

30 Years Strong!



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# Union Press

## Ponderings of the President

by Ira Lansing

A thought has occurred to me for a new column, not necessarily for this publication. Actually, only the title has come to mind, not the content nor where it might be appropriate. The articles would be entitled “Wisdom at the End of a String”. This was motivated by the paper tags that are found on the end of the string that attaches to a tea bag. One particular brand, Good Earth®, includes quotes on the paper attachment. One that I found particularly interesting was the following:



*“In mathematics you don’t understand things. You just get used to them.”*

Johann von Neumann was a mid-twentieth century mathematician who made major contributions in many areas of mathematics and also worked on the Manhattan Project. Not a light-weight, by any means. Now if you figure he admits to not understanding mathematical things, then the rest of us are completely off the hook. But where does this leave us where non-mathematical matters are concerned?

This column—”Ponderings of the President”—repeatedly exhorts its readers to stay informed, among other things. In an effort to move in that direction, let’s recap and catch up to where we are in the course of things related to a collective bargaining agreement.

First, we are still in impasse and have completed the mediation part of the process. It is interesting to note that one of the new mantras of Fran White and the Board of Trustees, as stated by White at the

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November meeting of the Trustees, is that “we [CoM administration] will not join them in impasse, we would rather sit at the bargaining table...[and] we are still in the process.” By the first part of her statement I surmise she meant that it was UPM who pulled the District, kicking and screaming, into impasse; they had much more they were willing to negotiate, if only we would have let them. Well, if that were true, PERB would not have certified us as being at impasse. If either party is willing to talk, you do just that—sit down and talk. But apparently, as she additionally said, the District was only willing to *sit*, not bargain. Hence, PERB sent us both to impasse. The last part of her statement was addressed to the Trustees as an indication that now we just have to let the whole thing work its way to a conclusion; we cannot interrupt the process. Sorry. Not true. At any time the parties may return to the table and bargain. PERB would love it if we could resolve this ourselves since they are essentially broke. Which brings us to the next phase: fact-finding.

The State’s Public Employees Relations Board has told us that they have lists of about three dozen fact-finders, but they have no money and we (who?) would have to pay the person (shared cost with the District?) to come here and do the job. Oh, but they do have one short list of people who would do

it for \$100 per day. What, trainees? Do you get what you pay for? Anyhow, we are looking at the short list since the other can run \$800 or more each day, and the process can take from three days to three weeks, once it starts. It depends on how much each party has to say, and remember the District proposed to bargain 18 or the 26 articles in our contract. In the meantime everyone is still waiting, and that’s where we are as of now.

Nothing has really changed, although \$50 million dollars of the Bond money has been spent (as reported at the last Board meeting and that is about 20% of the total) and the fruits of that expenditure can be seen all around us! Also, that number is almost as outrageous as what the District has spent on its labor negotiator attorney (see actual monthly totals elsewhere in this edition).

Hopefully you are now more informed, as I ask you to be. Stay in touch is one of my other requests—get on the UPM informational e-mail list; send your request with a non-campus e-mail address to [ira@UnitedProfessorsofMarin.org](mailto:ira@UnitedProfessorsofMarin.org). And stay involved is my last entreaty. There will be monthly (more or less) activities where you can join with your colleagues and make your desire be known for a fair contract now! Or at the very least, share a warm mug of tea with all of us.

	<p><b>Tick-tock, tick, tock, time on the clock. Amount paid to the attorney for the District during the month of August: \$11,550</b></p> <p><b>... and still no contract</b></p>	
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## CONNECTING THE DOTS

News and Opinion  
by Arthur Lutz

### CONVENTIONAL WISDOM

It was the economist John Kenneth Gailbraith who popularized the term ***conventional wisdom*** to describe outdated or erroneous ideas that are generally accepted as true by the public or by experts in the field.

Prior to Gailbraith, the term was neutral and descriptive, but Gailbraith used it as a pejorative to describe ideas and explanations that persisted despite scant evidence of their validity – persisted due to inertia, ignorance, or to protect the self-serving needs of those with vested interests.

And that's what we're seeing at College of Marin, where our District is promoting the *conventional wisdom* that student enrollment deficits can be explained by county demographics, or by shoddy buildings, or due to an overpaid and under-supervised aging and racist faculty – rather than by failures of the Fran White administration.

Unfortunately this "*wisdom*" has achieved some degree of currency in the community and in the local press due to the skillful work of our college's public information officer. Even some in our own faculty seem to subscribe. And it is having its intended effect of demobilizing and demoralizing our faculty at a time when we need unity for the difficult decisions we will need to make in response to the current stalemate in Contract negotiations.

Regarding this stalemate, the District has expressed the view that because of the state-wide financial crisis, now is not a reasonable or appropriate time for our faculty to demand higher wages or improvements in our Contract.

According to the District's *conventional wisdom*, the proper time for labor to petition for wage increases and better working conditions would be when the economy is flourishing and management can afford to reward its employees with increased compensation and other perks. During times of economic decline, we are told, it is more reasonable for labor to abandon or scale back or defer its wage demands, and even be willing to agree to take-backs or co-pays in order to ensure the survival of the workplace and the maintenance of jobs.

This position may sound reasonable and rational but like so much of *conventional wisdom*, it is erroneous and self-serving.

The truth is that in the history of labor struggles, labor's greatest advances were realized at times when the economy was at its weakest. It was during the Great Depression of the 1930's that labor achieved its greatest gains. The Fair Labor Standards Act which established the 8-hour day was created at the height of the Depression. And the National Industrial Relations Act of 1933 guaranteed workers the right of collective bargaining. And the National Recovery Act raised workers wages in 1934. And the Wagner Act of 1935 supported labor unions in their struggle for justice and pay equity. And Social Security, and Child Labor Laws etc. etc.

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All of these important labor gains were struggled for and achieved during the depths of the Great Depression.

The belief that workers scaled back (or should scale back) their demands because of a fragile economy may be *conventional wisdom*, but it is not historical reality. It is a view promoted by management and their paid publicists in order to demoralize and demobilize

labor in its struggle for justice and equity.

At this time at College of Marin our faculty has a choice. We can accept the bogus ***conventional wisdom*** promoted by management and shut our mouths and accept what we are being offered (a zero percent pay increase and significant loss of contractual protections), or we can stand with UPM and fight and win a fair and equitable contract – NOW.

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## UPM Protests for a FAIR CONTRACT

Thank you to all who showed up at Tuesday's Board meeting and held signs or addressed the Board. The following photos give you an idea of the event. The music was lively, provided by Musicians Alliance Group.

A couple things became apparent at the meeting. If there is a strike by faculty, both SEIU and CSEA, the other two employee organizations, are both AFL-CIO affiliates and would be required to honor a sanctioned picket line, even if they do not join us in going out on strike.

Second, Fran White and the Trustees are starting a "new truth": that the District would have preferred to continue bargaining, but UPM unilaterally declared impasse. To quote her from the Board meeting: "we would not join them in impasse, we would rather sit at the bargaining table...we are still in the process."

Impasse cannot be declared unilaterally. If the other party objects, that means there is still bargaining that can happen and the parties do not go into impasse. The District did not object and indeed, offered no new proposals either before or during mediation. Apparently their desire was really just to SIT at the table, since that seemed to be all that was happening!

Finally, while we are "in a process," that process does not have to finish for bargaining and discussions to take place. UPM has continually offered to continue to bargain with the District. Remember, it was the District's representatives who came to the table and said they "have no authority to negotiate".

Don't buy into these "new truths"!

UPM Executive Council

# UPM's 11/11 Protest for a Fair Contract



UPM's Youngest Supporter



The scene outside the Board Meeting

Marching and Music in Student Services



The Musicians Alliance Group



Students offer support



In the Boardroom





## Letters to the Editor

Feel free to voice your comments and/or opinions concerning any article or issue about you, the College or your union. Letters should be signed, but names will be withheld upon request. Please direct your letters to [john.sutherland@marin.edu](mailto:john.sutherland@marin.edu)

Dear Editor, Dear Colleagues,  
I've been away from the college for over a semester now. Well, not really away—I'm with you in heart and with my students in everything you all do. I made every attempt to come to last week's UPM protest, but as I was getting ready to leave, I just felt too wiped out and had to cancel my plans. I miss the fight, but I've got my own battle right now. But reports of the protest made me wish I had been there: My friends and colleagues, our students, live music, all in the name of a good cause—a fair contract for great teachers. Sounds great!

As much as anything else, I miss my students. I still see many of them when they come to help out or when they just want to talk, but I miss the energy of working with them in the learning environment that the college creates. In the hours and days that I have now to reflect, I appreciate more than ever the loop of learning that connects instructors and students. They learn from us, *and* they teach us. They teach us to be passionate and spontaneous; they teach us how to learn again, and we give that passion back to the next group of students, and the cycle repeats. I miss that most of all.

There were many times when I thought to myself that I could have left the

college to pursue performing, when I could have left a tenured position, but what always brought me back was the fact that I loved those kids and I loved my colleagues. Teaching is a wonderful opportunity to become mature... while simultaneously staying young.

At the same time, I fear that that loop, that dynamic that creates a learning experience for teachers and students alike, is being destroyed by the mean spirit and incompetence of the current administration. One very clear difference between the administration and the rest of us is that they no longer wish to teach or, for that matter, to learn. They're "out of the loop." They can make all the claims they want ("I used to be a great teacher...."), but now they choose to justify their existence by sitting in soul-deadening meetings, parroting the State's jargon-de-jour and imposing their will on us and on our students.

I'm over it now and have many better things to contemplate—a fall leaf, the warmth of the autumn sun in the afternoon, my friends, my son—but it took me some time to get over callousness of the administration when I left the college. I remember one meeting that Allen Taylor and I had set up with Anita Martinez. It took a lot of effort on my part to make it, but I did.

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Unfortunately the vice president didn't. When we later met at a rescheduled meeting, she excused herself saying, "I had a bit of a health scare myself." Health scare? I'm dying here!

Maybe the most hurtful experience was when I received a letter from the college congratulating me on my retirement. It went something like this:

"Dear Carla,  
Congratulations on your retirement! We at the College of Marin are so excited about what is in store for you."

Those of you who have read some of my opinion pieces when I was editor of this publication might well think the irony was intentional. After all, I have not made friends in high places with my rather blunt (it's a redhead thing) way of stating my opinion, but come on! They are excited about what's in store for me? Wow. While staff members (who have always gone out of their way for me) were very apologetic even though they didn't write the actual letter, Linda Beam responded to my complaints by saying she was sorry I "took the letter the wrong way." You can't make this shit up. By the way, there were only 5 other retirees, so you know they weren't swamped.

The degree of insensitivity is without parallel. The lunatics are in charge of the asylum.

In contrast, when I left Los Medanos as a part-timer, I got hand written letters from my Dean and from the College's president telling me they were sorry to see me go.

It's a new day, though, and many people at CoM believe that they can be instruments of change. Meanwhile, I am learning that change often comes whether we want it or not. Still, I have a renewed sense of optimism that change can come even to Marin where they appear to hate change so much they won't even send a custom written retirement letter.

If you are connected with the College, I urge you to join us (Yes, I'll be there with you) in every opportunity to show this administration what we're about, what teaching and learning are about. I'm heartened to hear that many students and faculty members were at the recent protest. I'm confident, too, that soon every faculty member will see the importance of these protests.

If there's anything good that has come of my illness, it's that I don't have to sit by and watch an inept administration smugly destroy the school I love.

I love you all,

Carla Zilbersmith



## They Really Can Teach

The current financial crisis in the country has yielded the new phrase “delicious irony.” It refers to execs flying in and landing in private jets with tin cups in hand, begging to be bailed out of the mess they got themselves and the rest of the country into. At College of Marin, one need not look far for examples of delicious irony; in fact, we need only look in our own backyard.

Recently (November 17,2008), we all received a reminder from our administration that “in 2007, President Frances White signed the American College and University Presidents Climate Commitment (ACUPCC), a nationwide consortium of institutions who are committed to reduce the global emission of greenhouse gases by 80% by mid-century.”

This is a strange commitment considering the District’s demand in Negotiations with UPM that faculty be required to commute to campus (CoM/IVC) 4-6 days a week, thereby requiring unit members (a majority of whom live outside Marin County) to commute round trip between 30 and 60 miles per day. This demand flies in the face of numerous expert recommendations that employers reduce on site work days to 4 or less per week to conserve energy and reduce pollution--Just another illogical policy

position taken by the Board of trustees and Management.

To date, the District has not made one proposal in Collective Bargaining related to this commitment, i.e., no incentives in compensation or in working conditions designed to achieve the goals of the ACUPCC.

For an equally tasty illustration, one might recall a recent grievance filed by UPM. It began with VP Anita Martinez directing her deans to deny overload to full-time instructors. The reasoning: In order to better serve students, instructors should not overextend themselves. And then the startling revelation: In order to return to teaching, her true passion (not to mention the lifetime medical benefits she’ll receive from CCSF just in case she retires in the near future), VP Martinez is leaving CoM and resuming her post at CCSF. She CURRENTLY holds a permanent instructional position (12 units) at CCSF AND is acting VP at CoM. Among her directives as VP is the one mentioned above: Ensure that instructors are not overextending themselves.

Maybe our recent criticisms of our administration have been too harsh. After all, they are teaching us well how to savor meaning of the word “irony.”

John Sutherland

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<b>Marin IJ Poll (11/12/2008):</b>	
<b>Do College of Marin professors deserve a raise?</b>	
<b>Final tally:</b>	<b>Total Votes = 808</b>
	<b>71% Yes (574 Votes)</b>
	<b>29% No (234 Votes)</b>

## UPM's Political Action Committee (PAC)

What is it and how do I contribute?

Last month, UPM's Political Action Committee made a donation to the Obama campaign since he was the Presidential candidate who best represented the ideals of education held by our contributors.

It is important for you to know that this and all other donations made by the UPM-PAC do NOT come from union dues. The Fair Political Practices Commission does not allow union funds to be used to support political campaigns. So, where does this money come from?

Every UPM newsletter has a form, (usually on the last page), that can be filled out and submitted to Payroll, requesting a monthly deduction, large or

small, to be remitted to the UPM PAC #990958. This is a completely voluntary contribution to provide financial support to candidates and measures that support or benefit education in Marin County and the College of Marin in particular.

On that note, I would remind all that members of the COM Board of Trustee are elected public officials. If you believe that change might be in order for the betterment of our institution, **fill out that form**. If you are already contributing, consider increasing your support. Change of leadership for the better can only happen when those in the group demand it.

The refusal of the Board to negotiate a fair contract with its labor unions begs that new leadership be elected. Become part of that movement for the future of College of Marin.

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## **Grievance Update** **Arbitrator Rules in favor on** **UPM!**

UPM has now filed two grievances against the District for not observing contractual language regarding required teaching loads. Paul Christensen has twice been denied his legal teaching units per semester, and our attorney notified us last week of the arbitrator's decision in the first of two identical grievances.

Our attorney reported that the arbitrator held that the contract was violated when the District refused to assign Paul Christensen to a full teaching load as well as his position (overload) of department chair. The Arbitrator further found that the District's action was retaliation for Paul's protected Union activities. Preliminary reports indicate

that the District is also responsible to reimburse Paul for any sustained financial loses.

This is a big win for UPM. It speaks to the blatant violations of the Collective Bargaining Agreement. In light of this decisive UPM win, one might ask how well taxpayer dollars are being spent by the District to fund its attorney's wine collection. The District must now pay at least its attorney's litigation fee and Paul Christensen's back-pay, as well as fund the many hours of HR work that went into this arbitration. When one thinks of the more than half a million dollars the District just wasted in the Retirement Savings arbitration, the answer to the above question doubles in significance.

**Congratulations to all on this important victory!**

John Sutherland

The following article appeared in the *Press Democrat* on 9/1/08 and is reprinted here with the permission of the author\*

## **Why unions matter now more than ever**

By MARTIN J. BENNETT

This Labor Day, Americans realize that their economic well-being and their prospects for upward mobility are at risk. According to a recent poll by Time magazine and the Rockefeller Foundation 72 percent of Americans believe they are less economically secure than a decade ago.

This widespread economic insecurity is a consequence of the economic restructuring that began in the 1970s, particularly the dramatic polarization of incomes and wealth, the decline of unions and the breakdown of the social contract between corporations and their employees.

Unions are the foundation of the American middle class, and the revival of labor is essential for building a new post-industrial economy based upon shared prosperity, rising productivity and labor-management co-operation.

New York Times reporter Steven Greenhouse, in his new book "The Big Squeeze: Tough Times for the American Worker," states that 37 percent of private-sector workers were union members in 1955, but by 2007 only 12 percent of all workers, and 7 percent of private sector workers, were unionized, the lowest number since 1901.

Until the mid-1970s, productivity gains and worker pay increased together, particularly in the highly unionized manufacturing sectors such as auto, steel and consumer durables.

Between 1947 and 1973 median family income and productivity roughly doubled. All quintiles of the income distribution grew together: the inflation-adjusted family income of the bottom 20 percent increased by 116 percent, the middle fifth by 111 percent and the top fifth by 99 percent.

Union contracts included cost-of-living adjustments and comprehensive health, retirement and vacation benefits.

Over time, nonunion firms matched the wages and benefits paid to union employees to retain their skilled workers and to avoid unionization. When President John F. Kennedy noted in 1960 that a "rising tide lifts all boats," he described the experience of an entire generation.

However, this golden era of American capitalism ended when President Ronald Reagan fired 11,500 striking air traffic controllers in 1981. Legal protections for workers' rights soon eroded, good jobs in the unionized manufacturing sector moved abroad, and American business instigated a prolonged attack on the standard of living of American workers.

The Reagan era initiated the "great disconnect" between wages and productivity. Between 1979 and 2005, the inflation-adjusted average hourly wage for production and nonsupervisory workers increased by less than 1 percent, while productivity grew by 60 percent. As a result, the incomes of American families grew apart during this period: The after-tax incomes of the bottom fifth were virtually stagnant, increasing only 6 percent; the middle fifth rose a modest 21 percent; the top fifth jumped 80 percent, and the top 1 percent left all behind as their incomes increased by 228 percent.

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According to Greenhouse, if wages had increased as fast as productivity since 1979, a full-time worker would earn \$58,000 a year and not the \$36,000 that was the average in 2007.

To cope with declining incomes and rising costs, particularly for housing, health care and higher education, middle-class families must have two income earners. So, 70 percent of married women with children are now part of the paid labor force. Moreover, the typical middle class couple works 540 more hours a year than a generation ago, while families are borrowing more than ever before. In 2005, the personal savings rate tanked to zero. Housing foreclosures and personal bankruptcies have tripled since 1979 as a result of this big squeeze on American workers.

Billionaire investor Warren Buffet has stated, "There's class warfare all right, but it is my class, the rich class, that's making war, and we're winning."

UC Berkeley economist Emmanuel Saez calculates that the wealthiest 1 percent of Americans, averaging \$1.1 million annual incomes, received 22 percent of all pre-tax income in 2005, up from 9 percent in 1980. The top 1 percent earned more than the bottom 40 percent.

The decline in the standard of living for the majority of American workers means that unions matter more than ever. According to the Economic Policy Institute, unions raise wages by 28 percent on average.

Union workers are much more likely to receive comprehensive and high quality health and pension benefits. The total union premium for wages and benefits is 44

percent more than nonunion. A 2006 Peter Hart poll indicated that 58 percent of nonunion workers would join a union if given the opportunity.

Unionization and high productivity go hand in hand. Union workers are more productive than nonunion, because they have better training, lower turnover and they are more highly motivated, given fair compensation and a stronger voice regarding innovation, promotions and production standards.

Kaiser Permanente provides an excellent example. In 1997, Kaiser made a commitment to a partnership with 26 unions representing 86,000 Kaiser employees. The partnership involves workers in a structured and collaborative decision-making process regarding compensation, working conditions, staffing ratios, workforce training and patient care. The result? Kaiser workers receive the highest wages and best benefits in the industry while costs are down, on-the-job injuries are reduced, staff turnover has dropped, worker job satisfaction is up and the quality of patient care continuously improves.

Unions brought you the weekend, but even more importantly, unions brought shared prosperity and a broad middle class. It can happen again.

\*Martin J. Bennett teaches American history at Santa Rosa Junior College and serves on the executive board of the North Bay Labor Council. He also is co-chairman of the Living Wage Coalition of Sonoma County.

**United Professors of Marin  
UPM-PAC Payroll Deduction Form**

The UPM-PAC (Political Action Committee) provides financial support to candidates and measures that support or benefit education in Marin County and the College of Marin in particular. If you would like to support the UPM-PAC with a monthly contribution, small or large, please fill out the form below and send it to the Payroll Office.

To: Payroll, College of Marin  
Date: \_\_\_\_\_

I hereby authorize the Marin Community College to deduct from my earnings the sum of \_\_\_\_\_ beginning in the month of \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ (year), and each month thereafter, and to remit this sum to the United Professors of Marin PAC #990958 until I revoke this authorization in writing.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_  
Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
City : \_\_\_\_\_  
Zip: \_\_\_\_\_  
SSN: \_\_\_\_\_

**UPM Membership Application Form**

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

Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
City: \_\_\_\_\_  
Zip: \_\_\_\_\_  
Home Phone: ( ) \_\_\_\_\_  
Campus Ext: \_\_\_\_\_ Dept \_\_\_\_\_  
Email: \_\_\_\_\_  
SSN: \_\_\_\_\_

**Check the appropriate box:**

- Permanent credit or non-credit employee or leave replacement.
- Temporary non-credit employee on the quarter system.
- Temporary credit or non-credit employee on the semester system.

Return to UPM Kentfield campus mailbox or UPM Office, Science Center 136

## UPM Committees and Staff

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