



*May 2019*

## Stewards Are Organizers: Picketing for a Fair Contract

Members of AFSCME Local 1110 and Local 3236 at Illinois State University have been working without a contract for over ten months. The locals are fighting for fair wages (some members are paid as little as \$11.00 per hour) and respect in the workplace.

The bargaining team, frustrated by the slow pace of negotiations, requested a meeting with ISU President Larry Dietz. He refused to meet, suggesting that the team “talk to HR.” That infuriated bargaining team members and the locals decided to conduct an informational picket. Bargaining team members, officers and stewards met to identify potential allies (student groups, faculty, other unions at the university). Stewards were given assignments to contact both AFSCME members and other organizations. The result was an informational picket involving over 100 members and supporters!

Local 3236 President Marsha Perry noted the crucial role of the stewards, working in conjunction with the bargaining team and local officers. “Stewards were all passing the word to get as many people to the demonstration as possible.” Local 1110 President Cody Key agreed: “The stewards made signs, posted flyers, and talked one-to-one with members and others at the university, including students. It was important to have that dialogue to explain our goals and turn people out.”

After the demonstration, the university scheduled two new bargaining sessions. Things are moving again...Stewards are organizers!

## Tips for Effective Stewards: Unwelcome Surprises

No matter how well you've prepared a case, there will come a time when the unexpected happens:

**The Grievant's Story Changes:** You're sitting in a grievance meeting with a grievant whose story you have reviewed countless times. But in the middle of the meeting the grievant tells another part of the story that you have never heard, and it changes the nature of the situation entirely. Try not to look surprised, but ask for a caucus. Use the caucus to figure out how this new piece of information fits into the case. You may have to concede the new information to management as a minor point, but argue that overall,

a legitimate grievance still exists. If you can't figure out a new strategy, ask for a postponement of the meeting. If the new information is too damaging, the union may have to drop the grievance. At a minimum, though, try to buy your side some time to regroup and consult with the chief steward or staff representative.

**New Evidence Pops Up:** Then there's the memo or letter that you did not know existed and management whips it out at the grievance meeting. If you made an information request from management and did not receive that particular item, that could be possible grounds for excluding the document from consideration. If you didn't request the item and it's something other than a correspondence to the grievant (e.g., a memo from one supervisor to another), then emphasize that management did not make the grievant or union aware of the issue. More problematic will be a disciplinary memo to the grievant; in that case focus on the unjustness of the discipline.

Minimize surprises by thorough preparation (including asking the grievant point-blank right before a meeting "Is there anything else I should know before we go into that room?"); requesting information from management; and keeping abreast of new policies and practices. *(Adapted and reprinted with permission from The Union Steward's Complete Guide, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. For further information, contact [www.unionist.com](http://www.unionist.com).)*

## **Steward Resources: *AFSCME International 24/7 Online Webinars***

The AFSCME International Education Department offers a wealth of free online training and education opportunities. Webinars are taped and are often of keen interest to stewards:

- Navigating the Five Steps of Grievance Handling
- The Duty of Fair Representation
- Weingarten Rights: What You Need to Know
- Seven Tests of Just Cause: What Are They and How do I Use Them?
- Discipline and Discharge Best Practices for Representing Workers
- The FMLA: How it Protects our Families and our Jobs
- It's Not Grievable, Now What?
- Building Power Organizing Around Workplace Issues

The webinars are available 24/7 at <https://www.afscme.org/webinar>

## **Going the Extra Mile: *Personal Support Program***

AFSCME stewards are in a unique position to become aware of and encourage troubled members to seek help for personal problems. We know that personal problems may be impacting not only individual and family functioning, but also job performance. As union leaders, stewards can often positively influence members to seek help when earlier attempts by others have failed. Due to your role in the workplace, you may often become aware of a member's personal problems long before they come to the attention

of management. As with any type of problem, early intervention with personal problems increases the likelihood of a successful outcome.

The Personal Support Program (PSP) is an employee assistance program provided to AFSCME-represented employees and their covered dependents, when negotiated into the agreement between AFSCME Council 31 and specific employers. All State of Illinois employees covered under the master agreement as well as City of Chicago and Cook County and some other local government employees have access to PSP. The PSP supports local union leadership by offering consultation regarding how to help a troubled member, and by providing free, professional, confidential counseling and referral services to those members (and/or their dependents) in need. Individuals seek assistance from PSP for a wide range of personal problems including stress, marital/family matters, alcohol and drugs, emotional difficulties, job problems and legal and financial concerns. PSP may be reached at (800) 647-8776.

### Terms You Should Know: *Group Grievance*

A group grievance can be a grievance alleging that a management action has hurt a group of individuals in the same way e.g., if an employer refuses to pay a contractual shift premium. Group grievances can also be a form of protest; a grievance signed by many people in a workplace protesting a management action demonstrates that members are united in their opposition.

### Test Your Knowledge: *AFSCME History and Structure*

- AFSCME International was founded in the year a) **1936** or b) **1966** by a group of state employees in the state of \_\_\_\_\_.
- Council 31 was founded in a) **1942** or b) **1977** and its headquarters is in \_\_\_\_\_. There are approximately a) **50** or b) **290** locals and a) **25,000** or b) **75,000** members in Council 31.
- The Illinois Public Labor Relations Act became effective in a) **1944** or b) **1984**.
- “Freedom of speech concerning the union’s operations”; “fair and democratic elections”; “full and clear accounting of union funds”; “full participation in the union’s decision-making processes.” These are all found in the \_\_\_\_\_ in the AFSCME Constitution.
- Council 31 represents employees in (circle all that apply) **state government, local government, school districts, universities, and private sector agencies performing public services**

*Answers are below*

## This Month in Labor History: American Federation of Teachers

The American Federation of Teachers was founded in Chicago on May 9, 1916, when eight local unions were granted a charter signed by AFL President Samuel Gompers. The original eight local unions were the Chicago Teachers Federation; the Chicago Federation of Men Teachers; the Chicago Federation of Women High School Teachers; the Gary, Ind., Teachers Federation; the Teachers Union of New York; the Oklahoma Teachers Federation; the Scranton, Pa. Teachers Association; and the High School Teachers Union of Washington, D.C. The AFT represents 1.7 million members today.

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### Answers to “AFSCME History and Structure”

- AFSCME International was founded in the year **1936** by a group of state employees in the state of **Wisconsin**.
- Council 31 was founded in **1977** and its headquarters is in **Springfield**. There are approximately **290** locals and **75,000** members in Council 31.
- The Illinois Public Labor Relations Act became effective in **1984**.
- “Freedom of speech concerning the union’s operations”; “fair and democratic elections”; “full and clear accounting of union funds”; “full participation in the union’s decision-making processes.” These are all found in the **Bill of Rights for Members** in the AFSCME Constitution.
- Council 31 represents employees in **state government, local government, school districts, universities, and private sector agencies performing public services** (*all of the above*)

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