

MAINLINE

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April 4 marks 44 years since Dr. Martin Luther King was assassinated. He was helping sanitation workers in Memphis, TN to fight for their right to unionize with AFSCME. He was also working on the Poor People's Campaign which sought economic justice of jobs and housing for all. A principal tactic was an occupation of the Mall in Washington D.C., which took place after his death but failed with the very sad loss of the civil rights leader.

This month Officers of the Union traveled twice to Sacramento to lobby against proposed public pension changes that would increase the retirement age from 65 to 67. The President, 1st- and 2nd-vice Presidents and the Chief Steward met with State Senators and Assemblymen to explain why the people working in the trenches can't and shouldn't have to work an extra two years to pull their pensions.

The Water Bond is currently off the table because the Governor does not want to propose raising taxes and issue bonds on the same ballot. But be sure to be on the look out for it in the future – Southern California is still thirsty for our water, and private interests will always seek to profit off of public goods (the proposal had included delivering water to privately operated reservoirs that would control allocation).

The Chief Steward, Cheryl Franklin and our Business Agent, Felix Heurta traveled Up-country to visit 444 members at Pardee, Bixler and the Stockton yard. They talked with the Power Plant Operators at Pardee about equity adjustments; the Stockton Aqueduct crew about the extra work load that Fulsome South has created since it is not being staffed as originally promised and the operators' user group recommendations were ignored and are now being fixed by the crews; and with the retirement of veterans at Bixler, institutional knowledge is being lost.

**Report From the 1st V.P. –
Report on the February 23 Board of
Directors meeting.** At the meeting it was repeated that water sales continue to lag behind budget projections due to economic down-turn and post-drought consumption. The result (if this trend continues) is a projected \$27M revenue shortfall. To offset this revenue shortfall Management will continue to carefully review the need for discretionary expenditure, manage the hiring freeze and continue to look for revenue enhancements. The biggest concern to 444 members is the hiring freeze, of course, which has a trickle down effect on staffing levels, workloads and promotion opportunities. A mid-cycle Board workshop will be held on May 22, 2012 to discuss these pressures as

well as the recommendations on how to close the gaps.

HTO Reassignment. 444 Officers met with members of Management again on April 5 regarding the reassignment of Oakport HTO's to E.S.S. and were unable to reach an agreement. The overriding issue has to do with the Union's request for a rotational schedule of HTO assignments and management's refusal to commit to one. Both sides are prepared to declare impasse and proceed with mediation.

Morphing Ideals-Public Unions, Politics, and Civil Rights

Cheryl Franklin

In 1932 the United States of America faced many oppressive labor, political, and civil rights issues. Political corruption was alive and well at all levels of government. Political patronage was favored by the party faithful, especially during the economic crash called the Great Depression.

Civil Service still in its infancy at the state level stipulated government jobs should be awarded on the basis of merit not political party affiliation. A few Wisconsin professionals, led by Arnold Zander were among the state workers that held jobs based on competitive civil service examinations and there was genuine fear that state politicians might attempt to return to a political patronage, or "spoils" system whereby government jobs would be given to voters who worked for and with the winning political party.

Under Zander's tutelage the Wisconsin State Employees Association was formed and the struggle to save the State's Competitive Civil Service System was undertaken. The national election of Franklin D. Roosevelt saw many Democrats also become elected to Congress and in January, 1933 a Democratic senator introduced a bill in the state legislature that would dismantle the state's civil service system. The WSEA began to solicit political opponents of the patronage system who joined forces and helped to defeat the bill.

During this time, minorities and women were, as a matter of course, discriminated against in the workforce. If private sector jobs were available to them, they were denied equal pay or benefits. Competitive

Civil Service was blind to race or gender and thereby equalized the availability of jobs, wages, and benefits.

You might well wonder how the formation of public unions, political party associations, and civil rights morphed into the struggles of today. Well, after years of slow growth the WSEA aligned themselves with other public state employees and formed the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees. Thus, AFSCME became one of the strongest unions for the public sector employees; this included the sanitation workers of Memphis, Tennessee. Civil rights advocates, like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., aligned themselves with the struggles of minority public union workers and the struggle to save the civil service system morphed into the economic, political and ideological struggles of a nation.

Over the years, AFSCME developed bargaining rights for public employees; including an equitable procedure for the resolution of differences and the establishment of rate of pay, hours of work, and other conditions of employment. AFSCME was recognized as the champion of union public workers.

In 2011 the United States of America faced many oppressive labor, political, and civil rights issues. AFSCME confronted new struggles in Wisconsin and other states, as Governors strip away the rights of public employees and concessions were demanded but the denial of bargaining rights was at the core of the debate. Political patronage had reared its ugly head and like Zander, I and fellow AFSCME employees across the nation have taken up the cause.

May Day – International Workers Day

Ernie Schnyder

May Day is celebrated in over 80 countries around the world as International Workers Day, though its foundations are in the United States in the early days of the labor movement's demand for an 8 hour work day.

In 1884 the Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions (later to become the American Federation of Labor) declared at their convention that "eight hours shall constitute a legal day's labor from and after May 1, 1886." This was seen as quite radical for the time as many people labored for 14 to 18 hours or more in unsafe conditions; work place injuries and death were common place. A few states and some cities had enacted regulations requiring 8 hour work days, but at that time the rules were all but ignored and workers recognized that direct action was required to meet their demands.

In the days before and after May 1, 1884 workers went on mass strikes. Chicago was the epicenter of these strikes with an estimated 35-40,000 workers taking part in that city – leaving work and traveling in groups to other work sites to encourage others to strike as well, and meeting to discuss labor politics. Over 190,000 are said to have taken part in the general strike nation wide.

Though the city police and company goons were high alert, the strikes remained largely peaceful until May 3rd when 1400 lumber workers who had been locked-out and replaced with scab labor went to their place of work to challenge the lock-out. They were attacked by the police who killed 4 workers and then went around the city to attack other groups of striking workers.

The following day labor leaders called a meeting at the Haymarket Square to discuss the violence. Police raided the meeting and a bomb exploded killing one officer and injuring others. It is not known where the bomb came from, but the police opened fire on the workers, killing eight police, many more workers and injuring scores of others in the mayhem.

Following the massacre police raided labor organizers' homes, offices and printing presses; the mayor banned marches and meetings and the police broke up pickets while the main-stream press printed bogus theories of anarchist plots and spun racist anti-immigrant paranoia. Police arrested hundreds in the following days but could not establish any evidence, yet in the clamor for revenge eight anarchist leaders were charged and tried for murder.

The notoriously partisan Judge Joseph E. Gary presided over the hearing and selected a knowingly prejudice jury, who without any evidence sentenced seven to death based on a conspiracy theory woven from excerpts of speeches and writings of the defendants; the eighth was sentenced to 15 years. The American working class was outraged, but all appeals failed. Two of the death sentences were commuted to life sentences, but four of the eight were hung in Cook County Jail and one committed suicide. Six years later Governor John Peter Altgeld granted absolute pardon to the remaining three, noting the lack of evidence and unfair trail.

While the French made May 1 a national holiday celebrating the struggle of the working class, President Grover Cleveland feared that celebrating Labor Day on May 1 would commemorate the riots (truly, the strikes, direct action, the notion that organized workers can overcome capitalist oppression, and above all might commemorate the martyrs, the anarchists) and Labor Day was moved to September.



This history and more can be found on-line at:

- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Workers%27_Day
- <http://www.holtlaborlibrary.org/mayday.html>
- <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/571.html>
- http://www.iww.org/en/history/library/misc/origins_of_mayday