



New York City Clerical-Administrative Employees

LOCAL 1549

AFSCME, AFL-CIO

www.local1549.com

Hey, What is a Union Anyway?

By Ralph Palladino, 2nd Vice President

Just what is a union anyway?

Members start working for the city and then find they pay union dues. But too many just don't know what unions are, why they exist and their importance. Why should most people know what a union really is? Unions are not taught about in schools and the media only attack unions since they are funded by big corporations in the form of ads.

Unions were formed by working people in order to better fight for economic justice. Workers came to realize that as individuals they could not fight management or big corporations. They began meeting at worksites and networked with other workers. Strikes and sit-ins were weapons workers used to fight management. They knew they needed solidarity of all the workers in a given worksite or industry in order to succeed. They pooled their resources in the form of dues paying. They knew it took people and money to fight big business.

Many workers were fired, were imprisoned and some even died for the right to form unions. But eventually the movement grew and became too big to stop. It was the union movement that forced President Roosevelt to institute the New Deal that included the right for most workers to form unions, unemployment insurance and social security. He did so because of the "street heat" created by millions of workers marching.

Eventually unions began to be involved in the fight for social justice. Most unions supported the civil rights movement. Great union leaders like A. Phillip Randolph and Cesar Chavez led successful union movements to organize people of color. Much of this fight led to President Lyndon B. Johnson signing such key legislation such as the Voting Rights Act, Food Stamps, Medicaid and Medicare. Like Roosevelt, he did so because he felt the "heat from the street."

Unions have grown. The best unions are the most democratic ones. *They are the ones that have elected shop stewards, and fight for workers' rights at the worksite and in City Hall and Congress.*

Our AFSCME International Union was a leader in all these fights. DC37 did likewise in New York. Local 1549 today holds elections by secret ballot at all levels of leadership. In city-wide elections we have ballots counted by a third party, the American Arbitration Association.

Our local carries on extensive training of activists and stewards. We encourage and ask for members to participate in meetings and their fights for a better workplace, contract and legislation that benefit workers.

Obviously like all unions we need the resources. The biggest resource is our membership. Everyone must take responsibility and get active. The other resource is our dues that go mainly towards services and our fights for a better life for our members.

So basically and briefly, this is what a union does. If you want to make us stronger, get involved!

Eddie Rodriguez
President

Alma G. Roper
Executive Vice President

Ralph Palladino
2nd Vice President

Alvin Williams
3rd Vice President

Gerald Johnson
Secretary-Treasurer

Carmen Flores
Recording Secretary