

Contingent Faculty Organizing in CFA-1975-2005

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INTRODUCTION

California Faculty Association (CFA) represents 22,000 California State University (CSU) system faculty at 23 campuses. The unit includes both tenure-line faculty and Lecturer faculty (full and part-time). After enabling legislation was passed in California in 1978, two unions competed to be the CSU collective bargaining agent: United Professors of California (UPC) and the Congress of Faculty Associations (CFA). In a close election, CFA emerged in 1982 as the exclusive bargaining agent for the CSU faculty and soon after became the California Faculty Association. The state labor relations board mandated one bargaining unit for all the faculty, including all contingent faculty.

Part I: The Vote and the early Years to the budget crisis of '91

Numerous lecturers were involved in UPC (AFT affiliated union) because it welcomed our input and participation. Many of us found our first collegiality in UPC. Though some lecturers were involved in CFA prior to the vote, few of them are active now. The UPC Lecturers Council was not unlike UPC itself in that we spent a lot of time arguing politics and a lot less time organizing faculty. We

were also stimulated by the fact that the old CFA urged two separate bargaining units, one for regular faculty and one for lecturers.

A key issue before collective bargaining became a possibility was unemployment insurance. Led by community college contingent faculty, we were finally able to assure unemployment benefits for contingent faculty whose appointments are contingent on enrollment and budgeting. This remains true today.

Once the vote took place and CFA became the exclusive agent, most of us sooner or later joined CFA and went to work on lecturer issues. CFA changed its internal structure to set up a lecturers council and dedicated lecturer positions, for example on the Board of Directors and the Bargaining Team.

There were some early bargaining gains. Careful Consideration for subsequent appointments was a procedural protection that was greatly expanded by a series of arbitrations won by CFA. On reappointment, a lecturer had an "Entitlement" to the same timebase he or she had the previous academic year and the right to the same or greater salary.

CSU lecturers had advantages from the get go that contingent faculty in other systems still don't have. Even before collective bargaining, CSU lecturers were on the same salary scale as the tenure track and tenured faculty. There was

also never a limit, up to full time, on the amount we could teach, unlike the community college contingent faculty.

Part II: The Lean Years: From budget crisis to revolution ('92-'98)

This was a period of retrenchment with few gains for anyone on the faculty, except those who benefited from the various forms of merit pay. This was a period of rapid growth in the use of lecturers and the spread of this labor system to campuses that had not yet used significant numbers of lecturers before. It was also a period of rapid decline in the portion of the budget that was spent on the classroom and an administrative bloat. In part this was facilitated by the change from a line item budget process to a dollar based budget process in which campuses were given lump sums of money to spend as they saw fit.

Part III: The Revolution

A contract expired in June, 1998, but was extended until February, 1999. Eventually, the officers and the bargaining team sent it out without a recommendation as “the best we could get.” The membership voted down this contract and new negotiations began. In the midst of the renegotiations, a new slate, led by Susan Meisenhelder, was voted into office and finished the negotiations. A new, slightly improved contract was ratified in May, 1999. This new CFA leadership had a very different vision of what a union was and what a

faculty union could be. Coincidentally, they were greatly aided when Gray Davis signed Fairshare legislation in January, 2000, allowing CFA to collect a Fairshare fee from ALL the faculty.

This new CFA administration, particularly President Meisenhelder and the new General Manager, Bob Muscat, were convinced that CFA could not win a fight to reverse the many negative trends in the CSU without engaging the half the faculty who were contingent. They put staff and financial resources into this effort and participated in it themselves.

In the process of lecturer organizing, we might say that we developed an inside/outside strategy. We organized within CFA with all the resources available to us and, at the same time, we went outside the traditional CFA campus-based lines of command to confront our campus administrations, to develop parallel forms of lobbying, and to reach out to other contingent faculty.

INSIDE ORGANIZING

In CFA's structure there is one lecturer representative from each campus to the statewide Lecturers Council. This person is on the chapter Executive Board and is an automatic delegate to the CFA Delegate Assembly (the union's highest policy making body). Traditionally the Lecturers Council met twice a year at the semi-annual Delegate Assembly meeting. There was often little of substance

that happened at these meetings; often they amounted to little more than gripe sessions. The group was essentially powerless within the union and even more so on the campuses.

The first thing we did was add two additional meetings a year and shift the focus to organizing, leadership development, and training in such things as faculty rights and lobbying. The idea was to develop the LC as a center of power in the union so that it would not just articulate lecturer needs but have the will and ability to get them met. It was only after this, we thought, that lecturers could take their rightful place along side the non-contingent faculty in the fight to change the CSU, even SAVE it from itself.

We first decided to build lecturer networks (often at first email networks) on the campuses to develop a group of people the Lecturer Rep on each campus could turn to for help. Rather than a lone lecturer on each campus trying to help her or his colleagues, we envisioned campus-based lecturer organizations (network, council, club, whatever worked). Soon we invited these new people to our state-wide lecturer meetings as well. Our first such planning meeting in June, 2000, had only about nine lecturers in attendance. Soon we were up to 35 and then nearly 60, as the lecturer reps built larger and larger networks on campus.

Finally, we decided to develop a lecturer dept rep system and we are still working on that.

One of our first successful campaigns, in the fall of 2000, was to get as many lecturers as possible to fill out the bargaining surveys used to determine what the key issues would be for the spring, 2001 bargaining. We asked lecturers (no hard sell here) to give the highest priority to “lecturer job security.” As a result, job security for lecturers became the second highest priority and thus a way to engage lecturers in the ensuing contract campaign.

As a result of our organizing and training, more and more lecturers came forward to take on positions of responsibility within CFA, both state-wide and on the campuses, including positions lecturers had rarely or never held, such as on campus faculty rights committees. Lecturers began to serve CFA not as lecturers but as the most energetic, competent, eager people available.

The Lecturers Council initiated a stipend program in which lecturer reps and other activists would receive stipends to work on CFA organizing projects on their campus. Traditionally, CFA officers, chapter Presidents and some committee chairs receive “release time” or “reassigned time” for their work in CFA. A limited amount has been bargained with the administration, which usually comes in units of one course off. Because lecturers usually don’t teach full time and have term appointments, it has usually been difficult to get the university to do this for lecturers. The stipend fills this gap and helps lecturers pay their bills and perhaps teach less.

OUTSIDE ORGANIZING

It will come as no surprise to anyone that these increasingly active lecturers received very little emotional, political, and intellectual support from the tenure track and tenured faculty, including most of those active in CFA. The “status gap” is still too great. These active lecturers needed to find engaged, positive collegiality—i.e., active, stimulating solidarity.

We first developed an association with the California Part-time Faculty Association (CPFA), which had just pulled off A2K (really the first Campus Equity Week). Margaret Quan, Robert Yoshioka, Mary Ellen Goodwin, and Chris Storer have all spoken at our meetings, and their wit, intelligence and especially their irreverence were very refreshing and stimulating. Through this association we learned about COCAL and a group of us attended and spoke at the COCAL meeting in San Jose in January, 2001.

CFA is affiliated with AAUP and has a lecturer sitting on the Contingent Faculty committee and through this connection we invited Rich Moser to speak to and work with us. We heard from the Canadians, Linda Sperling from the College Institute Educators' Association of British Columbia and Tom Friedman from the University College of the Cariboo, also in BC. We also had Gary Zabel from Boston and Linda Collins, President of the California Community Colleges

Academic Senate, come to speak at our state-wide Lecturer meetings.

A group of CFA lecturers also went to the COCAL meeting in Montreal and out of that meeting was born COCAL-CA. For the fall, 2003, Campus Equity Week (CEW), COCAL-CA decided to try regional organizing across the three state higher education systems—Community Colleges, CSU, and UC. We ended up with major regional events at Da Anza Community College near San Jose, at CSU Dominguez Hills near LA, and at the CSU San Marcos campus in the San Diego area. Contingent faculty from all three systems spoke at these meetings. We also had CEW events of some sort on every CSU campus.

In January, 2004, CFA lecturers and community college part-timers lobbied at both the Democratic and Republican state conventions. About the same time, a group of CFA lecturers, along with CFA President, John Travis, met with the system-wide Vice-Chancellor Jackie McClain. As a follow up to the system meeting, many groups of lecturers on the campuses met with their campus presidents to push for better working conditions for lecturers.

CONCLUSION

Much more could be said about the inside/outside organizing strategy and also about the significant role lecturers played in the more general CFA organizing

efforts, such as lobbying and building student and community alliances. We owe much of what we have achieved to strong support from Democratic Assembly members and to former Governor Gray Davis. Almost all of our system's money comes from the Legislature and thus we need to be part of that conversation. In the last few years, CFA has become increasingly involved in student organizing and on many campuses lecturers have played an important supportive role in that process.

What conclusions can one draw from this experience? The first one is obvious and usually a given. We had strong support from CFA's elected and staff leadership and considerable resources to carry out the project. Knowing this support was there emboldened us in our work. In the first 15 years of CFA's history as a bargaining agent, that support was not there (nor of course were the resources) and lecturers did not have the organizational power to move or change the union very much.

The second conclusion is also rather obvious: contingent faculty, whatever their circumstances, must organize themselves in their own interests. If they are able to do that, they will end up leading the way, showing the rest of the faculty how to organize. Increasingly in CFA, other groups and committees want to do things "the way the lecturers do it."

The third conclusion is also obvious; the shift that has taken place in CFA in the last five years is the shift from business or service unionism to organizing unionism.

Finally, it is our observation that it is the contingent faculty, the most marginalized and exploited faculty in higher education, who are fighting to save the university from the privatizers and dismantlers long after many if not most of the tenured and tenure track faculty have given up. It is the contingent faculty who seem to understand best what is happening to the university. Bert Brecht once said something to the effect that exile makes one a wonderful dialectician. So does academic contingency.

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