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**Madman or Visionary?**  
*New Biography Explores the Legacy of  
Teacher Union Leader Albert Shanker*

NEW YORK CITY— Woody Allen's 1973 science fiction comedy *Sleeper* depicted teacher union leader Albert Shanker as a madman who destroyed the world, but a new biography finds Shanker to have been a complex and visionary figure whose life story offers timely lessons for contemporary debates over education, labor, civil rights, foreign policy, and the future of liberalism.

Richard Kahlenberg's *Tough Liberal: Albert Shanker and the Battles Over Schools, Unions, Race, and Democracy*, provides the first complete narrative of the man who was the president of New York City's United Federation of Teachers from 1964-1986 and the national American Federation of Teachers from 1974-1997, as well as author of a well-known weekly column in the *New York Times*. The book, to be published in September by Columbia University Press, contains insights into several debates raging today:

\* Teacher Unions. At a time when teacher unions are routinely dismissed as bad for education, *Tough Liberal* illuminates why modern teacher unionism first arose in New York City under his leadership in the early 1960s and how Shanker reinvented teacher unionism to be a flexible and progressive force in the 1980s.

\* Liberalism. At a time when liberals are ascendant but still have difficulty defining what they stand for, *Tough Liberal* elucidates Shanker's simple and coherent answer: democracy. Shanker's defense of public education and trade unions was tied to their democratic mission, as was his support of colorblind policies and opposition to dictatorships on the left and the right.

\* No Child Left Behind. At a time when the Congress is debating reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act, the book revisits the origins of the education standards and testing movement that Shanker championed – and details where it went off track.

\* Race. At a time when race-based school integration and affirmative action policies are under attack from the courts and ballot initiatives, *Tough Liberal* describes how Shanker, Martin Luther King, and Bayard Rustin tried to chart an alternative path that sought to remedy discrimination with policies aimed at lifting up economically disadvantaged people of all races.

\* Charter Schools. As the charter school movement continues to expand, *Tough Liberal* revisits Shanker's original 1988 proposal for charter schools – and how Shanker turned against the movement he helped father as it morphed away from his original vision of teacher led schools.

\* Organized Labor. At a time when the AFL-CIO continues to decline, Shanker's story reminds us of how a smarter unionism, focused on quality, helped the AFT triple its membership during his tenure.

*“Al Shanker illuminated our nation's path toward educating our children with devastating honesty, sharp wit, and profound wisdom.”*

—President Bill Clinton, upon posthumously awarding Shanker the Medal of Honor

**Richard Kahlenberg** is a senior fellow at The Century Foundation and the author of *All Together Now: Creating Middle-Class Schools Through Public School Choice*; *The Remedy: Class, Race, and Affirmative Action*; and *Broken Contract: A Memoir of Harvard Law School*.

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