

LOCAL 1796
At
William Paterson University of New Jersey
General and Executive/Local Council Meeting

Date: February 18, 2010
Location: UC 171
Time: 12:30 pm – 1:45 pm

Present: S. Tardi, C. Williams, G. Guerrieri, J. Pinkston, E. Matthews, S. Selke, F. Pavese, R. Wolk, L. Mbogoni, G. Pope, M. Williams, K. Martin, G. Gerardi, K. Martus, B. Kollia, J. Najarian, S. Wollock, R. Rimmer, R. Soto, R. Pardi, L. Gazzillo Diaz, D. Koistinen, E. Martinez, S. Betts, D. Fengya, K. Louie, A. Montare, D. Hill, G. Furst, B. Jones, A. Holpp Scala, J. Matthew, S. Karibi-Whyte, R. Martinez, C. Simon, D. Potacco, E. Antoniou, E. Goldstein, B. Diamond, G. Overdorf, K. Makarec, B. Pakizegi, S. Sabatino, A. Rady, R. Cauthen, L. Fornarotto, T. Vandergast, J. Austin, M. Rosar, D. Nacin, J. Hutchinson, M. Arteaga, S. Rienstra, J. Heavey, R. Schwartz, A. Schaefer, L. Hamel

Items distributed to the Council and General Membership:

- 1) December 15, 2010 General and Executive/Local Council Meeting Minutes
- 2) Slate of Candidates AFT 1796 Executive Board

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 12:35 pm.

2. Adoption of the Agenda

A adopt the agenda was made by K. Martus and seconded by A. Montare. Approved unanimously.

3. Approval of Minutes of the December 15, 2010 General Membership and Executive/Local Council Meeting. A motion to accept the minutes was made by A. Montare and seconded by K. Martus. Approved unanimously.

4. Announcements

Tardi called attention to the Executive Board slate of candidates for 2010-2012 in the packet, and noted that anyone who is interested in running for an Executive Board position is welcome to self-nominate or ask someone to nominate them. Run-off elections will be held if necessary. Tardi further noted that the Executive Board is going through a restructuring due to the fact that Guerrieri is unable to commit to her duties as V.P. of Negotiations during master contract negotiations in 2011. Tardi stated that Donna Fengya has been brought on board as an assistant V.P. of Negotiations at no additional cost to the Membership. She will be trained by Guerrieri and will be totally prepared for her new role by the time negotiations begin.

5. Action Items

a. Legacy Dinner

Tardi stated that the Executive Board voted to send her and a guest to the Legacy Dinner on April 16. Tardi noted that this year's event is in honor of President Speert, and she feels that it is appropriate and important to have Union representation at this event.

A motion to pay for two tickets (\$400) to the Legacy Dinner was made by K. Martus and seconded by J. Najarian. Approved unanimously.

b. AFT New Jersey

Tardi stated that the AFT State Council Leadership is proposing that the nine State locals join an affiliate group which is an expanded AFT New Jersey. The current expanded AFT New Jersey includes pre-K through grade 12 teachers, Rutgers, and community colleges. Tardi explained that the nurse's union was invited to join and originally agreed to join, but have since declined because they feel they are strong enough on their own. Tardi noted that the State Council has provided all locals with a list of the pros and cons, and she is suspicious of the document because several items are listed on the "pros" side, with only a few "cons." She said one major red flag is that according to Nick Yovnello, President CNJSCL, the State Council reserves will be depleted by 60%. Tardi stated that the major benefit of affiliating with this group is that our numbers will be larger and that might translate to more power when it comes to lobbying and applying pressure to legislators. Tardi pointed out, however, that larger numbers might not translate into greater power if the various groups do not share the same goals.

Tardi stated another major issue is that our dues will eventually increase. Although AFT National will absorb a percentage of the increase and the Council will absorb a portion of the increase for the next four years (with a possibility of some increase in earlier years), there will be a minimum increase of \$6.00 per member after four years. Tardi and Ed Matthews explained that AFT New Jersey has a \$1,000,000 budget that goes primarily toward administrative costs, such as the salaries for an organizer and a researcher.

Tardi said that when Council representatives proposed the idea of joining AFT New Jersey during a State Council meeting, our Local took the position that each member of the Council should have a vote to determine whether or not to affiliate. Tardi further noted that the leadership of some locals make decisions for their members, but that our Local does not operate that way. She asked our Local's attorney to investigate if the Council can move forward on this without asking each member. Tardi noted that if the Council decides to move forward with this, our Local might not have a say in the matter. She further noted that the Leadership of our Local fights for the Membership even though voices are not always heard. Members questioned the degree of support provided by the State Council to William Paterson specifically and Unionism in general. Tardi noted that she is already investigating (along with the Union attorney), the possibility of breaking away from the State Council. She noted that there is a small window of

opportunity to break away from the Council prior to the next contract negotiations, and she wants to get all the details so our Membership can make an informed decision.

A member stated that she is weary of joining with NJEA. Another member clarified that this affiliation would not be with NJEA but would be with Pre-K through 12 AFT. Tardi noted that we do not share the same goals as the Pre-K through 12 AFT and that is why we rarely participate in AFT National meetings.

Tardi said that while negotiating the last contract, the Unions opened up Pandora's Box by agreeing to pay in 1.5% for health benefits. Tardi noted that our Local objected to this. It is likely that in the next contract, that figure will be increased to a minimum of 3% and possibly even up to 5%. Tardi noted that the State has proposed a third tier system which means that members who come on board are not assured the same rights and benefits as present members. Tardi said that since new hires get higher salaries, and are told up front about the cost of pension and health benefits, she favors this plan over the alternative, which is to require current members to pay more.

Questions and comments from members

A member asked if there is a possibility that the State Council's affiliation with AFT New Jersey will eventually lead to the dissolution of the AFT State Council. Tardi said the AFT New Jersey organizers promised no modification to our Council. She noted, however, that Christie is threatening to require us to negotiate on a local level only, and if that happens, she sees no need for a State Council. A member stated that pre-K through 12 teachers are the likely target of the Governor, and it seems that if we join together with them, we are putting ourselves in the bull's-eye as well. Tardi agreed, and added that in our contract, we are already paying toward our health benefits, however, pre-K through 12 teachers and other municipal workers are not. The Governor is threatening to detenure K-12 teachers and take away their pensions and other benefits. Tardi said she is waiting for the "shoe to drop," and the Governor to declare a salary freeze for our bargaining unit. She noted that the State Council negotiated a poor, end-loaded contract. Tardi further noted that Christie now has the opportunity to look at the MOA and claim that he inherited the problems and the State does not have the funds to fulfill obligations that were made under the previous administration. A member expressed concern that if salaries and other benefits are decreased, the University will have difficulty attracting quality individuals.

Tardi said she is concerned about a reduction of health and pension benefits for our unit. She said that Christie can easily sell his plan to reduce our benefits by stating the amounts of our salaries and benefits, and then pointing out that workers in the private sector do not get those kinds of salaries and benefits, yet State workers get them. Tardi noted that the general public does not look at what we do, but rather at what we get; there is little to no public support for educators.

Williams stated that he fears most people are scared and want to link up with

others because numbers represent power. He stated that he would like for us to be perceived as being different because we have a unique mission in the State. Williams further stated that rather than always saying that New Jersey outsources talented students, people should be reminded that we are a great State that attracts wonderful students.

A member asked where the pronouncements of the new Governor can be found. Tardi responded that Christie is quoted in the newspapers and on the Council website. Tardi stated that our Local's Executive Board is not comfortable with the manner in which the Council is pushing AFT New Jersey, and members fear that it was a "done deal" from the beginning. Tardi said she is leery because the nurses had originally planned to join, but opted out, and she also fears that we will be overwhelmed by Rutgers because we do not share the same goals. Tardi noted that she believes every member of each local has the right to vote on this issue, but recognizes that we cannot make the other locals in the Council require a vote by all members. Williams noted that it is upsetting that the Council wants to avoid permitting every AFT member to vote on this issue.

A member stated that he is concerned that our voices are not being heard, and would like more information about the mechanism to break away from the State Council. Tardi mentioned that some time ago when she looked into breaking away from the State Council, the Executive Board at the time disagreed because the members felt the move was anti-Union and were concerned that individuals in our Local would object. Tardi said another concern is that the President of the University may have to approve the action, and none of the three candidates being considered for president have experience with bargaining units. She further noted that Public Employees Relations Commission (PERC) approval may also be required.

E. Martinez made a motion to bring the question of whether or not the members of our Local support our Council becoming affiliated with AFT New Jersey to a local referendum if our attorney states that we cannot force a Council-wide referendum. The motion was seconded by A. Montare and approved unanimously.

M. Martin made a motion for the Union Leadership to send a list of the Pros/Cons regarding our Local's affiliation with AFT New Jersey to the Membership, as well as a recommendation from the Executive Board about whether or not to affiliate with AFT New Jersey. K. Martus seconded the motion and it was approved unanimously.

Tardi told the department representatives to discuss this matter with their colleagues. A member asked if participation in AFT New Jersey will place us in a more adversarial position as far as the Governor is concerned. Tardi responded that while we are in an adversarial position most of the time, she thinks the Governor will be extremely annoyed by the formation of an even bigger group

that opposes him. She stated that he will likely turn this around and claim that we are wasting money and time by forming even bigger Unions.

6. President's Report

a. Fiscal Crisis Update

Tardi stated that she has no information regarding what Christie plans to do regarding the MOA, but she will update the Membership as information becomes available. She noted that when the information does become available, it might require immediate action from the Membership in regard to contacting legislators or other lobbying efforts.

b. Mobilization Efforts

Tardi stated that at the last meeting, she asked the department representatives to discuss the possibility of a strike with their colleagues, and if there was interest, to get the names of possible strike captains. She noted that some people went back and announced that the Union wants to strike and that was not the case, but rather, the Union wants to know under what circumstances the Membership is willing to mobilize. A department representative said that some of her colleagues stated that the issues facing us are outrageous and the Union should strike, while others said the issues are outrageous, but we should think about it some more. Tardi said while the Union Leadership wants to avoid a strike, she still wants to know what it will take to get members to organize. Tardi said it is very discouraging that individuals on campus are not standing up for themselves, and gave an example that several people changed their furlough days in order to participate in the University Core Curriculum panels (GE committee). Tardi noted that despite all the furlough days, members are being asked to do more and more work and are seen as "stepping up to the plate." Tardi pointed out that this practice will not discourage the Administration from demanding more furlough days in the future. Tardi said she has only received four comments about the negative impact of the furlough, and this is not enough information to take before the Administration and the Board of Trustees to argue against future furloughs. She reminded the Membership to consider the furlough when choosing to participate in meetings, assessment, and advisement activities, rather than just saying yes and allowing the administration to pile on the work.

7. V.P. of Negotiations

The V.P. of Negotiations is currently working on a "Boatload" policy. By contract, faculty members are required teach 24 credits in an academic year. Tardi clarified that a boatload class is the equivalent of two sections of a course taught as one class. The Union Leadership would like to hear opinions on the minimum and the maximum number of students that should be recommended to constitute a boatload class and the coordinating compensation. Members were asked to email Guerrieri with suggestions and/or questions.

Questions arose regarding the new prescription plan (Medco). Tardi noted that members should contact Debra Davis, the staff representative at the Council as

she has been very successful at resolving issues regarding prescription coverage that individual members have not been able to resolve. The Membership will be provided with Ms. Davis' contact information by email.

10. Adjournment

A motion to adjourn was made by seconded by A. Montare and seconded by K. Martus. It was approved unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 1:46 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Jan Pinkston,
Recording Secretary
[Edited:]