



THE ADVOCATE



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SAILING THROUGH 60, UNION PROUD: My Lifelong Fascination with Organized Labor

I was born in a union home. Growing from infancy through childhood, I knew a few rock-solid truths: that Mother would always be home after school; that the Lone Ranger and Tonto would always get the bad guy; and that Dad would always make "a good living" because he belonged to the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, a group he called "a safety net for the working man." Even as a child I had the vague, hardly articulated notion that while any one American individual had the right to stand up and be heard, a group of like-minded individuals had the power to be heard and get results.

Deciding at 15 that I would be an English teacher some day, I asked my Dad about unions for teachers, but he didn't know about white-collar guilds, and I had to wait for my answers. My social science professors weren't much help in college, being, I realize now, very much the victims/products of the McCarthy era and not relishing disruptive questions in the classroom or office from restless students. Some of my more progressive, younger English teachers who read beatnik poetry and progressive magazines were more helpful and encouraging but largely gave me lessons from an earlier Samuel Gompers time and not much about right now and nothing whatever about the future. Beginning my teaching career in Cincinnati in 1961 did not exactly land me in a hot bed of union activity. At 21, I learned about jazz coffee houses, protest songs, more poetry, and of course the varieties of teaching in public school. I discovered very little about teacher organizations other than the NEA which I joined to find everyone very polite and agreeable but rather passive. I also joined the NAACP the same year and found much more energy and purpose to my liking, a

group of like-minded people with righteous causes. Graduate school in the more interesting late 60's displayed people in groups making noise (you remember the slogans and the music), organizing to disrupt almost everything, and breaking into violence with or without provocation. It was fascinating but seemed to follow very little collective purpose.

In the mid 70's, carrying five years of teaching experience and three degrees, I landed in a California school, Sierra College, where I finally found my crowd, the American Federation of Teachers. In my college newcomer's packet were all the usual brochures to read and papers to complete, among which was a *routine* application to the AFT. Well now! The AFT has long been the negotiating body for California's college and university faculty and staff, and I quickly learned that my pay was far better (\$20,000 in 1976), my health care more comprehensive, and my working conditions far more understanding (English comp teachers always had four classes instead of five). The purpose of the union was a given, and we often talked about work with the knowledge that both management and labor understood that purpose: to provide the state's students with the best teaching professionals, methodology, and facilities possible.

Did labor and management sometimes fight? Sure. Nonetheless the argument was seldom random or centered around personalities, and both sides worked toward resolution.

Arriving at NHC in '79 and even knowing that Texas to be a right to work state, I was nonetheless surprised, horrified in fact, to learn that certain administrators had such manifest animus toward unionism that faculty and staff were no "allowed" to talk about it on campus. Did academic freedom stop at the classroom door; did it not obtain in the hallways and offices? Were we all adults here? Who in America had the power to dictate civil discourse? Talking about this situation with my father, I was assured that things would change, that nobody holds that kind of power for long.

Sure enough, within weeks I was visited by some teachers who were going to form a union, no matter what; displaying intelligence, purpose, clever use of tactics, and pure courage in the fight for employee rights, twelve heroic souls began meeting off campus, facing the real possibility that their jobs were on the line. Sounds melodramatic, doesn't it? Well, those of us who were around at that time know that it was melodramatic; a real fight was going on. Shortly after initial organization, the first AFT executive committee went to the next board meeting, and then president Kevin Bailey made what we thought was a lovely olive-branch presentation, expressing a desire to work with the trustees in a conciliatory, hopeful manner. In response, a trustee pulled a prepared anti-union resolution from his pocket and read it into the record. The board voted immediately to make his resolution official college policy.

Our first president forbade meeting a group on campus during school hours (7AM to 10PM), using campus mail at anytime despite access by other organizations, placing union material in mailboxes during working hours. AFT sued; AFT lost that court case, but shortly after the suit, the board removed virtually all the prohibitions. Over the years AFT stayed at NHMCCD and flourished, our members enjoying friendships of the highest order and working to teach to the outer limits of our abilities.

Our chapter has grown until it represents 35% of the employees here. Last year our chapter came in second in Texas for greatest percentage increase of new members, perhaps because about 45 to 50 individuals came for help each year throughout the last decade with requests ranging in need from "gimme some advice" to "get me a lawyer." Often, however, the union works quietly behind the scenes to find resolution for both sides of an issue. We provide members to committees, often by request, and we celebrate our open channels to the overall administration and our welcome at the District Office. What a difference twenty years of gritty determination and hard work makes in an institution of learning. What a time we've had!

After my Dad died, I found all his union pins in a little box, including his treasured, extra fancy 50 year pin. Because of health reasons he had given up electrical work years before, but he never forsook his membership or love for IBEW. Too many friends, too much history, too many accomplishments were represented by the medals in that little cardboard box, and he continued to pay his dues until the month he died. When my mother moved to Texas, we brought the union pins with us, and she has them arranged in a special place in her jewelry box. One day I plan to arrange his medals and mine together, representing our union family.

Pat Gray
Professor of English
North Harris College

IS THIS AMERICA?

(The following is an excerpt from "Miami-Dade faculty come to impasse"

On Campus, November 1999, p 3)

It is shocking to read what the Miami-Dade Community College faculty union have been negotiating for in a bargaining process that has lasted for over a year. The administration has refused to "withdraw from the table any number of negative proposals," such as "the college's right to deny faculty the right to appeal to arbitration when their tenure and rank are at issue"; the administration's right "to force faculty to choose textbooks from a limited list created by management"; and, perhaps the most shocking of all, "the college's right to search faculty and their belongings at will."

Furthermore, M-DCC president Eduardo Padron "disbanded the elected faculty senate and dispensed with the board approved governance procedure established in the faculty handbook." Adding insult to injury, the administration gave "27 percent raises to department chairs, and 13 percent raises to staff" while faculty was offered far less. Each month that faculty refuses the offer, penalties mount, which have been attached to the offer. The good news is that this frightening state of affairs has brought the faculty together as never before. They are building a base of support from the public sector and are "joining the union at a steady rate." Because the administration has been unwilling to "give ground," the union has taken steps to resolve the situation, and have "asked that the impasse be resolved according to statute." The Public Employee Relations Board can, "according to statute," appoint a "special master" who "acts in a judicial manner to gather evidence and make a decision on issues in dispute." He or she then holds a hearing and listens to briefs from both sides of the dispute. The master then makes a recommendation to the board of

trustees which will then hold another hearing and make a ruling which is temporarily binding. Both sides in the dispute must vote on the board's ruling (of course, "any issues in dispute must be renegotiated"). The president of the United faculty Miami-Dade Community College feels that the board "will act fairly."

Maybe this is America after all.

Nell Newsom
editor

Progress With Colleague

The union applauds Dr. Pickelman's memo of January 7, 2000 which addresses problems related to Colleague. You will recall that the union highlighted Colleague-related concerns in two recent issues of The Advocate. In the December 1999 article, "A Matter of Communication--- Colleague Revisited, or Should the College Get Us All a Bigger Home PC?" we emphasized the high level of frustration employees have experienced with the system and identified lack of effective communication as the stumbling block to progress toward remedying the associated problems. The union called for the Chancellor or his designee to facilitate better communication between IT and college users as a first step toward solving Colleague problems. We were glad to see Dr. Pickelman acknowledge general Colleague problems in his January memo:

We have also experienced an inordinate amount of frustration with the implementation of software conversions intended to give us the best tools to do our jobs and serve students effectively. This has occurred despite the very hard work and tireless efforts of many at the campuses and the district office. The latest conversion, of course, was Colleague 16. The continued frustration with Colleague by many users has been systemic, producing adverse effects throughout our college district. Of greatest concern to me is that the lack of confidence in Colleague by many well-meaning individuals has led to the development of less than the type of attitudes that one would come to expect of a dynamic and progressive organization like ours.

Recognizing the importance of increased communication, he goes on to write, A district-wide task force will be appointed as soon as possible to review our strategic goals with Colleague, identify problems as noted by users, determine that such problems are integral to the success of Colleague, and develop a plan of action and timetable to resolve those problems. [. . .] The task force will be made up of users, primarily, as well as representatives of faculty senates, support staff councils, instructional councils and District and college based IT personnel.

We were pleased to see that Dr. Pickelman values the union's position that such a task force must consist primarily of users rather than upper level administrators. He also established a district-wide committee to "prioritize and evaluate IT projects. Like the task force, this committee will primarily be user-based."

This is clearly the best Colleague news we have had in some time. The December Advocate article ended, "It is time, finally, to demand some accountability." The Chancellor has accepted the challenge and, no doubt, will hold appropriate people accountable for implementing solutions. This move was bold and crucial to the progress of the district.

As a sidebar to this topic, I would be remiss if I did not emphasize the union as a significant player in the operation of the district. Our role regularly includes highlighting problems, and recommending solutions. We, in part, function as an agent of change. We have an excellent working relationship with senior administration. While we do not always agree with one another, we are able to communicate effectively to solve highly complicated problems. We often negotiate and compromise on complicated topics. We share the same goal, to make the college better. I am hopeful that I can soon answer the question, "What has the union done lately?" with, "We helped to make Colleague better."

The following employees have been appointed to serve on the Colleague Task Force:

Jim Berry - Co Chair
 Earl Campa - Co Chair
 Judy McCann Mary Shafer
 June Rhoton Cher Brock
 Ken Feld John Fishero
 Elaine Myers Larry Ridequx

Linda Scroggs Danny Osburn
 Lisa Cougot Connie Rogers
 John Chapin Kathy Dannenbaum
 Kathy Fleming Butch Juelg
 Michael Code Ray Mollere
 Jimisu Wolff Jim Simpson
 Gwen McCormick
 Rachel Lowe Pat Pate
 Kathryn Ruthven Kim Baker

The Texas Federation of Teachers is our union's state affiliate. To assist the TFT in preparing our focus for the next legislative sessions, they conducted the following survey. We thought you might be interested in the results.

**TEXAS FEDERATION OF TEACHERS
LEGISLATIVE SURVEY 2000
Higher Education Issues
Fall, 1999**

YOUR PRIORITIES ARE OUR PRIORITIES

Each year the Texas Federation of Teachers asks the most important people in education--our members--to tell us what's on their minds. We value your opinions and try to represent your concerns. Help us help you. It is more important than ever that we propose ideas that will really work and really improve the quality of education and your professional life. Please take a few minutes to share your ideas and opinions with us. We pledge to keep your individual responses confidential, but to report the overall results to you, public officials, and the media.

Issue	Very Important	Important	Somewhat Important	Unimportant
1. How important is it to you that community college employees have fully paid health insurance with benefits equal to those provided to state employees? (please check one)	80.95%	17.46%		1.59%
2. In 1999 the Texas legislature approved a \$3,000 pay raise that moved Texas teachers closer to the national average, but gave nothing to higher education faculty. How important is it to you that faculty get a pay raise similar to the one granted to K-12 teachers in 1999? (please check one)	77.78%	14.29%	7.93%	0
3. In 1999 the legislature increased the Teacher Retirement System multiplier to 2.2, leaving it still below the multiplier used to calculate state employees' retirement benefits. How important is it to you that we increase the multiplier to 2.25, equal to state employees' benefits? (please check one)	76.19%	6.34%	9.52%	7.95%
4. In 1995 the Texas legislature reduced the state's contribution to ORP from 7.31% to 6.0%. How important is it to restore that funding? (please check one)	71.43%	14.29%	9.52%	4.76%
5. Adjunct faculty frequently are denied retirement and health insurance benefits. How important is it to gain these benefits for adjunct faculty? (please check one)	58.73%	25.40%	14.29%	1.58%
6. How important is it to maintain tenure for faculty at 4-year institutions? (please check one)	58.73%	20.63%	17.46%	3.18%

For the next set of questions, please indicate whether you think that the idea proposed is a very good idea, a good idea, a poor idea, or a very bad idea

Proposal	Very Good Idea	Good Idea	No Opinion	Poor Idea	Very Bad Idea
7. Adjunct faculty frequently are hired as "at will" employees, without any guarantees of due process in employment matters. Should colleges be required to have good cause before disciplining or firing adjunct faculty? (please check one)	58.73%	30.14%	3.2%	4.76%	3.17%

Proposal	Very Good Idea	Good Idea	No Opinion	Poor Idea	Very Bad Idea
8. Among the suggestions for dealing with the increasing use of part-time faculty is the proposal that such teachers be paid at the same hourly rate as full-time faculty. What do you think of this idea? (please check one)	44.44%	41.27%	3.18%	9.52%	1.59%
9. Another proposal for dealing with the increasing use of part-time faculty would have the state establish staffing ratios that require that a set percentage of faculty members be full-time faculty. Is this a good idea? (please check one)	47.62%	34.92%	4.76%	11.11%	1.59%
10. In some school districts in Texas, school employees have been allowed to elect a representative to negotiate with the school board on matters involving wages, hours, and conditions of employment. Is this a good idea for community college faculty? (please check one)	73.02%	23.81%	3.12%	0	0
11. There has been a suggestion that tenure should be outlawed so that higher education officials could remove inefficient or incompetent faculty more easily. What do you think of this proposal? (please check one)	4.76%	12.70%	3.17%	30.16%	49.21%
12. It has been suggested that Texas faculty salaries lag far behind salaries for in other states because Texas is one of only a handful of states where faculty is prohibited from engaging in collective bargaining (negotiating of a legally enforceable contract—covering wages, hours, and working conditions—between the employer and an elected representative organization of employees). Do you think it would be a good idea to allow faculty to engage in collective bargaining, if a majority of the faculty in a college or university vote to do so? (please check one)	74.60%	25.40%	0	0	0

Listed below are issues that TFT might address in the next legislature. Please check 3 that you feel should be our top priorities.

- 77.78% Improving salaries for faculty and other higher education employees.
- 38.10% Restoring cuts in funding for TRS and ORP.
- 34.92% Defending tenure where it exists.
- 38.10% Providing for pay, benefits, and professional rights to adjunct faculty.
- 34.92% Changing state laws to ensure fairness in decisions on faculty grievances.
- 19.05% Reducing the use of part-time faculty.
- 46.03% Maintaining high acaden'dc standards for students.
- 6.35% Something we forgot to list:
 - Full funding by formula for community colleges.
 - High academic standards
 - Payroll deduction for union membership dues

Alan Hall

CALL FOR ARTICLES

We invite you to send us your opinions, your news, your questions and so forth. The Advocate is a forum for information and free interchange of ideas. Send your articles to Nell Newsom, Editor, NHC, ACAD 217, (e-mail at Nell.Newsom@nhmccd.edu or submit to any of the following officers: Alan Hall, President, ACAD 217, NHC, Velma Trammell, WNSP 174, NHC; Rich Almstedt, KC; Tim Howard, NHC; Julie Alber, MC; Allen Vogt, NHC, Bob Locander, NHV, Cris Neuman, NHC, Mary Ella Phelps, Tomball.

JOIN THE AFT: YOU CAN JOIN THE UNION BY CONTACTING ANY OF THE ABOVE OFFICERS.

CURRENT DUES:

FULL TIME FACULTY. . . \$23.80 PER MONTH
FULL TIME STAFF. . . \$16.65 PER MONTH
ADJUNCT FACULTY AND PART TIME STAFF. . . \$13.55