



Representing Wayne State Faculty and Academic Staff

# NEWSBRIEFS

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## “Fiasco at the AAUP”

### Local Executive Board Votes to Withhold Dues From National Organization

Charles Parrish, President

The headline, “Fiasco at the AAUP,” is not ours. It comes from the online publication *Inside Higher Education*, reporting on the continuing crisis in the national office of one of our parent organizations, the American Association of University Professors.

(<http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2006/02/09/aaup>)

Our academic union at Wayne State is jointly affiliated to the AAUP and the American Federation of Teachers. We normally do not report on the internal disputes of any organization, but the accumulating chaos and mismanagement in the national office of the AAUP has now come to a point of crisis.

Two dimensions of that crisis that are of concern to faculty and academic staff at WSU. The first involves the stunning mismanagement of the AAUP’s prime academic mission, the defense of academic freedom; the second concerns serious irregularities in the national AAUP’s capacity (or willingness) to provide accurate and timely reports on membership and finances.

#### The Gang that Can’t Shoot Straight

The headline in *Inside Higher Education* only begins to capture the dog’s breakfast that the National AAUP made of its attempt to organize an international conference around the theme of academic boycotts.

The debacle began with the National AAUP’s decision to organize an international conference on the issues raised by the attempt in 2005 of the Association of University Teachers,

the leading academic union in Great Britain, to boycott Israeli universities that support governmental policy toward the Palestinians. The AUT passed and then quickly rescinded a call for a boycott. The attempt created a firestorm of controversy, which was still raging when the AAUP plunged in with its conference proposal.

The AAUP’s new General Secretary, Roger Bowen, former President of SUNY at New Paltz, acquired funding for the conference from the Ford,

#### INSIDE

*“DeVos and Amway:  
Michigan or China?”*

page 3

con't from page 1

Rockefeller, and Nathan Cummings Foundations. A kind interpretation of events would suggest that, once the money was in hand, no one at the national office paid much attention to the actual organization of the conference. If they were paying attention, all the worse!

The AAUP invited 22 academics to the proposed gathering at a conference center in northern Italy. The list came under criticism when it was discovered that eight of the invitees were strong backers of the boycott, which was roundly condemned by many, both within and without academia. Bowen defended the list of invitees, noting that strong critics of the boycott were also invited. "It always shocks me when people are fearful about hearing the thoughts and ideas of those with whom they disagree," Bowen stated. "The AAUP does not boycott ideas.... We believe in the free and honest exchange of views and that's what we are doing here" (*Inside Higher Education*, 2 February 2006).

While Bowen and other AAUP leaders were scrambling to justify the composition of the invitee list, a second embarrassment emerged with the discovery that among the papers distributed to the conferees was an anti-Semitic article published in a magazine affiliated with Holocaust deniers. The article, "The Jewish Declaration of War on Germany," which blames German Jews for provoking Hitler, was from the *Barnes Review*, edited by Willis Carto, a noted anti-Semite. Carto is quoted on the Anti-Defamation League's web site as saying, "If Satan himself, with all of his super-human genius and diabolical ingenuity at his command, had tried to create a permanent disintegration and force for the destruction of the nations, he could have done no better than to invent the Jews." At least Mel Gibson could argue that he was drunk when he launched his diatribe.

According to *Inside Higher Education* (9 February 2006), "The additional turmoil of the article prompted AAUP leaders to apologize early Wednesday. But the three major foundations that are sponsoring the invitation-only conference called for it to be delayed." A joint statement by the Ford and the Nathan Cummings Foundations stated that "While we accept that this offensive paper does not reflect the views of the AAUP, we believe its errant inclusion in the conference materials has undermined the credibility of this conference as a forum for intellectually honest and rigorous exchange."

From there, conference planning (if it can be called that) stumbled from one uncertainty to the next. Initially, the AAUP web site announced that the conference would go on, then association officials announced that they would postpone it, and several weeks later they canceled the meeting altogether. (*Inside Higher Education*, 9 February and 21 March 2006.)

If you enjoy bootless academic donnybrooks, you might read the blogs that accompany the AAUP articles in *Inside Higher Education*. (Go to <http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2006/02/09/aaup> ). Dr. Joan Scott, who helped organize the conference as Chair of the AAUP's Committee "A" on Academic Freedom, contends that the distribution of the anti-Semitic article was not the reason the conference was called off. She alludes instead to "a carefully orchestrated campaign to abort the conference by a lobby of people (pro-Israel occupation) who believe that any representation of a point of view other than theirs is anathema...."

Scott darkly hints of an enemy within: "That Cary Nelson, an AAUP vice president and candidate for the presidency has jumped on their [anti-conference] bandwagon is, to say the least, distressing. He... failed to talk to those of us directly involved in the conference, and he repeats innuendoes circulated by the lobbyists and the *NY Sun* that have no basis in fact. His comments—based not on careful inquiry, but on polemic—violate AAUP procedure and harm the reputation of AAUP" (*Inside Higher Education*, 21 March 2006).

Nelson has since been elected the AAUP's national president. Good luck with your new responsibilities, President Nelson!

### Where's the Money?

The high jinks of the National AAUP in relation to the aborted conference are not the only example of inept leadership in the national office. A second issue of concern is the national organization's failure to provide—as the law requires—accurate and timely reports on key matters of internal governance.

These failures were highlighted at the recent annual meeting of the national AAUP in June, 2006, where the staff could not produce an accurate membership count. One claim is that the organization has 44,000 members, but when it came to redistricting the National Council and apportioning votes to this governing body of the AAUP, only 39,000 members were accounted for. This is no small matter, since regulations enforced by the U.S. Department of Labor require that these membership counts be accurate—otherwise, the apportionment of votes is potentially subject to manipulation.

con't on page 4

# DeVos and Amway: Michigan or China?

Steve Babson, Editor

Dick DeVos, the Republican candidate for Governor, says he would bring his jobs-first agenda to Lansing if he defeats Jennifer Granholm in the fall election. As past President of Amway, DeVos invested hundreds of millions of dollars in factories and stores in China, but his supporters claim that this actually creates jobs in Michigan.

Democrats, in contrast, charge that DeVos cut jobs in Michigan between 1998 and 2000, the very years Amway was rapidly growing in China.

Which claim is closer to the truth? The answer is important to students and employees at WSU as Michigan struggles with high levels of unemployment that drain public resources available for higher education.

## Spinning Free Trade

"DeVos's China venture isn't something he needs to defend," says *Detroit News* columnist Nolan Finley (2 April 2006). "It's something to brag about."

Finley's argument is a staple of the Free Trade mantra. Amway's Chinese factory in Guangzhou, opened in 1995 and expanding ever since, employs 3,300 workers making the full line of products sold in China, but we are told that none of the factory's output is *currently* exported to the United States. Indeed, Finley tells us, Amway's \$2 billion in Chinese sales actually creates employment at the company's headquarters in Ada, Michigan, for 300 white-collar workers in research and design, engineering, accounting, and legal services.

"DeVos has proven he understands the economic dynamics of the 21st century," says Finley. "He has faced first hand the challenges of the global economy and succeeded."

## Success for Whom?

There is no doubt DeVos has "succeeded": he is a very rich man, and Amway's China venture is very profitable. But does the success of Amway China really provide a model for Michigan?

Not if one considers the reasons why China appeals to U.S. corporations. The China market is huge and growing rapidly, true. But much of this growth is based on production-for-export by companies paying

rock-bottom wages that hover between 25 and 50 cents an hour. China's authoritarian, single-party government *enforces* these low wages by outlawing independent unions, prohibiting strikes, and violently suppressing political dissent. This is not an appealing model for Michigan.

Amway says it does not *export* from China and its sales in that market create white-collar jobs in Michigan. How long will this be true?

Not long, if we honestly evaluate the dynamics of overseas investment. Typically, companies begin by investing in low-wage manufacturing—as Amway has—then gradually build capacity in their low-cost production centers, and then gradually transfer low-end technical and engineering jobs to the foreign subsidiary. And why not? White-collar salaries are low in Mexico and lower still in China.

In fact, Amway has already quietly announced that it is planning to build a Research and Design center in Shanghai (*China Chemical Reporter*, 26 July 2004).

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con't on page 4

**“Fiasco at the AAUP”  
con't from page 2**

Beyond this, the finances of the organization are in such chaos that no verifiable financial report was given to the annual business meeting. Subsequently, the AAUP's chief financial officer was dismissed for this glaring oversight. (Why stop there, you ask?)

In response to this latter problem, the WSU AAUP-AFT Executive Board has authorized the withholding of dues payments to the national AAUP until our union is provided with an audited financial statement showing how our members' dues money is spent.

We take no pleasure in this action, nor in the airing of dirty laundry that this crisis requires. But we see no other way to bring pressure on the national organization to provide at least the bare minimum of competent administration.

As I said, it's a dog's breakfast at the national AAUP...

**DeVos and Amway: Michigan or China?  
con't from page 3**

For Amway's blue-collar workers, the near future is also problematic. While DeVos would have us believe that Amway will never export from China, that isn't what the company's executives are telling their Chinese hosts. As reported in the on-line English-language edition of the *People's Daily*, Amway Vice President Gan Chee Eng has said that “China's WTO entry is definitely favorable for his company's business development, and that his company is evaluating the possibility to make China Amway's only production base in the world” (“China, A Rising ‘Global Factory’”, 2 November 2001).

Contrary to Finley's claim, “the economic dynamics of the 21st century” are politically driven, defined by trade laws, foreign policy, labor legislation, and the contending claims of those who are helped or hurt by unfettered corporate globe trotting. In other words, “economic dynamics” are shaped in large part by who we elect to office.

We need a Governor who positions Michigan in the global economy by investing in education, training, infrastructure, the environment, and a social safety net that protects the quality of life in our community. These are the fundamentals of creating good jobs *here*.

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