

1650 REPORT

Henry Ford Community College Federation of Teachers

LOCAL 1650, A.F.T.

5101 Evergreen, Dearborn, Michigan 48128

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STATE OF UNION REPORT

When the charter members of Local 1650 adopted its constitution in 1966, they required of the 1650 President an annual report to the General Membership on the State of the Union. The intended purpose of the report was to review the issues addressed in the concluding year and those anticipated in the upcoming.

The need for such an annual report was probably less severe in the early years of the Local, because the professional lives and livelihoods of those teachers were less secure. Those charter members had taught without the right and protections of collective bargaining. They experienced Administrations and Boards unrestrained by bargaining laws and contract provisions. Those teachers took very real and considerable risks, economically and professionally, to secure the rights to form a union and bargain. They first won those rights in the political and legislative arenas, and then made them meaningful by exercising and asserting them before an often hostile public. They drafted our first contract and the College Constitution, labored to secure those documents at the bargaining table, and only achieved them with strikes in 1966 and 1967. Last March, we recalled their efforts and saluted those teachers, as Local 1650 celebrated its Thirtieth Anniversary.

In the early years of this Local, the President's annual reports to those charter members articulated events with which the great majority of them were intimately involved. For those teachers the tangible connection between the Union and their careers was made evident often, if not daily, throughout each contractual year.

The College faculty has grown in number since then and a sense of routine has evolved in HFCC's union - management relations. Many teachers have come to the College and have enjoyed uninterrupted years of economic and professional opportunity. For some HFCC teachers, such prolonged security has generated a disconnect between their rewarding and reassuring employment status and the union activism which made it all possible. Ironically, some circumstances of this last year have contributed to such a disconnect, while others have put HFCC teachers on notice that there is and can be no disconnect between their careers and their union.

With respect to the Local 1650 contract, HFCC teachers find themselves in the midst of a five year contract, providing wage increases in excess of inflation, medical coverage intact and enviable, and shared governance secure. That five year contract was negotiated with Governor Engler's PA 112 looming. That legislation, passed when the Republican Party took control of both the State House and State Senate, gutted teacher bargaining rights, and is now having a very chilling effect on teacher contract negotiations. The College Federation bargained its five year contract, the longest in the Local's history, to protect HFCC teachers, as long as possible, from exposure to PA 112, in the hope of learning from the experiences of other teacher unions, as they labored to preserve their contracts under PA 112, and in the hope that the Republican Party would lose control of Michigan's executive and legislative branches of government by the time this Union next went to the bargaining table. Other Dearborn District unions, however, will negotiate this year. We should learn a great deal about how our Board of Trustees will operate under PA 112 from their experiences. Unlike other teachers, within and without the Dearborn District, HFCC teachers are still secure from PA 112 and are perhaps lulled to some degree by that security and the appearance of "business as usual."

The State Supreme Court, however, has upheld the constitutionality of PA 112, with its sanctions against teacher strikes, its restrictions on the scope of subjects for bargaining, and its recognition that a Board of Trustees may impose its contract terms upon its employees. Moreover,

House Republicans entertained for a time HB 4993, which would have prohibited College teachers from negotiating tenure protections, contact hours, any aspect of calendar, and any limitations on the scope of part-time teaching. In its lame duck session, the Republican legislature did pass defined contribution pension legislation. Because of very strong lobbying efforts by the Michigan Federation of Teachers, its locals, the State AFL-CIO, and individual teachers across the State, including many HFCC teachers, defined contribution pensions shall be optional for new educational employees, unlike new State employees for whom they are now mandatory.

Had defined contribution become mandatory for new educational employees, the volume of money coming into our traditional retirement system and the interest generated by such money would have diminished over time, and with it any hope of retaining current retiree medical benefits. With fewer and fewer members in the traditional retirement system, the political clout to influence retirement legislation, that comes with numbers, would also have diminished. Many HFCC teachers participated in this Local's efforts to stop defined contribution pensions. Special recognition should go to members of the 1650 Legislative Committee, chaired by Reg Gerlica. Mention should also be made of Terry Foley and 1650 retiree Morris Taber, who accompanied me to Lansing to lobby legislators in person, and also of Mike Garms, who spent many late night hours analyzing the legislation as it evolved and additional hours enlightening members of the House Appropriations Committee as to what they had wrought.

The events of 1996 in Lansing again demonstrated the fact that the charter members of Local 1650 faced in 1966, and the fact that 1650 activists have confronted in every year thereafter. The quality of our careers is dictated in local, State, and federal political arenas. We must assert ourselves and our interests in those arenas, and in late 1996 we did. Not only did union pressure stall HB 4993 in committee and block mandatory defined contribution pensions for educational employees, union efforts in 1996 took the State House of Representatives away from anti-teacher, anti-labor politicians, who think teachers are overpaid, underworked, and undeserving of a meaningful voice in determining their wages, hours, and conditions of employment. We also elected

a former teacher to the State Supreme Court and pro-education candidates to the State Board of Education. With the lame duck legislative session finally over, the new State House can check the assaults on educational employees which have characterized the last two years. We may not yet have the Governor and State Senate needed to remedy the damage done, but the bleeding appears to have been stopped.

Given Governor Engler's "resourcefulness," however, 1997 should bring unforeseen political challenges, and this union will need to muster its economic and human resources to meet them. We do know, in part, what the Governor intends to do next. He proposes to diminish the authority of the State Board of Education by means of Executive Order. While this will most dramatically impact K-12 educational policy and K-12 teachers, the State Board does (or should) monitor proprietary school licensing, curriculum, and standards; and that role does have enrollment implications for State community colleges. In addition, the Governor will probably need legislative approval to float \$6 billion in bonds to cover our pension system's unfunded accrued liability and thereby implement his defined contribution pension legislation. There will be considerable "horse trading" with the new Democratic State House to accomplish this, and legislative opportunities and legislative pitfalls will present themselves to all parties engaged in those negotiations. PA 112 may be revisited by the State legislature in 1997, perhaps as part of the unfunded accrued liability "horse trading" or perhaps in some other context. Revisiting PA 112 was, in fact, foreshadowed by legislation proposed in 1996 to provide educational support personnel binding arbitration in the event of bargaining impasse.

At the federal level, President Clinton's proposals to underwrite the first two years of college education for virtually all American citizens have astounding implications for community colleges. These proposals would virtually eliminate enrollment concerns of the type which have preoccupied HFCC over the last several years. In fact, problems directly opposite in nature may arise - those of physically meeting the enrollment demands generated by such programs. The AFT will, no doubt, call upon its locals to lobby aggressively in support of President Clinton's higher education

proposals. Given limited federal resources and competing interests for those resources, this will be a daunting lobbying and legislative effort. Should the President's proposals become law, the impact on the higher education will be immense, with some \$40 billion moving primarily into the nation's community college system.

On the local level, two seats on the HFCC Board of Trustees will be on the ballot next November, as will the office of Mayor and the entire City Council. Most certainly, the United Schools Association, representing the District's six employee unions, will again actively support fairminded, constructive candidates for the Board of Trustees. We must also support a Mayor who has supported the College repeatedly by endorsing, when not chairing, our millage and bond campaigns. Support for the College on such issues has also been unfailingly provided by Council President Jack O'Reilly as well as several incumbent Councilpersons. These candidates too deserve our active support. In 1997, Local 1650 must also prepare for the massive impact of term limits in 1998, when nearly 70% of State House incumbents will be ineligible to run for their current office. 1997, in and of itself, and as a preface to 1998, will demand great political effort on the part of HFCC teachers.

The November, 1997 ballot may also contain a capital improvement bond proposal for new construction in the P-12 segment of the District. Clearly the College has remaining capital improvement needs which might be included in a District-wide proposal. If this materializes, Local 1650 will have a major responsibility in underwriting and directing the campaign. In 1997, the Federation will yet again provide each HFCC teacher with the "opportunity" to donate political action funds and, equally important, the "opportunity" to volunteer time and effort in several political campaigns.

It should be noted, though, that the College Federation was not as effective in soliciting either political action funds or volunteers in 1996, as we have traditionally been. This is an issue which the Federation must address in 1997. The 1650 contract, its wages and health coverage, its

workload, its professional enhancement provisions, and its shared governance safeguards are all at stake whenever a legislative body - be it local, State, or federal - convenes. There are elected officials and political candidates out there with agendas dramatically opposed to the interests of HFCC teachers. It pays, both literally and figuratively, to know your enemies, and it takes financial resources and individual volunteer effort to defeat them.

1996 also witnessed, as will 1997, the College Federation addressing matters of professional concern to HFCC teachers. The Union assisted Chris Briggs and Lyn Burns in developing the new student advising process; sponsored, with the College, professional issues conferences focusing on student retention and success; and, through its committee structure, drafted contractual language addressing North Central's call for the annual evaluation of tenured faculty. That language and the evaluation instruments that accompany it will be reviewed by the General Membership and presented to the Administration within the next few months. As drafted and hopefully approved, the faculty evaluation provision should identify teachers in need of assistance and provide a non-threatening, collegial, confidential intervention procedure to them. Members of the Local's Performance Review Committee, chaired by Marilyn Thibodeau, are to be commended for their efforts in addressing a very sensitive and potentially divisive issue. This past year, the Federation also concluded a Statement of Agreement with the College Administration which obligates the Administration to negotiate the wages, hours, and conditions of employment of distance learning courses, whether transmitted or received by the College. The Agreement also assures that such courses shall not result in the lay-off of 1650 Bargaining Unit members.

Another major and pressing issue has occupied the attention of the Federation in 1996 and will continue to do so in 1997. That is the Federation's obligation to begin to assimilate Rouge Academy teachers into the Local 1650 contract. Last July, Local 1650 welcomed seventeen Rouge Academy teachers into the Federation. This followed frantic and frustrating weeks of trying to negotiate their coverage under our contract, without having access to the teachers themselves or a clear understanding of their previous wages and conditions of employment. Moreover, neither they

nor HFCC teachers desired the complete application of the contract, given concerns about seniority, potential bumping, and job security. Over the last few months, much effort has been devoted to assess the costs of Rouge teachers being fully covered by the economic provisions of the 1650 contract - and those costs are considerable. It is the Federation's intention to provide complete contractual coverage over the next two to three years.

However, the Local faces new and significant challenges in achieving this. For the first time in our history, we are negotiating indirectly with the funding authority responsible for underwriting members of our Bargaining Unit, in this case UAW-Ford. We must present and negotiate a package which meaningfully moves Rouge teachers toward contractual economic equity with other 1650 members, and do so without pricing the Rouge Academy program out of the College and do so through the College Administration, as it negotiates the parameters of the overarching College contract with UAW-Ford. The Federation hopes to become a direct participant in those College's negotiations with UAW-Ford. Whether we can achieve that status and what we can achieve in such a context, or outside of it, for Rouge Academy teachers, will pose significant challenges for the Federation in 1997 and thereafter. Also significant is that the College Administration is already envisioning additional contracts of this nature at other facilities. Local 1650's responsibility for representing such teachers may well increase in the near future - and the Local has yet to meet the representational challenge presently posed by members teaching in the Rouge Academy.

The major issues confronting Local 1650 in the concluding and upcoming years have much in common, and must be addressed as much beyond campus boundaries as within. There is just so much Local 1650 can do for HFCC teachers vis-a-vis the College Administration and Board of Trustees. Our professional standing and futures will be largely determined by legislative action external to the College and by our own political activism. The Federation's greatest challenge in 1997 will be securing adequate political funding and reversing the decline in volunteer activity that surfaced in 1996. We met with some political success in late 1996, but did so with fewer funds and far fewer volunteers. Those who founded this Local in 1966 and those who built it over the years

bequeathed a legacy beyond the enviable wages, fringes, working conditions, and governance structure embodied in the 1650 contract. Those teachers also bequeathed a tradition of political activism that we must recommit ourselves to, if our professional lives and livelihoods are to remain enviable.

The Local 1650 leadership have always been few in number, and their efforts have not been the Union's source of strength over the last thirty years. This Union derives its strength and has achieved its successes through the concerted activism of its membership. You are the union, its strength, and its future - not the few individuals you elect to represent you. When you speak about what the union is doing, you are speaking about yourselves. When you contribute time to union meetings, committees, political efforts, contract strategies, and the like, you are contributing to your own self interest. In the final analysis, the Union is about self determination.

The Union, and it is you, can not and will not secure or improve your future at HFCC in a political vacuum. The Union, and it is you, can not and will not secure or improve your future at HFCC with "smoke and mirrors." You will secure and improve your future, as did the charter members of Local 1650, by means of political activism and collective bargaining. This Local, began in 1966 and grew for thirty years. It and the rest of the union movement were seriously damaged in 1996. We only began the process of recovering late in 1996. There remains much work for each of us to do in 1997 to further that recovery - and most of that work will be political, as always, in nature. The time you take and effort you make to do this work will determine the quality of your future at this College.

John McDonald
January 27, 1997