

Freedom in Retreat

Global Survey Reveals Pushback Against Democracy

BY ARCH PUDDINGTON

The year 2007 was marked by a notable setback for global freedom. That's the principle finding from the latest edition of *Freedom in the World*, Freedom House's annual survey of global political rights and civil liberties. The decline, which was reflected in reversals in one-fifth of the world's countries, was most pronounced in South Asia, but also reached significant levels in the former Soviet Union, the Middle East and North Africa, and sub-Saharan Africa. It affected a substantial number of large and politically important countries—including Russia, Pakistan, Kenya, Egypt, Nigeria, and Venezuela—whose declines have wider regional and global implications. Other countries experienced reversals after a period of progress toward democracy, including pivotal states in the Arab Middle East.

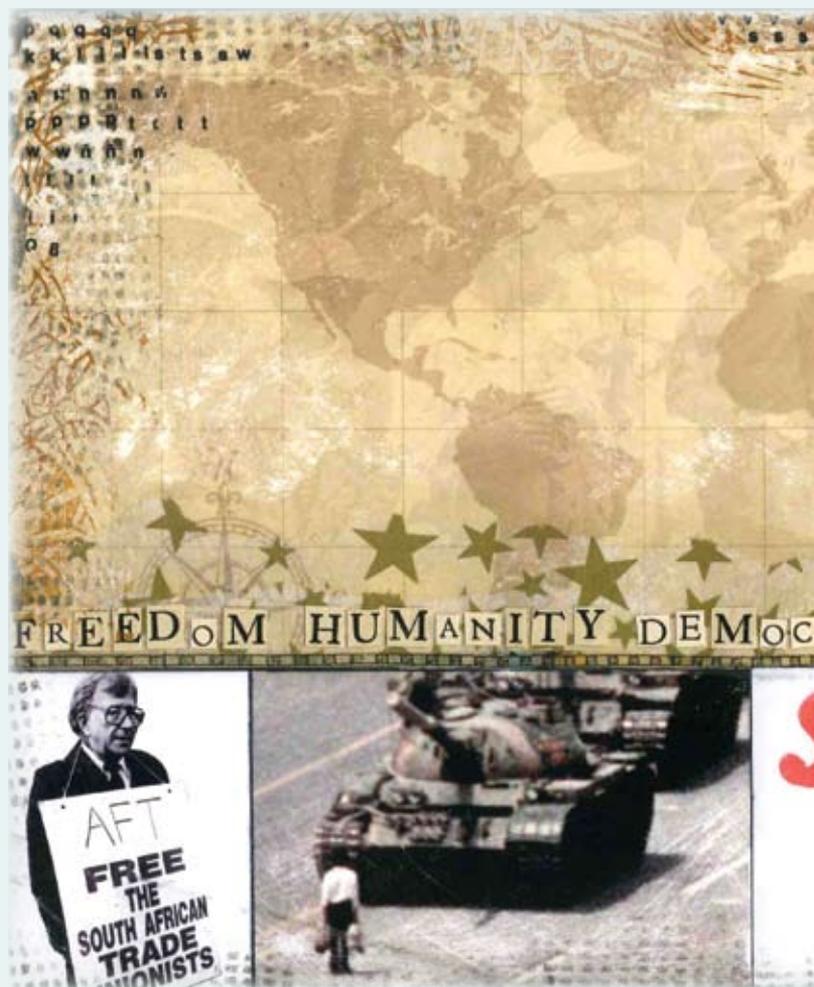
Although the number of countries designated Free, Partly Free, or Not Free changed little during the past year, there were many overwhelmingly negative changes within these broad categories. Furthermore, results for 2007 marked the second consecutive year in which the survey registered a decline in freedom, representing the first two-year setback in the past 15 years. In all, nearly four times as many countries showed significant declines during the year as registered improvements. Many countries that moved backward were already designated Not Free; in other cases, countries with recent records of improved democratic institutions were unable to sustain progress and gave clear signals of backsliding.

Civil conflict was an important contributing factor to this year's negative trajectory in South Asia, the Middle East, and Africa. The year also saw the intensification of an effort by authoritarian regimes to consolidate their power through the suppression of democratic opposition, civil society, and independent media—a process also known as the pushback against democracy. Freedom of association suffered a setback on a global scale, as governments in various regions initiated policies to weaken or neutral-

ize nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), human rights monitoring groups, and trade unions. Especially important in carrying out this assault on civil society were a group of market-oriented autocracies and energy-rich dictatorships that combine elements of a capitalist economy with sophisticated techniques of political repression.

A particularly worrying phenomenon that emerges from the findings is the negative impact of powerful autocracies on smaller, less powerful neighboring countries. Russia provides diplomatic and political support to a number of brutal dictatorships and autocratic regimes on its borders, including Belarus and states in Central Asia, and puts pressure on nearby governments, such as Estonia and Georgia, whose policies or leaders it disapproves of. Iran and, to a lesser extent, Syria have supported antidemocratic forces in Lebanon, Iraq, and the Palestinian

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Defending Democracy

Albert Shanker Still Leads the Way

BY HERB MAGIDSON

Richard Kahlenberg has received many accolades for his wonderful biography of Al Shanker, *Tough Liberal: Albert Shanker and the Battles Over Schools, Unions, Race, and Democracy*. I want to go a step further and thank him for writing his book when he did. I want to thank him for not writing it immediately after Al's death but, rather, a decade later.

And I say this because Al's vision that an international movement for democracy and freedom is indispensable to the health and vitality of America and the free world is currently being challenged as never before.

There was a time when dictators felt compelled to use the words freedom and democracy as their very own. Take, for example, the Democratic Peoples' Republic of North Korea. Even

this most brutal totalitarian state felt compelled to use the word "democratic." But now, with the development of vigorous economic engines expanding incredibly in nondemocratic countries (like China) and countries we might label partly free (like the Philippines), there's a very troubling idea growing on the world stage. There are those who believe the great world struggle is no longer between dictatorships and democracies, but between the efficiency of competing economic models. Freedom may very well become an afterthought—at best an adjunct to economic efficiency.

When Al died in 1997, we were still bathed in the glow of the overthrow of the Soviet Union and the fall of the Berlin Wall. Freedom was on the march, the so-called end of history had arrived. A biography of Al Shanker at that time may have only engendered a nostalgic look back at freedom's battles won—in Poland, South Africa, Chile, and so many other parts of the world.

But Kahlenberg's book comes out when the vision of an inexorable march toward freedom and democracy is being challenged by what may be a fundamental change in the way people perceive the relationships between political freedom, economic growth, and social justice.

Dictators around the world—as well as business entrepreneurs and social philosophers—are watching very closely the newly emerging economic engines—particularly in China. If the Chinese are able to suppress worker rights while strengthening one-party rule and, as a result, successfully compete economically, then many other countries will feel the Chinese model is the correct model—that economic success based on one-party rule and the subjugation of worker rights is the only way to compete. Dictators will be able to hide their disdain for freedom by cloaking it in the mantra of economic competition and necessity. This model of authoritarian capitalism is a great, new challenge.

So this book, which so clearly articulates Al's vision, is not only timely, it is essential if the march to freedom

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and democracy is to continue and thrive.

The question before us is not so much, “Should labor and the democrats revive the muscular liberal internationalism of Albert Shanker?” The question is, rather, “In a world where people are questioning the very legitimacy of the democratic imperative, who will champion the notion that there are certain universal values that transcend ethnicity, race, tribe, and culture?” Human-kind strives to be free—men and women strive to think what they wish, to associate freely with others, to speak their minds and challenge orthodoxy. To answer the question before us today, we need to recognize the unique role that organized labor in

general, and Al Shanker in particular, have played in developing what may be called “liberal internationalism.” Al Shanker envisioned democracy as the linchpin for human happiness and fulfillment. For him, it was the lifeblood of a universal yearning for freedom—not a Western phenomenon.

This view, that the great struggle in the world is between dictatorship and democracy, led the U.S. labor movement to a unique position in the great foreign policy debates in the U.S. For so many other groups, battles over foreign policy seemed to be ideological—between those on the political right and those on the political left. Consequently, right-wing ideologues happily

Albert Shanker’s Tough Liberalism

BY RICHARD D. KAHLENBERG

When Albert Shanker was born on September 14, 1928, he emerged from the womb with a large red birthmark on the right side of his neck running over the back of his head. His mother, Mamie Shanker, was beside herself. “What will ever become of him?” she asked.¹ In a childhood that would be marked by many struggles—deprivation and discrimination, the Great Depression and the rise of Adolf Hitler—it was not an auspicious beginning.

Shanker’s father, Morris, had studied in Europe to be a rabbi until his family ran out of money for his education, just short of his ordination.² During World War I, he served in the czar’s army then immigrated to the United States, where he went to work for the Ford Motor Company in Detroit. As the company was deeply anti-Semitic, life there was intolerable, so after a time, Morris Shanker came to New York, where he later began a grueling job delivering newspapers.³

Meanwhile, Mamie Shanker worked 70-hour weeks at J&J Clothing in lower Manhattan to help supplement her husband’s salary.⁴ She would sit at work, sweating, in deep concentration.⁵ One time Al went to visit her and was unable to recognize her among the essentially

anonymous group of toiling women. He was horrified.⁶ Though a sewing-machine operator, Mamie Shanker was an intellectual who liked to read poetry and discuss Yiddish books and literature.

If Shanker’s childhood suggested there was abiding unfairness in life—widespread poverty, persistent bigotry—his parents also taught him that certain institutions and ideas could help. One central institution was organized labor. Mamie Shanker had a dark view of human nature and believed employers would do whatever it took to maximize profits. When she first came to the U.S. as a garment worker, she worked very long hours, had no health benefits, and worked in unsafe conditions.⁷ She joined the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union and the International Ladies Garment Workers Union.⁸ The unions made a huge difference in her life, improving her wages and working hours (eventually down to 35 hours a week).⁹ Growing up, “unions were just below God,” Al Shanker said.¹⁰

So was labor’s champion, Franklin Roosevelt.¹¹ In 1940, when FDR ran for a third term, 12-year-old Al “stood for hours on a subway platform one afternoon arguing with grownups who didn’t intend to vote for FDR,” wrote reporter A.H. Raskin. “A ticket he had bought for the World’s Fair lay forgotten in his pocket.”¹²

Though they voted for Roosevelt, the Shankers were not Democrats. In the New York circles in which Shanker was

raised and schooled in the 1930s and 1940s, the question was not whether one was a Democrat or a Republican, but whether one was a Socialist or a Communist.¹³ Many Jewish immigrants had been Socialists in Russia, as part of the resistance to czarist rule.¹⁴

Teachers’ unions, Shanker argued, are uniquely positioned to promote democracy abroad. As mass organizations that train people to vote and help create a strong middle class, they are crucial agitators for democracy.

Shanker was briefly pro-Soviet in high school, but while still a teenager, he read George Orwell’s *Homage to Catalonia* and saw how Orwell, who had signed up to fight the fascists in the Spanish Civil War, became disillusioned with the Communists. Shanker later recalled: “Here was Orwell, this innocent leftist, who wants to fight the fascists, but the Communists will stop at nothing, including wiping out the non-Stalinist opposition, to make sure they alone emerge in control.”¹⁵ The Spanish Civil War was something that stayed with him for years, recalls his friend Mel Lubin, who said Shanker had six or seven books on the topic.¹⁶ Within months of beginning teaching, Shanker joined the New York Teachers Guild, an affiliate of the American Federation of Teachers that represented all the values Shanker

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and exclusively condemned dictatorships on the left, such as those in the Soviet Union and the countries in Eastern Europe in the post-WWII era, in China after the takeover by the Maoists, in Latin America when Castro took control of Cuba, and in Nicaragua when the Sandinistas took over. Their consistency was to be against all left-wing dictatorships. Similarly, left-wing ideologues condemned right-wing dictatorships, such as those in Chile under Pinochet, during the apartheid government's rule in South Africa, and Somoza's right-wing dictatorship in Nicaragua. But they, too, found it very difficult to condemn left-wing dictatorships.

Right- and left-wing ideologues did not divide the world between dictatorships and democracies. Some divided the world between capitalism and socialism; some between North and South; and others between the developed world and the underdeveloped world.

But these positions were not so much in opposition to dictatorships per se, as they were part of an ideological struggle for their views on economic theory and social policy. Their positions were a means to promote one system of government and condemn another. So it was acceptable to some that right-wing dic-
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treasured. It was a Socialist union, in favor of civil rights, antitotalitarian, anti-Communist, and intellectually rigorous.

* * *

By the late 1970s, Al Shanker was president of both the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT). But his interest in international affairs—especially in defeating Communism—had not waned at all. His foreign policy positions were guided by three core beliefs: the need to fight Communists and other dictators who wished to curtail human freedom and crush free trade unions, the need to actively promote and nurture democracy abroad, and the need to have a strong American military ready to help accomplish the first two objectives.

To some it was questionable that the head of a teachers' union would take

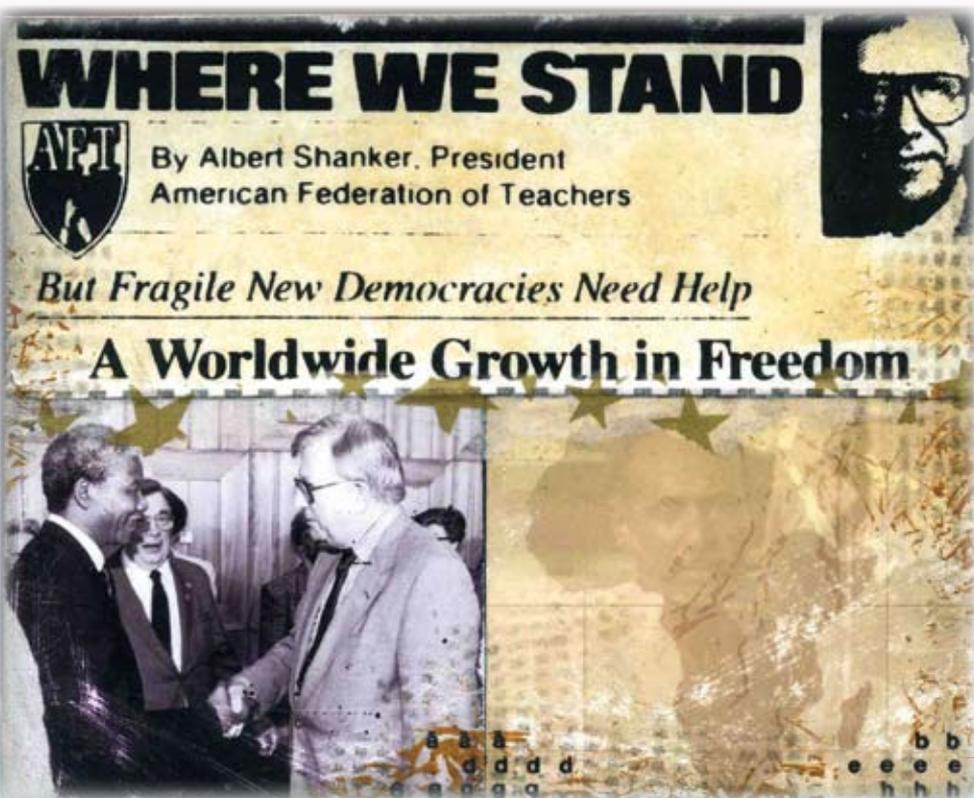
positions on foreign policy. But to Shanker, it was in the interests of American teachers to promote teacher unionism abroad because what happened overseas reverberated at home. Countries with weak teachers' unions, for example, were more likely to adopt school voucher plans, which would then be used to push for similar plans in the U.S.¹⁷ But even more powerful was the civic argument for teacher involvement abroad.¹⁸ Teachers' unions, Shanker argued, are uniquely positioned to promote democracy abroad. As a part of organized labor, teachers' unions are key political actors in societies seeking to democratize, Shanker said. As mass organizations that train people to vote and help create a strong middle class, they are crucial agitators for democracy.¹⁹

Shanker was deeply concerned that opposition to anti-Communism had

moved into the mainstream of the Democratic Party. What many liberals knew most about anti-Communism was its excesses—McCarthyism in the 1950s and the Vietnam War in the 1960s and early 1970s. At home, their egalitarian vision made them worry about defense expenditures diverting money away from social problems. And abroad, some even identified with what were perceived as the egalitarian aspirations of Communists, in contrast to the corporate agenda of the U.S. Finally, many liberals had pacifist tendencies and worried about ethnocentrism, which made them want to withdraw from the world and not impose American values on other societies.

Shanker wanted to rescue anti-Communism and emphasize that it was a part of the human-rights agenda. "Al's big contribution was in constantly keeping a very highly tuned beam of what Communism was all about," AFT staffer Eugenia Kemble says: repression of human rights, of free speech, of intellectual freedom, and of trade unionism.²⁰

Shanker denounced what he saw as a double standard on the Left. He argued: "When men and women are imprisoned, tortured, and killed because they dare to speak, write, or organize, it makes no difference whether they were silenced by a leftist or a rightist dictator. The action must be condemned."²¹ In the late 1970s, when the Vietnamese government was causing mass starvation in occupied Cambodia, Shanker asked: "Where are the expressions of outrage? Where are the demonstrations? How can it be that there are protests only against American support for the Shahs and the Somozas—whose crimes may be real enough and surely merit exposure—



and none at all against the Soviet Union and Vietnam, who are within weeks of annihilating an entire culture from the face of the earth?"²²

Shanker was also critical of Jimmy Carter's handling of the post-Vietnam War Southeast Asian refugee crisis, which Shanker saw as an important matter of human rights. He was appalled when Carter said the refugees would be better off in Asia. The AFL-CIO, which in a time of high unemployment had reason to be concerned about immigration, Shanker said, was taking a much more open stance, "because there were larger principles at stake."²³

Likewise, Shanker became very involved in the cause of Soviet dissidents. In September 1977, Shanker participated in and wrote about the third international Sakharov hearings to dramatize

the plight of Soviet dissidents and complained that the media mostly ignored the hearings.²⁴ He was disturbed that the issue, a basic question of human rights, did not seem to excite his fellow liberals.

In 1981, in addition to creating an International Affairs department in the AFT, Shanker gained a major platform from which to engage in foreign affairs: the presidency of the International Federation of Free Teachers' Unions (IFFTU). Shanker made sure that the IFFTU helped finance and strengthen free education unions in places such as Chile, South Africa, and Poland, and he banned nondemocratic, state-sponsored trade unions from the organization, even though accepting them would have meant more dues for

the organization.²⁵

Shanker actively engaged in foreign affairs throughout the 1980s, supporting the defense buildup, the creation of the National Endowment for Democracy, and anti-Communist groups in Central America, as well as promoting democracy in the Philippines, South Africa, and Chile. But first came the stunning developments in Poland.

Dramatic change in Poland began in August 1980, when workers in the Lenin Shipyard in Gdańsk struck against higher food prices, but also against Communism itself.²⁶ Shanker urged an active role for American unions in supporting Poland's Solidarity movement, and in September 1981, Solidarity's managing director of press and information set up an American office at the UFT headquarters in New York City.²⁷

Assisting Teachers Around the World

The AFT's International Affairs Department

Given Albert Shanker's commitment to democracy at home and abroad, it's no surprise that he established an International Affairs department within the AFT. Here, David Dorn, the department's director, explains its current projects.

—EDITORS

While the AFT has been active in international work to one degree or another for much of its history, Al Shanker created a formal International Affairs department in 1981. From the beginning, much of the funding has come from grants from a variety of sources, including the AFL-CIO's program for international labor solidarity (today named the Solidarity Center), the U.S. Agency for International Development, the State Department, and the National Endowment for Democracy.

Currently the department is developing projects with teachers' organizations in the Middle East, Eastern Europe, and Asia, and we continue to work with fraternal unions in Africa on a project to stop the spread of AIDS.

A new issue for us is teacher and healthcare-worker migration into the United States. For example, we discovered that 10 percent of our membership in Baltimore, Md., is Filipino, not Filipino-American. These are people who have come over from the Philippines to work temporarily in the U.S. They're not coming here to become American citizens. They're working as K-12 teachers in our inner cities. We don't know how many of these foreign teachers there are, but their numbers are growing. So the questions are: how do we help represent them and how do we ensure that they provide high-quality instruction? We want to make sure that they get fair treatment and that their students get the education they deserve.

The principles that guided Al Shanker's world view have

had a lasting influence on the department. Al was like a lot of the leaders in the labor movement. To them, it wasn't a question of being against Communism or against right-wing dictators. They had clear guiding principles for looking at political systems in other countries. The key questions were: Do they allow human rights? Do they allow free trade union rights? That basic idea led the AFT to support teachers' unions in Chile, Poland, South Africa, and other countries in their struggles against dictatorship and repression in the 1980s and 1990s.

A more recent achievement is our work in the African AIDS program. AIDS is one of the biggest challenges facing African teachers. The AIDS scourge is a threat to democracy because it undermines society. It undermines teachers and it undermines education. We are working with teachers in South Africa, Kenya, and Zimbabwe to help them develop peer-group education programs. In South Africa, the campaign is called "Breaking the Silence."

The world has changed in many ways over the past couple of decades, but the basic objective to support democracy and free trade unionism underlies AFT's international activity. For example, after 9/11, former AFT President Sandy Feldman directed the International Affairs department to seek ways to cooperate with teachers' organizations in the Middle East. As a result, we were one of the first groups to make contact with the new, independent Iraqi teachers' organization and to meet with Afghani teachers who are trying to establish a new union in their country. And now we're working in Yemen. We're also working with the main Palestinian teachers' union.

To learn more about our work, I encourage readers to explore "AFT at Work in the World" online at www.aft.org/topics/international.

By December 1981, Polish authorities had had enough. Solidarity's leader, Lech Walesa, and thousands of others were arrested and jailed. Martial law was declared and Solidarity was banned. With Ronald Reagan now president, anti-Communists hoped for a strong response, but they were disappointed.

In one of his weekly "Where We Stand" columns in the *New York Times*, Shanker lashed out at Reagan for being soft. "There was no expression of outrage at events in Poland, no demand for the release of Lech Walesa and thousands of others imprisoned." Shanker argued that the military crackdown in Poland was "clearly one of the historic moments of the 20th century. Many voted for a President they thought would be tough. So far, all they have heard is tough talk during an election campaign. But when it really counts, we get silence, then mushiness and evasion."²⁸

Following the Communist crackdown on Solidarity, many people assumed that Walesa's rebellion would go the way of earlier quashed revolts in other countries. But the American labor movement continued to support Solidarity, and the UFT was among the first to provide money.²⁹ The AFT helped Polish unionists with their underground newspapers, smuggling in items including copiers and fax machines.³⁰

After nine long years of struggle, Solidarity wore down the opposition and, in a stunning turn of events, came to power following a defeat of the Communists in democratic elections.³¹ In November 1989, Lech Walesa appeared at the AFL-CIO convention, received 15 minutes of sustained cheering, and thanked the unionists for their strong support.³² The Solidarity experience, Shanker said, was an important reminder



that unions not only provide better economic conditions, but they also provide a voice that can criticize both the boss and the government.³³

If Solidarity should have underlined for liberals that anti-Communism was a pro-worker stand, Shanker argued that the experience should make clear to conservatives that unions were not just economic instruments—they were civic associations. As critical mediating institutions that stood between the government and the individual, unions allowed people to organize as a counter to the power of government and needed to be nourished in the battles for democracy.

In 1989, just as Communism was collapsing all around him, Shanker was named chair of the AFL-CIO International Affairs Committee.³⁴ But Shanker knew that Solidarity's victory and the fall of the Berlin Wall were only the beginning of the effort to promote democracy. It would be a mistake, he said, to assume that "we are now moving effortlessly toward a world in which everyone will live in a free society."³⁵ Democracy is much more than voting, Shanker said, and in places like Eastern Europe, nongovernmental democratic institutions—independent political parties, churches, unions, newspapers, business groups, and universities—had atrophied and needed rebuilding.³⁶ While most conservatives focused on creating market economies, Shanker argued, "free enterprise alone will not lead to a free

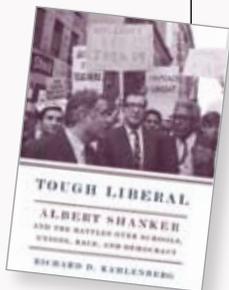
society. People need ... direct contacts with trade unionists, lawyers, teachers, journalists, and community leaders from democratic nations."³⁷ Shanker argued: "What we've seen are the beginnings of democracy. We haven't really seen democracy yet. We've seen the overthrow of dictatorship. Democracy is going to take generations to build and we have to be a part of that building because they won't be able to do it alone."³⁸

Today, Shanker's worldview is not dominant in the Democratic Party. Chastened by Vietnam and more recently by Iraq, many liberals see promoting democracy and projecting American power as futile at best and arrogant and imperialistic at worst.

Shanker would disagree. Throughout his life, Shanker and the group he most closely identified with politically—the Social Democrats USA—argued that their mix of traditionally liberal and conservative views was part of a well-thought-out ideology that put democracy at the core. His "Where We Stand" columns returned time and time again to democratic ideals.³⁹ For many conservatives, the marketplace is the touchstone; for Shanker it was democratic values that drove everything else. Although Communism is largely dead, totalitarianism is not. Shanker's Social Democratic vision may be virtually absent from today's liberal discourse, but his tough liberalism is not obsolete; its relevance to social realities continues to grow.

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AFT members may purchase Richard D. Kahlenberg's book, *Tough Liberal: Albert Shanker and the Battles Over Schools, Unions, Race, and Democracy*, at a discounted rate of \$18.00 including shipping (40 percent off list price). Visit AFT's online store at www.aftstore.org/aft/productenlarged.asp?ProductID=906401.



Defending Democracy

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tators were in power because they espoused economic market concepts that right-wing ideologues thought were the most important aspects of society. Extreme left-wing ideologues, on the other hand, accepted nondemocratic forms of government if they met certain tests, the most important of which was that they were generally anticapitalist.

For more than a century, the only organization in the U.S. that condemned and actively worked against both right-wing and left-wing dictatorships was the American labor movement. Labor unions were able to do so precisely because they saw the great world struggle as one between democratic and dictatorial regimes—no matter their political bent.

Consequently, it was the American labor movement alone that condemned both the Russian czars when they were in power, and then the Soviets when they came to power in 1917. And it was the labor movement alone that condemned both Chiang Kai-shek for preventing trade unions and the Chinese Communists under Mao for murdering trade union activists when the Communists came to power in 1948. This is the unique and indispensable quality that the American labor movement brings to the table. And this is the precise model that Al Shanker expanded when he became chair of the AFL-CIO's International Affairs Committee in 1989.

What is ironic is that Al Shanker's view of the world made him very controversial. He was attacked by those on the left who thought him too conservative and those on the right who thought him too liberal. They were both wrong. Al wasn't an ideologue in the regular sense of the word. He was a democrat. He was a humanitarian. And that, I believe, is the "tough liberalism" for which we long.

Whereas some determined which dictatorships they abhorred based on their political philosophy, Al was an equal-opportunity opponent of dictatorships on both the left and the right. He railed against both Fidel Castro and, before him, Batista. He was an opponent of the Nicaraguan Sandinistas and, before that, also an outspoken opponent of Somoza. He spoke out against the Communist insurgency in the Philippines and also was an opponent of Ferdinand Marcos. There were those on the right who never could understand why Al criticized right-wing dictatorships who they believed we could live with because they represented stability and weren't a direct threat to the U.S. There were those on the left who hated Al for taking on the Communists throughout the world because they thought the greatest menace to the world was capitalism.

But the essential value of the positions that Al and the labor movement espoused provided something that is sorely missing today: credibility.

Al Shanker's tough liberalism is more necessary today than ever, precisely because the United States has lost a great deal of credibility when it talks of the importance of freedom and democracy in the world while it turns a blind eye to certain dictatorial governments based on whether they are perceived to be

"with us or against us" on the world's stage.

One of the reasons some have become disenchanted with the democratic imperative is that they were so disappointed when the Soviet Union fell and the end of a dictatorship did not immediately give rise to the birth of freedom and democracy. Al understood this. With the fall of the USSR, Al was one of the few voices that cautioned that democracy will not necessarily flourish at the demise of a dictatorship. He recognized, as Kahlenberg points out in his book, the need for nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), independent political parties, the development of

The reason for American dominance over the last century was not because of its economic vitality. What made America the leader of the free world was that it held up a beacon of hope in the universal quest for human fulfillment.

churches, unions, newspapers, business groups, and universities for the long and hard conversion to a free, democratic society. Al would not have declared the "end of history." He understood that free enterprise by itself would not lead to a free society.

So what do we mean by tough liberalism? If Al were alive today, I believe he would not be meeting with representatives of the All-China Federation of Trade Unions—a wing of the Chinese government that is used to suppress worker rights, not enhance them. Some U.S. unions are doing that. Rather, Al would be speaking out and supporting the NGOs in Hong Kong and the fledgling worker movements on mainland China just as he did with Solidarity in Poland and the freedom movement in South Africa. It was not by happenstance that on their first trips to the U.S., both South Africa's Nelson Mandela and Poland's Lech Walesa visited the AFL-CIO and its International Affairs chair, Al Shanker. Were he alive today, I believe Al would be demonstrating at the embassies of Sudan and Burma. He would be fighting the dictator in Zimbabwe as well as the terrorist movements of Hamas and Hezbollah. He would be fighting for fledgling worker movements that are forming in Iraq and Afghanistan and speaking in support of free trade unions in Venezuela. Al would be articulating the role of unions as unifiers across ethnic, religious, and racial lines. That's how he would build credibility as an advocate for freedom and democracy.

The reason for American dominance over the last century was not because of its economic vitality. What made America the leader of the free world was that it held up a beacon of hope in the universal quest for human fulfillment. That beacon can only be credible if the U.S. remains a champion of human rights and democracy, and that will only happen if democrats, civil and human rights activists and, most of all, the free labor movement revive the tough liberal internationalism of Albert Shanker. □

Freedom in Retreat

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Authority. Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez has attempted to export his authoritarian brand of “21st Century Socialism” to other countries in South America, albeit with little success thus far. For its part, China has emerged as an impediment to the spread of democracy in East Asia and other regions, especially Africa. China has played a particularly negative role in Burma, where it sustains a brutal military dictatorship through economic and diplomatic support, and in North Korea, through its policy of forcibly returning those who flee the Pyongyang regime. In Africa, China provides various kinds of aid, including security assistance, to authoritarian countries and undermines the efforts of the United States, the European Union, and multilateral institutions to promote honest and transparent governance.

New and unstable democracies continue to be plagued by a host of problems stemming from a sharp and sometimes shocking increase in violent crime, often involving the narcotics trade, human trafficking, and organized criminal networks and exacerbated by corrupt or ineffectual police, a poorly functioning judiciary, and vigilantism. While the negative impact of crime on the public’s faith in democracy is a special problem in Latin America, it is also a growing phenomenon in sub-Saharan Africa and in Asian countries like the Philippines.

Disturbing Trends

1. *A resurgence of pragmatic, market-oriented, or energy-rich dictatorships.* Most visibly in Russia and China, but also in other parts of the world, governments are trying to harness the power of the marketplace while maintaining closed political systems. Strengthened by petroleum-based riches or capital amassed through long-term trade surpluses,

these autocracies are unapologetic and increasingly assertive, at home and abroad, in declaring that the paradigm of rights-based governance as the international community has long understood it is not relevant for the 21st century. Diplomatic and political efforts to undermine norm-setting bodies such as the UN Human Rights Council and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe are advancing as a consequence, with implications for the fate of freedom in a growing number of countries.

2. *Decline in freedom of association.* As repressive regimes move to strengthen their authority and eliminate sources of political opposition, they increasingly target human rights organizations, advocates of government transparency, women’s rights groups, representatives of minority groups, and trade unions. While the countries of the Middle East established standards for freedom of association, Africa and the non-Baltic countries of the former Soviet Union also have poor scores for associational rights.
3. *Weak governance.* Nearly two-thirds of the world’s countries rank as electoral democracies, but many score poorly on government effectiveness and accountability. Corruption, lack of transparency, and concentration of power in the hands of the executive or nonelected forces represent major obstacles to the consolidation of democracy in Latin America, Africa, and Asia.
4. *Islamic extremism.* While the world has been spared terrorist attacks of the magnitude of 9/11, the violent actions of Islamic radicals remain an important challenge to freedom, both in Muslim countries and in wealthy democracies. Terrorist violence remains a serious problem in Iraq, is a growing threat to freedom in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and continues to plague Algeria, Lebanon, and other



countries of the Arab Middle East. In Europe, during the past year alone, arrests for terrorist plots or actual attacks were made in Great Britain, Germany, Belgium, Italy, and Denmark. The threat of terrorism often provides an unjustified rationale for repressive emergency laws, torture, and the suppression of opposition political parties.

For the past few years, a number of the world's most important autocracies have engaged in what has been called a pushback against democracy promotion. The pushback differs from past strategies of repressive regimes in that it relies on the use of legal restrictions, tax investigations, bureaucratic regulations, and the like to neutralize opposition political parties and civil society organizations that seek political change, rather than rougher techniques like imprisonment, exile, or murder.

The rationale for pushback policies advanced by the authorities in Russia, Venezuela, Iran, and elsewhere is that they are necessary to prevent outside forces, primarily the U.S., from meddling in their sovereign affairs through the support of dissidents, human rights groups, and NGOs. In reality, the main target of this offensive is not the U.S., but the domestic advocates of democracy—those who are waging the on-the-ground struggle for fair elections, honest government, minority rights, women's equality, and freedom of expression.

During 2007, autocrats in various settings repeatedly singled out democracy advocates for especially harsh treatment. In Russia, the Putin regime went out of its way to force parties and candidates with strong democratic credentials off the parliamentary ballot. It has aggressively sought to eliminate or neutralize NGOs that seek political reform, while at the same time treating Communists, xenophobes, and outright racists with tolerance. In China, the harsh treatment meted out to scholars, activists, and journalists who publicly press for democratic improvements is exceeded only by the crackdown on proponents of increased autonomy for Tibet or Xinjiang. In Egypt, the Mubarak government has been as zealous, if not more so, in silencing those who advocate for peaceful democratic reform as it has been in suppressing the Muslim Brotherhood. Under President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Iran has launched an all-fronts offensive against those who speak out for change, including members of democratic parties, students, trade unions, academics, and advocates of women's rights.

Promoting Democracy through Solidarity

Yet even as autocrats fine-tune the mechanisms of repression and control, the past year brought impressive and inspiring examples of resistance from those who cherish freedom. Consider the following:

- A movement launched by students dismayed at Hugo Chavez's assault on freedom of expression grew into a broad opposition that came together to defeat the Venezuelan president's authoritarian constitutional overhaul.
- Even as the Iranian regime steps up its campaign of intimidation and reprisal, students, journalists, and human

rights activists have launched a series of protests that have gained substantial popular support.

- Lawyers in Pakistan, outraged by the government's efforts to undermine judicial independence, mounted protests that eventually galvanized a broader movement of civil society opposed to military rule.

To these champions of freedom can be added a number of others: bloggers and human rights lawyers in China, monks in

The pushback differs from past strategies of repressive regimes in that it relies on the use of legal restrictions, tax investigations, bureaucratic regulations, and the like, rather than rougher techniques like imprisonment, exile, or murder.

Burma, trade unionists in Zimbabwe, and students in Bangladesh. More recently, we can add those who used nonviolent tactics to press for democratic reform and cultural freedoms in Tibet, where the rights of Tibetans have been repressed for over a half-century since Chinese occupation.

The accusation that democracy campaigners are serving the interests of foreign powers is not only untrue, it completely distorts the goals and methods of today's dissidents. Indeed, it is too often the case that democracy's advocates are ignored by the outside world, governments, and the public alike. Today's generation of democratic dissidents work both in anonymity and—in Iran, China, and elsewhere—under extreme duress.

The achievements of these democracy movements represent grounds for optimism in an otherwise unimpressive year. But they need the support of their natural allies in the democratic world, including, and indeed especially, advocates of democracy outside government. At a minimum, those who are taking risks for freedom require the kind of protection that only outside attention guarantees, the kind of support that sustained Lech Walesa and Nelson Mandela in a previous era.

We should remember that freedom endured many dark days during the time of Mandela and Walesa, much darker than is the case today. Then, as now, many asked whether the tide had turned against freedom. Some suggested, as many do today, that a society's history or culture could render it inhospitable terrain for democratic development. We also hear again the argument that the democratic world should ignore incidents of repression on the grounds that our involvement will only make matters worse. Fortunately, democrats rejected these arguments. They stayed the course and gave critical support to the dissidents and freedom campaigners in Poland, Chile, South Africa, and elsewhere. The fact that democratic dissidents have thwarted autocrats in the current difficult atmosphere is an important accomplishment. The solidarity of democrats from around the world is essential if the broader momentum toward freedom is to be regained. □

Which Countries Are Free?

According to *Freedom in the World*, a **Free** country is one where there is broad scope for open political competition, a climate of respect for civil liberties, significant independent civic life, and independent media. A **Partly Free** country is one in which there is limited respect for political rights and civil

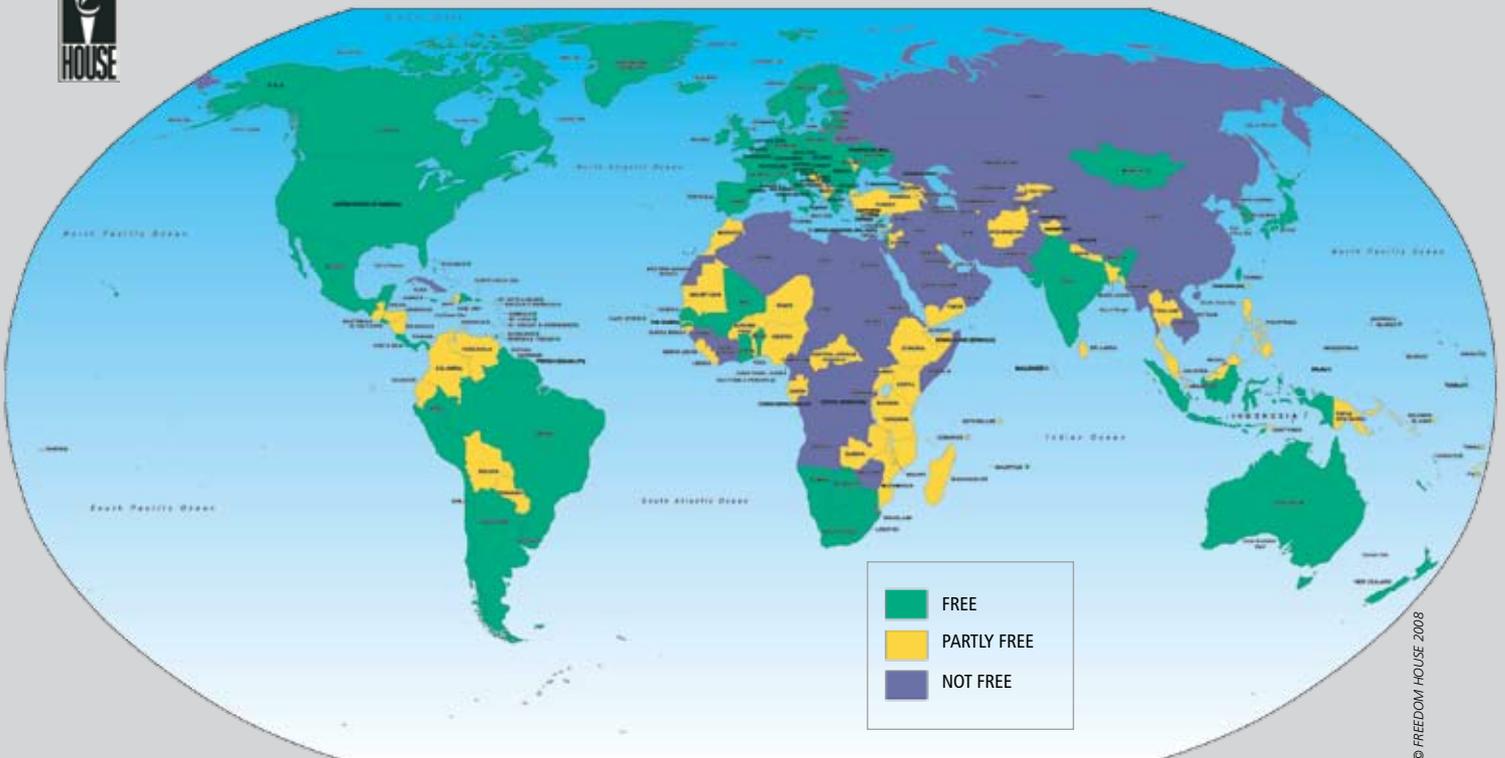
liberties. Partly Free states frequently suffer from an environment of corruption, weak rule of law, ethnic and religious strife, and often a setting in which a single political party enjoys dominance despite the façade of limited pluralism. A **Not Free** country is one where basic political rights are absent,

and basic civil liberties are widely and systematically denied.

Teachers can request a free Map of Freedom 2008 by contacting Katrina Neubauer at: 212/514-8040 ext. 10 or Neubauer@freedomhouse.org. The map is also available at www.freedomhouse.org/uploads/fiw08launch/mof2008.pdf.



MAP OF FREEDOM 2008

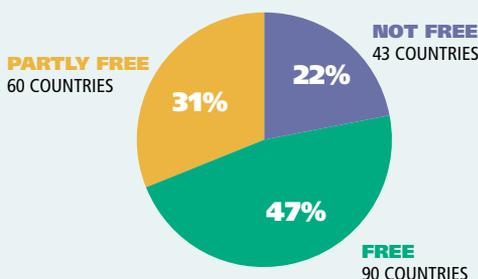


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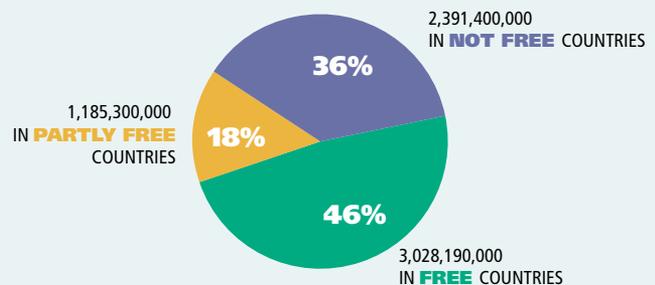
The number of countries judged by *Freedom in the World* as Free in 2007 stood at 90, representing 47 percent of all countries assessed and 46 percent of the global population. The number of countries qualifying as Partly Free stood at 60,

or 31 percent of countries and 18 percent of the population. Forty-three countries were judged Not Free, representing 22 percent of countries and 36 percent of the world population. About half of this number lives in just one country: China.

Freedom by Country



Freedom by World Population



Tough Liberalism Endnotes

(Continued from page 29)

- 1 Lillian Feldman interview, p. 3.
- 2 Pearl Harris interview, 5/6/03, p. 2. Eadie Shanker interview, 10/24/02, p. 3.
- 3 Pearl Harris interview, 5/6/03, p. 2-3. Albert Shanker interview with Sara Mosle. New York: NY 1996. Wayne State University Archives, part 1.
- 4 David Hill, *Education Week*, 2/21/96.
- 5 *New York Times*, 2/23/97, p. A1.
- 6 Jennie Shanker interview, p. 11.
- 7 "Where We Stand" column by Albert Shanker, in the *Sunday New York Times* "Week in Review" section, 1/5/92.
- 8 Jack Schierenbeck, *Class Struggles: The UFT Story*. United Federation of Teachers, 2/2/05, part 8.
- 9 Pearl Harris interview, 5/6/03, p. 4; Albert Shanker interview with Neil Cowan, United Federation of Teachers, 1985. NYU Archives, p. 4.
- 10 Albert Shanker interview with Neil Cowan, United Federation of Teachers, 1985. NYU Archives, p. 3.
- 11 *New York Times Magazine*, 9/9/73, p. 72.
- 12 *New York Times Magazine*, 9/3/67, p. 28.
- 13 Jack Schierenbeck, *American Teacher*, 4/97, p. 7.
- 14 Ted A. Morgan, *A Covert Life: Jay Lovestone: Communist, Anti-Communist, and Spymaster*, New York: Random House, 1999, p. 7.
- 15 Jack Schierenbeck, *Class Struggles: The UFT Story*. United Federation of Teachers, 2/2/05, part 8.
- 16 Melvin Lubin interview, p. 14-16.
- 17 Tom Mooney interview, p. 39-40; Ruby interview, p. 4.
- 18 Eugenia Kemble interview I, p. 48.
- 19 Burnie Bond interview, p. 17; Albert Shanker, Memorial Service transcript, 4/9/97, p. 4; David Dorn interview I, p. 10; "Where We Stand" column by Albert Shanker, in the *Sunday New York Times* "Week in Review" section, 10/28/84.
- 20 Eugenia Kemble interview.
- 21 Albert Shanker, quoted in *American Teacher*, 4/97, p. 10.
- 22 "Where We Stand" column by Albert Shanker, in the *Sunday New York Times* "Week in Review" section, 12/30/79.
- 23 "Where We Stand" column by Albert Shanker, in the *Sunday New York Times* "Week in Review" section, 5/11/75.
- 24 "Where We Stand" column by Albert Shanker, in the *Sunday New York Times* "Week in Review" section, 10/21/79.
- 25 Fred van Leeuwen interview, p. 5-6, 14.
- 26 Arch Puddington, *Lane Kirkland: A Champion of American Labor*, New York: Wiley, 2005, p. 163.
- 27 *New York Times*, 9/8/81, p. A3.
- 28 "Where We Stand" column by Albert Shanker, in the *Sunday New York Times* "Week in Review" section, 12/20/81.
- 29 Eric Chenoweth, "Albert Shanker's Involvement in International Affairs," unpublished mimeograph in Eadie Shanker papers.
- 30 Diane Ravitch, *New Leader*, 2/24/97, p. 4.
- 31 Arch Puddington, *Lane Kirkland: A Champion of American Labor*, New York: Wiley, 2005, p. 164.
- 32 Arch Puddington, *Lane Kirkland: A Champion of American Labor*, New York: Wiley, 2005, p. 263.
- 33 "Where We Stand" column by Albert Shanker, in the *Sunday New York Times* "Week in Review" section, 11/12/89.
- 34 E-mail from Lynda J. DeLoach, archivist, George Meany Memorial Archives, 4/5/05.
- 35 "Where We Stand" column by Albert Shanker, in the *Sunday New York Times* "Week in Review" section, 2/2/92.
- 36 "Where We Stand" column by Albert Shanker, in the *Sunday New York Times* "Week in Review" section, 6/10/90.
- 37 "Where We Stand" column by Albert Shanker, in the *Sunday New York Times* "Week in Review" section, 2/2/92.
- 38 Albert Shanker, in AFT video, "The Road to Democracy," 7/30/90.
- 39 Marshall Smith interview, p. 6.

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