



EMPLOYEE FEDERATION

of

North Harris Montgomery
Community College District

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THE ADVOCATE

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Edited by Steve Davis

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN--"CHANCELLOR'S UPDATE"

For better than a year now, the union has been voicing concerns over District spending patterns. Those concerns are familiar to all who have been reading The Advocate, and do not need to be rehashed here. The Chancellor's convocation address seems to have signalled a change. I was pleased to hear a number of issues that the union has raised finally being addressed.

In our final 1991-1992 Advocate, we urged the District to provide a 5% across the board salary increase and to take action regarding low staff salaries, and that is exactly what happened. In addition to a 5% increase for all employees, Dr. Pickelman recommended, and the Board approved, a minimum increase of \$1,000 for employees with the District six months. This \$1,000 floor insures that staff on the lowest end of the salary scale will enjoy an 8.77% increase. This is not a large step for employees who can not afford dependent health care, but it is a long overdue step in the right direction. The 5% increase insures that step-16 faculty (and now staff who have topped out) will not lose financial ground, a major union focus for more than two years now.

The Board also approved additional funding to maintain the current level of life insurance, rather than the state's \$5,000, as well as funding to make up the state's shortfall in ORP funding. These are major benefits to employees. Unfortunately, the state plan limits employees to purchasing up to four times their annual salaries in benefits through paying additional life insurance premiums. Under the previous arrangement, they could opt for five times annual income. This is a problem created by the state and not the District.

The Board is also moving, albeit slowly, toward opening the Aldine Center. In the last legislative session, I testified before the Senate Higher Education Committee regarding those needs. Southern Aldine has been underserved for years. For better than a decade, the union has urged the District to focus on the needs of this area, which perhaps requires our services the most desperately. It is gratifying to see

movement toward meeting these needs.

The Board also approved \$2 million for equipment, 1.8 million of that sum directly related to instruction and libraries. It approved 35 new faculty and 25 new staff positions. I remain unconvinced of the necessity for increases in administrative positions, but the faculty and most staff positions were necessary.

What are we to make of all this? For whatever reason, Dr. Pickelman and the Board have changed course. I still remain troubled over administrative proliferation and tandem costs, but for the first time in Dr. Pickelman's tenure, I see money being spent where it counts--on those who are on the front lines of education, faculty and staff, and on necessary instructional equipment. The students are the ultimate beneficiaries.

I am sure Dr. Pickelman, if asked, would say that all of these changes would have come about without the union, and he might complain that we are taking undue credit. Of course. However, our record speaks for itself. One need only review The Advocate for the last eighteen months to see that the union has been pushing on these issues, and is justifiably gratified to see them successfully addressed.

Certainly, more issues and problems remain, and the faculty and staff can be assured that the union will continue to be in the arena. Before we launch into those areas, I felt it important to give Dr. Pickelman and the Board the credit they are due.

Alan Hall

AFT NEWS

This month's Advocate marks the appearance of our new masthead, promised earlier this year. The old heading--NHCC United Faculty--had become outdated with the District's name change and the union's decision to open the ranks to staff employees. We continued to use the original name through last academic year in order to deplete our stock of stationery. AFT officers occasionally hear from staff employees who were not aware they were eligible for membership. We hope "Employee Federation of NHMCCD" more accurately identifies our organization and helps clear up any lingering confusion.

At the end of the spring semester, the local elected new officers to serve two-year terms. As a result, the expanded Executive Committee now consists of: Alan Hall, District President (443-5544); Marilyn Kron, District Staff President (443-5771); Allen Vogt, District Treasurer; Bob Locander, District Secretary; Tony Foster, Kingwood College Faculty V-P; Greg Mitchell, Kingwood College Staff V-P; Patricia Plunk, District Office Staff V-P; Thelma Jones, North Harris College Faculty V-P; Mel McFadden, North Harris College Staff V-P; and Steve Davis, Advocate Editor. This is a roster of people dedicated to improving this institution and serving employee needs. Please contact

any of them about concerns that should be addressed or about joining the AFT. Monthly dues rates are \$19.85 for fulltime faculty, \$12.70 for fulltime staff and adjunct faculty, and \$9.60 for part-time staff.

Please consider writing for this newsletter. The Advocate staff is always looking for writers who can provide incisive, lively commentary on college affairs. Essays, book reviews, news items, poems--all kinds of submissions are welcome. You need not be a member of AFT to be published in these pages.

Finally, congratulations to Alan Hall for his appointment by the Chancellor to the District's legislative committee. Alan's energy and expertise will be a great boon to NHMCCD in its critical dealings with the state government.

"BLENDED RATES" LEGISLATED OUT

Some of you may remember--I will never forget--that employees with dependent PRUCARE (health insurance) coverage have been paying more for that coverage than it actually should have cost. This inequity resulted in employees with dependent PRUPLUS coverage paying less than their coverage actually would have cost them. This injustice was brought to your attention three years ago in this newsletter. Many of you acknowledged the situation to be clearly unfair. However, to remedy the situation would have forced those receiving the benefit to pay their fair share.

It is a fact that for the past several years, NHMCCD employees with PRUCARE dependent coverage have subsidized the premiums of their colleagues who had the more expensive PRUPLUS dependent coverage. The euphemism coined was "blended rates." Now, the requirement that the College participate in the state health insurance program appears to have corrected the equal cost for unequal health coverage situation accepted by NHMCCD.

Last year ('91-'92), employees with family coverage paid \$178.48 per month for health coverage for PRUCARE or PRUPLUS coverage. Family rates for the three available programs for the '92-'93 year are listed below. Also listed is the annual "savings" for each program in relation to last year's premium.

<u>'92-'93</u>	<u>Family Premiums</u>	<u>Annual Savings</u>
Health Select	\$169.32	\$109.92
SANUS	\$161.08	\$208.80
PRUCARE	\$143.22	\$423.12

Today, therefore, PRUCARE employees with family coverage are receiving (basically) the same coverage this year with a premium decrease in excess of \$400. Although former PRUPLUS employees with family coverage also experience a "savings," they may be disgruntled or feel inconvenienced if they have to change doctors. A number of employees with PRUCARE dependent coverage are undoubtedly concerned for their

PRUPLUS counterparts--perhaps to the same degree the same PRUPLUS colleagues demonstrated concern in the past for the PRUCARE people who helped pay their premiums.

No one promised life would be fair. Injustice is a part of our society and usually will continue to be ignored by those who benefit most from it. From time to time, however, an injustice is often unintentionally remedied by forces unrelated to the efforts of those affected.

David Dahnke
Instructor of ESL
North Harris College

EDITORIAL MUSINGS

One role that the AFT plays is that of responsible watchdog over developments at NHMCCD. This aspect of our work has led us to criticize some of the Chancellor's policies and leadership decisions where we felt such criticism was merited. As Advocate editor, I strive to see that such commentary is voiced in a fairminded fashion. And there is welcome evidence that Dr. Pickelman receives and responds to criticism in a nonvindictive way. Despite some tough exchanges, he has maintained decent personal relations with the leadership of the AFT.

In this light, I want to follow up on some of Alan Hall's observations on the Chancellor's inservice address. I came away from the program enthused about much of what Dr. Pickelman related. Of course, having recently sat through the oratorical frothings of the likes of Pat Buchanan and Phil Gramm, practically any speaker would have struck me as rational and progressive. Still, there was much laudable substance in what the Chancellor had to say.

To start with, a 5% raise with a \$1000 minimum is not trifling in the current economic context. The 5% received by most employees is above the current increase in the cost of living. This is only fair, since for a stretch of years in the late 80's, real wages for our employees declined. As David Dahnke has already pointed out, those of us who have dependent health care coverage will see an additional increase in take-home pay. Most attractive in this package is the boost given to staff employees toward the depth of the salary scale. The \$1000 minimum raise is not exactly the "Ben and Jerry Solution" of a seven-to-one salary differential from top to bottom that I advocated last April, but it is an incremental step in the right direction. Ironically, this "solidaristic" policy of providing disproportional wage increases to the lowest paid, was pioneered in Sweden in the late 60's and early 70's by the union-backed Social Democratic government of Olaf Palme. Of course, given Palme's ultimate fate (look it up if you're curious), I'm not so sure this is a wise analogy. But whoever dreamed we would see Scandinavian social planning become a model for action at NHMCCD? One modest suggestion will complete my thoughts in this area. The Census Bureau currently puts the poverty line at \$13,924 annual income for a family of four. Why not work to make sure within the next couple of years that no full-time employee at NHMCCD

falls below that level? Even with the recent progress, some of our staffers--those at pay grade S-2--are still more than \$1700 short of this target. How about freezing administrative salaries until that is corrected? That would show the genuine commitment of this institution to social justice.

Related to the above is Dr. Pickelman's announcement that the entire District will now move to in-house custodial services. This will mean that all janitors and housecleaning employees (not just those at North Harris College) will now work directly for NHMCCD instead of for the private contractors who currently employ them. These dedicated workers have been terribly exploited under the old arrangement. The overwhelming majority are blacks and Hispanics who toil for the minimum wage with no benefits, thus constituting a Third World within the first world of this District. By coming to work for NHMCCD, those hired will see wages increase from \$4.25 up to \$5.65 per hour, a jump of nearly 33%. They will also receive the health insurance coverage for themselves and their families that is such a desperate need. One overlooked gain is that the custodial workers will now be able to take courses tuition-free. This is what our mission is all about--to give ordinary working folks a chance to elevate themselves through our first-rate educational services.

This is a much-needed action the Chancellor has taken. It also proves his ability to re-think some of his positions. During his initial meeting with the AFT Executive Committee in the Spring of 1991, he made a case for further privatization of services if it could cut expenses and thus benefit the taxpayers of the District. Perhaps Dr. Pickelman has seen the larger costs involved in such action. Does the community really benefit over the long haul when we acquiesce in the treatment of a segment of workers as virtual slave labor? Does the community college movement benefit when we are afraid to make the case for the vitality of the public sector? If privatization is so inherently efficient and virtuous, then what message does that send about our own brand of publicly-financed education? Thank God our leadership has reversed itself in this area. We welcome our brothers and sisters among the custodial staff aboard as employees of the District. And yes, we intend as soon as possible to recruit them into the AFT.

Adjunct faculty did not receive a raise this year. While this was disappointing, there was some progress for part-time faculty in other respects. A Kingwood College memo distributed before the adjunct inservice detailed the creation of additional office space, and announced new benefits of a \$25 annual payment for professional organization membership as well as a tuition waiver for any credit or non-credit course. These represent real gains for an often under-appreciated component of our workforce. Under the Airola regime, the custom was to raise adjunct salaries every other year. We hope to see this happen then in the Fall of 1993.

If Dr. Pickelman's speech had a downside, it was in his reiteration of his support for some sort of "system to reward excellence." AFT leaders--many of whom have received nominations and awards for either teaching or staff excellence--remain deeply skeptical about any scheme

for merit pay (whatever semantic quibbles might be engaged in, merit pay is what we are actually discussing). We have forcefully communicated our feelings on this issue and clearly will need to do so in the future. But that is not to detract from my own overwhelmingly positive judgment about the presentation as a whole. Wasn't the Chancellor's use of a nautical metaphor interesting? He spoke of the captain understanding the need to change course at the last minute, heeding the warnings of the lighthouse sailor. Was this a conscious or unconscious response to Alan Hall's image, used in a variety of articles, of the NHMCCD "showboat" heading straight for the shoals? One hesitates to say, for who can fathom the complexities of the administrative mind? But this much is sure--this is a new year that marks a fresh beginning. I believe the Chancellor has signalled his willingness to work with us to move this District forward. The AFT's leaders--the militant, able-bodied seamen of this vessel--are willing to accept the challenge.

Steve Davis

PERSONAL VIEW

Aid Democracy in Workplace

By Stanley Rosen

Labor Day celebrates the role that working people and their unions have played in building a democratic society.

It is ironic that as unions became a major force in leading the struggle for democracy in the Eastern bloc countries, editorial writers, political leaders and corporate moguls waxed eloquent about the virtues of unions of "solidarity." But here in the United States, those same persons are either hostile to unions or ignore their existence.

There are three ways to explain this hostility and cultural amnesia.

- First, the current opinion-makers of our society are expressing their class bias.

- Second, these opinionmakers are influenced by the propaganda and financial support provided by the corporate and managerial interests.

- Third, despite all the new managerial rhetoric regarding participation and human resources management, they fundamentally cannot accept the concept that the workers should play a day-to-day role in the decision-making process.

On a recent visit to the Li-

brary of Congress, I saw its excellent orientation film, which described the many services of the library. However, no mention was made that both the professional and nonprofessional staff are members of a union.

I then visited the national Museum of Building. A display on Pittsburgh paid homage to politicians, planners and corporate leaders, but made no mention of the building trade workers whose skill and courage helped to change the skyline. There was a display about the way the Brooklyn Bridge was built, giving no recognition to the skill and daring of the workers, 14 of whom were killed.

On a recent visit to the Museum of Science and Industry in Chicago, I saw a combination of high-quality displays and corporate self-congratulation. In presentations of the coal and steel industry, no mention was made of the excesses of free market capitalism, the exploitation of the workers, the unsafe working conditions. There was no mention of the role that unions played in building the economic strength of our country.

The last example however is most telling. Several years ago I attended an excellent concert of the Chicago Symphony Orches-

tra at the Illinois State Fair. There was no mention in the written program that the musicians were members of a professional union.

When I brought the lack of recognition of the union to the attention of the management of the symphony, I was told that announcing the union affiliation was unnecessary and maybe even irrelevant.

There is a quiet nobility and relevance to the idea of industrial and workplace democracy. It is a continuous, but sometimes slow, process for problem-solving. It is based on the belief that a combination of meaningful conflict, based on legitimate and differing interests, combined with cooperation, represents a truly democratic situation.

On this Labor Day, let us recognize the contributions made by both workers and their unions to the true practice of democracy. Unions have been downgraded and ignored too long.

They deserve better and fairer recognition. They are a precious resource to be cherished and properly honored.

Stanley Rosen is professor of labor and industrial relations at the University of Illinois.