

# A Proud Past... A Bright Future



AFGE:  
THE FUTURE  
IS OURS

*A history of the American Federation of  
Government Employees, AFL-CIO*

# Milestones in Federal Worker Labor History

- 1830-1835** Strikes and demonstrations led to the adoption of 10-hour days for private employees.
- 1835** Navy Yard workers in Washington, D.C., struck for shorter hours and general redress of grievances. The National Trade Union Convention petitioned Congress for reduced hours for federal workers. This effort at a shorter 10-hour day for the federal service failed.
- 1836** Workers at the Philadelphia Navy Yard went on strike for several weeks. The 10-hour day was put into effect in all federal locations where workers were organized (Pennsylvania, New York and Maryland). Unorganized workers in the District of Columbia, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Virginia and North Carolina continued working under a 12-14 hour day.
- 1840** President Martin Van Buren signed an executive order authorizing a 10-hour day for government employees with no reduction in wages.
- 1842-1862** Craft employees in private shipyards won the right to an eight-hour day. As a result federal shipyards were unable to maintain a stable workforce. In December 1861 Congress passed legislation authorizing the Secretary of Navy to establish wages consistent with private establishments in the immediate vicinity. This was the first recognition of the principle of prevailing wages for craft personnel.
- 1862** Government Printing Office employees struck for seven weeks for an eight-hour day. The strike was settled with a pay raise but no reduction in working hours.
- 1869** President Grant issued a proclamation directing that wages not be reduced as employees move to an eight-hour day.
- 1883** Civil Service Act established the U.S. Civil Service Commission, procedures for competitive examinations and the establishment of a merit system in federal employment.
- 1902** President Theodore Roosevelt issued the first “gag rules,” forbidding government employees to “jawbone” or lobby for legislation, individually or collectively through their associations. Violations were punishable by dismissal. Aimed at well-organized postal workers, these rules applied to all federal workers.
- 1906** AFL issued first all-federal worker charter to Post Office Clerks.
- 1912** The Lloyd-LaFollette Act was the first official recognition of the right of federal workers to organize but forbade membership in any organization which espoused the right to strike.
- 1916** Federal Employees Compensation Act provided first compensation for on-the-job injury, death or disability.
- 1917** AFL chartered the National Federation of Federal Employees (NFFE), predecessor of the American Federation of Government Employees.
- 1919** Congress enacted a ban on unionization of firefighters and police officers in the District of Columbia, making it a misdemeanor for them to affiliate with the labor movement. Ban was repealed in 1939.
- 1920** First federal retirement act provided annuities for federal workers based on salary and length of service.
- 1923** Classification Act established pay scales for federal white collar employees.
- 1924** Kiess Act established collective bargaining for printing trades employees at the Government Printing Office.
- 1926** Per diem allowances were authorized for actual expenses when federal workers travelled.
- 1931** Government limited Saturday work to four hours.
- 1931** NFFE defected from the American Federation of Labor (AFL) in December 1931 in a dispute over organizing federal skilled craft employees creating a rift within NFFE’s leadership.
- 1932** Those NFFE leaders who chose to remain with the AFL held their founding convention on Oct. 17, 1932, and named their union the American Federation of Government Employees.
- 1934** Thomas Amendment established a 40-hour week for Wage Board employees and authorized overtime for hours in addition to 40.
- 1935** The Wagner Act provided the means for secret ballot elections by workers of labor unions, protection of workers from coercion or intimidation by employers, set penalties for employers found guilty of unfair labor practices and established collective bargaining as federal government policy. The Wagner Act also reiterated the ban on federal worker strikes as initially expressed in the 1912 Lloyd-LaFollette Act.

# A PROUD PAST—A BRIGHT FUTURE

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## **INTRODUCTION: A HISTORY OF AFGE**

From the earliest days of the republic, the progress of the United States has been spurred by men and women answering the call of public service. Two centuries ago they were surveyors, shipbuilders, clerks and administrators. Today they are that and more: medical professionals, accountants, technicians, mechanics, researchers, scientists, cartographers, engineers, specialists in security, mathematicians, janitors, food inspectors, corrections officers, diplomats, interpreters, educational experts, data processors, mine inspectors, administrators and even cowboys.

Virtually every occupation in the private sector has a counterpart in government service. The key difference is the mission of government's workers: their job is making America work for all Americans.

America's citizens rely on the services of government workers much more than they realize. The products of government workers enable fishermen and farmers to plan their work. Older Americans know they will receive their Social Security checks on time. Educators throughout the nation rely on the statistics and predictions of employees



of the Department of Education. Workers throughout the nation depend upon the Labor Department's corps of inspectors, administrators and enforcement personnel monitoring the safety of American workplaces, protecting pensions, compiling data and facts relied upon by American commerce. Employees of the Department of Housing and Urban Development work in tandem with state and local officials to attack the problem of homelessness. The nation's children are protected from exploitation by compliance officers from the Department of Labor—just as migrant workers are. The nation's borders are protected and immigration laws enforced by the men and women assigned those tasks.

Every day government workers go about the business of assuring defense readiness, launching space missions, producing maps, charts and weather reports, caring for veterans and the elderly, monitoring the safety of food, formulating information and data and making it available to scholars, businesses and the general public.

The responsibility of government today is the same as it was when there were only 13 states: to protect America's citizens and to enable them to engage in the pursuits guaranteed by the Constitution. Since 1932 the responsibility of the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) has been to assure America's government employees of fairness, due process, decent and safe working

conditions, fair pay and a voice on the job. AFGE's story is America's story. When the union is free to carry out that role, the morale, efficiency and productivity of government workers are enhanced.

Since its inception on Aug. 18, 1932, AFGE has been guided by the words of its constitution:

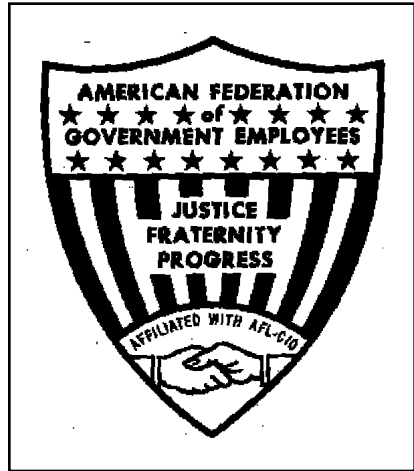
“The object of this Federation shall be to promote the general welfare of government employees, promote efficiency, advance plans of improvement...” Forty years later, concern for fair treatment of women and minorities prompted AFGE convention delegates to add the following clause to that objective: “and promote the full participation of women and minorities in AFGE activities at all levels throughout the Federation.”

Today AFGE remains in the forefront by advocating creative and positive solutions to shape the government into a model employer, concerned not simply with missions and efficiency, but also with the responsibility to set an example as the leading people-oriented employer in the nation. By looking back at AFGE's accomplishments and even its shortcomings, AFGE can maintain a steady course toward that goal.

AFGE has evolved into the largest labor union representing U.S. and District of Columbia government employees, with representation responsibilities for some 600,000 workers. As the character of government has evolved in America, as issues and technology have changed, as the American society has emerged from The Depression, World War II, the Cold War, the Vietnam era and the Reagan years, AFGE held steadfast to the belief that high standards of government service and the advocacy of the rights of government employees are two sides of the same coin. Government performance and efficiency are enhanced when the rights of its employees are protected and expanded.

Although its immediate goals have changed with the times, AFGE has always recognized that the men and women employed by government deserve respect and dignity for the service they perform. AFGE has consistently supplied strong leadership to advocate the rights of government workers through collective bargaining.

*AFGE's founding leaders selected its shield symbol to portray the protection the organization provides for its members. The stars and stripes represent the federal employment of its membership. The words "Justice," "Fraternity" and "Progress" in the center signify the overall objectives of the union. Delegates also selected the word "Progress" as the title of the union's first publication. The lower segment of the emblem contained the clasped hands emblem of the AFL.*



## **A UNION BORN IN ADVERSITY (1932-1952)**

The National Federation of Federal Employees (NFFE) defected from the American Federation of Labor (AFL) in December 1931 in a dispute over organizing federal skilled craft employees, creating a rift within its leadership. Those who subscribed to the principles and objectives of the AFL chose to remain. They formed an organization called the Joint Conference on Re-affiliation which became the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE).

David Glass and Helen McCarty were appointed to lead the Joint Conference on Re-affiliation by AFL President William Green. Glass was responsible for initially attempting to reconcile the differences between the NFFE defectors and those who wished to remain under the umbrella of the AFL. Failing that objective the group representing some 42 lodges, primarily in the Washington, D.C. area, began planning for AFGE's founding convention in October.

Since many of the new union leaders worked in Washington, D.C., AFGE's first office was set up in rooms over a bank at 1700 Pennsylvania Avenue, one block from the White House.

## The Union's First Convention

At the charter convention, Oct. 17, 1932, at the Hamilton Hotel in Washington, D.C., 42 delegates cast ballots for the first officers of the union. John A. Shaw replaced the AFL-appointee David R. Glass as president of the union. Navy employee Helen McCarty retained her AFL-appointed position as chief organizer.



*Glass: appointed to head charter group*



*Shaw: first elected AFGE President*



*McCarty: first organizing director*

Glass, originally from Lodge 25 at the VA Regional Office in Washington, D.C., became 1st Vice President. Other members of that first Executive Council were C. Grant Frick, 2nd Vice President, from the Brooklyn Navy Yard; C.H. Frederick, 3rd Vice President, from the Panama Canal Zone; George L. Jeffrey, 4th Vice President, from Washington, D.C.; John W. Thornton, 5th Vice President, from the U.S. Customs House in Providence, R.I.; Frederick Sommer, 6th Vice President, New York; Esther Penn, 7th Vice President from Seattle; William D. Eacho, 8th Vice President, from the Virginia Veterans Administration Home; John F. Daniels, 9th Vice President from the Philadelphia Navy Yard; John R. Newman, Secretary, from Washington, D.C.; and Clark J. McLane, Treasurer, from Washington, D.C.

Helen McCarty (she was to later marry Dr. William Voss, AFGE's Public Relations and Research Director) served as secretary of Navy Lodge 1. She was also an activist in the American Legion at the time of her appointment, serving as a vice commander and assistant adjutant. She was commander of the U.S.S. Jacob Jones Post and its finance officer. During World War I, McCarty-Voss was in the U.S. Navy Reserve, serving at the Portsmouth, N.H., Navy Yard. She was national adjutant and national historian of the Navy's

Yeomen F. She and Dr. Voss eventually retired to Dover, Del., after long and distinguished service to the union.

In a 1971 letter to AFGE headquarters, McCarty-Voss described the charter convention 50 years earlier as “much like the conduct of the present era—plenty of talk.”

McCarty-Voss’ assignment was to mount a membership campaign that, in the words of founding President John Arthur Shaw, was “in no sense the usual type of membership campaign. We planned no whole-sale drive for members.” Yet, within a matter of 11 months, McCarty-Voss had produced a tenfold increase in membership. Not bad for a campaign that was not “the usual type.”

The tone of AFGE’s relationship with organized labor was set during that first convention by AFL President William Green in his address to the delegates:

“The purpose of the American Federation of Labor is to give the full measure of its support to the new organization,” Green said. “You are a part of the great American labor movement. If you stand united, if personalities are subordinated to the common good, you cannot fail. I am encouraged by the progress you have made.... Your organization is the beginning of an irresistible forward movement.”

Green went on to charge the 42 delegates with the task of making the fledgling AFGE “the one organization cloaked with authority

## Early AFGE Presidents



*Babcock: 1933-36*



*Burns: 1939-46*



*Iler: 1950*

## AFGE'S ADDRESSES



*AFGE's first headquarters office was located at 1700 Pennsylvania Ave., one block from the White House, in offices above a bank. The union moved next to 805 G St. Later, headquarters operations were located at 900 F St., NW, above the Washington Loan and Trust Bank which later became Riggs National Bank. On May 30, 1965, the union took up residence in the Railway Labor Building at 400 1st St., in the shadow of the Capitol. In 1972, AFGE members realized the dream of a building of their own when the union moved into the Griner Building at 1325 Massachusetts Ave. On January 1, 1986, AFGE headquarters moved*

*again, to its current location, 80 F St., NW, once again in the shadow of the Capitol.*

speaking for government employees. You have been organized after the most careful consideration was given to your problems by the AFL Council. You must make it a militant and aggressive factor on the behalf of the federal employees, controlled by your membership and not by any dictator.”

In one passage, Green alluded to “further economies” and calls by politicians for “sacrifice” by federal workers. His response has echoed through the decades for government workers.

“I am firmly convinced that they can find a way to balance the budget without lowering the standards of living of the men and women who serve the government.”

Green was referring to the onerous “Economy Act” which had resulted in wage cuts as high as 15 percent, furloughs, hiring freezes, forced retirements and other draconian measures designed to keep the federal budget balanced as revenues dried up because of the Depression.

The platform drawn up by the charter convention was ambitious but apparently responsive to the needs of government employees of the time. It set the stage for an initial surge of growth that topped out by 1937 at more than 25,000 members.

The founding convention approved a program to win back the pay cuts they had suffered at the hands of the Economy Act. The convention also directed the union to seek an end to furloughs, urge Congress to appropriate adequate funds to meet payrolls, pursue a 30-year retirement program, protect the merit and classification system, establish a five-day work week without loss of pay and to demand employee representation on executive bodies dealing with employment policies and working conditions throughout government service, including an employee representative on the Civil Service Commission.

Electing union officers and solidifying AFGE's base focused the union leadership on the economic hardships faced by all Americans



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## PRESIDENT SIGNS LEAVE BILLS WITH A.F.G.E. PEN

### LOW TURNOVER IN HOSPITALS IS INDICATED

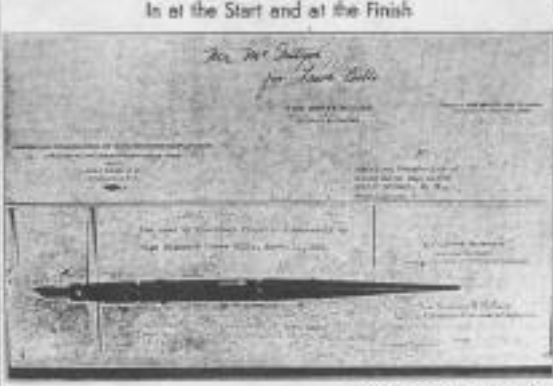
7 Percent of Employees on Job More Than Two Years, Is Report

### MORE DATA NEEDED

Full Information Arrives From Two Units; View of A.F.G.E. Borne Out

Figure showing length of service of attendants in Veterans' Administration hospitals, reported recently by the national office, are beginning to come in, and it is hoped that they will bring out data which may serve as a basis for changing terms of those employees under civil service protection.

Reports from two large hospitals show that 27 per cent of the attendant forces have had more than two years' service as the maximum, and that 27 per cent had more than three years. The percentage is 15 per cent and several less have one month and another 15 per cent from 6 months to a year. It seems reasonable to take the



HERE'S THE HIDDEN FOX, used by President Roosevelt in signing the Emergency Leave Bills and by President Delano in originally drafting them. It is shown in the box in which it went in the White House; above, the cover of the box, as addressed to the White House, and with the return address in the A. F. G. E., plus a personal note to Marvin W. McIntyre, of the President's secretarial staff.

### ANNUAL LEAVE EXTENSION TO 26 DAYS MADE

Sick Leave Benefits Will Cover Many Employees Not Formerly Included

### MAJOR VICTORY WON

President and Members of Congress Thanked; Debt to A. F. of L. Great

President Roosevelt signed the Emergency annual leave and sick leave bills, H. R. 4001 and H. R. 4002, on Saturday morning, March 16, after giving them his "thumbs up" on the day of their birth.

The President said in signing the bills the same day used by President Delano of the A. F. G. E. in making the original draft of those measures. The official death and the bills in fact have been printed in last week's Standard.

Mr. Delano made the following statement regarding the bills in a report of April 10: "The President and myself

*AFGE's first publication was known as "Progress." It was replaced on Dec. 29, 1933 by "The Government Standard." Members were offered a \$100 prize to name the union publication. The winning entry went to a member who suggested that the name remain unchanged. The union's official newspaper has been published continuously since 1933. In the early years, "The Standard" helped pay its own way through advertising, running ads for men's felt hats for \$2.65, brand name soap powder for 19 cents, corn flakes for 7 cents a box, leg of lamb for 27 cents a pound, frying chickens for 32 cents a pound and chuck roast for 19 cents a pound.*

during the height of the Depression. With massive unemployment and misery nationwide, government employees were easy targets for austerity measures. Agencies had imposed furloughs, suspended hiring and eliminated overtime pay. Retirement-age employees were forced out of their jobs and forbidden to seek work in other federal agencies. Congressional action required that if two members of the same family worked for the government, one had to be laid off before other workers in the same agency. Annual leave was cut to 15 days.

Along came the Hatch Act, shoving government workers backward into a political purgatory. The Hatch Act was largely a political response to the growing popularity of President Franklin Roosevelt and his new deal successes. Republican opponents of the New Deal and their allies among the conservative Democrats complained about partisan electioneering in the 1936 elections. These charges were intensified during the campaign of 1938. By the time the 76th Congress began its work in 1939, the public had become receptive to the idea of imposing tight limits on the political activities of all government workers.

Much of the publicity surrounding the legislative proposal crafted by New Mexico Democrat Carl A. Hatch and Vermont Republican Warren R. Austin focused on prohibitions against government employees belonging to subversive organizations. That emphasis intimidated any real Congressional opposition to the restrictive nature of the Hatch Act proposal. The measure was easily steamrolled through the Congress and President Roosevelt signed it. It would take more than half a century to ease the limits imposed by the onerous provisions of the Hatch Act.



*Penn*



*Heffner*



*Olding*

*AFGE's Women Leaders:*

*Helen McCarty-Voss—First Organizing Director. Esther Penn—elected 7th Vice President at the Founding Convention. Berniece Heffner—served as President three times when resignations and death left that position vacant. Henrietta Olding—Vice President from District 2. Esther Johnson—Secretary-Treasurer from 1956 to 1970.*



*Johnson*

*Charles Irwin Stengle (1869-1953)—Methodist minister, journalist, member of Congress—served as AFGE president—1936-1939. Born in Savageville, Virginia, Stengle owned, published and edited a weekly newspaper in Accomack, Virginia. He spent five years working as a Methodist minister along the Delmarva Peninsula before returning to journalism in 1899. Around 1910, Stengle became editor of a weekly publication of the civil service called “The Chief.” From 1918 to 1922, Stengle was secretary of the New York City Civil Service Commission when he announced as the Democratic candidate for Brooklyn’s 6th Congressional district. Stengle won that election, but served only one term in Congress. He declined to run for a second term in 1924, but remained in Washington editing the “National Farm News.” In 1934, he joined the AFGE staff and two years later became its president. In 1939, Stengle returned to the union staff as AFGE’s chief lobbyist, a position he held for many years.*



## **AFGE’s Early Victories**

By 1941 union membership had grown to almost 28,000. AFGE’s legislative influence and its victories on Capitol Hill expanded with each new member. As a result of the union’s lobbying efforts, workers gained the right to designate beneficiaries for their retirement funds, accumulate sick leave and take 26 annual leave days per year. These advances were even more amazing in view of the restrictions against government employee bargaining and strikes.

While labor unions in the private sector made great strides, labor laws such as the 1935 Wagner Act and the 1947 Taft-Hartley Act, which provided the foundation for collective bargaining rights for private sector unions, excluded government workers from mainstream unionism. These differences limited AFGE’s perspective during that time, leading many of its members to view AFGE as an association rather than a union. The “separate and unequal” treatment of government workers in the area of labor relations resulted in subtle differences

even in the structure and jargon of the union. Government determination to forestall strike activity by federal unions forced AFGE to publish its own disavowal of strikes on a weekly basis in the union's newspaper. Even President Franklin Roosevelt, regarded by most historians as a great friend of labor, drew a sharp distinction between federal workers and all others. "All government workers should realize that the process of collective bargaining cannot be transplanted into the public service," Roosevelt said.

Despite the strain federal labor laws placed on AFGE's early years, the union persevered. Conventions were held annually until 1941 when the war forced travel restrictions. They resumed in 1946.



*AFL President William Green and then-Secretary-Treasurer George Meany present President Franklin Roosevelt with a copy of a shop poster boosting war bonds. Although labor supported the war effort intensely, government workers bore a heavier burden than most as wage increases were withheld for the duration.*

## **Leadership in the Union**

Six presidents—David Glass, John Arthur Shaw, E. Claude Babcock, Charles I. Stengle, Cecil E. Custer and James B. Burns—had served AFGE by 1946. The union reelected Burns at the 1946 convention. When Burns resigned in May 1948, then National Secretary-Treasurer Berniece Heffner served as acting president until the September convention. The 1948 convention elected James G. Yaden who served until his death on July 15, 1950. Henry C. Iler was elected by the Executive Council to complete Yaden’s term. Iler was elected by the August 1950 convention and died Nov. 29, 1950.

AFGE benefited from the significant leadership roles of women even in its earliest days. Along with Helen McCarty-Voss, who spearheaded the union’s organizing campaign with great success, AFGE elected Esther Penn as its 7th Vice President at the founding convention. Fourteen of the 42 accredited delegates to that convention were women. Mary Anderson, then director of the Labor Department’s Women’s Bureau, was a delegate to that first convention. Berniece Heffner served for more than 20 years as Secretary and Treasurer. Heffner also served three times as president when the office was vacated by death between conventions. Henrietta Olding served as District 2 National Vice President and Esther Johnson served as Secretary-Treasurer from 1956 until 1970.

These pioneers opened the doors for women to serve in leadership positions not just within AFGE, but throughout the labor movement. Their contributions as aggressive advocates for all government employees and as capable administrators paved the way for AFGE’s steady successes on behalf of all government workers.

## **Growth in the War Years**

The ranks of government employees ballooned during the war years. Civilian government employees were an integral part of the war effort and their patriotism was a key factor in supporting armed service personnel on the front lines in Europe and the Pacific.

Ironically private sector workers—especially those working in defense plants—enjoyed tremendous income growth. By contrast government employees had their wages frozen during the war. The result was a 15 percent gap between government and private wages by the end of World War II. The war effort was imposing a much heavier economic sacrifice on civilian government employees. Although they expected the freeze to continue until after the war, AFGE began lobbying for a large pay increase, keeping the issue high on the legislative agenda.

It was AFGE’s affiliation with the AFL that helped the union fight its political and legislative battles in Congress. From the 1930s to the present day, conventions of the AFL—and after the 1955 merger the AFL-CIO—embraced the agenda of AFGE as expressed through AFGE-sponsored resolutions. In 1943, for example, the AFL adopted AFGE’s legislative program and pushed for it on Capitol Hill. Joint lobbying paid off. By 1945 federal employees received a 15.9 percent pay raise to make up for the salary increases held back during the war.

The union also won legislation granting government employees

transportation costs when they were transferred, the addition of within-grade increases, payments for accrued annual leave and overtime pay for night and holiday work.



*George Meany and Walter Reuther finalize the merger of the AFL with the CIO at the 1955 convention.*



*Members of the National Executive Council presented retiring President James Campbell, sixth from left, with an AFGE flag to mark his retirement. John Griner, AFGE's President-elect in 1962, is at right of Campbell.*

## **MEETING THE NEEDS OF THE MEMBERSHIP (1952-1972)**

In 1951 when James A. Campbell was named president by the National Executive Council, membership continued to increase steadily. In less than 10 years, from 1952 to 1961, membership grew over 36 percent, from 61,000 members to 83,000. Campbell's tenure was also characterized by consolidation and development of the union's infrastructure. That period set the stage for a decade of surging membership and radical change during the era of John Griner. Under John Griner's leadership (1962-72), membership increased another 159 percent, topping off at 305,000 members by the end of the decade. AFGE's gains during these years in legislation, representation and supplemental services for government workers were directly responsible for this membership jump.

AFGE won significant victories in Congress from 1952-1972. Retirement benefits were liberalized, the government began paying a

portion of health benefits insurance for workers and their families and legislation was passed reforming the pay system. By far the most significant victory in that era came not in legislation, but as a result of Executive Order 10988, issued by President John F. Kennedy in 1962, which established rules and methods to enlarge the voice of federal workers and their unions. The order set three levels of representation for unions within an agency, based on extent of representation. Exclusive representation—the highest level possible under the order—mandated agency heads to negotiate agreements with the union formalizing working conditions across the agency. The order created a strong incentive for intensive organizing by AFGE in order to strengthen bargaining power. The membership surges that followed also greatly enlarged the union's ability to deal with Congress.



Energized by a decade of growth, by 1972, the union's 40th anniversary, laws improving pay systems for both white collar and blue collar federal workers were enacted. These laws—the Federal Wage System for blue collar workers and the Federal Pay Comparability Act for white collar workers—were the result of intensive lobbying by AFGE and the newly established Government Employees Council, a coalition of AFL-CIO unions with members in the federal government.

## Representing and Protecting AFGE's Members

With the signing of President Kennedy's executive order, the union finally won the legal right—through negotiated contracts—to build a strong union. The task confronting the union was to educate government workers to the potential of this new order.

That job fell to the newly-established Organizing Department. One of the first of several new tools proposed by Griner, the Organizing Department was a corps of professional organizers drawn from the ranks of AFGE's membership and other AFL-CIO unions and assigned to gather membership applications, file petitions for representation elections and conduct ongoing membership drives. AFGE's organizing was further augmented by the professional staff of the AFL-CIO's Industrial Union Department. Results came quickly—between 1966 and 1969, the union's bargaining ranks swelled by 100,000.



*Rudolph Estrada, center, became AFGE's 250,000th member in 1967. He's shown here with then Local 1617 (Kelly AFB, San Antonio) President Philip Perez, left, and Steward Sam Cherry who had signed Estrada. The union celebrated this milestone by bringing Estrada to Washington to tour union headquarters and visit Capitol Hill.*

Meanwhile the number of government employees grew as President Lyndon Johnson's war on poverty and civil rights initiatives created new agencies such as the Office of Economic Opportunity and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. Johnson's Administration beefed up the government's domestic programs and services while the war in Vietnam expanded the requirements on U.S. defense bases worldwide.

In the mid-1960s AFGE's rapid growth forced the union's leadership to set up specialized departments to deal with the multitude of problems confronting its diverse membership. An Education Department was established to conduct leadership training and to equip local officers and stewards with information they needed to effectively represent the membership at the local level. A Fair Practices Department was established to develop upward mobility opportunities for women and minorities both within the government and within the union.

As AFGE's structure became more complex and representation responsibilities grew, the union recognized the need for a stronger leadership network. In 1966 the union acted to make all national vice presidents full-time positions and created a 15th District to administer to members outside of the boundaries of the United States. The



*George Meany and George Shulz flank President Nixon to witness the signing of the Wage Grade Act in 1972. For AFGE President John Griner, the legislation was a crowning achievement enacted just weeks before he retired due to ill health.*

position of executive vice president was created to assist in the administration of the union headquarters.

## Supplemental Programs to Benefit Members



*AFGE President Clyde Webber was welcomed to Atlanta in 1974 by future President Jimmy Carter, then Governor of Georgia.*

In 1957 AFGE established an Insurance Department to assist in developing supplemental benefits for government employees. The Department evolved from a modest program of supplemental life insurance into a sophisticated organization acting as one of the largest health and life insurance operations in the federal government after Congress established the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program (FEHBP) in 1959. In the 1960s as the FEHBP developed, AFGE's status as an insurance provider gave the union a watchdog role in the administration of the program. The union's

Insurance Department monitored rate-setting and benefits administration decisions by the then-Civil Service Commission to safeguard the interests of rank-and-file federal workers.

## STRENGTH THROUGH STRUGGLE (1972-1982)

As the union entered its fifth decade, once again outside forces would impose major realignments on federal workers and their union. The war in Southeast Asia would draw to an agonizing close and the divided public sentiment about that war would take its toll. At the same time, the nation's attention would be drawn to issues of the economy and the growing federal deficit. A fledgling "tax revolt" was being fueled by right-wing forces who saw an opportunity to attack programs they disliked by attacking public workers at all levels.



*Joe Gleason, who would later become AFGE's Executive Vice President, pressed the concept of collective bargaining rights with an annual collective bargaining banquet in the union's 2nd District where he served as District Vice President.*

Federal workers were caught in the middle as some politicians employed overblown rhetoric to use federal employees' pay and benefits as a symbol of what they considered to be bloated bureaucracies. Over the course of the decade that followed, Ronald Reagan would ride the crest of this sentiment to the White House on a Republican platform that called for "privatization" of many government services through contracting-out and hammering attacks on a range of federal services from education and housing assistance to federal health programs.

Yet even as these ideas were in the embryo of public consciousness, federal workers would once again be called upon to play a role in rescuing the nation from a vacuum of leadership. The constitutional crisis that began in a suite of offices in the Watergate Hotel as a "second-rate burglary" would ultimately test the resiliency of the nation's civil service. Over the next two years, as the sordid details of Watergate unfolded, impeachment proceedings got underway and President Nixon eventually resigned in disgrace. Yet federal programs

continued to operate seamlessly, despite revelations of gross misuse of federal agencies by dozens of political appointees.

As Nixon's successor President Gerald Ford did little to wipe away the grime of Watergate. One of his first official acts pardoned the former president for "any crimes he may have committed." President Ford also used his veto power to strike down Hatch Act reform legislation that reached the White House in 1976.

In 1978 former Georgia Governor Jimmy Carter arrived at the White House, elected largely on the strength of a promise to never lie to the American people. Reform-minded voters elected a record number of new faces to the House and Senate. For federal workers the Carter years would be best remembered for the enactment of the Civil Service Reform Act, putting into law protections and rights that up until then could have been wiped away with the stroke of a pen and for an ill-fated energy conservation program that indiscriminately turned off the hot water in thousands of government facilities.

Carter's Administration was beset by frustration, most notably when Iranian extremists took and held American hostages (including at least one AFGE member) for 444 days. Domestically, inflation and interest rates would reach double digits, rising to the highest levels in American history. The Carter Administration was perceived as ineffectual and paralyzed by indecision, and challenger Ronald Reagan exploited that perception in the November 1980 elections.

Bashing federal employees was a recurrent theme in the 1980 elections and provided the new Reagan Administration with a convenient scapegoat, setting the stage for a new series of legislative proposals which would keep the union on the defensive through the decade of the 80s.

## **Expansion and Leadership—Evolution in the Fifth Decade**

After the significant organizing spurt of the 1960s, AFGE responded to membership demands and began expanding its services under a series of leadership changes. President John Griner resigned due to ill health shortly after being reelected in 1972. In August 1972

AFGE moved out of its rented space at 400 First St., NW, into its new headquarters at 1325 Massachusetts Avenue, NW, dedicating it to President Emeritus John F. Griner.

Clyde Webber followed Griner in office after having served as executive vice president for six years. Dennis Garrison was elected by the Executive Council to serve as executive vice president and later took over as president after Webber's untimely death in June 1976. At the union's September 1976 convention in Chicago, District 5 National Vice President Kenneth Blaylock was elected to the post.

The highlight of Blaylock's era came with the passage and implementation of the Civil Service Reform Act (CSRA) in 1978 that expanded collective bargaining rights for government workers and created a number of new forums to administer federal labor relations, including the Federal Labor Relations Authority (FLRA)—loosely modeled after the National Labor Relations Board which governs labor relations in the private sector.

A critical provision of the CSRA provided government unions access to the courts to enforce collective bargaining agreements.



*Ken Blaylock chats with President Jimmy Carter following signing of the Civil Service Reform Act in 1978.*



*Mary Anderson, one of 14 women who attended the founding Convention of AFGE in 1932. She is honored in the Labor Department Hall of Fame.*



*Barbara Hutchinson, first director of AFGE's Women's Department to sit on the National Executive Council and later a member of the AFL-CIO Executive Council.*



*Rita Mason, elected as 2nd District Vice President in 1982. She was elected by the NEC in 1997 to fill the vacant position of National Secretary-Treasurer.*

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The CSRA also established a Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB) which provided an alternative forum for workers to seek redress of grievances not covered by a collective bargaining agreement. Architects of the new law saw the MSPB as primarily a forum to protect whistleblowers against retribution. The MSPB also became a forum for providing government workers added protections against discrimination.

Although contracting-out and privatization had long been a problem for AFGE, the wind-down of the Vietnam War intensified the problem as major defense contractors sought to shore up their declining incomes by displacing government workers with contract personnel for big ticket activities that had been traditionally performed by government workers. Major firms pressed Congress and the executive branch for expanded contracting opportunities, not just in defense agencies but also in civilian agencies.

Eventually virtually every civilian activity became subject to contracting-out under liberalized interpretations of federal contracting

rules issued by the Reagan Office of Management and Budget (OMB) in the early 1980s. But AFGE fought back, winning revisions in government contracting regulations, standardizing cost comparisons through court challenges and forcing agencies to maintain in-house functions performed by government workers when proven to be more economical. These initiatives eventually compelled agencies to conduct contracting decisions more openly.



AFGE created a headquarters capability to devise strategies to challenge contracting-out decisions and to permit units of threatened employees to “compete” with outside contractors to keep work out of the hands of contractors.

Building on groundwork established during Clyde M. Webber’s brief tenure, the Blaylock years also saw AFGE further anti-discrimination rights for federal workers and implement new and expanded rights for job safety—including an executive order applying most statutory safety protections to federal job sites through the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA).

During this time AFGE’s preeminence in representing federal employees was under constant challenge by independent organizations. An odd assortment of old-line, unaffiliated organizations nipped at the union’s heels by feeding on discontent in local areas wherever they found it. Some challenged the union as too large and diverse to be concerned with the specialized needs of individual agencies.

Unions representing IRS agents, national guard technicians, wage

grade workers and others were constantly filing representation petitions to force AFGE into defensive battles to hold on to recognitions won in earlier elections. In the 1970s the union's Organizing Department was re-configured to deal with these persistent challenges by taking the initiative to "unionize the organized"—employing incentive organizing programs to sign up members in agencies where the union had substantial recognition rights.

The growth of AFGE's councils provided the union with a new component to give individualized attention to problems unique to specific federal agencies. Only five AFGE national exclusive recognitions existed in 1969. Today, the Federation holds 34 national exclusive or consolidated recognitions covering over half of the 600,000 employees represented by AFGE. What drove this movement toward consolidation was a desire to improve the quality of collective bargaining agreements and the need for AFGE locals to deal effectively with issues that cut across an entire agency. As powerful front-line advocates for the interests of AFGE members, national bargaining councils play an important part in the success of AFGE, assuming a major role in organizing and representing workers within the membership.

Perhaps the most important early national agreements were those AFGE negotiated with the Social Security Administration (SSA) and the Veterans Administration (VA)—now known as the Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA). AFGE signed its first national agreement with SSA on June 11, 1982, covering some 60,000 SSA employees. Just a few months later, in August 1982, AFGE signed its first ever national contract with the VA, covering some 125,000 employees. These contracts not only ensured quality representation and fair working conditions for hundreds of thousands of government employees, but also served as models for other AFGE national agreements negotiated in the 1980s.

Government "downsizing" that flowed from massive contracting-out decisions and budget cuts in the late 1970s and 1980s had a significant effect on AFGE. As senior employees who had been the backbone of AFGE membership reached retirement age, the union was confronted with the need to reeducate an entire generation of new

government workers to the importance of union representation and to cultivate leadership within their ranks. Under Blaylock much of that role was decentralized and new responsibilities fell to the union's local and regional leaders. Membership shrinkage paralleled the declining number of federal workers.

Despite pinched resources AFGE continued to expand its services to the membership. Prior to the passage of the Civil Service Reform Act, federal workers frequently sought redress in the courts, forcing the union to beef up its corps of lawyers in the General Counsel's Office. Congressional realignments splintered the authority of many Congressional committees, forcing the union to deal with dozens of new power centers in Congress. The union's Legislative Department, once confined to two lobbyists, was also enlarged and diversified to provide better coordination between political action and legislative activity. The union's Labor Management Department, which had been confined to contract negotiations and administration, was also diversified to deal with the growing complexity of nationwide bargaining.



*Rep. Bill Clay (D-Mo.), perennial sponsor of Hatch Act Reform legislation in the House of Representatives, greets AFGE President John Sturdivant during an AFGE Legislative rally. Clay's persistence ultimately produced the 1993 Hatch Act amendments.*

In 1974 the convention's Women's Caucus had voted to create a Women's Department to promote more aggressive policies to deal with women's issues on the job and to open up more opportunities for women in leadership roles for the union. Louise Smothers, Local 2725 president, held the post of first appointed director until 1980 when convention delegates voted to make the director a member of the National Executive Council and thus subject to election by the entire convention.

By the early 80s AFGE, through its Fair Practices and Women's Departments, continued its long-standing commitment to the needs of women and minority union members and struggled to bring equity to the workplace—a demand brought on by civil rights laws of the late 60s and early 70s. Each district elected a district fair practices coordinator and a women's coordinator to further the civil rights and women's programs at the district and local levels. Barbara R. Hutchinson, elected as the first women's director to serve on the National Executive Council, was named a vice president of the AFL-CIO in 1982. Also in 1982 Rita Mason extended the tradition of women activists within the union when she was elected District 2 national vice president.

In the 1970s the union's public relations capabilities were directed toward media relations and public opinion to try and blunt growing attacks on federal workers in the media. By direction of the 1972 convention, *The Government Standard* went from bi-weekly to a monthly publication. A specialized leadership publication, the *Washington Letter* (which became *Political Action* in 1980), was created as a means to keep activists up to date on legislative developments. AFGE's Data Processing Department came into being in the early 1970s to maintain the union's membership lists and deal with new demands for record-keeping. Since that time Data Processing and the Finance Department have been closely linked to stay abreast of requirements for more sophisticated methods of record-keeping and financial management.

## **Era of Protests— A New Wave of Action from Union Members**

AFGE’s continued political influence had been reflected in the many laws improving working conditions and benefits for government employees and retirees. But the storm clouds from the Reagan Administration and Congress, threatening severe cutbacks in programs and services, triggered a new wave of action from union members—protest marches.



The AFL-CIO’s Solidarity Day march on Washington took place on Sept. 19, 1981. The event drew 500,000 union members from across the country, including 6,000 from AFGE. This march signified the frustration of all union members over the ruthless response by the Reagan Administration to the 1981 Air Traffic Controllers strike. When President Reagan summarily fired striking controllers, the action sent chills throughout the labor movement and both government and private sector workers joined forces in an effort to underscore the severity of the White House reaction. For the next decade private and public sector managers would take an unyielding tone in collective bargaining, poisoning labor relations for the duration of the Reagan era.

Having destroyed an AFL-CIO union, the Administration set out to “get government off the backs of the people” and President Reagan’s “supply-side” economic plan sailed through Congress. It slashed assistance programs to the poor and the elderly, limited aid to education, decimated a host of other government services and sharply reduced financial aid to cities. The Administration created tax breaks for the wealthy and continuously gnawed on the federal workforce as a symbol of its commitment to reducing the size of government.

## **HOLDING THE LINE (1982-1992)**

AFGE, as it approached its 50th anniversary, continued to adapt to the political and social changes that were occurring throughout the world.



### **Drawing the Battle Lines—Legislation and Representation**

The union faced a tough economic crisis because of the crippling programs pushed through in the early days of Reagan’s Administration. As the 80s progressed, the union’s goals became clearly defined by the Administration’s budget proposals. Employee pay laws had been subverted to accommodate the Administration’s proposals, abandoning the

white collar Comparability Pay Act. President Reagan’s pay plan was “trickle-down” at its worst—authorizing 3.5 percent pay hikes at the top of the scale and imposing an absolute freeze at the bottom. The pay of blue collar workers—whose wages were also supposed to reflect private sector salaries—was tied to the white collar pay limits set by Congressional action. Since the Reagan Administration took office in 1981, federal government employees’ pay had fallen some 26 percentage points behind the private sector with little hope of recovery.

Some 5,000 members drew a line in the sand at a Washington, D.C., legislative rally held in March 1983. They pledged to fight the continuing effort to merge the federal retirement system with Social Security and declared their opposition to proposed reductions in force, a 3.5 percent pay-raise in place of comparability and increased contracting-out. They lobbied for improved health benefits and working conditions and for Hatch Act reform.

At the start of the next fiscal year, the first dividends from that aggressive lobbying effort came in as more than 60,000 employees of the Veterans Administration, the Defense Department and the General



*AFGE’s concerns routinely extend beyond those issues affecting federal workers directly. In recent years, AFGE leaders were among those protesting South Africa’s apartheid policies.*

Services Administration got word that their jobs would not be contract-ed-out, thanks to AFGE-inspired legislation passed by Congress.

The persistent problem of less-than-comparable pay increases was another story, however. When in 1985, federal workers were again forced to accept a pay freeze, AFGE began soliciting support in Congress to promote an alternative pay system that would recognize and reward employees for the jobs they perform. By 1988 the union had offered several options, including collective bargaining.

AFGE continued its fight against the contracting-out build up and—recognizing that changes in the retirement system were inevitable—worked diligently with members of Congress to devise a new plan that would give government workers the same quality of retirement benefits that workers received under the old Civil Service Retirement Act. When a new retirement plan emerged, it contained many of the provisions stipulated by AFGE. The Federal Employees Retirement System (FERS) was enacted and signed into law in 1986.

## **Politics and Policies—AFGE’s Efforts for the White House**

AFGE’s political action efforts were radically altered in 1973 from a modest backyard fundraising and education program called COFEPE (Committee on Federal Employee Political Education) into



AFGE-PAC—American Federation of Government Employees Political Action Committee.

The role of AFGE-PAC was augmented with the creation, in 1983, of the Legislative Action Fund (LAF), designed to get AFGE local unions involved in the political process. LAF enabled AFGE locals to contribute from their treasuries to help pay for administrative needs of AFGE-PAC activities in all 15 Districts and to fund other costs relating to grassroots lobbying activities.

Although an independent entity AFGE-PAC was closely integrated with the Legislative and Political Activities Department. LAF enabled the union to conduct political education and fundraising campaigns through direct mail appeals to the membership. By 1984 AFGE-PAC had contributed close to \$500,000 to the 1984 Presidential and Congressional campaigns.

AFGE's emphasis on political action paid dividends despite the continuing restrictions of the Hatch Act. Government workers spent more time learning about their rights in the political process and those un-Hatched retirees, spouses, union staffers and leaders moved freely to prepare for the 1984 election process. As a first step, the union helped to elect the greatest number ever of AFGE-backed delegates at the Democratic National Convention. For the first time AFGE played a significant role in nominating the Democratic presidential ticket.

AFGE's open support of Walter Mondale in *The Government Standard* and through other avenues of communication with the membership ultimately resulted in the Office of Special Counsel bringing Hatch Act charges against President Blaylock and the presidents of the Postal Workers and Letter Carriers unions. They were later exonerated of all charges.

Delegates to the 1984 AFGE convention in Cleveland displayed their all-out support for Walter Mondale and Geraldine Ferraro. But that wasn't enough to overcome the ever-telegenic Ronald Reagan, who orchestrated a landslide victory.

In a sharp contrast to the 1984 elections, when Republican politicians rode into office on Reagan's wide coattails, voters in 1986



showed their displeasure with “supply-side economics” by restoring a Democratic majority in the Senate and strengthening it in the House.

In August 1987 AFGE unveiled “Participate in 88”—a nationwide voter registration and education campaign for the following year’s national elections. More than a dozen candidates for President of the United States—both Democrats and Republicans—had already announced and were seeking support from unions and their members. AFGE and the other AFL-CIO unions polled their memberships in an effort to find the most favorable one. However, unlike 1984, no one emerged as a front-runner and the

unions decided to wait until the 1988 primaries were completed. Massachusetts Governor Michael Dukakis claimed the nomination and received labor’s endorsement.

Once again the prospect of electing members of Congress and a President of the United States who cared about government employees and their families offered new hope for the future.

## **Combating Attacks on Government Employees**

Amidst the political chaos of the 1980s, several internal reorganizations had streamlined AFGE’s activities and brought them closer in line with modern methods of operation.

The Public Relations Department gave way to the Communications Department, where electronic equipment made it possible to send and receive information by computer. A bi-weekly leadership newsletter, the *AFGE Bulletin*, was added to keep local union officers informed about AFGE and the labor movement in general. Public information campaigns countered the Reagan Administration’s efforts to demean

the government workforce and services they perform for the American people.

In January 1985 AFGE's goal was to drive home the message that government employees are "Dedicated Americans Keeping our Country Strong." That slogan kicked off the most extensive media campaign in AFGE's history through radio commercials, newspaper articles, letters to the editor and media interviews with union members and officials. The union even started a new, highly stylized magazine, *Agenda*, featuring government employees—from astronauts to zoo keepers—at work and stressing the important role of government in improving the quality of life for all Americans.



AFGE entered 1986 on a high note despite the pressing demands of a heavy load of legislative issues. In January the union dedicated its new headquarters at 80 F Street, NW, just three blocks from the Capitol. It was named the Royal L. Sims Building in honor of 3rd District National Vice President Royal L. Sims, one of the first African-Americans to sit on the union's National Executive Council.

Exciting events were on the horizon. AFGE looked forward to its biennial convention scheduled in August where—spirited by the theme "Unity is Power"—delegates would prepare for the fall elections and the coming challenges. Abandoning a defensive mode, AFGE launched an upbeat organizing drive built around Lunch & Learn events where government workers attended open forums to talk with union organizers.

AFGE members were also highly visible as they participated in the centennial celebration of the Statue of Liberty and the 200th anniversary of the U.S. Constitution.

AFGE members mourned with the rest of the nation when the Space Shuttle Challenger went down that January, killing the seven aboard. Some astronauts at NASA facilities were represented by AFGE and their loss was a personal one.

The Gramm-Rudman-Hollings balanced budget law and the damage it could do to government programs and services dominated the



legislative front that year and became one of the focal points for the union's counterattack. A hotline was installed in the Communications Department to connect union members across the country with AFGE headquarters and to dramatize how budget cuts were affecting their agencies. In addition, the union set up an extensive media campaign to unmask the true purpose of Gramm-Rudman as a means for the Administration to transfer more government jobs to the private sector under the guise of cutting federal spending.

In September 1986 President Reagan launched his so-called “war on drugs” with an executive order requiring all government agencies to conduct random drug testing of civilian employees. The government workforce, angered and disappointed at being singled out by the Administration to “set the example for a drug-free workplace,” deluged AFGE with calls for help from workers in all grades and agencies, including managers.

AFGE attacked the order as an “hysterical and over-reactive response” to a situation that did not exist in the federal sector. But the Administration held firm. Two years later, after a number of AFGE law suits challenging the constitutionality of the executive order, results of random drug tests indicated that illegal drug use among government workers was much less of a problem than for the rest of the nation. Yet the testing continued.

In a prelude to the 1986 convention in Las Vegas, union activists returned to Washington to draw up a “Government Employee Bill of Rights” during a legislative rally held March 11-13 to coincide with formal ceremonies to dedicate the new AFGE headquarters. More than 4,000 unionists came to Washington to participate in both events and



under “Unity is Power” signs and banners, attended hearings and talked to lawmakers about the issues that mattered to government employees.

The top issues in the union’s Bill of Rights that year included:

- A pay system that would give government workers the same salaries as their counterparts in the private sector;
- Hatch Act reform allowing full participation in the political process;
- Efficiency and accountability in contracting-out programs;
- Full collective bargaining rights;
- The right to privacy and protection under the law from illegal search and seizure imposed by random drug testing; and
- A retirement system guaranteeing security and dignity.

The seeds planted in this 1986 initiative eventually bore fruit when Congress finally passed Hatch Act Reform in October 1993 and President Clinton signed it into law, ending more than 50 years of persistent work on the part of AFGE and its members.

AFGE’s 31st Biennial Convention in Miami in August 1988 marked a major point of departure for the union as delegates elected Executive Vice President John N. Sturdivant over 12-year incumbent Kenneth T. Blaylock. Much of the dialogue during the convention focused on restructuring the organization to deal with the new challenges of the 1990s. President-elect Sturdivant set about developing a “team leadership” concept involving the National Executive Council to achieve fiscal stability, expand political and legislative action programs, increase organizing efforts and respond to the mandates of the convention.

Delegates voted to eliminate the office of executive vice president, establish three-year terms for all national officers and schedule conventions every three years.

With the priority on strengthening membership and services, AFGE resurrected a membership incentive program—Bonus Bucks—coupling national staff organizers with specially designated incentive



**I want to join AFGE's Bonus  
Excursion trip in Washington, D.C.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**YES!** You can count on me to sign up the  
most members you think I can pick up a lot of extra work  
for the holiday season and when you're in Washington, D.C.  
What is only for filling out the information requested  
and giving it and the very beautiful application to my  
Local Union President. **MEMBERSHIP** (AFGE) We cannot  
have your name listed unless it goes in and all of  
the information requested below.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
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organizers from the ranks of AFGE locals. Significant membership growth followed.

Simultaneously the union prepared to rebuff challenges from upstart independent organizations. From 1989 through the summer of 1991, AFGE added more than 3,700 government workers to its bargaining units in 13 representation campaigns. An intense effort to shoot down a challenge by the National Treasury Employees Union (NTEU) in three massive new Social Security Mega Teleservice Centers eventually forced the challenger union to withdraw its petitions. By the fall of 1992, NTEU called a truce and scrapped its five-year, multimillion dollar effort to take over AFGE bargaining units in the Social Security Administration.

Because the diversity of government work often imposes health and safety risks on employees, in 1990 the National Executive Council established a Health and Safety Committee to concentrate on the most serious federal workplace problems on a national level and to work toward legislation providing full coverage under the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA). AFGE's Safety Division in the Field Services Department monitored developments in job health and safety for all federal workers and operated a clearinghouse to provide information on these issues to the appropriate Congressional staffers and OSHA personnel.

The creation of the Union Privilege program by the AFL-CIO provided AFGE the opportunity to offer a range of membership programs and consumer benefits, including free legal services, discounts and home mortgage assistance. Open to union members only, AFGE's

Union Privilege program created powerful additional incentives to attract new members to the union.

**Legal  
Ease**

**With AFGE's Union Privilege  
Legal Service, expert advice  
is as close as your phone.**

The task of representing federal workers continued at every level of AFGE.

Virtually thousands of grievances and arbitrations were handled routinely by stewards and local officers who had been trained through the various nuts and bolts leadership development programs AFGE conducted over the years. The union's professional representatives and attorneys from the Office of the General Counsel worked together to ensure a positive outcome when cases arose which had the potential for creating widespread precedents. Specialists from the

union also collaborated to marshal cases involving EEO issues and personnel cases with potentially important impact.

By focusing the union's resources on effective representation, the union built an enviable record of success—with back pay settlements in the millions and a greatly enhanced scope of negotiations for all government workers.

## **Seeking Comparable Pay for the Federal Workforce**

Early in the 1990s AFGE sought a viable alternative to the crippled Comparability Pay Act which saw federal employee pay lagging behind the private sector by some 30 percent. The union participated in one experimental pay project and endorsed several others that would make the union—through the collective bargaining process—an equal

partner with management in determining productivity, compensation and the quality of work life.

The Pacer Share Demonstration Project, conducted at McClellan Air Force Base, Calif., was one of the most notable of several experimental programs. It included: a simplified classification system consolidating both job series and grades into broader categories; a streamlined compensation system with three new pay schedules for salaried, hourly and supervisory workers; elimination of annual performance appraisals to be replaced by a new procedure for statistical quality control; and a productivity gain-sharing system based on total organizational performance where 50 percent of the savings were returned to the Air Force and 50 percent were distributed equally among the employees.

This and other cooperative programs laid the groundwork for AFGE's push to pass the Federal Employees Pay Comparability Act which was signed into law by President George Bush in 1991.

In 1991 AFGE also played a predominant role in drafting legislation that amended the Civil Rights Act which, for the first time, brought the right of a jury trial as well as compensatory damages to federal employees who fell victim to unlawful discrimination.

## **PROUD TO MAKE GOVERNMENT WORK (1992- )**

Government—its size and effectiveness—remained a major “hot button” issue with voters throughout 1992. As the primary season opened that year, President George Bush attempted to rally voters with a pledge of “no new taxes.” Implicit in that pledge was a commitment to continue attacks on government, reduce government employment and impair its effectiveness.

Under the Bush White House government employees suffered continued pay lags, stepped-up contracting-out and annual fights over budget proposals that tore at the federal retirement system.

## Taking the Pulse of the Membership

As the 1992 presidential primaries got underway, the Bush record seemed to simplify AFGE's choices as many AFGE activists clamored for the union to issue an "ABB" (Anybody But Bush) endorsement from the union's leadership. But AFGE wanted a more positive approach, reasoning that it would be more effective to mobilize members and their families to vote for candidates than against the incumbent. So the union polled members to voice their preference in the presidential race through the pages of *The Government Standard*.

**AFGE**  
**Presidential Preference Poll**

Who is your preference for the next President of the United States? (Indicate your first and second choices by placing a 1 and 2 respectively next to the candidate's name.)

Edmund "Jerry" Brown (D) _____	George Bush (R) _____
William Clinton (D) _____	Patrick Buchanan (R) _____
	David Duke (R) _____
	Undecided _____

Are you a registered voter? \_\_\_\_\_  
If yes, under what party? \_\_\_\_\_

MAIL TO: AFGE-PAC  
80 F Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20001

The results of that poll showed "tremendous support" for the candidacy of then-Arkansas Governor Bill Clinton. Delegates to the AFGE legislative conference in early June 1992 added muscle to the results of that poll by enacting a resolution formally endorsing the Clinton campaign.

Despite the strictures of the Hatch Act, AFGE's legislative and political apparatus went to work immediately to give life to the union's endorsement.

As President John Sturdivant explained, "AFGE recognizes that the way people work is changing everyday and will be much different in the 21st Century. With Bill Clinton as President and a strong Democratic majority in Congress, our union will be able to help shape those changes to the benefit of all government employees as well as to the taxpayers."

The November elections left Democrats in charge of both Houses of Congress, with a comfortable 78 seat margin in the House of Representatives and a 14 seat difference in the Senate. The number of

women in the House nearly doubled to 48 and four newly-elected women joined the two incumbent women in the Senate chambers.

More importantly for the first time in 12 years, the Democratic majority in Congress could look forward to a shared agenda with a Democratic White House. And AFGE looked forward to an opportunity to “change the focus of government, put it back on track to solve the nation’s problems and create a new America that helps everyone achieve a better life.”

Although President-elect Bill Clinton wanted no part of anti-government rhetoric, his first State of the Union message in February 1993 cast a chill on relations between the White House and AFGE with his request for a one-year freeze on government pay increases. Over the years that would follow, the President and his advisors continued to budget for white collar federal pay increases lower than called for by the Federal Employees Pay Comparability Act.

When his first year in office began, President Clinton recognized that the nation had been conditioned by his predecessors in the White House to take its federal workforce for granted. Within weeks of his inauguration, President Clinton’s disagreement with anti-government conservatives prompted him to embark on a major initiative to instill public confidence in government performance.

Vice President Al Gore was assigned the task of conducting a top-to-bottom review of regulations, personnel policies, work processes and employee relations. Following that review the Vice President issued a report with six fundamental recommendations to improve government performance. One of the recommendations in that report called on the President to form labor-management partnerships with executive branch employees. AFGE played a key role in crafting Vice President Gore’s report by participating in townhall meetings, press conferences and face-to-face meetings with the Vice President and his National Performance Review staff.

President John Sturdivant described AFGE’s vision of partnership in a speech at the Reinventing Government Summit in Philadelphia on June 25, 1993, declaring:

“We want to be full partners. We want government to work better. We want to be there in partnership to help identify problems. We want to be there in partnership to help craft the solution. We want to be there in partnership to help implement together the solutions that this government needs. And we’re prepared to work in partnership to make some bold leaps to turn this government around and make it work the way it should.”



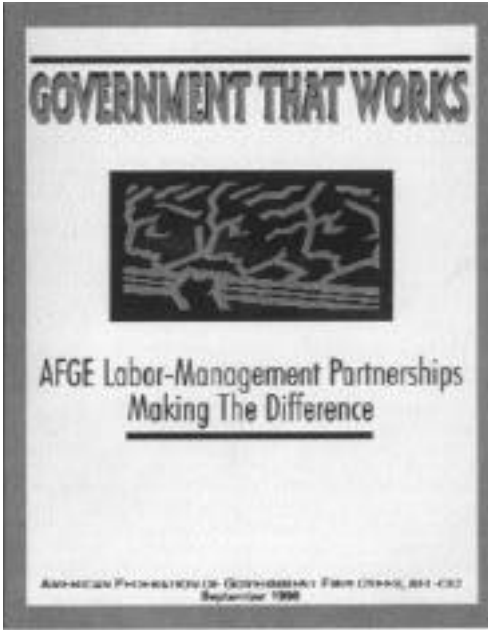
President Clinton signed Executive Order 12871 on Oct. 1, 1993, creating the formal National Partnership Council structure. With four labor members and representatives from each of the cabinet departments, the Council was to be the focal point of the reinvention process. President John Sturdivant became AFGE’s representative on the Council; the AFL-CIO Public Employees Department was represented by John Leyden. The remaining seats were held by the presidents of the National Treasury Employees Union and the National Federation of Federal Employees.

Each executive branch agency adopted a mirror-image partnership structure, co-chaired by the top union official and the head of the agency.

The mission of union partnership representatives was to express the positions and interests of government workers, provide a channel through which ideas and suggestions could be communicated and to act as a clearinghouse for implementing ideas to improve service to the public.

## Illustrating How Government Works for the People

As partnership filtered down to the grassroots, success stories focused attention on the impact that partnership-sparked innovations had on how government works for the American people.



Those anecdotes were collected and published by AFGE on the third anniversary of the establishment of the National Partnership Council. Some excerpts from that report included:

“Partnership has encouraged employee groups to take a more active part in directing and defining their roles and their tasks. Out of this has come self-directed work teams which are responsible for time

keeping, leave approval, performance standards and evaluation, hiring, cross training and work distribution—all without a supervisor,” wrote Ralph Noel, President of Des Moines, Iowa, VA Medical Center Local 1228. As a consequence of the relationship, Noel said, grievances had become nearly non-existent, patient processing had been streamlined and the time required to check patients in and out of the facility had been cut by more than 50 percent.

AFGE Local 1867, representing employees of the U.S. Air Force Academy in Denver, developed plans to remove barriers to productivity; introduce flexible work processes; create mutual respect and trust; and integrate the interests of employees, the union, management and the public. Local President Michael R. Little described the outcome of that effort as having established an “environment in which blue collar, white collar, higher and lower grade employees all feel safe and comfortable in sharing their ideas.... Power and decision-making are

shared.” Not surprisingly arbitrations dropped from some 15 a year to zero, and contract negotiations were accomplished in two months compared to two years prior to the establishment of the partnership.

In the big picture partnership had become a cornerstone of the Clinton Administration’s efforts to restore confidence in government and reduce federal spending without cutting the muscle of the federal workforce. AFGE embraced the concept of government as a high-performance workplace providing rank-and-file workers with new responsibility and support in pursuing their individual missions. The union was especially enthusiastic about provisions to cut supervisory layers and red tape and encourage workers to innovate the work process. The White House said that by creating high performance models in the federal government, it could reduce federal employment ultimately by 250,000 by the end of the century without reducing government effectiveness.



When the government reinvention task force targeted an overall reduction of the ratio of workers to supervisors from its 1993 levels at one to seven, to a more reasonable ratio of one to 15, support for streamlining grew within AFGE and among frontline workers.

AFGE’s 1992 legislative agenda mirrored the difficulties the union had faced throughout the Reagan-Bush era. Congressional leadership was sympathetic to the union’s objectives, but the persistent focus on cutting government and balancing the budget frustrated much of what the union sought to do for its constituents. The 1988

Gramm-Rudman Act, which clamped down on federal spending, was troublesome enough. But conservatives in Congress wanted even more restrictions on the federal budget. Their proposal for a balanced budget constitutional amendment was to become a direct threat to the entire range of government services, including consumer protection agencies, job safety protections, VA benefits and Social Security.

In June 1992 a floor vote on a balanced budget constitutional amendment was imminent as delegates to the AFGE Legislative Conference swarmed over Capitol Hill to voice opposition. Vocal conservative elements and right-wing organizations spurred the Bush White House and members of Congress to pass the measure.

AFGE argued that the rigid strictures of a constitutional amendment would hamstring government's ability to respond to economic problems and virtually force lawmakers to slash government spending across-the-board in order to meet its mandates regardless of economic circumstances.

Congress barely rejected the measure—with a mere nine votes to spare.

Pay for both blue collar and white collar federal workers continued to be a high priority legislative issue. AFGE focused its efforts on winning Congressional support for alternatives to President Bush's plan to delay implementation of the 1993 General Schedule pay raise for three months beyond the January trigger date.

For blue collar workers a pay cap imposed 14 years earlier had driven wages for some 350,000 blue collar workers down nearly 10 percent below comparability with private sector workers. AFGE National Vice President Rita Mason, Chair of the union's Legislative Committee, told Congress that the situation for blue collar workers had become "outrageous."

Following the end of the Cold War, thousands of workers in the Department of Defense (DoD) faced job cuts. The union pursued a number of initiatives on behalf of DoD workers which would eliminate new contracting-out within the Defense Department to give workers who faced downsizing added opportunities to continue their federal employment. The union also wanted to require at least six months notice for reductions in force (RIFs) and to develop a job clearing

house among all civilian agencies, again to give DoD workers an inside shot at continuing their federal employment.

AFGE urged Congress to permit outgoing workers to continue their health benefit coverage beyond termination dates to protect workers and their families until they could secure new jobs.

Late in 1992 Congress passed the AFGE-backed provisions in the Defense Authorization bill for the following fiscal year. The final measure included buyout payments of up to \$25,000, continued health care coverage and a minimum 60-day RIF notice (120 days notice when more than 50 employees were to be laid off). The bill also included special job referral information and priority hiring for displaced DoD workers, cash payments for accumulated annual leave, job training rights and other skill development opportunities and the right of laid-off workers to liquidate their thrift savings accounts even if they were not yet age-eligible for retirement.

The \$25,000 buyout would later serve as a model for civilian federal agencies faced with downsizing management and supervisory layers in the wake of partnership. AFGE persuaded Congress to enact the civilian buyouts to minimize the likelihood that federal managers would sabotage partnership programs to protect supervisory jobs against cutbacks.

Also high on the union's wish list in 1992 were initiatives to improve the government's equal employment opportunity processes to make discrimination protections for federal workers more parallel to those enjoyed by workers in the private sector. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) responded with its first reform in 20 years to the agency complaint processing system, streamlining the complaint process and imposing agency deadlines.

Meanwhile the blistering inflation in health care costs and insurance premiums that afflicted the entire economy had prompted AFGE to call for major reforms in the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program (FEHBP). In testimony before the House Post Office and Civil Service Committee, AFGE pointed out that some 42 percent of

federal employees who chose not to participate in the FEHBP made that choice because costs had become prohibitive.

## **Jump into Political Action**

Perhaps the high point of 1993 came on Oct. 6 with the final enactment of Hatch Act reform. AFGE began immediately to gear up its Political Action Committee (PAC) for a major push to get government employees registered to vote and to educate and motivate them to use their newly-expanded rights under Hatch Act reform in time for the 1994 elections.

Reform of the Hatch Act meant that for the first time federal workers could be candidates in non-partisan elections, assist in voter registration drives, handbill for candidates and issues, provide transportation to voters on election day and work the polls on behalf of their preferred candidates.



*AFGE President John N. Sturdivant attends White House signing ceremony for Hatch Act Reform law.*

The new law also allowed government workers to express opinions about candidates and issues, attend political fundraising functions and play active roles in political rallies and meetings. It permitted government workers to sign nominating petitions, campaign for or against

referendum questions and hold office in political parties and clubs.

Along with Hatch Act reform came an important administrative decision which permitted AFGE-PAC and similar organizations to qualify for automatic PAC donation checkoff by employees.

But the union had jumped into political action in a big way long before Hatch Act reform finally came to fruition. In the early 1990s AFGE was insistent in calling on union members to “Back the PAC”—hammering on the connection between the viability of the union’s political fundraising efforts and the level of respect the union is accorded by lawmakers.

In 1996 AFGE established the President’s Club to honor donors who contribute \$200 or more a year to the union’s PAC. Membership in the President’s Club quickly became the most prestigious distinction for individual PAC donors. Participation in each of these fundraising methods began snowballing quickly, enabling the union to accumulate nearly three quarters of a million dollars for the 1995-1996 election cycle. Those totals inspired the union to set an unprecedented 1997-1998 goal of \$1 million for PAC.

As AFGE’s fundraising capabilities increased, the union’s political profile sharpened as a new era of political rights dawned for federal workers as a result of Hatch Act reform.

Riding this wave of positive developments, AFGE launched a new series of Metropolitan Empowerment Initiatives, or Metros for short, to develop membership drives in areas where federal agencies and workers are highly concentrated. By 1996 those campaigns had yielded 10,000 new members. Metros combined union fairs, Lunch & Learn activities discussing workplace



problems and issues and partnership training programs in a given region to recruit members in multiple agencies and locations.

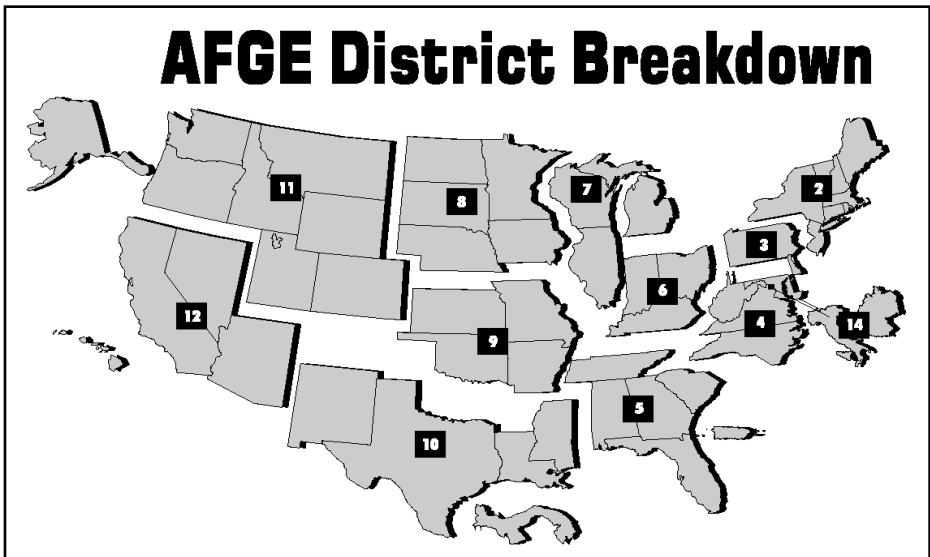
The Metro initiatives were augmented with AFGE's Bonus Bucks campaigns which added another 9,000 members, and various mergers and election victories added further to membership growth.

As President John Sturdivant had pointed out, the dramatic membership surges that resulted from AFGE's various organizing programs took place despite ongoing base closures, increased contracting and privatization which caused federal employment to drop by at least 100,000 jobs.

The momentum for growth was continuing to build, with AFGE's high visibility on issues critical to government workers acting as a magnet to attract interest among thousands of employees in units where little union interest had existed before.

## **A Reinvented AFGE**

While government was undergoing reinvention, AFGE was looking internally to develop its own plan for streamlining operations. Since the mid 1970s AFGE conventions had sought to address the problem of uneven geographic districts and spreading representational resources around sufficiently to meet membership needs.



After several false starts delegates to the 1994 Triennial Convention in Chicago enacted a resolution requiring that the union trim three of its then 15 districts. How to accomplish that task was left up to the national president. Three years earlier the union had established a special reorganization committee, with two members from each existing district. That committee's recommendations became divided and controversial and ultimately its recommendations were rejected by the union's membership.

In 1995 the union held a series of regional hearings to solicit suggestions from local and regional leaders and rank-and-file members. The hearings, along with written submissions and surveys of remote local unions, produced a harvest of ideas that, in the spring of 1996, resulted in the merger of the union's New England district (District 1) into its New York and New Jersey district (District 2). The union's 15th District (representing overseas units) and elements of its 13th District (covering Colorado, Utah, Arizona, New Mexico and Wyoming) were reassigned to other districts. The executive board was now 15 members strong, comprised of 12 national vice presidents and the three national officers. As diverse as the union's membership was, so also were the members of its board.

The union's 1994 convention had a larger agenda than simply internal reorganization. The 1,100 delegates re-elected incumbents President John N. Sturdivant and National Secretary-Treasurer Bobby Harnage and elected Kitty Peddicord as the new director for the union's Women's/Fair Practices Departments, defeating second-term incumbent Joan Welch.

The Convention theme for 1994, "Proud to Make America Work," hit a chord with most AFGE members. For too long union members had endured the



snide suggestion that government's inefficiencies were caused by inefficient government workers. But partnership and reinvention had chipped away at that stereotype until, by 1994, when AFGE testified about the union's concern over politics intruding into the administration of the Social Security program, the union's warnings were heeded. By 1995 Congress unanimously passed bipartisan legislation to establish SSA as an independent agency, free of political infighting and influence. President Clinton signed the measure into law.



Two years into partnership and reinvention the union ran into a bump in the road as the 1994 elections realigned partisan power in Congress. Taking control of the Senate with an alignment of 53 Republicans to 47 Democrats, the GOP also made major gains in gubernatorial seats and state legislatures and pushed Democrats out of control in the House of Representatives for the first time in 40 years with 229 Republican seats to 205 Democrats.

Analysts said a combination of circumstances had produced the Republican juggernaut. Right-wing conservatives had played upon voter discontent, pushing for term limits, tax cuts and a general distrust of Washington and incumbents (although not one Republican

incumbent, from governors to the U.S. Senate, lost). The results stunned the White House and radically altered the agenda of the Clinton Administration. In a press conference on Nov. 9, President Clinton characterized the mood of voters as unsatisfied with the work Washington had been doing.

Months before the election AFGE President John Sturdivant had foreshadowed events as he warned union members to fight against complacency and urged them to use their newly-won political rights to help elect members of Congress who would be friendly to AFGE issues.

“Do you want radical conservatives such as Representative Newt Gingrich or Senator Robert ‘Mr. Filibuster’ Dole controlling the destiny of our issues in the next Congress?” Sturdivant wrote in a pre-election edition of *The Government Standard*. “We could make a strong case, based on their voting record and their rhetoric, that life for federal workers will be far worse with them in control of Congress than at any time during the entire 12 years of the Reagan-Bush era.” He was right. The two years that followed would produce two unprecedented government shutdowns that left federal workers locked out of their jobs and uncertain of their futures.

As 1995 opened AFGE’s leaders remained optimistic that despite the rhetoric of the Gingrich revolution concern for the nation’s welfare would inject reason into the relationship between Congress and the Executive Branch.

That optimism proved to be unwarranted.

The union’s 1995 legislative program continued as a defensive battle—with a strong resolve to defend government employee pay, health benefits and retirement; a renewed effort to fight privatization through added grassroots education and more publicity about the costs and inefficiencies of the contracting process; and a major push to defeat the ill-advised Contract with America which called for a balanced budget amendment to the constitution.

The union would also hold its first Human Rights Conference, designed and presented by the union’s Women’s/FairPractices



Departments under the leadership of Women’s Director Kitty Peddicord. The conference offered delegates the opportunity to select from a range of training programs that focused on organizing through issues, diversity and developing a consistent union response to discrimination, racism, sexism and other threats to full opportunity for government workers.

The union had worked mightily on behalf of its endorsed candidates in the 1994 elections, but had been prepared for less than total victory. Following the elections AFGE announced that its efforts to make government more effective and valuable to the American taxpayer would continue, but vowed to resist the extremists who wanted government totally dismantled.

The new Congressional leadership touted its plans for a 100-day blitz to enact the provisions of its Contract with America. Radical cuts in federal jobs, pay, retirement and benefits—along with massive dismantling of key government programs and the imposition of a Balanced Budget Amendment topped the Republican agenda.

Even before the 104th Congress convened, the new leadership reorganized the committee structure to eliminate worker-friendly

committees, including the House Post Office and Civil Service Committee and the Committee on the District of Columbia. Proving that no detail was too small for their notice, the new majority also lashed out at D.C. Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton by eliminating her right to vote on the House floor.

AFGE responded with a new emphasis on PAC power, shooting for a \$1 million fund for the next election cycle. The union's political activities would take a longer view of the process, expanding to include a broad focus on involvement in state and local as well as national elections.

Meanwhile AFGE braced for the onslaught from Congressional radicals intent on flogging the government workforce. Setting up a special apparatus to fight off proposals which effectively imposed as much as \$1,000 in added retirement contributions on federal workers, AFGE generated a ground swell of discontent that eventually forced Rep. John Mica (R-Fla.) to withdraw his proposed bill attacking federal retirement benefits while increasing retirement contributions.

At the same time workers in the District of Columbia, where AFGE has long represented thousands of city employees, found themselves closed in on all sides as the city continued to slide into a financial morass. In the winter of 1995, the city imposed a series of furloughs, along with the threat of a 12 percent pay cut in a scramble to avoid a deficit of some \$70 million.

## **The Tragedy of Oklahoma City**

While government workers continued to endure criticism and persistent attacks on their pay and benefits, the spring of 1995 brought with it a tragic and sobering reminder of the dedication and risks that have long been associated with civil service work. The blast that tore through the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City—killing 168 and injuring hundreds more—caused most rational Americans to reflect deeply about their government and the people who are proud to make it work.

The victims were from all walks of federal service—many were AFGE members and children who were in the building's day care

center when the bomb went off.

Among the hardest hit were workers in the Oklahoma City Social Security office represented by Local 2205, where 16 were killed; and in the Housing and Urban Development office, which saw 35 of its workers killed (including all but two of Local 3138's executive board). AFGE also represented workers in the Department of Labor and GSA offices there.



The blast reverberated throughout the U.S. as AFGE pointed out that the dialogue of hate directed against government and its workers from right-wing commentators in recent years could not be dismissed as a factor contributing to the twisted thinking of the perpetrators. In the months leading up to April 19, many innocent government workers had been threatened by vigilantes and self-appointed militia members who disagreed with the laws those workers had been sworn to uphold.

Although the tragedy silenced some critics, others like Oklahoma Senator James Inhofe—who suggested that the victims who had been unaccounted for the day after the blast were probably “playing hooky”—continued to make gratuitous statements that added to the pain of the victims and their families.

AFGE's response to the tragedy was immediate and long-range. The union set up a relief fund for the victims and their families which



had collected more than \$400,000 within a matter of weeks. After paying a number of grants to families of Oklahoma City victims, the fund evolved into a long-term disaster relief operation, the AFGE “Fund for Emergency Disaster Support,” Inc., or FEDS, to provide relief to government workers hit by natural or man-made disasters.

President John Sturdivant flew with President Clinton on Air Force One to the memorial service held the week after the blast to console survivors and

reassure them that neither they, nor their dead colleagues, would ever be forgotten.

The union also began an immediate campaign to improve security in federal installations, pointing out that on the day of the tragedy, out of the 1,000 Federal Protective Officers (FPOs) needed to protect government buildings nationwide, the General Services Administration (GSA) had a mere 400 FPOs on its roster.

Later representatives of the FPOs would charge that GSA had ignored its own survey data that showed federal facilities’ personnel throughout government want FPOs, not contract guards, handling building security. FPO Stephen Nihiser told reporters at an AFGE press conference on government security that GSA was so short of trained security personnel that it had to send janitors into other federal buildings to look for suspicious items and inspect building areas. “No one knew what to look for, because no one was trained,” he said.

Although the tragedy in Oklahoma City produced a momentary truce in the right-wing propaganda battle against government workers,

hostilities resurfaced as Congressional leaders and the White House debated budget issues through the summer of 1995.

A series of skirmishes involving proposed cuts in retirement and health benefits programs for federal workers presaged the full-blown budget battle which would come to a head on Nov. 13, as temporary spending extensions expired. The expiration forced 800,000 federal workers into the first of two extended lockouts that would inspire AFGE's battle cry for the following year, "We'll Remember in November."

## **Lockouts: Government Workforce Caught in the Middle**

After more than a dozen years of false alarms involving differences over federal spending decisions, AFGE was prepared for the coming conflict. On Sept. 27 a series of rallies in 50 cities gave AFGE local and regional leaders an opportunity to sound the alarm to the American people through the media concerning the impending budget crisis. The early publicity was partially responsible for prodding Congress to back down at the last minute and authorize a temporary spending bill in the last days of September.

In addition to the 50-city media blitz involving thousands of AFGE members, the union had also set up a hotline directly to the Capitol switchboard to help members vent their feelings to Congressional representatives and urge them to resolve the spending dispute. A crisis communication network was set up to send information via facsimile to local union leaders.



Government employees were returned to work briefly in early December 1995, only to be forced back on the streets on Dec. 16 after another temporary spending bill expired. In all the two lock-outs cost workers more than 50 work days, while hundreds of thousands were forced to work with no assurance they would be paid and thousands of others were sent home— indefinitely furloughed—and told that they were forbidden to work until the crisis was resolved.

But the experience proved to be “AFGE’s finest hour.” The union’s preparation helped the American public focus on the causes of the lockout, creating a strong public backlash against the Republican Congressional leadership for its lack of concern for the nation and its government operations. The public was convinced that Congress— specifically House Speaker Newt Gingrich and Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole—could have worked out differences with the White House without throwing government into chaos and uncertainty. Flip comments from the two top leaders of the Republican Party left the distinct impression that they could care less if government operations ever resumed.

Speaker Newt Gingrich distilled the essence of the Republicans’ leadership position on the issue of government operations when he said, “There’s a lot of stuff we don’t care if it’s ever funded.”

As the lockout began AFGE focused the news media on what



services Americans would not receive when government workers were forced off their job. Such critical government work products as crop forecasts, labor statistics and banking data disappeared. Suddenly the unseen services of government became very real to those who needed them.

Work backed up in agencies serving small businesses; research into disease and illness came to a halt; people who expected federal checks to allow them to purchase homes had to cancel or reschedule real estate deals; VA hospitals continued to treat patients, but supplies were limited; and national parks were padlocked.

Less obvious, but equally serious, workers faced huge backlogs in their work when the lockout finally ended in mid-January 1996. Catching up took a long time.



AFGE had filed suit on behalf of government workers, seeking to enjoin the government from imposing a form of quasi-slavery on some government workers as it required so-called “emergency” personnel to work without any assurance that their work would be compensated. Although the union’s request for a temporary restraining order was denied because the court felt an order sending the employees home would have a “disastrous” public impact, Federal Judge Emmett Sullivan expressed empathy for the union’s position.

The sting of the lockouts, combined with the running battle with Congress over recycled ideas to cut retirement benefits, topped AFGE’s legislative agenda when hundreds of members came to Washington for the union’s legislative rally in the spring of 1996.

A series of new contracting initiatives within the Department of Defense elevated that issue to the top of the list of union priorities as DoD sought to reduce the 60/40 rule for DoD repair depots to expand contracting opportunities.

Attacks on affirmative action extended into the federal service when soon-to-be presidential candidate Bob Dole co-sponsored a measure which would gut federal affirmative action programs for women and minorities. Of course, protecting pay and retirement topped the list as the Republican leadership continued to dredge up recycled ideas for reducing government costs by cheapening pay and benefits for government workers.

The lockouts proved once again that adversity stimulates leadership. AFGE's grassroots leaders emerged from the experience strengthened and resolute at the same time that the AFL-CIO's new militancy was also coming to the fore. When the AFL-CIO unveiled its "Labor '96" strategy for the 1996 elections, the overall program meshed with AFGE's snowballing political fundraising and awareness programs. AFGE was one of the first of the AFL-CIO's affiliated unions to come forward with financial support for the ambitious \$35 million electronic information campaign that the federation developed to try to force candidates to confront worker issues.

The labor strategy worked better than anticipated. AFL-CIO leaders had hoped to oust radical conservatives in the House and Senate. Conservatives strengthened their margin in the Senate, but labor came close to



realizing its goal in the House, where a mere 20,000 votes nationwide in key House races would have resulted in Democrats regaining control.

Labor's activism—specifically AFGE's vocal support during the 1996 political campaigns for the ouster of radical conservative Republicans—did result in a new wave of vindictive measures. The backlash actually began in the 104th Congress when Senators Strom Thurmond (R-S.C.) and Lauch Faircloth (R-N.C.) and Representative Jim Bunning (R-Ky.) sponsored bills to take away or seriously limit "official time" rights in various agencies. Both Faircloth and Bunning cloaked their motivations behind budget concerns, but AFGE charged that the issue was vengeance directed against the union because of its successful political action.

## Changing AFGE to Work Better

During the Sturdivant Administration the union had adopted a trademark "pro-active" system of strategic planning and preparation for events. That style proved invaluable in times of crisis such as the lockout experience. But it also became a mainstay for the union's day-to-day operations. "Thinking outside the lines" helped AFGE analyze its internal structures and reorient policies and programs to better serve the membership. The method led to innovations, such as building new systems to combat contracting-out, developing an effective legislative program to monitor Congressional activity, staying on top of changes in federal personnel policies and regulations and developing new techniques for organizing around issues important to government workers.

Despite the new era of partnership, some things about government never change. Administration of the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) as it applies to paying government employees was one case in point.



AFGE's General Counsel successfully challenged dozens of federal agencies over the administration of the FLSA as it applied to government workers. In the 1990s those challenges resulted in back pay settlements and awards totalling over \$35 million for SSA employees, \$3-plus million to VA personnel, \$14.5 million within the Bureau of Prisons and \$80 million for Immigration and Naturalization Service workers.

As a result a number of arbitration cases bottled up for years in the Reagan-Bush era broke free. A spate of challenges to the government's refusal to pay overtime to thousands of mid-level workers in agencies such as Social Security, the Department of Labor and even within the Department of Defense were decided in favor of workers. For Social Security employees alone, a series of challenges to that agency's interpretation of the FLSA as it applied to government workers produced a \$35 million award in back pay.

Meanwhile the added responsibilities of working life under partnership also resulted in agencies softening their positions on grade levels, with the establishment of across-the-board upgrades for journey-level workers in several agencies.

Continuing threats of privatization throughout government service prompted AFGE to become more aggressive in preparing locals to fight contracting at the job site. AFGE developed a formal program to school local union officers on how to recognize privatization efforts, what information the union should demand prior to a contracting decision, how to counterattack privatization with bids to maintain functions as federal operations and when and how to "follow the work" by winning union representation under private sector collective bargaining laws.

AFGE was successful in establishing a strong precedent for "following" government workers into the sites of private contractors. A 1993 decision to shut down Newark Air Force Base in Newark, Ohio, was one of the first. Local 2221 union leaders Bruce Tolle, Dave Sheffer and Jane Bowen resolved to keep the Local alive and seek recognition under the National Labor Relations Board as contractors Rockwell and Wyle Laboratories took over functions at the base. The

project succeeded beyond the wildest expectations of the trio of organizers as union membership more than doubled.

Local 1744, which had represented government employees at the Indianapolis Naval Air Warfare Center since 1964, followed the work when the facility was transferred to Hughes Aircraft—one of the largest private industrial concerns in America at the time. The contract between AFGE and Hughes prohibited contracting-out—a first for AFGE—and included a successorship clause to ensure union recognition by a new owner.

AFGE used all available avenues to fight privatization. In a case before the U.S. Supreme Court, the union convinced the Justices to bar private contractors from using “government immunity” as a shield from liability because of contractor mistakes. The union also went to court to stop the Administration’s scheme to privatize-in-place work at both Kelly and McClellan Air Force depots, in direct opposition to the Base Realignment and Closure Commission which in 1995 ordered the two depots closed and the work transferred to the three remaining depots.

During the 1990s the union stayed ahead of the curve by adapting new technology to permit union members to respond rapidly to issues as they arose.

As early as 1993 the union debuted the first of its video productions entitled *Full Partners*—a 10-minute video explained how the union gives employees a voice on the job.



The success of that first video encouraged the union to continue to communicate through videos, utilizing polished and professional video productions to educate members on a range of issues, from support of the union’s political action fundraising (*Jump Into Political Action*) to organizing

videos explaining Metros (*Metro Power*) to mobilizing (*We'll Remember in November*) which highlighted the union's action during the government-wide lockouts of 1995-1996. The union's morale-boosting *AFGE & Me* music video won awards from two video industry organizations for its creativity and impact. *We'll Remember in November* won a bronze CINDY (Cinema in Industry) from the International Association of Visual Communicators in its 1996 International competition.

The core of the union's internal communications remained *The Government Standard*. It was redesigned in January 1995 with an eye toward putting more of a spotlight on AFGE's members "making a difference." It too won professional recognition, with a first prize for general excellence in the annual International Labor Communications Association (ILCA) competition.

AFGE was among the first unions to perfect a fax network to connect with stewards and local officers. The union went online with its web page in early 1997, providing instant access for members



to legislative updates, e-mail messages and the full range of information opportunities that the new technology permitted.

Staying ahead of the curve required constant planning. In 1997 the union conducted a series of brainstorming sessions—"Future Forums"—to elicit rank-and-file ideas for the union's agenda.

A similar session devoted strictly to organizing under the slogan "Vision '97" brought together union staff and officers and encouraged them to go "outside the lines" to develop new organizing approaches with the help of Richard Bensinger, head of the AFL-CIO Organizing Department, AFL-CIO Secretary-Treasurer Richard Trumka and others.

Some 1,100 delegates met at the union's 34th Triennial Convention in August that year and adopted the programs and initiatives needed to carry AFGE into the next millennium. Following the convention's theme—"The Future Is Ours: Creating A Shared Vision For The 21st Century"—the delegates voted to fund critical programs, including increased organizing efforts and local affiliation with the AFL-CIO's state federations.

AFGE's leadership team was re-elected by the delegates. John N. Sturdivant received an overwhelming 92 percent of the vote to serve a fourth term as national president. Bobby L. Harnage was re-elected by acclamation to his third term as national secretary-treasurer and Kitty A. Peddicord was chosen by the delegates to begin her second term as women's director.



However, National President Sturdivant, after a year-long battle with leukemia, died at age 58, on Oct. 28, 1997. D.C. Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton, who spoke at the memorial service, said it best: "Working people have lost a champion before the fight is over. It was not a fair fight. John never lost those."

Hundreds of AFGE members and staff, Congressional lawmakers, cabinet secretaries, union leaders and agency officials packed the funeral service Nov. 4—fittingly also Election Day—to remember and honor AFGE's fallen leader. Vice President Al Gore, who also spoke at the service, said: "America does not produce men like John Sturdivant very often. That is why it is so important that we honor him and remember him."

Sturdivant would be remembered for his tenacious efforts in passing Hatch Act reform legislation, which gave government employees



many of the same political freedoms as other Americans, and for Congressional passage of the Federal Employees Pay Comparability Act which was intended to close the pay gap between the private and federal sectors.

Bobby L. Harnage, who was sworn in as AFGE national president following the memorial service and reception hosted by AFGE, emphasized in his eulogy that: “John Sturdivant will be remembered, with honor and distinction, as one of the greatest presidents to ever serve our union. He will forever shine as a bright star in the history of this union.”

At the union’s National Executive Council meeting in November, 2nd District National Vice President Rita R. Mason was elected to fill the position of national secretary-treasurer left vacant when Harnage took over the helm as AFGE president. As 1997 came to a close, the union mourned but was looking to the future with strength and determination.

Close to 60 years have passed since 42 men and women did the heavy lifting that created this union for government workers. The organization they crafted has successfully carried its members through tumultuous challenges. The men and women who now do the work of the federal government owe a debt of gratitude to the vision, energy, foresight and determination of those pioneers of government unionism. This book is but a partial tribute to their accomplishments.







## Milestones in Federal Worker Labor History

- 1936** Laws providing 26 days of annual leave and 13 days sick leave for federal workers.
- 1939** Hatch Act limited federal employees' political activities and campaigning.
- 1945** Federal Employees Pay Act increased classified salaries 15.9 percent and provided payment for overtime, night and holiday work.
- 1946** Classified salaries increased 14.2 percent.
- 1947** Taft-Hartley Act amended the Wagner Act and primarily addressed private sector collective bargaining. But the act also banned government employee strikes, under penalty of discharge, forfeiture of civil service status and three-year ban against re-hiring in government service.
- 1948** Salary increase for classified workers averaging 11 percent.
- 1956** Legislation overhauling retirement laws provided for optional retirement at age 55 with 30 years of service, reducing annuities 1.5 percent instead of former three percent per year reduction for retirees under age 60. Also increased employee contributions from 6 to 6.5 percent.
- 1959** Health Benefits Act authorized government to pay part of cost of health insurance plans, including one government-wide plan offering service or indemnity benefits, employee organization plans and group practice and individual practice types of comprehensive medical plans.
- 1962** Federal Salary Reform Act increased salaries and established a new principle of comparability between federal and private industry wages. Introduced an escalator cost-of-living method for raising annuities in future years.
- 1962** Executive Order 10988 established three levels of union recognition in federal service—informal, formal and exclusive, depending on the level of membership.
- 1972** Wage Grade Act set up a system of wage surveys based on prevailing private sector wages in a region defined by the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The Act gave federal workers representation in wage-setting decisions.
- 1972** Federal Pay Comparability Act gave federal white collar worker unions representation on bodies monitoring the data and decision-making used to set annual pay adjustments for comparability.
- 1974** Federal Employees' Compensation Act revised to better protect federal workers injured or made ill on the job.
- 1978** Civil Service Reform Act formalized many aspects of the Kennedy executive order into statute, set up the Federal Labor Relations Authority to resolve disputes and the Merit Systems Protection Board as a mechanism to protect whistleblowers.
- 1986** Legislation established the Federal Employees Retirement System (FERS) for employees entering government civil service in 1984 and after.
- 1986** President Reagan issued executive order requiring random drug testing of the federal workforce.
- 1991** President George Bush signed the Federal Employees Pay Comparability Act (FEPCA), establishing locality pay to gradually close the 30 percent pay gap between the federal and private sectors. President Bill Clinton subsequently rejected the bill's pay formula and refused to follow the mandates of FEPCA.
- 1991** Civil Rights Act guaranteed the right of a jury trial and compensatory damages to federal workers who fall victim to discrimination.
- 1993** President Clinton signed Executive Order 12871 expanding the scope of bargaining and establishing partnership councils.
- 1994** Hatch Act reform was enacted, providing federal workers many of the same rights to participate in partisan political activities as other Americans while maintaining certain protections against abuses of power.
- 1995** The terrorist bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City killed 168 people—including many AFGE members—and injured hundreds more.
- 1995** Two government lockouts forced hundreds of thousands of government employees to work without the assurance of pay and thousands of others to be furloughed, causing many government facilities to shut down and services to be drastically curtailed or eliminated.
- 1997** The newly negotiated agreement with Hughes Aircraft and AFGE prohibited contracting-out—a first for the union—and included a successorship clause to ensure union recognition by a new owner.



# AFGE

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