

The 1940's: Birth and Growth of the SEA

In 1940, state departments were growing. Many state employees wanted to get acquainted with a larger circle of fellow state workers in a social setting where they could discuss issues of common concern. Other states had such employee associations which were proving very beneficial.

Harry E. Jackson, Mayland H. Morse, Winfield J. Phillips, and J. Harold Johnson thought New Hampshire should have such an association, and they decided to organize a very informal preliminary meeting. On a March day in 1940, at the Eagle Hotel on Main Street in Concord, twenty-nine state employees held a luncheon and appointed a constitution/bylaws committee and a nominating committee for their still-informal group.

Three months later, at a June 20 meeting called for all state employees, about eighty employees from various state departments and institutions met again at the Eagle Hotel and formed the State Employees' Association of New Hampshire. They elected Harry E. Jackson, Deputy Secretary of State, as their first president. This new association was intended purely as a social organization. Partisan political activity was barred, and at the first annual outing in September 1940 Jackson emphasized that the association would not become a "pressure group" or an affiliate of organized labor. All state employees, even those elected and appointed, were eligible for membership.

Membership grew to 425 by January 1941, with twenty percent of the state workforce paying their dues of \$1.00 per year.

While members enjoyed social events, the SEA inevitably started to function as the organized voice of state employees in all matters concerning their welfare. In December 1940, the membership decided that the organization should monitor legislation that affected the working conditions of state employees.

Soon, growing numbers of state employees organized within the SEA to resolve issues such as retirement, health insurance, credit unions, shorter work weeks, and job classification. By the end of 1942, membership had grown to 1,600 and the SEA had chartered its first chapter, White Mountain Region Chapter 1. In the years immediately following World War II, the SEA began evolving into something more closely resembling a collective bargaining organization, although it would be three decades before effective collective bargaining rights were extended to New Hampshire's state employees.

By 1948, the SEA was handling grievances and representing members by lobbying the legislature for salary increases, better annual and sick leave provisions, and increased mileage payments for travel on state business. A notable success occurred when the SEA won annual and sick leave benefits for State Hospital and Laconia State School employees similar to those of other state employees. As the SEA increased its activity, membership grew to nearly three thousand by the end of the decade.

The 1950's: Moving Forward

During the first half of the 1950's, SEA involved itself in legislation regarding salary increases, retirement, working conditions, vacation time, rights of employees, and the state budget. However, membership stagnated then dropped to 1,172 by the beginning of 1956.

To help stabilize membership, the leadership developed an authorization for deduction of membership dues from pay checks. At that time, dues were \$5.20 per year. By the end of 1956, a fall membership drive had rebuilt the SEA to 1,708 members.

Victories continued to help grow the association. A reduced work week program was approved by the Governor and Council on July 31, 1958, and notable grievance wins such as the upgrading of 100 road toll collectors continued to rebuild momentum.

Another major success occurred during the 1959 legislative session when SEA confronted Gov. Wesley Powell's reorganization plans, which would have eliminated approximately 200 jobs through consolidating departments. When this plan was passed without a quorum in the Senate, the SEA and other groups challenged the legislation in the courts. On July 17, 1959, the Supreme Court announced that the plan had not been constitutionally enacted.

Success in the political realm was translated into a surge in membership due to the diligent efforts of membership chairperson Edna McKenna. By the end of the decade, membership had grown to 3,074, and Glencliff Sanatorium became the first state institution to reach 100 percent membership. Not surprisingly, McKenna was elected President of the SEA in 1959, becoming the first woman to hold the association's top office.

The 1960's: On the Road to Becoming a Union

SEA had truly become the voice of New Hampshire state employees by 1960. Nearly 70% of all state workers were SEA members, and all employee benefits granted by the legislature were the result of SEA's agenda and lobbying program.

1960 was also the year Operation Santa Claus began. This project, which was at first confined to the Concord area, was spread statewide in 1962. With the cooperation of the state Welfare Division, approximately 700 children received gifts through this program in each of its early years.

Several SEA-sponsored bills were enacted in the first half of the decade. These included group life insurance for state employees and an increase in the mileage rate paid to employees traveling on state business. In 1964, the SEA worked with Gov. John King to achieve an 18% pay raise, and membership grew to 3,600 active employees plus 352 retired members.

Internal changes were also made in the association. 1962 saw the creation of the first chapter for retired members, and in 1964 employees of Keene and Plymouth State Colleges entered the SEA - the first opening of the association to members outside the state's executive branch.

Collective bargaining would become the main controversy of the late 1960's. In 1967, a great deal of interest was created by House Bill 347 - Collective Negotiations. This bill was opposed by AFL-CIO union leaders because they feared that if it became law and certification elections were held, the SEA (not yet a part of the AFL-CIO) would win all of the elections. As a result of pressure from the AFL-CIO, legislators decided to send the concept to a period of study.

In 1969 the Collective Negotiating Bill finally became law and a new era began. As feared by the AFL-CIO at the time, the SEA was overwhelmingly chosen as the bargaining agent by departments and institutions statewide.

1970-1975: Reshaping Collective Bargaining...and the SEA

By the 1970's, the growth of the SEA's membership and activity led to the need for additional staff. Hertel Pariseau had served as the association's executive director since 1958, but the decision was made to hire the organization's first field representative. That position was filled in 1970 by Denis Parker. When Pariseau retired in 1972, Parker became the SEA's executive director, a position he would hold for the next 28 years.

Early in the 1970s, problems with the Collective Negotiation Law of 1969 became apparent. The act was poorly written, which led to many problems with interpretation. Progress with collective bargaining was very slow; members grew frustrated with the disinclination of department heads to reach agreements, and the failure of the Attorney General's office to approve any of those few agreements that were reached.

In 1971, the SEA's annual convention overwhelmingly endorsed a program of embarrassing the state if it continued to bargain in bad faith. This marked a milestone in the organization's history, with its 3,667 members clearly starting to think and act more in terms of collective action. By 1972, not a single collective bargaining agreement had been reached in any state department. It appeared that SEA would have to take action against the department heads that stalled and obstructed the collective bargaining process.

During this time of struggle, achievements continued to be made by the SEA. During a 1972 special session of the legislature, the association secured a wage increase for the state workforce. That same year, SEA pressured the state into changing the personnel rules so members could utilize their sick leave for maternity leave.

In 1973, employee struggles continued. Formal grievances more than doubled over the previous year as the economic situation of SEA members worsened. Collective bargaining agreements were finally reached in a number of departments, only to be held up by the Attorney General's office.

The battle over collective bargaining precipitated further evolution in the mindset of SEA members in 1974. Despite a \$10.00 weekly wage increase which was double the amount of the previous year's, state employees continued to call for aggressive collective action to resolve the negotiation stalemate.

Informational picketing, working to rule and even the legality and consequences of a statewide strike were considered by SEA members. It became obvious that if members stayed docile, equity and justice would not prevail. It also became obvious that the association had evolved into a union - not just legally but in the collective psychology of the members.

Agitation by SEA members finally bore fruit in the 1975 legislative session with the passing of the Public Employee Labor Relations Act. For the first time, the state officials who abused the weaknesses in the previous law would have to submit to the authority of a neutral Public Employee Labor Relations Board (PELRB). The new law granted all public employees the right to collectively negotiate terms and conditions of employment with their employer. While strikes were prohibited by the law, it was also an unfair labor practice for a public employer to refuse to negotiate in good faith.

Once the law became effective in December 1975, the results of negotiations would be presented to the legislature for funding. Since the new collective bargaining law offered better conditions for negotiations, the SEA decided to renegotiate all issues and withdrew all pending contracts.

The first appointed members of the PELRB were not considered particularly union-friendly, and controversy broke out almost immediately over SEA's certification as bargaining agent under the old law. The PELRB held that the association would have to become recertified under the new law. SEA went all the way to the Supreme Court to challenge the PELRB decision, and won its continued right to be the exclusive bargaining agent as previously chosen by over 90% of all state employees. Just the previous month, SEA had won overwhelming majorities in representation votes held in two state departments.

1976-1979: Struggling with Meldrim Thompson

By the mid 1970's, the economic condition of state employees had suffered a distinct decline due to inflation and a slowdown in wage increases. However, the SEA scored a historic victory in 1976 when a bill was passed in the legislature making New Hampshire only the 6th state in the country to provide full payment of medical insurance for state employees, spouses, and families.

Bargaining progressed in 1977 from negotiations to fact finding, and Gov. Meldrim Thompson threatened to lay off ten percent of the state workforce. In March of that year, just to make sure employees got the message, the state rejected the first fact finder's report. In response, SEA members decided they were "sick" of the state's ill treatment

and authorized a two-day sick out scheduled to occur on July 7 and 8. The sick out ultimately was called off because the threat and the pressure on the state brought about a contract settlement without layoffs.

During its history, the SEA had used a number of different vehicles for communication with members. From its inception in 1940 through to the 1970's, the organization relied upon small, typed newsletters. Early on, these newsletters largely reported on social events, charity work, and committee activities. As the association became more of a political advocate for state workers in the 1950's and 1960's, the one-page mimeographed newsletters reflected this change.

By the mid-1970's, the association had experimented with a number of different types of communication. In the early decades, short newsletters were the method of choice. In the early 1970's, a sporadic attempt at a magazine was tried with "SEA Side." In 1977 the SEA published its first newspaper by changing the official "SEA Newsletter" into a newspaper. In March 1979, this newspaper was retitled the SEA News, which remains the union's primary publication today.

In the closing years of the decade, SEA continued to battle with the state in negotiations. In May 1978 Gov. Thompson vetoed the funding bill for the state employees' contract - a contract with significant pay increases negotiated by the union. SEA members mobilized, and convinced the legislature to override the veto and restore the funding.

1981: The Year of the Great Flood

With the dawn of the 1980's, SEA members had high hopes for the future. Many felt that the political climate of the state was changing in a way that meant a better environment for state employees and public services.

However, soon after the 1980 election the federal government began decreasing funding to states and Gov. Hugh Gallen sought significant cost-cutting measures. The state's apparent lack of planning was creating a crisis for services and employees.

When negotiations commenced in 1981, bargaining quickly reached impasse as politicians warned of massive job cuts and aimed to reduce the rights of state workers. SEA members determined that the log jam had to be broken, and the solution to this log jam would have to be a flood.

"Flood Day" took place in April 1981, as employees flowed in from all parts of the state to participate in the largest gathering of state employees in New Hampshire history. An estimated 4,000 SEA members flooded the State House grounds, and pickets totally surrounded the capitol building. Numerous political allies voiced their support and received cheers from the massive crowd.

Responding to these 4,000 state workers who were bold enough to speak up for themselves, the state Senate threatened to eliminate personnel rules and civil service protections. The climate for state employment soured further, and employees fumed.

Perhaps as a result of the tension, a wave of illness struck the state workforce on June 23-24, 1981. Nearly 85% of the workforce called in sick for these two days, the most successful labor action in SEA's history to date. Most state offices closed, and parking lots were largely wide expanses of empty space. The National Guard was called in to keep New Hampshire Hospital, Laconia State School, and the Youth Development Center operating. From one end of the state to the other, state government slowed or stopped completely

After two days of the mysterious illness, negotiations with Gov. Gallen resumed and employees returned to their jobs with the assurance that the legislature would address the funding of the pay increases contained in the contract's second year.

Dealing with Sununu

The contract's second-year raise of 9% came under fire in the 1982 legislative session, and a budget was passed without including funds for the raise.

Member mobilization failed to budge the politicians, and an outraged SEA had no choice but to reopen negotiations. Talks continued into the election season, and Gov. Gallen was defeated by John Sununu. Political turmoil and the recalcitrance of the legislature could not be overcome, and funds for the "second nine percent" grew further out of reach.

Members would again march on the state house in 1983, as negotiations with Gov. Sununu quickly reached impasse. Approximately 2,000 state employees rallied at the capitol on March 31, calling for an end to the downward slide in state wages as compared to inflation. Members' blood boiled when a favorable fact finder's report was rejected by the state, and a bill to appropriate the unfunded nine percent was killed in the legislature.

On June 17, 1983 the union's board of directors called for a general sick out of state employees, just two years after the members of SEA had brought state government to a standstill. But within hours of the board's action, Superior Court Judge David Souter, at the request of Gov. Sununu, issued a restraining order against the planned sick out. The contract would eventually be settled, but unfortunately the state had used the courts to thwart the mass sick out by state workers.

In Unity, Strength: Affiliation with SEIU

During the 1980's, a national decline in unions' bargaining strength and increased pressures on state services led many independent public sector unions to seek out partnership and coalition strength through joining established labor organizations.

A special committee was formed by the SEA to study the pros and cons of affiliation with an international union, and after more than a year of study and deliberation, the committee recommended an affiliation agreement with the growing Service Employees International Union, SEIU.

History was made on May 6, 1984 when delegates to a special convention of the SEA approved an affiliation agreement with the 850,000-member SEIU. The agreement protected SEA's independence while providing valuable assistance to the association in the areas of political action, collective bargaining, and organizing. SEIU Local 1984 had been born. In 1988, this affiliation was solidified when convention delegates gave overwhelming approval to the initial four-year trial period.

On New Year's Day 1989, New Hampshire became the first state in the nation to enact clean air standards for state office buildings. With the assistance of SEIU, SEA worked on the introduction and passage of this historic legislation. SEIU then completed a thorough air quality survey of hundreds of members in confined office buildings. Soon thereafter, Maine became the second state to pass this health-protecting legislation.

That year, our neighbors of the Maine State Employees' Association (MSEA) also joined us as members of SEIU, becoming SEIU Local 1989. Our fraternal relationship, developed over the previous years, would now be further enhanced by being part of the very same

An Early Battle in the Health Care War

Another national trend started to weigh upon the state workforce in the 1980's. Exploding health care costs led to an ever-increasing price tag for health insurance - which, due to SEA's tough negotiating stance and membership strength, remained wholly at the expense of the employer. However, employer-paid health insurance plans were under attack nationwide, and employees were being asked to accept reduced health benefits or to bear the cost.

In New Hampshire, state employee health insurance had been provided by Blue Cross/Blue Shield for many years without any bids. In 1985, the state decided to release bids for the health insurance plan and BC/BS entered the competition along with several other companies. AETNA Insurance Company, as the low bidder, was awarded the contract. After protests to Gov. Sununu by BC/BS, the contract was taken from AETNA and sent out to bid yet again. This time, BC/BS made the lower bid and won the contract. Against the backdrop of skyrocketing insurance costs, this turmoil was an omen of things to come.

Contract Campaign 1989

The battle for health insurance became a protracted war with Gov. Judd Gregg in contract negotiations that started in 1989. Difficult bargaining led to impasse, and a fact finder recommended robbing state employees of their longtime benefit of paid health insurance.

More than 1,000 SEA members gathered at the State House on May 9, 1989 for "Unity Day." They gathered to demonstrate their disapproval of the governor's conduct of negotiations, as well as their disgust at the lopsided opinion given by the fact finder.

An agreement was ultimately reached with the Gregg administration which provided a 5% pay raise and protected the fully paid health insurance benefit. However, a controversial provision on holding down insurance costs led to significant divisions within the SEA membership. Differences of opinion on the insurance cost provision were wide, and a substantial number of those in disagreement with the provision quit the union.

Sadly, those employees who were unhappy with the contract did not understand that by quitting, they left the organization in a weaker state as the 1990's began. With no respite from soaring health care costs and state fiscal pressures in sight, the non-members would become an obstacle to maintaining current levels of benefits.

1990-1992: Scuffles with Gov. Judd Gregg

Fiscal pressures and a political agenda hostile to public services caused Gov. Gregg to go on the offensive in 1990. He first attempted to strip professional and supervisory employees of their bumping rights in the event of a layoff, but was foiled in January when SEA members successfully lobbied the House Appropriations Committee to reject this attack on worker protection.

Several weeks later, the governor announced that up to 500 state employees would be laid off. Although SEA members mobilized, they were unsuccessful in preventing the layoff. However, a half-way victory was gained when the SEA won extended health insurance for many of the laid off employees. Later that year, members were reminded of their power when fourteen of sixteen SEA-backed candidates won election to the state House and Senate.

The assaults from the governor's office continued. Hundreds of SEA members again made the trek to the State House to rally in early 1991, this time in opposition to a unilateral, mandatory furlough plan being pushed by the governor. This scheme was halted by a cease and desist order the SEA obtained from the Public Employee Labor Relations Board.

Having faced the SEA in negotiations in 1989, Gov. Gregg had clearly learned that state employees do not back down from what they believe in. Determined to get what he alone wanted, he took steps in 1991 to bully his way around the SEA by seeking legislation that would make contract negotiations meaningless. He asked the state legislature to pass a law requiring state employees to pay part of their health insurance premium - with this law in hand, he hoped to enter the next round of bargaining able to say that any other proposal by the union would be illegal.

This brazen attempt to change collective bargaining by legal fiat was rejected by the Joint Fiscal Committee on September 25, 1991 after intensive lobbying by thousands of SEA members. Bruised by this setback to his attempted power grab, Gov. Gregg publicly called the Republican-run committee "cowards."

On March 21 of that year, a significant event occurred when the union moved from rented office space on Manchester Street to its new headquarters at 105 North State Street, ending 51 years of renting. The purchase of the building was made possible by the diligent work of a committee led by John V. Amrol of the state Department of Transportation. Just over a decade later, the building would be named for him.

1993-1996: Successes and Setbacks with Gov. Merrill

State employees had not received a raise since 1990, and the collective bargaining agreement negotiated in 1989 had expired in 1991. Contract talks in 1992 limped to impasse without reaching an agreement. At the end of the year, with Judd Gregg leaving the governor's office to carry his agenda to the United States Senate, union members hoped that new chief executive Steve Merrill would take a different approach to his dealings with the state workforce.

Indeed, negotiations took on a much different character with Steve Merrill's team at the bargaining table. While there were still setbacks and frustrations, bargaining could at least proceed in good faith without the employer attempting to bulldoze the state workforce by legislative mandate. Negotiations proceeded, and soon bore fruit.

By a vote of roughly 2,600 to 170, the SEA membership ratified a new agreement in May 1993 which included pay raises and maintained the increasingly sacred health care benefits. Two years without a contract came to an end, and state employees joined SEA in record numbers.

A different kind of history was made in May 1994 when union member Bob Lyon of the Department of Environmental Services organized the SEA's first 5k road race. Participants included competitive runners as well as families who walked the course, in what has gone on to become a major annual charity event.

The year 1995 was dominated by struggles with the state over privatization and the reorganization of the Department of Health and Human Services.

That spring, a new state budget was proposed which mandated the abolition of 580 jobs and privatization of the Youth Development Center and Youth Service Center. Union members began an educational campaign to demonstrate to the public and elected officials that privatizing these services would decrease security and the quality of services while costing the state important federal Medicaid dollars. After members gave extensive testimony to the legislature, the job-killing privatization plans were defeated.

Soon after, the legislature took the unprecedented move of granting imperial powers to Terry Morton, the commissioner of the Department of Health and Human Services. The legislative move, requested by Gov. Merrill, allowed Morton to bypass state laws and the personnel rules to reorganize the department.

At the same time, the legislature authorized contracting out the supervision of New Hampshire Hospital's dietary, housekeeping, maintenance, grounds, and laundry services. The French company Sodexo was given the contract without competitive bidding. These two actions by the legislature set the stage for years of frustration, fighting, and ill will.

Meanwhile, the national health care crisis continued to weigh upon the membership in contract negotiations. With state employees stuck between the state's antiquated fiscal policies and soaring national health care costs, a contract agreement was reached that protected health care benefits by foregoing raises. Members recognized reality and ratified the agreement by a 2-1 margin.

SEA member involvement elected member Marty Boormeester to the New Hampshire House of Representatives in a special election in January 1996. He defeated former NHTI president David Larrabee, who told the Concord Monitor, "I got beat by a pretty powerful machinery - the SEA." This statement would be illustrated numerous times that year, a heavily political year for the union. First, member mobilization and legislative contact brought about the death of HB 1559, which would have reduced the retirement benefits of state employees. At the first hearing on the bill, over 200 SEA members arrived to be heard.

Then, extensive contact from SEA members convinced the Executive Council to table the proposed privatization of liquor warehousing.

And finally, after Gov. Merrill chose not to run for re-election, a massive effort by thousands of SEA members helped elect Jeanne Shaheen governor of New Hampshire on November 5. In building toward this victory, the union conducted a voter registration drive which increased the number of SEA members registered to vote by 25 percent. Volunteers put in hours phone banking, leafleting, and stuffing envelopes, ultimately electing a governor who seemed ready to be a proponent of quality public services. The same day that SEA helped put Jeanne Shaheen into the governor's office, in another part of Concord, one lone member decided to take action against privatization. A single employee of New Hampshire Hospital stood alone picketing that day, to bring attention to the substandard services being provided by Sodexo's management.

On subsequent days she was joined by an increasing number of union members. As the number of members in attendance grew, so did the the frequency of picketing events. From one member taking a stand, the State Worker Action Team (S.W.A.T.) was born, and they would continue to grow and keep pressure on New Hampshire Hospital over the issue of privatization.

1997: Battle Over Bumping

With the 1996 elections behind them, SEA members looked forward to improved relations with the state. However, 1997 became a year of conflict.

Negotiations for a new state employee contract would be complicated by the intervention of the legislature, Department of Corrections employees would battle their management for a subunit agreement after nearly ten years without one, a questionable layoff in the Department of Health and Human Services would provoke a strong response, and two prominent commissioners would face landslide votes of no confidence.

An agreement for a new state employees' contract was reached with the Shaheen administration on February 12, 1997, the first time in over a decade that an agreement was reached before the statutory state budget submission deadline. This tentative agreement included a restoration of bumping rights which had been stripped from DHHS employees the previous year when the legislature bestowed Commissioner Terry Morton with overlord authority.

This new agreement received overwhelming membership support, and members ratified the contract by a 9-1 margin. However, a massive road block appeared. The legislature did not want their anointing of Commissioner Morton meddled with, and they informed the governor's negotiators that if the language restoring DHHS bumping rights remained in the contract, no funds would be appropriated.

Reluctantly, the state negotiators requested that the SEA re-open negotiations. Even more reluctantly, the union agreed. The entire contract could not be jeopardized for the sake of this one item. A new agreement was reached on May 16, which included everything from the original agreement minus the restored bumping rights. The newer agreement added one thing: nine months health and dental insurance for any employee laid off between July 1, 1997 and December 31, 1998.

1997: Action Leads to Corrections Subunit Victory

Nearly ten years without a subunit contract came to a head in the Department of Corrections after negotiators failed to reach agreement on any issue and impasse was declared. Determined to get issues of staffing, safety, and fairness resolved, DOC members developed member-based strategies beyond the bargaining table.

To demonstrate their unity and determination, members began doing "solidarity walks." Every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday employees gathered in the parking lot prior to their shift, then entered the building as a unified group. They also boycotted "Corrections Employee Appreciation Week," seeing the obvious duplicity in such an event while corrections employees were receiving a clear message of non-appreciation in negotiations. Rather than participate in a May 5 event during "Corrections Employee Appreciation Week," corrections members made the decision to picket the event.

Management's response was to videotape the picketers from a window - a shady tactic which backfired after it received extensive regional media coverage. The public was outraged by this blatant attempt at intimidation through surveillance during "Corrections Employee Appreciation Week." As the state's corrections facilities simmered with staff unrest and the union took legal action, DOC Commissioner Paul Brodeur succumbed to the pressure and agreed to destroy the surveillance tape.

Soon after, the members of SEA chapters 24 and 38 - both made up of DOC employees - voted no confidence in Commissioner Brodeur by a landslide 4-1 margin.

More than nine years without an agreement, job actions by staff, media exposure for heavy-handed intimidation tactics, and the overwhelming vote of no confidence all combined to bring the political pressures on the state to a climax. On July 22, Gov. Shaheen asked for Commissioner Brodeur's resignation.

With Brodeur out the door, negotiators returned to the table. Union members were eager to pursue an agreement now that the obstructionist commissioner was gone, and state negotiators were eager to quell the serious unrest which had been demonstrated by the unified employees.

Negotiations flowed forward, and an agreement was reached by autumn which was ratified by a 95% membership vote. On November 20, the SEA and Gov. Shaheen signed the new Department of Corrections subunit contract, the first in over ten years. This new agreement, with its extensive new protections for employees, immediately became a model for others to strive for.

1997: "Reinstate the 58"

That autumn also saw the beginning of what would be a long fight in the Department of Health and Human Services. Using the extraordinary powers bestowed upon him by the legislature, Commissioner Terry Morton announced during the first week of October that fifty-eight employees would be laid off effective November 30.

While not a large number, the layoff announcement lit a firestorm under SEA members because it was procedurally improper, focused in many cases on people who were personal targets of the Morton administration, and was presented in manner so aloof and callous that even Morton's longtime critics were taken aback. In addition, soon after announcing the layoff of the fifty-eight, Morton began creating new, high-salary, non-union managerial positions at the highest levels of the department.

One week after the announcement, more than 150 union members rallied on the grounds of State Office Park South, and the "Reinstate the Fifty-Eight" movement was born. On Oct. 23, just two weeks after the layoff announcement, petitions with hundreds of signatures supporting the reinstatement of the fifty-eight were presented to Gov. Shaheen's office.

Then in November, Morton became the second state department head to receive an overwhelming vote of no confidence in 1997. The vote against Morton in DHHS was a staggering 96%.

While members mobilized and took actions against the layoff, legal proceedings began which would unfortunately drag on for years due to the refusal of the state to accept repeated defeats.

1998: The "Save Our Slopes" Fight and Winning Elections

The year 1997 had been one of the most tumultuous years for SEA members since the battles of 1981. There had been setbacks as well as advances, and new areas of struggle had appeared. The following year was perhaps less trying, but only barely.

A sad event came early in 1998 when former SEA president Joan Dolloff passed away on March 13. A nurse from New Hampshire Hospital, she was the union's longest-serving president (1981-1991) and had led the union through the tumultuous and challenging decade of the 1980s. Five years later, the meeting room in the union's office building would be named in her honor.

For many years, politicians had discussed the possibility of privatizing Cannon and Sunapee Mountains. The decision to sell these public areas to a private company came to a head during the first half of 1998. As the push to privatize these properties gathered momentum, the SEA attempted to thwart the sell-off.

True analysis of privatization efforts had repeatedly shown the results to be higher prices and degraded services, and members could see that Cannon and Sunapee would be no different. This battle was not just about saving a number of state jobs; union members saw it as a battle to keep New Hampshire's recreational resources in the hands of the people of New Hampshire. Many businesses, skiers, and members of the general public agreed, and the "Save Our Slopes" coalition was created with the SEA as the driving force.

Ultimately, however, the momentum to privatize was too great a monster for the union to contain. Although Cannon Mountain was saved, on June 12 the Executive Council approved the sale of Sunapee. The Granite State's own ski mountain was thus handed over to a private company, who promptly raised the price of lift tickets by 48%. In this case, like so many others, the SEA was able to tell politicians "we told you so."

The November 1998 elections were another time of electoral mobilization by SEA members. A massive effort was made to identify and support candidates of both political parties who were supportive of state employees' issues and the protection of public services; the result was that every single candidate endorsed by the SEA won.

The union elected enough Democratic friends that control of the state senate switched hands; they elected enough Republican friends that a significant bipartisan bloc of

legislators now existed who supported the protection of quality public services and fairness for state workers.

Party Like it's 1999

SEA members had a pair of reasons to celebrate in 1999. In January, Governor Shaheen did not reappoint Terry Morton as commissioner of DHHS when his term ended. The unpopular agency head who had been granted superpowers by the Legislature, who had stirred a hornet's nest with reorganization and layoffs, and who had been dealt a 96% vote of no confidence by his own employees was shown the door.

Direct action and mobilization by large numbers of members had resulted in another removal of a departmental commissioner.

Then, later in the year, Virginia Lamberton resigned as state director of personnel after a 12-year reign of hostility toward state employees. Year by year, her negative revisions of the personnel rules and spiteful actions toward employees had built a wave of opposition to her continued tenure, and during 1999 SEA members mounted a very public campaign to have her removed.

Among her accomplishments were making employees wait ten years to gain bumping rights instead of five, and extending the length of time a disciplinary letter hangs over an employee's head from two years to five. Upgrade requests were often met with threats of downgrading.

Clearly, Lamberton had to go, and SEA members heavily lobbied the governor and the Executive Council against her reappointment. Perhaps seeing the writing on the wall, she resigned and moved to a management position within the Department of Health and Human Services. In announcing her resignation, the Concord Monitor referred to her as the SEA's "longtime nemesis."

However, not every departure in 1999 was a reason to rejoice. On November 30, SEA Executive Director Denis Parker retired after 30 years of service to the union. 1999 was also a year of continued efforts to defend public services. At the start of the year, an unprecedented tri-state coalition of state employees' unions was launched; the New Hampshire SEA (SEIU Local 1984), the Maine SEA (SEIU Local 1989) and the Vermont SEA stood together publicly to announce region-wide initiatives for quality and accountability in public services.

The defense of public services would again focus on privatization, and the Department of Corrections became the battlefield. DOC members mobilized against the proposed privatization of health care services within the state's correctional facilities. Armed with data that showed the failure of such schemes elsewhere in the country, the DOC members educated elected officials and successfully defeated the drive to sell correctional health care.

2000: "Fair Pay" and a Full-Time President

The year 2000 was a mixture of success and frustration for union members. In the plus column, SEA members successfully convinced the legislature to pass safe needle, or "needle stick" legislation to help protect health care workers. Also, SEA members worked to successfully re-elect Gov. Shaheen. However, after just two short years, the pro-worker majority in the state Senate was lost in the 2000 elections.

Preparations for the state employees' contract campaign began early in the year. A large-scale drive to recruit new members was launched in the spring, calling for unity to achieve "Fair Pay." Collective bargaining "town meetings" were held with employees across the state, and members prepared for yet another tough round of bargaining in the face of skyrocketing insurance costs.

In the closing months of the year, SEA reached a new historical milestone: the election of the union's first full-time president. During its entire history, the elected president had been a part-time, volunteer position while the union was essentially managed by a staff person, the executive director. The members had decided - and the constitution properly amended - for the union to elect a full time chief officer at the 2000 convention, and to eliminate the position of executive director.

At the 60th annual convention in October, delegates elected Timothy Decker of the Department of Health and Human Services as the union's first full-time president. Pursuant to recently-negotiated contract language, he began a two-year leave of absence from his state position to assume the helm of the SEA full time.

Once again, the SEA defied the dominant stereotypes. While opponents of working families have constantly whined about the influence of "union bosses," the SEA members elected their leader from among their own ranks. Far from a "union boss," they had selected a fellow worker who served the public as a juvenile probation and parole officer.

2001: "Just Say No" and 9/11

As negotiations carried over into 2001, the state proposed significant cost sharing of health insurance, which they had so often in the past. This time, union members adopted a creative response. Thousands signed "Just Say No" messages and returned them to the union's bargaining team. These huge piles of green "Just Say No" requests were then dumped out onto the bargaining table in front of the state's team. "We get the point," one of them remarked. A contract rally had been scheduled ahead of time for April 19, although the bargaining team could not be sure where things would stand at that point - the members would either be calling for an agreement to be reached, or for an existing agreement to be funded.

As it turned out, an agreement was reached just days before the rally, which then adopted a celebratory and positive tone as over 600 members rallied somewhat politely for the legislature to fund the agreement. Members' refusal to back down on their benefits led to

a widely popular agreement which protected health benefits while providing 6% in raises over two years.

The year ended under a cloud of fear and sorrow due to events beyond the borders of the Granite State. On Sept. 11, terrorists attacked the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, killing thousands of innocent people. Among those killed were 62 fellow members of SEIU. The tragedy continued for the survivors, as thousands of SEIU members lost their jobs and faced uncertain economic futures due to the attacks.

2002: Goodbye to Ray and N.H. for Health Care is Born

SEA members suffered a tragedy here at home in 2002, with the accidental death of longtime activist Ray Proulx on April 27. Proulx had been a union steward, chapter president, member of the Board of Directors, and had been one of the strongest voices for working people in the New Hampshire House of Representatives. Exactly six months earlier to the day, Proulx had received the union's John B. Parker Award for Outstanding Member at the 61st annual convention. By the following convention, a new award would be named for Ray: the Raymond E. Proulx Award for Political Activism.

Early in the year, a drawn out battle against contracting out came to a successful conclusion, illustrating the importance of patience and persistence, as well as the sheer tenacity of SEA members. The struggle against outsourcing at New Hampshire Hospital had started back in 1995 when management of certain areas was contracted to the Sodexo corporation. This led to the picketing by S.W.A.T. and a number of other political pressures by union members.

Every time something went wrong, or workers were mistreated by the Sodexo bosses, union members immediately brought it to the attention of the Executive Council. In fact, more than one time Executive Councilors were brought in to have a tour to see for themselves. Finally, after seven years of pressure, action, and education by SEA members, the Executive Council voted to remove Sodexo from the hospital and return management functions to state workers effective July 1, 2002. Workers celebrated this as a victory for their own working conditions as well as a victory for effective public services.

Also in 2002, the union launched New Hampshire for Health Care, an organization that would reach far beyond our organization to place quality, affordable health care at the forefront of the upcoming presidential campaign.

Efforts began to recruit Granite Staters as "health care voters" who would state their intent to vote only for candidates who proposed to deal with the national health care crisis. By the end of its first year, New Hampshire for Health Care recruited over 30,000 health care voters.

At the 62nd annual convention in October, SEA members gathered to elect their second full-time president. Because Tim Decker had decided not to stand for re-election, the

field was open. Members elected Paul Stokes, a longtime activist and trainer in the union's steward education program. The union's new president then began his two year leave of absence from his position at the state Department of Labor.

The end of the year did not provide much cause for celebration in the political arena. Efforts to elect Gov. Shaheen to the United States Senate were unsuccessful, and her replacement in the governor's office, Craig Benson, was an unknown factor in regard to public services and employees. Members cautiously awaited signals from the new governor as to his views on public services and state employees.

2003: Stronger Together

As 2002 rolled into 2003, Gov. Benson's outlook became much more obvious. He purged the state's bargaining team in the midst of negotiations and replaced many of them with cronies from his business career at Cabletron Systems. These new negotiators showed very little interest in compromise and made very clear that a new agreement would be unlikely without taking a sledgehammer to public services and employee health benefits.

Simultaneously, the new governor proposed a state budget that would have crippled state services. Union members rolled up their sleeves for the two-pronged battle.

In the bargaining realm, stalemate was reached despite creative actions by employees. A rally held on a cold April day drew several hundred members, who marched around the state house calling for a fair contract that protected public services. The governor's stance in bargaining remained unchanged, showing that more pressure had to be brought to bear.

A public campaign was mounted - "We're There for You" - to demonstrate to the public the need to defend state services. A fact-finder's report which proposed to preserve employee benefits was approved after Executive Councilors had extensive contact with union members. However, their vote to support state workers and services was negated by Gov. Benson. A candidate who said he would not balance the budget on the backs of state workers now sought to reach directly into their families' pockets and do exactly that.

In the area of the state budget, the governor's veto of a budget that didn't slash services deep enough nearly brought the state crashing to a government shutdown on July 1, 2003. A budget was ultimately passed that cut away at public services, but not as deeply as Benson originally proposed. Along the way, mobilization by SEA members prevented the closure of the NH State Prison for Women. After six years of member action and legal wrangling, the "Reinstate the Fifty-Eight" effort came to a close in early 2003. What started as a large-scale mobilization by DHHS members and others became a struggle of legal action as the years wore on.

The state had engaged in years of delay tactics. The SEA repeatedly won hearings calling for the matter to be arbitrated, and at each stage the state appealed the union's victory. Ultimately, the state Supreme Court decided that the state had not acted in good faith and said the grievances must be arbitrated.

By the time the cases went to arbitration in the spring of 2002, all but four grievants had settled or withdrawn. In a long-awaited victory for these final four, an arbitrator ruled in their favor, and ordered each reinstated to their prior position or an equivalent position.

In mid-year, the union embarked upon an innovative new communications project by starting its own daily radio show, appropriately titled "SEA Radio." The show, airing from 11:00-12:00 noon on WKXL-AM in Concord, brought the union's call for defense of public services to the daily airwaves.

As 2003 came to a close, the presidential primary brought national attention to the State Employees' Association of New Hampshire. As the largest AFL-CIO union in the first primary state, SEA members found themselves in the national spotlight.

As always, the union focused on issues rather than political parties. And at the national level, the issues were clear: health care and economic security for working families were at the forefront. It was also clear that President Bush was wrong on these issues. For the first time in its history, the SEA moved toward making a primary endorsement in the presidential race.

Members were polled, both at the 63rd annual convention and also by telephone. What appeared in New Hampshire was the same pattern that SEIU had noticed nationally: among our members, former Vermont governor Howard Dean had a tidal wave of support surging behind him.

With the national eye focused on New Hampshire and on the SEA within New Hampshire, the union made history with its primary endorsement, announcing their backing of Gov. Dean on Nov. 13. Surely, more history would be made in the months ahead.