

# Vocational Instructor

Local 4200A ~ AFT, AFTCT, & AFL-CIO



"It Pays  
To Be Taught  
By a Vo-Tech  
Teacher"

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## A Very Different Year in Review

*Ed Leavy, SVFT President*

In June of 2008 I wrote my first "end of the year" newsletter article. I have written one every year since. They are not all the same, but they are all within a reasonably narrow range. Teaching becomes harder every year: the expectations become higher, the needs of the students become greater, and we alas become older while the students in our classrooms are always teenagers. It is a difficult and emotionally demanding profession in the best of times.

These are not the best of times. Teachers have had to reimagine lessons they have taught for years or even decades, trying to engage students who are miles away in a platform most of us have rarely or ever used. Teachers have never seen so many directives or read so many emails coming from so many different people within the system. The daily interactions with students, the personal connections we make with kids which is often the most enjoyable and reward part of the job, is greatly diminished. The collaboration and connections with our colleagues, the friendships we form with people we see day after day, year after year, are strained by the increase in distance and decrease in time.

We are also not immune to the problems everyone else is facing, though we try our best to act as though we are. Our teachers have been among the 1.6 million Americans who have suffered from Covid19; their relatives are among the over 100,000 Americans who have died from the disease. We are not immune to the loneliness and frustration that quarantine has brought. We have family members we do not get to see, and other family members who (to be honest) we are seeing a bit more than might be ideal. My father is 82 years old, and though I talk to him every week I don't get to see him, and I'm not sure when I safely can. Many of you are in the same position. All of us have been shaken by the images we are seeing throughout the country. It has been a rough end of the year.

Yet through it all, our teachers have risen to the challenge. I am on regular calls with AFT CT officers from our teacher locals, and the struggles we are having with student engagement are nothing compared to what many districts are facing. That difference speaks volumes not only about the efforts you are putting in to make distance learning work, but also to the relationships you had already built with your students. Distance learning is not designed for the trades - most students don't have piles of bricks or lumber sitting in their homes - but somehow even those classes have maintained engaged students. It has been remarkable.

It seems to me that most of the problems of this school year have been if not solved, at least wrestled to a draw; most of my emails and calls we are receiving are now about next year. Those plans are being formed, and the SVFT has been guaranteed that this time we will have seats at the table, or at least the Google Meets call. We also have been discussing return to worksite plans for all State workers through SEBAC. It will be different, and it probably won't be perfect, but we have time to plan. That's next year, though. Everyone deserves time to recover from this year first. Please, send us your concerns and opinions, but then finally take a deserved and necessary step back. Create time for your family, and especially for yourself. This year has been unique in the history of our system; next year will be as well. We keep hearing that we have to adjust to the "new normal." Find a way to have the regular normal, at least for a while. Your commitment to your students, to each other, and to the profession has been remarkable. Please take the time to feel the pride in that before switching to how you can do it again next year. No one is Superman; we just play him on Google Meets.

I know I speak for Paul, Bob, Emily, Greg, and our remarkable building reps when I say it is an incredible honor to represent you. Have a healthy, relaxing, and fulfilling summer.

## Labor History: The Players' League

By Ed Leavy

Major League Baseball in the 1880s was still a new idea. There were two leagues that were considered to have that designation: The National League and the American Association. The leagues did not play against each other - the World Series did not exist until the next century - and the National League had the vast majority of the good players. What united the two leagues was they respected each other's reserve clause.

The reserve clause stated that when a player's contract expired, he could not sign with any other team. The purpose of the clause was to depress salaries; when a player's contract ended, his choices were to re-sign with the team at what the club offered or not play. This process was so obviously unfair - the team had a responsibility to the player only for the length of the contract; the player was "owned" by the team forever - that it was overturned by the courts a mere 90 years after it was instituted, in 1975.

John Montgomery Ward, a star pitcher and shortstop for the New York Giants in the National League, began the Brotherhood of Professional Base Ball Players in 1885 ("base ball" was two words until the 1930s, then became one word seemingly overnight. I've never understood that). Ward, who received his law degree from Columbia University while playing, wanted his union to strike in 1889 over the passage of the Brush Classification Plan, which would eliminate contract negotiations and replace it with five tiers based on "habits, earnestness, and special qualifications." Ward understandably saw this as a further effort to depress salaries, and was ready to strike to eliminate this clause as well as the reservation of a player at a lower salary (a team could offer a player a pay cut, knowing the player could not play anywhere else if he refused it) and a ban on the selling of players. The final issue was personal to Ward; he was supposed to be sold to another team for \$10,000. His salary was \$4000. Ward argued that if his fair-market value was \$10,000, that should be his salary. He refused to report to his new team, and because as a lawyer he had other ways to make a living, the clubs backed down.

Ward then decided that instead of a strike, the players should start a new league run by the players themselves. The Players' League began in 1890. Most of the best players flocked to the new league; 55% of the National League and 17% of the inferior American Association players went to the new league. In total, 14 future Hall of Famers moved to the Players' League, while the other leagues had only three combined. Players owned a stake in the team, but because new stadiums needed to be built, they also brought in "capitalists" to invest. Ward viewed this as a collaboration; he said, "The Major Leagues would be a success if they could just get over the idea they owned us." The players announced their schedule in late winter.

The National League showed they were going to fight this league by then scheduling their games in cities where both leagues existed on the exact same dates. The battle was on. The NL, facing a dearth of quality players, began raiding the American Association teams regardless of the reserve clause (shockingly, the reserve clause was no longer sacred when it hurt the owners' wallets), putting the Association in a death spiral; two teams went bankrupt during the season, another switched to the National League, and the Association ceased to exist after the season.

The season ended with all three leagues losing money. The Players' League lost \$150,000, but that total was dwarfed by the National League, which lost over \$500,000. With the American Association poised to disband, the National League set up a meeting with the Players' League. The National League owners were willing to compromise; owner Albert Spaulding, the titular President of the league, said, "I have no intention of dying with my boots on." The Players' League brought a delegation of six people, three capitalists and three players. Spaulding refused to meet with the players, most likely out of concern that John Montgomery Ward would be a shrewd negotiator. Ward demanded that as a player-coach and stockholder, he had every right to be in the room. Unfortunately, the "capitalists" agreed with the NL owners, and the three players left.

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Spaulding then encouraged everyone to be honest about their financial situation. The three capitalists acknowledged their league lost \$150,000. Spaulding then told them the NL turned a profit, a clear lie. He then offered the three capitalists the right to buy NL teams. The capitalists sold out the players, and the Players' League was dead.

The next year began with a 12-team National League. They accepted the players back, but with significant pay cuts. The Brotherhood disbanded, and professional athletes did not unionize again for over 75 years. The American League was formed in 1900, and the two leagues agreed to recognize each other's reserve clause. Baseball's labor-management relationship remained unchanged from 1875 until 1975. Until then, the Players' League was the last, best chance to change the economic landscape of professional sports.

*Most of the information came from an article by Ethan Lewis, which is available online. If you would like to learn more about the Players' League, we talked about it in more detail (and with many more jokes) on the podcast "The Bill Bradley Collective," which I cohost with my son Zak and our friend Andrew. The podcast discusses the "intersection of sports and politics," and is available on iTunes, Spotify, and any other place where podcasts can be found. Please give it a listen.*

## **Labor Management**

The final labor-management was held via Google Meets on June 2. CTECS management was represented by Superintendent Jeff Wihbey, Assistant Superintendent Dr. Nikitoula Menounos, Human Resource Specialist Rafael Palacio, and Director of Human Resources for the DoE Karen Zuboff. The SVFT was represented by Prince Director of Guidance and Admissions Lisa Higgins, Windham Social Studies Teacher Angela Ocasio, Platt IST DH Tom Viola, Paul Angelucci, Bob Riccitelli, and Ed Leavy. The following topics were discussed:

- Next year - what plans are currently being made? There are a range of options being considered, but a plan has to be made before July 4th. Superintendent Wihbey guaranteed the SVFT will have representation on the committees. It is clear the start of next year will be very different than normal years.
- New history curriculum - We have heard concerns about starting a new curriculum in a year in which school- at least at the beginning - seems very different than a usual year. Dr Menounos responded that social studies teachers voted 52-11 to replace the current Big History curriculum with a world history program.
- Summer programs and Virtual High School- how will summer school be handled, and what role does the district foresee for VHS in that plan? Summer school will be done remotely. Virtual High School, a remote learning program, will be used for enrichment but not for credit-recovery or incoming 9th graders
- TEAM - how will TEAM be considered for teachers in the program this year? TEAM deadlines will be extended six months.
- Fall sports - will there be fall sports? Football teams often begin practice during the summer; when will a decision be made, and by whom? The district is waiting for the CIAC to announce their plan for fall sports. It seems likely the seasons will be delayed and shortened.
- Teacher evaluations - how will the "archived" evaluations work in practice? Dr. Menounos said all information will be available, but there will be no scores for this year.
- World language- how will the CTECS handle the new requirement? The district is budgeting for 15 new world language teachers to comply with the graduation requirement. The jobs have yet to be posted. The SVFT mentioned that it may be very hard to find qualified teachers at this late date.
- Grading - The directive that most student work be handed in five days before the end of the school year and all work by three days before has not been shared with the teachers at many schools. Dr. Menounos said she will reach out to schools to remind them to share that directive with the teachers. If any school has provided a different timeline or not shared the directive, please contact SVFT officers to let us know.

## **Bad Culture, Not Bad Apples**

*By Ed Leavy*

This article may not make everyone, or anyone, happy. However, I have received emails from members saying it is the responsibility of every union president to make a statement about what has been transpiring throughout the country over the past two weeks. I decided the people who sent those emails were right. These are my sentiments; I am not speaking for the other officers.

I started teaching at Bullard-Havens in November 1985. I was 23 years old, the youngest person on the staff. At the time, we had a 10-minute break every day, when we could go down to the cafeteria and buy a cup of coffee. One day in my first month, I was in line behind an older teacher I will call Tony. He was probably about 60 and had been teaching for decades. As he went to pay, he held the dollar very close to him. The girl at the register, a sophomore, smiled nervously and put her hand out. Tony held the dollar where it was. Finally, she leaned over to get the dollar, and he made an obvious show of looking down her shirt. "C'mon honey, you're so pretty," he said. "Give an old man a thrill." He laughed and walked away. The same nervous smile stayed pasted on her face. "I'm so sorry," I mumbled to the girl. "Do you want me to do something?" She just shook her head, her face never changing. "He's like that with all of us. It's ok." I paid for my coffee and went to the table where Tony was sitting. He was joking and laughing with the other teachers. Tony had more years at Bullard-Havens than I had days there. He was a decade older than my father. I said nothing. I am ashamed of my silence to this day; I have never forgotten the pain in her eyes.

As the days at Bullard-Havens became months and then years, I noticed that while very few people were as direct as Tony, sexual jokes and comments about female students and – to a lesser extent – female teachers were commonplace. Male teachers openly talked about which students they thought were desirable, about wanting to pull the fire alarm when the senior girls were in the showers – it was constant. After a couple of years when a new Guidance Coordinator arrived, we had a faculty meeting in which he discussed the damage caused by making sexual comments. To my dismay, there was wide-spread pushback from many male teachers. "You should hear the comments they make to each other; they're not so innocent." "If they don't want people looking at them, don't dress that way." It was a greatest hits of terrible things bad men say. A female teacher started speaking about how sexual comments were inappropriate; someone yelled out, "Don't worry, no one is making them about you." There was laughter. I said, "Is it really too much to ask us not to talk about sex between 7:30 and 3:00?" I could hear male teachers mumbling about me, questioning my masculinity. Some male teachers refused to speak to me for weeks.

There were rumors that there were teachers sleeping with students; I don't know if that was true, but the rumors about some teachers were persistent. Finally, some teachers were disciplined for their comments. A trade teacher who used to tell new trade teachers how to move the toolboxes so the girls had to bend over in front of them was "counseled" into retirement. So was Tony. They had stepped "over the line," but that line was very blurry because the culture was steeped in misogyny. The culture began to change, however. Part of the change was DCF mandated reporting rules. Part of it was the other teachers started standing up to these comments, making it clear that it was not ok. Part of it was that students started reporting the comments to administration so they could not be overlooked. And part of it was that teachers had finally faced consequences for their behavior. The teachers who were pushed out were "bad apples," but they were not the problem. The culture in the building that allowed them to behave that way year after year, their behavior only getting bolder and worse, was the real problem. Bullard-Havens did the work to change that culture. Removing those two teachers was the easy part, though no one felt strongly enough about protecting our female students to do even that for decades.

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I am in no way equating what happened in the early 1990s at Bullard-Havens with what is happening now throughout our country. It is not minimizing the pain in that girl's eyes 35 years ago to say that unlike George Floyd or Breonna Taylor or Eric Garner or far too many others, she was allowed to live while they were not. The stakes for far too many African Americans in dealing with their government and their police can literally be life and death. It is increasingly clear that it is lunacy to claim that Derek Chauvin, who knelt on George Floyd's neck for 8 minutes and 46 seconds, is a "bad apple" and believe that answer is sufficient. We have all watched the videos in city after city of police officers (or, in Washington DC, soldiers) aggressively using violence against unarmed protesters and the press; the most recent count as of this writing is 135 separate incidents have been filmed. One officer in Lexington grabbed an African American woman who was kneeling peacefully, pulled down her mask and shot pepper spray into her face, then kicked her; that officer had 71 complaints about use of undue force in his 3 ½ years on the job, but was still sent out into the streets. He is also a bad apple, but when the mayor of Lexington addressed the police force to discuss this and other incidents, several officers walked out of the meeting in protest of his comments. It is not just the bad apple, it's the culture that accepts and defends the bad apple.

Let's be clear: I do not believe that all policemen, or most policemen, are bad people. I disagree strongly with those who watched officers cooperate with protesters, talk to protesters, and kneel with protesters and just dismissed it as propaganda. People can learn and grow. Clearly, not 100% of the protesters were peaceful, and I differentiate between "protesters" and "looters." Police were at risk, too. I was incredibly moved by the social media posts from one of our members who after posting about Black Lives Matter and the killing of George Floyd then wrote about a conversation with her father, a police officer who was saddened and angry about the people who are dishonoring the badge he has spent a lifetime honoring. Yet I find it impossible not to be ashamed as an American when I see the aggression by representatives of our government against peaceful protesters, especially those of color, who are demanding the government they pay to protect them stop injuring and killing unarmed African Americans. How is that statement controversial?

We individually can do very little to change the culture of some of the police departments we have seen, other than demand from our elected leaders that changes be made. We can, however, work to improve the culture regarding race within our system. We can take the time to listen to our students of color when they talk about their experiences of dealing with authority figures, including their teachers and administrators. We should acknowledge their anger, frustration, and fear – not ignore it. We can have difficult and open conversations about race with our colleagues, and we must call out comments that are racially insensitive, even if that makes for an awkward lunch or meeting. The 92% of us CTECS teachers who are white can acknowledge that the 8% of our teachers who are not have experiences we do not have, and thus speak with a knowledge we cannot possess – knowledge that is important to all students, and not just minority students. Many of our African American teachers are relatively new because our district has only recently improved their policies improving their recruitment of teachers of color and has yet to adequately address our retention of teachers of color. That 92% of us, including me, should listen more and talk less.

The SVFT officers have had two meetings with many of our minority teachers this past year. Those conversations were raw and painful, and they have changed me as a union president and as a person. As a union and as a system, we need to do more of that. Cultures can change. I learned that, like I learned so much, from my twenty-three years at Bullard-Havens. It comes from the outside, and it comes from the inside. The last two weeks have laid bare the fact that things must change. That was the call from the outside. Let us all summon the courage to join that call from within.

In Solidarity,  
Ed

## What's Happening in Wallingford

“Wallingford” is metaphorical; we have mostly been working remotely, though we have been going to the office more often of late. Here is a short list of issues we have been addressing:

- **Certification:** Alicia Palmer from payroll told us there are many certifications that need to be renewed. Many people keep their certification in their desks at school so they don't forget to renew it; this year, it may as well be on Mars. Please be sure your certification doesn't lapse.
- The transfer window ends June 15th. All positions posted for the first time on or before that date are eligible for transfer. Anyone interested in transferring should check the postings on CTTech.org. Positions for transfer are marked “internal only.”
- The election for SVFT Secretary will be held in September. It's not clear what the exact process for the election will be, because it's not clear what September will look like. Nominations are closed. There will be a special August newsletter so that candidates will be able to publish an article about themselves. We will have remote meetings with both the Constitution and Bylaws Committee and the Nominations and Elections Committee to ensure we have a fair and legal election.
- We have filed for arbitration on behalf of the Athletic Directors, who were told to work three days over the summer and were then denied pay. The date of the arbitration has yet to be determined.
- Be sure to inform your business managers if you want to carry over a personal day to next year. Under Article 4, section 3 (a), any unused days not carried over will be paid at the rate of \$155 per day. Partial unused days cannot be carried over or paid, so make sure they are used.



## Vocational Instructor

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*Happy  
Father's  
Day!*

### **SVFT Mission Statement**

The SVFT is an organization of professional educators that promotes excellence through the mutual adherence to policies, documents, and procedures negotiated with the CTEC. We work to guarantee that the contract is followed and positive working conditions are maintained. This organization shall be to provide a safe and positive teaching environment for all by:

1. Maintaining the integrity of the contract, the Vocational Technical High School System, and the solidarity of the union
2. Ensuring all members are protected by the contract and equipped with the tools and knowledge necessary to make them successful
3. Protecting the jobs of our members and strengthening our system
4. Providing members opportunities to further their education and receive quality professional development
5. Responding quickly to the emerging changes to the workplace and technological challenges
6. Handling all interactions with fairness and integrity
7. Striving for productive, open communication between the SVFT leadership and our membership
8. Building and improving relationships with our union affiliates and local labor councils