

2-18-85

Report on State of the Union

An annual report on the State of the HFCC Federation of Teachers is required by its Constitution. On seven previous occasions I have addressed this Local on the achievements of the preceding year and the challenges of the commencing year. On those seven previous occasions, there has never been a more difficult and demanding year on which to report than 1984.

The energies and effort expended on contract negotiations during 1984 may well have been unprecedented in the history of this Local. Perhaps only the Local's earliest contracts demanded more of the Local's negotiators and leadership than did its current contract. While negotiations of 1984 are behind us and we have the respite of a three year contract for the first time in the Federation's history, 1985 promises to make serious, if not equally arduous, demands upon this Union's leadership and this Union's membership as well. Millage renewal and a millage campaign are once again upon us.

First, a few things need to be said about our current contract and the strike which proved necessary to achieve it. Many of these remarks were made at the November ratification meeting, but a number of members were not in attendance, and reports such as these constitute the Union's only means of reaching or attempting to reach some of its members.

The contract which we now enjoy was the product of some 20 months at the bargaining table, 20 months which began in April of 1983, concluded in November of 1984, and included not only bargaining but mediation, factfinding, a strike, a settlement followed by the immediate reopening of negotiations, further mediation, quite nearly a second strike, and all the preparations required by both of these events.

Had it not been for the strike in May, this Local would never have achieved the three year settlement now in place. That strike was called, as has every strike in the history of Local 1650, to protect the collective bargaining process. The Board of Trustees had refused to fulfill its legal obligation to bargain in good faith, a rather common practice

for that particular "deliberative" body. Moreover, it refused to accept the report of a factfinder who found heavily in the Board's favor. When a Union accepts a factfinder's report which calls for a wage freeze in year one and merely a wage reopener in the second year because the report was the ruling of a neutral third party, that reveals something about responsibility. When a local seeks to correct a disproportionate ratio of part-time (600) to full-time (212) teaching staff, a correction called for in the College's last North Central Accreditation, that reveals something about a Union's sense of responsibility. When a Board rejects a factfinder's report because it calls for restoration of a contract concession and incentives for post graduate study, recommendations amounting to merely a \$100,000 expenditure in a \$25.5 million budget, that also reveals something, but what it reveals has nothing to do with responsibility.

The strike in May was not a strike to secure significant economic gain. No strike in the history of our Local has ever achieved such a goal because no strike has ever been called in pursuit of such a goal. We withheld our services to protest the Board's bad faith and to protect our right to meaningful collective bargaining. It is the collective bargaining process, and that process alone, which has brought equitable compensation to our profession in general and to HFCC teachers in particular. Moreover, the collective bargaining process has frustrated the efforts of reactionary Board members on the one hand and patronizing Board members on the other to undermine the rights, benefits, and compensation due members of our profession. It is to the credit of the Local 1650 membership that it recognized the need to resist the Board by withholding its services, even when other employee groups would not. It is to the credit of this membership that it did so in May and was prepared to do so again in November.

Last June a few asked what the May strike accomplished. The leadership's answer at that time was twofold. First, the May strike forced the Board to move, not as much as it would have moved in the absence of misguided students and an unfair judiciary, but the Board did move. The leadership's second point was that the May strike would serve us well in the Fall, and it did. A message had been sent. In May, the Board did not believe that an employee group had the courage to conduct a strike, particularly since other employee groups had settled. May 1984 proved the Board wrong.

The most significant material outcome of the May 1984 strike was the November 1984 contract. The Union was within 24 hours of calling another strike last November. Dr. Bundy knew it, the Board's \$100/hour attorney knew it, and the Board knew it. That awareness of Local 1650's resolve produced a three year contract, with a wage improvement of 10% plus increments over three years. That modest salary adjustment was made palatable, however, by a third Early Retirement Incentive opportunity in the first year of the contract, a \$17,000 professional improvement fund in the second year, and binding arbitration of

grievances and a wage reopener tied to the Consumer Price Index in the third year. With binding arbitration, we achieve a contract that is enforceable without costly and time-consuming judicial proceedings. With a wage reopener tied to the CPI, we create the possibility of future multi-year contracts because recourse to bargaining is now available in the event of excessive inflation.

Coupled with these contract improvements are the \$30,000 graduate tuition fund and the additions to full-time staff produced by the May strike and May settlement. All of these contractual improvements represent several significant breakthroughs for this Local at the bargaining table. They reflect the fact that the Local 1650 membership forced the Board to bargain. They demonstrated to the Board that the summer pay concession of 1982-83, the wage freeze of 1983-84, and the modest percentage increases of the current contract had a price, and that price was an unprecedented number of contractual breakthroughs.

Such were the material gains of the 1984 negotiations. More significant, though, was the message sent to the Board in 1984 that this Union insists upon good faith bargaining and will resist a Board that refuses to fulfill its legal obligation to bargain in good faith. This Local has had to demonstrate its resolve in 1966, 1967, 1978, May of 1984, and quite nearly again in November 1984; and given the bargaining posture of Dearborn Boards, we must be prepared to do so in the future.

While the preoccupation of 1984 was bargaining the contract, that of 1985 will be financing it. 1985 will bring the expiration of all voted millage of the Dearborn Public Schools, including the 2.04 mills allocated to HFCC. In all likelihood, a millage election will be held in June. With decreased revenue due to the reduced valuation of Ford Motor property, with pressing capital improvement needs in the District and at the College, and with the need to renegotiate employee contracts within the duration of the new millage, it is clear that a mere renewal of millage will be insufficient. It is also clear that a ballot proposal requesting a millage increase would still leave Dearborn at or very near the point of paying the lowest school taxes in Wayne County. Unfortunately, it is painfully clear that a proposal to increase school millage in Dearborn would require a display of political courage on the part of the Board of Education/Trustees, and therein lies our problem. The citizens of Dearborn must be persuaded of the need to pass an increased millage; but before that can happen, the Board must place such a proposal before them. Given the personal political ambitions and narrow political agendas of certain Board members, it will be difficult to get a majority of the Board to act responsibly, much less achieve an unanimous Board endorsement which most political observers believe essential to a successful campaign.

Once an election date is set and should the millage sought reflect an amount adequate to meet the District's needs, the United Schools' Association, the political action

committee representing all five of the District's employee unions, will participate in the Citizens' Millage Campaign. As in the past, we will be called upon to contribute time as well as money to the campaign. No doubt, Local 1650 will be called upon to participate in a telephone survey of Dearborn's registered voters and a get out the vote campaign. There will be telephone numbers to look up; mailings to prepare; literature to be distributed at the polls; and many, many phone calls to be made.

None of these tasks is terribly stimulating, but each is terribly important to a successful campaign. In 1983 over 60% of full-time College teachers participated in the telephone survey and the get out the vote effort; those teachers averaged over six hours each on the phones during a seven week period. The efforts of those 122 teachers resulted in the passage of the millage which, in turn, provided some 15% of College revenue. In short, the efforts of 122 teachers subsidized 15% of every paycheck of the other 84 teachers.

Shortly, a millage date and figure will be announced. At that time this Union will have to meet and probably exceed its efforts of 1983. You will be called upon to volunteer time as well as money. The Federation leadership urges you to respond and urges each of you to compel your colleagues to respond with time as well as money. In the opinion of a State Task Force on Millage Campaigns, the phone campaign made the difference in Dearborn's 1983 millage election, and it is a fact that HFCC teachers were the telephone campaign of 1983. Of that we can be proud, but as is most often the case for public employees and union members, you volunteer now so that you will have continued employment and, with it, the opportunity to volunteer again, and again, and again.

Another issue should also be raised in connection with the historic readiness of this Local's membership to assume responsibility and leadership, be it in frustrating contract negotiations, Board elections, millage campaigns, battles against reactionary tax referenda and recall elections, and other such "delights." While it is no pleasure to come to you year after year and call upon you to confront yet another crisis, I do take solace in the knowledge that the majority of Local 1650 members unfailingly respond. Local 1650 members know what it means to be a public employee and an activist employee. It means that each year brings yet another crisis. It also means that the job of the HFCC teacher does not begin and end with the classroom and preparation for the classroom. This College is strong and this Union is strong because its staff has been historically a proud and involved staff. That fact struck me when I first arrived at the College in 1969. The events of the past year reconfirm that the strength and determination of HFCC teachers have not diminished.

This year, this summer, we may see 10% of our professional colleagues and fellow unionists retire under ERI. The Fall of 1985 may bring twenty new teachers to the College. While the millage of 1985 will have an immediate and significant impact upon this College and this Union, our efforts to convey the importance of teacher unionism to our new

colleagues will have a less immediate but equally significant impact upon this College and this Union. These new teachers will come to the College in the context of a three year contract, in the context of three years of labor peace. We all have earned and need a respite from contract negotiations and their tensions. There is, however, a certain advantage in having new teachers arrive in a climate of labor strife. Such a climate reveals very graphically and quickly the arrogance of public employers and their attorneys, the disdain with which both view the economic aspirations of employees, and the indifference of both toward their legal obligation to bargain in good faith. A teacher receives a very thorough and swift education when he or she arrives at such a time. Next Fall, some twenty new teachers will arrive at the College; enjoy, if not marvel, at their wages, benefits, and rights under contract; and not comprehend the struggles it has taken to achieve such a contract and the struggles it will take to maintain it. This Union's strength and its effectiveness in championing our economic and professional interests depends upon our effectiveness, next Fall and thereafter, as teachers of teacher unionism.

A final observation. It has been a very difficult and exhausting year for Local 1650's negotiating team, for Paul, Lynne, Les, Ed, and Weldon. I want to express once again my appreciation to that negotiating team. No team has gone through the hellish 20 months that this team has. The arrogance and ignorance of the Board's Chief negotiator were quite nearly unbearable. The factfinding process was exhausting and painful. Formulating recommendations for membership strike action in May and November was agonizing. I owe a great deal to these people, and we are all fortunate that they have chosen to serve the Union and our interests.

It was a most difficult and exhausting year. On occasion, the team heard a few individuals criticizing the decision to call the strike in May, a few objecting to the fact that we did not accept what the other employee groups had accepted, a few asserting we would achieve nothing more than other employee groups had achieved and that we ought to give it up. But most often we heard and felt the support and strength of the vast majority of 1650 members, and we are grateful to the many who expressed their support, because it does help. It does make a difference. Throughout those 20 months we relied upon the membership's strength. We knew that we were not making the critical decisions, only the recommendations. The membership made the critical decisions, and the membership stood behind them. The "Union" made the decisions, the "Union" stood behind them, and the "Union made us strong."

Thank you for your support.

John McDonald
February 18, 1985