

Letters to the Editor

Cangiarella a True Unionist

To the Editor:

I first met Sal Cangiarella, who passed away in late January, in 1987, when the Organization of Staff Analysts was about to win collective-bargaining rights for 650 Analysts working in city agencies.

Because I had never been previously involved with running a bargaining unit of a relatively small number of members scattered across half a hundred agencies, I hoped to learn how, as president of SEIU Local 300, he served a widely scattered membership, given the limited resources of a small local.

Local 300 was the direct descendent of the Civil Service Forum, the first of all the municipal unions, and represented a total of 28 titles covering 800 members.

On the occasion of my first visit, Sal welcomed me as if he was already my best friend. He was pleased to learn that a new bargaining unit was about to be created and very willing to share the details of how he ran his union. I learned a lot from Sal on that day and days thereafter.

I suspect that Sal was then well past 70. His health was clearly poor, but his enthusiasm for the union gave him an energy that did not stop. Local 300's dues rate was lower than average, and yet membership satisfaction with the union was high.

Sal's explanation was that he had made a practice of hiring retirees from his executive board or from among the retired activists. He knew that these retirees had a lifelong love of their union and would feel honored to work in that good cause. The retirees already had pensions and health benefits. Sal could not afford to, and did not, pay them anywhere near as well as they deserved. In return, however, Sal treated his volunteer force as his partners and not as employees.

It worked for Sal and Local 300, and over the years, that idea has worked for OSA also.

Sometimes it is easy to forget the level of idealism and altruistic feelings that inspire many a union activist.

I learned of Sal's passing too late to make the funeral, but I do know that if there is a misunderstanding in my own record when I reach St. Pete at the gate, I will call upon Sal to file a grievance on my behalf. By that time, hopefully, Sal will have organized the guardian angels properly and I will be welcomed as a brother.

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Chairman, OSA