

third dimension

Robinson: faculty losing power

By Randy Blauvelt

John Robinson doesn't want to see traditional university practices collapse. That's why he's a strong advocate of collective bargaining for UNL faculty members.

"There are quite a few indications that the traditional system has broken down, is breaking down," he said.

Currently, Robinson is president of the UNL chapter of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP). AAUP has spearheaded a drive to establish collective bargaining for UNL faculty. The case is awaiting decision by the Nebraska Court of Industrial Relations.

Many causes

According to Robinson, the causes of this collapse are many. Two of the most important are the lack of faculty participation in university government and the growth of "amalgamated universities," he said.

Amalgamated universities are schools, like NU, that started as a one-campus institution and have since acquired other campuses and a subsequent central administration to govern the university.

Robinson, who also is chairman of UNL's English Dept., said the faculty is losing power in university government because they no longer have the last word on granting academic credit, a power traditionally reserved for the faculty.

"The most shocking example, the one that has really concerned a lot of people, is giving graduate credit for a course operated by State University of Nebraska (SUN), without the approval and against the expressed wishes of the graduate faculty," Robinson said. "Now you can't do that for very long without destroying the whole reputation of the university."

Faculty threatened

He said the setting of admission and graduation standards, developing a grading system and peer review are other threatened traditional faculty responsibilities.

Because of the growth of "amalgamated universities," another layer of bureaucracy has been added, Robinson said. This has caused further faculty alienation from university government, he said.

"Some of the better universities that have collective bargaining... gear it toward this issue," he said. "And we (AAUP members) intend to (establish collective bargaining) if we win the election."

Robinson said that although collective bargaining in higher education is "fairly recent" and a majority of

schools don't use it, there is a definite trend toward its implementation.

"Everybody has some uncertainties about collective bargaining in higher education. It hasn't existed long enough to really know how it is going to work out," he said. "However, about 15 per cent of all the professors in America now are represented by collective bargaining."

A member of AAUP for 14 years, Robinson said the group "took a serious look" at collective bargaining before starting the drive.

"We need it here"

"I think it would be irresponsible on the part of the local AAUP not to look at it quite seriously—which we did—and we decided that we needed it here," he said.

Robinson said he disagrees with those who have charged that collective bargaining isn't a professional way for university faculty members to negotiate with administration on disputed matters.

"It's not true that collective bargaining is unprofessional," he said. "Across the board pay increases are unprofessional."

Robinson was referring to formula salary increases for faculty members, instead of merit raises to those who deserve them.

Separate unit defended

He defends a separate bargaining unit for UNL, instead of a system-wide unit, by saying UNL does not have anything in common with either the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO) or the University of Nebraska Medical Center.

"In fact and in theory, administratively and totally, there is no connection whatsoever with the UNO faculty or the medical center faculty," Robinson said.

The University of Nebraska Board of Regents has opposed a single unit for UNL. They have argued to the court that the whole system should be included in the bargaining unit.

Although Robinson strongly defends AAUP's position on collective bargaining, he says his personal feelings are "mixed."

"In some moods... I think 'How unfortunate', and how uncertain and what an incredible effort it is going to take (to establish collective bargaining). But, we absolutely do need it," he said.

"But, in other moods, I say to myself, 'No, it's not unfortunate, it's going to work, we just plain need it.'"

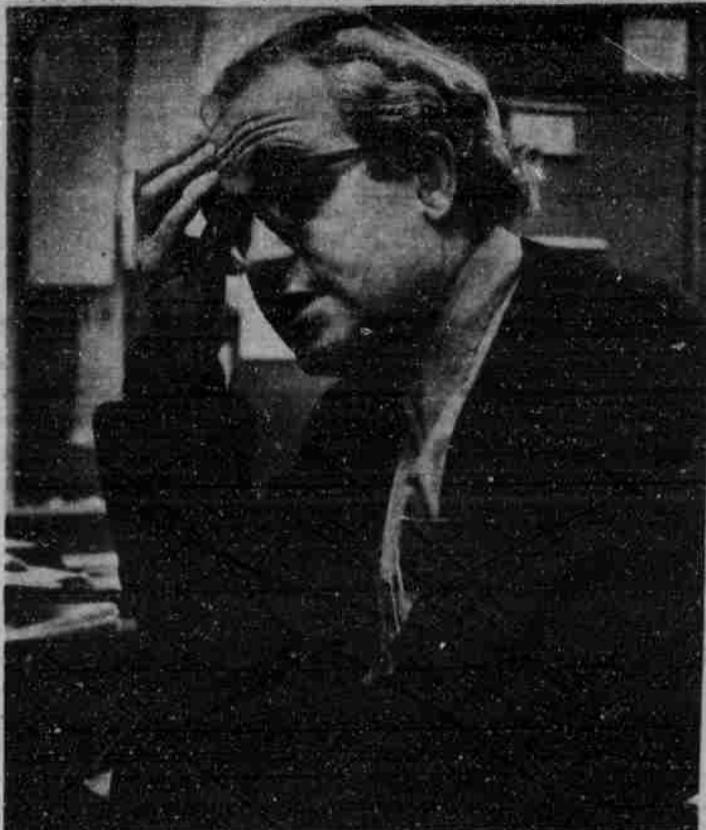


Photo by Steve Boerner

John Robinson, president of the UNL chapter of AAUP, discusses the merits of faculty unionization.

Collective bargaining chronology

Three years ago—AAUP tried to "sound out" UNL faculty attitudes about collective bargaining. Response not overwhelming in favor of collective bargaining.

May, 1975—NU Board of Regents temporarily blocked tenure appointments. Believed to have sparked early acceptance of AAUP's drive to establish collective bargaining. Drive was originally planned for Fall semester.

Sept. 25 and 26, 1975—The Nebraska Court of Industrial Relations heard arguments from the NU Regents and UNL's AAUP chapter about the appropriateness of AAUP's proposed bargaining unit. In about 90 days—Decision expected from the court.

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