries's attack on the NEA, sending letters to American mayors warning them in 1949 about the red

10. *American Teacher*, 36 (October 1951).

11. Smith, *Limits of Reform*, pp. 125–88; Jones, *Great Expectations*, pp. 60–67; *School and Society*, 63:1620 (12 January 1946), p. 22.

teachers' organizations. The NEA *Defense Bulletin* noted with dismay that it had to retain a lawyer to protect the teachers' rights of association while it pursued a 1948 bill to increase federal aid to education. It was no coincidence that the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) began investigating education in 1948 just one month before Congress began considering the NEA's funding bill. One reactionary journal made the connection between the NEA's press for federal educational funding and the growing intensity of the red scare: "We tire of the collectivist plotting of economic planners of the fair deal." The first rumblings of the McCarthy era came with a fiscal crisis that would grow geometrically in the coming years.¹²

The immediate postwar years also made it clear that the AFL would feel the heat of political reaction. The union's Commission on Reconstruction prophetically announced, "The real choice is between American imperialism and militarism, versus a program of international cooperation." On the domestic front, the commission declared, "We shall not have peace within our own country unless we can bridge this gulf of color, and get rid of long standing discrimination and prejudices."¹³ It appeared that the union, armed with this sober and remarkably insightful analysis, would cut a distinctively progressive path in the mire of cold war politics. The absence of reflection on the possibilities of a red scare and its impact on the union illustrates perfectly how McCarthyism hit the union on its blind side and steered it off its already compromised progressive course. Despite the ritualistic cleansing of the union and the fanfare of its welcome back into the fold, the teachers could not avoid the smear of the postwar red hunt.

Teachers' Strikes and Militancy

As the fiscal crisis in education deepened, schoolteachers took matters into their own hands. A series of teacher strikes between the fall of 1945 and the late spring of 1948 set the stage for the red scare in education. Given the gloom of the economic picture and the effects of deflation and overcrowding, it is not difficult to imagine why teachers took to picket lines after months of fruitless negotiations. The mass demonstrations of the thirties had helped teachers to become more articulate as a collective of interests. They could also see the greater gains being made by blue-collar unions. Between 1939 and 1946 the average industrial worker's income rose 80 percent in real dollars, while the average teacher's income fell 20 percent.¹⁴

12. *Defense Bulletin*, 4 September 1946, p. 16.

13. AFT Commission on Reconstruction; Office of Education, *Biennial Survey of Education in the United States, 1946-1948* (Washington, D.C., 1950), p. 41; *American Teacher*, 31 (October 1946).

14. Emery M. Forster, in *Biennial Survey of Education* (1941), pp. 38-124; (1955), pp. 13-21; (1946-48), chap. 1.

An NEA-led strike in Norwalk, Connecticut, was the first and most dramatic because of its success. Teachers in this union town walked out in the fall of 1946 and did not return until they were guaranteed a pay raise and recognition. Although the NEA *Defense Bulletin* denied that this was a strike, the eight-day walkout inspired other small, NEA-affiliated organizations to strike for higher wages. The NEA called these work stoppages "professional group action by professional methods," and tried unsuccessfully to hold the line against strikes in Hawthorne, New Jersey, and McMinnville and Shelbyville, Tennessee. Small, unaffiliated groups of teachers also struck in Wilkes-Barre and Rankin, Pennsylvania. The NEA warned members that they had taken an oath of ethical standards as association members that required them to honor their contracts.¹⁵

St. Paul teachers in the AFT had a very strong local, years of experience in coping with the Board of Education, and a very specific, public goal in their strike in November 1946. A tax increase, needed to raise teachers' salaries, had lost at the polls in July by a three-to-one margin. They struck for five weeks until reaching an agreement with the board on 1 January 1947 that insured another referendum in February. Furthermore, they were able to negotiate a provision that if a substitute teacher could not be found (a problem in every school district short of teachers), the principal would send the children home from school rather than pack the classrooms of other teachers. This was an important win because it brought the problem of the teacher shortage and classroom overcrowding home to the parents who were turning down tax increases. The teachers lost again in February, but much more narrowly, and a third vote in April won them their pay raise. But the NEA condemned the union teachers, calling their five-week walkout a failure and insisting that the whole affair "confirms the NEA's position that strikes are ineffective."¹⁶

The St. Paul example certainly helped teachers in Minneapolis, whose strike in May 1948 ended after only a few days when the board tried to literally lock them out and shorten the school year. Minneapolis teachers won raises, as did militant teachers in San Francisco, Jersey City, and Chicago. Teachers in Chicago took their strike vote in the face of the recent AFT convention position upholding the concept of a national no-strike policy. Nevertheless the teachers voted to strike and won concessions before their planned walkout. In Buffalo, twenty-four hundred teachers walked a picket line closing all but nineteen of the district's ninety-eight schools. Most

15. *Defense Bulletin*, 4 September 1946, p. 2.

16. "The St. Paul Story," *American Teacher*, 31 (February 1947), pp. 8-9; "The St. Paul Strike," *American School Board Journal*, 88 (January 1947), p. 62; "Struck Buffalo," *Newsweek*, 3 March 1947, p. 22; "Teachers Strike," *Newsweek*, 8 March 1948, p. 80; "Teacher Strikes," *School and Society*, 65 (19 April 1947), p. 277; "A Teachers' Strike," *American School Board Journal*, 113 (October 1946), p. 54; Maurice L. Hartung, "Strikes by Teachers," *School Review*, 54 (December 1946), pp. 563-66.

of the strikes were one-day affairs although strikes lasted as long as six weeks. The majority of the strikers were teachers, but in some districts students walked out with their teachers, and in McMinnville bus drivers and teachers walked out together. By the winter of 1947, teachers had gone on strike in twelve states.¹⁷

Most of the strikes had a result that the strikers never intended: state legislatures retaliated with strict antistrike laws for public employees. New York and Delaware were the most vindictive. New York passed the Condon-Waldin Act forbidding strikes after Buffalo teachers struck. At the same time Senator Feinberg led in passing legislation to raise teachers' salaries and thereby hold off any further militant teacher activity. In Delaware, after a half-day strike and march to the state capital for a raise, Delaware teachers were met by a bill calling for a five-hundred-dollar fine and a year's imprisonment for striking public workers.¹⁸

In the AFT the strike fever was so widespread that the annual convention in 1947 passed a resolution calling for a full discussion on changing the union's no-strike policy. The *American Teacher* carried a debate on the issue. The union was not yet ready to change its policy, but unions like the St. Paul local were given quiet financial help to defray expenses from the strikes. Meanwhile growing militancy among rank-and-file teachers nationwide forced school districts to grant pay raises that pushed teachers' wages up by 13 percent in one year, from 1947 to 1948.¹⁹

The Red Scare in New York

As teachers kept the heat on for pay increases, tax-conscious organizations and the old patriotic coalitions pressured state legislatures for less rewarding remedies to teacher demands. In discussions of teacher militancy in state legislatures the issues of teacher loyalty were again raised and reexamined. Generally, teacher oaths were revised and directives to school boards outlined methods for ousting subversives from schools. By far the most compelling of these statutes was the Feinberg Law, passed in New York in 1949.²⁰

While the rising militancy of teachers and public employees often instigated legislative reaction, the strikes were not solely responsible for the first skirmishes in the red scare that followed. As the cold war deepened, politicians were finding that the search for an internal "fifth column" could be glamorous and popular. It also posed serious dangers for anyone who sided

17. *American Teacher*, 31 (December 1946); *Defense Bulletin*, 3 March 1947, p. 5.

18. *Defense Bulletin*, March 1947, pp. 5-9.

19. *American Teacher*, 31 (December 1946), 31 March, April, and May 1947.

20. Leon Bock, *The Control of Alleged Subversive Activities in the Public School System of New York, 1949-1956* (New York, 1971), p. 46; NYT, 4 April 1949.

with "Communists." In New York City the stormy history of Local 5, targeted in the Rapp-Coudert hearings and expelled from the AFT in 1940, was an issue ready to be exploited. Local 5, now renamed the Teachers' Union, was still a major presence in the schools. Moreover, despite its expulsion, its fortunes would remain tied to the AFT: no matter how explicit the AFT was about its past, to the broader public it was the "teachers' union" that had been nailed as a Communist union, and many conveniently chose not to make the distinctions the AFT would have them make.²¹

Old Local 5 was an affiliate of the CIO when it came to the attention of the House Committee on Education and Labor in the summer of 1948. The Teachers' Union, Local 555 of the United Public Workers, CIO, was conducting a strike against the Radio Electronics School, a small, private, technical training school that had grown out of GI benefits. School director Robert Duncan refused to negotiate with the strikers, arguing that they were Communists defrauding the federal government. The strike was settled in November after the school's board of directors removed the flamboyant Duncan from his position. In the meantime, however, the congressional investigation of Local 555 had begun in earnest in September. It headed immediately and unimaginatively into the old Rapp-Coudert material.²²

Witnesses could provide little in the way of new revelations, yet the hearings introduced three significant characteristics that would stick with the teachers in the next decade of the red scare. The committee called on the New York superintendent of schools, William Jansen, and board member George Timone for their estimation of the Teachers' Union. This was the first time local school authorities appeared before a national investigatory committee of this nature, providing a rehearsal for more dramatic appearances in the early fifties. Second, this was the first time the grievances between factions in the Teachers' Union would be nationally aired. Although Linville had testified at a Martin Dies hearing and the entire story was rehashed thoroughly in New York, it had never been publicly detailed outside the union halls. Finally, it was the first hearing faced by the Teachers' Union without the benefits of Bella Dodd's legal skill. After leaving the Teachers' Union in 1943 as legislative representative, she had risen in the ranks of the Communist party and become a chief proponent of Earl Browder, the party secretary until 1945. Because of Browder's predictions of a peaceful coexistence between Communist and capitalist nations after the war, he became the object of a purge and would be ousted along with many of his supporters,

21. The general studies are Robert W. Iversen, *The Communists and the Schools* (New York, 1959); David Caute, *The Great Fear* (New York, 1978); and Victor Navasky, *Naming Names* (New York, 1980). The best study of McCarthyism in higher education is Ellen Schrecker, *No Ivory Tower: McCarthyism and the Universities* (New York, 1986).

22. U.S. Congress, Hearings before a Special Subcommittee of the Committee on Education and Labor, House of Representatives, 80th Cong. (Washington, D.C., 1948); Teachers' Union Collection, 10/1, Cornell University; Rosalind Russell to Editor, *New York Sun*, 15 December 1948; *Journal American*, 14 September 1948.

including Dodd, in 1949. The alienated Dodd was still nominally in the party in the first of her national appearances; later she would turn on teachers and give names that were used in a city-wide investigation. Disaffected, she had not yet in 1949 defected from the movement. Her appearance later became a fixture of red hunting in the schools.²³

There was another twist to the hearings that freshened the immediacy of a dramatic retelling of the Teachers' Union story, further nailed the coffin lid for the union, and paved the way for charges that Communist teachers were subverting innocent students in the classroom. Abraham Lefkowitz, Dodd's nemesis and old crony of Linville, had become principal of a high school in which a very political member of the Teachers' Union taught history classes. The head of the history department wrote consistently critical evaluations of the clearly left-thinking teacher, to which the teacher wrote long, elaborate defenses. Lefkowitz became involved when he was attacked, along with his supervisor, in a left publication. Not one to walk away from a dogfight, Lefkowitz published his own defense and his attack on the teacher, providing further fuel for the controversy and ensuring that the issue would come before the superintendent of schools and the Board of Education. The situation added to the tension of the Washington hearings where Lefkowitz, no doubt still feeling that he was under attack by the Communists in his own local, painfully led the committee through the entire history of the AFT, Teachers' Union Local 5, and the Communist party.²⁴

The defense of the teachers in the Teachers' Union proved astonishingly inept compared with Bella Dodd's well-orchestrated defense before the Rapp-Coudert Committee.²⁵ Local president Samuel Wallach responded to Lefkowitz by merely dismissing him: "I want to point out with regard to Dr. Lefkowitz, that he is a pathological opponent."²⁶ However true that may have become, it hardly explained why the committee should not listen to his testimony. Bella Dodd had done much better on that issue, pointing out the jealousy Lefkowitz expressed when she took over his position as legislative representative for the union and that he had done everything in his power to discredit her in Albany. But this time Dodd's replacement, Rose Russell, had the enthusiasm but not the skill to turn Lefkowitz's damaging testimony around.²⁷

The House hearing served the threefold purpose of drawing CIO attention to its affiliate, the United Public Workers (UPW), of testing the propaganda possibilities of looking for Communist party activists in public schools, and, finally, of opening up *both* the Teachers' Union and the anticommunist AFT Teachers' Guild (Local 2) to further action by the Board of Education. The

23. Hearings, pp. 358–61; Teachers' Union Collection, Box 38, Folder 13.

24. Hearings, pp. 107–19; Teachers' Union Collection, 38/13.

25. Hearings, pp. 385–408.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 329.

27. *Ibid.*

CIO was the first to act. At the November 1948 CIO convention, President Philip Murray began an effort to purge the left-led United Public Workers, the parent union of Local 555 the CIO/UPW Teachers' Union. Finally on 9 January 1950 the UPW was formally tried and condemned by an investigating committee of the CIO, which charged that the union was "consistently directed toward the achievement of the program or purposes of the Communist Party rather than the objectives and policies set forth in the constitution of the CIO."²⁸ Cut loose from the CIO, the Teachers' Union faced the effects of the Feinberg Law in the first round of red-scare firings three months later.

The Feinberg Law stated that "despite existence of statutes to prevent it," members of "subversive groups, and particularly the Communist Party and of its affiliated organizations, have infiltrated into public employment in the public schools of the state." Aimed at New York City and members of the Communist party there, the law specified that the superintendent of schools should not merely impose a loyalty oath but actively seek out Communists and report the results of his investigation to the Board of Regents.²⁹

Superintendent Jansen, like many of his contemporaries in other cities, was under public pressure. In March 1950 a Committee to Rid the Schools of Communists met at the Waldorf-Astoria to proclaim loudly its concern that the superintendent had not yet moved on any teachers. But the committee needn't have bothered: Jansen was well prepared to act against the Teachers' Union. In April he called the members of the union's Executive Board to his office. He told them that he strongly suspected they were members of the Communist party, and he wanted to have them attest to their loyalty. Teachers were given only a few days to reply and were denied counsel at their meetings; although wire recordings of the testimony were made, the teachers had no access to these recordings.

Uniformly, all eight teachers refused to cooperate. They pointed to the fact that the Feinberg Law was being tested in the courts, they argued that they would say nothing without legal counsel, and they demanded open hearings. Because they refused to cooperate with the superintendent they were fired in May. Although their cases were tried individually the following fall, they were permanently dismissed from New York schools in February 1951—while the Feinberg Law was still being tested in the courts and while the red scare was heating up. It was a dramatic beginning.³⁰

The eight teachers—Alice Citron, Louis Jaffe, Celia Zitron, Abraham Feingold, Abraham Lederman, Mark Frielander, Isidore Rubin, and David Friedman—provided a stark lesson to the rest of the teaching force. This was especially true of Abraham Lederman, who had been well known in union circles since he joined the local in 1932. An award-winning mathematics

28. Bock, *Subversive Activities*, p. 155; *American Teacher*, 33 (February 1949).

29. Bock, *Subversive Activities*, pp. 136–38.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 138.

teacher who had devised special teaching programs for teachers in the whole system, Lederman was highly regarded in old AFT circles and maintained contact with AFT Local 2 people despite his ouster. His old district superintendent testified as a character witness. His lawyers presented glowing recommendations from supervisors and parents as well.

Others, like Celia Zitron, had been active in the Harlem schools in the thirties and forties and had organized strong parental support for her efforts on behalf of black children. Obviously a Communist activist, Zitron argued that her political views were quite beside the point: she wished to be judged on her conduct as a teacher. Newspaper articles in the *Teachers' News* pointed insistently to the teachers' school record while the superintendent of schools hammered at Communist party affiliation and the formal charge of "conduct unbecoming a teacher." For their refusal to cooperate with the superintendent, the teachers were dismissed. Other less well-known activists in the union could only wait for their summons to the superintendent's office.³¹

The work of Communist teachers in Harlem and Bedford-Stuyvesant was well known in the city. The projects in both areas seemed designed to bridge the growing gap between professionalism and community interests. Reaching out to the parents of disadvantaged children, these Communist organizers hoped to radicalize progressive education and make the classroom a vehicle for social change. In the thirties the strategy had worked well, as a special chemistry of interests fused the Communist teachers with community groups. But after the war the coalition began to fall apart and the teachers grew increasingly isolated. In part some of this was due to the split in the AFT, with Counts's supporter Layle Lane taking an active role in discrediting the Communist teachers in Harlem. Beyond that, progressive education itself had less appeal in the black community. Just as the NAACP had to abandon its coalition politics behind federal funding, black parents looked beyond the promise of progressive education to racial integration as a solution to quality education.³²

This is not to say that everyone in the black community abandoned the Teachers' Union and its leaders. Indeed, Langston Hughes continued to work with the union to promote black history programs, and when the union teachers were dismissed a storm of protest arose from the community. But the Communist party strategy had been to seek protection in the community from external attacks without recognizing that centralization had long ago destroyed the community's power to protect its interests in teacher selection and retention. Only the union, and the procedures sanctioned by professionalization, could protect teacher interests—and these were sadly weakened by the persistent attack from the right, which connected teachers with

31. *NYT*, 4–20 May 1950; Bock, *Subversive Activities*, p. 157.

32. Mark Naison, *Communists in Harlem during the Depression* (New York, 1983), pp. 309–14.

progressive education and communism without regard to the distinctions within the educational community.³³

Success in the first move to remove Communist teachers brought more publicity and prompted new national investigations of teachers. A subcommittee of the McCarran Senate Internal Security Committee blew into New York City, taking testimony in the summer and fall of 1951, and again in the spring of 1952. In that same summer, Jansen hired Saul Moskoff to head his investigation, and at that point the hunt took on a new professional look. Each new congressional investigation—the Jenner Committee, a subcommittee of the Senate Internal Security Committee, which arrived in March 1953, the Velde Committee, the House Un-American Activities Committee, which met in April 1954, and so on—invoked a new list of names to be added to Moskoff's file of investigations. Moskoff collected all the lists he could find, from Communist party nominating petitions to license-plate numbers of cars observed at rallies for the Rosenbergs, and he looked for teachers' names.³⁴

Charges under the Feinberg Law could not be made until 30 September 1955 because the regents had to draw up a list of subversive organizations. In the meantime, however, teachers could be dismissed for falsification of their oaths, for insubordination, for "conduct unbecoming a teacher" (a relic of World War I once contested by Henry Linville), or for refusing to answer questions.

Teachers seemed to understand before coming into the questioning that Teachers' Guild membership was a good sign and that Teachers' Union membership was the kiss of death. In one case a teacher admitted to being at Communist party meetings, but when asked if he could demonstrate that he was no longer a member, he volunteered that "I am not a member of a certain organization in the teaching field believe me I am not a member."³⁵ When the teacher mentioned he was a member of the NEA and the Jewish Teachers' Association, his inquisitor admitted, "Well, that is to your credit."³⁶ One teacher who admitted to past Teachers' Union membership offered that he was now only a member of the NEA and the High School Teachers' Association. Apparently afraid that the superintendent might read his transcript, he quickly added that he was not actually a member of the High School Teachers' Association (HSTA) because he disagreed with them on the issue of salaries. Although the only evidence that Moskoff had on this teacher was his name on a Communist party petition and past Teachers' Union member-

33. Interview with Mildred and David Flacks, summer 1988; see also the correspondence of Rosalind Russell, Teachers' Union Collection, Box 38.

34. Bock, *Subversive Activities*, p. 149.

35. "Hearings and Associated Materials," no. 807, Individual Files, Board of Education Archives, IVE8d, Special Collections, Millbank Library, Columbia University.

36. *Ibid.*

ship, the teacher still felt it necessary to dissociate himself from anything that would even seem militant to school authorities.³⁷

Shortly after fingering the leaders of the Teachers' Union as Communists, the board announced that it would not negotiate with the union, would not allow the union to have meetings in public schools, and would treat the union as an organization "directed towards the achievement of the program of the Communist Party."³⁸ The Teachers' Union spent the next twelve years devoting itself to defending the legal rights of its members and pursuing legal remedies for teachers caught in the red dragnet.

For the teachers associated with the union, the impact was felt immediately. Teaching merit was never a consideration in their hearings. Only through cooperation with Moskoff, a full "confession," and (after 1955) the naming of other names, could teachers save their jobs.³⁹ Many teachers resigned before their hearings; others simply never appeared in the school district again. As Teachers' Union lawyer Harold Cammer reported: "Moskoff destroyed the lives of hundreds of teachers. These were people well along in years and careers. Many became menial salesmen, burdens on friends and families, moving about like beggars. Some were totally shattered. And they had all been good teachers, some great."⁴⁰ One teacher objected to the publicity given in her case; she reported that "the most horrible rumors became rampant in the neighborhood of my former school; some even saying I was pulled out of school by the FBI and I was now in prison."⁴¹ When she tried to meet with students and parents to explain herself, she was forbidden to do so by her school principal. David Flacks spoke bitterly of the irony that he had planned a class trip to see the Statue of Liberty when he was unceremoniously pulled out of classroom teaching.

Old Teachers' Union members took a certain pride in their role during the red scare. Cecil Yampolsky wrote, "When a nation bent its head in fear, the Union grew in courage."⁴² Much later, in 1967, after the investigations had wrought their damage to teachers, a federal court deemed the entire procedure unconstitutional. Restitution for teachers, however, was slow and far from complete.⁴³

Several aspects of the Feinberg investigations troubled all teachers and stirred memories of the first red scare. Cammer and Teachers' Union presi-

37. "Hearings and Associated Materials," no. 844. The salary issue was a protest against the board's decision in 1949 to go to a single salary schedule and wipe out the pay differential for high school teachers. It was one of the High School Teachers' Association's most popular issues, one that it was now renewing with increasing militancy.

38. Bock, *Subversive Activities*, p. 94.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 86; *NYT*, 24 March 1954.

40. Bock, *Subversive Activities*, p. 149.

41. Correspondence of Rosalind Russell, Teachers' Union Collection, 38/4.

42. Cecil Yampolsky to Rosalind Russell, 6 October 1963, Teachers' Union Collection, 42/1.

43. Lawrence Chamberlain, *Loyalty and Legislative Action: A Survey of Activity by the New York State Legislature, 1919-1949* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1951), p. 192.

dent Rose Russell charged that most of the victims were Jewish whereas charges against Christians were dropped. One board member recalled, however, that "they tried their damndest to get a Catholic but they couldn't pin it on him."⁴⁴ There was a strong connection between board member George Timone, a Catholic board member, and Cardinal Spellman, whose own anticommunist campaign was not devoid of bigotry. The same charges had arisen in 1919 when Henry Linville expressed his suspicion that the victims were all Jewish and union members. Some of the attacks on Jewish teachers were frightening reminders of Nazi hatred. Threatening postcards were mailed to investigated teachers, with the names of family members included in the addresses. Many said that Hitler was right. "Hooked nosed, immoral, money hungry, anti-christian, mongreloid, parasitic leeches and vermin of Delancey Street sewers," said one letter. "Jews don't make good Americans" and "Judas Cow" were other bits of invective. One correspondent said, "First plane for Moskow and Warsaw leaves Monday, hurry hurry, do not miss it as we will not miss you."⁴⁵ The ugliness of the campaign and its insistence on connecting communism with Jewish origins became a threat to the entire Jewish community, which remained divided between loyalty to the old Teachers' Union, with its many friends and roots in the Jewish community, and the new Teachers' Guild, which had some important young Jewish leaders.⁴⁶

The conversion of Bella Dodd from Communist agitator to committed Catholic under the tutelage of Bishop Fulton Sheen caused Jewish schoolteachers to wait with great apprehension to see what she would do. Her appearance before the McCarran Committee in New York, in the fall of 1952 and again in the spring of 1953, confirmed their fears. Bella Dodd named over fourteen hundred teachers associated with the union, many of whom were now inside the AFT. Shortly after her revelations George Timone, one of the leading Catholic members of the Board of Education and a staunch anticommunist, insisted that it was not enough that teachers confess their sins of the past and renounce communism. He added that he wanted them to name the names of other teachers. The Teachers' Guild angrily and instantly protested. Charges of anti-Semitism were raised since the hunt would now clearly widen to include most of the teachers who had been in the guild, the membership of which was largely Jewish. Timone and others insisted that the red scare was unrelated: after all, Moskoff was Jewish as were most of the lawyers involved in the Feinberg investigation. The opposition responded by pointing out that these same lawyers worked for predominantly Catholic law firms and that Cardinal Spellman had been in the forefront of the attack on federal aid, even going so far as to attack Eleanor Roosevelt in the process.

44. Bock, *Subversive Activities*, p. 166.

45. Teachers' Union Collection, 21/5.

46. Bock, *Subversive Activities*, p. 161-67.

Others have documented the contribution of a rising Catholic middle class to the intensity of McCarthyism in the fifties. Although the full impact of the religious animosity is difficult to assess, it would be reasonable to suspect that the experience of the red scare helped to bind together the Jewish teachers still in the Teachers' Union. It would seem that the taint of communism could bring with it an American pogrom.⁴⁷

Although the Teachers' Guild opposed the board's policy on investigations and argued that the Feinberg Law was an attack on academic freedom, it refused to work with the Teachers' Union in opposing the investigation.⁴⁸ Abraham Lefkowitz called the Feinberg Law an insult to teachers, yet the New York City Teachers' Guild argued forcefully and successfully at the AFT's national convention in 1954 that any teacher who took the Fifth Amendment "as a cloak to hide membership in the Communist Party" should not be defended by the union.⁴⁹ Charles Cogen, president of the guild in 1954, argued that locals had a right not to defend a teacher who took the Fifth. Nevertheless, the guild protested some violations of due process and denounced Timone's informer policy as reprehensible. The guild also led the Joint Teachers' Organization to oppose the Feinberg Law and complained when the school principals praised it. The fact that the High School Teachers' Association endorsed the Feinberg Law kept the guild and the association from working together on issues of mutual interest until 1959.⁵⁰

The Red Hunt in the Schools

New York City teachers took the brunt of the red scare accusations and endured an ongoing investigation that carried well into the late fifties. But they were not the only teachers targeted in the red hunt. The exact scope of the red scare for teachers is difficult to assess because the charges were local. In many cases teachers could not face the publicity or the tension of investigation and, when called, resigned without defending themselves. The NEA report of 1949 on Tenure and Academic Freedom reported that 38 states had general sedition laws, 21 forbade seditious teaching, 13 disbarred disloyal persons from public teaching, and 25 had loyalty oaths.⁵¹

Probationary teachers were, of course, most vulnerable. Describing the dismissal of a probationary teacher in a Utah high school, Superintendent James Glove explained that he could not prove his charges of communism and atheism, but "I have seen Tremayne running around with Jews and

47. Bella Dodd, *School of Darkness* (New York, 1954).

48. Guild Papers, Robert Wagner Archives, New York University.

49. Bock, *Subversive Activities*, p. 168; Guild Files.

50. Bock, *Subversive Activities*, p. 170; *NYT*, 14 September 1955.

51. NEA, *Report of the Committee on Tenure and Academic Freedom* (Washington, D.C., 1949); Teachers' Union Collection, 9/6.

niggers and he voted for Wallace and that's proof enough for me."⁵² Without tenure rights, probationary teachers were automatically dismissed, many without a hearing.

In Pennsylvania, forty teachers were called to a HUAC hearing in the fall of 1953, and thirty were immediately suspended by Philadelphia superintendent Louis P. Hoyer. Two other teachers were included in Hoyer's list of suspected teachers and dismissed as incompetent. In contrast to the New York law, Pennsylvania had no category specifying conduct unbecoming a teacher. Hoyer charged, despite the overall superior ratings of these teachers, that their communism impaired their abilities as teachers. One teacher, Herman A. Beilan, challenged his dismissal under the Fourteenth Amendment and won his case in the state supreme court in June 1958. Most teachers had little recourse. Pennsylvania's Pechan Law of 1952 replaced the earlier loyalty oath and again put more force into what legislators declared was an opportunity to "rid the schools of red and pink minded teachers." The American Legion and Blue Star Mothers expressed the desire to "rid the schools of political zionists."⁵³

In California the state assembly set up the Tenney Committee to investigate subversion in education. Tenney's commitment to anticomunism began in 1940, shortly after his ouster as president of the American Federation of Musicians in Los Angeles. Having joined with Sam Yorty to form the "little Dies" committee of California, Tenney ran the committee from 1941 to 1949. Although Tenney focused mainly on people in higher education, he looked into a case of sex education taught in a Chico, California, high school and later held hearings against two officers of AFT Local 430 in Los Angeles, who were accused of spreading Communist propoganda in the classroom.⁵⁴

In some cases, teacher leaders were joined by school superintendents who refused to let investigations go on. Detroit superintendent Arthur H. Dondineau gave such a response in 1953, after Bella Dodd's McCarran Committee testimony. "I have been watching the situation over the last five years and have seen no indication of nests or cells."⁵⁵ But not all the pronouncements were as brave as these, and mostly they were inconsistent.

It was impossible for the AFT to distance itself from the many local investigations that multiplied in the late forties. In the Los Angeles case, the national AFT offered defense funds for the accused officers, but then turned its wrath on the Los Angeles local. In February 1949, shortly after a

52. Teachers' Union Collection, 3/12.

53. *Ibid.*, 15/1.

54. Laurence D. Shubow to Harold Cammer, 25 November 1953, Teachers' Union Collection, Box 2; Bock, *Subversive Activities*, p. 170; Edward L. Barrett, Jr., *The Tenney Committee: Legislative Investigation of Subversive Activities in California* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1951), pp. 164-67.

55. *American Teacher*, 37 (February 1953), p. 31; see also the Detroit files at the Walter Reuther Archives. Jeffrey Merrill gave me the quotation.

Christmas investigation of Local 430, the AFT Executive Board voted to oust the local on the grounds that it supported other unions in the city that were thought to be associated with the Communist party.⁵⁶ The convention thoroughly debated the new ouster, but the decision was upheld. In a similar investigation, Local 61 of San Francisco also came under scrutiny because of its association with the California Labor School, an organization listed by the Tenney Committee as a Communist front. Local 61 was given a warning. In yet a third west coast case, College Local 401 of the University of Washington had its charter revoked. Each local had members called before an investigatory committee.⁵⁷

The AFT's underlying position on government investigations was expressed by the Commission on Reconstruction in 1948: "The Commission recognizes the right and obligation of our government at this time to take dire steps to assure itself of the loyalty of those engaged in public service, including educators."⁵⁸ In 1952 the AFT committee on Civil and Professional Rights declared that the AFT did not have to defend Communists, only teachers who were loyal to the AFT charter and were trying to clear their names. In 1953 when a debate arose over the justifiable use of the Fifth Amendment, many teachers wanted to allow its use, while Selma Borchardt and representatives from New York Local 2 opposed it. Urging that teachers testify fully, Borchardt successfully moved for the reconsideration of the issue. All agreed, however, that the procedures of the investigatory committees were "manifestly inadequate to protect the rights of witnesses."⁵⁹ As the red scare mounted against all teachers, the union was forced to take a stronger stand against it.

There can be no doubt that the red scare had a demoralizing effect on teachers in both the AFT and the NEA. Both organizations maintained a legal advisor to give general national advice, but the defense of teachers was most often local. Both organizations went out of their way to condemn communism in the schools and Communist teachers. Both organizations also pointed at the same time to the demise of academic freedom and the decline of freedom in the classroom. In a telling 1953 editorial to teachers, Carl Megel wrote about "Another Iron Curtain." He told of how he was watching television in a department-store window; the commentator pointed dramatically at a map and declared, "This is the Iron Curtain." Then Megel glanced down the street at a "screaming headline that read, 'McCarthy To Investigate Teachers.'" The usually conservative AFT president responded, "So it has come to this! If teachers are going to be harassed, if they are going to be stifled and fearful of discussing controversial issues in our schools and colleges, then we, too, will find ourselves behind an Iron Curtain."⁶⁰

56. *American Teacher*, 33 (February 1949).

57. *Ibid.*

58. Reeves, "Commission on Reconstruction."

59. *American Teacher*, 33 (February 1949); *AFT Proceedings*, 1953, AFT Collection.

60. Megel, *American Teacher*, 37 (February 1953).

The Communist teachers themselves had not appeared to be so very different from ordinary teachers. After all, they had all faced the depression with some compassion for working people, they had all hoped that by drawing closer to the community and the great labor movement they could work out a new accommodation that would embrace the best that progressive education had to offer. Under the strain of the McCarthy era, the divorce of the professional teacher from the community appeared complete. Political advocacy and community involvement spelled isolation against which teachers had only their professional associations for protection, and even these protections were at best flimsy. "The teachers are so afraid," observed AFT secretary-treasurer Irwin Kuenzli. AFT president John Eklund referred to a "wave of intimidation that is sweeping the country."⁶¹

61. Lawrence D. Shubow to Harold Cammer, 25 November 1953, Teachers' Union Collection, Box 2.