

## **Vera Weekes Interview by Jean Weisman and Andrea Vásquez**

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Jean Weisman: Today is November 6, 2014, and we're interviewing Vera Weekes. I'm Jean Weisman, and Andrea Vásquez is here both as a technician and to ask questions. Vera, what was your first job at CUNY?

Vera Weekes: I was an assistant at the Caribbean Research Center at Medgar Evers College. I started working there November 1990. And I became a HEO [Higher Education Officer] April 1, 1991.

Jean: What is your current job?

Vera: I am a senior paralegal, and a BIA accredited representative at Citizenship Now, Medgar Evers College.

Jean: What's a BIA accredited?

Vera: Board of Immigration Appeals. It means, basically, I can—even though I'm not an attorney—I can go and represent clients at the interviews, or whatever they're doing. So that gives me, kind of the same, a little position like an attorney, but not a full-fledged attorney. But I can do representation.

Andrea Vásquez: And would you tell us a little bit about your background? What led you to that position?

Vera: Well, first of all, I am an immigrant. I came to this country in 1989, and, like all immigrants, I had to work hard. I remember that I went to a school just to get a foot start, or head start. And I went to – I think the school was called Career Builders. And I paid \$1000 for the course, that used to really help me to get a job in America. And the lady said to me, "Well, you do not have any American experience." And I was shocked. Because I said to her, "You mean I've lived and work in England? I've had senior positions in England. So that doesn't count? And I'd been a teacher in the high schools and the college in Montserrat, and that doesn't count?" You know, so that was really a shocker, that. Okay, so because you don't have accreditation in America, you are nobody. So, from then on, I wasn't going to take any backseat. So, it was all, go to school, whatever.

Jean: How did you hear about CUNY?

Vera: Well, my children actually attended university. My daughter, when she came, had already done high school, first year of college, so she went straight to Bronx Community College. And my neighbor, who knew me from back home, knew of all my experience, and qualities, and hard work, so he was happy to recruit me at Medgar Evers College. So that's how come I entered there. But, really, when I left Montserrat, I only had two aims and desires. One was to be a professor, and the other was to work on Wall Street. Those were the only two desires.

Jean: Small ambitions.

Vera: I had actually applied to Hunter College to do my Ph.D., you know, when I was in Montserrat, and I had gotten accepted. But, you know, I didn't move at that time. I came subsequently to that.

Jean: Is the PSC active at Medgar Evers College?

Vera: Oh, yes. We have meetings at least once per quarter, if not more.

Andrea Vasquez: When you first arrived, in 1990, were you immediately involved with the union at all? Was there a union presence at Medgar when you got there?

Vera: There was a HEO chapter. Not a chapter, but there is a HEO organization at Medgar. So, I knew of it, and sometime soon after Jean approached me and asked me to join the union, so, of course, I spoke to folks who were in the HEO chapter. So, at that time, you know, they thought – Okay. It was new. New caucus was new, because the old guards were, I think, gone. I didn't know too much about the history.

Andrea: So, this was later? This was in 2000, or something?

Jean: Yeah. That was when we were running for office.

Vera: Right.

Jean: In about 2000.

Vera: Two thousand, right, so... There still is a HEO organization. So, they had their own rules and regulations, and so on.

Andrea: And so before the new caucus was there, you didn't know about the union at all?

Vera: Well, I wouldn't say I didn't know about it, but maybe not involved in it. I mean, I know there's a union, because one thing I always tell my children and myself, "I will never work anyplace where there is no union." So, of course, I knew about it. Don't offer me any job if it's not union. I'm coming from a union background. All my life I've worked in union shops.

Jean: What are the issues for HEO's at Medgar Evers?

Vera: Well, recently, there were, to me, a lot of turmoil, I would call it, because people were being moved around. And, whenever you have changing of the guards... For want of a better word, I would say 'turnover,' because people leave, and then you have new people come. We have a new President, who is probably there maybe a year. And the HR Director is there probably a year.

And, so, people don't know about the culture of, you know, of the college, and so on. So, sometimes it's a little hard. But I find that they will tell me certain things. And when I tell them to call the union and complain, then they don't do it, so for me, my observation is there seems to be some fear going along. And there's some unfairness from the outside looking in ...

Jean: They're afraid of the union? Is that what you're saying?

Vera: No. They're not afraid of the union. They know of the union because we've had a very, very, very good union rep. We used to have meetings every month under Dr. Jackson, before Dr. Jackson left.

Andrea: The President, right? He was the President.

Vera: He was the President there for many years. And he advised me to have meetings every month. He wanted me to have meetings every month, because he looked at it as educating the members, because my thing is, if the members... A lot of them don't read, they don't read upon the agreement, and they go along, you know. So, we used to go through the agreement what the... and he loved it. So, he advised us to have meetings every month, and they can ask questions, and they feel freer to do that. So, a lot of them knew about their rights, and what they can and cannot do.

Andrea: So, when you first became involved in the union, when Jean asked you to join the chapter and take a role in the chapter, as you became involved, what did you feel about being a HEO in the union? What was it like to become active as a HEO in the union?

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Vera: Well, it was exciting times, because we were going... We started off, and there was Iris, and Jean, and Authyrine. We were like the four people trying to the HEO chapter revived. And we, actually, split up the colleges. So, I was responsible for certain colleges, Jean had certain colleges, Authurine had some, and Iris had some.

So, you know, we could drop in anytime. So, it was a good time. It was very, very exciting, and I think all the members were excited. They learned a lot. And, just by us going on campus... I remember once, we went over to, not York, Kingsborough Community College. So we used to go during lunchtime and have meetings, and then come back to work.

Andrea: And what issues did you feel came up for you guys, then?

Vera: Well, I think, for the first time, the HEOs felt represented. They felt they had a say, because the union was geared towards faculty and not really towards HEOs. So, this is how we came up with... You know, over time, and having the... what do you call it? The Labor Management Committee on campus, and what their rights are, in terms of the 40-hour week and all of that.

Jean: And, were there struggles that you were involved in? Was there a campaign around the Labor Management committee?

Vera: Oh, yes.

Andrea: You want to tell us a little bit about that?

Vera: Some people will work, because HEOs want to get the job done. So, you know, I've slept at the office, you know. I mean, I've stayed at the office from Friday, and I left my office on Monday night. So... And sometimes when I'm doing proposals, I will do an overnight at the office, and I'd stay there all night and get stuff done.

So, the President... We went to the President, because you have some managers who are mean-spirited, in the sense that a HEO would stay late and get the job done. But let's say they want to go out or leave early. They would bring the sheet and say, "Sign." So, we had a meeting with Dr. Jackson. And he told all of the leaders... Because, what I did once, I asked him to address the HEOs. And I also sent an invitation to the HR person to come and address the HEOs. And I also asked the labor designee to come and address the HEOs. I said, "They're your employees. You tell them what you expect of them." You know, not having it all over...

And Dr. Jackson distinctly advised them; he didn't put it in writing, but he said, "Lisa," who is his assistant, if he's having any function. He said, "Lisa stays." And I've seen Lisa at events. She stays until the event is completed. Nobody gets overtime. But he says, "Okay. She stays." So, if Lisa wants to take her son to the doctor, I let her go. I don't ask her to sign anything. So, what he's saying, it's a give-and-take. You can't want them to stay and get the job done, they don't get paid, and should they want a favor, you're becoming mean-spirited. So, that was one of the concerns he advised them to do. He didn't put it in black and white, but that was that understanding.

Andrea: And was there a citywide similar situation for other people that you've heard about when you were organizing on other campuses, for example? Or were there different issues?

Vera: Well, I think it's, basically, you know, the same sort of issues. I know there was one serious one where they won some overtime with the people at one of these colleges. They had to stay, the folks in... Bursar, those people. We spoke to some people, but I think, again, it's individuals, individual management. Because when I asked on campus, what is your procedure? And they would tell me the HEO, "We do not have a problem." Because whatever it is, their managers give them days off. So, everything is done, the informal organization. And that's what Dr. Jackson was saying. So, I think... You know, you may get the odd one or two manager who doesn't understand how to be bigger, but kind of, a punitive kind of management style.

Jean: How did you get your position as a member of the Executive Council?

Vera: Okay. I think, once I got into the union, I was... I think I was there every day. I think everything that was going, I was in it, because, at that time, the union wanted to diversify and,

you know, have some color in it, and I was... I think I was the only person of color that was, more or less, visible. So, I came to everything. I was... You know, I started off as a delegate. I just know I was just there, doing everything. I was Grievance Counselor, I was on the Executive, I'm on the Legislative... You know, I was just there everyday.

Jean: Well, did you feel that you had an influence on the policies of the union, or what was going on with the union?

Vera: Yeah, I think so. I mean... You know, we had a group, when we all sat down together, and we looked at issues, and so on, and demands. I think we did. I think there were... You know, I'm proud of that little document, that one-page document that we got out of all our years of struggle. In the sense that it is now mandatory. It's not left at the wills and fancies of punitive managers to accord over time. It's your right now. And I think that's a big achievement.

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The Labor Management is also an achievement... I know Kingsborough College had some successes with it. And I think maybe John Jay. A few colleges have had success. But it's a lot of work. It's really a lot of work, people did it but if you're going to do all of that, it's... you have your own job to do, so it may not be as easy to do.

Andrea: How long did you serve and go to demonstrations?

Vera: I'm a little... Well, you know, really at Medgar, now. I know years ago, we had a vibrant student body, and you were able to achieve more. I know that they used to go up to Albany and lobby.

Andrea: In the '90s you're talking about?

Vera: No, this is during Dr. Jackson's time. So, I would think maybe in the '90s, because some of them have jobs now. But I don't see that... Maybe it's a different age group. Maybe back then, they were a little bit more mature.

Andrea: So, tell us about what that was like to have all of that student activism on the campus? And how were you, or faculty, involved? Were the HEOs and faculty involved together or was it very separate?

Jean: It was separate, but you may have some of them as work-study students, and they had their own clubs, and you could talk to them. You'd give them fliers. And I think it's probably that bunch that was there. There were probably a little bit more politically astute. So, now what you have, you probably have a younger generation that is not... They don't have the same background. I mean like, say, those people that were there; the older people. Some of them had a lot of background from the Caribbean, and brought with them their own political things.

You know, but those were... I mean, I don't have a lot of time, now, since I'm doing Immigration, to go around, because it's very, very demanding. And we work by appointments,

and they don't miss the appointments. So, I couldn't do that now, what I did years ago. I'd have to make sure that I block off a lot of time.

Jean: Remember you told me you got referrals from all over the city?

Vera: All over the city, and the thing about it is that now I'm trying to wean them off, because, you know, I've been doing this since 2007, so this is seven years. So, I start off with some clients where they get their Green Card, then they become citizens, then they file for their children, and then their children are getting their citizenship, so they've been with me, like, seven years. And they come there, and they ask for Miss Vera. And they don't want to see anyone else. So, you know, I have to tell them, "You've got to see other people." Sometimes they go and they sit with someone else, and they get up because they think they were coming to see me. So I tell them, "Please don't do that."

Jean: But they're not students at Medgar?

Vera: No. We serve anybody.

Jean: So you are a really strong connection to the community?

Vera: Oh, yes. All over.

Jean: And, not only your immediate community, the whole city.

Vera: All over. And we even have people outside of New York City coming.

Jean: What is your family situation?

Vera: You mean presently? Well, presently, I'm ready to retire. As soon as we get this elusive contract on the way so I can... And my husband is already retired.

Andrea: Let me follow up. You mentioned the contract. When you were on the Executive Counsel, you must have been there for some contracts. What was that like?

Vera: Well, I wasn't really part of the team. We did go and observe, because they choose whoever they want. Iris was... Well, it was Iris and Jean, at one time, who were in that group. And we had the opportunity to come and do observations.

Jean: And was there a campaign to get a good contract, that you were involved in?

Vera: Oh, yes. We always have campaigns. And, we would go around and talk to people one-on-one. You know, they're very receptive and, no problems, really, on campus, in terms of, you know, giving them advice and getting cooperation.

Jean: Tell us about your experience in Montserrat, and the work you did in the U.S. Congress.

Vera: Strange. I was telling the legislative coordinator about my work with Congress. When I was in Montserrat, I really didn't join the union of my free will, because I have four children. So, the President wanted someone to help with the secretarial duties. So, he came and asked me, and I warned him, I said, "Listen. I have four children." I have extended family, because all my family are in England. I was living in England and came back, because the government wanted us to come back; my husband to help with science, and I was to help with business.

So, he says, "No. It's just to help with the secretarial part of it. You're not getting involved." But, eventually, I ended up being the secretary, the Vice President, everything. And we actually used to produce a newspaper. So, even though I was not supposed to go in to do a lot of work, I ended up doing a lot of work, and we used to raise a lot of money for the...you know. So, we didn't increase membership; we raised funds. That's how we did it back then.

And then I came here in 1989. And then in 1995, we had the volcano in Montserrat, and I was very much involved in trying to get a bill introduced in Congress for the Montserratians to get permanent residence. Because, you know, I did several site visits, and, you have to be strong when you see people who had palatial homes were now subjected to sleeping in cots. And everything they had, they had lost. So, it wasn't a good experience.

So when I came back, I was so traumatized. So, I started... I sent out something on the blog, and I said, "Oh, can you adopt a family?" So I was looking for people to adopt a family and just give them the support. But people didn't want to do that, so they just sent me money, and then I would go down and distribute the money to the families. And, I did that, maybe, like, on four occasions. And then I realized — Okay, they can't go back. So why not see if I could get permanent status. And we did very well. We had a lot of... Major donors introduced the bill. We had a lot of co-sponsors.

And I would go up to Congress, and I would visit the 435 members of Congress. And I would go on a Monday, and I come back on a Thursday. So, I visited every single person and leave it. And they were very supportive. I had several co-sponsors, and the bill was going fine. And then came 9/11. And once 9/11 came, the country became very anti-immigrant. So, the bill was re-introduced again, but you know, it just petered out. And then after a while, Tom Ridge decided that he was going to terminate TPS (Temporary Protected Status) So, you know, I worked on it for, like, five, six years. So it was a lot of work. Just going up, by myself, to lobby, was that. So... It will be 20 years.

Jean: Did that experience help you, in terms of doing union work? Did you work on the Legislative Committee, or work with the Legislative Committee?

Vera: Right, right, right, because, you know, now I think I can talk to anybody. I can do any lobbying. You know, you just got to set it up, and so on. So, you know, I love to go to Albany. And I try to go as often as I can, because, you know, it's real issues. It's not every issue that pertains to the HEOs because we got a win situation. And when I'm talking to the HEOs I said, "Look. It took us ten years to not pay that 3%." Right?

I think you had penned that beautifully where you said that when they were doing...when the city was giving the tenure to the other group. The TIAA - CREF employees were left off. Because you penned it, Jean penned it very nicely. It was really an oversight. And so for ten years, we went up to Albany. Sometimes we were saying the same thing, you know, and you go from one person, you're going to the next assemblyman, Senator, like, you're saying the same thing, and... But I said, "After ten years, we won."

So, it's not a walk in the park, so you have to tell folks. I said, "Don't become despondent. If you say it enough times, and you're persistent, you will get through." If you believe in what you're fighting for, do not give up. Walk. Let your boots do the walking and your mouth do the talking. If you believe it, it will happen. And it happened.

Jean: You were studying the history of the PSC and the people that were involved. And is there anything you'd like to add, in terms of your own impressions or the importance of the PSC?

Vera: As I started off saying, I will not work anyplace that is not unionized. I realize we are living more now in an anti-union era, but I usually say, "As weak as the union may be, it is still strong," you know. And I can give you an example at the college that happened a few months ago. Someone worked in HR. She was a HEO associate, and they terminated her for no reason. She was a HEO associate, and those people told her, "You have no rights." And they moved her. And she doesn't even have a job description. But the job they offered her is an assistant to a HEO. That is the power of the union.

If she was unionized, it would never happen. And the poor young lady; she was by me last week. I said to her, "Listen. I don't know what to tell you. You got to pull yourself up." She's just a shadow of herself, because when you're in HR, you're out of the union. They used that, and trampled the poor girl. So, that, in a nutshell, is the power of the union.

Jean: Is she in the union now?

Vera: She's in the union now, but it's, like, they just picked her up off the street, and offered her a job. Even though all her benefits are there, she...

Jean: She got demoted.

Vera: Yes. And she's just like anybody, so she has to... She wouldn't get 13.3b until the next 8, 9 years.

Jean: Explain what 13.3b is.

Vera: Okay. After you've been in the union for four years; every year you're evaluated, and they will say whether they're going to reappoint you or non-reappointment, and that goes on every year for four years. After that, it's done every two years. And then you get two two-year reappointments. So, that's about eight years. Then, you're not evaluated... You're evaluated, but they can't just get rid of you like that. They have to give you three annual negative evaluations [in order to fire you].



We call it tenure but it's different from faculty, because they have to give you three annual negative evaluations. There was talk of Management wanting to make it three annual...three negative evaluations. And they could come three times in the month, and boot you out. So, at least, that you have some kind of job security. Even though it's not full security, but you have three years in which to make your case. So, what we normally advise our colleagues: The first time you get a negative evaluation, call the union. And that's the advice we give to everybody. Call your union and have a talk. Don't take anything for granted. So, that, to me, is the power of having the union on your side.

[00:32:16]

Andrea: And the other issue, the issue of the HEO series being a non-promotional series. Have you had experiences around that struggle?

Vera: Yes. I actually made that one of my agenda items for every HEO meeting that I have. The reason being, many years ago, I remember we had a HEO meeting at Hunter College. I don't know if Jean remembered it. And we had asked Steve London had come as a speaker, and I think Iris was there. And this lady, she didn't cry, she bawled. She was from BMCC. And we used to go there and have HEO too. Because, as I said, we had all these colleges, and we used to visit them. It was very, very nice. I loved it. And, she came to the meeting, and she just bawled because she's stuck as a HEO associate, all these years; she's not getting any more monies, there's no promotion, and she just felt that her back was against the wall.

Andrea: She was at the top salary step. She couldn't go...

Vera: Right. There was nowhere else. She couldn't get any increments. It's not promotional. And, her supervisor, who was a full HEO, he said, "Listen. I would do anything in the world just for her to be able to get an increment or two, but because you can't have a full HEO reporting to a full HEO. So, you know, those are the ramifications of that.

So, I always use that incident to advise HEOs "Okay. You need to start thinking whether you want to spend the rest of your life in CUNY. And you have to look at the salary. And once you reach the top, you're stuck. You could be stuck there for 15 years, and there's no way out." So, you know, and I usually say, "The lady didn't cry, she bawled." That's how traumatic it was. But that's the reality. You know, how can we, sort of, work around that once? Most people are happy until they get to the point of no return, where there's nowhere else to go. And there may not be another job that they can move to.

Andrea: And did that experience move you to organize around this issue? Was there a campaign to change this? Contract, anything like that?

Vera: Well, we always talk about how to do it, you know, but it's going to take... You know, having gone through the whole reclassification issue. It's not that easy.

Andrea: So, that was posed as a solution...

Vera: Yes. Right. So, one of the things I would try to do is educate them, so that remember, do not become complacent in the job that you have. Because, if you're a HEO assistant now, okay, you can go to school, you can do other things, you may move yourself out of that. You probably could become a computer tech. So if you're just doing clerical work, and you're at the front desk, doing admin, think about ways you can change your position down the road, and not finding ten years, when you reach the top, and there's no way out. So, start, you know, focusing on career movement, than reaching the stage where the young lady was. I mean, at her stage, there's no way to go, because she wasn't just, like, a 35-year-old. You know, I don't know if she's retired by now, but when you reach a certain stage and age in life, then you have take what is there.

So, my focus has always been to tell people what is there. Then they can make intelligent decisions. And maybe those would be the same advocates who will push for the reclassification to be changed. Because once they reach the endline – ok, I know I'm talking about... Okay. I want it to be... Not that I could not have been a full HEO but when the Vice President, who was doing the reclassification, they didn't ask for my input, and they didn't know what they were doing. So, they did it without consultation.

When I changed from a HEO assistant to a HEO associate, the labor designee had me involved, so we worked on it together. So when it reached 80<sup>th</sup> Street, (no longer) it was okay. These people didn't involve me. And so, when it got to 80<sup>th</sup> Street, it wasn't completed properly. They returned it. By the time they returned it, it was too late because there was a freeze. You know, so...

Jean: But you did get the HEO associate?

Vera: Yes. I got the HEO associate.

Jean: But the other people that were working on it, didn't...?

Vera: On the full HEO didn't do it right.

Jean: I see.

Vera: And then, you know, all these years I'm just there. But I'm not going to bawl over it because that is what the contract...

Jean: And you're, basically, in charge of the department, right?

Vera: Yes. I was the director for...

Andrea: Maybe my last question about the past has to do with your mentioning the freeze. And I alluded to it with student activism, and things like that. But things must have changed when the budget was seen as so problematic. Did you experience any change in the culture? — You mentioned the culture of the college or in the practice of what could be done, and what could not be done, as a result?

Vera: I mean, where there's good will... It's not that I didn't try, because there's always a way to get around giving more money. And I went to the President, and I said, look, there's this chapter, whatever, part of the agreement. I mean, if someone has skills, and so on, you can give them a 30% increase. And they do it. They get it done for their friends. You know what I mean? But, then he said to me, he said, "Look, Vera. I'm willing to do it, but they've clipped my wings." He said, "I don't have the power that I used to have. I don't have it anymore." What you going to do?

So, you know, there's a lot of issues, and I think people become frustrated when they don't see any promotion. And, it's the same old same where you come in, you're doing all that effort, and your probably getting the same salary for ten years or 15 years. And so, maybe sometimes you may be moving them to another department, or something, you know. I don't know.

Because people become complacent and, you know, they could be harboring... I'm working and I'm not getting any money for the effort I'm putting in, you know? But these are real challenges, and I think our biggest challenge would be how do we deal with the reclassification and promotion? So, I think if we... That's something that we could work on, and maybe, you know, come up with something that's workable.

Andrea: Well, as you said earlier — Just keep plugging away at those issues, and at the worst, and, hopefully, we break through some day soon.

Vera: Yes. Yeah.

Andrea: Soon.

Vera: Yes.

Andrea: This contract.

Vera: No. You just have to be strong, and that's what I tell them. I said, "It took ten years, but we didn't lose what we wanted." So, we got it in ten. It may have taken 20. But if you believe that it's right, then you do it. And that's how you win battles, you know. And then we need more people to come in so that we have more people to fight the battles.

I usually say, "Management don't like unions." You know, but, as weak...because unions have lost. I've lived in England where I see union lost. They, virtually killed the union under Margaret Thatcher's reign. And, more and more, I remember when Roger Toussaint went to jail because he was saying, you know, "We have to protect the younger people coming in." And, more and more the people, the younger people, are the new entrants, and getting the privilege that we have the union rights. So, by them tapping away at the entry-level people, you have to understand, this is a tactic. The union is going to become weaker and weaker.

So, even though it's the new entries, it's eventually what the union is going to look like, because things that we've had, they're not going to have. But, remember, once we move off the scene,

it's these new things that they these new people, will be the backbone of the union. So, you know, that's something that we have to fight for so that it's not weakened too much for the new people, because we're there to say, "Yeah, yeah, yeah. Have all these little privileges and rights." But they won't be around.

Jean: Well, thank you very much. Your insights have been really important, and you really provide an important history of the PSC when you speak.

Andrea: Thank you, Vera.

Vera: Right. Thank you.

[End of recorded material 00:43:19]

[Start of recorded material at 00:00:01]

Interviewer: Okay. Today is March 23, 2016. I'm Irwin Yellowitz, and I'm about to interview Cecelia McCall for the PSC Oral History Interviews.

Why don't we start with the question that we ask everyone. What is your background, your family background, your education background, etc., so that we know something more about you before we get into the actual questions.

Cecelia: Okay. I was born in Boston, Massachusetts. Neither my mother or father were high school educated, although they were very intelligent people. My mother was very creative; my father was one of the smartest people I've ever know. She was always a part-time worker, and he was trained as an electrician. However, because he was African American, he was never able to get a union card, so he did off-the-books work a lot of the time.

I went to the public schools in Boston, Massachusetts. I have always felt that I received a very good education from those public schools. It was a very strict system. I don't think I ever had a teacher who wasn't an Irish-American spinster, and they were dedicated to the profession, so I was very well educated in the public schools. However, I do recall when I was in high school, I was never given any information about going to college - how to apply for college, that I should go to college - even though I was the top student in my class. So I just sort of stumbled upon it. My mother said to me

once, "Aren't you going to go to college?" And I said, "Hmm, I guess I am, but no one has mentioned it to me."

So we went to see the counselor, and because I had a very good academic record, all As, I was accepted into the state college without an exam.

Interviewer: Do you have siblings?

Cecelia: I have a brother who is younger and a sister who is two years older.

Interviewer: Were you the first to go to college in your family?

Cecelia: I was the first to go to college. My sister went to nurses training school to become a registered nurse. My brother started Boston College, but he didn't finish.

Interviewer: How'd you get from Boston to New York City?

Cecelia: I came to New York because my then-husband had been offered a job in New York City that he felt he had to take. I had started a master's degree at Boston College. When I came to New York, I finished it at NYU. A few years later, I went into a Ph.D. program at NYU and finished that, here in New York City.

I did start teaching when I was still at Massachusetts. I taught in the Newton public schools, and that was a wonderful experience. When I came here, I taught for one year in the New York City public schools, and then when I finished my master's, I went to NYU and worked in their developmental skills lap[b]. It was from NYU that I came to City University, because then open enrollment had begun, and they were looking for people with my background to do the developmental skills work. So that was fortuitous that the SEEK program started at the same time I was ready to make a contribution to it. I actually read about that in the newspaper and decided that's where I wanted to be, and I applied at Baruch College and got my job there. I stayed at Baruch College until I - actually the last six years in my career, I was at the union full time.

Interviewer: How did you become involved with the PSC?

Cecelia: I actually became involved with the PSC through a caucus that I was working very closely with, the New Caucus. Prior to working with the New Caucus, I was with another CUNY faculty and staff organization called the Concerned Faculty and Staff of CUNY. At that time, I was more involved in the Faculty Senate. I was actually vice-chair of the Faculty Senate and was more involved in governance activities, as opposed to union activity, but the caucus drew me more toward the union, and when we started organizing, I ran for chapter chair at Baruch College.

Interviewer: Now we're in the 1990s, and the New Caucus challenged the City University Union Caucus, which had been the dominant one since the founding of the union in 1972. Why did you believe new leadership was needed at that time?

Cecelia: Well, I was very, very much a faculty activist throughout the university. As I said, I was very much involved in faculty governance through the Faculty Senate. I was on any number of committees throughout the university. I knew a lot of people on all the campuses. I saw what was going on on the campuses. Then as I got drawn closer to the union, I realized that probably we needed to defend[ing] open admissions, which was then going under attack.

Interviewer: Yes, it was.

Cecelia: And I had come to the university to work in the open admissions program, and for that group of students who were admitted because of open admissions, so I very much wanted to work in the defense of open admissions and in the defense of the university, which was also under attack at that time. The city had a fiscal crisis and then consistently - that was in the '70s, but after that fiscal crisis, and our finances were ceded to the state, the state never really lived up to its commitment of fully funding the university and kept continually withdrawing funds and gradually, when the university had to make decisions about where to put its money, it decided that it was going to put its money in the academic side rather than the developmental and began withdrawing funds from those programs.

Interviewer: So you didn't believe that the union leadership was doing enough to offset these negative factors?

Cecelia: I was not in the delegate assembly, but I knew a number of people who were in the delegate assembly, and I know the union leadership was challenged in the delegate assembly to do more in defense of the university, and I was influenced by a number of those people who were my close allies in the various organizations that I was a member of.

Interviewer: Now you're at Baruch, and you say you ran for chapter chair. Did the New Caucus have an established group at Baruch, and did you run for chapter chair once, or was it a cumulative process?

Cecelia: No, I ran for chapter chair once. We did not have a lot of New Caucus people at Baruch, but there were a few who did run with me. Marilyn Neimark, when I ran for chapter chair, she was vice-chair of the chapter. I wasn't challenged. We had had one chapter chair up to the time that I ran for chapter chair, and that was Fran Barasch, who was a very strong chapter leader, I have to say that. She also was the grievance counselor for our chapter at Baruch, and she saved my job, and she saved the job of many people then. But she decided not

to run, so I was not challenging Fran Barasch. She just stepped down and the office was open, and I don't think there was anyone from the CUUC caucus challenging us, so we actually won an uncontested election.

Interviewer: Right. Now this follows the pattern of that time, because the New Caucus won at almost all of the larger senior colleges, including, say, Baruch, but also City, Brooklyn, Queens. I'm not sure about Hunter at that time. It did much more poorly at the community colleges, and I wonder if you have any thoughts about why there was this divide in the way the faculty responded to this challenge of the New Caucus?

Cecelia: Yeah. Well, that question actually surprised me when I took a look at these questions, and I asked about that, because I do remember that the leadership of some of the community colleges were actually New Caucus people. It was Bill Friedheim and Jim Perlstein at Borough of Manhattan Community College. John Hyland was at LaGuardia. I don't think we ever had anybody at Kingsborough. Queensborough, I don't think, and I'm not sure of the Bronx or Hostos. I do remember being among a group of people who were talking with people at Bronx about starting a New Caucus chapter, so I think we had some leadership there, but it started late. It didn't have the time that both the people at BMCC and LaGuardia had to organize.

So we did lose one election. We won the second time we ran. So I looked at the figures for the community colleges, and we did win the vice-president for community colleges. Anne Friedman was elected vice-president. She got 552 votes. Her opponent was Katherine Stabile.

Interviewer: From Queensborough.

Cecelia: Queensborough. She got 457.

Interviewer: And what year was that?

Cecelia: This is 2000. Then we got two of the other officers for the community colleges. Sam Farrell was an officer at large and Ingrid Hughes. The other one was Norah Chase, who eventually stepped down. She didn't hang in there.

So we didn't do that badly at the community colleges. Where we lost was with the cross-campus chapter. That was a strong chapter led by Peter Hoberman, I believe.

Interviewer: Peter Hoberman, yes, although by 2000, I think Peter Hoberman had retired - by 2000. These figures are for 2000, and there had been a change. The New Caucus grew stronger as you came closer to 2000. We'll get to the election of 2000, so we can talk about that.

Cecelia: Yeah. Well, we weren't strong, anyway, at the cross-campus level, I think because of their leadership and because there was a lot of tension then between higher education officers, CLTs, and the faculty. I think there was some resentment that the union was largely faculty-oriented and wasn't really paying attention to the needs and demands of the HEOs and the CLTs -

Interviewer: I think this a longstanding -

Cecelia: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Interviewer: - belief. Okay. We had two general elections as part of this conflict. We had 1997, when the New Caucus did not win the general election. Irwin Polishook was still running at that time, and he won about two thirds of the vote, and Steve London won one third. But in 2000, he had retired.

Cecelia: That's right.

Interviewer: So it was an open seat, and Barbara Bowen was now the candidate, and she won by a significant but not overwhelming margin.

Cecelia: Yes.

Interviewer: So how do you explain the 1997 result and then the 2000 result?

Cecelia: Well, I think we learned from 1997 how to better organize, and we did continue organizing until 2000, and we grew stronger on the campuses. I think we won - I'm not sure, but we might have won more chapter elections at the campus level.

Interviewer: I think you did, yes, between '97 and 2000.

Cecelia: Right. We really went at the 2000 election as though it was a real election campaign. We fundraised. We got a lot of people to volunteer, to do house parties, so we were able to raise money to do a lot of literature, to pay for our literature. We were able to pay for a real organizer, who showed us what we needed to do, and that was one-on-one contacts with people, and that's what we went to the campuses - each one of us had a list of people to talk to at our campuses, and we went and we did that.

I also think that part of the reason we won is that Irwin wasn't running, Irwin Polishook wasn't running, and he didn't endorse a successor. So he didn't really back, I think it was Richard Boris.

Interviewer: Yes.



Cecelia: So we didn't have that to contend with, and I think the strength of our organizing, and maybe our message, which was, you know, every once in a while, you do need change. And that was the moment where people felt there was some change needed, and they gave us an opportunity.

Interviewer: And the fact that he didn't run - there's a tendency among unions that's been well documented that they don't change their leadership very much. Especially presidents: they stay in office for very long periods of time.

Cecelia: Yes. Yes.

Interviewer: So I think that the situation in PSC was not unusual at all. But once he retired and it's an open seat, then it's an entirely different story.

Cecelia: That's right.

Interviewer: Okay. In that 2000 election, you stood as the secretary -

Cecelia: Yes.

Interviewer: - and we can now move to your involvement as an officer. When did you leave office? You came in in 2000.

Cecelia: 2007. I retired in 2007.

Interviewer: 2007. All right. So we're talking about the first seven years of New Caucus leadership. What were the major issues that the union faced in that period that you were the secretary?

Cecelia: Well, first of all, as new leadership, we came into pretty much a blank slate, an office where there were very few records, so we didn't have past experience to fall back on. Even when we went into bargaining, all we had was a boxful of handwritten notes on yellow paper. So we had to teach ourselves how to run a union, and that's what we set about doing.

We worked very closely as a team of four, and with our executive committee, Executive Council, we worked through. We followed the constitution very strictly, so that we wouldn't get into any trouble. I think that was the main hurdle we had: teaching ourselves how to be union officers and to represent our constituency.

Then we had to go into bargaining, and of course, that was something new for most of us also. We had to sit across the table from management and stare them down and win what we thought was a pretty good contract, because I think in our contract, we actually used the money differently. We actually raised the people at the bottom in a higher percentage than people at the top.

We also won something for adjuncts that they had not had before, which was that office hour. And that's what we actually - the bargaining went longer than we thought it would, because that was the one thing that management wouldn't yield on until the very end. So that kept us out for a long time.

And then, again, the defense of the university. That was the era of Giuliani, and he really was not a friend of the university. He demeaned the university and its students whenever he could. There was very negative publicity. And again, we were facing a state that didn't want to fund us. So we had to develop a really strong lobbying and legislative program, which was one of my responsibilities, and we did develop a good team for that. We really wrote all of our own literature. We never asked for less than what the university was asking for. We always asked for more, and we had the data and the figures to show why we needed the money that we were after for the university.

Interviewer: Now, the staff was pretty much the same. Was the staff helpful in this transition from CUUC to New Caucus?

Cecelia: Well, as I said, we didn't have a paper trail to look at. We didn't have a history to look at. We didn't have files to look at.

Interviewer: And you had a new Executive Director.

Cecelia: We had a fairly new Executive Director. He had worked for Irwin, I believe.

Interviewer: Frank -

Cecelia: Frank Annunziato. Yes.

Interviewer: Yes, but he was replaced by Deborah Bell at some point early in your -

Cecelia: Not for a while. Frank was with us at least for a year.

Interviewer: Oh, I didn't recall that.

Cecelia: But he was different from the New Caucus people.

Interviewer: Right.

Cecelia: And some of the staff were strong supporters of him, as opposed to strong supporters of us, and a few did actually resign, have to leave. Not many. I can think of three people, actually: the editor of the Clarion, the woman who was the secretary for -

Interviewer: That was Carol Sims, the editor?

- Cecelia: Carole Sims was the editor of the Clarion. The woman who had been Irwin's secretary and Frank Annunziato's secretary. She worked in that center little -
- Interviewer: Oh, Robin Forman.
- Cecelia: Robin. And then the office manager also resigned, and I can't remember her name, either.
- Interviewer: Yeah.
- Cecelia: So there was some hostility, but by and large, people like Debra Bergan who was there before us, she's still here.
- Interviewer: Still here. And Nick Russo stayed on.
- Cecelia: Nick Russo, he was terrific. I always enjoyed working with Nick.
- Interviewer: Clarissa stayed on.
- Cecelia: Clarissa stayed, and she retired just a few years ago. She was very helpful. She knew her job, certainly. And I think gradually other people left, but that wasn't because they felt they had to leave. I think it was just attrition and retirement. We got a wonderful executive - oh, before we got Debbie Bell, we had an interim Executive Director, Leslie Kagan, who was an activist that we had known through community work and work throughout the university. So she helped us over a period of time, and then we finally found Debbie Bell, who you know is - I mean, she's an absolute workhorse. Yeah.
- Interviewer: Right. And had a lot of experience in New York City unionism.
- Cecelia: Yes, a lot of prior union experience.
- Interviewer: Yes.
- Cecelia: I think she came through DC 37.
- Interviewer: Yes. Yes, she did. And what about the issues that you faced? Other than getting acclimated in running the union, what were, do you recall, the major issues that the union had to face, beyond the contract? Having Giuliani as mayor was an issue in itself, but...
- Cecelia: Well, we also had to face our constituency. As I think I mentioned earlier, there were great divisions among the various members that we represented. The HEOs felt we weren't representing them strongly enough, that we were terribly, you know, too oriented toward faculty. The adjuncts, of course, felt that they were not at all represented and what the union offered them was very

limited. So we needed to build support among those constituencies, make them feel a little more comfortable.

I don't think we have as much angst among the HEOs anymore, but there has always been tension between the full-time faculty and the part-timers. Though they're the majority, you know, we still feel we have to represent them as a part-time working force. They are a part-time working force, and we want to maintain that difference between them and the full-timers while trying to give them parity and as much representation as possible and as much security as possible. But it's still a part-time working force, and we see them as such.

Interviewer: Did you find in the negotiations - as I had done negotiations when I was in the leadership - did you find that the university was more resistant to making changes in the adjunct area than in any other area?

Cecelia: Hands-down.

Interviewer: Because it is cheap labor to them, and they did not want to change that in any significant way.

Cecelia: Right. Hands-down. Absolutely. The management was very disparaging toward part-timers - not only the adjuncts, but also HEOs, the full-time HEO staff. They were adamant about not yielding on many of the issues that were important to them as well. So in some ways, it wasn't easier representing the full-time faculty, but I think management understood the needs of the full-time faculty better than they were willing to have empathy for the needs of the adjuncts.

I think one of the first negotiations that we had, we put on the table a healthcare system for part-timers, and they thought that was laughable. So from 2000 to, I guess, 2014 or '15, that was an issue that we had been negotiating. And it took us that many years to win healthcare for part-timers because the university was adamant in not allowing that to happen.

Interviewer: Yeah. Well, they did have healthcare in the welfare fund.

Cecelia: Through the welfare fund, but that was a drain. That was a drain on the welfare fund.

Interviewer: Yes, and it was limited.

Cecelia: Yes.

Interviewer: A limited program. Now they get their healthcare through the New York City health plan.

Cecelia: That's right. Yeah.

Interviewer: On the legislative side, you were a major force in that for the years - and even after you left as secretary, you continued to head the Legislative Committee. You say it was a blank sheet of paper when you came in, with contract negotiations. Was it also a blank sheet in Albany, or did you have experience in Albany beforehand, and how did you just handle that whole legislative area?

Cecelia: I was flying by the seat of my pants, basically. No, I did not have any - well, I knew a lot of people. I did know people, but I had never worked as a lobbyist. But through community work and social activity, whatever, I did know some people in Albany, and I think that was a strength.

There was money that we had to spend. The money that was rebated by NYSUT-COPE funds had never been spent, so we had a pool of money that we could start with. So I organized a conference to bring in our members from all over the university, from every campus. We developed a legislative book, a huge binder of materials with all the information about the City Council and the state representatives in that. That was the beginning of how I tried to organize a group that would fight for the union and defend the university.

So that was really how it started, and then of course from that conference, we were able to develop a strong committee that we met with monthly. We tried to develop - we weren't as successful as developing legislative committees on the campuses. That was one of our goals, but that really never came to fruition. The best we could do was try to get a representative from each campus to our central legislative committee.

Interviewer: I think your legislative efforts were stronger than any that I remember from my days in the leadership.

Cecelia: Yeah. As I said, we used the money that was rebated to us for our lobbying efforts. That year, I noticed that we did have that fund, so that's what I used to develop the beginnings of the program.

Interviewer: In Albany, did you find that there was generally support for CUNY, or was it a struggle?

Cecelia: You know, that's a difficult question to answer, because when you meet individually with legislators, of course, they're welcoming and they listen politely and they offer comments. I think it probably was easier on the Assembly side of the legislature than the Senate, because the Senate had been typically Republican. I think one of problems we had was - I'm not sure if this is a problem, but then, when we began, NYSUT believed in a divided legislature. They believed that the Assembly should be Democratic and the

Senate should be Republican, and they tried to work both sides of the aisle. That never really worked out too well, I don't think.

So we did work to try to persuade NYSUT to change some of its role and the way that it approached elections, and I think that finally has happened, also -

Interviewer: Yes.

Cecelia: - because we have a much more, I would say, aggressive and militant leadership on the legislative side in NYSUT. And I think a lot of that was through the influence - not so much me, but Steve London and other people.

Interviewer: Right. Okay. In terms of the leadership, what was your role in the leadership? That is, was the leadership a leadership in which the president did most of the decision-making? Was in a cooperative leadership? How did the leadership operate?

Cecelia: Well, I always tell this story. The first day we all came into office - literally, walked into the office - I was coming in early in the morning to prepare materials for our first Delegate Assembly. When I went to the copying machine, Barbara Bowen was there already, doing my job. So I had to tell her, "Barbara, this is my job. According to the constitution, I'm responsible for this, that, and the other thing." So I knew what my job was, and I really attended to that, as the secretary of the union. Beyond that, I really was responsible for doing the recording of all of the deliberations during negotiations, which really was tough, and that really wore me down.

But we were a collective. We did work as a group of four in decision-making. And that's the most important thing, I believe, for the officers to realize, that though you may have that role of treasurer, of looking after the funds, and you may have a certain responsibility as secretary, the real role is to make decisions that affect our membership. And so we did. We worked as a collective. We had a lot of arguments. I have to say that. We did not always agree. There was a lot of yelling across the table. But we really worked through that.

Interviewer: Do you think the leadership, the four officers, were able to lead the Executive Council and the Delegate Assembly, or was it a more chaotic situation once you went out?

Cecelia: Well, of course it was much more chaotic in the Delegate Assembly, because even though we had won the leadership, we did not have a lot of delegates who were New Caucus. So the first several meetings were really chaotic because, I think, there was still a great deal of resentment on the part of some CUUC [City University Union Caucus] people toward us, and they really wanted to gum up the works. They didn't want us to - I guess they didn't want

us to be successful, basically. But gradually, through successive campus elections, we got the majority of the delegate assembly, and that made it easier.

The Executive Council was not so difficult because we had a majority on the executive council from that 2000 election.

Interviewer: Okay. Is there anything else you want to say about the PSC before we leave it and go to some of your other activities that were going on at the same time?

Cecelia: Not really. I think the leadership works very hard for not just the membership but for the students and the university at large. They feel responsible for getting as much funding for the university as possible. They struggle around that issue each and every year, through the legislative work, working closely with NYSUT and bringing people up to Albany to lobby.

And then, of course, they're persistent and stubborn, and even though it might be easier to give in, they hold out for their principles. They've certainly held out on this last contract, because they don't want to settle for anything less than what our members deserve. A six percent increase, which is below the level of inflation, certainly isn't something that they're going to accept. So this is a very trying time for the leadership, but I have a great deal of admiration for them.

Interviewer: Okay. You mentioned NYSUT [New York State United Teachers] several times in connection with legislative work. Was NYSUT a major asset in legislative work, or did the PSC primarily work on its own?

Cecelia: Oh, no. We never worked on our own. We always tried to work through NYSUT, although there were many differences, ideological differences, between NYSUT and the New Caucus leadership. But NYSUT was very helpful from the very beginning, because, as I said, we were trying to figure out how to run a union, and they had a conference for us, a small conference for us, at a little hotel in Tarrytown. They had sessions for us, workshops, sort of taught us the ropes.

Interviewer: Did their lobbyists follow your lead? As you were the head of the Legislative Committee -

Cecelia: Yeah. Yes, they did.

Interviewer: - and they have full-time lobbyists in Albany, did they follow your lead in lobbying?

Cecelia: Yes, they did. Yes, they did. Yes, they did. They certainly did. There was never any antagonism there, even though we did hire our own lobbyist for a

while. We felt for a long time that the predominant constituency for NYSUT was K through 12, and that's really where they put most of their energy and lobbying, and we were sort of second-class citizens. And it took us a while to get NYSUT to shift and pay more attention to the needs of higher education, but gradually, that did happen, and I think we're very well represented now.

Interviewer: One other thought that occurs to me is that we have a sister union in CUNY, and they also lobby in Albany and work on legislature. What was your relationship to them and were you able to work cooperatively with them?

Cecelia: We did work cooperatively - We had to build a relationship with the UUP [United University Professions], because until the New Caucus became the new leadership - PSC, the UUP was predominantly the major voice in higher education at the state level, and the AFT. And when the PSC started to become more aggressive in that arena, UUP had to take notice and maybe change its strategy.

I remember once overhearing one of the leaders of UUP say, "Well you know, before this election there was no PSC, but now there is a PSC." So I think the fact that we made our presence known - and the other thing we did at the RA [Representative Assembly], we were a factor at the RA -

Interviewer: The [New York State United Teachers] United Representative Assembly -

Cecelia: Yes, because we went to the RA with many resolutions, representing various needs of different committees of whatever for the PSC, and that was one of the first times that we were recognized as a force, because prior that - and I had remembered looking through some of the RA material before we went to our first one, and there were no resolutions from the PSC. So we totally changed that. We made that part of our strategy.

Interviewer: Okay. Do you think that one of the problems with working with UUP is that they have term limits and their president changes every six years and often many of their other officers, whereas PSC does not have term limits and therefore has a much more stable leadership?

Cecelia: I'm not sure it's term limits. I think their structure there - You know, they're so huge - I think they're so huge, and they have to operate differently from us. We're here in the city, we're a smaller union, we see each other every single month in the Delegate Assembly. They don't have that. So they're so widely



dispersed, I think it's much more difficult for them to really be able to have the kind of presentation that we have - the kind of presence that we have.

Interviewer: Okay. Let's turn to the AAUP [American Association of University Professors], which is another affiliate of PSC going back to 1981. You were very active in the Collective Bargaining Congress of AAUP. Would you tell us about your role there and what you think the Collective Bargaining Congress could accomplish?

Cecelia: Well it was very difficult when I was on the Collective Bargaining Congress [CBC], because there was a great deal of friction between AFT [American Federation of Teachers] and AAUP at the national level. And the Collective Bargaining Congress of AAUP was very confused as far as I was concerned. One moment they say we are a union and the next one we're not a union.

Interviewer: They're supposed to be a union, a collective bargaining congress -

Cecelia: They didn't know that. It took them a long time to realize that. So there was that friction. And I was the only African American on the Collective Bargaining Congress, and some of those guys - and it was mainly men - some of those guys were really right-wingers, whether they thought so or not, even though they were collective bargaining and they negotiated contracts. Some of the things they said were really beyond the pale.

So I thought it was very difficult, but I always - I spoke up. I defended my positions. Gradually, the situation between AFT and AAUP grew better, because they started working more cooperatively instead of opposite one another. They started organizing collectively, you know, together on various campuses.

Interviewer: Joint ventures they called them.

Cecelia: Joint ventures. And their relationship became much better. So we always felt that the PSC should be a presence on the Collective Bargaining Congress. I think I didn't just represent this union, I think I represented, you know, generally the constituency of AAUP.

Interviewer: And did attitudes change among the men who you first met as time went on? Because you were there well beyond 2000.

Cecelia: Yeah, I think the biggest problem with AAUP is that they don't have term limits on the CBC, and the positions rotate from - though they do have term limits, but what they do, they rotate from one position to another. If their term is up as secretary or person at large, representative at large, they'll go to other one, so that they just keep - it's the same voices, over and over again. So I think that's really not a good thing for AAUP to allow that to continue,

because I haven't been active nationally for a number of years, but when I go to the conferences, the spring, the June meeting - the same people. The same people are there.

Interviewer: Can they accomplish anything as a Collective Bargaining Congress? Do they have money that they can use to help affiliates in hard times? What is it that they think they're doing?

Cecelia: Well, they do collective bargaining. They have collective bargaining chapters. They do have money. They only part of AAUP that's growing actually is the CBC unit, not the - what's the other one?

Interviewer: The advocacy unit.

Cecelia: Advocacy unit. That seems to be dying. So the money that's coming into AAUP is really coming through CBC. And they do have an organizing staff that is hired nationally - at the national office - but they do send them out to the various campuses where they're needed. They do offer great support, and I think they have been able to negotiate some pretty good contracts for their people. So they do offer their affiliated chapters a lot of assistance.

Interviewer: Did you have any problems with the other side of AAUP, the advocacy side, because that's always - they've always had the split. It was only in the early 1970s that they accepted collective bargaining as a legitimate function of faculty. Did you have any problems in that area with the people who do not have collective bargaining?

Cecelia: No, I worked on some committees with them. Some of them were very pleasant people, very committed people. But my feeling about that side, it has no reason for being as far as I can see. I was a delegate to their session during the June meeting, and there was no business conducted at all whatsoever at that meeting. They have nothing to talk about. So I don't see that continuing much longer. They don't have a role, they do not seem to have much of a role in the congress [AAUP].

Interviewer: What about their academic freedom work or the Red Book which has these principles -

Cecelia: Well the Red Book is - Yes, but that's not just the advocacy side, that's CBC as well.

Interviewer: Yes, but it did come from the advocacy side, and they depend on it more heavily because they don't have a contract.

Cecelia: I know that, yes. And they do cite the Red Book a lot when I guess when issues occur at their campuses, but I just don't see that they have any strength.

Interviewer: Well, there's been attempts to take them over by AFT and NEA [National Education Association] in the past, but it hasn't happened.

Cecelia: Yeah, they want the CBC chapters -

Interviewer: They also want the academic freedom part of it.

Cecelia: Yeah.

Interviewer: NEA was very interested in that back in the 1980s, because they believe that the academic freedom role - Committee A as they call it in AAUP - that that was very valuable, and that NEA did not have anything like that. And they tried to take that over, and it came very close to happening.

Cecelia: Yeah, most of that work is done at the national level. It's not done at the local level.

Interviewer: Yes, it's national. Now the New York conference of the AAUP, you've been active in that for - I guess from the time you took office in PSC in 2000, and you're still active in it. So I've also been very active in the New York conference for many years, and I guess the question that somebody would ask both of us would be, "Why do you need a New York conference?"

Cecelia: I'm not sure, would be my answer, unfortunately, because again that is a small group of people from very committed campuses, really, talking to one another, and they've never really been able to bring in all of the other chapters in the state to become active in it. You know, if we somehow or other could wake those chapters up and get them involved, maybe that would become a more vigorous state conference. But it isn't, and I'm not sure what's going to happen there.

Interviewer: Okay. When you were in Washington at CBC meetings, did you hear any discussion of whether conferences had any value to AAUP? Because there's always been a feeling among the conference leadership that the national leadership does not really pay much attention to them or even think that they're of much importance.

Cecelia: I've never heard that said explicitly, but I think the feelings from particularly the New York State Conference is well founded, because it seems that when there are issues related to chapters here, affiliates here, we're not consulted, and that's always been the problem. I think they tend to be forgotten. I think they're just forgotten. They [are] left to do whatever it is they do. Maybe they'll take an issue to national, but other than that - I don't think national considers them at all. I've never heard anything said disparagingly, but I think basically they're out there doing their thing, and national's going to do it's

thing anyway. There have been attempts to negotiate agreements - you know, the state conference would be consulted or at least informed about a local issue - but that isn't consistent at all, I don't think.

Interviewer: Yes, I would tend to agree with you from my experience. The conferences are not taken very seriously by the national organization, and that is a weakness of AAUP.

Cecelia: But I think the strength of the conference is that CBC and advocacy do have an opportunity to meet at the state level and talk about issues that are important. So I think that is one strength of the conference, that it is both CPC and advocacy.

Interviewer: Yes, and many of its leaders have been from the advocacy side.

Cecelia: Yes.

Interviewer: Okay, that concludes the questions that I had, but is there anything else that you want to expand on or add? Any areas that I haven't covered that you think are important?

Cecelia: No, I don't think so.

Interviewer: Okay, well, thank you very much, Cecelia, for giving me this time and for putting it in the permanent record of the PSC. Thanks.

Cecelia: Thank you.

[End of recorded material 47:13]