**To Strike or Not to Strike: The University of Minnesota Clerical Workers’ Decision**

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**Abstract**

In the fall of 2003, the workers of AFSCME Local 3801 and Local 3800 had to decide whether to go on strike against their employer, the University of Minnesota. The case reviews Minnesota labor law and the history of AFSCME at the U of M. Because of a pattern of devaluing clerical workers at the U of M, these workers have historically been the least-paid and their collective bargaining agreements the weakest of all the University unions. Leadership of AFSCME 3800, a union whose membership is 94% female, attributes this devaluation to institutionalized sexism. The common perception is that the male-dominated Teamsters union at the University has consistently received better contract offers from the administration. During the period of the breakdown in negotiations, not only the administration’s negotiators but also the other unions at the U met the prospect of an AFSCME strike with disbelief by. No one believed that the “secretaries” would strike, since it would be “mean.”

This case explores the dilemma confronting AFSCME members in the face of a potential strike. Three broad categories of workers resisted the strike: non-voting “fair share” clerical workers who felt alienated from the union, members who felt the University was offering the best deal it could, and those who could not afford to strike without strike support funds. The case explores each of these perspectives to give the reader the background information needed to understand the reluctance to strike. The case also includes the perspectives of several AFSCME leaders who advocated striking and were called upon to communicate this to the membership.