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AFSCME's Success with Public Sector Clericals

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AFSCME's Success with Public Sector Clericals

Abstract

[Excerpt] In December 1985 the American Federation of State, County & Municipal Employees (AFSCME) was certified as the bargaining agent for more than 11,000 State of Ohio clerical employees. This victory followed a string of similar successes: 1981, Florida, 23,000, and Connecticut, 7,500; 1983, California university clericals, 19,500; 1984, Iowa, 6,000.

Keywords

AFSCME, clerical workers

AFSCME's Success with Public Sector Clericals

In December 1985 the American Federation of State, County & Municipal Employees (AFSCME) was certified as the bargaining agent for more than 11,000 State of Ohio clerical employees. This victory followed a string of similar successes: 1981, Florida, 23,000, and Connecticut, 7,500; 1983, California university clericals, 19,500; 1984, Iowa, 6,000.

Other unions have been able to organize only a small fraction of the 67,000 clerical workers that AFSCME has, although the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) has gained recognition for a large number through the affiliation of state associations.

As the labor movement goes through this period of self-examination as a follow-up to the AFL-CIO's *Future of Work* report, it might be instructive to reflect on the reasons for AFSCME's success in the 70s and 80s.

Under the direction of the late Jerry Wurf, AFSCME established a centralized organizing structure which enabled the union to marshal its resources anywhere that conditions were ripe for organizing. Many other unions were handicapped by locals which insisted on keeping all the resources at home, leaving their national unions without the resources to organize.

Secondly, AFSCME, perhaps more than any other union, was willing to reach beyond its ranks when necessary to find staff who could relate to a clerical constituency.

Thirdly, AFSCME, well before the AFL-CIO's self-examination began, was using more sophisticated techniques such as polling and direct mail, and was hiring the best in the business to do it.

Fourth, in most instances AFSCME has been the most successful union in winning victories for the clerical workers it already represents and this is an important selling point. Starting with AFSCME's pay equity win in San Jose in 1981, the union has had a string of pay equity settlements which have helped its organizing efforts. Our organizers have concrete victories they can point to and live bodies they can produce for employees interested in organizing.

Now that almost all the large state government clerical units in the North have been organized, the focus must shift to the South, where unions will face not only the problems inherent in organizing clericals but the problems of organizing in the South. It will be no easy task.