

# P-fac NEWS

Serving the Part-time teaching community at Columbia College

December, 1999

## UNION ORGANIZING AT OTHER SCHOOLS

Part-time faculty at several other schools around Chicago are in the midst of attempts to organize themselves.

At our neighbor Roosevelt, a card drive to authorize union representation for part-time faculty is currently underway, and organizers expect to file during December to represent the part-time faculty there. (See our open letter to colleagues at right.)

"I think we're going to be successful there," says IEA organizer Tom Suhrbur, with an organizing committee working hard there. {They've adapted the words and credo of the man Roosevelt University was named for (FDR) with slogans like: "We want a new deal, not a raw deal," and "We have nothing to fear but fear itself." Suhrbur believes those words are particularly fitting for the union cause at a school whose founding was based on a promise of bettering life and educational opportunities for all classes and races.}

At other schools, progress has been more rocky. In some cases, the resistance and troubles they've encountered are alarming, particularly at smaller schools.

At the International Academy of Merchandising and Design, for instance, where Pat Raff is trying to organize the part-time faculty, she reports that her group cannot even "get hold of a mailing list," to communicate with other part-timers. At the same time: "We're working for slave wages." Tom Suhrbur reports that the administration at this school may have committed extreme intimidation practices.

Elsewhere, headway is being made in a case against the American Academy of Art. (Because of the small number [67] of total faculty at this school, full- and part-timers are organizing together.) There, a 29-29 vote on union organization by the faculty may have been gravely influenced by the administration — a fact which the school as much as admitted to in a hearing before the NLRB (National Labor Relations Board), which ruled in favor of authorizing a new vote.

While the administration has subsequently appealed to have the 29-29 vote stand up, Suhrbur is hopeful of new elections there by or during January, 2000. {Bob Krajecki, leading the organizing effort there, notes, though, that 25 instructors have left since the previous vote, which means a new vote will be tough to win because the replacements may be gun-shy about jeopardizing their new positions. Krajecki, who chairs the Fundamentals Department, also notes that he hasn't received a raise in salary in nine years.}

At community colleges, lobbying efforts to have changes made legislatively would greatly benefit organizing efforts in Illinois. (See accompanying article.) Recently, for example, William Rainey Harper College in northwest suburban Palatine was able to have a union-organizing vote of approval overturned, and that will likely stand up unless the pending legislation lobbying effort is successful.

## OPEN LETTER TO PART-TIMERS AT ROOSEVELT

Dear Colleagues,

Part-time faculty at Roosevelt are in the midst of organizing to bargain collectively with the university administration. As fellow part-time faculty, who have taught at Columbia College during and after a similar campaign, we'd like to share our experiences with unionization.

Like Roosevelt, Columbia relies heavily on part-time teachers. Our pay was inequitable; we had no benefits and no security, and were excluded from decision-making.

For years, Columbia's part-timers raised issues of equity and participation. By speaking out, we made a few small gains; but we still felt excluded, and some of us lived close to the poverty level.

We concluded that administrators wouldn't pay attention to our concerns unless we organized to bargain collectively. We affiliated with the Illinois Education Association, and within a short time we were ready to put unionization up for a vote. Our administration began publicly opposing our efforts. They hired consultants, published ads, sent us a barrage of letters. Department chairs were induced to sign letters to us, arguing against unionization.

The part-time faculty knew better. When it came to a vote, 79% chose union representation. They knew that a united voice would be heard loud and clear in every administrative office.

That voice was loud and clear when we negotiated a contract with raises of 35% to 102%, a foot in the door on benefits, some due-process guarantees, and participation in decision-making.

The administration's scary claims were disproved as well.

- Contrary to administration claims, unionizing didn't ruin our relationships with our chairs. In fact, several chairs began consulting regularly with Part-Time Faculty Association representatives soon after the union vote. We were invited to take part in the process of choosing new chairs. Now, our contract mandates regular consultations, and provides for part-time representation in search committees. Part-timers recently elected a representative to the committee choosing a new President.

- We found the process of negotiation was not only not confrontational, but — using interest-based bargaining techniques — we showed the administration that we have a lot of common ground and a basis for rational discussion of tough issues.

- Contrary to claims that a union contract might threaten the economic foundations of the school, the school has continued to grow. We never received more than about 8% of our students' tuition dollars in the first place, so substantial increases to us barely dented the budget. (Columbia keeps buying real estate.)

- Contrary to the claim that we were an outside organization, we had been around for some years before affiliating with the IEA. We've had a great deal of practical advice from them on matters of negotiation, law, and organization. But we've always run our own show and made our own decisions.

We came out of this process feeling a great sense of self-respect.

We've got a ways to go before we achieve all our goals — parity in compensation, proportionality in benefits, and full, non-discriminatory involvement in the life of the institution. But unionization has taken us a long way in a short time. We couldn't have achieved these results without collective bargaining.

Unionizing creates an opportunity to be heard and to exercise influence.

What precisely it will mean for the part-time faculty at Roosevelt, of course, depends on how you use the opportunity. But if our experience is any guide, it's an opportunity worth taking.

Sincerely,

Part-time Faculty Association at Columbia (P-fac), IEA-NEA

## EXPANDING THE BARGAINING UNIT!

*P-fac* recently mailed petition cards to those part-timers not currently in the bargaining unit in an effort to collect enough signatures to gain an agreement to include all part-timers in *P-fac*.

"We've always wanted to represent all the part-timers," says *P-fac* President Joe Laiacona. "This is just a way to 'go back and get' those who were unfortunately, but by necessity, excluded at the time of our original certification election."

The union hopes to gather signatures from more than 50% of the eligible part-timers and arrive at an agreement for their inclusion with the college administration. Short of that, 30% of those eligible need to sign cards in order for the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) to hold another certification election.

If successful, the part-timers not now in the bargaining unit would be included under the non-financial terms of the current contract. Financial terms applying to new members of the bargaining unit would have to be negotiated with the college, under NLRB rules.

Inclusion of all part-timers would alleviate much of the confusion as to who is in the unit and who isn't, as well as allow non-unit part-timers to gain new benefits and to bargain collectively.

So sign those cards and return them as soon as possible! For more information call *P-fac* at 773-281-0975.

## RESTORING RIGHTS DENIED

We who teach part-time at Columbia College are lucky. We have the legal right to organize a union. But most part-time faculty in Illinois aren't so lucky. Most don't have the right to form a union or to bargain with their administration.

As you may remember, we at Columbia organized and bargained under rules set by the National Labor Relations Board. The rules of this federal agency cover private colleges and other institutions.

But at public colleges, the rules are set by the State of Illinois, which is currently bad news. State law recognizes no such rights for part-time faculty who wish to organize unions and negotiate contracts.

It used to be different, until a single word in state labor law was changed. That single word needs to be changed back, so that part-time faculty regain the basic right to organize and to bargain, in an atmosphere free from threats and reprisals.

A bill to restore those rights will be introduced into the next session of the legislature, and it deserves your support.

The people affected are part-time faculty like ourselves. And it's worth remembering that if our colleagues throughout the region are organized, that will transform the environment in which our next negotiations are conducted. We at Columbia will have a much easier time striking a favorable bargain.

Here's some steps you can take to help:

- Write or call or e-mail your state senator and state representative. Tell them to restore one of the most basic of human rights to part-time faculty in Illinois by supporting the part-time faculty organizing bill.
- Visit your state senator or rep, and tell them what it's like being a part-time faculty member. A lot of them have absolutely no idea. Ask them to support the bill; maybe they'd like to co-sponsor it.
- Help *P-fac* and the IEA bring this to public attention, and to law. If you'd like to help in any way, large or small, call the *P-fac* Hotline, 773-281-0975.

## DUES — OR FEES — ARE DUE!

Not to use an unfitting analogy, but as Senator Joe McCarthy once said, "I have a little list...." I too have a little list, but it isn't of communists and it isn't phony; it's a list of people in the bargaining unit who haven't paid either union dues or an agency fee.

The contract says it clearly (P-3): "The parties recognize that each employee in the bargaining unit must, as a condition of employment, satisfy a financial obligation to the Association as the unit's exclusive bargaining representative."

Now the dues (or agency fee) for the fall semester are due. The bills are out: \$60 for dues or agency fee. (Agency fee payers will receive a partial refund — about \$10 — from the IEA.) If you still owe for the spring, that's \$86.25. On December 19, we will give a list of names to the college of those who taught last spring semester but have not paid.

There have been five written notices and numerous mentions in this newsletter of these financial facts. We are setting up a phone campaign and will try to reach those who haven't paid. (This kind of bookkeeping is a career path none of us need.)

The option of talking to people on the list or simply not rehiring them is the college's call. Once we give them the list our job is done, except to monitor those hired for the spring semester. If you think you may be on the list, call me or send money!

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## *P-fac* NEWS

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