

ISEA represents about 35,000 Iowa teachers, and a vast majority of them have misgivings over terms of a proposed merger between NEA and the late Albert Shanker's American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO.

Critics of the proposed merger contend that, more than an endeavor to improve the lot of teachers, it's a surreptitious effort aimed at strengthening the labor movement and rebuilding the Democratic Party.

NEA has a membership of about 2.2 million and AFT about 800,000, but the merger terms being pushed by NEA's national leaders endorse AFT's way of doing business instead of the more moderate approach of the traditional NEA.

An indication of that came in a February speech by NEA President Robert Chase at a National Press Club luncheon.

"I came here this afternoon to introduce the new National Education Association—the new union we are striving to create in public education," he said.

Chase called for "building an entirely new union-management relationship in public education."

No one knows more than teachers what schools need, he said: "higher academic standards; stricter discipline; an end to social promotions; less bureaucracy; more resources where they count, in the classroom; schools that are richly connected to parents and to the communities that surround them."

"To this end," he continued "we aim not so much to redirect the NEA, as to reinvent it."

"The new direction . . . is about action. It is about changing how each of our local affiliates does business, changing how they bargain, changing what issues they put on the table, changing the ways they help their members to become the best teachers they can be."

The union's goal? "An agreement that allows teachers, in effect, to co-manage the school district."

Terms of the NEA-AFT merger would make the new organization a member of the AFL-CIO, with the power to override the concerns of local and State affiliates.

Such things as student welfare and professional teachers' concerns and local school conditions could be lost in the dust of battle over union politics, local and national, and wages, hours and working conditions.

Local concerns would come behind the union's national priorities. A community might find itself held hostage by national union goals that have nothing to do with the community itself.

The new national organization would have the power to take control of local and state organizations for refusing to follow the national organization's policy and political lines.

In effect, it would have the power to trample the professional and ethical considerations that have led the huge majority of teachers in Iowa and the nation to join a professional association such as ISEA rather than a local of the AFT.

The Iowa and New Jersey state affiliates of NEA have been the most vocal critics of the merger terms, which seem basically dictated by the AFT's power sources in New York and other big urban centers.

Although a substantial majority of teachers across the country may oppose merger terms, top NEA officials and staffers have the power to bring it off.

That's because a number of state organizations are financially dependent on NEA and have little choice except to do its bidding.

ISEA, in contrast, is not financially dependent on NEA. But it might have to drop its affiliation with NEA to avoid being taken over by the newly merged organization.

So the ISEA has no alternative but to think about and start making contingency plans to cancel its NEA affiliation.

The details of that dominated a number of private discussions at the ISEA's delegate assembly at the Hilton Coliseum at Ames in April.

In most places, the merger seems a well-kept secret.

The idea is to keep the implications of the merger from the teachers in the states where local organizations and their leaders are beholden to NEA and AFT leaders.

ISEA has kept Iowa teachers up to date on the merger talks, and has advocated that other state organizations mirror the effort.

"The more information that comes out on the proposed merger, the more the membership seems disinclined to do it," said one person who has been following the merger talks.

It's probably not hard to find people who would dismiss all this as intramural arm wrestling between two unions.

That may well be. For the public, it may not make any difference which view prevails.

I've fought with ISEA over the years, and have been soundly denounced by dozens of teachers for dismissing it as little more than a trade union.

Whatever. If I were an Iowa teacher, I'd be against the merger because it surely would take away all hopes of the organization ever becoming a professional association that cared about anything except wages and hours.

On a practical basis, moreover, a merger would take away the implicit threat that many teachers' groups now are able to use.

Deal with the moderate ISEA or its equivalent, they lead the school boards and others to believe, or you may end up with the blood-letting unionism of the AFT.

On the other hand, I'd choose the AFT's militance before I'd relegate Iowa teachers to the kind of second-class citizenship—lots of respect and no money and no say about their working conditions—they suffered under before they acquired the ability to collectively bargain with the school districts about 25 years ago.●

THE BALANCED BUDGET ACT OF 1997 AND MEDICARE

● Mr. DODD. Mr. President, with Wednesday's passage of the Balanced Budget Act of 1997, the Senate with some trepidation, has taken a number of courageous steps toward ensuring long-term solvency of the Medicare Program.

Specifically, I believe that the adoption of means testing of Medicare premiums moves us in the right direction toward the long-term solvency of this critically important program. It is important to remember that this provision will affect only those seniors with individual annual incomes over \$50,000 and married seniors with incomes above \$75,000, on a sliding-scale basis. While some tried to portray this provision as a retreat from protecting our Nation's seniors, I view it as a step toward ensuring that our seniors will be well served for a long time to come. The adoption of this provision simply says that those Americans who can afford to contribute a little more for their health care should do so. Such a measure is surely needed if we are to sustain the safety net that Medicare provides to millions of senior citizens.

While I supported that particular part of the bill, I must share my deep concern over other provisions that I feel go too far. I find particularly unacceptable the provision which will raise the age at which individuals are eligible to receive Medicare from 65 to 67. The likelihood of these seniors finding affordable private insurance is slim—many will be forced to forego coverage. At a time when the number of uninsured individuals in this country is growing and employer-sponsored insurance is declining, I find it astonishing that some would choose to exacerbate the current problem further with this measure.

I also opposed a provision that will require the poorest and sickest seniors to pay up to \$700 a year in home health costs. One-quarter of the home health users are over 85; 43 percent have incomes below \$10,000. Forcing the most vulnerable Medicare beneficiaries to bear this significant financial burden under the guise of addressing the long-term financial challenges of this program is indefensible.

Because of these concerns, I was unable to support this bill. It is my sincere hope, however, that these issues will be resolved in conference and that ultimately we will pass into law a measure that truly will protect our Nation's seniors and the vital safety net that Medicare provides to them.●

AN INDEPENDENCE DAY TRIBUTE

● Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. President, I rise today so that this great body may momentarily reflect upon the importance of our upcoming Fourth of July celebration.

Over 200 years ago, this country began a historic experiment. Our Founding Fathers were told it would fail. Yet, after many trials and tribulations, the United States of America stands, it can fairly be argued, as the greatest Nation in the history of the world. Independence Day is our annual celebration of this achievement.

Yet, we must have the courage and honesty to admit that we are not all that we hope to be. We have much work to do, and we have many dreams to make a reality. This is our American journey. And let us not forget the debt we owe to those who sacrificed to make this journey possible, the men and women who have stood sentry as our country marched to greatness. Today, they protect the finest democracy the world has ever known and keep watch around the globe. They are a beacon of hope, freedom, and justice to all the world's nations. Today, we trumpet the personal courage of our forefathers and the continuing sacrifices of the members of our armed services.

Who are these veterans and service members? We all know them. He was your friend in school. She was the kid next door. You go to church with them, and you pass them in the grocery store. They are Americans just like you and