

# **WE DON'T NEED A UNION**

## **Top Five Myths about Unions and a Reality Check**

by Kimberly Olson

**Myth 1: We don't need the union! They were needed by workers (years ago) that *used to be exploited*.**

**Reality Check:** While blatant physical exploitation isn't as prevalent as it once was, fiduciary exploitation is alive and well. Many companies (including educational institutions) have made the hiring of part-time staff a full-time practice. The institution avoids payment of benefits and having to compensate faculty for hours spent preparing for classes and grading assignments. While some individuals work part-time by choice, many continue because full-time positions are simply not available. Why? Most of the community colleges in California exploit part-time faculty members to preserve full-time faculty and administrator salaries and benefits.

**Myth 2: Unions just cause trouble.**

**Reality Check:** As with any organization, there is good news and bad news. However, lack of representation hasn't helped part-time staff. It seems that some people think that if we just play nice in the sandbox long enough, then our loyalty and benevolence will be rewarded. Fat chance. Administration seems to think that verbal accolades of appreciation and devotion compensate for a living wage. While sentiments like "we know you love to teach and we could not run this school without you" are lovely (albeit condescending) ... that doesn't pay the rent. We show people we "love" them by taking care of them.

**Myth 3: If I join the union, I will get in trouble or decrease my chances for promotion.**

**Reality Check:** At the new faculty orientation before the start of classes this semester, an administrator informed us that the union organizers were sitting outside and — in a demeaning manner — proceeded to state, "and they *really* want to talk to you." Many people chuckled and sneered, because everyone wants to identify with administration. I thought this was an interesting trap. Everyone wants to be liked by their boss, and the boss doesn't like the union. (Of course your boss enjoys a living wage with benefits.) Consequently, many people avoided the organization that is looking out for them! The administrator isn't going to fight for your raise, but Local 6286 is! While it would certainly be illegal for an employer to discriminate against an employee on the basis of union membership, the fear of this occurring demonstrates the need for the union. While you certainly don't have to broadcast your membership, the greater our numbers ... the greater our strength.

**Myth 4: You make \$40.00 per hour ... how much more do you want?!**

**Reality Check:** Part-time faculty are paid for classroom time only. As any instructor will tell you, this is a quarter (or less) of the amount of time needed to facilitate an effective class. That is, part-time faculty are NOT compensated for class preparation, test creation, grading papers and tests, tutoring, office hours with students, etc. So let's face reality ... part-time faculty with post-graduate degrees make less than \$10.00 an hour.

**Myth 5: I (or my spouse) have a full-time job with benefits. I don't need the union, because teaching is just a hobby.**

**Reality Check:** You may not need the union today, but what if you need legal

representation tomorrow. We live in a litigious culture, and legal action is being taken against professors. The union will provide representation. Finally, while you may be fortunate enough to not need a living wage, your colleagues may not be as fortunate. It may not be your fight, but supporting your colleagues in their struggle is a demonstration of professionalism and ethics.