CSEA INTERVIEW

GERALD McENTEE, AFSCME President

July 2003
When did you first become aware of CSEA?

MR. McENTEE: Well, it's a while back now. It was in the -- I was in Pennsylvania. We were fighting to get a collective bargaining piece of legislation for public workers and AFSCME ran against CSEA for the representation rights -- oh, thousands and thousands of State employees. I didn't work the campaign because I was in Pennsylvania, but everybody in the union and AFSCME was acutely aware of the campaign, how important it was, and then we proceeded to get our butts kicked by CSEA.

I would mention one thing, though. After the election Wirth called me to Washington and asked me to go in individually and sort of look around and see if we could find out the reasons that AFSCME lost and I did that. I spent about three weeks up in New York talking to a lot of different people, people that supported AFSCME, people that supported CSEA, of which there were many more than supported AFSCME.

And I came back and I said to Wirth, the people voted for CSEA because they thought they were a better union and it would be a good thing if we were able to affiliate with and be a partner with CSEA.

THE INTERVIEWER: Then maybe you
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5     could talk a little more about that. How did the
6     relationship soften over time to the point where
7     CSEA considered affiliating with AFSCME?

MR. McENTEE: Well, we were able to
8     get collective bargaining legislation all across
9     the country. AFSCME was growing. They -- as
10     always, they were tough times for public workers
11     in the negotiations and otherwise. We had grown
12     considerably and I believe because of the tough
13     times, because of the size of AFSCME and of course
14     -- to a large extent because of the expertise and
15     skills of CSEA, meetings started to take place,
16     meetings started to occur. We found that we
17     really had the same goals and objectives which
18     were to best represent public workers, and over a
19     course of time relations changed from one of
20     antagonist to one of possible partners, and then
21     eventually we had the affiliation.

THE INTERVIEWER: What role did you
22     play in making sure that it happened?

MR. McENTEE: I voted for it.

(Laughter.) I voted for it and, of course, I had
23     said to Wirth earlier, this would be an awfully
24     good thing for our union, an affiliation. It
25     would make us or help make us a powerhouse
26     throughout America and he a powerhouse in probably
27     the most important state in the United States, and
28     so I prodded him, but it was a lot of people on
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both sides, CSEA and AFSCME, and I remember he
called a special board meeting and I was on the
board then, came down, and was obviously 110
percent in favor of this affiliation coming, this
partnership coming together.

THE INTERVIEWER: How important was
the affiliation for AFSCME?

MR. MCENTEE: Oh, I think it was
incredibly important. I think it put AFSCME on
the map, collective bargaining happening,
representation rights happening for public
workers, campaigns beginning all across the
country, and here AFSCME was in a position where
they became a partner with the largest, largest by
far, association of public workers that had really
an excellent record in representing public workers
in the Empire State, and I think it took us over
the top in terms of being a large and integral and
important part of the American labor movement.

THE INTERVIEWER: How has it, the
relationship between CSEA and AFSCME, evolved over
the years?

MR. MCENTEE: Well, I think--
(Inaudible discussion.)

THE INTERVIEWER: How has the
relationship between CSEA and AFSCME evolved over
the years?

MR. MCENTEE: Oh, I think it's
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become a real partnership where AFSCME has been able to utilize their skills, their expertise, their history in the public service, and I think AFSCME's been able to lend their support to whether there were possible raids on CSEA or whether or not they were organizing drives within CSEA. I think we had become really important partners in the political area, whether they were in the gubernatorial elections or they were elections for mayors and heads of counties throughout New York, and so I think it developed in an area of (inaudible) reorganizing and
devolved particularly in the area of politics and it's been a good time.

THE INTERVIEWER: There's just a few questions on history.

MR. MCENTEE: M-m h-m-m-m.

THE INTERVIEWER: Can you talk about some of the CSEA leaders you worked with over the past 25 years: Bill McGowan, Irving Flamingbaum, Joe McDermott, Danny Donohue, Mary Sullivan, George Boncoraglio, Irene Carr or any others?

MR. MCENTEE: Well, I can take those one at a time. Let's start with Irving Flamingbaum, who was a real leader in CSEA. I believe he came from the largest district in CSEA, was also a member of the International Executive Board of AFSCME, which is where I really came to
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17     know him. He was a very skilled individual, a
canny individual, what I would sort of sum up as a
real negotiator; not just externally with the
members he represented with the county and places
like that or the State, but internally he was a
very sophisticated negotiator and on our board
fought very hard for CSEA and the members of CSEA.
Who else?

THE INTERVIEWER: Bill McGowan?

MR. MCENTEE: Bill McGowan I think
got elected and I think began to at least change,
to a degree, sort of the -- sort of the soul of
CSEA. It had always been an association and Bill
in a brusque but a wonderful way was a
rank-and-filer, a rank-and-file leader. He
brought that kind of insight into the presidency
of CSEA. More member input, more member
participation and I think he started -- he didn't
finish, but he started CSEA in the direction of
being a real membership organization.

THE INTERVIEWER: What about Joe
McDermott?

MR. MCENTEE: I think Joe McDermott
brought to CSEA an approach where he was able to,
I think probably better than anyone, organize CSEA
internally; bring about the various departments,
bring about the various leaders in CSEA. I think
he was a very, very bright, skilled individual
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21     that could bring people and ideas together. He
22     had great technical skills and utilized them for
23     CSEA and became a real, real good leader for CSEA.

24     THE INTERVIEWER: Danny Donohue.

MR. MCENTEE: I think Danny Donohue

1     has an -- of course, he's still a peer so I'll say
2     kind things about Danny Donohue, of course, but
3     you would have to. Danny embodies all of it.
4     Rank-and-filer, embodies a lot of the skills and
5     perception that Bill had, Bill McGowan, but he's
6     also able to run the organization. He's able to
7     lead in terms of organizing new direction for
8     CSEA, so he has all the inside grounds: A rank-
9     and-filer, and yet all the skills and abilities
10     and expertise of a true professional in the field
11     of representing public workers. He's got it all.

12     THE INTERVIEWER: Mary Sullivan.

13     MR. MCENTEE: Mary Sullivan is a
14     stellar performer. I mean if Mary thinks you're
15     right, if Mary thinks you are for CSEA because
16     that's where Mary's head is, that's where her
17     heart is, then she's an ally and she's a friend.
18     But the other side of the coin is if you're not
19     and you're a Governor who's trying to push around
20     State employees or a County Exec, she's no ally of
21     yours and a tremendous spokesperson and fighter
22     for CSEA. They got a good team; always have had.

23     THE INTERVIEWER: George

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Boncoraglio.

MR. McENTEE: George represents really sort of the heart of New York City and believes that CSEA, which is a statewide organization, you know, and whether you're in Schenectady or Rye or Albany or wherever, he brings that New York City piece to it, that urban piece, and vigorously represents that Big Apple but in the realm of CSEA and he brings an incredibly important aspect to the whole leadership quality of CSEA.

THE INTERVIEWER: Irene Carr.

MR. McENTEE: Irene Carr was, is, a very respected officer of CSEA, but she also played a role in partnering and melding together CSEA and AFSCME. She became probably for both organizations the voice of women. She most certainly did in AFSCME, heading up the Women's Committee for any number of years. A very articulate, a very gentle person, and did play a major role in terms of the voice and the movement of women in our organization and a tremendous asset to both CSEA and AFSCME.

THE INTERVIEWER: (Inaudible.)
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question. I mean there's about 240,000 of them up there. I mean there was a lot of leaders but you covered, you know, the leaders that I have known and been closest to.

THE INTERVIEWER: How has CSEA changed AFSCME (inaudible)?

MR. McENTEE: Oh, I think it added so many things to our organization. I think they'd been around a long time, longer than AFSCME as a national union. They brought to it, I believe, a degree of maturity in terms of leadership, but yet an aggressive and progressive leadership as well. They are a very integral part of AFSCME. We feel, the leadership of AFSCME, that we can call upon the CSEA to utilize their political skills, to utilize their organizational skills, and so they have become a real leading -- a really leading partner in this relationship and so I think they have made AFSCME -- and they're such an integral part of it, that they have made AFSCME really the battleship or the flagship for the American labor movement.

THE INTERVIEWER: How do you think...
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rules and things like that. AFSCME's a labor union, always has been, and so I think we have given that part of us to CSEA. I think it has helped really a round CSEA, build CSEA into the -- into the really great movement it is in the State of New York.

THE INTERVIEWER: How did you see the relationship between CSEA and DP 37 develop over time?

MR. McENTEE: I think it's -- I think when Gottbaum was there he had a great relationship with CSEA, particularly with the leaders. I don't know, though, that Vic saw it as one of equal partners. You'd have to know Victor to understand that, but now and with Lillian Roberts now there, I think it's evolving more in the direction of equal partners or even the fact that 37 understands -- the leadership in 37 understands how powerful CSEA is politically in Albany. When you talk about that monumental State budget where monies go to the City of New York, that they work so close together -- I've attended meetings with the leadership in the House, leadership in the State Senate up there, that had been joint meetings of 37 or other affiliates in New York, as well as CSEA and I think now -- and I never saw those meetings before. And I think now it's more of a team
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concept with co-captains.

THE INTERVIEWER: What -- this is
the last question. What are some of the most
vivid personal memories of CSEA that (inaudible)?

MR. MCENTEE: Well, I mean, there's
always the rallies, you know, there's always the
lobbying day up in the Capitol with a couple
thousand people that are always very, very
exciting, but I remember when I was first -- had
this distant thought of running for president of
AFSCME, that CSEA was the first organization, the
first union, to invite me outside of Pennsylvania
and it was Joe McDermott that did that and invited
me to his district meeting. That was a big step
for me and I always think of that personally, and

then I always think of the election that I ran
after Gerry Wirth died and when CSEA decided to
endorse me, I was incredibly grateful but it gave
me such a high in that election and I wouldn't be
sitting here doing this interview if it wasn't for
CSEA.

THE INTERVIEWER: Anything else you
want to add?

MR. MCENTEE: I think we just
covered the whole book.

(Conclusion of interview of Gerald
McEntee, AFSCME President.)