

Report on State of the Union
General Membership Meeting - January 21, 1980

January brings Local 1650's first membership meeting of 1980, and with it the constitutional obligation of a State of the Union message. Its purpose is twofold- an assessment of the Local's performance throughout the past year and a reflection upon the challenges of the upcoming year.

Local 1650's record during this last year proved to be a mixed one; it was a year of accomplishments and a year of losses. The Local's most significant accomplishment, one often overlooked, I think, by many of its members was the revision of the contract's seniority clause so that pre-1966 district seniority has been excluded from any further application at the College. Prior to this change, pre-1966 district seniority counted at full value for a teacher coming to the College from within the district and, as such, constituted a potential threat to the seniority standing of many Local 1650 members, particularly in light of pressures generated by the annual pink-slipping of P-12 employees.

The revision of the seniority clause had been sought by the Local since its very inception. Nine rounds of negotiations, while adjusting the seniority clause to eliminate post-1966 district seniority from application at the College and the further accumulation of seniority by non-elected College administrators, nine rounds of negotiations had not produced the elimination of pre-1966 district seniority from application. However, a year of meetings with the College and P-12 administrations, tedious, repetitious, and often obstructionist meetings, brought this contractual change, and the expression College seniority ceased to be a misnomer. This change in contract constitutes a major step in establishing the College as a distinct entity, rather than a mere adjunct of the Dearborn Public Schools.

Shortly following the ratification of this contractual change, the Local was called upon to defend the significant role which College teachers play in the hiring of replacements and additions to the teaching staff. The reluctance of the Board of Trustees to act upon the recommendations of the Counseling Division for three replacements necessitated a formal grievance and the Local's call for a moratorium on all staff replacements and additions throughout the College. The members of the Local 1650 responded forcefully to the Board's inaction, and the recommendations of the Counseling Division were approved shortly thereafter.

Given the current rate of inflation, 15.3% for 1979 in Metropolitan Detroit, it is difficult to speak of the last round of negotiations in any respect as an achievement for Local 1650. Yet, certain observations should be made. The economic settlement reached in that round, an 8.25% adjustment in salary and approximately 1% in longevity, constitutes the second highest economic settlement in the history of collective bargaining at the College. Only the 1975-76 contract contained a greater economic package. While that observation offers little substantive solace given the current inflationary spiral, it does speak to the efforts made in your behalf by last year's negotiating team.

More noteworthy achievements in the last round of negotiations were the letter of understanding which subsequently led to the reinstatement of sabbaticals and the dramatic improvement in the longevity clause. The improvement in longevity compensation and its conversion to a percentage of Master's maximum salary had been

two longstanding goals of Local 1650. Since the early seventies, the Union had sought such contractual changes. The conversion of longevity compensation to a percentage of salary leaves only Accidental Death and Dismemberment Insurance on a flat rate basis of compensation. All other non-salary compensation, the travel-conference fund, extra-contractual and extra-compensation pay rates, life insurance, and longevity, all are now a percentage of salary and will increase automatically with each increase in the salary schedule.

At the State level, teacher unions are closer than they have ever been to achieving "Right to Strike" legislation. The passage of such legislation in the State House was a difficult task, and the teachers of Local 1650 who contacted their Representatives played an important role in that achievement. Particular appreciation should be expressed to Representative Lucille McCollough who recognized the need for and fairness of the legislation despite strong opposition by certain members of the Dearborn Board of Education. I urge the Dearborn residents of Local 1650 to write Representative Lucille McCollough expressing their appreciation.

However, the battle for passage now moves to the State Senate. The upcoming issue of the MFT publication The Michigan Teacher will review the steps which now must be taken. During February, you will be urged to write your State Senators in support of H.B. 4645 and the deletion of the "Sietsma amendment" which restricts an arbitration award if a Board of Education asserts that such an award would require additional millage.

Assertions by Boards of Education regarding finances brings me to the losses which the Local endured during 1979. The Dearborn Board's \$1.4 million unanticipated addition to its already sizable surplus, which should total over \$5 million by 6/30/80/, calls into question the entire round of 1979-80 negotiations and the settlement derived therefrom. Little needs to be added to the Union's published observations of December 4, "...the \$1.4 million surprise surplus destroyed what little credibility the Board and its negotiators might have had. The Board and its negotiators will come to the bargaining table next February with the burden upon them to restore their credibility. Their only hope of doing so will be through meaningful and productive negotiations from the very outset of bargaining. Failure by the Board to generate early progress at the table would be tragic, if not traumatic, mistake."

The mishandling of negotiations by the Board and its agents cost this Local dearly. The opportunity to negotiate on the basis of accurate fiscal data was denied us, and with it the opportunity to pursue a settlement more in keeping with the current inflationary rate. Moreover, the very process of collective bargaining as a means of equitably resolving differences has been undermined. This fact alone would produce a most difficult round of negotiations. Couple it with the need to recoup the purchasing power lost to inflation during the last two years as well as the need for protection against double digit inflation in the upcoming year, and the probability of a timely contract settlement appears extremely remote.

A second loss, of sorts, during 1979 stems from the ruling of the State Tenure Commission that community college teachers are not covered by the State Tenure Act. While the Union hopes that the negotiation of a detailed tenure clause into the contract will not prove contentious, your negotiating team is very apprehensive about the assertions by the Board's attorney that probationary teachers should have no due process protection under contract. The total insensitivity of such a position, not to mention the arrogance with which it was forwarded, should serve to remind the administration and the Board that the longest and most bitter strikes this district has ever faced came when the Board employed negotiators from outside the District. As the Board prepares for the next round of negotiations, it would do well to keep that history in mind.

Another loss for the Local, perhaps the most telling in the long run, has been the nearly simultaneous departure of three of its most active and valued members—Ellen Hoekstra, Harold King, and Mary Joan Woods. One need only consider the size of the Local, 211 members, and the portion of that number actively participating in Local affairs, and the seriousness of these departures becomes all too apparent. In January, 1978 when I first delivered a report on the State of the Union, I spoke to the very serious challenge this Local would face as its senior members retired. The process has begun. In the English Department alone, five teachers have been replaced in a period of three semesters. The Counseling Division witnessed three replacements this year. The pattern is clear. Again the Local urges its senior members to impress upon the growing contingent of new teachers the importance of teacher unionism and the protections that only a vital, active union membership can provide. The Local urges its newest members to become involved in Local affairs, at least to the extent of participating in its monthly meetings. There is much at stake. Ask those whose careers began prior to collective bargaining and contractual rights.

The challenges of 1980 are, then, several and serious. We must negotiate protection against the ravages of inflation with bargaining counterparts currently lacking credibility and direction. We must achieve tenure provision which protects a probationary teacher's right to due process. We must continue to police the collective bargaining agreement in light of periodic lapses in compliance by the Administration and Board. Lastly, we must begin to deal with the drastic turnover in the Local's membership which is now commencing. This has been a continuing concern to the Union leadership; it is rapidly becoming the pressing concern.

Your Local's leadership, its Executive Board and officers, face a demanding if not trying year. The entire membership does as well.

John McDonald