

CURRENT ISSUES

GOING TO CONVENTION

by Mark Wessel

The California Federation of Teachers Convention was held in Manhattan Beach March 21-23. CCAFF sent a contingency to represent the interests of part-time Citrus union members. It was a stimulating and inspiring event that acted as a reminder that we are a part of a much larger body of influence that is comprised of passionate, intelligent individuals, deeply committed to student progress and welfare, as well as to social justice in general.

CFT conventions offer the opportunity to participate in informative workshops centered on a variety of topics. Examples from this year's offerings included: *A Conversation About Racial Justice for 2015*, *Developing Successful Labor/Management Partnerships*, *Interacting With Students/Minimizing Unintended Consequences*, and *Work Smarter, Not Harder: Making the Digital Library Work for You*.

There's so much information available of interest to educators or to anyone who values access to facts and considers participation in democracy a cherished and valuable exercise.

Additionally, an important part of the convention is dedicated to deciding upon a list of resolutions submitted to the attending membership as positions to be adopted and advanced by the organization. Submitted by various committees, these resolutions stake out positions that will be voted upon before becoming official plat-

CCAFF Executive Board

President
 Bill Zeman / williamjzeman@yahoo.com

Vice-President
 Anne Battle / Abattle922@yahoo.com

Secretary-Treasurer
 Mark Wessel / mwessel1999@gmail.com

Representation Officer
 Linda Chan / linda.chan42@gmail.com

CFT Field Representative
 Martha Figueroa / mfigueroa@cft.org

Mission Statement

Citrus College Adjunct Faculty Federation, (CCAFF), is dedicated to serving its membership by working to:

- Assure a level of professional respect from the District reflected in its policies and practices consistent with the achievement, dedication and professionalism of its adjunct employees.
- Through contract negotiations, maximize members ability to earn a fair wage consistent with education industry standards.
- Work to provide working conditions for adjunct faculty that maximize their effective interactions with students and co-workers.

forms that define the values of the organization and act as consensus for action - whether it be lobbying state officials for legal mandates or defining political positions that hope to influence society as a whole.

This year CFT officer elections took place as well. Joshua Pechthalt was re-elected as president, and Jeffrey Freitas as Secretary/Treasurer. But additionally, our own Linda Chan was elected to one of the CFT Vice-President positions. Congratulations to Linda. It is good to have Citrus adjuncts represented so ably on this larger stage.

Student Debt

by Mark Wessel

"Education is the path to prosperity." We have ample reason to believe this commonly heard statement. Educators in particular are rightfully, advocates of this position. But paying for education has become increasingly difficult for students and their families, as tuition costs have escalated 1000% since the 70's, far outstripping the rise in the general cost of living, or of increases to income levels.

To pay for the costs of what most of us agree is a societal benefit, we have come to rely on student loans. We need to re-examine our reliance on a system that leads to huge numbers of people caught in the grips of a system that for too many is an endless cycle of debt, instead of the "leg up" to promised prosperity that it was understood to be.

In this country there is an estimated total of \$1.3 trillion of student debt. The Department of Education, our own Federal government, owns \$1.1 trillion of this total. Forty one million people have student debt. Seventy five percent of these loans were co-signed by parents and grand parents.

Graduation numbers yield the following demographic statistics: 83% of African American graduates have debt. 64% of white American graduates do. More than 50% of women were having to pay more for student loans than men.

It stands to reason that more borrowers come from disadvantaged financial backgrounds, ie. the poor. Who qualifies for Pell Grants? - low income students. And those receiving grant money will still have to

borrow additional funds to pay for their education. How many of these are repaying their loans? - 47%. The rest are in forbearance, delinquency or default - some eight million people. The repercussions of not paying these loans lead to a list of negative outcomes: 1) Wage garnishment. 2) The possibility of schools where large numbers of these students were in attendance might make these institutions ineligible for federally backed programs.

3) Social Security can be garnished. (35,000 seniors fell into this category last year alone.) 4) Twenty two states have passed legislation that revokes professional licenses, making it even less likely that individuals can work in jobs that might enable them to earn enough to pay back their loans. This leads to the possibility of whole

communities suffering. Hospitals have been closed for loss of nursing certifications. Twenty-two states have laws on the books that allow them to take away professional certifications for default offenses. In addition to conservative southern and mid-western states, even Washington and Massachusetts have such a law. Until recently, Iowa and Montana had laws that revoked driver's licenses for non-payment of student loans. Jobs affected by these laws range from K-12 teachers, nurses and physicians, to barbers and electricians. It's no surprise that jobs requiring licenses or professional

certificates often also require a college degree. And those degrees have become more and more expensive. More than seventy percent of the 2014 graduating class took out loans to cover the cost of their education, owing an average of \$33,000 upon graduation. This doesn't even address the large numbers of students with loans who don't graduate. Losing the ability to work or drive



doesn't help anyone pay back loans. It simply punishes them, further perpetuating the cycle of poverty and indebtedness.

In 2013 the Department of Education made \$43 billion on student debt. It is projected that in ten years it will generate another \$120 billion, making it the third most profitable (business?) in America, after Exxon and Apple.

There are efforts being made to address these injustices. The organization - *Jobs With Justice* has been working with legislators, workers and others for reform.

Visit: www.JWJ.org to learn more.

Bill's Beef

Good Comes to Political Society Only Through Organization and Agitation Part 1

by Bill Zeman

After I had been reading and teaching history for many years, it became clear to me that I had read of nothing beneficial, such as voting rights that was given by leaders, neither kings nor elected magistrates, that came without a lot of activism by common people. This is true all the way back to ancient times and in all cultures.

The ancient monarchs had to legitimize their rule by organizing large-scale building projects that benefitted society, such as irrigation systems, flood controls, city walls, and temples to the gods. The priests that ran the temple societies had to provide help such as grain distribution in times of famine, orphanages, redeeming captured citizens with ransom payments, and underwriting trading ventures with proto-banking services. Only in this way could the early leaders hold the moral authority to claim tax payments. We know they felt the pressure of social justice from people because of the inscriptions they left.

Greek democracy was founded and expanded because the abundance of trade lowered the price of metals and made it possible for more and more common farmers to own weapons. The farmers used their importance as soldiers in the incessant wars of the Greek city-states to press for more of a say in when these wars would be

launched and to have a voice in other matters that affected society. The Greeks did away with their kings and formed democracies. In Attica, they elected Solon the Lawgiver to introduce the *Seisachtheia* (the shaking off of burdens) that cancelled debt on land, ended debt slavery and freed all debt slaves. When leaders would not respond to desires like these, the people would follow populist military leaders (the so-called tyrants) who overthrew unresponsive oligarchies and introduced more reforms.

The Romans overthrew their king and founded a republic because the king was executing arbitrary power and oppression. When the Republic was not inclusive enough the plebeians seceded from Rome and threatened to found a competing city. Rome gave in to get these people back whom they needed for their army and granted them more power. This pattern repeated itself throughout the first two hundred years of Roman history. Rome's somewhat egalitarian society and enhanced rights of citizenship are at the root of the success of the Roman system. Rome fought civil wars over popular reforms. When the populares won they introduced many liberal reforms including extensive land redistribution to the poor. When Rome became an empire they expanded the rights of citizenship again and again first throughout Italy and then in all the provinces. The people agitated in every way for this, from subtle political pressure, all the way to civil war and Rome lasted for 1000 years in the West and 2000 years in the East.

Serfdom was created because of the instability of the decaying Western Roman Empire. People gave up their freedom to attach themselves to powerful aristocrats who could

protect them from roving bandits, armies and tax collectors. The Dark Ages were so bad because the people largely lost their rights to advocate for a better life. The black cloud of the Bubonic Plague had a silver lining in that it reduced the population so much that lords had to compete for people and the people used this to negotiate for better conditions and eventually serfdom ended and people became free again.

Guilds were formed that improved conditions for craftsmen. Cities formed governments and commissions that bought their freedom from aristocrats. Student guilds gained the right to have decent food and housing and to have grades to distinguish good learners from bad. Professor's guilds won the right to confer degrees and to limit their profession to teachers with degrees. Early Medieval kings were weak and had problems managing the nobility. When they finally became well organized enough to exert control over them, the aristocrats rebelled when they were not well treated. Late Medieval kings exercised heavy taxation, arbitrary arrest and excessive control over religion.

The aristocrats in England beat King John at the Battle of Runnymede in 1215 and forced him to sign the Magna Carta, a 63 point document that enumerated basic rights for Englishmen including habeas corpus, trial by a jury of peers, no taxes without the consent of the nobility through a council, freedom of church from state, and many others. This began a 700 year process where parliament became increasingly inclusive and gained more and more power from the king. Again they resorted to everything from subtle persuasion to civil war to achieve a better life for more people.

Parliamentary democracy was in

spired by the Renaissance, in which Europeans looked back to the Classical Age of Greece and Rome and ancient Christianity and re-assimilated this high culture and sought to emulate and exceed it. The examination of ancient writings led to the Reformation of Christianity, an epic fight by the people for religious freedom. If the ways of God can be questioned, is there anything else that cannot be rethought? The Reformation caused the Enlightenment which accelerated the Scientific Revolution. New philosophies that covered the entire gamut of life were read and debated in salons. The ascendant parliament in England was the admiration of Europe. People began to hunger for a much better life. Monarchs like Catherine the Great, Frederick, William I and II and Joseph II made progressive reforms, inspired by the philosophers who preached popular acclaim. During this time the new world was settled.

The people who came had one thing in common. They were ambitious, they were adventurous, they thought outside of the box. They made a dangerous crossing of a vast ocean to settle in a harsh wilderness all for the chance to have a better life. Most people stay in the same place their whole lives; The people who came to America were those who were the minority of the communities in Europe who were so dissatisfied with the status quo that they would take extreme measures to change it. These people were more aggressive, they were more inventive, they were more prosperous because of who they were and the vast majority of them were parliamentarians.

All the English American colonies agitated with the crown to have representative governments like back at home. They all had elected assem-

blies with crown appointed governors. When their assemblies did not adequately represent them, they rebelled. Bacon's Rebellion, the Glorious Revolution, the Boston Grain Riots, the New York Baker's Strike, the Boston Impressment Riot, the New Jersey Land Riots, the Paxton Boy's Revolt, the North Carolina Regulators, the Hudson Valley Land Riots, the South Carolina Regulators, and the Green Mountain Boys Land Revolt were all popular uprisings that gained improved conditions for the people before the American Revolution. Guilds and many other types of civic society were strong in America and they were the organizers of both peaceful political agitation and violent unrest. Quakers fought for abolition of slavery and New Yorkers began the fight for freedom of the press in the 1730s through the Trial of John Peter Zenger.

The American Revolution began as a struggle for equal rights as Englishmen. Civic society exploded. The Loyal Nine, the Sons of Liberty, Congresses and Committees of Correspondence as well as unruly mobs fought for no taxation without representation, trial by a jury of your peers, and other rights. No one thought of independence until the British tried to enforce the violation of their rights with an army. The American Revolu-

tion inspired the French Revolution. The French Revolution inspired revolution around the world.

The great legacy of the revolutionary era is strong civic society that constantly agitates for a better day. The first struggle of the early republic was a movement to pass the Bill of Rights. This was a popular issue supported and organized by common workers and farmers. Next came the voting franchise. All the new states had the same system as England, there were property qualifications for voting and running for office. You had to have a high value of property to do either. The thinking was that only men of wealth and ease would have the luxury of time to become informed citizens who could vote and hold public office. The problem in the eyes of the less affluent was that history and experience had taught them that the privileged would run society only as it suited them. Interest groups were formed to pressure for universal white manhood suffrage, this movement is called Jeffersonian Democracy. Many states gained white manhood suffrage in the first 35 years of the nineteenth century.

There were many different causes people organized and fought for. By 1840 they had won the abolition of debt imprisonment, the enactment of mechanics lien laws, the abolition of the compulsory militia system, a more equitable tax system, a more democratic nomination process for public candidates, tax supported public school systems, and the first legal recognition of the right to organize and collectively bargain.

When the industrial revolution began and business became more organized through the profit motive, workers were systematically oppressed and exploited.

Crafts guilds no longer worked because craftsmen were replaced by machines. Workers experimented with different ways to improve their condition. They tried unionism, worker's political parties and utopian societies. By the 1850s or so, experience had proven that unionism worked best. The first American union was formed in 1778 and they successfully negotiated a contract. The first union led strike was in 1786 and they won. At first workers would form temporary unions that would fight for a better wage or condition and then disband after the fight was over. The first permanent union was formed in 1792 as workers gained the habit of running a continual campaign for better wages and conditions. In the early 1800s workers put in 13 ½ hour days, six days a week. In the 1830s, many workers won a 10-hour day for the same wages through radical strikes. It took until the 1860s for the majority of workers to get it through many decades of strikes and political activity. They had 10-Hour Day clubs that published newsletters and pressured politicians. It was a long struggle and soon after they had won, they began the 8-Hour Day movement. This took another 70 years to become general.

It is hard to prove a negative, but the striking thing that I have seen in all my study is that none of these gains were just given to the people by wise and benevolent rulers. There were always people pressuring for it in some way. I would be interested if somebody can show me an exception. This has been a brief summary of my thesis up until mid-way through the 1800s. In my next article I will describe the continued fight for a better life as it was waged by our ancestors into the 20th century.

AFFILIATIONS

Citrus College Adjunct Faculty Federation (CCAFF) maintains an affiliation with:

- The American Federation of Teachers (AFT)
- The California Federation of Teachers (CFT)
- AFL-CIO
- The California Labor Federation
- The Los Angeles County Federation of Labor