

Illinois Academe

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National News

Dear Secretary Paige:

You have admitted that you referred to the National Education Association, an organization dedicated to furthering the cause of education in the United States, as a “terrorist organization.” Your words were, at best, intemperate and, at worst, malicious. Such disregard for appropriate language demeans both your office and civil discourse. The flimsy simulacrum of an apology that you gave to the NEA membership, but from which you pointedly excluded the national leadership, is insufficient and fails to repair the damage you have inflicted on educators and their profession.

Sincerely,

Jane Buck, Ph.D., President, AAUP

February 24, 2003

Rod Paige’s response:

“The comments I received reflect a variety of reactions to what I said. I appreciate the support offered by some and the criticism offered by others. Both reflect the discourse that is a part of democracy, a discourse we are fortunate enough to learn about as a part of our education. As I have already indicated, my choice of words was inappropriate and I have apologized for the comments. We may disagree on the stands NEA’s leadership has taken, but I believe we share a belief in the importance of our nation’s teachers and the value of what they do every day. They are the soldiers of our democracy, and I am thankful for their efforts.”

AAUP Protests OFAC’s Action Barring U.S. Scholars from International Conference
On Friday March 12, 2004, AAUP general secretary Mary Burgan wrote to Richard Newcomb, director of the Office of Foreign Assets Control in the U.S. Treasury Department, objecting to the reported action of his office barring U.S. scholars from traveling to Cuba to participate in an international conference on brain injury.

“This Association has long held that the free circulation of scholars is an inseparable part of academic freedom,” Burgan wrote. She further urged that OFAC, together with the Department of State, facilitate the travel of U.S. scholars to academic conferences in Cuba, because “the unfettered search for knowledge is indispensable for the strengthening of a free and orderly world.”

Crue v. Aiken (University of Illinois-Urbana-Champaign):

This case involves a challenge by faculty and students at the University of Illinois to the administration’s policy prohibiting them from communicating with prospective student athletes. The faculty and students oppose the school’s use of the Chief Illiniwek mascot,

and they wish to contact prospective student athletes to make them aware of this controversy.

The district court ruled in favor of the faculty and students, finding that the administration's directive violated the First Amendment.

In October 2003 the national AAUP and University of Illinois-Urbana-Champaign AAUP Chapter filed a joint amicus brief in support of the faculty's right to speak to prospective student athletes about the mascot.

The brief, which was written by Professor Matthew Finkin (University of Illinois, College of Law), focuses on the protections afforded to professors to speak out as citizens. In addition, the brief argues that the First Amendment rights of faculty outweigh the administration's interests.

A copy of the brief is available at www.aaup.org.

Education for Democracy Network News, March 1, 2004

In the not too distant future, the US Senate will vote on reauthorizing the Higher Education Act (HEA), which provides significant funding for colleges and universities. The Act needs to be reauthorized, but without the political policing and inquisitorial International Advisory Board, which the House slipped into its version of the legislation (HR 3077). The Board, its functions, and its mandate represent a clear and present danger to academic freedom, civil liberties, and the integrity of education.

In October 2003 the House passed HR 3077, a bill reauthorizing Title VI, the International Studies component of HEA. The idea of the International Advisory Board was developed by right-wing think tanks. Despite its harmless sounding name, the Board is a centralized, federal, political police agency, with at least two reserved slots (as the legislation states) for "Federal agencies that have national security responsibilities" (e.g. Homeland Security, Defense Department, CIA, FBI, etc.). Since "national security" is the stated main purpose of the Act, these agencies will dominate the Board. The Board is given broad powers to enforce right-wing ideology in the curriculum and in research, to place academia under surveillance, to regiment thought, and to purge dissenters, all under the pretext of "national security."

Among the many kinds of actions the Board is mandated to take, it can target as "security risks" students, faculty, programs, or area studies centers that dissent from US foreign policy and refuse to fund them on political grounds. It can hold public hearings to denounce dissenters as "anti-American," like the House subcommittee hearing on HR 3077 in June 2003, which featured a crude assault on Edward Said and post-colonial theory as "unpatriotic." In the name of a specious "broad range of views," the Board can also impose a political test on academic employment, requiring the hiring of new faculty (e.g. operatives from right-wing think tanks) irrespective of professional qualifications and in violation of standard faculty hiring procedures.

Well before the vote, the Senate must hear the voices of thousands of teachers, students, and citizens concerned with the future of higher education, academic freedom, and civil liberties.

For detailed background information and an analysis of HR 3077, go to <http://iml.umkc.edu/aaup/facadv13.htm>; in the table of contents click on “HR 3077—the Education for Empire Act,” by David Brodsky.