

P-fac NEWS

Serving the Part-time teaching community at Columbia College

May, 2000

SEARCHING FOR THE PRESIDENT

AN INTERVIEW WITH JOE LAIAONA, PART-TIME REPRESENTATIVE

P-fac News recently interviewed Joe Laiaona, the president of our steering committee, who served as the part-time representative on the Presidential search committee. Joe was elected by part-timers under the contract agreed to last year. Previously he headed P-fac's Negotiation Committee.

P-fac News: What was the original idea of having a P-fac representative on the search committee?

Laiaona: It's part of increasing our involvement on the campus by giving us a voice in governance, and certainly that's a major part of governance, finding the President.

P-fac News: Do you think it panned out?

Laiaona: It panned out very well. It gave us a voice in the selection of the president. And although it was only one voice and it was a non-voting voice, it was certainly a respected voice. They [the other committee members] listened to me and they appreciated my opinions, and I think that those opinions were taken into the balance. And then I would also say that the other point is that my being on the committee gave an opportunity for many members of the college community to see part-timers in a different light, and therefore the part-time contribution, I believe, was much better respected.

P-fac News: How did you feel, being the only part-time faculty member on the committee?

Laiaona: Well, I felt there should be more of us, but on the other hand, I didn't feel I was a minority or anything like that. The committee had eleven members, including trustees, administrators, and full-time faculty. The committee was assisted by a search firm. (Selecting the search firm was their first job.) The committee discussed the criteria for choosing a new president, asked

around the college for comments and advice, wrote a position paper, sought more comment. Finally they were ready to advertise.

Laiaona: We got some 140 resumes. I read every one.

P-fac News: That's an awful lot for a part-timer to do.

Laiaona: Well, yeah, but I thought it was an important job. How could you not do it?

The committee set about narrowing down the list, eventually hitting on about half a dozen to interview in a two-day marathon. After another round of interviews, two candidates were selected, and the committee presented their names and resumes to the college's board.

P-fac News: What kind of issues were discussed?

Laiaona: We were very interested in the candidate's knowledge of art education. We wanted someone who had a strong familiarity in the arts community.

Secondly we were very conscious about their management style. We wanted to find someone who was a collegial manager, someone who would help bring the college together, help the college to communicate with itself as well as externally.

Thirdly, because fundraising is a major job for a president, we needed someone who could speak to the public and provide a good public face.

P-fac News: Did part-time faculty issues get discussed?

Laiaona: Yes certainly, I mean, I asked every candidate about part-time faculty, and certainly we talked about how they dealt with part-time faculty, what they thought about part-time faculty, how would they approach us, what they thought about unions. Warwick's answer was really a good answer. "Only one faculty." And he was insistent that in his administration, there would be only one faculty.

P-fac News: You're a teacher. Did you teach the committee members, or the incoming president, anything?

Laiaona: I hope to say that I taught them that it's a good idea to listen to part-timers, that we have something to say.

P-fac News: What did you learn about Columbia?

Laiaona: I think I learned a bit more about the power structure of the college. And I got to know [some of the] personalities better.

P-fac News: Did you feel you were becoming part of the establishment?

Laiaona: No.

P-fac News: You said we need more part-time faculty involvement in governance. Can you flesh that out a little more?

Laiaona: Well, I think that that is important because that's what directs our lives. And if we don't have a say in governance, we don't have a say in our life. It's as simple as that. That's why I'm so in favor of part-time faculty involvement in governance. I believe in democracy here, and I believe we have something to say to the college. Everybody in the campus has something to offer, and I believe they should give everybody an opportunity to offer it.

P-fac News: Anything else?

Laiaona: It was a really good experience, and I would encourage anyone who has a chance to get involved.

Note: P-fac's contract provides for ongoing communication and consultation between part-time faculty and the college, including at the department level. P-fac encourages part-timers to get involved. For information, talk to your department representative, or call P-fac's hotline at 773-281-0975.

NEGOTIATION COMMITTEE FORMING

The organizing meeting to form a new Negotiation Committee will be held Saturday May 27 from 1 - 3 PM at the home of Malcolm Chisholm, the chairperson of this committee. The address is 721 Brompton, Chicago (Brompton runs east-west just south of Addison, and 721 is just west of

Broadway). Malcolm's phone is 773-525-0180.

The Negotiation Committee will research items for the next contract, and will advise the team that is chosen to bargain with the college? Anyone interested is invited to attend.

MUMIA MUST HAVE A NEW TRIAL

John Stevenson

I would like to bring up an important case involving some vital issues in this country, and at the same time discuss the necessity of sometimes broadening the focus of P-fac.

Mumia Abu-jamal, who has been classed by Amnesty International and many others as a political prisoner, is currently on death row in Pennsylvania with an appeal pending to the federal courts. The trial and conviction of Mumia (as he is known to his supporters) are riddled with the same sort of grotesque problems as we've seen in the cases of the thirteen death row prisoners in Illinois who have been found to be wrongfully convicted in recent years. In Mumia's case these include suppressed, manipulated and inconsistent evidence, witnesses who seem to have been bribed or coerced, a "confession" which was only "remembered" by a police officer two months after it was supposed to have occurred, a clearly biased judge, and a lawyer (appointed by the court over Mumia's objections) who provided a grossly inadequate defense.

In addition, what has particularly sparked a worldwide movement in Mumia's support is the manifestly political character of the case. Mumia had been active in the Black Panther Party as a teenager and was well known in Philadelphia as a radical journalist and persistent critic of police misconduct. All of this was widely publicized during his trial (90% of those in the jury pool were familiar with media coverage of the case), and the prosecutor was allowed to question him about political remarks he had made as a teenager during the sentencing phase of the trial. Since his conviction Mumia has continued to speak out, from his prison cell, on many issues.

Granted all that: why should news of this case appear here? Many unions have traditionally spoken out on issues of social justice, and I would argue that this is highly appropriate. We fight for equity and fair treatment in our working lives. But justice is not a concept which applies only to our relations with employers; we need also to be aware of injustice beyond the boundaries of our jobs and professions, and we should stand with those who fight against it. In this case, a number of significant union locals are on record, including the Chicago Teachers Union which recently passed a resolution supporting a new trial for Mumia.

As well, the mainstream media have done a markedly poor job of informing us on this case and the movement in support of Mumia. Coverage has been scant, and what there is has frequently been slanted or hostile. For example: This spring graduating students at Antioch, a small prestigious college in Ohio, chose Mumia as their com-

mencement speaker. This unusual event (a tape of his speech to the students, made in prison, was played to a large and sympathetic audience) was surely newsworthy, yet received almost no mention in the press. When a rally attended by thousands at New York's Madison Square Garden took place earlier this month, the NY Times covered only the police demonstration against the gathering.

Yes, the case is controversial. The fact that Mumia was tried for the killing of a police officer has meant that nationally the Fraternal Order of Police has been active in opposing a retrial for this "convicted cop killer." But of course the question is whether the trial at which he was convicted was a fair one, conducted according to the provisions of law and the constitution; it seems clear that it was not.

Let me just note in closing that Mumia's writings and conduct since his incarceration disclose a man of rare courage, nobility, and loftiness of purpose. In his Antioch commencement speech Mumia did not once mention his own case, but spoke of fighters against oppression, and ended with the admonition, "You...have the somewhat unique opportunity to prove that old axiom, that man is made for more than meat and life is more than bread. In an age where everything, even the human gene, is commodified, it can't be denied that we are all material beings. Yet aren't we also social beings?...What is owed to humanity? What is owed to life, itself?"

For more information: The recently released Amnesty International report on the case includes a review of the facts and anomalies, and the "memorandum of law," showing constitutional violations and filed by Mumia's legal defense, is available on many of the web sites devoted to support of Mumia. (There are also web sites maintained by those who wish to have him executed.) There is a Columbia College Students for Mumia group as well as a Chicago Committee to Free Mumia Abu-Jamal (773-381-6507) and, nationally, an Academics for Mumia organization.

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NEWS

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