

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24

CSEA INTERVIEW

of

GERALD MCENTEE, AFSCME President

July 2003

□

GERALD MCENTEE

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

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

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

23 And I came back and I said to Wirth,
24 the people voted for CSEA because they thought

□

3

1 they were a better union and it would be a good
2 thing if we were able to affiliate with and be a
3 partner with CSEA.

4 THE INTERVIEWER: Then maybe you

GERALD MCENTEE

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?

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

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

4

1 MR. MCENTEE: I voted for it.
2 (Laughter.) I voted for it and, of course, I had
3 said to Wirth earlier, this would be an awfully
4 good thing for our union, an affiliation. It
5 would make us or help make us a powerhouse
6 throughout America and he a powerhouse in probably
7 the most important state in the United States, and
8 so I prodded him, but it was a lot of people on

GERALD MCENTEE

9 both sides, CSEA and AFSCME, and I remember he
10 called a special board meeting and I was on the
11 board then, came down, and was obviously 110
12 percent in favor of this affiliation coming, this
13 partnership coming together.

14 THE INTERVIEWER: How important was
15 the affiliation for AFSCME?

16 MR. MCENTEE: Oh, I think it was
17 incredibly important. I think it put AFSCME on
18 the map, collective bargaining happening,
19 representation rights happening for public
20 workers, campaigns beginning all across the
21 country, and here AFSCME was in a position where
22 they became a partner with the largest, largest by
23 far, association of public workers that had really
24 an excellent record in representing public workers

5

1 in the Empire State, and I think it took us over
2 the top in terms of being a large and integral and
3 important part of the American labor movement.

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

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

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

12 MR. MCENTEE: Oh, I think it's

GERALD MCENTEE

13 become a real partnership where AFSCME has been
14 able to utilize their skills, their expertise,
15 their history in the public service, and I think
16 AFSCME's been able to lend their support to
17 whether there were possible raids on CSEA or
18 whether or not they were organizing drives within
19 CSEA. I think we had become really important
20 partners in the political area, whether they were
21 in the gubernatorial elections or they were
22 elections for mayors and heads of counties
23 throughout New York, and so I think it developed
24 in an area of (inaudible) reorganizing and

□

6

1 developed particularly in the area of politics and
2 it's been a good time.

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

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

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

11 MR. MCENTEE: Well, I can take those
12 one at a time. Let's start with Irving
13 Flamingbaum, who was a real leader in CSEA. I
14 believe he came from the largest district in CSEA,
15 was also a member of the International Executive
16 Board of AFSCME, which is where I really came to

GERALD MCENTEE

17 know him. He was a very skilled individual, a
18 canny individual, what I would sort of sum up as a
19 real negotiator; not just externally with the
20 members he represented with the county and places
21 like that or the State, but internally he was a
22 very sophisticated negotiator and on our board
23 fought very hard for CSEA and the members of CSEA.
24 who else?

7

1 THE INTERVIEWER: Bill McGowan?

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

13 THE INTERVIEWER: What about Joe
14 McDermott?

15 MR. MCENTEE: I think Joe McDermott
16 brought to CSEA an approach where he was able to,
17 I think probably better than anyone, organize CSEA
18 internally; bring about the various departments,
19 bring about the various leaders in CSEA. I think
20 he was a very, very bright, skilled individual

GERALD MCENTEE

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.

8

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

13 THE INTERVIEWER: Mary Sullivan.

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

24 THE INTERVIEWER: George

1 Boncoraglio.

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

12 THE INTERVIEWER: Irene Carr.

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

24 THE INTERVIEWER: (Inaudible.)

□

GERALD MCENTEE

2 question. I mean there's about 240,000 of them up
3 there. I mean there was a lot of leaders but you
4 covered, you know, the leaders that I have known
5 and been closest to.

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

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

24 THE INTERVIEWER: How do you think

□

11

1 AFSCME has changed CSEA?

2 MR. MCENTEE: I think we probably
3 helped, in a way, to continue what Bill McGowan
4 started so that, as I said, it was an association
5 for so long. Associations have certain bylaws and

GERALD MCENTEE

6 rules and things like that. AFSCME's a labor
7 union, always has been, and so I think we have
8 given that part of us to CSEA. I think it has
9 helped really a round CSEA, build CSEA into the --
10 into the really great movement it is in the State
11 of New York.

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

15 MR. MCENTEE: I think it's -- I
16 think when Gottbaum was there he had a great
17 relationship with CSEA, particularly with the
18 leaders. I don't know, though, that Vic saw it as
19 one of equal partners. You'd have to know Victor
20 to understand that, but now and with Lillian
21 Roberts now there, I think it's evolving more in
22 the direction of equal partners or even the fact
23 that 37 understands -- the leadership in 37
24 understands how powerful CSEA is politically in

12

1 Albany. When you talk about that monumental
2 State budget where monies go to the City of New
3 York, that they work so close together -- I've
4 attended meetings with the leadership in the
5 House, leadership in the State Senate up there,
6 that had been joint meetings of 37 or other
7 affiliates in New York, as well as CSEA and I
8 think now -- and I never saw those meetings
9 before. And I think now it's more of a team

GERALD MCENTEE

10 concept with co-captains.

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

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

13

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

7 THE INTERVIEWER: Anything else you
8 want to add?

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

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

13

GERALD MCENTEE

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

□