

Commentary:
Fair share union fees: One instructor's 10,000 mile journey

-- *Lin Fraser*

Once upon a time a part-timer discovered that without a by her leave, her paycheck came up short. As a matter of fact, it came up short exactly the amount of union dues.

How can that be, she cried. She did not belong to the union—heck, she didn't even believe in unions. And most certainly, she never intended to join one.

A union member overhearing her angry and anguished cries stopped to explain. He told her the union works for everybody, member and non-member alike. He told her that the union would be stronger and able to do more if it had more members.

And he told her, like it or not, the union would be receiving part of her paycheck each month. She had to pay her fair share.

Still grumbling, she admitted that there was a certain logic related to the size of the union and its ability to do more for the faculty, so she reluctantly joined.

But she vowed she would NEVER become an active union member. Why should she when her district treated her far better than any district she had previously worked for?

Then she found employment in another district that paid far less for the same kind of work and did not treat its faculty members well. What a shock!

There was nothing to do but join the union in the new district. And once she joined, she encountered not only other union members but also union activists.

As the activists began educating her about inequitable working conditions in both districts and throughout the state, she realized that she had to do more than just be a dues payer. She had to DO something. But, what?

First, she stopped griping about fair share dues. She joined the second union. She went from being an inactive union member to an active union member to a union activist. Who would have thought? Certainly not she.

Her activism led her to executive board positions for two locals and to becoming a founding member of a statewide part-time faculty organization. She took part in Campus Equity Week activities and twice spoke at demonstrations at the Capitol.

She spoke with legislators and served on the Little Hoover Commission's study of the community college system. She testified before a joint meeting of the state higher education committees.

As the state part-time coordinator of one union, she served on the Community College Chancellor's Task Force on Part-Timer issues and traveled up and down the state, organizing part-timers and gathering information about part-timer concerns.

And after a two-year hiatus, she finds herself on the executive board of one local and traveling to Board of Trustees meetings to make all faculty—not just part-time faculty—voices heard. Since becoming so involved, she has made some wonderful discoveries. Slowly but surely, state laws are changing. At local levels, working conditions improve while salaries rise. But none of this could have happened without fair share to support the unions and the work that they do.

Now, when you receive the announcement about fair share and a union membership application, just remember two points: First, the union that represents ALL faculty is more powerful with more members. Our union has made significant gains, so sign that application form.

Second, a few but dedicated union members have made positive changes—and folks, they're getting tired. They need your help. You don't have to go to extremes. Simply come to an executive board meeting where you will discover a niche with your name on it just waiting to be filled.

You don't have to go 10,000 miles, but surely you can take that first step.