

# SHOPTALK



by Keith Hoeller

Since the 1970s, America's colleges and universities have been increasing their use of low-wage, low benefit adjunct professors who teach without any job security. Nearly 500,000 now serve as apprentices to nowhere, without any hope of ever becoming masters in the guild of tenured professors. Yet despite the recent push to organize and represent adjuncts, there is

little evidence that collective bargaining has made significant gains for them in the United States. Equality for adjuncts remains elusive, and even unionized adjuncts have contracts that are entirely separate—but unequal—to their full-time counterparts. In *Unionization in the Academy: Visions and Realities (2003)*, Clark University philosophy professor Judith Wagner DeCew summarizes the conclusions of a study conducted by Gary Rhoades (*Managed Professionals: Unionized Faculty and Restructuring Academic Labor, 1998*) in the following way:

*"Rhoades concluded from his analysis of 183 faculty union contracts that these documents do not often protect, but actually further marginalize, part-time faculty....Rhoades concludes that while the professional strategy of unionized faculty appears to be to contain the use of part-time faculty, the strategy backfires because the contracts ultimately encourage more use of part-time faculty members rather than less. Consequently, the national unions may claim to be advocating for part-time faculty, but the contracts do not show that they have made much progress"* (p. 85).

In the Washington state community colleges, where the AFT and the NEA have represented both full-time and part-time faculty since the 1970s, adjuncts who teach a full-time load still earn only 58 percent of a full-time salary. While full-time faculty can teach overloads, union contracts usually limit part-time teaching to only two-thirds of full-time at any one college. Only half of the adjuncts receive health care and retirement benefits, and all work on tenuous quarterly contracts—without any job security from year-to-year.

The two unions have even bargained annual step raises for all of the full-timers, while leaving two-thirds of the part-timers with no incremental raises at all. From 1999-2004, 90 percent of all increment money statewide went to the full-timers.

Since collective bargaining has failed so many adjuncts, it is not surprising that so many who teach in public colleges have turned to their state legislatures for help. State governors and legislators control the purse strings of these higher education

institutions, and they set much of the policy as well.

It should therefore be welcome news to learn that the national AFT has recently announced its own legislative campaign for 20 states. Unfortunately, the AFT has placed its number one priority on adding new full-time faculty positions—without guaranteeing that current adjuncts will fill these new tenure-track jobs. Indeed, some adjuncts could very well lose their jobs as a result of the AFT's push for more full-time faculty.

The AFT's emphasis on full-time faculty is not surprising given that perhaps as few as 10 percent of AFT dues-paying members are adjunct faculty. Indeed, while the locals may have been coercing more adjuncts into the unions with "agency shop" provisions, the state and national unions contain fewer adjuncts the higher up you go. If tenured faculty are full-fledged members of the union country club, adjunct faculty are visitors on a temporary guest pass.

The AFT wants state legislatures to set a goal of having 75 percent of all courses taught by full-time faculty by 2013, but only in departments where there are at least the equivalent of 8 full-time professors. As noted by Doug Collins, ESL professor

## Equal Rights Legislation for Adjunct Professors

at South Seattle Community College, this goal could be met in part by having more full-timers teach overloads, thereby taking courses away from current adjuncts.

This goal-setting strategy has failed in the past. The California legislature passed AB 1725 in 1988, which also mandated that 75 percent of community college courses should be taught by full-timers. Twenty years later, this bill has had little effect on part-time faculty, whose numbers have continued to increase.

While the AFT plan calls for "preferential consideration" for current adjuncts, this could mean as little as a perfunctory interview. When I raised this issue with InsideHigherEd.com ("New Push for Full-Time Faculty Jobs," November 30, 2006), AFT leaders took to the "Comments" section to say that there was no need to limit these new jobs to current adjuncts, since many of the recent full-time hires have had some part-time teaching experience. This is neither surprising nor relevant. Given the expansion of part-time teaching, most full-timers have probably taught part-time at some point in their careers. But there is no reason to believe that these new full-time jobs will be filled by people who have taught part-time at that particular institution. Any union worthy of the name ought to insist that its part-time members be promoted into full-time jobs.

I also pointed out that new full-time positions are usually created by taking courses away from current part-timers, and thus many adjuncts could end up losing their jobs to make way for additional full-timers. When I checked the AFT website after the InsideHigherEd.com article came out in November, their “model legislation” had been altered to give more prominence to adjunct faculty issues and to add a paragraph saying that new full-time jobs should not come at the expense of current adjuncts.

These words may have little effect, however, since even where legislation has explicitly said that money should be spent solely on part-time faculty salaries, as has happened in Washington state, the colleges and the unions have diverted some of this money to raise the salaries of full-time faculty who teach overloads.

Not surprisingly, the AFT legislative program does not even seek equal pay for adjuncts. Instead, it wants to prorate adjunct pay based on the “comparable work” of full-time faculty. The union has thus bought into the administrative claim that since adjuncts “just teach,” they don’t deserve pay equal to the full-timers who also do research and committee work.

The national AFT plan glaringly omits any legislation on either job security or equal raises for adjuncts.

Given the failure of collective bargaining to significantly improve the lot of most adjuncts in the country, it would be reasonable to pass state legislation to grant equal treatment of all adjunct faculty now. Yet the national AFT plan wants to merely set goals and leave all of the solutions to six years of local collective bargaining. Not only would this result in vastly different treatment of adjuncts from campus to campus, it might result in little or no improvement at all, especially given the dismal track record of the unions in the past.

In *Solidarity for Sale: How Corruption Destroyed the Labor Movement and Undermined America’s Promise (2006)*, labor historian Robert Fitch shows how America’s craft unions, going back to the early 20th century, lobbied against the 8 hour day for federal workers; against government provided health insurance and in many states, workman’s compensation. The reactionary craft unions made the same argument as the AFT today: if workers want improvements in their working conditions, they should get them by joining a union, paying dues and supporting their leaders in collective bargaining—not by going the legislative route.

But adjuncts who do join the AFT find that raising their pay, status and job security is not exactly at the top of the union’s collective bargaining priorities. For 40 years the AFT has done little or nothing while adjunct pay has fallen to a fraction of full-timer’s pay. But isn’t that the AFT’s real bargaining strategy: using adjuncts as a bargaining chip in negotiations with management? They oppose substantial legislation for adjuncts because it would force them to act like a real union — fighting for all of their members.

Adjunct faculty should seek relief from their state legislators. And if their unions are unwilling to seek equality for them, they should form their own groups and run their own legislation.

Model legislation for adjuncts should grant equal salaries, benefits, and job security for all adjuncts, which is what several current bills in Washington state would accomplish.

**Job Security.** Adjunct faculty who teach three years or more should have annual contracts, with the presumption of renewal. Colleges could let people go for cause, but the adjunct would have full due process, including grievance procedures and the right to appeal any decision. (See the Washington State 2007 “Adjunct Bill of Rights” [SB 5019 Jacobsen / HB 1452 Haigh]. All bills are available at [www.leg.wa.gov](http://www.leg.wa.gov).)

**Equal Pay and Equal Work.** Adjunct faculty should insist on equal pay and equal work. Each college should have only one salary schedule, and pay should be prorated based upon a full-time teaching load. If the college wishes to require non-teaching duties of their adjuncts, participation should be prorated as well. (See the Washington State 2007 “Equal Pay and Equal Work Act” [SB 5020 Jacobsen/HB 1660 Sullivan].)

**Annual Incremental Raises.** Adjunct faculty should receive annual raises, just like their full-time counterparts. Indeed, unless adjunct faculty receive equal raises, they will not be able to achieve equal pay, since full-time salaries may be increasing at a faster rate than part-time salaries. All faculty should be rewarded for their experience and professional development. (See the Washington State 2007 “Equal Increments Act” [SB 5021 Jacobsen / HB 1647 Kirby]).

**Health and Retirement Benefits.** While the AFT recommends health and retirement benefits for those adjuncts who teach more than 50 percent of full-time, they have not proposed any benefits for those who teach less than half-time. These adjuncts should be able to participate in health care and retirement systems on a prorated basis.

**Unemployment Compensation.** It is high time all state laws follow the 1989 California Supreme Court *Cervisi* decision and state unequivocally that adjuncts whose future employment is dependent upon enrollment, funding, and program changes, do not have “reasonable assurance” of future employment and cannot be barred from collecting unemployment when they are unemployed and meet all other eligibility criteria.

**Conversion of Part-Time Faculty to Full-Time, Tenure Track Positions.** While the primary goal of any legislative plan should be equal pay and benefits for current adjuncts, the colleges should be encouraged to promote qualified adjunct professors to full-time tenure track positions, as long as no adjuncts lose their jobs in the process.

The goal of any adjunct legislative plan should be the abolition of the current system of faculty apartheid for everyone, sooner rather than later. What is needed is a national push for full equality swiftly, not a piecemeal patchwork of incremental reforms that will take decades to accomplish.✍