

# P-fac NEWS

Serving the Part-time teaching community at Columbia College

November, 1999

## UNION MEMBERSHIP

No one can be forced to join a union, and we certainly don't want anyone to become a P-fac member who is reluctant to join us for any reason. On the other hand: a lot of money was spent (by IEA) negotiating a very nice pay raise for everyone in the bargaining unit, and P-fac felt that these costs should be shared equally by everyone who profits from the contract. The College agreed, and an agency fee provision became part of the contract.

What this means is that, if you are part of the bargaining unit, you don't have to become a member of the union, but you do have to contribute to our costs.

For reasons that have to do with labor history and the courts, it's important that every faculty member in the bargaining unit make an informed decision to join us or not. And a newsletter article is not enough to ensure that everyone is informed.

So.....you will each (if you are in the bargaining unit) be getting a letter written by us and the IEA and the lawyers. We have put a lot of work into it, trying to make the issue clear.

What it comes down to is this: We really think you should become a member. Everybody worked hard to get us a union, a nice raise, and a lot more respect than we used to have. We've also worked hard to make the union as democratic as possible. We want you to be part of this.

If you choose not to join us, and to become an agency-fee payer, you just sign the form in the letter and it will be done. You will also save about \$10 per semester. If you aren't doing it for the monetary savings, we have set up a student scholarship fund at the College that you can contribute to.

However: we want you to join us and not sign the form.

## STEERING COMMITTEE ELECTION THIS MONTH

This is a heads up for the Steering Committee election. You should have your ballot in hand soon.

Don't take it home! Take a few minutes when you get it. Vote and drop the ballot envelope in Campus Mail in the department office.

And thanks to the candidates! You're volunteering for a significant amount of work. We all appreciate you.

## THE BARGAINING UNIT

The bargaining unit includes: (1) all employed as part-time faculty for at least two complete consecutive semesters who have taught a total of eight credit hours or more (excluding one- and two-credit courses), and (2) all who have been employed as part-time faculty for at least three complete semesters out of five complete consecutive semesters and who have taught at least three credit hours during each of those semesters. This means all of you who teach a course every fall year after year, but don't teach in the spring. Summer semesters do not count in determining this.

Excluded from the bargaining unit are: part-time faculty who are also grad students or full-time staff at Columbia, those teaching non-credit courses, and a few others.

## Coming next issue

Organizing news — drives for union recognition at several other Chicago institutions of higher education. And more discussion of the state and direction of *our* union.

# PERSPECTIVE

by Jack Behrend

*(Editor's note: Jack Behrend is a long-time part-time instructor at Columbia, a member of P-fac's Steering Committee, and a member of the bargaining team which negotiated the current contract. As P-fac grows, we face new questions of attitude, of tactics and strategy, which need to be thrashed out and understood throughout the union. With this piece we hope to inaugurate such a discussion. We invite responses.)*

We've come so far in so short a time. One year ago we had no contract and were working for – not enough. Two years ago we only existed in the minds of half a dozen people; radicals all, who thought things could be better.

Today we have a designated member on the Presidential Search committee as secretary, a number of members on various search committees for department chairmen, four of us are on the College Council, several of us have been invited to the faculty retreat. We have suddenly become part of the life and governance of the college.

## *A Cultural Change*

Along with that change in our position has come a cultural change within our own group, equally dramatic. Two years ago when a few people were sweating out the tough process of getting to and through the NLRB election, fairness and justice were the passwords. We don't hear those words very much any more.

The election brought the college up short. They were absolutely AMAZED at the 80% turnout, and AMAZED at the 80% vote in favor of the union. Suddenly they realized that they didn't know the part of their faculty that taught 70-80% of the total credit hours.

Whereas before the election they had refused to even form a committee to discuss part time faculty issues, after the election they greet us cordially, agreed to our proposal to negotiate the contract via interest-based bargaining, and have been open and accessible since we came to an agreement.

## *The Contract and the Process*

No one knows better than I do that the contract needs work. The two-class limit has not been interpreted in the spirit in which it was written, the health benefits issue needs work, and much more. Although the 65% average raise was probably as much as was reasonable to expect and we all feel good about it, it will take a good deal more to get us to the place we ought to be.

The most important feature of the contract was the way it came to be: we are still dealing with every segment of the college in the spirit of interest-based bargaining. It is in the college's interest to have a happy faculty. We bring something important to the deliberations of the various search committees. Our voice is heard, not because we insist on its being heard but because they have realized that they need our input.

During the bargaining process we, the negotiating team, were under a self-imposed gag rule. We agreed with management that our negotiations should not be via the media but across the table. Both sides kept their word. But that meant

that the cultural change implicit in interest-based bargaining, moving from an adversarial to a cooperative/communicative position, could not be readily communicated either. The union just had to trust us.

## *Interpreting the Contract*

Of course, it is one thing to have a contract, another to read it in the sense in which it was written. The college is not a monolithic organization and at the moment they seem to be interpretively challenged.

Had I been king, there would have been a series of meetings of management and department chairs, explaining the contract and the spirit in which it was written. These meetings would have started the day after we reached an agreement, long before ratification.

As things happened, the contract was nearly kept secret. Administrators and department chairs got their drafts of the document from us, the union. And we could only give them the spin that we put on it; we didn't see it as a rubber hose management would use to beat the chairs into submission.

Some departments are taking the position that if the contract doesn't specifically call for an action, then that action can not be taken. It seems obvious that to write a contract that covered every possible contingency would take years and the final document would be unreadable. But that is the way it is being taken in some quarters, and the administration doesn't seem anxious to change that perception.

It seems to me that we, the part time organization, can never be as distant from the governance of the college as we were before we had a contract. The cultural change has run deep and affected many people on both sides. The problem that certain administrators and chairs are having interpreting the contract doesn't change that. It only gives the next negotiating team something to think about.

There are many issues that still confront us. Certainly the most immediate is to expand the bargaining unit itself. This shouldn't have to take us back to the bad old days but it will take work.

## *New People*

Now it is time for new people to get involved. They must absorb the culture, work with us, work with the college, in the interests of everyone in order to be effective. Department reps are the life-blood of P-fac.

We have much to do and we desperately need new active people to do it. It is not easy holding a part time organization together for all the reasons you already know. But together we must be, if we are going to bargain effectively next time.

P-fac  
**NEWS**

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