

IX: ALL ABOUT AFSCME

This section of the handbook contains some information about AFSCME International. You can use this information to answer some of the everyday questions that you are asked by people in your workplace.

How many members are in AFSCME?

There are more than 1.3 million AFSCME members. They live and work in almost every state from coast to coast, including Alaska and Hawaii, in the District of Columbia, and in Puerto Rico. AFSCME represents employees of state, county and municipal governments; public and private health care providers; school districts and universities; federal government agencies and non-profit agencies.

What are “councils”?

Most states have one or more councils or district councils. Some councils represent only state workers in that particular state; some councils represent only city and county workers in a state; and in some states, one council represents all AFSCME members in that state. It differs from state to state. There are more than 60 AFSCME councils.

What are “locals”?

Every council has a number of locals, each representing a particular jurisdiction (e.g., workers in a city or workers at a particular institution or agency). Some locals are statewide, covering all employees in a statewide bargaining unit, and may have more than 1,000 members. On the other hand, some locals cover employees in a department in a small town and may have only a handful of members. There are about 3,500 AFSCME locals.

And what are “affiliates”?

In some cases, independent employee unions or associations have affiliated with AFSCME — to the mutual benefit and strengthening of both. Affiliates often serve the same role as councils and have locals or chapters operating within their structure. More than 100 independent employee associations have voted to affiliate with AFSCME — part of the reason AFSCME is the largest and strongest union representing public employees.

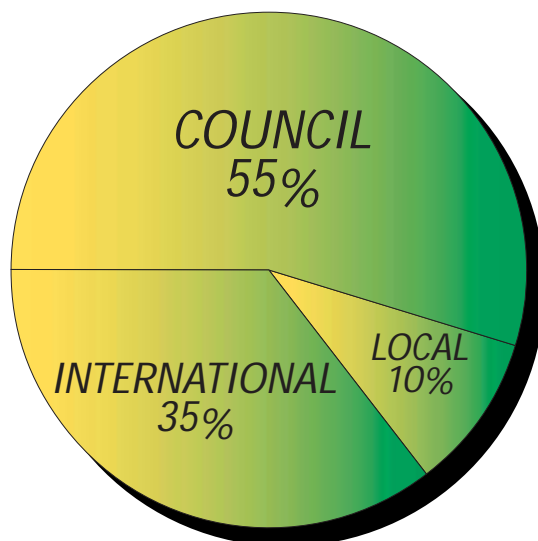
What services do councils and affiliates provide?

These bodies provide a number of services for AFSCME members, including representation in grievances in the higher steps of the process and at arbitration hearings; staff assistance with contract negotiations; lobbying of state and local political officials; research; education to members and leaders; and organization of new members and new bargaining units.

What about AFSCME International — what does it do?

The International union provides a number of valuable services to councils, affiliates and locals. A brief overview of various departments in the International offers a glimpse of the breadth of resources available to AFSCME members and affiliates. The Department of **Education and Leadership Training** offers training and skill-building programs on a wide variety of subjects, including organizing, representation and union building. The Department of **Organizing and Field Services** works on organizing new bargaining units and helps councils and locals increase strength and membership in existing units. The **Legislation** Department has full-time lobbyists who testify before committees of the U.S. Congress and lobby members of the Senate and House of Representatives on legislation affecting AFSCME members. The **PEOPLE** Department is the union's political fund-raising arm (PEOPLE stands for **P**ublic **E**mloyees **O**rganized to **P**romote **L**egislative **E**quality). The **Political Action** Department is active at all levels of government — federal, state and local — lobbying public officials, conducting get-out-the-vote drives, and working on issues affecting AFSCME members. Using radio, television and the print media, the **Public Affairs** Department spreads the word on AFSCME's goals, achievements and positions on issues and produces publications, including our membership magazine. The Department of **Research and Collective Bargaining Services** offers assistance to affiliates, councils and locals in a variety of areas, including contract negotiations, safety and health issues, and contracting out/privatization. The **Women's Rights** Department coordinates services to members on issues of particular concern to women. And the **Retirees** Department works on issues (e.g., Social Security, Medicare, pension rights, etc.) affecting the growing number of retired AFSCME members.

Where does a union member's dues money go?



How are decisions made in AFSCME?

AFSCME is a democratically run union, from top to bottom. The International Union is governed by a constitution. The **International President** is the chief executive and administrative officer of AFSCME. The **International Secretary-Treasurer** is the chief financial and recording officer of AFSCME. When in session, AFSCME's biennial Convention is the highest decision-making body in the union. Convention delegates make decisions on adopting policies and setting the union's direction for the coming two years. In between conventions, the International Executive Board — consisting of the President, Secretary-Treasurer and Vice Presidents elected by region — is the highest policy-making body in the union.

Councils and affiliates are also governed by constitutions. Delegates to their conventions make decisions on issues affecting their members; in between conventions, the council's or affiliate's elected executive board has the responsibility to conduct council or affiliate business.

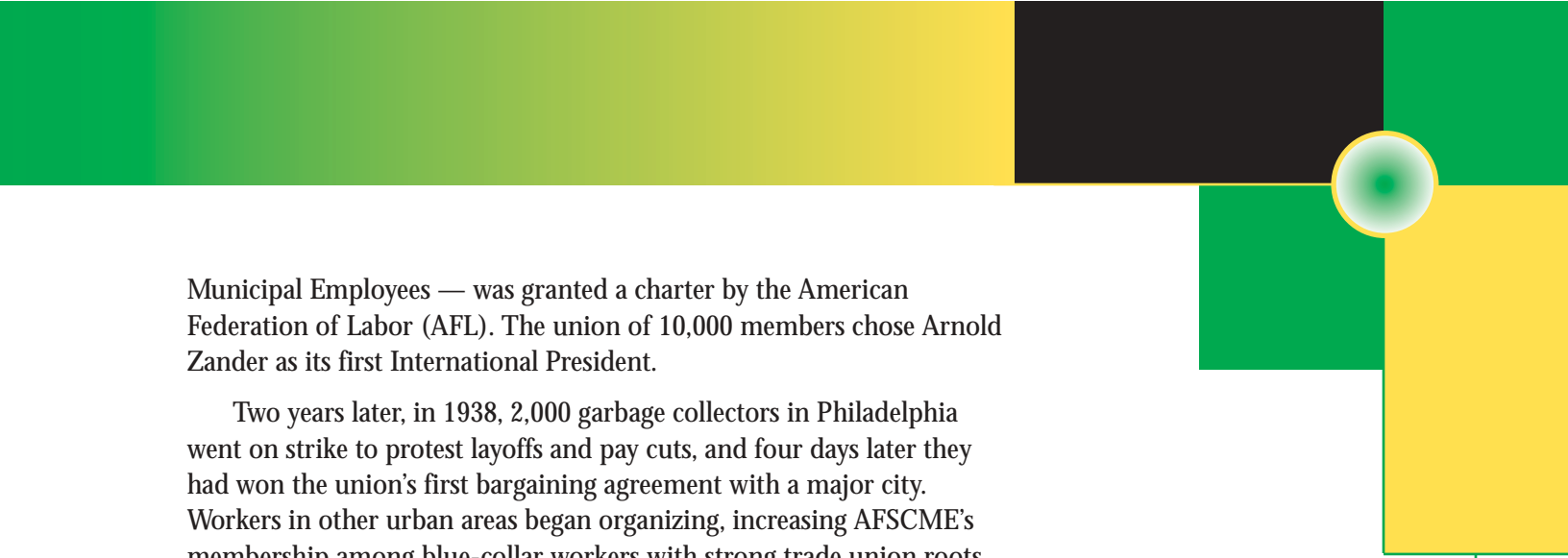
Finally, local unions are also governed by constitutions or bylaws. Locals are run by their members who meet on a regular basis — usually monthly — to pass motions and decide on issues facing the local. In between those meetings, the local's elected executive board is the governing body of the local union.

What do union officers do?

No matter what level of the union, each officer, and the executive board as a whole, have specific duties and responsibilities. These duties are spelled out in the constitution or bylaws governing that particular union body.

How did AFSCME come to be the powerful force for social justice and workers' rights that it is today?

In 1932, as the country suffered through a severe economic depression, a small group of white-collar professional state employees met in Madison, Wisconsin, and formed what would later become Wisconsin State Employees Union Council 24. The reason for the group's creation was simple: basic survival. State employees feared that politicians would implement a political patronage system and thousands of workers would lose their jobs. Meetings were held, marches and demonstrations were organized, and this first movement of public-sector workers saved their jobs and gave birth to a union. By 1935, similar state employee associations had emerged in 19 states, fighting for job security, decent pensions and health insurance for public workers. In 1936 the group — which changed its name to the American Federation of State, County and



Municipal Employees — was granted a charter by the American Federation of Labor (AFL). The union of 10,000 members chose Arnold Zander as its first International President.

Two years later, in 1938, 2,000 garbage collectors in Philadelphia went on strike to protest layoffs and pay cuts, and four days later they had won the union's first bargaining agreement with a major city. Workers in other urban areas began organizing, increasing AFSCME's membership among blue-collar workers with strong trade union roots and traditions. Twenty years after the creation of AFSCME, the union had 200,000 members and a battle on its hands with the entrenched power structure of America's major cities.

The movement to build power for public employees got a major boost in 1958 when a young organizer named Jerry Wurf led a series of strikes and demonstrations that forced the mayor of New York City to negotiate with the unions representing city employees. A turning point had been reached. Workers in other states saw New York's example and joined AFSCME in the fight for collective bargaining nationwide. At the 1964 AFSCME Convention, Wurf — running on a platform of more aggressive organizing, pursuit of collective bargaining rights for public employees and union reform/union democracy — was elected the new International President. A year later, a special convention rewrote AFSCME's constitution and included a Bill of Rights for members, a first in the American labor movement.

During the years that followed, AFSCME organized public employees, and state after state felt the heat and enacted collective bargaining laws. At the bargaining table, newly organized workers fought for and won major breakthroughs, moving millions of public-sector jobs from low pay to a decent standard of living. During this period, AFSCME's struggles became linked with those of the civil rights movement. Progressive unions like AFSCME joined students and civil rights activists as they took to the streets to protest economic and racial oppression. This alliance culminated in Memphis, Tennessee, in 1968 when sanitation workers struck for union recognition after two African-American workers were crushed to death in a garbage truck. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who was organizing the Poor People's March, came to Memphis to support the strike. Dr. King gave a historic speech to a group of AFSCME members and others the night before he was killed. Only after Dr. King's assassination did the city agree to recognize the workers' union, AFSCME Local 1733.

As AFSCME demonstrated its ability to fight for and win collective bargaining rights and to negotiate with tough politicians during recessions and boom economies, public employee associations across the country took notice. Almost 60 associations — representing 450,000

members — joined AFSCME by affiliation or merger. With the affiliation in 1978 of the Civil Service Employees Association of New York, AFSCME membership passed the 1 million member mark.

AFSCME's increased membership gave the union a more powerful voice when it came to fighting injustice for its members and in the world at large. In September of 1981, at the AFL-CIO's Solidarity Day, a massive demonstration in the nation's capital demanding fair treatment for American workers, AFSCME's 60,000-member delegation, the largest from any single union, led the march. That same year in San Jose, California, AFSCME staged the first strike in the nation's history over the issue of pay equity for women. The strikers demanded that female-dominated classifications be paid on the basis of "equal pay for work of equal value," attracting national media attention and sparking the pay equity movement.

In 1981, Gerald W. McEntee, leader of the successful drive to organize 70,000 Pennsylvania state employees (now Council 13), became the union's third International President. William Lucy — the union's top-ranking leader in Memphis and the founder of the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists — remained International Secretary-Treasurer. He was first elected to that post in 1972. Their vision of AFSCME as the leading voice for social justice in the country helped propel the union's political action and organizing agenda for the decades that followed. During the 1980s, AFSCME won collective bargaining rights for and organized workers in a dozen new states. The affiliation of the health care union 1199/National Union of Hospital and Health Care Employees in 1989 solidified AFSCME as a leading voice in the fight for the rights of health care workers.

With state legislatures increasingly turning against public employees, it became more difficult to expand collective bargaining rights in the 1990s. In addition, governments at every level sought to cut costs by contracting out public service jobs and attacking the hard-won benefits and wages of union members. AFSCME responded by stepping up its efforts to mobilize members to increase its visibility and political influence. AFSCME also led the change in the leadership and direction of the national AFL-CIO in 1995. At its national convention in 1998, AFSCME committed to an even bolder and more aggressive program of organizing and fighting on behalf of all public service workers — public or private.

In 2001, 60,000 public service workers in a dozen states and Puerto Rico organized with AFSCME — the largest single year of organizing in three decades. In 2002, AFSCME added another 55,000 workers. These new AFSCME activists — united with their union brothers and sisters in their desire for fairness and economic justice — represent the face of AFSCME today.