CITY CLUB FORUM

CLEVELAND CITY CLUB

SPEAKER: Albert Shanker, President
American Federation of Teachers

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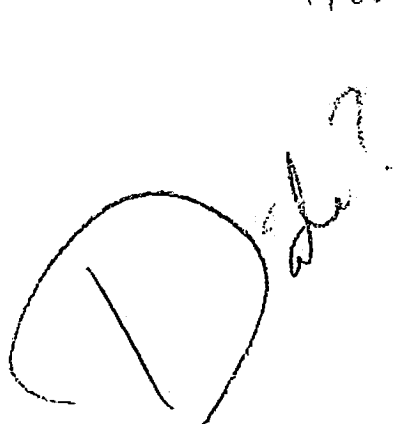

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THE ANNOUNCER: From the City Club in Downtown Cleveland, we present the City Club Forum, the oldest continuous free-speech forum in the United States. Todzy'a speaker is Albert Shanker, President of the American Federation of Teachers. National distribution is made possible by the Standard Oil Company headquartered in Cleveland and proud to support these free exchanges of opinion and thought.

THE CHAIR: Good afternoon, and welcome to the City Club Forum. I am Lorraine Thwig, a trustee of the club.

Today I am very pleased to introduce our distinguished forum speaker, Albert Shanker, President of the American Federation of Teachers. This is a 630,000 member union which he has lead since 1974. In addition he serves as Vice President of the AFL-CIO where he ranks fourth in seniority in the Executive Council.

After attending public schools in New York City, our speaker earned degrees from the University of Illinois and Columbia. His career began as a math teacher in the 1950s, and with his election as President of New York City 's United Federation of Teachers, Mr. Shankers' stature in both education and the labor movement became widely recognized. Among

numerous memberships of national organizations and boards, Mr. Shanker is President since 1981 of the International Federation of Free Teachers ' Unions which is head= quartered in Brussels (sic).

For the past 16 years he has written a weekly column entitled "Where we Stand " which addresses the issues on education, labor and political and human rights. It appears in the Sunday NEW YORK TIMES, and some additional other papers across the country. He is a frequent contributor to National magazines and journals and appears often on major television news and interview programs.

His topic today is The Professionalization of Teachers."

It is a pleasure to present to the Cleveland City Club Forum, Mr. Albert Shanker, President of the American Federation of Teachers. Welcome to Cleveland.

(Applause)

MR. SHANKER: Thank you very much. It is a pleasure to be here today to discuss the professionalization of teachers, and I would like to place that question in the broader context of what we need to do to restructure American public education so that it has the effectiveness

that has been called for in recent years. We have now been through a very amazing period. We have been through a period of five years when education has captured the attention of the people throughout the country.

When "A Nation at Risk" appeared, many people said this is like everything else in our society. The headlines will follow it for a week or two weeks or a month or two months, and then the headlines will be taken by some other topic. That has not happened.

The governors have devoted the last four of their annual meetings to education. The Carnegie Report has set up two national commissions and now a National Board of Professional Teaching Standards.

And the entire business community of the country, the Committee on Ecomomic Developemnt, the National Chamber of Commerce, business partnership groups around the country have made education a major priority, and to me it looks not like one of the temporary issues that people get interested in and then move away from, but a lot more like the energy crisis of the 1970s.

We no longer have the big lines at gas stations stations, but everybody knows that the price will eventually

go up and there will again be shortages and we will probably not again ever get to a point where we feel we don't have to worry about it or think about it or be concerned about it.

And while there may not be headlines every day or every week concerning education, there has been a conscious-raising in this country which has made education a permanent and not merely a temporary issue.

Now the earliest wave of reforms that came with about 30 separate reports were all very mechanical. They just said test the teachers before you hire them. Don't automatically promote the kids. Lengthen the school day a little bit. Lengthen the school year a little bit. Make sure the kids study foreign languages, English, mathematics, science and so forth. These were a bunch of buttons that were being pushed. And those reforms were all right as far as they went.

Certainly teachers should be tested before they are hired the same asas all other professionals are, and certainly students should not determine what the curculum is. It should be determined by society and by adults, so many of the reforms were worthwhile and they

continue in the states that enacted them..

However, the country very soon became aware that that these reforms would not, even if we wait five or twn years to see what the impact is, that these reforms in an of themselves, unless we make other major changes will not bring about any major improvements in education.

About what they will do, they are not going to do very much for those kids who were really working very hard and making it anyway.

They may actually do something that is bad for those kids who stay in school feelong as long as they lived long enough, they would eventually get a diploma, that there no standards attached to it. Now some of those kids are told you can hang around as long as you want, but if you are unable to pass the competency test, you won't get it - some kids will give up. They are going to say, I wasn't able to learn it the past. I am not going to make it.

So at best many of these reform laws will pressure sort of middle level students who in the past felt that they didn't have to work so hard because they would graduate anyway, that working harder didn't make much difference, so it may get them to work harder, so there

will be some incremental effect.

But as we move along in terms of education reform, we really face two major issues that were not anticipated or thought of. You find practically no awareness of the issue at the time that the first reports came out.

The first is really the question of how are you going to teach math and science and foreign languaes; indeed how are you going to teach any of the subjects, or even basics if you don't have teachers. Now one-half of all the teachers in the United States are going to leave teaching in the next six years. That is 1.1 million out of 2.2 million are leaving. They are leaving for the usual reasons. A lot of them are retiring becase they came in at the time of the baby boom and they have served their years and they are leaving.

Many leave for the reasons they have always left. It doesn't pay well, and there is not much respect and it is hard work. And every place I go, someone at an airport or at a hotel usually says "Hi, Al," and I turn around to see if I really know that person, and usually they say,"You don't know me. I used to be a teacher."

Noboby says, "Hi, Al, I used to be a surgeon,"

or anything like that. They all used to be teachers. So people have always left teaching and they continue to do it now.

Now just to give a picture of how serious this problem is, the usual reaction when I say we are going to have to replace half the teachers in America in six years, they say, "Well, so what. Why dont you just round up the usual suspects. Get them in the same way you usually get them."

Well the problem is the usually suspects are not there. We got a lot of teachers because of the great depression of the 1930s. They had no other place tto go. Then we got a lot of teachers because we had military conscription in this country, and many men had a choice of fighting in Vietname or Korea or Cleveland --or Brooklyn-- and they chose the home war rather than the foreign war.

Then of course we had a large number of women who had no other place to go. Well, we don't hace the draft anymore and we don't have the depression anymore and if you look at the law schools, medical schools, dental schools, business schools and accounting schools and see the percentages of women today as compared to ten years

ago, you will see that ten years ago the percentage of women getting baccalaureates and masters in these fields was three, four five, six seven, eight, nine ten per cent. Now it ranges between 50 and 65 per cent in these other professional schools.

Now, that is a great thing for women, great for human rights, but it is an absolute unmitigated disaster for public education because most of those women would have headed toward teaching or nusrsing.

So that means that for the first time in the history of education, American education, we cannot rely on getting teachers who are escaping some other problem, that is they are escaping military conscription or discrimination or depression, we have to get them the same way that any business gets them, that is through incentive. They are going to come here not because they are running away from something else,but they are going to become teachers because they say that is what I want to do. And that is one of the major reasons for the movement toward the notion of professionalism.

Yes, you need more money. That is an incentive. And yes, you needbetter working conditions. That is an incentive. But we have a very major change in our work force

in recent years.

On occasion I asked my mother or father when I was gorowing up when they were going off to work, "Why do you work?"

They would answer very quickly, "Do you want to eat" Do you want a roof over your head?"

People for a long time worked for only one reason. It was an exchange of sweat for the necessities of life, but today if you ask people why do you work, of course they wouldn't work if they weren't being paid, but they don't say "I work because I have to eat," but they say I work because I have certain skills and by using those skills which I do very well, I get satisfaction, I am able to help people and I get recognition."

The doing of work today is much more personal fulfillment and satisfaction. That is the first thing that people think of rather than instantly: Well, I have to feed my family. What that means is that people are more and more looking for jobs which are not--they don't want to be hired as hired hands to be told what to do. They don't want to be treated as people who have no judgment, no intelligence of their own with other people constantly telling them what to do. The motion of professionalism is

essentially to move away from the school as a factory in which teachers are treated as hired hands and told by others what to do. There used to be a term for this in the 1950s, a lot of things were created which were called "teacher-proof materials," teacher-proof.

They were going to create materials that were so good that no teacher could destroy them. That is, the kids would learn no matter how bad the teacher was. That was the idea, the idea that teachers were somehow impediments. We are not going to get good people coming into this field unless we say that you are intelligent, we know that you are coming into this field to get satisfaction. We respect your intelligence and therefore we are going to give you a substantial amount of autonomy and the ability to excercise judgment, and I will come back to that.

The percentage of college graduates that we will need each and every year for the next 11 and 12 years to come in merely to maintain the present staffing ratio, we will need 23 per cent of all the college graduates--almost one quarter of all the college graduates to come into this one field, public elementary and secondary school teaching.

Now what is happening is that we are getting the teachers, but who is coming? We we need all these people. We will need 23 per cent. Only six per cent of the students enrolled in college today say they want to become teachers. The unfortunate thing is that while among them there are some very bright and excellent people who will make very good teachers, that a very large number of those coming our way are in the bottom quartile of all college students, so that what happens when they go to states that have minimum competency examinations, 20, 30,40 per cent of them fail a simple sixth grade arithmetic test. They can't read themselves. In other words they are people who should not become teachers, so we have a very, very serious problem.

Now I would like to come back to the question in terms of how to get these teachers in terms of salaries and working conditions and professional life, but I would like to turn now for a few minutes to talkking about students.

How well are our public schools doing? How poorly, what are the students learning, what aren't they learning. There is a Big debate. Public school people

paper that is written at a very low level, how many can read the Wall Street Journal or the Washington Post or the New York Times; and then finally how many can read technical knowledge, technical information?

How many people could use a railroad timetable or an airline timetable which essentially means that they could open up a book that has some statistical information and they could read from the chart and figurre out what the numbers mean.

The good news is that almost nobody is illiterate, that is cannot read anything, but when you get up to how many people can read the Wall Street Journal and the New York Times, how many youngsters who are still in high school --we are not talking about the dropouts--how many who are still in high school and just about getting ready to graduate, can read the New York Times or the Washington Post? It is 35 per cent.

So 65 per cent still in high school cannot read at that level.

What percentage can read an airline timetable or a bus schedule or a train schedule? Under 5 per cent of all kids about ready to graduate high school. Under 5 per cent.

Well, let us go to the question of mathematics. How many can do a simple two-step problem? That is the numbers are easy, no complicated fractions or decimals, but you have to do a little thinking. You have to know that first you do this and then you do that--two different operations, 26 per cent of those about to graduate high school can do a simple, two-step problem.

How many 17-year olds about ready to graduate high school can write a letter to a prospective employer that shows some critical thinking and some minor persuasive skills, that is: Dear Empooyer: I think you should hire me for this job because I used to do the following at church: I eas responsible for collecting money and taking a record of things that were in the closet, ~~and~~ then I worked one summer in this and one summer in that.

How many can write a simple letter to an employer which shows a little bit of thinking, the abiilty to muster arguments, evidence in support of a conclusion? 20 per cent. 20 per cent of those still in school. Mind you we are not the kids who dropped out. These are successful. They are still in school They are going to make it. 20 per cent. Those are pretty dismal results.

So we have to reach a conclusion. One possible conclusion is that that is how God makes kids. He

makes 20 per cent like us (Laughter) Or if you don't like God, I know we are in a lot of trouble on these religious issues, the laws of nature do it that way annd that is it. There is not much that we can do about it.

By the way if you look at England and France and Germany and Italy, you find about the same numbers. It is hard to get the exact numbers, it is hard to get exact comparisons, but if you go over and say how mnay youngsters go to college, how many can do this and that it is about the same. Japan is different. They are different for other reasons. We may get into that later. So that is one conclusion.

But there is another one. In the old days if you went to Chrysler or to Ford or General Motors and say,"How come 26 per cent of your cars keep getting recalled each year?"

They would say,"That is the nature of mass production.When you have got factories and you have these svstems, there is always a certain number of errors." There is no way of avoiding that.

Then along came the Japanese and found that if you had a somewhat different system of production, you could

have almost zero recalls. So the question I would like to raise now, are there certain things we are doing in our schools which actually turn certain kids away from learning and prevent them from learning, not because we are evil people or not because we are trying to do that to the youngsters, but because we are in a situation that is similar to the medical world which for 2,000 years you went to a doctor and you wanted to get cured and you had a very good chance that the doctor would kill you inadvertently. He didn't know he was supposed to wash his hands. He didn't know that he was supposed to sterilize his instruments. These are all very recent notions, so for a couple of thousand years you went to get help fro m the people who knew it, but there were simple little things that they didn't know like washing your hands.

Are there simple things like that which get those of us who are education to do somethings that arre wrong. Let me touch on a few of those things. We take all students in when they are, let us say, six ye ars old, the same day, right after labor day or somewhere around there, and we put them in a class and call them first graders or six year olds Then the teacher

starts talking to them and we give them sets of books and we start doing numbers with them. And they all come the same day.

Why do they all come the same day? Because that is when the teacher starts talking. If you had some of them coming in later, that is like coming in in the middle of the movie. They might not understand.

Well, are all those kids really six years old? Of course not. They were not all born on the same day. They were all b o r n different days during that one year. That means that the oldest youngster in the class is a year older than the youngest. Now I ask you does a year make any difference at age six? It is a major part of one's life at that time. And to take two kids and have them sit next to each other and to tell them you are both first graders and you are both six years olds, and I going to ask you the same questions and give you the same work and expect you to learn it at the same rate--but if one is one year older than the second one--is to set up a system in whiich certain inevitable things happen; namely, statistically, the youngest kids get to feel that they are weeker and slower and dumber. And if you look at the percentage

who drop out later on who happen to have the wrong birthday--it is amazing. Even where the kid who is a year younger has has an IQ that is substantially higher than the kid who is a year older, a substantial difference in IQ does not necessarily overcome that tremendous difference in maturity. So that is one little thing that we do. So we have to ask ourselves: Is there a way of organizing our school so that the kids don't all all have to come the same day?

Then there is something else we do. We have all the kids and they all have to sit still and keep quiet and they have to listen to the teacher. How many adults can sit still from 9in the morning until 3 in the afternoon? And listen to someone talk? Very, very few. And yet we expect six and seven-year olds to do it.

So those six and seven-year olds who are able to sit still, will sit still, and remember what someone said from listening, we say they are smart. But if there are other youngsters who may learn in other ways, but can't do that, we say that they are dumb or disruptive.

Another thing we do in class, we ask questions. Why do we ask questions? Well, we want to see if the kids have learned something. We want to keep them wide awake. We want to encourage them to do work at home because maybe they will be called on. So everyday there are kids

whose hands are always up. And every time you call on them, they almost always get it right. School is a great place for them. They would come Saturdays, Sundays and holidays. Wonderful for them.

But then there are the kids over here. Thhey never have their hands up. I can tell you what they are doing while I am deciding who to call on. They are praying. There has always been prayer in the schools.

(Laughter)

But neverless I cannot call only on those who have their hands raised. And what happens to the kid that I call on in the morning and in the afternoon, today and tomorrow and the next day and the day after that and the kid always gets it wrong? What am I doing to that kid? Well, I am publicly humiliating that kid.

Just think of the time when you are constantly called on in front of all of your peers and you never get it right? And think of what everybody else is saying and how they are looking at you.

And just ask yourself, what impact does that have on your willingness to learn? What does

that do to your emotional make-up as this goes on for a little while? It doesn't take too long. So essentially by setting up unfair competition, by saying that only those students learn who can sit still and are able to listen, only those who are fortunate enough not to be humiliated early on and therefore feel successful, those are the ones who are going to make it; others, too bad.

Well, is there a way of organizing things so that students don't have to sit still all day long? Is there a way of organizing instruction so that learning in the early years is relatively private and free from this type of humiliation?

Let me add just one more thing that we do in schools. That is, schools are usually organized on an annual or semi-annual basis. That means when Johnny or Mary come into school in September, the payoff is June. It may be February. That means that one of the things we place very important stress on is that you, as a child must know that what you do on September 9, September 10, or

September 11, you must do because that is going to determine what happens on June 24.

How many adults if you were to give them their salary on September 9 and tell them to plan until next June24 would be able to have enough to live on over the year ? Most people are not very good at that and to ask six, seven, eight and nine year olds to be able to think that what they do every day is going to have this tremendous cumulative effect at the end of the year is asking a bit too much because the time span is just too great.

Well, I must say that there are other ways of organizing schools. My youngest songraduated high sxhool and he didn't like school very much, so he decided not to go on to college. He started working at a restaurant as a dishwasher and after that he made salads and then he made soups, and then he came to me and said, "Dad, I want to go to the CIA."

I said, "What?"

And he said, "Don't worry, it is not what you think. It is the Culinary Institute of America."

So he went there and after he was there a few days, I thought to myself well, I will go up there

and have dinner with him because he is likely to suffer a shock. He thinks it is a place where you learn how to make scrambled eggs, but actually you learn about nutrition and you l e a r n culinary French and actually there is a lot of academic work.

So I called up and said,"Michael, can we have dinner? and he said,"No."

I said "Why not?"

He said, "I am studying tonight."

I said, "You have only been there a few days."

He said, "You don't understand. A semestet is three weeks long."

(Laughter)

Well, if a semester is three weeks long, it concentrates the mind. The student doesn't waste a day. The teacher doesn't crack a joke unless it is really going to make a point. But furthermore if some kid doesn't learn, you don't have to worry about leaving him back for a whole year with a bunch of little kids. Losing three weeks that you have to repeat over again is a little different than

losing a whole year.

These are some of the things that we have to change and restructure. We will have to do some of these things if we will have a school that is more effective

And I would like to spend the last few minutes talking about how we might do that. Suppose that instead of a self-contained classroom in which the students are sitting still and the teacher is lecturing all the time, suppose that we said that there will be a team of adults and maybe a whole bunch of students, maybe what would now be two or three or four classes and you had different ways in which the students could learn. The students could learn by reading a book, they could learn by using a computer, they could learn by pulling a video tape out and watching shows about how the grand canyon was formed or how eskimos live in Alaska, or they could go to an older student in that cluster who happens to know that very well, or they could go to one of the adults. In other words, there are a lot of different ways of doing it, and by and large, they do it by themselves and they do it with one other person so they

are not humiliated. In a school like this, since the teacher isn't lecturing, the kid can actually enter on his birthday. They don't all have to come in on the same day.

If a kid wants to sit still and be lectured to, you could even have a little group down at the corner who love to be lectured to, but I doubt that there will be any who want to be lectured to for the full day.

Now, since the teachers now are not lecturing, what are they doing? They are giving kids individual help and they are thinking about Johnny who is trying to work out a way. He has tried the book, and the computer, and he has tried another kid, and has tried the video tape and he still hasn't learned and they are figuring is there some game or some other way in which we can reach Johnny, but the things that the teachers will do more of and which they don't do now is they will have time to get kids to write, to get kids involved in critical thinking, in persuasion. They will not be spending all their time regurgitating a lot of facts which can be gotten elsewhere.

Furthermore since the adults are working in a

team, you could have a lead teacher, you could have other teachers who who are professional teachers, but who are not yet nationally board-certified. You could have a few interns who would do the same type of work that interns do in hospitals, namely things that they could do that teachers would allow them to do. You could evrn have some parents who are volunteers who are very good at some things but who are not there every day to do everything. They are there s ome days to share wtih the kids the things that they can do.

Now I conclude by suggesting that the schools that we have right now are good for 20 per cent of the students; that 80 per cent of the students fail; that if we are not to attribute this failure rate to their own innate lack of ability which I do not, then we have to attribute it to the fact that we have a system which is too rigid, to unresponsive and actually turns kids off of and away from education.

Now for the first time in human history because we have technology that we never had before, we now are able to do things that we never could before. When I went to school the teacher didn't have the VCR, didn't

have the computer, didn't have the simulation. There was no other choice but to sit them all down together and to run it like an old-fashioned factory.

Today unfortunately the schools have not done what every other industry in the world has done, and that is in order to stay alive, you have got to change and you have to use the new technology, not to depersonalize education, but to allow for greater individuality and to allow for more individual time of adults with students.

This, too, enables the teacher to be a professional, to exercise judgment, not merely to be a policemen, to have some teachers as part of a team who are compensated differently, to have a more professional structure.

So I leave you with the thought that the United States is about to go under in the automobile industry and the one hope that we have is things like the Saturn project which are radically re-thinking the way in which we make automobiles to turn that whole process into something very different.

In education we are doing the same thing today that we did 200 years ago. We have one teacher in front of a bunch of kids lecturing, using a blackboard and using a couple of books. We too need to come into the new age, and we need to radically not merely reform, but we need to revolutionize education in this country.

(Applause)

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr. Shanker. Today at the City Club of Cleveland we have been listening to Albert Shanker, President of the American Federation of Teachers. We now are ready for questions of Mr. Shanker. We have two microphones., Allan Davis in the front and Bob Cabana in the back.

We are ready for our first question.

QUESTION: Yes, Mr. Shanker, I am very impressed with some of the ideas that you have suggested today. Are you aware of any instances where some of these ideas have been followed, where there have been attempts to do some of these things? And if so, what have the results been?

MR. SHANKER: Well, first I should say that these ideas obviously bear a resemblance to some of the open schools of the 1960s. There are two major

differences. One is that most of those open schools were influenced by what came to be known as the counter culter of the new left in which essentially they said if the kid doesn't want to do something, he shouldn't have to and that the child should determine the curriculum in a sense. This does not do that.

The second major difference is that every teacher in those programs had to invent every type of experience because the technology was not there yet, and the technology is here now.

There are pieces of this happening. The concept behind it is--Theodore Sizer has a network known as A Coalition of Essential Schools which is about 30 high schools across the country organizing on a basis which is very different from traditional high schools with concepts very similar to these.

And there are now school systems across the country that are devoting one or two schools essentially to asking the faculty to spend a year thinking about how they would --they are asking the faculty essentialy to reorganize the whole school on the basis of principles

like this. We will not know probably for another ten years. One year obviously doesn't tell you very much with students, especially if you are going to measure the results with some sort of idiotic test that doesn't mean anything.

For instance we give kids a lot of little tests where we try to find out if they remember a certain day or name or something else.However, there is no state in this country that requires a student to write a simple letter to see if they learned how to write or think,,but if we had real tests of that sort, it will take a while to find out, but there are many districts that are now beginning to experiment with programs like this.

QUESTION: Mr. Shanker, we read about Community Control Boards in New YorkCity. Have they produced the anticipated desirable results of local input or have they caused problems for the union and the administration?

MR. SHANKER: It depends. There are 32 districts and there are times that there have been problems and there has been conflict and confrontation and at times there has been graft and corruption, but many

of these districts have brought forth community leadership that had not been there and community support. I would say that basically it is kind of a dead and boring issue now in New York.There was a big fight 20 years ago and it was very exciting then. But right now very few voters turn out in the elections, about 4 per cent. I think it provides a basis for a community activity,support and involvement and I don't think it has hindered the operation of the schools.

It hasn't produced the great results. People said "Gee, if communities become involved, the kids will really learn." That hasn't happened.

Others said if you have local peoplerunning, you are going to get graft, corruption, violence. That hasn't happened. They are pretty much like school boards elsewhere made up of the same economic circumstances as they are, so essentially, it doesn't make much difference whether you have,whether you have a central board of education or 33 local boards as long as you have the same kids with the same books and the teacher doing the same thing in the classroom. You could have three of these boards or fifteen or 160. If you

don't change what is actually happening in the place where it is actually happening which is students and teachers, you are not changing anything that is educational.

QUESTION: Hi Al, I used to be a teacher 50 years ago and I used to be a member of your union too.

(Laughter)

Two questions. Lou Harris this morning in the New York Times and the Plain Dealer said said that now more than ever the American People are willing to vote more taxes for education.

The second question is what about Secretary of Education Bennett, is he going along with these new ideas or doesn't he and what should the government be doing which it is not doing?

Those are my questions.

MR. SHANKER: Well, that is half of what Lou Harris said. Lou Harris said that the people in this country by overwhelming majority, huge, like four or five to one say they are willing to pay more money education, but not for the same old thing. They want something different, and the thing I am talking about is

something that is different, but essentially if you just go back and say we want a little smaller class sixe, a little more money for teachers, a little better textbooks, a little better this, people say that is an endless thing and they are not willing to.

If you say we have got some new ideas in education. We will raise standards which will attract good people into teaching, they are willing to do that.

As far as Secretary Bennett is concerned, I am glad to see his recent conversion. He just discovered last week that more money is needed for education (laughter). He has spent three years saying that we basically don't need money, don't need more money that basically what we need is good character and moral fiber. I agree that money alone won't do it, but I think that some of the things that Bennett has emphasized have been valuable. He has emphasized the need to teach democracy, the need to teach moral values. He has emphasized the need to have standards. He has talked about a curriculum which has good cultural materials in it. All those things we stood for before that and we still do, but essentially he has presided over a very tough, bad period

of time when many students who were getting special help and were making progress because of that special help lost it because to some extent of Mr. Bennett and certainly because of President Reagan.

QUESTION: Mr. Shanker, your main job I assume is dealing with the New York City School Boards or New York City School Boards, I am not sure what the exact organization would be-

MR. SHANKER: No, I retired from that job two years ago.

QUESTION: Oh.

MR. SHANKER: I am the National President of the American Federation of Teachers. From 1974 until two years ago for a 12-year period I wore both hats, but I wear one hat now. I am President of the American Federation of Teachers and the New York local has a very fine president and she is doing the negotiating with that school board and dealing with that school board--Sandra Feldman.

QUESTION: Well, maybe my question is not so relevant then, but I was about to ask you what success you had in dealing with the New York School Boards, and I assume as a president emeritus you may still have some

influence with your successor.

MR. SHANKER: Well, school boards in general are one of the --I mean they are a great assett--you have 15,000 school districts in this country and that means that you have about 130,000 citizens who sit on these boards and in some places they provide great support for public education.

In other cases, the school boards themselves came out with a report which showed a lot of petty politics, a lot of revolving door----and I think that there will need to be some major change in the attitude of school boarrds toward teaching as a profession. You are not going to get people to come in to be math teachers and science teachers and social study teachers and English teachers if they are constantly going to be told what to do by people who are not basically experts in the field and not professionals.

Maybe for many years in days gone by the teachers themselves did not go through the kind of training that they are going through and will be going through now, so I think we will need some jamor changes.

Big city school boards have been special problems

in most of the country. They have not in recent years provided the kind of leadership that would be necessary to get community support. I won't speak about this city. I don't know it, but on a national basis I can say that as I go from a large city to another large city, that educational problems to some extent are more severe in those cities because of a lack of leadership over many years. Small cities do pretty well as do medium-sized cities.

QUESTION: Mr. Shanker, you spoke about the failure of high school graduates to adequately communicate in writing on many subjects including applying for a job.

I would like to hear your comments on how you feel the young graduates are speaking. I have had a lot of experience in over hearing conversations of boys and girls who are in high school and are about to graduate and some of them, I just can't understand what they are saying. I wonder if you feel that English as a spoken language is being taught properly, and if not what can be done to improve it?

MR. SHANKER: I agree with you, but part of what can be done to improve it is writing as well because part of what you learn in terms of all of your communication

and writing is not just writing, it is not just a technical skill, it is persuasion. It is thinking. It involves a number of things and it comes back to your speech as well. And of course what you do in speech also reflects in terms of writing.

By the way the reason that students are not getting as much of this as they need is very easy to see. Suppose you are a secondary school teacher and you see five classes a day, and let us say there are 30 students in each class and you see 150 students a day.

If you ask each of them to write an essay, you will take 150 papers home to mark. The way you learn to write and to speak isto write and have somebody read it and mark it and not just say a, b, c or d, but somebody has to sit with you for five minutes and say is there a better way of beginning this? Is that interesting? Is that really what you mean to say? Why don't you try another way, and then you go through it again and again and again and as you do it and edit and re-edit and rewrite eventually you get to be pretty good at it. But if you don't do that over and over again, nobody is born to do these things.. It is work and it is practice.

Now if you are a teacher and you have to mark 150 papers and sit with 150 youngsters to help coach them, and if it takes you five minutes to mark each paper and five minutes to sit with each youngster, it is 25 hours for each set of papers.Now there is no way you can do that and that is one of the reasons that these schools are being developed.

It is also one of the reasons you have to get the teachers away from standing in front of the room and lecturing all the time, and get the kids doing their own work in different ways and give the teacher the time to mark those papers and to talk to the youngsters and to coach the youngster.

QUESTION: Mr. Shanker, I wanted to ask about the decline in teachers. In the first place I am very proud to be a part of the teaching community and a little bit I feel badly that I am considered a reject, a 20 per cent failure rate and so forth.

On the other hand I am quite concerned--

MR. SHANKER: Did you hear me say that aboout you?

(Laughter)

QUESTION: I hope not, but I just wanted to clarify that.

MR. SHANKER: You did.

QUESTION: The second thing was in terms of the shortage of teachers, it seems to me in our particular part of the country, we have a tremendous number of extra teachers and I wonder about those teachers who would like to get back into the work force who have taught for six or eight years and are now told by boards of education that unless they have one or two years they are not rehireable or for those teachers who move from one state to another and again find they are not hireable or caught by their particular retirement system, what kind of innovations might be in the offing for those people?

MR. SHANKER: It is an excellent point and the Carnegie Commission addresses itself to that I have written a few pieces on that.

In most other fields if you move from one place to another and if you are a lawyer or a doctor or you are a working for a computer company and you decide to move from New York to California or the other way around, usually you will be able to either continue earning what you

earned before or you actually each time you move, you may get an increase. If you move as a teacher, you really face a nightmare of a situation. Every state you go to, you may have to go back and take a lot of courses. You may have to take another examination to be licensed in the state. It is very rare that any state will allow you to get more than three or four years of credit for teaching anywhere else, so that you may have to work even though you may now have 20 years of experience, you may have to start working at the bottom of the salary schedule or make half of what you were making before, and then of course you may get no credit toward retirement.

So actually what happens is that when a lot of people move from one place to another, they just decide the heck with it, I am not going to be a teacher. I am going to go into some field where I am going to move ahead and move up.

So Carnegie recommends that there be portability and that there be a national system and, of course, rigght now, one of the reasons that there is no national system is why should California license someone just because they got it in New York where they have different standards?

That is one of the reasons for this National Board of Professional Teaching Standards which has just been set up so that teachers in the future are certified by a national board with a single high standard, then the states don't have to individually decide whether that is good enough for them. It will be good enough for all of them.

As to your first point, I did preface my remark that a lot ot talented people are there and come in, but unfortunately the numbers of those coming in right now are weighted by those at the bottom. That is not to look at any individual and say that you are one of them,but obviously--look, the city of Baltimore gave an examination a couple of years ago and it found that, a large number of teachers, prospective teachers, were illiterate, and I mean illiterate. They could not write a letter to the parent talking about the child. That was the test. The whole test was writing to a parent about something that their child did and ask for cooperation.

So those teachers got a letter saying, "You are not hired because you failed the exam." That was in May. Then in September they became what is called "Labor Day Specials." A "Labor Day Special" for those who don't know know it, is a person who could not get a job

in teaching until Labor Day, and then was hired by a school district who couldn't find anybody else. And so on Labor Day they all got telegrams saying "Even though we said you were illiterate and you flunked, we need you."

What they did do is that they required these teachers to go to school at night to learn how to read, write and count at the same time that they were teaching kids.

Now, by the way, Baltimore isn't the only place. This is not to say that Baltimore isn'ta system that is doing a lot to improve itself. They are not the only ones doing this. It is just that they are the only ones who somehow let a newspaper reporter get hold of it. Most other places, it is kept quiet. There is an awful lot of it. We are not going to have success in education--see if there is a shortage of doctors, you don't go out and turn somebody into a doctor just because there is a shortage, or in any other field.

So until we in teaching say that there are certain standards to enter the profession and if you don't meet the standards, you don't come in -- we don't succeed.

Now in England, they have got kids who do not come

to school for a whole semester or longer because there is a shortage of teachers, because there is no certified teacher. They will not hire a substandard person there, whereas here there is never a class that sits there without a teacher.

Well, what does that mean? It means the standard will always be flexible to move down low enough to get whoever is available. That is no way to build a profession.

QUESTION: You did not mention anything about teacher education courses. I found them so horrible that they drove me away from from teaching in a public school and I taught for 20 years in a non-tax supported school.

What about teacher education courses?

MR. SHANKER: Well, you are not the only one. The Carnegie Report, I was on that commission, says that every person in the future who wants to be a teacher should have a four=year liberal arts degree, no education majors in the undergraduate, in other words. And you should have majors and minors in subjects so that you become proficient in a number of areas--all teachers, elementary school and others.

And then there should be a professional school combined with an internship so it is not all what some professor thinks is his philosophy, but if you were an intern say in the morning and then came to your professional school in the afternoon with problems that you had faced there, in other words you need something that is closer to a teaching hospital.

You need a university-school relationshio so that it is practical and you also need something that is based on research. Now in the last ten years we have had a very rich, excellent period. We have learned a lot and good teacher education programs today are very worthwhile, although many of them are still not good, and that is a complaint that you know thousands of others share with you.

QUESTION: You spoke about a national program for licensing teachers. What about proposals to nationalize teacher retirement so that if a math teacher teaches high school math in five different states, he or she can get full credit for their teaching years when they decide to retire without having to figure out how and when to purchase service credits from the various states?

MR. SHANKER: Yes, I just indicated that we favor a national system. There is already a national system for college professors. It is called TIAA=CREF and it was developed for college teachers many years ago, somewhere before World War I because college professors move from one institution to another. Basically the individuals and the institution just contribute to this national fund, and the individual has a choice of several different types of investment, and wherever you go, you pay into the same pension. It is not a governmental fund, it is private. And I think the same should be done for teachers. I don't see why it should be nationalized in that sense. It should be nationalized in the sense that it should be available nationally, but it should not be nationalized in the sense that it should be governmental. I think that is one of the things that will come out of the Carnegie Commission, that within a few years I think you will see the creation of a national non-governmental teacher pension fund and those districts that say that our teachers have a choice of belonging to this national fund will find that they can attract teachers more readily because in other places teachers will know if they ever leave

those places they will lose money and they will lose credit, so I think we will get there and we will get there soon.

QUESTION: At the beginning of your talk you alluded briefly to the Japanese experience in education, and I gathered that there were some other remarks that you wanted to make about Japan's experience as opposed to those systems in other countries. What do you think is the difference? And why?

MR. SHANKER: Well, the Japanese system shows you the most that you could possibly get out of our current system if you did everything just right, that is if you had the perfect mother and father; and if mother and father started worrying about the kid the second the kid was born, if you started teaching that kid immediately as the kid was born so that the kid--you have programs, you have schools to prepare the kid to compete to get ito nursery schools for three-year olds. And then again into the elementary schools. And then if you had not only mothers and fathers, but all the other kids in the class pushing each other to excell--that is in American schools it is sort of the kids against the teacher, or it is almost a

labor-management type of relationship there, but in Japan it is the kids who push each other. They work in teams, very large class sizes, but broken up in teams with team leaders. The team leader is called the Honcho, and that is true, and so you have everything going for you.

You have got a society--now what happens? Nobody is illiterate. They get to read and write a complicated language, a very complicated language, and they get to do basic mathematics quite well, so that shows that if you have got everything going for you, you would have kids who could write the letter and they could read, they could read the equivilent of the New York Times or the Washington Post and technical material and they could do mathematical problems, so you could do that almost without exception with all of your kids with all that pushing, however, you can walk into a social studies class of 17-year olds and ask any question like what are the reasons for disarmament, having disarmament talks or is it good to have a progressive system of taxation--whatever--you won't get any discussion in any class. You won't get any weighing of things.

As long as it is memorization, as long as it is mechanical, as long as it is what do I have to learn

and I will spit it right back to you--that is great and that is a very high level. And so the Japanese have had a reform Commission in which they want their schools to be more like American schools where the kids are more creative and where they are able to judge.

The Japanese system shows you that even if you could have all the parental support and all the social support and have the kids going longer hours and longer days and a longer year and a longer everything else, if you had everything going for you, you wouldn't want ir that way because there is something missing. And it is not only missing for us, but the Japanese realize it is missing.

QUESTION: As an educator, secondary education in the Cleveland system, I certainly agree with your plan of having more educators in the room to work with the students, however that plan seems to be long-term as far as actually being able to organize it in Cleveland.

And also even though you may have a number of people working with the students, you are still going to have students being influenced by the negative problems in society.

My point is that at my school we have 350

students with one guidance counselor, and as we continue to build more prisons instead of hiring more guidance counselors to to deal with these students' problems when they are younger, I think that is not going to solve the problem of them going to be able to learn until we do that.

My question to is how do you feel about having more guidance counselors so that we do have someone to talk to these students while they are young so that they don't have a block from learning?

MR. SHANKER: I think that is fine so long as you have a traditional model of school, and certainly in Cleveland you could do it and you could do it in some other places, but on a national basis, you can't do it. I mean--I indicated a few minutes ago just to replace the teachers who leave, you need23 per cent of all college graduates.

Now nationally, I am not talking about one place or another where sometimes things can be done, , but nationally if you were to hire more guidance counselors and reduce class size so that the teachers would have a little more time to plan and talk to each other, I mean have more time for teachers and reduce class size so that teachers wouldn't have to spend 25 hours

to mark papers, they would only have to spend 20 hours or 15 hours. Remember that if you double the number of teachers and reduce class size to half of what it is now, it would men that 46 per cent of all college graduates in this country would have to become teachers and each teacher would have to spend 12 and one-half hours marking the papers, you see.

What I am saying is that as long as you continue on the current model everything is impossible. It is impossible because nobody is going to spend 12 1/2 hours marking the papers anymore than they are going to spend 25 hours, and if you are going to get 46 per cent of all the college graduates, I can tell you who they are going to be. They are going to be the bottom because our society needs doctors, lawyers, dentists, generals. It can't take all the talent and put it in one field, so yes as long as the traditional model is there, but we have got to movee very quickly, not in the long term, but in the short term to get a revolutionary change in our schools. (Applause)

THE CHAIR: Thank you Mr. Shanker. The City Club is now adjourned.

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