

Interview Date: 4/13/05

Subject: Norman Adler: President and Political Affairs Consultant, Bolton-St-Johns, Inc. 1991-present; Assistant to NYS Assembly Speaker of the House, 1989-1990; Director of Political Action and Legislation for District Council 37, AFSCME, 1976-1986; Deputy Campaign Manager and Field Director for Governor Mario Cuomo, 1982; Speechwriter to former NYC Mayor Robert F. Wagner; First Director of the NYC Council Political Action Committee; Adjunct Full Professor at NYU Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Affairs; Faculty at Hunter College, Columbia University's Teachers College, Barnard College and Baruch College; Member of NYS Temporary Commission of School Decentralization; Two terms on the Advisory Commission on Archives and Historical Records; Author.

Norm Adler, a former political and legislative director for AFSCME's District Council 37, who held this position when CSEA and AFSCME merged, provided a descriptive account of his relationship with CSEA and their employees throughout their time working together. Adler, who after leaving AFSCME briefly did consulting work for CSEA, spoke in detail about his partnership with CSEA after the merger, namely the "enormous bond" he was able to create with them. He specifically mentioned traveling around the State to psychiatric centers and other hospitals with CSEA, and helping them organize political committees, which allowed them to become an effective political machine.

In his interview, Adler provided great detail about the Public Employees Conference (PEC), explaining how and why it was created, the hard work put forth by representatives from the unions involved, who among other things met to coordinate endorsements for legislative races, and the relationship PEC built between AFSCME and CSEA. He also explained the importance of PEC due to its role in the creation of agency shop and OSHA for public employees, and described the efforts leading up to the Public Employee Safety and Health (PESH) Act, the next biggest union interest after agency shop.

Adler recalled organizing and directing political campaigns with the help of DC 37 and CSEA and mentioned how CSEA had become a political "powerhouse" by 1982. He spoke in abundance about Mario Cuomo's campaign for Governor in that year, which DC 37 had worked extensively on with CSEA. Adler mentioned the "major" role CSEA played in coordinating all of Cuomo's Upstate operations, which allowed Cuomo to gain support from Upstate workers and ultimately win the election. Adler referred to the

leadership and power demonstrated by CSEA during the Cuomo campaign as a political benchmark for the organization.

Adler also spoke about CSEA Presidents, Bill McGowan, Joe McDermott, and Danny Donohue. He attributed CSEA's longevity due to their members need for the political voice CSEA provides them and mentioned that over the years CSEA's staff has become more sophisticated, well prepared, professional, and experienced.

Key Words

Agency Shop

Communications Workers of America (CWA)

Electrical Workers

International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU)

Governor Mario Cuomo's Campaign in 1982

Mt. Sinai Hospital

New York State United Teachers (NYSUT)

OSHA

Owls Head Sewage Treatment Plant

Public Employees Conference (PEC)

Public Employees Federation (PEF)

PESH Act

Teamsters Union

Textile Workers Union of America (TWUA)

Transport Workers Union (TWU)

United Auto Workers Union (UAW)

United Federation of Teachers (UFT)

Key People

Warren Anderson

Alan Chartock

John Corcoran

Governor Mario Cuomo

Michael Deljudice
Danny Donohue
Bill Dougherty
Jim Featherstonhaugh
Barry Feinstein
Victor Gottbaum
Jack Haggerty
Dr. Ludwig Jaffe
James Jennings
Ed Koch
Manny Kofka
Senator Norman Levy
Joe McDermott
Bill McGowan
Guido Mendez
Jan Pierce
Seymour Posner
Al Provensano
Frank Rooney
Bernie Ryan
Larry Scanlon
Al Schenker
Dick Schermerhorn
Anthony Scotto
Ray Skuz
Linda Tarwhalen
Guy Valella
Senator Red Water
Assemblyman Saul Weprin
Jerry Wirth

CSEA HISTORY PROJECT

NORM ADLER INTERVIEW

4/13/05

INTERVIEWER: Norman, I wonder if you would start by telling us your full name and if you would spell it for us and tell us what some of your professional positions at the (inaudible) and your contact with CSEA.

MR. ADLER: Sure. I'm Norman Adler, A-d-l-e-r, and I'm the president of Bolton St. Johns, which is a lobbying and political consulting firm with offices here in Albany and also in New York City. I was the political and legislative director of District Council 37 of AFSCME at the time that CSEA merged with AFSCME, so my first contacts with AFSCME were really contacts with -- with Jim Featherstonhaugh when he came down to meet with Victor Gottbaum who was then the executive director of District Council 37 in the preliminary discussions prior to CSEA coming into AFSCME.

And I spent 11 years at District Council 37 and I think that CSEA came in around the time that I went to DC 37. I went to DC 37 in February of '76 and CSEA came into AFSCME --

INTERVIEWER: A short while later.

MR. ADLER: -- shortly thereafter.

And then later on, of course I had a long history during that time, but later on I was hired by Larry Scanlon when he was the political director of CSEA to do consulting work, so I subsequently left DC 37 and I spent several years creating a political education program, including the PALS program where, you know, members lobbied their own Assembly members and State Senators. I created training modules, I created a video training program and the like for the CSEA.

INTERVIEWER: Of course, you were also at the Assembly at one time.

MR. ADLER: And I was the assistant to the Speaker of the Assembly for one year when Mel Miller was the Speaker, and during that time I was considered the Assembly's liaison to the public employee unions, so I spent a fair amount of time actually over in this building.

INTERVIEWER: Let me -- let me ask this. When you first went to District Council 37, CSEA at that time was an unaffiliated union, not yet part of AFSCME. What was the relationship between DC 37 and

CSEA?

MR. ADLER: Not a lot.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

MR. ADLER: DC 37 was exclusively a Downstate union, really New York City union, because it represented municipal workers for the most part. We had a -- some affiliates in the watershed because of the reservoirs but that was basically it.

And up here in Albany, as far as I could determine, there wasn't a whole lot of cooperation between my predecessor and the Civil Service Association.

One of the things is that DC 37 was regarded as the left wing of the public employee labor movement for a whole variety of reasons and CSEA was looked upon largely as an Upstate Republican union, even though, of course, they did have membership in the metropolitan area, you know, a modest size membership in the City of New York.

So there was -- during the very early part of my -- of that first year, I don't think I ever met anybody from CSEA, even though I was

coming to Albany every week.

INTERVIEWER: What -- what do you remember about the dynamic between the two as CSEA became a part of AFSCME? At that time District Council 37 was by far the largest entity in AFSCME --

MR. ADLER: Right.

INTERVIEWER: -- and here you have this other gigantic organization that's gonna come in and basically be even bigger than they are.

MR. ADLER: Well, Gottbaum was delighted that CSEA was coming in. First of all it was a feather in the cap of AFSCME that CSEA would merge with AFSCME because they could have gone other places or, you know -- I don't know whether they could have stayed independent. I think that CSEA was the ripest tomato on the vine for raiding by other unions, but -- and it was having its own internal problems with its professional division at the time, you know, that eventually split off.

So I think that from the point of view of the leadership of -- of DC 37, they were

really glad that CSEA was coming in and they understood that in terms of size, at least, that they would be eclipsed, but we were, you know, miles ahead of CSEA in terms of our political in-servicing operation, and if I had to describe the early relationship between DC 37 and CSEA I would say we were the Seeing Eye Dog of CSEA's traveling down the road into AFSCME and Bill McGowan and Victor spent a fair amount of time, as I recall, communicating with each other and visiting with each other and the like.

The other thing was -- is that there was a -- a continually evolving friction between Gottbaum and Jerry Wirth, who was the president of AFSCME at the time, although Wirth had been Victor's predecessor at DC 37, and -- in fact, several of the big City unions were in friction with Jerry and I think somewhere in the recesses of Victor's mind he thought that Bill McGowan would be an ally of his in some of the battles that were emerging on the executive board of AFSCME.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. Well, talk about that a little bit because Vic, you know, it was

certainly a benchmark event when Jerry Wirth passed and there was a fight for --

MR. ADLER: Right.

INTERVIEWER: -- the leadership of AFSCME. How did the whole situation play out from your perspective?

MR. ADLER: Well, I think Victor made assumptions that he shouldn't have made about where CSEA would wind up. You know, we were both from New York State. We were close politically and the -- and he just kind of assumed initially and then kind of worked at getting CSEA on board to cast their votes for him and he believed at one point, as I think I did too, that ultimately CSEA would vote for Vic, which they did not, and he felt he was screwed, and perhaps he was and perhaps he wasn't.

But at the -- at the time Victor believed that -- that this would be like the axis around which other dissident affiliates around the country would -- would congeal and, in fact, I remember going with him to Louisiana and meeting with the rebels down there.

The Cajun guys in Louisiana hated Jerry and -- and Victor's -- part of Victor's sales pitch was that he was New York. We had CSEA, we had DC 37, we had 1707, we had 35, we were all together. We were an enormous block. I think we represented at that time maybe 35 or 38 percent of the entire voting membership of the union and they should come on board because he was gonna be the -- gonna be the next leader and, of course, that didn't -- that didn't take place.

INTERVIEWER: M-m h-m-m. Was part -- was part of the issue -- was Joe McDermott part of the fight?

MR. ADLER: Joe McDermott was part of the fight, but if you asked me ultimately what the cause of the final outcome of that was, I couldn't tell you.

My own belief was that it was -- had more to do with personality than it had to do with ideology or internal issues or even the management of the union, and I -- I don't know what CSEA got out of it. I mean looking back in retrospect, I don't think we lost anything, but

I don't think we gained anything either.

But I -- and I think there was hard feelings for a while. I know there was in DC 37 and there were some people who were fired and some people quit and there was a big rift among some of the locals.

It did not affect my relationship with the political arm of CSEA for one day because by that time we had traded PEC, the Public Employee Conference, which Victor and Barry Feinstein -- really Barry Feinstein for the Teamsters initiated, but CSEA was more than willing to come on board and, in fact, in many ways CSEA's early support for PEC legitimated PEC in the eyes of a lot of the smaller Upstate unions because the suspicion originally was this was a deal by the big city guys in New York and then CSEA said, no, this is a good idea. We're gonna join, it made it easier for other groups to join because Schanker had already given it his reluctant blessing.

INTERVIEWER: Now, why was -- why was PEC created? Was it basically because the public employee unions were not really getting a

fair shake within the AFL-CIO?

MR. ADLER: The AFL-CIO in this state has generally been much more sensitive. That may not be true exactly today, but over the years much more sensitive to the construction trades than it was to the public employees and the public employees were, of course, emerging as the largest organizing group inside the AFL-CIO.

And we would -- we didn't get -- in fact, the State said to not even think of a public employee department until we started to organize PEC and then all of a sudden Ludwig Jaffe, who was the research -- Dr. Ludwig Jaffe was the research director of the State Fed -- then dreamed up this public employee department and we had a pretty much of a war up to the point where I was brought up on charges by -- and had a hearing before the executive board of the State AFL-CIO because of my work in organizing PEC.

But PEC was probably the best idea and the most effective vehicle for public employee legislative politics in the history of the state

and it's really a shame what happened to it. You know, its shattering, which was post-Barry Feinstein, but it -- it gave us immense -- immense power.

I remember sitting in a room with Ray Skuse from New York State United Teachers and Jim Featherstonhaugh from CSEA with Bernie Ryan, who was political director then, me, Manny Kafka from the United Federation of Teachers, and -- and Ralph Prossimo from the Teamsters and several other public employee lobbyists. Al Provencano from the Transport Workers Union was in the room at the time and talking about agency shop, which is something that all of us wanted very, very badly.

And the -- we were -- had an impossible task of getting it done before PEC was created and, of course, PEC's great surprising and lasting impact on public employees was the creation of agency shop and then ultimately of public employee OSHA, neither of which could have ever come about without the concerted lobbying efforts.

We used to meet every week and usually

up at my offices on State Street and somebody -- Frank Rooney from the cops would bring bagels. I always thought that was kind of funny. And we'd have coffee and my interns would be there, you know, passing out papers and stuff, and we'd agree on what we were gonna do and we coordinated efforts and helped each other with our legislation and we were purely legislative.

We didn't do any political coordination on campaigns and the like although DC 37 and CSEA did a lot of coordination. In fact, even very early on CSEA, DC 37, the Teamsters, the Electrical Workers, the Auto Workers and CWA used to have informal meetings in which we would compare notes on which candidates we were supporting, who was giving them printing, who was giving them money, who was loaning them personnel and that sort of thing.

And while we didn't always see eye to eye on all this stuff, we generally coordinated on a number of the legislative races.

INTERVIEWER: Before we go on with that I want to go back for a second to the

agency shop and the PESH Law because --

MR. ADLER: Nah, you don't want to do that. You want to go down before that --

INTERVIEWER: Well --

MR. ADLER: -- because after -- after CSEA came about the second year I was up here, '77, we moved our offices out of the United Auto Workers, which is where DC 37 was, and into Twin Towers, you know, here on Washington, to form an AFSCME office, which was Jim Jennings, who worked for the international, and us.

And CSEA used to come over, Bernie Ryan used to come over and spend a lot of time over there. We had a staff, we had interns and the like. During that year, '77 and '78, I drove around the state, usually on Tuesday evenings, with Bernie Ryan and Linda Tarr-Whelan and -- and me to mental hospitals and to other large facilities to help CSEA organize political committees because CSEA had a dearth of grassroots political committees at a lot of the institutions and at DC 37 we were busy organizing a very tight political ship with enormous rank-and-file participation and major

recruitment campaigns.

And so I went around and spoke, told them about our experience, and then we'd organize a PAC and so I spent the better part of a year, maybe more than a year, actually out on the hustings with CSEA and AFSCME doing political organizing for CSEA which, of course, created an enormous bond which when -- later on in '82, and then we'll go back to -- it's okay to pack -- when we did Mario Cuomo.

I was in so tight with a lot of the CSEA guys because of that early organizing, many of those people stayed on and became big organizers and it made the whole organization about the Cuomo campaign much more effective and, you know, Bernie and CSEA played a major role in coordinating all of the Upstate operations for Mario Cuomo.

Indeed, Mario Cuomo couldn't have become Governor had it not been for Bernie Ryan and Jim Featherstonhaugh and CSEA. I remember the office now, down the hill, which was nominally a Cuomo office but in reality it was a CSEA office. By '82 CSEA had become even more

of a powerhouse because not only was it big and pretty well-financed, but by that time it had become much better organized as a -- as a political -- as a political machine and I always felt, with some ego involved, that that early organizing that we did after CSEA came into AFSCME was a predicate for that eventual power.

INTERVIEWER: Well -- well, talk about what you actually did when you went out to those psych centers and other places. How did the -- how did the rank and file receive you when you --

MR. ADLER: Great. I -- it was amazing. First of all, you know, we were often there in the evening, although some -- not always, and we hit there and there'd be, you know, one of the -- the local officials from the union was there and they'd already posted the notice on the bulletin board and we'd get enormous turnouts.

You know, you'd think since in many of the places CSEA had not done a lot of that kind of politics, pretty much checkbook union, you know. It wrote very large checks in a number of

places and in a lot of localities. In lower level campaigns, at the county level and the city level, it was pretty active, but on the State stuff it was mostly financial.

But they really rose to it so we'd come, we'd have forms and what we'd do is we'd describe what the political action committee did and what we were gonna do and then Bernie or somebody from CSEA would talk about what was happening in Albany and what kind of fights we were involved in or what kind of things were coming up and there was a Q&A period and then people'd fill out volunteer forms.

And a while back I was doing -- I was doing a campaign for the -- Nick Spano when he won by 18 votes this past year so I've been his consultant for a long time and I was standing in the big room where all the volunteer groups were and this elderly gentleman -- and I'm pretty old so elderly is really elderly -- came up and said, Remember me? And I said, gee, you know, I wouldn't remember my sister today, and he introduced himself.

And he said, you know, you know the

first time I met you, and I said when was that, and he said I met you when you came to our chapter, our CSEA chapter to talk about politics in Albany and I -- right after you were there I joined the political committee and now I'm in the Retirees' Association and we're here today volunteering for Nick Spano.

I said, well, that's really terrific, and he said CSEA gave me an interest in politics, he said, and I never would have done it without them, and I just thought, wow, talk about, you know, planting a seedling and eating an apple, that really was -- that was really a wonderful experience.

INTERVIEWER: M-m h-m-m. Talk a little bit more about the agency shop and --

MR. ADLER: And PEC.

INTERVIEWER: Because it seems like those are two very interesting -- both very important for the organization. One's kind of an inside campaign, the other's an outside campaign.

MR. ADLER: Well, the original -- Barry -- we -- there was -- there had been a

series of meetings in New York City between Tony Scotto from the Longshoremen, Barry Feinstein from the Teamsters, Al Schanker from the United Federation of Teachers, and Victor Gotbaum about taking over the old Liberal party which at one time had been an arm of the Textile Workers Union and the Clothing Workers Union.

And -- matter of fact, the two ILGWU heads had been the, you know, the bosses of the Liberal party and it was -- the Liberal Party had kind of fallen on bad times and it was losing membership but there was kind of this thought that Labor probably should take them over and they had a number of discussions. They didn't get anywhere.

But Barry at one point said to Vic, you know, what we really should do is we should really organize a statewide operation, at least to do lobbying work, so Victor said, you're never gonna get all these unions to agree on political candidates. You got Republican unions, you got Democratic unions, you know, and the like.

And Barry said but, you know, a lot of

the unions are not in the AFL-CIO and the Teamsters weren't at that time and he said we should be putting all the public employees together in one place like this discussion we're having here.

And Victor said what do you think, he asked me, and I said, yeah, screw it. You know, what do we need them for? You know, we were building our political arm. At that point I had a political staff of 11, you know, and one -- you know, one union in one place, that was a huge step.

But Victor said, well, you know, Barry thinks it's a good idea and Schanker thinks it's a good idea so let's give it a whirl, and out of a variety of conversations and levels higher than me, the agreement was to have a meeting and we had a meeting and -- first there was a meeting of the bosses, you know, the presidents and the executive directors.

And then we had a political meeting but, of course, for Feathers and Bernie, I mean, we'd been doing that all along. This was not anything novel for us but -- and we also circled

the Teachers warily because, you know, they were kind of on their own. They cut their own deals and they would also go yeah, yeah, yeah and then they'd screw us so -- but, of course, the big impetus here was agency shop which was not as important like to the cops and firefighters because, you know, you can't be in a precinct and not join the PBA 'cause somebody'd shoot ya, but, of course, for us, for CSEA and for DC 37 and to a lesser extent for the Teamsters, this was an important thing.

(A) It got a lot of people into the House of Labor where we could then talk about them actually taking a membership card but at least they'd be, you know, paying dues and, of course, it was a big money maker as well and there were an enormous number of free riders around the -- around the state who got our benefits because it was mandated by Taylor Law. You know, we had to represent them, but they didn't, you know, give us any money.

And every year they'd come up and fight for agency shop and every year they got screwed, they just never got it and, you know,

it was yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, but the Republicans didn't want to do it because they were suspicious of us because even though CSEA had a lot of Republicans in the ranks, more than in the Professional Division, of course, than in the -- you know, the guys who take care of the roads and work in the mental hospitals and stuff.

They thought that it was dangerous to give us agency shop. They understood a lot of money was at stake there and membership so -- but PEC was -- was a -- the people who came into PEC were in different stages of political development but together -- I mean we were really, really big.

You know, when you started to take a look, when you put all of the Upstate and Downstate unions together and also all these non-AFL-CIO unions like the cops and -- and some of the correction officers and -- and the Teamsters and some of the other groups, there was a lot of muscle there and, as I said, the AFL-CIO, you know, they were no -- they had no interest in organizing or servicing public

employees or very little interest, I should say.

So the PEC organizing was a tool mostly for communication and coordination. For one thing, we all started getting together and talking to one another and then we started socializing, which I hadn't done before. I mean the great story which -- I don't know who told it the other day -- reminded me of it was.

The first year I was up here when I was a fledgling lobbyist, I didn't know what was going on. We went and had a meeting with Jack Haggerty who was, at the time, the Secretary to the Republican Conference in the Senate, and there were a bunch of us, different public employees talking about issues.

And on the way out we were all going through the door, I was kind of like in the middle and some guys were up front, and the guy from one of the uniform unions -- pretty big guy, too, as I remember -- said something very derogatory about Gottbaum. You know, we'd be in better shape if, you know, fuckin' Gottbaum blah blah blah blah, and I was very hot-headed in those days. Actually, I'm still kind of

hot-headed, but I was very hot-headed, and so I went to get 'im and the only reason I didn't get to him was that there were like all these guys between he and me and they all started holdin' me back and stuff like that.

But I, you know, wanted to get him and punch him out and it was like, you know, it was enormous friction but I didn't know this guy from a hole in the wall and he didn't know us, so when PEC got started, the good thing about it, first was we all got together in the room. We started to know each other. We started to talk to each other. We started to share information, at first very warily.

In fact there was -- I mean I don't know what Feathers said when he talked to you but he was very, very suspicious about this thing and about whether you could ever trust the Teachers and, you know, we just weren't really sure about them and stuff, so -- but little by little we start socializing, we go out together and we had different kinds of information because we had access to different kinds of people.

And I was extremely strong in the Assembly, not very strong in the Senate. The uniform guys were very strong in the Senate, didn't know a soul virtually in the Assembly, and we started sharing stuff and then, because I wanted to do politics and I was doing a lot of it in the City.

Jim called me one day on the phone, Featherstone, and he said to me, you know, Red Warder may be in trouble in his race, this is up in Geneva. He was State -- Republican State Senator. We al...we subsequently found out he was dying of cancer, and he was very close to Warren Anderson, and Bill Dougherty who was the labor counsel and to the Senate, wonders whether you might be willing to, you know, give a hand.

I had no members up there or anything like that and I said, you know, what do you want me to do? And he said, well, you know, go up and help to organize the campaign and stuff like that, and I said sure. He said, well, I'm gonna drive up there next Wednesday or whatever after Session. Would you go and we'll have a meeting, so I said sure.

So Jim and I hopped in the car and we drove to Geneva, New York which is the first time I'd been in Geneva, New York and we met with Senator Water in his rumpus room in the basement with his people and they talked about how many pens they had left over from the last campaign and how many combs and how many Reagan hats and I was like dismayed.

I said is this the way you run a campaign? And Jim was looking at me and I was looking at him and then I said, you know, Senator, I'd like to try a very different type of campaign and so I started to outline a campaign with, you know, phone banks and not the rubber chicken circuit stuff, and a series of direct mails and dramatic things and a poll and, you know, all this exotic stuff that they'd never heard of.

And Jim's kind of saying, that's (inaudible). Water said, well, you know, we could try that, we could try that, and Dougherty was there too. So when it was over we, you know, drove back and I said what do you think and Dougherty said, you know, you just

interested this guy in the far side of the moon.

Well, we did do the campaign. I sent one of my interns, Deanne Wilson actually, up there physically to be in the campaign and started to direct the campaign and CSEA and DC 37 did the campaign. We did it with, you know, expertise and we also had printing presses so we printed all of Water's campaign literature which I designed and stuff.

And he won and that -- and that changed everything because it changed my relationship with Dougherty. It changed my relationship with the Senate. We had also endorsed -- at Jim's prodding we had endorsed several Republican candidates for the State Senate.

When I went to Gottbaum and suggested that we do this he said, well, if you can find -- of course, we had never endorsed any Republicans. I think the only one we ever endorsed was -- at that point had been Guy Valella. He was an Assemblyman and that's because he was Guido Menta's cousin and Guido was the associate director of political action

in DC 37.

So, you know the way politics works in unions, so -- so Jim and CSEA had helped me kind of create a relationship and we endorsed, actually, seven Republicans. We worked hard for Calandra in the Bronx and Marchi in Staten Island, working very closely with CSEA affiliates and with the firefighters, who also we had had no relationship in the past, out in the Staten Island campaign for Marchi, who won by a hair's breadth.

And that was kind of a signal that the most left wing and minority Democratic union could work with the Republicans and it was also a signal that there was a special relationship between CSEA and DC 37 which politicians better take cognizance of because it had now married a largely Upstate somewhat Republican union, although I always believed that in its heart of hearts and its rank and file even in the old days that if you peeled away the Republican county guys you basically got Democrats in CSEA.

But together -- so when PEC came about later on, so it was not just CSEA/DC 37 and our

relationship with the Teamsters, it signaled a remarkable power center and all of a sudden the Republicans had two things goin' for them.

(A) They could count on us to support their people that we regarded as friendly to labor but we wouldn't do it automatically the way CSEA would in a lot of its places.

(B) That it was CSEA/ DC 37 and the teachers and the firefighters and the cops and the correction officers, et cetera, and that was when a number of Senators and staff members started to say we can create a permanent bond and then CSEA said, well, we'd like permanent agency shop but why don't you just give it to us with the sunset and if you feel like we screwed you, you can always pull it.

So in a way I guess we climbed into something that we've never extricated ourselves from, which is the fact that the thing's gotta be done every two years, but they don't -- you know, it's -- they also made a pact with the devil 'cause they don't dare not do it, and that's basically how it came about.

Then years later I remember one

morning it was like maybe 3 a.m., Jim Featherstonhaugh and I were sitting outside of Warren Anderson's office and they were -- Warren was getting ready to leave and I think he was thinking as his parting gift, although he didn't leave that following year, was that he'd give us permanent agency shop and we lobbied our asses off for it.

And I remember sitting in this outer office, Jim and I. I was napping on the desk and we were waiting to see Warren and the time ticked away and it was the last day of the Session and finally somebody came out and said he'll see you and we went in. And Warren said, I can't do it. He said we have other constituencies which, in those days, meant the Conservative Party, and I just -- he said I've thought about it and I've talked to people about it and he said if there were two people that I'd want to do it for, it would be you two guys, really meaning our unions, and I can't do it and I'm sorry.

And we said fine and we, you know, we kind of walked out. We were exhausted and

discouraged and stuff like that, but there were no other unions in the room so, in effect, he was talkin' to us but through us he was talkin' to PEC. But in some ways, even though Barry Feinstein personified PEC as the leader, as the lobbyist, I think it was really Jim and I that represented the, you know, all the public employees in the minds of a lot of the union leadership and especially the Senate.

INTERVIEWER: Talk about the POSH Act because that was more of an outside campaign, one that rank and file --

MR. ADLER: OSHA.

INTERVIEWER: -- could get behind and be --

MR. ADLER: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: -- more actively involved in --

MR. ADLER: When I came to Albany, John Corcoran who was my predecessor, had been working on OSHA for at least four years with no notable progress whatsoever. And once we got agency shop and we started focusing in on other issues. The thing that the blue collar guys in

both our unions were most interested in was PESH, occupational safety and health for public employees.

And we had a legislative conference every year and our legislative conference adopted OSHA as its number one issue, which kind of surprised me in a way because it wasn't really a bread-and-butter issue and usually when we got together it was always, you know, pensions and salaries and pensions and salaries and salaries and pensions, so -- but that was what they were -- they were -- and even unions that -- locals that didn't have that big a thing.

And then, more surprising, I get a call from Larry Scanlon and he says to me -- I think it was Larry. Maybe it was Bernie Ryan -- said to me we're gonna do OSHA as our number one issue this year. I said whoa. You know, there's chemistry there.

So we went and we talked to the firefighters and a couple of the other unions for whom OSHA was a big deal. The Teamsters -- for the Teamsters it was very big and sanitation

guys and the transport workers. They all had major issues; lung issues and things like that.

And so when we had our first PEC meeting in the -- in the wintertime, we presented the thing and a few of the unions, like the teachers, were not really that interested in it but the unions that cared about it, really cared about it and so PEC basically decided to make it, OSHA, the number one issue, and we had the good fortune of having two new labor chairs in the two Houses that year.

In the Assembly we had Sol Weparin, who had replaced Seymour Posner and Seymour Posner was one of these guys, he had originally come out of DC 37 and he was -- Seymour Posner was the guy in the debate on the floor of the Assembly at one point, one of the Republicans accused him of being a tool of labor. And his response was, you think it's easy being a tool of labor?

So (laughter) so, that was Seymour. He was nuts and he also was -- you know, I mean he worked for us very hard but he wasn't that respected and in the Senate I think parts of

that was like Dick Schermerhorn. You know, I think he was there kind of to shove it up our nose in a way 'cause he wasn't really that interested in labor. He was pretty conservative. He hated the teachers.

But we got Levy, Norman Levy, from Merrick in there who, you know, I mean I don't know -- he had some CSEA people down there and some cops, but it wasn't much of a labor district, but he was one of these guys that liked to toy with legislation. He liked to play with language and think about, you know, all the different parameters of it and stuff like that and he was one of the few real intellectuals up here.

And we started to put together a campaign with printed material, brochures, we brought up different groups that had been impacted. Every week we'd bring one or two groups to town from CSEA, from DC 37, the Teamsters, from the bus drivers and others, to talk about the impact.

We brought in a bunch of retirees. We got the people at Mt. Sinai in the OSHA group

down there. You know, they've done a lot of research. They put together a research paper for us. We got them to do a hearing in the Assembly on the issue. We got them to do a hearing in the Senate on the issue. We did all of the groundwork stuff on this thing.

I think -- I think CSEA ran a letters-to-the-editors campaign in the Upstate papers as well to kind of, you know, focus attention back home on it and then we got together and we decided that we would get Levy, because we could get -- the Assembly really came on board. We could get -- we were gonna get Levy and show him the OSHA problems and herein lies the story.

So I talked to my blue collar guys and we decided that among the places we'd take him was to the Owls Head sewage treatment plant in New York City. Owls Head was one of the most disgusting, old-fashioned sewage treatment plants anywhere in New York State.

And the guys worked in this huge facility with this great churning sewage thing there where, if you fell into it, you would sink to the bottom because you couldn't -- nothing

floated in it because of the density and stuff, and the stink was so bad they had like a dome that the guys would take poles and bust out some of the glass so that some of the fresh air would come in, even though in the wintertime the temperatures got really cold and the snow came through.

So we took Norman Levy to Owls Head and above this big churning mass was a catwalk that went all the way round so the guys could go around, check different parts of it, make adjustments on the wheels and stuff like that, so we dressed Levy in a rain slicker with a hat, because the air was always 100 percent humidity in there, and -- and rubber boots, and we take him up on the catwalk to show him what was going on, you know.

And he'd been on trucks and he'd been at sewage sites and he'd been in the tunnels of the Transit Authority, we really moved him around, but this was something else. He was pretty game till he got up there and there's this catwalk -- and this catwalk has got barely anything to keep you from going right off the

catwalk and into the thing except this very narrow rail but, you know, you could slide under and over.

And he's walking along the thing and we got one of the -- one of our foremen is walking, great big guy, is walking behind him and as he walks -- and the catwalk is slick as hell -- his foot slips and he starts to skid and this guy grabs him by the arm and pulls him back and he says, you know, you're lucky you didn't fall in, Senator.

And he said why, and he said because there's no way to get you out. You just would have fallen right to the bottom and we would have had to drain the pool in order to get you out of the thing and Norman said, well, did anybody ever fall in? And the guy said, yes, a number of people have fallen in.

And he said what happened to them and one of the other guys said, they died, and Norman was like -- he just couldn't believe it and he said, well, then, why hasn't anybody done anything and they said because they don't care, you know. They paid off -- they paid off the

widows and that was the end of that.

We go back and Bernie and I went to see him like the next week and he said we're gonna do an OSHA at that plant and we're gonna have a hearing. So we have a hearing and so we go to testify and when I get to testify on behalf of PEC, and we had workers there.

I tell the story of a place in Long Island City where on one side there's an auto paint place and they've gotta have exhaust fans and an air purity monitoring system and stuff like that because they paint cars and trucks commercially.

But in the same building on the other side is a municipal paint thing that does painting for the trucks in the city and they don't have anything, so the guys there are breathing in paint and stuff like that, so -- and then we give 'em a lot of different examples.

So I walk out and one of the CSEA guys turns to me and says where is that place in Long Island City? I say what place? He says, well, that place with the two sides. I said I don't

know. He said, well, there is such a place, isn't there? I said, well, there could be very well, right?

(Laughter.)

MR. ADLER: So we stretched a little bit, but it was -- now with the two chairs really gung ho on the thing and our opposition was really just governmental, you know, of course, you know, the Business Council is against everything that the workers are for, but other than that we just didn't have a formidable opposition. So the City of New York and, you know, the counties and stuff put in opposition things but we had done such a good job of -- of bringing the issue home to individual members and making it very clear that this was our number one issue, that -- that the thing passed after lots and lots of years of doing it, which I think is also, again, a credit to the coordinated efforts of -- of the public employees.

INTERVIEWER: Tell me about how the Mario Cuomo endorsement came about.

MR. ADLER: Well, I don't know how it

came about at CSEA but Victor Gottbaum and Ed Koch were not gettin' along that well and Victor wanted an alternative and Mario was lookin' for the endorsement. I remember Victor going in to see -- to see Victor and he said, look, Mario Cuomo's running against Koch in this primary and he can't beat 'im but I don't care.

And I talked to McGowan. I think it was McGowan. Maybe it was McDermott by then, I'm not sure, but he said we're gonna go against him and I just want you to go in there and make Koch bleed from the ears.

And he said CSEA's gonna be on board and the Communication Workers are gonna be on board and Schenker doesn't know what he's gonna do and Jan Pierce and you are gonna run that show and you're gonna be the inside guy and he's gonna be the outside guy.

So I immediately picked up the phone and called Jim Featherstonhaugh and I said are you guys gonna do that? He said absolutely. He said we can't have Koch. He said first of all we can't sell him to our members. You know, he's the mayor of New York City and he's very

City and our people won't trust him and, you know, we know Cuomo. We have a relationship with him and while I'm not personally that fond of him, he's gotta be a lot better than Koch and right now Koch is a big threat because everybody assumed he was gonna win.

So the -- we all -- a bunch of us met with Andrew Cuomo and with the guy who was managing the campaign, whose name escapes me at the moment, who then went on to run like generic drug companies and stuff like that. I know I can't think of his name. And we said -- and we had all met with each other and most of the unions -- teachers were not involved in that at that time.

Feinstein was with the -- was with Koch. A couple of the unions were gonna do the Republican. A couple of the uniform guys were gonna do the Republican but basically it was us, CSEA, Transport Communications, Auto Workers, Electrical Workers and the garment trades and there were a few smaller unions in there and we met with them and we said we'll come in but we want the number two spot in the campaign.

And they said, well, you know, we don't like to be dictated to and I said, well, you know, fine. You have -- it's your prerogative but you have to understand something. We're -- we're gonna endorse Cuomo but there's a difference between endorsing him and doing a real campaign.

And by that time, by '82, we were very muscular politically. CSEA was, DC 37 was. We had large, trained political cadres. By that time we had committed a lot of financial resources. The unions understood the importance of the election.

But we were given instructions that we shouldn't be pushed around, so they said, well, give us a few minutes and they went out and then they came back and they said, okay. You can have the number two spot. Who's gonna do it? And we said we'll let you know.

So we had a meeting and, of course, nobody wanted to do it so finally Jim nominated me, for which I'll never forgive him as long as I live. I went back to Gottbaum and Gottbaum said he would release me and he released me to

the campaign and CSEA released Bernie Ryan, although I don't know how Jim Featherstonhaugh ever practiced law for those four and a half months because he was -- virtually did nothing but travel Upstate New York on behalf of -- on behalf of Cuomo. He was in more places than Cuomo was.

Of course what happened at one point they turned against Bernie, and that came about -- oh, and the thing about the Cuomos was is that you could be for them 99 percent and if you made one faux pas they acted as if you were, you know, Osama Bin Ladin.

And I don't know if you heard the story, but the story is that Bernie was invited to speak to Alan Chartock's class, political class, and Alan said that everything that was said in that room was confidential and Bernie took him at his word and he said something about the campaign or about the Cuomos.

And one of the kids in the class was like a budding journalist type and he immediately went out and told a reporter and it was in the papers and the next thing I know I've

got Andrew storming into my office and, you know, we're firing Bernie Ryan.

I said, well, that's interesting since you don't pay him, you know, and he's a volunteer and he's a CSEA official. He's out of the campaign. I said, well, you know, he's not out of the campaign because if he's out of the campaign then you're gonna lose a lot of other people.

And I went into town and got Striker from the Teachers because by that time we had had the AFL-CIO convention and the Teachers had come along with us and Pat came into the room and I explained what was going on and, you know, Pat is like tough, tough, tough.

And she said, well, you're not throwing Bernie out of the campaign. You throw Bernie out of the campaign you're throwing Civil Service Employees Association. What are you gonna do, close the office in Albany? You have no operation north of Rockland County and she said, besides which -- and she was running all the phone banks all over the state with mostly teachers for Mario -- and she said, besides

which, if Bernie Ryan's goin', I'm goin' and Norman's goin', so you're not firing anybody.

And Bernie was very upset about the thing. I was on the phone with Jim and all of them and, of course, they didn't do that but it was like -- the Cuomos were assholes but they were our assholes, which was really the whole thing, but it was a come-from-behind campaign.

We provided a lot of the personnel. Many of the people who worked on the campaign were on our payroll. Today you'd go to jail for it, you know, the rules are so much different, but then it was much more flexible.

But you'd show up in some county and there'd be a rally for Cuomo and there'd be a hundred people at the rally and 98 of them would be from CSEA.

INTERVIEWER: CSEA really sold Cuomo to --

MR. ADLER: They sold Cuomo, absolutely, totally there. And not only that, it was more than that. They got Upstate workers, county and state workers, to come out and vote in that primary which, you know, I

think a lot of them just would have stayed home figuring, you know, you got two guys from New York City. You know, what's our stake in this thing?

And Cuomo, if you read the diaries, you know, that he wrote about this thing, he really -- first of all, the only person he thought he owed anything to was Erastus Corning, which was a joke, but that was his way of ducking his responsibility to acknowledge the fact that the labor movement got him elected and so herein lies one more story. Then you can ask me another question.

Right after Cuomo was sworn in -- well, Cuomo was elected. Then we had the PEC convention and so I went to -- I think it was the Fallsview or the Nevele for the PEC convention and Mario called me there and said I've hired Michael Deljudice to be the budget director, I think he was, and I think David Burke was the secretary to the Governor. What do you want?

Well, I'd worked with Cuomo long enough to know I didn't want any part of him. I

said I -- I'm going to back to the union. You know, I like being with the union, and just be a good governor.

He said, no, no, no. He said you can be in the executive office, you can be somewhere else, da da da and, you know, let me know what you want. So I said, okay, but I knew I wasn't gonna do it, so I went back to the union.

Right after we came back to Albany in January, Mario got sworn in and there was a budgetary problem and the first thing he did was he laid off State workers, so the press called me on the phone and said -- and they were all CSEA as far as I remember, and there was a lot of 'em. It was like -- I don't want to exaggerate the number, but it seemed to me it was like 1000 or 1200, but it was a formidable number.

So I got a call from the Times Union and the reporter says to me, you know, well, you know, what do you think, and you were the labor guy in the campaign. And I said, Mario Cuomo should remember who helped get him elected Governor. And that appeared in the paper and he

called me on the telephone and he was flyin', man. You know, the -- and I said, wait, wait, wait, wait, wait, wait, wait a minute, Governor.

I said I went into this campaign not because of you but because the AFSCME leadership in the state decided that you were the preferable candidate for Governor and then I came back to DC -- and he said, well, there were no DC 37 people laid off.

I said, hey, we're all in this thing together. You laid off our brothers and sisters in the Civil Service Employees Association. I said you can't conduct your governorship like that. You're gonna be a one-term governor.

And he said, well, I expected more of you and he slammed down the telephone. From that day on there was bad blood between me and he and the first that happened is that Michael Deljudice called the press and said that the reason that I had bad-mouthed the Governor is that I wanted to be the Secretary to the Governor and I was jealous because I wasn't named to the post, so --

INTERVIEWER: And that kind of set the

tone for the Cuomo Administration.

MR. ADLER: For the Cuomo Administration and for the continuing acrimony and it just proved what Barry Feinstein always said, which is that there is no good deed that goes unpunished.

INTERVIEWER: The -- was the Cuomo campaign a benchmark for CSEA in terms of its political credibility?

MR. ADLER: Yes, because it -- NYSUT was involved and other unions were involved but when it was over, everyone in the union movement and many people politically out there on the hustings around the state knew that -- where the Cuomo campaign had any kind of operation it was largely and often exclusively, especially in some of the smaller areas, the province of CSEA.

And so I would say if CSEA got its -- I think CSEA got the largest notch in its gun handle, in its political gun handle, because of the campaign and because of the work that -- within the campaign that Jim and Bernie did as the representatives of the union, but also because hundreds and hundreds of rank and file

members worked, you know, staffed these little tiny offices, you know, on Main Street and store fronts and up a flight of stairs over the hardware store and stuff like that, and they were there.

And then they -- CSEA also did a rather remarkable get-out-the-vote operation, both the primary and the general election. I mean, if anything, Lehrman scared us more than Ed Koch 'cause Ed Koch was still, you know, a New York City Democrat but, you know, I think that -- I think that this was a very important watershed politically for the CSEA.

And I think at that point the leadership began to think that a lot of the untrained members ought to get some training and I think that that's when they began to rethink the organization. You know, Larry came in and he created these regional political directors in each of the regions which were answerable to Albany rather than to the regions, so there was a coordinated effort.

And then they started to send out, you know, materials and stuff and then later on down

the line, after I set up my own shop, that's when Larry approached me and said, you know, I'd like to -- 'cause I'd done a lot of writing and creation of instructional materials modeled after the Black Rock program at UAW.

Of course when I -- when I first got in I looked around to see who had the best political education and the best was at UAW. They had this thing at Black Rock, this training center, and they had created some really good stuff and I went and got the stuff and I swiped some of it and I expanded on it and then I -- and we were always -- CSEA and DC 37 were always sharing, you know, that -- at least our level was sharing that kind of stuff, and so I had developed it.

And Larry said, you know, we've got the infrastructure now. Now I'd like to do the -- the organiza...you know, the political education stuff.

INTERVIEWER: Tell me about some of the personalities you worked with. I mean you've certainly talked a lot about Jim Featherstonhaugh. Tell me about McGowan, tell

me about McDermott.

MR. ADLER: Jim McGowan was a real salt of the earth union guy. He was -- he was the genuine article. He was in some ways enormously unsophisticated and in some ways he was very sophisticated in the ways of union politics. He was very suspicious of professionals. You know, I think if he had had his own way he would have kind of brought in a bunch of rank and files and let 'em run everything.

But he also understood his own limitations, which is why he relied more and more on -- on the Featherstonhaugh law firm for things and, of course, Jim was glad to accommodate him since Jim loved to run everything, but he was -- he was in some ways a very simple man and in some ways he was a very sharp guy because he -- he un...he knew how he got where he got and he understood what some of the problems of holding together this enormously disparate and argumentative union was about.

Although, you know, there was a period there where CSEA really lost some of its compass

and it lost its Suffolk affiliate and it lost the Professionals, although my own -- I used to say in the early days when I'd go and observe the conventions, I always used to say that Jim, you know, if the Professionals march out tomorrow morning, you guys would be a better union for it, so I wasn't always sure that the creation of PEF was necessarily a bad thing.

I know it hurt the union in terms of span and in terms of losing a certain level of sophistication, but I -- I was very fond of -- of Bill McGowan and I spent some time with him and Victor Gottbaum spent some time with him and we always came away thinking he may not be the sharpest knife in the drawer, but he was certainly -- there was very little bullshit in the man and he always said what was on his mind, sometimes to the detriment both of he and of the union, but you -- what you saw, I believe at least, what you saw is what you got.

McDermott was a different breed. He was better educated. He was more sophisticated. He was -- he was more of what one of my chauffeurs at DC 37 once described as a con...as

a labor bureaucrat and that was his role. He was much more attuned to sharpening up the bureaucracies, building departments, creating chains of command and responsibility than McGowan.

He also had an eye to Washington and the national stuff. Bill McGowan didn't give two shits about, you know, what was happening in Oklahoma, or whether or not the Pennsylvania affiliate was having a bad or good relationship with the leadership in Washington but, you know, his successor was very, very different in that way.

And so that was the time that the union, I believe, structurally made its greatest strides in putting together real departments and real ways of working and also developing much more rigorous criteria for titles and promotions and things of that sort.

INTERVIEWER: Tell me -- tell me about your observations of Danny Donohue on the leadership scene.

MR. ADLER: Well, Danny's the best politician the union's ever had in terms of

external politics. I mean he knows politics. He's very smart about politics. He I think in some ways is a melding of his two predecessors because on one hand I think that Danny has a real understanding about the importance of -- of the shop, so to speak, the internal people who make the union work, but -- and -- but he also has a very good understanding of what moves both the internal and external politics of the union.

And he also, obviously, has a very big interest in the international and could very well be the next head of the international, depending on how, you know, the cards fall out or how long the current incumbent decides to, you know, to cheat the fates and death.

So I think he's a really good public employee union politician on one hand, and on the other hand I think that he's the kind of guy who I wouldn't be sorry to see Danny in a position at the AFL-CIO to do some of the wheeling and dealing and work on some of the reforming of the national union movement.

I think that -- I don't know whether either of his predecessors were up to it, but I

think -- I think he probably is and so in that way there is -- that would be the biggest difference.

INTERVIEWER: Why do you think CSEA has been able to succeed over a hundred years?

MR. ADLER: Well, one reason is there's a need for it. Many of the members that CSEA represents are people who have very, very little voice of their own. They're often not exceptionally well paid, although now in most cases better paid than their colleagues in the private sector but, you know, they're not people making a great deal of money.

A lot of them are unsophisticated in the ways of politics in the world. CSEA gives them a voice politically and lower-paid workers in my experience are much more understanding of the value of unionism than higher-paid workers.

When I was at DC 37 you could always get a hospital worker or a school lunch room worker or a guy who filled potholes to come out and work in the political campaign but librarians and the social workers and the accountants, the guys who ran the snake house at

the zoo, forget about it, you know 'cause they figured they could get it on their own, and the lower-paid workers understood that they couldn't and I think that's part of it.

And I think part of it is that the union has kind of risen over the years to the task. It's become much more sophisticated in terms of its internal operation. It's become a lot more selective in who it hired to do the jobs. It isn't just, you know, Moe's cousin the way it -- it was years ago, and so they've got a much -- I think the union's got a much more sophisticated and well-prepared and professional and experienced staff.

I think that the union has understood the inextricable relationship between politics and government on one hand and the collective bargaining fate on the other hand and it's used its politics rather well in order to advance the interest of its -- of its work force and I think that the other thing is that the servicing arm of the union has gotten better and better.

If anything, the union's biggest liability is the liability that all unions have,

which is they get to the point where people think if they pay their dues they're entitled to the services and they don't realize that they gotta be part of the union, so a very small number of people take on the responsibilities that a larger group should probably have, and the better you are as a union at servicing the bigger risk you have that you won't be so good on participation and I don't know a single, really good servicing union that hasn't -- and I worked for a lot of unions -- that hasn't faced this problem.

But in a way it's a testimony to the -- to the success of the union that the members are largely willing to say you handle it so -- and so there have not been huge, acrimonious, political fights statewide within the union and there aren't these warring political parties that you see in some unions, and that's testimony to the -- to the success of the union in the eyes of its membership.

(Conclusion of interview of Norm Adler.)

