

The Teacher Rebellion

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Preface

As reliable as falling leaves, teacher strikes have become harbingers of autumn. It was not always so. For the first century and a half of American history, teachers accepted poor wages and working conditions with hardly a grumble. Then, as the social changes following World War II impacted the schools, America's teachers became militant. They demanded better pay, smaller classes, improved teaching conditions and other benefits. When they were not satisfied with what their school boards offered, they demonstrated, picketed and even went on strike.

Yet, the teachers have remained divided. If the more than three million educators and related professional workers should come together under progressive leadership in a unified organization, the effect on American society would be momentous. The "United Teachers of America" would be the largest, most articulate and most influential organization in the nation.

This book is a memoir of the postwar decades, when the spark of teacher militancy spread across the country. I was a participant in that movement. My experience helps locate the events of the rebellion in their time and social context. It also invokes the attempt to build that "one big union" for all teachers.

The main thrust of the teacher rebellion was carried by elementary and secondary school teachers. With some noteworthy exceptions, college and university teachers were late in joining the movement. For this reason, and to avoid "meanwhile, back on the campus" digressions, *The Teacher Rebellion* deals only with the spread of teacher collective bargaining in public school systems.

The events described here all really happened. Conversations are as correct as my memory allows; their sense is entirely accurate. However, to emphasize their personal origin, most conversations are contained in the sections called "Memory Tapes." These "Tapes" allow the reader an insider's view of the rebellion as it began to unfold.

The Teacher Rebellion was a half dozen years in the writing. I am deeply indebted to many people for their help and encouragement. The most notable of these are John Schmid, Pat Strand and David Elsila, former members of the American Federation of Teachers national staff. Les Strand gave *Rebellion* a line-by-line reading for editorial errors while the book was in manuscript. David Darland, formerly head of the NEA's department of instruction, provided much valuable information about the Association.

Other friends who were particularly helpful include Edward Simpkins, dean of the College of Education at Wayne State University; John Herling, editor of Herling's Labor Letter; and David Issacson of the Western Michigan University faculty. Arnold Johnston, a member of the WMU faculty, also made helpful suggestions. My dear friend Robert Halbeisen was especially supportive over a long period of time. Gregory Kearse, my editor at Howard University Press, supplied vitally needed encouragement and many useful suggestions.

Above all, however, the assistance given by my wife, Bernice, was invaluable. In addition to the usual editorial corrections, Bernice was able to curb many of the excesses which are endemic to first-person narratives.

Part I

A MOVEMENT BEGINS

Chapter 1

CIRCUIT RIDING

MEMORY TAPE: GOING FULL TIME

It is the day after Thanksgiving, 1948. I am sitting before the fireplace in my small, newly acquired, 100-year-old cottage near Peekskill, New York. It is cold out but the fire is comforting. Its flickers create interesting patterns on the white-washed ceiling. I am cracking walnuts and sipping sherry.

I had left my teaching position in Dearborn, Michigan, in 1943 to join the Navy. After the war I had taught school in Florida. Now, I am in my second year of teaching in a junior-senior high school overlooking the Hudson River valley. This is it, I believe, from here to retirement, twenty or thirty years down the road.

The telephone rings. It is Jessie Baxter, an old friend and president of the Michigan Federation of Teachers (MFT). She is calling from a meeting of the executive board. The union has managed to scrape together \$3,000 to hire an executive secretary. She asks, "Would you be interested in the job?"

Jessie's words are electrifying. Full time for the union! I had dreamed of such an opportunity but I had not thought it possible. Still, the salary is less than I am earning as a teacher. How will my family and I get along?

I tell Jessie that I am interested in the job and that I will need some time to think it over. If she will send an application, I will fill it out and return it as soon as I can.

After a few days, an application arrives. It is an all-purpose, six-page form which can be purchased at office supply stores.

I fill it out carefully and send it back to Detroit. Weeks pass with no word. I begin to believe that the position has been offered to someone else.

It is March when a telegram arrives from Washington, D.C. The message reads, "You are hereby appointed to the organizing staff of the American Federation of Labor." It is signed, "William Green, President."

I call Jessie Baxter, who apologizes. "Didn't anyone tell you?" she asks. "After I talked with you I found out about the AFL job, so I just passed your application along to Washington. You will be assigned to the AFT, but you will be paid by the AFL. Congratulations!"

ROOTS

Since the turn of the century teachers had made sporadic and isolated attempts to form unions. In 1916 a handful of leaders from New York, Chicago, and other scattered localities met in New York City to form a "national" organization. A year later the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) was granted a charter by the American Federation of Labor (AFL).

Some of the leaders of the fledgling union, including John Dewey, the educational pioneer and philosopher, considered the new organization a militant vanguard within the established National Education Association (NEA). However, this ecumenical view was brusquely rejected by the conservative administrators who controlled the NEA. Long before I became a union member in 1940, the antagonism between the two organizations had become a bitter feud.

The clash between the AFT and the NEA had an element of class conflict. The NEA and its state affiliates were dominated by school superintendents and other administrators who seemed afraid of antagonizing the business interests which held the budgetary purse strings. Though committed to expanding the system of education and improving its quality, the administrators were concerned that teachers not become embarrassingly aggressive. The Federation challenged this paternalistic attitude and called on teachers to take their destiny into their own hands.

It seemed preordained that I join the AFT. My parents were teachers, and I came of age in Michigan during the turbulent thirties. By the time I began teaching in Dearborn, I called myself a Socialist. Although I was not a member of an organized group, I had read much of Marx, Veblen, the Webbs and others. Socialism seemed a matter of common sense.

I was also interested in the labor movement. Soon after coming to Dearborn, I did volunteer work for the United Automobile Workers (UAW) at its West Side headquarters in Detroit. I had worked in the auto plants to help put myself through school, but that was before the sitdown strikes and the growth of the union. Being at the UAW headquarters and teaching classes for UAW Local 600 gave me my first direct union contact. Thus, by 1940, when friends asked me to sign an AFT charter application, I was ready.

My joining the AFT was not without misgivings. I had grave doubts about the compatibility of public employee unions and socialism. If the workers owned the enterprise, why should they unionize and strike against themselves? Later I came to realize that a public boss could be as tough and oppressive as a private one, and that *all* workers need unions.

A TASTE OF VICTORY

The AFT was not much of a union in 1940, certainly not much of a union compared to the UAW. The United Automobile Workers was only a few years old but it had many more members than the AFT had enrolled after thirty years. In fact, there were only a few school districts where the Federation was well-organized. The prevailing view among AFT members was that most teachers were too conservative or too timid to join the union. They felt that most AFT locals could never be more than small agitation groups. Feeble though it was, however, the AFT was headed in the right direction. When I was asked to become president of the tiny new local I accepted. Soon I was devoting my spare time to building the union.

I was involved in an internal controversy almost immediately. Some of the members in the local wanted to restrict membership to teachers whose views on social and economic ques-

tions coincided with those of the members of the founding group. In contrast, I thought the union should recruit all teachers, even the coaches in the physical education department. I believed that once these half-hearted members were admitted, the union could educate them; otherwise, they were likely to work against the union. It was a view that I retained throughout my union career.

During those early days in Dearborn I also learned the value of militancy. Teachers are generally aspiring members of the middle class who become militant only after extreme provocation. In Dearborn, the board of education provided that provocation by making three blatantly political appointments to high-paying administrative positions. Teachers were outraged. Weak as the union was, I sent the school board a public letter of protest. It was printed by all three Detroit papers.

The board of education responded to the union's public protest by insisting that I appear at a special meeting to apologize. I tipped off the papers and instead of apologizing I repeated my charges. The controversy went on for months, but in the end the board established a rudimentary civil service merit system for extra-pay jobs.

The union had won a victory. In the course of the struggle teachers had become so enthusiastic that the Federation ran a slate of candidates against three board members who were up for reelection. Although the AFT candidates lost, membership in the union increased dramatically.

MEMORY TAPE: ELECTION NIGHT

There is a hubbub of excited activity throughout my home on Payne Street in Dearborn. It is school board election night. The leaders of the Fordson Federation of Teachers, forerunner of the Dearborn Federation of Teachers, are waiting anxiously for reports of the vote from the watchers at the dozen polling places. It has been a long, eventful campaign. It is over, and we do not know whether we have won.

The union did not intend to challenge the school board—at least not so soon. The local had been chartered less than two years and still had only fifty or sixty members. But one

thing led to another, and the Federation was drawn into a two-pronged drive: to elect three new board members and to win adoption of teacher tenure. The new board members and the one friendly incumbent would give teachers a favorable majority. Tenure was a local option by Michigan law. Up to that time, Dearborn had not participated.

The campaign had been hard fought. With the help of others in the teachers union, I had set up a Dearborn branch of Labor's Non-Partisan League. The Dearborn league included four organizations: a bus drivers local (about 200 members); a painters union (about 20 members); UAW Local 600 (more than 50,000 members); and our little teachers organization. During the campaign my basement had been converted from ping-pong parlor to political headquarters. Election workers spent hours sorting the names of Dearborn residents from Addressograph tapes of the Local 600 membership. The names were further sorted so that canvassers could seek out all the union members on each block.

We had also run an intensive registration campaign. To participate in school board elections a voter had to own property or be the parent of a school-age child. For months before the election we hauled prospective voters to the registration office at the board of education headquarters. Because many teachers were single or did not own property, the union bought a vacant lot and sold quitclaim deeds for five dollars so all teachers could register to vote.

Suddenly the telephone rings. Everyone stops in mid-sentence while I pick up the phone.

"Yes, this is Dave. Go ahead."

It is a watcher from one of the voting places. I scribble vote totals on a yellow pad.

"Wow! We won!" I shout. "How about tenure?"

Tenure, too, has carried. Although it is only a report from one precinct, we are jubilant. Victory is at hand! People dash to their cars and race to get the ingredients for a celebration. A keg of beer is already in one of the basement washtubs. Soon, the suds are flowing.

Then, the disappointing truth is revealed as the totals come in from the other precincts. It is a close contest, but all three union-supported candidates have been defeated. There is good

news, though. Tenure has been approved. Still, this morsel of success is not enough to lift the spirits of the Federation members.

The party makers return with White Tower hamburgers, pretzels and drinks. The little house fills with scores of disappointed election workers. The party becomes a wake. By midnight it is a mean, sodden brawl. Beer is spilled. At any moment a fight could break out. We do not even know the union songs with which to boost our spirits. But in the future, few elections will be lost by the Dearborn Federation.

BACK DOOR COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

During the Federation's challenge to the board of education the Dearborn branch of the Michigan Education Association remained quiet. After the election I proposed that the union take over the Association. It was not unusual for AFT activists to provide leadership for their local associations. The association membership was a shelter against harassment by administrators. In this case, however, I had a different purpose in mind.

Our slate of AFT members challenged the Association's board of directors on a publicly announced one-plank platform. If the union slate won, the Association would be voted out of existence. Although fewer than a third of the members of the Association were members of the AFT, the union slate won. To ensure their mandate, the new officers conducted a referendum on disbanding. When that carried, the Association was disbanded, leaving the Federation the only teacher organization in the district.

The Federation had backed into the position of sole representative of Dearborn teachers. It would be thrilling to report, "and thus did teacher collective bargaining begin," but although collective bargaining was within the grasp of the Dearborn Federation, none of us dared think in such terms. It would take nearly two decades of Federation development before anyone could say that.

MISSIONARY WORK

I spent three years in the Navy during World War II. I went back into teaching in 1947, and in 1949 I became an AFT or-

ganizer. Actually, the union was too poor to afford organizers. I was paid by the American Federation of Labor, which then had a policy of helping struggling unions.

I became the AFT's "Eastern organizer." Ted Snow, another activist, became "Western organizer." I covered the country east of Lincoln, Nebraska, and my colleague covered the rest. For several years I roamed the territory, following leads forwarded from the AFT national office in Chicago. It was a frustrating but valuable experience.

My first organizing attempt was in Kentucky. One of the teacher uprisings which periodically sweeps through that state was taking place. The only AFT local in the state was the Louisville Federation of Teachers. By the end of the school year I had chartered thirteen new locals. Organizing? Nothing to it!

But a few months later it became clear that things were not as simple as they seemed. When I returned to Kentucky after the summer recess, I found that few of the new locals were functioning. The legislature had enacted a modest across-the-board pay raise. Coupled with intensified antiunion pressure from administrators, the flames of rebellion were damped.

Even worse, the Louisville union, which had included more than two-thirds of the city's teachers, was now wracked by an internal dispute. Most of the members had quit in disgust. Furthermore, prominent members of the Federation had become involved in trying to oust the secretary-treasurer of the Kentucky Federation of Labor, on whom I depended for important support.

In Kentucky, I learned that young unions are highly perishable. They require a lot of care and support. Even then workers can defeat themselves by dissension and disunity. I tried several times during the next two years to revive the Kentucky locals. I also spent a lot of time shooting at new targets of opportunity. Despite hard work, the results were discouraging. I came to realize that unplanned, helter-skelter attempts to organize wasted precious time and money. We needed organizers to handle assigned territories where work could be planned and strongholds developed.

Just before the 1951 national AFT convention in August, I presented an "area organizing plan" to John Eklund, the AFT president. I proposed that national dues, per capita, be raised

by ten cents a month to produce a special organizing fund of fifty thousand dollars a year. State federations in various regions would then be encouraged to band together to raise part of the money to hire organizers. Each organizing area would receive support from the special organizing fund to subsidize the organizer's salary and expenses.

Eklund listened to my exposition of the plan with growing impatience. When I finished he pointed out that he was running for reelection. Coming out for a per capita increase was tantamount to political suicide. He suggested that I present the plan to Irvin R. Kuenzli, the AFT secretary-treasurer, who was the operating head of the union. The secretary-treasurer was chosen by the executive council, unlike the president and the vice-presidents, who were elected by the convention.

Kuenzli was no more encouraging than Eklund. For the past ten years he had steered the union through a series of internal crises. Though he had held the union together, his enthusiasm for organizing had long since cooled. He looked at me with condescension and said he would think about my proposal.

I spent the week of the convention trying to interest other AFT leaders in my plan, but I had little success. At the convention's end, however, my organizer colleague and I were asked to give reports to the executive council. I took advantage of this opportunity to present an amended version of my organizing scheme. I suggested that the national organization match funds raised by any group of state federations that would voluntarily raise their national per capita. The "voluntary" was important, since only a convention could raise the per capita rate, and the convention had already adjourned.

Most council members were openly skeptical of convincing state federations to increase their payments voluntarily, but on the theory that it would not hurt to let me try, they gave their approval. With this dubious charter I set to work.

The state federations in Pennsylvania, New Jersey and New York were scheduled to meet in October. I visited each and found that the teacher unionists were eager for organizing help and willing to make sacrifices to get it. By the month's end, all three state federations had agreed to raise their dues in order to participate in the new plan. However, New York City, virtually a state in itself, would be omitted.

The new organizing area would include about 3,000 AFT members—there were only 50,000 nationwide. These dues payers would produce enough money from their new special per capita payments to permit the plan to function.

A few minutes after the vote in the New York convention I went outside for a breath of air. I ran into Secretary-Treasurer Kuenzli, who was just arriving. We went to a Chock Full O'Nuts lunch counter to talk things over.

“Well, how’s it going?” Kuenzli asked.

“Pretty good,” I replied. “They just approved a voluntary dues increase.”

“They did?”

“Yup.”

The secretary-treasurer was incredulous. “How about New Jersey and Pennsylvania?”

“Same thing,” I answered smugly. “Looks like I’m in business.”

But there was one more problem to be worked out. I had made it clear that I would be an applicant for the position of territory organizer even though I was well aware of the job’s shaky financial footing. But before I went over to the new job, I wanted to make sure that the American Federation of Labor hired someone to take my place. Once I’d taken care of that detail, I formally applied for the new position. Within a month I was working in my new territory.

MAKING MY ROUNDS

With my organizing area now reduced to New York, Pennsylvania and New Jersey—still large enough, certainly—I worked out three organizing circuits. Every Monday morning I left my home near Peekskill, New York, to begin the route for that week. I drove from school district to school district, met contacts and discussed tactics and strategy. I dropped into teachers’ lounge rooms, left literature and picked up news of what was going on. I located the cheap places to stay. Sometimes I stayed in the homes of union members or slept in my car. I returned home late Friday night or Saturday or sometimes Sunday if I had to cover a weekend meeting.

My circuit riding was supplemented by a monthly newsletter I wrote, mimeographed, hand-addressed and mailed. I used the telephone a great deal, and any contact person could call me collect any time. I called home every day or so to check for messages.

The objective was to line up a dozen or so teachers in each school district who would apply for a union charter. Other teachers could then rally around the nucleus when the time was ripe. I would help the new locals draw up a constitution, set up committees, adopt an action program and get out a newsletter. We would also arrange a schedule of meetings at which I could give advice and encouragement.

Unconsciously I was trying to duplicate my Dearborn experience. But, although I chartered dozens of locals during this period, none of them ever achieved the success of my home local. However, after a few months, my efforts began to produce modest results. Membership in the special organizing area began to increase.

Nevertheless, I was dissatisfied. From the outset I regarded the organizing area as a prototype which would lead to the formation of others. As soon as I felt the plan was working, I convinced the leaders in Pennsylvania and New Jersey to split off and join with Maryland, the District of Columbia and Delaware to form a new area to which another organizer was assigned. I then tried to convince the AFT leaders in Connecticut and Rhode Island to join with upstate New York to make a viable area in that region. I foresaw a network of special organizing areas spanning the country wherever there were organizing opportunities. This vision of AFT expansion was disrupted by a change of political alignment within the national union.

ON TO NEW YORK CITY

In 1952 Carl J. Megel became president of the union. Before Megel, AFT presidents had continued to work at their teaching positions, leaving the management of the national office and most of the policy decisions to the secretary-treasurer, who was a full-time union employee. Megel set out to establish himself

as president in fact as well as in name. Within six months Secretary-Treasurer Kuenzli had been dismissed. The new president then turned his attention to other problems.

The AFT, small as it was, had long contained three political factions. The largest of these was the Progressive Caucus. The second largest grouping, to which Megel belonged, was usually called the "National Caucus," or sometimes known as the "Classroom Teachers Caucus." The third faction was a relatively small leftist caucus with strength mainly in New Jersey and California.

Even though I had never been politically active in the union, I felt that Megel regarded me with suspicion. I had come from Michigan, home of the Progressives, and lived in New York, another Progressive stronghold. Since the cooperative governance of the special organizing area insulated me from direct presidential interference, it did not come as a complete surprise when the new president moved to abolish the special organizing area and place me directly under his supervision. But before this change in my status could be carried out, an escape hatch suddenly opened up.

Although New York City had been excluded from the special organizing area, I had developed friendly relations with several of the New York leaders. In the spring of 1953 the chairman of the city's organizing committee asked me to become the local's organizer. I was very excited by this offer. After making arrangements for an ongoing relationship with some of the new locals that I had chartered in the special organizing area, I accepted the position.

Chapter 2

THE GUILD

1953

When I entered the grimy fourth floor office of the New York Teachers Guild at Two East Twenty-third Street that hot morning of July 1, 1953, I had no idea that I was taking a step toward the teacher rebellion of the 1960s. I felt overwhelmed by the immensity of the task before me. New York City was the largest school district in the world. More than 40,000 teachers and 800,000 students were distributed through 600 elementary schools, 100-plus junior high schools and 90 high schools. The teaching staff was the best-qualified and best-paid in any big-city school system. How could this elite corps be unionized?

The Guild was the outgrowth of a bitter struggle in the original teachers union. A social-democratic faction which included all of the officers had waged a long fight against a more militant rank-and-file faction led by Communists, Trotskyites and other leftists. The leadership group, unable to control the local, broke away to form the Teachers Guild. About a thousand members of the union seceded with them.

"The Split," as it is known in New York City teacher union history, occurred in 1935. It was a bitter, scarring experience for all who went through it. The participants will talk about it as long as they live. The newly formed Teachers Guild immediately applied for an AFT charter. The application provoked seven years of struggle, which resulted in expulsion of Local 5—the original local—and the chartering of the Guild as AFT Local 2. By the time I became New York City organizer,

the Guild had only grown to eighteen hundred members. The old Teachers Union, under its leftist leadership, had dwindled to about the same number.

The divisiveness between the Guild and the Teachers Union was augmented by other rivalries among the dozens of teacher organizations in the city. In fact, an organization existed for each category of teacher, including borough, religion, grade level of teaching and subject area. Furthermore, unlike most school districts, New York City had not fallen under the hegemony of the National Education Association.

The Guild competed with its rivals by intense leafletting and by providing a range of services. It maintained an office and published a four-page monthly paper. It also offered retirement counseling, grievance service and preparatory courses for the teaching license examinations. Its legislative program in Albany was the center of its action program.

Soon after I came to the Guild, its executive secretary left for a better-paying job, and I assumed the responsibilities of that position in addition to my organizing duties. There were two other staff members—a bookkeeper and a secretary. We were assisted by a corps of dedicated volunteers who stuffed envelopes, made phone calls and performed other essential tasks.

Charles Cogen was president of the Guild. For the next 14 years we maintained a close working relationship, although we were certainly an unlikely pair. “Charlie” was unmistakably a New Yorker, a Social-Democrat and scholar. He had graduated from Cornell Law School with honors in the midst of the Depression and had turned to teaching to support his family. He had never left the security of the school system to try his luck in law.

Charlie was usually cautious to the point of timidity but courageous and stubborn on occasion. He had joined the Teachers Union and left with the other moderates to form the Teachers Guild. In 1952 he became president as a compromise choice in response to demands by a rebellious faction of younger Guild members. Throughout our long association, I often urged him to do things he did not want to do, and he frequently moderated my often abrasive proposals. Whether because of our differences or in spite of them, we made an effective combination.

THE SUBWAY CIRCUIT

In filling the roles of executive secretary and organizer I turned my attention to improving the internal functioning of the union. The Guild members enjoyed each other's company, and there were many meetings. The administrative committee—"AdCom," I nicknamed it—composed of the officers and committee heads, met every Wednesday afternoon at four o'clock. The 35-member executive board met two evenings a month. The delegate assembly, made up of representatives from schools in which there were Guild members, met once a month. There were also more than a dozen committee meetings every month.

I attended all the meetings. More often than not I prepared the agendas and reproduced the minutes. I tried to use each meeting as a pretext for a news release, a flyer to the schools or a petition to circulate among the teachers. The purpose was to portray the Guild as a sleepless champion of teachers' interests.

In addition to attending functions at headquarters, I pushed my way onto the subway several times a week to journey to a school. Teachers brought their lunches to the library, the teachers' lounge or a Guild member's classroom, and I held forth on the latest issues the Guild was espousing. At the end of the lunch hour I distributed membership applications and hoped someone would sign up. Afterward, I returned to Twenty-third Street to cut mimeograph stencils or copy materials for the after-school and evening meetings.

Even though this work was more rewarding than the lonely missionary journeys and the circuit riding had been, the results were only slightly greater. Knowing that thousands of teachers were ready to be organized was stimulating, but I was still doing "sign 'em up organizing." Despite my frenetic effort the Guild was only gaining a hundred or so members a year.

During my earlier days as an itinerant organizer, I had pondered the economics of union organizing. According to my calculations, I would have to increase the union by at least a thousand members each year to cover the cost of keeping me on the road. For every three new members who joined, two others were backsliding. Progress was agonizingly slow.

While riding the subway circuit, I made similar calculations about organizing in New York City. At the rate the union was growing, it would take more than a hundred years to enroll a majority of the teachers. Even assuming that the growth rate would accelerate as the union became larger and more credible, the job could not be done in fewer than twenty-five years.

As one year and then two passed, I found such thoughts increasingly discouraging. Even though Cogen and other Guild leaders seemed satisfied with my performance, I could not justify merely "working for the union." Organizing was more than a job—it was a mission.

My dissatisfaction was deepened by a growing disillusionment with the labor movement. I had been attracted to unionism because I saw it as a lever to change society. I believed that most unionists were committed to the same idealistic goals that I had accepted. But after half a dozen years of contact with union leaders, little of that mystique remained. I was shocked to learn that most of them were not Socialists and that many were not even liberals. George Meany, president of the American Federation of Labor, so I read, openly supported capitalism.

The contrast between reality and my idealized version of unionism caused me intense pain. At a union legislative conference in Albany, delegates from the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) objected to public ownership of the power plants along the St. Lawrence Seaway on grounds that it was easier to negotiate with private employers than with the government. I guiltily withheld comment because I did not want to appear foolish to these experienced unionists. Nevertheless, I felt that my silence betrayed my beliefs and principles.

In New York City I attended the Central Trades and Labor Council, which was controlled by a coalition of conservative Teamster and building-trades locals. Most liberal unions did not send representatives to this body. The Teachers Guild had almost no influence on its policies, even in matters affecting education.

Those were also the dismal years of McCarthyism, the cold war and Eisenhower. Liberalism was on the wane. A reactionary bipartisan coalition ruled in Congress. College campuses were "beat." The promise of racial integration offered by the

Supreme Court in *Brown v. Board of Education* remained unfulfilled.

If I could have comforted myself with assurances that unionism was increasing or that the Federation was moving ahead, my morale might have been fortified. But there were no twitchings in the liberal community to encourage me. I became more depressed about the future of the Teachers Union, unionism and American liberalism.

After five years of organizing teachers—two years in New York City and three in other parts of the country—I was ready to quit. I applied for a teaching position in a Westchester County school district. Then, so subtly that I hardly noticed, things began to change.

ELY TRACHTENBERG

One of the first things I had done at the Teachers Guild was to reorganize the organizing committee. The Guild's charter members had not been very good organizers, so I turned to the younger, more militant members teaching in the junior high schools.

I kept the office open evenings and scheduled organizing committee meetings at night instead of after school. Once a month there was a beer and peanuts party. I led sudsy renditions of labor songs with a cheap banjo. We viewed labor films from the International Ladies Garment Workers Union and from Rutgers University. I was trying to develop the camaraderie which had carried the leadership group in the Dearborn local to success. Gradually new young activists emerged within the staid Guild, and unionism began to be fun again.

Ely Trachtenberg was a member of the new group. He was in his early thirties, broad-shouldered and handsome. Well over six feet tall, Trachtenberg taught in a Manhattan junior high school and was on the Guild's executive board. He had belonged to the Trotskyist Socialist "party" led by Max Schachtman, the gifted Marxist intellectual. Schachtman insisted that his followers take jobs in industry so that they could give socialist leadership to the workers at the work place. Following

this dictum, Trachtenberg had worked in an automobile plant and had joined the United Auto Workers.

Although I called myself a Socialist, I had had very little contact with other Socialists. Ely Trachtenberg, however, had grown up in the hurly-burly of left-wing debate in New York City, where socialism and union theory were constantly discussed. He was skilled in Marxist dialectic yet he had a pragmatic attitude toward the Guild's problems. He became chairman of the organizing committee.

I had realized that alone I could not organize 40,000 teachers. Neither could they be organized solely by propaganda emanating from the Guild's central office. Accordingly, I developed a school-by-school approach. The members in each school—even if there were only two or three—were to regard themselves as a little union. Each chapter was asked to elect a chairman, hold weekly meetings and develop a program to improve working conditions throughout the school. Trachtenberg added the principle of "chapter life" to this chapter structure.

This concept meant that the Guild chapter would give leadership to the entire faculty. Chapter meetings were open to nonmembers. They would be encouraged to participate in discussions and decision making. In the sectarian organizational atmosphere of New York, this lack of distinction between members and nonmembers was unheard of. The idea of letting non-dues payers vote on Guild policy seemed strange, but Trachtenberg convinced me that teacher unity at the grass roots was absolutely essential. He was certain that dues paying would inevitably follow involvement.

We carefully analyzed the Guild's position among competing organizations. We prepared two lists. One included those items which tended to keep teachers from joining the Guild. The other listed those items which made the Guild attractive. From these lists we developed a report to the executive board and called it "Big Guild, Little Guild."

The thesis of "Big Guild, Little Guild" was that the union should regard itself as a "candidate for public office"—the office of bargaining agent. It should therefore do things which would gain teacher support. It should also avoid actions which would alienate any group of teachers. For instance, the Guild had always taken strong stands on issues involving separation

of church and state. It had vigorously opposed efforts to establish prayer in the schools. The Guild had also protested the board of education's adoption of a policy statement on teaching moral and spiritual values because the statement seemed to be based on belief in a Christian God. We asserted that following a liberal line on such matters made the Guild vulnerable to attack by persons who were not so much interested in the issues as in discouraging teacher unionism. If Guild leaders wanted to take positions on such questions, they should do so in other organizations—at least for the time being. The Guild should emphasize the bread-and-butter issues of salaries, fringe benefits and working conditions. Once the union had become the bargaining agent, it could more safely turn its attention to broader issues.

A CRUCIAL VOTE

“Big Guild, Little Guild” got a cold reception. It challenged deeply felt values which had guided the leaders of the Guild through their careers. Not surprisingly, our report was referred to a study committee, where it languished for months. Although most old-timers had been offended by our report, a few, including President Cogen, agreed with many of its recommendations. So did most of the younger members of the executive board.

Even though we could not persuade the board to adopt the recommendations of “Big Guild, Little Guild,” we kept trying to gain acceptance of our ideas. We believed that if the Guild adopted a “candidate for office” attitude, it would soon launch a campaign to become the exclusive bargaining agent for the city's teachers.

At first the idea of collective bargaining for teachers seemed outlandish. Public employees had been excluded from the Wagner Labor Relations Act and the Taft-Hartley amendments, and besides, teachers were “professionals” who did not need bargaining rights.

Trachtenberg and I realized that one of the first tasks in moving toward collective bargaining would be gaining the assent,

if not the support, of the Guild leadership. We made our move in the spring of 1956. We urged the delegate assembly to declare collective bargaining to be the Guild's highest priority. After lengthy debate the delegates voted approval.

Because the Guild's membership was less than five percent of the total teaching staff, a representation election would have destroyed the union. Few of those voting thought that such an election would be held. Had they known that such a vote would take place within five years, they might not have approved the collective bargaining motion.

The delegate assembly vote gave me a sense of embarking on a perilous voyage to an uncertain destination, but Trachtenberg's steady confidence was reassuring. He felt that if the Guild were defeated in an election, the winning organization would be forced to become a union because of the conflict inherent in the collective bargaining process. He maintained it was not the Guild that was important; it was the movement.

Today, having seen many unions merely operate as vending machines that dispense benefits to their members—or agree to “givebacks”—I am much less confident about the triumph of the working class. Collective bargaining is not an automatic mechanism; insight and leadership are needed too, but at the time, I found Trachtenberg's argument convincing.

With as much trepidation as hope, collective bargaining became the Guild's overriding concern. Every flyer, every report and every statement issued from the union's headquarters said that collective bargaining was the cure. Salary too low? Collective bargaining will increase it. Your principal giving you a hard time? The Guild will take care of him when it wins collective bargaining. Under this new drive membership began to grow.

Early in the struggle for collective bargaining, there was a victory in the school system's Bureau of Child Guidance (BCG). The BCG was a unique, semiautonomous agency of more than 400 psychologists, social workers and psychiatrists whose mission it was to help children and teachers overcome psychological and environmental obstacles to learning. These professionals were not the most likely group to lead the way to

collective bargaining. Yet, under the subtle influence of Lou Hay, a dedicated social reformer and psychologist, the BCG employees conducted their own collective bargaining election. As a result the Guild was recognized as the bargaining agent for the unit.

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Chapter 3

THE ROOTS OF REVOLT

TEACHER MILITANCY RISES

The social conditions which followed World War II had an unsettling effect on the schools, particularly those in the big northern cities. The postwar baby boom pumped hundreds of thousands of “extra” children into the school systems. The northward migration of blacks and other minorities added thousands of pupils who had attended segregated schools in the South or who had been excluded from schools altogether. Soon classrooms overflowed. Many of the entrants were ill-prepared to cope with school routine.

At the same time, the increasing turbulence in American society was reflected in the overtaxed classrooms. The controls which had enforced social order—family authority, community pressure, religion, racial repression and economic pressure—had weakened or disappeared. No new institutions of a more positive nature had emerged. As a result the nation experienced a rising tide of crime, violence and social disintegration.

Teachers bore the brunt of the deteriorating social conditions in the schools. Even in smaller, less urban districts, schools were becoming storehouses of highly combustible social conditions. Furthermore, teachers' salaries were lagging further behind the rising cost of living.

Before World War II, teacher protest was relatively mild. Strikes were practically unheard of, even during the Depression, when teachers' salaries were slashed and paid in scrip. In 1936 Chicago teachers marched on the board of education

because the board had defaulted on their salaries. They chose a Saturday. The "walk," as it came to be known, was not a "walkout."

After World War II, spontaneous teacher protests and work stoppages erupted in scattered areas. But in New York City, a strike by public employees was considered too risky to contemplate. Even the valiant Mike Quill, leader of the subway workers, managed to settle with the city in time to avoid walkouts.

But although teachers seemed unlikely to strike, teacher militancy had escalated steadily in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The annual demonstrations at city hall became larger and louder. The "marches" on Albany via bus and train attracted more participation as city and state officials failed to improve salaries and working conditions.

In addition, the state legislature took an action in 1947 which served to agitate New York City high school teachers for the next ten years. For many years high school teachers had been paid \$1,100 a year more than elementary school teachers. The lawmakers abolished this salary differential in an effort to recruit more elementary school teachers.

High school teachers were outraged. They felt that they had been grievously injured. The High School Teachers Association (HSTA), long somnolent, was aroused to angry reaction. After searching for an appropriate way to express their displeasure, they called for a boycott of extracurricular activities by coaches and other teachers. The Guild had long opposed the salary differential and had applauded its abolition. But after some hesitation it voted to support the boycott.

The real strength of the after-school work stoppage lay in the high school coaches, who were members of a semiautonomous organization loosely affiliated with the HSTA. In the summer of 1952, the coaches received a special salary increase and they decided to resume their duties. The board of education also voted a general salary increase, but it refused to restore the differential.

In 1954, two years after the boycott of extracurricular duties, the HSTA again tried the same tactic. Not to be outdone, the Guild, on my recommendation, called a slowdown. I euphemistically dubbed it the "Minimum Service Program (MSP)."

A committee drew up a list of things teachers would no longer do, such as put displays on bulletin boards, bring materials from home, patrol the halls between classes or write on the blackboard.

The MSP project was an utter failure. Critics sourly asserted that teachers could not work any slower anyway. But the MSP failed because teachers could not bring themselves to sabotage their work. After a month of unsuccessfully promoting the scheme I quietly let it die. Teacher anger and frustration continued to mount.

THE RIGHT TO EAT

While Guild organizing in the high schools was severely handicapped by its stand against the salary differential, the junior highs were prime territory. Teaching in the junior high schools was more difficult than teaching elsewhere, mainly because of the students' unruliness. Furthermore, half of the junior high school teachers were full-time substitutes who were paid less than regulars and received no fringe benefits. My slogan was, "Show me a junior high school teacher and I'll show you a union member."

Teachers in the elementary schools, however, seemed uninterested in joining anything, let alone a militant union. Therefore, the "Right to Eat" campaign surprised me completely. As a routine agitational exercise in the spring of 1958, a petition calling for the school board to grant a half-hour, duty-free lunch period every day was sent to all elementary schools. High schools and junior high schools had this privilege in addition to free periods during the day; elementary school teachers were required to supervise their students throughout the 35-hour school week; hence, the "Right to Eat."

The petitions were standard Guild tactics. They were circulated in response to almost every complaint. Most of them garnered scarcely more than two or three hundred signatures. Surprisingly, the "Right to Eat" petition attracted thousands of names during the first month of its circulation.

ONE DAY AT A TIME

Emboldened by the response to the "Right to Eat" petition, I drew up a more inclusive list of demands that included a salary increase. To reinforce these demands I persuaded the executive board to call for a one-day demonstration work stoppage and rally at city hall on the day of the annual budget hearing.

After-school city hall rallies were a budget hearing ritual for teachers in New York. Two or three thousand people would go to city hall, picket for an hour or so, listen to a few speeches and go home to hear the budget hearing on radio. I had been searching for a more dramatic but "safe" form of protest against the city's education budget. A one-day work stoppage would certainly have the desired shock value without exposing teachers to reprisals. I knew that few teachers would actually walk out of their classrooms in defiance of the authorities. Most would call in sick or would take a day of unpaid personal leave. The demonstration would violate the state Condon-Wadlin Act, which prohibited strikes by public employees, but I thought it was unlikely that school officials would invoke the law for such a limited infraction.

Some of the old-timers in the Guild feared that the demonstration might get out of hand and turn into a full-fledged strike. When a reporter asked me about that possibility I replied that the union was "taking it one day at a time." In fact, President Cogen and many of his friends were afraid that the union would be destroyed by the stoppage. In order to reassure them, I drew up a "pledge of support," a petition-like sign-up sheet, so that I could estimate the amount of teacher support for the stoppage. Copies of the sheet were sent to the school chapter chairpersons, who were asked to report to the Guild office each week. But response to the pledge call was so poor that I had to pad the totals or risk cancellation of the walkout.

Fortunately, the success of the one-day work stoppage was aided by a provocative action by school and city officials. The school budget is prepared each fall. After approval by the board of education, it is sent to city hall and then submitted in revised form to the board of estimate and the city council. The 1958-59 budget had passed through several steps in the attenuated process when the school board president told a reporter

that teachers would receive a \$300 raise, a not inconsiderable amount at that time.

I began to consider ways to call off the stoppage in order to avoid an embarrassing debacle. Before I could take action, however, the actual budget was made public. Instead of the anticipated \$300 increase, only \$200 was provided. A hundred dollars does not seem crucial, but it angered teachers, and thousands of angry teachers signed the pledge of support.

MEMORY TAPE: SCORE ONE FOR THE GUILD

I am sitting in my cubbyhole in the dilapidated home of the New York Teachers Guild. A telephone is pressed to my ear and I am scribbling notes on a yellow pad. There is a stir of excitement throughout the headquarters. People are checking lists of names. A Guild member at another phone is receiving reports from chapter leaders. In a corner Ely Trachtenberg is earnestly explaining something to a group of teachers. It is the night before "D-Day"—the day of the demonstration work stoppage.

I look up to see a grim-faced man glaring at me. It is Harry Van Arsdale, president of the Central Labor Council. In the two years since he had taken over the leadership of the council, its functioning has vastly improved. Van Arsdale, a veteran of many rough and tough organizing campaigns, is known as a progressive leader. I also know that he works closely with the city Democratic machine.

"I've been trying to get hold of you for hours," the union leader growls. "Is this the only phone you got?"

I have been trying to arrange a meeting with the central labor president for weeks, but he has been evasive. I wanted him to use his political influence to arrange a meeting with school officials. Now, when it seems too late, Van Arsdale is here. "No," I answer. "We have another."

"Two phones for 40,000 workers!" Van Arsdale snorts, and I try to hide my chagrin. I had wanted to install emergency phone lines, but the Guild could not afford the added expense.

"Where's Cogen?" Van Arsdale demands.

I explain that Cogen is on his way to appear on an eleven o'clock television news broadcast.

"Get him back," Van Arsdale snaps. "We're going to Brooklyn to meet with the school superintendent."

A break at last! I phone the television station. Cogen has not yet arrived.

"Tell them to send him to the superintendent's office as soon as he shows up," Van Arsdale directs. I leave the message, and the labor leader hustles me out of the office and into a waiting taxi. Soon we are racing down East River Drive, Brooklyn-bound.

Dr. John J. Theobald, the superintendent of schools, is waiting for us. Theobald is the son of a former high official in the school system. He is an adventurer in education. He has used his political connections, in addition to his other skills, to become head of the world's largest school system. He leads us into his inner office. A television set flickers in a corner.

"I've been listening to the news," Theobald says. "You've got the whole city up in arms. Where's Cogen?"

"He's on his way," I answer, more confidently than I believe. I know that the thrifty Cogen will be coming by subway to save taxi fare, and that could take a while. I hope that nothing has gone wrong. We have already entered the countdown to what may be the first citywide strike in New York City history. But, I am far from confident about the outcome. A small turnout would be a defeat for teachers and a setback for Guild organizing. I am hoping that this last-minute meeting will end in a settlement.

The eleven o'clock news comes on. The camera zooms in on two men sitting at a desk. One is the special events broadcaster for the program. The other is Charlie Cogen. In the superintendent's office we are aghast. "My message must not have gotten through," I explain.

Van Arsdale snatches a phone, dials information and gets the number of the TV station. He places the call and barks, "This is Harry Van Arsdale. Let me speak with Cogen. No, Cogen, the president of the teachers union. I know he's there because I can see him. This is an emergency." There is a pause. Then, "OK. Tell him to come to Superintendent Theobald's office right away."

"Tell him to take a taxi," I interject, and Van Arsdale relays the message.

We watch the scene on the tube. In a minute or two we see someone hand a paper to the reporter. He glances at it and gives it to Cogen. "Mr. Cogen," he says, "Perhaps you would share this important message with our viewers."

Charlie reads the note. "Dr. Theobald would like to see you in his office as soon as possible. Take a taxi." Cogen looks uncertainly at the television reporter. "Excuse me," Cogen says and he walks out of the camera's view. A half hour later he joins us.

It does not take long to find the money for the \$300 raise the teachers had been expecting. The word goes out to the news outlets. The one-day teacher demonstration work stoppage has been averted.

THE FRUITS OF MILITANCY

The aborted one-day work stoppage was not a sensational victory, but it was enough to demonstrate the organizing value of militancy. In the remaining two months of the school year, Guild membership soared past the 3,000-mark. Charles Cogen was on his way to becoming a folk hero.

Over the summer, I made plans for an intensive organizing campaign to maintain the momentum. I asked the AFT national president, Carl Megel, to provide extra organizing assistance. He agreed to finance an additional organizer—to be designated by me—and I asked Ely Trachtenberg to take the job. But Trachtenberg wanted to stay in the school system.

My second choice was George Altomare, one of the junior high school activists who belonged to the union's executive board. But Altomare turned down the organizing position. I then turned to another member of the activist group, Albert Shanker.

Shanker and I were close friends. We lived in the same apartment complex in upper Manhattan and visited constantly. Shanker had joined the Socialist party as a student at the University of Illinois. After Shanker became a union staff member we rode to work together every day. Our friendship became a

pupil-teacher relationship—I was fifteen years older, more experienced in union organizing and head of the union staff.

During the next school year union membership continued to grow, but in January growth was accelerated by a major event in the history of New York City teacher union organizing—this was the 1959 strike of the evening high school teachers.

A STRIKE IN THE NIGHT

Most of the thousand teachers who taught in the night schools also taught full-time during the day, and many were members of the High School Teachers Association. They were led by two officers of the HSTA, Roger Parente and Samuel Hochberg, both of whom had organizational backgrounds. Hochberg had been a member of the original Teachers Union in his early days of teaching, while Parente's father was an officer in a building-trades local. In spite of their commitment to the salary differential for high school teachers, their views on most union issues were far more progressive than those of other HSTA leaders. In fact, their views were more progressive than those of many Guild members.

Working with the HSTA's free-wheeling attorney, Harold Israelson, Parente and Hochberg demanded that the superintendent of schools raise wages and improve conditions for night school teachers. They threatened a shutdown of the night schools to begin in early January. Israelson had devised a scheme to get around the state antistrike law. He pointed out that while strikes by public employees were illegal, resigning was not. If everybody resigned at the same time, the effect would be the same as a strike. Sign-up sheets were distributed among the evening high school faculty. Signing the sheet indicated one's intent to resign on January first if there was no settlement of the demands.

As the deadline approached, it became clear that the conflict in the night schools would not be settled. Guild leaders were in a quandary about proper union policy. A victory for the HSTA-led group would be a setback for the Guild in the race for organizational dominance in the city. Most Guild leaders believed, therefore, that nothing should be done to assist our

militant competitor. On the other hand, the effect would be worse if the night school teachers should succeed despite Guild opposition.

Ely Trachtenberg convinced the Guild executive board, as he had convinced me many months before, that it did not matter which organization sponsored a particular militant action. What mattered was that the workers, in this case the teachers, advance. It was the struggle that was important, not the organization. It was heresy, but it was true, and I strongly supported Trachtenberg's position. The Guild could only win the organizational war by fighting the teachers' battles.

The Guild gave complete support to the strikers in the night schools. Pickets carrying Guild signs marched side-by-side with the other high school pickets in the frigid January darkness. When Hochberg and Parente called a rally at city hall, the Guild telephone network, mimeograph machine and chapter structure were used to turn out a crowd. Every night, Shanker and I made the rounds in our station wagons, which we called "Guild Coffeemobiles." We dispensed coffee and donuts to the shivering demonstrators.

By the end of the strike, the Guild and the high school militants had established strong bonds of comradeship. The strike was a success. Collective bargaining had come to the evening high schools. More important, teachers were taking their first steps toward unity.

Chapter 4

THE UFT

TALKING UNITY

The strike by the night school teachers was a triumph for teacher militancy and union solidarity. Hochberg and Parente, however, considered it a mere skirmish before the main battle for the high school teachers' salary differential. They therefore turned to trying to revitalize the High School Teachers Association. Ten years had passed since the legislature had wiped out the high school differential, but high school teachers still rankled. As a result the HSTA had become a one-issue organization. That issue was a powerful unifying force for the 10,000 high school teachers, but it alienated them from the 30,000 teachers in the elementary and junior high schools. Obviously, the HSTA needed reinforcements.

On the urging of Hochberg and Parente, the association changed its name to The Secondary School Teachers Association (SSTA) in order to recruit junior high school teachers, who were promised a special differential of their own. An open meeting was called to kick off the organizing campaign.

I regarded the junior highs as the Guild's exclusive territory, and I particularly wished to repel the high school invasion. It was just possible that the lure of a special salary increase and the aura of high school teacher militancy might attract a following. I therefore decided to flood the meeting with Guild loyalists.

Hochberg later told me that when he looked out at that crowd of young, militant junior high school teachers—many of whom

he knew to be members of the Guild—he realized that the SSTA, with its conservative, older leadership, would never appeal to them. The meeting was a failure. Hochberg and Parente were forced to search for a new way to achieve the goal of restoring the salary differential.

It was now time for the Guild to take the initiative. Supporting the evening high school strike had proved to be more than a defensive maneuver. The nighttime picketers had developed a feeling of solidarity which transcended organizational demarcations. Representatives from the Guild and the SSTA began meeting secretly to explore the possibility of merging the two organizations.

THE PROMOTIONAL INCREMENT

From the outset the SSTA's insistence upon restoration of the high school salary differential stood in the way of a merger agreement. The Guild's opposition was based largely on expediency, since there were more elementary and junior high school teachers than there were high school teachers, but for the SSTA, the differential was the Holy Grail.

Support for the differential was more than a matter of some people wanting to make more money than others. The high school license examinations were more difficult than the others. One must also have completed five years of college and have earned 36 credits in an academic field before taking the tests. Elementary school teachers needed only four years of college with a major in education. It was common for high school teachers to teach in the elementary schools while they completed their course requirements for the high school license. Thus, going to teach in a high school was a step up in status.

Almost everywhere except New York City, however, the single-salary system was the rule. Before the adoption of single-salary schedules, women were paid less than men. Frequently, single men were paid less than married men. Married women, if they were hired to teach at all, were paid less than single women. Relatives or friends of school officials were often treated more favorably than those without such connections.

These "special" arrangements undermined teaching standards and depressed salaries.

The solution to the conflict between the "single-salary Guild" and the "differential SSTA" turned out to be simple and rational. Under the single-salary system, teachers with more years of service and greater academic preparation were paid more than their colleagues. Therefore, paying high school teachers more because of their greater academic qualifications would not violate the single-salary principle. It would only be a violation if other teachers with equivalent qualifications were denied the same extra payment.

The city had recognized this principle long ago. The basic salary schedule for teachers with minimum qualifications had fifteen annual steps. There were also two extra salary increments, one for 30 college credits above the baccalaureate, and another for 30 credits beyond that. Why not have a third differential for high school teachers and all others who had equivalent qualifications? Call the new differential the "promotional increment" in order to give it status.

Once the salary issue had been resolved, the rest of the merger plan speedily fell into place. All that remained was to gain the official approval of the two organizations. However, although the secret negotiators from the Guild had a quasi-official standing, the SSTA operatives were entirely on their own.

By coincidence, the SSTA and Guild executive boards were scheduled to meet on the same day, the SSTA in the afternoon and the Guild in the evening. Soon after the SSTA board adjourned, I received a telephone call from Sam Hochberg. He was dejected. The SSTA officers had been shocked and outraged when they learned about the merger plan. They charged that Hochberg and Parente had betrayed the SSTA's basic policy by accepting the promotional increment concept, because it would permit elementary and junior high school teachers to qualify if they met academic standards the equivalent of those for high school teachers.

At the Guild executive board meeting that night I took the position that there was nothing for the Guild board to discuss because the SSTA had rejected the merger plan. Furthermore, since the Guild's position in any future negotiations might be undermined if the merger terms were to leak out, I refused to

disclose any of the details. Although annoyed, the Guild's board members were forced to accept my silence. The Guild-SSTA merger plan was shelved for the time being.

But the urge to unite was a powerful force. Once set in motion, it was difficult to confine.

CATU

Rumors about the attempted merger reverberated through the giant school system. Under increasing pressure from their members, the SSTA leadership went through the motions of discussing unity. Several official but secret meetings between SSTA and Guild officers were held in some of the most unlikely places in Manhattan. One meeting was in Toffenetti's restaurant, a bustling establishment below Times Square. Another was held in the august Columbia University Faculty Club. But agreement could not be reached.

Beginning in the fall of 1959, two important steps were taken to move the merger talks off dead center. First, in order to arouse teacher support for the unity idea, the Guild made a public offer to join the SSTA. Second, in order to put pressure on the reluctant leaders of the SSTA, a merger support group called the Committee for Action Through Unity (CATU) was set up in the high schools.

CATU consisted of three young militant members of the Guild executive board and the three chief SSTA militants, Sam Hochberg, Roger Parente, and their associate, John Bailey. Sign-up sheets were mimeographed in Guild headquarters and mailed to Guild high school chapter chairpersons and to friends of the three SSTA militant leaders. The Guild-SSTA merger idea soon gained widespread acceptance among high school teachers.

Recruiting for CATU was given a powerful boost by an advertisement which mysteriously appeared on the School Page of the *World, Telegram & Sun*. The ad revealed the hitherto secret details of the aborted merger plan of the previous spring, including the compromise salary schedule and the promotional increment. It strongly implied that a \$1,000 salary increase was

within the grasp of high school teachers if the Guild and the SSTA would amalgamate.

The World, Telegram & Sun ad was the work of John Bailey. Within a few days, more than 2,000 high school teachers had signed the CATU support sheets, and there was no longer any doubt that the time had come for united teacher action.

MEMORY TAPE: THE UNITED FRONT FROM BELOW

President Cogen calls the Guild executive board to order. The minutes of the previous meeting have been distributed. He calls for corrections, and the minutes stand approved. The board then moves to a special order of business: CATU.

Many board members are perturbed by the formation of what they think is a rival group. I am called on for an explanation. Most of the board members do not know the depth of my involvement.

"I felt I was carrying out our policy," I say. "CATU is just a way to force the SSTA to move. It is not a permanent organization."

Q: Did you consult with Charlie before going ahead?

A: I didn't think it was necessary. We were already on record favoring merger between the Guild and the SSTA.

As a matter of fact, I had avoided talking with Cogen until after the CATU ad had been published. Cogen would have insisted that an action as far-reaching as CATU be debated thoroughly before proceeding. That would have defeated the whole scheme. The new committee would have been revealed as a Guild plot.

After the ad had appeared I had received an urgent phone call from Cogen. He wanted to see me immediately. I drove to Charlie's apartment in the upper Bronx and found him lying on a couch. Two of his old friends were also present. In the discussion that followed I heard the term "united front from below" for the first time.

During the tumultuous days of "The Split" in the original New York City Teachers Union, the "united front from below"

designated the left-wing membership caucus which had gained control of the union over the opposition of the elected officers. Cogen and some older executive board members see CATU as a possible plot to destroy the Guild.

Q: This group is backing a salary differential for high school teachers, isn't it?

A: Yes and no.

The executive board had not known the details of the compromise salary plan until the CATU ad appeared. Many of them had not yet grasped the significance of the promotional increment. I point out that the promotional increment is really a single-salary plan because the extra pay differential would be based on educational qualifications which all teachers could acquire. Many board members still object to it but they are through with me for the time being. They want to question the three board members who were a part of CATU. These are George Altomare, Milton Pincus and Louis Heitner.

Altomare follows my line: he felt he was carrying out Guild policy. Pincus tries to minimize the situation: he says the CATU matter is being blown out of proportion. Heitner is the last to be quizzed. So far, the board is still unaware that I am the architect and chief carpenter of the CATU project.

Heitner strips away my anonymity. "Listen," he says. "When my organizer calls me and asks me to do something, I do it!"

I try to look unconcerned during the vigorous discussion that follows. "The united front from below" is frequently heard. Shanker takes the floor. He has retained his seat on the board even though he is a full-time union employee. I had told him that union staff members usually do not run for political office. He had insisted that by continuing on the board he could support positions the two of us had discussed privately. He tells the rest of the board members that thousands of teachers have already signed the CATU petitions. The teachers want unity, he says, and there is no way the sign-up sheets can be called back. He finishes his speech and looks mockingly at first one member and then another. He demands, "Well, what are you going to do about it?"

Shanker holds the floor for a long moment before sitting. There is nothing the executive board can do, and he has left

them no way to cover their impotence. I am embarrassed. I wish he had let them work their own way to the inevitable conclusion.

After futile efforts to revive the dying meeting, the board adjourns. CATU has survived, but I am acutely aware of lingering resentment among the board members.

THE GUILD NO MORE

As the CATU movement continued to gather force, the Guild renewed its public demand for merger talks with the SSTA. Two meetings were held, but the SSTA officials had no intention of uniting with the Guild.

The rejection of the Guild's offers opened the way for further negotiations with Hochberg and Parente. The enthusiastic response to the CATU sign-up sheets had convinced the two leaders that breaking away from the SSTA to establish a new organization would be a step toward leadership of the city's teachers. By vote of the Guild executive board, the CATU representatives were invited to enter into direct negotiations with Guild representatives, by-passing the SSTA officers.

The negotiations were as hard fought as if Hochberg and Parente had headed a functioning organization rather than a phantom created by the Guild. When asked by members of the executive board what the Guild had to gain from the CATU merger, I replied, "We are buying the franchise to organize in the high schools."

Once the salary differential issue was settled, the chief problem in the "merger" talks became the distribution of power within the new organization. In private, Charlie Cogen was far from the tiger he often appeared to be in public. Other Guild leaders seemed equally vulnerable. At one point, the CATU leaders tried to assure me that I had nothing to fear from their possible accession to power in the new organization.

In the end, the twelve officerships provided in the UFT constitution were evenly distributed among Guild members and the newcomers. Cogen remained president, and Hochberg became "deputy president." The executive board was expanded, and Hochberg and Parente were allowed to choose a third of

the members. Safeguards were designed to prevent high school teachers—who comprised less than a third of the teaching staff—from being overwhelmed by other teachers.

When the merger plan was complete, a special meeting of the Guild delegate assembly was called. The most effective speech of the occasion was made by the leader of the Guild veterans, Rebecca Simonson. She had been president of the Guild for the ten years preceding Cogen's presidency. Simonson reminded the Guild leaders of the many crises they had survived to establish a liberal, "responsible" organization. Now, she said, the time had come to take a bold new step into the future.

The reorganization plan was approved overwhelmingly. The New York Teachers Guild ended, and the United Federation of Teachers emerged.