CSEA INTERVIEW

of

WILLIAM LUCY, AFSCME Secretary-Treasurer

July 2003
WILLIAM LUCY

THE INTERVIEWER: When did you first become aware of CSEA?

MR. LUCY: I think anyone who did work in the public sector knew CSEA or knew about CSEA all the time, specifically in the mid-sixties, late sixties, when the campaign for recognition in the State of New York took place under the new Taylor Law.

THE INTERVIEWER: I'm gonna ask you to talk a little bit about The Taylor Law. CSEA and AFSCME had a very contentious relationship in the late sixties and early seventies after the establishment of The Taylor Law in New York in representation size. What do you remember about those times?

MR. LUCY: Well, I clearly remember the fact that both organizations were very competitive, both in terms of the areas of the work force that they represented at the same time as well as competing for new areas that were made possible by The Taylor Law itself. We had a direct competition in the Institutional Unit which involved the Mental Health Institutions and those at the State level in addition to some of the Local governments, County and Local government races.

THE INTERVIEWER: How did the relationship soften over time to the point where
CSEA considered affiliating with AFSCME? 

MR. LUCY: I think both CSEA and ourselves recognized that ultimately we were not each other's enemy but the employer was the enemy of both, and while we had different missions our representations were our State Councils and certainly our City of New York locals under District Council 37. We were trying to find the best way to service the needs of public sector employees.

I think what caused the situation to really, you know, crystallize was the fact that a large piece of CSEA, notably the what is called now PEF, the Public Employees Federation, came into being which, I think in the minds of the leadership of CSEA, really raised the question of fragmentation and how could they best keep their entire unit together.

THE INTERVIEWER: What do you remember about the affiliation? How did it happen and what role did you play in helping to make sure it happened?

MR. LUCY: Well, as I said, the -- on the event of the Public Employee Federation comin' into bein', I think great thought went through the minds of the leadership of CSEA as to how to avoid this fragmentation issue and we, AFSCME, were then the largest public sector union
in the state and I think the natural drift was to see what kind of relationship could be worked out with ourselves and that same view was going through our mind and it was on that basis that a number of discussions began to take place at the leadership level and also at the affiliate level.

THE INTERVIEWER: How important was the affiliation for AFSCME?

MR. LUCY: Oh, critically important to us. I think it not only established AFSCME or reaffirmed AFSCME's leadership in the public sector, but it brought into bein' a large unit of public sector employees in the State, which meant for us that we had to intensify our efforts in understanding State government and certainly developing stronger procedures and methods for being the State employee interest.

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

MR. LUCY: I think it's been a magnificent relationship. CSEA was an independent association. I personally come out of an independent association background, so we had -- those backgrounds give you a different perspective on your role and your relationship with the employer, whether it be a State government or County government.
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I think we convinced CSEA leadership at its top level and local levels that we understood public sector representation and I think what they drew from us and learned from us was that we were not sort of the wild-eyed radical union that we had been presented to be on a local situation, but that we were trying to increase our ability to meet the needs of State employees and Local government employees and that they were a key factor in that.

We had to work together to improve the whole and I think over time this proved to be a very wise decision.

THE INTERVIEWER: How would you describe CSEA's role in AFSCME today?

MR. LUCY: Oh, CSEA is a major participant, a major player in shaping the policy direction of the union as well as how we approach major public policy questions, not just in terms of the day-to-day representation but what's public employment gonna be like two years, four years, six years from now, and New York State and the various public entities in New York State are a unique piece of our union and a unique piece of that problem. I mean we want to maintain quality public services performed by trained and qualified public employees and CSEA's vision of that, as the largest group of public sector employees in our
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union, is critical to how we formulate our
programs for the rest of the country.

THE INTERVIEWER: What do you think
were the most important events and issues for CSEA
and AFSCME over the past 25 years?

MR. LUCY: I think it's probably
been the continuin' to build this relationship so
that each party sees the continuous -- as a work
in progress. We're continuing to learn about
their needs from a political perspective in New
York State and they are continuin' to learn that
they are a part of a -- of our, should we say, a
magnificent whole.

And what they give us is a sense of
stability as we look at major public issues and
hopefully what we give them to deal with our
situation is resources and support wherever it's
asked for.

THE INTERVIEWER: This is the
(inaudible) question. We want you to comment on
some of the CSEA leaders you've worked with over
the past 25 years and I'll just (inaudible). Bill
McGowan?

MR. LUCY: I think Bill McGowan was
probably one of the strongest leaders who
recognized the need for CSEA to make this
transition from an independent but strong
association to an integral part of the American
labor movement and that to come in as a strong organization meant that you not only played a rightful role as a part, but you became even stronger by increasing the size of the total union.

THE INTERVIEWER: Irving Flamingbaum.

MR. LUCY: Irving was one of the most colorful individuals I’ve had the pleasure of meeting. As a matter of fact, I knew Irving Flamingbaum before I met Bill McGowan. Irving was a leader at the County level, one who really makes his knowledge and understanding of Local government, had an incredible sense of political engagement and was really a sort of a people's person, so you put all those three characteristics together and it gave -- you come out with a leader that was both cunning in the context of dealing with the employer, he was politically sophisticated because he was able to -- I say walk all sides of the street on behalf of his employees. Irving was a master politician.

THE INTERVIEWER: Joe McDermott.

MR. LUCY: I think Joe McDermott as a successor to Bill McGowan really built on the foundation that Bill laid, that foundation being a strong and forthright engagement inside of AFSCME itself, makin' sure that CSEA was well-represented
in the decision-makin' process of AFSCME, but
bringin' his basic trade union skills to work on
behalf of this affiliation. And both Bill and Joe
had major roles in terms of integrating the two
organizations together.

THE INTERVIEWER: Danny Donohue.

MR. LUCY: I think Donohue is one of
the brightest and ablest leaders in the American
labor movement today and while he represents CSEA,
which in the grand scheme of things is just one
piece, his leadership of CSEA and his
participation in our national union has allowed
him to make a mark for public employees and
workers in general at the highest levels of labor.
I have a great deal of admiration for Danny.

THE INTERVIEWER: Mary Sullivan?

MR. LUCY: Mary and Danny and George
Boncoraglio played two important roles. One,
representing CSEA on our board, but also
representing our total union in New York and
across the rest of the nation. They have been, I
think, key parts of transmittin' AFSCME's agenda
to the CSEA leadership and rank and file and vice
versa; makin' sure that the executive board of our
union is totally in tune with the thinkin' of CSEA
THE INTERVIEWER: Irene Carr.

MR. LUCY: Irene, aside from bein' a tremendous leader in CSEA, did somethin' for the national union and I don't believe we could have done without her and that is to take on the chore of building the women's movement in AFSCME and in buildin' in a way that kept it focused on what it's ultimate goal was. She was a very quiet but effective lady and one who had the total respect, even though she come from the association side, all the other members came from basically the old AFSCME side, and she was able to bring her leadership to that group in a very quiet and effective way. We've probably got, as a result of her contribution, the most effective Women's Committee of any union.

THE INTERVIEWER: Anybody else that I haven't named?

MR. LUCY: No, because if I name one or two we have to mention others.

(Laughter.)

THE INTERVIEWER: How has the CSEA changed AFSCME over time?

MR. LUCY: Well, I'm not sure "changed" is the word so much as maybe how has it made us intensify our work. I mean we have become, obviously, much more knowledgeable about
the importance of State government in the overall
scheme of government: State, County and Local.
And I think that's as a result of, (a) the need to
recognize that in terms of State and Local
governments being able to function, State is
where, you know, the action starts and we have
intensified our efforts in that area. We've
restructured our service mechanism to meet some of
the needs that exist there, so I would say we've
gained from understandin' the need to focus on
State government at that level.

THE INTERVIEWER: How has AFSCME
maybe changed CSEA?

MR. LUCY: I think we've convinced
the leadership and the rank-and-file members of
CSEA that we are all public employees with the
same set of problems and that as an institution of
1.4 million folks our ability to focus on the
policy issues, focus on the day-to-day problems of
workers, is the key to our survival and that they
are as much a part of this institution as we are a
part of them and that together we have an
obligation to confront employers irrespective of
whether they're national Presidents or State
Governors on the day-to-day issues that affect our
work force.

THE INTERVIEWER: One of the last
questions. How did you see the relationship
between CSEA and DC 37 evolve over time?

MR. LUCY: I think it started off as a distant, a nonexistent relationship because as I said earlier, the competition, you know, between leadership, the competition for turf was alive and well for all the world's ears leadin' into the sixties. But under Danny's leadership, that gap has been breached and you now have DC 37, 1707, and CSEA meeting as a family in one state to talk about policy questions that affect everybody and I think that that could not have happened effectively without the leadership of Danny Donohue and the enlightened leadership of DC 37.

THE INTERVIEWER: What are your -- what are some of your most vivid personal memories of CSEA events and activities?

MR. LUCY: Well, I think I would have to go back to one that George Boncoraglio got me engaged in and that's when I discovered that the Brooklyn Bridge is not nearly as short as some folks think it is. (Laughter.) One of the most magnificent demonstrations that was held in the region that George is vice president of was in New York City and those of us who jumped at the chance to walk across the Brooklyn Bridge jumped at a chance. The bridge is longer than they say. That's my most vivid memory.
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(Laughter.)

THE INTERVIEWER: Anything else?

MR. LUCY: No. I would just say that over time CSEA and its leadership and its rank and file have really found a home in AFSCME and we've found a home with them. And as a result we're organizing more and more workers who were both in their jurisdiction and who are in the basic AFSCME jurisdiction and as a result more workers are bein' made -- more workers are gettin' the opportunity to have a strong union represent 'em, to have effective leadership up and down the chain and public employees in the State of New York really have over the last 25 years, let's say, seen a new beginning where their work and their value is much more appreciated as a result of the representation brought by CSEA and AFSCME united.

(Conclusion of interview of William Lucy, AFSCME Secretary-Treasurer.)