

CHIEF NEGOTIATOR'S REPORT

By KC Boylan

In early fall, members of the LRCFT negotiations team traveled to all four colleges and conducted forums where we outlined the possible economic challenges facing community colleges in general and Los Rios specifically. Those “possibilities” have become a nightmare budget reality, and the preemptive actions of the membership in voting to extend the existing contract may have delayed the worst case scenarios now being faced by our colleagues in other districts across the state. Many colleges are facing significant cuts to sections, the elimination of summer school, the suspension of paid office hours for adjunct faculty, the suspension of professional development, the possibility of furloughs and salary reductions. Additionally, as March 15 nears, many of our colleagues in all segments of education are preparing themselves for the onslaught of the dreaded pink slip. In the President’s Report, Dean Murakami details the harsh reality of the state budget cuts and what those cuts may mean for faculty in Los Rios.

In spite of the lingering uncertainty about community college funding statewide, the LRCFT negotiations team has begun the work to improve our contract in a number of areas, many of which simply need clarification while still others may require serious revisions.

During the coming weeks, LRCFT will work with LRCCD to clarify a number of workweek issues for all faculty members, but particularly for non-instructional faculty. These issues range from scheduling concerns, to office hour expectations, to college service requirements. Article 4 identifies the criteria for determining schedules, including student need, quality education and efficient use of facilities, yet faculty schedules have been rejected by the deans at some colleges without clear connection to the above criteria, seemingly to meet an unstated administrative interest. LRCFT would like the decision-making criteria to be transparent and clearly related to student need and consistent with contract language. In addition to the scheduling of class assignments, faculty would like greater flexibility in determining how best to meet student need in the scheduling of office hours, both in location and modality.

Beyond meeting student needs in classrooms, libraries, labs, nursing and counseling offices, faculty also contribute to the success of the institutions in which we work through college service. An important element of the full time faculty workweek includes the ongoing and often significant contributions made to our students, departments, disciplines, and colleges. While participation in shared governance continues



to be the most visible way that faculty provide college service, the challenge is to make visible all that faculty do beyond our college committees.

Safety continues to be a high priority issue for faculty at all of the colleges and educational centers. Disruptive students are no longer just a disciplinary issue; they have become more prevalent, more aggressive and, in too many cases, more threatening. Many faculty have discovered the current processes for addressing violations of the Standards of Student Conduct are no longer sufficient to encompass a wide range of student behaviors and disabilities. More and more of our students are facing the challenges of psychological disabilities, and faculty find themselves ill equipped to manage confrontations or violent behaviors. Unfortunately, reporting practices are inconsistent from college to college, and faculty often remain silent and worried for their safety and the safety of other students in their care. Faculty have also expressed concern over the lack of support personnel on campus during early mornings and late evenings when faculty and students may be arriving for early classes or leaving late at night. Article 21 of our contract, Work Environment/Safety, has previously been revised to reflect the language from Education Code that ensures faculty authority to remove a student from class, and the support for that authority is evident in college disciplinary processes. The process by which faculty are protected outside of the classroom, however, is not as evident.

Article 17 of the contract begins with an affirmation that LRCCD and LRCFT agree that academic free-

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dom is essential for the fulfillment of the educational mission of the District and for the ability of faculty members to perform their professional duties. In addition, academic freedom ensured faculty members' rights and obligations of professional protection, autonomy and responsibility. In spite of this united support for professional autonomy, faculty members across the district are increasingly constrained in their efforts to determine appropriate methods of instruction, course materials and methods of assessment. While all faculty have a responsibility to teach to the approved course outline, those outlines are designed to allow for variations in instructional design and approach. Yet through the performance review process as well as through college mandates to participate in SLO development and Assessment Planning, more and more faculty have complained about a lack of professional autonomy and a significant increase in workload. Both adjunct and full time fac-

ulty members have come forward at all of the colleges with performance review recommendations that demand conformity to specific assessment methods or that dictate the selection of specific course materials or methods of instruction. During the next several weeks, LRCFT will continue to work to strengthen the protections for academic freedom and professional autonomy for all faculty.

While the topics to be negotiated this semester may be limited to those listed above, several other issues remain unresolved, including clarification of Leaves, particularly maternity/paternity, personal necessity and personal business leaves. LRCFT will continue to work with faculty on these issues at the local level where appropriate and through our ongoing labor/management meetings with representatives of LRCCD. ■

THE SHAMEFUL ATTACK ON PUBLIC EMPLOYEES

By Robert Reich

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In 1968, 1,300 sanitation workers in Memphis went on strike. The Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. came to support them. That was where he lost his life. Eventually Memphis heard the grievances of its sanitation workers. And in subsequent years millions of public employees across the nation have benefited from the job protections they've earned.

But now the right is going after public employees.

Public servants are convenient scapegoats. Republicans would rather deflect attention from corporate executive pay that continues to rise as corporate profits soar, even as corporations refuse to hire more workers. They don't want stories about Wall Street bonuses, now higher than before taxpayers bailed out the Street. And they'd like to avoid a spotlight on the billions raked in by hedge-fund and private-equity managers whose income is treated as capital gains and subject to only a 15 percent tax, due to a loophole in the tax laws designed specifically for them.

It's far more convenient to go after people who are doing the public's work - sanitation workers, police

officers, fire fighters, teachers, social workers, federal employees -- to call them "faceless bureaucrats" and portray them as hooligans who are making off with your money and crippling federal and state budgets. The story fits better with the Republican's Big Lie that our problems are due to a government that's too big.

Above all, Republicans don't want to have to justify continued tax cuts for the rich. As quietly as possible, they want to make them permanent.

But the right's argument is shot-through with bad data, twisted evidence, and unsupported assertions.

They say public employees earn far more than private-sector workers. That's untrue when you take account of level of education. Matched by education, public sector workers actually earn less than their private-sector counterparts.

The Republican trick is to compare apples with oranges -- the average wage of public employees with the average wage of all private-sector employees. But only 23 percent of private-sector employees have college degrees; 48 percent of government workers do.

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