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# Albert Shanker and the Future Of Teacher Unions

The author of the recent biography of Albert Shanker discusses the union leader's life and work and its implications for the future of American education.

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BY RICHARD D. KAHLENBERG

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**“Quality Assurance:  
What Must Be Done to  
Strengthen the  
Teaching Profession,”  
by Albert Shanker,**

originally published  
November 1996.

*Also*

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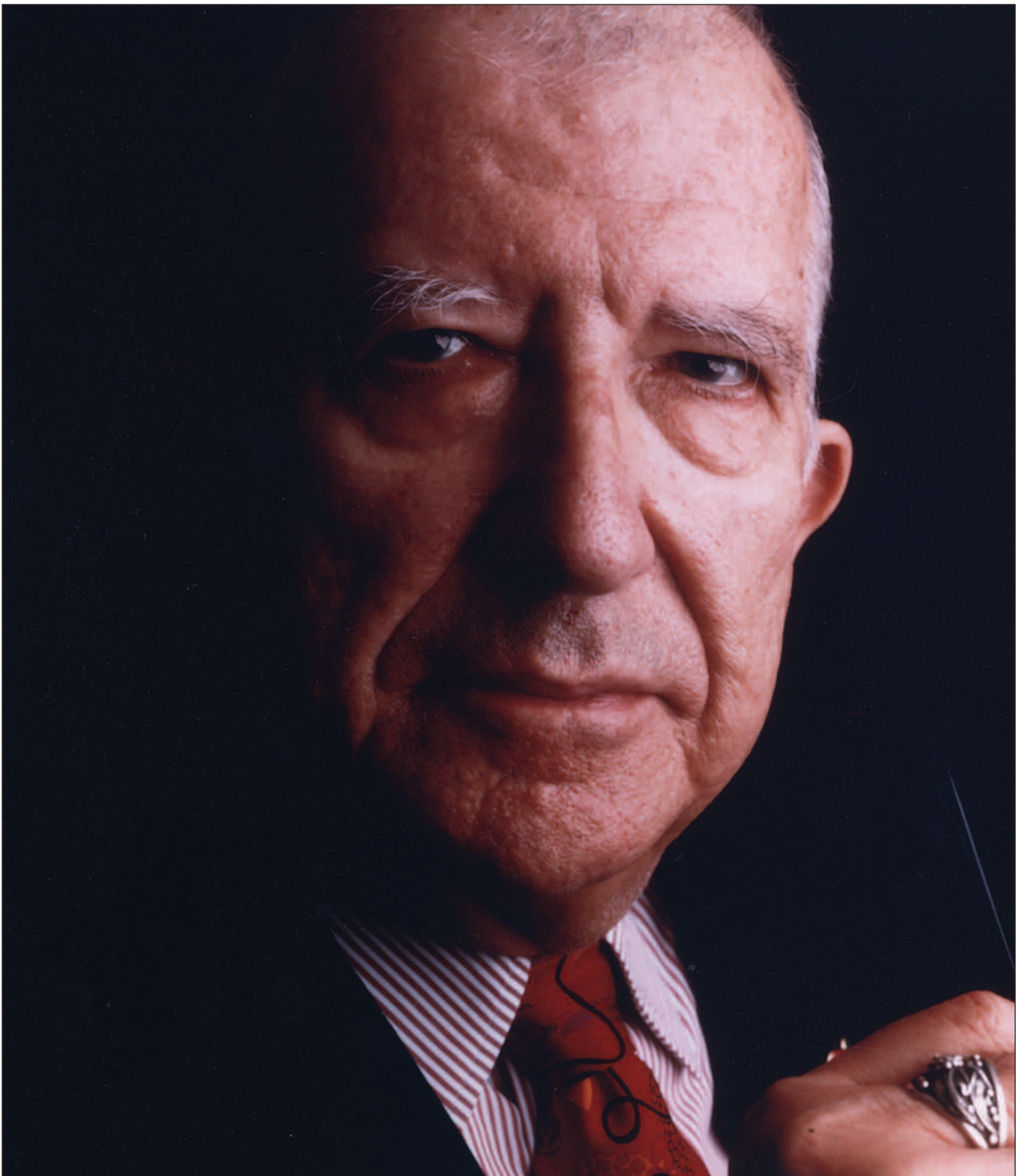
**B**EFORE my biography of Albert Shanker (1928-97) was published last fall, no one had written a full-length account of his life and work. I was amazed. Most of us would love to do one big thing in life. Shanker did three. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, he was a founding father of modern teacher unionism. Then, in the 1980s and 1990s, he became the country's leading education reformer. And throughout, he was a key combatant and spokesperson for a unique political philosophy — what I call “tough liberalism” — which I believe is more politically potent and intellectually coherent than either orthodox liberalism or conservatism today.

The longtime head of the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) in New York City (1964-86) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) nationally (1974-97), Shanker was a colorful and complex character who was loved by some and hated by others. He is probably the only union leader or education reformer to be mentioned in a Woody Allen movie. Those of a certain age will recall the 1973 science fiction comedy *Sleeper*, in which Allen's character wakes up in the future and is told that the world was destroyed two centuries earlier when “a man by the name of Albert Shanker got hold of a nuclear warhead.”

I spent seven years working on *Tough Liberal* and was uneasy about what sort of reaction the book would receive. The volume is mostly sympathetic toward Shanker's role as a teacher union leader, education reformer, and political figure. In the book, I do disagree with him on certain issues, such as his strong support for the Vietnam War, and I do identify certain flaws in his character (for example, he was a neglectful father). But for the most part, I found him to be a visionary figure, and people's reactions to the book, not surprisingly, generally accord with their views of Shanker.

Shanker had fans (and enemies) across the political spectrum, so reactions

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did not break down neatly along ideological lines. Fairly positive reviews ran in some conservative outlets (the *Wall Street Journal*, *Weekly Standard*, *City Journal*, and *Education Next*) as well as in some liberal publications (*Slate*, *American Prospect*, and *Democracy Journal*).<sup>1</sup> Conversely, somewhat negative reviews

were published in the liberal *Nation* and the conservative *Policy Review*. The *Nation* complained that Shanker wasn't orthodox enough in his liberalism, while the *Policy Review* felt he was too much of a unionist.<sup>2</sup>

Because Al Shanker continues to hover over many of the debates we have about education today, the bi-

ography has spurred discussion regarding “what would Al say” about various contemporary issues. Inevitably, at many of the forums held to discuss the book, people also asked whether there was anyone like Shanker today — in the teacher union movement or in public education more generally. In this article, I begin by reviewing the major themes of *Tough Liberal*. Then I outline the reactions to the book and my response to those reactions. Finally, I speculate about what these discussions might say about the future of teacher unionism and education reform.

## THE BOOK

*Tough Liberal* traces Shanker’s life chronologically from birth to death, but three major contributions stand out: his role as a founding father of teacher unionism, his role as an education reformer, and his role as a tough liberal.

**Founding father of modern teacher unionism.** The late Tom Mooney aptly called Shanker the “George Washington of the teaching profession” for inspiring teachers to organize and bargain collectively. Shanker came by his unionism naturally. He grew up in a working-class family in New York City; his father delivered newspapers, and his mother, a seamstress, was a member of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU). In that respect, Al Shanker was typical of New York City teachers in those days, many of whom came from blue-collar backgrounds. Indeed, Shanker used to joke that the ILGWU and the UFT should merge and call the new entity the Garment Workers and Their Children.

Shanker began public school teaching in the early 1950s after dropping out of a doctoral program in philosophy at Columbia University. He was particularly struck by the poor pay of teachers and the dictatorial power of principals. In one of the New York City schools he taught in, the assistant principal literally spied on teachers with binoculars. Shanker clearly saw the need to unionize, but there were three main obstacles to organizing teachers in New York when he started trying in the late 1950s. First, many considered unions to be beneath them. Because they came from blue-collar backgrounds, educators supported unions, but they thought that, as college graduates, unions were not for them. Second, it was illegal for public employees to strike, so few thought it made any sense to organize government employees. Teachers could lose their jobs if they struck, so many were intimidated. Third, Shanker faced the problem of teacher disunity. There were different teacher organizations for different ethnic and religious groups,

for high school teachers and elementary school teachers, for science teachers and English teachers. In all, there were 106 teacher organizations in New York City.

Shanker and his colleagues, however, overcame each of these obstacles. The Teachers Guild, of which Shanker was a member, merged with the high school teachers and became the United Federation of Teachers. Shanker and others also convinced teachers that unions weren’t unprofessional; indeed, teachers needed an organized voice to be treated as true professionals. What was professional about being paid less than those who washed cars, about being required to supervise kids while you ate lunch, about having to bring a doctor’s note to prove you were telling the truth when you said you were sick? Moreover, drawing on the civil rights movement, Shanker argued that while public employee strikes might be illegal, sometimes you needed to break bad laws for a good cause. Shanker personally landed in jail twice in the 1960s for leading illegal strikes, which helped turn him into a hero among teachers.

Over time, Shanker transformed not only the AFT but also the much larger National Education Association (NEA) into powerful organizations that would stand up for teachers. He built the UFT in New York City into the largest union local in the country, a potent political force that greatly improved the wages and benefits of teachers. Shanker used to say you could tell New York City teachers by their good teeth, alluding to their generous orthodontia benefits.

**Leading education reformer.** Building a national teacher union movement, by itself, would have been a significant accomplishment. But then, in the 1980s and 1990s, Al Shanker became the leading education reformer in the United States. Although there were inklings of his passion for education reform early on, he mostly held a more traditional union view in his younger years. When people complained about strikes he led and asked about their impact on children, Shanker initially replied that he represented teachers, not kids. But in time, he moved dramatically on that question.

After the strikes of the 1960s, Shanker began writing “Where We Stand,” his well-known paid column in the Sunday *New York Times*. At Shanker’s memorial service, Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D-N.Y.) noted, “The impact was extraordinary. Union leaders in those days rarely wrote essays, still less felicitous, thoughtful analyses of public policy.” Many readers thought the column was part of the *Times* editorial copy, not an advertisement, and wrote letters to the editor in response, which the *Times* ran. In his column, Shanker unleashed 52 ideas a year. *Education Week* said he ran the AFT more like a think tank than a union.

Shanker truly broke out as an education reformer in 1983, when — in contrast to the rest of the education establishment — he supported the Reagan Administration’s controversial report, *A Nation at Risk*, which declared public schools to be mediocre and called

by reducing teacher voice, which is exactly the opposite of what Shanker was proposing. Shanker recognized that there were good charter schools and bad charter schools, but he was sorely disappointed in the overall direction of the movement that he had helped father.

Shanker forged a compromise on the divisive issue of “merit pay,” proposing what would become the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, which allows for greater pay for highly accomplished, board-certified teachers.

Shanker’s third contribution was his greatest: a call for creating a system of standards, testing, and accountability in education. His basic vision was to overlay a system of incentives of the type used in the private sector onto the public school system, while maintain-

ing the essentially public nature of schooling. He looked abroad and saw that most countries that were beating us in international comparisons had clearly articulated standards of what students should know and be able to do, along with tests to see whether students were learning and accountability for failure. As a teacher, Shanker said, whenever he gave a quiz, students would invariably shout out, “Does it count?” He worried that in American schools, because employers did not look at transcripts, doing well academically mattered only for the sliver of the student population applying to elite colleges.

Shanker’s various reform ideas continue to influence most of the great education policy debates going on today. Moreover, it’s fair to say that he is the single individual most responsible for preserving public education in this country. First, by building a powerful teacher union movement, he helped create a unique political force with the muscle and sophistication to defeat most privatization initiatives. Second, by responding to legitimate concerns about the need to improve public

for a new movement toward excellence. In the coming years, Shanker advocated three major sets of reforms that continue to influence education policy debates today. First were his initiatives to make teaching not just an occupation, but a true profession. Astoundingly for a union leader, Shanker was willing to admit that there were a lot of lousy teachers in public education. When his wife Eadie asked how he, as the head of the union, could write such things, he joked: no teacher reading what I write thinks I’m talking about them. To make teaching more like professions such as medicine and law, Shanker called for a rigorous national entry-level test for teachers and said that AFT would admit as members only those who passed it. Responding to the charge that unions protect incompetent teachers, Shanker defended tenure but backed a controversial “peer review” plan in which master teachers would evaluate incoming and veteran teachers, weeding out those not up to the job. Likewise, Shanker forged a compromise on the divisive issue of “merit pay,” proposing what would become the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, which allows for greater pay for highly accomplished, board-certified teachers. He also proposed a “merit schools” plan to reward teachers in a school collectively for raising student test scores.

Second came Shanker’s proposal for teacher-led charter schools. Shanker first proposed charter schools in a March 1988 speech at the National Press Club. He envisioned these schools as teacher-led institutions, which would allow for greater creativity. Interestingly, conservative education advocate Chester Finn, Jr., was one of the early opponents of Shanker’s idea, declaring that we know what works and don’t need more experimentation. Over time, however, Shanker and Finn switched sides, as the charter school movement was largely hijacked by conservatives who saw charter schools as a way to get around teacher unions — there-

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*Got a Question?*



### **Continue the Conversation**

A podcast of a follow-up author interview, featuring readers’ questions, will be made available on the PDK website at [www.pdkintl.org](http://www.pdkintl.org). Readers who have questions they would like to direct to the author may send them to Erin Young at [eyoung@pdkintl.org](mailto:eyoung@pdkintl.org). Questions must be received by June 13 if they are to be considered, and please include your name and location. — *The Editors*



*Al Shanker, president of the UFT, rallying the troops during the 1968 Ocean Hill-Brownsville strikes in New York City.*

education, he helped defang critics of the system. Considering all the contributions he made to education, it is accurate to say that he was, in the words of journalist Sara Mosle, “our Dewey.”

**Advocate of tough liberalism.** Al Shanker’s third and most controversial legacy was his fight for what might be called “Tough Liberalism,” which combined an idealistic desire to promote social mobility with a tough-mindedness about the realities of human nature. Speaking at Shanker’s memorial service, President Bill Clinton remarked, “Al Shanker would say something on one day that would delight liberals and infuriate conservatives. The next day, he would make conservatives ecstatic, and the liberals would be infuriated.” A defender of public schools and unions, he was also a fierce anti-Communist and a strong opponent of racial preferences. There was, however, something that bound together his seemingly disparate views: a profound commitment to democracy.

Shanker believed that trade unions were not just interest groups, but important institutions in a democracy. With Ronald Reagan, he supported the Solidarity union movement in Poland in its challenge to Commu-

nist rule. But unlike Reagan, he also supported unions at home as a way of giving employees a democratic voice in the workplace, some influence in the Congress, and a check on the unbridled economic power of corporations. “There is no freedom or democracy without trade unionism,” he argued. Likewise, he believed public schools were more than places to train future employees; they were institutions that taught democratic citizenship and helped bind children from vastly different backgrounds together to teach them what it means to be an American.

The same democratic rationale, however, drove Shanker to be an unrelenting anti-Communist. He didn’t see why it was “liberal” to stand by while the Sandinistas in Nicaragua beat up democratically elected union leaders. And he thought America should project its values abroad and that promoting democracy had to be central to a liberal foreign policy. Likewise, he thought, in a democracy, it was essential to have a single standard for individuals of all races. He recognized the need to take affirmative action to redress past discrimination, but he argued that extra help should be provided to low-income people of all races.

## REACTIONS TO THE BOOK

Shanker's tough liberal philosophy was solidified in 1968, when he led a series of strikes during the battles over "community control" of New York City schools in Ocean Hill-Brownsville. The struggle began in November 1967, when two wealthy white liberals — New York City Mayor John Lindsay and Ford Foundation President McGeorge Bundy — sided with Black Power advocates and called for greater community control of schools. An experiment was set up in the ghetto of Ocean Hill-Brownsville, but all hell broke loose in May

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1968, when the local school board terminated the employment of several unionized white educators. No legitimate charges were brought for dismissal, and "due process" rights were ignored. This was something new. Shanker and the unions were accustomed to attacks from the right wing, but this was the first liberal assault on labor.

For Shanker and his colleagues Bayard Rustin and Michael Harrington, liberalism stood for the integration of schools over white or black separatism, the right to unionize and not be dismissed for arbitrary reasons, and the idea that people should be hired and fired based on merit rather than race. The Black Power movement, aided by Lindsay and Bundy, upended that consensus, and Shanker and the UFT responded by shutting down New York City schools in a series of three strikes, which lasted 36 days and threw a million students out of school.

Most upper-middle-class white liberals sided with the Black Power movement. Shanker, who had participated in sit-ins against segregation and had marched with Martin Luther King, Jr., in Selma, Alabama, was nevertheless branded a racist for opposing the community-control effort. In the ensuing years, however, Shanker made clear that the issue wasn't black versus white, but the rights of people to organize and be treated fairly. In 1970, Shanker helped organize a group of mostly black and Hispanic teacher aides in New York City, winning wage increases and benefits, but also a career ladder, so that paraprofessionals would be paid to go back to school and earn degrees to become teachers. Bayard Rustin called it the most important affirmative action program in the country.

Since its publication in September 2007, the Shanker biography has received three sets of reactions. Most reactions have been positive and have expressed nostalgia for Shanker's extraordinary leadership in education reform. A second group of responses has criticized Shanker from the Left, particularly his handling of the New York City teacher strikes and his relationship with the black community. A third group of reactions has been critical from the Right, arguing that whatever Al Shanker's personal qualities, his primary legacy is a strong teacher union movement that is opposed to positive education reform.

### **Longing for Al Shanker.**

For the most part, the biography seems to have generated a yearning for Al Shanker's wisdom and leadership in education. At a forum in New York City sponsored by the Committee for Economic Development and the Century Foundation, for example, several panelists spoke about Shanker's ability to form a strong reform alliance between business groups and teacher unions — and about the need to renew such bonds today. At another forum, panelists expressed a longing for Shanker's ability to work with education conservatives on certain issues (e.g., higher academic standards), even while he fought them on other issues (e.g., private school vouchers). Today, teacher unions and education conservatives have retreated to their respective bunkers and engage in little cooperation, some said.

Interestingly, the longing for Al Shanker's ideas and leadership was expressed by a variety of people who otherwise do not appear to agree on much. In New York, for example, I participated in forums with both Chancellor Joel Klein and two of his fiercest critics, Randi Weingarten, president of the UFT, and historian Diane Ravitch of New York University. All three expressed a deep admiration for Shanker's ideas on education. In Washington, D.C., forums were sponsored by both the conservative-leaning American Enterprise Institute and the liberal-leaning Brookings Institution. At these discussions, panelists as varied as Sen. Lamar Alexander (R-Tenn.) and Clinton White House Chief of Staff John Podesta; former Reagan official Chester Finn, Jr., and former AFT official John Cole; and liberal columnist E. J. Dionne and conservative columnist David Brooks all found much that was admirable in Al Shanker's legacy.

Having said that, not everyone expressed a nostalgia for Shanker, of course. Many on the Left don't care for his toughness, while many on the Right reject his liberalism.

**Criticisms from the Left over toughness.** Though Shanker was a committed unionist and champion of public education, the fiercest criticisms of Shanker and my book, ironically, have come from the Left. Some on the Left saw Shanker's "toughness" as educationally unsound or even racially insensitive.

At a forum at New York University, educator Deborah Meier said that Shanker's legacy includes an obsession with testing and accountability that has culminated in the counterproductive No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. Shanker essentially won the standards debate, she said, and that is an enormous tragedy.

Meier is certainly right to say that Shanker was a strong supporter of standards, testing, and accountability, which he believed would promote equity. It did poor kids no favor to throw away the thermometer that indicated they had a fever, he argued. But she is wrong to suggest that Shanker would have endorsed NCLB in its current form. While Shanker would have agreed with the thrust of the bargain — more resources for more accountability — his writings about earlier versions of standards-based reform suggest that he would have had serious problems with NCLB.

First, Shanker believed that a system of accountability had to include kids as well as teachers, something NCLB fails to do. He noted wryly that it is not a smart strategy to tell students that, if they fail, they won't be punished but their teachers will be. Second, Shanker argued that a requirement that 100% of students meet a single standard of proficiency — as NCLB provides — was plain silly. It would result either in a dumbed-down standard, which was meaningless, or in high rates of failure, which would pave the way for vouchers. Instead, Shanker argued for multiple standards that would put pressure on all elements of the academic distribution to improve. Third, Shanker argued for a set of national standards, not 50 different state standards, as NCLB provides. He couldn't understand why the knowledge of math should be different in Alabama than it was in New York. Finally, Shanker argued for high-quality standards and assessments, not the low-quality bubble tests employed by many states under NCLB.

The other major criticism I've heard about Shanker from the Left involves his handling of racially charged issues. Critics on the Left remain particularly angry over his handling of the 1968 Ocean Hill-Brownsville strikes and his subsequent stances on affirmative action and multiculturalism in education. For those who were liv-

ing in New York at the time, the mere mention of Ocean Hill-Brownsville can make the blood boil even today — some 40 years after the controversy. It was like a domestic Vietnam, pitting family member against family member. And it was a turning point for American liberalism. It marked, in important ways, the beginning of "identity politics," which posits that what matters more about an issue than the substantive principles is the racial identity of the participants. It also marked the transition from colorblind liberal principles to a new era in which race would be considered — in jobs and in college admissions — as a way of promoting diversity.

For many liberals, Shanker's opposition to community control and racial hiring and firing in Ocean Hill-Brownsville — and his larger insistence that liberals stick to colorblind policies — was reactionary and racially insensitive. When Shanker warned that promoting racial preferences even for good purposes was undemocratic and would alienate the old coalition of working-class whites and blacks, these liberals respond that, in fact, working-class whites have had a long history of anti-black racism and that the breakup of the New Deal coalition can be blamed on white racism, not on new liberal policies aimed at promoting diversity.

Historian Jonathan Zimmerman of New York University, in a forum about *Tough Liberal* held at NYU, cited evidence of white racism and a backlash against the passage of the Civil Rights Act as evidence that there was no "liberal consensus" in favor of civil rights prior to the controversies over affirmative action policies and the Black Power movement's call for community control. Likewise, the University of Pennsylvania's Thomas Sugrue, in a review of *Tough Liberal* in the *Nation* titled "Shanker Blows Up the World," took issue with Shanker's criticism of his fellow liberals for abandoning such policies as racial nondiscrimination. Shanker's approach — which "often discredited liberalism in the name of saving it" — in fact ended up enabling the right wing, Sugrue argued. In Sugrue's telling, Shanker "was no small part of a political and intellectual Manhattan Project that exploited the fractures of New Deal and Great Society liberalism and empowered the New Right to rebuild from the rubble." In denouncing liberal deviation from its earlier commitment to colorblind policies, Shanker helped facilitate "liberalism's destruction." Sugrue concludes, "We live under a regime that [Shanker's] tough liberalism helped more than hindered."<sup>3</sup>

Was it white racism, rather than liberal abandonment of the nondiscrimination principle, that drove many white working-class voters to the Republican

Party? That explanation seems too simple. Surely it was some of both. Some whites opposed the Civil Rights Act and opposed the Democratic embrace of it, but others, like Shanker, strongly supported the 1964 Act and were angered when those colorblind policies were stood on their head in places like Ocean Hill-Brownsville. Many previously liberal supporters of civil rights and voting rights were concerned about the new regime of racial preferences that prioritized race over class and seemed to say that a black doctor's child deserves to be admitted to college more than the child of a white waitress. In New York City, before Ocean Hill-Brownsville, white teachers heavily supported Lyndon Johnson and the civil rights movement. Only after the strange alliance between limousine liberals and black separatists inflamed New York City schools did many of those voters move to the right, eventually supporting Ronald Reagan.

Shanker believed that, under the right conditions, class alliances could trump race alliances. I saw evidence of that time and time again in the union Shanker helped build as I spoke about the book to AFT audiences in Washington, New York, Miami, Houston, and Toledo. In discussions about Shanker, tough and divisive issues of race were debated, but at the end of the day, long lines of teachers — black, white, Latino, and Asian — stood to ask me to sign the book “in solidarity.”

**Attacks from the Right.** The criticism from the Right, by contrast, takes Shanker to task for being too liberal and seeks to distinguish between Shanker the education reformer and the union he led. The Hoover Institution's Liam Julian, for example, reviewing *Tough Liberal* in *Policy Review*, was somewhat sanguine about Shanker's overall impact as an education reformer, but he faulted Shanker for inaugurating collective bargaining for teachers and said that today there is an increasing divide between “the ‘reformers’ who favor implementing in the public-school arena new and controversial ideas (merit pay, school choice, charter schools), and the unions who mostly oppose them.”<sup>4</sup>

In fact, however, Shanker was mostly in synch with his union members, who continually supported his reelection. While he was invariably more innovative and open to reforms than the leaders of the much larger NEA, Shanker took nuanced positions on the three issues Julian highlights — merit pay, school choice, and charter schools — and opposed the more extreme views of conservative education reformers.

On merit pay, Shanker supported middle-ground compromises, such as establishing the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards to provide salary



*In 1985, Shanker gives one of the hundreds of speeches on education reform that he delivered across the country.*

premiums to excellent board-certified teachers and “merit schools” to provide extra pay to teachers who raised schoolwide achievement. But he supported collective rewards, rather than the individualized bonuses favored by conservatives, because he believed that paying all teachers in a school for improvements would encourage collaboration. Good teachers would have a strong incentive to share effective techniques and to work to help struggling teachers because everyone's pay would depend on how the school as a whole performed.

On the issue of “choice,” Shanker recognized that poor kids shouldn't be trapped in failing schools, but he favored choice within the public school system and vehemently opposed the conservative version — private school vouchers — which he believed would undermine the social cohesion that public schools have been so instrumental in promoting. And while Shanker supported teacher-led charter schools, he strongly opposed the anti-union version championed by the Right. Far from being out of synch with the union on these three issues, then, Shanker stood shoulder to shoulder with its membership in support of innovative compromises and drew the line at conservative policies that would undermine public education and trade unionism.

## **THE FUTURE OF TEACHER UNIONS AND EDUCATION REFORM**

What do Shanker's life and the reactions to the book say about the future of teacher unions and education reform?

On a policy level, it turns out that Shanker's writing and speeches, more than a decade after his death,

have much to say about the future of education reform. In the past several months, I've written about what Al Shanker might say about current controversies over No Child Left Behind and charter schools (in *Education Week*), about performance pay for teachers (in the *Los Angeles Times*), about school vouchers (in *Politico*), about ethnic-themed schools (in the *New York Times*), about the firing of bad teachers (in the *Washington Post*), and about plans to provide financial rewards to low-income kids who perform well on tests (in *Slate*).<sup>5</sup>

Teacher union critic Mike Antonucci playfully accused me of engaging in a "Shanker Séance,"<sup>6</sup> but there are certain themes that Shanker held firmly in mind, which today's teacher unions would do well to remember. One is the need to look for reasonable compromises that recognize the legitimate arguments of opponents. Rather than oppose all forms of merit pay and tenure reform, for example, Shanker acknowledged that some teachers are better than others. He backed "peer review" to fire bad teachers and the National Board to reward excellent ones.

Shanker also emphasized the need to continually remind people of the fundamental purpose of having a system of public education, which he identified as teaching kids what it means to be an American. For Shanker, that principle argued against both conservative proposals for private school vouchers and liberal proposals for public schools aimed at empowering particular ethnic groups.

A third theme Shanker was clear about was the need to recognize certain realities of human nature. This led him to acknowledge that kids often need incentives to work hard and achieve — above and beyond a love of learning. More broadly, the discussion of Shanker's legacy reminds us that we need teacher union leaders who can bridge divides in a polarized environment, who don't just resist reform but try to shape it for the benefit of kids and teachers, and who can articulate the larger vision and democratic purposes of public education in the way that Al Shanker did.

In several forums, people asked me whether I see a new Al Shanker on the horizon in the teacher union movement. My view is that Al Shanker was a very hard act to follow and that we're unlikely to see someone precisely like him for a very long time. But his successors at the AFT, Sandy Feldman and Ed McElroy, both continued in his broad tradition of advocating tough and smart unionism. The AFT remains the more intellectual of the two major unions and the more committed to education reform. To take one example, the AFT, through the efforts of Toni Cortese, is making a

strong push to promote the idea of peer review. Randi Weingarten in New York City stands in Al Shanker's tradition when she advocates higher teacher pay on the schoolwide level for higher performance, UFT-run charter schools, and the organizing of child-care workers. Likewise, Adam Urbanski in Rochester follows in Shanker's tradition of promoting innovation through the various efforts of the Teacher Union Reform Network. Of course, there are many teacher union leaders who aren't doing enough to live up to Shanker's legacy. But he did lay down a marker by which all subsequent union leaders must be measured.

In the larger political arena, the story is more discouraging. Today, no political figure fully represents the tough liberalism that Al Shanker stood for — combining economic populism with colorblind policies and credibility on national security. Shanker's tough liberalism responded to the central critique of American liberalism — that it is elitist and soft and doesn't understand the way the world works. More important, while centrist Democrats are accused of being poll driven and liberal Democrats are accused of being driven by interest groups and identity politics, Shanker had a coherent and simple answer to the question, What do you stand for? Al Shanker stood for economic and political democracy. After years of writing the book, and several months discussing it with panelists and audiences, I'm left with a question of my own: What might society look like if we took Shanker's vision seriously?

1. See Arch Puddington, "Making All the Right Enemies," *Wall Street Journal*, 28 August 2007, p. D-6; Fred Siegel, "Mugged by Reality," *Weekly Standard*, 10 September 2007, pp. 37-39; Sol Stern, "Old-Style Idealist," *City Journal*, 7 September 2007; Nathan Glazer, "The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly," *Education Next*, Spring 2008, pp. 82-83; Sara Mosle, "The Man Who Transformed American Education," *Slate*, 1 October 2008; Jal Mehta, "Standard Error," *American Prospect*, November 2007, pp. 57-59; and Jim Sleeper, "Teaching Toughness," *Democracy Journal*, Winter 2008, pp. 90-97.

2. Thomas J. Sugrue, "Shanker Blows Up the World," *Nation*, 12 November 2007; and Liam Julian, "The Shanker Legacy," *Policy Review*, December 2007/January 2008, pp. 105-11.

3. Sugrue, pp. 37-38, 41.

4. Julian, p. 105.

5. See Richard D. Kahlenberg, "No Child Left Behind: What Would Al Think?," *Education Week*, 5 September 2007; idem, "The Charter School Idea Turns 20," *Education Week*, 26 March 2008; idem, "Mr. Shanker's Lesson: The Legendary Teachers Union Leader Knew the Formula to Make Merit Pay Work," *Los Angeles Times*, 21 October 2007; idem, "Balkanizing Utah's Schools," *Politico*, 1 November 2007; idem, "Americanization 101," *New York Times*, 19 August 2007; idem, "The Right Way to Oust the Wrong Teachers," *Washington Post*, 11 November 2007; and idem, "In Defense of Bloomberg's Bribe," *Slate*, 6 November 2007.

6. Michael Antonucci, "Shanker Séance," Education Intelligence Agency, 1 November 2007.



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