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**“I’VE ALWAYS HAD A VOICE, NOW I WANT TO USE IT”: THE
WORKING WOMEN’S MOVEMENT AND CLERICAL UNIONISM IN
HIGHER EDUCATION**

by

AMANDA WALTER

DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Graduate School

of Wayne State University,

Detroit, Michigan

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

2019

MAJOR: HISTORY

Approved By:

Advisor

Date

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DEDICATION

For Grandma Millie

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INTRODUCTION

Nine to Five, the film starring Dolly Parton, Lily Tomlin, and Jane Fonda, was released in 1980. Based on Cleveland Working Women members' experiences, the film shows clerical workers training young executives who would become their boss, sexual harassment, and an impersonal office. Judy, played by Tomlin, declared "I have never seen anyone leapfrog so fast to the top in my life. And I have the bad back to prove it. I remember when he was just a management trainee . . . in fact, I'm the one who trained him." As these fictionalized women joined together to fight office inequities, the women they represented in offices across the country joined together to fight through working women's organizations and unions. As *Ms.* reported, "Now that the 20 million office workers are organizing, the promise of a more humane workplace for all of us is no fantasy."¹

This dissertation, "*I've Always Had a Voice, Now I Want to Use It*": *The Working Women's Movement and Clerical Unionism in Higher Education*, examines the intersection of the labor movement and the women's movement through the working lives and organizing efforts of clerical workers in higher education in the United States beginning in the 1970s. Through an examination of clerical organizing efforts among women in the United Automobile, Aerospace and Agricultural Implement Workers (UAW); District 925 of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU); the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME); District 65, Distributive Workers of America; and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), I contend that unions had to adopt new and diverse organizing styles to meet the new constituency of women clerical workers. Individual unions and the labor movement as a whole altered their practices from

¹ "Secretary as Hero!," *Ms.*, January 1981; *Nine to Five*, directed by Colin Higgins (1980; Los Angeles: Twentieth Century Fox).

the 1970s to the early 1990s. The women's movement had a tremendous impact on the labor movement's efforts in the clerical sector, including the style of organizing, what workplaces would serve as targets for new organizing campaigns, and what issues unions should prioritize in campaigns and contracts. Women found that their lack of collective bargaining power in the higher education workplace limited their effectiveness. Working women's organizations and clericals in higher education, dealing with university budgetary constraints, stagnant wages, and a reorganization of work, further sought to address their problems through unionism. As clericals reached out to unions, those unions, faced with increasing hostility, declining membership, and the devastating impact of deindustrialization, entered the largely unorganized clerical sector, to save themselves and the labor movement.

My dissertation links feminism and labor history in new and interesting ways, forging a path-breaking extension of our existing knowledge into little-known but critical areas. *"I've Always Had a Voice, Now I Want to Use It": The Working Women's Movement and Clerical Unionism in Higher Education* adds depth to the largely unknown history of the university workplace, the working women's movement, and union entry into clerical organizing, contributing to labor and gender scholarship in several ways. This study expands the discussion of clerical work beyond the pre-World War II era, where most of the literature on women clerical workers is concentrated.² Second, the work will show how cuts to public funding (beginning in the 1970s), stagnant wages, and deindustrialization affected universities and their clerical workers, who saw the changes reflected in the organization of work and inadequate compensation. Through the use

² Elyce Rotella, *From Home to Office: U.S. Women at Work, 1870-1930* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1981); Sharon Hartman Strom, *Beyond the Typewriter: Gender, Class, and the Origins of Modern American Office Work, 1900-1930* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992); Claudia Goldin, *Understanding the Gender Gap: An Economic History of American Women* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); Margery Davies, *A Woman's Place is at the Typewriter, 1870-1930* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982).

of newly-collected oral histories of clerical employees and organizers, my dissertation brings the voices of staff to the forefront. By analyzing the struggles of higher education in the late twentieth century, my work expands understanding of higher education today. Third, this research examines the tremendous impact the working women's movement had on the labor movement, including new organizing tactics and priorities. The importance of cultivating networks among working women and the greater activism of women in the labor movement today can be traced back to the period. Tens of thousands of women entered the labor movement in higher education, but the influx of new members has been largely ignored by labor historiography.

In the late 1960s and 1970s, women across the United States came to challenge their unequal place in society. Their role in the workforce was central to that effort. Women encountered discrimination not only in hiring but also in society, benefits, and promotions. An ever-increasing number of women were joining the workforce, where they encountered limited job opportunities and low wages. By 1980, more women over age sixteen worked than did not. Overall, 51.5 percent of women worked. Despite the average woman working an average of twenty-five years outside the home, employers regarded women workers as transient.³

Despite the public presence of the women's movement, women workers felt removed from feminist organizing. Some believed feminists were too radical. They seemed too focused on the issues of professional women and removed from working women's day-to-day concerns. This perception was not entirely accurate, as multiple women's movement and women's liberation newsletters discussed trade unionism and sex-segregation in the workplace. In 1969, Chicago's

³Nancy Barrett, "Women in the Job Market: Occupations, Earnings, and Career Opportunities," in *The Subtle Revolution: Women at Work*, ed. Ralph E. Smith (Washington D.C.: Urban Institute, 1979); Women's Bureau, Department of Labor, "Labor Force Participation Rate by Sex, Race and Hispanic Ethnicity, 1948-2016 Annual Averages," https://www.dol.gov/wb/stats/NEWSTATS/facts/women_lf.htm#one; Women's Bureau, Department of Labor, "Labor Force Participation Rate of Women by Age," https://www.dol.gov/wb/stats/NEWSTATS/facts/women_lf.htm#one.

National Organization for Women (NOW) chapter declared, “Every woman who has been pegged forever as an assistant, doing jobs for which men get the credit, STOP!”⁴ Feminists frequently spoke on equal pay for equal work. Young, often-college-educated women involved in women’s liberation offered a scathing critique of the subservient nature of women’s work, especially office work. The Seattle-based women’s liberation organization Women’s Majority Union reported on the same issues at NOW. It noted that most women were stuck in service, low-status, and low-paying jobs, making one-third of the average men’s wage.⁵ The feminist writings, for the most part, however, offered no practical advice to women in clerical jobs. A working women’s movement was needed to fill this gap.

Gender inequality played out in social relations across a range of social practices, including employment patterns. It has been used to categorize people and has led to prejudice and discrimination. Gender bias has resulted in the devaluing of women’s work, consigning women to the lowest-paid and least recognized positions. Women’s inequality in the workplace had more to do with the unequal distribution of power and resources than any other reason. The task for women’s advocates became how to redistribute and reclaim power.⁶

By the 1970s, women’s organizations identified unions as one significant force for social justice for women, but they did not and could not ignore unions’ conflicted history of forwarding women’s rights and, simultaneously, devaluing women’s contributions to labor organizing. As

⁴ Chicago Chapter of the National Organization for Women, *Act Now: Equality for Women in Truly Equal Partnership with Men*, April 16, 1969, Special Collections, Labadie Collection, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI; Chicago Chapter of the National Organization for Women, *Act Now: Equality for Women in Truly Equal Partnership with Men*, June 15, 1969, Special Collections, Labadie Collection, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI.

⁵ Women’s Majority Union, *Lilith*, Spring 1969, Special Collections, Labadie Collection, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI.

⁶ Gillian Creese, *Contracting Masculinity: Gender, Class, and Race in a White-Collar Union, 1944-1994* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Rosabeth Moss Kanter, *Men and Women of the Corporation* (New York: Basic Books, 1977).

NOW stated, “Although labor unions historically have been the most powerful force in upgrading the social position of workers, they have not yet consistently mobilized to defend women.”⁷

Women’s place in the labor movement was reflected in membership numbers. In 1982, while women made up 42 percent of the workforce, only 11 percent of women belonged to a trade union, significantly lower than the 29 percent of men workers who were union members.⁸

Since the 1930s, the most common form of women’s paid employment was clerical work. In the years after World War II, women workers gravitated toward a broad range of clerical occupations. These jobs were considered “appropriate” for women and, yet, of higher status than many of the other available occupations. Thirty-five percent of all American working women were employed in clerical positions, pink-collar jobs. Pink-collar jobs, those traditionally considered women’s work, include clerical work, nursing, childcare, and domestic work. Clerical work, one of the largest categories, encompassed a range of jobs including bookkeepers, bank tellers, secretaries, file clerks, stenographers, and data-entry operators. Clerical positions can be broken down further into two categories: low-level and high-level positions. Low-level positions were more common and required only a small number of routine tasks. High-level positions included a wider variety of tasks and more opportunities for decision making. In 1982, eighty percent of clerical workers were women, including 99.3 percent of secretaries.⁹ In 1979, 17 million women

⁷ National Organization for Women, “Labor Union Task Force Report,” *Do It NOW: Monthly Action Newsletter of the National Organization for Women*, July/August 1975, Special Collections, Labadie Collection, University of Michigan Library.

⁸ Janet Ridgeway and Larry Adelman, *Women’s Worth: Valuing Our Own Worth—Realizing Our Own Value: A Resource Manual for the Award Winning Film The Willmar* 8, 1982, p. 40, California Newsreel. <http://newsreel.org/guides/the-willmar-8.pdf>.

⁹ Kim Moody, *An Injury to All: The Decline of American Unionism* (New York: Verso, 1988), 278; Elyce Rotella, *From Home to Office: U.S. Women at Work, 1870-1930* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1981); Sharon Hartman Strom, *Beyond the Typewriter: Gender, Class, and the Origins of Modern American Office Work, 1900-1930* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992); Claudia Goldin, *Understanding the Gender Gap: An Economic History of American Women* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); Davies, *A Woman’s Place is at the Typewriter*.

were clerical workers, more than in any other women's occupation and more than all the steelworkers, autoworkers, and electrical workers combined.¹⁰

Not all clerical workers were women. In 1974, the *Chicago Tribune* reported on Richard Grzyb, the first male secretary at Alcoa. He returned from the Vietnam War with clerical skills and limited options. While he found a good-paying clerical job with benefits, Grzyb experienced discrimination, as employers expressed reluctance to employ a male secretary. Men in clerical work, who tended to be in higher-status clerical positions, shared women's concerns with pay and working conditions, but women encountered lack of pay equity in the workforce, generally, as well as sexual harassment and the difficulty of balancing their work and home lives.¹¹

Most of the scholarship on clerical work has focused on its shift to a women's occupation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.¹² The growth and conditions of clerical work in the postwar period are the subject of only three monographs from the 1970s. Written from a feminist perspective, Mary Kathleen Benét's *The Secretarial Ghetto* gives a history of changing clerical work. In targeting the sex segregation of clerical work and its conditions, the author's consciousness-raising approach both invoked the women's movement and sought to spur clerical workers to act. Jean Tepperman wrote two of the books on postwar clerical workers—*Sixty Words a Minute and What Do You Get?* and *Not Servants, Not Machines*. *Not Servants, Not Machines* drew on a large number of interviews with contemporary women in clerical work. It discussed common problems in the workplace and the myths that kept women stuck in adverse conditions and poorly paid employment. The perceived prestige of their boss or workplace or feelings of

¹⁰ Ridgeway and Adelman, *Women's Worth*, 6-7.

¹¹ "Speaking of Stereotypes, 'Take a Letter, Richard,'" *Chicago Tribune*, April 28, 1974.

¹² Margery Davies, *A Woman's Place Is at the Typewriter, 1870-1930* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982); Brian Luskey, *On the Make: Clerks and the Quest for Capital in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: New York University Press, 2010); Jessica Ziparo, *This Grand Experiment: When Women Entered the Federal Workforce in Civil War-Era Washington, D.C.* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017).

loyalty to their employer provided barriers to standing up for their rights. Tepperman, like Benét, sought to inform readers of the history of clerical work, while pushing for activism to rectify the contemporary issues facing women clerical workers.¹³

Several works discuss women in the workplace and the post-1960s labor movement, but they pay surprisingly little attention to clerical work, despite it being one of the major sectors in which women are employed. Dorothy Sue Cobble's *The Other Women's Movement*, a study of labor feminism since the 1940s, only briefly discusses clerical work. However, white-collar unionizing has not been ignored entirely. Carl Dean Snyder's *White-Collar Workers and the UAW* provides valuable information on the UAW's Technical, Office and Professional (TOP) department, but it was published in 1973, before the start of most UAW higher education clerical campaigns. Lane Windham discusses 9to5, the working women's organization, and SEIU District 925 in *Knocking on Labor's Door*, but she does not examine the multitude of unions that started to see clerical unionizing as an opportunity to gain members around the same time, nor does she examine higher education. Along with examining the higher education workplace, I aim to show how the labor movement has been shaped by clerical workers, changes that are seen in labor union practices today. Other scholars have not adequately explored this subject.¹⁴

At a time when the women's movement was ascending, it remained focused on primarily legal challenges to discrimination and public policy. Influenced by women's liberation and informed by labor practices, numerous women began to see the need to organize women clericals to better their working conditions. In the 1970s, new organizations emerged to bridge the gap

¹³ Mary Kathleen Benét, *The Secretarial Ghetto* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1972); Jean Tepperman, *Not Servants, Not Machines; Office Workers Speak Out!* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1976); Jean Tepperman, *Sixty Words a Minute, and What Do You Get? Clerical Workers Today* (Somerville, MA: New England Free Press, 1972).

¹⁴ Carl Dean Snyder, *White-Collar Workers and the UAW* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1973); Dorothy Sue Cobble, *The Other Women's Movement: Workplace Justice and Social Rights in Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); Lane Windham, *Knocking on Labor's Door: Union Organizing in the 1970s and the Roots of a New Economic Divide* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017).

between the women's movement and the labor movement, utilizing and expanding existing labor feminism. These groups focused predominantly on wages and working conditions, but they also paid attention to the gender-specific needs of women workers, such as the need for childcare and the double burden of women's household responsibilities. The working women's movement focused on women's workplace issues, while also seeking to improve clerical work for all. Working women's organizations took on one of the great bastions of women's unequal employment, clerical work. However, it took a change in economic and political circumstances for women to organize and for the labor movement to support their organization and fight against sex discrimination.

Before 1975, many unions were only receptive to clerical unionization only if large numbers of unorganized workers showed interest, as adding a large unit would bring increased dues and strengthen the union's power overall. Before the mid-1970s, organizing among office workers occurred primarily in public employment and in workplaces with current union representation for some portion of the workforce. Otherwise, clericals who wanted to organize were routinely ignored. By the mid-1970s, the women's movement and working women's organizations, on the one hand, and the general labor movement, on the other, shared a willingness to work together in a strategic alliance to address the concerns of working women and to expand union membership and participation. The women's movement changed ideas about what was appropriate for women and empowered them to stand up for themselves. Unions, experiencing increasingly adverse labor laws and job loss in highly unionized sectors, needed more members to sustain power. Certain leaders in the labor movement reexamined union priorities and began to focus on sectors of the labor force that had not yet unionized, many of which included a high percentage of women workers. Some leaders also realized that unions could not attract women

members without encouraging women's leadership and addressing women's issues. As the labor movement became more amenable to women's interests, unions focused on a host of women's concerns. Unions slowly realized that women were a growing part of the labor force and that women-dominated sectors were rapidly expanding. According to Karen Nussbaum, many men union members, for the first time, embraced the issue of pay equity, as "male union members have quickly grasped the old axiom, 'less wages for one, less wages for all.'" During labor organizing, the specific needs of women had not always been at the forefront of union agendas; but by the late 1970s, that began to change.¹⁵

By the early 1980s, faced with the Reagan administration's hostility to unions, union organizing, and strikes, declining union membership, and the devastating impact of deindustrialization, unions began looking with greater urgency for solutions to how to save the labor movement. As unions saw the need to look toward unorganized sectors to expand membership, women workers became the prime target. In a 1982 interview, 9to5 founder Karen Nussbaum summarized labor's opportunities. She said, "For those who listen intently, there is beneath the muffled drumbeat that distant sound of trampling feet, a sound reminiscent of the 1930s and 1940s when labor gained many of its greatest organizing victories." Forty-five million women worked in low-wage, sex-segregated, dead-end jobs. Nussbaum believed that the labor movement was at the threshold of a new period of union growth. The growing number of women union members would help redefine and renew the labor movement itself.¹⁶

Significant barriers existed to organizing clerical workers, including fears their jobs would be made more difficult by angry supervisors, beliefs that joining a union was disloyal, and

¹⁵ Karen Nussbaum, "Can Women Save the Labor Movement?," *Los Angeles Herald*, September 1982, box 14, folder 81, SEIU District 925 Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University Library.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

persistent stereotypes of unions as not appropriate for women clerical workers. Historically, clerical workers had developed close relationships with their bosses. Secretaries often fulfilled the role of “office wife” or “office mother.” They were expected to perform personal services, including housework, and exhibit loyalty.¹⁷

Many women workers took years to see unions as a viable option. Often, only after building a relationship with organizers or encountering extreme injustices in the workplace, did working women respond. Barbara Rahke, Boston University employee organizer and Cornell University organizer, gave one example during her time organizing at Boston University:

In my building, there was a woman who was the only secretary in that office...I was constantly talking to her about the union...She'd challenge me, like what is in this for me, are you getting something personally out of this, are you being paid to talk this way. One day, I went into the bathroom, and she was washing dishes at the sink and sobbing...She explained to me that it was her birthday, and the faculty, after she cooked them all lunch, had given her her birthday present. It was a new wastebasket for the office...The next day, she signed a union card. The process that people went through to decide that they had value and that they would stand up for the value was a complicated process.¹⁸

Lack of job postings for promotions, low wages, lack of respect, age discrimination, and automation all pushed clerical workers closer to unionism. In addition, the introduction of new technology placed greater demands on workers, who were now expected to produce more in less time. The dominant belief that clericals were unorganizable came to be challenged. According to Kim Moody, the most organizable among unorganized workers are those found in lower-paid positions and who see their job as a dead end.¹⁹ Women workers did not see employment as a temporary period in their lives. They were invested in long-term employment that allowed them to have their own resources.

¹⁷ Nikil Saval, *Cubed: A Secret History of the Workplace* (New York: Doubleday, 2014), 89.

¹⁸ Barbara Rahke, interview by Amanda Walter, November 29, 2016. [Please provide brief identifying information for Rahke, the place of interview, and, if a transcript or recording is available, where to find it.]

¹⁹ Moody, *An Injury to All*, 211.

Significant success in clerical unionization occurred in higher education during the 1970s through the early 1990s. Dealing with budgetary constraints, universities paid low wages and pursued vigorous automation by the 1970s. Higher education institutions, moreover, could not pick up and move like private businesses. United Steelworkers founded the first known higher education clerical unit in 1946 at a Scranton, Pennsylvania, junior college and correspondence school, the Center for Degree Studies. This was just the first sign of a trend of clerical organizing in higher education that would bring thousands of workers into the labor movement in subsequent decades.²⁰

A strong local reputation for a specific union consistently proved more important than any image or stereotype associated with the national union. United Steelworkers may seem an unusual union for clerical workers, but the Center for Degree Studies understood its strength in Pennsylvania. Embracing clerical workers within industrial unions became one way university clericals organized in the 1970s and 1980s.

While teacher and government employees were largely unionized by the 1970s, clerical workers in higher education experienced significant gains in unionization by the end of the decade and into the 1980s and early 1990s. Since 1971, 70 percent of campus clerical organizing drives ended in union certification. That high win rate resulted in union representation for 40 percent of the clerical workforce at public universities and 25 percent at private universities. By 1993, nearly 150,000 clerical workers in higher education were covered by a collective bargaining agreement.²¹

²⁰ Richard W. Hurd, "New Directions in Collective Bargaining: The Unionization of Clerical Workers and Colleges and Universities: A Status Report," in *Power Relationships on the Unionized Campus, Proceedings, Seventeenth Annual Conference, April 1989*, ed. Joel M. Douglas (New York: National Center for the Study of Collective Bargaining in Higher Education and the Professions, 1989), 40-49.

²¹ Dorothy Sue Cobble, *The Other Women's Movement: Workplace Justice and Social Rights in Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 222; Richard W. Hurd and Elizabeth O'Leary, "A Preliminary Report on Non-Faculty Bargaining at Colleges and Universities – 1993," *Newsletter of the National Center for the Study of Collective Bargaining in Higher Education and the Professions* 20, no.4 (November/December 1992): 1-8.

Inquiries from dissatisfied clerical workers initiated most organizing campaigns in higher education. Other unions on campus, particularly faculty unions, had a significant positive influence on clerical organizing success. Unlike other private sector employees, clerical workers did not demonstrate less support for unions as a result of representation election delays. The slow, relationship-based organizing often used in clerical campaigns built strong commitment.²²

The dissertation starts by tracing the emergence of the working women's movement in the early 1970s and examining how it raised interest in unionization among women workers. Working women, who felt that the women's movement was too oriented toward middle-class issues, came to form their own organizations, such as 9to5, which dealt with both workplace issues and home issues. Working women's organizations struggled with diversity and had to alter structures to attract older women and minority women. Chapter 2 examines who constituted the clerical workforce in higher education, mostly well-educated women who would take less pay for the perceived prestige of working at a university. The chapter investigates the changing university workplace from the 1970s onward. Chapter 3 moves to District 65 Distributive Workers of America, focusing on the campaigns at Boston University and New York University. The chapter examines the increased use of management consultants to fight unionization in private universities. District 65, a union known for wall-to-wall organizing of poor workers, entered clerical higher education organizing earlier than many other unions. Chapter 4 examines the UAW's entrance into clerical higher education unionization, a result of a decline in their traditional jurisdiction and the advocacy of small independent locals in Michigan. The UAW's strength in the state made the Michigan campaign efforts relatively easy, something that could not be said when the organization attempted to unionize Cornell University clerical workers. Chapter 5 focuses on SEIU District 925,

²² Hurd, "New Directions in Collective Bargaining," 40-44.

a local growing directly out of the working women's movement. While working alongside their sister organization 9to5, SEIU District 925 employed relationship-based organizing and consciousness-raising techniques drawn from the larger women's movement. The women-led District 925 created a sense of community that helped contribute to its successes. Chapter 6 looks at AFSCME, the union representing more university office workers than any other nationally, arguing that it drew on its experience in the public sector, its large complement of women members, and its advocacy for issues of importance to clerical workers to gain support. They adopted a similar organizing style as the SEIU in response to the success of relationship-based organizing. AFSCME made it their own by disposing of literature in the campaigns at Harvard University and the University of Minnesota. The conclusion surveys the developments in universities and colleges, including the continued public funding cuts to higher education institutions and how unions continue to actively organize in these workplaces. Ultimately, my dissertation tells the stories of men and women who stood up to better their lives at a time when unions saw clerical workers as an organizing target and were willing to alter their practices to bring these workers into the labor movement.

CHAPTER 1: WORKING WOMEN AND FEMINIST ORGANIZING

While working as a clerk-typist at Harvard University in 1970, Karen Nussbaum, then twenty years old, was surrounded by doctoral students and faculty at one of the world's most prestigious research universities. A passing professor popped into her office one day and asked, "Why aren't you smiling?" Nussbaum had an on-the-job education in some of the difficulties facing clerical women while working at Harvard. Along with the need for cheeriness, lack of respect and opportunities for advancement, inadequate salaries, and the pressure to conform to the ideal of a happy office wife, limited horizons and shortened resources dogged women in the university's clerical workforce. Nussbaum, remembering the smiling incident, wanted to rectify these issues.²³ Along with other Harvard clericals, Nussbaum formed the organization 9to5 to fight for clerical workers' rights.

On December 12, 1973, the *New York Times* ran the article "Something New in the Women's Movement." In it, Margie Albert contended that the women's movement altered women's understanding of themselves and their relationship to the world, giving women a new awareness of inequities in society and the workplace. Women's liberation reached a threshold where feminist consciousness expanded beyond white middle-class concerns to the needs of Latino and African American women and women workers, especially those in clerical work. Women office workers in the United States numbered approximately 11 million in 1973. Suddenly, women office workers, once thought immune to ideas of feminism, were demanding respect in the workplace and improvements in their working conditions. Margie Albert further stated that the labor movement projected that the next group to organize would be office workers. Their organizing

²³ Karen Nussbaum, "Isn't Anybody Here? How the 925 Movement is Winning Recognition, Rights & Respect for College and University Office Workers!," undated, box 1, folder 66, Miscellaneous Subject Files, Special Collections and Archives, Kent State University, Kent, OH.

potential had not been tapped, due to both employer and employee resistance and the lack of a concentrated union effort. Albert, a former secretary and steward with District 65, predicted significant changes for women office workers, trends that would increase over the decade.²⁴

By the early 1970s, women office workers in the United States started to create working women associations, which began to address their workplace concerns. The working women's movement, which included women from a range of occupations, emerged in independent local organizations such as 9to5 in Boston, Women Office Workers in New York City, Women Employed in Chicago, and Union W.A.G.E and Women Organized for Employment in San Francisco. Their efforts expressed the renewed expectation that women workers were entitled to certain fundamental rights, such as respect on the job and equal pay. All the working women's organizations engaged in activities made possible by consciousness-raising groups and women's liberation, but they were closely aligned with NOW and other women's rights organizations through their forwarding of economic and political rights. Working women's organizations, however, focused on the needs of women in their current jobs, rather than trying to gain women access to untraditional employment or supervisory positions.²⁵

Class structures gender inequality, as working women's organizations were acutely aware. The organizations, expanding labor feminism, had to move beyond the more limited goals of middle-class feminists who sought equality with male professionals. Labor feminists fought to improve working environments for all wage-earning women, organize unorganized women, and carve out a place in the labor movement for women. They worked to dissolve the sexual division of labor that kept women trapped in low-paying positions, and to improve conditions for women in the jobs they already held. Flight attendants, domestic workers, and clerical workers were all

²⁴ Margie Albert, "Something New in the Women's Movement," *New York Times*, December 12, 1973.

²⁵ Windham, *Knocking on Labor's Door*, 152–77.

were part of the expanded labor feminist goals of the 1960s into the 1980s—a time of increased interaction between feminists and unions.²⁶

Utilizing and expanding labor feminism, the new working women's organizations bridged the gap between the women's movement and the labor movement. They fought for better wages and working conditions, without ignoring the gender-specific needs of women workers, such as the double burden of work and household responsibilities.²⁷ This chapter explains how the working women's movement began to support unionism and to reach out to minority women, who felt that the mainstream women's movement was based too heavily in the middle class and ignored their needs as minorities. Working women leaders attempted to create racially diverse organizations and to speak to the needs of minority women, combining their efforts with those of other civil rights groups to fight wage discrimination and job segregation and to prevent the weakening of federal equal employment laws. In alliance with other social movement activists, working women recast the landscape of women's activism, addressing the pressing issues of race and sex discrimination and the needs of women in traditionally women's occupations. The solutions they enacted ultimately led to increased women's awareness and interest in unions as a way to achieve and maintain concrete gains.

²⁶ Cobble, *The Other Women's Movement*.

²⁷ Helen Williams, interview by Ann Froines, September 12, 2006, SEIU District 925 Legacy Project: Oral History, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI; Gloria Steinem, interview by Stacey Heath, October 2, 2006, SEIU District 925 Legacy Project: Oral History, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI; Janet Selcer, interview by Ann Froines, February 1, 2005, SEIU District 925 Legacy Project: Oral History, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI; Ruth Milkman, "Women Workers, Feminism and the Labor Movement from the 1960s," in *Women, Work and Protest: A Century of U.S. Women's Labor History*, ed. Ruth Milkman (Boston: Routledge, 1985), 300–22.

Women in the Workforce

The 1970s was a decade of enormous growth in women's labor force participation. Women continued to experience low pay, limited opportunities for upward mobility, poor working conditions, and occupational segregation in lower-paid, women-dominated sectors of the economy. Despite the increasing number of women working, their needs were not being met. Women's economic inequality was particularly acute, as women earned a fraction of men's wages. They often worked in temporary and low-skilled sectors of the economy. At the same time, households headed by women continued growing, making up 9.35 percent of homes in 1950 and rising to 16.2 percent by 1985. By the early to mid-1970s, these issues, raised by both women workers and the new women's movement, were increasingly visible in public and political life.²⁸

The typical woman worker in the 1970s and 1980s was a clerical employee. One in three women held clerical jobs in 1979. Women made up 80 percent of workers in clerical occupations, including 91.1 percent of bank tellers in 1976 and 99.1 percent of secretaries in 1980.²⁹ Only the private household workforce, including maids, nannies, and home care attendants, had a higher percentage of women. Nearly 96 percent of the workers in private household service were women. Although men held the minority of clerical jobs, they usually worked in higher-status positions, received higher salaries, and trod a more accessible path to promotions. Pay inequality with men, while notable, was only part of the issue. Due to the sex-segregated labor force, women erroneously continued to be seen as temporary workers or secondary wage earners. The women-dominated clerical workforce earned wages insufficient to support a family.³⁰

²⁸ Elyce Rotella, *From Home to Office: U.S. Women at Work, 1870–1930* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1981), 106.

²⁹ Nancy MacLean, "The Hidden History of Affirmative Action: Working Women's Organizations in Workplace Struggles in the 1970s and the Gender of Class," *Feminist Studies* 25, no. 1 (1999), 55.

³⁰ Rotella, *From Home to Office*, 106; Moody, *An Injury to All*, 278.

Unlike household work, office work had not always been a women's job. During the first two-thirds of the nineteenth century, clerks were predominantly young men. They received better pay than workers in manufacturing, and they had opportunities for job advancement. They learned the business before becoming managers or owners in their own right. However, many would never achieve high status, due to economic conditions and the small number of positions available. With the industrial revolution, the clerical labor force expanded, as did the needs for record keeping and communications. Women got a foot in the door during the Civil War, due to wartime labor shortages; but the typewriter, invented in the early 1870s, paved the way for clerical work to become a female domain. Typewriters, as new technology, were sex-neutral, and, thus, available as a work implement for women. A clerical position for women paid better than most other available jobs, making the positions coveted by the working class as relatively high-status jobs. As the work became routinized and mechanical, the profession became feminized, and the chances for occupational advancement were significantly lowered. Clerical work no longer was considered a skilled job. It became seen as a low-skilled job where workers could easily be replaced.³¹

By the postwar years, women overwhelmingly occupied clerical positions. Women geared work expectations to such positions, despite higher levels of education, on average, than men. The working conditions of secretaries, moreover, were far from ideal. Inaccurate job descriptions, duties that had nothing to do with the job, such as having to run personal errands, and lack of a voice in workplace decisions characterized most clerical work. Many women clerical workers, after years of education, expressed disappointment in their jobs, stating, "The eight by ten box is

³¹ Margery Davies, *A Woman's Place Is at the Typewriter, 1870–1930* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982); Brian Luskey, *On the Make: Clerks and the Quest for Capital in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: New York University Press, 2010); Jessica Ziparo, *This Grand Experiment: When Women Entered the Federal Workforce in Civil War–Era Washington, D.C.* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017).

your reward for passing exams, doing what you were told, and trying hard to please.”³² Ellen Cassedy, a Harvard clerical worker and co-founder of 9to5, recounted having to perform tasks that her boss could do but would not, deeming them too insignificant and menial. She noted that she even experienced her boss placing a reminder on her desk to remove the calendar from his wall, a task that would have taken the same time as writing the note. As Mary Kathleen Benét wrote in her 1972 book *The Secretarial Ghetto*, clerical jobs were becoming increasingly factory-like, with less flexibility in work routines, a faster pace, and a heavier workload. Many general secretaries and clerks worked in secretarial pools, which gave them less autonomy and greater supervision.³³

Some women likened their work to domestic slavery transferred to the office. While employers selected managers for the masculine-typed qualities of aggressiveness, toughness, and practicality, they selected women for secretarial jobs based on their ability to fill the ideal of an office wife, mother, mistress, or maid. Cooperation and compliance were seen as desirable “feminine” qualities for clerical work. Male employers sought either elegant secretaries as status symbols or motherly secretaries who coddled and took care of the boss. Many women were socialized to allow their supervisors to treat them poorly, as the relationship between the boss and secretary had the potential to create or reinforce low self-esteem.³⁴

Several common office myths eroded the public status of women clerical workers, lowered morale, and undermined arguments for improved conditions. These myths included that the job was not significant and did not deserve better pay and that management took good care of its white-collar workers. In the wake of the women’s movement and growing feminism, these myths came

³² Mary Kathleen Benét, *The Secretarial Ghetto* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1972), 61.

³³ Karen Nussbaum, “Isn’t Anybody Here?: How the 925 Movement is Winning Recognition, Rights & Respect for College and University Office Workers!,” undated, box 1, folder 66, Miscellaneous Subject Files, Special Collections and Archives, Kent State University, Kent, OH; Benét, *The Secretarial Ghetto*, 1–10.

³⁴ Benét, *The Secretarial Ghetto*, 1–170.

to be questioned, as women sought to change their roles. Better pay and improved benefits were part of the answer. Many issues were not within the scope of traditional union grievance procedures, even when clerical workers had access to unions. Secretaries often responded that they liked their job, as they made the best of their niche, despite its problems; but others simply thought clerical work was better than other job opportunities open to women.³⁵

For most of the twentieth century, many women in the workforce did not appear to question the system in which they worked, nor did they perceive the larger pattern of gender discrimination. Younger women often did not have enough life experience to know that working women would not get a fair deal by simply working hard.³⁶ As Benét argued in her study of the secretarial workforce, “The secretaries seem to Women’s Liberationists incredibly unaware of their own interests, but they do stand to make some gains from their social conservatism.” Many in the clerical workforce in 1972 had little contact with the labor movement, nor did they initially connect with the emerging women’s movement and its questioning of their work life. That was beginning to change in the early 1970s. Women realized they had to become powerful enough to change their status and compel their employers to listen to and meet their demands. Career secretaries had formed the National Secretaries Association (NSA) in 1949, but the organization supported traditional office organization and the customary image and status of women in clerical work, even as it noted the importance of secretaries in the workplace. The NSA emphasized loyalty, fidelity, and duty, keeping the feminist movement at arm’s length until automation in the mid-1980s. While feminist organizations tried to publicize women’s shared disadvantages resulting from sexism, the NSA sought to protect gendered privileges and the “value of their feminized skills.” The

³⁵Ibid., 1–170, esp. 61.

³⁶ John Hoerr, *“We Can’t Eat Prestige”*: *The Women Who Organized Harvard* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997), 11.

organization also left out clerical workers who did not work in the more elite secretary positions. By contrast, while working women's organizations extended their activism to all clerical workers, the NSA provided a community for women secretaries. Changing the work lives of clerical workers had to wait for a different organization.³⁷

Women's Activism in Labor Unions

Until the 1970s, most unions had ignored industries with a predominantly female workforce or abandoned their attempts to organize in the service and clerical sectors. Based on persistent stereotypes, unions, almost exclusively male-led, believed that the women in pink-collar jobs were not interested in or capable of organizing and leading their own unions. Women were still viewed as temporary workers who would soon leave the workplace to raise families. None of the working women's organizations, including the multiple-occupation, nationally based Coalition of Labor Union Women, spoke for the working women's movement as a whole, nor did they come together in a nationally visible way as a larger labor women's movement.³⁸ While pursuing unionism was years away for many clericals, the early working women's organizations educated women on ways to organize themselves within a workplace and showed the value of collective action, making the labor movement increasingly appealing.³⁹

Due to a labor movement seen as unresponsive to women workers' needs and because of the lack of women's leadership, union women decided they needed an organizing advocate within the labor movement. Established in 1974, the Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW) hosted

³⁷ Benét, *Secretarial Ghetto*, 93; Hoerr, "We Can't Eat Prestige," 11; Kathleen Turk, "Labor's Pink Collar Aristocracy: The National Secretaries Association's Encounters with Feminism in the Age of Automation," *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas* 11, no. 2 (Summer 2014):105.

³⁸ Moody, *An Injury to All*, 274.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 271–78.

its founding conference of 3,200 trade union women. Their statement of purpose declared, “It is imperative that within the framework of the union movement, we take aggressive steps to more effectively address ourselves to the critical needs of 30 million unorganized sisters and to make our unions more responsive to the needs of all women...”⁴⁰ The CLUW aimed to organize the unorganized, increase women’s participation in their unions, promote affirmative action, and increase women’s participation in political and legislative activities.⁴¹ Requiring union membership to become a member, the CLUW did not challenge the basic structure or character of the labor movement. Sparse resources limited the CLUW’s ability to work toward the goal of organizing the unorganized. They raised awareness of sex discrimination in unions and pushed men leaders to think of reform, but they achieved only limited progress. The CLUW thus provided an organization to make unions more hospitable to women, but ultimately it was distinct from the majority of working women’s organizations that sought to change the nature of discrimination in the workplace from outside organized labor. At the same time, working women’s organizations took on one of the great bastions of women’s unequal employment—clerical work. Women clerical workers eventually found a home in 9to5, the largest working women’s organization, and Working Women, the umbrella organization of multiple working women’s groups. It took a change in economic and political circumstances to create reasons for women to organize and for the labor movement to support their organization.⁴²

⁴⁰ Hoerr, “*We Can’t Eat Prestige*,” 111.

⁴¹ Milkman, “Women Workers,” 300–22.

⁴² Moody, *An Injury to All*, 274.

The Origins and Growth of 9to5

The impetus for 9to5 came in 1972, with the Harvard Office Workers Group, which met every Wednesday at noon. The ten to twelve attendees organized a protest of Richard M. Nixon's wage freezes, which limited pay raises to five percent. They petitioned around campus, and hundreds of office staff signed up. They requested a meeting with the head of personnel, who said he would get back to them. He never did. 9to5: Organization for Women Office Workers grew out of the Harvard Office Workers Group and the newsletter *9to5 News*, first published in Boston in December 1972. *9to5 News* was a bi-monthly publication with an eventual distribution throughout Boston of about six thousand. The organization and its newsletter aimed to help improve the lives and working conditions of clerical workers by organizing women in workplaces, facilitating consciousness raising, and conducting public protests, prompting unionizing when possible. They chose to use "office workers" in their name, rather than secretaries or clerical workers, to make it the most inclusive without being too broad or hard to identify with.⁴³

Ellen Cassedy, Karen Nussbaum, and Joan Tighe, clerical workers in their early twenties, prepared the proposal for an independent women office workers organization, 9to5. At a September 12, 1973, meeting at Tighe's house, the women discussed the proposal which cited positive responses to the newsletter and the desire to become an action organization rather than an organization attempting to raise consciousness through literature. The founders hoped to make the labor movement more democratic and jumpstart an independent women's movement to help represent women's interest inside and outside the labor movement. It was founded explicitly as a women's organization, not one for office workers of both sexes. Its constitutional documents state that 9to5 was "trying to direct women's consciousness into an organizational force" and attract on

⁴³ Dorothy Sue Cobble and Alice Kessler-Harris, "Karen Nussbaum," in *Talking Leadership: Conversations with Powerful Women*, ed. Mary S. Hartman (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1999), 135–56.

the basis of women's consciousness, which then had no outlet in downtown Boston. An important part of 9to5 activities included women rethinking their jobs and rights and realizing they were not alone. They sought to make women aware of problems and have them think about how to do something about their concerns.⁴⁴

The first public mention of what would become the most famous working women's organization came in the November 22, 1973, *Boston Globe* article "Hub Women Office Workers Unite for Higher Pay." The article reported on their first public meeting, which had 150 attendees. The reporter noted the organization's formal structure, including its established committees on insurance, publishing, universities, temporaries, planning, and media.⁴⁵ By 1980, *Business Week* covered the organization in the article "Rebellion behind the Typewriter." It reported that office workers were no longer decorously quiet, with organizations like 9to5 blending "political activism with white-collar gentility." Such groups were a bridge to organized labor. Other journal reports expressed fear the organization was too radical, even as 9to5 attempted to foster a non-political, nonviolent image.⁴⁶

9to5 had strong influences from the New Left and the women's movement, but tactically the organization avoided talking about controversial issues such as the Vietnam War and some of the more radical aspects of the women's movement. It sought to appeal to the largest number of workers possible. Early issues of *9to5: Newsletter to Boston Area Office Workers* discussed the Vietnam War and the United Farm Workers, but negative reader response pushed the group to focus their energy and attention on the problems faced by clerical workers. According to Helen

⁴⁴ "The Future of 9 to 5: A Proposal for an Independent Women Office Workers' Organization," 1973, box 1, folder 19, 9 to 5, National Association of Working Women, Additional records, 1972–1985; 82-M189—86-M213, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

⁴⁵ "Hub Women Office Workers Unite for Higher Pay," *Boston Globe*, November 22, 1973.

⁴⁶ "Rebellion behind the Typewriter," *Business Week*, April 28, 1980.

Williams, a 9to5 activist from Cleveland, the organization intentionally distinguished itself from the women's liberation movement, as media representations of bra-burner, anti-male feminists alienated some women.

At the same time, the clerical organization may have attracted more women into the women's movement. 9to5 raised women's awareness of their unfair treatment, not only in the workplace but in politics and in the home. Its leaders attempted to reach clerical workers across racial and class barriers. With this agenda, 9to5 was part of the women's movement as Gloria Steinem defined it: "[t]he idea of women organizing together as women across boundaries." Some working women who felt that the women's movement was too middle-class oriented came to support 9to5. It dealt with women's immediate needs in its own form of labor feminism, addressing both workplace and home issues.⁴⁷ As Nussbaum explains, women in the office often rejected participation in women's organizations. They did not identify with the women's movement, particularly with the media's image of women's liberation, but they were questioning their own working conditions. Judith McCollough, an office worker who became part of the 9to5 staff, recalled that while she was interested in the women's movement, she found it intimidating. McCollough remembered that although she "identified with the idea that women should do . . . all the things that they wanted to do . . . The National Organization for Women . . . just didn't seem to connect with [her]."⁴⁸ Issues such as individual empowerment, abortion, and women's lack of professional advancement were seen as not working-class focused and removed from the day-to-

⁴⁷ Helen Williams, interview by Ann Froines, September 12, 2006, SEIU District 925 Legacy Project: Oral History, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI; Gloria Steinem, interview by Stacie Heath, October 2, 2006, SEIU District 925 Legacy Project: Oral History, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

⁴⁸ Windham, *Knocking on Labor's Door*, 154.

day work lives of clerical women.⁴⁹ Nussbaum saw working women as expanding the women's movement, creating an offshoot, a newly invigorated movement.

Kim Cook, like many others, came to the working women's movement out of a social movement background. Cook stated,

I definitely considered myself a feminist, and I believed that justice for women had to do with economics and with our ability to earn a decent living, to take care of ourselves financially, and not be dependent on men. That was where by CR analysis came in from my CR days, I knew that raising women's economic status was what I needed to be doing and that 9to5 was the place to do it.⁵⁰

Nussbaum herself had an extensive social movement background. After dropping out of the University of Chicago in 1969, she moved to Boston to be active in the anti-war movement while supporting herself by working a clerical job at Harvard University. Nussbaum explained, "It began with this realization that here I was working as a clerical worker so that I could do my organizing, and then realizing I could do my organizing on the job, too." She was not interested in the women's movement in and of itself, but rather in relation to women as actors in their roles in the world. Further, she wanted to pursue women's equality and empowerment in the context of class. From this perspective, she came to see unions as a vehicle for social change and the intersectionality of class and gender.⁵¹

At a 1971 peace demonstration in front of the Justice Department in Washington, protesting union members chanted, "What are unions for? General strike to end the war." This event was pivotal in Nussbaum's view of the social potential of unions.⁵² Additionally, the genesis of 9to5

⁴⁹ Cobble and Kessler-Harris, "Karen Nussbaum," 135–56.

⁵⁰ Kim Cook, interview by Ann Froines, May 10, 2005, SEIU District 925 Legacy Project: Oral History, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

⁵¹ Karen Nussbaum, interview by Ann Froines, November 16, 2006, SEIU District 925 Legacy Project: Oral History, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

⁵² Cobble and Kessler-Harris, "Karen Nussbaum," 135–56.

came from her experience with the waitresses at Cronin's restaurant in Boston. The eight career waitresses there decided they would organize their own union and go on strike. They stayed on strike for a year. Supporters would go out and picket with them, which Nussbaum did every Wednesday night. She remembered,

It was as I walked in a circle for my hour or two every Wednesday night that I began to realize the potential that existed in combining the desire for women to be first-class citizens in the workplace, you know, confronting the employer with the power of women's rights. That was really the genesis for me of the idea of 9to5, and how you could do that in my kind of workplace, with the women I was working with.⁵³

9to5 was the outcome of trying to figure out how to deal with the problems facing clericals and compel change.

Spaces of resistance emerged across the Boston area and the country in the early 1970s, including Massachusetts Institute of Technology. These organizations had no connection initially and did not know what each group was doing. The idea of a citywide organization eventually came about, with the goal to help women workers understand they were part of a larger movement. From a small group, the membership of 9to5 doubled in 1975. They decided to expand in 1976, resulting in Janet Selcer becoming a regional organizer, raising more money, and hiring more staff. One of the original twenty-five members, Selcer recalled driving to tiny chapters in Providence, Hartford, and Amherst.⁵⁴

9to5's organizing training manual in 1975 counseled the path to successful organizing included being positive, building on previous work, and picking a realistic issue. The importance of choosing issues realistically was paramount as it improves morale and gives the sense that actions matter. The manual warned that it is better to not ask for money. It suggested, instead,

⁵³ Karen Nussbaum, interview by Ann Froines, November 16, 2006, SEIU District 925 Legacy Project: Oral History, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

⁵⁴ Janet Selcer, interview by Ann Froines, February 1, 2005, SEIU District 925 Legacy Project: Oral History, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

presenting management with three demands, one easy to win (i.e., a bulletin board for employees), one they might or might not win (i.e., regulations on personal service), and one that is unlikely but is a future demand (i.e., job training). In addition, 9to5 counseled utilizing activities with low-participation barriers, such as petitions. Signing a petition is an easy way to encourage a worker's involvement without asking too much commitment and can be used to show employees that they can do something. Helen Williams recounted combining fundraising with social activities so that members could feel comfortable. She stated, "We can't get four hundred women to demonstrate, but we can get them to bake."⁵⁵

Early organizing by 9to5 included leafleting outside of workplaces, such as in the Boston Common. The activists were told to state that the leaflets were something women workers should have. Many women appeared not to want to interact with anyone, and 9to5 organizers encountered difficulty due to others distributing literature on the Common. One member reported that a controversial group handed out literature close to the 9to5 organizers, which made some women reluctant to speak to anyone distributing leaflets. They labeled 9to5 as "crazy by association."⁵⁶

Leafleting was not the only way 9to5 aimed to gain members. Leafleting and lunch meetings, along with newsletters, surveys, and PSA/TV spots, all worked toward the goal.

Organizers were asked by potential activists how they get rewards or recognition for what they do.

One responded that the reward is when women feel they can do something, and then do it.⁵⁷ One

⁵⁵ Organizer training material, 1975, box 3, folder 110, 9 to 5, National Association of Working Women, Additional records, 1972–1985, 82-M189—86-M213, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA; Helen Williams, interview by Ann Froines, September 12, 2006, SEIU District 925 Legacy Project: Oral History, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

⁵⁶ Organizer training notes, 1975, box 3, folder 115, 9 to 5, National Association of Working Women, Additional records, 1972–1985, 82-M189—86-M213, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

⁵⁷ Organizer training material, 1975, box 3, folder 110, 9 to 5, National Association of Working Women, Additional records, 1972–1985, 82-M189—86-M213, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA; *Surviving as an Organizer*, 1982, box 3, folder 111, 9 to 5, National Association of Working Women,

of the most effective tools for building organizations proved to be showing how the organization could benefit them. To increase the chance of further contact, organizers were instructed to leave literature with the potential member and tell them why they joined. By 1978, organizers were instructed to present forming a union as an option. Scripts that organizers used during lunch meetings in 1978 already made a clear union connection, offering referral to one and providing information on white-collar unionizing, including examples of victories in the Boston area.⁵⁸

9to5 emphasized education and attempted to foster connections between chapters across the country. One of its primary education programs for chapter members was summer schools. The schools ran annually, one weekend each July, for approximately ten years. A hundred or so 9to5 leaders, three to five from each chapter, would come to Bryn Mawr College, a significant location as the site of the original summer school for working women in the 1930s. Nussbaum recalled the aim of making the summer schools fun:

We were trying to be expansive, giving people skills but also opening their minds, to be able to analyze the world. And to have fun with each other... We had a scavenger hunt in a hotel in Cincinnati one year, and people were wandering around the hotel for an hour finding stuff related to organizing skills. We had this commitment to skills, understanding the world, and knowing how to run your own organization. We ended up with a sense of real ownership of the organization.⁵⁹

The unions, SEIU District 925 and Local 925, continued the tradition of having fun meetings that included songs and skits interspersed with regular business.

The fifth-anniversary convention showed a steady increase in membership numbers, going from ten to over five hundred in the Boston chapter. In front of the eight hundred attendees, Senator

Additional records, 1972–1985, 82-M189—86-M213, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

⁵⁸ Boston 9 to 5 staff organizing handouts, 1978, box 3, folder 114, 9 to 5, National Association of Working Women, Additional records, 1972–1985, 82-M189—86-M213, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

⁵⁹ Karen Nussbaum, interview by Ann Froines, November 16, 2006, SEIU District 925 Legacy Project: Oral History, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

Ted Kennedy praised the growth of office worker groups across the nation. More than eight hundred attended the fifth-anniversary convention in 1978. Janice Blood asked the crowd, “Is there anyone here today working for pin money?” The crowd responded with an arousing “No!” Blood went on to explain that the paychecks clericals received were meant for little extras, not to feed a household and clothe themselves and their families.⁶⁰

Leadership development was taken seriously by 9to5. They wanted to provide opportunities and support for women, who rarely had the chance to take on a leadership role. Janet Selcer, 9to5 regional organizer, reminisced that 9to5 gave women an opportunity to blossom as leaders. She noted,

We were able to bring that experience to a huge number of women who had never done anything political in their lives, or anything activist in their lives. They ended up making speeches before large numbers of people or leading demonstrations or researching company structure, many, many things. In that regard, I think we were truly a grassroots organization and activated a lot of people. And a lot of people, their lives were transformed. I’m sure if you could find people now, they would talk about 9 to 5 as an incredibly important experience in their lives.

9to5 believed one could find leadership in anybody. The organization’s programs included assertiveness, public speaking, and organizing training, but there was no conscious diversity training.⁶¹

9to5 aimed to be as inclusive as possible, but minority women proved difficult to recruit. Family issues also received scant attention. In the early days of the organization, many of the members were young, in their twenties, without children.⁶² They did have some older women in

⁶⁰ 9 to 5 Convention, Tape 1, Pat Cronin and others speaking in Boston, November 4, 1978, Reel 1, 9 to 5, National Association of Working Women (U.S.) Videotapes, 1978–1980, Vt-10, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University.

⁶¹ Janet Selcer, interview by Ann Froines, February 1, 2005, SEIU District 925 Legacy Project: Oral History, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

⁶² Phyllis S. Glick, “*Bridging Feminism and Trade Unionism: A Study of Working Women’s Organizing in the United States*,” 1983, Ph.D. diss., box 2, folder 59, 9 to 5, National Association of Working Women (U.S.) Additional records, 1972–1986, 88-M96—89-M104, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

the organization, as well as women married with children. Janet Selcer believed that the organization was not conscious of family issues. Age discrimination, though, became the subject of several campaigns. Selcer noted,

I know 9 to 5 in later years, and in the union work, has very consciously taken up issues of child care, home, and family. In those first 5–10 years, they were low on the list. And it probably affected our organizing in ways we weren't aware of then.

An unfortunate blind spot for the organization, the lack of attention to family and childcare, made a diverse membership challenging to achieve.⁶³

By 1977, 9to5 took the next step and formed the loose affiliation Working Women: National Association of Office Workers. The national organization started with five local organizations (9to5, Women Office Workers, Cleveland Working Women, Women Organized for Employment and Women Employed). They soon grew to about a dozen affiliates, expanding to over twenty by 1980. The individual organizations had often competed with one another for fundraising. By affiliating, they consolidated and amplified their efforts.⁶⁴

With three national offices, fifty paid staff, and a seven-hundred-thousand-dollar annual budget, Working Women utilized pressure tactics toward university administrations. It also supported discrimination lawsuits and lobbied government agencies.⁶⁵ Working Women focused principally on one-time actions against employers and year-long corporate campaigns and legal suits. In the late 1970s, 9to5 scored some impressive victories, including expanded promotional opportunities, job postings, back pay, and clearer grievance procedures.

⁶³ Janet Selcer, interview by Ann Froines, February 1, 2005, SEIU District 925 Legacy Project: Oral History, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

⁶⁴ Windham, *Knocking on Labor's Door*, 170.

⁶⁵ MacLean, "The Hidden History of Affirmative Action," 55.

Most importantly, the organization encouraged a collective identity among office workers and informed the public of the conditions of clerical work through both local and national media.

Janet Selcer argued,

We weren't a union, but we had enough information from inside to construct campaigns on issues that women were complaining about, and I think completely scare the bejesus out of the management because we knew something and all of the sudden, it was on the street, and if we could get it in the media, we did pressure tactics.⁶⁶

9to5's victories strengthened women clerical workers' belief in the possibility of change, with women learning first hand that they had become a formidable force. However, without the ability to command a response, their power remained episodic, and many efforts got nowhere. As such, the 9to5 leadership began to think about launching a union, as a union could force an employer to bargain and gain rights in a contract, which an association could not.⁶⁷

Due to misconceptions about unions, 9to5 decided they could not talk about the labor movement to women workers right away. In addition, less than 10 percent of the clerical workforce in the United States in 1974 were unionized, mostly government employees. 9to5 did have as part of their goal to get union leaders as an audience, making them think about clerical women workers and see clerical workers as possible targets for organizing. Cassedy recalled,

We thought it would take five years for 9to5 to make its point among office workers and to get the attention of the unions. In fact, it took a lot longer than that. People were interested in being part of an ad hoc organization longer than we'd expected. And it took longer to get the point across to the unions.

⁶⁶ Janet Selcer, interview by Ann Froines, February 1, 2005, SEIU District 925 Legacy Project: Oral History, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

⁶⁷ 9 to 5 Convention, Tape 1, Pat Cronin and others speaking in Boston. November 4, 1978, Reel 1, 9 to 5, National Association of Working Women (U.S.) Videotapes, 1978–1980, Vt-10, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA; Helen Williams, interview by Ann Froines, September 12, 2006, SEIU District 925 Legacy Project: Oral History, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI; Gloria Steinem, interview by Stacey Heath, October 2, 2006, SEIU District 925 Legacy Project: Oral History, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI; Selcer, interview by Ann Froines, February 1, 2005, SEIU District 925 Legacy Project: Oral History, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI; Milkman, "Women Workers," 300–22.

Eventually, they believed unions would come to see the benefits of organizing in the clerical sector.⁶⁸

While 9to5 organizers feared that women were hostile to unions in general, there is no evidence that women workers were more adverse to unions than men. The perception of unreceptive women was nonetheless powerful. Traditional accounts of labor had focused on the story of working men, which depicted work as men toiling in mines, steel mills, and auto plants and imagined union struggles as men slugging it out with their employers. The stereotype was a stark contrast with the new face of labor and did not fit the typical woman worker in 1970—a woman at a typewriter. Labor’s politics often ignored the large experience of working women organizing in the twentieth century. Labor unions also often devalued the long history of radical women in textile and garment trades who unionized and the labor organizing of women clerical workers dating as far back as the 1900s with the Women’s Trade Union League in the 1910s and the United Office and Professional Workers of America until 1949.⁶⁹

9to5 member Kim Cook commented that she was told even to avoid using the word “union” with women, as “other office workers would be turned off.” The association, however, was interested in unionizing by the late 1970s. Cassidy noted, “So I think we saw ourselves as a bridge, or an intermediary stage, that was sort of softening up the labor movement to understand women workers and also softening up women workers to understand that collective action and unionizing could be for them.” Janet Selcer went further, saying that 9to5 attempted to employ a union

⁶⁸ Ellen Cassidy, interview by Ann Froines, November 6, 2005, SEIU District 925 Legacy Project: Oral History, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

⁶⁹ Michelle Murphy, “Toxicity in the Details: The History of the Women’s Office Worker Movement and Occupational Health in the Late-Capitalist Office,” *Labor History* 41, no 2 (2000): 189; Sharon Hartman Strom, “Challenging ‘Woman’s Place’: Feminism, the Left, and Industrial Unionism in the 1930s,” *Feminist Studies* 9, no. 2 (1983): 359–86.

strategy, as it never wanted to stay only a women's organization or a women's work organization alone. Rather, "we wanted to use it to prompt union organizing among office workers." Nussbaum contended that unionization might be an outcome of their activism, but it was not a deliberate strategy in 1980.⁷⁰ While 9to5 may not have initially set out to be a union, many members intended to have 9to5 as a union organizing vehicle early on. 9to5 provided one model for working women's activism, but no single model appealed to all working women. Across the country, women adopted organizational styles to appeal to women in their local environment.

Working Women's Activism Across the Country

By 1975, multiple other organizations with similar interests and goals were founded throughout the country, including Union W.A.G.E and Women Organized for Employment in San Francisco, Women Office Workers in New York, and Women Employed in Chicago. Women Office Workers (WOW) was founded in response to the 1973 Women's Office Workers Conference in the city, to "organize women to organize." The structure of Women Office Workers was quite similar to 9to5, utilizing a primarily action-based approach. Women Office Workers' activities show evidence of shared ideas among working women's groups. For example, the 1976 National Secretaries Day rally, WOW used the slogan Respect, Rights, and Raise —Not Roses, a slogan very similar 9to5's. Connections between organizations played a vital role in the working

⁷⁰ Kim Cook, interview by Ann Froines, May 10, 2005, SEIU District 925 Legacy Project: Oral History, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI; Ellen Cassidy, interview by Ann Froines, November 6, 2005, SEIU District 925 Legacy Project: Oral History, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI; Janet Selcer, interview by Ann Froines, February 1, 2005, SEIU District 925 Legacy Project: Oral History, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

women's movement. Debbie Schneider, who joined 9to5 in 1978, worked as an organizer for Women Office Workers in the early 1980s after they became affiliates under Working Women.⁷¹

WOW activism revolved extensively around the issue of age discrimination. The organization filed age-discrimination complaints against various employment agencies. In 1976, WOW produced a fifteen-page research report on discrimination against older women. The report cited complaints against Snelling and Snelling, Cosmopolitan Girls Employment Service, Key Employment, Kellogg Employment Agency, Aavis Personnel Associates, and New York State Employment Service. Noreen Connell of WOW staff said they chose complaints based on their severity and their obvious nature. Four of the charged agencies denied the allegations, while two had no comment. A March 12, 1976 article in the *Daily News* stated, "The WOW investigator was a young man, 'Paul' who called 100 agencies during January and February to place a job offer for 'a young chick under 25.'" The investigator thought the agencies would laugh. Not only did they receive what they asked for, but sometimes the agencies also asked what race the investigator would prefer. The investigation included women with the same skills and education but different years of experience, applying for a job at ten agencies. "Dorothy," age fifty, received few job offers and many age comments, while "Marge," age twenty-five, received more job offers, along with better pay, bonuses, and benefits. Also cited by WOW was a telephone survey of one hundred agencies, of which 68 percent allegedly willingly accepted a request for a pretty, young job applicant. "I won't send you any dogs," one agency allegedly promised. Another agency responded, "I understand what you're saying, and I can fit the bill—an airline stewardess type."⁷²

⁷¹ "Friday Want a New Day," *Daily News*, April 22, 1976; Debbie Schneider, interview by Ann Froines, November 3, 2005, SEIU District 925 Legacy Project: Oral History, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

⁷² Paula Bernstein, "WOW Protests Beauty before Age Pattern in Job Market," *Daily News*, March 12, 1976.

The only organization in New York City for women clericals to get together to discuss common job problems and how to improve them, WOW offered a variety of facts sheets and advice for clerical workers. Like 9to5, Women Office Workers had a Bill of Rights that included the right to organize on the job and the right to choose whether to do the personal work of employers. Women Office Workers also steered women toward unions, advising the clerical workers to make sure the union was democratic. Unions could help clericals improve their working conditions, but without a democratic union, the workers may still not get their voices heard.⁷³

One thing that set WOW apart from other working women's organizations was their attention to discrimination on the basis of sexuality. A fact sheet devoted to the issues of lesbian office workers explained that, while all office workers dealt with powerlessness, lesbian office workers encountered even more oppressive conditions, including fear of dismissal for sexual identity. The fact sheet noted that not many office workers have unions. Even those that do, few have protective clauses in contracts against discrimination on the basis of sexual preference. WOW advised clerical workers who experienced discrimination to contact the ACLU and Women Office Workers to organize a protest. The Women Office Worker's Bill of Rights also included "freedom to choose one's lifestyle and to participate in on-the-job organizing or outside activities which do not detract from the execution of assigned tasks." They included a call to end discrimination based on affectional or sexual preference, sex, age, race, creed, national origin, marital status, parenthood, and disability. No other working women's organization stated such explicit support for lesbian clerical workers.⁷⁴

⁷³ Women Office Workers, "Choosing a Union," 1979, box 2, folder 10, SEIU District 925 Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

⁷⁴ *Women Office Workers Bill of Rights*, undated, box 2, folder 10, SEIU District 925 Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

The New York metropolitan area saw the formation of other working women organizations and projects. Women on the Job, a Long Island–based advocacy project to increase women’s awareness of job rights and pay equity, assisted in employment discrimination cases and collected data and issued reports on women’s employment. Funded by the North Shore Unitarian Universalist Veatch Programs and private contributions, Women on the Job was similar to the other working women’s groups, although it was a non-profit for all women workers, rather than an activist group focused on clerical work. Women on the Job was the only women’s advocacy group working exclusively to expand equal employment opportunity for women at the local level in New York State. The group’s 1981 founding came considerably later than the start of many other working women groups. Nonetheless, as one-third of all women on Long Island held clerical positions, clericals remained the primary focus of activism. Women on the Job used the same tagline as 9to5, “Raises, Not Roses.”⁷⁵

Information and assistance were always available from Women on the Job, which provided a phone number, information on federal and state laws that barred discrimination, information on government enforcement offices, and a directory of services for women employed on Long Island. Women on the Job tried to encourage women to enter nontraditional fields, a practice fairly uncommon in office worker–specific groups. It also provided training to help women advance their career, moving them up to technician positions.⁷⁶

One aspect of the project was the Task Force, a nonpartisan coalition of Long Island organizations that met monthly with Women on the Job. Starting with twenty-five organizations in 1984 and growing to forty-eight in 1987, the Task Force aimed to help redress discriminatory

⁷⁵ Women on the Job brochure, undated, box 2, folder 6, Women on the Job Records, Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University, New York, NY.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

practices against all women employed on Long Island. For 1984's Women's History Week, the coalition planned a special event to demonstrate that women's issues cut across occupational and political lines.⁷⁷

Women on the Job felt that it was necessary to continue to assert, even into the late 1980s, that their members were not involved in the women's movement. In a letter to the editor of the *New York Times*, Charlotte Shapiro and Lillian McCormick wrote, "The many women for who we advocate for neither were nor are participants in the women's movement. They are participants in the labor market revolution and work because they must work to support themselves and their families." The conscious and deliberate attempt to separate their activism for women's job rights from the women's movement shows how some women began to distance themselves from the powerful movement that flourished in the previous decade. The working women's movement declined in large part due to an increasingly conservative political climate. Women on the Job, like many other working women's organizations, spent time focusing on jobs and far less on issues considered personal, such as sexuality or reproductive rights.⁷⁸

Like 9to5, Women on the Job's focus on women employees primarily revolved around clerical workers. With the majority of its participants school clericals, it held a workshop for the school office workers, attended by fifty women groups, thirty-five school districts, and seven task forces. Afterward, many responded that the workshop was excellent; and they requested more workshops on pay equity, negotiations, career development, and labor law. The project also forged connections with office worker and women's organizations. They supported, advised, and shared information with the Hempstead chapter of 9to5, and they received documents from NOW and the

⁷⁷ Women's History Week Planning Committee minutes, 1983–1984, box 1, folder 34, Women on the Job Records, Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archive, New York University, New York, NY; Task Force member lists, box 10, folder 23, Women on the Job Records.

⁷⁸ Charlotte Shapiro and Lillian McCormick, "Letter to the Editor," *New York Times*, August 22, 1989.

national 9to5. Women on the Job worked closely with 9to5 in 1988 on the Working Women Education Fund, a nonprofit research and educational program, which helped expand organizing among school clericals begun by Women on the Job.⁷⁹

Despite a sometimes-conflicted relationship, Women on the Job worked with unions. It received and retained a significant amount of organizing material from them, including Local 925, District 925, UAW, and AFSCME, showing the unions' commitment to women's rights. AFSCME sent a pamphlet that stated its women members were equal partners in the union and described the needs of working mothers. Additional pamphlets in their collection included information on pay equity, which became Women on the Job's major campaign issue. An AFSCME pamphlet in their collection described why women choose AFSCME, noting that women "will be backed by a strong international union staff that has made women's concerns a priority, will be supported at the bargaining table and given the opportunity to attend training programs to learn to negotiate with management." Women on the Job responded to women's requests and held more workshops on pay equity, negotiations, career development, and labor law. It also helped school clericals meet with union representatives, including District 925, at a pay equity workshop in Garden City, New York.⁸⁰

Margaret Miller, a Women on the Job staff member, attended a UAW educational training conference in the summer of 1983. Similar to 9to5 members, Women on the Job staffers encountered a level of resistance to women's issues. She noted that her resolution to have women's committees in local unions met with opposition from women and men. Her resolution passed, but

⁷⁹ Meeting minutes, December 5, 1985, box 1, folder 23, Women on the Job Records, Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archive, New York University, New York, NY; 9to5 Hempstead flyer, undated, box 6, folder 38, Women on the Job Records; "Proposal to North Shore Unitarian Universalist Veatch Program," 1989, box 6, folder 33, Women on the Job Records.

⁸⁰ AFSCME, *Are You Paid What You're Worth...Really?*, box 1, folder 26, Women on the Job Records; Correspondence between Women on the Job and Jackie Ruff, SEIU District 925, 1985, box 2, folder 40, Women on the Job Records.

“the struggle and misunderstanding indicated that the need for more education about women’s issues in unions.” She did not explain the reason for union resistance, but women met similar resistance in other unions.⁸¹

Pay equity was the largest issue Women on the Job mobilized around in the 1980s. Pay equity went beyond equal pay for equal work to comparable worth. Even with equal pay laws, a wage gap continued to persist, in large part, because occupational segregation remained rampant. Jobs coded as women’s almost always paid less than jobs coded as men’s positions. According to a 1986 National Academy of Sciences study, researchers found that “each additional percentage of women in an occupation was associated with \$42 less in median annual earnings.” Pay equity attempts to correct the historical practice of paying less for work performed by women. When comparing jobs of equal value, almost universally, jobs performed predominantly by women had lower pay. The differences were not explainable by qualifications, length of service, or job performance; they were about gender attitudes and discrimination. The goal of pay equity campaigns was eliminating this dual pay structure. Pay equity had been taken up as an issue for women’s groups as well as unions, with both undertaking educational efforts to increase public awareness. For working women’s groups in the late 1970s and 1980s, this was the central defining issue.⁸²

To be expected, working women’s organizations prioritized different concerns and had different ideological backing. Union Women’s Alliance to Gain Equality (Union W.A.G.E.), a socialist feminist organization, formed in 1971 to combat discrimination on the job, in unions, was fighting for a “movement of all of our sisters-organized, unorganized, unemployed and on

⁸¹Task Force minutes, 1983, box 1, folder 1, Women on the Job Records.

⁸² *Women on the Job Annual Report*, 1985, box 1, folder 30, Women on the Job Records; Sara Evans and Barbara Nelson, *Wage Justice: Comparable Worth and the Paradox of Technocratic Reform* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

welfare—against racism and sexism.” It formed in response to a call by Jean Maddox of the Office and Professional Employees International Union and Anne Draper of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers at an International Women’s Day Conference. Draper stated that the liberation of women must come from their ranks if it would take root.⁸³ While a working women’s group, Union W.A.G.E. focused on class-wide problems that affected all workers such as a shorter work week, a higher minimum wage, and the extension of protective laws to men.⁸⁴

Working women’s organizations also employed different organizational models. Women Employed (WE) chose to focus more on federal equal employment campaigns, rather than the direct needs of office workers. Founded during National Secretaries Week in 1973 by Anne Ladky, president of Chicago NOW, Women Employed focused on women workers, both clericals and professionals, in the Loop area of Chicago. Professionals, mainly college-educated white women, made up a disproportionately large part of Women Employed’s membership and leadership, as they did in NOW, but clerical women were a significant base of support.⁸⁵ Women Employed organized offices and other workers interested in confronting government enforcement agencies to demand enforcement of equal opportunity laws. By the summer of 1973, the staff already had come to believe that women had diverse interests and that their anti-discrimination program appealed primarily to professional women. As a result, they created two programmatic tracks: office organizing and EEO advocacy. Organizers also believed that the real divergence in interests occurred not between professionals and clericals, but between women with long-term and short-

⁸³ Union W.A.G.E. informational flyer, undated, and “Why a Union Women’s Alliance to Gain Equality?,” 1971, box 5, folder 284, 9 to 5, National Association of Working Women, Additional records, 1972–1985, 82-M189—86-M213, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

⁸⁴ Union W.A.G.E. informational flyer, undated, box 5, folder 284, 9 to 5, National Association of Working Women, Additional records, 1972–1985, 82-M189—86-M213, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

⁸⁵ *Grassroots Organizing in the 1970s: Five Case Studies*, 1979, box 58, folder 637, Women Employed Records, Richard J. Daley Special Collections and University Archives, University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, IL.

term perspectives. The former came to WE because of their struggles through government agencies to improve advancement opportunities for women. The later came to address immediate workplace issues of wages, benefits, and “unfair but not illegal” employment practices.⁸⁶

Initially starting with a geographic committee structure, Women Employed found the strategy unsuccessful. The geographic division provided no commonality of interest. Shifting to an industry-based committee structure in 1974, WE formed committees in insurance, banking, retail work, and public employment, with each committee mobilizing its own constituency. They also had a Secretaries Committee, drawing women office workers from workplaces not represented by one of the industry committees, often from small firms. Ultimately, the structure would shift to two divisions, Enforcement and Secretaries.⁸⁷

The dominant strategy, the life-blood of Women Employed, was enforcement of equal employment opportunity laws. When employers refused to negotiate with the organization, equal employment agencies became the means to achieve change. Education and agitation around general office problems continued, but most activities undertaken by the committees and the organization as a whole reflected a trend toward the use of government EEO measures and enforcement agencies. In 1976, Women Employed achieved national attention for their work preserving and strengthening affirmative action.⁸⁸

While Women Employed and 9to5 shared many concerns, their tactics diverged. The legal strategy differentiated 9to5 from Women Employed, which, for the most part, prioritized

⁸⁶ *Grassroots Organizing in the 1970s: Five Case Studies*, 1979, box 58, folder 637, Women Employed Records, Richard J. Daley Special Collections and University Archives, University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, IL.

⁸⁷ Day Creamer, “Women Employed-A Voice for Working Women: Organizational Strategies and Challenges,” 1979, box 84, folder 897, Women Employed Records, Richard J. Daley Special Collections and University Archives, University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, IL; *Grassroots Organizing in the 1970s: Five Case Studies*, 1979, box 58, folder 637, Women Employed Records.

⁸⁸ *Looking Ahead to the 1975 Women Employed Convention*, 1975, box 54, folder 588, Women Employed Records; *Working Women and Affirmative Action: Women Employed’s Experience*, May 28, 1976, box 30, folder 314, Women Employed Records.

enforcement of laws over active organizing and flashy rallies. Janet Selcer, a 9to5 activist and regional organizer, recalled,

Though we often threatened the court route, we were not keen on filing discrimination complaints, and going through the plodding process of EEOC or Mass. Commission Against Discrimination. I associate that more with N.O.W. and the women's movement, those groups that, shamefully, we tended to scorn...I think we felt like organizing is where it's at, collective action is where it's at.⁸⁹

However, Women Employed's Secretaries Committee/Secretaries Division, centered on internal organizing and workplace conditions, represented the most similarities to 9to5. Like 9to5, Women Employed developed a Secretaries Bill of Rights that stated minimum standards for any office. They also had a version of a pettiest office procedure contest, where women employees would send the organization a description of an outrageous job duty. Women Employed received nominations, such as a clerical worker who had to put drops in her boss's eyes and make sure he took the drops home with him at night. 9to5 awarded Cheapskate of the Year to a boss who fired a woman over a sandwich. The office worker was instructed to get her boss a sandwich while she was on her lunch hour. She complied but got the sandwich on the wrong bread. Her upset boss told her to get a new one. She refused and was fired. Two days later, forty 9to5 members demonstrated outside the office with a placard stating, "Boss says, 'Rye bread or no bread.'" Despite their efforts, the worker did not get her job back.⁹⁰

Women Employed Institute was its research and education division, providing in-depth analysis of women's economic status and statistical information regarding barriers to economic equality. It recommended corporate policies and worked closely with the Communications Workers of America (CWA) to identify possible union targets. Like 9to5, Women Employed

⁸⁹Janet Selcer, interview by Ann Froines, February 1, 2005, SEIU District 925 Legacy Project: Oral History, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

⁹⁰ Cobble and Kessler-Harris, "Karen Nussbaum," 135–56.

encountered leering to embracing unionism, yet they found unions and union members to be allies. Women in AFT, AFSCME, and CWA joined Women Employed. Women Employed also became active in efforts for Chicago Blue Cross/Blue Shield to affiliate with Teamsters. During the summer and fall of 1973, WE staff members leafleted outside the Blue Cross office and publicized the drive in their newsletter. In 1979, Women Employed developed a labor education project, with financial support from CWA. The organization held question and answer sessions and produced brochures to help explain union functions and activities.⁹¹ Women Employed reported,

We are developing materials, holding educational programs and talking about why our organizational experience over the past 6 and a half years indicates the necessity of unions to solve problems faced by working women...If we have to wait until groups of clerical employees contact unions and request assistance in organizing, clericals will never organize in any number.

Women Employed had been optimistic about employers negotiating with WE representatives earlier in the decade, but they discovered the difficulty of achieving that goal. While a small part of Women Employed, the organization conducted an aggressive outreach program to counter the distrust of unions and show that fundamental change is possible in the office. Joyce Miller, president of CLUW, stated that clerical workers have said they want improvement in their working conditions, but they have yet to say they want a union. Education and consciousness raising became a necessary preliminary step to unionization.⁹²

Many WE members wanted to pursue the goal of establishing progressive clerical unions across Chicago. They sought to work within existing labor networks to build union women's caucuses and organized a union campaign under WE's sponsorship. After leading an anti-

⁹¹ *CWA/WE Project Status Report*, 1980, box 57, folder 630, Women Employed Records, Richard J. Daley Special Collections and University Archives, University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, IL.

⁹² WEWIN report, 1980–1981, box 38, folder 394, Women Employed Records; *Grassroots Organizing in the 1970s: Five Case Studies*, 1979, box 58, folder 637, Women Employed Records.

discrimination campaign at CNA Insurance, Chicago's largest insurance company, WE tried to organize its workers in 1975. While not expecting to win, WE wanted to scare the employer into halting massive layoffs. They researched if they could gain support for unionization from insurance workers. In February 1975, WE began passing out authorization cards, holding organizing committee meetings, and distributing information on their own committee and union operations. While unsuccessful at achieving representation, the campaign saved many jobs, as CNA canceled planned layoffs at the start of the drive. The campaign provided an opportunity to discuss unionization with women throughout WE and to show unionization as a viable option for redress.⁹³

Women Employed had far more participants than actual members. The organization did not push women to sign membership cards, resulting from fears of reprisals and clericals' hesitance to join the developing organization. Financially, Women Employed did not depend on dues-paying members, as half of the organization's income came from foundations and philanthropic sources, one-quarter from fundraising, and one-quarter from dues payments. Membership grew from eight at its founding in April 1973 to sixty at the end of 1973. By 1974, Women Employed had over three hundred members. The numbers ultimately leveled off at approximately five hundred members. Participants numbered around one thousand. The organization recruited members through networks already active in offices. It affiliated informally with women's and labor organizations, developed its own networks in offices, and recruited individuals directly. While there were some struggles with membership, over five hundred attended WE's first convention in November 1974. Over eight hundred women attended the 1977 Working Women's Conference. Growing tensions between secretaries and professional WE members, however, hurt the

⁹³ *Grassroots Organizing in the 1970s: Five Case Studies*, 1979, box 58, folder 637, Women Employed Records.

organization, as secretaries felt their interests were being slighted. Some women, including board members, left as a result of the affirmative action focus. Despite some notable efforts at internal organizing around general office issues, many clerical workers never felt attracted to the organization.⁹⁴

Affirmative Actions and Minorities in Working Women's Organizations

Minority women remained on the sidelines of the working women's movement in its early years. After decades of exclusion from clerical work, large numbers of black women only entered the field in the late 1960s. The number of minority women in the clerical workforce increased greatly in the mid-twentieth century. In the late 1960s, 19 percent of black women workers were in clerical jobs. In 1979, the percentage jumped to 29 percent. Thirty-two percent of Hispanic women workers held clerical occupations. Minority women encountered special problems in the office, with a 10 percent unemployment rate for black women clerical workers, more than double the 4.5 percent unemployment rate of white women clericals. Employers funneled minority women into the lower-paid clerical positions, such as telephone operators and keypunch operators.⁹⁵

The need to prioritize minority women's needs was acute in the 1970s, as minority women faced severe discrimination in the workplace. The median income of minority women was below any other worker category, with minority women making 49.6 percent of what the average white man made. Black women were reported to make \$158 weekly compared to \$167 for white women,

⁹⁴ "Jean Hoffenkamp to Women Employed Friend," December 14, 1977, box 113, folder 1239, Women Employed Records; *Grassroots Organizing in the 1970s: Five Case Studies*, 1979, box 58, folder 637, Women Employed Records.

⁹⁵ *The Black Clerical Worker*, 1977, box 2, folder 90, 9 to 5, National Association of Working Women Records, 1972–1980, 79-M16—81-M121, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA; Affirmative Action Campaign Committee notes, 1976–1978, box 1, folder 16, 9 to 5, National Association of Working Women Records, 1972–1980, 79-M16—81-M121, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

\$218 for black men, and \$279 for white men. Women and minorities were segregated into the lowest paying jobs and held more part-time positions, with minorities in part-time positions at twice the rate of white men. 9to5 provided a striking example of discrimination facing black women, telling the story of an African American woman who worked in a clerical capacity for many years. Seeking a transfer to a suburban branch that offered a better job doing the work in which she had maximum skills, she was denied the job, since she was not familiar with all the new job's procedures. The job ultimately went to a white woman who was trained by the black woman who had applied for the transfer.⁹⁶

Groups such as 9to5, Women Employed, and Union W.A.G.E. listed recruiting minority women to their organizations as a top priority, along with fighting sex, age, and race discrimination. While 9to5 focused primarily on sex discrimination, it also addressed the double oppression of minority women, noting that employers channeled African American women into positions lacking prestige. 9to5 expressed the desire to reach more minority women early in its organizational life, but misunderstandings and the priorities of 9to5 alienated some African Americans. Having a keen understanding of the difficulties facing working mothers, African American women in the group wanted childcare included in the Bill of Rights for Women Office Workers. 9to5 founders did not believe they could win childcare, so they resisted including it. Ultimately, the primary young, white leaders treated minority women's concerns as secondary to their own. As a result, several African American members left the organization.⁹⁷

9to5 explained the continuing lack of representation in multiple ways, including that many people viewed the organization as radical and extremely feminist. Other explanations included that

⁹⁶ AA Campaign material, 1977, box 2, folder 90, 9 to 5, National Association of Working Women Records, 1972–1980, 79-M16—81-M121, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

⁹⁷ Windham, *Knocking on Labor's Door*, 158.

minority women felt more comfortable in civil rights organizations that were better established and could offer more help to the minority community. There was the contention that since minorities had only recently entered the clerical workforce, they were content with their current success since they had to deal with their own survival and getting jobs first. Finally, there was difficulty envisioning how to effectively increase minority participation.⁹⁸

While 9to5 did not collect uniform, personal data on its members, the organization largely was comprised of young, white middle to upper-middle-class college-educated women. The organization was self-conscious about its uniformity and devoted resources and energy to minority recruitment. In 1976's "Minority Women Office Workers: A Status Report," 9to5 reported that, in Boston, the non-white population was 25 percent, but non-whites only made up 6 percent of women office workers. At the October 14, 1976 meeting, members decided to form a committee to intentionally recruit and speak to the needs of minority women, hoping to gain proportional representation.⁹⁹ 9to5 created the Minority Task Force and Minorities Committee with a full-time staff to provide information regarding anti-discrimination laws and specialized outreach. The task force offered career development through churches in minority communities and defined special problems that confront minority women on the job and incorporating the potential solutions in all its campaigns. Part of the task force's program included conducting workshops on racism and developing relationships with leaders in minority communities. They decided it was necessary to

⁹⁸Amy E. Weisman, *9 to 5: Organization for Women Office Workers and Local 925: An Organizing Duo with New Hope for Office Workers*, 1981, box 2, folder 58, 9 to 5, National Association of Working Women (U.S.) Additional records, 1972-1986, 88-M96--89-M104, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA; "Affirmative Action notebook," 4/1976-3/1977, box 1, folder 17, 9 to 5, National Association of Working Women Records, 1972-1980, 79-M16--81-M121, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA; Janet Selcer, interview by Ann Froines, February 1, 2005, SEIU District 925 Legacy Project: Oral History, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

⁹⁹ Executive Board Meeting minutes, October 14, 1976, box 1, folder 22, 9 to 5, National Association of Working Women, Additional records, 1972-1985, 82-M189--86-M213, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

use pictures of diverse women in their literature and television appearances and to have minority women speak at conferences. Members suggested printing bilingual literature and cosponsoring multicultural events. The involvement of minority women in office worker organizations was an important part of strengthening the working women's movement and building a movement to ensure better treatment for minority women in the office.¹⁰⁰

Minority representation concerns continued into the 1980s. 9to5 sought to attract office workers in new ways. Janet Selcer suggested rapidly hiring a minority staff person and having minority women recruit. She recommended continuing to educate people, talking to people in the office, using specific instances to challenge the belief that discrimination did not exist and to explain how any discrimination hurts all workers. Selcer recalled, "We absolutely had to be representative. And we knew that."¹⁰¹ Visibility matters. People make assumptions about organizations based on the people who speak for it. Encouragement of minority members to play an active, visible role became a major part of 9to5's agenda. As the organization evolved, it became more interested in fighting for issues minority women saw as the most important, but the long delay in doing so resulted in continued alienation of many women from the organization. Clerical unionization drives, which included many African American and Latino women, had to take into account the needs of their diverse unit. The University of Cincinnati and Columbia University drives reached across racial boundaries to create a multi-identity movement.

¹⁰⁰ Boston 9 to 5 all-day staff meetings, 1981, box, 2, folder 59, 9 to 5, National Association of Working Women, Additional records, 1972-1985, 82-M189--86-M213, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA; *Minority Women Office Workers-A Status Report*, 1976, box 16, folder 1013, 9 to 5, National Association of Working Women, Additional records, 1972-1985, 82-M189--86-M213, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA; Minority Outreach Task Force three-month plans, 1980-1984, box 16, folder 1014, 9 to 5, National Association of Working Women, Additional records, 1972-1985, 82-M189--86-M213, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

¹⁰¹ Janet Selcer, interview by Ann Froines, February 1, 2005, SEIU District 925 Legacy Project: Oral History, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

As of 1983, minority representation in 9to5 remained relatively low. Representation did, however, depend on the local. Atlanta Working Women, established in 1980 and a 9to5 affiliate in 1982, had more African American members than white members. Many came out of experiences in the civil rights movement or church activism and had leadership experience.¹⁰² African American leaders in the 9to5 Baltimore chapter provided minority outreach training across the country for the organization.¹⁰³ According to Amy Weisman, “In fact, developing ways for more office workers to become involved, in general, [was] a major challenge to the Organization for Women Office Workers.”¹⁰⁴

Women Employed pressured employers to obey equal opportunity laws by paying, hiring, training, and promoting women on the same basis as men. It pressured employers to value women’s work and urged employers to keep Loop offices running by paying women a decent wage and treating them with respect. Like 9to5, they struggled to obtain a proportional representation of minority women members. In its first six months, 75 percent of WE’s members were professional and 100 percent white, even though 19 percent of Loop women workers were black or Spanish speaking. Over the years, however, the increased visibility and successes achieved by Women Employed, and active recruitment efforts, brought more clericals and minority women into the organization.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² Mary Frederickson, “‘I Know Which Side I’m On’: Southern Women in the Labor Movement in the Twentieth Century,” in *Women, Work and Protest: A Century of U.S. Women’s Labor History*, ed. Ruth Milkman (Boston: Routledge, 1985), 174.

¹⁰³ Windham, *Knocking on Labor’s Door*, 170-171.

¹⁰⁴ Amy E. Weisman, *9 to 5: Organization for Women Office Workers and Local 925: An Organizing Duo with New Hope for Office Workers*, 1981, box 2, folder 58, 9 to 5, National Association of Working Women (U.S.) Additional records, 1972–1986, 88-M96—89-M104, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA; Affirmative Action notebook, April 1976 to March 1977, box 1, folder 17, 9 to 5, National Association of Working Women Records, 1972–1980, 79-M16—81-M121, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

¹⁰⁵ WE WIN informational flyer, box 3, folder 16, Women Employed Records, Richard J. Daley Special Collections and University Archives, University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, IL; *Grassroots Organizing in the 1970s: Five Case Studies*, 1979, box 58, folder 637, Women Employed Records.

One of the major ways working women's organizations reached out to minorities was through educational programming, often in conjunction with other organizations. 9to5 maintained contact with the NAACP, NOW, and the League of Women Voters. They supported the Women's Inner-City Educational Resource Service, which provided educational counseling, advocacy, and support services to adult Boston inner-city women who wished to pursue some form of post-secondary education. Similarly, Women Employed met with the Urban League who wished to learn about progress in the area of women's rights for both personal knowledge and organizational practices. In 1977, 9to5 worked with the Minority Women Employment Program, formerly called the Black Women Employment Program, which provided resources to minority women caught in dead-end jobs with little prospect of upgrading. It assisted them in gaining access to professional, technical, and managerial positions. In addition, 9to5 members attended and spoke at the meetings of the Hispanic Job Developers Association, which helped place women, who frequently ran into stereotyping, into a clerical training program. Janet Selcer addressed the association about 9to5 and possible areas of collaboration. She presented strategies and tactics to pressure companies to hire more minorities.¹⁰⁶

Affirmative action, the issue that brought many minority women into the working women's movement, was designed specially to correct the unequal distribution of women and minorities in all job categories. Despite affirmative action, minority women continued to be discriminated against. They were placed on the bottom of the clerical ladder and suffered more layoffs than whites due to discrimination and the "last hired, first fired" custom. 9to5 launched multiple affirmative action campaigns to educate clerical workers about how affirmative action could be

¹⁰⁶ Correspondence between the Urban League and Women Employed, 1974, box 4, folder 24, Women Employed Records; Association of Hispanic Job Developers Meeting notes, May 12, 1977, box 3, folder 106, 9 to 5, National Association of Working Women, 1972–1985, 79-M16—81-M121, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

used to further their careers, and how to get stronger affirmative action plans in place and enforced. They spent years identifying companies and institutions that discriminated against women and minorities. For example, Northeastern University provided minorities and women few promotional opportunities. Furthermore, the assistant director of affirmative action at the university said, “The affirmative action office does not get involved with clericals.”¹⁰⁷

In 1976, 9to5 urged the Special Legislative Committee on Affirmative Action to hold public hearings on the poor state of affirmative action enforcement in Massachusetts companies. The organization requested to participate in the hearing to devote their testimony to the double discrimination facing minority women office workers. In their testimony, 9to5 noted that only four out of every one hundred workers at Massachusetts banks and insurance companies were minorities, even though they were required by law to be proactive on affirmative action. Led by 9to5, the Enforcement Campaign, aimed to start in spring 1976. In particular, the Enforcement Campaign focused on the provisions of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, the Wage and Hour Law, Chapter 151B of Massachusetts state law (which prohibits sex and race discrimination), and Executive Order 11246, which established affirmative action. The Enforcement Campaign had several subcommittees, including a minority subcommittee to produce a media blitz for the minority community, interview minority women, and work with other community organizations. A 9to5 member noted, “We need to unite all discriminated women if we ever plan to eliminate sex discrimination.”¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ University Committee: Northeastern University notes, undated, box 15, folder 987, 9 to 5, National Association of Working Women, Additional records, 1972–1985, 82-M189—86-M213, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

¹⁰⁸ Peg Terry to Special Legislative Committee on Affirmative Action, August 11, 1976, box 3, folder 93, 9 to 5, National Association of Working Women, 1972–1980, 9-M16—81-M121, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA; Special Legislative Committee on Affirmative Action notes, October 11, 1978, box 3, folder 93, 9 to 5, National Association of Working Women, 1972–1980, 79-M16—81-M121, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

Affirmative action enforcement became the major organizing and lobbying point for Women Employed in the 1970s. They took the lead on the issue in the working women's movement. One of their earliest campaigns involved a joint campaign with Chicago NOW against Sears, who refused to publicly disclose their affirmative action plan. Sears even filed a lawsuit against the federal government to prevent disclosure.¹⁰⁹ It argued that it could precipitate "unwarranted civil rights litigation." 9to5 assisted Women Employed, distributed leaflets, and held a demonstration against Sears.¹¹⁰ Women Employed established a separate division, the Enforcement Division, devoted entirely to EEO advocacy activities in mid-1975. Enforcement of fair employment law became the major topic at the 1976 Women Employed convention. Women Employed aided women in filing charges with the National Labor Relations Board, found and developed congressional allies in Washington, provided research and testified before multiple House and Senate Committees, and joined with Operation PUSH and Organization for Workers Rights in a suit against the EEOC.¹¹¹

Women Employed's "Affirmative Action Crisis" campaign of 1976 grew directly out of their previous frustrations with the government EEO enforcement agencies, which Women Employed had used from its earliest days in its battles against corporate discrimination. Women Employed chose to adopt a confrontational strategy to expose the failure of regulation, stop revisions to weaken affirmative action, and pressure action. In 1976, under the direction of Lawrence Lorber, the Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs (OFCCP) proposed revisions that would simplify enforcement procedures and clarify contractors' obligations, but the

¹⁰⁹ Ruth Milkman, "Women's History and the Sears Case," *Feminist Studies* 12, no. 2 (Summer 1986): 375–400; Alice Kessler-Harris, "Equal Employment Opportunity Commission v. Sears, Roebuck and Company: A Personal Account," *Feminist Review*, no. 25 (Spring 1987): 46–69.

¹¹⁰ Sears flyer, undated, box 3, folder 18, Women Employed Records, Richard J. Daley Special Collections and University Archives, University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, IL.

¹¹¹ *Grassroots Organizing in the 1970s: Five Case Studies*, 1979, box 58, folder 637, Women Employed Records.

revisions would weaken affirmative action. The revisions proposed to increase the amount for a federal contract requiring pre-award review from \$1 million to \$10 million and increase the minimum from fifty employees and to one hundred employees, thus removing the requirement for a majority of contractors. This change would allow approximately 80 percent of corporate contractors to escape review, according to Jean Hoffenkamp of Women Employed.¹¹²

Women Employed coordinated strategy and action timing for a coalition of groups fighting the revisions, including working women's groups in Boston, San Francisco, New York, Dayton, and Cleveland. The coalition circulated petitions, issued joint press releases, confronted the regional director of the Department of Labor, sent numerous letters to enforcement agencies with letters, held rallies, and requested civil rights groups to do the same. Through publicizing that over eight hundred Boston companies received federal funds and that the weakening of affirmative action would be detrimental for thousands of working women, more women joined the campaign and working women's organizations.¹¹³

The coalition of groups announced their determination to stop the revisions, to block the appointment of any secretary of labor unfriendly to affirmative action, and to make clear to President Jimmy Carter that minorities and women expected his administration to strengthen equal employment. The OFCCP withdrew its recommendations two days before Carter's inauguration. In the process of the campaign, Women Employed gained alliances with over one hundred women's rights, civil rights, and public interest groups across the country.¹¹⁴

¹¹²Campaign to Save Affirmative Action material, 1976, box 30, folder 314, Women Employed Records.

¹¹³ Miscellaneous correspondence between 9to5 and Women Employed," 1974–1977, box 5, folder 252, 9 to 5, National Association of Working Women, Additional records, 1972–1985, 82-M189—86-M213, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA; "Affirmative Action Committee Three-Month Plan," 1976, box 18, folder 1024, 9 to 5, National Association of Working Women, Additional records, 1972–1985, 82-M189—86-M213, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

¹¹⁴ *Grassroots Organizing in the 1970s: Five Case Studies*, 1979, box 58, folder 637, Women Employed Records, Richard J. Daley Special Collections and University Archives, University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, IL.

Continuing the work after 1976 on equal opportunity enforcement, Women Employed members testified before the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee. Assistant Secretary of Labor Donald Elisburg considered Women Employed a group that should be consulted. With the entrance of the Democratic administration in 1977, Women Employed increasingly became involved in policy formation in Washington and Chicago, interviewing and lobbying local government officials, and preparing proposals for presentation. They continued to work with civil rights organizations, meeting with the NAACP, National Urban League, Operation PUSH, among others. At their 1977 conference, Women Employed convinced Eleanor Holmes Norton, the new commissioner of the EEOC, to deliver the keynote address. She unveiled plans to reorganize and reform the EEOC along the lines of Women Employed's proposals.¹¹⁵

Working women's organizations challenged discriminatory office policies through organizing women workers and pressuring corporations and the government. The groups expressed the commitment to recruit minority women and viewed the constituency and potential membership of the organizations as a very diverse group. Much of the groups' work attempted to reach across movements and fight discrimination. As 9to5 stated, "The working women's movement is rooted in the labor movement of the 1930s and 1940s, the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, and the current feminist movement." While gaining minority representation in the working women's groups was a difficult process, some minority women did join. They directed attention to minority and women's issues, as evident in the affirmative action campaigns.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ Press release, October 19, 1977, box 27, folder 273, Women Employed Records; *WE Mid-Year Assessment of Government Equal Employment Enforcement Agencies*, 1978, box 28, folder 288, Women Employed Records; "WE Affirmative Action Report," undated, box 59, folder 647, Women Employed Records; "Testimony on Women in the Workplace Before the Senate Committee on Labor and Human Resources," 1981, box 35, folder 359, Women Employed Records.

¹¹⁶ "Letter to OPEIU representative," 1980, box 2, folder 17, SEIU District 925 Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

Working women's organizations provided women a place to learn about their rights in the workplace and to believe in themselves and the possibility of change. Since the organizations could not command a response through collective bargaining, many of the successes were episodic. Due to the changing workplace, automation, and budget cuts, clericals, particularly in higher education, felt the need to go further. Pursuing unionization became the next step. The next chapter explores the conditions that made higher education ripe for unionization.

CHAPTER 2: “ORPHANS” OF THE ACADEMIC FAMILY: CLERICALS IN THE UNIVERSITY WORKPLACE

December 1988 was a bad month for higher education funding and clerical workers. Southern University, a historically black institution in Baton Rouge, dropped a bombshell on its staff. With a projected budget deficit on \$5.2 million, the university laid off seventy employees and ordered pay cuts for 560 other workers. Half of the laid-off workers were administrative staff, clerical workers. The deficit developed as a result of lower than expected state appropriations.¹¹⁷ The same week, the recently defeated Democratic candidate for the presidency, Massachusetts governor Michael S. Dukakis, ordered Massachusetts public higher education institutions to return 3 percent of their budget to the state treasury in an attempt to close the state’s budget deficit. The cut of \$19 million, which resulted in layoffs and a hiring freeze, came on the heels of a \$22 million reduction in the 1987–1988 budget for public higher education.¹¹⁸ The situations at Southern University and in Massachusetts were not unique, as higher education experienced declining state and federal funding, along with declining enrollment into the 1980s. While institutions as a whole experienced belt-tightening to combat the fiscal crises, clerical staff were left particularly vulnerable.

Starting in the late 1950s, higher education expanded, as did its workforce. From 1970 to 1985, the trend continued with the number of institutions growing from 2,556 to 3,340.¹¹⁹ The expansion can be attributed to the G.I. Bill, helping veterans receive an education, and national security concerns, which helped pump research funds into higher institutions. Along with a

¹¹⁷ “Pay Cuts, 70 Layoffs Ordered at Southern University,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, December 14, 1988.

¹¹⁸ Goldie Blumenstyk, “Dukakis Orders Cuts in State College Budgets,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, December 14, 1988.

¹¹⁹ United States Bureau of the Census, *Statistical Abstract of the United State: 1988* (Washington, D.C., 1988), 141.

booming economy and a growing college-age population following the baby boom, more Americans sought college education than ever before.

As a result of the growth of higher education, staffing needs increased. Labor costs fueled part of the increase in state education spending, but that did not necessarily mean staff received high wages. By 1993, the United States had 2.7 million employees in higher education, making up 2.1 percent of the total workforce. Outpacing total labor force growth of 32 percent from 1976 to 1993, higher education staff grew by 40 percent, from 1.54 million to 2.1 million.¹²⁰

Working at a college or university gave the workers a sense of prestige, but conditions for workers were not always ideal. Financial downturns and declining state appropriations often left clerical workers, in particular, subject to layoffs. This was increasingly true by the late 1970s. Technological changes created the opportunity for higher productivity but also more routine and repetitive work and increased supervision, not just in higher education, but in all clerical workplaces. Computers and video display terminals (VDTs) prompted fears of automation and health concerns. As in most clerical jobs, sexual harassment remained an ever-present concern. These concerns helped inspire the creation of working women's organizations and made universities one of their primary sectors.

The Evolution of Higher Education

From the late 1950s to the early 1980s, the United States saw a massive expansion in higher education. Once the domain of a tiny elite, higher education became accessible to millions of Americans. Veterans returning from World War II were met with expanded social subsidies in the

¹²⁰ David R. Morgan, Kenneth Kickham, and James T. LaPlant, "State Support for Higher Education: A Political Economy Approach," *Policy Studies Journal* 29, no 3 (2001): 359; National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, "Fall Staff in Postsecondary Institutions, 1993," April 1996, <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs96/96323.pdf>.

form of the G.I. bill. In California, enrollment tripled in the five years following World War II. From 1959 to 1979, college enrollment increased from 3.2 million to 11.6 million. Nationally, this meant enrollment increases of 78 percent in the 1940s and 120 percent in the 1960s.¹²¹ State and local governments sought increased access as a priority, a valuable source of knowledge and service needed by the population.¹²² The massive expansion of public education “made a bachelor’s degree so broadly attainable in the United States, such that a college degree could come to seem more or less a prerequisite for middle-class life.”¹²³

In the 1960s and 1970s, state-level support for higher education also grew at a rapid pace. As states established systems of higher education and enrollment increased in the early 1960s, some states instituted two-year percentage gains in funding of 50 percent or more. By the 1970s, however, state tax funding declined, in large part due to the tax revolts, economic crises and accompanying high unemployment, and higher energy costs. Gains in state funding of 20 percent became more common in the 1970s. This resulted in a shift to increased reliance on tuition for funding and staffing cuts to help balance the budget. Wide variation between states existed, as each state had different needs. In some cases, the total amount spent declined, while in others, the amount spent on higher education increased but the relative amount of support, funding per student, deteriorated.¹²⁴ With resistance to additional taxation, that revenue stream became politically unappealing. Tax limitations, restrictions on the growth of state revenue or expenditure, extended into the 1980s and 1990s, along with widespread interest in reducing the size of

¹²¹ Christopher Newfield, *Unmaking the Public University: The Forty-Year Assault on the Middle Class* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 27–28.

¹²² Robert G. Peterson, “Environmental and Political Determinants of State Higher Education Appropriations Policies,” *Journal of Higher Education* 47, no. 5 (1976): 524–35.

¹²³ Aaron Bady and Mike Konczal, “From Master Plan to No Plan: The Slow Death of Public Higher Education,” *Dissent*, Fall 2012, <https://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/from-master-plan-to-no-plan-the-slow-death-of-public-higher-education>.

¹²⁴ David L. Buhler, “The Decline in State Funding of Public Education in the United States: Competing Budget Priorities and State Variations” (PhD diss., University of Utah, 2014), 4-5.

government. These beliefs led to more conservative policies across the country. Based on the idea that the government was too large, citizens' willingness to support higher education, which grew in the 1960s and 1970s, declined in the 1980s and 1990s.¹²⁵

By the end of the 1970s and into the early 1980s, student enrollment in higher education leveled off. Economic uncertainty resulted in calls for the need for belt-tightening and increased efficiency in government and higher education. Since 1979, state appropriations began to decline in real dollar terms. Many states encountered financial problems in 1980 and 1981 that were reflected in state budgets. At that time, due to vast reserves accumulated during years of high inflation, most institutions did not need to cut back significantly. By 1982, however, the reserves were significantly depleted. Many states began implementing across-the-board cuts on state agencies. Higher education was not exempt. In 1983, the National Center for the Study of Collective Bargaining in Higher Education and the Professions predicted reductions in the size of administrative and support budgets, with an accompanying reduction in the size of the workforce. Both administrative and support budgets had grown faster than instructional budgets.¹²⁶ These conditions put downward pressure on wages and gave incentives to cut the largely unrepresented staff.

In the 1980s, the economic disparity between public and private universities grew. Public institutions had to grapple with the economic recessions and state legislature attitudes, resulting in broad-based budget cuts. Declining state funding contributed to the downward pressure on higher

¹²⁵ Edwards Hines, "State Support of Higher Education: A 20-Year Contextual Analysis Using Two-Year Percentage Gains in State Tax Appropriations," in *Collective Bargaining and the Economic Condition of Higher Education, Sixteenth Annual Conference, April/May 1988*, ed. Joel M. Douglas (New York: National Center for the Study of Collective Bargaining in Higher Education and the Professions, 1984), 9–12; Michael K. McLendon, James C. Hearn, and Christine G. Mokher, "Partisans, Professionals, and Power: The Role of Political Factors in State Higher Education Funding," *Journal of Higher Education* 80, no. 6 (2009): 692.

¹²⁶ James R. Mingle, "Retrenchment in State Government: Its Consequences for Higher Education," in *Collective Bargaining in a Period of Retrenchment, Proceedings, Eleventh Annual Conference, April 1983*, ed. Douglas (New York: National Center for the Study of Collective Bargaining in Higher Education and the Professions, 1984), 8–13.

education staff wages. Private universities, due to profitable investments and donations, often expanded their endowments. Despite diverging economic fortunes, however, clerical workers in both private and public institutions encountered problems on the job and low pay.¹²⁷

When state finances are healthy, higher education benefits disproportionately; but when state finances are weak, higher education disproportionately bears the brunt of cuts. Increased revenue from sales tax and reduced expenditures for safety-net programs during good economic times allows for more higher education funding. The reverse is true in tough economic times. While the balance wheel theory held through the 1980s, in the 1990s, once the economy recovered, higher education funding did not increase as expected. Overall, state expenditures grew before sharply falling in the early 1990s. In 1980, state appropriations represented approximately half of public university revenue, declining to about one third in 2001.¹²⁸ A product of political choices, higher education was and continues to be a primary target for funding cuts.

Conservative states tend to see education spending as a low priority. Higher education spending declined when Republicans controlled both the state legislature and the governor's office. Conservative legislators saw higher education as identified with liberal ideas and the Democratic Party and as "a bloated sector insulated from market discipline and therefore overspending on gold-plated student facilities and self-indulgent faculty research."¹²⁹ Republicans generally were more generous to two-year colleges, as they favored economic development initiatives, which two-year colleges help foster. However, single-party legislative control also correlated with decreased

¹²⁷ Kate Shaughnessy, "Negotiating the Collective Self: Clerical Work Culture and Labor Militancy at the University of Minnesota, 1989–1994," (MA essay, Sarah Lawrence College, 1995), 2.

¹²⁸ Thomas J. Kane, Peter R. Orszag, and Emil Apostolov, "Higher Education Appropriations and Public Universities: Role of Medicaid and the Business Cycle," *Brookings-Wharton Papers on Urban Affairs* (2005): 99–101; Harold Hovey, *State Spending for Higher Education in the Next Decade: The Battle to Sustain Current Support* (San Jose, CA: State Policy Research Inc., The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 1999): 19.

¹²⁹ Christopher Newfield, *The Great Mistake: How We Wrecked Public Universities and How We Can Fix Them* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2016), 21.

funding, regardless of party, as a unified legislature could more easily make budgetary trade-offs in difficult financial situations.¹³⁰ Irrespective of the political culture of the state, K–12 education funding, seen as reaching a broader population, took priority, funneling money away from higher education. As scholar Christopher Newfield noted, “Legislatures show no sympathy for the hardships they cause by using public universities in the piggy bank during downturns.” Higher education was no longer seen as a universal public benefit.

The Higher Education Act of 1965, part of Johnson’s Great Society, and numerous other federal government initiatives strengthened the educational resources of U.S. higher education, although they would start to taper off in the 1970s. The majority of funding for higher education comes from the states, with states providing 65 percent more than the federal government on average from 1987 to 2012.¹³¹ Apart from federal granting agencies such as the National Science Foundation and National Endowment for the Humanities, federal funding chiefly takes the form of financial assistance to students and funds to expand the institutions’ capacity to serve disadvantaged students.¹³²

Federal deficits in the 1980s created a dire situation for higher education funding. Reagan’s 1981 tax cuts and the success of California’s Proposition 13 helped put “lower taxes at the heart of the GOP agenda and economic message.”¹³³ With intense public pressure to reduce the deficit and proposed draconian cuts to student aid in 1986, higher education institutions had to

¹³⁰ Buhler, *The Decline in State Funding of Public Education in the United States*, 21–26; McLendon, “Partisans, Professionals, and Power,” 690–707; David Tandberg, “Interest Groups and Governmental Institutions: The Politics of State Funding of Higher Education,” *Educational Policy* 24, no. 5 (2010): 744.

¹³¹ Center for College Affordability and Productivity, “A Look Back at the Higher Education Act,” *Forbes*, December 3, 2014, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/ccap/2014/12/03/a-look-back-at-the-higher-education-act/#74d6c74242e4>.

¹³² “Federal and State Funding of Higher Education: A Changing Landscape,” PEW Charitable Trusts, June 11, 2015, <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/issue-briefs/2015/06/federal-and-state-funding-of-higher-education>.

¹³³ Newfield, *The Great Mistake*, 38.

aggressively lobby to preserve funding. Three years later, *The Chronicle of Education* reported, that educators had traditionally accepted cuts to protect themselves from criticism “that they weren’t doing their fair share to reduce the deficit.” Richard Jerue, vice-president for governmental relations at the American Association of State and College Universities, stated, “We’ve already taken our fair share of cuts”... “we’re not the reason there’s a deficit problem—it’s the 88 percent increase in defense spending and the ill-advised tax cuts Reagan made that have caused the problem.”¹³⁴ Funding for education continued to face vigorous competition as it fell within the same budget category as many other important programs, including environmental protections. Jerue, then staff director of the House Postsecondary Subcommittee, stated, “It’s going to be very tough. Education is going to have to get in and fight with everyone else.”¹³⁵

While serving as president, Ronald Reagan proposed budget cuts to educational institutions in an attempt to shrink the federal government’s role. While governor of California, Reagan had demanded 20 percent across-the-board cuts in higher education funding. Reagan’s fiscal 1986 budget cut \$2.3 billion from the higher education budget and reduced federal financial aid for college students. Total federal government appropriations to higher education throughout the period kept pace with inflation, but the increases higher education witnessed in previous decades were gone. When Reagan was elected president, the federal share of total education spending was 12 percent; it declined to just 6 percent when he left office.¹³⁶

From 1992 to 2011, higher education funding had declined in thirty-three states. It decreased 3.2 percent in Ohio, 3.9 percent in Illinois, and 3.6 percent in Michigan, even while the

¹³⁴ Stacey E. Palmer, “Some Big Losses for Higher Education Predicted in Fierce and Frustrating Battle for Federal Funds,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, February 19, 1986.

¹³⁵ Colleen Cordes and Scott Jaschik, “U.S. Budget Outline Suggests Lean Year for Colleges,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, April 26, 1989.

¹³⁶ Center for College Affordability and Productivity, “If in Doubt, Blame Ronald Reagan/”.

real dollar amount increased.¹³⁷ State funding for higher education doubled from 30 billion in 1974 to 60 billion in 2000, but per-student funding increased by less than 1 percent per year. Since 1977, the percentage of the state budget for higher education declined more than 6 percentage points from 22.6 percent to 16.4 percent by the early 2000s, peaking at 23.5 percent in 1982.¹³⁸ This has resulted in massive increases in tuition as a way to regain lost funding, the increased use of adjunct faculty, and cuts and low wages to clerical staff.

The federal and state legislatures believed that higher education institutions could tap resources other than state governments, such as alumni donations and tuition, unavailable to other increasingly expensive programs and sectors, such as Medicaid or corrections.¹³⁹ At the same time, these sectors faced growing costs. Medicaid costs grew due to escalating prescription drug costs for an aging population. Corrections costs rose due to public demands for crime prevention and stricter sentencing laws. Public policy scholars David Weerts and Justin Ronca found that “for every \$10,000 per capita increase in funding for corrections, there’s a 12% decrease in funding for higher education.”¹⁴⁰ California, the center of the 1970s tax revolt, to use one example, passed Proposition 13. That proposition significantly restricted the state’s capacity to raise revenue through property taxes. In the 1980s, California also embarked on a prison-building boom. With dramatically limited income in the state’s coffers and expanded funding for corrections, little was left available for higher education. K–12 education, the largest item in state budgets, was much more visible and considered a higher priority than higher education, although K–12 education too

¹³⁷ Buhler, *The Decline in State Funding of Public Education in the United States*, 52.

¹³⁸ Michael J. Rizzo, “State Preferences for Higher Education Spending: A Panel Data Analysis, 1977–2001,” in *What’s Happening to Public Higher Education?*, ed. Ronald G. Ehrenberg (Washington, D.C.: Praeger, 2006), 6.

¹³⁹ Buhler, *The Decline in State Funding of Public Education in the United States*, 12; Rizzo, “State Preferences for Higher Education Spending,” 3–29.

¹⁴⁰ David J. Weerts and Justin M. Ronca, “Understanding Differences in State Support for Higher Education Across States, Sectors, and Institutions: A Longitudinal Study,” *Journal of Higher Education* 83, no. 2 (March/April 2012): 167.

had challenges. These competing interests, often with aggressive lobbyists, won the scarce funding.¹⁴¹

Higher education institutions can raise tuition, apply for research funding and grants, secure private donations, and engage in entrepreneurial activities. In the 1970s and 1980s, they did all this and more. Legislators could use increases in those as a way to legitimize diminishing appropriations to higher education even further.¹⁴² As David Tandberg notes, the federal government and many states subsidized higher education through student aid, “mak[ing] increases in tuition slightly more tolerable.” Still, it did not make up for other deficits. To comply with deficit reduction measures, federal agencies limited contract and grant awards to universities, all while student-aid programs contracted. Higher education was seen as having more flexibility to alter spending levels through courses offered and class sizes, so state and federal funding for higher education was viewed as an option for cuts.¹⁴³

Rising conservatism in the country, along with inflation and stagflation, led to budget cuts for higher education and increasing restrictions on unionization, both of which pushed university employees to turn to unions to deal with the threat of job loss. As advocates for higher education, unions, like the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), led successful budget and tax fights to preserve education funding in California, New York, Massachusetts, and Connecticut. At the federal level, the District 925-9to5-SEIU partnership lobbied for the rollback of budget cuts. These efforts made unions more appealing to unorganized higher education workers.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴¹ Bady and Konczal, “From Master Plan to No Plan.”

¹⁴² Julie L. Nicklin, “Public Colleges Scoring Big in Private Fund Raising,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, January 29, 1992.

¹⁴³ David Tandberg, “Politics, Interest Groups and State Funding of Public Higher Education,” *Research in Higher Education* 51, no. 5 (August 2010): 418; Kim McDonald, “Wary of New Cuts, U.S. Agencies Defer College Spending,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, January 8, 1986.

¹⁴⁴ Center for College Affordability and Productivity, “If in Doubt, Blame Ronald Reagan.”

Clerical Work in the Academy

During the 1980s and 1990s, non-instructional staff in universities and colleges lost job security due to higher education's financial woes and the impact of automation. While the total higher education workforce was growing, the percentage of non-professional staff in the workforce decreased. There were 790,671 non-professional staff in 1976 (42.4 percent of the workforce), rising to 949,775 in 1991 (37.3 percent of the workforce). By 1993, the number declined to 915,325 (35.2 percent of the workforce).¹⁴⁵ In 1993, there were 438,041 clerical and secretarial workers in higher education. Clerical workers made up 18.6 percent of the 2.3 million workers in higher education in 1987 but dropped to 16 percent in 1993. Supporting faculty, administration, and students, higher education clerical employees worked in a large variety of positions that were essential to the smooth running of the university,

In the higher education sector, even as occupational segregation declined overall, clerical workers continued to be predominantly women. Nearly 90 percent of clericals were women. In 1987, there were 391,164 women of a total 435,434 clerical workers. A wage gap persisted between men and women, even in this sector, and few women entered the higher paying skilled positions. Budgetary cuts for higher education prompted freezes on new hires and promotions, elimination or curtailment of hiring seasonal temporary workers, and cutting programs. Unfilled positions expanded the duties of clerical workers without an increase in pay. This and the lack of job security helped lead many clerical workers to unions and working women's organizations.

In this new context, unions saw higher education as a potential place to organize for multiple reasons. Unlike corporations, universities are geographically confined and cannot simply pick up shop and move to avoid worker organizing. There were also unionized faculty, showing

¹⁴⁵ Non-professional staff includes technical and paraprofessionals, clerical and secretarial, service and maintenance, and skilled craft workers.

that unions are appropriate for all types of workers. Faculty unionization, which expanded slowly but steadily in public sector institutions in the 1980s, was partially offset by membership losses in private institutions as a result of the *Yeshiva* decision, which ruled tenure-track faculty were managerial and, thus, excluded from the National Labor Relations Act.¹⁴⁶ The ruling happened concurrently with clerical unionization. As seen in the next chapter, private university clericals would rarely have a faculty union that would help support their organizing. Yet, often, unrepresented faculty still supported clerical unionization, as exemplified at Columbia University.¹⁴⁷ Furthermore, campuses were open to the public, allowing organizers to talk to employees with relative ease, workers were not always closely supervised, and universities tended not to be as blatantly anti-union as private employers.¹⁴⁸

By 1989–1990, non-faculty bargaining units represented more than 250,000 workers in institutions of higher education. Eighty-nine percent of the non-faculty collective bargaining units were located in New England, the Midwest, Great Lakes, and Far West. With no single union specializing in representing non-faculty employees in higher education, twenty-seven national unions represented subgroups of non-faculty employees, sixteen among white-collar workers. Among white-collar units, the most frequent were the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) (76 institutions) and SEIU (63 institutions).¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶In 1974, the Yeshiva University Faculty Association filed for a representation election with the National Labor Relations Board, which the university opposed, citing that faculty had extensive control over academic and personnel decisions. The NLRB ruled with the faculty association and directed an election, which the union won. The university appealed, ultimately reaching the Supreme Court.

¹⁴⁷Gerald A. Bodner, “The Implications of the Yeshiva University Decision for Collective Bargaining Rights of Faculty at Private and Public Institutions of Higher Education,” *Journal of College and University Law* 7, nos. 1–2 (1980), 78.

¹⁴⁸John Hoerr, “Solidaritas at Harvard,” *America Prospect*, Summer 1993, <http://www.prospect.org/article/solidaritas-harvard>.

¹⁴⁹Richard W. Hurd and Gregory Woodhead, “The Unionization of Clerical Workers at Large U.S. Universities and Colleges,” *Newsletter: National Center for the Study of Collective Bargaining in Higher Education and the Professions* 15, no. 3 (July–Aug 1987), 1–8; Hurd, “Non-Faculty Unionization at Institutions of Higher Education,” in *Directory of Non-Faculty Bargaining Agents in Institutions of Higher Education*, ed. Douglas (New York: National Center for the Study of Collective Bargaining in Higher Education and the Professions, 1991), ix-xii.

Unionization primarily occurred post-1970. A survey of the one-hundred largest public universities and fifty largest private universities in the United States found that only six of the listed clerical unions were certified in 1970 or earlier—less than 10 percent. Fourteen were certified between 1971 and 1975, nineteen between 1976 and 1980, and twenty-four between 1981 and 1985.¹⁵⁰ Even as unionization as a whole became tougher into the 1980s, the clerical organizing climate improved as unions saw the possibility of victories in the sector.

The Beginnings of Working Women’s Activism in Higher Education: The 1970s

Offices come in many shapes and sizes. As in business, clerical workers in higher education often experienced tedious work. Some offices were factory-like, where clericals worked in a secretarial pool in a centralized location. Pools allowed for community, but also close supervision. Many workers in higher education did not work in such pools, in part, because departmental units were small. Certain administrative offices, such as registration, were the exception. Many clerical employees worked in small offices with few co-workers.¹⁵¹ At universities, especially those considered status institutions,¹⁵² the clerical workforce was better educated and more highly skilled than the clerical workforce as a whole.¹⁵³ The feeling that they were not being valued and fairly compensated for their education and skills contributed to higher education clerical worker unhappiness.

¹⁵⁰ Hurd and Woodhead, “Unionization of Clerical Workers at Large U.S. Universities and Colleges,” 3.

¹⁵¹ Rosabeth Moss Kanter, *Men and Women of the Corporation* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), 72; Gladys McKenzie, interview by Clarke A. Chambers, October 11, 1995. University of Minnesota, <http://purl.umn.edu/49954>.

¹⁵² Higher education institutions are considered status institutions when they have selective admission standards and confer doctoral degrees.

¹⁵³ National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, “Digest of Education Statistics, 1990,” February 1991, <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs91/91660.pdf>; Hurd, “New Directions in Collective Bargaining: The Unionization of Clerical Workers and Colleges and Universities: A Status Report,” in *Power Relationships on the Unionized Campus, Proceedings, Seventeenth Annual Conference, April 1989*, ed. Douglas (New York: National Center for the Study of Collective Bargaining in Higher Education and the Professions, 1989), 40–49.

A 1972 report commissioned by the Nixon administration, *Work in America*, confirmed office worker discontent. It noted,

Secretaries, clerks, and bureaucrats were once grateful for having been spared the dehumanization of the factory...the office today, where work is segmented and authoritarian, is often a factory. For a growing number of jobs, there is little to distinguish them but the color of their worker's collars: computer keypunch operations and typing pools share much in common with the automobile assembly-line.¹⁵⁴

Working conditions in clerical work have consistently deteriorated, with extreme supervision and small repetitive tasks becoming the norm. A survey of women office workers conducted in 1981 found that workers' primary complaint was lack of mobility or raises. Concerns also included monotonous and repetitive work, a lack of decision-making power, and heavy workloads and overtime.¹⁵⁵

When 9to5 began at Harvard University, the concerns of university clericals were close to the heart of 9to5 founders. The University Committee, formed in 1974, was one of the earliest committees in the organization.¹⁵⁶ Meeting every two to three weeks, the committee, aiming to improve the conditions of clerical workers in higher education, planned to bring clerical women from different campuses who were doing on-campus organizing together to share experiences and learn useful tactics. They also hoped to bring in to 9to5 a group of activists who would feel loyal to the organization and would have the opportunity to participate as spokeswomen in other campaigns.¹⁵⁷ Overall, a disproportionate number of active working women's movement

¹⁵⁴ Nikil Saval, *Cubed: A Secret History of the Workplace* (New York: Doubleday, 2014), 245.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 249.

¹⁵⁶ 9to5 had committees in several employment sectors including insurance, publishing, banking, law firms, universities, and temporary work agencies.

¹⁵⁷ University Committee plans, 1975–1976, box 15, folder 955, 9 to 5, National Association of Working Women, Additional records, 1972–1985, 82-M189—86-M213, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

participants came from universities, as they saw their skills and education undervalued.¹⁵⁸ The sex segregation of higher education prevented many college-educated women from moving up.

Carol Papineau, a clerical and contact person from Massachusetts Institute of Technology, joined 9to5 as a result of deteriorating conditions at her workplace and the potential resources available from the association. Papineau wrote, “Notice that the application [for 9to5 membership] has been crumpled. I threw it away twice and retrieved it three times. I think the time has come to do more than bitch.” Among other issues, she and her fellow workers identified a discrepancy in the recommended classifications for office/clerical work. The Vice President of Personnel recommended retaining the existing four classifications but then listed only three.¹⁵⁹ Fewer classifications could mean less opportunity for advancement.

Emerson College in Boston provided one example of 9to5 University Committee activism. The Emerson College Staff Association provided an ongoing forum for discussion of common concerns facing employees below middle management. They voted ‘no confidence’ in the salary structure and grading system, which varied dramatically across departments. Along with 9to5, they formulated and presented a new compensation plan determined by responsibility. High turnover among clerical workers made union organizing extremely difficult, but 9to5 helped provide some resources for redress and assisted in reforming the staff association after it dissolved.¹⁶⁰

Media reports played a valuable role in increasing the public’s knowledge of 9to5 and spreading the word among women clericals. One of the earliest reports, in an August 1974 *Ms.*

¹⁵⁸ Ellen Cassedy, Karen Nussbaum, and Debbie Schneider, interview by Ann Froines, November 1, 2005, SEIU District 925 Legacy Project: Oral History, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

¹⁵⁹ Carol Papineau, letter to 9to5, 28, June 28, 1979 and July 12, 1979, box 15, folder 955, 9 to 5, National Association of Working Women, Additional records, 1972–1985, 82-M189—86-M213, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

¹⁶⁰ Emerson College organizing notes, 1978–1983, box 15, folder 976, 9 to 5, National Association of Working Women, Additional records, 1972–1985, 82-M189—86-M213, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

article, resulted in a flurry of inquiries. Soon after, the University of Chicago staff reached out to 9to5 to receive newsletters and advice during their Distributive Workers of America campaign. Requests for more information came from York University in Toronto, a statewide organization of community college office workers who sought to gain recognition, a consciousness-raising group of University of Minnesota office workers, and Michigan State University clericals.¹⁶¹

In 1977, the 9to5 University Committee developed a three-month plan for an outreach project for smaller local colleges, starting with surveying concerns and holding meetings on local campuses. In May 1977, after a successful conference at Simmons College the previous year, 9to5 planned to launch an industry-wide campaign at a meeting of one hundred university office workers from fifteen Boston-area colleges. The conference aimed to gain 9to5 more members in general and to create a 9to5 presence within the university community. 9to5 leaders would talk about organizing as an effective means of problem solving and developing leadership. They wanted to recruit more committee members from smaller, more organizable schools, with the hope that Local 925, the union that grew out of 9to5, could help them pursue unionization. The conference included workshops on legal rights, self-assertion on the job, how to organize, and collective action. The assertiveness workshop asked the attendees, “Have I, as a woman, been taught to behave in ways that make it difficult for me to act assertively in the present situation?” The how-to-organize workshop included information on union-busting tactics and explained to potential union members what to expect. Collective action workshops presented different alternatives for community action, such as staff associations and support groups. After the conference, 9to5’s plans for a university office worker newsletter got underway. Suggestions

¹⁶¹ Miscellaneous letters to 9to5, 1974, box 11, folder 614, 9 to 5, National Association of Working Women, Additional records, 1972–1985, 82-M189—86-M213, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

received by the university committee became a significant part of the organization, including a hotline women could call to obtain resources and to raise consciousness.¹⁶²

Along with the University of Massachusetts–Amherst group, 12to1, 9to5 helped produce the *First Statewide Status Report on University Office Workers*. In 1977, they surveyed twenty-five schools of various sizes in Boston, Worcester, and Amherst. With a 15 percent return rate, 9to5 presented the report at their first conference for working women. Most University of Massachusetts survey respondents listed the issues of clerical work, including a woman who responded,

The only reason I finally got a promotion and raise is because I aggressively and independently collected evidence and built an iron-clad case for myself, backed by threats of legal action. My immediate supervisor also threatened to quit. After all that, I had to agree to ... no benefits. Administration stinks.

Another respondent reported that a janitor, typically a position considered unskilled and filled by men, earned more than a technical typist in the Chemistry Department, a job requiring extensive training. Unskilled jobs, such as parking attendant, also earned more. One respondent informed 9to5 that some clericals could not take lunch breaks. Reported as dead-end and boring positions with inaccurate descriptions, secretarial jobs garnered poor public perceptions. Men in similar jobs earned significantly more money than their women counterparts, despite having less responsibility.

¹⁶² University Steering Committee, “Three-Month Plan,” January 1977, box 15, folder 955, 9 to 5, National Association of Working Women, Additional records, 1972–1985, 82-M189—86-M213, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA; Conference for University Office Workers workshop notes, May 19, 1977, box 15, folder 965, 9 to 5, National Association of Working Women, Additional records, 1972–1985, 82-M189—86-M213, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA; Conference for University Office Workers evaluations, May 19, 1977, box 15, folder 964, 9 to 5, National Association of Working Women, Additional records, 1972–1985, 82-M189—86-M213, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA; Conference for University Office Workers workshop notes, May 19, 1977, box 15, folder 965, 9 to 5, National Association of Working Women, Additional records, 1972–1985, 82-M189—86-M213, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

In one example, at the University of Massachusetts, women clericals at grade 9 did the same job as a man at grade 15.¹⁶³

The First Statewide Status Report on University Office Workers found that Boston-area university clericals made \$37 less per week than the average secretary nationally and \$4 less than average in Boston. Benefits for university workers did not close the gap. Considered one of the foremost benefits of working at a university, tuition remission was not always available to clericals. Furthermore, 80 percent responded that no organization on campus existed that adequately represented their concerns. By 1979, the 9to5 University Committee extensively discussed how to break through clericals' fear and present unions as non-threatening.¹⁶⁴

Their May 1979 University Workshop confirmed that increased faculty unionization and the certification of the first clerical union in a major Boston university put organizing at the forefront of the minds of office workers in the city. The workshop, titled "Becoming a Priority," emphasized the importance of clerical workers in higher education and the need for workers to band together through staff associations or unionization to get a voice in decision making. Janet Selcer, a 9to5 regional organizer, noted that 9to5 would sometimes help out with union drives, recalling several weeks spent working on a University of Pittsburgh organizing campaign.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶³ University office staff surveys, undated, box 15, folder 960, 9 to 5, National Association of Working Women, Additional records, 1972–1985, 82-M189—86-M213, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA; 9to5 University Committee, *First Statewide Status Report on University Workers*, 1978, box 15, folder 967, 9 to 5, National Association of Working Women, Additional records, 1972–1985, 82-M189—86-M213, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

¹⁶⁴ 9to5 University Committee, *First Statewide Status Report on University Workers*, 1978, box 15, folder 960, 9 to 5, National Association of Working Women, Additional records, 1972–1985, 82-M189—86-M213, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

¹⁶⁵ Janet Selcer, interview by Ann Froines, February 1, 2005, SEIU District 925 Legacy Project: Oral History, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI; University Committee notes, 1979, box 15, folder 960, 9 to 5, National Association of Working Women, Additional records, 1972–1985, 82-M189—86-M213, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

In the 9to5 University Committee three-month plan from January 1980, the focus started to shift to age discrimination as the committee's primary concern. Clericals at some colleges and universities reported incidents of blatant age discrimination. The primary goal became to collect information on age discrimination as it affected older women office workers. A secondary goal was to provide university members with training in recruitment techniques. In August 1980, the University Committee became the Age Campaign Committee. While the formal committee on university workers in 9to5 dissolved that year, discussions to re-establish a committee occurred and talks with SEIU to gain a national union charter increased. The charter would authorize the establishment of an SEIU local or auxiliary with the right to organize clerical workers across the country.¹⁶⁶ Its goal appeared to change as a result of committee members' interests to move to a prevalent issue in numerous workplaces. Even without the University Committee, 9to5 activism did not stop at universities. Along with 9to5 support, Local 925 actively organized at several Boston-area universities. The needs of clerical workers in universities extended far beyond age discrimination. Changes in technology in the 1970s and 1980s led to a reorganization in the nature of clerical work, concerns that new campaigns had to address.

Technology in the Clerical Workplace

The clerical workplace, whether in a university or a private business, changed dramatically in the last decades of the twentieth century due, in large part, to the introduction of computers. Many clericals feared that the implementation of computers, word processors, and other technology could result in job erosion, loss of job security, and employee layoffs. They also feared

¹⁶⁶ University Steering Committee, "Three-Month Plan," January 1980, box 15, folder 955, 9 to 5, National Association of Working Women, Additional records, 1972–1985, 82-M189—86-M213, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

the possible health effects of the new technology. Automation in the office was, from the outset, a women's issue, as clerical work was a women-dominated occupation.

The working women's movement sought to slow the speed of automation, reducing the possible negative impact of the technology. Many working women's groups believed that while computing provided new job opportunities, new high-status, skilled clerical positions involving the new technology would be transferred to men, and current clerical work would be deskilled, resulting in job downgrades. Of the new jobs created from 1979 to 1987, however, more than 50 percent paid less than the poverty threshold.¹⁶⁷ 9to5 engaged in education campaigns to inform the public and clerical workers of the potential negative consequences of automation. It also encouraged unions to fight for video display terminal (VDT) protocols in contracts and pressured employers to create their own regulations. With union support, 9to5 also sought government legislation to get uniform policies regarding implementation of new technology and health and safety guidelines. As secretarial job levels consistently declined from 1981, not even increasing in the expansionary 1983–1984 period, women felt the changes of office reorganization.¹⁶⁸

Fear of the automated office started with discussions of the potential threat appearing in union literature in the late 1960s. An early discussion came in the Office and Professional Employees International Union (OPEIU)'s newsletter, *White Collar*. An April 1969 article, "A Warning to Women—Automation Threatens," noted that many repetitive tasks had been taken over by machines. Phonetic writing apparatuses, for example, would make shorthand typists redundant. As OPEIU warned, the problem was multi-faceted. Due to a strong economy and a high

¹⁶⁷ Vernon Mogensen, *Office Politics: Computers, Labor, and the Fight for Safety and Health* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1996), 22.

¹⁶⁸ Nancy MacLean, "The Hidden History of Affirmative Action: Working Women's Organizations in Workplace Struggles in the 1970s and the Gender of Class," *Feminist Studies* 25 (1999): 55; Elyce Rotella, *From Home to Office: U.S. Women at Work, 1870–1930* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1981), 106; Ohio organizing material, 1983 and 1986, box 8, folder 39, SEIU District 925 Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

demand for labor, the initial impact of office automation had been masked. Workers were said to feel anxiety, suspicion, and resignation, as the introduction of office machines were seen as something they could not influence. In January 1969, OPEIU argued that automation might persuade office workers to turn to organizing, as they became dissatisfied with their conditions. White-collar unionism also had gained respectability due to the increased unionization of government employees, professionals, and teachers.¹⁶⁹

The introduction and spread of new technology produced a fundamental shift in the American workplace, as fundamental as the move from agriculture to a manufacturing economy. The way companies implemented technology influenced how it could be a positive or negative force. For employers, VDTs were a wonderful addition that reduced labor while still increasing productivity. For example, in 1975, Citibank took three days to process a letter of credit, with fifty processing steps and fourteen people involved. By 1985, it took one VDT worker one day to process a letter, allowing for over 30 percent reduction in staff. For workers, technology could increase workloads, make their job more routinized, and put their livelihoods at risk.¹⁷⁰

The ability to eliminate some bad jobs, with routine work reduced, provided welcome relief to clericals. Studies indicated that people who used computer terminals for part of their work day found them beneficial, but those that worked all day at the computer found them detrimental. They felt tied to the computer. Office workers often have little knowledge of computer functioning or repair. The feeling of powerlessness increased in the event of computer failure, as they could not complete work with an unchanging deadline.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁹ *White Collar*, January 1969, box 2, *White Collar*, Office and Professional Employees International Union, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

¹⁷⁰ Linda Valli, *Becoming Clerical Workers* (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986), 1–20.

¹⁷¹ Press coverage, automation, 1980–1984, box 2, folder 38-9, SEIU District 925 Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI; Valli, *Becoming Clerical Worker.s*

Clericals did not passively accept office reorganization. Automation became a major issue for the working women's movement. An advocate for control within the office, 9to5 was the most visible voice against office automation.¹⁷² Education campaigns, the dominant tactic for fighting the impact of automation, aimed to influence public opinion and publicize the potential hazards of technological change, such as job loss, lack of new opportunities, and health hazards. These campaigns also sought to inform the clericals of what they could do, or ask for, in their workplace through workshops, speak-outs, and publications. Activism among office workers in the 1970s was largely related to reducing the spread of VDTs. 9to5 contended that workers should not solely work on VDTs, as jobs should be interspersed with non-VDT work. With one million VDTs in place in offices in 1975 and with predictions of over ten million by 1985, the campaigns showed urgency, with massive activism starting by the early 1980s.¹⁷³

A major fear of automation regarded the loss of job security. Women held 90 percent of the jobs earmarked for automation, including file clerks, bookkeepers, secretaries, typists, bank tellers, and insurance workers. The majority of office workers faced with the introduction of automation were unorganized. Karen Nussbaum, executive director of 9to5 and president of SEIU District 925, believed that the overall expansion of the clerical workforce masked the issue of job displacement in relation to office automation. In time, the losses would be significant. European studies predicted job losses of 15 to 20 percent in the clerical fields. Corporations sold computers

¹⁷² Williams, interview by Ann Froines, September 12, 2006, SEIU District 925 Legacy Project: Oral History, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI; Gloria Steinem, interview by Stacey Heath, October 2, 2006, SEIU District 925 Legacy Project: Oral History, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI; Janet Selcer, interview by Ann Froines, February 1, 2005, SEIU District 925 Legacy Project: Oral History, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI; Milkman, "Women Workers, Feminism and the Labor Movement from the 1960s."

¹⁷³ Press coverage, health and safety, 1980–1984, box 2, folder 40, SEIU District 925 Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

specifically with promises of personnel cuts. One advertisement, portrayed as a classified ad, expressed the preference of machines to workers. It stated:

Help Wanted: Versatile workers to improve productivity. Willing to work days and nights. No vacations or sick leave. Job environment may be tedious or hazardous. Must have perfect vision and concentration—applications unlimited. Call personnel!

Among employers, at a time when offices started unionizing, and the working women's movement was growing, machines that never attended union meetings or went on strike were seen as particularly beneficial.¹⁷⁴

9to5 and affiliated organizations produced multiple studies that confirmed the elimination of clerical positions as a result of automation. The shrinking offices resulted from workers squeezed out through attrition and internal reorganization rather than massive layoffs. Working Women's Education Fund's 1985 study, *Computer Technology and the Displacement of Clerical Workers in Ohio*, reported that the overall number of workers decreased by 26 percent since the introduction of automated equipment. Clericals also found their jobs less secure. With increasing ease, businesses could move work away from downtowns to suburbs or even other countries in an attempt to avoid unionization and regulations. At a time when clerical workers were demanding better pay, promotions, better benefits, and attention to health and safety, businesses saw the opportunity to rebuild away from these conditions. The movement of jobs did not usually negatively affect clericals in higher education, but the shrinking offices certainly did.¹⁷⁵

In a study of clerical work and technological displacement in Ohio, Karen Nussbaum argued automation perpetuated job ghettos for women with escalating routine work, earning less

¹⁷⁴ Press coverage, automation, 1980–84, box 2, folder 38, SEIU District 925 Collection; *Race against Time: Automation of the Office*, 1980, box 2, folder 51, SEIU District 925 Collection.

¹⁷⁵ *Computer Technology and the Displacement of Clerical Workers in Ohio*, 1985, box 2, folder 45, SEIU District 925 Collection.

for producing more, and loss of opportunities for social interaction.¹⁷⁶ As a 1985 study noted, “The secretary who is required to produce more complex work without an increase in pay and the file clerk who is reduced from full-time to part-time status are both victims of the automated office.” Clericals, who acquired more complex skills as a result of automation, were not rewarded with higher pay or given promotions. The belief “that it’s the boring and repetitive jobs that get computerized, leaving room for more glamorous and exciting jobs: is one of the most prevalent myths in computer lore,” according to author Joan Greenbaum. Office automation meant that the majority of jobs would become more routine and repetitive, and jobs would be deskilled, making wages as low as possible.¹⁷⁷

Computers entered the workplace as gender-neutral, as the first operational computer ENIAC, used to perform calculations for the atomic bomb in 1944–1945, was successfully programmed by women classified as clerical workers. Once computer programming became defined as technical and professional, the job category became overwhelmingly male. This was not because women could not do the work but because the social definition changed. In the 1980s, only 19 percent of computer specialists were women, concentrated in the lowest-paid computer jobs as programmers and coders.¹⁷⁸

Computers did offer a variety of new job opportunities, but these rarely went to women in clerical positions. Automated office systems created “new” office hierarchies, maintaining sex-stratification in pay, power, and prestige, all long familiar to women office workers. Women remained concentrated in the computer-based clerical jobs and the lowest levels of the newly

¹⁷⁶ *Computer Technology and the Displacement of Clerical Workers in Ohio*, 1985, box 2, folder 45, SEIU District 925 Collection; Press coverage, automation, 1980–84, box 2, folder 38, SEIU District 925 Collection.

¹⁷⁷ *Race against Time: Automation of the Office*, 1980, box 2, folder 51, SEIU District 925 Collection.

¹⁷⁸ Joan Greenbaum, “Effects of Office Automation on the Public Sector Workforce: A Case Study” (Report, Washington, D.C.: Office of Technology Assessment, Congress of the United States, April 1985).

emerging computer occupations, whereas men had more opportunity for advancement to high-level positions. With clerical jobs automated, two low-level jobs were created for every high-level job.¹⁷⁹ Lack of job postings and promotional opportunities, significant concerns of 9to5 since its founding, became exacerbated. As newly created, better-paying positions were not posted, clericals had no opportunity to apply.

Managers used changes associated with automation to create ambiguity in jobs, reduce pay, or get rid of better-paid, experienced employees. 9to5 publicized these issues, through flyers, surveys, press releases, and reports, giving the public notice, while also showing clerical workers that they could speak out and access resources. Clerical worker and union steward Janine Morgall noted in 1981, “New technology should be met with ideas and feasible plans for its utilization, not by unchallenged acceptance.”¹⁸⁰

Many clericals complained about inadequate, haphazardly administered training, minimal-to-no opportunities for advanced training, and little say in implementation. A twenty-nine-year-old woman at a school noted:

The school bought the equipment and the software and said ‘Here you go!’ The faculty was provided with extensive training sessions, but nothing was provided for the staff. Finally, I was given a one hour session, but it was very disorganized, and I didn’t find it very helpful.

Many times, one person got selected for training with the expectation that the worker would come back with the knowledge and teach others. The chosen employee may have lacked adequate

¹⁷⁹ Press coverage, automation, 1980–84, box 2, folder 39, SEIU District 925 Collection.

¹⁸⁰ Janine Morgall, “Typing Our Way to Freedom: Is It True That New Office Technology Can Liberate Women?” *Feminist Review* 9, no. 1 (November 1981), 87; *Computer Technology and the Displacement of Clerical Workers in Ohio*, 1985, box 2, folder 45, SEIU District 925 Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI; Turk, “‘Labor’s Pink Collar Aristocracy.’”

teaching skills, and interpersonal issues could interrupt the process. As a result, many workers had to explore the new technology on their own, creating a highly frustrating situation.¹⁸¹

Other groups besides 9to5 spoke out against the hazards of automation. Women Employed, a working women's group from Chicago, received a grant from the Ford Foundation to study the effects of automation and recommend guidelines for corporations. Women Employed found it necessary to involve clericals in the automation process, as they held the essential knowledge about the current information needs in any office. Such involvement would help minimize the problems of choosing and implementing the right equipment and ensure fairness. The resistance to automation remained largely unorganized, however, due to the exceptionally high turnover at highly automated jobs. The support of working women's organizations and many unions provided hope.¹⁸²

Just because the office did not have the chemical and mechanical hazards of the industrial workplace, it did not mean that the office was a healthy and safe work environment. While the air-conditioned and carpeted office provided a striking contrast to sweatshops and mines, women office workers encountered continuous daily exposures, which built up over months or years. The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) was not particularly concerned with office worker health, partly because the illnesses differed from those in industrial workplaces. Sick building syndrome, where multiple employees in the workplace became ill for no apparent reason, fit no available model of occupational illness. While offices conditions were examined, instruments, constructed to use in the industrial workplace, could not accurately detect the

¹⁸¹ *Computer Technology and the Displacement of Clerical Workers in Ohio*, 1985, box 2, folder 45, SEIU District 925 Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

¹⁸² Women Employed, "Office Automation and the Secretary: Recommended Corporate Policies," 1982, box 36, folder 368, Women Employed Records, Richard J. Daley Special Collections and University Archives, University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, IL; Press coverage, automation, 1980–84, box 2, folder 38, SEIU District 925 Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

chronically low-level exposures, putting them outside what the NIOSH would consider significant chemical exposure.¹⁸³ As 9to5 co-founder Ellen Cassedy noted, the barely discernible potential hazards were “all the more severe because they are often invisible and unrecognized.”¹⁸⁴ Occupational health researcher, Dr. Jeanne Stellman confirmed, “Today all workers – in one way or another – become chemical workers and everybody is exposed to chemicals in the workplace.”¹⁸⁵ Hazardous chemicals, such as toluene and benzene, were used to clean offices, and office machines produced toxic fumes. Inadequate ventilation and chemical usage could lead to indoor air pollution and an unhealthy workplace.

Further, women’s occupational health and safety attracted little attention in the 1970s. Not until the 1980s would the office to become a subject of health and safety research. In January 1984, Dr. Stellman and former Women’s Occupational Health Resource Center research associate and resource coordinator Mary Sue Henifin co-wrote *Office Work Can Be Dangerous to Your Health*.¹⁸⁶ Stellman, a frequent speaker on women’s occupational health at working-women’s organization events, discussed the chemical exposures in offices, the concerns of noise and air quality, lack of ergonomic workplaces, and stress associated with office work, especially VDT tasks.¹⁸⁷ Stellman and Henifin’s research helped show that the health problems facing office workers were based on scientific facts and should not be dismissed.

Even more than job loss and job reorganization, health consequences alerted the public to the reorganization of offices. By the 1980s, health and safety regarding computers, particularly VDTs, became a prime issue of working women’s organizations and unions representing clerical

¹⁸³ Michelle Murphy, *Sick Building Syndrome and the Problem of Uncertainty: Environmental Politics, Technoscience, and Women Workers* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006), 90.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 69.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 67.

¹⁸⁶ Jeanne Stellman and Mary Sue Henifin, *Office Work Can Be Dangerous to Your Health* (New York: Pantheon, 1984).

¹⁸⁷ Murphy, *Sick Building Syndrome and the Problem of Uncertainty*, 76.

workers. District 65 of the United Automobile Workers (UAW) noted in the January 1982 edition of *Distributive Worker* that stress, muscle fatigue, noise, and air pollution were not dangers confined to blue-collar workers. They noted, that “although those machines won’t spurt oil or chop off a finger, they can make you sick.”¹⁸⁸ In 1980, 9to5 demanded a moratorium on the further introduction and manufacture of video display screens until safety standards were established and congressional hearings explored the impact of office automation on clerical workers and the economy.¹⁸⁹

Some well-documented health problems accompanied clerical work. A 1980 study found working women generally had no higher rate of heart disease than homemakers, but women employed in clerical positions did. Compared to women workers overall, clerical women experienced twice the incidence of heart disease. When combined with three or more children and a husband in a blue-collar position, clerical women had three times the incidence of heart disease. Economic stress contributed, but the findings associated stress with the lack of feeling of control and deskilling, downgrading, and monotonous work. A Cleveland Working Women stress survey found that 72.5 percent of secretaries, clerks, and typists found their jobs somewhat or very stressful. The breaking down of jobs into the smallest possible components limited the variety of tasks an office worker performed. As Karen Nussbaum argued, “Specialization is proving to be a psychological disaster for office workers.”¹⁹⁰

Further, a NIOSH study in 1981 confirmed that full-time VDT operators had the highest levels of stress of any group, including air traffic controllers, and a resulting level of stress-related

¹⁸⁸ District 65, *Distributive Worker*, January 1982, box 1, folder 3, *Distributive Worker (District 65 News)*, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

¹⁸⁹ 9to5 Health and Safety Committee publications, 1981, box 5, folder 165, 9to5 National Association of Working Women, Additional Records, 1972–1986, 88-M96—89-M104, Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

¹⁹⁰ Karen Nussbaum, “The Hazards of Office Automation,” *Business and Society Review* 40 (December 1981), 46.

disease. Stress, an expression of office oppression, was “a mechanism for adapting to the environment.”¹⁹¹ Clerical workers widely reported eye ailments, with some secretaries closing their eyes to type rather than to continue to look at the screen, as well as musculoskeletal problems from a lack of ergonomic equipment. One report found that 25 percent of secretarial/clerical workers, especially those who work on VDTs, suffered severe muscular distress in their arms, neck, and shoulders.¹⁹²

The effects on pregnancy became a subsequent concern for workers in women-dominated clerical occupations. From 1978 to 1983, eight clusters of birth defects and/or miscarriages were reported in the United States and Canada among women office workers. In one case, United Telephones Sale representatives, over a five-year period, reported that of the forty-eight pregnancies in the office, almost half experienced miscarriages or pregnancy problems. The link between pregnancy problems and VDTs remained controversial, as no one knew if they were caused by low levels of radiation, stress, or statistical anomaly. 9to5 advised women to meet with their boss and ask to continue in non-VDT positions until the end of pregnancy. Some successes for the right to transfer came early. Four Bell of Canada employees won the right to not work at VDTs in 1981. In 1991, NIOSH concluded the clusters to be the result of chance, but 9to5 demanded further research, calling the study design flawed. The study failed to identify women early in their pregnancies, and it could not detect the impact of radiation on miscarriages that occurred the first few weeks after conception.¹⁹³ NIOSH also published findings in 1980 that no

¹⁹¹ Murphy, *Sick Building Syndrome and the Problem of Uncertainty*, 76.

¹⁹² Press coverage, health and safety, 1980–84, box 2, folder 40, SEIU District 925 Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI; Michelle Murphy, “Toxicity in the Details: The History of the Women’s Office Worker Movement and Occupational Health in the Late-Capitalist Office,” *Labor History* 41, no. 2 (2000), 205.

¹⁹³ Press coverage, health and safety—VDTs, 1983–88, box 2, folder 41, SEIU District 925 Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

significant chemical exposure or significant radiation resulted from VDT exposure.¹⁹⁴ This study did not end the debate. Workers worried that the studies were not long-term and that the long-term effects remained unknown. One concerned clerical noted, “It just seems like we’re going to be the asbestosis people of the future.”¹⁹⁵ Working women’s groups pushed for further studies and conducted their own. They also organized conferences on health hazards and the first international conference on the effect of technological change. Held in 1982, this conference had two hundred academics, unionists, managers, and women activists in attendance.¹⁹⁶

Unions were committed allies who saw automation as a way to undermine office workers right to representation and to collapse job classifications and pay scales. Employers eliminated long-term employees whose positions were automated and hired consultants to ease the transition. These consultants often served as anti-union or union-busting forces. Unions and working women’s groups worked together, notably in the Campaign for VDT Safety, a joint project of 9to5 and SEIU. The four-year study conducted by Dr. Irving Selikoff of the Mt. Sinai School of Medicine, who was famous for establishing the connection between the inhalation of asbestos particles and lung-related ailments, examined the potential for eye damage and birth defects involving more than 10,000 VDT users.¹⁹⁷

The UAW, SEIU, Communication Workers of America (CWA), and other unions made automation a significant bargaining issue and frequently spoke on the matter. In 1982, District 65

¹⁹⁴ Murphy, “Toxicity in the Details,” 205.

¹⁹⁵ In 1964, the widespread prevalence of asbestosis was confirmed among asbestos workers and their families. The disease garnered massive media attention and federal regulations in the 1970s and 1980s. Jeb Barnes, *Dust-Up: Asbestos Litigation and the Failure of Commonsense Policy Reform* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2011), 23.

¹⁹⁶ Health and Safety Committee notes, February–March 1981, box 5, folder 148, 9to5 National Association of Working Women Additional Records, 1972–1986, 88-M96–89-M104, Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.; Press coverage, health and safety—VDTs, 1983–88, box 2, folder 41, SEIU District 925 Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

¹⁹⁷ Mary T. Schmich, “Safety of VDTs: Are They Really User-Friendly?,” *Chicago Tribune*, July 21, 1985.

and 9to5 co-sponsored a speak-out.¹⁹⁸ Like other unions, the UAW played an active role in lessening the hazards of the office, negotiating frequent breaks, transfer rights, time off to participate in all aspects of designing the work layout, and monitoring limits. The UAW also published *Guide to Visual Display Units*, which suggested contract language for working conditions in the automated office.¹⁹⁹ The message of the guide was that workers should have a say in the conditions of their work. Without worker input, the impact of new technology could be devastating due to layoffs, increased workloads, and health problems.

Automation was, moreover, a potential issue that moved some workers toward unionization. 9to5 referred workplaces that seemed receptive to unionization to Local 925 and SEIU District 925, 9to5's sister unions. In media coverage, District 925 linked automation to the need for a union as a way to seek redress for the deteriorating conditions of office work. In a televised panel, Karen Nussbaum argued that unions were the best way to get strict health and safety regulations and challenge job classifications to avoid getting paid less for doing more. Nussbaum noted by the mid-1980s, "No worker should have to go home sick because of his or her work. That's why in my union, as I'm sure is true in the ones representing your workers, there's not a clerical contract being negotiated that doesn't cover ergonomics."²⁰⁰ Nussbaum was not just talking about technological change, but, rather, the increasing stress and health problems women experienced in the office that resulted from the reorganization of work.

¹⁹⁸ District 65, *Distributive Worker*, January 1982, box 1, folder 3, *Distributive Worker (District 65 News)*, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

¹⁹⁹ "A Labor Perspective: Workers' Expectations and Views," BELLCORE VDT Safety Seminar (Cleveland), speech, May 6, 1988, box 15, folder 36, SEIU District 925 Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI; Barrie Brooks, *Guide to Visual Display Units* (Detroit: UAW Health and Safety Department, 1982).

²⁰⁰ "A Labor Perspective: Workers' Expectations and Views," BELLCORE VDT Safety Seminar (Cleveland), speech, May 6, 1988, box 15, folder 36, SEIU District 925 Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI; *Phil Donahue Show* with guests Karen Nussbaum and Pat Cronin, 1980, 9 to 5, National Association of Working Women (U.S.) Videotapes, 1978–1980, Vt-10, reel 4, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University.

Unions struggled to get contract language on VDTs and other concessions. As Janet Bertinuson of the *Labor Occupational Health Program Monitor* noted, “Even when they have a union, the contract often stated that management sets work standards, so that the employees can’t file grievances on production quotas.” She noted that workers were challenging production quotas on health aspects, citing that high quotas created a work environment that was stressful enough to cause health problems. Since VDTs allowed workers to process information faster than ever before, employees were expected to produce more. VDTs also facilitated increased monitoring, of which many employers took advantage. Managers could see data on every keystroke made by an employee, eroding employee privacy and increasing stress even more.²⁰¹ Since the clerical workforce remained mostly unorganized, and thus without the protection of a union, 9to5 contended that clerical workers needed the labor legislation to protect themselves; at the same time, it while still encouraged unionism as a way to improve working conditions.²⁰²

It quickly became clear that eliminating and resisting VDT work in the office was not feasible, but something could potentially be done to limit its impact. Municipalities, state governments, and the national government released recommendations, but these suggestions, which potentially increased employer costs, were rarely enforced. The NIOSH recommended fifteen-minute breaks after every two hours of VDT work or every hour of intensive work. The American Optometric Association recommended visual testing. Other nations proved more receptive to regulations than the United States. For example, Sweden instituted regulations in June 1985, covering broad aspects of VDT work. These fairly far-reaching regulations required adjustable heights for keyboards, adjustable screen angles, adequate work surfaces, vision rests,

²⁰¹ Mogensen, *Office Politics*, 12.

²⁰² *Race against Time: Automation of the Office*, 1980, box 2, folder 51, SEIU District 925 Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

and special glasses if the test indicated worker need. Sweden mandated task rotation to relieve eye and other strain, thus avoiding tedious routine work. Multiple countries issued technical specifications on the characteristics of VDT terminals, desks, and chairs. While American manufacturers began producing equipment to meet the new standards, inferior equipment remained in the United States. The nation remained notable for its absence from any federal regulation for VDTs. According to Karen Nussbaum, 60 percent of terminals manufactured in the United States did not meet international safety standards.²⁰³

By the mid-1980s, Karen Nussbaum was lobbying for legislation in eighteen states that mandated adjustable equipment, more rest periods, and proper lighting. One of the earliest bills had been introduced in the Maine legislature in 1981, calling for employers to provide annual eye exams and paid fifteen-minute rest breaks for every two hours of VDT use. In 1983, utilizing research conducted by Cleveland Working Women, a 9to5 affiliate, Representative Barbara Pringle introduced a similar bill in Ohio. The act included transfer rights, regular inspections of VDTs by the Ohio Department of Industrial Relations, and a hefty per day fine for ignoring the legislation. Ohio House Bill 522 provoked significant opposition from some businesses. John Reiners of the Ohio Chamber of Commerce was staunchly against the bill. He argued it placed severe employment restrictions on computer technology and stated that, if companies were considering coming to Ohio, they would look elsewhere. He objected to mandated rest breaks and “unnecessary health concerns.” Opponents to a similar bill in Pennsylvania voiced the same concerns as Reiners. They argued that passage of the bill would signal to businesses that

²⁰³ Press coverage, health and safety—VDTs, 1983–88, box 2, folder 41, SEIU District 925 Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

Pennsylvania is “not hospitable to technological progress and is not particularly sensitive to the use of advanced technology to control costs through increased productivity.”²⁰⁴

Unions worked with working women’s groups on legislation. In Massachusetts in 1982, 9to5, the AFL-CIO, and SEIU District 925 worked together on a bill, frequently called the VDT bill, which included provisions for ergonomic workspaces and advanced notice of new automation. Although it was defeated in 1982, the bill was reintroduced in 1984, where it was recommended for future study, showing growing momentum for legislation.²⁰⁵ At the same time, Sally Tanner, a representative in California, introduced a bill for the California State Employees Association to protect state government workers from automation.²⁰⁶

Nine to Five, the 1980 film, helped 9to5 and the working women’s movement gain another prominent ally in Tom Hayden. Hayden, then married to the most prominent celebrity supporter of 9to5, Jane Fonda, became interested in the issues affecting clerical workers through his wife’s involvement. While serving as a California state representative in 1984, Hayden introduced a VDT bill to the California State Assembly backed by the AFL-CIO and Working Women. Noting the extreme resistance to the bill from business interests, Hayden stated, “It’s clear they see it as a mortal threat. They’re stonewalling by claiming there isn’t a problem.” While drastically watered down by the time of its approval, the bill allowed pregnant video display terminal (VDT) workers to switch assignments. It also established a sixteen-member statewide VDT safety task force to look into some of the areas initially covered by Hayden’s bill. Originally, Hayden’s bill had included lighting, brightness controls on the screen, rest periods, eye exams, and company supplied

²⁰⁴ Press coverage, health and safety—VDTs, 1983–88, box 2, folder 41, SEIU District 925 Collection.

²⁰⁵ VDT Bill materials, 1984, box 18, folders 1221-5, 9 to 5, National Association of Working Women, Additional records, 1972–1985, 82-M189—86-M213, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

²⁰⁶ Press coverage; health and safety—VDTs, 1983–88, box 2, folder 41, SEIU District 925 Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

eyeglasses. The task force, made up of VDT workers, union representatives, employers, manufacturers, and occupational health leaders, was to study if VDTs caused visual, musculoskeletal, reproductive, or stress problems. The group then was to discuss ways to tackle the issues. Hayden and working women groups saw the approval and creation of the task force as significant. It would lead to official recognition of the problem and allow representatives of women and labor groups to have an equal voice with the business community in discussing industry safety standards. In the 1980s, guidelines did get passed in several additional states, including Massachusetts, New Mexico, Washington, and Wisconsin.²⁰⁷

The working women's groups and unions continued to publicize the hazards and effects of the high-tech office into the 1990s. The working women's organizations' work on automation and their concerns about respect in the workplace, fair pay, and promotional opportunities, helped bring more women into the working women's movement. The publicity showed that the problems clerical workers encountered were not confined to their own offices. It provided a feeling of solidarity and knowledge to fight the unknown health complications caused by job design.

Sexual Harassment in the Office

Beyond the new office technology, there were other problems women workers faced. Sexual harassment was endemic to the office, no matter which sector, as clerical workers had significantly less power than their bosses. One of the only ways to win power was by saying yes to propositions. The term, "sexual harassment," means sexual coercion and exploitation in the workplace and the use of legal, economic, or social power to impose unwelcome sexual advances or to create an intimidating, hostile, or offensive environment based on sex. Women are more

²⁰⁷ Press coverage; health and safety—VDTs, 1983–88, box 2, folder 41, SEIU District 925 Collection.

prevalent targets of sexual harassment, with 40 percent of women reporting experiencing it.²⁰⁸ It is, however, a problem that survives in most unequal workplaces, as shown in the contemporary #MeToo Movement.

Before 1975, women lacked a vocabulary to express their experiences. In 1961, the National Secretaries Association published a guide for common secretarial problems and practical solutions. “Discouraging the office wolf” appeared at the end of the guide, after tips on developing a working file system. The guide acknowledged the vulnerability of women, clearly identifying the issue as something clericals had to combat on the job. However, individual workers were given the responsibility for solving the problem. No systemic changes were suggested or advocated for. Unwanted and coercive sexual behaviors were simply seen as a normal part of life for women workers. Yet as historian Julie Berebitsky noted, “Sex should not be in the office, and therefore many people either refused to acknowledge that it was or minimized its presence.”²⁰⁹

The term “sexual harassment “ was first used in a 1975 conference at Cornell University. An administrative assistant at Cornell, Carmita Wood, was denied unemployment compensation after resigning the year before due to a professor’s sexual advances which included groping and touching. Cornell previously had refused her request for a transfer. It stated she resigned due to “personal reasons” and denied her benefits. Along with activists at the university’s Human Affairs Office, Wood formed a group called Working Women United. The group organized a conference and an accompanying speak-out, where secretaries, factory workers, and

²⁰⁸ Catherine MacKinnon, *Sexual Harassment of Working Women: A Case of Sex Discrimination* (New Haven: Yale University, 1979); Chloe Reichel, “Sexual Harassment: Who Suffers, and How,” *Journalist’s Resource*, October 25, 2017, <https://journalistsresource.org/studies/economics/workers/sexual-harassment-assault-health-discrimination-race/>.

²⁰⁹ Julie Berebitsky, *Sex and the Office: A History of Gender, Power, and Desire* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012), 6 and 11; Carrie Baker, *The Women’s Movement Against Sexual Harassment* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

waitresses shared their stories of harassment. Nearly three hundred women attended and shared stories very similar to Wood's. The speak-out revealed that sexual harassment extended far beyond higher education. Women were vulnerable on the shop floor and in the office.²¹⁰

The first successful sexual harassment case was decided in 1976, followed by the first Supreme Court decision on sexual harassment in 1986. Incidents of sexual harassment continued to be reported in higher education. Major incidents of harassment at Yale and Harvard Universities in the late 1970s and early 1980s were covered by *TIME* magazine.²¹¹ A new woman faculty member at Harvard encountered repeated sexual advances and “veiled threats to jeopardize her career” from her committee chairman. A study of sexual harassment at Harvard found “some 34% of female undergraduates (and a smattering of males), 41% of female graduate students and 49% of nontenured women faculty reported experiencing some form of harassment, ranging from verbal abuse to assault.” From students to faculty to staff, sexual harassment touched all occupations in higher education.²¹²

Many women's organizations and unions combatted sexual harassment starting in the 1970s, efforts that helped push the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission to establish guidelines in 1980. Working Women United continued to work on sexual harassment, supported by District 65. Starting in 1978, AFSCME's Women's Rights Committee trained stewards and union leadership in techniques for responding to sexual harassment complaints. They published a handbook in 1981, which included sample contract language and policy statements. Pushed by the Women's Department and the Coalition of Labor Union Women, the UAW also became active on

²¹⁰ Baker, *The Women's Movement Against Sexual Harassment*, 27-48.

²¹¹ Sascha Cohen, “A Brief History of Sexual Harassment in America Before Anita Hill,” *TIME*, April 11, 2016, <http://time.com/4286575/sexual-harassment-before-anita-hill/>.

²¹² “Fair Harvard, Are You Fair?,” *TIME*, November 14, 1983.

sexual harassment, including anti-harassment clauses in Ford and Chrysler contracts in 1979. In 1981, UAW President Douglas Fraser called for strong and clear policy statements on the problem.²¹³

Women faced sexual harassment in different occupations and time periods. Office workers have always been particularly vulnerable to sexual harassment due to their dependence on their boss, often men, for status. Nonetheless, sexual harassment was not initially an overt part of the working women's movement, but organizations voiced opposition to the emphasis on a worker's attractiveness and sexualization, such as Women Office Worker efforts to combat employer preferences for attractive young women. As sexual harassment gained more public saliency, it grew as a campaign priority. 9to5 produced a guide to combating sexual harassment, published in 1992. They established a job hotline on sexual harassment, prevention programs, and awareness training.²¹⁴ Legislators also took notice of sexual harassment. Advocating for government action to address sexual harassment, Congresswoman Patricia Schroeder stated, "We've talked openly about battered wives and battered children. The next thing is battered office workers."²¹⁵

Conclusion

Clerical worker organizing in the 1970s and 1980s often started by emphasizing working women's needs and their perceived rights in the workplace. While working in what were seen as better conditions than clericals in insurance or banking, long occupational ghettos for women, the college and university staff that 9to5 first encountered had low starting salaries and pervasive

²¹³ Baker, *Women's Movement against Sexual Harassment*, 74–75.

²¹⁴ Ellen Bravo and Ellen Cassedy, *The 9to5 Guide to Combating Sexual Harassment: Candid Advice from 9to5, National Association of Working Women* (Milwaukee: 9to5 Working Women Education Fund, 1992); Berebitsky, *Sex and the Office*, 216.

²¹⁵ Berebitsky, *Sex and the Office*, 8.

feelings of invisibility. Nussbaum recalled an incident at her workplace, when a student came into her office, faced her, and exclaimed, “Isn’t anybody here?”²¹⁶ The belief that clerical workers were inferior and uneducated was contrary to the lived experience of many workers in the field. Secretaries often took on responsible, decision-making work, but administrators, faculty, and even students harbored negative attitudes toward office workers that were hard to overcome. Sarah, a university secretary, commented on her knowledge at work and the lack of recognition when she said, “Whenever there are meetings about budgets, my boss always has to come to me and get the information and go talk to the other biggie who gets *his* information from *his* secretary—instead of getting the two *secretaries* together (who know what they are talking about), and getting it done.”²¹⁷ University clericals often were left out of deans’ letters. While directed at the university community, the letters addressed only faculty and students. Most importantly, clerical workers had little say on their working conditions. Marge, a college record clerk, lamented, “They have staff meetings. I would like to go, and I have asked, but they say I would have nothing important to say.”²¹⁸ An outline for a 9to5 University Report noted,

Secretaries are the “orphans” of the academic family. Universities and colleges boast about having an atmosphere of collegiality, but that feeling is reserved for faculty and students and leaves secretaries out in the cold. Secretaries are often unrecognized for their work, not respected for the contributions they make to the smooth operation of the institution, and often forgotten when it comes to special events, parties, university publications, etc.²¹⁹

No one spoke out or advocated for university office workers. Staff positions were often the first cut in times of budgetary stress. Without union representation, pay levels stayed low, and raises

²¹⁶ Karen Nussbaum, *Isn’t Anybody Here?: How the 925 Movement is Winning Recognition, Rights & Respect for College and University Office Workers!*, undated, box 1, folder 66, Miscellaneous Subject Files, Special Collections and Archives, Kent State University, Kent, OH.

²¹⁷ Jean Tepperman, *Not Servants, Not Machines: Office Workers Speak Out!* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1976), 5.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 12.

²¹⁹ University Committee, “Original 1978” *First Statewide Status Report on University Office Workers*, 1978, box 15, folder 971, 9 to 5, National Association of Working Women, Additional records, 1972–1985, 82-M189—86-M213, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

were negligible. While the workplace atmosphere was usually less rigid at colleges than in private sector workplaces, personnel policies, job descriptions, salaries, and grievance procedures were sometimes ambiguous and, therefore, frustrating. The subsequent chapters examine how frustrated higher education clericals pursued unionization to rectify their adverse workplace conditions.

CHAPTER 3: DISTRICT 65 AND ANTI-UNIONISM IN PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES

At a university, clerical workers provide essential services to keeping the university running smoothly. As historian and Columbia University clerical union supporter Eric Foner noted, the better the job they do, the more invisible they are. Letters are typed. Exams are Xeroxed. Grades are posted. Faculty and administration are not hurting until the clerical workers are gone. Clerical workers in higher education keep the university running.²²⁰ In the 1970s and 1980s, clerical workers, primarily women, who had been either excluded from or underrepresented in labor unions for decades, became a priority for unions, as membership from other sectors declined. The working women's movement prepared clericals to stand up for themselves. While there were successes in both private and public universities, organizing at private universities proved more difficult, as administrations could devote large amounts of resources with less concern about taxpayer opinions. The organizing atmosphere was also more hostile in private institutions in general. District 65, Distributive Workers of America, a progressive New York—based union committed to organizing low-wage workers, devoted extensive time, money, and energy to clerical organizing, particularly in private universities, both due to their history of organizing in diverse workplaces and a need to gain membership. By examining the District 65 unionization campaigns at New York University, Boston University, and Columbia University, I contend that the keys to successfully overcoming anti-union campaigns at private universities included creating a clear adversary when possible; having clear issues; employing committed organizers, and gaining support from others on campus and in the community.

The organizing atmosphere in private institutions grew bleaker in 1980 with the 5-4 decision on *NLRB v. Yeshiva University*. The Supreme Court affirmed the ruling of the U.S. Court

²²⁰ Julie Kushner (presentation, Eric Foner: A Celebration of His Career, New York, NY, April 21, 2017), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-NfyTKGy_HQ&t=6097s.

of Appeals and refused to enforce the NLRB's collective bargaining order for Yeshiva University faculty. The ruling effectively put an end to unionization among tenured and tenure-track professors in the private sector. It confirmed that private sector faculty were managerial or supervisory personnel and, thus, not under the purview of the National Labor Relations Board. While the decision did not apply to clerical workers, it meant that private university clericals would rarely have a faculty union that could help support their organizing.²²¹

Nonetheless, unions saw universities as an excellent place to organize clerical workers, with a higher chance of success than in private industry. Universities cannot pick up shop and move, and organizers and fellow employees often have access to employees during the workday. Public colleges and universities tend to be easier to organize than their private counterparts for a variety of reasons. Budgetary data, lists of employees, and other information are more accessible from public universities, thus facilitating the organizing process. In public universities, political pressure and the importance of public opinion can be used to assure relative neutrality from the university's administration during the campaign. Most importantly, public schools tended to fight unionization less doggedly than private schools. This does not mean the organizing at public universities was easy, just that it was, in some cases, easier at public institutions.²²² High turnover of staff and feelings that unions were blue-collar and not suited to the needs of clerical workers provided considerable barriers. Multiple losses occurred in clerical organizing in the early 1970s, with Boston University (BU), New York University (NYU), and Cornell rejecting unionization. By the end of the 1980s, Yale, Harvard, NYU, and Boston University would be all unionized.

²²¹ Gerald A. Bodner, "The Implications of the Yeshiva University Decision for Collective Bargaining Rights of Faculty at Private and Public Institutions of Higher Education," *Journal of College and University Law* 7, no. 1-2 (1980), 78.

²²² Richard Hurd and Gregory Woodhead, "The Unionization of Clerical Workers at Large U.S. Universities and Colleges," *Newsletter: National Center for the Study of Collective Bargaining in Higher Education and the Professions* 15, no. 3 (1987), 4.

However, unions still made more inroads at public institutions than at private institutions. In 1987, in a survey by scholars Richard Hurd and Gregory Woodhead, 52 percent of included large public universities bargained with unions representing clerical workers; only 26 percent of large private institutions surveyed did.²²³

District 65

Margie Albert, an organizer for District 65 and a former legal secretary, ran an organizing workshop espousing the benefits of unionizing and how to go about choosing a union. She suggested looking at the history of the union, particularly looking at their history with women and minorities. Albert stated, “You will probably find that unions that did nothing for blacks ten or fifteen years ago will probably do nothing for women today and vice-versa.” Founded in 1933 by Jewish immigrants working as salesclerks, District 65 was a union known for its commitment to organizing women and minorities. They chose to organize in sectors that were low-wage and dominated by people of color and immigrants. Local 65 of the Retail, Wholesale, and Department Store Union (RWDSU), the precursor to District 65, recorded 20 percent African American members and 30 percent women members by the start of World War II.²²⁴ Membership included workers in hundreds of classifications such as office workers, salespeople, display designers, bookkeepers, manufacturing workers, publishing house employees, and warehousemen.²²⁵

²²³ Hurd and Woodhead, “The Unionization of Clerical Workers at Large U.S. Universities and Colleges,” 1–8.

²²⁴ “Choosing a Union,” Women Office Workers, 1979, box 2, folder 10, SEIU District 925 Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

²²⁵ Lisa Phillips, *A Renegade Union: Interracial Organizing and Labor Radicalism* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 29; Gary Zabel, “The Boston University Strike of 1979,” in *The Encyclopedia of Strikes in American History*, ed. Aaron Brenner, Benjamin Day, and Immanuel Ness (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2009), 690–97; “District 65, UAW—Our Union,” *Coffee Break*, August 16, 1979, Boston University Union District 65, Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center, Boston University, Boston, MA.

Founded during the Great Depression, District 65, a progressive union and one of the earliest participants in the civil rights movement, enjoyed a close relationship with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. District 65 Secretary-Treasurer Cleveland Robinson help organize the March on Washington in 1963. Disagreeing with the AFL-CIO support of the Vietnam War and the conservatism and feelings of stagnation associated with the federation, District 65 joined the UAW and the Teamsters in the Alliance for Labor Action. District 65 even sued President Nixon and the Secretary of Labor in 1971, alleging discriminatory employment practices by the administration.²²⁶

Along with its own discount pharmacy and development and training programs, the union offered a comprehensive health plan to workers, providing 100 percent coverage of all family medical, surgical, and hospitalization bills.²²⁷ The high cost of insurance and membership concentrated in industries feeling the effects of the recession meant the union needed to cut back on services or gain more members. In addition, many of their shops were perilously small, with only twenty-five to fifty members. In 1975, District 65 ran a deficit of \$4 million, depleting much of its reserves. Clerical organizing became highly appealing, as it was a sector almost wholly unorganized. It provided an opportunity for the union.²²⁸

District 65 purposefully organized the poor working in dead-end jobs. Departing from organizing along rigid jurisdictional lines, District 65 engaged in catch-all, or area, organizing.

²²⁶ “Who is District 65?,” *Columbia Staff Union Star*, June 1973, box 1, folder Columbia University, Printed Ephemera Collection on the United Automobile Workers of America, District 65, PE.016, Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University, New York, NY; “District 65, UAW—Our Union,” *Coffee Break*, August 1, 1979, Boston University Union District 65, Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center, Boston University, Boston, MA.

²²⁷ “What is District 65?,” 1970, box 1, folder 1970–1971, Printed Ephemera Collection on the United Automobile Workers of America, District 65, PE.016, Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University, New York, NY.

²²⁸ “Why Is District 65 Interested in You?,” February 12, 1976, box 1, folder Columbia University, Printed Ephemera Collection on the United Automobile Workers of America, District 65, PE.016; “Fact Sheet: Notes on the 65 Security Plan,” February 11, 1976, box 1, folder Columbia University, Printed Ephemera Collection on the United Automobile Workers of America, District 65, PE.016; “Fact Sheet: What Kind Of Union is District 65?,” February 11, 1976, box 1, folder Columbia University, Printed Ephemera Collection on the United Automobile Workers of America, District 65, PE.016.

The New York City-based union initially focused on organizing wholesale shops and warehouses, including all workers in those shops regardless of occupation. The union began expanding its organizing operations and exploring unionization drives among clerical workers. Clerical workers had long been part of the local due to their wall-to-wall organizing approach, but the women's movement and changing ideas about women's place in the workforce pushed the union to pursue organization campaigns that focused on women by the late 1960s.²²⁹

District 65, which eventually became part of the UAW (1979 as an affiliate, 1987 as a department) due to their financial difficulties, began organizing university workers on the East Coast in the late 1960s, including clerical workers at the Columbia-affiliated Teachers College and Barnard College. Union president David Livingston conveyed the need for strong organizing in new areas. He recalled, "Had we not made a decision, several years ago, to allocate major resources for organizing in new industries and new territories, we would, today, have about 6,000 members less. Our situation would be far more serious than it is."²³⁰ The politically progressive union decided to organize clericals at New York University, Boston University, and Columbia, as part of the union's vision of organizing workers in low-wage jobs and the practical purposes of increased membership and dues payers.

New York University

In one of its first higher education clerical organizing campaigns, District 65 embarked on a campaign to unionize the 1,500 clerical workers at New York University, the country's largest private university and second-largest landowner in New York City. Despite committed organizers,

²²⁹ Phillips, *Renegade Union: Interracial Organizing and Labor Radicalism*, 6–11.

²³⁰ "Why Is District 65 Interested in You?," February 12, 1976, box 1, folder Columbia University, Printed Ephemera Collection on the United Automobile Workers of America, District 65, PE.016, Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University, New York, NY.

District 65 suffered a devastating defeat in 1971. It failed, in the city with one of the most favorable climates for unions, to convince the clericals at NYU that they needed collective representation. Seven years later, in December 1978, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) Local 3882 won representation of the predominantly women office, clerical, technical, and laboratory employees. I contend that a less intense anti-union campaign, deteriorating economic conditions, the emergence of the working women's movement, and the strength of the AFT in New York, all contributed to the shift in sentiment and success. The AFT campaign was part of changing national trends, as multiple clerical campaigns at higher education institutions launched and succeeded in the late 1970s, while only a small number of campaigns and successes occurred from the late 1960s to the early 1970s.

In 1970, the clerical staff at the university libraries kicked off the initial campaign for unionization, reaching out to Local 153 of the Office and Professional Employees International Union (OPEIU). Despite their enthusiasm, the State Labor Relations Board decided the unit would be too small. After this initial setback, District 65 entered the picture, with its goal to unionize all clerical workers at NYU. Chosen for its militant stance and commitment to multiracial democracy, the thirty-five-year-old District 65 had 30,000 members in offices, retail, warehouses, and wholesalers, in the New York metropolitan area. Unfortunately, the committed cadre of library workers and the union faced extreme difficulties in their effort to create a broad-based union. The union's communist origins cast a long shadow, as did the long-held stereotypes of women being less suited for unionism.²³¹

²³¹ District 65 flyer, 1970, box 1, folder 6. United Automobile Workers of America, District 65, WAG.006, Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University, New York, NY; Lawrence Richards, *Union-Free America: Workers and Antiunion Culture* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 126.

Despite seemingly limited support on campus, District 65 demanded the university negotiate with library workers and then all clerical workers. The union called for workers to strike over the issue. The strike lasted twelve days. As a result, District 65 got an election scheduled for May 1970. During the strike, over three hundred clerical workers signed authorization cards, cards to signal that they wanted a secret ballot election and District 65 as their union. While initially only a library strike, overnight it became a strike of clerical and technical workers on the Washington Square campus. During and after the strike, clericals at other universities contacted District 65 about organizing.²³²

The university did not mount a sustained anti-union campaign in 1970, due to unrest nationally and on campus. The decision to invade Cambodia sparked protests across the nation, including at NYU, where students occupied the university's personnel offices. The anti-war protests and the clerical strike distracted NYU from pursuing a vigorous anti-union campaign. The administration sent only one letter about a union security clause prior to the election. The election resulted in 479 votes for District 65, 73 votes for Local 153, 320 votes against unionization, and 518 challenged or not counted ballots. District 65 declared themselves victorious and started a membership drive. Confident in their success, District 65 moved to form an education division, but the victory was in question. The State Labor Relations Board held hearings on how to deal with the challenged ballots, which the university claimed resulted from their inability to provide the SLRB a comprehensive list of employees before the election due to the student protests. During the hearing process, the National Labor Relations Board claimed jurisdiction over large private non-profit universities, voiding the State Labor Relations Board election. Despite the protests of

²³² Richards, *Union-Free America*, 125–46; “Monday’s Latest,” April 27, 1970, box 1, folder Strike, 1970, New York University Clerical Workers Organizing, TAM.126, Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University, New York, NY; *NYU Local: A Brief History*, 1970, box 1, folder Student Support Leaflets, 1970, New York University Clerical Workers Organizing, TAM.126.

District 65, the NLRB ordered the entire process of determining a bargaining unit and scheduling an election to start over. The new election did not occur until June 1971.²³³

The lack of an anti-union campaign in May 1970 made the strong campaign in 1971 somewhat of a surprise to union organizers. By 1971, NYU experienced an increasingly ominous fiscal situation, likely contributing to the university's changed tactics. A new realization that the union might succeed also played a role in the emergence of an anti-union campaign. Union supporters reported harassment for reading union leaflets in offices and for posting union flyers. The university sent out numerous memos emphasizing the adverse effect of unions, sending twelve to the entire clerical staff in the three weeks leading up to the election.²³⁴ The administration "put leaflets in paychecks, distributed leaflets through supervisors, [and] posted leaflets in offices."²³⁵

The administration highlighted the possibility of strikes and the contrast of District 65's industrial membership. District 65 worked hard to deemphasize strikes, arguing that they settled 99 percent of their contracts without striking. A mere few weeks before the 1971 election, NYU's Teamster truck drivers went on a twelve-week strike.²³⁶ They ultimately conceded and accepted the university's offer. Some workers contended the administration intentionally delayed the strike settlement to illustrate how union membership could entail prolonged strikes.²³⁷ NYU and the No-Union Committee, an anti-union employee group, stressed the lost wages and the inability to make

²³³ Richards, *Union-Free America*, 125–49.

²³⁴ Alfred Vogel, "Your Clerical Workers Are Ripe for Unionism," *Harvard Business Review* 49 (March–April 1971), 48–54.

²³⁵"Freedom of Expression for Staff," undated, box 1, folder 1970, New York University Clerical Workers Organizing, TAM.126, Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University, New York, NY.

²³⁶ Richards, *Union Free America*, 91; Joshua Freeman, *Working-Class New York: Life and Labor since World War II* (New York: The New Press, 2000), 245.

²³⁷ Peter Miller, "Violets on the Picket Line: Clerical Worker Unionism at NYU, 1969–1988," Introduction to Public History II, NYU, January 29, 1989, box 8, folder Violets on the Picket Line, American Federation of Teachers, Local 3882 (Clerical Union) Records, WAG.071, Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University, New York, NY.

up the pay.²³⁸ NYU played on the stereotype of a District 65 union member as a blue-collar worker. One memo declared, “Remember District 65 affiliated with the Alliance for Labor Action which is composed of the Teamsters and Auto Workers Union. Is this the type of affiliation you need?”²³⁹ By the 1971 campaign, District 65 represented 8,000 white-collar employees, including non-faculty staff at Fisk and Hampton University. The anti-union campaign, however, exploited stereotypes about unions as strike happy and blue-collar to play on clerical workers’ fears and to create doubt about the utility of strikes and unions.²⁴⁰ As sociologist Daniel Bell noted in 1956, women had played a small role in the labor movement, as many unions of the day echoed the stereotypes that kept unionism at bay in traditionally women’s occupations. Nonetheless, the UAW and District 65 were more forward thinking.²⁴¹

Wages were of primary concern for NYU clericals, as, in December 1969, starting salaries were \$20 per week less than wages in comparable private industry jobs. By the time of the 1971 election, the university instituted a large general pay raise of 25 percent. High turnover made new employees unaware of the pay scale before the drive. During the campaign, District 65 stopped speaking on social issues such as women’s equality and working conditions, instead focusing on wages and working conditions. By focusing on wages, the union was left severely weakened, as their primary issue became far less urgent. This shift blunted union support, even as District 65 publicized that the university only announced the pay increase after the unionization campaign

²³⁸ Richards, *Union-Free America*, 128-9.

²³⁹ “We Are Not Alone,” box 1, folder Student Support Leaflets, New York University Clerical Workers Organizing, TAM.126, Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University, New York, NY.

²⁴⁰ Martin Heggstad, “State-Of-The-Art: Defeating Harvard’s Antiunion Campaign,” *Radical America* 21, no. 5 (September/October 1987), 42–53.

²⁴¹ Daniel Bell, “The Great Back-to-Work Movement,” *Fortune*, July 1956.

began. Many workers felt they could get raises without the cost of a union. The pay raise was just part of an increasingly concentrated anti-union campaign.²⁴²

District 65 wanted to keep the NYU administration neutral, resulting in the union emphasizing the university's anti-unionism. The idea was that if the union publicized that NYU was not fully neutral, it would feel the pressure to stop any resistance to unionization. Historian Lawrence Richards argues that the union's tactic would be unheard of later in the 1970s, as employer anti-unionism had become a given. To an extent, the tactic worked. Priding itself on its liberal public image, NYU fought unionization less vigorously than many employers in the private sector and even some private universities such as BU.²⁴³

Ultimately, the campaign ended in a devastating defeat for District 65. While 387 voted for District 65, 926 voted against representation. District 65 attempted limited campaigns in 1973 and 1974, but they could not gain much traction. These campaigns lacked a defining issue to mobilize NYU's workers.²⁴⁴

Between 1971 and the new AFT campaign in 1978, the organizing atmosphere changed. Financial crises in New York in the 1970s made concerns about layoffs a reality, challenging the belief that clericals did not need a union. A dire fiscal situation emerged in New York City in 1975, when financial institutions refused to continue to lend the city money, and the federal government refused to help. To avoid bankruptcy, the city instituted an austerity budget, a wage freeze, cutbacks in the number of city workers, and cutbacks and raised rates for city services. Suggested

²⁴² Memo from Local 153 to All Employees of New York University, undated, box 1, folder Local 153, New York University Clerical Workers Organizing, TAM.126, Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University, New York, NY.

²⁴³ Richards, *Union-Free America*, 146–47.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 125–49; Miller, "Violets on the Picket Line: Clerical Worker Unionism at NYU, 1969–1988," Introduction to Public History II, NYU, January 29, 1989, box 8, folder Violets on the Picket Line, American Federation of Teachers, Local 3882 (Clerical Union) Records, WAG.071, Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University, New York, NY.

cuts of \$70 million to the budget of the City University of New York resulted in closures and mergers of campuses. The New York economy bottomed out in 1977, following eight years of decline.²⁴⁵ The New York Coalition to Fight Inflation and Unemployment reported national inflation at 3 percent and a high unemployment record of 8.2 percent. New York City, one of the hardest hit areas, saw thousands laid off. The coalition stated the conditions caused “disproportionate suffering and catastrophe for New York’s Black and Puerto Rican communities, women, youth, senior citizens, and veterans.” For NYU clericals, these factors meant that it cost more to commute to and from work and that a higher percentage of income went to taxes, but wages remained stagnant and bought less.²⁴⁶

In the mid-1970s, working women formed their own movement and helped counter misconceptions that unionization was not appropriate for women. Founded in 1974, Women Office Workers (WOW) located its main office three miles from NYU’s campus. By 1977, 9to5 became a national organization and maintained a chapter nearby in Hempstead, the home city of Hofstra University. The 1970 and 1971 campaigns had predated most clerical organizing successes in universities. Multiple campaign losses occurred in the early 1970s, with Boston University and Cornell rejecting unionization. By the mid-1970s, Boston University (1978) and Barnard (1974) unionized with District 65 and Eastern Michigan University (1975) and Wayne State University (1978) with the UAW. The atmosphere around organizing clericals had changed.²⁴⁷

²⁴⁵ Freeman, *Working-Class New York*, 263; Kim Phillips-Fein, *Fear City: New York’s Fiscal Crisis and the Rise of Austerity Politics* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2017), 91.

²⁴⁶ New York Coalition to Fight Inflation and Unemployment material, undated, box 33, folder 14, AFT President’s Office: Albert Shanker Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

²⁴⁷ “Friday Want a New Day,” *Daily News*, April 22, 1976; 9to5 Hempstead flyer, undated, box 6, folder 38, Women on the Job Records, WAG.240, Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University, New York, NY; Nancy MacLean, “The Hidden History of Affirmative Action: Working Women’s Organizations in Workplace Struggles in the 1970s and the Gender of Class,” *Feminist Studies* 25 (1999), 55.

Due to publicized crime and economic difficulties in New York, NYU's enrollment, especially out-of-state enrollment, dropped. As a private school, NYU received the majority of its operating budget from tuition and room and board. In 1973, the university sold its 4,500 student Bronx campus, University Heights, to the City University of New York to make up for the budget shortfall.²⁴⁸ NYU's deficit dropped, but it rose again shortly after. In 1975, John Sawhill started his time as NYU president by appointing a budget task force to define financial targets and balance the budget for the current year. It resulted in spending limits for academic and non-academic payrolls and "a more economical classification system for clerical jobs." Layoffs and consolidation of positions, noted as a possibility in the 1970 and 1971 District 65 campaigns, thus, became a reality. This austerity plan primed the clerical workforce ready for unionization.²⁴⁹

In April 1978, the United Staff Association (USA), formed and run by NYU secretaries and clerks, voted to affiliate with NYSUT, an AFT/NEA affiliated union. The clerical staff at NYU considered NYSUT, one of the leading lobbying forces in New York, a good fit. Specifically designed for educational institutions and schools, "unions affiliated with NYSUT represent[ed] more clericals and secretarial staff who work in educational institutions than any other in the state." With nearly 200,000 members, nearly 800 locals, sixteen service centers, twenty-four full-time lawyers, and sixty government and political action experts, NYSUT seemed an excellent choice to organize the campus. 1978 marked the first time that NYSUT attempted to organize NYU staff. The campaign would be for both clerical and technical positions, but clericals made up over 80 percent of the unit.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁸ "History of NYU: Milestones from 1931 to the Present," New York University, accessed May 9, 2019, <https://www.nyu.edu/about/news-publications/history-of-nyu.html#1972>.

²⁴⁹ Edward Fiske, "Miracle on Washington Square," *New York Times*, April 30, 1978.

²⁵⁰ Memo from United Staff Association Organizing Committee to Friends, 1978, box 4, folder leaflets, 1978, American Federation of Teachers, Local 3882 (Clerical Union) Records, WAG.071, Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University, New York, NY; "NYSUT: We're Here and We're Helping," box 4, folder leaflets, 1978, American Federation of Teachers, Local 3882 (Clerical Union) Records, WAG.071,

American Federation of Teachers, founded in 1916, represents teachers, paraprofessionals, higher education staff, health care professionals, public employees, and other groups. Under the presidencies of David Selden and Albert Shanker, organizing efforts significantly increased in the 1960s and 1970s. The AFT became the fastest growing union in the mid-1970s. The New York State United Teachers (NYSUT), formed out of the merger of the United Federation of Teachers and New York State Teachers Association in 1972, represented teachers in the state. After disaffiliation from the National Education Association, NYSUT became exclusively an American Federation of Teacher affiliate by 1976. Throughout the 1970s, AFT and NYSUT reached out to new constituents, including paraprofessionals and school staff.²⁵¹

The choice of the American Federation of Teachers contributed to the success of the campaign. NYSUT was a strong union that understood higher education and the context of New York. Already on campus by the mid-1970s, AFT attempted to organize faculty without much success. It provided the crucial link for bringing clericals workers back into unionism. The lowest paid workers on campus, clericals still saw themselves as professionals and welcomed the AFT, a more white-collar union.²⁵²

By the end of summer vacation in 1978, the conditions that prompted the formation of USA at NYU had gotten worse. High job turnover continued, but the university hired few replacements. The raise announced at 8 percent did not come close to the increased cost of living at 15 percent. As in 1970 and 1971, a quick campaign would be essential to victory. The 1978 campaign moved

Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University, New York, NY; Dennis Gaffney, *Teachers United: The Rise of New York State United Teachers* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007).

²⁵¹ "AFT Organizing Department Records," Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, November 18, 2015, <http://reuther.wayne.edu/node/13135>.

²⁵² The NYU Federation of United Professionals, the faculty association, endorsed the efforts of the clerical union. Steven Cocheo and John Byrd, "Petition for Union Elections Given to Labor Relations Board," *Washington Square News*, October 30, 1978; Miscellaneous newsletters, box 1, folder *Over Due Gazette*, American Federation of Teachers, Local 1460, WAG.096, Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University, New York, NY.

quickly lasting only nine months from formation and collecting signatures to election victory for the clerks, secretaries, and laboratory technicians.²⁵³

On October 25, 1978, USA announced the collection of signatures of over 30 percent of the Code 106 and 104 employees, the amount needed for the union to petition the NLRB for a secret ballot election. On November 21, 1978, following two days of hearings, the university agreed to hold a secret ballot election, scheduled to take place on December 15, 1978. Noting that the previous efforts by other organizations to unionize clerical staff had failed, USA emphasized the importance of voting, stating, “The only way to secure salaries at least comparable to the Medical Center staff and improved benefits (tuition remission, pension, dental plan, layoff allowance, and recall rights) is through collective bargaining.” A perfect example of the inequalities that existed throughout the university, Medical Center staff made twenty to forty dollars a week more than other university clericals for the same work. Medical Center staff also received full family coverage from Blue Cross/Blue Shield, while other clericals only received half coverage. USA organizers held that if the administration could afford to pay and provide more benefits for Medical Center employees, then they could do the same for the rest of the employees. These issues contributed to the union’s ultimate success.²⁵⁴

NYU was not a university that allowed unionization without any resistance. The anti-union campaign, while not nearly as intense as the one in 1971, still showed up in memos to staff and media reports. In a memo, John Sawhill, writing of his opposition to the union drive, stated, “This union, with minimal employee support, has the legal right to force another election upon us. We

²⁵³ USA flyer, 1978, box 4, folder leaflets, 1978, American Federation of Teachers, Local 3882 (Clerical Union) Records, WAG.071, Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University, New York, NY.

²⁵⁴ “NYU Staff at The NYU Medical Center Make \$20-\$40 A Week More Than We Do!!!,” flyer, 1978, box 4, folder leaflets, 1978, American Federation of Teachers, Local 3882 (Clerical Union) Records, WAG.071.

can only protect ourselves by continuing to vote NO on union representation.” He later commented that the union would undermine the sense of community workers had with the university. The university prevented the union from utilizing campus mail services and from soliciting employees during work hours, while the administration used the same channels to spread their anti-union message.²⁵⁵

In an attempt to challenge the anti-union campaign and gain supporters, United Staff Association organizers handed out literature in the street. USA produced a flyer on the forthcoming raises, in an effort to combat one of the significant factors that contributed to the failed 1971 campaign. The flyer read,

Raises will be coming out soon, and maybe they won't be half bad this year, but look around...How much did you get last year and the year before that? If you're like other NYU employees, it wasn't much, not even enough to keep up with the cost of living. Isn't it very possible that the raises were a little larger as a result of our union activities and are an attempt to buy us off?

The flyer notes clerical workers still lacked job security, a dental plan, and a better grievance procedure. “What have you gotten without a union?,” asked the flyer. It listed layoffs, few promotions, and added work, without an accompanying increase in pay.²⁵⁶

NYU offered only limited resistance to the 1978 campaign for several reasons. AFT was less visible at NYU than District 65 had been. Already having a presence on campus, AFT organizers did not arouse as much suspicion. Frequent changes in top administration hindered the university's ability to run a consistent anti-union campaign, as it had done in 1971. Following years of turmoil on campus, the new NYU president, John Sawhill, may have been anxious to

²⁵⁵Steven Cocheo, “Technical and Clerical Staffs Get Administration's Views,” *Washington Square News*, November 29, 1978; Marilyn Feuer, “Sawhill Issues Memo against Union Attempt,” *Washington Square News*, November 22, 1978; “Extra extra extra,” 1978, box 4, folder leaflets, 1978, American Federation of Teachers, Local 3882 (Clerical Union) Records, WAG.071, Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University, New York, NY.

²⁵⁶United Staff Association flyer, 1978, box 4, folder leaflets, 1978, American Federation of Teachers, Local 3882 (Clerical Union) Records, WAG.071.

avoid conflicts. The administration may also have believed that pay increases undermine the union's chief argument.²⁵⁷

Despite some concerns that NYSUT provided only limited technical and financial support and did not have a good understanding of problems facing clericals, more than 1,300 of the eligible voters cast ballots in the December 15, 1978 election, resulting in a victory for unionization. 713 voted for unionization with AFT, and 573 voted against unionization. Other unions, universities, and clerical workers closely watched the ensuing contract negotiations at NYU, one of the first major private universities to unionize clericals. Despite the devastating failure in 1971, a swift campaign by the end of the decade ended in union victory. It resulted from a declining economic environment, a limited anti-union campaign, clear issues, the involvement of the NYSUT, and the influence of working women's organizations.²⁵⁸

Legal maneuvering and the use highly paid management consultants became increasingly popular amongst employers in late 1970s. While NYU conducted somewhat limited anti-union efforts, Boston University, by contrast, threw its full weight behind what would become a vicious anti-union campaign. NYU workers had clear issues in 1978, but campus support remained spotty. BU needed a unifying adversary, clear issues for workers, committed organizers, and campus support to succeed against such stiff opposition.²⁵⁹

²⁵⁷ Miller, "Violets on the Picket Line: Clerical Worker Unionism at NYU, 1969–1988," Introduction to Public History II, NYU, January 29, 1989, box 8, folder Violets on the Picket Line, American Federation of Teachers, Local 3882 (Clerical Union) Records, WAG.071.

²⁵⁸ Anne Blanchett, "Clerical Union's Demands to Be Presented in March," *Washington Square News*, February 18, 1979; Leslie Gura, "Clerical and Technical Workers Decide to Unionize by 140 Votes," *Washington Square News*, December 18, 1978.

²⁵⁹ John Logan, "The Union Avoidance Industry in the United States," *British Journal of Industrial Relations* 44, no. 4 (December 2006): 651-675.

Boston University

Boston University, a private university with a relatively small endowment of \$25 million, faced immense pressure from the neighboring Harvard and Massachusetts Institute of Technology and from the rapid expansion of the University of Massachusetts, which offered quality education at a significantly lower price.²⁶⁰ Faced with continuing problems of dwindling enrollment and rising costs, Boston University decided to start cutting the benefits and the raises of staff and faculty in the 1970s. Despite deteriorating conditions, the District 65 unionization election for the 1,500 full and part-time clerical workers at BU was lost quite soundly in 1971, as workers were not mobilized enough. Stereotypes about unions as blue-collar, corrupt, violent, and money-hungry convinced many workers to vote no. As at NYU in 1971, the working women's movement had not yet shifted the attitudes of clericals to see unionization an appropriate course of action. In 1974, however, BU, which had a step salary system based on years of service, announced they were freezing that system, replacing it with a merit-based salary system. It also halted cost-of-living adjustments. The merit-based system made raises subject to supervisors' subjective evaluations, with no objective criteria. Moreover, the administration recommended quotas to limit the number of employees in each rating category. By its guidelines, only 2 to 3 percent of workers could be deemed outstanding. The administration suggested classifying 2 percent as unsatisfactory. BU workers researched the merit plan system, discovering the Pinkertons, the firm used to suppress labor unions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, initially introduced the system. As the only unorganized workers in the BU community, clericals, the administration assumed, would accept the new plan passively. The university drew a hard line against workers.²⁶¹

²⁶⁰Gail Jennes, "Colossus or Megalomaniac, Boston University's John Silber Keeps His Campus in Turmoil," *People*, June 2, 1980.

²⁶¹ *Coffee Break*, June 1974, box 7, folder 29, SEIU District 925 Collection. Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI; Barbara Rahke, interview by Stacey Heath, May 23,

The new merit-based system stimulated the 850 clerical workers to react in anger. Clerical salaries at BU already ranked among the lowest in the Boston area. The merit system offered little hope of making salaries more equitable or in line with the high cost of living in the city.²⁶² Several workers went to the Dugout, a restaurant on Commonwealth Avenue, to discuss what to do. The group decided to form an action organization, founding the Staff Committee Against the Merit Plan (SCAMP). Gladys Delp (now McKie), a SCAMP founder, recalled, “We did not want to unionize. We wanted our voices to be heard.”²⁶³ Interested in the notion of improving conditions, David Hofstetter, a library employee and soon-to-be employee organizer, became involved after seeing a leaflet. The organization began meeting regularly and publishing a newsletter.²⁶⁴

For over a year, SCAMP members produced the newsletter *Coffee Break* out of their own pockets. During this time, they circulated a petition and campaigned about removing the merit plan. The organization reached out to the administration to discuss the staff point of view. Staff had no input in the creation of the merit salary plan. During a conversation with a SCAMP member, a representative of the BU Personnel Office said he felt those employees who disliked the plan would soon leave, creating more staff-supervisor solidarity and creating less solidarity among staff members by encouraging competition.²⁶⁵

SCAMP members presented a petition with over two hundred staff signatures in opposition to the plan to the Vice President of Personnel, Pat Harvey. Barbara Rahke, a SCAMP founder, remembered Harvey came out of her office and said, “I won’t accept the petitions, because, if I do,

2006, SEIU District 925 Legacy Project: Oral History, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

²⁶² Gladys Delp, “The Road to Unionization: The History of BUSOC,” *b.u. exposure*, September 1977.

²⁶³ Gladys (Delp) McKie, interview by Amanda Walter, November 11, 2016.

²⁶⁴ David Hofstetter, interview by Amanda Walter, September 10, 2017; Barbara Rahke, interview by Amanda Walter, November 29, 2016.

²⁶⁵ *Coffee Break*, July 1974, box 7, folder 29, SEIU District 925 Collection. Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

I'd be recognizing you for collective bargaining. If you want that, you have to form a union." The merit plan pushed clerical workers to turn toward unionism. Rahke recalled, "Obviously, she gave us the blueprint of what we're supposed to do if we want to move this issue forward. And so that's what we did."²⁶⁶

Through the production of the newsletter, *Coffee Break*, many other staff issues became visible at Boston University. Along with low salaries and the merit system, clericals received poor tuition remission benefits, getting only 50 percent tuition remission on two courses, when most other schools offered full tuition remission. The grievance procedure, staffed entirely by administration officials, was widely regarded as inadequate; most employees did not even know it existed. Boston University had become infamous for capricious firings. Around the same time, administrators fired BU health clinic employees for protesting their working conditions and poor treatment of students in the clinic. The clerical employees experienced poor promotional opportunities, lacked adequate pension plans, and had little to no input in matters directly affecting their work lives.²⁶⁷

The involvement of committed activists like Barbara Rahke was vital for clerical workers to gain positive change from Boston University. Rahke came to Boston University in 1971. She had earlier experienced disturbing incidents of sexual harassment while working as a secretary at Honeywell in Europe. Expecting to continue her education at Boston University, Rahke discovered that low pay and poor tuition remission benefits made it impossible for her to afford to take classes. Working alongside Rahke at BU's Metropolitan College, Gladys Delp had a similar experience.

²⁶⁶ Barbara Rahke, interview by Stacey Heath, May 23, 2006, SEIU District 925 Legacy Project: Oral History, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

²⁶⁷ *Coffee Break*, August 1974, box 2, folder 29, SEIU District 925 Collection. Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI; Gladys Delp, "The Road to Unionization: The History of BUSOC," *b.u. exposure*, September 1977.

Rahke and Delp shared an apartment with two other people. Rahke worked full time as a secretary and waitressed on weekends to make ends meet.²⁶⁸

At the time, the atmosphere in Boston was one of change. The city was an important intellectual and activist center of the feminist movement. The Boston Women's Health Book Collective, Bread and Roses, and the Combahee River Collective were all founded in Boston. In 1974, clericals at Harvard established 9to5, the working women's movement's most famous group. The organization helped raise the consciousness of clerical workers, helping them see the value their work deserved. This atmosphere helped push clerical workers to fight for change, and make unions see the clerical workplace as a targets for new organizing campaigns. Rahke, one of 9to5's earliest members, recalled how feminist activity in the area helped raise her consciousness.

One day, somebody asked me what I did...I said, "I work at Boston University"-I went through these contortions of trying to say what I did without ever saying I was a secretary, I was an office worker. And finally it started getting embarrassingly awkward. And I just realized what was going on. At that point, I felt like, I am an office worker, I work my tail off, I produce work for all kinds of professors, I am getting paid nothing, and if anything, am I not only-I'm not ashamed about it, but I should be screaming it from the rafters. And that was a big change.²⁶⁹

9to5 provided support for BU clerical workers, assisted with the SCAMP petition drive, and offered ideas for action. Ten BU clerical workers participated in 9to5's conference for university clericals. At the conference, representatives attended workshops on how to start staff organizations, how affirmative action may affect the position of university office workers, on unionization, and on legal rights. These skills would be vital to the Boston University union campaign.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁸ Barbara Rahke, interview by Amanda Walter, November 29, 2016; Gladys (Delp) McKie, interview by Amanda Walter, November 11, 2016.

²⁶⁹ Barbara Rahke, interview by Stacey Heath, May 23, 2006., SEIU District 925 Legacy Project: Oral History, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

²⁷⁰ *Coffee Break*, August 1974, box 2, folder 29, SEIU District 925 Collection. Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

From the beginning, clerical workers had support from many members of the campus community. They all shared a common adversary in President John Silber. A politically ambitious dean at the University of Texas, Silber had lost his job in a power struggle with the Board of Trustees. Silber became president of BU in 1971 and ruffled feathers immediately. The night Silber was voted in as president, he addressed the BU Board of Trustees. Throughout the speech, using surgical imagery, Silber spoke of cutting this and cutting that. He wanted to eliminate tenure, thought student demonstrators should be arrested, mercilessly attacked the student press, and wanted budget cuts throughout the university.²⁷¹ David Hofstetter recollected, “I won’t even say he was polarizing because that suggests there were two poles. I don’t know anybody that really liked him, except the Board of Trustees.”²⁷²

Controversy followed John Silber. Accused of selling law school admissions, Silber stressed that the university would not admit unqualified applicants. Yet, he said, “When we facilitate that admission, there is no reason why we should not go right back to . . . the father of the person who’s been admitted and talk to him about a major gift to the school.”²⁷³ He became regarded as a censor for both the student press and the school radio station. His administration put *the b.u. exposure’s* money in escrow as a result of an article calling Silber a mediocre philosopher. Faculty, clerical staff, and buildings and grounds workers stood behind the student newspaper, as did members of the community and students at other universities such as Harvard, MIT, and Brandeis.²⁷⁴ In early 1972, President Silber inflamed tensions by inviting Marine recruiters to campus. Students staged a sit-in; police arrested and beat the peaceful student protestors. Silber

²⁷¹ Nora Ephron, “Academic Gore,” *Esquire*, September 1977.

²⁷² David Hofstetter, interview by Amanda Walter, September 10, 2017.

²⁷³ Peter Bonventure, “Rich Man, Poor Man.” *Newsweek*, March 27, 1978.

²⁷⁴ “Pot Shots---,” *b.u. exposure*, February 1977.

called the protestors “primates.” He maintained he was fostering an open university, even as he pulled the campus charter of the Students for a Democratic Society.²⁷⁵

Tenure also became a process rife with conflict. Silber’s administration denied some tenure reviews on the basis of overstaffing. The central administration rejected tenure even for assistant professors receiving enthusiastic endorsement at every stage of faculty review. At least two cases existed where the administration granted tenure to a professor deemed unqualified by colleagues and deans.²⁷⁶ The administration informed ninety untenured professors the university would not renew their contracts; Silber indicated the dismissal of tenured faculty might be needed.²⁷⁷ He also pressured departments to hire his friends at extravagant salaries. After budget cuts, raised tuition, and the placing of several million dollars in reserves to hide a budget surplus, the university community revolted. In the spring of 1976, the faculty held a large meeting. At the meeting, 377 faculty members and ten of the fifteen deans voted no-confidence in the Silber administration.²⁷⁸

The veteran news reporter Mike Wallace created a *60 Minutes* segment on Silber, “Bad Man on Campus.” During an interview, Silber told Wallace, “A university is certainly not a democracy if it is any good. The more democratic the university becomes, the lousier it becomes.” Historian Howard Zinn spoke out against Silber. Citing a change in the collegial atmosphere, Zinn exclaimed, “You feel somehow some group of men has been planted here by a foreign power and is occupying Boston University.” He added that Silber was quick to call the police and fire those who disagreed with him and was someone who had “no particular regard for people as human beings.” History professor Arnold Offner said, “John Silber has alienated every single constituent

²⁷⁵ Howard Zinn, “A Showcase of Repression: Boston University Curves Its ‘Excess of Democracy,’” *Progressive*, June 1980.

²⁷⁶ Felix Zydallis, “Report Shows Large Surpluses,” *b.u. exposure*, December 1977.

²⁷⁷ Gene Maeroff, “Crisis Over Silber Presidency Grows at Boston U.,” *New York Times*, April 9, 1976.

²⁷⁸ Zabel, “The Boston University Strike of 1979,” 691.

element in this University.” The Massachusetts branch of the American Civil Liberties Union publicly criticized Silber on charges of violating academic freedom and civil liberties. The chapter commented that “it had never received such a large and sustained body of complaints about a single institution as in the case of BU under Silber.”²⁷⁹ Employee organizer David Hofstetter recalled, “We used to say our best organizer was John Silber.”²⁸⁰

Turmoil existed within the administration as well. In November 1977, Joseph Kay, Executive Director of Personnel Services, resigned. Many on campus assumed that President Silber asked Kay to resign over disagreements about the anti-union campaign. Kay was the second personnel administrator to be forced from office in the previous fifteen months. Pat Harvey, the former Vice President of Personnel, had been fired without notice by Silber. She was one of three vice presidents fired after speaking out against Silber.²⁸¹

In May 1975, four years after Silber’s arrival and after over a year of organizing, the faculty voted to unionize with AAUP.²⁸² Faculty mobilized around vast issues of governance, which were attributed to changes under the Silber administration. Low salaries frustrated faculty as well. Averaging \$2,000 less than the national average, BU faculty earned \$4,000 less than comparable Massachusetts schools.²⁸³ Faculty at BU, the nation’s fourth-largest private university, became the first in the country to embrace trade unionism in a major private university. Richard Hurd found, “Given the barrier to organizing created by the faculty prestige factor..., the presence of a unionized faculty would clearly create a more sympathetic organizing environment for clerical

²⁷⁹ Zabel, “The Boston University Strike of 1979,” 692; 60 *Minutes*, “Bad Man on Campus,” aired January 6, 1980, on CBS.

²⁸⁰ David Hofstetter, interview by Amanda Walter, September 10, 2017.

²⁸¹ “Personnel Director Ousted,” *Coffee Break*, November 2, 1977, Boston University Union District 65, Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center, Boston University, Boston, MA.

²⁸² The election results were 394 for AAUP representation, 212 for no union representation, and 194 abstentions; Nora Ephron, “Academic Gore,” *Esquire*, September 1977.

²⁸³ “What is the AAUP?,” *b.u. exposure*, February 13, 1979.

unions.”²⁸⁴ The AAUP’s victory helped create the momentum that led to clerical and librarian unionization drives.

Around the same time that faculty unionized, SCAMP became the Boston University Staff Organizing Committee (BUSOC). Workers had wanted to make gains without unionization, but the administration refused to enact changes. Employees needed a different method to gain strength. Unionizing was seen as the only alternative. The announcement of the turn toward unionization came in *Coffee Break*. The plan to begin a unionization campaign commenced.²⁸⁵

BUSOC decided to unionize with District 65. The clerical workers did not make the decision lightly. Staff members spent the entire summer of 1975 educating themselves about unionization and interviewing several different unions, including District 65, Local 6 OPEIU, and SEIU Local 925. BUSOC chose the three due to their history of organizing office workers and a commitment to Boston-area workers. Women made up the majority of Local 6’s membership, but the union’s administrative structure was not representative of the general membership. BU clericals believed that Local 6 did not possess enough experience organizing university workers to address the unique needs of the workers or be supportive enough of women’s leadership. Barbara Rahke expressed support for Local 925, but the union had existed only a matter of months. While Local 925 committed itself to address the problems of BU’s clerical workers, many BU workers expressed trepidation. BU would have been their first shop. Some had concerns that the

²⁸⁴ Richard Hurd, and Gregory Woodhead, “The Unionization of Clerical Workers at Large U.S. Universities and Colleges,” *Newsletter: National Center for the Study of Collective Bargaining in Higher Education and the Professions* 15, no. 3 (1987), 6.

²⁸⁵ Gladys (Delp) McKie, interview by Amanda Walter, November 11, 2016; *Coffee Break*, October 1974, box 2, folder 29, SEIU District 925 Collection. Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

international did not show a strong commitment to encouraging active rank-and-file involvement in the union.²⁸⁶

Gladys McKie recalled that the BUSOC did not want a union affiliated with the AFL-CIO. Liberal workers viewed the labor federation as not dedicated to progressive ideas, particularly in regards to the Vietnam War and inaction regarding women and minority issues. The Alliance for Labor Action, the trade union center founded by the UAW and Teamsters in 1968 as a progressive alternative to the AFL-CIO, ceased operation in 1972. District 65 did not go back to the AFL-CIO immediately.²⁸⁷ Regarded as the most democratic of the unions interviewed, District 65 had more experience organizing clerical higher education workers than the others. District 65 campaigns at other Boston universities, including MIT and Harvard, had started, and they already represented the Columbia-affiliated Barnard College and Teachers College. In 1967, when the NLRB accepted jurisdiction for university workers, District 65 was one of the first unions to help university workers organize. They promoted minorities and women into leadership positions and hired organizers from within the workplace. District 65 conducted the failed clerical organizing campaign in 1971, but they had minimal experience in higher education at that point. In 1971, workers believed the university administration would address their grievances without the union and encountered an anti-union campaign. Since 1971, the economy deteriorated, the women's movement resulted in many women workers being unwilling to accept poor treatment, and the credibility of the administration suffered severely. District 65 came into the new campaign better prepared and with a more receptive workforce.²⁸⁸

²⁸⁶ Barbara Rahke, interview by Amanda Walter, November 29, 2016; BUSOC District 65 information packet, box 7, folder 30, SEIU District 925 Collection. Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

²⁸⁷ Gladys (Delp) McKie, interview by Amanda Walter, November 11, 2016; Barbara Rahke, interview by Amanda Walter, November 29, 2016.

²⁸⁸ *Coffee Break*, October 1975, box 7, folder 30, SEIU District 925 Collection. Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

The union initially sent two organizers to work on the drive, but they were unresponsive. They had difficult personalities and strategic ideas at odds with the organizing committee. BU workers asked for new organizers. Kathy Koutzer, the high-energy organizer at MIT, started working with BU as well. She instituted an effective strategy used by the employee organizers. Clerical worker organizers, including Barbara Rahke, Carol Knox, and David Hofstetter, focused on one-on-one organizing. They tried to speak with all the members of the unit and answer any questions that they had, all while creating a personal connection with the workers. They also instituted a sizable organizing committee to get more workers actively involved. With the anger about Silber and the merit plan, incredibly low pay, and active organizers, more and more clericals became interested in unionism.²⁸⁹

In response, Boston University spent thousands of dollars on lawsuits and consulting firms to keep faculty and clerical workers from unionizing. At the same time, Silber pushed for more budget cuts. In February 1977, *the b.u. exposure* reported that, while the spring cutbacks included severe reductions of office staff, the administrative budget more than doubled over the preceding five years. Silber had one of the most lucrative salary and benefits packages in higher education. All the while, the university purchased large quantities of real estate. That same month, moreover, the faculty union was still not certified, nearly two years after the election.²⁹⁰

On May 25, 1977, clerical staff petitioned for an election with the NLRB. That year, the administration hired Modern Management Methods (MMM), the notorious union-busting firm from Deerfield, Illinois. MMM had been employed to fight union drives in several Boston area hospitals, including Beth Israel and Children's Hospital, but Boston University marked the first time the firm worked in a university setting. MMM ranked among the most expensive union-

²⁸⁹David Hofstetter, interview by Amanda Walter, September 10, 2017.

²⁹⁰“\$3,830? That's Bunkum!,” *b.u. exposure*, February 1977.

busting companies in the United States. The firm had rapidly expanded in the 1970s as the demand for union-busting firms grew. It employed fifty professionals and simultaneously worked on forty-five to fifty campaigns in 1979. The AFL-CIO called MMM “one of the most effective consultants in the business of creating a union free environment.”²⁹¹

MMM contended that they wanted to solve the grievances of the employees. Tom Crosble, its vice president, told the *Chicago Tribune*, “We consider that unions are an alternative. But we are pro-employee, too, and believe that an employer should provide good employment opportunities. What we do is union avoidance.” MMM urged companies to install responsive supervisors, open up promotional procedures, and increase employee opportunities for learning and problem-solving. They contended, “It is easier to solve problems when there is not an adversary union to deal with.”²⁹² As management consultants, MMM believed their advice, when implemented, obviated the need for unions. Unions did not agree with MMM’s self-assessment of their pro-worker goals.

Richard Hurd describes two models of union avoidance in his studies of clerical unionization. “Union substitution” offers workers an increased voice in decision making to create a more pleasant work environment. “Union suppression” relies on aggressive anti-unionism during organizing campaigns. Boston University chose the union suppression model.²⁹³

AFL-CIO produced a scathing indictment of MMM’s practices. They alleged that the firm told employers to not worry about unfair labor practice charges, as the penalties were minor. They also claimed that Raymond Mickus, MMM executive vice president, provided advice on how to

²⁹¹ Jerry Flint, “A New Breed – Professional Union Breakers,” *Forbes*, June 25, 1979; Logan, “The Union Avoidance Industry in the United States,” 651-675.

²⁹² RC Longworth, “Consultant Firm Thrives: Business Is Booming for ‘Union Avoidance,’” *Chicago Tribune*, September 28, 1979.

²⁹³ Richard Hurd, “Contesting the Dinosaur Image: The Labor Movement’s Search for a Future,” *Labor Studies Journal* 22, no. 4 (1998): 5-30.

avoid hiring potential union activists, such as looking for sympathy for the underdog and involvement in liberal activities.²⁹⁴ The university followed MMM's advice, accumulating numerous unfair labor practice charges.²⁹⁵

The union-busting firm reportedly had a slogan, "We've Never Lost Yet." Its first defeat came around the same time as the BU campaign, when it lost a decertification election for the Massachusetts Nurses Association of the New England Medical Center. Along with MMM's assistance, BU continued to fight the faculty union and attempted to stop librarians and clericals from winning their elections. The hiring of MMM signaled a get-tough attitude on the part of the BU administration.²⁹⁶

In September 1977, MMM's professional union consultants met individually with supervisors to interrogate them about their staff. The consultants asked the supervisors to describe employee attitudes, personal characteristics, and concerns. The firm computer analyzed the answers and used them to design the most effective method of dissuading each employee from supporting unionization. The firm also developed a job evaluation form for all non-faculty, non-unionized personnel to complete. The evaluation's purpose was claimed to be to make job levels and salaries competitive with other universities, but staff had suspicions as to its real purpose. One hundred-forty employees from the Mugar Memorial Library, the primary library on BU's campus, refused to complete them. Library workers, a stronghold of unionization support, already had been denied the use of facilities for meetings.²⁹⁷

²⁹⁴ Jerry Flint, "A New Breed – Professional Union Breakers," *Forbes*, June 25 1979.

²⁹⁵ Howard Zinn, "A Showcase of Repression: Boston University Curves Its 'Excess of Democracy,'" *Progressive*, June 1980.

²⁹⁶ "Personnel Director Ousted," *Coffee Break*, November 2, 1977, Boston University Union District 65, Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center, Boston University, Boston, MA.

²⁹⁷ "MMM Fails to De-Rail Staff Union," *b.u. exposure*, September 1979; "Personnel Director Ousted," *Coffee Break*, November 2, 1977, Boston University Union District 65, Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center, Boston University, Boston, MA; Lisa J. Boodman, "The J. P. Stevens of Academia," undated, Boston University Union District 65.

Memos from the university barraged the staff with anti-union rhetoric. The university contended that District 65 delighted in imposing fines, was strike-happy, and hoisted contracts on members without any input. Ignoring the fact that District 65 established a permanent office in Boston, university memos framed the union as an outside organization taking the conditions of work out of employees' hands and putting them into the hands of New York union leaders. Pamphlets reinterpreted the union constitution and misrepresented how District 65 used funds.²⁹⁸

The administration placed tremendous pressure on supervisors to have their staff vote against the union. Many of these supervisors were required to attend daily sessions with MMM, which emphasized that the union would destroy the congeniality between supervisors and staff. In the weeks before the election, the administration required supervisors to speak to employees on unionization to express "their opinion," likely an opinion learned from the session.²⁹⁹ Frustrated with the administration's attempts to play them against their coworkers, some supervisors refused to act as the messengers of the anti-union ideas. Overall, MMM wanted to foster an atmosphere of confusion and fear.³⁰⁰

Part of MMM's anti-union plan included setting up supposedly neutral—actually pro-management—"employee committees."³⁰¹ MMM embarked on organizing anti-union groups to spread their message. The Administrative Library Council (ALC), comprising library administration and library department heads, produced material to divide and confuse employees in the library. One of the union strongholds, the library boasted an 80 percent card signing rate.

²⁹⁸ Correspondence from the Concerned Voters Committee to Biweekly Employees, May 17, 1978, Boston University Union District 65; Correspondence from Virginia Tierney to Boston University employees, May 9, 1978, Boston University Union District 65; Correspondence from the Concerned Voters Committee to Biweekly Employees, May 22, 1978, Boston University Union District 65.

²⁹⁹ "Raises, Rumors and Reality," *Coffee Break*, May 8, 1978, Boston University Union District 65.

³⁰⁰ Lisa J. Boodman, "The J.P. Stevens of Academia," undated, Boston University Union District 65.

³⁰¹ RC Longworth, "Consultant Firm Thrives: Business Is Booming for 'Union Avoidance,'" *Chicago Tribune*, September 28, 1979.

District 65's Library Organizing Committee (LOC) sent multiple open letters to staff to refute false information, omissions, and the material taken out of context. The ALC reported an exorbitant initiation fee. The LOC claimed it was only 20 percent of what the ALC said. The LOC requested an open meeting with the ALC to discuss union issues, but they failed to respond. Instead, the ALC made new accusations about closed shops and special assessments. The Concerned Voters Committee, another supposedly neutral committee, wrote employees weekly memos to emphasize that District 65 was an industrial union which did not represent educational shops in Massachusetts.³⁰²

MMM also advised its clients to keep union organizers out, but the university structure made that almost impossible in most buildings, as they were open to the public. Anti-union committees and propaganda aimed to make people uncomfortable and uncertain. Julie Kushner, a District 65 organizer, noted, "You don't have to win [workers] over that the union is bad. You just have to convince them that, if the union wins, life will never be the same." The psychological warfare, fairly new in union organizing, often found success with white-collar workers.³⁰³

Unsurprisingly, the university challenged the makeup of the proposed unit. MMM advised its clients on using the law wherever possible to delay elections. Delaying elections allowed time for management to campaign against the union and dampen the enthusiasm of the organizing team. BU had a relatively transient workforce. Many did not expect to stay long term, accounting for a 30 percent turn over each year. New staff did not know recent improvements only came as a result

³⁰² "An Open Letter to All Library Employees from the Library Organizing Committee," July 22, 1977, Boston University Union District 65, Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center, Boston University, Boston, MA; Correspondence from the Concerned Voters Committee to Biweekly Employees, May 17, 1978, Boston University Union District 65.

³⁰³ Julie Kushner, interview by Amanda Walter, September 8, 2017 and October 13, 2017.

of union agitation. Before the start of the 1977 fall semester, *Coffee Break* informed new staff that tuition remission benefits only improved three months earlier.³⁰⁴

While staff called for a unit of all clericals on the Charles River campus, BU took the position that the bargaining unit should also include all those in the medical campus, in Washington DC, New York, and North Andover. The university used all legal maneuvers at their disposal to drag out the hearing, including litigating whether nineteen individuals the university claimed were supervisors were ineligible for the bargaining unit. BU did relent, saying that the workers were not supervisors, thus “making apparent that the original purpose was to stall for time.”³⁰⁵ The university also put one hundred known supervisors on the bargaining unit list. In December 1977, the bargaining unit definition still languished in litigation. The NLRB recently had ruled that geographically separate campuses could be separate bargaining units. BU organizers remained hopeful, yet the waiting continued for months.

The BU organizers did not wait idly by during the drug out composition decision. They solidified their distribution network, “so that [they could] get newsletters and other notices out to staff about 137 times faster than campus mail.” Organizers took time talking with new staff, informing them of the campaign. Cutbacks continued during the delay. BU’s property purchases forced the university to implement a 5 percent budget cut across the board, raise tuition, institute a hiring freeze, and reduce academic and related services.³⁰⁶

The anti-union campaign did make some missteps. One occurred when the Concerned Voters Committee tried to recruit the president’s office staff to join their ranks. Those workers

³⁰⁴ “New Staff Welcome,” *Coffee Break*, September 14, 1977, Boston University Union District 65. Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center, Boston University, Boston, MA.

³⁰⁵ Barbara Rahke, “BU Staff Drive Awaits Ruling,” *b.u. exposure*, October 1977.

³⁰⁶ “Documents Show: No Grounds for Hike,” *b.u. exposure*, February 1978; Felix Zydallis, “BU Grabs \$5 Million in Property Since January,” *b.u. exposure*, September 1978.

strongly supported the union, although not publicly until the day before the election. The union requested a debate between Silber and David Livingston, District 65's president. University attorney John Hill responded that Silber would only debate with Livingston if District 65 waived the right to object to illegal conduct in the course of the debate. This request received swift refusal.³⁰⁷

Five days before the election at BU, District 65 represented clericals struck at Teachers College at Columbia due to the frequent cancellation and delay of negotiations. Fear of strikes tends to be more prevalent among clericals than other workers, a possible detriment to the election. High strike activity tends to reduce affirmative union representation votes.³⁰⁸ Nonetheless, District 65 emerged victorious at BU on May 24, 1978. With a voter turnout of 95 percent, 418 voted for District 65, while 360 voted for no union. BU became one of the largest bargaining units of private sector clerical workers in New England and one of the few to ever beat MMM, the first in a new organizing election. It would take six months to get certified after the election.³⁰⁹

MMM did not intend to leave campus after the clerical election. Instead, they turned to their favorite technique, to refuse to negotiate with the union, even after employees had voted for representation. According to this technique, "all the while, union officials say, pro-union employees are harassed. Eventually, the union, seeing that it is doing the workers more harm than good, may become frustrated enough to go away."³¹⁰ Three years of legal challenges plagued the faculty union. MMM finally left BU in October 1978 after the clerical unit certification. In 1979, MMM had an article in the *Wall Street Journal* bragging that of one hundred campaigns in 1978,

³⁰⁷ Boodman, "J. P. Stevens of Academia," undated, Boston University Union District 65, Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center, Boston University, Boston, MA.

³⁰⁸ Richard Hurd and Adrienne McElwain, "Organizing Clerical Workers: Determinants of Success," *Industrial and Labor Relations Review* 41, no. 3 (1988), 369.

³⁰⁹ "Victory," *Coffee Break*, May 26, 1978, Boston University Union District 65, Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center, Boston University, Boston, MA.

³¹⁰ Longworth, "Consultant Firm Thrives: Business Is Booming for "Union Avoidance."

they only lost two. Boston University was one of those losses, because there the union created a clear adversary, had well-defined issues, employed committed organizers, and gained support from others on campus and in the community.³¹¹

While the clerical workers fought for unionization, non-supervisory professional librarians began to organize with Local 925 in the summer of 1977. Local 925, growing out of the working women's organization, 9to5, recently organized Brandeis library workers. The BU unit had approximately twenty-five members. In August 1978, librarians voted to unionize with Local 925. While organizing with different unions, the librarians and clerical staff forged a feeling of cooperation and solidarity. Following the same pattern it had with clericals and faculty, the administration disputed the election, arguing that the bargaining unit of Mugar Library and its satellites was not an appropriate unit and should include the librarians in the Medical School and School of Theology.³¹²

With MMM gone after certification, clerical workers hoped negotiations would finally begin. That would not be the case, especially as BU hired another management consulting firm soon after MMM's departure. The university continued to disagree with the bargaining unit composition. Barbara Rahke expressed extreme frustration regarding the delays in negotiations. In a letter to the Vice President of Financial and Business Affairs, Charles W. Smith, Rahke requested negotiations finally commence. He responded to her late December letter, expressing disappointment for not receiving a Christmas card and stating that the certification of District 65

³¹¹ Barbara Rahke, interview by Stacey Heath, May 23, 2006, SEIU District 925 Legacy Project: Oral History, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

³¹² *Raises and Roses*, June 1980, box 2, folder 25, SEIU District 925 Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

as the exclusive bargaining unit for full-time and regular part-time clerical employees of the Charles River campus was invalid.³¹³

Boston University clericals had the support of faculty and students throughout their campaign and recognition struggles, even as faculty fought their own battles. The First Circuit Court of Appeals of the United States ordered negotiations between faculty and the university begin in mid-1978. Silber and the trustees continued to fight the union, filing an appeal with the U.S. Supreme Court. In April 1979, faculty went out on strike after failed contract negotiations. Faculty thought they reached an agreement on a contract, but trustees returned only conditional approval and considerably altered several articles.³¹⁴ Students struck at the same time for no tuition hikes, to control student activities, for the immediate resignation or firing of John Silber, and in full support of faculty, librarian, and clerical demands.³¹⁵

The clerical union, still not recognized, decided to strike for recognition. District 65's membership overwhelmingly voted in favor of a work stoppage to coincide with the faculty strike. Workers saw the alliance between the AAUP and District 65 as a positive way to gain a more powerful position making contract demands. Local 925 stuck as well. The process of taking Boston University to court to enforce the certification could easily take over a year and a half. The faculty

³¹³“BU Replies,” *Coffee Break*, January 10, 1979, Boston University Union District 65, Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center, Boston University, Boston, MA.

³¹⁴ While clericals had the support of the faculty union, the building and grounds local, SEIU 254, did not provide support for the clerical workers. Rahke recalls the leadership as under the thumb of Silber. SEIU members crossed the clerical picket line. Rahke recalls the president of the local saying, “While we’re in the winter out there in the freezing cold, shoveling the snow for them. They’re in their warm little rooms sitting on their soft butts.” Barbara Rahke, interview by Amanda Walter, November 29, 2016.

³¹⁵ “What is the AAUP?,” *b.u. exposure*, February 13, 1979; “Front Lines,” *b.u. exposure*, April 11, 1979; “Students: A Call to Strike,” *b.u. exposure*, February 13, 1979.

union languished in the courts for three years to bring BU to the bargaining table. Clericals wanted to avoid the same fate.³¹⁶

Strikers encountered harassment and violence while on the picket lines. During the strike, Silber personally came out, walked up and down Commonwealth Avenue, and yelled at workers go back to work. Rahke remembered what it was like for the majority women clerical strikers:

We had all kinds of injuries. Police would grab us and start screaming, “You should be home having babies. What kind of decent girl would be out here doing this?” It was wild, and it was on the news every night. Headlines on the Boston news every night. It was intense. It was very intense.³¹⁷

BU paid police overtime to patrol the strike. Police choked a man and pushed and arrested a female student. President of the AAUP chapter, Fritz Ringer, noted the university might need to meet the demands of all three unions for the faculty to return to work.³¹⁸

After nine days, the faculty union settled before clerical union recognition. Some faculty continued to support the clericals. Around seventy professors refused to cross the picket lines, continuing to hold classes off campus.³¹⁹ The majority, however, felt little enthusiasm to continue to strike after their demands had been met. Ultimately, faculty intervened, behind the scenes, to bargain with the university administration to resolve the fight and recognize the clerical union. The faculty union liaison met with Rahke and told her that, if the clerical union held a meeting and asked the members in good faith to go back to work, the administration would immediately recognize them. The university required the offer to stay secret. After a two-and-a-half-week strike, clerical union members, voting with blind faith in their leadership, agreed to go back to

³¹⁶“Front Lines,” *b.u. exposure*, April 11, 1979; “Members Vote: Faculty/Staff Coalition to Be Explored,” *Coffee Break*, February 23, 1979, Boston University Union District 65, Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center, Boston University, Boston, MA.

³¹⁷ Barbara Rahke, interview by Amanda Walter, November 29, 2016.

³¹⁸ “Arrest!,” *b.u. exposure*, May 2, 1979; Gary Zabel, “The Boston University Strike of 1979,” 695–96.

³¹⁹ Howard Zinn, “A Showcase of Repression: Boston University Curves Its ‘Excess of Democracy,’” *Progressive*, June 1980.

work with nothing. By the time they walked out of the hall, the university had announced the recognition of the union.³²⁰

District 65 conducted an eight-day strike during the negotiations for their first contract, finally signing a contract in October 1979. The union did not achieve the wage gains they had hoped, noting that they did not attain the kind of alliances they had during the recognition strike. Nonetheless, clerical workers achieved trendsetting clauses in their contract, including provisions on sexual harassment, working conditions, and personal work. They eliminated the merit salary system, improved tuition benefits, and got robust health and safety language.³²¹

Union busting activity continued during negotiations and beyond. In one instance, library workers arrived at work to flyers from “concerned voters” on their desks to remind workers of the cutoff date for withdrawal of union membership. The flyers arrived before the official opening of Mugar Library. Library workers questioned the identity of the “concerned voters.” They may have been representatives from personnel or the public relations office.³²²

Despite the vicious anti-union campaign, BU clericals succeeded as they had a clear adversary in John Silber, issues of the merit plan and tuition remission that unified workers, strong organizers, and campus community support. The same keys to success appeared at Columbia during their clerical unionization campaign. NYU showed some of the same components of success. With a lower-key anti-union campaign, unionization succeeded at NYU, even with less community support. While having to combat anti-unionism campaigns became the norm, Silber made the Boston University case atypical. It would be rare to have someone who nearly all parts of campus saw as a villain. Women workers came to comprise close to half of District 65’s

³²⁰ Barbara Rahke, interview, by Amanda Walter, November 29, 2016.

³²¹ Ibid.

³²² “District 65: Challenge to ‘Concerned Voters,’” *b.u. exposure*, October 24, 1979.

membership. The clerical workers of Boston University, 75 percent women, were one of the first large private sector clerical units to win union representation in New England.³²³

The faculty played a vital role in the ultimate success of the clerical union. Without faculty intervention on the clericals' behalf, the clerical union may have spent months continuing to fight for recognition, a delay that could dampen the enthusiasm for their new union. The active and strong faculty union lasted only a few years as a result of the decision in *NLRB v. Yeshiva University* (1980). Boston University administration refused to bargain with the faculty union on a new contract after the current one expired in 1982, resulting in the union's disintegration. The faculty voted for Silber's dismissal again in 1980. He stayed president until 1996.³²⁴

Columbia University

In 1973, women clerical employees at Columbia University, involved in formulating Columbia's affirmative action program, decided to organize a union after realizing that affirmative action can only affect hiring opportunities.³²⁵ Despite cards signed by more than 50 percent of eligible workers, District 65 failed to win in a 1976 NLRB election at Columbia. Considered a moral victory, workers began to overcome their isolation from one another. At least 342 voted for the union.³²⁶ At that point in time, District 65 could not overcome the anti-union charge that they were not a union of clerical employees in the field of higher education and only became interested

³²³“Victory,” *Coffee Break*, May 26, 1978, Boston University Union District 65, Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center. Boston University, Boston, MA.

³²⁴ Bodner, “Implications of the Yeshiva University Decision for Collective Bargaining Rights of Faculty at Private and Public Institutions of Higher Education,” 78; Gail Jennes, “Colossus or Megalomaniac, Boston University’s John Silber Keeps His Campus in Turmoil,” *People*, June 2, 1980.

³²⁵ “What is District 65?,” 1970, box 1, folder 1970–1971, Printed Ephemera Collection on the United Automobile Workers of America, District 65, PE.016, Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University, New York, NY.

³²⁶ Nancy Carlin, “Feedback,” *Columbia Daily Spectator*, May 23, 1976, box 1, folder Columbia University, Printed Ephemera Collection on the United Automobile Workers of America, District 65, PE.016.

due to severe financial problems. It was also early in the life of working women's organizations, before their message of clerical empowerment reached the masses and before automation's full impact would be felt. District 65 achieved more success among clericals at three smaller institutions affiliated with Columbia. Barnard clerical workers unionized with District 65 in 1973, the first major private college in the country to vote for unionization. Teachers College joined them in unionizing in 1978, along with Union Theological Seminary in 1979. In 1969, Local 1199 unionized clericals at Columbia's School of Social Work, libraries, and controller's office. Given the successes at affiliated colleges and unionized clericals in select departments at Columbia, it seemed to be the right time for District 65, coming off the victory at BU, to organize the rest of the clericals at Columbia. Columbia's 1,100 clericals did succeed in 1984, achieving District 65 representation the same way BU workers did: by having clear issues, committed organizers, a common enemy, and community support.³²⁷

After the narrow 1976 defeat, the organizing campaign at Columbia remained inactive until September 1979, when a group of ten clericals began meeting with leaders from the locals at Barnard and Teachers Colleges. These unions provided excellent examples of the benefits of unionization. The unionized clerical workers at Barnard made approximately \$2,000 more than the 1,100 clericals at Columbia. The Barnard union victory urged Columbia workers to unionize too. A cartoon in one of the Columbia newsletters showed a bear, the mascot of Barnard attempting to wake a lion, the mascot of Columbia. The bear says, "Come on, Leo, wake up and follow me! It's time for you to get moving too!" Clericals at Columbia, who had no experience with unionized workplaces, could see concrete examples of the benefits unionization could bring. Despite the

³²⁷ Richard Hurd, "Learning from Clerical Unions: Two Cases of Organizing Success." *Labor Studies* 14, no. 1 (1989), 34; Sharon Kurtz, *Workplace Justice: Organizing Multi-Identity Movements* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 3.

faculty not being able to unionize, the university had a reasonably positive organizing atmosphere.³²⁸ At Columbia, the faculty and the other unions on campus and at Barnard and Teachers College offered incredible support.

The union collected only two hundred signed authorization cards a year into the organizing. Starting in September 1980, Julie Kushner, who had worked on the successful drive to unionize Boston University's clerical workers, was convinced that one-to-one contact with every member of the unit would be necessary. Another important form of communication, the newspaper covered issues of importance to members of the unit, experiences of clerical unions on other campuses, and information relevant to District 65 activity. Kushner committed to the one-on-one style, which proved largely effective against anti-union campaigns.³²⁹

Kushner, like Rahke, came to union organizing through her activism in working women's movement organizations. She joined Madison Office Workers while working at the University of Wisconsin. Upon arriving in New York in 1977, she contacted WOW to express her interest in organizing women workers, particularly office workers. Directed to District 65, Kushner called their office to speak with Margie Albert, a former clerical turned staff organizer. Kushner saw Albert's interview in a video by 9to5, which pushed Kushner to want to work with unions. Kushner found out that someone quit the organizing staff. District 65 hired Kushner, forming a team of five women committed to organizing clerical workers in New York City.³³⁰

Like BU, major issues helped propel the campaign forward. The majority women workforce found that women received wages lower than men doing comparable work at Columbia.

³²⁸“Come on Leo!” *Columbia Staff Union Star*, July 1973, box 1, folder Columbia University, Printed Ephemera Collection on the United Automobile Workers of America, District 65, PE.016, Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University, New York, NY.

³²⁹ Julie Kushner, interview by Amanda Walter, September 8, 2017 and October 13, 2017; Richard Hurd, “Learning from Clerical Unions,” 34; Kurtz, *Workplace Justice*, 4.

³³⁰ The five women were Margie Albert, Julie Kushner, Kitty Krupat, Bernice Crosick, and Ellen Harper. Julie Kushner, interview by Amanda Walter, September 8, 2017 and October 13, 2017.

The workforce, approximately 50 percent non-white, also found that non-white clerical workers earned \$1,000 less than whites in similar jobs. Personal work particularly angered clerical workers. Stories included a faculty member having his secretary collect his mother's ashes at the mortuary, a supervisor requiring his employee to travel from Manhattan to Flushing, New York to pick up dry cleaning, and a boss discarding an empty Oreo box on a worker's desk as a message to buy a new package. Columbia workers had poor medical coverage. District 65 promised dental and optical coverage and lower deductibles. Before the election, Columbia's administration was not seen as especially malevolent, the way many saw BU's administration. They made improvements, but the changes came in the shadow of the District 65 campaign and pressure from Local 1199.³³¹

Fairly typical of anti-union campaigns, employees received a tide of anti-union literature, along with pressure exerted on individual workers by their supervisors and forced attendance at captive audience meetings, meetings used to spread the administration's views to employees. Columbia, like BU, employed extensive use of litigation before and after the election. Columbia University administration, considering the proposed unit inappropriate, worked to secure a more favorable bargaining unit definition. The university wanted the 300 officers of administration, a middle-management position, included. The National Labor Relations Board decided in December 1981 that the officers could vote in the representation election. District 65 decided to appeal, contending that officers of administration made up a different community of interest. With the case reopened in February 1982, the newly appointed NLRB regional director, Dan Silverman, reversed the decision in April 1983. On May 4, 1983, nearly three years after the first filing, Columbia clericals finally had the opportunity to vote on unionization.³³²

³³¹ Ibid.

³³² Hurd, "Learning from Clerical Unions," 35–36; Julie Kushner, interview by Amanda Walter, September 8, 2017 and October 13, 2017.

In the lead-up to the election, the administration refused to allow free and open discussion of the issues, ordering several workers distributing information outside buildings to leave. The election for unionization would be perilously close, with union victory 468 to 442. Challenging the election, Columbia took advantage of the massive backlog at the NLRB. The NLRB had a backlog of 1,700 cases, the largest in its existence. Donald Dotson, Ronald Reagan's appointee to chair the the NLRB, was using his power to subvert the board's protection of workers' right to organize. In addition, the number of decisions handed out each year dropped significantly. District 65 finally received certification in March 1984.³³³

Delays usually help management, but, at Columbia, it backfired. The delay between the vote and the strike to force recognition helped get more people involved. Over the two years between the election and negotiations, organizers went out every lunch break to talk to workers, establishing relationships. Employees came to know who they could contact if they had a question, especially when encountering anti-union material. In what would become known as balloon days, District 65 organizing committee members tied union balloons everywhere—to chairs, doors, and typewriters-to keep the union visible. Despite a 35-percent turnover rate every year, the strong organization could not be broken.³³⁴

Shortly after the election, Columbia unilaterally made sharp cuts to medical benefits and cut unpaid maternity leave by half, as well as having plans to cut tuition benefits. Columbia said that men and women should have equal time off for parental leave. Instead of raising paternity

³³³ "What is Going on at the Labor Board?," *Clout! The Newsletter for Columbia Support Staff*, March 1984, Julie Kushner personal collection; William Serrin, "Columbia Faces Threat of Strike over Union Vote," *New York Times*, December 31, 1984.

³³⁴ "A Union Contract---It Makes A Difference," Princeton flyer, undated, Kushner personal collection; Hurd, "Learning from Clerical Unions," 35.

leave to equal maternity leave, they reduced maternity leave from twelve months to six months.³³⁵

Frank Beck, an administrative assistant in the Classics department, said,

When Columbia cut our benefits, they gave us an important but brutal lesson in collective bargaining. They proposed the same kind of cuts to the workers at Barnard across the street. But Barnard has a union contract with District 65/UAW. They couldn't do to Barnard what they did to us.³³⁶

Workers realized the changes would severely hurt them, including those who voted against the union. The organizing committee circulated a petition protesting the benefits cuts and demanding the administration negotiate the issue with the union. The petition was signed by 630 workers, seventy more than voted for the union.³³⁷

Two months later, District 65 distributed a second petition to Senator Patrick Moynihan, Governor Mario Cuomo, and Mayor Edward Koch, asking the elected officials to intervene and encourage the NLRB to speed up the process of certifying District 65's bargaining unit. More than seven hundred clericals signed. The 125 member committee circulated the petition. The extended committee, which approximated the union's racial and ethnic diversity and had representatives from each of the major buildings on campus, had the ability to contact every member of the unit individually. BU similarly had a large committee to encourage active involvement in the union. Petitions provided the local a means to maintain direct contact with the supporters.³³⁸

A mood of anger and frustration swept campus. District 65 consistently demonstrated their clear, legal majority status as a union. Nonetheless, Columbia refused to recognize District 65, using every maneuver at its disposal. The workers were losing patience, and a strike seemed

³³⁵ "Mr. Early, Where's the Beef?," *Clout!: The Newsletter for Columbia Support Staff*, March 1984, Kushner personal collection; "Columbia Workers Seek Justice – Now," *Distributive Worker*, April 1984, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

³³⁶ "A Union Contract—It Makes A Difference," Princeton flyer, undated, Kushner personal collection.

³³⁷ Richard Hurd, "Learning from Clerical Unions: Two Cases of Organizing Success," *Labor Studies* 14, no. 1 (1989), 36.

³³⁸ Hurd, "Learning from Clerical Unions," 37.

inevitable.³³⁹ Seeking to avert a strike, Columbia finally did recognize the union in February 1985. Nonetheless, clerical workers would go on strike in October 1985, as contract talks stalled. The union proposed a contract similar to the one already covering workers at Barnard. One-third of clerical workers at Columbia earned wages below the starting rate for Barnard workers. It also proposed an affirmative action program, as District 65 accused Columbia of salary discrimination on the basis of sex, race, and age.³⁴⁰

Faculty provided invaluable support during the strike. In his fourth year at Columbia, Eric Foner coordinated the teaching of 500 classes off campus during the strike. Faculty members taught in movie theaters, restaurants, bowling alley, and churches. The administration could not claim it was business as usual, but the educational process did not stop. Students and faculty joined the picket lines and sit-ins. The community also rallied around the workers, as the university's policies as a landlord had come into conflict with the community on many occasions, and the issue of sex and race discrimination received broad support. One thousand District 65/UAW members from the New York metropolitan area arrived on campus to assist on the picket lines. Eventually, Columbia clerical workers would win major improvements as a result of the strike.³⁴¹

After five days on the picket lines, on October 21, 1985, Columbia clerical workers voted to accept a contract which met all their significant demands. Columbia restored the benefits it cut in the interim between the election and negotiations. For a short time, clericals received better benefits than faculty, solidifying the relationship between the groups. The contract instituted a special adjustment fund to compensate individual employees who experienced discrimination or a

³³⁹ "Workers of Columbia Prepared for Strike," *Distributive Worker*, December 1984, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

³⁴⁰ Hurd, "Learning from Clerical Unions," 38.

³⁴¹ Julie Kushner (presentation, Eric Foner: A Celebration of His Career, New York, NY, April 21, 2017), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-NfyTKGy_HQ&t=6097s.

lack of recognition for length of service. It also prohibited personal work and formed three important committees: an affirmative action monitoring committee, a joint advisory committee on health and safety, and a classification review committee.³⁴² Factors beyond the control of the union or the workers, such as the predisposition of management and the universities' trustees, the university's finances, and the level of union support in the community, help determine whether campaigns succeed. At Columbia, the union overcame such factors, with unifying issues, a clear adversary, good organizers, and community support helping the workers ultimately emerge victorious. Now as UAW Local 2110, Columbia clerical workers continue the legacy of District 65, using the union as a vehicle to challenge racism and sexism in the workplace.³⁴³

Conclusion

These union drives showed that large, well-funded anti-union campaigns could be overcome, and the lack of faculty unionism did not necessarily mean that the organizing atmosphere of a campus would be entirely inhospitable. New York University, Boston University, and Columbia University were examples of successes in organizing, recognition, and bargaining. Administrations at Boston University and Columbia University fought viciously at every step of the way, more so than would be seen at most public universities. But workers could win if they possessed unifying issues, good organizers, community support, and if they also had unions ready to commit the time and resources to be successful. In all three cases, District 65 battled at private universities, which tended to be more difficult than public sector campaigns. Opposition from

³⁴² Hurd, "Learning from Clerical Unions: Two Cases of Organizing Success," 41; Julie Kushner, interview by Amanda Walter, September 8, 2017 and October 13, 2017; "Victory!" *Picket Lines*, October 23, 1985, Kushner personal collection.

³⁴³ Kurtz, *Workplace Justice*, xxxiv.

management tended to be not as stiff, and management consultants were not as common in public sector campaigns.³⁴⁴

The increasing use of management consultants coincided with a decrease in union victories nationally. Clerical unionism in higher education, which began in earnest in the mid-1970s, had to contend with this opposition. It was especially true at private universities which did not have a responsibility to taxpayers. Moreover, into the 1980s, management consultants grew increasingly sophisticated, launching campaigns emphasized psychological warfare. In the 1960s, unions won 57 percent of their representation elections. In 1978, the victory rate decreased to 46 percent. AFL-CIO unions won elections covering only 99,700 workers in 1978 compared to 193,800 in 1968. From 1972 to 1979, unions held 2,000 elections for private sector clerical workers, resulting in 35,000 workers joining the labor movement. However, 91 percent of the 15 million clerical workers in the United States remained unorganized in 1979.³⁴⁵ Decertifications increased at the same time. *Forbes* reported that the industry might be spending as much as \$100 million a year on management consultants.³⁴⁶

Despite all of this, the clerical organizing campaigns of the 1970s and 1980s continue to benefit workers in private universities. The Columbia local, now over thirty years old, led a successful inclusive campaign for justice in the workplace. Improvements in pay, childcare, and job classifications have made the work lives of the higher education clerical workers, mostly women and minorities, substantially better.

³⁴⁴ Richard Hurd and Adrienne McElwain, "Organizing Clerical Workers: Determinants of Success," *Industrial and Labor Relations Review* 41, no. 3 (1988), 360–71.

³⁴⁵ Vicki Shanamary Gabriner, "Clerical Workers: Victory at Boston University," *Equal Times*, May 13, 1979.

³⁴⁶ Jerry Flint, "A New Breed – Professional Union Breakers," *Forbes*, June 25, 1979.

CHAPTER 4: “UNITED ACADEMIC WORKERS”: THE UAW IN THE ACADEMY

When the Queen’s University classics department secretary moved to Toronto in 1977, the department head believed that the professors should take one-week turns at conducting secretarial duties during the summer. After weeks of struggling to locate office supplies, seeing poorly typed letters, and failing to fix the copy machine or find the repairman’s number, the professors noted the importance of clericals to the smooth running of the office. As Professor Anthony Marshall wrote, “It made us realize how much a good secretary does. A good secretary is unobtrusive and therefore gets taken for granted. A good secretary is the linchpin of the whole operation.” While the importance of clerical work had been apparent to faculty, administrations did not always agree, as was evident in low wages and difficult contract negotiations.³⁴⁷

By the 1970s, affiliation with a multi-local union appealed to clerical workers in Michigan universities. Many had staff associations with some collective bargaining rights, but they lacked the expertise, resources, and political clout of a large union. Faced with higher inflation, state budget cuts to institutions of higher education, and the introduction of new technology to the office, clerical workers began to reach out to unions such as the United Automobile, Aerospace, and Agricultural Implement Workers of America (UAW). The UAW, while it had not organized higher education workers before the 1970s, now sought to gain university clericals as members. The membership base of the UAW was declining at a rapid pace. Of the first college and university affiliation campaigns centered in Michigan, the UAW campaigns had the most power and widespread support. In affiliation campaigns, local independent unions joined the UAW for more protections and resources; they already have collective bargaining rights at the time of the

³⁴⁷ *The Working End*, November 1977, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

campaign. The UAW succeeded in multiple affiliation campaigns even as they were testing the higher education sector for continued expansion.

By focusing on the Eastern Michigan University, Wayne State University, and Cornell University campaigns, I show how clerical organizing in higher education exemplified the push for unions like the UAW to enter areas outside their traditional sectors to combat the decline of union membership from industrial occupations. Clerical workers in higher education increasingly reached out to the large unions for help in bargaining, as they encountered difficult bargaining conditions due, in part, to diminishing state funding for universities. They turned to affiliation to strengthen workers' power. As more higher education clericals affiliated with it, the UAW was able to build on its successes through fostering solidarity between clericals on campuses. A Michigan statewide university clerical group that met quarterly to exchange ideas, information, and problems clericals faced, had several UAW affiliated attendees. The group helped persuade the independent unions to affiliate to gain a stronger united front.

The UAW efforts to affiliate or absorb independent clerical unions in Michigan coincided with the expansion of clerical organizing nationally. Their commitment to organizing clericals grew as they succeeded in Michigan, expanding with the affiliation with District 65, as seen in the Cornell University campaign. The Cornell case study shows the commitment to organizing unrepresented workers in higher education and the novel approach of trying to organize multiple diverse occupational groups in one campaign into a single local. While the tactic failed to achieve union representation at Cornell for clerical workers, unity across units helped Columbia clerical worked succeed, an effort started by District 65.

White-Collar Organizing and Women in the UAW

White-collar unionism in the UAW has attracted little attention. Carl Dean Snyder's *White-Collar Workers and the UAW* sought to explain white-collar unionism in the UAW and how white-collar unionism could be taken up by other unions. Published in 1973, before the start of most UAW higher education campaigns, Snyder provided valuable information on the origins and functions of the UAW's Technical, Office and Professional (TOP) department. Emphasizing the growing importance of white-collar workers in the U.S. economy, Snyder contends that the UAW sought to emphasize white-collar organizing by the end of the 1960s. The power of the UAW in Michigan made the union more favorable than other unions in the state, but they still had to counteract the perception that unions were more suited for blue-collar workers.³⁴⁸

By 1971, it was clear that the UAW intended to organize universities and colleges, starting in southeast Michigan. In an interview with the *Toledo Times*, Hubert Emerick, assistant director of the TOP department, laid out the reasons for entering the sector. Noting that auto industry membership was rapidly declining, with the recent layoff of thousands of workers, the UAW sought to move outside its traditional areas.³⁴⁹ As Tori Deas, trustee of Local 1975, one of the first UAW locals in higher education, declared, "Office workers are the factory workers of today." Clerical workers came to be seen as a potential base for union power, as the power of factory workers declined.³⁵⁰

³⁴⁸ Tony Gilpin, Gary Isaac, Dan Letwin, and Jack McKivigan, *On Strike for Respect: The Clerical and Technical Workers' Strike at Yale University, 1984–85* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994); John Hoerr, "We Can't Eat Prestige": *The Women Who Organized Harvard* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997); Carl Dean Snyder, *White-Collar Workers and the UAW* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1973).

³⁴⁹ "UAW Wheels and Deals on University Campuses," *Toledo Times*, February 14, 1975, box 7, folder 16, UAW Technical, Office, Professional (TOP) Department Records, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

³⁵⁰ The UAW began to organize government employees around the same time. News clippings, 1976, box 1, folder 1, United Auto Workers (UAW) EMU Local 1976—Office and Professional Technical Records, University Archives, Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti, MI.

With factory employment dropping, the UAW started to see a decline in automotive union membership. At the same time, the white-collar sector expanded, especially in the public sector and in higher education. In response to organized labor's failure to maintain its influence in the growing labor force, the UAW knew that they needed to expand its membership base to include more white-collar workers. The UAW saw a decline from 1.4 million members in 1953, dropping to 1 million by 1961. Much of the decline came from production jobs.³⁵¹

White-collar organizing had long been part of the UAW. Still, white-collar UAW membership saw a decline from 80,000 in 1953 to 50,000 in 1963. As most of the union's white-collar members also worked in automotive, they too were affected by the industry's declining employment numbers. Automotive factories and offices moved to the southern United States and then overseas to flee unions. The move from union strongholds to ununionized locations resulted in significant membership losses. In 1961, the UAW won only two elections among white-collar workers, while losing eleven. In 1962, the white-collar interest group, the Engineering–Technical–Office–Professional caucus, was reconstituted as the Technical–Office–Professional (TOP) Department. Some historians, such as Snyder, have argued that the TOP Department lost out in contract negotiations, because white-collar workers had far less priority than manufacturing workers, the majority of the union. This might account for the 1960s decline in white-collar union members and the delay in UAW expansion in the sector. White-collar workers may have known about the poor reputation, resulting in less excitement for UAW representation. Bucking the trends, Leonard Woodcock, then the vice-president, noted,

I ask you to think what economic power will the UAW have in these three great base industries of the United States and Canada as we represent an increasingly smaller percentage of the total labor force. It is an inescapable fact that if we cannot achieve the organization of professional and technical and engineering employees,

³⁵¹ Snyder, *White-Collar Workers and the UAW*, 4–9.

and as well as office workers, this union will become an increasingly less effective force.³⁵²

The most dynamic, growing sector of the labor force offered the opportunity for union expansion. Considerable pessimism by UAW officials was attached to white-collar unionism in the 1960s, since office work was considered an unorganized sector. Believing that women, who held the majority of clerical jobs, were not receptive to unionization, UAW organizers and leaders had long been skeptical of investing in efforts to organize them. But as the union's blue-collar membership dipped, the UAW increasingly came to see white-collar unionism as an integral part of its future. By the 1970s, UAW leaders were beginning to consider ways to translate their experience in organizing and bargaining for white-collar employees into a coordinated effort to build the union's clerical membership.

Male workers dominated the UAW in this period. Women comprised no more than 15 percent of the automotive workforce, except during World War II. Even so, women had a voice in the UAW. The UAW, regarded as one of the most liberal and democratic unions, has a long history of supporting women's rights in the workplace. In 1944, the UAW established the Women's Department, the first of its kind in an industrial union. The Women's Department was made up of women from various locals. It linked problems inside and outside the plants, focused on gender-specific concerns, increased women's participation in the union, and gave women an opportunity for leadership. In 1962, the UAW constitution was amended to mandate the organization of women's committees in all the locals, all of which had connections to the Women's Department. Women's committees already had been put in place in numerous locals in the 1940s. By the 1960s and 1970s, the Women's Department pursued the goal of getting a woman elected to the

³⁵² Ibid., 7.

International Executive Board.³⁵³ Through the Women's Department, workers established a collective identity as women. Its most important mission was getting women to work together to get their concerns heard and taken more seriously.³⁵⁴

In 1968, the Women's Department surveyed women attending a class on women and the psychology of leadership. The survey asked, "What do you think your local union should do to ensure EQUAL RIGHTS for women workers?" Answers included elect women to positions at the local level, provide childcare and labor education, offer encouragement, and give women members opportunities and equal pay. Nearly all the women polled noted they left previous jobs for better wages, conditions, security, increased autonomy, benefits, and chances for promotion. The survey indicated that women felt happy to have their jobs but saw areas of potential improvements.³⁵⁵

The legacy of the Women's Department was positive overall. As Dorothy Haener, another Women's Department leader and a founder of NOW, noted, feminism and the auto industry had deep ties. Women in the shops were the "most instrumental in getting Title VII of the Civil Rights Act into effect. Somebody ought to write [this story] sometime because it's all sort of getting lost." On the negative side, many women felt that they had little useful purpose, as many committees simply did fundraising and hosted social events. Some believed that "[the Women's Department] encouraged men to believe that women's committees were not only the best, but the only place for women in the union."³⁵⁶ Nonetheless, the Women's Department challenged gender norms, helped

³⁵³ Nancy Gabin, *Feminism in the Labor Movement: Women and the United Auto Workers, 1935–1975* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 189.

³⁵⁴ Gabin, *Feminism in the Labor Movement*, 1, 92; Amy Bromsen, "'They All Sort of Disappeared': The Early Cohort of UAW Women Leaders," *Michigan Historical Review* 37, no. 1 (2011): 23–24; Dorothy Sue Cobble, *The Other Women's Movement: Workplace Justice and Social Rights in Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

³⁵⁵ "Questions for Participants of Women's Department Courses," 1968, box 15, folder 2, UAW Women's Department: Dorothy Haener Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

³⁵⁶ Gabin, *Feminism in the Labor Movement*, 189, 219.

fight sex discrimination in multiple forms, and encouraged more women representatives on local fair practices committees. While unions usually are considered a brotherhood, they also have been spaces of sisterhood.³⁵⁷

Beyond such changes, women, as well as men, were faced with the consequences of deindustrialization. Deindustrialization had a profound impact on women, shaping many of the campaigns UAW women enacted for their benefit. Deindustrialization did not simply appear in the 1970s. In fact, deindustrialization was evident in Detroit by the 1950s. The Milwaukee Junction area of Detroit, the “heartbeat of the industrial metropolis” in the 1940s, was a location of prosperous, high producing automotive plants.³⁵⁸ By the 1950s, layoffs and plant closures were already occurring. They occurred due to economic recessions, which, as Thomas Sugrue notes, automotive companies weathered poorly, as they reacted to consumer demands. In addition, automation in the 1940s and 1950s, reduced jobs, with Ford’s River Rouge plant declining from 85,000 employees in 1945, to 54,000 in 1954, to 30,000 in 1960. Overall, jobs numbers were permanently reduced, with Detroit losing 134,000 jobs between 1947 and 1963 and the relocation of plants to areas where they could get cheaper labor.³⁵⁹

While women were not disproportionately affected by deindustrialization, women expressed concerns that they bore the brunt of unemployment in the 1950s and 1960s. For example, the UAW Women’s Department continually received reports that auto companies would not hire women. Women applicants often met the pronouncement that all women’s jobs were filled. Not only were jobs at the time gender typed, as sociologist Ruth Milkman has noted, but

³⁵⁷ “Southeast Michigan Conference of the Coalition of Labor Union Women Report,” July 21, 1974, box 15, folder 19, UAW Women’s Department: Dorothy Haener Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

³⁵⁸ Thomas Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 125; Paul Clark et al., “Deindustrialization: A Panel Discussion,” *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 58, no. 3 (July 1991): 181–211.

³⁵⁹ Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis*, 126, 132.

ideas about women's proper place, their physical capacity, and men's entailment as actual or prospective heads of households underwrote women's particular vulnerability to layoffs. Women's defense work was considered an exception.³⁶⁰

Women in the post-industrial workforce faced limited opportunities to gain manufacturing employment. They tended to end up in low-wage non-union service sector jobs. During deindustrialization, the opening of municipal employment to women and minorities helped women achieve well-paying employment. Nonetheless, due to budgetary cutbacks, even these jobs remained highly competitive and difficult to obtain.³⁶¹ Not often recognized, the feminization of poverty has been, in part, a result of deindustrialization, lack of jobs, and persistent discrimination. According to Jacqueline Jones, in 1980, "One-third of all black households, 70 percent of them headed by women, fell below the poverty line (about 10 percent of white families were poor)." During that decade, 6 percent of African American women lost jobs as a result of plant closings. African American women took almost two years to find new employment; white women took approximately one year. In part a result of the expansion of higher education and the clerical sector overall, many women ended up finding clerical positions, but they paid insufficient wages to support a family.³⁶² Despite expanded job opportunities in the 1970s and beyond, women continued to be tracked into traditionally women's jobs, such as clerical work.

³⁶⁰ Gabin, *Feminism in the Labor Movement*, 155; Ruth Milkman, *Gender at Work: The Dynamics of Job Segregation by Sex during World War II* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 128–52.

³⁶¹ Todd Shaw, *Now is the Time!: Detroit Black Politics and Grassroots Activism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 79; Joshua Freeman, *Working-Class New York: Life and Labor Since World War II* (New York: The New Press, 2000), 169.

³⁶² Teresa Amott and Julie Matthaei, *Race, Gender, and Work: A Multi-Cultural Economic History of Women in the United States* (Boston: South End Press, 1996), 179–82; Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work and the Family, from Slavery to the Present*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1985), 277.

UAW's Entry into Higher Education: Eastern Michigan University

The UAW targeted clerical higher education organizing in Michigan in the early-1970s. It had its headquarters in the state, high appeal in the region, and a robust network of lobbyists in the Michigan state legislature. An administrative aide to a Michigan legislator stated, "I don't think there's a question the UAW has the biggest clout up here. Anyone who denies it is naïve." Daniel Krueger, a Michigan State University professor, believed that the UAW was well suited to organize clericals in higher education, as the UAW had a reputation as a liberal union and "most universities have a liberally minded staff that wants a union with a successful track record. The UAW certainly has that." While Kreuger assumed the political leanings of clerical workers, the desire for job security and benefits in an uncertain economy and the UAW's reputation in Michigan probably were the major factors in the early university affiliation campaigns.³⁶³

UAW involvement in universities began in 1971 when the independent association of clerical workers at Wayne County Community College reached out to affiliate with the UAW.³⁶⁴ Eastern Michigan University (EMU) was an excellent place to start in earnest the campaign to gain members in higher education. At EMU, the Clerical and Technical Association, an independent bargaining unit, represented clerical and technical employees. The locals on campus, including the EMU-AAUP and the Clerical and Technical Association, previously had reached out to the UAW to assist with contract negotiations. By the mid-1970s, EMU clericals believed it was necessary to affiliate with a larger union to gain power as contract negotiation increasingly grew more difficult.³⁶⁵

³⁶³"UAW Wheels and Deals on University Campuses," *Toledo Times*, February 14, 1975, box 7, folder 16, UAW Technical, Office, Professional (TOP) Department Records, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

³⁶⁴ The UAW also had a local at the University of Michigan in 1974, but it decertified in 1975.

³⁶⁵ Open membership meeting minutes, March 1975, box 7, folder 9, UAW Technical, Office, Professional (TOP) Department Records, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

The Hayes study, a university-sponsored report conducted by Robert Hayes and Associates, reclassified workers and adjusted pay scales at EMU. The report found that Eastern Michigan paid equally or better in the higher salary grades but below the market wage in the lower salary grades. More women than men had salaries below the suggested minimum, and women had lower salaries within the same grade. The report advised the university to help rectify the inequalities in compensation. While the report recommended the university not to lower current employees' salaries, it made many workers ineligible for almost all raises, including merit increases and across the board raises. The report provoked considerable rage among employees and propelled the push toward affiliation with a more powerful union. The Clerical and Technical Association turned to the UAW to help redress the Hayes recommendations. The UAW had the legal expertise and experience in salary grade and classification problems that EMU workers needed.³⁶⁶

While southeast Michigan was a heavily unionized region, the UAW still had to contend with the concerns of many white-collar workers. Many often believed that unions were reserved for blue-collar workers and also that unionism constituted disloyalty to their employer. To counter the argument, one flyer used in the EMU campaign noted that forming a union was not disloyalty to the university but, instead, a sound economic practice. It stated that people in all segments of society have found it necessary to unionize to address their security and economic interests. Further, members were concerned about technical and clerical employees being in the same union. The UAW responded that the locals could be separate or combined, based on the desires of the employees. In addition, clerical workers had expressed concerns that their needs would be lost or misunderstood by a large international union, especially one based in manufacturing. The UAW

³⁶⁶ "EMU Salary Program," box 43, folder 23, UAW Technical, Office, Professional (TOP) Department Records, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

argued that they understood the needs of clerical workers were different from those in other occupations and that control of the local would be principally in the employees' hands. The local would have its own officers and membership meetings, negotiate their own contracts, and conduct their own affairs.³⁶⁷

The UAW blanketed the Eastern Michigan campus with pamphlets that stressed the past success of the union. In a 1975 brochure, the UAW noted its 1.7 million members nationwide, with 600,000 members in Michigan alone. It also highlighted its success in unionizing General Motors, the second-largest corporation in the world at the time. In *UAW on Campus*, a pamphlet distributed across the state, the UAW argued that they entered campuses as concerned employees asked for assistance. They asserted that the UAW was the "most effective people's lobby." The reputation that the UAW could lobby legislators was extremely important for higher education clericals. State budget cuts to higher education determined if the universities or colleges had to do budget-cutting of their own, resulting in possible layoffs for clericals. Also, the language utilized by the UAW emphasized democracy. The clerical workers often felt that the administration did not listen to their needs; the UAW argued that they could give the workers a voice in the decisions that affected their lives.³⁶⁸

The major issues at Eastern Michigan reflected many of the main problems in the national economy. The primary concern was keeping up with inflation through cost of living increases. Clerical work by temporary employees, who were not members of the Clerical and Technical Association, also concerned full-time workers. Full-time EMU clericals sought to limit the number of days a temporary worker could work from one hundred eighty to one hundred twenty. They

³⁶⁷ UAW election flyer, 1976, box 7, folder 9, UAW Technical, Office, Professional (TOP) Department Records.

³⁶⁸ Contract negotiations report, 1976, box 43, folder 19, UAW Technical, Office, Professional (TOP) Department Records.

hoped to guarantee that student employees and temporary workers did not replace bargaining unit workers who had been laid off. Negotiating job descriptions, classifications, salary ranges, improved benefits, and enhanced job security were all taken up in the EMU campaign and subsequent contract negotiations.³⁶⁹

UAW's entry into university organization came as a surprise to AFSCME, the union that represented more university office workers than any other union nationally. AFSCME had a presence on campus, but they were not actively pursuing clerical worker affiliation until UAW started their campaign. While the UAW had to contend with worker concerns, they also competed for affiliation with AFSCME who now competed for clerical worker loyalties. With the increase in public employee unionism in the 1960s, AFSCME had enjoyed phenomenal success in affiliating independent associations of public employees. The union hoped to appeal to higher education clericals by drawing on their long experience in the public sector and paying attention to women clerical workers' gender-specific needs. In campaign literature, AFSCME noted that 40 percent of their delegates were women, and they had more women members than any other labor union. Proclaiming that clericals made the offices run, AFSCME voiced a commitment to advancement, improved salaries, job security, and recognition of workers' value to their employers, something clerical workers felt they often lacked. While AFSCME noted their thirteen years of experience on EMU's campus, they had not, in that time, represented any clericals at EMU, making their appeal less powerful.³⁷⁰

In March 1975, Eastern Michigan workers had a choice to vote for affiliation with the UAW, with AFSCME, or with neither. While the UAW wanted to gain the clerical workers as

³⁶⁹Contract survey, 1976, box 7, folder 9, UAW Technical, Office, Professional (TOP) Department Records.

³⁷⁰ AFSCME informational brochure, 1975, box 7, folder 17, UAW Technical, Office, Professional (TOP) Department Records.

members, they sought to get them fully into the labor movement and out to vote in the election. A flyer distributed before the election extolled the virtues of unionism, stating, “However, if in your judgment, you can’t vote UAW, a vote for neither indicates complete satisfaction with the administration, and we know you are not satisfied.”³⁷¹ At the election, 43 voted for neither, 106 for AFSCME, and 150 for UAW affiliation.³⁷² The local, thus, became a UAW affiliate. Clericals cited the political clout and sizable research and legal staff as the chief reasons they preferred the UAW.³⁷³

The 1976 contract negotiations, which included a twenty-four day, strike helped prove that women could be strong, determined union members that sought respect and recognition of their value. Esther Williams, the chief bargainer, proclaimed, “The strike vote is to show the administration that we aren’t just four dippy broads sitting at a table asking for things that the union doesn’t want.” Women served as bargainers and held almost all positions in the local, showing that women had a place in the UAW and did not adhere to the stereotype that unionism lacked appeal to women.³⁷⁴

Later negotiations in the early 1980s increasingly paid attention to clericals as women workers, but this trend began early. In the late 1970s, EMU clericals attended numerous UAW education workshops, such as the Eighth Biennial UAW Women’s Workshop in September 1978. The Women’s Workshop helped further the interests of women in the union by urging them to become active and aware of union policies and programs. Other education workshops held at

³⁷¹ UAW election flyer, 1975, box 7, folder 9, UAW Technical, Office, Professional (TOP) Department Records.

³⁷² As this was an affiliation election, the administration did not mount an anti-union campaign. They likely would have preferred the union stay independent, as it would have less resources than it would with national union backing, but removing the union entirely was not a possibility.

³⁷³ Election report, 1975, box 7, folder 16, UAW Technical, Office, Professional (TOP) Department Records, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

³⁷⁴ *Eastern Echo*, January 19, 1983, box 1, folder 1, United Auto Workers (UAW) EMU Local 1975 - Clerical Records, University Archives, Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti, MI.

UAW's facility at Black Lake and across the nation aimed at making women members feel more a part of the UAW and the labor movement while catering to gender-specific concerns. Free workshops for Region 1A and Region 1E members included "We Were There: Women in Labor History," "Working Women and the Law," and assertiveness training.³⁷⁵

Solidarity and Affiliation in Higher Education: Wayne State University

After a successful campaign at Eastern Michigan University, the UAW expanded their campaigns to seek affiliation with independent locals at other campuses around the state, such as Wayne State University. Established in 1964, the Wayne State Staff Association (WSSA) was the official independent bargaining unit for clerical workers on campus. The WSSA grew in experience and power in its early years. As Russell G. Troutman, a WSU employee, noted in the WSSA newsletter, *The Working End*, "In the few years I've worked for Wayne State, I've watched the Staff Association go from a social club to a university [association] with some strength." In 1973, the WSSA had bargaining rights and more power than they previously had, but within a couple of years, the WSSA's strength would be regarded as inadequate by its members due to increasingly contentious contract negotiations.³⁷⁶

In 1974, the WSSA prepared for contract negotiations. It aimed to gain fringe benefits, such as health benefits, short-term disability, dental insurance, free parking, the closing of the university between Christmas and New Year's Day, and increased cost of living allowances. They also had to contend with a classification and salary grade study, similar to the one conducted at EMU. The WSSA sought to ensure that no employee would have their current salary cut, even if

³⁷⁵ *Eastern Echo*, May 1978, box 1, folder 15, United Auto Workers (UAW) EMU Local 1976 – Office and Professional Technical Records.

³⁷⁶ *The Working End*, September–October 1973, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

the salary for the job classification was reduced. They were able to get a contract set. At this point, they felt that affiliation with a larger union was unnecessary. Sentiment toward unions remained positive, as the UAW offered assistance in response to the WSSA request. The UAW helped resolve contract issues and develop the cost of living adjustment. Furthermore, Douglas Fraser, the UAW President, intervened on behalf of the WSSA during negotiations.³⁷⁷

By 1975, due to an economic crisis in the state, plant closings, cutbacks in production, higher unemployment, and decreased state funding to universities, the specter of layoffs and job consolidation became greatly concerning. Current employees generally believed that the university might turn to student employees and temporary workers to circumvent paying worker benefits. In the August/September edition of *The Working End*, the editors noted that WSU would have to lay off 130 Staff Association members if the university budget was adopted. The budget reflected decreasing enrollment at WSU and cuts in state funding. The Staff Association leadership proposed that the clericals choose to work twelve payless days to stave off the layoffs. They noted that there still could be departmental layoffs, even with the payless days.³⁷⁸

At the April 13, 1976 WSSA membership meeting, the first official support for affiliation with the UAW appears in the meeting minutes. Noting that the Professional and Administrative Association had just affiliated with the UAW, the minutes report that a similar route “was mentioned as something for the Staff Association to think about.” The June meeting minutes reflect the mixed sentiment toward affiliation, following a discussion comparing the methods and philosophies of large unions and WSSA. The notes recorded that, “Some members felt that we need to be more like these international unions and others state that they feel our ‘volunteer leaders’

³⁷⁷ *The Working End*, January–February 1974, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

³⁷⁸ *The Working End*, August–September 1975, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

have developed many of the skills and expertise needed.” The WSSA members had experience with negotiations, but they did not have the benefits of a research department and the political clout of a large union.³⁷⁹

By September 1976, as contract negotiations began to break down, the sentiment shifted toward affiliation. The university withdrew their offer of a one percent salary increase, stating that their next offer would be lower. The one percent already was unacceptable, as it worked out to only \$3 more per week for an employee making \$7,000. Furthermore, the clerical workers had already accepted twelve payless days. AFSCME 1497, representing building, grounds, mailroom, and maintenance workers, settled a contract recently that granted their workers an average of \$13 more per week. During the negotiations, the UAW provided assistance, as they had in the previous contract negotiations in 1974. WSSA formed a strike planning committee, ultimately conducting a week-long strike. While the contract was settled in October, many members were left deeply dissatisfied with the new contract.³⁸⁰

The movement to affiliate really started at the beginning of 1977. While the Executive Board Members attended a meeting with the Teamsters on January 7, 1977, Helen Friedman, a WSSA member, noted that she acted alone in contacting them, noting her disgust with the previous negotiations. Voicing her support for affiliation, Friedman stated, “I believe [the Teamsters] to have the power and know-how to deal with our Administration. I have contacted them because I have lost all faith and hope in the Staff Association bargaining team. The University did not deal

³⁷⁹ *The Working End*, May 1976, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI; *The Working End*, August 1976, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

³⁸⁰ *The Working End*, September 1976, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI; *The Working End*, October 1976, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI; *The Working End*, Crisis-Second Edition, September 1976, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

honestly with them.” To Friedman, the Teamsters had knowledge of state budgets, which directly affected university budgets, and could assist with obtaining accurate job descriptions.³⁸¹

Additional meetings with other unions occurred throughout the year. In February, the Executive Council met with the UAW. At this point, the UAW represented Oakland University, Western Michigan University, Northern Michigan University, and Wayne County Community College. It also had represented the University of Michigan clericals until 1975. While the Teamsters were depicted positively in the previous edition of *The Working End*, some wanted the Teamsters removed from consideration, due in large part to the controversy over their jurisdictional battle with the United Farm Workers.³⁸² The UAW was viewed as the better choice, as the UAW had experience in representing the office and clerical staff of universities. That experience helped persuade more university clerical units to view the UAW as an excellent choice. Its political clout and the past work of the UAW to gain appropriations for state universities and work with legislation on budgets mattered. The concerns of white-collar workers about controlling their own affairs, evident in the Eastern Michigan campaign, lingered; but the WSSA noted that, with the UAW, they could handle their own business, while still having access to the UAW research and lawyers.³⁸³

The staff association met with AFSCME in June 1977 and SEIU in August 1977. AFSCME was viewed as a positive choice, as they fully understood the needs of public sector workers. They were the only union with sole jurisdiction in the public employer domain. After the meetings,

³⁸¹ *The Working End*, February 1977, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

³⁸² Robert W. Gordon, “Environmental Blues: Working-Class Environmentalism and the Labor-Environmental Alliance, 1968-1985,” (PhD diss., Wayne State University, 2004).

³⁸³ *The Working End*, March 1973, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI; *The Working End*, June 1973, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI; *The Working End*, August 1973, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

WSSA appointed a committee to study affiliation. They produced a report delivered to the Executive Board of the WSSA in February 1978. The report preferred affiliation with a large union, as opposed to remaining independent. It noted the advantages of affiliating. They would receive expert legal assistance, be able to offer greater support to political and WSU Board of Governors candidates, and have stronger bargaining power. The report favored the SEIU, noting that the WSSA treasurer would handle the dues directly and that only a portion of the dues would be sent to the SEIU. The WSSA would have considerable ability to make their own decisions. As the report comments, “[The SEIU] appeared to be tuned into our conditions and problems. When discussing the UAW, the report notes some of the advantages; but it stated, “In our judgment the UAW displayed a lack of interest in the Association and therefore they were found unsuitable by the committee.” The lack of interest noted in the report may have simply been a result of a poor interaction. The UAW continued to voice its commitment to representing the Wayne State clericals.³⁸⁴

The two frontrunners for affiliation came down to the UAW and SEIU. Not everyone agreed that the SEIU was the best choice. This was evident in the message WSSA President Wendy Hamilton sent out to members expressing her support of the UAW. She believed that it was wise to affiliate with the union that already represented all the affiliated clerical and technical employees in higher education in Michigan. Furthermore, Hamilton cited the previous assistance the UAW provided in negotiations in both 1974 and 1976.

The Working End covered the continuing debate. The information on the SEIU emphasized its history in fighting for university and public workers, its low dues compared to the UAW, and that the “SEIU is the classification expert in the public sector!!” It also noted that the UAW

³⁸⁴ *The Working End*, May 1976, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

representation of clerical workers would create a conflict of interest, as the Professional and Administrative Association (P&A), which represented supervisors of clericals, had already affiliated with UAW. The UAW and P&A disagreed with the contention, producing extensive literature and extolling the virtue of both being represented by the UAW. They emphasized that they could present a unified front against the administration. The UAW tagline for the affiliation campaign was “UAW-Service, Support, Solidarity, Autonomy.” The largest union in the state and the union with the most experience in higher education in Michigan, banked on that strength, stating, “As citizens of Michigan, we know the reputation of the UAW for strength, resources, service, and integrity. The university and legislature know that reputation, too.”³⁸⁵

WSSA members were invited to attend a UAW Technical-Office-Professional (TOP) meeting in Atlanta. Clifford Sheets, WSSA President, and Wendy Hamilton, WSSA Vice President, joined. Inviting potential members to make them feel welcome in the UAW and help them learn more about the UAW was an effective way to persuade the leadership to affiliate with them. At the meeting, Sheets and Hamilton learned about collective bargaining strategies and grievance procedures. Both attendees felt that they learned a considerable amount about the TOP department and helped educate many other attendees about the specific concerns of public sector workers.³⁸⁶

WSSA members were invited to attend subsequent TOP meetings, such as the March 1978 conference in Boston. The conference saw representatives from numerous higher education institutions in Michigan, including the already affiliated Northern Michigan University, Oakland University, Eastern Michigan University, Wayne County Community College clericals, and the

³⁸⁵ “Please Don’t Split Us Apart,” flyer, 1978. box 85, folder 10. UAW Region 1B Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

³⁸⁶ *The Working End*, April 1977, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

Wayne State Professional and Administrative Association. At this meeting, the UAW confirmed their continued commitment to addressing the needs of higher education clericals. A resolution to establish a public employee sub-council within the UAW/TOP Council was passed. It aimed to help channel the lobbying efforts of the UAW to improve the bargaining efforts in public institutions of higher education.³⁸⁷

The March 1978 conference primarily focused on new technology in the workplace, innovations that were dramatically changing the jobs of clerical workers. One of the attendees reported back, “The implementation of computers, word processors, and other ‘technological improvements’ can result in job erosion, loss of job security, a decrease in union membership and strength, and employee layoffs.” While the WSSA did not discuss the threat of mechanization in its earlier publications, later editions of *The Working End* show the concerns that new technology created.³⁸⁸

The 1978 meeting helped quell the fear that WSSA members had voiced, believing the UAW to be a male-dominated union that was unresponsive to women’s needs. The WSSA delegates attended a women’s group session to discuss the role of women in unions and the labor movement as a whole. With women making up the majority of the WSSA, their concerns were paramount. Evidence of the UAW’s commitment to women workers frequently appeared in the UAW newsletter, *Solidarity*. The January 1978 edition reported on the National Women’s Conference in Houston, which focused on women’s employment. The UAW supported many of the aims of the conference, such as low-cost federally funded childcare centers and the

³⁸⁷ *The Working End*, May 1978, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

³⁸⁸ *The Working End*, May 1978, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

enforcement of anti-bias laws.³⁸⁹ Voicing support for efforts to address working women's concerns, UAW women leaders helped found the National Organization of Women and the Coalition of Labor Union Women.³⁹⁰

The Wayne State Staff Association had a long history of supporting women workers, promoting free daycare centers for employees' children and gaining clearly defined maternity leave. They also supported the eighty women, who, with the help of the American Civil Liberties Union, filed a lawsuit against the university, charging that the WSU pension plan was discriminatory. It gave women smaller monthly retirement checks than men. The system was based on actuarial tables that showed women lived a greater number of years after retirement than men. In its newsletters, WSSA support of women's rights is evident in the articles on the Equal Rights Amendment, noting locations and dates of rallies and demonstrations, as well as telling employees to join the Coalition for Labor Union Women. Furthermore, the leadership of the WSSA was predominantly women. The presence of women-dominated leadership continued after affiliation, as did the support of gender-specific needs.³⁹¹

Another notable development that aided the UAW affiliation campaigns during the late 1970s was the advent of a statewide university clerical group that met quarterly to exchange ideas, information, and problems. At the June 1977 meeting, University of Michigan, Michigan State University, Oakland University, and Eastern Michigan University clericals met. With some of the participating groups represented by the UAW, the union's assistance in dealing with administrations was noted. This helped Wayne State clericals see the UAW as a desirable option.

³⁸⁹*Solidarity*, January 1978, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

³⁹⁰Gabin, *Feminism in the Labor Movement*, 188; Cobble, *The Other Women's Movement*, 182.

³⁹¹*The Working End*, May 1976, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI; *The Working End*, June 1976, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

The other UAW-affiliated higher education units wrote directly to the WSSA urging affiliation. A pamphlet urged, “Join your colleagues at Eastern, Oakland, WSU P&A, Wayne County Community College, and Northern.” Being in the same union as clericals across the state could convey solidarity between the higher education clericals, showing administrations that the clericals had the support of others.³⁹²

Like the UAW, the SEIU conducted an extensive campaign for WSSA affiliation, believing they could efficiently respond to clerical workers’ needs. SEIU supporters tried to portray the personal connection that SEIU could forge through its organizing style. Judy McNaught, a WSSA member, stated to *The South End*,

We approached them as co-workers rather than bombarding them with mail at home like the UAW. We went into their offices, asked for them by name and explained the advantages of the SEIU. People seemed receptive. Many even thanked us for talking with them.³⁹³

The SEIU had a more personal style of organizing, evident in many of its clerical campaigns for District 925 in the 1980s. They hosted social gatherings, visited people’s homes, and created personal connections with potential members. Nonetheless, the power of the UAW in Michigan, its experience in higher education in the state, and its robust research and education departments, which SEIU lacked, made it a reasonably tough campaign for the SEIU.

The final affiliation vote at Wayne State University came in September 1978, with 563 voting for the UAW, 321 voting for SEIU, and 174 voting against affiliation. After the vote, the UAW showed its continued commitment to higher education clericals. It fought for free tuition, lowering the age requirement for retirement benefits, and addressing age discrimination. The

³⁹² “To the Leaders of the Wayne State Staff Association,” 1978, box 85, folder 9, UAW Region 1B Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

³⁹³ “SA Voices Merger Doubts,” *The South End*, August 3, 1978, box 85, folder 9, UAW Region 1B Collection.

WSSA and UAW continued to show its commitment to women workers' needs, voicing support for the growing movement against sexual harassment.³⁹⁴

The economic recession continued to plague the United States, which concerned union members who saw real wages decline. *Solidarity* reported on inflation in the United States, reporting that total inflationary rate reached 9.8 percent in October 1978. Buying power plunged 3.3 percent from September 1977 to September 1978, and interest rates increased considerably. Without wage increases, workers could easily no longer sustain their current way of living. Armed with that knowledge, the WSSA-UAW fought for one of the chief concerns, keeping up with inflation. They achieved a substantial cost of living adjustment, as more and more workers turned to unionism in those uncertain times.³⁹⁵

Organizing New Locals: Cornell University

Seeing the possibilities of successful campaigns, the UAW continued its commitment to higher education clerical organizing through District 65. Affiliating with the UAW in 1979, District 65, Distribution Workers of America, was the union that successfully organized clerical workers at Boston University in 1979. It was a leader in organizing technical, office, and professional workers since the early 1970s. Organizing often tiny shops and occupations that had low wages, had unstable workforces, and/or were dominated by women and minorities, District 65 became financially unstable and needed to affiliate with another union to survive. The UAW

³⁹⁴*The Working End*, November 1978, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI; *The Working End*, April 1979, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

³⁹⁵ *Solidarity*, September 1978, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

agreed to the affiliation, seeing it as a way to continue entering untraditional sectors and, ultimately, expand university organizing.

Up to the affiliation with District 65, UAW university campaigns had been limited to Michigan. District 65, based in New York, already tried organizing clericals at New York University and had made gains elsewhere on the East Coast. While Wayne State dealt with a clerical affiliation campaign, at Cornell, one of District 65/UAW's campaigns followed a different model. The original intent was to organize "one big union" of service and maintenance workers, technical workers, and clerical and library workers to maximize power and resources. At a time when UAW membership in manufacturing continued to suffer, this approach presented the UAW with an opportunity to gain four thousand workers in one campaign. Unlike the higher education clerical affiliation campaigns, in new organizing efforts, the UAW would have to fight against the anti-unionism of administrations.³⁹⁶

Founded in 1865, Cornell was and is a private endowed university and a federal land-grant institution located in Ithaca, New York. In the early 1980s, Cornell employed nearly seven thousand regular full-time employees on the Ithaca campus, comprising one-third of all jobs in Tompkins County.³⁹⁷ Women held 45 percent of the positions, but few had professional careers. With Cornell's dominant place in the local economy, the university "could flex its economic power by paying its local employees considerably less than the 'going wage.'" While employees regarded the wages as abysmal, a level of prestige was attached to working at the Ivy League school.³⁹⁸

³⁹⁶This level of unity was unique, as working women's organizations repeatedly criticized the pay of janitors and parking attendants, male-dominated positions. The service and maintenance had a notably bad relationship with the clerical unit at Boston University. Barbara Rahke, interview by Amanda Walter, November 29, 2016.

³⁹⁷"Strike Update: Faculty Support Us!," *Service and Maintenance Bulletin*, October 7, 1981, box 1, folder 2, UAW-Cornell University Organizing Documents #5117, Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Cornell University Library, Ithaca, NY.

³⁹⁸Situated atop a hill, Cornell used a powerful euphemism to fire worker, who were told that they were being sent down the hill. Al Davidoff, UAW Local 2300 Oral History Project #6956 OH, Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Cornell University Library, Ithaca, NY.

Cornell, with its 350-million-dollar annual operating budget, had the tenth highest endowment of any university in the United States. While some differences between statutory employees, those who worked for the state contract colleges, and endowed employees, those who worked for the private colleges existed, their problems were largely the same—poor wages, lack of job descriptions, and poor pension plans.³⁹⁹

Social activism, including campaigns for women's rights, occurred on the Cornell campus in the 1960s and 1970s. A chapter of the National Organization for Women (NOW) was founded at Cornell in 1969, a unit of the Women's Liberation Front was established in 1970, and protests and sit-ins were held to gain sex-specific medical care. In May 1975, the first-ever public rally about sexual harassment, held at the Greater Ithaca Activities Center, became national news. The rally was in response to a former Cornell employee's sexual harassment case.⁴⁰⁰

Labor activism also appeared at Cornell in the same period. In 1967, a group of Cornell library workers founded the Cornell University Library Employee Association. Made up of the only non-exempt library employees, the organization sought to redress problems experienced on the job. Seeing that other occupational groups on campus had similar issues, they tried to be an independent organization with multiple chapters able to represent many different groups on campus, including dining, housing, and maintenance staff. Now named the Association of Cornell Employees, the library chapter moved to create an independent union. The National Labor Relations Board, however, ruled that it was not an appropriate unit. During this time, a wide variety of unions expressed interest in unionizing the non-exempt employees. The Civil Service

³⁹⁹ *Backbone*, October 2, 1980, box 1, folder 1, UAW-Cornell University Organizing Documents #5117, Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Cornell University Library, Ithaca, NY.

⁴⁰⁰ Glenn C. Altschuler and Isaac Kramnick, *Cornell: A History, 1940–2015* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014), 141–42; Carrie Baker, *The Women's Movement Against Sexual Harassment* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

Employees Association (CSEA) attempted to become the representative union for Cornell employees. With a choice between no union or CSEA, Cornell employees chose no union on July 16, 1970. In an effort to block campus-wide union organizing efforts, Cornell gave unusually generous one-shot raises before the election. By the end of the decade, wages had fallen behind inflation; and jobs became less secure. Renewed worker activism surfaced in a new employee organization and unionization drive.⁴⁰¹

The 1980s became the most intense decade of labor strife in Cornell University history. It all began in 1979. That year, thirty-six Cornell heating, water filtration, and chilled water plant employees decided it was time to unionize, ultimately joining the Operating Engineers' Union. They accused administrators of conducting a smear campaign and of threatening workers with dismissal before the election. The union conducted a twelve-day strike to get their first contract.⁴⁰² From 1975 to 1979, the general fund budget for the endowed unit was reduced by more than 10 percent resulting in stagnant wages. This created a mobilizing issue for employees, increasing labor turbulence.⁴⁰³

Formed in 1979, Active Concerned Employees (ACE), comprised of employees from multiple classifications, tapped into the discontent workers felt on campus. Faced with a lack of basic respect and dignity, Cornell employees combated a much-abused merit pay system, low wages, health and safety concerns, and parking fees.⁴⁰⁴ Many people had stayed in jobs at Cornell

⁴⁰¹ "The Statutory Story: The Facts," *The Bear Facts*, no. 34, July–August 1982, box 1, folder 10, Colette Walls Collection of UAW District 65 Cornell Organizing Materials #6365, Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Cornell University Library, Ithaca, NY.

⁴⁰² "They Struck for All of Us... Now They've Won!," *The Bear Facts*, March 24, 1980, box 1, folder 9, Colette Walls Collection of UAW District 65 Cornell Organizing Materials #6365.

⁴⁰³ Altschuler and Kramnick, *Cornell: A History*, 242.

⁴⁰⁴ UAW clerical organizing committee member Sue Van Buskirk said, "I am GR-17. I make \$3.71 an hour. Cornell sent me to Dallas, Texas, for a ten day seminar. I met other women doing basically the same thing I do who are making \$20,000 a year." *Clout!*, no. 2, September 23, 1980, box 1, folder 12, Colette Walls Collection of UAW District 65 Cornell Organizing Materials #6365, Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Cornell University Library, Ithaca, NY.

for a long time, as few better positions existed locally. Despite working full time, some still had to rely on state services to get by. Most were forced to live many miles away from campus due to housing prices. Cathy Valentino, a duplicating machine operator in Newman Lab, believed workers needed to talk with Cornell to make them understand the challenges their employees faced. Politically conservative and a registered Republican, Valentino worked in Space Sciences along with her machinist husband. She lived in Ithaca most of her life, but she had only been employed at Cornell for a short time before the emergence of ACE. A room in Newman Lab was slated to serve as the inaugural meeting location of ACE. Valentino expected a small group, but, with over one hundred attendees, people ended up attending the meeting from the hall and stairway.⁴⁰⁵

ACE soon comprised of a small group of fifteen to twenty committed workers. Cathy Valentino and a small cohort of fellow employees continued to produce flyers. They encouraged workers to turn out for meetings held by human resources. Meetings that on average had a dozen attendees now had 150 workers turn out to express themselves. Al Davidoff, a custodian and graduate student, recalled, “Out of those very basic organic initial efforts, more and more workers started talking to each other.”⁴⁰⁶ ACE started to get some publicity on campus, which helped them secure a meeting with one of the university’s vice presidents. A group of five met with an administrator on areas for improvement. Treating the group as an inconvenience, the vice president looked at Cathy Valentino and said, “There’s something you need to understand. There are people up here, and there are people down here, and that’s the way it is always going to be.” Valentino

⁴⁰⁵ Cathy Valentino, UAW Local 2300 Oral History Project #6956 OH, Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Cornell University Library, Ithaca, NY.

⁴⁰⁶ Al Davidoff, interview by Amanda Walter, August 16, 2017.

responded, “We’ll see about that.”⁴⁰⁷ Due to a lack of success and an inability to command a response, members started to lose hope and energy. Research showed that for at least twelve years, most of the same employee problems persisted.⁴⁰⁸

Originally, ACE did not have the goal of unionizing, but due to the university’s handling of their requests, the group gradually radicalized. The administration threatened to arrest Cathy Valentino as she put flyers about ACE on car windshields in B lot, a large parking lot of over one thousand spaces used by service and maintenance employees. Coupled with the lack of any positive changes and the unpleasant interaction with administration, ACE moved to bring a union to campus. Judy Serlin, a student in the labor school, further suggested non-exempt employees at Cornell unionize.⁴⁰⁹

Following Al Davidoff’s suggestion, ACE interviewed four unions—the American Federation of Teachers, District 65/United Auto Workers, the United Food and Commercial Workers, and the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers. As the largest union in Ithaca, the Machinists had a good reputation; and many employees had family who were members. Unionizing Cornell would be a long-term commitment and a gargantuan undertaking. ACE’s impression was that the Machinist local could help with the campaign, but the Cornell employees did not believe they would make the commitment required to be victorious. Other unions did not understand the university setting or who would make up the membership ranks. Cornell employed two thousand clericals (90 percent women), seven hundred technicians (40 percent women), and nearly fifteen hundred service maintenance workers (40 to 50 percent

⁴⁰⁷ Cathy Valentino, UAW Local 2300 Oral History Project #6956 OH, Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Cornell University Library, Ithaca, NY.

⁴⁰⁸ Correspondence from Active Concerned Employees to Cornell Employees, January 31, 1980, box 1, folder 1, UAW-Cornell University Organizing Documents #5117, Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Cornell University Library, Ithaca, NY.

⁴⁰⁹ Judy Serlin, interview by Amanda Walter, November 13, 2016; Al Davidoff, interview by Amanda Walter, August 16, 2017.

women). One union said it “would help with those girls.” Another did not understand the difficulty of the task. They promoted a model of the union as a third party, promoting discounts on goods for members.⁴¹⁰

In response, ACE decided to bring District 65/UAW to the Cornell campus to organize a UAW shop with District 65 organizers. A visiting professor at Cornell’s School of Labor and Industrial Relations (ILR) named Brendan Sexton contributed to the decision. Sexton had a long and storied career with the UAW. Recently retired from the UAW education director position, Sexton had served as an administrative assistant to Walter Reuther and as president of the second-largest UAW local, Local 50.⁴¹¹

Brendan Sexton met with ACE members to get a campaign off the ground. Genuinely interested in students and workers, Sexton called the UAW office and made sure the UAW took the Cornell opportunity seriously. Sexton’s students, Al Davidoff, Kurt Edelman, and Judy Serlin, helped develop a small organizing committee along with ACE. At the interview, the UAW brought remarkable people, including Barbara Rahke who had just helped organize Boston University clericals, Judy Scott, a UAW attorney, and Ed Gray, regional director. Rahke, hired as a professional organizer soon after the BU campaign, was at the forefront of the working women’s movement, becoming one of the early members of 9to5.⁴¹² Along with progressive traditions, a commitment to social justice, and a strong lobby in New York, the UAW became the choice of ACE. By that point, the UAW had university experience, representing nearly 10,000 white-collar members at nine universities, and was organizing at Harvard, Yale, and Columbia. ACE members

⁴¹⁰Al Davidoff, UAW Local 2300 Oral History Project #6956 OH, Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Cornell University Library, Ithaca, NY.

⁴¹¹ Ibid.

⁴¹² Hoerr, “*We Can’t Eat Prestige*,” 107.

liked that the UAW believed in democratic, locally autonomous unionism.⁴¹³ Its legacy of supporting women's rights likely contributed as well.⁴¹⁴ At the end of the interview, ACE expressed enthusiasm for organizing with the UAW and asked for Barbara Rahke as their organizer.⁴¹⁵

The initial goal of one big union of all non-exempt employees from clerical, technical and service and maintenance positions was well received by the workers. Despite conventional wisdom that the multi-occupational group would be harder to organize, workers thought that the larger group would give them more power. Davidoff noted,

If you want to really change things, if you want to have maximum input, a group of four thousand was pretty mind-blowing... It probably gave courage to the service and maintenance workers the idea that there were folks who were one or two steps up the ladder in that traditional hierarchy.⁴¹⁶

Rahke noted that Boston University employed the common university strategy of challenging the bargaining unit composition to delay an election. Attempting to learn from their experience, since ACE was already multi-occupational, they decided to keep the group together to try to avoid the roadblock of unit composition challenging. They also sought to foster solidarity and strength among all the workers. Additionally, Cornell workers shared 90 percent of issues, and the UAW had demonstrated success in organizing large workplaces.⁴¹⁷ The campaign commenced in January 1980. While fifty people made up the organizing committee, the campaign started with only one

⁴¹³ Cathy Valentino, UAW Local 2300 Oral History Project #6956 OH, Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Cornell University Library; Barbara Rahke, interview by Amanda Walter, November 29, 2016.

⁴¹⁴ *Technical Employees Report*, August 18, 1983, box 1, folder 13, UAW-Cornell University Organizing Documents #5117, Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Cornell University Library, Ithaca, NY.

⁴¹⁵ Barbara Rahke, interview by Amanda Walter, November 29, 2016.

⁴¹⁶ Al Davidoff, interview by Amanda Walter, August 16, 2017.

⁴¹⁷ "Reviewing Our Progress," *The Bear Facts*, no. 4, April 1980, box 1, folder 10, Colette Walls Collection of UAW District 65 Cornell Organizing Materials #6365, Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Cornell University Library, Ithaca, NY.

organizer, Barbara Rahke. Privately, she wanted to just stay for a month; she ended up staying for four years.

In the evenings and late afternoons, workers would go out in teams of two, multiple times, a week on home visits. Due to employees' fear of talking while on campus, the best conversations took place at workers' homes. Judy Serlin remembered, "You worked as a community and as an environment...It wasn't done from above. It was really done by people talking to people." Building relationships mattered. While many workers would never become comfortable having a conversation about unions, and organizers often were asked to leave when approaching workers, the tactic helped create an organization supportive of unionism. The lessons from Boston University about relationships came to Cornell along with Rahke.⁴¹⁸

Specific jobs put people in contact with many fellow workers. Bus drivers and mail couriers, two very pro-union groups, had ample opportunities to talk to other workers and have them see their UAW pins. Davidoff recollected, "They could tell us you couldn't put flyers on windshields, but you could go to those parking lots at five in the morning and six in the morning and seven and eight in the morning and see hundreds and hundreds of people and talk to them." Hundreds of conversations took place waiting for the bus to and from the parking lots and at neighborhood restaurants and bars frequented by employees.⁴¹⁹

The campaign utilized tactics that would make sense for the community, tactics not usually seen in organizing. Since workers often had long commutes and no public transportation options, the UAW started a radio show that ran during commutes. *Bear Facts Radio* reported on news of the organizing drive, local and national labor news, and general interest stories. Rank-and-file

⁴¹⁸ Serlin, interview with Amanda Walter, November 13, 2016; Carolyn York, interview by Amanda Walter, November 18, 2016.

⁴¹⁹ Al Davidoff, interview by Amanda Walter, August 16, 2017.

workers created all content. Hosted by Perry Houston, a rank-and-file worker who went by the handle the Naked Bear, *Bear Facts Radio* utilized humor. Brendan Sexton ultimately suggested the radio show. When organizing auto plants in Detroit, another city with limited public transportation options, the UAW had a similar radio show during drive-time. Sexton thought the Ithaca community would be a perfect setting for the tactic.⁴²⁰

Community meetings played a vital role. Many workers lived in distinct communities far from Ithaca. The UAW rented rooms in high schools, in auditoriums, and in restaurants in different communities in Cortland, Tioga, Schuyler, and Chemung counties. They were sponsored by supporters of the union who lived in that area. The successful meetings got more workers involved and lowered the barrier to participation by having the meetings close to home.⁴²¹

As with community meetings, low participation barriers allowed busy workers a chance to contribute to the drive and feel ownership of the effort. After receiving a masters degree in Asian Studies from Cornell, Carolyn York secured a job as the East Asia serials assistant. Working alongside other very highly educated employees in the library who were paid poorly, York decided to attend one of the union meetings. A call for assistance for the simple task of reorganizing Cornell employee contact information provided the entry point for York into the union.⁴²²

Cornell dominated Ithaca. Ithaca's businesses and economy were largely tied to the university, and people rooted for Cornell's sports teams. The UAW had to appeal to the community to succeed. Support came from multiple groups. The UAW solicited support from local government officials. At the UAW's "Welcome UAW to Ithaca" event, Ithaca mayor Raymond

⁴²⁰Al Davidoff, UAW Local 2300 Oral History Project #6956 OH, Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Cornell University Library; *Bear Facts Radio* flyer, undated, box 1, folder 13, UAW-Cornell University Organizing Documents #5117, Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Cornell University Library, Ithaca, NY.

⁴²¹ Barbara Rahke, interview by Amanda Walter, November 29, 2016.

⁴²² Carolyn York, interview by Amanda Walter, November 18, 2016.

Bodoni spoke, telling listeners, “It is essential that we have unions. Unions have provided employees of occupations equitable rights, proper working conditions, reasonable wages and respect and dignity.”⁴²³ The mayor said positive things about the union drive, noting that unionization would have a good effect on the economy, helping garner business-owner support. Faculty, led by Isaac Kramnick, organized a faculty support group, Faculty United Support Employees (FUSE), which announced their support publicly and lobbied administration behind the scenes.⁴²⁴ Students also played a vital role in the union drive from start to finish, particularly students of Brendan Sexton who were learning about union organizing in their classes. Al Davidoff served as Sexton’s teaching assistant while in school and took a custodian job to support himself. He continued as a custodian after graduation and became a leader in the service and maintenance unit.⁴²⁵

Judy Serlin, a student at Cornell’s labor school in 1979, began participating in the campaign by taking pictures for *The Bear Facts*. She did not participate in organizing while a student; but after being hired by Cornell in 1981 to work in the university development office, Serlin became an effective employee organizer. She had been interested in working women’s organizations for years before the campaign, including activism in Women Organized for Employment in San Francisco.⁴²⁶

Newsletters played a valuable part in the campaign at Cornell, as they had in the other UAW campaigns. Each unit published their own newsletter as specific issues needed more attention for certain units. There also existed a need to craft each unit’s identity. *The Bear Facts*,

⁴²³ “Ithaca Welcomes the UAW,” *The Bear Facts*, no. 29, August 1980, box 1, folder 9, Colette Walls Collection of UAW District 65 Cornell Organizing Materials #6365, Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Cornell University Library, Ithaca, NY.

⁴²⁴ Isaac Kramnick, UAW Local 2300 Oral History Project #6956 OH, Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Cornell University Library, Ithaca, NY.

⁴²⁵ Al Davidoff, interview by Amanda Walter, August 16, 2017.

⁴²⁶ Judy Serlin, interview with Amanda Walter, November 13, 2016.

the main newsletter; *Backbone*, the service and maintenance newsletter; *Clout!*, the clerical newsletter; and *Cross-Reference*, the library newsletter, often came out weekly or bi-weekly to keep the workers informed of developments in the campaign. Workers distributed the newsletters to their fellow workers on campus. Judy Serlin encountered a woman who was openly hostile about the union. Serlin recalled the meeting, stating,

Somebody took a newsletter and crumpled it up in front of me. I took it out of the trashcan and said to her, “Read it. Be educated about it. I don’t care if you hate the union, but I do hate the fact that you won’t even read what we’ve written, and we spent a long time doing that for you.” That point made her read the newsletters forever.⁴²⁷

The newsletter provided opportunities for workers to be exposed to ideas they were not necessarily familiar with and counter some of the negative perceptions they held about unions. It also gave them information about the workplace and their co-workers that they could find nowhere else. Clear communication was vital for successful labor organizing.

Barbara Rahke understood the need for the visible leadership of people who spent their lives and raised families in Ithaca. Spouses of faculty members or graduate students, and Cornell graduates who expected to leave, were not viewed as the permanent leaders. Having long-term employees as leaders proved more valuable, as other workers understood that these leaders would feel the improvements and potential ramifications of the union drive the most. Carol Lane, a clerical worker from Ithaca, was hired by UAW as an organizer. Some workers felt they could trust her, but they could not trust someone who was from another area of the country.⁴²⁸

Like Serlin, Colette Walls, a clerical worker, had social movement background, having participated in anti-Vietnam War protests while in high school. Upon moving to Ithaca from Indiana, Walls joined women’s consciousness-raising groups and assertiveness training at Cornell.

⁴²⁷ Ibid.

⁴²⁸ Ibid.; Carolyn York, interview by Amanda Walter, November 18, 2016.

While interested in the ideas of the women's movement, she did not feel a connection to the national movement. Walls stated, "I kept running into people thinking I was a lower-class feminist and thinking that I was stupid...Those kinds of things radicalized me too. I was a thorn in just about everybody's side for a couple of years." Walls expressed interest in social justice, but she proved skeptical of unionism.⁴²⁹

Employee organizer Jean Macomber reached out to Walls, after she had reacted with hostility to a recent union publication. In calling Walls, Macomber showed the importance of building relationships with fellow employees. Walls reminisced, "I didn't push her away with my anger. She brought me in...Mostly she just listened to me and heard me, and encouraged me to bring my anger to the table, and invited me to come to some meetings." The first meeting Walls attended drew her in. She saw the UAW as bringing together social justice and women rights. She recalled, "I felt like finally there was someplace I was going to belong. Not only was she talking about labor issues, [Barbara Rahke] was talking about issues of labor and feminism." The attention to women, particularly women in pink-collar jobs, was new for Walls. She noted, "Nobody ever cared about us. Nobody in the union, but she did." It energized Walls to become involved in the campaign. Every Wednesday night for years, she went to the organizing committee meetings. She spent countless lunch hours doing organizing in offices, handing out materials, and trying to engage people in conversations.⁴³⁰

Barbara Rahke believed in clerical organizing, but she had her own doubts along the way. The persistent stereotype of meek clerical workers who could not stand up for themselves or make a difference haunted Rahke as well. Feeling overwhelmed and frustrated, Rahke said to Brendan Sexton, "Here I am, trying to put this whole thing together, and I am really just a secretary. I just

⁴²⁹ Colette Walls, interview with Amanda Walter, November 18, 2016.

⁴³⁰ Ibid.

can't do all of this." Sexton, a firm believer in the campaign, responded, "What do you mean you are just a secretary and you can't. Of course, you can organize Cornell, and you will. I don't want to hear any more of this self-indulgence."⁴³¹ The campaign continued with Rahke's strong leadership.

By October 1980, the employees in the service and maintenance area had more than the majority needed who signed authorization cards. The service and maintenance workers on the organizing committee pushed to separate and call an election. They threatened to affiliate with another union if the UAW did not allow them to separate. Another national union had sent organizers to Cornell's campus, so the possibility was real. While a heartbreaking decision, the Cornell organizing committee voted almost unanimously to split, with clerical and technical employees supporting the service and maintenance drive. Clericals and technicians kept organizing their units. As the election for service and maintenance grew closer, clerical and technical employees worked to help ensure a victory, talking to custodians and the service and maintenance workers they encountered. The entire organizing committee knew that clericals and technicians would face incredible difficulty unionizing if service and maintenance did not win.⁴³²

Overall, Davidoff recalled that it still felt like one big campaign. Some ill feelings, however, existed between units. A few secretaries wrote a letter to the editor of the *Ithaca Journal*, which stated that service and maintenance workers were lazy bums who stole, did as little work as they could, and were overpaid. The article created bad feelings among the service and maintenance workers, especially among those that had not been leaders and actively working on organizing

⁴³¹ Barbara Rahke, "Brendan Sexton," *Labor Studies Journal* 16, no. 1 (Spring 1991), 53.

⁴³² Colette Walls, interview with Amanda Walter, November 18, 2016; Al Davidoff, interview by Amanda Walter, August 16, 2017.

across units. Rahke believed it did not hurt the election and probably even helped, as it upset and mobilized workers.⁴³³

The local media regularly covered the campaign. The unionization fight was the story of the year two years in a row for the *Ithaca Journal*. *The Ithaca Times* wrote a glowing editorial supporting unionization of all four thousand employees.⁴³⁴ Barbara Rahke understood that being friendly with the media and giving them access benefited the campaign. When first meeting with a reporter assigned to cover the story, Rahke told her,

Look, we'll make this really simple. We'll always cooperate with the press and give you the story, but I'm willing to do something more with you than that. I'm willing to give you unprecedented access, because I think the story will then tell itself to you, but only if you absolutely do not violate confidentiality.

The reporter faithfully followed the instructions. The day before the election, the paper ran an article that included a big picture of Gary Posner, the personnel director, who looked slightly devilish in the image. The other picture was Emily Apgar, an older custodian to was considered one of the most committed and successful employee organizers. The article stated, "The UAW isn't the story. Barbara Rahke isn't the story. It's the workers that are the story. That's what this is about." Rahke fondly recalled the article, "That was how [the reporter] compared what this fight was about. Gary Posner, who was building a career for himself, and Emily Apgar, who worked three jobs... That was the result of us figuring out how to work with the local press and letting them see the story themselves."⁴³⁵

⁴³³ Barbara Rahke, interview by Amanda Walter, November 29, 2016; Al Davidoff, interview by Amanda Walter, August 16, 2017.

⁴³⁴ Al Davidoff, "Letter to The Editor: Thanks All Around," *The Bear Facts*, no. 19, April 1981, box 1, folder 10, Colette Walls Collection of UAW District 65 Cornell Organizing Materials #6365, Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Cornell University Library, Ithaca, NY.

⁴³⁵ Barbara Rahke, interview by Amanda Walter, November 29, 2016.

The organizing committee wanted employee morale to stay high. They knew a union victory could help push the other units further. On February 24, 1981, service and maintenance employees held the election. With 95 percent of eligible workers voting, the final tally was 483 for UAW representation and 375 voting against union representation. Once it became clear that the UAW emerged victorious, members cheered and started to sing union songs. The NLRB officials demanded the workers quiet down; but after a few minutes, someone started to hum “Solidarity Forever.” Others joined in humming. The NLRB agents smiled and let the humming continue.⁴³⁶

Carolyn York felt the optimism of the victory. She remembered, “Cornell is very bleak in the winter and harsh. I remember the day after the election, looking out at some of these cold, hard hills, and thinking we just softened it a bit.” Judy Serlin recalled that as the most memorable election in her career. It gave a feeling of optimism to the clerical and technical staff who were struggling to get cards signed. Despite the win, much work still had to be done.⁴³⁷

As the UAW shifted to the clerical and technical campaigns, women’s issues received increased attention. The original campaign literature did not focus on women’s issues, as the big unit had a large number of men. Attention to gender was evident from the beginning, however, including the choice of organizer, Barbara Rahke. Rahke supported the mobilization around National Secretaries Week, which had been extensively used by working women’s organizations

⁴³⁶ “February 24: Our First Anniversary,” *The Bear Facts*, no. 29, February 24, 1982. box 1, folder 11. Colette Walls Collection of UAW District 65 Cornell Organizing Materials #6365, Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Cornell University Library, Ithaca, NY.

⁴³⁷ Carolyn York, interview by Amanda Walter, November 18, 2016; Judy Serlin, interview with Amanda Walter, November 13, 2016.

to call for “Raises, Not Roses.”⁴³⁸ Rahke also brought Jean Tepperman, a Boston-based clerical activist and writer, to campus to speak with clerical workers during the union drive.⁴³⁹

Some of the clerical organizing committee (between ten and twenty employee organizers) were feminists and political activists prior to the Cornell unionization campaign. Yet, others felt alienated by the national women’s movement, identifying instead with the working women’s movement and efforts to improve clericals’ lives in their current positions. Colette Walls stated, “The women’s movement has failed the working woman in traditionally female jobs ... you don’t have to take clerical work because you are subhuman, but because it is important work.”⁴⁴⁰ The clerical newsletter, *Clout!*, ran articles expressing the same sentiment. One report noted the emphasis on women making it to the top or breaking into a profession. However, a limited number of managerial positions existed at Cornell, compared to the thousands of clerical jobs. Discussing job advancement, the same article declared,

There is another approach to job advancement, however, and it’s beginning to catch on: instead of competing with each other, clerical workers are uniting around common employment demands, both to improve the status of their current positions and to improve the method whereby one can advance.⁴⁴¹

Carol Lane echoed the sentiment that others need to take notice of those who type the letters and that a union can preserve clerical workers’ feelings of self-worth and economic well-being.⁴⁴²

⁴³⁸ “Clericals Crowd Reception,” *The Bear Facts*, no. 32, May 1982, box 1, folder 11, Colette Walls Collection of UAW District 65 Cornell Organizing Materials #6365, Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Cornell University Library, Ithaca, NY.

⁴³⁹ “The UAW Clerical Organizing Committee Presents an Evening with Jean Tepperman,” undated, box 1, folder 13, UAW-Cornell University Organizing Documents #5117, Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Cornell University Library, Ithaca, NY.

⁴⁴⁰ “Raises, Not Roses,” *Ithaca Journal*, April 21, 1980.

⁴⁴¹ “Can You Get There from Here?” *Clout!*, March 1982, box 1, folder 12, Colette Walls Collection of UAW District 65 Cornell Organizing Materials #6365, Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Cornell University Library, Ithaca, NY.

⁴⁴² “Raises, Not Roses,” *Ithaca Journal*, April 21, 1980.

As the organizing drive continued, connections to other UAW units proved a useful strategy. Newsletters gave examples from the UAW successes at universities for clerical, technical, and service and maintenance units. One article noted that the starting pay for a custodian at Wayne County Community College, a relatively small, state-supported school, was over six dollars an hour while the custodians at Cornell started at less than four dollars an hour.⁴⁴³ *Clout!* noted UAW contract victories at colleges and universities and the experience that dated back over a decade. Clericals at Oakland University, Eastern Michigan University, Teachers College and Barnard College at Columbia, Boston University, Northern Michigan University, and Wayne State University all had UAW representation by the time of the Cornell drive.⁴⁴⁴

Cornell clericals met with the leadership and rank-and-file members of other UAW clerical locals. As part of the union's Employee Week, a special week of activities honoring non-exempt employees, the committee organized a visit and talk by WSU chapter president Laura Paige to discuss Wayne State clerical and technical employees' experiences with UAW. She helped quell the fear that Cornell employees shared with WSU employees. She commented that before affiliation with the UAW, some Wayne State employees feared losing their identity within a larger organization. The union gave the local enough autonomy and a structure that suited its needs.⁴⁴⁵ In June 1982, UAW members from Wayne State University, Boston University, Eastern Michigan University, and Oakland University came to meet Cornell employees at a reception hosted by the

⁴⁴³“Where Is OUR Fair Share?,” *The Bear Facts*, no. 18, February 1981, box 1, folder 10, Colette Walls Collection of UAW District 65 Cornell Organizing Materials #6365, Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Cornell University Library, Ithaca, NY.

⁴⁴⁴ “Why the UAW?,” undated, box 1, folder 13, UAW-Cornell University Organizing Documents #5117, Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Cornell University Library, Ithaca, NY.

⁴⁴⁵ “Union President Talks to C.U. Employees,” *The Bear Facts*, no. 23, July 1981, box 1, folder 10, Colette Walls Collection of UAW District 65 Cornell Organizing Materials #6365, Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Cornell University Library; “The UAW Employee Organizing Committee Presents Employee Week,” 1981, box 1, folder 13, UAW-Cornell University Organizing Documents #5117, Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Cornell University Library, Ithaca, NY.

clerical and technical UAW organizing committee and the service and maintenance local, UAW Local 2300.⁴⁴⁶

As the campaign shifted to the clerical and technical campaigns, more material discussed women's place in the UAW. *The Bear Facts* noted that more than 200,000 women belonged to the UAW and the history of the UAW Women's Department. The newsletter also commented that seventy-six UAW locals had women presidents in 1979, which increased to 292 in 1981. UAW's membership hovered about 13 percent women; UAW leadership was 13.8 percent women.⁴⁴⁷

Not surprisingly, the UAW combatted an anti-union campaign throughout the unionization campaigns at Cornell. Articles in *CONTACT*, a university publication, argued that "the primary function of a union at Cornell would be to collect dues 'and use it to finance strikes in the automobile industry.'" It stressed that unionization would harm the relationships between workers and supervisors, as did a 1980 manual prepared by Cornell University personnel services.⁴⁴⁸ With Cornell hiring the Syracuse-based union-busting firm, Bond, Schoeneck, and King, the anti-union campaign had experience behind it.⁴⁴⁹

Cornell frequently held captive audience meetings during the early phases of the organizing drive. Run by specialists from the union-busting firm and the personnel department, the meetings were designed to scare people away from unionization. Due to the geographically distant

⁴⁴⁶ "Come and Meet UAW Members from Wayne State University, Boston University, Eastern Michigan University, and Oakland University," 1982, box 1, folder 13, UAW-Cornell University Organizing Documents #5117, Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Cornell University Library, Ithaca, NY.

⁴⁴⁷ "Women in the UAW," *The Bear Facts*, no. 33, June 1982, box 1, folder 11, Colette Walls Collection of UAW District 65 Cornell Organizing Materials #6365, Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Cornell University Library; "Clerical Workers: We Keep Cornell's Offices Running," *The Bear Facts*, no. 7, June 1980, box 1, folder 9, Colette Walls Collection of UAW District 65 Cornell Organizing Materials #6365.

⁴⁴⁸ "Guidelines for Supervisory Conduct During Union Organizing Efforts," 1980, box 1, folder 1, UAW-Cornell University Organizing Documents #5117, Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Cornell University Library, Ithaca, NY.

⁴⁴⁹ Altschuler and Kramnick, *Cornell: A History*, 275; Colette Walls, interview with Amanda Walter, November 18, 2016; "Lies My Employer Told Me," undated, box 1, folder 13, UAW-Cornell University Organizing Documents #5117, Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Cornell University Library, Ithaca, NY.

workplaces, Human Resources ran the same meeting approximately forty times, sometimes five times in one day. Due to the repeated nature of the meetings, workers could be prepped on what to expect and given the union's rebuttal.⁴⁵⁰ Many courageous people would stand up during the sessions and argue with the union busters, but the meetings hurt card signing.⁴⁵¹ Nonetheless, the downfall of Cornell's anti-union campaign was their attempt to make the UAW an outside organization. Many workers understood that the drive was an outgrowth of a worker organization; the connection to ACE aided UAW's credibility.⁴⁵²

The UAW tried to make it clear that the union campaign was not anti-Cornell. They wanted to make Cornell a better place to work. The anti-union button the administration produced read, "I heart CU." The organizing committee understood Cornell's existence was intertwined in the community. In the *Bear Facts*, they ran an image of the button alongside a picture of the UAW button with the heading, "A Great Union for A Great University." The bear, Cornell's mascot, provided the logo of the newsletter, a cute, non-threatening bear wearing a half-shirt. The singing group was named The Singing Bears, and the radio show was called *Bear Facts Radio*.⁴⁵³

Contract negotiations commenced two months after the service and maintenance victory. They went nowhere. Both sides charged the other with bargaining in bad faith. Al Davidoff recalled it was like bargaining a contract in a fishbowl. If service and maintenance made a significant breakthrough that had relevance to the other three thousand non-exempt workers, unrepresented workers would see the benefits of unionizing. The university wanted to punish

⁴⁵⁰ "Amazing Story of How Union (UAW Local 2300) Started at Cornell University," interview with Sue Heisey Compton, 2014, box 1, folder 6, Colette Walls Collection of UAW District 65 Cornell Organizing Materials #6365, Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Cornell University Library, Ithaca, NY.

⁴⁵¹ Cathy Valentino, UAW Local 2300 Oral History Project #6956 OH, Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Cornell University Library, Ithaca, NY.

⁴⁵² Al Davidoff, interview by Amanda Walter, August 16, 2017.

⁴⁵³ "A Great Union for Great University," *The Bear Facts*, no. 3, April 1980, box 1, folder 9, Colette Walls Collection of UAW District 65 Cornell Organizing Materials #6365, Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Cornell University Library, Ithaca, NY.

service and maintenance for organizing and teach the other units a lesson, with initial proposals taking things away from the status quo. Cornell also did not agree to binding arbitration, refused to allow certified UAW health and safety experts access to the campus to investigate serious health and safety concerns, and threatened bargaining committee members with discipline for taking time off work to participate in the negotiations.⁴⁵⁴

At an August 1981 meeting, workers authorized their representatives to call a strike due to the inability to resolve differences with the university on about thirty to forty outstanding issues. A three-day walkout was scheduled for the last weekend in September, Parents Weekend. The union estimated that 90 percent of its members, about 760 people, did not report to work. Cornell students, faculty, clericals, and technicians walked the picket lines with the service and maintenance workers.⁴⁵⁵ Service and maintenance workers conducted a twelve-day strike in October 1981, as contract negotiations continued to stall. The union and administration reached a tentative agreement to end the strike.⁴⁵⁶ As a result of the strike, service and maintenance received a decent contract which provided for wage increases, a grievance procedure with binding arbitration, and eliminated merit pay. And yet, the gains of the contract did not meet expectations. Workers who were unsure about unions and the threat of strikes felt less willing to stick their neck out. Davidoff said middle-of-the-road secretaries had a hard time seeing themselves striking.⁴⁵⁷

Toward the end of the unionization campaigns, five to six full-time organizers were working on the clerical and technician campaigns; some workers simply got tired. The process to

⁴⁵⁴ Al Davidoff, interview by Amanda Walter, August 16, 2017; “If Not Now, When? If Not Us, Who?,” *Service & Maintenance Bulletin*, September 22, 1981, box 1, folder 2, UAW-Cornell University Organizing Documents #5117, Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Cornell University Library, Ithaca, NY.

⁴⁵⁵ Altschuler and Kramnick, *Cornell: A History*, 276; “We Are STRONG!”, *Service & Maintenance Bulletin*, September 28, 1981, box 1, folder 2, UAW-Cornell University Organizing Documents #5117, Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Cornell University Library, Ithaca, NY.

⁴⁵⁶ Altschuler and Kramnick, *Cornell: A History*, 277.

⁴⁵⁷ Al Davidoff, interview by Amanda Walter, August 16, 2017.

organize workers was slow, especially for those not predisposed to unionism. Carolyn York recollected,

[The workers] had to think about their marriage; all kinds of things they hadn't thought about before they could make a decision on what stand they wanted to take on an issue that would impact their job, their wages. Some had that whole discussion and made their decision, and some, I think, in the course of the whole drive, never got there.⁴⁵⁸

York remembered talking to a woman for nearly three years before she decided to sign a card. Colette Walls attempted to recruit a clerical who consistently asked difficult questions. Walls would have to get back to her with answers. When discussing the clerical with Rahke, Rahke said, "Colette, she's not going to make a decision based on the facts you give her. This is an emotional decision." Walls recalling her experience said, "It's funny what it takes to get through people's pain. It's usually that. It's usually pain."⁴⁵⁹

The victory of the service and maintenance unit boosted morale for clericals and technicians; but once the service and maintenance leadership group started electing their bargaining committee and moving forward, the disappointment hit, particularly among clerical unit leaders, according to Rahke. Technical workers got discouraged as well, but many of the leaders in the technical unit were men who bonded with some of the men in the service and maintenance unit. While the men of the technical unit and the service and maintenance unit participated in activities together, women clerical workers felt left out.⁴⁶⁰

While proclaiming to be neutral during the service and maintenance drive, the Cornell administration decided to abandon its supposed position of neutrality on unionization during the push for a technical election. The administration communicated to technicians that further

⁴⁵⁸ Carolyn York, interview by Amanda Walter, November 18, 2016.

⁴⁵⁹ Colette Walls, interview with Amanda Walter, November 18, 2016.

⁴⁶⁰ Barbara Rahke, interview by Amanda Walter, November 29, 2016.

unionization of Cornell employees was neither necessary nor desirable. Cornell President Frank Rhodes said unionization of clericals and technicians was not in their best interest. Noting the positions work in close consultation with supervisors, Rhodes believed it would harm their working relationship and the campus community. Drawing on rhetoric of the university workforce as a family, Rhodes attempted to use gender to appeal to women's sense of caregiving. He also expressed paternalism, emphasizing that the administration knew what was best for Cornell's employees.⁴⁶¹ Cornell particularly fought the makeup of the technician bargaining unit. It sought to include the technicians on the horse farms on Long Island, a move that resulted in a lengthy NLRB hearing. During the hearing, the technician organizing committee asked to have a meeting with faculty and department heads to discuss the reason for unionization. As Barbara Rahke recalled, the Provost sent out a letter that stated any department holding such a meeting would risk having all their funding withheld.⁴⁶²

After almost a year delay, on September 28, 1983, a 650-member technical unit election was held. It ended in a devastating defeat. By mid-1983, three and a half years after the campaign commenced, clericals still did not have enough cards to call an election. The UAW and the steering committee decided to end the drive. Rahke opposed ending the campaign, but she saw Cornell fixing union-exposed issues. Rahke recalled, "People were sort of saying, 'Wow, we know that all this happened because of the union. Thank you very much. Now we have it. All this has been fixed, and we don't have to pay dues.'"⁴⁶³

⁴⁶¹ "Editor's Note," *The Bear Facts*, no. 38, December 1982, box 1, folder 11, Colette Walls Collection of UAW District 65 Cornell Organizing Materials #6365, Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Cornell University Library, Ithaca, NY.

⁴⁶² Barbara Rahke, interview by Amanda Walter, November 29, 2016.

⁴⁶³ *Ibid.*

Supporters believed the UAW was helpful and provided the resources needed. The clerical organizing committee could not overcome turnover, the location outside of a major unionized city, and traditional views held by clericals. Many of these clerical employees were workers who expected to move from the area quickly. Many others were wives of families that owned farms, did seasonal labor, or worked in businesses that lacked unions or decent benefits. Clericals and technicians were in more constant contact with supervisors and also more isolated from other workers, contributing to the difficulty in organizing those units. Davidoff recalled that, as a custodian, he punched in and out with twenty-six other workers and walked to buildings and cars with fellow employees. Service and maintenance also worked alongside other employees. It allowed for greater feelings of solidarity with co-workers and an easier time building relationships. The isolated nature of clerical and technical work made organizing slower and a more one-on-one process. While the organizing committee employed examples of clericals unionizing at Boston University, at Michigan universities, and at Columbia, ideas of who belonged in a union provided a barrier for clericals. Cornell also gave good raises while organizing took place, thus, dampening some of the enthusiasm for unionism.⁴⁶⁴

Colette Walls was proud of the union effort, believing it developed skills and leadership abilities in the women who fought so hard. While clericals never made it to an election, the campaign touched the workers' lives. For Walls, it made an enormous difference. She stated,

It transformed me. It completely changed my life. It made me feel strong and powerful. I never looked back. I never doubted myself after that. It gave me skills that nobody would have ever given me before. It gave me way more than I gave it. It was one of the best things that ever happened in my life. I am so grateful for it. I'm not exaggerating or kidding. I'm not a generous person. That's the truth.⁴⁶⁵

⁴⁶⁴ Al Davidoff, interview by Amanda Walter, August 16, 2017.

⁴⁶⁵ Colette Walls, interview with Amanda Walter, November 18, 2016.

While success is often associated with union representation, workers, no matter the outcome, often felt personal victory, showing that women could stand up, change conversations, and achieve gains. The labor movement also gained committed activists. Carolyn York decided to intern at the UAW after the campaign, starting a career in labor that continues today.⁴⁶⁶

Conclusion

In 1982, the UAW furthered their commitment to organizing university workers. At the February TOP conference in Detroit, a university sub-council was founded to organize and represent university workers nationwide, exchange information, and provide mutual assistance in campaigns. The sub-council assisted already organized academic workers get better contracts and aided unorganized employees to form unions. In June 1982, the UAW launched the first nationwide organization of university employees, the UAW Academic Council.⁴⁶⁷ Brendan Sexton noted,

This is definitely a historic meeting. Perhaps historic because the UAW Academic Council is taking responsibly for organizing a huge section of our economy, but definitively historic in that never in the history of the UAW have so many of your sex [female] met to decide on the basic UAW policy, not just women's issues.

Al Davidoff, president of the service and maintenance local, proclaimed, "Now it should be clear to all university employees that we're not only United Auto Workers but United Academic Workers as well." Douglas Fraser, whose last organizational campaign before retirement was

⁴⁶⁶ Carolyn York, interview by Amanda Walter, November 18, 2016.

⁴⁶⁷ Promoted to an international representative in the TOP department, Barbara Rahke coordinated the Academic Council. Carolyn York, "Former Clerical Heads Academic Council," *The Bear Facts*, no. 34, July–August 1982, box 1, folder 11, Colette Walls Collection of UAW District 65 Cornell Organizing Materials #6365, Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Cornell University Library, Ithaca, NY.

Cornell, showed a commitment to organizing clerical workers in higher education his entire presidency of the UAW from 1977 to 1983.⁴⁶⁸

The case studies of Eastern Michigan University, Wayne State University, and Cornell University show why the UAW entered clerical organizing, and how they campaigned for affiliation, attempted to organize workers, built on their past successes, and paid attention to women workers. The UAW successes extended beyond the case studies. At Oakland University, the UAW assisted in gaining \$40,000 in back pay through job classification gains. It also helped women employees earn equal pay for equal work. In one notable example, through UAW arbitration, a woman employee won \$1,500 in back pay. She had been doing the same work as others while earning considerably less pay. Clericals at Wayne County Community College and Northern Michigan University received similar positive benefits that helped the workers win better contracts and improve working conditions. While failing to unionize clericals at Cornell, UAW victories in higher education improved the lives of thousands of workers.⁴⁶⁹

The locations of the campaigns significantly affected the outcomes. Campaigns in Michigan were relatively easy due to the power of the UAW in Michigan. As seen in the previous chapter, clericals at Columbia succeeded, in part, due to their location in a highly unionized city. Cornell, located in an isolated, largely non-union town, presented significant barriers to success.

In April 1978, *Solidarity* ran an article on white-collar unionism, “White Collar Workers Look to the Future.” The article portrayed the excitement the UAW felt about the expanding membership base and its ability to help solve the problems clericals and other white-collar workers

⁴⁶⁸ Douglas Fraser, “Brendan Sexton,” *Labor Studies Journal* 16, no. 1 (Spring 1991), 44–47; “The First Nationwide Organization of University Employees—UAW Academic Council,” *The Bear Facts*, no. 33, June 1982, box 1, folder 11, Colette Walls Collection of UAW District 65 Cornell Organizing Materials #6365, Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Cornell University Library.

⁴⁶⁹ *Solidarity*, January 1978, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

faced. Douglas Fraser noted the resistance of employers to allow white-collar organizing. He mentioned something evident in independent associations and their decision to pursue affiliation: “[U]nions don’t organize workers; workers organize themselves when they are subjugated, abused, and kept on the short end of the economic totem pole.” Interviews with clericals in the same issue showed the improvements that affiliation had made in their lives and the need for unionization.

Ruth Eberle, an English Department secretary at Oakland University, stated,

All workers, whatever collars they wear, need collective bargaining and a clear agreement...We realized that only the UAW could give us the kind of help we needed in our bargaining. We couldn’t get it in our own small independent [local], and we were pretty well isolated.

She noted that salaries were now competitive and that being part of the international union helped the clericals in her unit pick up valuable experiences. The UAW actively sought to gain members to bolster their declining rolls. At the same time, clerical workers in higher education, facing budgetary cutbacks and new technology, sought out the UAW, believing affiliation and unionization could help them achieve rights and contract guarantees that would otherwise be unobtainable.⁴⁷⁰

⁴⁷⁰*Solidarity*, April 1978, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI; *Solidarity*, August 1978, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

CHAPTER 5: CHANGING TACTICS FOR CHANGING TIMES: SEIU DISTRICT 925

Only a handful of unions could claim growth in the 1970s and 1980s. Due to its strategy of organizing across a range of industries and jurisdictions, the Service Employees International Union was an exception and one of the leaders in expanding union membership. As SEIU District 925 also noted, “At a time when workers in some industries are being battered by takeaway bargaining, SEIU is winning breakthrough contracts.”⁴⁷¹ Public sector unions, including SEIU, had enjoyed significant growth beginning in the 1960s, with women making up a growing proportion of the public sector workforce and union membership. Organizing women clerical workers seemed a wise strategic move for labor, which gained membership and legitimacy among women workers. Working women’s movement organizations forged alliances with labor unions in the 1970s and shaped successful campaigns that spoke to the needs of women. Affiliating with the Service Employees International Union, 9to5 formed Local 925 and District 925 and forged the most direct link between the labor movement and the working women’s movement.⁴⁷² Within District 925, organizers effectively combined the goals of the women’s movement with the goals of labor unions.⁴⁷³

Chartered in 1981, SEIU District 925, a union affiliate, grew out of 9to5. With Karen Nussbaum as president, it had the explicit purpose of organizing clerical workers. Little scholarly

⁴⁷¹ Karen Nussbaum, *Isn’t Anybody Here? How the 925 Movement Is Winning Recognition, Rights and Respect for College and University Office Workers!*, box 1, folder 66, Miscellaneous Subject Files (Special Collections and Archives, Kent State University, Kent, OH).

⁴⁷² Dorothy Sue Cobble, *The Other Women’s Movement: Workplace Justice and Social Rights in Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); Ruth Milkman, “Women Workers, Feminism and the Labor Movement from the 1960s,” in *Women, Work and Protest: A Century of U.S. Women’s Labor History*, ed. Ruth Milkman (Boston: Routledge, 1985); Kim Moody, *An Injury to All: The Decline of American Unionism* (New York: Verso, 1988); Karen Nussbaum, “Women in Labor: Always a Bridesmaid,” in *Not Your Father’s Labor Movement*, ed. Jo-Ann Mort (New York: Verso, 1995); Louis Jones, “The Rise of Public Sector Unionism in Detroit, 1947–1967” (Ph.D. diss., Wayne State University, 2010).

⁴⁷³ Portions of this chapter are reported in Walter’s article in *the Journal of Labor and Society*. Amanda Walter, “Rights and Respect: The Working Women’s Movement’s Influence on Clerical Unionization in the United States,” *Labor and Society* 22 (2019): 381–97.

attention has been devoted to 9to5 and SEIU District 925, which made a significant impact on the lives of women clerical workers. Janet Selcer, a 9to5 activist from Boston, has said, “I feel like the organization has a place in history and people will, at least should be, reading about it, like I read about those times when they were advanced by women organizing.”⁴⁷⁴ The women’s movement itself has received considerable scholarly attention dating back to the 1960s. The leaders of 9to5 and District 925 members studied this history, but the stories of 9to5 and District 925 have remained largely outside the scholarship thus far. SEIU’s records, are underutilized, especially in terms of campaigns to organize women clericals. The few studies of 9to5 and District 925 come out of labor studies, industrial relations, and the limited references to working women’s organizing in books on feminism.⁴⁷⁵ In *The Other Women’s Movement*, a study of labor feminism since the 1940s, Dorothy Sue Cobble devotes a mere seven pages to clerical workers, one of the largest women’s occupations. Neither 9to5 nor District 925 are extensively discussed. Economist Richard Hurd, in two essays, looked at university clerical organizing and determinants for its success, but his articles lack in-depth examination of District 925 campaigns and the influence of the women’s movement.⁴⁷⁶ This chapter seeks to address this gap in the literature by explaining how women clericals, who had been either excluded from or underrepresented in labor unions for decades,

⁴⁷⁴ Janet Selcer, interview by Ann Froines, February 1, 2005, SEIU District 925 Legacy Project: Oral History, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

⁴⁷⁵ The works dealing with labor feminism do not extensively address clerical organizing. They primarily focus on women in jobs where they compete with men (manufacturing) or in jobs that contrast with men’s in the same sector (service work). See Nancy Gabin, *Feminism in the Labor Movement: Women and the United Auto Workers, 1935-1975* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990); Cobble, *The Other Women’s Movement*; Dennis Deslippe, *Rights, Not Roses: Unions and the Rise of Working-Class Feminism, 1945-80* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000); Lane Windham, *Knocking in Labor’s Door: Union Organizing in the 1970s and the Roots of a New Economic Divide* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017).

⁴⁷⁶ Cobble, *The Other Women’s Movement*, 214–21; Richard Hurd, “Learning from Clerical Unions: Two Cases of Organizing Success,” *Labor Studies* 14, no. 1 (1989): 30–51; Richard Hurd and Gregory Woodhead, “The Unionization of Clerical Workers at Large U.S. Universities and Colleges,” *Newsletter: National Center for the Study of Collective Bargaining in Higher Education and the Professions* 15, no. 3, (1987): 1–8.

sought to unionize through the explicit connection between District 925 and the working women's movement.

Using tactics learned in both the women's movement and labor unions, District 925 (SEIU) focused on organizing the predominantly female clerical workforce and responded to their needs as women, both inside and outside the workplace. The legacy of feminist labor unionism, what scholars have described as labor feminism, can be seen in the campaigns to organize women workers on university and college campuses. In exploring the campaigns at Kent State University (1984–1986) and University of Cincinnati (1984–1988), this chapter shows how the labor feminism of SEIU affiliate District 925 came to organize women workers in the difficult organizing environment of higher education. Despite increasingly confrontational university administrations, District 925's campaigns in Ohio represented the movement of women clericals toward incorporation in the labor movement. Its campaigns combined women-specific issues and tactics from the women's movement, such as consciousness-raising and relationship-based organizing, and traditional union tactics, such as cold calls and campaign literature. District 925 thus created a novel relationship-based unionism. District 925's campaigns made tangible gains for clerical workers, such as increasing pay, defining maternity leave, fixing reclassification problems, and giving clericals input into decisions affecting their work. This was particularly evident in higher education campaigns. District 925 gave women workers a voice and created a sense of community that helped contribute to the successes of the women-led 925.

Local 925 and the Beginnings of District 925

After encountering setbacks due to its inability to enter collective bargaining, 9to5, in 1975, decided to pursue affiliation with a union to help office workers in the Boston area organize. 9to5

had approached ten different unions. They included the UAW, District 65, and SEIU, the three doing more active organizing in the sector and, thus, considered the best options. When first soliciting support from national unions, 9to5 frequently encountered massive hostility. After seeking support from the Teamsters, its leaders responded by saying that women did not think with their brains. Other labor unions scorned the idea of organizing women and refused to invest the time or resources necessary to organize women workers. The long legacy of the labor movement believed that women lacked extensive knowledge of unionism. Other unions, offered 9to5 organizers but not a local charter. 9to5 was told that they had to recruit members before the organization would receive financial support or a charter. Karen Nussbaum and Ellen Cassedy, 9to5 cofounders, and Debbie Schneider, early 9to5 member and District 925 organizer, firmly believed their treatment was because of their gender.⁴⁷⁷

One of the few unions receptive to the needs of women was SEIU. The union formed in 1912 by janitors in Chicago was chartered in 1921 as the Building Service Employees Union. Under President George Hardy (1971-1981), SEIU gained substantial wage and benefit increases and political victories. SEIU organized health care, public employees, and service sector employees throughout the twentieth century. Under the leadership of John Sweeney in the 1980s, SEIU was organized into divisions by sector, including Building Service, Clerical, Public, and Healthcare Allied Industries.⁴⁷⁸

Since its inception, women had a place in SEIU. Elizabeth Grady, elected Trustee at the founding convention in 1921, told the male executive board members, “You men must know that you cannot get very far or make any real progress if you have women workers who compete with

⁴⁷⁷Ellen Cassedy, Karen Nussbaum, and Debbie Schneider, interview by Ann Froines, November 1, 2005, SEIU District 925 Legacy Project: Oral History, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

⁴⁷⁸ Donald Dennis Stillman, *Stronger Together: The Story of SEIU* (Washington, D.C.: SEIU, 2010).

you, unorganized and working for less wages.”⁴⁷⁹ Its long history of including women and African Americans made SEIU a diverse union and a beneficiary of and contributor to the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Leaders such as SEIU president David Sullivan participated in the Selma to Montgomery March. With the emergence of the working women’s movement of the 1970s, SEIU also sought to affiliate with women-led organizations.⁴⁸⁰ SEIU, combined with its women-led clerical local, District 925, became a leader in organizing women, drawing on ideas and tactics from the social movements of the era.

SEIU was the only national union that was willing to take a chance on 9to5. It granted both a local, and later a national charter, to the association and financial support. Still, even SEIU had reservations, according to John Sweeney. Office work was not an organized sector in those days. In 1981, fewer than 10 percent of women clericals and secretaries were unionized. Representing public and private sector office workers for over fifty years, SEIU, under Sweeney, renewed its commitment to organizing. It raised dues and put a quarter of all SEIU income into organizing, well above the 5 percent norm among unions. This allowed SEIU to deploy hundreds of organizers who utilized direct action and often community-wide mobilizations.⁴⁸¹ 9to5 chose SEIU in part because it gave locals an enormous amount of autonomy while providing technical and political assistance. SEIU membership was already 50 percent women, with some locals having 95 percent women members. The international’s leadership displayed a willingness, even a passion, for

⁴⁷⁹ Linda Briskin and Lynda Yanz, eds., *Union Sisters: Women in the Labour Movement* (Toronto: Women’s Press, 1983), 16.

⁴⁸⁰ Donald Dennis Stillman, *Stronger Together: The Story of SEIU* (Washington, D.C.: SEIU, 2010); Cobble, *The Other Women’s Movement*.

⁴⁸¹ Nelson Lichtenstein, *State of the Union: A Century of American Labor* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 256.

organizing women. They were more alert to women's needs than other unions. Importantly, the international was supportive of working women's efforts to build a base among clerical workers.⁴⁸²

Even in SEIU, the concerns and voices of women workers were not necessarily represented in its model of union democracy. As Nelson Lichtenstein noted, "Many of its older urban affiliates like the New York City hotel and apartment house Local 32B-32J were classic fiefdoms ruled in an autocratic fashion." By contrast, SEIU District 925 was able to integrate women workers into its version of union democracy. In its early years, District 925 pushed members to exercise their right to participate in decision-making, and its agenda for organizing and collective bargaining prioritized women workers' concerns.⁴⁸³

First noted in one of 9to5's founding documents, many members intended to use 9to5 as a union organizing vehicle early on, with higher education clericals as one of its primary targets. Karen Nussbaum, 9to5 co-founder, recounted that about a year after 9to5's founding, Frank Lyons, a labor educator at the University of Massachusetts, asked members what they were going to do about unionization. They responded that they would refer workers to a union. Lyons thought that was a poor idea, as 9to5 was doing all the organizing and then giving members away. The question served as a pivotal moment, moving 9to5 from thinking about using unions to forming one of their own. In their own union, 9to5 could combine the character and concerns of the working women's movement with the power of a union.⁴⁸⁴

⁴⁸² John Sweeney, interview by Ann Froines, November 7, 2005, SEIU District 925 Legacy Project: Oral History, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.; Karen Nussbaum, interview by Ann Froines, November 10, 2006, SEIU District 925 Legacy Project: Oral History, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

⁴⁸³ Lichtenstein, *State of the Union*, 253; Steve Early, *Civil Wars in U.S. Labor: Birth of New Workers Movement or Death Throes of the Old?* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2011). In *Civil Wars of U.S. Labor*, Steve Early critiqued more recent efforts of SEIU to restrict local autonomy and coerce union mergers.

⁴⁸⁴ 9to5, *The Future of 9to5: A Proposal for an Independent Women Office Workers' Organization*, 1973, box 1, folder 1, 9 to 5, National Association of Working Women (U.S.) Additional records, 1972–1985, 82-M189—86-M213, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA; Ellen Cassedy, Karen Nussbaum, and Debbie Schneider, interview by Ann Froines, November 1, 2005, SEIU District 925 Legacy Project:

In 1975, 9to5 affiliated with SEIU to form Local 925 to establish collective bargaining rights for women clerical workers in a tough jurisdictional area. At first limited to only Boston, Local 925 was a breakthrough. It was, importantly, a financial commitment by a major union. This occurred at a time when most unions were not interested in organizing office workers, did not understand what 9to5 was, and saw clericals as un-organizable. Seeking some independence from labor practice as usual, 9to5 chose SEIU, in part, because it gave locals an enormous amount of autonomy while providing technical and political assistance. At the time, SEIU was then the seventh-largest union in the AFL-CIO, with 650,000 workers, 50 percent of them women. Women held nearly 20 percent of the union's executive board positions.⁴⁸⁵ SEIU's international's leadership displayed a willingness to organize women. They were more alert to women's needs than other unions. More importantly, lacking the skepticism and hostility of many men-dominated industrial unions, the international was supportive of working women's efforts to build a base among clerical workers.⁴⁸⁶ 9to5 remained independent, but they directed groups of workers seeking a union to Local 925. Both groups continued to meet to share resources and ideas.⁴⁸⁷

1978 saw many firsts in white-collar unionism. Local 925 and many other unions across the nation established significant landmarks toward the goal of improving working conditions for employees in the lower-paying white-collar professions. Boston University, Wesleyan University, University of Chicago, and New York University all unionized in that year. Local 925 activities

Oral History, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI; Dorothy Sue Cobble and Alice Kessler-Harris, "Karen Nussbaum," in *Talking Leadership: Conversations with Powerful Women*, ed. Mary S. Hartman (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1999), 135–56.

⁴⁸⁵ While there were clerical SEIU members before 1975, many of the women members came from other sectors, such as healthcare and custodial services.

⁴⁸⁶ Local 925, "Union Affiliation Proposals," undated, box 4, folder 288, 9 to 5, National Association of Working Women (U.S.) Additional records, 1972–1985, 82-M189—86-M213 Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

⁴⁸⁷ John Hoerr, *"We Can't Eat Prestige: The Women Who Organized Harvard"* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997), 56, 84.

increased in 1978 and 1979, frequently meeting with 9to5 members to share resources and address common concerns. By 1979, Local 925 had launched a summer recruitment project to gain supporters and find potential organizing targets in universities and other locations. Organizers distributed leaflets at major transportation stops and the Boston Common, made contact with office workers during their lunch break, and, then, followed up on inquiries about the union developed through the previous activities. Mirroring to 9to5 organizing, Nussbaum stated Local 925 engaged in intensive one-on-one organizing. They assumed that it would take five conversations with a person before she committed to union campaign or signed a card. Local 925 aimed to negotiate seven contracts over the summer and emphasizing women's rights in the union. These early campaigns focused on small independent publishing houses, moving on to the universities, including the Brandeis Library and Boston University Library. Local 925 reached five hundred members by June 1979, but the need for expanded organizing remained acute. In Boston alone, there were a quarter million office workers, 73 percent of them women and paid less than office workers in almost any other city.⁴⁸⁸

By 1979, clerical organizing emerged as a potential force for strengthening the labor movement. SEIU was organizing at universities, in publishing, and in private businesses. It was interested in other public sector workers. District 65, which had just merged with the UAW, was organizing in publishing and universities. Clerical workers became major players in the unions traditionally seen as blue-collar. Additionally, workers saw OPEIU as a union that addressed the concerns of women members more regularly.

⁴⁸⁸ Local 925, *Victories: A Look at 1978*, undated, box 5, folder 290, 9 to 5, National Association of Working Women (U.S.) Additional records, 1972–1985, 82-M189—86-M213, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

Following their early successes, 9to5 discussed plans to build internal organizing, educate workers about unions, and speed the process of unionization. A joint meeting of 9to5 and Local 925 about unions in early spring 1980 recommended 9to5 use its recruitment lunches as a litmus test to see if unionization was possible. On October 11, 1980, Working Women's national board notified the Boston 9to5's leadership that talks with SEIU were expanding regarding a national charter. They emphasized that the information was both exciting and significant but should not be released to the public until everything was finalized.⁴⁸⁹

Internal discussions show the willingness for SEIU to extend a national charter and meet the requests of 9to5 and their umbrella organization, Working Women. Reporting on a meeting with Karen Nussbaum in June 1980, executive assistant to the president, Bob Welsh wrote SEIU president John Sweeney. Welsh describes Nussbaum's feeling that a stronger alliance with a particular labor union was needed and that Working Women should move from a general "interest group" and educational organization to an amalgamated national labor union. Nussbaum preferred SEIU due to the union's past relationship with Working Women, its structure, and position within the labor movement to organize clericals. The proposal requested five national field staff to assist SEIU clerical campaigns and direct new organizing efforts. The proposal also requested SEIU create a clerical division to focus and represent the needs of office workers, working closely with Working Women and giving a general support payment to Working Women. Stating that the proposal seemed one-sided, Welsh believed the charter should be pursued vigorously, to avoid the UAW, CWA, or OPEIU gaining the advantage. He stated,

Working Women is a legitimately sound organization that would be an asset to us. They have a half-million-dollar budget, twelve officers, fifty staff, and 10,000

⁴⁸⁹ Correspondence from Working Women Executive Board to Boston 9to5, 1980, box 1, folder 29, 9 to 5, National Association of Working Women (U.S.) Additional records, 1972–1985, 82-M189—86-M213, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

members. Over the next few years, they could easily become recognized as ‘the organization’ representing office workers (outside the labor movement).⁴⁹⁰

Welsh expressed the belief organizing in the clerical field could greatly expand, and comparable worth might become the issue of the 1980s. Comparable worth “would be a powerful force for organizing, since there will be no chance of getting legislation passed to deal with the issue.” Welsh also noted that 9to5 leaders often went on to organize their own workplaces. The organization had an attractive public image and could provide potential union contacts. Through 9to5’s industry committees, workers learned organizing skills, which often led to an interest in unionizing. It had already contributed to several successful drives in publishing, universities, and legal offices. Welsh wanted SEIU to be seen as the trade union that cares about the concerns of working women inside and outside the workplace.⁴⁹¹

Another major factor in Welsh’s argument was the upcoming release of *Nine to Five*, the film. The film, *Nine to Five*, premiered on December 15, 1980. Based on conversations between Jane Fonda and Cleveland Working Women members, a sister organization to 9to5, *Nine to Five* and Jane Fonda’s speaking engagements were to serve both as a fundraising and recruitment tool. As Welsh commented, there would be significant media coverage on the topic. In a February 1981 letter to Jane Fonda, June Andrews noted that the visibility of the working women’s movement skyrocketed. Hundreds of women called the 9to5 office to find out how to join in the two months after the movie’s premiere. The organization received broader press coverage of its events and actions. Andrews wrote, “This was the first time working women’s issues have been so clearly

⁴⁹⁰ Correspondence from Bob Welsh to John Sweeney, June 2, 1980, box 62, folder 23, Service Employees International Union Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

⁴⁹¹ Ibid.

identified for such a broad number of people. It was exciting for our membership to be legitimated in that way.” SEIU and 9to5 utilized the film as an introduction to the benefits of joining a union.⁴⁹²

Near identical proposals were sent to the UAW and the CWA, but 9to5’s talks with those unions did not prove as fruitful. In 1981, District 925 was chartered with chapters nationwide. Recognizing the value of a close relationship with Working Women, SEIU granted nearly all their requests. District 925 primarily developed in Massachusetts, Ohio, and Washington, with the goal of organizing office workers and answering the charge that unions were only for blue-collar workers and men. Welsh accurately predicted the effects of the film and charter. In the first three months of District 925, the district received nearly 1,000 inquiries. It soon had seven campaigns underway. After the charter, SEIU and 9to5 collaborated on activities, such as a hotline clericals could call to get connected to resources, direct mail, a radio public service announcement, and membership recruitment.⁴⁹³

Jackie Ruff, Local 925’s president, became the executive director of District 925, in charge of organizing campaigns. Karen Nussbaum served in leadership roles in both District 925 and Working Women. Local 925, with the international subsidizing them for some years, merged in 1983 with District 925, gaining access to broader resources.⁴⁹⁴

⁴⁹² Correspondence from June Andrews to Jane Fonda, February 15, 1981, box 7, folder 454, 9 to 5, National Association of Working Women (U.S.) Additional records, 1972–1985, 82-M189—86-M213, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA; Correspondence from Bob Welsh to John Sweeney, June 2, 1980, box 62, folder 23, Service Employees International Union Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI; “9to5 Fundraising Summary,” 1980, box 7, folder 452, 9 to 5, National Association of Working Women (U.S.) Additional records, 1972–1985, 82-M189—86-M213 (Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

⁴⁹³ SEIU District 925, *Inside Line*, 1981, box 62, folder 24, Service Employees International Union Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

⁴⁹⁴ Local 925 merger information, 1983, box 7, folder 23, SEIU District 925 Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

District 925 was a women-led union local, a fact it promoted in many publications. It carefully chose its staff, 90 percent of whom were former office workers. The union never had difficulty finding women leaders or recruiting women staff, as women saw District 925 as speaking directly to their needs and as the best place to improve the workplace for women. Nussbaum, Schneider, and Cassedy believed that, by working in a women-led union local, they were able to have a voice—and perhaps even exercise power—in the male-dominated union movement through their own women-dominated base.⁴⁹⁵ District 925 became a leader in clerical higher education organizing in the 1980s. After the charter, SEIU and 9to5 collaborated in activities, such as a hotline clericals could call to get connected to resources, direct mail, and a radio public service announcement, and recruiting members to both 9to5 and District 925.

Not all workplaces were close to unionization, so 9to5 and Working Women continued to support and identify union campaigns and assist non-union clericals. Since its inception, 9to5 had had inquiries from women across the country. In 1974, Kent State receptionist, Michelle Reidy, requested to receive 9to5's bi-monthly newsletter at her office for herself and her coworkers to share.⁴⁹⁶ The group would eventually unionize, but it would take over a decade. The 9to5 Summer School's two-day events provided resources for women, and, particularly in 1982, exposed attendees to union education. In that year, John Sweeney gave the keynote address. Workshops

⁴⁹⁵ Ellen Cassedy, Karen Nussbaum, and Debbie Schnieder, interview by Ann Froines, November 1, 2005, SEIU District 925 Legacy Project: Oral History, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

⁴⁹⁶ Correspondence from Michelle Reidy to 9to5, September 3, 1974, box 11, folder 614, 9 to 5, National Association of Working Women (U.S.) Additional records, 1972–1985, 82-M189—86-M213, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

included organizing and bargaining. Attendees would come away with new skills and union inspiration.⁴⁹⁷

The similar name choices for the local, district, and association were a deliberate attempt to associate the groups and the film with the same movement. They all had a similar goal of improving the status of office workers. Nussbaum declared,

We had the decision that we would have the creative confusion of calling everything 9 to 5, that we would have 9to5, the association that would have the character and concerns of the working women's movement; the union 925, which had the power of unions; and "Nine to Five," the movie, which was the glamour of Hollywood. And we wanted people to get all that stuff confused; we didn't care if they knew exactly what they were talking about. That was the power of it.⁴⁹⁸

The idea was that, if one of them was brought up, a person would think of the others and expand the movement.

The intermingling of the labor and working women's movements came in the form of the District 925 hotline, a number to call to talk confidentially about joining a union. Dabney Coleman, the actor portraying sexist boss in the film, fielded complaint calls from across the country for several hours. The union mailed an 8x10 of Dabney Coleman and a one-page release to 400 daily newspapers, fan magazines, and labor-related groups, and a press release with no photo to 1,100 radio stations. As a result, District 925 received interview requests from radio stations in Seattle and Phoenix and newspapers in more than a dozen cities across the county. In the release, Coleman stated, "I'm not what you would call a big union person. But in the case of office workers, I'm

⁴⁹⁷ 9to5 Summer School program, 1982, box 11, folder 662, 9 to 5, National Association of Working Women (U.S.) Additional records, 1972–1985, 82-M189—86-M213, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

⁴⁹⁸ Ellen Cassedy, Karen Nussbaum, and Debbie Schnieder, interview by Ann Froines, November 1, 2005, SEIU District 925 Legacy Project: Oral History, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

convinced it's needed. You wouldn't believe the professional persecution these individuals have to undergo." District 925 soon received letters and calls from twenty-eight states.⁴⁹⁹

As labor unions faced growing opposition from well-organized employers in the 1970s, non-adversarial labor issues came to monopolize the bargaining agenda in several industries. In women-led District 925, the concerns of women remained the core of their agenda, making women's issues not an option for concessions. Even as the women's movement no longer had the same vibrancy and influence as it did in the 1960s and early 1970s, the labor feminist commitment to civil and social rights reasserted itself in the mid-1970s and 1980s, as is evident in District 925.⁵⁰⁰

Representing public and private sector office workers for over fifty years, SEIU, under President John Sweeney (1980-1995), renewed its commitment to organizing. SEIU raised dues and put a quarter of its income into organizing, well above the 5 percent norm. This fund allowed SEIU to hire hundreds of young organizers. These organizers used a broad repertoire of direct actions and community-wide mobilizations to unionize janitors, health care workers, and clericals; they made a strong commitment to organizing the unorganized. With their stated goal of self-representation, power, and participation, SEIU embraced the social-justice form of unionism that supported political struggles for human rights, social justice, and democracy. It told management the realities of the workers' lives at the bargaining table. The union's structures encouraged member involvement, with small teams working on specific issues that reflected its majority women service worker constituency in its agenda and institutions.⁵⁰¹ Agreeing with 9to5, SEIU

⁴⁹⁹ SEIU District 925, *Inside Line*, 1981, box 62, folder 24, Service Employees International Union Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

⁵⁰⁰ Moody, *An Injury to All*, 280.

⁵⁰¹ Tom Balding, Pat Cooper, Grace Palladino, and Peter Pieragostim, *A Need for Valor: The Roots of the SEIU, 1902-92* (Washington, D.C.: Service Employees International Union, 1992).

believed it would be a good idea to organize women through a union. 9to5, the association, would serve as a bridge between the labor movement and working women. They could mobilize office workers in the workplace, even if the workers did not feel powerful enough to start a unionization effort.⁵⁰²

Despite the positive association, working women's organizations still felt trepidation about SEIU's commitment. Day Piercy, Executive Director of Women Employed, wrote John Sweeney in November 1981, stating they were encouraged by SEIU's action and formation of District 925. Long a supporter of unionization, she noted, "For the past eight years, Women Employed has actively worked to help women win equal opportunity, high wages, and fair employment policies. We believe that collective bargaining provides one of the best guarantees for securing these rights." Her tone changes to a warning, with Women Employed advocating for more concrete organizing strategies designed to help women understand the benefits of unionization and to assist women directly in their efforts to organize where needed. They also expressed disappointment in SEIU, which had provided only a 1-800 number to call for more information at a press conference in Chicago. Women Employed leader Day Piercy stated,

In fact, when women expect SEIU to be available to help them and instead are referred to a Washington telephone number and offered a packet of materials, they will assume that this is simply a new public relations effort by the labor movement to improve its image among working women without committing resources to actually organize them.⁵⁰³

⁵⁰² John Sweeney, interview by Ann Froines, November 7, 2005, SEIU District 925 Legacy Project: Oral History, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI; Nussbaum, interview by Ann Froines, November 10, 2006, SEIU District 925 Legacy Project: Oral History, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI..

⁵⁰³ Correspondence from Day Piercy to John Sweeney, November 9, 1981, box 62, folder 26, Service Employees International Union Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

Women Employed and others believed the telephone number hindered efforts to convince women that the union cared about their welfare.

As employers fought back, some labor leaders considered the results of clerical organizing disappointing. Nonetheless, OPEIU, SEIU, AFSCME, UAW, and AFT witnessed successes in higher education clerical organizing from the 1970s into the 1990s. District 925 was especially successful, as its win percentage was equal to or better than any other union in the 1970s and 1980s. District 925 built a ten-thousand-person membership through its progressive one-on-one organizing tactics, while also spurring tremendous growth in office worker membership in other SEIU locals. 9to5, Local 925, and District 925 were able to combine some of the best aspects of the labor movement and the women's movement to make a large class of workers, who had previously been pushed to the background, more visible.

District 925 Ohio Campaigns

The state of Ohio received extensive attention from District 925 as a place to unionize clerical workers. Organizing in the state began as soon as the District received its national charter, and it carried forward with real momentum into the 1980s. With its committee structure including university, insurance, banking, and publishing sectors, District 925 gathered information on clerical workers. Beginning with its work in Boston, 9to5 reached out to women working in higher education. They sent brochures entitled *You're Worth It* to university and college staff. The brochure included the University and College Office Worker Bill of Rights. It asserted that office workers had the right to "a decent living wage, an end to sex, race, and age discrimination, opportunities for advancement, safe and healthy working conditions, a voice in policymaking, and dignity and respect." The demands for university and college office workers applied to many other

clerical workers, who saw minimal opportunities for advancement, with the training necessary for advancement not offered, and concerns that incoming technologies, such as computers, had adverse health effects and might lead to more invasive supervision. The brochure spoke to higher education clericals who, while taking pride in their work, received pay below the market wage and had little say in the conditions of their work.⁵⁰⁴

College and university clericals became an early focus of District 925's national organizing campaigns. They were attractive targets since universities were largely open to the public and university administrators could not easily deny union organizers access to employers. Universities and colleges were tied to a specific location and thus could not move to avoid unionization. The university campaigns in Ohio came at a time when AFSCME, OPEIU, and the UAW, along with SEIU, launched national efforts to unionize clerical workers. These campaigns were often bitter, drawn-out affairs, as exemplified by the Harvard clerical and technical organizing drive. That campaign took twelve years before it achieved AFSCME representation. As with other efforts at organizing clerical workers, employers, who were accustomed to dealing with unions representing blue-collar employees fiercely resisted unions. Difficulties were further compounded by clerical workers' physical proximity to management and the often-subordinate nature of their work roles. Employers often "view[ed] [clericals] as part of a private domain that should be immune from unionization."⁵⁰⁵

District 925 fought to rectify adverse conditions to give clericals the respect they deserved.

As *The Daily Collegian* at Penn State University commented, "If the administrators are the

⁵⁰⁴ 9to5, *You're Worth it: Working Women in Higher Education*, undated, box 2, folder 44, SEIU District 925 Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

⁵⁰⁵ Richard Hurd, and Gregory Woodhead, "The Unionization of Clerical Workers at Large U.S. Universities and Colleges," *Newsletter: National Center for the Study of Collective Bargaining in Higher Education and the Professions* 15, no. 3, (1987): 1; Marion Crain, "Gender and Union Organizing," *Industrial and Labor Relations Review* 47, no. 2 (1994): 237.

designers and the faculty members are the builders, then the secretaries are the cement that keeps the university together.”⁵⁰⁶ Noting the importance of clericals to a university, District 925 fought against discrimination based on sex, age, and race, and against the pressure to provide personal services outside of the job description. They also demanded pay that accurately reflected office workers’ importance to the university. District 925 sought to get clericals a voice in policy decisions that affected their work lives. Fighting to better the lives of university clericals, District 925’s campaigns at the University of Cincinnati and its terminated campaign at Kent State expressed labor feminism in the 1970s and 1980s. They combined labor organizing with issues and tactics drawn from the women’s movement, such as consciousness raising and relationship-based organizing.

The story in Cincinnati began long before District 925’s formation. In 1973, Cincinnati Working Women (CWW), affiliated with 9to5, was established to better the lives of women office workers. Part of a statewide network of working women’s organizations, CWW was the third such organization in Ohio. Organizing in Cincinnati, a decidedly more conservative city than Boston, New York, or Cleveland, was seen by 9to5 and District 925 as a crucial move to extend clerical unions and working women’s organizations beyond the larger liberal cities. Similar obstacles to recruiting arose, no matter what the political climate or size of the city. CWW provided educational resources to inform working women of their legal rights on the job, programs on problems faced by working women over forty, and counselors on discrimination and unfair treatment. Arguing that it was time “that someone spoke up for raises, rights, and respect for women office workers,” CWW held monthly meetings as forums for mutual concerns after working hours. The issues, such as improving wages and benefits, equal access to training and promotions, implementation of job

⁵⁰⁶ 9to5, *You’re Worth it: Working Women in Higher Education*, undated, box 2, folder 44, SEIU District 925 Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

descriptions and job posting procedures, and respect for the important work done by clerical workers were the same concerns that District 925 addressed across the country.⁵⁰⁷

By 1977, Cincinnati Working Women began to think seriously about unionism. Debbie Balzell, one of the CWW leaders, had written to Karen Nussbaum for information on Local 925. Nussbaum suggested that Balzell gather information on discrimination and review the range of services available to working women. She also asked Balzell to contact her if she was interested in unionizing. By asking about Local 925, Balzell and CWW indicated that they wanted to form a similar offshoot union. In 1978, CWW noted that “unions, which normally deal with such problems [like discrimination], have traditionally ignored the clerical sector, with nationally only 6.5 percent unionized.” Ultimately, CWW followed Nussbaum’s advice that they needed more grassroots educational work before creating a union. CWW remained an association dedicated to working against discrimination, doing public events, such as picnics and movie screenings, that publicized the problems of clerical workers and targeted specific returns.⁵⁰⁸

Feeling they had to avoid discussing collective action or bargaining for fear of alienating people, CWW conducted publicity campaigns that encouraged the involvement of women in ways that did not require a full-time commitment. Like 9to5, CWW held contests, such as the “Pettiest Office Procedure.” Flyers, sent to women across greater Cincinnati, provided an address for mailed entries. Responses included one requirement that clerical workers sign in and out to use the restroom. The contest was an easy way for CWW to find women receptive to their mission. Their campaigns, including one to nominate “Grinch of the Year,” engaged women in non-threatening ways. They also served a consciousness-raising function, a women’s movement tactic applied to

⁵⁰⁷ CWW pamphlet, undated, box 1, folder 21, SEIU District 925 Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

⁵⁰⁸ *Ibid.*; Correspondence from Karen Nussbaum to Debbie Balzell, 1977, box 1, folder 21, SEIU District 925 Collection; Staff report, April 26 to May 4, 1978, box 1, folder 21, SEIU District 925 Collection.

labor organizing by District 925. Through such efforts, women came to question the adverse conditions they faced in the workplace.⁵⁰⁹

One of CWW's most successful campaigns came along with National Secretaries Week. During National Secretaries' Week, bosses were encouraged to buy secretaries lunch or give them roses. Roses, however, did not make up for the adverse conditions or poor pay of clerical work. Working under the slogan, "Raises, Not Roses," CWW distributed buttons, balloons, job surveys to find out women's grievances, and fact sheets on what it means to be a working woman in Cincinnati. In conjunction with Secretaries Week in 1980, CWW held various workshops, such as how to ask for a raise. The organization provided resource guides with suggestions on how to be received positively, such as being prepared with factual information on salaries and review policies. The organization was becoming a powerful advocate for working women, but CWW was plagued by the same problems as other 9to5 affiliates across the country. It lacked bargaining power without a union. CWW still needed to find the proper vehicle to become an effective and powerful voice for women office workers.⁵¹⁰

Throughout its history, educating women workers about their rights had been a primary goal of 9to5 and CWW. Along with workshops, including a series for older women workers on retirement rights, laws for older women and on-the-job survival skills, CWW published *Stitches, Whistles, Bells, and Wires: Oral History of Cincinnati Working Women, 1904–1981*. This book provided the accounts of sixteen women who worked in various occupations, such as telephone operators, secretaries, and garment workers, in an effort to link the history of working women with their own cause. CWW contended that, through oral histories, women would begin to recognize

⁵⁰⁹ CWW, Pettiest office procedure information, 1980, box 1, folder 22, SEIU District 925 Collection; Staff report, April 26, 1978 to May 4, 1978, box 1, folder 21, SEIU District 925 Collection.

⁵¹⁰ CWW Secretaries Week flyer, 1980, box 1, folder 22. SEIU District 925 Collection.

their worth, efforts, and contributions, and identify with their sisters, mothers, grandmothers, and daughters. A number of the interviews discussed the positive impact of unions on women's work lives, noting overtime pay and improved working conditions, and their desire to unionize. Telephone operator Esther Hunter's interview linked the goals of CWW and the new awareness of unionism among Working Women nationally and CWW locally. Hunter stated that no one ever thought that the telephone company would unionize. Many shared the same sentiment about clerical workers. Hunter noted, "Before the union, we just had an association. It didn't amount to much."⁵¹¹

CWW was plagued by the same problems as other 9to5 affiliates across the country. It lacked bargaining power without a union. Without a union, however, women could still advocate for themselves. In one of the interviews in *Stitches, Whistles, Bells, and Wires*, Janet Barker, a former clerical worker, noted, "I speak up if something seems wrong. I refuse to be pushed around." 9to5 advocated similar action among the clerical workers they wanted to organize. Through its educational efforts and publications, CWW linked the growing field of women's history that emerged from the women's movement with their own goals, in an effort to address the needs of their members.⁵¹²

Publicity was on the side of the Cincinnati Working Women in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Jane Fonda and her husband, Tom Hayden, were slated to appear at the University of Cincinnati for a lecture. Fonda had been friends with Karen Nussbaum since protesting together during the anti-Vietnam War movement in Boston. A 9to5 supporter since its inception, Fonda agreed to speak at a cocktail hour put on by CWW pro bono, a fact local newspapers eagerly picked

⁵¹¹ Cincinnati Working Women, *Stitches, Whistles, Bells, and Wires: An Oral History of Cincinnati's Working Women, 1904-1981*, 1981, box 1, folder 25, University of Cincinnati Chapter—925 Union Collection, Archives and Rare Books Library, University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, OH.

⁵¹² Cincinnati Working Women, *Stitches, Whistles, Bells, and Wires*, 31-32.

up. Speaking on the economic rights of working women, Fonda presented to eight hundred attendees. She offered to give CWW a fund-raising premiere showing of her upcoming film, *Nine to Five*, in which she starred along with Lily Tomlin and Dolly Parton. In the film, they portrayed office workers who find a way to turn the tables on their sexist, hypocritical and bigoted boss, as inspired by stories Cleveland 9to5 members told Fonda. Events where Fonda spoke, including benefit screenings, drew up to a thousand attendees. They raised visibility, provided the opportunity to publicize the issues, and raised funds. Recalling the screenings, Fonda said,

It was so exciting and rewarding to watch the response from the women who would come to these screenings. Like in the scene where I don't know what to do, how to stop the Xerox machine, women would stand up and say, "Hit the stop button!" They'd applaud at different places, and they just went wild! As Karen often said later, once the movie came out, nobody had to explain the problem. The problem was now on the map. What we had to do was figure out the solution.

Fonda ultimately traveled to a dozen cities to speak about the film. Coming off these successful publicity campaigns, CWW saw an increase in the community's support.⁵¹³

One women's movement tactic that allowed working women's associations and their sister unions to flourish was the emphasis on one-on-one contact. Initial recruiting of members came through individual meetings with survey respondents. One of the leaders would organize a lunch meeting to meet and talk about the organization and the woman's job. With 73 percent of office workers who took the survey responding that they supported the goal of "rights and respect," CWW lunch meetings took place almost every day of the week and sometimes even twice a day. On the agenda for Katie Whelan, president at the time, was sending out more surveys and "lunches and more lunches." CWW meetings, whether one-on-one or general membership, paid close

⁵¹³CWW, Cocktail hour flyer, box 1, folder 22, SEIU District 925 Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI; Jane Fonda, interview by Stacey Heath, July 25, 2006, SEIU District 925 Legacy Project: Oral History, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

attention to women's work schedules, lowering the cost of participation for potential and current members, meeting at lunch or before or after work.⁵¹⁴

The University of Cincinnati office workers started to reach out to the working women's movement in 1978. Founded in 1818, the University of Cincinnati (UC), a public university with an annual enrollment of over forty thousand, was one of the largest universities in the country and the second largest in the state. UC was also the largest employer in Greater Cincinnati. The only organization representing clerical workers at UC was the UC Staff Association (UCSA). Its members felt that they had no collective input into the decisions made by the UC administration and department heads that affected staff. The association advocated for official representation in decision-making bodies and sanction as a bargaining body, but their concerns were repeatedly passed over. At the September 16, 1976 quarterly meeting, association members discussed gathering more information about unions, but only 66 percent in attendance at the meeting were in favor of the motion. In April 1978, with no union and continued poor working conditions, the UC Staff Association president, Jane Shreve, met with CWW's Katie Whelan to discuss ways to improve the conditions of the office workers. While the all-women CWW was not a union, Whelan believed that the organization could provide assistance. However, by May 1978, the relationship between the staff association and CWW had become contentious, with the association head deciding not to distribute a CWW survey on working conditions for fear that it would alienate the men in the association.⁵¹⁵

While initially off to a productive start, CWW began to decline by 1983, shifting to an all-volunteer chapter. Government funding and foundation grants decreased, and members left the organization. Feeling burnt out after years of activism, Debbie Nichoff, the president of the

⁵¹⁴ Staff report, April 26 to May 4, 1978, box 1, folder 21, SEIU District 925 Collection.

⁵¹⁵ Ibid.

chapter, began to feel as if there was little support for the organization. She was still hopeful, however, believing that volunteer militancy could succeed. Working Women hoped that the unstaffed chapters could still help office workers stay a locally visible political constituency and make contacts with potential District 925 campaigns. By 1984, however, CWW no longer had enough money to continue to have an office or a phone. Membership steadily dropped, and the organization received far less media coverage. Ultimately, CWW became a representative network, where individuals still affiliated themselves with 9to5 but there was actual organization. The chapter no longer existed.⁵¹⁶

At the same time as CWW declined, executive director of 9to5 and president of District 925, Karen Nussbaum, began conducting SEIU work in Cincinnati with the intent to start organizing at the University of Cincinnati while on her book tour. Several UC clericals had previously called the Cleveland office, the headquarters of District 925, to ask for organizers to come down. The UC clericals were interviewing various unions to find the best match. District 925 jumped at the opportunity, seeing UC as a target as early as 1983. In 1983, District 925 had organizers in Ohio call approximately twenty universities and colleges to gain as much information as possible on the employees. They advised organizers to tell the universities that they were graduate students in sociology, economics, or labor relations who were studying the impact of collective bargaining legislation and employee staff organizations. Under no circumstances were organizers to say they were from a union. Through this canvas, District 925 learned the University of Cincinnati's eight hundred and fifty clerical workers were unrepresented. District 925 already had been working on university and library campaigns in Ohio, including the successful 1982 campaign at Cuyahoga Community College in Cleveland. Upon choosing District 925, Kim Cook

⁵¹⁶ Correspondence from Debbie Nichoff to Maureen O'Donnell, June 13, 1983, box 1, folder 24, SEIU District 925 Collection.

helped form the first organizing committee, and Midwest Coordinator Debbie Schneider moved there in 1984. The campaign at UC finally seemed to take off.⁵¹⁷

The large size of the university concerned organizers, but the huge discrepancy between clerical and faculty benefits, the lack of regular work reviews and evaluations, petty work rules, and reports of supervisor harassment made UC a good potential target for organizing. Even as the UC Staff Association (UCSA) and CWW had a contentious relationship at the end of the 1970s, and District 925 regarded them as an elite social club made up of generally older women, UCSA still served as an already organized group that could serve as a base for District 925.⁵¹⁸

After the May 1984 closure of the CWW office, District 925 bought its furniture and continued to rent the former office space. The year saw a focus on university organizing in the state of Ohio. The District 925 Midwest Regional office published a small newsletter, *University Report: Becoming a Priority*. It contended that university administrations were acting more like corporate management. First, they were spending enormous amounts of money to prevent unionizing. In the places where union votes had been successful, administrators made contract negotiations as difficult and prolonged as possible.⁵¹⁹ Based on an Ohio college and university office staff survey, the newsletter reported that 64 percent of university and college clericals believed they could not advance from their present position. Seventy-four percent responded that universities did not offer job training that could lead to advancement, and 66 percent of universities lacked clear written personnel policies. At the University of Cincinnati, 38 percent responded that their job description was inaccurate, and 76 percent believed pay equity ceased to exist at UC. By

⁵¹⁷ UC campaign notes, 1983, box 8, folder 39, SEIU District 925 Collection; Debbie Schneider, interview by Ann Froines, November 3, 2005, SEIU District 925 Legacy Project: Oral History, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

⁵¹⁸ UC campaign notes, 1983, box 8, folder 39, SEIU District 925 Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

⁵¹⁹ SEIU District 925, *University Report: Becoming a Priority*, 1984, box 8, folder 37, SEIU District 925 Collection.

spring 1985, District 925 began actively organizing at UC, distributing job surveys, gathering information about experiences and soliciting priorities, and meeting in small groups.⁵²⁰

Since the founding of 9to5 at Harvard, organizing university office workers was on its agenda. In 9to5's *Handbook for University Office Workers: Organizing for Change*, several myths about universities that kept office workers from speaking up about their working conditions were analyzed. It included the myth of prestige that kept office workers accepting low wages because of their perception of the workplace. The handbook also examined the myth of the stimulating university environment that did not truly extend to office workers and the myth of the spirit of the university community, disproved by the fact that departments and administration often excluded staff from decisions that affected them. Also providing organizing tips, the handbook suggested simple measures such as listing things that were bothering the worker, what the worker did on the job, and all the people that might be receptive to the worker's ideas. As the handbook suggests, "Before you give up, make a list of the things you've got going for you. For one thing, we have the benefit of the ideas of women's liberation, which are becoming increasingly widespread."⁵²¹

As for CWW, building relationships was essential to the success of District 925 gaining followers. Union activists went to see people at their homes through cold calls, a traditional union tactic, and phoned potential supporters, in an attempt to build relationships and win workers' trust and respect. District 925 believed strongly in one-on-one organizing, a tactic adopted from the women's movement, where women helped build relationships with one another through talking about the issues they encountered. While unions sometimes doubted the efficiency of such tactics, labor scholars Kate Bronfenbrenner of Cornell and Tom Juravich of the University of

⁵²⁰ SEIU District 925, "Ohio College and University Office Staff Survey Results," 1984, box 8, folder 37, SEIU District 925 Collection.

⁵²¹ *Handbook for University Office Workers: Organizing for Change* 1974, box 2, folder 48, SEIU District 925 Collection.

Massachusetts have since demonstrated that unions built from the grassroots through personal networks and face-to-face meetings had win rates of 10 to 30 percent higher than traditional campaigns.⁵²²

Through the one-on-one organizing, District 925 adopted a relationship-based unionism, one that relied on the shop floor and union democracy. Scores of individual meetings occurred, from discussions at the water cooler to lunches and after-work drinks. Carol Sims, one of the lead organizers, recalled the tough campaign, working for months and months. She recalled billboarding early in the morning and standing outside on the corners of the campuses with big signs, “Turn your computer off at 12 o’clock, come out and have a power-lunch meeting.”⁵²³

At larger membership meetings, District 925 offered free childcare to attract working mothers. Carolyn Schweir recalled that scheduling was always a problem for many women workers. Organizers had to meet people where they were and reach out to those who could not make it to meetings. One organizer working on clerical campaigns noted that the informal meetings she held were more like receptions, where the organizers avoided the appearance of talking at people and the rally-style meeting frequently used by unions. Instead, organizers provided information on the union and facilitated discussions between workers.⁵²⁴ The emphasis of the campaign shifted from pushing signing cards, the desire of many unions at the time, to establishing a relationship and selling the union. District 925 steered clear of pressuring workers to join while extolling the benefits of unions. In meetings with women, the organizer asked how they felt about

⁵²² Hoerr, “*We Can’t Eat Prestige*,” 157; Casedy, interview; Kate Bronfenbrenner and Tom Juravich, “It Takes More Than House Calls: Organizing to Win with a Comprehensive Union-Building Strategy,” in *Organizing To Win: New Research on Union Strategies*, ed. Kate Bronfenbrenner, Sheldon Friedman, Richard W. Hurd, Rudolph A. Oswald, and Ronald L. Seeber (Ithaca, NY: ILR Press, 1998), 19–36.

⁵²³ Carol Sims, interview by Ann Froines, December 7, 2005, SEIU District 925 Legacy Project: Oral History, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

⁵²⁴ Crain, “Gender and Union Organizing,” 239; Carolyn Schweir, interview by Ann Froines, September 26, 2006, SEIU District 925 Legacy Project: Oral History, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

what they were doing and solicited input.⁵²⁵ While time-consuming, the method of relationship building helped produce committed union members, who saw the union as responsive to their needs.⁵²⁶

Sims lamented that current organizing attempts to move fast. She believed time needed to be spent on conversations with individuals and on building an organization. Recalling the UC and Cuyahoga Community College campaigns, Sims said,

I think it's better because you have to have the conversations; you have to figure out what's wrong, what needs to be fixed. And that takes time. That takes time, communication, education—it just takes time to bring people together, to get them onboard.... But I do think that it takes conversations, and you have to have the face-to-face—be able to have those face-to-face. And that's a little time-consuming.

Organizing the University of Cincinnati certainly took time, but it was successful reaching women who felt deeply disenfranchised in the workplace.⁵²⁷

Kim Cook thought it essential that women organize women, as it proved to be more successful and could be done on a relationship basis. Like many other District 925 organizers, Cook believed that women could relate better to the issues facing women clerical workers. Schneider disagreed to an extent, arguing that they did not make a concentrated effort to hire only women organizers, but rather hired based on skill. They had some men organizers who understood the needs of clerical workers and could effectively communicate with the workers they were trying to organize, regardless of gender. District 925 sought to facilitate a class consciousness among clerical workers, as it facilitated union organization and raised the level of worker solidarity.⁵²⁸

⁵²⁵ Kim Cook, interview by Ann Froines, May 10, 2005, SEIU District 925 Legacy Project: Oral History, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

⁵²⁶ Crain, "Gender and Union Organizing," 227–46.

⁵²⁷ Carol Sims, interview by Ann Froines, December 7, 2005, SEIU District 925 Legacy Project: Oral History, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

⁵²⁸ Ellen Cassedy, Karen Nussbaum, and Debbie Schneider, interview by Ann Froines, November 1, 2005, SEIU District 925 Legacy Project: Oral History, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI; Kim Cook, interview by Ann Froines, May 10, 2005, SEIU District 925 Legacy

Years later, women commented that working with women who shared a common experience and had personal knowledge of their problems brought about feelings of solidarity, making them feel a part of a collective effort.⁵²⁹

Many activists, like Kim Cook, who supported the tactic of one-on-one organizing had come from the women's movement and participated in consciousness-raising groups. She had engaged in door-to-door campaigning and attended rallies on women's rights; but before District 925, she had no union experience. Similarly, Ellen Cassedy, coming from a family involved in the Old Left, after joining the student movement and the women's movement, began to question gender and social stereotypes. While in the women's movement, she participated in consciousness-raising, a tactic utilized by 9to5. The 9to5 organizers, and particularly District 925, drew on the tactics with which they had experience, in addition to ones drawn from labor movement traditions, to improve the lives of clerical workers.⁵³⁰

Carolyn Schweir, a library worker at UC, did not become involved in District 925 until the contract struggle, but she was a supporter during the organizing campaign. She remembered that UC was "just a place where we had been told so long that we weren't important and that we were so nearly invisible that we all started to believe that." District 925 came to UC and started meeting with the workers. The union told workers that they were important. They were not invisible, and

Project: Oral History, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

⁵²⁹ Hoerr, "*We Can't Eat Prestige*," 157; Ellen Cassedy, interview by Ann Froines, November 6, 2005, SEIU District 925 Legacy Project: Oral History, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI; Kate Bronfenbrenner and Tom Juravich, "It Takes More Than House Calls: Organizing to Win with a Comprehensive Union-Building Strategy," in *Organizing To Win: New Research on Union Strategies*, eds. Kate Bronfenbrenner, Sheldon Friedman, Richard W. Hurd, Rudolph A. Oswald, and Ronald L. Seeber (Ithaca, NY: ILR Press, 1998), 19-36.

⁵³⁰ Kim Cook, interview by Ann Froines, May 10, 2005, SEIU District 925 Legacy Project: Oral History, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI; Ellen Cassedy, interview by Ann Froines, November 6, 2005, SEIU District 925 Legacy Project: Oral History, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

they would have power if they joined together. This approach made a huge difference in the lives of the women workers, who constituted 95 percent of the UC clerical unit. It also helped clericals build a coalition with women workers across campus and with the faculty, particularly women faculty, who were having difficulty gaining tenure and not being taken as seriously as their male colleagues.⁵³¹

Organizing literature long played a significant role in labor organizing, where organizers would give potential targets information on their union in newsletters, flyers, and pamphlets. District 925 produced extensive publications that dealt with both the union and the specific problems facing women. A newsletter reported on the significant contribution of well-designed, well-written organizing literature to successful union campaigns and overall SEIU growth record. Weekly, SEIU produced thousands of pieces of literature designed specifically for individual campaigns.⁵³² Through its publications, District 925 appealed to workers as women. In a September 1986 newsletter, they emphasized that women held all officer positions in District 925. Women made up a large percentage of SEIU members. The newsletter contained various cartoons and satirical writing about working women. One such piece, “A Recipe for a Working Woman,” targeted sexism, the difficulty of balancing home responsibilities with work, and the adverse conditions of women’s jobs:

A Recipe for a Working Woman

1 cup crushed ego
 1 tsp. job description
 ¼ tsp. chauvinism
 1 well beaten path to the washing machine
 ½ tsp. grated nerves

⁵³¹ Carolyn Schweir, interview by Ann Froines, September 27, 2006, SEIU District 925 Legacy Project: Oral History, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

⁵³² *17th International Convention: A Decade of Progress: 1980 Convention Organizing Report*, 1980, box 142, folder 7, Service Employees International Union Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

1 pinch from a man on the street
 1 dash from the dentist to the babysitter

Mix all ingredients, one on top of the other and stir violently. Cook until you feel a slow burn and add one last straw.⁵³³

The writing shows the concerns of women workers did not merely result from working conditions but, rather, included the difficulties women faced as caregivers and as women. District 925 attempted to rectify the working conditions while lessening the problems women faced in the home.

Even as women made up the majority of District 925, men comprised some of the membership and were organizing targets. In an attempt to address the belief that District 925 was exclusively for women, nearly all flyers from the union included at least one picture of a man, while showing the racial diversity of the union with a wide range of images. Walter Seniors, an African American clerical worker at Cuyahoga Community College, interviewed for a District 925 newsletter article, stated, “To be honest, since the majority of office workers are female, there arises the necessity to address the needs of women workers. But, really, we all have the same problems here at CCC.” The message was that men could feel comfortable in the union.⁵³⁴

Despite the emphasis on women’s leadership, men played a valuable role in District 925. When asked about the experiences of men in the women-dominated union, Linda Robers responded that men in the union had the same goals. They demanded the same rights and respect that the women did. Further, at least one man led a local, Neal Culver, an administrative data processor at the University of Washington. He initially expressed reluctance to accept that role,

⁵³³ *District 925 Newsletter: Union News for Office Workers*, September 1986, box 10, folder 17, SEIU District 925 Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

⁵³⁴ “UC Staff Meet with Cleveland 925,” July 1984, box 11, folder 5, SEIU District 925 Collection; Carol Sims, interview by Ann Froines, December 7, 2005, SEIU District 925 Legacy Project: Oral History, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI..

because he thought, in a primarily women's union, the leaders should be women. His leadership style and understanding of the values of the union coincided with the District's vision. In Local 925, men made up about 20 percent of members. They served as stewards and on the Executive Board, but the leadership remained primarily white and female, reflecting the membership of 9to5.⁵³⁵

In line with its mission, 9to5 published several pamphlets designed to help working women. They were distributed to women in areas with a 9to5 presence or which were District 925 campaign targets. The pamphlets advised workers to form a support or advocacy group and directed those interested in unionizing to SEIU and District 925. The flyers reached a broad audience, with one hundred thousand copies of *The Working Women's Guide to Office Survival* distributed nationally. Published in 1982, the *9to5 Office Worker Survival Guide* was one of the most widely distributed materials 9to5 produced.⁵³⁶ It advised women clerical workers on how to get respect from their bosses, how to say no firmly but without hostility, and how to start a support group with coworkers. The particular needs of women were addressed throughout, notably discussing childcare. 9to5 understood that finding affordable childcare remained one of the major difficulties facing working mothers. They suggested teaming up with natural allies in the workplace, other women with similar concerns, and presenting suggestions for workplace improvements to employers.⁵³⁷

With 70 to 90 percent of women experiencing sexual harassment on the job, it became a prominent issue for working women. Surprisingly, sexual harassment rarely took a central place

⁵³⁵ Linda Robers, interview by Ann Froines, May 12, 2005, SEIU District 925 Legacy Project: Oral History, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI; Neal Culver, interview by Ann Froines, May 11, 2005, SEIU District 925 Legacy Project: Oral History, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

⁵³⁶ *9to5 Office Worker Survival Guide* was updated in 1987 and 1995.

⁵³⁷ *9to5 Office Worker Survival Guide*, 1987, box 2, folder 48, SEIU District 925 Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

in District 925 campaigns, where a focus on respect seems to substitute for discussions of the problem. This tactic likely was a result of fears of alienating male workers from District 925. Sexual harassment policy was still in its infancy. There were few legal recourses to address the issue. At the same time, 9to5, District 925's sister organization, produced extensive literature on sexual harassment and made it available at organizing sites. Sexual harassment was not ignored at the international level, as the SEIU Research Department published a sexual harassment booklet in 1987. Mirroring many of the same points in the *9to5 Office Worker Survival Guide*, the booklet discussed how the union could help address the issue. The suggestion that workers consider assertiveness training gave direct support to District 925, which had implemented assertiveness training workshops in almost all campaign target areas.⁵³⁸

District 925 gathered information from the inside about what issues UC staff women faced, ideas that informed its strategy. The union shaped its campaigns around issues identified by surveys, a tool extensively used by both 9to5 and District 925. District 925 organizers did not limit themselves to salaries or women's issues of childcare and comparable pay but expanded their demands to representation in the campus community and governance. The union wanted the workers to decide their own agenda for action.

Most university clerical organizing campaigns had salaries high in their priorities and sought to achieve pay equity for women. The goal, for 9to5 activist Janet Selcer, was not just a raise, but to "create a national movement that would have an effect on women's organization, have an effect on the union movement." Unions clearly took notice, as was evident in District 925; but the issues facing women did not end with union charters. In the article, "Why Pay a Secretary Less

⁵³⁸ SEIU Sexual Harassment booklet, 1987, box 6, folder 1, SEIU District 925 Collection; *9to5 Office Worker Survival Guide*, 1987, box 2, folder 48, SEIU District 925 Collection; Baker, *The Women's Movement against Sexual Harassment*, 27–161.

than a Go-fer?,” Karen Nussbaum noted that skilled clerical workers, nurses, and many other women workers were paid less than warehousemen, grocery baggers, and parking lot attendants. On average, women clerical workers made 40 percent less than men in similar positions. In District 925 newsletter, *We Make UC Work*, the union emphasized the pay gap between the higher paid blue-collar employees and clericals. It asserted that “[t]he pay gap is a function of UC’s assumption that we are simply worth less than other workers in the UC community.”⁵³⁹

District 925 reassured workers that they could help close this gap. They needed to confront the myth that women were ancillary workers, providing only a secondary income. As one woman noted, “I work because I have four children and a mother at home to support...General opinion of the men is that my salary is great ‘for a secretary.’ I do not agree. My bills are the same as theirs, and I am not unique in my field.”⁵⁴⁰ The step increases, with no cost of living increases, remained far from adequate for single heads of households like Sandra Dennis, an administrative secretary at the University Hospital.⁵⁴¹ At UC, compensation became a particularly important issue, as the pay was one to two dollars per hour lower than other area universities and 23 percent lower than at Kent State. UC had a budget surplus, but they still proposed cuts to wages and layoffs.⁵⁴²

Health and safety concerns were also high on the 9to5 and District 925 agenda. With video display terminals (VDTs) entering the offices and further automation of work, clerical workers were increasingly concerned about adverse health effects. As Ellen Cassedy noted,

⁵³⁹ Janet Selcer, interview by Ann Froines, February 1, 2005, SEIU District 925 Legacy Project: Oral History, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI; Karen Nussbaum, “Why Pay a Secretary Less than a Go-Fer?,” *USA Today*, September 30, 1982, box 14, folder 86, SEIU District 925 Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI; *We Make UC Work*, June 1988, box 11, folder 3, SEIU District 925 Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

⁵⁴⁰ Cincinnati Working Women meeting minutes, April 25, 1978, box 1, folder 21, SEIU District 925 Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

⁵⁴¹ “UC Staff Meet with Cleveland 925,” July 1984, box 11, folder 5, SEIU District 925 Collection.

⁵⁴² *We Make UC Work*, June 15, 1988, box 11, folder 4, SEIU District 925 Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

Office workers were not falling off tall buildings emerging at 5 pm covered with soot, or getting their hands caught in dangerous machines. But as an understanding of chemical and psychological hazards has increased, we have learned that office workers are exposed to severe dangers, all the more severe because they are often invisible and unrecognized.⁵⁴³

Clerical workers displayed high instances of eyestrain, exhaustion, musculoskeletal problems, and digestive disorders, resulting from high stress on the job and looking at computer screens for hours on end. Considered leaders in VDT research, 9to5 and District 925 made occupational health a core issue. They provided workers with tips on how to reduce the problems the new technology caused, such as covers for printers to lower noise pollution and adequate lighting. Stress reduction tips included “rest breaks, task variety, fair pay grievance procedures, and assistance with childcare.”⁵⁴⁴ Workers reported other concerns about the reproductive hazards of VDTs and computers. Clusters of employees at offices encountered high rates of miscarriages, stillbirths, and congenital disorders. While 9to5 investigated the issue, it made suggestions on precautions. The often-noted sick building syndrome was another issue, as a high density of workers came down with a multitude of symptoms associated with particular buildings.⁵⁴⁵

Beyond occupational safety, workers sought official maternity leave from UC, which lacked a maternity leave policy, and a review of the newly implemented policy that prevented workers from using accumulated sick time for maternity leave. Women were only allowed six weeks of maternity leave unless they had a doctor’s statement, no matter how much sick leave they had available. UC clericals also wanted full health benefits, which they saw as under attack. UC had been advocating a new health insurance plan that potentially would cut benefits. District 925

⁵⁴³ Murphy, “Toxicity in the Details,” 189.

⁵⁴⁴ 9to5, *The New Office Worker Survival Guide*, 1990, box 1, folder 66, Miscellaneous Subject Files, Special Collections and Archives, Kent State University, Kent, OH.

⁵⁴⁵ Murphy, “Toxicity in the Details,” 211.

focused on specific women's concerns in its campaigns while addressing the health concerns that affected the entire field.⁵⁴⁶

Respect also came up as an important issue. It could not simply be resolved by a union contract. District 925 reminded workers, "A union contract can't order respect but, it can specify that training and other job opportunities will be assigned fairly and equally."⁵⁴⁷ SEIU and District 925 sought to gain respect for clerical workers by giving them a voice to negotiate conditions and terms of the work, as faculty had earned through the American Association of University Professors (AAUP). The union took empowering clerical workers seriously, similar to the pursuit of empowering women in the women's movement through community organizing and consciousness-raising. It gave women a voice in their own affairs and asserted the value of the women's work. Women who had never had the opportunity to take on leadership roles had the opportunity to do so in their union chapter, which mobilized and educated many new people. According to legal scholar Marion Crain, having a voice in decision making appeals to many women workers. In a survey of forty-four unions, Crain found that in workforces disproportionately composed of women, women organizers ranked participation in decision making as the most important issue in organizing campaigns.⁵⁴⁸

Taking leadership development seriously, District 925 held speech workshops at UC and other campaign targets to help clericals feel confident in public speaking while informing them about each aspect of campaigns. Assertiveness training was added to give women confidence speaking up for their rights and boost their self-esteem, valuable training that extended beyond the

⁵⁴⁶ *UC and the Community: We All Make UC Work*, undated, box 11, folder 5, SEIU District 925 Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

⁵⁴⁷ *District 925 Newsletter: Union News for Office Worker*, October 1986, box 10, folder 17, SEIU District 925 Collection.

⁵⁴⁸ Marion Crain, "Feminism, Labor, and Power," *Southern California Law Review* 65, no. 4 (1992): 1819–86; Hoerr, "We Can't Eat Prestige," 200.

workplace. Many of the women clericals jumped at the chance to help their fellow workers garner the respect they deserved.⁵⁴⁹

After two years of organizing, District 925 got a representation election on the calendar at UC. District 925 lost the election, which took place in 1986, by just twenty-nine votes. The loss was, in part, a result of the veiled anti-union campaign conducted by the administration that spread false information. Using newsletters, such as *U. C. Cares About Your Benefits*, the administration stated that, with a union, an individual would have no voice and benefits could be reduced. It also emphasized the current benefits at UC of tuition reimbursement and full dental insurance. Addressing these concerns, District 925 had noted that changes to work policies could not be made without employee input if they had a union, that they would not bargain away existing benefits, and that “things will only get better.” They published, *A How-to Manual for Fighting the Union Busters*, to provide information on the techniques used by employers to fight unions. And it gave organizers and potential members ways to stand up and counteract the rumors, fears, and confusion created by anti-union campaigns. After the loss, the union alleged unfair labor practices on the part of the university. It cited instances of supervisors asking employees how they planned to vote, employees not allowed to vote if they lacked identification, and worker intimidation through the use of challenging ballots.⁵⁵⁰

With the removal of annual step increases and longevity pay for new employees, after the failed election, UC activists went to the Summer School for Working Women put on by 9to5. There they learned about organizing and fighting the administration, lessons they would soon put into practice. Redoubling their efforts after their return, District 925 organizers gathered as many

⁵⁴⁹ Summer School for Working Women information, August 1986, box 11, folder 2, SEIU District 925 Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

⁵⁵⁰ UC election report, 1986, box 11, folder 2, SEIU District 925 Collection.

union cards in six weeks in 1987 as they had in twelve months in the last campaign. With the momentum in their favor following compensation changes, workers once resistant to the union became supporters. The SEIU Research Department discovered a 31.7 million dollar surplus in the UC general fund that coincided with employee layoffs and health insurance cuts. It was a major turning point in the campaign. District 925 noted that one of the most financially stable universities in the Ohio public university system had broken its promise of continued benefits that it had publicized only a year and a half earlier.⁵⁵¹

In 1988, after four years of organizing, the twelve hundred office workers at the University of Cincinnati voted for District 925, winning by a two to one margin. In the fall edition of the SEIU Clerical Division newsletter, *Update*, an organizer declared the vote a victory and a sign of progress for all unorganized office workers: “We know how to organize. Even more important, perhaps, I think we understand better and better the importance of what we are doing, and we can communicate that clearly and unambiguously to the eighteen million office workers waiting to be organized.”⁵⁵² The UC campaign had a strong impact across the country, showing that even when university administrations engaged in long, bitter fights over organizing campaigns, unionization was possible. The UC example figured prominently in campaign literature across the nation as a beacon of success, with numerous references to UC in the 1991 Kent State campaign.⁵⁵³

After more than a year of bargaining, the UC office workers secured a labor contract in 1989. It included a 16 percent salary increase, fully paid health insurance, and tuition fee waivers. Denise Boggs, a coordinator of operating room scheduling at the University Hospital, hoped that the contract showed her family that, just because office work was considered women’s work, it

⁵⁵¹UC commitment flyer, box 11, folder 4, SEIU District 925 Collection.

⁵⁵² *Update*, 1988, box 11, folder 4, SEIU District 925 Collection.

⁵⁵³“It’s About Time,” authorization card flyer, 1991, box 1, folder 66, Miscellaneous Subject Files, Special Collections and Archives, Kent State University, Kent, OH.

need not be undervalued. With the new contract, Boggs likely was not disappointed. The contract included a “dignity and respect clause.” As Debbie Schneider noted, the clause was the first for the union. It prohibited verbal abuse and humiliation, a contract provision that received high billing in future campaigns. The District 925 contract improved protections from layoffs and gave clerical workers a voice to protest budget cuts, making office workers a formidable presence at UC. District 925 had challenged universities to become an organization that valued the input of all its members, not just a band of individuals, and it won this challenge at UC.⁵⁵⁴

While UC started to organize around District 925 in 1984, Kent State University appeared as a target in 1983. Located in northeastern Ohio, Kent State had one of the largest student enrollments in the state. Throughout the 1980s, Ohio had been cutting state support of public universities with expected consequences for clerical workers’ pay and benefits. One clerical made her motivation for supporting unionism clear, stating that the current budget constraints on the state of Ohio resulted in a political struggle for funding in higher education. The hardest-hit employees were those not represented. At Kent State, enrollments and student fees rose. So did faculty salaries, but staff salaries stagnated. The same Ohio college and university office staff survey that identified grievances at UC also revealed Kent State clerical employees shared similar grievances: the absence of salary reviews, lack of accurate job descriptions, and unfair pay. A clerical specialist responded that she was “underpaid and underprivileged.” She added that she was required to perform additional duties that had been classified as miscellaneous but which fell under every job description.⁵⁵⁵

⁵⁵⁴“UC Office Workers Approve Contract,” November 18, 1989, box 1, folder 2, University of Cincinnati Chapter—925 Union Collection, Archives and Rare Books Library, University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, OH.

⁵⁵⁵ SEIU District 925, “Ohio College and University Office Staff Survey Results,” 1984, box 8, folder 37, SEIU District 925 Collection.

The Communications Workers of America (CWA) had attempted to organize Kent State from 1984 to 1986, but workers were discontent with the union's approach. One worker even responded that the CWA "doesn't feel the need to talk to us." In another targeting study, District 925 confirmed that Kent State clericals viewed the CWA unfavorably. It learned, too, that the union was either seen as favorable or that respondents were not familiar with the union. Kent State was thus considered a good place for organizing by District 925, with District 925 moving in after the January 1986 defeat of CWA.⁵⁵⁶

Like UC, Kent State had its own organization of clerical employees, Labor Association of Clerical Employees (LACE). LACE met with several union representatives, hoping to find one that could successfully organize clerical workers, while still gaining input from the workers. After LACE canceled a meeting with Bonnie Ladin, a clerical organizing director in District 925, Ladin reached out to LACE. After asking them to reconsider meeting, Ladin explained that District 925 was a union of office workers specifically. It would expend money, time, and energy on clerical and technical staff. Noting District 925's focus on organizing colleges, libraries, and insurance companies, Ladin pushed the idea that SEIU and District 925 had a decentralized structure that allowed decision-making to rest in the local. LACE ultimately decided to go with District 925, dropping the Ohio Education Association, the union LACE initially decided on. LACE cited OEA's minimal experience representing clerical workers, amounting to under one year, as the main factor they switched. OEA, while representing Youngstown State clericals and starting to move into other universities, had focused on teachers, making the clerical-focused District 925 seem like a better choice.⁵⁵⁷

⁵⁵⁶ CWA lost by twenty-nine votes. "Election Report," January, 1986, box 10, folder 13, SEIU District 925 Collection.

⁵⁵⁷ LACE meeting minutes, 1986, box 10, folder 13, SEIU District 925 Collection.

In May 1986, the Kent State campaign started with modest goals. It hoped to start a newsletter by September and gain five new members every two weeks. As in other District 925 campaigns, building relationships remained foremost on the agenda. An early meeting told attendees that the assignment for the next meeting was to bring one new potential member with them. Organizers utilized a phone tree to reach potential members and instituted a picnic committee to plan one where they could tell attendees about the union. It focused on what District 925 could do for them and informed them of recent contract gains in Ohio, such as at the Cuyahoga County Library. A one-page newsletter that summer pointed out petty office procedures at Kent State, such as clerical workers having to choose between a fifteen-minute coffee/bathroom break in the morning or afternoon or to drink at their desk and go to the bathroom when needed. Each member, given three copies of the newsletter, was requested to give the other two to potential contacts.⁵⁵⁸

The Kent State administration fought any attempts at unionizing. During the CWA organizing campaign, a commentator said, “The KSU administration confronts the organization of its clerical staff with all the dignity that Archie Bunker brings to father-daughter relationships.” The CWA contended that Kent State administrators were engaged in unfair labor practices, such as interrogating employees, telling employees not to vote, and making anti-union speeches within twenty-four hours of the vote. Continuing to undermine clerical worker receptiveness to the union campaign, the anti-union messaging remained particularly high in 1986 at Kent State. Maintenance workers in 1986 held a representation vote deciding to stay with AFSCME, switch to the

⁵⁵⁸Correspondence from Martha Gruelle to Bonnie Ladin, July 1986, box 10, folder 17, SEIU District 925 Collection.

Teamsters, or have no union representation. AFSCME, at this point, had not been approaching clericals, despite their presence on campus and victory in the representation vote.⁵⁵⁹

When District 925 began organizing, the administration instituted a 7 percent pay increase for all unrepresented workers and 5 percent across the board, with the likely goal of undermining union appeal and effectiveness. The administrators also amended the policy on solicitation of employees, restricting contact with employees and the distribution of literature within university buildings to designated areas. The administration disallowed the use of campus mail except for university-sponsored works, charitable information, and educational information, thus ensuring that the administration's views of the union reached workers and District 925's did not. The solicitation policy troubled District 925 members, many of whom felt paranoid about meeting on campus. They feared doing any recruitment or even discussions around time clocks, believing that distribution of material could only occur in parking lots.⁵⁶⁰

At Kent State, 53 percent of clerical workers believed their salary was good, comparing favorably with other universities in Ohio. The chief issue that made organizing Kent State clericals difficult, however, was the fact that a job at the university, for all of its drawbacks, was one of the best options available for working women who lived in the vicinity of Kent State. Nonetheless, cuts to health care and the lack of ability to climb the career ladder made organizing possible. Workers expressed frustration with classifications, as workers were doing work outside their job description but were unable to get reclassified to represent their duties accurately.⁵⁶¹ Many clericals shared a reluctance to speak up about on-the-job concerns, as the job was not terrible, but certain conditions needed improvement. After noting her frustration with her boss, and the lack of

⁵⁵⁹Organizing flyer, 1984, box 10, folder 11, SEIU District 925 Collection.

⁵⁶⁰*Amended Policy on Solicitation of Employees*, 1986, box 10, folder 17, SEIU District 925 Collection; District 925 Organizing Committee meeting minutes, July 23, 1986, box 10, folder 17, SEIU District 925 Collection.

⁵⁶¹*Daily Kent State* clippings, 1986, box 10, folder 13, SEIU District 925 Collection.

adequate breaks and sufficient training for automation, one worker stated in a survey response, “I am rather shy about what I have filled in because it sounds like ‘sour grapes.’ I have struggled with this for three years. I should not complain, for I have a beautiful office and real state of the art equipment, but somehow it just doesn’t compensate-if you know what I mean.”⁵⁶² Other barriers to District 925 organizing included Kent State’s eight-campus system. Regional campus staff lacked the same mobilizing issues as main campus staff. Parking was free at regional campuses, but it was a major cost on the main campus. Further, each regional campus had minimal staff that did not allow them power, even if organized.⁵⁶³

In 1986, District 925, assessing the situation at Kent State, decided not to pursue the campaign, even though they had some enthusiastic supporters. With AFSCME considering organizing clericals and the high barriers to unionization at Kent State, SEIU withdrew. It had placed a large emphasis on organizing workplaces but avoided what may have been a difficult battle with the administration and a jurisdictional battle with AFSCME. When District 925 returned in 1991, working conditions had deteriorated. Clericals lost all step increases, and the university implemented a new classification system. Years later, District 925 leaders complained about the difficulty they had getting resources for campaigns. The halted Kent State campaign may have been a casualty of struggles between the SEIU international and District 925, which wanted to organize university clericals but did not have the financial support to be successful at Kent State.⁵⁶⁴

⁵⁶² Correspondence from Alice to Helene, 1986, box 10, folder 17, SEIU District 925 Collection.

⁵⁶³ *Daily Kent State* clippings, 1986, box 10, folder 13, SEIU District 925 Collection.

⁵⁶⁴ “Campaign summary,” 1991, box 10, folder 17, SEIU District 925 Collection.

Conclusion

As employers fought back against clerical organizing, with particular vigor in insurance and banking, the results of clerical union campaigns seemed disappointing overall. As Karen Nussbaum lamented, “We got smashed over and over again. These businesses had not traditionally been unionized, and they were darned if they were going to the first ones in the new wave. We never had an easy election.”⁵⁶⁵ Public sector and university organizing, however, were a clear success with a 70 percent win rate in the 1970s and 1980s. New laws allowing public sector unionism helped pull many workers into the labor movement which had once been closed to them. District 925 was especially successful, as its win percentage was equal to or better than any other union in the 1970s and 1980s. In the 1980s and 1990s, District 925 built a ten-thousand-person membership through its progressive one-on-one organizing tactics while spurring tremendous growth in office worker membership in other SEIU locals. As Dorothy Cobble notes, “Labor feminists had increased their numbers and leadership in a class movement that was rapidly declining in power and prestige.”⁵⁶⁶

SEIU helped further their success by building relationships with organizations outside the labor movement, such as supporting the work of 9to5. According to women like Ellen Cassedy, however, the union did not fully embrace the people and goals of these organizations. Cassedy noted, “I think it would have been better if the labor movement, SEIU, had said, “We’re going to really, really extend ourselves to pull in the talents and skills of Janet Selcer and Helen Williams, people who, today, are using those same skills someplace else.”⁵⁶⁷ Yet, it attracted organizing talent that the labor movement would likely have not found another way.

⁵⁶⁵ Cobble, *The Other Women’s Movement*, 221; Cobble and Kessler-Harris, “Karen Nussbaum,” 13556.

⁵⁶⁶ Cobble, *The Other Women’s Movement*, 221.

⁵⁶⁷ Ellen Cassedy, interview by Ann Froines, November 6, 2005, SEIU District 925 Legacy Project: Oral History, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

While 9to5, the association, and District 925 had the ability to organize citywide campaigns to publicize issues, the SEIU did not support that. The union's goal was to get workers and workplaces organized. District 925 could do other things, but SEIU would not financially support them in these goals. Believing SEIU "kept stringing [District 925] along," promising resources that they did not deliver, Nussbaum, Schneider, and Cassedy contended that the standards for organizing success were always higher for District 925 than other SEIU locals. Looking back, Andy Stern, SEIU president from 1996 to 2010, agreed that SEIU did not handle District 925 in the best way, stating, "I think in the long run, we lost what they had to contribute by having them do what we did with everyone else." The international pushed District 925 into an institutional role and foregrounded organizing to the exclusion of almost everything else.

Women who chose to venture into the labor movement had and have many battles to fight in attempting to preserve their autonomy and in getting funding for campaigns they desire(d).⁵⁶⁸ Nonetheless, District 925 helped spur office-worker membership in other SEIU locals, raising the number to 179,000 office workers represented by SEIU in 1990 and members at over one hundred and twenty colleges and universities across the United States and Canada. Overall, from the beginning of their partnership to mid-1990, SEIU grew from six hundred thousand members to more than one million members in three hundred locals. District 925, representing thousands of librarians, college and university staff, and other office employees, existed until 2001 when it was restructured and merged with other SEIU locals.⁵⁶⁹

⁵⁶⁸ Ellen Cassedy, Debbie Schneider, and Karen Nussbaum, interviewed by Ann Froines, November 1, 2005, SEIU District 925 Legacy Project: Oral History, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI; Andy Stern, interviewed by Ann Froines, November 9, 2005, SEIU District 925 Legacy Project: Oral History, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

⁵⁶⁹ Karen Nussbaum, *Isn't Anybody Here?: How the 925 Movement Is Winning Recognition, Rights and Respect for College and University Office Workers!*, Box 1, Folder 66, Miscellaneous Subject Files (Special Collections and Archives, Kent State University, Kent, OH).

District 925's campaigns at UC and Kent State show the movement of women clericals toward incorporation in the labor movement. The campaigns addressed the needs of clerical women through labor feminism, with the use of tactics from the women's movement, such as consciousness-raising, and traditional union tactics, such as cold calls and campaign literature. Women moved steadily into the labor movement, increasing from 22 percent of union members in 1966 to 33 percent in 1986. There has undoubtedly been a change in men's attitudes toward organizing women and dealing with women leaders, but sexism still exists, evident in that women do not hold leadership positions in proportion to their membership numbers. Gender continues to be a root cause of status inequality. Dominant gender stereotypes remain challenging to break, persisting even in the face of disconfirming experiences; people spontaneously fill in unspecified data of men's behavior to make experiences consistent with gender expectations. Women see themselves as more assertive, but self-perceptions still largely conform to the stereotypes, lagging behind the culture, social, and economic changes.⁵⁷⁰

District 925, while battling against stereotypes in the workplace and with the labor movement, did help serve the needs of women workers. 9to5 and District 925 were able to combine some of the best aspects of the labor movement and the women's movement to make visible a large class of workers who had previously been pushed to the background. Even with some limits, the message Karen Nussbaum has been trying to convey since the 1970s appears to have reached the labor movement: "Women are nearly half the workforce! Concentrated in the growing sectors of the economy! Special consciousness as workers! More likely to believe in collective action!"⁵⁷¹ Women's continued strength in SEIU's clerical unions is evidence enough.

⁵⁷⁰ Cecilia L. Ridgeway, *Framed by Gender: How Gender Inequality Persists in the Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

⁵⁷¹ Karen Nussbaum, "Women in Labor: Always a Bridesmaid," in *Not Your Father's Labor Movement*, ed. Jo-Ann Mort (New York: Verso, 1995), 68.

CHAPTER 6: “ISN’T IT TIME YOU WERE A PRIORITY?”: AFSCME ORGANIZING

“I’ve always had a voice, now I want to use it,” said one clerical worker who traveled to AFSCME’s University of Minnesota office to sign her authorization card in the winter of 1990.⁵⁷² She was not alone. Hundreds came, in near blizzard conditions, to sign cards and listen to testimonials from clerical, technical, and professional employees. What motivated them? The deeply relational approach to organizing taken by their union, the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) was undoubtedly one of the motivators.

By examining AFSCME’s campaigns at the University of Minnesota in this chapter, I show how the union changed its tactics in unionization campaigns in response to its clerical and technical organizing success at Harvard University and the working women’s movement, particularly 9to5 and its sister union, SEIU District 925. At the University of Minnesota, AFSCME, the union which represented more university office workers than any other union nationally, switched from an unsuccessful effort that focused on literature in 1982 to a highly successful one-on-one, relationship-based organizing model in the drive from 1989 to 1991.

In some ways, AFSCME’s approach mirrored that of other unions seeking to organize clericals in higher education. It sought to appeal to University of Minnesota clericals by drawing on their long experience in the public sector and by paying attention to the majority women clerical workers’ gender-specific needs. AFSCME campaigns also targeted the growing differential between state clerical worker salaries and those of university clerical workers, which made AFSCME, the state workers’ union, appealing, as seen at the University of Minnesota and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

⁵⁷² “Hundreds of Cards Signed in University Organizing Drive,” *Minnesota Public Employee*, January/February 1990, box 43, folder 18, AFSCME Publications, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

While relationship-based organizing was not entirely new when it was adopted at Harvard and Minnesota, AFSCME took the tactic further, disposing of nearly all literature to push one-on-one conversations. AFSCME's tactics also included a focus on self-representation, rather than on particular issues. SEIU District 925 also had employed a relationship-based model, but unlike the AFSCME campaigns at Minnesota and Harvard, they utilized literature much more extensively and held flashy campaigns. And they were more directly connected to the working women's movement. UAW relied on its strength in the Midwest, choosing to affiliate with independent locals before embarking on new organizing. After the merger with District 65, one-on-one tactics had a place in campaigns, but newsletters and flyer remained highly important.

After beginning a decline in the 1960s, only a handful of unions could claim growth in subsequent decades. AFSCME gained membership while other unions lost, even in the 1980s and 1990s. Historian Leo Kramer wrote, "There seems to be something in the dynamics of AFSCME, something in the imagination of its leadership, that has caused it to take the lead organizationally and to create a new approach to collective bargaining within the public state."⁵⁷³ Under the presidencies of Jerry Wurf and Gerald McEntee, AFSCME's vision was to become a union of all public service workers. Public sector unions became the most important source of growth in the labor movement in the postwar era. Thousands of women entered the ranks of union membership as a result of the extensive efforts to unionize clerical workers and other public workers. AFSCME grew explosively in the 1970s, with women making up a growing proportion of their membership. By 1986, AFSCME had become the nation's third-largest union with more than one million members. Clerical workers, once seen as unorganizable, were key to this growth. Clerical

⁵⁷³ Leo Kramer, *Labor's Paradox: The American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees, AFL-CIO* (New York: Wiley, 1962), 23.

organizing experienced a 70 percent win rate in university and public sector campaigns in the 1970s and 1980s.⁵⁷⁴

Formed in 1932 by a small group of white-collar Wisconsin state employees, AFSCME began during the Great Depression. Created to promote, defend, and enhance the civil service system, the organization sought to expand the system by lobbying to pass and strengthen civil service language. AFSCME experienced slow growth in its first two decades, largely avoiding the traditional union tactics. With the enactment of collective bargaining laws for public employees in several states in the 1960s, AFSCME's membership reached more than 250,000. After the election of Jerry Wurf to the union's presidency in 1964, AFSCME embraced a more expansive, aggressive brand of unionism. A socially-conscious union, AFSCME engaged in the Civil Rights Movement, most notably in the Memphis Sanitation Strike in 1968.⁵⁷⁵

In its early years, AFSCME focused on organizing blue-collar workers, although not exclusively.⁵⁷⁶ As women became increasingly crucial to the union, AFSCME came to the forefront of fighting for women's rights in the 1970s and 1980s. It became known as a union with a superior track record responding to the needs of clerical workers and women. In 1983, AFSCME directed its locals to set up separate women's committees. It pushed its affiliates to "work aggressively for truly meaningful affirmative action programs" and for the inclusion of comparable worth in collective bargaining contracts.⁵⁷⁷

⁵⁷⁴ Cobble, *The Other Women's Movement*, 221; Hoerr, "We Can't Eat Prestige," 186; Shaughnessy, "Negotiating the Collective Self: Clerical Work Culture and Labor Militancy at the University of Minnesota, 1989-1994," (MA essay, Sarah Lawrence College, 1995), 1; Deborah Bell, "Unionized Women in State and Local Government," in *Women, Work and Protest: A Century of U.S. Women's Labor History*, ed. Ruth Milkman (Boston: Routledge, 1985), 280.

⁵⁷⁵ Joseph Hower, "Jerry Wurf, the Rise of AFSCME, and the Fate of Labor Liberalism, 1947-1981" (Ph.D. diss., Georgetown University, 2013).

⁵⁷⁶ Professionals in government service led the union.

⁵⁷⁷ Nancy MacLean, "The Hidden History of Affirmative Action: Working Women's Organizations in Workplace Struggles in the 1970s and the Gender of Class," *Feminist Studies* 25 (1999): 58; "AFSCME Women - Equal

AFSCME emphasized that women were equal partners in the union and made up over half of its membership. Well-represented in both local and national level leadership positions, women held 46 percent of officer positions in 1991.⁵⁷⁸ Numerous union-produced materials noted that 33 percent of local presidents were women in 1982, an increase from 25 percent several years before. With full-time women workers earning, on average, less than two-thirds of what men made, pay equity became a consistent campaign issue for AFSCME in the 1980s and early 1990s.⁵⁷⁹ Childcare and job flexibility, issues of high importance to many women, were the subject of numerous organizing efforts and AFSCME materials. Especially under President Gerald McEntee (1981–2012), AFSCME noted and understood the need for effective militancy to improve working women’s lives.⁵⁸⁰

In the early 1980s, AFSCME used polling and opinion research to assess support and identify issues of concern. Telephone banks, direct mail, and media advertising were seen as vital; they worked best at large state universities and multi-campus systems. Both AFSCME’s clerical victories at the University of California System in 1983 and the Iowa University System in 1984 utilized a “media-oriented, high-tech campaign.” Later in the decade, Harvard and Minnesota clerical organizers, however, changed the tactics of AFSCME in higher education to foreground one-on-one, relationship-based organizing. The campaign at the University of Illinois at Urbana-

Partners,” box 1, folder 27, Women on the Job Collection, Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University, New York, NY.

⁵⁷⁸ *Minnesota Public Employee*, April 1991, box 43, folder 19, AFSCME Publications, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

⁵⁷⁹ In 1981, AFSCME Local 101 (San Jose) conducted the first strike over the issue of pay equity in the history of the United States. AFSCME, “AFSCME: 75 Years of History,” <https://www.afscme.org/union/history/afscme-75-years-of-history>.

⁵⁸⁰ Bell, “Unionized Women in State and Local Government,” 280–95; “The Fight for Women’s Rights,” *Public Employee*, June 1982, box 30, folder 1, AFSCME Publications, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI; AFSCME, “Women Leaders of AFSCME: A Letter to Harvard Employees,” Box 6, Folder Clericals-Harvard, American Federation of Teachers, Local 3882 (Clerical Union) Records, WAG.071, Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University, New York, NY.

Champaign, assisted by Harvard organizers, also utilized one-on-one organizing but showed some remnants of the earlier tactics with its use of literature and an issue-oriented effort.⁵⁸¹

University of Minnesota

Fundamental and far-reaching changes occurred in the state of Minnesota in the 1970s. Actions that negatively impacted labor had a long history in Minnesota. In 1938, Minnesota passed a state-level equivalent of the Taft-Hartley Act and banned public employee strikes following a strike of school employees in the 1950s. In the 1960s and 1970s, labor saw signs of progress in Minnesota, a state with a legacy of influential unions and an economy divided between financial services and the unionized industries of transportation, mining, and manufacturing since the 1930s. In 1972, a strong liberal government pursued increased spending on education and addressed unionization rights for public employees. The Public Employment Labor Relations Act (PELRA) granted state workers the right to join a union. State workers became members of AFSCME after decades of the governor and legislature controlling their benefits. Along with PELRA, the Minnesota Legislature passed a state minimum wage law and an occupational health and safety act. As the 1970s wore on, double-digit inflation and a slowing economy convinced many that the government was taking and spending too much. Minnesotans demanded tax relief and helped Republicans defeat Democrats in every major statewide election in 1978. Democrats, however, retained control of the state legislature.⁵⁸²

⁵⁸¹ Richard Hurd and Gregory Woodhead, “The Unionization of Clerical Workers at Large U.S. Universities and Colleges,” *Newsletter: National Center for the Study of Collective Bargaining in Higher Education and the Professions* 15, no. 3 (1987): 1–8.

⁵⁸² Dave Kenney and Thomas Saylor, *Minnesota in the 70s* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Press, 2013); Greta Kaul, “Union Membership in Minnesota Has Been Declining for Decades. How are Unions Changing to Stay Relevant?,” *Minnesota Post*, March 8, 2017, <https://www.minnpost.com/politics-policy/2017/03/union-membership-minnesota-has-been-declining-decades-how-are-unions-changin>.

AFSCME organized several large state institutions in the 1970s and 1980s. Founded in 1851 as the state's land-grant institution, the University of Minnesota was considered one of the most comprehensive public universities in the country. With 67,000 students and 33,000 workers, the University of Minnesota appeared to be a good place to gain union membership.⁵⁸³

AFSCME has a long history in universities and at the University of Minnesota. AFSCME Local 1164 had expressed interest in organizing sectors of the university as early as 1971. Council 6, which Local 1164 belonged to, won four elections for various occupations in the state university system by February 1972. The local tried to organize clerical workers at the university in 1975.⁵⁸⁴ At the time, both men and women clericals recounted disrespect on the job and rarely being consulted on decisions affecting their work lives. Along with desiring cost-of-living raises, clerical workers wanted a voice in the rules that govern the conditions of their work. As clericals noted in the *Minnesota Daily*, "We can continue with the Civil Service Rules that are written by and for our Employers or have a union and a written agreement (called a contract) that is written by and for CLERICAL WORKERS!!"⁵⁸⁵

Concerns about which union would be appropriate for clerical workers at the University of Minnesota surfaced in the 1975 campaign. The Teamsters and AFSCME vied for clerical worker loyalties. AFSCME organizing material pointed out that the Teamsters generally had paid officials appointed from the top, while AFSCME had its own elected officials, made up of workers at Minnesota. AFSCME also touted its AFL-CIO affiliation, arguing it meant "solidarity with

⁵⁸³ Shaughnessy, "Negotiating the Collective Self," 2.

⁵⁸⁴ *Minnesota Public Employee*, September 1971, box 43, folder 5, AFSCME Publications, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI; *Minnesota Public Employee*, February 1972, box 43, folder 6, AFSCME Publications, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

⁵⁸⁵ John Egn, "University Clericals Need Unionization," *Minnesota Daily*, May 13, 1975, Unions 1975-76, folder 2, Information Files, University Archives, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN; Authorization card flyer, AFSCME flyer, Unions 1975-76, folder 2, Information Files, University Archives, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN.

teachers, carpenters, social service workers, and many jobs from clerical and technical areas.”⁵⁸⁶ The 1975 campaign was short-lived, but a renewed effort followed in 1982.

In the years between efforts to unionize the clerical workers at the University of Minnesota, AFSCME furthered its commitment to women workers. In 1979, AFSCME held a women’s conference in Minneapolis, which included assertiveness training, lectures on women’s role in the union, and workshops on comparable worth.⁵⁸⁷ In 1981, the national union created the Women’s Advisory Committee to organize new members and develop women leaders in AFSCME locals across the country. Linda Ramirez of Council 99 (San Antonio) stated at AFSCME’s third annual women’s conference in May 1981, “Women public employees now have a place to go—it’s within AFSCME. Let’s use the resources AFSCME has to make us better people.”⁵⁸⁸ In 1977, nearly a quarter of a million working women in Minnesota held clerical positions.⁵⁸⁹ AFSCME reported its efforts to bolster clerical organizing in Minnesota by 1981.⁵⁹⁰

A connection existed between the working women’s movement and the University of Minnesota besides communication and activism on similar issues. In November 1981, Minnesota Working Women co-sponsored a conference at the University of Minnesota to explore office workers concerns. It included workshops on unionization, new technologies and related health effects, and survival skills in the office.⁵⁹¹ Along with the Coalition of Labor Union Women and

⁵⁸⁶ “Questions? and Answers!,” AFSCME flyer, Unions 1975–76, folder 2, Information Files, University Archives, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN.

⁵⁸⁷ *Minnesota Public Employee*, December 1980, box 43, folder 8, AFSCME Publications, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

⁵⁸⁸ *Minnesota Public Employee*, May 1981, box 43, folder 9, AFSCME Publications, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs.

⁵⁸⁹ *Minnesota Public Employee*, December 1980, box 43, folder 8, AFSCME Publications, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs.

⁵⁹⁰ *Minnesota Public Employee*, April 1981, box 43, folder 9, AFSCME Publications, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs; Kathleen Turk, *Equality on Trial: Gender and Rights in the Modern American Workplace* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019).

⁵⁹¹ *Minnesota Public Employee*, August/September 1981, box 43, folder 9. AFSCME Publications, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs.

the Labor Education Service at the University of Minnesota, Minnesota Working Women also helped plan a celebration of Minnesota women's contribution to the American Labor Movement. University of Minnesota clerical employees likely attended these events, learning more about the working women's movement and raising expectations about what their working conditions could be like.⁵⁹²

The 1977–1979 Willmar Bank strike showed women workers across the country they could stand up and fight discrimination in their workplaces. Eight women struck Willmar's Citizens National Bank for nearly two years due to sex discrimination. Willmar, Minnesota, a small town of 13,000 in South Central Minnesota, saw the women form the first bank union in the state. The union combated unequal pay for women, overtime without pay, and lack of job promotion opportunities. It took Doris Boshart, a teller and bookkeeper, ten years to go from earning \$400 to \$700 a month. Young men, whom Boshart trained, started at \$700 a month and would often be promoted over the long-term women employees. Upset with the unfair treatment, the women confronted bank president Leo Pirsch in April 1977. Pirsch responded, "We're not all equal, you know."⁵⁹³

The women formed a union and filed a gender discrimination complaint, of which the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission found the bank guilty. With negotiations going nowhere, the women went on strike, the first against a bank in the United States. Both NOW and the UAW sent supporters. The strike garnered expansive media coverage, including coverage in Minneapolis/St. Paul and nationally.⁵⁹⁴ Despite massive support, the women were defeated after a nearly two-year effort. The National Labor Relations Board ruled that the bank committed unfair

⁵⁹² *Minnesota Public Employee*, August/September 1981, box 43, folder 9. AFSCME Publications, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs.

⁵⁹³ John Fitzgerald, "In 1977, Boss Tells Willmar 8 'We're Not All Equal, You Know'; Strike Ensues," *Minnesota Post*, June 28, 2018, <https://www.minnpost.com/minnesota-history/2013/06/1977-boss-tells-willmar-8-we-re-not-all-equal-you-know-strike-ensues/>.

⁵⁹⁴ Lee Grant, *The Willmar 8* (1981; GTY), DVD; Fitzgerald, "In 1977, Boss Tells Willmar 8;" Elizabeth Faue, *Rethinking the American Labor Movement* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 162.

labor practices but that the strike was not a result of the unfair practices, and, thus, the women were not owed back pay.

The women of the Willmar strike were not radical, did not consider themselves feminists, and were of all ages and relationship statuses. The documentary on the strike, *The Willmar 8*, showed how regular people found the courage to stand up and take control of their lives. “The women in the film are just like ordinary people—like me,” recounted one clerical worker who worked for a large industrial company. 9to5 and AFSCME, along with other groups, used film screenings to prompt discussions on sex discrimination, sex role conditioning, and occupational segregation. A viewing guide presented factors inhibiting activism, ways to address them, and paths to achieve equity, such as union organizing and community action.⁵⁹⁵

Occurring just two hours from the Twin Cities, University of Minnesota workers watched the strike closely. Glennis Ter Wisscha, one of the striking bank employees, gave talks at the university during the strike to share their story. The university workers shared the concerns of lack of power in the workplace and sex discrimination in hiring, promotion, and wages. Marked differences between the workers of the small private bank and those of the large public university did exist. University workers could easily link with the power of unionized public workers in the state, could more easily get the ear of the public due to their unit size, and the administration had to be more transparent about its activities as it received public funds. While the influence of the Willmar strike did not immediately result in a union victory, it undoubtedly influenced what some of the workers at Minnesota felt was possible.⁵⁹⁶

⁵⁹⁵ Janet Ridgeway and Larry Adelman, *Women’s Worth: Valuing Our Own Worth—Realizing Our Own Value: A Resource Manual for the Award Winning Film the Willmar 8*, California Newsreel (1982): 5 and 51 <http://newsreel.org/guides/the-willmar-8.pdf>.

⁵⁹⁶ Loretta Simonet, “Glennis Ter Wisscha and the Willmar 8,” September 17, 2015, http://www.curtisandloretta.com/blog/glennis_ter_wisscha_and_the_willmar_8/.

Three years after the bold unionization effort and strike in Willmar, University of Minnesota clericals began agitating for unionization. The 1982 campaign at the University of Minnesota started at the urging of the Concerned University Employees (CUE), an employee organization of fifty active members and a network of workers from across the university, including supervisors and clerical, professional, and technical employees. Composed of predominantly women clericals, Concerned University Employees voiced their desire to have a say in decision-making and improved pay. CUE developed an internal newsletter distribution system and used petitioning as a vehicle to confront the university. The Civil Service Committee, the body currently representing workers, consisted of seven members appointed by the university president. CUE members believed the administration controlled the Civil Service Committee. CUE wanted to change that. Further, the staff at Minnesota were very aware that the brunt of the growing budget cuts fell on them.⁵⁹⁷

The co-chair of CUE, Paula Moyer, first broached the idea of unionizing to fellow CUE members. CUE interviewed four unions, the Teamsters and AFSCME, as they represented workers on campus; SEIU District 925, due to its connection to the working women's movement and focus on clerical organizing; and Minnesota School Employees Association, due to personal connections with CUE members. Glennis Ter Wisscha headed the Minnesota School Employees Association. CUE met with them principally because of Ter Wisscha's reputation and work during the Willmar strike. In May 1982, CUE chose AFSCME. They represented 18,000 state workers, including 10,000 clericals, and had a lot of power in Minnesota, due to their lobbying strength and research

⁵⁹⁷ Alan Aker, "U Clerical and Office Workers Consider Joining Union," *Minnesota Daily*, February 3, 1983, Unions 1979–1989, folder 4, Information Files. University Archives, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN; Marc Perrusquia, "New Group Aims University Civil Service Worker Toward Unionization," *Minnesota Daily* August 19, 1981, Unions 1979–1989, folder 4, Information Files, University Archives, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN; Gladys McKenzie, interview by Amanda Walter, August 14, 2016.

capabilities. Exclusive to the public sector and with substantial clerical membership, AFSCME geared itself toward rank-and-file participation and internal democracy.⁵⁹⁸ In addition, AFSCME had an excellent record responding to the needs of clerical workers and supporting women's rights, including leading the state fight for comparable worth. Its long-range hope was to start with clerical workers and, ultimately, have all un-represented units (clerical, technical, and professional) at the University of Minnesota unite under AFSCME.⁵⁹⁹

Despite committed organizers and a strong employee association, the first campaign did not immediately succeed. Gladys McKenzie, a clerical worker and employee organizer in 1982, considered the campaign quite poor. A typical union campaign, the effort focused on small giveaways and on mailings and flyers, written material that said who the union was. The mailings did not investigate what the precise grievances clerical workers at the University of Minnesota had. When the union came in, they received lists of home addresses and mailed all their literature. People received union mailings, along with their junk mail, in the isolation of their homes.⁶⁰⁰ Many clericals already felt hesitation about unionization and lacked extensive knowledge on the subject. No one was readily available to answer questions on the mailings, which could easily be dismissed and discarded without a second thought. The newsletter distribution network built by CUE disappeared. Gladys McKenzie recalled,

What I learned in that first campaign was that every single time that we presented the union as a third-party, that we told people this is what the union is, that every time we did things in a way that didn't have a person attached to it, in an anonymous way, we lost organization. And every time we brought people together, because we

⁵⁹⁸ "U of M Civil Service Pay Raises," *Minnesota Public Employee*, June/July 1982. Box 43, Folder 10. AFSCME Publications, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

⁵⁹⁹ Marc Perrusquia, "New Group Aims University Civil Service Worker Toward Unionization," *Minnesota Daily*, August 19, 1981, Unions 1979–1989, folder 4, Information Files. University Archives, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN; "University Group Recommends AFSCME for Future Organizing Possibilities," *Minnesota Public Employee*, March 1982, box 43, folder 10, AFSCME Publications, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

⁶⁰⁰ Gladys McKenzie, interview by Clarke A. Chambers, October 11, 1995, University of Minnesota, <http://purl.umn.edu/49954>.

did have some small meetings in the workplace, we gained organization in that first campaign.⁶⁰¹

AFSCME got close to the number of signed authorization cards needed to call an election. Ultimately, however, seeing the campaign as unwinnable, the union abandoned the effort in March 1983.⁶⁰² It was impossible to build a strong organization during the short drive. Despite the failed effort, Eliot Seide, AFSCME area director, expressed commitment to keeping an AFSCME presence on campus.⁶⁰³ AFSCME had made a clear commitment to women and clericals, but their tactics did not translate effectively to the university.

One of the obstacles of the 1982 campaign was that clericals received many of the same benefits as unionized state employees. This changed as the 1980s continued, with pay differentials growing every year. In 1983, 23 percent of Minnesota's workforce were union members. Clerical employees at the university, one-fourth of the university's civil service staff, continued to make up the largest unorganized group of public employees in the state.⁶⁰⁴ The state civil service employees unionized with AFSCME in the early 1980s. AFSCME represented 85 percent of the state's women government employees.⁶⁰⁵

Established between the campaigns at the university, Minnesota's pay equity plan was an enormous victory for comparable worth advocates. In 1976, the Twin Cities chapter of the National Organization for Women first documented the wage gap between men and women state employees

⁶⁰¹ McKenzie, interview.

⁶⁰² Richard Ericson, "Clerical Union Organizers Campaigning for Elections Despite Insufficient Support," *Minnesota Daily*, April 5, 1983, Unions 1979–1989, folder 4, Information Files, University Archives, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN.

⁶⁰³ *Minnesota Public Employee*, January 1984, box 43, folder 12, AFSCME Publications, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

⁶⁰⁴ "U of M Organizing Drive Put on Hold," *Minnesota Public Employee*, March 1983, box 43, folder 11, AFSCME Publications, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs; Greta Kaul, "Union Membership in Minnesota"; Susan Klemond, "U Workers' Group Will Push for Unionization," *Minnesota Daily*, October 31, 1985, Unions 1979–1989, folder 4, Information Files, University Archives, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN.

⁶⁰⁵ "Comparable Worth," 559–85.

and women's concentration in a small number of positions. The Minnesota legislature passed legislation in March 1982 to determine which positions were underpaid. The law made wage adjustments, with \$21.8 million appropriated for salary equalization. Approximately 6,000 employees, in 250 women-dominated job classifications, were eligible for the salary equalization funds. In 1984, Minnesota required "all cities, counties, school districts, and other government entities to participate in the comparable worth assessment and adjustment." They earmarked funds to make necessary salary adjustments.⁶⁰⁶

AFSCME played a key role in moving comparable worth as a union demand and was a national leader in the fight over the issue. AFSCME made explicit arguments for comparable worth by the early 1970s, including negotiating an agreement with the state of Minnesota to conduct a job evaluation survey to determine inequities in 1974.⁶⁰⁷ In *American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees v. State of Washington* in 1983, a United States district court judge ruled in favor of AFSCME. It was the first successful comparable worth case decided in federal court, although it would ultimately be reversed in 1985. The plaintiffs – men and women state employees who had worked or were working in women-dominated positions – challenged "Washington's failure to compensate women according to the state's own determination of their worth." A 1974 study showed that women state employees earned 20 percent less than their worth. AFSCME also filed EEOC suits against Hawaii, Wisconsin, Chicago, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, and Nassau

⁶⁰⁶Nina Rothchild, "Toward Comparable Worth: The Minnesota Experience," *Yale Law and Policy Review* 2, no.2 (1983): 346–58; "Comparable Worth—Its Status in the Nation and Minnesota," *William Mitchell Law Review* 10, no. 3 (1984): 559–85; Bryce Covert, "The Radical Movement to Close the Gender Wage Gap That You've Never Heard Of," *Think Progress*, May 1, 2014, <https://thinkprogress.org/the-radical-movement-to-close-the-gender-wage-gap-that-youve-never-heard-of-118bf2928243>.

⁶⁰⁷ Sara Evans and Barbara Nelson, *Wage Justice: Comparable Worth and the Paradox of Technocratic Reform* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 35.

County, New York. And, at the University of Minnesota, with AFSCME assistance, employees fought for pay equity at the university during the 1982 unionization campaign and after it ended.⁶⁰⁸

In 1989, clericals experienced a resurgence in interest in unionization due to university actions. Dennis Hill, a longtime CUE member, noted that clericals reaped the benefits state workers won through bargaining. Increasingly, however, the university acted independently of the state and chose not to take part in Minnesota's pay equity plan.⁶⁰⁹ The divergence between the state and the university showed the benefits of union contracts and pushed more university workers to see unionization as necessary.

The Minnesota legislature had decided that all state-employed clericals and civil service university employees must receive comparable wages and benefits. Salaries at the state and university were nearly equal in the early 1980s; but by 1990, state workers made approximately 24 percent more than university workers in equivalent positions, despite state law requirements.⁶¹⁰ The university skirted the pay requirements by raising the maximum of pay ranges. The midpoint of clerical salary pay ranges at the University of Minnesota remained comparable to the state salary midpoint. However, the average salary at the university fell further and further behind the state.⁶¹¹

In response to statewide and national recessions, the university also enacted wage freezes and health benefit cuts. The state did not. State workers' raises were averaging 6 percent, 2 percent more than university workers. In addition, while the state continued to pay step increases, the university replaced them with merit pay for unorganized workers. As Gladys McKenzie recalled,

⁶⁰⁸ Gladys McKenzie, interview by Amanda Walter, August 14, 2016.

⁶⁰⁹ "Comparable Worth," 559–85.

⁶¹⁰ Shaughnessy, "Negotiating the Collective Self," 14; Pat Mack, "Auditor: U Still Guilty of Lavish Spending," *Minnesota Daily*, October 6, 1989, University Archives, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN.

⁶¹¹ Doug Pond, "U Clerical Workers Once Again Divide Over Union Issue," *Minnesota Daily*, August 20, 1990, Unions 1990–1999, folder 5, Information Files, University Archives, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN; Bruce A. Center, "University Bypasses Law by Bypassing Raises," *Minnesota Daily*, August 21, 1990, University Archives, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN.

University of Minnesota workers saw themselves as public state employees, but they were “having a very different work experience than unionized workers at the state.” Teamster and AFSCME members on campus continued to receive step increases, along with bigger across the board raises than the unorganized workers. The final straw that pushed workers to turn toward unionization was when the state negotiated a 5 percent raise for public workers. University employees only received 4 percent. Evelyn Miks, AFSCME area director, noted she started to receive more calls about unionization after the raise.⁶¹² In the late 1980s, a group of non-union employees went to a Board of Regents meeting to complain about the growing wage disparity. Regent Mary Schertler, elected in 1977 by a Democrat-controlled legislature, told them, “Do yourself a favor and organize.”⁶¹³

In 1989, the University of Minnesota was found guilty of inappropriate use of funds for lobbying, leaves of absences for administrators, and lavish expense accounts. While preaching deep budget cuts, President Nils Hasselmo received a 4.6 percent salary raise. He started an expensive renovation of his home on campus, and he began construction of a new building. In the years after the failed campaign, clericals saw their health benefits reduced and encountered stagnant wages.⁶¹⁴ Clerical workers saw themselves as being punished for the financial mismanagement of the university, as an easy target for cuts without union representation.

About 35 percent of the activists from 1982 remained at the University of Minnesota when the 1989 campaign commenced.⁶¹⁵ Concerned University Employees continued to exist in the

⁶¹² *Minnesota Public Employee*, September 1989, box 43, folder 17, AFSCME Publications, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

⁶¹³ Monte Hanson, “Civil Service Employees Poised to Unionize,” date and paper not noted, Unions 1979–1989, folder 4, Information Files, University Archives, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN.

⁶¹⁴ Shaughnessy, “Negotiating the Collective Self,” 14.

⁶¹⁵ “Area Office Kicks Off U of M Campaign,” *Minnesota Public Employee*, September 1989, box 43, folder 17, AFSCME Publications, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

interim period. Becoming a less visible organization, CUE continued to advocate for unionization, but their focus turned to educating employees about various safety issues. Due to the resurgent interest, however, Concerned University Employees started working on another unionization drive.⁶¹⁶

In the time between campaigns at Minnesota, AFSCME strengthened its position in large state universities. While it agreed to its first contract at the University of Wisconsin in 1972, in 1984, University of Iowa clerical workers voted for AFSCME representation 2,377 to 1,610. The victory of the 6,000-member unit came a year after losing by sixty-seven votes.⁶¹⁷

Before the start of the campaign at the University of Minnesota, Harvard clerical and technical workers succeeded in their long bid for unionization. After fifteen years and three elections, the 3,100 workers at Harvard voted for AFSCME representation on May 17, 1988, forming the Harvard Union of Clerical and Technical Workers (HUCTW). AFSCME won by only forty-four votes. Its success energized the union's efforts at universities.⁶¹⁸ AFSCME president Gerald McEntee was thrilled with the victory. He stated, "The point is that you can't win if you don't try, and try again, then keep on trying some more."⁶¹⁹ Harvard had put up deep resistance to

⁶¹⁶ Susan Klemond, "U Workers' Group Will Push for Unionization," *Minnesota Daily*, October 31, 1985, Unions 1979–1989, folder 4, Information Files, University Archives, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN.

⁶¹⁷ David Czeck, "Other Big Ten Schools Show Results of Unionization," *Minnesota Daily*, September 28, 1989, University Archives, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN; "AFSCME Gains 6,000 at University of Iowa," *AFL-CIO News*, November 10, 1984, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

⁶¹⁸ Harvard workers initially tried to organize with UAW/District 65. The relationship ended in 1985 over conflicts on organizing methods. Harvard continued as an independent effort for 18 months. In January 1987, HUCTW became AFSCME Local 3650 with a \$300,000 organizing grant. They allowed HUCTW to retain its autonomy and preferred organizing methods. John Hoerr, "Solidaritas at Harvard," *The America Prospect*, Summer 1993, <http://www.prospect.org/article/solidaritas-harvard>.

⁶¹⁹ *Public Employee*, October 1989, box 31, folder 2, AFSCME Publications, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

unionization efforts over an extensive period. It was a major union victory for both the unit size and type of worker involved.⁶²⁰

Harvard organizers were encouraged to share their experience and organizing style with other AFSCME organizers to continue the trend of victories on college campuses. At the impetus of the 1989 University of Minnesota campaign, Gladys McKenzie, now the lead organizer, went to Harvard to meet with Kris Rondeau, lead organizer of their campaign. The Harvard Union of Clerical and Technical Workers shared tactics and ideas with University of Minnesota organizers, and AFSCME sent several Harvard organizers to work on the Minnesota campaign, including Kim Ladin and Sue Dynarski. The campaign at Minnesota utilized similar tactics as those that led to success at Harvard: one-on-one organizing, small group meetings, and strong communication networks.⁶²¹

On the surface, Harvard and the University of Minnesota appeared very different, but the conditions for workers were similar. The decentralized university workplace, lack of decision-making power for clerical workers, and the competition between departments and academic disciplines for grant money and budget requests characterized both locations. Similar campaigns tactics would be successful in both places.

One of the concerns about the 1982 University of Minnesota campaign had been that women were not running the drive. Harvard workers had the same concerns during their campaign. The UAW, which worked on the Harvard drive until 1985, sent older men to organize the clerical and technical workers. Used to an industrial setting, organizers in the early efforts focused on leafleting, attacking the boss, and emphasizing what the union could win for workers. UAW

⁶²⁰ Henry Weinstein, "A Textbook Labor Union Campaign," *Los Angeles Times*, May 17, 1988; Gary Witherspoon, "Harvard Workers Vote in Union," *Boston Herald*, May 18, 1988.

⁶²¹ "The University Works Because We Do," *Minnesota Public Employee*, April 1990, box 43, folder 18, AFSCME Publications, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

officials proposed that supporters and organizers hand out samples of pantyhose to those who filled out an authorization card.⁶²² The UAW was perpetuating a stereotype that women could easily be won over by consumer goods. The organizers at Minnesota had handed out flowers in 1982.⁶²³

Organizers like Kris Rondeau thought women could best organize other women, as they could more easily form relationships and better relate to their issues. William Lucy, AFSCME Secretary-Treasurer, agreed, declaring, “You can do something much better than any man in this union: You can reach out to other women and encourage them to join the fight.”⁶²⁴ The 1989 organizing team at Minnesota was predominantly women. Not everyone believed the unionization effort would succeed. Director of Labor Relations for the University of Minnesota, John Erickson, said that clericals would not win, because the university was too big and the workers were women.⁶²⁵ The sexist comment likely pushed the women organizers to work even harder.

AFSCME, like SEIU District 925, sought to facilitate class consciousness, union organization, and worker solidarity.⁶²⁶ When sharing why the union seemed attractive to her, Kathy Kleckner, a university clerical worker, said, “It was women. It was all these women. It was clerical workers...It was stunning to me that clerical workers were organizing and speaking up and making demands...It was so needed.”⁶²⁷ Women forged feelings of solidarity as they worked with other women who shared their common experience of work. Nationally, most paid union staff and leadership continued to be predominantly men. While women started making more in-roads

⁶²² Hoerr, “Solidaritas at Harvard.”

⁶²³ Gladys McKenzie, interview by Amanda Walter, August 14, 2016.

⁶²⁴ “AFSCME Women’s Letter: It’s Time for Political Action by AFSCME Women,” *Public Employee*, September 1982, box 30, folder 1, AFSCME Publications, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI; Crain, “Gender and Union Organizing,” 229–39.

⁶²⁵ Gladys McKenzie, interview by Amanda Walter, August 14, 2016.

⁶²⁶ Seymour Martin Lipset, ed., *Unions in Transition: Entering the Second Century* (San Francisco: ICS Press, 1986), 18–19.

⁶²⁷ Kathy Kleckner, interview by Amanda Walter, August 9, 2017.

into unions in the 1980s, a woman-led campaign was still highly unusual and helped dash some of the stereotypes of unions being only for blue-collar men.

Many clerical workers did not want to associate themselves with confrontational forms of unionism, such as the use of strikes.⁶²⁸ One of the longest strikes of the 1980s, the Hormel strike likely weighed on the minds of many clerical workers at the University of Minnesota.⁶²⁹ Led by Local P-9 of the United Food and Commercial Workers, the ten-month strike saw over 1,000 meatpackers walk off the job in Austin, Minnesota, one hundred miles south of the Twin Cities. The strike, in response to steep wage cuts and dangerous working conditions, garnered national media attention. The local embarked on a highly original and controversial corporate campaign which aimed to create bad public relations for Hormel and a consumer boycott to force the company to the bargaining table. Historian Peter Rachleff noted how the strike tore families and the community apart. At the end of the strike, Hormel hired new workers at lower wages. Strikers achieved only minimal improvements for their months on the picket lines, and many were laid off. The difficult Hormel strike, the continued negative portrayal of unions in the media as corrupt, and a clerical strike at Yale in 1984 forced Minnesota organizers to grapple with the fears of workers.⁶³⁰ Relationship-based organizing was one way to counteract the fear and distrust of unions.

⁶²⁸Kate Shaughnessy, "University of Minnesota Clerical Campaign Ushered in New Model of Organizing," *Workday Minnesota*, March 28, 2007.

⁶²⁹ The strike lasted from August 1985 to June 1986.

⁶³⁰ Peter Rachleff, *Hard-Pressed in the Heartland: The Hormel Strike and the Future of the Labor Movement* (Boston: South End Press, 1993); Peter Perl, "The Hormel Strike Was Doomed," *Washington Post*, February 16, 1986; Elizabeth Baier, "25 years ago, Hormel strike changed Austin, industry," *MPR News*, August 17, 2010, <https://www.mprnews.org/story/2010/08/17/austin-hormel-strike>; Shaughnessy, "Negotiating the Collective Self," 18; Polly Peterson, interview by Amanda Walter, August 9, 2017; Tony Gilpin, Gary Isaac, Dan Letwin, and Jack McKivigan, *On Strike for Respect: The Clerical and Technical Workers' Strike at Yale University, 1984-85* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994); *American Dream*, directed by Barbara Kopple (1990: Los Angeles: Miramax), DVD.

Gladys McKenzie negotiated to accept the lead position on one of the largest organizing initiatives in Minnesota to include a commitment to talk to every single worker who would be part of the union. The Minnesota team spoke to all but sixty-one of the 3,200 clerical workers spread across the six campuses of the University of Minnesota – Twin Cities, Duluth, Morris, Crookston, and Waseca.⁶³¹ This was an impressive feat considering the large university workforce and the distance between campuses.

Rondeau and McKenzie believed one-on-one organizing would succeed in Minnesota as it had at Harvard. One-on-one organizing, or relationship-based organizing, was not a new method for organized labor as we have seen in other chapters. However, usually, much of the organizing work was still accomplished through traditional leaflets, handbills, and newsletters. Harvard and Minnesota took one-on-one organizing much further, using minimal literature, meeting multiple times with each person, and not relying only on specific issues. Their tactics received criticism from many union leaders as being too soft and not confrontational enough. Despite the criticism, these tactics helped unions succeed at both Minnesota and Harvard.

Initial meetings usually took place on the job with fellow workers. Often, organizers had multiple one-on-one meetings during lunch and after work. Organizers did a soft sell, avoiding pressuring workers to sign an authorization card right away. Instead, they attempted to establish a personal relationship with each worker, introduce him or her to other workers, and form a complex web of relationships, while building trust among workers.⁶³² According to Kim Cook, an SEIU District 925 organizer,

⁶³¹Initially, the 1989 campaign at Minnesota was going to be for 8,000 workers from technical, clerical, and professional classifications. State law required that the different bargaining units hold their own elections. AFSCME decided to start with clerical workers. Gladys McKenzie, interview by Amanda Walter, August 14, 2016.

⁶³² Shaughnessy, “Negotiating the Collective Self,” 8 and 21; Shaughnessy, “University of Minnesota Clerical Campaign,” *Workday Minnesota*, March 28 2007.

It is the issues that move people to organize, but I actually think that people will take risks and do more if they feel support and respect from someone they feel close to... You could get people to do things because of your relationships with them, as opposed to the issues that moved people.⁶³³

The idea was that the tactics had a mushrooming effect as more workers talked to one another and shared their concerns. While time-consuming, the method of relationship-building helped produce committed union members, who saw the union and its officers and organizers as responsive to their needs.⁶³⁴ Laurie Peterson, a clerical worker in the Department of English as a Second Language, recalled, “There were unions where I never saw a rep come around. I think the reason why I got so interested was actually because of the organizers and the fact that I had relationships. They talked about things that mattered in my life.”⁶³⁵ The experience at Minnesota in 1989 was in stark contrast to the 1982 campaign that prioritized literature over personal connections. As Kris Rondeau recalled,

Most of our conversations did not involve content of the union...We ended up sometimes referring to it as no content organizing. But it was really just kind of getting to know people and sharing also, because you can’t ask someone about their life without telling them about yours.⁶³⁶

The relationship-based style of organizing created community. It was particularly well-suited for women, who were isolated by occupation, geography, and gender.

By forging relationships, organizers were able to change people’s ideas about unions. Robin Berg, a clerical worker who previously belonged to a railroad union, recalled feeling voiceless among railroad workers, giving her a negative view of unions. Nonetheless, as AFSCME organizers kept coming back, they built a relationship with her and convinced her of the benefits

⁶³³ Kim Cook, interview by Ann Froines, May 10, 2005. SEIU District 925 Legacy Project: Oral History, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

⁶³⁴ Marion Crain, “Gender and Union Organizing,” *Industrial and Labor Relations Review* 47, no. 2 (1994): 229.

⁶³⁵ Shaughnessy, “Negotiating the Collective Self,” 14.

⁶³⁶ Kris Rondeau, interview by Amanda Walter, August 10, 2017.

of unions and the ability of AFSCME to address the concerns of clerical workers. Berg remembered,

Before my union activity, I really had very little interaction with... any other people. Now I can go just about anywhere on or off campus and see some I'm familiar with. We go out and have a beer or coffee sometimes, and it just feels good to talk... I've gained some extremely good friends, even on a personal level, through it... I know sometimes you can go talk to your friends about stuff, and they can sympathize or understand or whatever because they're your friends and they care about you. But they can't ever totally relate (like a friend from work).⁶³⁷

Berg's experience mirrored the experiences of many others, including Mary Ann Beneke, who switched from being anti-union in the 1982 campaign to become one of the most active employee organizers.⁶³⁸ Clerical workers Katherine Brown and Laurie Peterson expressed the same sentiment. Harvard and Minnesota organizers aimed to have an activist for every ten to twelve workers so each worker would have someone they knew in the organizing effort.⁶³⁹

At Minnesota, organizers largely avoided rally-style meetings frequently used by unions, instead choosing small building and committee meetings. The small size allowed people to be comfortable to express themselves. According to Gladys McKenzie, "A meeting among three workers who get the chance to really talk about their lives and their dreams for the union, is far better than a meeting of twenty people where no one is really able to share."⁶⁴⁰

Meetings served as a consciousness-raising activity, as in the women's movement. Sharing stories raised consciousness and helped locate a collective voice and experience. Calling stories the "language of the workers," Rondeau strongly believed a collective voice was needed to

⁶³⁷ Shaughnessy, "Negotiating the Collective Self," 39.

⁶³⁸ Ibid.; Labor Education Service, *Minnesota at Work*, "Person to Person: Organizing at the U of M" (1992; Minnesota AFL-CIO, 1992).

⁶³⁹ Katherine Brown, "AFSCME Offers the Best Representation," *Minnesota Daily*, January 31 1991, University Archives, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN; Shaughnessy, "Negotiating the Collective Self," 16.

⁶⁴⁰ Kris Rondeau, interview by Amanda Walter, August 10, 2017; Lisa Oppenheim, "Women's Ways of Organizing: A Conversation with AFSCME Organizers Kris Rondeau and Gladys McKenzie," *Labor Research Review* 1, no. 18 (1991), 53; Crain, "Gender and Union Organizing," 229–39; Lisa Oppenheim, "Women's Ways of Organizing," 57; Gladys McKenzie, interview by Amanda Walter, August 14, 2016.

transform the workplace and to create a strong union.⁶⁴¹ The act of sharing stories brought clericals out of isolation. Judy Berdahl, a nine-year employee working on the St. Paul campus, explained isolation as the result of management's structuring of the workplace. She noted, "That's the way the University liked it, to keep us separate and each one dealing with her own problems. Whereas when we come together and talk, then we find out, 'oh, that person over there is getting the shaft just like I am over here.'"⁶⁴² Since what organizers were doing was raising self-confidence and giving workers a place to find their voice, the valuable process took significant time. As more individuals connected to each other, the more daring and committed they became.⁶⁴³

Building community tended to be easier at smaller university campuses. People knew each other in town, and people knew each other at work. Breaking isolation was not as difficult. Workers on smaller campuses felt like they had been ignored previously by the university and by the union. The workers worried that would happen again. McKenzie recalled, "We kind of had a mantra that you really take seriously not leaving people out. And you go to that far-flung workplace...And you make sure you get to know those women, those workers."⁶⁴⁴

Minnesota and Harvard both downplayed union literature in their successful campaigns. At Harvard, they had been moving away from literature early on, seeing newsletters as unhelpful or even destructive. With literature, remote adversaries hurled accusations at one another, while workers felt caught in the middle. Kris Rondeau contended that union handouts took significant effort to produce and only connected workers to a campaign in a passive way. After reading a few sentences, a worker could conclude they could reject the union.⁶⁴⁵ Rondeau believed literature

⁶⁴¹ Shaughnessy, "Negotiating the Collective Self," 26.

⁶⁴² *Ibid.*, 22.

⁶⁴³ Lisa Oppenheim, "Women's Ways of Organizing," 47–57; Richard Balzer, "Finding Their Voice: Kris Rondeau Discusses Organizing with Richard Balzer." *Boston Review* (Sept/Oct 1993), <http://bostonreview.net/archives/BR18.5/findingvoice.html>; Shaughnessy, "Negotiating the Collective Self," 26.

⁶⁴⁴ Gladys McKenzie, interview by Amanda Walter, August 14, 2016.

⁶⁴⁵ Hoerr, "*We Can't Eat Prestige*," 183.

gave “people the sense that they already know what the union is about and that’s no way to learn about the union.” Due to lack of funding, Harvard organizers stopped putting out a newsletter altogether, forcing themselves to go out into the campus and start talking one-on-one with workers.

Rondeau added,

When you rely on one-on-one organizing, people don’t have the safety valve of literature anymore. If they want to know what’s going on, they have to approach somebody. Workers who were really nervous about talking to the union would eventually ask their co-workers: “What’s going on with the union drive anyway?”—and then the door would be open to talking.⁶⁴⁶

In addition, the employer cannot distribute memos in response to literature if the union is not producing any. Rondeau stated, “They can’t take statements out of context, they can’t pigeonhole us, try to refute what we believe. They’re forced to base their anti-union campaign on some fantasy of what a union is and, frankly, that fantasy is always wrong.”⁶⁴⁷ Prominently used at BU, the tactical change removed memos in direct response to literature as an anti-union weapon. Numerous instances of the effective use of literature exist, such as the conservative movement and 9to5. It can grab attention when the message is right; but as seen at Harvard and Minnesota, union literature is not necessary for success and has some drawbacks.⁶⁴⁸

At the University of Minnesota during the 1982 campaign, labor organizers used direct mailings and a bimonthly newsletter.⁶⁴⁹ In the second campaign at Minnesota in 1989, there was almost no literature, no small giveaways, and no telling people what the union was. Instead, there was a commitment to meet and get to know people. The limited literature produced was usually a

⁶⁴⁶ Lisa Oppenheim, “Women’s Ways of Organizing,” 50.

⁶⁴⁷ Oppenheim, “Women’s Ways of Organizing,” 50; Balzer, “Finding Their Voice”; Kris Rondeau, interview by Amanda Walter, August 10, 2017.

⁶⁴⁸ Martin Heggstad, “State of the Art: Defeating Harvard’s Anti-Union Campaign,” *Radical America* 21, no. 5 (September/October 1987): 42–53.

⁶⁴⁹ “AFSCME Calls for Union Election at University of Minnesota,” *Minnesota Public Employee*, August 1990, Box 43, Folder 18, AFSCME Publications, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

collective effort, in which union organizers and supporters expressed their values to the university community. The pieces were signed by workers, “so that it would be a statement to workers from workers.”⁶⁵⁰ One example was a booklet of photographs of different people in their workplace along with information about who they were and their hopes for the union, often reflecting feminist ideology and strategy.⁶⁵¹ Another notable example was an open letter from the AFSCME organizing committee to the university community. It explained the eight main points of the campaign:

1. We believe in ourselves.
2. We take pride in our work and this University.
3. We believe in self-representation.
4. We are committed to a constructive relationship with the University.
5. We believe that dedication and loyalty must be honored.
6. We recognize the particular needs of women.
7. We value the diversity and flexibility of our workplace.
8. We care about our co-workers.⁶⁵²

The points show the union was not denigrating the university, but rather stating that employees were committed to the university. While the University of Minnesota was considered a good place to work, it could be improved through union representation. Signature posters, an enlarged public statement of support for unionization, were displayed throughout the university and used at both Harvard and Minnesota.⁶⁵³

Another difference between the 1982 campaign and the 1989 to 1991 campaign was the focus on issues. The later campaign moved away from specific issues. Harvard experienced problems with issue-based campaigns in one of their first organizing drives. The campaign called

⁶⁵⁰ McKenzie, interview.

⁶⁵¹ University of Minnesota/AFSCME, *Speaking for Ourselves*, undated, box 373, folder AFSCME and Other Unions, 1991–1992, University of Minnesota, President’s Office, University Archives, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN.

⁶⁵² Shaughnessy, “Negotiating the Collective Self,” 25; Minnesota/AFSCME, “Our Voices, Our Union: An Open Letter to the University Community from the AFSCME Organizing Committee,” undated, box 373, folder AFSCME and Other Unions, 1991–1992. University of Minnesota, President’s Office, University Archives.

⁶⁵³ Shaughnessy, “Negotiating the Collective Self,” 14; Rondeau, interview.

for dignity, democracy, and a dental plan. When they received a dental plan, employees became less interested in the drive.⁶⁵⁴ Organizer learned from the experience and instead talked about larger ideas of respect and self-representation. They emphasized that change happened through relationships and could not happen if workers were isolated. The cornerstones of the working women's movement were the ideas of respect, recognition, and self-assertion. The values of the University of Minnesota campaign demonstrate the influence of the working women's movement on clerical workers at the university.⁶⁵⁵

In 1989, two unions vied for the loyalty of Minnesota clericals—AFSCME and the Teamsters. The Teamsters had not participated in the 1982 campaign, explaining that AFSCME asked them not to enter.⁶⁵⁶ In 1989, the Teamsters already represented the university's forty police officers and 2,000 janitorial, maintenance, and food service employees. Citing their history on campus and strong contracts since 1974, the Teamsters now sought to represent the 3,400 clerical workers and 1,100 technicians. With the Teamsters traditional sector of trucking declining, the Teamsters tried to recruit new members in other sectors, including flight attendants and clerical workers. The Teamsters' largest local in Minnesota, Public Employees' Local 320, represented sheriff's deputies and some government and university employees.⁶⁵⁷

At the start of the 1989 campaign, AFSCME represented approximately 19,000 state employees, including about 800 health care non-professionals at the University of Minnesota. AFSCME already had a reputation for a progressive agenda, fighting for issues of social justice and workplace equity. In response to the AFSCME campaign, the Teamsters argued that university

⁶⁵⁴ McKenzie, interview.

⁶⁵⁵ Oppenheim, "Women's Ways of Organizing," 47; Gladys McKenzie, interview by Clarke A. Chambers, October 11, 1995, University of Minnesota, <http://purl.umn.edu/49954>.

⁶⁵⁶ Doug Pond, "Teamsters Work to Unionize U's Office Workers," *Minnesota Daily*, July 20, 1990. Unions 1990–1999, folder 5, Information Files, University Archives, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN.

⁶⁵⁷ Dave Hage, "Teamsters, AFSCME Duel at the 'U,'" *Star Tribune*, January 29, 1991.

workers would have more control over their union local with the Teamsters than they would with AFSCME. AFSCME representatives disagreed, contending that the local would be part of a state council. The council's staff members would be responsive to both state and university workers.⁶⁵⁸ In September 1990, AFSCME members from the state, universities, and community colleges visited the University of Minnesota to show Minnesota workers what they achieved through their union.⁶⁵⁹

AFSCME and the Teamsters engaged in a rivalry from the 1970s through the 1990s. In 1973 and 1981, both unions fought to represent service, maintenance, and labor employees. While the Teamsters became the union of those workers, AFSCME succeeded in organizing university hospital personnel. Jack Mogelson, the Teamsters business representative, called AFSCME a company union that agreed to sweetheart contracts. Paul Goldberg, an AFSCME representative, called the Teamsters a do-nothing union that was dormant outside trucking.⁶⁶⁰

At the University of Minnesota, the Teamsters filed for an election in July 1990, while AFSCME was still collecting cards.⁶⁶¹ The Teamsters pushed card signing right away, reportedly telling workers that signing a card did not mean much, other than to have an election.⁶⁶² AFSCME organizers wanted workers to sign cards only after they built relationships and supported the union.

⁶⁵⁸ Anne Hanson, "Unionization Effort Underway," *Minnesota Daily*, January 22, 1990, Unions 1990–1999, folder 5, Information Files, University Archives, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN.

⁶⁵⁹ "AFSCME Members Visit University," *Minnesota Public Employee*, September 1990, box 43, folder 18, AFSCME Publications, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

⁶⁶⁰ *Minnesota Public Employee*, January 1981, box 43, folder 9, AFSCME Publications, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs; Jay Novak, "Union Settlement May Affect Other U Workers," *Minnesota Daily*, February 2, 1973, University Archives, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN; Chris Evans, "U Service and Support Personnel to Consider Union Representation," *Minnesota Daily*, August 29, 1973, University Archives, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN; "Teamsters Defeat Rival Union For 'U' Bargaining," MS, September 7, 1973. Unions, folder 1, Information Files, University Archives, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN.

⁶⁶¹ Doug Pond, "Teamsters Work to Unionize U's Office Workers," *Minnesota Daily*, July 20, 1990, Unions 1990–1999, folder 5, Information Files, University Archives, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN.

Gladys McKenzie, interview by Amanda Walter, August 14, 2016.

⁶⁶² Gladys McKenzie, interview by Clarke A. Chambers, October 11, 1995, University of Minnesota, <http://purl.umn.edu/49954>.

McKenzie often said that a union election was an important day in the life of the union, but it was not the goal. Rondeau felt the same, noting that signing an authorization card should be the climax of individual development and commitment to the union.⁶⁶³ McKenzie and the rest of the Minnesota organizing staff had the goal of building a strong organization, breaking down the isolation of the workplace, and together being able to enact change and have a voice.⁶⁶⁴ Despite some scrambling, AFSCME received enough cards and filed for an election in July 1990.

Most unionization campaigns encountered anti-unionism. At Harvard, the anti-union campaign manifested as subtle forms of harassment and intimidation, and efforts to undermine worker self-confidence and create workplace tension and distress. Harvard clerical and technical organizers were particularly effective in combatting the administration's campaign. In advance of the anti-union campaign, organizers warned workers that they would receive a large number of letters and other literature from various administrators and that management would hold numerous meetings throughout campus. Clerical organizers had Jim Braude, Kris Rondeau's husband, conduct a simulated anti-union meeting, where he used almost all the arguments and techniques Harvard ultimately used to confuse and frighten people.⁶⁶⁵ The administration presented distortions, half-truths, and lies regarding unionization, taking advantage of "a new federal ruling removing legal penalties for disseminating false or misleading statements during a union campaign."⁶⁶⁶

The most effective way to combat an anti-union campaign is to make workers feel less isolated and give them the sense that people outside the workplace care about their desire to

⁶⁶³ Hoerr, "We Can't Eat Prestige," 153.

⁶⁶⁴ Gladys McKenzie, interview by Amanda Walter, August 14, 2016.

⁶⁶⁵ Hoerr, "We Can't Eat Prestige," 193.

⁶⁶⁶ "At Harvard," *Coffee Break*, July 7, 1977, Boston University Union District 65. Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center, Boston University, Boston, MA.

unionize. At Harvard, twenty-seven faculty members issued a letter to support staff. They remained neutral about unionization, but they sharply criticized the administration's conduct, arguing it poisoned relations for years to come. University clerical worker had each other as well. "When Harvard fought us," Rondeau remembers, "We learned that we had nothing, but each other ... We just only had these bonds of friendship and this ability to talk with each other." The close relationships formed in organizing allowed Harvard workers to overcome the tough anti-union campaign.⁶⁶⁷ Along with student support and endorsements from labor leaders, Harvard clerical and technical workers won with a small margin of victory.⁶⁶⁸

The University of Minnesota, while not pro-union, could not outwardly fight the clerical organizing drive due to a statute of Minnesota's Public Employment Labor Relations Act. The provision prohibited public sector anti-union efforts. In contrast, Harvard University, as a private institution, could function as a corporation. Short of committing unfair labor practices, Harvard had the right and ability to engage in a hard-fought, expensive anti-union campaign.⁶⁶⁹ During the unionization campaign, the University of Minnesota attempted to restrict access to some locations and only allowed workers to meet in non-work areas during non-work hours. Unlike the cantankerous John Silber, the president of Boston University, University of Minnesota president, Nils Hasselmo, was an amiable person who never spoke harshly. Many supervisors expressed support for the drive, a significant difference from many supervisors at Harvard. Peter Brenner, executive director of AFSCME Council 6, said, "It's not that anybody is malicious. Nobody is

⁶⁶⁷ Kris Rondeau, interview by Amanda Walter, August 10, 2017.

⁶⁶⁸ Hoerr, "Solidaritas at Harvard;" AFSCME, "A Message from Members of the Harvard Faculty," undated, Box 6, Folder Clericals-Harvard, American Federation of Teachers, Local 3882 (Clerical Union) Records, WAG.071, Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University, New York, NY; Martin Heggestad, "State of the Art: Defeating Harvard's Anti-Union Campaign," *Radical America* 21, no. 5 (September/October 1987): 42-53; Seth Newton Patel, "Have We Built the Committee?: Advancing Leadership Development in the U.S. Labor Movement," *WorkingUSA* 16 (March 2013): 113-142.

⁶⁶⁹ Shaughnessy, "Negotiating the Collective Self," 13.

accusing the regents of being mean or malicious. But employees who are unorganized are last to get to the table.”⁶⁷⁰ AFSCME did not speak negatively about the university. Instead, they said the University of Minnesota was a good place to work, but workers needed self-representation. As Gladys McKenzie noted, “This has to do with representing yourself, having a voice, and it doesn’t always have to be about things that are wrong.”⁶⁷¹

After a year-and-a-half-long drive, on February 20, 1991, University of Minnesota clerical employees, in over four hundred buildings, spanning six campuses, voted 51 percent for AFSCME representation. The Teamsters received 10 percent of the vote.⁶⁷² Gerald McEntee called the Minnesota win one of the happiest days in the union since the Harvard victory.⁶⁷³ With 3,200 members entering AFSCME, it was the largest public employee election in Minnesota in ten years.⁶⁷⁴ Organizing around the same time as Harvard, the University of Minnesota victory showed the influence of the women’s movement. The campaign had succeeded through a dynamic blend of feminism and rank-and-file union organizing.

The bargaining unit was approximately 93 percent women. Women came to believe it was right to stand up and represent themselves. Utilizing tactics from the women’s movement, such as consciousness-raising, and disregarding traditional union tactics, such as campaign literature, the

⁶⁷⁰ Kathy Kleckner, interview by Amanda Walter, August 9, 2017; Chuck Haga, “Three Unions Competing to Organize 7000 Workers at U,” *Star Tribune*, January 14, 1990, Unions 1990–1999, folder 5, Information Files, University Archives, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN.

⁶⁷¹ Carol Cochran, “Bureaucracy Blocks Fair Representation of Civil Servants,” *Minnesota Daily*, July 24, 1989, University Archives, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN; Shaughnessy, “Negotiating the Collective Self,” 19.

⁶⁷² Duluth clerical workers have a separate local, Local 3801. The campus had a unionized faculty for a number of years before the election and a supportive community labor movement. Workers at Duluth requested their own local during the organizing campaign. Gladys McKenzie, interview by Amanda Walter, August 14, 2016.

⁶⁷³ *Public Employee*, April/May 1991, box 31, folder 3, AFSCME Publications, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

⁶⁷⁴ *Minnesota Public Employee*, January/February 1991, box 43, folder 9, AFSCME Publications, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs.

campaign relied on a distinct relationship-based unionism. McKenzie, who continued to work for AFSCME for almost twenty more years, stated,

My entire experience in the union has confirmed that anytime you try to leap over building the relationships, building the community in the workplace, you are going to fail. Any time that you take the time to do that work, it really bears fruit. All the successes that I've ever had in the labor movement have come out of doing that very simple work of breaking down the isolation and building the relationships and involving people in their union.⁶⁷⁵

The relationship-based model worked for the University of Minnesota, as it had at Harvard. The tactics used during the campaigns would soon be seen in other AFSCME efforts, such as at the University of Illinois clerical organizing drive in 1991.

Organizers hoped to focus on internal organizing at the University of Minnesota after the campaign victory, but unfortunately, they were no longer employed in that capacity. The union turned instead toward negotiating its first contract. The lack of a well-funded, concentrated internal organizing effort resulted in a loss of community. All Harvard and Minnesota organizers were laid off within weeks of the elections. Kathy Kleckner remembered, "The Council felt that once the election happened, the work was done. Time to collect dues. Get this contract signed. That was a big mistake. We needed more advocacy as an organization to protect people to be activists."⁶⁷⁶ The shortened timeline to the election due to the Teamsters filing meant more grassroots organizing was needed to solidify relationships. Only about 50 percent of the unit were full members in 1995.⁶⁷⁷ The university proved to be a tough negotiator with the first contract not ratified until more than a year after the victory.⁶⁷⁸ The Minnesota local, Local 3800, continued to maintain a connection to Harvard for some years. Kathy Kleckner, Local 3800 president from 1993

⁶⁷⁵ Gladys McKenzie, interview by Amanda Walter, August 14, 2016.

⁶⁷⁶ Kathy Kleckner, interview by Amanda Walter, August 9, 2017.

⁶⁷⁷ Shaughnessy, "Negotiating the Collective Self," 27 and 32.

⁶⁷⁸ Local 3800 stuck in 2003 and 2007. To date, the union has been unable to get contract language on how to deal with harassment by supervisors. Polly Peterson, interview by Amanda Walter, August 9, 2017.

to 1996, went to Harvard to see their internal organizing methods, and Kris Rondeau came to the University of Minnesota to conduct training sessions on problem-solving.⁶⁷⁹ Despite having to battle university budget cuts, AFSCME significantly improved the work lives of clerical workers at the University of Minnesota. It was part of the trend of organizing clerical staff unions at colleges and universities, which has become more common since the mid-1970s, and drawing on the insights of the working women's movement.⁶⁸⁰ AFSCME Local 3800 celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary in 2016, with a large number of the original members still working at the University of Minnesota.⁶⁸¹

Conclusion

AFSCME became the leader in clerical organizing at state universities. The success at Minnesota helped revive the efforts at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC). In August 1991, seven months after the University of Minnesota victory, the 2,200 UIUC clericals voted for AFSCME representation, winning 979 to 922.⁶⁸² The second victory in the Big Ten in 1991 "further established AFSCME as the conference champ for university office employees."⁶⁸³

AFSCME's strength in state governments and growing success in large public universities made the union a natural choice for university workers. The union had bargained for strong

⁶⁷⁹ Kathy Kleckner, interview by Amanda Walter, August 9, 2017.

⁶⁸⁰The 1,200 technical workers at the University of Minnesota achieved AFSCME representation in 1993, receive 58 percent of the vote. Organizers from Harvard and the University of Minnesota clerical unit assisted in the campaign. *Minnesota Public Employee*, May/June 1993, box 43, folder 21, AFSCME Publications, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI; Shaughnessy, "Negotiating the Collective Self," 35; Kathy Kleckner, interview by Amanda Walter, August 9, 2017.

⁶⁸¹ "25th Anniversary Celebration," program, June 16, 2016, Unprocessed Materials, AFSCME Local 3800 Union Office, Minneapolis, MN.

⁶⁸² AFSCME Local 698 granted the clerical employees a separate local, Local 3700. Timeline, undated, box 1, folder 1, AFSCME Central Regional Office: University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Clerical Administrative Campaign Records, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

⁶⁸³ *Public Employee*, October 1991, box 31, folder 4, AFSCME Publications, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

contracts at the state, but university workers saw their wages and benefits slip further and further behind comparable state workers. It became the most salient organizing issue in a number of campaigns.

As at the University of Minnesota, UIUC clerical workers were mobilized by a significant pay gap between state clerical workers, represented by AFSCME since 1977, and the university clerical workers. The salaries were close to equal in 1977, but that changed dramatically by 1989. According to the Illinois Board of Higher Education, University of Illinois workers earned an average of 29.58 percent less than state clerical employees. State employees received better raises and made insurance gains with AFSCME representation. Full-time state employees worked 37.5 hours a week in contrast to the 40 hours worked by university employees. In contrast to the state's definition of seniority, the university civil service system made employees vulnerable to layoffs if moving positions. Furthermore, a pay gap existed between men and women on campus. Men dominated the top ten salary grades. Women dominated the bottom five.⁶⁸⁴

Employee pay and benefits at the University of Illinois were less than at other AFSCME-represented Big Ten schools. A secretary III at the University of Illinois earned nearly \$9000 less than a worker in a comparable position at the University of Iowa and over \$6,000 less than a worker at the University of Wisconsin. A flyer from the Illinois campaign stated, "At Universities across Illinois... Across the Big 10 and throughout the Nation, office employees are finding a better

⁶⁸⁴ *History of Pay Equity*, undated, box 1, folder 4, AFSCME Central Regional Office: University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Clerical Administrative Campaign Records, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI; *AFSCME Action*, November 1988, box 1, folder 2, AFSCME Central Regional Office: University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Clerical Administrative Campaign Records, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI; Peter Schmalz, "The State's Fortunate 50," *Labor Research Review* 1, no. 3 (1993): 36; *AFSCME Action*, February 1989, box 1, folder 2, AFSCME Central Regional Office: University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Clerical Administrative Campaign Records, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI; Finding aid, AFSCME Central Regional Office: University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Clerical Administrative Campaign Records, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

life with AFSCME. Isn't it time you were a priority?" For Illinois state and Big Ten office employees, being an AFSCME member paid off. All this helped make AFSCME an attractive union to the workers at Illinois.⁶⁸⁵

In 1989, the University of Illinois clerical workers encountered increases in parking rates, long a source of frustration. Some insurance benefits increased, a result of AFSCME's negotiations on behalf of state employees, but university employees did not receive an Employee Assistance Program, which helped workers struggling with alcoholism, drug abuse, and mental illness.⁶⁸⁶ The majority of the literature used in the campaign focused on state worker benefits. A booklet of quotes by current and former university employees discussing benefits concludes by stating, "AFSCME is helping others, now let them help us." The message the union sent was, "The University doesn't really care about your problems. AFSCME does."⁶⁸⁷

By 1990, almost 40 percent of the public university clerical workforce and approximately 25 percent of the private university clerical workforce were unionized.⁶⁸⁸ The victories in Illinois and Minnesota added to those numbers. Clerical workers at Harvard University, the University of Minnesota, and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign engaged in campaigns that lasted for years, achieving AFSCME representation by slim margins.

⁶⁸⁵ "At Universities Across Illinois," AFSCME flyer, undated, box 1, folder 4, AFSCME Central Regional Office: University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Clerical Administrative Campaign Records, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

⁶⁸⁶ *AFSCME Action*, February 1989, box 1, folder 2, AFSCME Central Regional Office: University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Clerical Administrative Campaign Records, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI; *AFSCME Action*, April 1989, box 1, folder 2, AFSCME Central Regional Office: University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Clerical Administrative Campaign Records, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

⁶⁸⁷ *AFSCME Action*, February 1989, box 1, folder 2, AFSCME Central Regional Office: University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Clerical Administrative Campaign Records, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI; *Speaking for Ourselves*, undated, box 1, folder 4, AFSCME Central Regional Office: University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Clerical Administrative Campaign Records, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

⁶⁸⁸ Craig Becker, "Lessons from the Harvard Drive," *Nation*, February 12, 1990.

The innovations of the Harvard campaign carried over to other efforts. Kris Rondeau sent the Illinois workers a letter of support, and Harvard organizers assisted with the campaign. Organizers employed one-on-one organizing throughout the effort.⁶⁸⁹ However, literature and specific issues played a larger part in the Illinois campaign than at Minnesota or Harvard. The Harvard victory loomed large for AFSCME in clerical organization campaigns in higher education, showing the possibility of victory in long efforts.⁶⁹⁰

As at Harvard and Minnesota, one-on-one organizing formed the core of the unionization efforts. The one-on-one focus came as result of tactics that effectively could appeal to women clerical workers and combat anti-union charges. While continued organizing through one-on-one tactics was not well-funded at Minnesota immediately after the victory, in 1998, the union recognized the need to focus on internal organizing through one-on-one communication. AFSCME's internal organizing manual from 2000 shows a focus on one-on-one communication and listening to workers as the best way to recruit new members and learn about the issues workers cared about. *Building Power in the Workplace: The AFSCME Internal Organizing Manual*, declared, "Most of all, organizing is built on personal relationships, and the best way to build personal relationships is through one-to-one communication." It goes on to state that written materials are only useful if the campaign is already based on one-on-one communication.⁶⁹¹ The legacy of the work and innovations of the organizers at Harvard and Minnesota is evident in the current tactics of AFSCME.

⁶⁸⁹ Kris Rondeau contributed to many AFSCME campaigns in the ensuing years, including the organizing of nurses in Connecticut and Indiana state clerical workers. Kris Rondeau, interview by Amanda Walter, August 10, 2017.

⁶⁹⁰ Lisa Oppenheim, "Women's Ways of Organizing," 58; *AFSCME Action*, September 1989, box 1, folder 2, AFSCME Central Regional Office: University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Clerical Administrative Campaign Records, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

⁶⁹¹ *Building Power in the Workplace: The AFSCME Internal Organizing Manual, 2000*, Unprocessed Materials, AFSCME Local 3800 Union Office, Minneapolis, MN.

CONCLUSION

Starting in the 1970s, large numbers of clerical workers, predominantly women, joined together to improve their working conditions through associations and unionization. Unions, which had long ignored the clerical workforce, began to see the clerical sector as a vital source of new members, altering their tactics and contract priorities to appeal to their new constituency. Despite employer opposition, approximately 70 percent of higher education clerical campaigns in the 1970s and 1980s resulted in union contracts. Over fifty national unions came to represent roughly 380,000 non-faculty employees. By 1993, 40.4 percent of clericals in higher education were represented by unions. This all occurred at a time when the cultural atmosphere in the United States was becoming increasingly anti-union, union membership was dropping, and the number of organizing victories declined.⁶⁹²

In 1989-1990, non-faculty bargaining units, including clerical, professional, technical, healthcare, and blue-collar workers, and police, represented 25,000 more workers than did faculty bargaining agreements. As Richard Hurd has noted, “Although white-collar workers are less likely to be union members than their blue-collar counterparts, in society at large, it appears that at institutions of higher education the unionization of clerical employees surpasses the unionization of blue-collar workers by a substantial margin.”⁶⁹³ Successes occurred more regularly at public

⁶⁹² Dorothy Sue Cobble, *The Other Women's Movement: Workplace Justice and Social Rights in Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 222; Richard W. Hurd and Elizabeth O'Leary, “A Preliminary Report on Non-Faculty Bargaining at Colleges and Universities—1993,” *Newsletter of the National Center for the Study of Collective Bargaining in Higher Education and the Professions* 20, no.4 (November/December 1992): 1–8.

⁶⁹³ Richard Hurd, “Non-Faculty Unionization at Institutions of Higher Education,” in *Directory of Non-Faculty Bargaining Agents in Institutions of Higher Education* ed. Joel Douglas (New York: National Center for the Study of Collective Bargaining in Higher Education and the Professions, 1991), ix–xii; Hurd and O'Leary, “A Preliminary Report on Non-Faculty Bargaining,” 1–8.

institutions than private ones, and predominantly in New England, the Great Lakes, and Far West. While no single union had a monopoly on higher education clerical units, AFSCME and SEIU represented the most workers. Public employees, generally, were more unionized than clerical workers in other major sectors such as banking, publishing, and insurance.

In the decades of the 1970s and 1980s, clerical union victories occurred at two-year colleges and the nation's most prestigious universities. Boston University and Harvard, the sites of major successes, exemplified how institutions resisted sharing control with their predominantly women clerical staff. Campaigns could be long and drawn out, like the exhausting twelve-year long Harvard campaign or the multi-year efforts at the University of Minnesota.

Some observers expressed reluctance in calling clerical unionism a success, as insurance and banking workers remained mostly unrepresented. Union decline, beginning in the private sector workforce in the 1950s, continued in the 1980s and 1990s. Workers were losing their say in working conditions as labor law enforcement grew weaker, factories moved to un-unionized areas of the county and overseas, and the national atmosphere became more conservative and anti-union. Clerical worker unionism helped slow the weakening of labor unions to some extent. Tens of thousands of women, largely ignored by unions for decades, bolstered organized labor's ranks. By the end of the 1980s, the percentage of office worker unionization (16 percent) was comparable to the workforce as a whole (17 percent). University clerical organizing was undoubtedly one of the bright spots in the labor movement of the 1980s.⁶⁹⁴

Despite achieving union representation, universities continued to oppose union demands, resulting in frequently difficult negotiations and sporadic strikes. At the University of Minnesota,

⁶⁹⁴ Richard Hurd, "Organizing and Representing Clerical Workers: The Harvard Model," in *Women and Unions: Forging a Partnership*, ed. Dorothy Sue Cobble (Ithaca, NY: ILR Press, 1993), 319-320; Dorothy Sue Cobble, "'A Spontaneous Loss of Enthusiasm': Workplace Feminism and the Transformation of Women's Service Jobs in the 1970s," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 56 (1999): 23-44.

to use one example, clericals struck in 2003 and 2007. In 2003, the university had proposed freezing wages for one year at the same time they increased health-insurance expenses by hundreds or thousands of dollars a year.⁶⁹⁵ The first strike in sixty years at the university resulted in only minimal gains.⁶⁹⁶ University of California clerical and skilled trades workers, represented by Teamsters Local 2010, conducted a strike over wages in 2017. They contended that, over the past two decades, wages fell 25 percent when adjusted for cost of living. Over 80 percent of UC union employees were unable to afford an “adequate but modest standard of living.”⁶⁹⁷ After almost a year of negotiations, UC administrative and clerical workers settled a contract with wage increases and bonuses.⁶⁹⁸

In the 1990s, neoliberalism reshaped higher education, creating budgetary shortfalls and an atmosphere hostile to unions. Budget problems continue to negatively affect clerical workers on university and college campuses. At the University of Minnesota, nearly 12 percent of civil service employees were laid off to balance the budget in 1991 and 1992.⁶⁹⁹ Even now, a decade after the Great Recession, state spending on higher education in the United States is below historical levels. In 2017, overall funding for public higher education was nearly \$9 billion below the level in 2008. Campuses have closed; programs have been cut, and student services have been reduced. The elimination of administrative and faculty positions continues, even as some reinvestment in higher education is beginning. Eastern Illinois University, for example, eliminated

⁶⁹⁵ “University Clerical Workers Set Oct. 21 Strike Date,” *Workday Minnesota*, October 9, 2003, <https://www.workdayminnesota.org/articles/university-clerical-workers-set-oct-21-strike-date>; Polly Peterson, interview by Amanda Walter, August 9, 2017.

⁶⁹⁶ Polly Peterson, interview by Amanda Walter, August 9, 2017.

⁶⁹⁷ Jeremy Dalmás, “University of California Clerical Workers Strike,” 91.7 FM San Francisco, January 11, 2017, <https://www.kalw.org/post/university-california-clerical-workers-strike#stream/0>.

⁶⁹⁸ Ryan Leou, “UC, Workers Union Reach Tentative Agreement on Clerical Employee Contract,” *Daily Bruin*, March 26, 2017, <https://dailybruin.com/2017/03/26/uc-workers-union-reach-tentative-agreement-on-clerical-employee-contract/>.

⁶⁹⁹ Matt McKinney, “AFSCME Officials Hope to Reverse Union Pay Freeze,” *Minnesota Daily*, October 4, 1993. University Archives, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN.

413 positions in 2016, nearly a quarter of its jobs. The administration mandated that all administrative and professional personnel take eighteen furlough days.⁷⁰⁰

Clerical organizing in higher education continues although it has lost momentum. The vitality of higher education organizing has shifted to graduate employee organizing. Like clerical workers, many graduate employees have come to understand their exploitation as workers. Graduate employees see themselves as professionals, seeking input into decision-making and expecting respect. They have been subject to increasing teaching workloads, financial difficulties resulting from low salaries, loan debt, and limited job opportunities.

Graduate student unionization efforts began in the late 1960s and 1970s, notably at the University of California-Berkley and the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1969, resulting in the first negotiated bilateral agreement for graduate student employees in the United States.⁷⁰¹ Two other social movements that challenged social relations in higher education coincided with this initial union activity: the student movement and faculty unionization. The student movement fought for increased student rights and participatory democracy, prompting actions such as the Free Speech Movement that rocked the UC-Berkley campus in 1964-1965. A collective voice as students and a collective voice as workers came together at this time. Faculty members' support for unionization resulted from grievances about wages, benefits, job security, and internal governance.⁷⁰² While the movements were distinct from graduate employee organizing, faculty

⁷⁰⁰ Michael Mitchell, Michael Leachman, and Kathleen Masterson, "A Lost Decade in Higher Education Funding," Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, August 23, 2017, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/state-budget-and-tax/a-lost-decade-in-higher-education-funding>.

⁷⁰¹ "Academic Labor History: 1970 GSE Contract at the University of Wisconsin," *National Center for the Study of Collective Bargaining in Higher Education and the Professions E-Note*, January 2019, http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/nscsbhep/assets/files/Jan19%20Newsletter_FINAL_2.pdf.

⁷⁰² Kimberly Quinn Johnson and Joseph Entin, "Graduate Employee Organizing and the Corporate University," *New Labor Forum* (Spring/Summer 2000): 99.

unionization showed that unions could be appropriate for professionals and that students could and did speak out.

Only a small handful of graduate employees unionized in the 1980s. Aggressive growth in the 1990s and early 2000s resulted in the number of unionized graduate employees nearly tripling from 14,060 in 1990 to 38,750 in 2001.⁷⁰³ There were only five graduate student unions in 1990. By Fall 2000, units existed in twenty-three universities. Nineteen were in the process of organizing. As education scholars Robert Rhoads and Gary Rhoades contend, “The unionization of graduate students in the United States has rapidly escalated to the point that it can now be seen as a social movement.” Graduate employees now had a say in the conditions that would influence their education and future job prospects.⁷⁰⁴

Like clerical unionization, graduate employee unionization occurred at both public research universities and elite private institutions. Private universities prove to be more challenging to unionize due to the same reasons that made clerical workers in private universities more difficult to unionize. Private institution administrations are more willing to devote resources to anti-union efforts and are less accountable to the public. In addition, the National Labor Relations Board rulings prohibited private university graduate student assistants from unionization, arguing they were not employees. Prior to the NLRB rulings, the UAW-affiliated Graduate Student Organizing Committee (GSOC) became the first graduate employee union to negotiate a contract with a private university in the United States in 2002. In 2013, despite the NLRB decision and after years

⁷⁰³ Gary Rhoades and Robert Rhoads, “Graduate Employee Unionization as Symbol of and Challenge to the Corporatization of U.S. Research Universities,” *Journal of Higher Education* 76, no. 3 (May/June 2005): 248.

⁷⁰⁴ Gary Rhoades and Robert Rhoads, “The Public Discourse of U.S. Graduate Employee Unions: Social Movement Identities, Ideologies, and Strategies,” *Review of Higher Education* 26, no. 2 (Winter 2003): 163.

of refusing to negotiate, New York University recognized GSOC again, making it yet again, the only graduate employee union recognized by a private university in the United States.⁷⁰⁵

For this success to occur, significant barriers to graduate employee unionization had to be overcome. A graduate student employee was likely to “identify with policies that further one’s own exploitation, due to an ‘apprenticeship mentality.’”⁷⁰⁶ Graduate students often see their employment as an opportunity for experience and, thus, accept poor working conditions. In addition, when supervisors also serve as mentors, it can be difficult to challenge power relations in the workplace. Anti-union campaigns did not disappear with clerical organizing. Administrations fought graduate employee organizing with the same vigor. Like clerical workers, many graduate students also viewed their work as transitory, making it more challenging to promote collective action. Furthermore, media portrayals of unions as “corrupt protectors of blue-collar workers,” and the common belief that “teaching is not ‘work’ but a sacred craft that would be demeaned by designating it as labor,” made it difficult for many graduate employees to identify with unionism.⁷⁰⁷ The geographically disperse workforce created a barrier for organizers, a constant concern in clerical campaigns. Along with poor conditions, clerical workers needed the women’s movement to understand they deserved more. Continuing deteriorating conditions helped graduate employees perceive themselves as workers with little power in the workplace.

The increase in the unionization of graduate employees, spurred by changes in higher education, has coincided with union revitalization efforts in the broader U.S. labor movement, including reaching out to new constituencies, such as home health care workers and childcare

⁷⁰⁵ Rebecca Nathanson, “How Graduate Students at NYU Organized a Union,” *Popular Resistance*, February 8, 2014, <https://popularresistance.org/how-graduate-students-at-nyu-organized-a-union/>.

⁷⁰⁶ Debra Swoboda, Kevin Delaney, and Rick Eckstein, “A Theoretical Exploration of White Collar Organizing: Graduate Student Employees and the Future of Unions in Academia,” *Humanity and Society* 11, no. 2 (May 1987): 418.

⁷⁰⁷ Johnson and Entin, “Graduate Employee Organizing,” 103.

workers. This is the same process that helped clerical workers become a union target in the 1970s and 1980s.⁷⁰⁸ The atmosphere in higher education and the nation overall has become more hostile to unions than ever before. Unions, however, have continued to make progress in higher education, particularly among graduate employees and part-time faculty.⁷⁰⁹

Increased labor union activity in higher education, including clerical, technical, and service workers, has played a crucial role in graduate employee unionization. Graduate students can more easily access legal support, financial resources, and networking opportunities from unions, especially those already on campus. At NYU, GSOC-UAW students are connected both to the amalgamated UAW local of office and professional workers and to AFT 3882, NYU's clerical worker union.⁷¹⁰ As noted in the *New Labor Forum*, "The campaign to organize graduate students is founded on the notion that everyone who works at universities – from maintenance workers to postdocs to clerical workers to professors to TAs – should have a meaningful voice in the institutional policies that determine the conditions under which they work."⁷¹¹

Solidarity across campus and the community has helped facilitate union organizing and success.⁷¹² This was evident at Cornell University, as the service and maintenance, clerical, and technical workers assisted each other's campaigns. Existing unions on campus or networks of labor-friendly activists may foster campaign activity. Still, not all units are supportive of one another, and conflict among unions does occur. Yale's clerical and maintenance workers, to use one example, do not necessarily feel solidarity with graduate employees, as they "tend to perceive

⁷⁰⁸ Marc Dixon, Daniel Tope, and Nella Van Dyke, "The University Works Because We Do': On the Determinants of Campus Labor Organizing in the 1990s," *Sociological Perspectives* 51, no. 2 (2008): 375.

⁷⁰⁹ Jenny Lee et al, "Tangles in the Tapestry: Cultural Barriers to Graduate Student Unionization," *Journal of Higher Education* 75, no. 3 (2004): 340.

⁷¹⁰ Dixon Tope, and Van Dyke, "The University Works Because We Do," 382; Johnson and Entin, "Graduate Employee Organizing," 104.

⁷¹¹ Johnson and Entin, "Graduate Employee Organizing," 107.

⁷¹² Swoboda, Delaney, and Eckstein, "A Theoretical Exploration of White Collar Organizing," 422.

graduate students as privileged proto-professionals playing at unionization.” Similarly, graduate employees do not always identify or connect with undergraduate students and other workers on campus. Often, they forge a distinct identity based on their educational level and professional future and pursued negotiated organized strategies that focus on their position alone.⁷¹³

Two of the leaders of clerical organizing in higher education, the UAW and AFSCME, have been the leaders in graduate employee organizing. In 2003, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, commenting on the UAW’s work in higher education, “ran a front-page headline in which ‘United Auto Workers’ was scratched out and replaced by ‘United Academic Workers.’”⁷¹⁴ That headline seemed to bear out a prediction of sorts that Al Davidoff, president of Cornell’s service and maintenance local, had made in 1982, “Now it should be clear to all university employees that we’re not only United Auto Workers but United Academic Workers as well.”⁷¹⁵

The Legacy of the Working Women’s Movement

The working women’s movement and the clerical unionization efforts have improved the lives of countless clerical workers. While it was difficult to make inroads in insurance and banking, the public sector clerical workforce is mostly organized. The labor movement changed as a result of clerical activism. Kim Cook, 9to5 and District 925 member, stated, “I think we realized our goal of creating a different kind of local union with women leadership that is committed to finding and developing women in the labor movement. I think we realized that goal, and we did a really good

⁷¹³ Johnson and Entin, “Graduate Employee Organizing,” 105; Dixon, Tope and Van Dyke, “The University Works Because We Do,” 382.

⁷¹⁴ Rhoades and Rhoads, “Graduate Employee Unionization,” 248.

⁷¹⁵ “The First Nationwide Organization of University Employees – UAW Academic Council,” *The Bear Facts*, no. 33, June 1982, box 1, folder 11, Colette Walls Collection of UAW District 65 Cornell Organizing Materials #6365, Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Cornell University Library, Ithaca, NY.

job.”⁷¹⁶ While the labor movement is still in many ways, men dominated, women have a place at the table. Campaign organizing today borrows from the lessons learned in clerical campaigns, especially the need to form relationships with workers to counteract the anti-union efforts of employers and to overcome stereotypes of unions. The legacy of 9to5, District 925, and the pioneers of clerical organizing in the 1970s and 1980s include the fostering of women leaders in the labor movement and the transformation of who could be seen as a unionization target and what could be campaign priorities.

In hard-fought campaigns in the 1970s and 1980s, District 925 organized thousands of workers, predominantly women. Members worked in libraries, colleges and universities, daycare centers, and local government. Along with working women’s organizations, particularly 9to5, it worked tirelessly for equal pay, affirmative action, and office health and safety. District 925 lasted for twenty years. In 2001, it restructured and merged with other SEIU locals.⁷¹⁷

While District 925 no longer exists, SEIU Local 925, a former District 925 local based in Washington, continues the legacy of the working women’s movement. Local 925 has nearly 20,000 members who are childcare providers, public school employees, higher education staff, and local government and non-profit workers. Seven thousand of the members are University of Washington employees. Local 925 continues to work in women-dominated fields that are difficult to organize. On the cutting edge of childcare organizing, the union fights for social and economic dignity and self-determination.⁷¹⁸

⁷¹⁶ Kim Cook, interview by Ann Froines, May 10, 2005. SEIU District 925 Legacy Project: Oral History, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

⁷¹⁷ “Collection Summary,” SEIU District 925 Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI, http://reuther.wayne.edu/files/LR001805_0.pdf.

⁷¹⁸ SEIU Local 925, “About Us,” SEIU Local 925, <http://www.seiu925.org/about/>; SEIU Local 925, “University of Washington,” SEIU Local 925, <http://www.seiu925.org/university-of-washington/>.

Barriers to organizing office workers continue, as stereotypes of the unions as all male or blue-collar persist despite ample evidence to the contrary. Ellen Cassedy, 9to5 co-founder, commented,

One thing is, I to this day am just flabbergasted over the question of why it is that an immigrant, a woman from Central America, working three jobs, one of which is being a janitor in an office building, maybe doing work under the table, kids, poverty—why is that person able to organize and become part of a union drive, yet the office worker working in the same office building feels she can't?⁷¹⁹

Despite this, many clerical women workers did come to believe that they deserved better and could unionize to achieve the needed improvements.

While the working women's movement is not commonly known, many Americans are aware of the issues women in offices face, due to the film *Nine to Five*. The film showed the reality of sex discrimination, sexual harassment, technological change, and forced personal service. Because of the film, 9to5 and Working Women sailed into the 1980s with enormous momentum as more and more women learned they were not alone in their grievances about the clerical workplace. Followed by a television series and a Broadway musical in 2008, the film still has cultural resonance, with the most common occupation for women continuing to be secretaries and administrative assistants. The continued popularity and meaning of the film was evident recently. The 2017 Emmys featured the reunion of Jane Fonda, Lily Tomlin, and Dolly Parton. Fonda and Tomlin linked the film to current politics. Fonda exclaimed, "Back in 1980, in that movie, we refused to be controlled by a sexist, egotistical, lying, hypocritical bigot." Lily Tomlin responded, "And in 2017 we still refuse to be controlled by a sexist, egotistical, lying, hypocritical bigot."⁷²⁰

⁷¹⁹Ellen Cassedy, interview by Ann Froines, November 6, 2005. SEIU District 925 Legacy Project: Oral History, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

⁷²⁰Ashley Hoffman, "The Cast of 9 to 5 Reunited at the Emmys to Blast Donald Trump," *Time*, September 18, 2017, <http://time.com/4945537/9-to-5-cast-emmys-reunion/>.

Franklin Hart, the boss in the film, exhibited the negative qualities that the working women's movement organizations and clerical unions fought against in the workplace in the 1970s and 1980s. Unions, understanding the need for new members, adopted new and diverse organizing styles and prioritized women's concerns to meet the needs of clerical workers. Whether it be the clerical workplace or government offices, women are now more empowered to stand up against discrimination, whether it be through a union, a women's organization, or individually.

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ABSTRACT**“I’VE ALWAYS HAD A VOICE, NOW I WANT TO USE IT”: THE WORKING WOMEN’S MOVEMENT AND CLERICAL UNIONISM IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

by

AMANDA WALTER**August 2019****Advisor:** Dr. Elizabeth Faue**Major:** History**Degree:** Doctor of Philosophy

“I’ve Always Had a Voice, Now I Want to Use It”: The Working Women’s Movement and Clerical Unionism in Higher Education examines the intersection of the labor movement and the women’s movement through the working lives and organizing of clerical workers in higher education in the United States beginning in the 1970s. Through an examination of UAW, SEIU, AFSCME, District 65, and AFT clerical organizing campaigns in higher education, *“I’ve Always Had a Voice, Now I Want to Use It”: The Working Women’s Movement and Clerical Unionism in Higher Education* contends that women found their lack of collective bargaining power in the higher education workplace limited their effectiveness. Working women’s organizations and clericals in higher education, dealing with university budgetary constraints, stagnant wages, and a reorganization of work, further sought to address their problems through unionism. As clericals reached out to unions, unions, faced with increasing hostility, declining membership, and the devastating impact of deindustrialization, entered the largely unorganized clerical sector, to save themselves and the labor movement. Unions had to adopt new and diverse organizing styles to meet the new constituency. The women’s movement had a tremendous impact on the labor movement’s efforts in this sector, including the style of organizing, what workplaces would serve

as targets for new organizing campaigns, and what issues unions should prioritize in campaigns and contracts.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

Amanda Walter is a historian of gender, labor, and modern America. She received her B.A. from the University of Michigan-Dearborn (2010) and M.A. and Graduate World History Certificate from Wayne State University (2013). At Wayne State, she was a Thomas C. Rumble Fellow (2010) and received the Charles F. Otis and Dr. Jeffrey L. Reider Scholarship in the History of Gender and Sexuality (2014), the Joe L. Norris Endowed Award (2014), the Alfred H. Kelly Research Award (2015), the Graduate Professional Scholarship (2015), and the Humanities Center Graduate Travel Award (2015). As a member of an interdisciplinary working group on a grant from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), Walter helped analyze existing research on the question of how to increase the civic and political participation of women, especially in developing countries, and the risks women face to participation. She is a contributor to *The American Middle Class: An Economic Encyclopedia of Progress and Poverty*. Her first article, "Rights and Respect: The Working Women's Movement's Influence on Clerical Unionization in the United States" (2019), was published in the *Journal of Labour and Society*. Walter is currently a Lecturer at Towson University.