

AFT PEACE AND JUSTICE CAUCUS

October 2006 Newsletter

Our website is up and running at www.aftpeaceandjusticecaucus.org. Mail suggestions for links, calendar items, updates, resources etc. to webmaster@aftpeaceandjusticecaucus.org

URGENT: SUPPORT OAXACA TEACHERS, ACTIVISTS AFTER FRIDAY NIGHT ATTACK BY PARAMILITARY FORCES

After Oaxaca teachers voted last week to end their six-month strike, plainclothes police and PRIistas opened machine-gun fire on Friday night, October 27, on the barricades in downtown Oaxaca City. At least four were killed and 23 or more seriously wounded. At almost the same time, riot police attacked an encampment of teachers and supporters in Mexico City, and dozens more were arrested or disappeared in Santa Maria Coyotepec and Oaxaca City. On Sunday evening October 29, thousands of Mexican Federal troops stormed and occupied the center of Oaxaca City. Many teachers and other activists are still in serious condition, arrested, or “disappeared.” Support rallies took place over the weekend at Mexican consulates in San Diego, Los Angeles, and elsewhere. More are planned for this week. Please attend one in your area, and if you don’t know of anything, plan one yourself.

LOS ANGELES: Rallies, vigils and press conferences at the Mexican Consulate (6th & Park View, NW corner of Macarthur Park) MONDAY OCT. 30 (noon and 4 p.m.), TUESDAY and WEDNESDAY (5 p.m.), THURSDAY NOVEMBER 2 (all day, to 9 p.m..)

AFT resolution “Support of Striking Teachers Attacked by Police in Oaxaca, Mexico (July 2006) see www.aft.org/about/resolutions/2006/MexicoTeachers.htm (reprinted below)

AFT PEACE & JUSTICE CAUCUS CONTINUATIONS COMMITTEE REPORT

A conference call was held on Thursday October 12, 2006. Participants: Andy Griggs, Nancy Romer, Bonnie Blustein, Bill Friedheim

This report of that call includes:

1. Financial report
 2. Proposed mission and structure of continuations committee
 3. Proposals and questions for e-communication
 4. Input needed
 5. Revised convention report, approved by interim officers
1. **FINANCIAL REPORT** (as of August 31, 2006). – from Andy Griggs

AFT expenses and commitments to date (8/31/06):

Kozol hotel:	302.75
AV meeting costs -	288.75
Catering costs -	1023.76
Convention table -	427.50
Printing at convention ~	924.60
Buttons	518
Electricity	119
Books 96 x \$15	1512
Andy Convention expenses	195.10
Face to Face payments	315
Education Action Fund Donation	300
Banking Expenses	51.25
Computer costs (convention)	10.66
TOTAL	5988.37
Income -	
Sales, Donations, Memberships	7244.00
TOTAL CASH ON HAND	1255.63

2. PROPOSED MISSION AND STRUCTURE OF CONTINUATIONS COMMITTEE

This is a PROPOSAL to the caucus membership. We invite and welcome comments, questions, and suggestions. There are some questions on which we NEED your input. Please respond by November 15 to Blustein@earthlink.net. If we don't hear from you by then, we'll assume that you are okay with the proposal.

Mission

- Maintain communication with and among Caucus members until July 2008, when the Caucus will reconvene at the AFT Convention in Chicago.
- Revisit the (provisional) bylaws that established the Caucus and propose any amendments that would create, clarify or improve an ongoing structure and decision-making process.
- Initiate policy discussions within the caucus on issues as they arise; create a process through which the Caucus can make decisions in the interim period before the 2008 AFT convention.
- Maintain financial and membership records and create a budget for the period extending through July 2008.

Composition:

- **All members of the Caucus are hereby invited to participate in the Continuations Committee.** Please let Andy Griggs (lauslaw1@aol.com) know if you wish to do so, and how you might want to help.
- Those Caucus members who already volunteered, at the convention, to serve on Continuations or to serve as local/regional contacts will receive an additional e-mail message following up on the roles they are willing to play.
- We are hopeful that the Continuations Committee will represent the various diversities within the caucus, including but not limited to geography,

demography, and type of work (i.e., K-12, Higher Ed, Classified, etc).

Structure/Meetings

- Periodic telephone conference calls
- Should there be a “continuations” listserv? (NOT the same as a general-discussion listserv – see below on that)
- Face-to-face meetings when feasible – for example, at the US-LAW conference in Cleveland in December. Please come if you can! Let Andy know if you can attend. We'll try to arrange hotel room-shares to cut down the expense.

3. PROPOSALS AND QUESTIONS RE: E-COMMUNICATION

Website

- Bill Friedheim (webmaster@aftpeaceandjusticecaucus.org) has set up and will maintain the website at www.peaceandjusticecaucus.org. If you have ideas or suggestions, or if you'd like to help, please contact him.
- The cost of setting up the site and maintaining it for two years is \$166.80. This seems to be a good use of our funds.
- This is a public website. It includes:
 - “Who we are” – including the revised convention report (see below)
 - An archive of e-newsletters
 - Links – to Educators to Stop the War, Students and Educators to Stop the War, BASE to Stop the War, US Labor Against the War, and others. We need suggestions on others.
 - Soon there will be an on-line membership/payment form. PayPal is a possibility but we

- are looking at alternatives. Bill will find out from Michael Eisenacher what USLAW uses.
- Local/regional contacts will be set up shortly, using e-mail addresses that will come with the website, so as not to give out personal emails on a public site.
- A “take action” page, perhaps structured to facilitate letters-to-the-editor of AFT publications.

e-Newsletter

- Bonnie (Blustein@earthlink.net) offered to put this together if others send her material, but has since learned that a group in PSC is ready to do this. Mainly this would be short reports on what is being done locally around the issues we acted on at the convention. It could also include requests for individual action to support local issues. Each newsletter would include a membership form.
- This would be sent to members via the “announcement list” that Doug Ferrari has established. It would be posted on the website. Recipients could download and print copies of the newsletter for local distribution, or forward it electronically.
- Frequency? About once a month – assuming there is material! – with the possibility of a second “announcement” message in the interim if an urgent matter arises.
- If someone wants to design a logo, that would be cool and we could use it for the website – or we can use the button design from the convention.

Discussion ListServ

This would be separate from the announcement list, and separate from the “Continuations” listserv which would be confined to “continuations business.”. Caucus members could choose whether or not to subscribe. Do we want one? Or are people already overloaded with listservs?

4. INPUT NEEDED - SILENCE WILL BE TAKEN AS CONSENT! PLEASE RESPOND TO Blustein@earthlink.net by November 15, 2006

- Are you willing to serve on Continuations, and if so, how?
 - Local/regional contact? (Specify area)
 - Participate in conference calls and/or “business” listserv?
 - Attend meeting at USLAW conference in Cleveland in December?
 - Work on website
 - Work on newsletter
 - Work on bylaws
 - Other
- What should (or should not) be on the website – and what “links” would you suggest?
- Would you want to participate in a discussion list-serv?
- What other comments or suggestions do you have?

What are you doing locally on issues relating to the Peace and Justice Caucus?

AFT RESOLUTION, JULY 2006

Support of Striking Teachers Attacked by Police in Oaxaca, Mexico

WHEREAS, Local 22 of the Mexican National Education Workers Union (SNTE)—representing teachers in Oaxaca, Mexico—is on a protracted strike, and, in the best traditions of teacher unionism, is demanding not only decent wages but also adequate funding for schools and stipends to allow the poorest students to attend school; and

WHEREAS, after the Oaxaca state governor, Ulises Ruíz Ortíz, blocked negotiations, the teachers on May 22, 2006, began an occupation of a massive tent city in the main square of Oaxaca; and

WHEREAS, on June 2, 2006, more than 100,000 people marched in Oaxaca to show their support for the teachers' struggle; and

WHEREAS, at dawn on Wednesday, June 14, 2006, state police brutally attacked the teachers' camp for four hours, launching tear gas grenades from a helicopter, and leaving nearly 100 strikers injured, some of them severely:

RESOLVED, that the AFT:

condemn the state police attack on our striking brother and sister teachers in Oaxaca;

join the growing international condemnation of the use of state violence to break a teachers' union;

support the demands of Local 22 of the SNTE for fair salaries and funds for adequate buildings and supplies, and for student stipends for the poor;

express solidarity with their courage and organization in winning such wide public support of their struggle and defending their encampment;

ask the AFT Executive Council to consider contributing funds to replace the teachers' radio equipment—a vital part of their communication with the public—which was destroyed by the police; and be it further

RESOLVED, that AFT call on the Oaxaca governor and the Mexican president to end all police attacks on the teachers immediately, return to negotiations, and meet the teachers' just demands.

(2006)

US LABOR AGAINST THE WAR

Assembly & National Labor Conference Against the Iraq War

Cleveland, Ohio * December 1-3, 2006

Downloadable flyers, registration forms, and more at

<http://uslaboragainstar.org/>

AFT Peace & Justice Caucus Convention Report 2006 (revised 10/12/06)

BACKGROUND:

The AFT Peace & Justice committee was organized in May-June 2006 to build on the success of the anti-war work done at the 2004 AFT convention. Andy Griggs (UTLA, AFT 1021) did most of the paperwork (including a bank account, tax ID number, and provisional by-laws as well as the AFT paperwork) and is Interim President. Nancy Romer (PSC) is Interim Vice-President, and Bonnie Blustein (AFT 1521) is Interim Secretary-Treasurer. About a dozen folks were involved in preliminary phone calls and e-mail exchanges to do the advance planning for the convention.

IN BOSTON:

ORGANIZATION

We maintained and staffed a P&J Caucus table in a good location in the exhibit area, distributing materials, signing up members, talking to delegates.

We distributed thousands of leaflets against the Iraq war and thousands more on the immigration issue, plus thousands more invitations to specific events.

We surpassed our goal of 100 members, reaching 135 paid-up caucus members from Boston, New York, Connecticut, Philadelphia, Austin, St. Louis, Michigan, Wisconsin, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and elsewhere.

Financially, we did a little better than "break-even."

Official caucus business meetings were held every day Wednesday-Saturday, with an informal meeting at the table on Sunday. They were attended by 20-60 people.

EVENTS

- An amazing Thursday evening forum with members of Military Families Speak Out and Iraq Veterans Against the War had an audience of about 80, with inspirational speeches and an excellent discussion. This event helped to frame our anti-war work on the convention floor.
- The Caucus "adopted" a Saturday morning forum on the Middle East, organized by a caucus member from Connecticut, in which speakers provided some background on the crisis in Lebanon and shared moving stories that highlighted the need to struggle against anti-Arab racism within the US. About 75 attended, and again there was good discussion.
- Close to 400 delegates attended a P&J Saturday lunchtime event featuring Jonathan Kozol, who also signed books. Unfortunately, the formal presentation ran overtime, leaving no time for discussion.

ISSUES

On the Iraq War: A strong P&J contingent attended the International Committee meeting and were able to get some good language into Resolution #31, which had the support of the AFT leadership. For example, they inserted language stating that the AFT "opposes the war in Iraq." Initially the Caucus decided to push a little harder on the floor in an attempt to insert language calling for an immediate start to withdrawal of troops, and leaflets were produced to this effect ("support 31 with this amendment"). However, at a subsequent Caucus meeting, a majority of those present felt it was unwise to risk antagonizing the leadership which might then turn against the resolution

altogether, so the leaflets were not distributed and no amendment was proposed from the floor. For similar reasons, P&J did not organize a demonstration. #31 passed, and the question now is how this can be used locally to mobilize AFT members into anti-war action. Earlier, we had lost the vote on affiliation with USLAW, but not without a fight. Many of our locals are already affiliated, and more should try to do so.

Comment: Important differences in perspective emerged within the Caucus in discussions of strategy and tactics around the Iraq resolutions. For example: Will P&J grow mainly by distinguishing itself from the AFT/UFT leadership, or by finding common ground with them? These discussions were friendly and healthy. We saw how we could have such discussions of long-term disagreements and yet agree on a short-term course of action, even though not everyone was happy with it, and not everyone was willing to carry it out. It was emphasized that we do NOT expect all our members to "vote as a block" or consider themselves bound by Caucus decisions. We are organized as an "issues" caucus, not as an "electoral" caucus.

On Israel/Lebanon: The UFT/AFT leadership introduced a "special order" that, in essence, supported Israel's attack on Lebanon. A P&J Caucus member introduced a substitute motion that, in essence, called on all parties for a cease-fire. The floor debate over this issue gave thousands of AFTers a lot to think about. P&Jers explained the context and the history of the immediate crisis, and urged the AFT not to "take sides" in the first weeks of what could turn into a major war. UFT speakers relied to a large extent on racist stereotypes and inflammatory language about "terrorism." The voice votes on the substitute motion and then on the main motion were too close to call, and the original motion was passed by a show of hands with about 1000 AFTers voting against the "special order."

Comment: This floor fight highlighted that we can make a real difference by getting involved in a principled way. Some delegates joined the caucus specifically because of what we did on this issue.

On China: The AFT Executive Council sponsored a resolution condemning the violation of human and labor rights in Chinese workplaces. In a quite stunning turn of events, the resolution was defeated (narrowly) in committee, with several members of the Peace and Justice caucus speaking eloquently against it.

Comment: The problem with the Executive Council's resolution was not so much what it said, but what it omitted. The Chinese government has a dreadful record on human and workplace rights, but it works hand in glove with U.S. and other major global corporations (e.g. Wal-Mart) to super-exploit its labor force. The Executive Council resolution was absolutely silent on the complicity of these corporations and the U.S. government, the WTO, the IMF and World Bank in promoting trade and investment agreements that are to the great advantage of global capital and to the great detriment of labor. Chinese workers get slave-labor wages; American workers (and others) see their jobs disappear. A special guest speaker at the plenary, a Chinese labor organizer, presented dramatic evidence of the rise of state capitalism in China - and its devastating impact on Chinese workers.

When the International Relations Committee reported its "non-concurrence" vote on the resolution to the plenary, a member of the Executive Council moved to reverse the decision and called for "concurrence." Several P and J members proposed an amendment, adding new language to the original resolution that (1) identified the complicity of the U.S. corporations and the U.S. government in the violation of human and workplace rights in China and (2) identified China as a capitalist nation. In the course of a heated debate, it was said that the amendment "struck out the lines promoting democracy" when in fact the amendment proposed no strike-outs at all. A delegate had to take the mike to point out that the strike-out displayed on the screen was incorrect. The voice vote on the amendment was close, but it failed and the original resolution carried on shows of hands with many delegates apparently not voting.

On Immigration: Several Caucus members played a major role in committee discussion of the two immigration resolutions. One got an amendment for “full legalization and citizenship for all undocumented workers” added onto the AFT-leadership resolution (#1) for AFT to endorse the AFL-CIO position. Another helped to ensure that the California Federation of Teachers resolution (#2) to “oppose exploitative immigration reform” would be considered after the Progressive Caucus had decided to oppose it. On the convention floor, it was announced that the amendment already printed as part of #1 was “a mistake” and that it had not actually been approved by the committee! A P&J motion from the floor to amend was defeated and the resolution passed without it. #2 was referred to the Executive Council along with a large amount of unfinished business when the convention was abruptly ended at 1 p.m. Sunday after the vote on the China resolution.

Comment: Unfortunately the Caucus did not have time for a thorough discussion of this issue, on which there was apparently a great deal of disagreement and possibly misunderstanding within the Caucus. Related issues arose here. Many P&J delegates from California saw #1 and #2 as contradictory, since the AFL-CIO basically supports the Senate “comprehensive immigration reform” bill, which contains several provisions that the CFT resolution specifically opposed. Most other P&J delegates supported both #1 (as amended in committee, or even without the amendment) and #2. Few realized that the amendment to #1 itself contradicted the body of the resolution.

On Racism: The P&J Caucus endorsed resolutions calling on the AFT to join the defense of the “Brown” decision and school integration, and helped to amend them so that they passed easily. But we dropped the ball on Katrina. Nobody submitted a resolution on how the AFT should more vigorously address the continuing New Orleans crisis - including the privatization of the public schools and the plan to change the complexion of the city— and some P&Jers felt strongly that this had been a mistake. A few P&Jers from UFT (non-delegates) belatedly drafted a resolution, but it was not possible to move on this at the convention.

On the Oaxaca Teachers’ Struggle: The P&J Caucus supported a special order brought forth by the Professional Staff Congress for the AFT to provide material support to the Oaxaca teachers, specifically to help rebuild their radio station. This Special Order was passed overwhelmingly by the plenary with little discussion.

MOVING FORWARD FROM BOSTON:

- There was general enthusiasm for making P&J an “ongoing issues caucus.” Members were invited to “take it and run with it” - recruit more members in their locals, organize activities, and we’ll be in contact. This could happen in NYC, western NY, LA, SF, Chi-area, St Louis, Philly, Austin, CT, NJ., MI and possibly elsewhere.
- Meanwhile we will set up an announcement e-list and a discussion e-list and start talking about a newsletter, website, and continuations committee.
- We agreed that ANY AFT member (not just delegates) can join the P&J Caucus and be active. Non-delegates did lots of important work at the convention. You don’t have to be a delegate to staff the table, write and distribute leaflets, contribute to Caucus discussions, engage other delegates in conversation, liaison with other caucuses, committees and delegations, etc.
- For Chicago 2008, we should start working early to bring more friends from our locals as delegates where possible, and as “visitors.”

Report approved by the AFT Peace & Justice Caucus Interim Leadership team:
Bonnie Blustein, Bill Friedheim, Andy Griggs, Nancy Romer

AFT PEACE AND JUSTICE CAUCUS

Membership Application (Please print)

Date: _____

Name _____

AFT Name and Local # _____

Address: _____ City: _____

State: ____ Zip: _____

email _____ Cell: _____

Home Phone: _____

Teacher ____ Higher Ed ____ PSRP ____ Public Employee ____
Healthcare ____ Retired ____

Annual Dues: _____ Membership Category ____ renewal ____ new
____ \$ 50 Donor member
____ \$ 25 General
____ \$ 25 associate (non-AFT member)
____ \$ 10 student/retired/part-time teacher

(Make checks payable to: **AFT P & J CAUCUS**)

I want to help build the **AFT Peace and Justice Caucus** by:

- ____ A. Serving as a Caucus contact person for my state/region
- ____ B. Working the Peace and Justice Table at the Conventions and Conferences
- ____ C. Working on a Peace and Justice Newsletter
- ____ D. (other) _____

Please mail to:

AFT PEACE and JUSTICE CAUCUS, 2002 21st St. Apt C, Santa Monica, CA 90404

and keep a copy as your receipt/proof of membership