

Faculty group tells legislators low pay may lead to unions

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BOWLING GREEN, Ky. — Faculty members at Kentucky's state universities are becoming increasingly frustrated with inadequate salary increases and their apparent powerlessness to do anything about them.

That was the message that members of a new state university professors' group had for two state legislators during a weekend meeting at Western Kentucky University.

The two lawmakers — Reps. Jody Richards, D-Bowling Green, and Steven Wilborn, D-Shelbyville — were also told that collective bargaining may be the only way to better the professors' lot.

"There's more and more talk on the campuses about unionization. . . . It's naive to believe that we don't have in this room the making of a union," said Tom Jones, who heads both WKU's faculty senate and the state Council of Faculty Senate Leaders.

Wilborn said that unionization of professors would not be accepted by the legislature and that it would be "flowing against the tide" of history.

But Carl Abner, a University of Louisville economics professor, disagreed. Abner said there are about 350,000 faculty members on U.S. campuses and about 190,000 belong to unions.

"Unionization is the tide," Abner said.

He said he expects an increased push at U of L in the next year for a faculty union, even though U of L's trustees have said they will not recognize any bargaining group.

Jonathan Bushee of Northern Kentucky University said a committee of NKU's faculty senate has been studying unionization for the past year.

"I'm not so sure that we want to form a union, but I am sure that we want to be able to say something about salaries and working conditions," Bushee said.

Wilborn asked if there weren't any way short of unionization that faculty members could exert more pressure on campus administrators and others to address their grievances.

Attempts to work through their administrations, boards of regents and trustees and at the state level have proved fruitless, the professors replied.

Average salary increases for state university faculties have remained at 5.5 percent for the past several years, they said, despite efforts for increases more closely comparable with double-digit inflation.

"We want the legislature and regents to know that those of us who work in higher education favor collective bargaining to some degree because there's no alternative except the status quo," said Ted Smith of Eastern Kentucky University.

Both Wilborn and Richards, who are members of the legislature's interim Committee on Education, warned that new money for salary improvements or anything else in higher education will be scarce in the 1980 legislature.

Abner asked why additional funds couldn't be raised by increasing tuition. "I don't know any state in the nation that gives (higher) education so cheaply," Abner said.

Richards said he opposed higher tuition because it might prevent many people from attending college.

The state's Council on Higher Education also took some lumps from the professors and Richards. Richards said that some changes might be needed in the agency's powers, but he wasn't sure what the changes should be.

In response to a question from Dr.

Gus Ridgel of Kentucky State University, Richards said he thought the council had too much control over many campus activities.

Ridgel noted that KSU faculty members had been penalized in pay raises because the council said the school had too many faculty members for its size.

Ridgel said no one understood the formula for that determination. "The council has taken a very jaundiced look at the size of faculties. But the size of administrations has not been placed under the same scrutiny."

But U of L's Abner said the education council is often used "as a whipping boy" by campus administrators who need someone to blame for problems the administrators are unable to resolve.

Wilborn said he will sponsor a bill in the 1980 General Assembly to put one voting faculty member and one student on the council. That way, he said, council members will know what issues confront professors and students.

A similar bill failed in the 1978 General Assembly.