



## NEWSBRIEFS

*Representing*  
**Wayne State University  
Faculty and Academic  
Staff**

**April 2012**

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# Michigan is Ground Zero

**Charles J. Parrish, AAUP-AFT President**

We live in a unique time, in a unique place. Michigan is the cradle of unionism. From the Flint sit-down strikes in 1936 and 1938 until today, unions have been an integral part of the social and political fabric of our state. In examining the history of unions in the United States, Richard B. Freeman and James L. Medoff<sup>1</sup>, point out that “unions reduce wage inequality, increase industrial democracy, and often raise productivity, while in the political sphere, unions are an important voice for some of our society’s weakest and most vulnerable groups, as well as for their own members.” When the unions say that they provided the foundation for the development of the middle class in Michigan, they are speaking the truth.

Today we are facing the real possibility that, in the future, the union movement in Michigan will be reduced to a largely powerless force, unable to represent its members effectively, unable to support policies to address the effects of poverty, and unable to fight for social justice for Michigan citizens as they have in the past and continue to do so today. Our system of education, from kindergarten to graduate school, has been supported by our socially progressive labor unions whose very existence is under attack. This is not an exaggeration. Republican radicals in both houses of our state legislature are determined

to turn Michigan into a “Right to Work” state in which unions are rendered powerless by a hostile government.

While Governor Rick Snyder has stated that he has no interest in passing a “Right to Work” bill, declaring it to be too divisive, he has not hesitated to sign whatever anti-collective bargaining law the legislature has seen fit to pass. Most recently, he signed a bill that outlaws the payroll deduction of union dues for K-

12 teachers, a measure that will, as intended, severely hobble teacher unions financially. Presently, there are over 80 anti-union bills that are making their way through the legislature.

(Go to <http://www.protectourjobs.com/> and click on “Bills”)

Right wingers across the country are salivating over the prospect of making Michigan a “Right to Work” state. They have just passed such legislation in Indiana and they see the battle

now is in Wisconsin, Ohio and Michigan. If they win here, a major blow will have been struck against the labor movement nationally. It is an open secret that important leaders of our Republican legislature are members of the Koch brothers-funded American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC). ALEC drafts legislation based on its very conservative agenda and distributes these “templates” to conservative legislators around the country. ALEC-model bills have been introduced in 20

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<sup>1</sup> *What Do Unions Do?* (1984)

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state legislatures, including the “Stand Your Ground” law that ALEC promoted in Florida and other states. That law is being invoked as a defense in the killing of teenager Trayvon Martin by George Zimmerman in Sanford, Florida. For information on ALEC see the Center for American Democracy’s web site: <http://www.prwatch.org/>

### **Lansing’s Radical Tax Agenda**

Governor Snyder has dramatically changed the tax revenue structure of the state government. He signed legislation that cut taxes drastically on Michigan businesses, shifting the burden of taxation to individual Michigan taxpayers. The recent report of the Michigan League for Human Services summarizes the result:

Michigan’s business taxes will be reduced by \$1.6 billion, while individual income taxes will increase by \$1.4 billion, when fully implemented. Fifty-one percent of all Michigan taxpayers will pay more in individual income taxes. The new tax changes cut business income tax revenues by 83 percent and will increase individual taxes by 23 percent. These tax changes make Michigan’s tax structure more regressive. Reforming the tax structure could have softened the blow of poverty and provided greater economic security for low-income people. What was implemented, however, does the exact opposite.

Michigan’s labor unions joined with other progressive forces to oppose this shift from having business pay its fair share of taxes and increasing the taxes on individuals.

### **Lansing’s Radical Education Funding Agenda**

There is an attack on higher education in the state that is being led by Tea Party radicals in the legislature. It begins by underfunding public education across-the-board, from kindergarten to higher education. The funding base of higher education has been systematically decimated for years. Our public

universities are operating at a level of funding equal to that of a decade ago. Our research universities have been especially hard hit. Last year the three research universities were accorded the lowest budget increases of all the 15 public universities in Michigan. The amount was 1.3%, with our university coming in at .9%, the lowest of all. The only variables that were included in the budget were four undergraduate variables, chosen to favor universities in Republican constituencies. (Grand Valley got 7%.)

In the latest formulation of next year’s state higher education budget, the underfunding continues. The budget recommendations of the Governor, the Michigan House and Senate differ slightly, but all have the same effect. The overall amount is small and it does not attempt to ameliorate the damage that the severe cuts have made over the past decade to our system of higher education. Further, all three of the budget recommendations put the three research universities at the bottom of the list in terms of funding increases. Michigan, Michigan State and Wayne State do almost all of the funded research from the National Institutes of Health and the National Science Foundation. They teach 55% of all Michigan undergraduates. Yet, the state’s research universities get an average recommendation from them of 1.7% for Michigan, 2% for Michigan State and, dragging up the rear, 1.1% for Wayne State. The overall, completely inadequate, increase for higher education is at the 3% level.

Douglas Rothwell, President and CEO of Business Leaders for Michigan, testified before the House and criticized the lack of recognition of the economic role of university research. He stated: “We believe excluding the impact universities have on the economy fails to recognize the role higher education plays and that we want it to play in today’s economy.” Most of this impact comes from the work done in the three research universities in the state. It is clear from the budget proposals that the legislature does not think that the Business Leaders of Michigan know what they are talking about.

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## **Union Files Charges Against Administration for Labor Law Violations**

In response to the Administration's failure to provide the Union with important financial information and other data, we have filed an Unfair Labor Practice (ULP) charge with the Michigan Employment Relations Commission (MERC). Under Michigan labor law, public employers are required to provide information relevant to the bargaining and administration of the collective bargaining agreement. Not doing so is considered a violation of the employer's legal duty to bargain in good faith.

The request for financial data was made jointly by the AAUP-AFT, the Graduate Employees Organizing Committee (GEOC) and the Union of Part-Time Faculty (UPTF) on November 10, 2011, asking for contracts with vendors in excess of \$20,000, as well as monthly financial reports, enrollment reports, revenue and expenditure reports, and budget data. All three academic unions are negotiating new contracts this year. The ULP also cites an October 20, 2011, joint information request regarding employees performing bargaining unit work without Union representation.

In a pre-hearing phone conference with the MERC Administrative Law Judge on March 14<sup>th</sup>, WSU Assistant General Counsel Linda Galante claimed that the lack of re-

sponse to the financial data was simply an "oversight" and she promised a response in one week. We subsequently received an official statement indicating that for much of the information requested, "There are no documents responsive to this request." Needless to say, the Union finds the Administration's response inadequate.

This ULP is the second of two pending charges against the Administration. Another ULP was filed March 5, 2011, after the School of Medicine (SOM) improperly disciplined a faculty member and denied him rights to Union Representation. SOM administrators claimed that this faculty member was disciplined as an employee of the University Physicians Group (UPG), which is nominally separate from the SOM and therefore, administrators claim, not subject to the terms of our Collective Bargaining Agreement. The Union supports the widely held belief of SOM faculty that UPG, a vehicle to collect and distribute funds generated by clinical faculty, is an extension of the School of Medicine. In our view, UPG is being used in shell-game fashion to deny faculty due process and to avoid transparency and accountability of finances.

After attempts by the Administration to dismiss the UPG case, hearings began on March 28, 2012. The ULP charge regarding refusal to provide information is scheduled for June 6, 2012.

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## **Lansing's Radical Higher Education Social Agenda**

The Michigan House of Representatives has introduced a law that prohibits a university from disciplining any student in counseling, social work or psychology who refuses to counsel a client when her religious beliefs dictate that she should not. The "Julea Ward" bill is named after an Eastern Michigan student who refused to counsel a client because he was gay.

When University of Michigan President Mary Sue Coleman recently testified before the House Appropriations Sub-Committee on Higher Education, conservatives castigated her for not providing information on the university's embryonic stem cell research in the manner they had demanded. Stem cell research is legal under a constitutional amendment passed by the voters of Michigan in 2008. But Tea Party Republicans still do not accept it as legitimate. "This isn't just stem cell research," Senator Patrick Colbeck (R-Canton) stated to the committee. "This is embryonic stem cell research and many of us believe this is taking a human life. I think all of us understand the importance of life." Susan Demas reported on this last year on her *MLive Blog* in an article entitled, "Your Michigan Legislature: a Wholly Owned Subsidiary of Michigan Right to Life."

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### What Can We Do About It?

You may have seen members of our Union on Gullen Mall collecting petition signatures for a constitutional amendment protecting the right to form unions and bargain collectively in Michigan. These volunteers understand that your Union, and every other union in Michigan, is in a fight for its life.

The constitutional amendment we support would guarantee all Michigan workers the right to organize into unions and to bargain collectively with their employer over pay and working conditions. It would protect the right to advocate for collective bargaining in the workplace, and it would safeguard the democratic process that gives workers a vote for union representation.

The proposed amendment merely restores the collective bargaining rights that prevailed here for over half a century before the Governor and the current radical legislature began implementing their anti-union agenda. It ensures that no legislature in the future can take these rights away merely by passing a law and getting a conservative Governor like Rick Snyder to sign it.

Union members and their allies across the state are working to collect the 323,000 signatures we need by July 9<sup>th</sup> to put this constitutional amendment on the November ballot. You can read the amendment's provisions at <http://www.protectourjobs.com/> and you can help gather signatures by calling the Union Office at (313) 577-1750.

It was the labor movement that built the middle class in Michigan and has been a major support for progressive legislation. If it disappears, the continuing assault on the working and middle classes in Michigan will know few limits. Sign the petition. Circulate the petition. Support the efforts to get the amendment on the ballot and, finally, vote for it in November. With your help we can do it!

### AFT MICHIGAN LOBBY DAY

**Tuesday, May 22<sup>nd</sup>**

Please be sure to join us for the annual AFT Michigan Lobby Day in Lansing. We'll leave campus by 8:30 a.m. and return by 5:00 p.m. A training session is scheduled for the morning and we'll lobby our legislators after lunch.

To RSVP, contact Tammy Force at (313) 577-1750 or email to [office@aaupaft.org](mailto:office@aaupaft.org).

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Visit our website at [www.aaupaft.org](http://www.aaupaft.org) for an electronic copy of this newsletter.

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