



A brief history of WFSE/AFSCME's first 50 years, 1943-1993

PRE-CHARTER YEARS

In the late 1930s, organized labor won \$100 a month minimum wage for state employees. A group of Pierce County welfare workers, contending they were state employees, challenged their sub-minimum wages. Led by Neville B. Crippen, they took over a management-dominated employee association and affiliated with AFSCME in 1938. Three years later, the state Supreme Court declared them state employees entitled to the \$100 a month minimum wage.

That same year, 1941, new Gov. Arthur B. Langlie boosted union organizing by declaring that state employees had the right to join a union. Several AFSCME locals covering highways and institutions workers were organized. And in August 1942, representatives from state employee locals met in Olympia with AFSCME International President Arnold Zander and voted to form their own AFSCME council. Eddie Alexander of Olympia was elected the first president; in 1943, Crippen was elected its second president.

1943-1952

Having built a strong foundation, Council 28 received its official charter from AFSCME on Nov. 18, 1943 as the Washington Federation of State Employees. Hired on as the union's sole staffer in 1944, Crippen nearly quadrupled membership, built a strong treasury and started the ball rolling in the Legislature on a bill granting a minimum retirement for state employees. Crippen resigned in 1946 to return to state service.

For the next four years, the council declined: Membership dropped from 1,800 to 500, and it went broke. In 1950, a reform slate of officers, led by Wilbur Rice, won election. Soon, what are now known as the union's policy committees started, a permanent headquarters opened in Olympia and Norm Schut hired on in 1952 to guide the day-to-day operations of the council.

1953-1962

WFSE/AFSCME membership stood at 2,500 when Rice resigned in 1954 to take another job and handed over the presidency to Frank Muscutt. But dissatisfied with the direction the council took, Neville B. Crippen of Tacoma Local 53 returned in 1955 with a slate of reformers. He was elected to the council presidency and served until 1963. During this second decade, the union won a 40-hour work week for institutions workers (1953), the first industrial insurance coverage for a group of workers (1954), Social Security coverage for all state employees (1957) and passage in 1960 of Initiative 207 extending civil service protections to state workers and ending the spoils system in state hiring. The first WFSE/AFSCME newspaper appeared in November 1953.

1963-1972

Union membership had just reached the 5,000 mark when Neville B. Crippen stepped down as council president in 1963. He was succeeded by James Cole of Chehalis Local 862. During this decade, WFSE/AFSCME achieved: state health benefits (1965); the 1967 Public Employees Collective Bargaining Law that removed several barriers to union organizing and bargaining; unemployment coverage (1971); and an executive order guaranteeing the rights of state employees to have union representation (1971).

The union scored a number of contract firsts including: the first contract with a state institution - the Veterans' Home in Retsil (1964) and the first statewide contract under the 1967 bargaining law - for 4,000 human services workers (1972). In 1972, the council presidency passed from the retiring James Cole to Howard Jorgenson of Medical Lake 782 as WFSE/AFSCME membership reached the 9,000 mark.

1973-1982

WFSE/AFSCME's fourth decade was marked by huge membership gains and progress on pay equity. With passage of the WFSE/AFSCME-initiated union shop law in 1973, membership quickly passed the 13,700 mark. The first union shop was voted in by buildings and grounds workers in Olympia (October 1973). The first higher education union shop: Western Washington State College physical plant workers (November 1973). The biggest: The 5,700 workers in state Institutions (March 1974). The contract covering the largest group of workers - in state Institutions - was signed in September 1973. Norm Schut stepped down as executive director in July 1974 and was succeeded by Director of Field Services George Masten. Two strike votes were held in 1975 and 1977, but pay and benefits disputes were resolved.

During this decade, the union achieved fully funded state health benefits (1977), a strong anti-contracting out decision from the state Supreme Court (1978) and the first voluntary payroll deductions for PEOPLE (1978). The long battle for comparable worth for state workers in job classes historically dominated by women - and underpaid - began with a 1973 call for a state study; in 1982, the union filed its landmark comparable worth lawsuit in federal court.

1983-1992

WFSE/AFSCME's fifth decade was marked by major membership milestones, victories on comparable worth and job upgrades, and high visibility "Fighting Back." Membership cleared the 17,000 mark in March 1984, the 18,500 mark in October 1985 and the 20,000 mark in June 1991. Executive Director George Masten retired in October 1985; Area Representative Gary Moore was hired to replace him. The state and WFSE/AFSCME worked out a \$482 million settlement of the union's comparable worth lawsuit (1985). The union won a string of big job upgrades before the personnel boards and in the courts, including: Psychiatric Security Attendants, \$10.9 million (1987); Attendant Counselors, \$6.7 million (1990); and Higher Education Clerical workers, \$6 million (1991).

After a 1987 study and 1988 convention action, WFSE/AFSCME first introduced its comprehensive collective bargaining legislation (1989). Starting in 1987, the union "kept the pressure on" in new, high-visibility ways: the union's first-ever peaceful picket line went up in July 1988 in Spokane to protest layoffs at Eastern State Hospital; University of Washington members, protesting workplace discrimination, stormed the administration building during the International Goodwill Games on campus (1990); the union started its annual Lobby Days in 1987; the 1990-1991 "Fight Back" campaign around the state culminated with a rally drawing 2,000 members to Olympia.

WFSE/AFSCME members kicked off the 50th year in November 1992 by helping elect a progressive slate of candidates for U.S. president, U.S. senator, governor, Legislature and statewide offices.

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