

TO AFFILIATE OR NOT TO AFFILIATE, THAT IS THE QUESTION

The Organization of Staff Analysts (OSA) is one of the largest independent (unaffiliated) local unions in New York City or even in the country at large. How we got here is a story of great length, full of missteps and betrayals, faith and triumphs.

The faith part was the faith and belief of hundreds – and eventually thousands – of Analysts and similar employees in the value of united action. The other aspects of our story involved established unions which sometimes did and sometimes did not choose to help us.

The most recent series of events started after the 1970's fiscal crisis.

OSA, 300 members strong, asked DC37 and its Locals 371, 375 and 1407, and Teamsters Local 237, to help them gain union status, rights and protection. The Teamsters made the best offer and OSA affiliated with Local 237.

DC37 and its locals were unwillingly to accept that decision and came together behind Local 371 and its Analyst Organizing Drive.

A great deal of progress was made with help from both 237 and 371. Unfortunately, the City delayed the hearings and did all it could to slow down the process. Finally, both of the main organizing unions (237 and 371) dropped out of the effort. A deal was made to stop organizing Analysts. The Analysts themselves, however, did not agree nor did they stop organizing themselves.

Supporters of both sides now came together and OSA, by 1985, was up to 600 voluntary dues paying members.

In 1985, talks were held with the

Communication Workers of America, Region I. The OSA Executive Board voted to agree to bring to the membership a motion to affiliate.

However, at that point, the Public Employment Relations Board (PERB) granted a collective bargaining election for 38 Analysts at the Board of Education. We were called by CWA International and informed they would be backing CWA Local 1180 and opposing OSA in that election.

Pretty much everyone was surprised when tiny OSA shut out the larger, established union with 20 votes for OSA and none for our opponent.

Thereafter, we challenged the deals made by the larger unions regarding Analysts. Our attorney, Joan Kiok, was able to get PERB to cancel those deals. This resulted in a further election. We won and we added 650 Analysts to the union membership.

By the late 1980's, we were a union, but still felt a need for help from a larger, established union. Talks were held with DC37 and CWA but, finally, we could not obtain fair terms and we were left to complete our first City contract on our very own – and so we did.

At some point thereafter, the leadership of OSA began to realize that, against all odds, we had actually created a successful union and did not *need* to affiliate.

Even so, we still wanted to be a part of the larger labor movement. We were, in fact, a member union of the Municipal Labor Committee and the Central Labor Council, but we were open to further affiliation.

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When we voted to set the dues at .007 of salary, the union leadership promised to do all in its power to avoid any further percentage increases unless or until we affiliated with a larger union and had to pay a “per capita” fee.

We made it clear that the OSA leadership was open to affiliation and we also engaged in discussions with many unions. We would regularly report the result of such explorations at membership meetings. Finally, none of our efforts were successful.

The one offer that was most attractive was from DC37 under Stanley Hill. In 1994, their offer was met with a single counter demand from OSA. We insisted that they return to organizing. They agreed and, by 1997, we came very close to entering final detailed negotiations. We were planning to commit as soon as we jointly had won an effort to unionize a group of 1800 Analysts in the Transit Authority and MaBSTOA.

Both the proposed affiliation and the joint organizing drive were casualties of the scandals that soon crippled DC37 and sent them into receivership.

OSA entered the new millennium representing 4,000 Analysts and others. By that time, OSA began to offer (in our Welfare Fund) benefit coverage to members of other, smaller, independent, locals.

Over the next ten years, our strength as a union endured and our leadership was accorded a seat on the Municipal Labor Committee Health Technical Subcommittee and, later, on the Steering Committee of the MLC itself.

By this point, the leadership had begun to lose all hope of a happy affiliation with an International Union and so we sought to become a “Directly Affiliated Local Union” of the AFL-CIO. Instead, we were asked by the AFL-CIO to consider affiliating with

either the Office and Professional Employees International Union (OPEIU) or the United Federation of Teachers (UFT).

The UFT offered us the right to represent the Education Analysts if we affiliated. We, in turn, pointed out that the UFT had let most Education Analysts be classified as Managerial and/or Confidential. Thus, they could not offer them to us unless those Analysts were brought successfully under the protection of the UFT.

As many members are aware, the efforts took years but, with our help, over 600 more Analysts did achieve union coverage within the UFT.

We are still open to affiliation, with DC37 or the UFT (or AFT) or OPEIU or any of the unions that have been a part of our history so far. We are now, again, seriously considering affiliation, but those unions seeking our allegiance should understand our needs.

By accident, and with no intention of doing so, OSA evolved into a fine independent union. After nearly a half century of existence, we would have no wish to lose anything already achieved.

Thus, all negotiations must start with OSA’s continuing autonomy, maintenance of our effective grievance, negotiations, organizing and benefits sections and, as far as possible, a really low dues rate.

We have already had talks with DC37, the UFT, and OPEIU and we are open to others, if they approach us.

You, as a member of our union family will be kept informed on our progress and there is an opportunity for your input at any time.

All options (including continued independence or direct affiliation with the AFL-CIO) are on the table, but the matter does merit serious consideration.