Abstract

In the early nineteenth century, elementary educators formed the Chicago Teachers’ Federation to better teachers’ rights and public-school funding. Leading the Chicago Teachers’ Federation for more than thirty years, Margaret A. Haley took point to assure teacher’s citizenship, investigate tax inequalities that were denying teachers a salary increase, and to include teachers on political decisions that affected the education system. During the Progressive era political corruption took control of education leader positions. This led Margaret Haley to encourage the Chicago Teachers’ Federation to follow her on a political platform and to align with unions with the hope of creating a stronger foundation that would allow them to start making impactful changes. 

I argue that within the process of bettering teacher’s rights and school funding their efforts to joint organized labor and to expose political corruption led to the success of what became the “largest women’s union in the country.”

Margaret A. Haley

Margaret A. Haley was a part of the Chicago Teachers’ Federation from 1861-1939, she was a unionist, a feminist, and a life long educator. Haley’s goals were to increase teacher’s salaries, create a political platform for teachers to make changes and to unionize the CTF.

“Haley found that five municipal service corporations, Chicago Edison Company, Chicago Telephone Company, People’s Gas, Light and Coke Company, Union Traction Company, and Chicago City Railway Company had never been assessed for their franchise rights, an assessment that came to over two million dollars.”

--Robert Louis Reid, Ph.D. Dissertation, Northwestern University, 1968)

Figure 1:

Elementary school teachers consistently fought for a raise in their salary. High school teachers and men were paid higher. The Board of Education called the teachers incompetent and refused to give them a raise. Margret Haley and Catherine Goggin took time off of teaching to investigate the lack of funding that should have been going towards the Chicago public schools. Haley searched into corporations tax records, gained knowledge about business and politics, and went to court for two years to finally win some money to go towards teacher’s salaries.

Conclusion

In my research thus far there seems to be a constant pattern of male authors that have negative views of the Chicago Teachers’ Federation and see Margaret A. Haley as a failure. The focus is on the continuous battle of teacher’s salaries, better working conditions, centralization of schools, creating a political platform for educators, and creating a union teachers could be a part of. Previous work from scholars tend to only emphasize the obstacles the Chicago Teachers' Federation faced and every time Margaret Haley was turned away or rejected rather than magnifying the achievements this federation accomplishes with the leadership and Haley. I intend to use the hardships to my advantage to show how society was ran during the early 20th century, expose the male political figures that were involved with the Board of Education, corrupt corporations, or simply friends with the mayor. Furthermore, actually talking about the successes that Haley pushed for ranging from raising teacher’s salaries to becoming a female leader that help create “the largest women’s union in the country.”