

The History of Mississippi AFT

The first AFT Local in Mississippi, Pascagoula Local 2419, chartered in April, 1973. From Pascagoula, AFT spread across the coast and then northward through the state. The state organization was chartered in February 1975. The first President was Bettye Nelson, followed by Raymond Magalianes, James Cater, Jimmy Britt, and Maryann L. Graczyk.

The early years of AFT in Mississippi were marked by secret meetings, struggles, administration threats, personal sacrifices and great courage. From their earliest beginnings, fledgling locals stood strong and loudly for improving education and teaching conditions. Today AFT still maintains its legacy of action and excellence and is recognized as one of the leading forces in the state.

Mississippi Education Association and Mississippi Teacher Association (NEA) were long entrenched in the state before AFT organized. Both groups were edged over by AFT, however, when the 1974 legislature failed to approve a teacher pay raise. The lack of activity by these two organizations ignited teacher frustration and unrest and these teachers formed the early locals. In July 1974, AFT members from throughout the state met and voted to strike if salaries were not raised for the 74-75 school year. The teacher unrest snowballed and AFT leaders guided a walkout on April 11, 1974. Thus the daring of AFT leaders and members led to the first teacher walkout, the first teacher march on Jackson, and first call for a special session on education. All of this eventually led to the largest pay raise for teachers in Mississippi history to that date...\$800 across the board plus extra for experience, an average of \$1,337 per teacher.

News media took notice, In a Sun-Herald editorial of May 5, 1974, AFT was credited with awakening "the sleeping MEA" to action, since echoes of AFT's calls were now being heard from both MEA and MTA. Positive media response has continued to be one of AFT's assets throughout its history in Mississippi.

AFT continued to press for needed change. In the meantime, at NEA's urging and after months of discourse, the MEA and MTA merged into the single Mississippi Association of Educators (MAE), with claims that it was a "professional" organization and not a "union" as the AFL-CIO affiliated AFT. That the MAE-NEA was definitely a union was later confirmed under the Landrum-Griffin Act. But some MAE members continued their dislike of the union label and eventually broke away to form the Mississippi Association of Professional Educators. This organization, more in tune with the old MEA ideas, was started by administrators in Jackson.

From the beginning, the AFT has been responsible for remarkable changes in Mississippi. Some of the things we currently take for granted were non-existent years ago. MAFT started and led the fight for equalization of property taxes, filing suit in 1975 along with the AFL-CIO, to force the state to abide by the Mississippi Constitution's mandate for equal taxation of property, and to raise local revenues at the local district level.

AFT was the first to ask for sick leave policies, personal leave, professional leave, extra pay for extra curricular activities, mandatory local supplements, duty-free lunches, textbooks and class supplies, reduced teacher-pupil ratio, hospitalization and major medical insurance, full retirement benefits after 20 years, increase of the retirement benefit factor, state funds for school districts based on enrollment not average daily attendance, compulsory attendance of students, attendance counselor, kindergartens, professional leave, and more.

MAFT has been a leader throughout its history. MAFT stirred the call to action for the march on Jackson in March 1983. MAFT stood alone against reduction in teacher certification standards. MAFT started and led the investigation into the State Department of Education Accountability Instructional Management (AIM) Program. MAFT has continually led the battle against the School Employment Procedures ACT (SEPA). MAT has waged numerous suits for the rights and protection of teachers, students and citizens. President Maryann Graczyk was appointed by the Mississippi State Superintendent of Education Richard Boyd to serve on the Personnel Appraisal and Compensation Committee mandated by the legislature. This mandate tied the final \$1000 of a three year state salary raise package to an evaluation for all certified personnel. The Committee was unable to determine the best way to implement a system and petitioned the State Board of Education to adopt an inappropriate instrument advocated by the State Department of Education called the MTAI - Mississippi Teacher Assessment Instruments. While efforts were started to stop the MTAI, Graczyk as a member of the PACC, knew it wasn't going to go away. So MAFT tackled what no other organization was willing to tackle - the training of teachers to help them pass the test. Over 3000 teachers were trained in thirty-two workshops across the state. Trained teachers brought training to others bringing MAFT information to every school district in the state. Materials designed and produced by MAFT called "MTAI MADE EASY" are to this day the guideline for education across Mississippi. MAFT also organized an MTAI information network and started a toll-free information line. MAFT was the only teacher organization to testify before the State Board of Education to remove the controversial and unfair areas of the MTAI. MAFT, laud (continues on back page which is not included).

* Faxed on 11/09/2000 from MS AFT