AFT fights for better schools

NEW YORK — Throughout its 60 - year history, the American Federation of Teachers, AFL - CIO, has championed the cause of quality education with people, money, legislation and all the resources at its command.

A major part of what the AFT means by quality education is a commitment both inside and outside of the school context to equal opportunity for all Americans.

In the AFT's case, the commitment to equality has been much more than pious rhetoric. From the 1920s, when the union refused to hold its annual convention in cities with segregated accommodations, to the early 1950s, when the organization expelled segregated locals before the Brown v. Board of Education decision was handed down, right up to the present day, the AFT has stood firmly for justice and full human rights.

In 1963 big-city locals of the American Federation of Teachers met in New York City to draw up guidelines to help promote racial integration of pupils and school staffs in urban school districts in the North.

The result was a series of guidelines for AFT involvement in big - city school integration.

In the preamble to the guidelines, the AFT said, "In every large Northern city there is an active AFT local, and these local unions of teachers are especially well - qualified and have a special responsibility for speeding integration in their localities."

The guidelines called upon AFT locals to "do everything possible to insure that they exert a real influence and achieve the desired results," including (1) integration of pupils; (2) integration of school staffs; (3) improvement of the quality of education so that all pupils are given an equal opportunity to succeed in social, economic and political life, and (4) teaching of integration as a characteristic of American life.

Thus, AFT leadership pointed the way to solutions of problems in the big - city school systems almost a decade before the Supreme Court ruled that de facto segregation in the North was a problem as, if not more, serious than the problem of de jure segregated school systems in the South.

One of the proudest examples of the AFT's commitment to equal rights is its More Effective Schools program.

Designed as an alternative to the typical educational deprivation found in ghetto schools, the MES program was initiated by the AFT in New York City in 1964 and has since been introduced by AFT locals in a dozen other cities and states.

The MES program has been recognized as an exemplary compensatory education program by the United States Office of Education and has been recommended by the USOE to school districts throughout the United States.

Its success has resulted in the creation by AFT member committees of four basic designs, called the Comprehensive Program for American Schools (COMPAS), which outline optimum teaching conditions in elementary schools, junior and senior high schools and community colleges.

In December 1966, the first AFT National Conference on Racism in Education was held in Washington, D.C.

More than 1,500 teachers and other educators heard a massive indictment of American education for its systematic campaign to keep Afro-American contributions to American society from its citizens.

The final plenary session produced a set of recommendations to launch a national campaign to combat racism in the schools.

Specifically, the conference called for textbooks that would give a true picture of the contributions of blacks in American and world history.

AFT local unions in their drives against racism, in cooperation with civil rights groups, liberals and labor leaders, brought pressure on boards of education to secure federal funds to support the writing of more technically oriented textbooks; and they boycotted against those publishers who refused to correct their inadequate textbooks, in addition to sponsoring local conferences to point out these glaring injustices.

The 1968 Poor Peoples March, conceived by Dr. Martin Luther King, drew large participation from the American Federation of Teachers.

The AFT was called upon to organize and staff freedom schools in Washington and to lend financial assistance for the participants in the march — poor blacks, Mexican - Americans, Indian - Americans and poor whites — from all over the country.

This march placed emphasis on relief of poverty and better educational opportunities for all.

The demands for ethnic studies have been pushed by AFT locals long before they became fashionable.

For example, in 1969, the San Francisco Federation of Teachers demanded that all San Francisco teachers and administrators be released a period per day for a 3-week intensive course in black, Chinese or Spanish - speaking culture.

They further asked that at least one all - day conference among teachers, administrators, students, parents and

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NEA spends $1.5 million for defense

WASHINGTON — National Education Association's DuShane Fund invested a record $1,153,446 last year to defend teachers whose rights were violated. A total of 511 cases were processed in courts throughout the country in 1975-76.

"In the past year, NEA and its affiliates have shown increasing effectiveness in their fight for improved education and economic security for educators through such activities as bargaining, political action, and instructional and consumer advocacy," declares NEA President John Ryor.

"But basic to the protection of our members has been our expanding defense effort, which ensures that teachers can perform the job of educating the nation's children without fear of attacks on their rights."

WITH NEW CHIEF—NEA staff members confer with NAACP's Clarence Mitchell, newly elected chairman of the Leadership Conference on Civil Rghts. (L-R) are: Gloria Starks, NEA legislative consultant; James Green, NEA manager for legislation and Mr. Mitchell.

NEA and its affiliates have chalked up major court victories in recent months affirming teachers' rights in the areas of negotiated benefits, free speech and association, corporal punishment, desegregation and tenure.

In a decision with broad implications for Iowa teachers, the state supreme court ruled that 25 Durant teachers were illegally denied negotiated tuition reimbursements totaling $5,590.

NEA and the Iowa State Education Association led a five - year fight on behalf of the teachers, whose 1971-72 contract provided that individuals could receive up to $320 reimbursement for college course work taken with the superintendent's approval.

However, the board later refused to comply with the provision, arguing that it was illegal because it was not covered in the state code.

The ruling is significant because "the Supreme Court has granted broad discretionary powers to school boards that will allow them to enter into agreements with local associations on a variety of fringe benefit policies not specifically mentioned in law," according to ISEA.

Another victory was scored in the NEA - Washington Education Association - backed case of high school teacher Lawrenee Wagle, who won reinstatement with back pay and damages which will total at least $50,000.

Wagle, active in the American Civil Liberties Union, was fired in 1970 after teaching eight years in the Longview School District.

The district claimed to have fired him on the grounds of his teaching performance and his attitude toward the school system.

However, the Ninth Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals ruled that his termination was "motivated by the public expression of his controversial views" and that his competence as a teacher was not challenged until 1966, a year after he was elected chairperson of the local ACLU.

In a Wyoming case involving teachers' rights in relation to corporal punishment, elementary teacher Marion Compton won reinstatement with back pay with support from NEA and the Wyoming Education Association.

Compton was nonrenewed at the end of the 1974-75 school year for alleged corporal punishment of a minor nature, lack of organization, discipline and grading problems, and poor health.

However, a judge said charges that her grading method represented a pattern were insubstantial. He found evidence that she seldom struck students and, in fact, had long discontinued the practice.

Further, he noted, the district superintendent violated board policy since he failed to seek an impartial understanding of the problem by arranging a conference between Compton and complaining parents, and he neither observed her classroom nor let her know whether her performance met acceptable standards.

NEA and its Louisiana and Mississippi affiliates won favorable rulings in two cases involving the transfer of black faculty during school desegregation.

A district court awarded Louisiana high school coach Robert Smith back pay of $4,345 and attorneys' fees of $3,000 and ordered the school system to offer him the position of head football coach.

Smith, who served as head coach in an all-black school for almost 10 years, was transferred to the position of assistant coach at a desegregated school. Two white men subsequently held the position of head coach, which Smith was denied in 1973 and 1975.

The court ruled that the district's action violated

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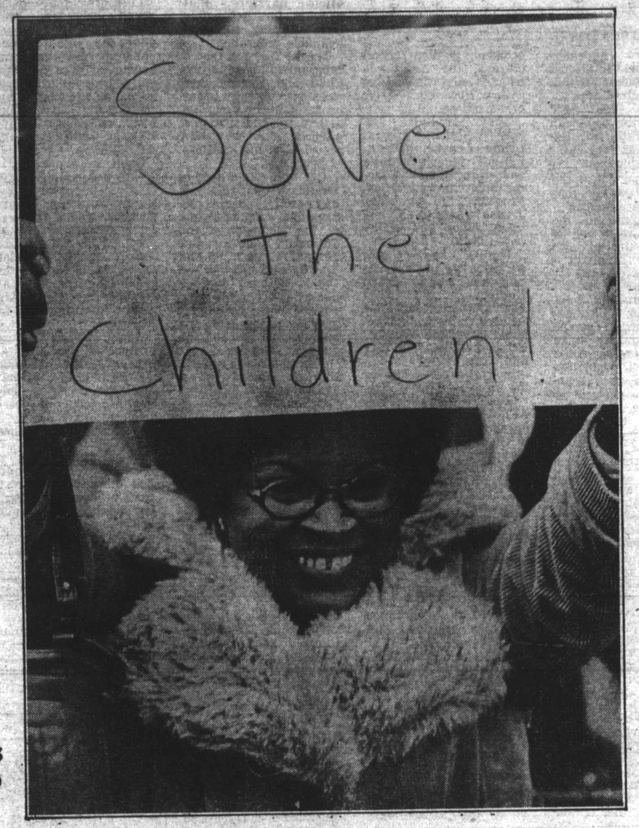

The picture tells the story.

In the 1970's and beyond, the schools will need all the help they can get.

With the support of the AFL-CIO, the AFT is helping.

Helping move the economy so schools will have the revenues they need to function.

Helping pass laws that will guarantee more and better education for everyone.

Helping teachers gain the power and respect they need to do their job well.

You can help, but you need to join the winning team.

AFT

AMERICAN FEDERATION OF TEACHERS, AFL-CIO
Education for Democracy, Democracy in Education

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