

**Cynthia Sledz
Interviewed by Ann Froines
Cleveland, Ohio
December 6, 2005**

I am interviewing Cynthia Sledz in Cleveland, Ohio on December 6, 2005. Cynthia, tell me the story of how you entered 925. What made you go to that first meeting or discussion?

Well, everyone has heard my story at one point or another because to me it exemplifies how rank and file union members often feel about a union. I had been working at the library years and had signed up to be a union member within a few months of starting. My supervisor was a union member and said, "Here, sign the card" and she couldn't really tell me much more than that. I don't think she ever went to meetings but the particular facility where I was, the library executive board used to meet there on the first Thursday of every month as we still do.

And this is a Cuyahoga...

...County Public Library. It was the Parma Ridge branch. So, they used to meet there in one of the rooms. I finally said to my supervisor, "Who are those people and what are they doing in there?" And she said, "Well they're the Union Executive Board, they're doing union business." And my thought was, "Boy, what a bunch of time wasters," because they'd meet for like three hours on this Thursday morning. So, you know, that's what I was thinking. I was a clerical for a new service that was developed by the library from a grant that they had written and received monies from the State Library of Ohio. And we were just starting everything up. It was myself doing the administrative and the clerical work and my supervisor, who was the librarian, was developing this collection, which was for pre-school. Well, the library was going through some building redesign in that they were constructing a new administration building and moving it over there in 1990. They took occupancy in 1991 and I had started working in '88. So, about three years into this, they said that they were going to move the Project Leap operations to the Administration Building to have it centrally located. That made a lot of sense because we were sending out these pre-school story time kits and it made perfect sense to have them shipped from a central hub rather than from a branch. But then they went on to say that the job that I was doing was going to be taken over by this other department and what I had been doing was actually going to be farmed out to three different areas in this department -- Audio, Visual and Booking Services. So I wasn't really concerned at first but then it became more apparent that I really wasn't going to have a job anymore. My job was going to be diced up and dispersed. I kept calling Anne Hill actually. She was our rep at the time. I kept calling Anne. I kept saying, you know, "I don't think things are going to go well with my job. You really need to be looking into this and making sure that I don't lose my job here." So, I don't think that the union hierarchy... It was not one of the things that was on their front burner, let's put it that way. They had bigger things to worry about than just one single job in a bargaining unit. So there came a time when Anne called me up and said, "Cynthia, we're going to have some paperwork. We

want you to sign it. The move of the LEAP kits are final and what we've negotiated with your job is that you're going to be moved into Children's Services and 20 hours" - I was a 40 hour full time person - "20 hours of your time is going to be as a Children's Services clerk and 20 hours is going to be something else... I don't know. So, I still had a full time job. I didn't want to do this first of all. Children's Services was sort of a back office kind of a thing and I knew that I would not be having any more dealing with the public. That really bothered me because I've always had jobs where I've dealt with the public. I just really thrive on that so I knew it'd sort of be a feeling like my right arm was going to be cut off. And when the day came for me to actually sign those papers, I just went into total meltdown. I cried. I don't even think they could get me to sign the papers for this memorandum of understanding for at least ten minutes until I got myself under control. Then after I got myself under control I got angry and go, "I'm going to find out what the hell that Union is doing." (Laughing) and that's what got me to my first meeting. But it was still that idea that the union was separate from me, that I wasn't part of this and that *that* union, that far off picture of something going on. I started going to my first union meetings, just as an interested member. I wasn't even a steward, now they call them delegates. I wasn't even a steward at the time. But I had made my mind up. That's what I was going to do. I was going to become a steward and I was going to take more and more control over my work life. I was not going to have anybody else in control of my work life.

Did you end up having to take that job, divided up?

Oh yeah, yeah, and I was miserable. I went home for at least two weeks and just cried about it every night for like two weeks. It was *so* not what I wanted to do. It just turned out very strangely that I just kept eyeing Audio-Visual, this department that had taken my duties over piecemeal to various people and I kept eyeing it because part of that department there was public service, there was contact with the public. It looked like what those people did was very, very interesting. So I eventually was able to interview for a job and got in there and it worked out okay.

Now, was the first leader you met from SEIU 925, Anne Hill?

Yeah. She was the rep at that time.

Once you started to go to the meetings what was your impression of the union and its leadership.

I thought they had it together. I thought they really knew what they were doing. The president at that time was Chris Crimaldi. I don't think it was Anne Conway. Although maybe when I first started attending it might have been Anne Conway and Chris might have been the vice-president. But then very shortly after that, Chris became president and Doris Sarfi became the vice-president. Chris was a very take-charge type of a person. If you don't know the full story of Chris, you can be quite impressed by her because she just had this very assertive kind of a personality and if you like people like that you'll gravitate toward her but if you're intimidated by people like that, she could be

somewhat of a steamroller in her approach. So, it just depends if you like to be around people like that and I did enjoy being around people like that. Later, I found out that some of the stuff she did was not especially good but I didn't know that at the time.

Did you have any other events happen to you while working at the library before finding out that your job was going to be taken away from you that led you to realize the importance of a union? What were some of your other experiences as a clerical worker? Were they positive? Negative?

Well, I immediately felt the hierarchy.

In your workplace.

Yeah, Libraries are very hierarchical. In a way that is good because they sort of lend themselves to be unionized because unions go in and they want structure in a workplace. So, libraries have a natural structure that lends themselves very well to the overlay of a union. It can also be a drawback for people who are relegated to lower jobs in the bargaining unit structure because all it takes is one unfeeling supervisor or manager to make those people really feel like they've been put in their place. Conversely, all it takes is one really good supervisor or manager to mentor or encourage somebody and you can really achieve anything you want to achieve in a library. Librarianship is a career that people come to very late in life sometimes after having two or three careers prior to that. It's not something that you've got to get started with when you're in your twenties. People are entering library school in their forties and fifties. It's not uncommon at all.

Did you go to library school?

Yes. I eventually did. I had a degree but, yet, I didn't try out for a paraprofessional job because I wanted a full time job so I tried out for a clerical job and people make assumptions about you when you're in a clerical job. Just like they make assumptions about cocktail waitresses you know, (laughing) you've got to be dumb to be this. I think that's prevalent in a library and I think that used to be more prevalent in libraries when I first started in the late eighties. That was the culture. It was very much, you know, clerical, paraprofessional with a bachelors degree, professional librarian with a masters degree and you know your pecking order and you don't deviate from it.

So that slogan about rights and respect really resonates with clerical workers in libraries because they're kind of at the bottom of the totem pole.

Yes... yes.

Had you done clerical work before you worked in this library, in other settings?

I started in the library when I was forty years old so I had done a lot of other work. I've been a waitress, I've been a cocktail waitress I've been a bookkeeper, I've been in retail. When I graduated from college I graduated sort of late, I was 33 when I graduated. I had

my own business for a while doing promotions. I was very used to being independent and going up and finding my own jobs and working in a retail environment where everything is about profit. Everyday when you start you're comparing that day to the stats from the day before, to the stats of that day a month previous to the stats that day a year previous. You're always trying to increase you sales and push them up. That's the whole focus. Then when I came to public service, it was like, "OK, what's the product here? What are we selling? What are we promoting? With my supervisor saying, "Well, we're promoting service to the customer," which, like, I couldn't get my arms around that. That made no sense at all. It was just so intangible. But, after a while, I was able to grasp it.

Had you run across unions in any of these other jobs?

Oh, yeah. When I dropped out of college the first time I got a job working for, it was Ohio Bell at the time, and I worked as a long distance operator and I was in CWA. I never went to any of the union meetings but joined the union. I came from a union background. My father was in a union. So I understood the importance of unions.

I was about to ask a question about that.

Oh, yeah, I very well understood the importance of unions.

So, growing up you knew something about unions and felt in what way towards them?

Oh, very positive.

What union had you father been involved in?

He was in an independent union at the Standard Oil Company. He worked for SOHIO. They just had, like, a little shop union. This is another story that I told a lot of people and I didn't even realize the significance of it until I was much older and could look back and could really have some reference points to what happened. When I was about eight years old, my father, of course, was working for Standard Oil. They must have been in the middle of a contract negotiation because they were being raided by the Teamsters. That's, basically, the only time you can be raided by another union is when you're in contracts. So, my father was very much against having the Teamsters come in because, you know, the Teamster in the fifties, in those days, they really were run by a bunch of hooligans and almost affiliated with the Mafia...some connections there at least people thought, even if it couldn't be proven, they, at least, assumed it. I know my father put up a very big fight with other members in the independent union. There was, like, an NLRB election and I know my father and mother were very, very worried right up until election time. They would talk about things, like, the house being firebombed. They were always worried about things like that happening. I look back and thought, "Wow, that was really courageous of my father to do that, to stand up for his convictions and to stand up for what he believed in knowing that harm could have come to him and his family. They lost

the election anyway and they affiliated with the Teamsters but looking back on it as an adult, I'm proud my father did that.

Before you became active in SEIU, was it called 1199 then?

No, it was 925 SEIU.

Of course, it was 925. Had you had any earlier experiences as an activist or organizer, in college...?

When I went to Northwestern, I went to a couple of SDS meetings, Students for a Democratic Society, before they got really weird and went off and became the Weathermen and all that. Because that was on campus at that time. I went '66-'67 and it was when the protests were starting about Vietnam. And then I dropped out after a year, I mean I didn't go back, it was basically dropping out. I didn't go back. I started to hang out with friends who were very much against the war. We used to have a draft induction center down on Ontario a little bit north of Public Square where Ontario sort of is running toward Lakeside, and I used to go down there and lay down in front of the induction center so people couldn't go in and sign up for the draft and we were dragged off. (Laughing)

Do you remember what was the name of the group?

It wasn't organized at this point. We'd just hear, "Hey the Young Republicans are having a rally down on the square. Let's go down and harass them." So we'd go down and harass them and yell stuff then when they were trying to speak, they'd be up there with microphones and like suits and ties. And like, "Whoa, they're, like, out of it." You know. And then we'd all just like rush over to the induction center. It was just really a spur of the moment thing. I don't think anybody was really organizing us.

But you felt obviously strongly against the war so you were willing to risk arrest or be arrested in this civil disobedience.

Oh yeah.

What about the movement? Had you participated in that in any specific way?

There's a whole period in my life when I was just, sort of, out of it. In 1970, I left the country and I didn't come back until 1973. I was three years off in Europe and the Middle East just traveling around being a hippie. I say I was a member of the counter culture, that's how I put it. There are whole things that happen in the United States that I wasn't even aware of. I remember I voted absentee ballot for George McGovern in '72. I went in and dropped off my ballot at the consulate in Ankara, Turkey. I suppose they deposited it in the trash can as soon as I walked out of the building, I always imagine that's what they did. But, you know, when I came back, you know, people would be talking about stuff that happened and I just wouldn't even be aware or they'd be talking

about top-forty music and I wasn't even aware of songs. That's what hit me the most. They'd say, "Oh, you know that song." And I'd say, "No, I don't know that song."
(Laughing)

When you look back how do you evaluate those three years of travel and living in other cultures? What kind of impact do you think it had on your life?

Oh, a tremendous impact. Just tremendous...to be gone from the time you're 21 to 24, at a very young age. You know most people let their travel go until they're retired or seniors and you know I'm just glad I got it out of the way when I was young and healthy and I could do stuff like that. But more than that it really made me aware of how egocentric Americans are. They think that this is the only culture on earth and because we've become highly successful at raising up the middle class that this is a validation that capitalism is necessarily the right way to do things. That it's the be all and the end all and that other societies that aren't as capitalistic or aren't as sophisticated in their approach to capital markets therefore there must be something wrong with them. They don't recognize a lot of the wisdom of these third world or emerging nations. They have a type of market place too and its not measured by a stock exchange. But it doesn't mean that it's any less important or less valid than what we have.

It took some self-confidence to go on your own especially in a country like Turkey, which was...

Oh, I was all over the place. See, what happened was, my girlfriend from Northwestern who had stayed after I had dropped out after a year. She had stayed in and graduated so she was getting a six-week trip to Europe as a graduation present. She said, "Would you like to go with me?" I said, "OK, fine." Her whole senior year when she was goofing off, that year I was, like, working two jobs and saving up my money and so I went with her. After about three weeks of traveling together we just couldn't stand doing that. It'll just put a strain on any relationship. So, we parted ways in Salzburg, Austria and it was a real defining moment for me because even though prior to this I'd been going off, you know, and harassing Young Republicans and going to Janice Joplin concerts and liked to think that I was part of this culture, I hadn't really crossed over and made a full commitment to it. Because when we went to Europe, we went with suitcases, we went with a bunch of pretty, little dresses. I had heels. I mean, when I parted ways with Carol, it was a major schism. I shipped all of my stuff home in a steamer trunk. I bought a backpack, hiking boots, a bedroll, and jeans and some clothes and just took off with that. That was the defining moment that I was not going to be this person anymore. I was going to fully commit myself to being a member of the counter culture. I think that was it. And the deeper I got into travel, you know you start out in Europe and then it gets cold and you find there's a whole influx of people who are continually going south to follow the warm weather. Then, as you get in these Middle Eastern countries everybody's, you know, "Let's go over land to India." I had been studying yoga for a while so I thought, "Yeah, this is good. I'll go study yoga in an ashram." And then I got hepatitis in Afghanistan and that, sort of, changed my perspective on everything.

Three years is a long time.

It's a long time. You know I don't know if I ever would have come back except that my father became very ill and really was on his deathbed. I felt obligated to go back because my mother told me he was dying. I came back with the thought, "I'm just going to come back, you know, to put my father to rest and then I'm going to go back again because I have a whole bunch of friends all over the world." And then my mother was very, very moody and I just stayed here.

Did your mother work outside of the home when you were growing up?

No, she didn't. She had worked outside the home previously with my two older sisters. I was really the baby of the family. I had a sister who was sixteen years older and another who was eleven years older. When they were little, like during the war when my father went off to Japan, she worked as a waitress and she also worked as a substitute teacher for Cleveland public schools. And when I came along she didn't work. As I got older, when I was a teenager, she got a job working at May Company, which is Kaufmans now. But my dad never liked her to work. He was the type; he wanted her home with dinner on the table at 4:30 when he got home from work. I mean dinner had better be on the table at 4:30, not 4:40, not 5:00. I mean, looking back I just can't imagine, you know, that things were that strict. That's what was expected.

What was their reaction to your going off and traveling around the world on your own?

That was another funny thing. I just came up with this bright idea and told them, you know, Carol's going to Europe, she's got it as a graduation present, I'm going to accompany her. I've got the money, I'm going to do it. Well, then like, a couple nights or the night before I was supposed to leave, Jimmy Hendrix died of an overdose in London and it was like right before I was supposed to leave and I don't know why that threw me into a tailspin but it did. I don't know if I was just looking for an excuse not to go. I was sitting there crying. I go, "I'm not going, I'm calling Carol, I'm going to tell her I can't go." Nobody in Europe -- I don't speak that many languages.; I only spoke German and rudimentary French -- nobody will know what I'm talking about, I won't be able to get around, I won't be able to find directions." My parents put their foot down. "You are going. You are not leaving your friend in the lurch. You are going" And then they told me later they had second thoughts whether they made the right decision (Laughing) "We told her, did we do the right thing?"

That's a very interesting story and not a usual one for 925 activists. Returning to your time in District 925, can you describe in some detail one or more campaigns or struggles that were important to you in that organization, or where there were some memorable or exhilarating moments. I guess you already had the union, though, so you didn't have to fight for that. You just became active after it existed. When you became active what were some of the memorable...

Well, a memorable fight for me, personally, was that I had this bachelor's degree. No, first it was I was classified as a branch regional clerk even though I didn't work doing what a normal branch regional clerk does. I was being this Project Leap clerk, which was this administrative position, but my classification was a branch regional clerk. So, when they had sign-ups for Sunday where you could earn time and a half plus a premium pay for volunteering I wanted to sign up for Sundays and they said, "Well, no, you can't do that." I said, "Well, I think I can because my classification is a branch regional clerk." "But you don't work in a branch so we'd have to train you to learn how to do all the circulation functions." So I kept saying, "OK, so train me." So we had to have a grievance about it. I felt very good about that. That they had this silly rule, they classified me as this but, yet, they didn't want to give me the full citizenship of what this classification would be able to do. They wanted to treat me second-class. Then, when they shifted my job over and I went to the administration building after Project Leap broke up, I had this bachelor's degree. I'd had it all along but I said, "Gee, why can't I work as a paraprofessional on Sundays. They said, "Well, you can't do that." Well why not? I had the qualifications to be a paraprofessional. "Well, we'd have to train you." "Well, OK, train me." "Well, you might get confused in your roles. If you're a paraprofessional, which is a higher grade, on Sunday, you might try to act like a paraprofessional when you come back and you work your weekly 40-hour job as a clerk. You might overstep your bounds." "Believe me, I'm smart enough I won't make that mistake, I'll be able to keep the distinction in my brain." So there was another grievance about that. Even though that affected me personally, that is what opened up the door for people working in one classification being allowed to work outside of the classification if they have the educational certification to do that. It went to a lot of workers and I feel very proud about that.

So, what was your first role in the union?

My first role was that I was a building steward. The person that left Audio-Visual, Gerald Rogers, was HIV positive and got AIDS, and felt like he wanted to leave before his disease became too pronounced. When there was that opening I applied for the job and got it. He was the building steward.

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START of SIDE B of TAPE 1**

It was a good position for me because not only did I want to be in that position where I now had contact with the public again, I wanted to find a way to become involved in the union and it was like everything was handed to me. I had been going to meetings but now I was going to meetings as a building steward.

What were some of the things you would do as a building steward?

Inform people in the building about what happened at the council meetings, hand out union materials, you know, flyers and newsletters, things like that.

Did you help with other people's grievances or was that passed to a grievance officer?

I can't remember if I ever helped with a grievance when I was a steward. I wasn't a steward long. I think what I did was...oh this is so, I don't know, what would you say, crass, no, it's so self-serving. When I got to be a steward, they were having this promotion called 925 Second Generation, so they had been in existence for ten years and they were starting their second decade... not Second Generation, it was called Second Decade. The colors at the time were turquoise and black lettering, turquoise and gold maybe but with black lettering. They had promotional items made up. There was a teal colored sweatshirt and there were some other union items that they had made up with the union insignia on them. I wanted that sweatshirt. I still have it in fact. I wanted that sweatshirt, it was so cool looking and all you had to do was sign up ten people who weren't in the union. So, I went and I got ten people signed up, I just badgered people into joining the union. It was amazing. I was like a kindergartner punching these ten cards. I was just really like a kid. It was wonderful.

Had it been an open shop where people didn't have to join?

What we have is fair share. That's in this state. You have to have it in your collective bargaining law that it's a fair share rather than a right to work state. Then, even though it's in the collective bargaining law, you have to get it in your contract that you have fair share. In other words, you bargain for everyone, they'll be treated the same but that they have to pay their fair share for what you're getting for them in wages and benefits. They don't have to be union member if they don't want to for religious and philosophical reasons but they have to pay an agency or service fee for servicing that we're doing for them. So I got these people who were paying agency or service fee and got them to be full-blown members.

Was that a library wide campaign, other people rose to the challenge, too, or was it just a couple of you?

It was just a few of us in Ohio got prizes. It was a library wide campaign. It was a district wide campaign. It was something they were doing throughout the whole district. I don't think just in Ohio. I think they were doing it in our units on the Eastern seaboard, I think they were doing it in our unit in Seattle, Washington.

I see. Were there any organizing campaigns you were involved in?

Oh, yeah, once I started being an officer. Oh, you're talking organizing rather than action campaigns. Like around negotiating.

Was your first position after being steward?

After steward, I became the grievance steward. What I like that came out of that was the library had this, I shouldn't say this, if it's read anywhere it just might be bad, the library

had this branch, I was going to say horrible branch, that was very problematic. It was in Warrenville Heights. It's a culturally diverse neighborhood and it's across from the school. They had a manager who was very, very weak and she had a horrible management style of playing people off against each other, staff members all off against each other. So those three factors culminated in, really a branch situation that was out of control. Staff was berated on the floor publicly. They were made to feel inconsequential and just worthless. The patrons, especially the kids who went to the school were rowdy and made the staff feel horrible and they got no support from management on that. One of the things that she did that was particularly egregious was they had an outreach program that a librarian, a full scale MLS, Master of Library Science, Librarian went over a couple days a week and took care of a library they had in the Warrenville House of Corrections. When that particular librarian quit they pushed a PSA into that position. The previous librarian had been a male. So, now this was a woman PSA who was going into a men's...

What's a PSA?

Paraprofessional. Public Service Assistant. We had this female PSA being pushed into an outreach situation at a men's correctional facility where she didn't feel very comfortable being in with people that she didn't know what kind of criminality they had. Were they serial killers or were they just in there for some minor traffic violation that they had overlooked and now they were serving their time? She didn't know who she was being put in with. The situation with the room was that there was no easy exit once they were in this... So, she didn't feel particularly feel safe with the physical constraints of being over there. And on top of it all, she wasn't being paid any pay differential for a job that had been done by a professional librarian. This went on and on and on, her manager jerked her around and jerked her around, and finally we just made a claim that she was working beyond her classification. She refused to do it, that's what it was finally, she refused to do it, got charged with insubordination, got a whole bunch of things in her file. We got those erased and we got her \$1,000 back pay. So that was, like, one of the first grievances I ever had and it turned out, I felt, very, very well. I was proud of that.

Describe one or more of the action campaigns that you were involved in as a union officer.

Probably our most famous action was one of the negotiating campaigns that we had. I don't know whether it was '92 or '95. Peggy Torzewski, if you interview her, she'll probably remember because it was her first campaign as a staff member and it was my first campaign as the union president. I think it was '95. We just, you know, lined a board meeting. We had everybody come out for us. Jobs for Justice and the Cleveland Federation of Labor really turned people out for us. The Teamsters had this huge truck and they pulled it up in the semi-circular drive in front of the Library Administration Building. This big truck and all these big, burly Teamsters walk in. They stood in this library Board of Trustees meeting along the back wall, I mean it was standing room only. We got on the agenda. We had people speak about how important it was that the Library

find the money to pay us what we were worth. It was always about pay. They would be willing to spend money on other stuff, technology, throw it into anything, waste money on stupid things. But when it came down to recognizing their human resource, they were so unwilling to do that. I think that was the campaign where we got stickers made up that said, "This library works because we do." It's just that simple. The computers can go down, the lights can be out and you will still have librarians helping you find what you need and you will still have your desk clerks being able to check you out so that you can take the things that you want out of the library. We'll figure out a way to do it. That's what the Board couldn't grasp. That we were the ones who made that library work.

So every time the contract came up for renewal you would frequently have fights over increments, pay raises. They just wouldn't acknowledge you that way.

Yeah.

Was this a repeated kind of thing when you were president that you had to fight for every new contract with direct action?

There were about three negotiations in a row that were quite acrimonious. '92, '95 and '98. And the one was sort of funny. I can't remember if that was '95 or '98 where we were sitting around trying to figure out a slogan that would really, sort of be funny, but would be, you know, what songwriters call the hook. I think it was either Dale Woike or Kathy Kosiorek said, "When are they just going to give in and pay us?" - this was in a caucus - "When the cows come home?" and then, I think, Dale said, "Yeah, *moove* on wages." And then we took off and we were thinking of all these stupid cow things. We went out and we rented cows and we had the whole front lawn of the Administration Building...

Real cows?

No, like people have for their fortieth birthday or their fiftieth birthday. We rented cow statues and we stuck them all over the front lawn of the Administration Building for the Board action. When the Board came down to go in the Boardroom of course we had all those cows stuck there. We had the news media there. We were standing at the entrance to the auditorium, where the Board came in. We made a gauntlet of people ringing cowbells. Those board members who were so straight laced had to walk through people ringing cowbells in their face. It was stupid but it was so much fun to be idiots because they were being idiotic too, not recognizing the worth of the workers again. So, eventually we got a raise but not before a number of people took the microphone and just laid it out to the board members what a worker really has to do to exist. I remember this one guy, Ron Zurowski. He brought his two little kids and he said that on his wages (he worked in tech services and he was a lower classification in our bargaining unit)... He worked forty hours at his regular job. He worked every Sunday for time and a half, and on top of that, he had a second job. So basically he had three jobs to support his family. It just dawned on them what they were dealing with. We're not dealing with people who earn over \$100,000 a year. We're dealing with people that were being paid \$7 and \$8 an

hour and because a lot of them were part time, maybe their annual wage was \$16,000 a year. One of the other campaigns that we had they balked at giving us one percent more. We were in a fight over 1%! We figured out what it would be in wages and benefits and it came to a million dollars over the three years of a contract. We got stickers made up that said, "We're worth a million." It's just, you know, that simple.

So, in each of these cases, these tactics were effective in various ways, in getting you publicity, in getting your ultimate goal of these pay increments?

Yes, you can't lose faith and you never give in too soon. It's the one who's standing at the end of the day that wins. When you're in that type of a battle with an administration or a board that is totally stonewalling. I mean, right now, in the library, we seem to have an administration that is more amenable to getting to yes. And trying to see that if we both go down it doesn't do anybody any good so we need to learn to work together. But, in the '90's, the administrations we were working with in the library could not see the value of when your workers succeed, this whole organization succeeds. I remember one of the mediators that we had in from Federal Mediation and Conciliation Services, Jerry Carmichael, when the library was talking about, "well, you know if you keep this up we're just going to have to outsource all of this, you know." They were threatening us with outsourcing and contracting out and finally Jerry just turned to the library's negotiating team and he goes, "Did you ever think of who you're going to be supervising when you outsource all these jobs?" In other words, you're management, you outsource all the jobs, where's your work? It's like they were so dumb that they would cut off their nose to spite their face. That's what we dealt with all through the '90's. It was just very, very difficult. You just have to hang in and say, "Don't give up, don't give in." To me, that's where the team, comes to rely on each other. Because the bargaining unit is expecting you to do it. I mean you call on them for actions but in the cold light of day, you and your four other team mates and the three alternates, you're the ones who are there talking to each other saying, "Don't give up. We think we can do this. Come on let's not lose faith. Hang in there. We can get this done."

Did you ever have to do any actual job actions where you slowed down the work or withheld work?

We're not supposed to do that because of our contract. It's right in our contract. We took strike authorization votes several times and that really sends the whole rank and file into a tailspin because, you know, you've been handling negotiations for them. They still feel like it's the union, like they're not a part of that. So you call this special meeting and you just lay it out. You know, boom, boom, boom. This is what we're getting. This is the excuses that they're giving us. This is as far as we can take it but we need the strike authorization vote because this is the leverage that we need. We need to be able to tell them we took this vote, it came back and if push comes to shove, we've got the rest of the unit behind us. To get people to that point, that comfort level, it's very, very hard. I was president two times where we had to do that, ask people to make a strike authorization vote, and it was very difficult.

How many years were you president then?

Six years.

Six years. What do you think about your own development as a leader of the union during those six years? What kind of changes do you think you went through?

Oh, I just can't believe the things I ended up doing. Never in my wildest dreams did I think that... I never thought of myself as a leader. I always thought of myself as independent, assertive, could take care of myself, self-reliant, resourceful. I never thought of myself as a leader. So, I guess looking back, I became a leader. That's how some people view me. I'm always a little bit chagrined at that; that's how people view me.

Why do you say chagrined?

I don't think I'm deserving of that.

They elected you to do their work.

I know but hey, people elected Bush too! (Laughing) I mean, go figure! A lot of people who shouldn't be leaders get elected to be leaders. That is not a measure of anything... elections.

Well, there's a certain legitimacy when you're elected a union president.

But, what I heard was... this was at a women's conference that Karen Nussbaum gave for like a thousand of her closest friends when she was director of the women's bureau of the Department of Labor. We had this big conference in Washington. I think it was there that I heard Linda Chavez-Thompson speak. She said everybody was always coming up to her, "Who can be a leader, who can be a leader in the union movement, who can be a leader?" And she said, "You know what I tell them, anybody who is doing the work is a leader." She said, "You're out on the street passing out handbills, you're a leader. You're getting names on a petition, you're a leader." So, it was like, oh, you don't have to be high up like a president or somebody in the union hierarchy. At the very ground level, you can be a leader if you're doing those things. It was like, whoa. It was an epiphany for me. That's what a leader is. Somebody who gets in, who rolls up their sleeves and starts doing the work. Other people see them doing the work and they join in. (starting to cry) I'm sorry I'm being so emotional.

It's obviously a very meaningful experience.

It really is.

Because when you're a union president, you have a lot of responsibility, don't you.

Yeah, but that's not what it's about. It's getting down on the ground level and doing that work. That's the important work.

And in your case, being able to inspire people to do that, right?

Well, you inspire them by setting an example. You lead by example.

You mentioned the word 'team' a bunch of times when talking about the bargaining team. Do you think building a team was something that 925 tried to do?

Oh, definitely, definitely. In fact, I felt it more than I do with the new union. We merged with 1199 and I feel no sense of team with 1199 because it's so big. It's so huge. We've got, I don't know between the three states, West Virginia, Kentucky, and Ohio we've probably got 25,000 members now. When I was on the executive board of 1199 after we made the merger, they offered me a term on the executive board because I had been on the board of 925. It was a courtesy, really and I was just overwhelmed because we used to have 925 union Executive Board, National Executive Board meetings of, like, eleven or thirteen people and I remember we agonized, *agonized*, about taking the Executive Board to eighteen members because, would this be too unwieldy, and you know, just too big to make crucial decisions. And I walked into my first Executive Board meeting for 1199 and there were 150 people there. And I was, like, oh my God, how do they ever get anything done? Well, they do manage.

How do they?

Well, they get stuff done but it's more or less a rubber stamp. And I don't feel they really get down to what the membership needs or what the membership needs to filter up to the leadership hierarchy. I felt that when I was a National Executive Board member of 925, I was really taking exactly what the members told me that they needed to that National Executive Board, as I respected every other person on that National Executive Board to be giving me the truth about what their members in their unit needed. If we were having discussions and the people from Seattle said, "This is what our members need," I wouldn't second-guess them. I'd say, "You know what, I bet that's what they do need." Not that I always agreed with it, but "Ok they need it, now, are they going to have it or not."

So, somehow, a level of trust was built in that smaller executive group?

A tremendous level of trust and Anne and Debbie were just, just so great at leadership development, so great at nurturing people to do things. They would give you assignments that they probably knew were going to develop a certain skill in you. Maybe they even designed it that way. I don't know if there was that much deliberation of their actions. You'd end up doing this assignment and realize later yeah, that developed that skill in me. It was just amazing. They never, ever took any of the credit or the glory for themselves. Debbie Schneider, especially, was always about pushing people to the forefront, always about getting other people in the news, always about putting the

spotlight on other people. I mean, she was a true master of leadership development and succession planning. I have never, ever seen that in any other boss or person anywhere else other than in my skating pro.

Your what?

My skating pro. My coach for figure skating, I mean. That's what coaches do. That's what coaches in athletics do. So, I don't know if Debbie got that from a background in athletics or that's just something she came by inherently. But, Anne and Debbie were just remarkable for that.

So, the leadership skills you developed were more just by doing the job, coming forward, getting elected president, and then being presented with all these challenges?

Oh, yeah, I remember my first negotiations. Chris Crimaldi, remember I mentioned her -- she was the union president. Well, she wanted to step up to management so she was going to make a real quick exit out of the bargaining unit and her term was not finished as president. So, Doris Sarfi, who was vice-president, did not want to move up to president. She had too many health concerns. So, they went to Chief Steward of the region who was Melanie Deutsch and they said, "Melanie, we need you to take over the presidency." Melanie said, "I don't want to be president but for the good of the unit I will do it but with the understanding that I only finish out Chris's term," which was six months, "and then you better find a president." So, they came to me and they said, "Cinthia, here's what's going to happen. Melanie's going to be president for six months. You are going to be vice president. After six months, you are going to be president and Melanie's going to drop back to vice-president. But you're not going to tell anybody that this is what we're going to do because..."

You were going to *be* president or *run* for president?

Well, I was going to run and it was pretty much going to be uncontested so I was going to be president. "So, you are going to be president but during the six months do not tell anybody that this is the plan that we want to see for the unit because people will start treating Melanie different. They'll treat her as a lame duck. And we want her to have authority during this six months. We don't want people playing the two of you off against the middle." Ok, fine, I can do this. So I took over the presidency in September/October and in January we were in negotiations. So, I was president for, like, three months and I was thrown into negotiations and I was, like, "OK, sink or swim, you're going to do this."

What position had you held when they approached you with this proposal?

I had been grievance steward for two years and then vice president for six months and then into the presidency.

Do you remember what those first three months of presidency was like? I mean were there any [problems]?

One is was proving to people that I was old enough to do the job.
How old do you think I am? You might know how old I am.

I don't know.

But people tend to think that I'm younger than I really am. I was, like, 43 when I took over the presidency but people must have thought I was like, in my thirties, so they thought I was very young and very inexperienced. And I wasn't that long at the library, maybe about four years. So, I didn't have a real background in library history so they tended to assume that I really didn't know what I was doing where really I had this whole back story of a lot of varied things that prepared me skill wise for undertaking this. I'm 57 but people think I'm a lot younger than I am and when I was younger people really assumed I was younger. To me it was just like paying my dues, basically. "Yes, I'm old enough to do this job. My mommy says I can do this." (Laughing)

Some of the other leaders had been older? Or they had been with the organization longer?

They had been with the organization from the get go. They had been members of the organizing committee. They had seen the fruition of the union from staff association to independent union to affiliation with 925. So here's this person who just comes in, she's only worked for the library for four years. She had no idea what our history is, you know and she's only been vice president for six months and now she's our president!

Was there anyone else, you think, who wanted to run for that position? I mean, I don't know that much about how union presidential candidates come forward.

It didn't appear to me that there was anybody else who wanted to do that. I'm trying to think of the executive board at that time. We had a Chief Steward from the Eastern Region, from Mayfield region. I can't even remember her name now. She would have been great. But there was just some friction between Chris and this person and she eventually ended up leaving the library altogether. She took a job with another non-profit organization. Then there was Parlin Meyer, was very gung ho, but Parlin - I had taken over Grievance Steward from her - Parlin was one of these go getters but she didn't like to do the work. She was a person who didn't really like to get in, roll up her sleeves and you know, shoulder to the wheel kind of stuff, so organizational-wise she never would have made it as union president because she just didn't want to do that much detail. There is a lot of detail.

When you're union president, do you also have to work your forty-hour week?

END of SIDE B of TAPE 1

START of SIDE A of TAPE 2

Yes, writing the newsletters, helping out with grievances, I'm such an anal freak. Anything I do I do 110%. So, where they had been used to not having agendas for the Executive Board meeting, I would have an agenda made up. I would have assignments, you know. I don't think people were used to that much micro management. (Laughing) I pissed a lot of people off.

But it sounds like you needed to have an organized leadership role if every time a contract came up you had this amazing struggle.

You know, another thing that I'm really proud of I started during my presidency and it's really taken off. We'd had a fundraiser. I don't know if it's from the days when they'd had a staff association or when it was the union starting but they had this fundraiser where they sold candy bars. And it just made us a little bit independent to have this little treasury of our own, that we didn't have to depend on 925 for everything. I think it was a carryover from the Staff Association because they used to collect dues from the Staff Association people but when they affiliated with 925 either some of those dues had to go to 925 or they had to be dispersed between the Staff Association members. There was some legality there. So when Chris was the Union president, these candy sales had sort of gone into hiatus. And our treasury was down to, like, nothing. Prior to that we had used the candy sales to have educational awards because we're a non-profit organization, we gave away the money that we took in to our members for educational awards. It was more like a stipend really than a scholarship or reimbursement. That had fallen by the wayside. So I got candy sales up and running and the first year that we reinstated it we gave away \$600. We were going to do three \$200 awards but only two people applied so they each got \$300. The next year it went to, I think, like, \$900 and then the third year it went to \$1500 and we just kept pushing this. I kept pushing this. We needed to build up a nest egg, a war chest, whatever, because money is power. When you have money, you can do things that you can't normally expect to take place. Now our candy sales are totally legitimized by the library administration.

To the public that comes in, you do this.

Yeah, we have it right at the circulation desk. We have signs out that follow the signage for the library. Branch managers cannot at their whim say that they will not sell candy. That's how it was in the old days. We were supposed to be able to sell candy at any branch, but they put it to the vote of the staff and non-bargaining unit staff would be voting not to sell candy. Hello! This is our fundraiser. So now, it's legitimate. No branch manager can say, "We don't want it in here. It's too messy." It's come from the executive director. Candy sales, it's ok, you know why? Because we've got so much money now we give to their library levy, we give to their foundation that's eventually going to be used for endowment purposes for special collections, things like that. The library sees that we do a lot of good through this. We gave away this year \$5000 in educational awards.

Wow, and these are for people to basically do continuing education?

For people that want to get that bachelors degree so they can go and become a paraprofessional. For people that have the bachelors who want to get a Masters so they can become a professional Librarian.

That must promote quite a bit of goodwill for the union, too.

It does. We've also used our funds for charitable donations. We give to Susan B. Komen Race for the Cure because we are predominantly female. So many of our members have had cancer we feel that that's one charity that we can really give to. And now because we have more money we want to stay on the right side of the IRS code we've got to be giving even more of our money away since we're taking more revenue in. So I'm chairing up , sort of a task force that is going to examine guidelines for giving. If members come to us and say, "Will you recognize my charity and give to this?" What are the guidelines that we're going to use to pick one charity over another so that people don't feel that we're playing favorites.

A little transition here. You mentioned the workforce being predominantly women. How do I want to ask this question? Let's see. There are men who work in these libraries. How did you see their role in 925 when much of the leadership was, in fact, women?

Well, our executive board now for just our chapter, we've got a male steward from Mayfield Regional. We have a male steward from the Administration Building, our treasurer is a male and we have a male steward from Parma Regional. So, out of eleven positions on the Executive Board, four of them are men. We feel that [they're] pretty well represented. I'd say about the mid '90's we were told that our Executive Board and our chapter had to be more diverse.

Told by whom?

The leadership at 925. You know, libraries do not attract a lot of diversity. Library schools, where you go to get your MLS, are predominately white, female. They don't even attract African-American females or Asian-American females or Native American females. They're predominantly White Female so our library situation and our library system I don't think does a good job of going out there and recruiting for diversity. It just really doesn't. It falls short. So you've got this workforce that's, like, 97 or 98% Caucasian and they're telling us to get an Executive Board that's diverse. Well, you know, it was very difficult to make that happen but in terms of gender diversity, yeah, we've managed to do that. We did have a very dear friend of mine, Mary Foreman, who was African-American and she was the Chief Steward from the Administration Building, but she suffered a stroke and had to go on disability. I hate to say it and I used to joke with her about it. I'd say, "You're our token so we stay on the right side of diversity." It's just terrible to think of it in those terms but we did not have a lot of diversity in the workplace. On National Executive Board for 925, I remember we had a number of males; Craig Arnold from Montgomery County Public Library; Anthony Richer, who

used to sit on CCPL's Executive Board and then was elected as regional rep to the National Executive Board. Numerous people from Seattle were males. So, I always felt there was gender diversity.

Sure, and in fact, one could argue that sometimes it's easier for men than for women to assume those roles. The question has come up whether now that District 925 no longer exists, whether the way it generated and grew women's leadership will continue to happen in SEIU? For example, Kim Cook, in Seattle, talked about how even though the union is predominantly women, at the meetings most of the people who speak are men. And she, as a women president, is aware of this and knows she needs to do something about this but doesn't always do something about it because it's hard to know what to do.

Why don't they give more locals to women? Why doesn't Debbie Schneider have a local? Why isn't Debbie Schneider the president of a local right now? I think she'd do just a remarkable job to some of the men who are in there now running locals right now. She could replace a number of them and it would be a benefit to SEIU.

But, these men who run the locals are workers in the setting whereas Debbie was a staff person. Is that part of the reason?

No. Men who run the locals and your union hierarchy, not like chapters like we have at the library but actually the local, they're staff, that's their paid job. They get elected to it. They have to have elections because that's in the bylaws so they're elected but you really know that election is pro-forma. To run against someone who's established as a union president in a local, you've got be doing a major turn around campaign. That just doesn't happen. Debbie has been appointed to run locals that are in trusteeship, which means when a local isn't doing well because the leader that was in there was less than honest or just had no management skills, they've taken him out and she's been put in there to run that local while it's in trusteeship until it gets straightened out. Anybody who can do that has certainly proven that they have the skills to be running a local.

I think what's happened is she being promoted upstairs to national leadership now and is going to be based in Washington. Did you know that?

Oh, great. No, I didn't. I'm so glad to hear it. She should be.

She is now their international relations person. She is going to be doing whatever SEIU decides it needs to do in relation to a global strategy.

That totally fits in because I know she was over in Bosnia, Yugoslavia. Working with unions over there. She had taken a number of trips.

Now, that's what she's doing full time.

That's great.

Well, we're getting to some of the legacy issues about how 925 developed all these fantastic women leaders locally and nationally. With its disappearance, technically speaking, even though the unions, the people, still have collective bargaining representation, will that kind of women's leadership keep being generated. Let me ask you a couple more questions. Do you have a little more time?

Yeah.

We're doing things so much in depth. It's a really good interview. Did you consider 925 a family friendly organization? I guess this is more a question for people who are staff and maybe it's not germane to all folks. Were you able to combine your union work pretty well with whatever you felt your personal life entailed? Was it respectful of...

Union work is not easy for families. And you're right. It's probably more of a staff question. I think 925 was much more family friendly than the current union that we've merged with, 1199. 1199 I do not find family friendly at all. I think they take their staff and they run them ragged. They just squeeze every last ounce out of them that they possibly can. So, you either have to be young and single and you don't want to socialize or you have to be retired and you don't want a social life and you're going to devote your time to the union like somebody would devote their time to a ministry. That's what it is. I often tell people, in fact, I told my pastor this at church and I've had discussions with another person on our chapter executive board, we consider this our ministry.

It's a calling.

It is. When my pastor came to me and said we want everybody to become involved in the church and what ministry are you going to do I said, "I already have one. I work every day to bring social justice to people in the way of better wages and working conditions. That's my ministry." And I said, "I just can't do any more than that." I feel that 925 tried to be very family friendly with their staff. To understand that if you're a woman and you're a staff rep and you got a call from school and your kid's sick, you know, you go, you take care of your kid. I think they really tried to do those things. I'm not sure 1199 does it as well. Maybe that will change now that the president, Dave Reagan, has a child of his own. He may start to understand the importance of family. On a personal level, I could never have done everything that I did without the support of my husband. My husband, my late husband now, was just fantastic. We were so much a team and raising two kids, going through negotiations, being union president, being on a National Executive Board and going to graduate school for my Masters Degree and working 44 hours a week. How does somebody do that? You do it because somebody is there who's going to pick up the slack and somebody is there who's saying, no matter what cockamamie idea I came home with, it was always, "Cinthia, yeah you can do this. Yeah go for it. Yeah you can do this." It was never, "I don't think you should do this" like some husbands are, or, "Oh, maybe you ought to think about this." It was always,

just the first thing out of his mouth, "Yeah, you can do that. Go for it. Yeah." He was such a remarkable person in that he totally was a great cheerleader for me.

That helped you a lot, obviously.

It did. It did.

Would you consider that the aims of 925 were realized?

Yeah, to a certain extent. Could they have been realized much more. Yeah, we'll never know that because we made that decision based on expediency to dissolve the union. There were some of us who believed, even though we knew the solution was in the best interest economically, I think there were some of us who still wanted to say, let's just push it another year or two and see if we can't find a way to squeeze out more efficiencies and maybe make this work.

So, you're implying that you and some of the others locally here felt quite a loss when District 925 decided to disband?

Oh, that doesn't even begin to touch it. You know, when we went down to that convent in Kentucky, and you know, we think we're going there for just a regular Executive Board meeting to sort of discuss the way that the union's going, we knew that it was a rocky road ahead. But we actually thought that there were going to be an array of options and we were going to get to analyze a number of options. I don't think I was delusional in thinking this. I think other people thought this, too. Then we get there in this convent that's God-awful, far away from everything else. We've got these two people called in from the International to facilitate this session and the outcome becomes more clear that it's not to look at an array of options but to really choose this option and decide how we're going to implement it, which just really has a note of finality to it. We were devastated. Just devastated. That's why I think we insisted on this legacy piece because we did not want this entity to die.

What, from your perspective, then, as someone who was taken aback by the finality, what were the rocky road parts that you had been able to observe? How did you know it was rocky? Because you knew there were financial problems? What were the signs?

Well, I think financially we could have done it. Because right after, no it was before that, it was 2000. We'd gone to the convention in Pittsburgh and we'd been told that everybody was going to get on – I forget what this plan was called – but we were going to go on this plan where everybody was basically going to pay their fair share. There were people that were on all sorts of dues schedules all over the country, all over the place. You could have a chapter in Michigan that was on a flat fee dues schedule and you could have a chapter right next door in Michigan that was on a percentage schedule. There was no consistency. So, they knew in order to grow the union with monetary resources, everybody was going to have to be the same and we were all going to have to

pitch in. We all felt that we could have achieved that because that was in 2000. We felt that we could make the plea to our members, we're going to raise dues. We have to do it. The International said we have to and if we go along with this and pour "x" amount of our money into organizing as we always did, we could do it. And our officers were making very big contributions to make that happen. Debbie Schneider was turning over her whole salary from being on the SEIU International Executive Board. She was plowing that back into our treasury to make ends meet. Things like that. Just being very generous. There was nothing that dictated she had to be, but she was. I think we thought that we could make it happen. At least give it a try for another year or two. But there was also the thing that because we were so spread out we could not really support each other with union solidarity. You know when there were problems in Seattle, how many members could we fly across country to really give them support.

We just couldn't do it. And as much as we, the leaders, had an affection for our union brothers and sisters in Seattle or in Boston, the rank and file didn't share that. I mean they could listen to us talk about it all day but they really didn't get it. You know, we knew it because we knew people from Boston. We knew what their struggles were. We knew people in Cincinnati. We knew what their struggles were. But if you're a rank and file person and you don't hear those stories, you just don't have that intimacy.

Was size also an issue? I mean, SEIU is made of much bigger locals.

Yes. I think it was the whole way they wanted to have this organizational structure that made them respond quicker to what the industries where they were organized were doing. You know, you have to have a quick response because for most cases unions are reactionary. They're not proactive. They're always reacting to something that the management does. And so to have that quick reaction time you've got to be organized in silos by industry. You can't have a union that spreads across industries. It just doesn't make sense. It's not a good organizational chart. I mean I could see it for all the intellectual reasons.

But [] something was lost. OK. A couple more quick questions. What is important in the legacy of 925 then in your view?

Helping women become leaders and saying, "You can do this." Because as much as we think that the gender gap has lessened and they can point to statistics and women's wages are up to men's and this and that, there still is an inequality.

And, in fact, that's one place the gender gap still does fully exist, in wages. Do you think that 925 had an impact on SEIU, in particular or organized labor in general?

I think it did when we were active. When we came into a convention, that they have every four years, you know, we always marched in very proud. I mean, one year we had these flags and you got a flag for every thing that you accomplished. If you organized so many... you had flags. I mean, we just strode into that convention hall and we were

nothing but banners (laughing). It just showed how hard we worked. And for the size our local was, I mean *we worked*.

Did the other locals have banners or was that the idea of 925 to have the banners?

Oh no, they all had banners. Because it was the SEIU thing.

I get it. I get it. Ok. What did the experience working as a leader mean in your life? You've certainly touched on this.

Well, personally, it's going to make me become a lot more politically engaged. Part of the story I didn't tell you, which SEIU gave me a lot of support, was I decided that I wanted to run for a seat on the retirement board in Ohio, the public employees retirement board. I went to this convention in 2000 where I heard Denise Napier speak. She's the treasurer in Connecticut. I'd had these ideas on my own, you know, about all the money workers are pouring into their pensions and then it must go in investments somewhere. I wasn't really quite sure how that worked out, how this money made it into capital markets. But I had a feeling that it was probably being invested in a lot of companies that were doing their best to bust unions and I thought, "This is really crappy. It's really rotten. Somebody should be looking into this and make this stop, make this not happen." Then when I went to that 2000 convention and I heard Denise who was, like, the sole trustee for the public employees' retirement system in Connecticut talking about how this was important, it was like she was talking right to me. It was like a spotlight came down on me. "I'm talking to you, Cinthia, pay attention." (Laughing) I was going to Debbie, I was going to Anne, saying "I've got to figure out a way to get on the Ohio Public Employees Retirement System. I think I can get a seat on this. I think I can do this." They didn't even know what it was about. They started putting me in touch with more people in the International, who, unbeknownst to me, started this Capital Stewardship Program, which is supposed to be about, tracking where our members' retirement money was going and seeing if it could be used to their benefit or collateral benefits rather than be used against them. I got lined up with the right people that made all of this happen.

You ran and got elected?

Yes. I ran and got (elected) and I served a four year term and now I'm starting my second four year term in January. I ran this time undefeated. So, yeah, it was a good thing and I'm just thinking, you know what, I'm just going to keep pursuing this. I'm going to become more and more politically involved and see where I can take this.

Were you able to raise that issue on the retirement board and get the Ohio board to start thinking about that?

Yes, there were a number of people already elected from labor on that board but they were from AFSCME, so we weren't really working that close, hand in hand, because that's the other public sector union and sometimes we're rivals for the same people that we want to organize. But it's been a good experience because that's one place where

we're not rivals. We all work together for what's good for labor. We've really sort of formed a coalition. Now one of our members has retired and we don't have that majority on the board and there was some pension reform in Ohio where they realized we had this labor majority and I'll be damned, they knocked some members off, augmented it with three more members that were appointees from the governor. It really was a political ploy to get rid of that labor majority. The powers that be knew that labor could pretty much vote in anything that we wanted to take place.

The vast majority of the workers who pay into the pension board are probably in a labor union, right?

A good amount of them are.

So, I mean it wasn't unrepresentative? This labor majority...

No, not at all.

Did that just happen within the last few years?

It happened within the past two years, that pension reform, House bill 133.

Do you think that's going to make it harder to pursue that strategy you were talking about?

What it will do is that probably for every individual issue now that's brought before the board you'll have these coalitions that will go in and out. There'll be ad hoc coalitions. In other words, you'll coalesce with somebody on the board and you'll pull them into your group because they think likeminded with you. There will not be a labor bloc that will vote thinking of what labor issues are. The person you're sitting next to may be in your coalition on one issue and on the next issue you're going to be at opposition to each other. So, it'll just make it harder. You'll have to work each issue, rather than thinking, "Yeah, we all think alike on this."

Is this the kind of major union-related activity you're doing now? You're thinking of it as union-related.

Yes. And that's why I've dropped off of the 1199 executive board. Because it takes up so much of my time. When I got elected to the OPERS board by default I actually got elected to another board. The OPERS board serves, in statute, as the board for the Ohio Deferred Compensations Program, which is a 457 plan that's an IRS tax code plan that allows you to defer some of your wages and invest them. It's a member-directed plan. So, I sit on that board, too, and between the two of them, they take up a lot of my time.

So, are there any other kinds of organizing activities you're thinking about getting involved in?

Well, I always go anytime they're organizing a library. I will go and speak to library workers anywhere. I mean, and I would go to speak to workers in other industries but they don't want me. I would go and speak to health care workers. I would go and speak to nursing home workers except they don't want me there because, "Cynthia, you really don't know the issues of nursing homes." I know the issues of workers but it's not closely enough aligned. So, basically, if they're organizing a library, I'm there. I will speak to people, I went out and spoke to people at Avon Lake Public Library and they organized. They got their first contract. I spoke to Mentor Public Library. They organized. They are having a very difficult time getting a first contract. Right now we've got a big campaign going in Cincinnati at the Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County and the professionals have organized.

END of SIDE A of TAPE 2