As I sit down to write this month’s Ponderings, I have gathered around me a number of articles and relevant quotes to share with you. It’s been pretty easy to collect these things this month because we just celebrated Labor Day, which used to be a day to celebrate and reflect about the gains in wages, benefits, and working conditions of workers in this country. Organized labor had brought us the 8 hour work day, the 40 hour work week, child labor laws, and my personal favorite, the weekend!

On this Labor Day, however, I find article upon article bemoaning the growing inequities in this country. With the rapid decline in union participation, we have witnessed wage stagnation over the last 30 years. The median income of American workers is 4% lower than it was at the beginning of the current economic “recovery.” The unemployment figures for this month have just come out and they are sputtering at best. Yes, we have added jobs, but the vast majority of these jobs are low wage or minimum wage jobs. The unemployment rate has crept down by 0.1%, but experts say that this is only because so many people have given up looking for work. As I dig through my articles, I find one written by Robert Reich. He posits that corporate America LIKES high unemployment for the following reasons:

1. High unemployment rates keep wages down. When people are worried about losing their jobs they will accept low wages and settle for whatever they can get.

2. Low wages raise corporate profits. Less is going to the workers and more is going to the stockholders and corporate chieftains.

3. High unemployment is fueling the extraordinary gains on Wall Street. Reich says that as long as unemployment stays high, the Federal Reserve is committed to buying long...
term bonds, which keeps bond yields low so that investors buy more equities. Thus the present bull market, which, in turn, boosts executive pay through stock options and bonuses.

4. Reich’s last point is that corporate America likes the fact that working people feel insecure because insecure people are more likely to believe that corporate taxes should be reduced because corporations and wealthy people are the “job creators.”

In the meantime, there are many millions of Americans who are employed, full time, but whose wages don’t provide them with enough money to live. Many have to choose between food and shelter and so we have people who are working full time, but are homeless. According to the Census Bureau, one-third of adults who live in poverty are working but do not earn enough to support themselves and their families. A quarter of jobs in America pay below the federal poverty line for a family of four ($23,050). Not only are many jobs low-wage, they are also temporary and insecure. The national minimum wage is $7.25 per hour (a little higher in CA, $8.00 per hour, and in San Francisco, it is a record breaking $10.55 per hour.) If the national minimum wage had been adjusted for inflation from its 1968 level, it would be around $10.50 per hour today. If the minimum wage had been adjusted for productivity during the same period, it would be around $15 per hour. Imagine working full time and living on $320 per week, under $1300 per month.

Large corporate, obscenely profitable employers, such as McDonald’s and Walmart have the gall to counsel their employees on how to live on the unlivable wages that they provide for most of their employees. McDonald’s provides their employees with a budget list that includes getting a second job. The budget includes $20 per month for healthcare and fails to include expenditures for food at all. What?@#$%^&*. Walmart instructs employees to apply for food stamps. (By the way, last year the average food stamp allotment was $4.45/day per person, and House Republicans just pushed through a bill that slashes 40 billion dollars from the food stamp program). Chew on that for a bit and tell me when you get hungry.

When full time or part time workers have to rely on public assistance programs to survive, the taxpayers are indirectly giving tax breaks to the large companies who are pocketing money that they should be paying their workers for DOING THE WORK that allows them to be so profitable.

Other articles in my pile talk about employers reducing employees’ hours so that they don’t have to pay for their workers’ benefits. With the implementation of the Affordable Care Act (derisively nicknamed OBAMACARE by its opponents) we hear of employers cutting their employees’ hours just to avoid having to follow mandates to provide employees with the peace of mind of having affordable health care.

The things I have just described have not happened in a vacuum. The shrinking of the American middle class, along with the lack of peace of mind that comes with people knowing that they cannot afford the basics of a stable life, is completely positively correlated with the shrinking power of labor unions in this country. Samuel Gompers, the first and longest serving president of the AFL, said it well in 1893 when he proclaimed:

"What does labor want? We want more schoolhouses and less jails; more books and less arsenals; more learning and less vice; more leisure and less greed; more justice and less revenge; in fact, more of the opportunities to cultivate our better natures."
That, too, is what we want at College of Marin for our UPM unit members, along with our fellow workers in the other bargaining units. We want these things so that we can provide peaceful, secure lives for our families, ourselves, and our students. I am hopeful. Walmart workers across 15 American cities are planning a mass demonstration, protesting low Walmart wages and demanding a minimum wage of $25,000 per year. Workers at McDonald’s and other fast-food chains conducted strikes and walkouts in nearly 60 cities recently, hoping for super-size wage hikes that for many would boost their hourly pay to $15 from the current federal minimum $7.25. They were also demanding the right to unionize without retaliation.

At College of Marin we can be part of the movement to strengthen labor in this country. UPM has always worked for equal pay for equal work and humane benefits and working conditions for all. We are not there yet, but we are determined. We cannot do it alone. Remember that the President of UPM is not UPM. The Chief Negotiator is not UPM. The Bargaining Team is not UPM. The Executive Council is not UPM. The other committee members are not UPM. WE ARE ALL UPM, and we can only succeed when we ALL work toward our goals.

So stay informed, stay in touch, and stay involved.

Note: As this edition of the newsletter is going to press, California Governor Jerry Brown is saying that he will sign into law a new state minimum wage of $10 per hour.
EDITORIAL

MYTHS ABOUT FACULTY UNIONS

MYTH: “WE DON’T NEED A FACULTY UNION - WE HAVE SHARED GOVERNANCE.”

“Shared Governance” means that faculty, staff, students, and administration collaboratively shape decisions affecting the educational mission of a college.

Shared Governance gives faculty, through their Academic Senate, a major and definitive role in academic decision making at the level of the department and the school.

In many colleges, faculty are represented by unions, and while the work of a faculty union and the Academic Senate may overlap, the two organizations do not play identical roles.

Only the Senate can define and evaluate the intellectual strength and validity of college programs.

The Academic Senate, however, does not engage in negotiations with management about wages, benefits, workload, working conditions, health and safety issues and other matters that are subject to the collective bargaining agreement. The Senate’s role is advisory. It is the faculty union that negotiates these issues with management through the collective bargaining process, leading to a legally binding contract. All of these union negotiated issues very much affect the quality of education on campus.

*United Professors of Marin* has a long history of protecting and advocating for the needs of our faculty. We see our concerns regarding academic excellence as consonant with those of our Academic Senate, but our union fulfills a special and separate function at our school, one that an Academic Senate cannot provide.

UPM values and supports Shared Governance and the work of our Academic Senate. But Shared Governance and an Academic Senate cannot fully protect and advance the needs and interests of our faculty. For that task, we also need our faculty union. □

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*HUNGRY PEOPLE CANNOT BE GOOD AT LEARNING OR PRODUCING ANYTHING, EXCEPT PERHAPS VIOLENCE.*

- PEARL BAILEY
FACULTY UNION SUES TO KEEP SF CITY COLLEGE OPEN

The accrediting agency that ordered City College of San Francisco closed is facing a second lawsuit in as many months.

The California Federation of Teachers and its parent union, the America Federation of Teachers, filed suit Monday in San Francisco Superior Court to keep the community college open.

The suit alleges that the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior College (ACCJC), violated state and federal conflict of interest laws; prevented students, faculty and journalists from attending the commission’s public meetings; destroyed documents; and circumvented its own regulations.

At a news conference on the steps of San Francisco City Hall, Alisa Messer, an English instructor at City College San Francisco and president of the faculty union, AFT Local 2121, said, “The decisions made and processes used by the ACCJC were flawed, not just at CCSF but in numerous other cases as well. Their sanctions have destabilized our college, our community and the education of more than 80,000 students.”

In July, a year after placing City College on “show cause,” the most severe sanction short of being shut down, the commission ruled that it would revoke City College’s accreditation in July 2014 unless the school gets its finances in shape and corrects its problems with governance, leadership and evaluation of courses.

In the weeks leading up to the commission's decision, the college faculty union filed a nearly 300 page complaint with the U.S. Department of Education alleging, among other charges, a conflict of interest because the ACCJC president Barbara Beno’s husband was on the City College evaluation team. Although the commission has rejected the charges, federal education officials sent a letter to Beno in August threatening to “limit, suspend or terminate” the commission’s federal recognition for being out of compliance with federal regulations.

The union’s suit comes a month after San Francisco City Attorney Dennis Herrera sued the accrediting commission to block efforts to close City College.

Kathryn Baron, SF Chronicle, 9-23-13
WE ARE ALL CCSF!

By Paul da Silva

In 1994, the Zapatista uprising in southern Mexico made headlines throughout the world. The Zapatistas’ spokesperson, Subcomandante Marcos, explained the reasons for the rebellion. He issued harsh critiques of a continually worsening political and economic situation inside Mexico and he condemned the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) as a cause of further misery. His actions sparked strong official reactions, and many considered him a marked man.

One might guess that it would be dangerous to be associated with him. However, throughout Mexico, people began to appear in public wearing the type of ski mask that had become Marcos’ trademark. “We are all Marcos!” became the rallying cry. They had recognized the truth behind many of his statements and wanted to show their support.

In the California Community College system, the last decade has been a time of worsening conditions. Although these are largely the result of the total economic and political climate of California and the nation, the Accrediting Commission of Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC) has definitely been a cause of further misery. The best-known example is their threat to remove the accreditation of City College of San Francisco (CCSF).

Obviously, this is a concern to CCSF, but why should we care? The most obvious reason is that we should help our neighbors. In the event of any disaster, this impulse to help is what we expect of any decent human being.

However, it goes beyond that. We could be the next target for a similar action. But even for colleges that have been able to keep their accreditations, there has been significant cost. The California Federation of Teachers (CFT) has calculated that statewide, 137 administrators are now working full-time only on accreditation issues. This does not include all of the additional work done part-time by administrators, faculty and staff. Imagine the resources that are being diverted from our educational mission to satisfy ACCJC! And demands are constantly made to further feed this cancer.

What is being done? At the federal level, the U.S. Department of Education has acknowledged the merit of the CFT’s complaints that ACCJC has used faulty process and has not complied with federal standards in its accreditation procedures. At the state level, the Joint Legislative Audit Committee has approved a request for an audit of ACCJC. (Check out cft.org for more details).

However, it is important to remember that none of this would have happened without popular pressure, such as the mass rallies in San Francisco over the past year. But current momentum for reform could easily stall in the state and federal bureaucracies. The consensus is that we need to “Keep up the Street Heat.”

There will soon be a meeting here at COM to discuss what we can do to help. Please make every effort to come…. and avoid being forced to do things you never dreamed of doing when you became a teacher. □
TRUSTEE INTERVIEWS

In a show of Solidarity, members of the leadership of UPM, CSEA and SEIU, our three campus labor unions, joined together to interview the four candidates running for College of Marin Board of Trustees; incumbents Diana Conti, Barbara Dolan, Wanden Treanor, and challenger Brady Bevis.

We asked questions specific to the concerns and needs of our individual bargaining units as well as questions relating to the candidates’ understanding and commitment to the goals of education at COM, and labor in general.

On the basis of their responses and our experience with the past performance of the incumbent trustees, our UPM Executive Council voted to endorse incumbent Diana Conti for COM Trustee in the upcoming trustee election.

We did not feel that any of the other three candidates, Bevis, Dolan, or Treanor would best serve the interests of our faculty or staff, or the best interests of our college, our students or our community.

ARE COM FACULTY OVERPAID?

Janet Napolitano, former U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security and former governor of Arizona was recently hired as president of the University of California. She’ll be receiving full medical benefits, a $9,950 per month residence, $8,916 a year for car expenses and $142,500 for relocation costs, all in addition to a yearly starting salary of $570,000.

How much do our COM faculty earn?

SEPTEMBER LABOR HISTORY

On September 2nd, the first Monday in September, we celebrated Labor Day, a yearly commemoration of the social and economic achievements of American workers. It’s a tribute to the contributions that working people have made to the strength, prosperity, and well-being of our country.

Labor Day was a creation of the labor movement. It was achieved after much protest and struggle, with initial resistance on the part of government. But in 1894, after 10 years of active agitation by labor leaders and rank and file workers, Congress declared the first Monday in September as a legal holiday—a day to honor the contributions of the American worker.

Has Congress forgotten?
FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE WAS A UNION MEMBER

How about you?

UPM MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

I hereby apply for membership in the United Professors of Marin, AFT Local 1610

Name: ___________________  SS#: ___________________

Address: ___________________  City: ______________  Zip: _________

Date: ___________________  Email: ___________________

Home Phone: _______________  Campus Ext: _______

Check the appropriate category:

___ I am a permanent credit or non-credit employee or leave replacement
___ I am a temporary credit or non-credit employee on the semester system
___ I am a Community Education instructor

Return to the UPM mailbox or to the UPM Office, TB-124.
And please make sure you have completed the UPM payroll deduction option, in Human Resources.

Please Note: Unless you have filled out the above UPM Membership Application, you are only paying a representation fee and you are not a member of UPM and entitled to UPM's full membership benefit.