



February 2005

# WCCFT Union NEWS

Monthly Newsletter of The Westchester Community College Federation of Teachers

## What is a Union Culture?

### International Unionism

We are increasingly linked with other nations economically and politically and the impact of those links must be exposed:

- Educate members on the connections between local needs and global demands.
- Make available to members the educational training facilities offered by schools such as Cornell's Global Labor Institute.

### WCCFT: Faculty to Faculty

This is where we begin – with the local union, the most important unit of Building a Union Culture:

- Draft a visionary plan.
- Strengthen faculty loyalty to each other and the union.
- Negotiate a progressive contract.
- Identify and resolve problems in faculty-administration relations.
- Advance educational as well as union goals through faculty development.
- Reach out to other constituencies, sister unions, community organizations and government representatives for support in achieving our goals.

### Westchester Community College

Our initial outreach must be with our own institution and its continuing improvement as an educational facility:

- Help student leaders understand the goals of the union.
- Work with CSEA on common goals.
- Contribute to the Foundation's efforts to assist students.
- Share faculty achievements and needs with the Board of Trustees.

### National Organizations

Decisions made by the federal government play an important role in state and local funding of education:

- Attend national level conferences sponsored by our founding union, the American Federation of Teachers.
- Understand the role of the AFL-CIO in the union structure.
- Lobby Congressional politicians in the House and Senate on issues of higher education.



### Westchester County

As joint-employer with the College, the County must remain a high priority for communicating our vision:

- Build alliances with the Board of Legislators.
- Keep the County Executive aware of faculty interests.
- Form coalitions with other unions which bargain with the County.
- Attend Board & committee meetings.

### New York State

Understanding the connections between local and state politics, the Union needs to stay involved on this level of action:

- Maintain regular contact with State Assembly and Senate representatives.
- Join in NYSUT lobby days in Albany to explain issues of higher education to State politicians.
- Bring organizations such as the New York Committee on Safety and Health (NYCOSH) to campus for training.

### NYSUT

Our state affiliation to which we pay dues and which provides a labor relations specialist, legal representation, training conferences and an annual representative assembly (RA) to which we send delegates:

- Utilize the services of NYSUT for budget analysis, information on benefits, legal questions.
- Attend conferences bringing community colleges and four-year institutions together to exchange information and ideas about developments and collective bargaining in higher education.
- Participate in Local Action Project (LAP), a three-year matching grant of funds for activities which improve the image of unions, gain community support and increase member interest and an annual retreat for the duration of the grant for union leaders to strategize for bargaining and organizing.

### Westchester Putnam Central Labor Body

This is the umbrella organization for local unions belonging to the AFL-CIO and a source of networking among other trade unionists:

- Send delegates to monthly meetings, demonstrations and events.
- Participate in community service and organizing activities.
- Communicate information from State AFL-CIO federation.
- Interview and endorse candidates for local, state and national office.



#### WCCFT Officers, 2003-2004

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Richard Rosell, vice-president  
Jack Anderson, treasurer  
Ellen Zendman, secretary

#### WCCFT Executive Committee

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## Calendar of Events

### Monthly Meetings:

**First Wednesday, 12:00, Sci 102**

**February 2, 2005**

Welcome Back Luncheon

**March 2, 2005**

Forum on Issues of College Governance.  
Join us for a frank and open discussion of  
decision-making, reappointment and  
promotion, creation of faculty lines,  
allocation of resources, faculty-administra-  
tor ratios, and all other related topics

**April 6, 2005**

Nomination of Officers and Executive  
Committee for two-year terms

**May 4, 2005**

Building a Union Culture: Workshops on  
Special Topics of Local, National and  
International Importance

## Special Union Event

A workshop on Workers' Compensation  
The AFL-CIO Navigator Program  
Friday, March 11, 2005  
Tech Building 115M  
8:30 a.m. coffee and doughnuts  
9:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m. workshop



### President's Message

# Labor at the crossroads

By Anne D'Orazio

This year is the fiftieth anniversary of the AFL-CIO formed in 1955 by a merger of skilled and industrial labor unions in the aftermath of the turbulent strike-filled years following the Second World War and in the immediate wake of McCarthy era anti-Communism. It was the American Federation of Labor and the Congress of Industrial Organizations, a national umbrella organization with union affiliates representing 35% of the workforce and it boasted a tradition of benefits won through struggle. Recently its very existence was challenged by union leaders who charged that the current leadership of President John Sweeney hadn't fulfilled its mission of reversing the decline of unionism in the United States. Today, barely one in eight workers belongs to a labor union in the private sector. Only in the public sector does union membership of 28% come any where close to the 1955 bench mark.

And what exactly did Sweeney promise when he, in turn, successfully unseated the incumbent AFL-CIO leadership to become president in 1995? Coming out of the militant Service Employees International Union, Sweeney announced ambitious goals of union organizing and backed this up with a considerable commitment of AFL-CIO dues money. He also stopped the funneling of union money into overseas operations, left over from the Cold War, dedicated to undermining leftist trade unionists in developing countries. This practice, supported by the previous AFL administration of Lane Kirkland, helped create the climate for out-sourcing by leaving workers without viable labor representation. In many cases, the only individuals organizing workers into unions were leftists or at least leftist by our all-encompassing definition of the word "left" during that period.

The anti-Sweeney dissidents who founded the New Unity Partnership (NUP) represented five major unions: SEIU, UNITE HERE (the merged textile and restaurant unions), the Laborers and the Carpenters. The basic message of the group was that the time had come to centralize the structure of the AFL-CIO and to streamline the number of existing unions history lines. Planks of its policy program included: organizing

Wal-Mart, universal health care, and diversity. And most of all, the partnership also wanted a greater share of dues paid by rank and filers to the AFL-CIO, \$90 million, to go to the local unions rather than the national federation. The most radical of the partnership's leaders, Andy Stern of SEIU, even threatened to leave the AFL-CIO if it didn't adopt the NUP's plan.

In response to this challenge, the AFL-CIO opened a dialog of proposals for strengthening the labor movement in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Major union leaders such as James Hoffa of the Teamsters, and Larry Cohen with the Communications Workers' of America weighed in with proposals of their own which mirrored the demands of the Partnership. All proposals were posted on the AFL-CIO website and launched a debate which was echoed in union halls across the country.

Then at an early January meeting of the AFL-CIO executive committee, an extended heated debate took place which resulted in the disbanding of the New Unity Partnership. Its leaders announced that their goal of forcing a long overdue review of the structure and mission of the labor movement in the United States had been accomplished. With their pressure, it looks as if a significant portion of dues money will be returned to the locals for purposes of organizing campaigns. Sweeney's bid for another term as president may still be challenged and Stern and Hoffa have emerged as powerful partners in forging a new direction for the AFL-CIO.

The American Federation of Teachers is a national organization which chartered our union, the Westchester Community College Federation of Teachers, as local 2431. It is a member of the AFL-CIO. The WCCFT is a part therefore of this debate and what happens at the AFL-CIO national convention in July affects us. We are clearly at a critical juncture in union organization and development and should not retreat from scrutinizing everything we do on the local, national and even global level. We are calling this coming year, Building a Union Culture, and invite you to be a part of what will certainly be an historic year for the labor movement in the United States.



## News Flash:

The Union's request to be represented on the Search and Screen Committee for the new Vice-President for Academic Affairs has been rejected by the Administration. The Union asked to be included as the representative of the faculty. The Union is charged by the collective bargaining agreement to deal with the Administration on all matters of salaries and working conditions with that office. The Union felt it was important that an officer or executive board member, specifically elected by faculty to handle problems arising in the workplace, should be a part of the process of selecting a person who has such an important role in determining what happens on a daily basis on campus. The Administration's reply was that the Union's presence would be form of "factionalism" which the College didn't want on a Search and Screen Committee. The Union maintains that this is a negative view of what the Union is and does at Westchester Community College which is to help identify and work to resolve all problems that arise in the course of fulfilling our duties as teachers, counselors, librarians and academic support coordinators. We regret that the Administration does not recognize that the Faculty Union is a partner, not a faction, in governance.



## Quote of the Month

Those following the trials and tribulations of SUNY chancellor Robert L. King were undoubtedly moved by his plea for a \$170,000 sabbatical (at a time when SUNY students face a possible \$600 tuition increase). King explained that he needed to "get reacquainted with my family" and "recharge my inner batteries." This prompted Assemblyman Richard Brodsky (D-Westchester) to comment that "There are \$14 an hour janitors at SUNY Albany who also want to recharge and reconnect with their families, but they aren't getting this deal." How callous of the assemblyman! We totally support Dr. King's request and hasten to add that we at the WCCFT would also like to recharge and reconnect in Dr. King's style.

## Hermetic Decalogue

(From "Under Which Lyre," 1946)

Thou shalt not do as the dean pleases,  
Thou shalt not write thy doctor's thesis  
On education  
Thou shalt not worship projects nor  
Shalt thou or thine bow down before  
Administration.

Thou shalt not answer questionnaires  
Or quizzes upon World-Affairs,  
Nor with compliance  
Take any test. Thou shalt not sit  
With statisticians nor commit  
A social science.

Thou shalt not be on friendly terms  
With guys in advertising firms,  
Nor speak with such  
As read the Bible for its prose,  
Nor, above all, make love to those  
Who wash too much.

Thou shalt not live within thy means  
Nor on plain water and raw greens.  
If thou must choose  
Between the chances, choose the odd;  
Read *The New Yorker*, trust in God;  
And take short views.

-- W.H. Auden



Are you aware of a  
health or safety problem?  
**Think Union.**  
We will work to get it solved.

If there is a problem, **Think Union.**