

## Report on State of the Union

February 17, 1981

This is the fourth State of Union report I have made to the General Membership as President of Local 1650. As with the others, its purpose is to assess the Local's accomplishments during the past year and consider the challenges which lie ahead. I am pleased that this report catalogs greater achievements for the Local than any which has preceded it. Unfortunately, it must also catalog greater uncertainties.

1980 witnessed major achievements for this Union in the contractual and political arenas. The two year contract ratified by the General Membership last September contains perhaps the best economic settlement this Local has ever negotiated as well as extremely significant advances with respect to job protection. While the salary settlement of 9.8% and 9.7% falls considerably short of the current and anticipated rates of inflation, those percentages represent, nevertheless, the largest two year salary adjustment in the history of the Union. They place HFCC teachers on Masters' starting salary, 10th out of 74 districts in the tri-county area. They place Masters' maximum 6th. This was accomplished with the retention of even step increments and even lane differentials and with the introduction of a Masters' + 60 salary lane.

Above and beyond these salary adjustments were many improvements in contractual fringe benefits - improvement in life insurance coverage from one times salary to one and one-half times salary, improvement in disability income insurance from 66 2/3% of contractual salary to 66 2/3% of contractual and extra-contractual salary until age 65, improvement in dental insurance moving from a fixed schedule of benefits and ungodly paperwork to an 80-20% co-pay based on "reasonable and current" dental charges with BC-BS of Michigan, the introduction of orthodontic coverage with BC-BS, and the introduction of pre-paid optical insurance - BC-BS Vision 80. Also in this contract the Union achieved a reduced teaching load with full fringe benefits in lieu of Child Care Leave, the application of unused personal business days to sick bank, and breakthroughs, after years of effort, on tuition at HFCC for teachers and their families and on Early Retirement Incentive.

Of equal significance to this economic package was the non-economic package. The infamous "equivalent economies" clause has been removed from the contract, a clause which posed a potential threat to both the working conditions and job security of HFCC teachers. Perhaps the most overlooked but important feature of the 1980-82 settlement is the contractual tenure provision which safeguards due process provisions for probationary and tenure teachers, provisions under severe attack throughout negotiations. Time and again, the Board's chief negotiator sought to diminish the tenure rights and contractual protections of HFCC teachers. Time and again the Board's attorney attempted to tie these fundamental issues of job security to economic issues, despite mutual understanding prior to negotiations that such was not to be done. The achievement of strong tenure language and retention of the contract's protections for probationers was a difficult and frustrating task, but they will prove over the years far more important than any other aspect of the 1980-82 settlement.

Lastly with regard to negotiations, the membership would do well to remember what the 1980-82 contract does not contain. It does not embody administrative demands to cut extra-contractual rates of compensation. It does not contain administrative demands to limit the number of hours taught extra-contractually by HFCC teachers. It does not contain administrative demands to reduce the contractual earnings of RTI teachers. It does not contain the administrative demands weakening the contract's provisions protecting teachers on probation. It does not contain administrative demands to weaken the grievance procedure. It does not freeze extra-contractual rates of compensation, as administration sought to do late in negotiations. That not one of these take-away demands became contract language was no small feat and stands as a tribute to the team that represented this Union at the negotiating table. While the Union must now battle, away from the negotiating table, to protect extra-contractual earnings, I would remind each of you that we could have had to wage that battle on a picket line, marching in a community enduring severe lay-offs and equally severe increases in property tax reassessment.

1980 also brought challenges aside from those contractual. The reappearance of the reactionary Tisch taxation proposal was resisted successfully by the State's education and labor forces. In that effort, the Michigan Federation of Teachers mounted a get out the vote campaign in which 25 HFCC teachers participated. A less successful political effort was the push for "Right to Strike" legislation and an end to the "second class citizen" status afforded employees who happen to teach for a living. While the MFT and AFL-CIO were able, for the first time, to move a meaningful package of bills through both the Michigan House and Senate, this unprecedented achievement was undone by Governor Milliken's veto. Most disturbing was the fact that the "Right to Strike" legislation embodied every one of the Governor's requirements. Indeed it was written, amended, and amended again to meet the Governor's criteria, yet with every one of his requirements met, it was vetoed. It is sadly apparent to all in Lansing that 1981 will not bring "Right to Strike" legislation, nor will such legislation materialize while the current governor remains in office.

What 1981 will bring is anything but reassuring. The defeat of the Tisch proposal has not brought security to school finance or school employees. This College and the Dearborn School District, as well as every other governmental unit in the State, have suffered and will continue to suffer severe reductions in state financing. HFCC has lost \$1.2 million in state aid; the Dearborn Public Schools \$550,000. Given the condition of Michigan's economy, there is no likelihood for improved State financing in the next two years.

Moreover, the implementation of P.A. 114 will bring about a 49.7% increase in residential property assessments within the City of Dearborn. Whether or not such action is overdue in Dearborn is of little consequence. However, the effect of such reassessment upon the College and Dearborn Schools is of considerable consequence. Not only is State support of education diminishing, but given an assessment increase of such magnitude, the likelihood of continued local support is in serious jeopardy. Long before the current millage expires, there will be overwhelming pressure upon the Board of Trustees to provide property tax relief to residential taxpayers.



Before the current millage expires, we will again face contract negotiations. Ponder the context of those negotiations given residential assessment increases of 50% and the Board's unpleasant fixation on HFCC extra-contractual earnings. Also consider that all future millage and Board of Trustees' elections will now be part of the general November election, and no longer conducted in June. From now on, a much larger and very different electorate will be determining the outcome of school elections, and Municipal politics will have hitherto unheard of influence on school elections. Given all these circumstances, if any future millage is to pass in this district, meaningful property tax relief must come from Lansing. Property tax simply can no longer be relied upon as the primary method of school financing.

Compounding the problems arising from questionable future financing are those of current contractual violations. The Local is facing an alarming number of actions by the administration and Board of Trustees which impact upon the contractual rights of HFCC teachers. Three grievances, the first in over three years, are now at the stage of Board hearings. Others may soon be filed. What the Union faces is, at best, a tendency toward ill considered intrusions upon teacher rights or, more likely, the beginning of a series of well considered infringements upon teachers' wages and benefits. As the pressures of diminishing revenues mount, the Union can expect even further infringements upon the contract by the administration and Board, and, with these, increasing recourse to grievance and arbitration. The two year contract is not bringing a respite from adversarial roles, but rather contention in a different context.

There is much at stake in this contention and in the uncertain years ahead. Quite frankly, HFCC has been a good, a very good, place to work, for each of us, both professionally and economically. The Union has played a major role in creating and preserving the professional and economic security that HFCC teachers currently enjoy, and the Union's efforts have benefitted not only its members, but students, administration, and the institution itself as well. This College has prospered because its teachers have the pride and dedication that come when one feels economically and professionally secure. Not all teachers enjoy such security.

This College and Union are moving into a period of great uncertainty. One might respond to the challenges, perhaps the hazards, of this period with self imposed isolation from the Union and its efforts. One might respond by teaching classes, receiving compensation, and departing without involvement beyond the minimal. One might respond with sporadic involvement arising only when one's particular interests are threatened. Or one may respond with commitment and involvement that is consistent and contributory - rather than sporadic and contentious.

We have come through extremely difficult contract negotiations. We have a good contract. We must now police and protect that contract to the extent of grievance and arbitration if necessary. We must become politically active, beyond the level of school politics, and develop an identity at the municipal and State levels of government. These endeavors and responsibilities devolve on more than the Local's Executive Board or the two to three dozen members faithfully present at membership meetings and when volunteers are needed. If we are to continue to enjoy what employment at this College has come to represent, 211 of us must recall what the word Union means.

John McDonald  
President