Analysis

Parties dispute union negotiations

By BILL LUTZ
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Editor's note: Bill Lutz has covered the Graduate Teaching Fellows Federation for a year-and-a-half, and has sat in on many of the GTFF's confidential negotiations with the University. What follows is his analysis of the situation now that the negotiations are at an impasse.

One week ago the Graduate Teaching Fellows Federation (GTFF) called an impasse in negotiations with the State Board of Higher Education after six months of frustrated attempts to obtain an equitable contract.

The impasse itself, however, is only the tip of the iceberg. The problems the GTFF has faced confronting the University and the State Board go back two-and-a-half years.

The GTFF charges the State Board with "stalling" negotiations in order to sap the strength of the union, thereby demoralizing GTFs and weakening the union.

Vice-chancellor Bill Lemman, representing the State Board and the University, claims the length of time spent at the bargaining table is simply a product of the long involved contract proposal presented by the GTFF.

"They placed sixty different articles on the table, many of which combine aspects of their student status as well as employee status," says Lemman. "These have to be sorted out and dealt with."

However, only eight minor articles have been signed off in that six months — a long time for sorting.

Whether the GTFF claim of stalling is true only the University administration knows. But the University's practice in dealing with the GTFF from its inception in 1975 is certainly supportive of the GTFF charge.

For 18 months after the initial GTFF attempt to gain collective bargaining rights, the University and the State Board insisted GTFs were students, not employees.

After a series of hearings and two appeals by the University, the Employment Relations Board (ERB) upheld its decision that GTFs are employees receiving a wage for their services as teaching and research assistants, and therefore would be accorded the rights of public employees under the law.

The University claimed at the time that GTFs' primary relationship is graduate student to professor, not employee to employer. The GTFF never claimed the faculty was their employer. They simply wanted to be recognized as employees receiving wages for services they provided the University.

In fact, the faculty chapter of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT local 3209) stated the following in a paid advertisement (Emerald, April 25, 1978):

"We do not view GTFs as our servants or our adversaries.

Only with the perpetuation of the current situation could such sentiments develop. With collective bargaining rights, GTFs and faculty will be able to work together towards our common goal of better education for all."

It is understandable that the state board fears GTF unionization because of its budgetary concerns, but it is significant when an institution of liberal education refuses to recognize the rights of people without whose services it could not survive.

Now that the state system has been legally mandated to meet the GTFF at the bargaining table, it raises the question of what tactics they are using. They have clearly refused to bargain on items not mandated by law. Furthermore, unlike the GTFF, the state has made few concessions, slowing negotiations considerably.

The GTFF negotiators are not making outlandish demands. They simply want equitable wages and benefits, established criteria for GTF appointments, participation on departmental committees and maintainence of their previous rights and benefits.

The University's reluctance to meet these demands may stem from the unfortunate fact that universities must carry the economic burden of a large business, but that is the tenor of our times.

Whatever the reason, it remains that the University is fighting hard to prevent the minimal recognition and gains for its part-time employees.

Indians protest oil drillers, hiring, land use practices

MONTEZUMA CREEK, Utah (AP) — Navajo tribal officials and oil company executives met Tuesday to see if they can end a sit-in by about 100 rebellious Indians that has shut down private oil drilling in this corner of the Navajo Reservation for six days.

The protestors have gripes with four oil companies drilling on leased reservation land and with the Arizona-based tribal leadership.

They say the oil companies are guilty of discrimination in hiring and carelessness about the reservation's environment.

And they complain that money from the leases — millions of dollars a year — should go to individual Indians living in the area rather than to the tribe as a whole.

Tribal leaders from Navajo headquarters in Window Rock, Ariz., met with oil company officials in Phoenix in preparation for negotiations in Utah with the occupiers. A first meeting between Texaco and the protestors was held in Utah Friday.

"We'll be here a year until we get everything straightened out," said Larry Anderson, group spokesman and an American Indian Movement member.

"We are taking no more racist; prejudiced attitude from the non-Indians' point of view," he said.

He accused the companies of not hiring enough Indians and of having "no respect for Mother Earth, no respect for livestock."

Anderson said 90 percent of the oilfield workers are non-Indians and unemployment among reservation Indians in Utah is 85 percent. A state Indian affairs official said 50 percent to 60 percent of the Utah reservation population is on welfare.

The protestors have demanded in a petition that the companies stop polluting drinking water, clean up oil spills and pay for destroying livestock.

John Masson, a Texaco spokesman in Denver, said he could not respond because the group had not cited specific incidents.

The unarmed protestors took over a Texaco pumping station in the Aneth oil field Thursday and set up a roadblock on the only road out, causing the oil companies operating there — Texaco, Superior, Continental and Phillips — to halt operations.

The occupation was peaceful and the companies have declined to press trespass charges.

"We'll stay here. We've got a nice building, water, lights, everything. We're staying right here until all these things are settled," vowed Calvin Thomas, a spokesman for the occupiers.