

A CASE HISTORY

The Founding and Early Struggles  
Of the  
Federation of Catholic Teachers, Local 2092  
American Federation of Teachers, A.F.L. - C.I.O.

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## Introduction

Three possibilities came to mind as I considered what I would write about in this paper. Two of the three case histories did not involve me personally but had the advantage of being relatively recent. The one I chose happened a number of years ago but it involved me personally and intensely. As a matter of fact I was one of the main characters in this story of education and politics. Other characters, some in major and some in supporting roles include: Cardinal Cooke, Governor Rockefeller, Albert Shanker, Dan Sanders, Harry VanArsdale, Raymond Corbett, and Vincent McDonnell.

As you've probably guessed by now, it has something to do with teachers, the union, and the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of New York. Specifically, it has to do with the founding and early struggles of the Federation of Catholic Teachers, the union which represents the lay teachers in the Catholic schools of the Archdiocese of New York.

## Catholic Lay Teachers Group

I finished my master's degree in guidance at SUNY/Buffalo in 1966. Although I had taught for one year at Pearl River High School prior to my graduate work, I was not eligible for certification as a counselor because two years of teaching experience was then required for state guidance certification. My plan was to find a half time teaching/half time counseling position in a Catholic high school, get certified after one year, and then go back to the public schools as a guidance counselor. I sent my resume to all the Catholic high schools in the Archdiocese of New York. The Archdiocese includes the Bronx, Manhattan, Staten Island and seven upstate counties. I was offered a job which suited me perfectly at St. Agnes High School on East 44<sup>th</sup> Street in Manhattan. I was given a salary of \$6,400. That was in 1966-67 when a comparable salary in the public schools would have been substantially higher. Nevertheless, I was happy to get the kind of job which would get me back in to public schools in a year's time. But a funny thing happened on the way to the Forum. I loved the school, the kids, and my job. And that positive feeling was mutual. I didn't want to leave after the year. Toward the middle of that

first year, I went to my first meeting of the Catholic Lay Teachers Group (C.L.T.G.). It met on Sunday afternoons in the basement of the chancery office (now the Helmsley Palace Hotel) on Madison Avenue. I was the only high school person there. The others were elementary teachers, almost all of them older women. They had a chaplain and much of their agenda was concerned with social and religious activities. There were very glad to see me there. I was young, male and a high school teacher! I was appointed chairman of the high school division at that first meeting! Of course, I was its only member than but I was eager, optimistic and energetic. We made plans for a May "convention" of all lay teachers to be held at Spellman High School. Something had to be done about salaries. Elementary teachers at that time were being paid \$3,600. to start. That was for those with degrees. Non-degree teachers got less. High school teachers started at \$5,000. but they all had to have degrees.

We did a great job at P.R. for the May convention. Letters and posters went out which were very professional in their look and tone. Membership in the Catholic Lay Teachers Group (then \$3) was growing at a tremendous rate. It looked like the Spellman High School meeting would be very successful. About a month before, a delegation from the C.L.T.G., along with its chaplain, Father Harry Browne, went to a meeting it had requested with Cardinal Spellman. The then Auxiliary Bishop Cooke, representing the Cardinal, met with us. As we went around the conference table Bishop Cooke expressed his surprise when I said I was from St. Agnes High School. He had thought that the C.L.T.G. was exclusively an elementary teachers' group. Father Browne really impressed me that day. He actually banged his fist on the table and told the Bishop that "these people eat hot dogs while priests eat roast beef." Soon after the meeting, but before our scheduled May convention, the Archdiocese came out with a new salary schedule for the elementary lay teachers giving them a whopping 40% raise! The base salary went from \$3,600. to \$5,000. for the following school year. We felt that the announced increase would take the wind out of the sails of our fledgling teachers' union (although "union" was word no one dared use in those days). The May convention might just turn out to be more like a social tea than a union rally.

Interestingly, it didn't turn out that way. Even though it was held on a Friday night, it drew a standing-room-only crowd to an auditorium that sat over 800. The Archdiocese hadn't bought out the teachers at all. In fact, it may have proven to the teachers just how effective organized activity can be. A 40% raise and we hadn't even met yet!

It was in those very early days that there emerged a word, a goal, a rallying cry. It was later to be widely misunderstood by the press and by the public and it remains today more the dream and less the reality than it was back in 1967. The word was "parity." It referred not to equality of pay with public school teachers, as was commonly misunderstood, but rather to equality of pay between our own elementary and secondary school teachers in the same Catholic school system.

Back to May of '67. The Archdiocese was planning to pay beginning elementary and secondary teachers the same \$5,000. starting salary. From that point on, however, the pay scales were very different. Increments were much less for elementary teachers and the top salary much lower for the elementary teacher compared to his counterpart in the high school. Elementary teachers were angry about that. At the same time, high school teachers felt that they too deserved a raise. After all, elementary teachers were to get 40% more in '67-'68. Following the May convention, the membership of the high school division met and it had grown now into a group of about one hundred teachers, many of them male and relatively aggressive. We decided we would request a raise and picket the chancery if we didn't get it. I met with the superintendent, Monsignor Edward Connors, and even brought with me stamped manila envelopes already to go announcing the demonstration for the following week. I asked Monsignor Connors, man to man, if I should mail them. He wasn't ready to give me a definite answer on a raise and yet I needed time to organize the demonstration. He asked me to trust him and not to mail the letters. I didn't and a few days later a new salary schedule was published for high school teachers, giving them very substantial raises, not the 40% the elementary teachers got but high school teachers were much better off to begin with. So everyone was looking forward to big increases in salary and everyone had the C.L.T.G. to thank for it but the differential between elementary and

secondary teachers was very great. The parity at the base was now gone again and disparity as the highest steps was increased.

The high school salary schedule was a carbon copy of the high school schedule in the Diocese of Brooklyn which includes Brooklyn and Queens. It had been negotiated by their teachers' union, known as the Lay Faculty Association (L.F.A.). The teachers in the high schools of the Brooklyn Diocese had organized and been recognized by the diocese as the bargaining agent for the teachers there. At that time, 1967, the New York State Labor Relations Act specifically excluded employees in eleemosynary institutions, i.e., employees in charitable institutions such as in Catholic hospitals and schools. The Brooklyn Diocese freely chose to recognize the L.F.A. There was no legal requirement for them to do so. I'm sure the teachers themselves brought some pressure but Brooklyn was also a diocese which, now as then, is considered far more liberal than most other dioceses, especially the Archdiocese of New York. New York is considered in church circles to be a bastion of conservatism.

The C.L.T.G. was a growing, dynamic organization as the 1967-68 school year got underway. Membership was up to nearly 1,000 out of a possible membership of 3,000 lay teachers in the system. While C.L.T.G. was attracting members, and power, inevitably there were internal political factionalism and infighting. I decided to run for president of the C.L.T.G. in the fall of 1967 but my candidacy was ruled invalid on a technicality by the nominations and elections committee controlled by the old guard which by now was fighting hard to keep control. A male elementary teacher was elected unopposed. He considered his election an empty victory; later telling me he wished he had won in a real contest but at the time he had done nothing to prevent my political lynching.

In 1968-69, the New York State Labor Relations Act was amended so that its provisions were extended to employees in charitable and religious organizations. The political pressure for this amendment came primarily from hospital workers. Teachers in Catholic schools were also to benefit from it. It is important at this point to note that teachers in private and parochial schools are not considered to be public employees.

Therefore, the Taylor Law and similar legislation affecting the public sector does not affect the private. So with the 1968 amendment, the New York State Labor Relations Act which applied to private businesses now also applied to religious and other charitable institutions.

Needless to say, the C.L.T.G. saw this change in the law as a marvelous opportunity to gain collective bargaining rights. The C.L.T.G. retained the law firm of Guozzo, Silagi and Cramer, which specialized in labor law. Cards designating C.L.T.G. as bargaining agent were signed by hundreds of lay teachers and submitted to the New York State Labor Board. The position of the C.L.T.G. was that it should represent all the lay teachers in all the Catholic elementary and secondary schools of the Archdiocese (except the twelve so-called Archdiocesan High Schools which by this time had their own teachers' organization). The position of the union was that it should bargain with the Archdiocese itself for all the schools. The Archdiocese took an interesting position and it was that it shouldn't even be a party to the proceedings. Their argument was that all the schools, except the Archdiocesan High Schools themselves were not operated by the superintendent's office but rather by the individual parishes and religious orders that actually owned and operated the various elementary and secondary schools. The Archdiocese argued that if the union were to have bargaining rights, it would have to petition in each of the three hundred plus schools and bargain a separate contract with each pastor or principal. The union countered that such an arrangement would work undue and overwhelming hardship on the union and that, although the schools were owned and operated by individual parishes or religious orders, the Superintendent of Schools located at the chancery and the Archbishop did have authority in a number of areas such as curriculum, personnel, insurance, etc. The Labor Board heard the arguments on both sides which contained elements of both civil and canon law. Its ruling was Solomon-like. It ordered the Archdiocese to form as large an association of employees as possible and to report back to the Board on the success of its efforts. Evidently the word went out from the Chancery that all parishes and religious orders which had schools should join the "Association of Catholic Schools." When the Archdiocese reported its success

back to the Labor Board, it surprised everyone on the union side with the degree of compliance with the Labor Board's mandate. Virtually all parish elementary and high schools became part of the employers' association. Many high schools owned by religious orders also joined. One notable exception was the Jesuit High Schools. They refused to join and their lay teachers showed little or no interest. I later learned that the lay teachers in the Jesuit schools were always paid at least a little better than they would have been under our contract. Of course, they never got tenure and other rights later to be enjoyed by their colleagues in the other Catholic schools. A similar thing happened much later at Salesian High School in New Rochelle. Their teachers were bought out when the administration refused to join the employers' association. After a year of high salaries, virtually every teacher was terminated and new, less costly teachers hired. Those terminated had no union protection because they had refused to petition for collective bargaining rights, when they had been available. It always surprised me how easily people could be persuaded to give up rights by the lure of a couple of extra dollars. In this case, what sickened me was how unscrupulous management could be for the sake of a few dollars, yes even management which wears the Roman collar.

During this early period, the union was able to quote management's own teachings as they were written in papal encyclicals, labor day addresses, sermons, etc. The church has a long and very strong alliance with the working man and his right to organize, bargain collectively, and strike if all else fails. We were able to exploit this unique situation very well. We found, however, that the Church acted just like any other employer, maybe even tougher than most other employers, when it came to unions of their own workers. Seasoned labor leaders in New York were often to tell me how tough the Church was not just with its teachers but with its cemetery workers, hospital workers, etc. In 1948, Cardinal Spellman tried to break a strike of cemetery workers by sending in the Dunwoodie seminarians to dig graves. They did dig graves but eventually the Cardinal was forced to settle. A seminarian was no match for an experienced grave digger. The bodies were piling up too fast. In 1948 and twenty years later in this case of the

teachers, the attitude of the Church remained the same: unions are great...for the other guy.

Eventually, the controversy over the "unit" was settled by the State Labor Board and a consent election was scheduled for the Spring of 1969. Lay teachers in the over three hundred schools in the Association of Catholic Schools were to vote whether they wished to be represented by C.L.T.G. or not. The Archdiocese did mount a public relations campaign to dissuade the teachers from consenting but the C.L.T.G. won overwhelmingly. Bargaining for a first contract began in the early Fall of 1969. Soon after negotiations began, the biennial C.L.T.G. elections were held. I won the presidency against the incumbent handily. At that time, the incumbent was a high school counselor, like myself, who had been elected vice-president in 1967 but who had succeeded the president when he had resigned to take an administrative job in a public school in Westchester. As president, I also became chief negotiator.

The first round of negotiations wore on through the fall with no real progress. On December 8<sup>th</sup>, 1969, the teachers met at the Belmont Plaza Hotel and marched from the hotel to the chancery, a few blocks away where we picketed for the very first time. The press coverage was overwhelming. Every T.V. station sent a camera crew, every radio station and newspaper a reporter. The sight of lay teachers picketing the chancery right behind the cathedral and across the street from the Cardinal's residence was a major media event in New York City. Negotiations continued on through mid-January which we eventually set as a deadline. On a Sunday afternoon in mid-January, the teachers gathered again at the Belmont Plaza. The negotiating team arrived directly from the offices of the State Mediation Board at 270 Broadway where the chairman, Vincent McDonnell, had mediated throughout the entire weekend. We had a package we had agreed to sell to the membership. It contained a substantial money offer but it came close to failing and a close vote narrowly averted a strike. The reason was that the salary increase was greater for the high school teachers than for the elementary teachers. Parity was not achieved; disparity was increased. Many accused the negotiating team and me, personally, of selling out. Many refused to join the union after the first contract. I honestly see no way a better



package could have been negotiated given the peculiar way Catholic schools are financed. That first contract contained other non-money items which teachers have never before enjoyed such as tenure, grievance procedures, sick and personal leave, fringes, etc. It was an historic agreement not only for teachers in the Archdiocese but for Catholic school teachers everywhere. It was the first time anywhere in the country that Catholic elementary school teachers were covered by a labor contract. Two other dioceses, Philadelphia and Brooklyn, had contracts with high school teachers but New York now had a contract covering virtually all elementary teachers and a large number of high school teachers as well.

One reason for the success of the first attempt to negotiate a contract was the behind-the-scenes cooperation of Cardinal Cooke. He, obviously, persuaded the pastors and principals to join the employers' association. He too was responsible for the final money offer. Vincent McDonnell had actually gone to the Cardinal's residence on the day before the settlement and he came away with the money offer which was a very substantial increase over what had been on the table until that final all-night session.

Another important reason for our success was the help of the A.F.T. The Catholic high school teachers in Philadelphia were at this time a local of the A.F.T. They had heard about us when we demonstrated on December 8<sup>th</sup> and sent a delegation to help. A meeting was arranged shortly after with Al Shanker and other leaders of the U.F.T. and quiet but very helpful support was provided to us by the U.F.T. A master negotiator from the Philadelphia area was assigned to help us as he had the Catholic teachers there. His name was Harold Ashe, a man who, although not a Catholic, was able to understand our peculiar situation and was able to gain the respect of management rather quickly. He sat by my side all through that final weekend of negotiations. But when it came down to the last couple of hours before the membership meeting, it was the labor lawyer from the Archdiocese and me who put the final package together. It was about eleven o'clock on that Sunday morning, a couple of hours before the one o'clock meeting. I was exhausted and catching a little shuteye on a very uncomfortable couch in the lobby of the mediation office when the attorney for the other side woke me up

and asked me what we needed to wrap things up. I told him precisely what I needed to sell the package to the membership which was all geared up for a strike if negotiations failed. He went back to his team and when we met later at the table we had the bare minimum I felt we could accept.

When the dust settled a bit, the Superintendent of Schools, who never was a participant in the negotiations because technically they were with a management association of pastors and principals, invited me out for dinner. He was ecstatic about how things had gone and thanked me for making the Catholic schools a system at last. This provided me with an insight I hadn't had and it explained why the central administration appeared so cooperative about the association. One contract for all the schools helped centralize a system which the central office probably viewed as too much the confederation and too little the federation. The horror of unionism had actually worked to the advantage of management.

Federation of Catholic Teachers, Local 2092, A.F.T., A.F.L.-  
C.I.O.

The very day after our first contract was ratified, I was asked to lunch with Al Shanker and Lucille Swaim, one of his closest assistants and the U.F.T. person who helped us the most in the final weeks leading up to the settlement. We lunched at his private club on Gramarcy Park, a short walk from the U.F.T. building on Park Avenue South. It was great to be with Al and Lucille both of whom I held in great respect, perhaps awe, and that conversation served as a good debriefing for me. By now I was convinced that the C.L.T.G. must affiliate with the A.F.T. Al was very encouraging. He congratulated me for the success of our first contract, achieved without a strike, and he encouraged me as I faced the task of reuniting the union after an acrimonious debate and a split vote the day before.

The next few months were relatively quiet ones. I was still a full time guidance counselor at St. Agnes High School and that, in addition to my union activities, kept me very busy but I thoroughly enjoyed what I was doing. I was single and living in the Yorkville section of Manhattan so I had a lot of time and getting around by subway, etc., was very convenient.

Aid to non-public schools was a hot political topic at this time. The Blaine Amendment and a variety of attempts to fund non-public schools were major legislative and constitutional issues. P.E.A.R.L. and other organizations were formed to fight attempts at funding. Al Shanker and the U.F.T. were in the forefront of these fights as he and the union are still today in regard to tuition tax credits. Al Shanker was considered the devil incarnate by most parochial school people. In some peoples' minds, it was Al Shanker v. God, or at least the Pope. Catholic school teachers regarded him with mixed feelings. On the one hand, he was a champion without peer for teachers and their rights. On the other, he would deny us the governmental dollars we needed for the schools to survive or, at least, for the schools to afford decent salaries for its lay teachers. We were able to resolve the problem of ambivalence by assuring ourselves and the membership that affiliation with the A.F.T. would not lock us, as a Catholic teachers' local, into an anti-aid position. The A.F.T. is a fiercely democratic organization and dissent is expected in its debates. The Philadelphia Catholic high school teachers had already affiliated as Local 1776. They assured us that affiliation would allow us to continue to fight vigorously for our own special interests.

One of the arguments we made for affiliation was that we could be more effective proponents of aid to non-public schools from within the A.F.T. and the labor movement than from without. Our local was represented at the State A.F.L.-C.I.O. convention shortly after we affiliated. The U.F.T. sponsored a resolution opposing aid to non-public schools. I was on the education committee that was to consider the resolution before it would be brought to the convention floor. Al Shanker chaired the committee and a couple of U.F.T. officers were also on the committee. I spoke up in opposition to the resolution but it passed in committee. I threatened a floor fight if it was recommended to the membership. Since the A.F.L.-C.I.O. had been on record for years of favoring aid, I felt I could win a floor fight. When resolutions were reported, this one was recommended for tabling. Al had backed down. David had beat Goliath.

So, in May 1969, the C.L.T.G. voted to affiliate. Its new name was the Federation of Catholic Teachers, Local 2092, American Federation of Teachers, A.F.L.-C.I.O. (F.C.T.). A week

or two later, the Archdiocese opened fire. They announced in legal documents that they did not recognize the teachers' union as the bargaining agent for its lay teachers. They attacked the procedure followed in our affiliation vote as being against the constitution of the C.L.T.G. They threw every objection they could into the pot. What they were really boiling in oil was Albert Shanker and the U.F.T. The Archdiocese decided to fight an affiliated union because they were afraid that Shanker would control us and therefore the same turmoil that he caused in New York public schools just a year before in 1968 would happen in the parochial schools and tear them apart. That's one theory. The other is that the Archdiocese simply seized on the affiliation issue as a way of attacking the union and as an opportunity of killing it before things got out of hand. The truth probably lies somewhere in between. The specter of a Shanker at the bargaining table or even behind the scenes was too much to bear. Why not attack the union while the opportunity was there? The attack by the Archdiocese brought the matter back to the State Labor Board. After a number of hearings, the Board decided in favor of the Archdiocese and called for another consent election to be held in the early Spring of 1971.

The Archdiocese under the guise of the "Association of Catholic Schools" mounted an ambitious, costly and some say vicious attack on the union during the weeks leading up to the election. Every one of the 3,000 lay teachers in the unit were bombarded with literature from management. They had the great advantage of having access to every voter. Principals put the literature in every teacher's hands. The union had to scramble to get at least one delegate in each of the 300+ schools who would do the same. We were strong in the city but weak in most of the upstate areas. In many schools, we didn't have a single member. The A.F.T. and the U.F.T. were very generous to us. We had a large area of the U.F.T. building given over to us. It was equipped with desks, and other office equipment and most importantly a bank of phones. Eventually we did get a roster of all voters from the Labor Board and our executive board and other volunteers set about calling every voter.

The political power of the U.F.T. really came in handy during this affiliation fight. The main attack upon us was that

A.F.T. affiliation was affiliation with the anti-Catholic school establishment; that somehow the lay teachers would be co-opted and lose their ability to lobby for governmental aid. We needed something dramatic to counter this virulent attack. I came up with an idea which proved to be very effective. I asked the U.F.T. if it could arrange a meeting for me with Governor Rockefeller. At this meeting, I would present the governor with petitions supporting aid to non-public schools. A picture of this presentation would be worth a thousand words, at least. Well, Lucille Swaim and Dan Sanders, who by now was very involved with our local, went to work on arranging a meeting with the governor. It didn't take them long to set one up. Ray Corbett, president of the New York State A.F.L.-C.I.O. would personally take me to meet with the governor at his New York City office on West 55<sup>th</sup> Street. Meanwhile, we got the word out on an "S.O.S." (Save Our Schools) campaign. Many pastors cooperated with us in getting petitions signed. Of course, no one but a few of us knew these petitions would end up in a picture of the governor and me, a picture which dramatically proved how hard the affiliate union would work for aid to non-public schools. That picture was printed on a flyer that went our first class mail to every one of the 3,000 voters just before election day.

A day or two before the vote, the chief spokesman for the Archdiocese, Monsignor Donald Pryor, and I debated the issues surrounding the upcoming vote on the Archdiocesan Instructional Television (I.T.V.) network that was broadcast from the Dunwoodie facilities to most of the schools in the Archdiocese. Many lay teachers saw the debate. Monsignor Pryor had fancy charts to show on T.V. and cue cards for his prepared text. I had just some notes on cards. His presentation was well-rehearsed, very smooth. Mine was somewhat uneven but more passionate. Initially, I felt I lost the debate but the vote was soon to prove me wrong, very wrong.

On election day, I visited a number of polling places, not electioneering of course, but checking on proper procedure, etc. The polling places were located throughout the ten county area. It was, like its predecessor in 1969, one of the largest and most complicated consent elections ever run by the New York State Labor Relations Board. When the results became known the

next day, we were all gathered at the Labor Board. The faces of Monsignor Pryor, Edward Burke, their very effective labor attorney, and others from the Association of Catholic Schools were glum indeed. It felt so good to finally be vindicated. The teachers had voted overwhelmingly for the Federation of Catholic Teachers, Local 2092, A.F.T., A.F.L.-C.I.O.

We celebrated back at our campaign headquarters at the U.F.T. Al, Dan, Lucille and many other U.F.T. leaders came in to congratulate us. I remember Al telling me with great delight that the results had been announced to him as "Shanker one, the Pope zero." I'm not so sure I really liked that sentiment because I am a staunch Catholic, very loyal to the Pope and even to the Cardinal except when he's wrong as he was in fighting to de-certify us. Nevertheless, it was a great night. The party at our headquarters preceded a luxurious and festive dinner at the Grammercy Park Hotel. Al joined us late that night and the party went on into the wee hours. It was the happiest day in our union's short life. It felt so good to know that a jury of our peers, over 2,000 voting teachers, had found us innocent. They judged that we had not made a pact with the devil after all.

During the school year, 1969-70, I had been able to arrange a half time working arrangement at St. Agnes. After the affiliation vote and the struggle to win it, I knew I would need to devote full time efforts to the union. It represented over 3,000 teachers in more than 300 schools located in an immense geographic area from Tottenville on Staten Island to Saugerties in Ulster County. The school system of the Archdiocese was one of the largest school systems in the country. So it was a big job and one full time employee was a bare minimum.

So as the 1970-71 school year drew near, we began negotiations for a second contract which would turn out far more difficult to achieve than the first.

#### The Strike of November - December 1971

Management's attitude toward us was now much tougher than it had been when we were the unaffiliated Catholic Lay Teachers Group. As we began negotiations in the late Spring of 1971, it soon became clear that advances were going to be hard to come

by. Fresh from our election victory with its mandate from teachers and with a sense of great security which came with our affiliation with the A.F.T. and the A.F.L.-C.I.O., we brashly made out demands which not only included large raises and a single pay schedule (parity) but a host of other demands in the usual areas of fringe benefits, tenure, transfer rights, class size, prep periods, etc. It was all there and more. The Archdiocese for its part demanded some give backs as its starting position. We were miles and miles apart at the start and as negotiations wore on through the summer. We were geared up for a possible September strike when, out at the A.F.T. convention in San Francisco in August, President Nixon announced a wage-price freeze that made strikes illegal. The freeze was imposed for a three month period to end in mid-November, 1971.

As the November deadline approached, negotiations became very intense. The weekend of the Sunday afternoon vote in mid-November, both sides took rooms at the Commodore Hotel and met round the clock again with the help of Vincent McDonnell and two other specially appointed mediators, Thomas Fitzgerald and James McFadden. Jim McFadden had served as Mayor Wagner's Commissioner of Labor. He was a real politician type who loved long lunches and who seemed to avoid long mediation sessions. The principal duty of the two special mediators seemed to be to keep Vincent McDonnell informed. When, at the last minute, Vince would appear on the scene, he was well-rehearsed and able to take the aggressive, head-banging role that has averted many a strike in the New York area over the years. He is a bright, articulate, personable guy with an amazing facility for words and numbers. It was good to have him on the scene. As a good Catholic layman himself, he seemed anxious to avoid embarrassing the Church by a strike of its teachers.

That first Sunday vote was not for a strike but for a strike authorization. We wanted more time to prepare for a strike and we wanted the media attention to have its effect in pressuring the Church to come up with a decent wage offer. The media attention was unbelievable. Every New York City T.V. station sent a reporter and camera crew. Each of the radio stations wanted to tape a piece either in person or by phone. The papers and wire services were there including the national Catholic publications. On the second weekend, the negotiations

were even more dramatic and intense. Essentially, little changed. We did not have an agreement. When we entered the grand ballroom of the Commodore, the place was packed. The press was barred until the time of the actual vote. It seemed like a hundred microphones were suddenly thrust in front of me or taped to the podium as the vote result was announced. We were on strike.

We were well prepared for the strike with signs and flyers, etc. We were up late Sunday night with last minute details. Of course, a union leadership has no definite idea how successful a strike will be until it actually happens. We did know we had a membership of 1,400 and that the Commodore ballroom held almost 1,000. We didn't expect that we would close many schools, however, because half the teachers were religious and not even in the unit. As a matter of fact, a Saturday afternoon meeting to which we had invited all 3,000 religious teachers in the Archdiocese yielded only about 100. Of the 100, many were pro-Archdiocese. As a matter of fact, Monsignor Pryor himself came to answer questions. Only 30 religious actually went on strike with us. Only two schools of over 300 were closed down completely.

On the first morning of the strike, November 22, I got up early and went to get the papers. I couldn't believe my eyes as I looked at the front page of the Daily News. The main headline, sub-headline and picture were all about our strike and the picture was of just one person—me. The caption read "Hi\$ intere\$t\$ are parochial." We also made front page in the Times but they were a little more discreet. I knew we would get lots of press coverage but the amount of it was overwhelming. I went by cab to a school in East Harlem, St. Cecilia's, where our membership was very strong. I picketed there and the press all knew that's where I'd be so there were a lot of reporters on hand. I have a picture taken that morning hanging up at home. It shows an N.B.C. camera crew, Gabe Pressman with a mike in his hand, me and another teacher picketing. That other teacher, Regina McCrystal, turned out two years later to be my wife. It's the first picture we have of us together.

For the rest of the morning, I rode around to a few of the schools in Manhattan with reporters from the Times and News. Of



course I picked schools I knew were strong union schools. On the afternoon of that first day, we held a rally at the Belmont Plaza and picketed at the chancery. It was at the chancery that I heard some news that upset me greatly. One of the reporters had gone inside and talked with one of the Cardinal's closest aides, Monsignor Eugene Clark. He told the reporter, "We're going to bust the union." The reporter told me.

Those words turned out to be chillingly prophetic. That strike lasted 21 long, difficult school days. We had 1,100 teachers out when it started. On December 22, when it ended, we were down to 600. The night it ended, I was chauffeured from the meeting to a live interview on ABC's Eyewitness News. I was asked how long the strike had lasted. My immediate answer was "five years." I corrected myself and then said "five months" and finally I got it out correctly, "five weeks." It was the most difficult five weeks of my life. They seemed like years. Each day the number of strikers declined, each day reporters would call the chancery, get their figures and then call me for mine. It was tough. The weather was bitterly cold especially during the first two weeks. We didn't have a strike fund so our teachers began hurting right away.

It is important to keep in mind that this strike was legal unlike strikes in the public sector. Our teachers were docked only one day for each day out but our teachers had such low salaries to begin with that few teachers could last long on savings. Al Shanker told me he thought we would have been better off if our strike were illegal. It helps rally the troops and attracts fresh media attention when injunctions are served and when union leaders are thrown into jail, and when heavy fines are imposed. Our strike didn't stay on page one for long. On the second day, I was "Man in the News" in the New York Times, a heady experience but the strike and stories connected with it gradually receded further and further back in the paper. Soon it was back with the girdle ads if it made the papers at all.

Of course, we knew numbers were against us considering our membership was less than half the lay teachers and the lay teachers were just half the total teaching force. We were counting more on public pressure, the nobility of our cause

(dignity and other such words), and our affiliation with labor to bring us success. As far as public pressure was concerned, there seemed little around. People in general, politicians in particular, don't come out against the Church. I think people felt sorry for us. Our salaries were in the papers and they were pitifully low but, if you don't like it, go into the public schools (if you're qualified). As to the nobility of our cause, no one denied that we had a grievance. Even Ed Burke, the Church's labor lawyer, would tell us time and again they'd like to pay us more but they just couldn't afford it. As to labor, that's an interesting story full of political implications.

Al Shanker was with us. At least, until he went to Africa. He came to rally early in the strike. He was very enthusiastically received by the striking lay teachers. They saw him as their hero. He gave a rousing speech which helped everyone's resolve to continue on and he gave us a hefty check for our strike fund. Just before we marched into the auditorium though, he told me he had accepted an invitation to go to Africa that night or the next day for a week or two. That demoralized me. Not that Al was involved on a day to day basis but it felt good to know he was around if I needed him. He assured me that Dan and the others would be available day and night but he just had to go. Al did speak about us at the meetings of the Executive Committee of the New York City Central Labor Council. All together, labor unions in New York sent us about \$8,000 for our strike fund. This money was used to help teachers who were desperate. The A.F.T. arranged for our members to get interest-free loans from the Amalgamated Bank on Union Square in New York.

When Al returned to the City, the strike was going badly. He arranged for me to brief a breakfast meeting of the City's labor leaders. I remember being very nervous waiting outside their private dining room at the Commodore. Finally, Al came out and escorted me in. The leaders heard my plea for pressure being applied to the Church and for donations to our strike fund. They were a very gray-haired group of men. Al was one of the youngest there. I did not sense any enthusiasm on their part to help. They listened politely and asked some questions. Meanwhile my teachers were dying on the line. After the breakfast broke up, Al and I met alone with Harry Van Arsdale,

president of the Central Labor Council. We asked him to do whatever he could to bring pressure on the Church for a settlement as soon as possible. Soon after, he arranged a meeting at the chancery with the Cardinal's Secretary of Education (now Vicar General), Monsignor Joseph O'Keefe. To this meeting which was completely private came the following people from labor: Harry Van Arsdale, Ray Corbett, Al Shanker, and Peter Brennan, then president of the Building Trades Council and later Secretary of Labor under Nixon. We met with O'Keefe in his private office. Each of the labor chieftains made a pitch for a quick and fair settlement. A couple reminded O'Keefe of the Church's own teachings on labor and how contrary to its own teachings would be a failure to bargain in good faith, etc. Of course, what was really being said was: don't kill this union. Monsignor O'Keefe explained their financial constraints, a story I had heard many times before in a different forum. He assured them that he would do what he could to get things settled. I did the same. The meeting ended on a cordial but cool note. The specter of Albert Shanker in the chancery must have turned many a head. It must have been very difficult for Al to go there that day and I am very grateful to him for going as a lion into a den of Christians! Very few people even knew about that meeting. It never got into the press, deliberately.

One other similar thing happened during the strike which never became known at the time. Actually, it happened before the "summit" at the chancery. One morning, in the third week of the strike, I decided to go to the Cardinal's residence and attempt to see him. I wanted to tell him that his lieutenants were doing a hatchet job on us at the bargaining table. The Church's labor lawyer could just as easily be dealing with Teamsters as with lay teachers. For example, he didn't allow any member of his bargaining team to talk at the table. All communication was by him and through him. As teachers we felt that we could make progress if the principals, pastors and other members of their team would react as we talked at the table. At one point, we accused the other side of having taken a vow of silence. A caucus was called immediately. They were gone for a long period. When they returned, one of the principals, my principal as a matter of fact, now the Superintendent of

Schools, Brother James Kearney spoke. He denied that they had taken a vow of silence. He explained their modus operandi as a team and then simply reaffirmed their intention of continuing along just as they always had. So our attempt to break through had failed.

I went to the Cardinal's house early in the morning, before 9. The Irish housekeeper opened the door. I told her who I was and that I'd like to see the Cardinal. She disappeared. After a rather long few minutes waiting in the vestibule, I heard feet coming down the stairs. It was Monsignor James Murray, then the Cardinal's secretary. He seemed very flustered. I guess not too many people just pop in on the Cardinal. I told him I'd like to speak with the Cardinal alone. He told me I'd have to go through Monsignor O'Keefe, if I had something to tell the Cardinal. I expressed my disappointment, thanked him for his time and left. This just confirmed in my mind that there was no essential difference in this labor dispute than there might be with any other employer, and that includes the Trucking Association. So it might just as well have been the Teamsters up against the Truckers. To this day, I remain disappointed that the Cardinal did not see me that morning. I was perhaps a little too idealistic to think he would.

Shortly after the summit at Monsignor O'Keefe's office, negotiations resumed. There was little movement on money but non-money items were resolved. Vince McDonnell worked hard at the end getting a final agreement worked out. He had a suite of rooms at the Americana for some conference or other and brought both sides in at different times. When we met again at the bargaining table, there were few obstacles to a settlement.

A membership meeting was set for 8 p.m. on Wednesday, December 22<sup>nd</sup>. We were tired and wanted this thing over by Christmas even though the Central Labor Council promised a big demonstration at the Cathedral if the strike dragged into the New Year. We negotiated intensely that last day at the offices of the Mediation Board. We got a settlement with no time to spare. Just before we left for the ratification meeting, I impulsively went into the caucus room where all the Association's bargainers were congratulating each other. I angrily lectured them for their attitudes toward the teachers

not just during the strike but since negotiations began. I told them that even though they won that night, they would lose ultimately as many good teachers were forced to leave the system. When I slammed the door behind me, one of the pastors and the chairman of the Association, Monsignor John Considine, came running after me to calm me down. He had known me as a young man and our relationship had always been cordial. All I told him as I continued toward the elevator was "Go to Hell!" In retrospect I regret my outburst of anger but I do feel it was understandable. They did try to bust the union and probably would have except that the labor community would have been angry if they did. After all, many labor leaders and a heavy percentage of their members are Catholic.

#### Postscript to the Strike

The strike left the union demoralized and broke. The biennial elections had been postponed from the fall of 1971 until a new contract was achieved. A membership meeting was called for January 21<sup>st</sup>, 1972. Besides nominations, a dues increase was on the agenda, not only did we have large back bills to pay for expenses incurred in conjunction with the negotiations and strike but we had fallen behind in our "per caps" to the A.F.T. Clearly this was no time for a dues increase. Most, if not all, of the teachers at the meeting would be strikers who had lost over ten percent of their annual salaries. Yet, there was no alternative. I put the dues increase vote on the agenda before the nominations and I considered it a vote of confidence in my leadership. The dues increase went down in a close vote. I followed up that vote with an announcement of my own retirement as president. That sent the potential heirs into a state of frenzy. I had planned what I would do in the event I had to step down and I immediately threw my weight behind Jack O'Neill who had been one of the two strike coordinators and a loyal friend throughout. Jack was ultimately elected and served four years during which time all the bills got paid and the union got into the black again. However, to this day, the union has not achieved a level of militancy anything like it had in 1969 or 1971. It's as if it's in a permanent state of shell shock. Subsequent contracts have gotten \$100 increases in some cases. The current contract for 1980-1983, has a top salary for the period ending August,

1983 of \$14,100. for an elementary teacher with a Masters +30 at the 15<sup>th</sup> step (the top step). A secondary teacher with the same education and experience levels will get \$18,300 (also the top step). A teacher with the same credentials in the Ramapo Central School District, where I've worked since 1972, will earn \$35,171. in the 1982-83 and, of course, that is not the top step!

In retrospect, I'm thankful for all the excitement and experience I had in the two and a half years I was union president. I'm grateful also that I had the good sense to leave when I did and especially that I got the job I have enjoyed since September 1972 at Suffern High School.

It was ironic that my first day at Suffern was also the first day of their first and last strike. It lasted four days and it had the support of 98% of the faculty including me. It ended with a very handsome increase in salary, a high level of faculty morale and little or none of the anti-administration sentiment that strikes often engender. It was a strike like you'd read about in a union textbook. Fortunately, I haven't been in another since. Two in nine months was enough for a lifetime, thank you.

### Conclusion

Political power is wielded by unions and by boards of education. In the case history I've developed, it is clear that political power was used by both sides with varying degrees of success at different times.

In 1967, the infant union used political power when it articulated its needs in an organized way. For some reason, the response of the Archdiocese was extremely generous at that time. With each increase in the level of organization, the Archdiocese became increasingly antagonistic. In 1969, it fought the first consent election to certify C.L.T.G. as bargaining agent but it fought without much enthusiasm. In 1970, when the union affiliated, the Archdiocese waged a strong, passionate battle to persuade the teachers to choose no union rather than the affiliated F.C.T. In 1971, it took the F.C.T. into a strike and held the union in a strangle hold as long as it could before the labor community went militant against it. Now it has just

what it wants, an impotent union. The union gives it centralized power, but the union itself is virtually powerless.

In retrospect, from the vantage point of ten years, I don't see how a different application of political power might have resulted in a different outcome. The outside observer will perhaps comment that for a strike to be effective, all or almost all the teachers have to go out. The religious teachers would not have gone out no matter how just our cause. Their very strong loyalty is to ecclesiastical authority, whether she or he be the principal of the school, most often a fellow religious and quite often the religious superior of the community, or the pastor, or the Cardinal Archbishop himself. To close schools with half the faculty not even part of the unit was not a realistic expectation.

Another might suggest that more advantage might have been taken of the labor movement itself. Perhaps it was me but I found the old New York labor leaders tired or perhaps reluctant to support a union against Holy Mother the Church. Calling an old, retired nun who crossed a picket line a "scab" would be tough for even a tough, hardened member of the longshoreman's union. Labor leaders held back from this one.

The mayor and other political leaders did not utter a public peep. We didn't even try to get them involved. They stayed clear. No matter what side a politician supported in this one, he'd lose.

Talk all you want about affiliation, when it comes down to it, you're your own best friend. We did get \$8,000 for our strike fund from labor unions and a number of union workers refused to cross our picket lines but, by and large, it's your own members that make or break a strike. When the strike ended almost half the teachers who had been out had gone back in. There's no counterbalance for that. Either your people stay out or the strike collapses. It's just a matter of time. Yet, I can't blame many of those who went in. It was cold that November- December. Most teachers had little money to sustain them. Many were a minority at their schools. Some strikers were solos. It was for many a very lonely, solitary, cold, hard experience.

A reader of this case history might conclude that I regret having led "the strike that failed" as the Daily News put it in its editorial the day after it ended. Not at all. I feel that we bargained in good faith and that we were treated unfairly and unjustly. We postponed our strike as long as we could but then it came time to say NO. We didn't gain much although we did get a contract and the union survives even to this day. But those who went out, especially for 21 days, kept their self-respect. It was a fight doomed to failure but one which had to be fought. I have no regrets.