

BUDGET BELT-TIGHTENING BLUES

During the spring semester at North Harris County College, the attention of the faculty and staff turns to the Board of Trustees and next year's budgetary appropriations. How well will we do this year? Can we expect to keep up with inflation? Or will teachers, like preachers, have to do without because of the nobility of their offices? Perhaps a look at last year's budget will give us a greater insight into the problem.

In spite of the fact that the Financial Resources Committee of the 1979-80 Self-Study found NHCC in "a position of growth and financial security," the NHCC faculty has either maintained the status quo or lost ground in benefits during a time when benefits in every area should be improving. NHCC is on a solid financial base, so funding for improved benefits is available. The problem is fiscal conservatism and administrative and board priorities, long a concern of the Faculty Senate Benefits Committee. Buildings appear to be a major priority. Certainly, a healthy building program is necessary, but such a program at the expense of salary and benefits seems questionable. A review of recent discussions between the Benefits Committee and the administration disclosed manifold ways in which the needs of faculty members

could have been met with relative ease but have been systematically denied.

Health insurance is the area of our biggest loss. In September, 1979, our premium increased and the board declined to meet it, causing the coverage to decrease to \$250 deductible and only 80% coverage. Only \$21,000 more than budgeted would have been required to keep coverage constant, but Mr. Thorne informed the Benefits Committee that no money was available above what had been budgeted. In December, 1979, only four months later, \$1,232,000 in surplus operating funds were transferred into the building fund, leaving \$200,000 in surplus. It seems that \$21,000 (1.5%) of \$1,432,000 could have been spared to cover the increased premium.

Early in Fall, 1979, the Benefits Committee informed Mr. Thorne that its goals included restoration of our previous health package, disability, and, possibly, dental insurance. After months of work, including bid taking, the committee was informed by Mr. Thorne on August 13, 1980, that he had only budgeted \$45 per month for health insurance, a 23% increase from the previous year. However, Blue Cross bid our current "lean" plan at \$45.51. The committee suggested several ideas for funding.

In a meeting with the Standard IV (Financial Resources) Committee of the 1979-80 Self-Study, Dr. Airola estimated that an increase of one cent per one hundred dollar valuation in the tax rate would generate approximately \$100,000 in extra revenue with an approximate cost of \$12 annually to the average property owner. Currently, NHCC tuition and fees are only slightly above the required state minimums. A small increase could generate funds for benefits. (Standard IV of the Self-Study recommended that, as tuition fees and tax rolls increase, resulting funds should be applied toward salaries and benefits. - page 10) A firm no was the response to both suggestions. When asked about operating surplus, Mr. Thorne said that there would be a surplus (the actual figure being available in September or October, 1980), but that it would be used for construction for which NHCC has not sold bonds. (Standard IV of the Self-Study recommended use of funds for salaries as well as the building program. - page 11) The committee then focused on a compromise between our previous health coverage and our current coverage, a plan requiring approximately \$33,000 above what was budgeted. It asked Mr. Thorne on August 13 to present its request for an additional \$10 per month per employee to the board, a request to which he agreed. However, at the August 14 board meeting (at which a member of NHCC/UF was present), Mr. Thorne "presented" the request and followed it with his belief that the college could not afford the request and with his own recommendation that the board approve the continuation of current coverage with

Blue Cross. When asked by Mr. York why the committee made this request, Mr. Thorne cited interest in disability and dental insurance, rather than the committee's concern for at least recovering previous losses. One positive note--the next morning Mr. Thorne assumed total responsibility rather than crediting the board with such a decision, as he had in the past.

In his defense, Mr. Thorne pointed out that the state does not fund insurance for non-professional employees; NHCC picks up the tab. Standard V of the Self-Study reported that NHCC spends \$23 per year per faculty member toward health insurance. However, the area average is over \$200 per year (Standard V, page 7), an average for colleges which face the same policy of state funding. Incidentally, Standard V pointed out that NHCC is in a minority locally and statewide by not providing faculty disability insurance.

Salaries are another issue. Standard V reported that 1973-75 were lean years for faculty; 1976-79 salaries eased slightly ahead of inflation; in 1979-80, however, they lagged behind again. That committee concluded that, with a 13.5% inflation rate during 1979, the "faculty will continue to lose real income at an alarming rate unless the college makes a bold commitment to close this gap...." However, the Benefits Committee's 1980-81 recommendations on salary were cut so that salaries stayed even with inflation but did not recover 1979-80 losses.

Losses in benefits and salary plus minimal response to a horizontal mobility proposal have created some

frustration in the Benefits Committee. As suggested previously, priorities are a problem. A building program is necessary; operating surplusses are necessary; but improved salary and benefits are also necessary. The faculty has had a history of belt tightening recommended to us during our expansion program. In 1973-74, Mr. Thorne said that construction of our first buildings caused money to be tight, and he promised that things would improve when we got on the campus (when we have "died and gone to heaven" were his words). Then came the second and third rounds of construction. Now a second campus is about to become a reality, and a third is planned. In a Standard IV meeting, Richard Curd was asked how long we would be constructing buildings; he laughed and said, "Forever." When pressed for a serious answer, he responded, "Twenty years." That is a long time to tighten our belts. Interestingly, in a recent newspaper article ("NHCC Enrollment," The Woodland's Sun, October 1, 1980), Mr. Thorne attributed the growth of NHCC's

enrollment in the past to "its reputation for quality instruction." Nowhere in the article does he stress the need for improved benefits for those who are responsible for that reputation. He does, however, dwell on the need for a second campus--more buildings.

In a Faculty Senate meeting on November 4, 1980, Larry Shirts reported to the group that Mr. Thorne wants to know what faculty priorities are concerning benefits. Thorne claims that, since only so much money is available for salary and benefits (the infamous "size of the pie"), this information would help him make decisions. No one seems willing to point out that, while there are realistic limitations, the amount of money available for salary and benefits is an administrative decision.

A final note--Standard V reported that "...only about a third of the faculty expressed the opinion that the administration was highly responsive to individual needs as expressed by the Senate." (Standard V, page 3)

Alan Hall

LAWSUIT FILED

In late March, 1981, Texas United Faculty and the American Federation of Teachers filed suit against the administration and Board of Trustees of North Harris County College. The suit included a claim for damages as well as a permanent injunction against actions by the college against the union. The lawsuit is based upon encroachments upon the first amendment rights of the local membership, whose

right to associate freely has been denied by acts of direct and indirect coercion. In addition, the union's rights under the equal protection clause of the fourteenth amendment have been denied.

The union maintains that the Board and administration have embarked upon a campaign designed to thwart the organizing efforts of TUF. The campaign is two-fold: First, a series of ini-

tiatives designed to attack the organization, and, second, an effort directed at individuals who are members of the local.

The Board's and administration's actions are as follows:

(1) The Board of Trustees passed an anti-union resolution in July designed to frighten and intimidate faculty into not joining the union. This action was followed in March by the adoption of a policy to be part of the policies and procedures of the college, expressing the Board's desire that faculty not join a union.

(2) In the past, NHCC/UF has consistently been denied on-campus meetings for academic concerns, membership meetings and meetings of its executive board. Further, the union was told that it would not be allowed to sponsor an address to the faculty by State Representative Gene Green, even though any other campus organization would be allowed to sponsor such an event.

(3) The NHCC/UF leadership is not allowed professional leave or expenses for organizational meetings, including strictly academic workshops. Yet the TJCTA leaders are allowed professional leave and expenses to academic and non-academic workshops, including those on collective bargaining.

(4) Membership in TJCTA and the Faculty Senate is encouraged and promoted directly by administrative staff and at division meetings by solicitation, adverse comparison, and the circulation of anti-union petitions.

(5) The campus newspaper, after running the first front page story on the formation of the NHCC/UF, now refuses to run any more articles and further refuses to even run paid ad-

vertisements. These refusals are the result of administrative decree.

(6) No formal agreement exists, exclusive or otherwise, by which the Faculty Senate is recognized for purposes of consultations. However, in the absence of a formal agreement, the Faculty Senate is used as an in-house sounding board for some administrative recommendations. Input by the NHCC/UF is uniformly ignored, rejected, or relegated to a five-minute address to the Board following a cumbersome agenda procedure.

(7) The president of the NHCC/UF was prevented from speaking at a student association sponsored political forum as a Carter representative. The association requested that the president stand in for a Carter representative who was unable to attend. The president is active in Democratic Party politics but was not allowed to speak on the rationale that he should be completely non-partisan and that students should be unaware of his politics. At the same time, the college has issued press releases specifically describing faculty members' political views that are being taught in continuing education courses.

(8) In the Board election in January, incumbent Board member L. B. York directly threatened and intimidated a union faculty member working for the election of David Robinson. Mr. York informed the faculty member that the NHCC/UF consisted of "a band of renegades"; that teachers are "dispensable" and can have their contracts pulled at any time; and that he could make their lives miserable.

For these reasons, TUF and the AFT have no other choice but to proceed

with a lawsuit against the college. In announcing the suit, TUF president Don Smith stated, "It would be hard to find an American business in recent times with more feudal and backward labor policies" than the administration and Board at North Harris County College. "It is time for them to realize that this is 1981, not 1921," Smith concluded.

Kevin Bailey, TUF corresponding secretary and president of the NHCC/UF Guild, stated that "it is unfortunate that the Board at NHCC does not believe that faculty members are capable of judging what is in their own best interests and instead attempt to deter-

mine for us what organizations we should or should not join. They don't give us credit for being able to conceive of the college's or our own best interests." Bailey continued, "We have a union because of the administration and Board's failure to legitimately include faculty in the decision-making process. The points in our suit could easily be resolved if the Board were willing. Resolution of these issues would enormously improve relations and prove their good faith. Unfortunately, it does not appear that they are willing to resolve them. We have been given no other alternative but to go to court."

A HISTORY OF THE RELATIONSHIP
BETWEEN NHCC/UF AND ADMINISTRATION

- March 11, 1980 The administration approved a room request in CE 201 for an executive board meeting of the NHCC/UF.
- March 27, 1980 The Paper published an article on the formation of the NHCC/UF.
- April 7, 1980 The executive board of the NHCC/UF met with Mr. Thorne, Dr. Airola and Dean Burks. Mr. Thorne requested that the union not meet on campus because it "is a different kind of organization."
- April 10, 1980 NHCC/UF membership meeting off-campus. The members voted not to meet the request not to meet on campus, maintaining that we have a legal right, like other organizations, to meet on campus.
- April 11, 1980 Meeting between Mr. Thorne and Kevin Bailey. Mr. Thorne made his request a requirement. He stated that the AFT guild would not be allowed to meet on campus during regular hours, but could meet before 7 a.m. or after 10 p.m.

- April 18, 1980 Kevin Bailey, Bob Locander and Louis Bolieu of TUF met with Mr. Thorne and Dr. Airola. Mr. Thorne held to the position that the union is a "different kind of organization" and that it could not meet on campus except during the hours previously established. He maintained that this requirement is not discrimination against the union since no other organization meets on campus. The Faculty Senate, he held, is not an independent organization.
- April 24, 1980 Kevin Bailey and Bob Locander met with Mr. Thorne. Again, he stated that the union could not meet on campus, but that we could use the campus mailing system.
- July 10, 1980 The NHCC/UF appeared before the Board of Trustees to work with the administration and Board. The Board failed to respond to our statement, but, instead, passed a resolution expressing the desire for a "union-free environment" at NHCC.
- Fall, 1980 The Board changed the building use policy, apparently to make it easier to deny room requests from the NHCC/UF.
- October, 1980 The NHCC/UF requested a room, on campus, in order to sponsor a talk by State Representative Gene Green, who would inform the faculty about educational issues before the 1981 legislature. Green had accepted our invitation, but the administration denied the room request, saying that this was equivalent to a membership meeting.
- Feb. 27, 1981 A request by the NHCC/UF to have a room on campus for a meeting of its academic committee was denied by the administration. The committee was to examine the student evaluation of faculty and to make recommendations to the administration. The guild was also informed that advertising in The Paper would no longer be allowed.
- Feb., 1981 The TUF attorney George Kirk contacted Mr. Thorne and the college's attorney in an attempt to resolve the problems between the college and the union and to make them aware that TUF and AFT would file suit against the college if necessary. The college's response was that they had done nothing wrong and that they had no interest in a meeting with the TUF attorney to resolve these issues.

- March 5, 1981 The administration approved a room request for an on-campus meeting of the NHCC/UF executive board.
- March 17, 1981 The Board of Trustees met and adopted an anti-union policy, making it part of the college's policies and procedures.
- March 19, 1981 The administration informed the NHCC/UF that non-members may not attend union meetings on campus.
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NHCC/UF NEWS

On March 17, 1981, the NHCC Board of Trustees met and adopted a series of changes in the college's policies and procedures. Among these changes was an anti-union policy. The Board also approved contracts of faculty for the coming year. The guild is pleased that the Board held to its policy statement and did not threaten union members with loss of their jobs. Despite our activity this year, contracts were renewed for all union members, many of whom were scheduled to receive continuing contracts for the first time.

The Fleetwood Construction Company lawsuit against North Harris County College has been settled. During a self-study meeting of the Financial Resources Committee, Hazel Woods of the Business Office stated in response to committee member's questions that the college's liability in this case amounted to \$750,000. At its February meeting, the Board approved

a \$1,000,000 transfer of surplus funds to cover the Fleetwood loss and a building project.

The University of Houston Teaching Assistants, Teaching Fellows and Lecturers Salary Association has reached an apparent "informal" agreement with UH Chancellor Barry Munitz which should double TA salaries for Humanities instructors next fall. At the present time, the salaries for these instructors is \$281 per month. Prior to this agreement around 150 parttime instructors participated in a sick-out in early February for three days until UH officials agreed to meet at the bargaining table.

During the TA sick-out, the central campus administrators threatened to fire the instructors for their refusal to meet classes in protest over salaries and working conditions. No firings were forthcoming, however, as both sides resolved their differences. The instructors agreed to return to classes with Munitz's promise that salaries in the fall would be raised to the \$500 to \$600 level.

PLEASE RESPOND!

We urge you to compare TUF benefits with those of other faculty organizations. We are convinced that only the AFT provides the kind of benefits and support that college faculties need.

If you want more information or would like to join, simply fill out the information below and send it to an NHCC/UF member or mail it to:

NHCC/UF, P.O. Box 38893, Houston, Texas 77088.

I would like more information.

SIGN ME UP!

Name _____

Phone _____

Address _____