

Summary of Conversation with  
Jordan Kurland, Associate General Secretary of the AAUP

Lynn Koplitz, President, Loyola AAUP Chapter  
March 14, 2008

Jordan Kurland called to say he had received copies of the Loyola Chapter letter dated March 3 to President Wildes and the reply from Wildes dated March 11. He noted in particular that President Wildes says he has not received a protocol for getting censure removed. Kurland reviewed with me the official correspondence that has taken place between the National AAUP office and President Wildes since censure was imposed on the Loyola administration last June.

There is a letter from Kurland to Wildes dated October 9, 2007, which states three conditions that must be met for the censure of the administration to be lifted. These may be summarized as: 1) redress for the faculty members who were injured by termination; 2) reaffirmation and adherence to existing regulations on academic freedom and tenure; 3) and the existence of a climate hospitable to academic freedom on campus.

By the end of our conversation, Kurland said in order for Loyola University New Orleans to make progress, "There is a very significant need to get these cases settled. If the President, with the backing of the Board, would agree to have the lawyers push for settlements, rather than make offers that the plaintiffs are simply going to refuse, that would lead toward the regulations and perhaps a better climate." In other words, taking care of the issue of redress for the injured faculty members is key. If the law suits were resolved to the satisfaction of our colleagues, then that would be a big step toward abiding by the regulations. I would add that issuing contracts in a timely fashion, as specified in our Faculty Handbook, would be another such step. It seems that a climate hospitable to academic freedom on campus would grow from there, since faculty would likely become far less uneasy about their own status.

We discussed a few other topics. One important one is that an AAUP annual report on the status of censured administrations will be published soon. Kurland has pledged to send me an advance copy on Monday. I will share it with the chapter members when I receive it. He summarized it as follows: the administration of LSU Health Sciences is likely to be removed from consideration for censure by Committee A; SUNO is likely to have censure of its administration lifted; UNO and Tulane are making progress but there are some sticking points, so their administrations probably will not be removed from the list in June 2008. Loyola's administration has made no progress toward having censure lifted. In fact, it seems to be going in the opposite direction.

Kurland also mentioned to me that Fr. Charles Currie, S.J., president of the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities, had spoken with Ernie Benjamin,

AAUP General Secretary, at a meeting of representatives of academic organizations. The message Currie relayed was that President Wildes would be willing to talk with someone from the AAUP if they thought it would do any good. Here Kurland mentioned to me that there seems to be a pattern in Wildes' interactions. They start off cordial and look promising but there is never any follow-through, never any actual engagement. Wildes characterizes these initial contacts as "consultations" or says he is "working with" a certain group by extrapolation from one brief interaction. I speculate that this contact between Fr. Currie and Ernie Benjamin is the basis for Wildes' claim to student leaders that he was "working through the Jesuits" to try to get the AAUP censure lifted.

In another instance, a conversation with Fr. Bob Gerlich, S.J., chair of the University Senate, about the Faculty Handbook resulted in this claim in President Wildes' letter to the Loyola AAUP Chapter dated March 11, 2008: "I know the Senate is in the early stages of a review of the Handbook and I have been supportive of that review. I have spoken about it with Bob Gerlich, S.J., Chair of the Senate, and expressed my support and cooperation." There was never any review; there was just a motion before the Senate concerning revision of the Handbook that was put forward by the Executive Committee in January 2008. The motion was defeated unanimously on March 13, 2008.

One last example is Wildes' statement in his October 17, 2007 letter to Kurland:

"...we have maintained and will continue to encourage dialogue directly with our faculty, formally, informally, through the faculty's representative bodies, in committees, and individually. In fact, I am meeting with representatives of Loyola's AAUP chapter later this month."

Of course, it took dogged persistence on my part from early September until mid-October just to get that appointment with Wildes with myself as president of the chapter and Catherine Wessinger, vice-president of the chapter. Thereafter, Wildes kept agreeing in principle to meet with the Chapter members, but never agreed to a date. After the chapter members wrote Wildes a letter dated March 3, 2008, he did a 175 degree turn (just short of 180 degrees, as described by Kurland) and stated that he will not meet with the Loyola AAUP Chapter. In his March 11, 2008 letter Wildes writes: "I suggest, if you have concrete suggestions that you make them to the Senate." He wrote further: "I suggest that you and your AAUP colleagues make good use of the committees of the Senate." In this letter, he claimed, "My commitment to shared governance is strong," and "I look forward to continuing to work with you through our normal structures." I note that President Wildes has been absent from all meetings of the University Senate during the present academic year.

President Wildes never followed through on his stated commitment to meet with the Loyola AAUP Chapter members, except to have one 45-minute conversation

with the chapter president and vice-president in his office on October 29. We accomplished almost nothing at that meeting, in my opinion, except to try to open a dialogue.