April 28, 2011

**Labor Studies Faculty Targeted**

5/12/11 Update: University of Missouri St. Louis Chancellor Thomas George and Provost Glen Cope issued a statement declaring that adjunct professor Don Giljum remains eligible to teach at UMSL. After conducting a careful review of all 30 hours of videos of the course in question, they concluded that the excerpts made public by Andrew Breitbart were “definitely taken out of context, with their meaning highly distorted through splicing and editing.” The UMSL administration acknowledged that firing Giljum would have been a gross violation of academic freedom, while it reaffirmed the campus’s support for and commitment to “academic freedom, civility, diversity, open discourse and the pursuit of knowledge.”

The AAUP was involved in efforts to ensure the successful resolution of this incident. In addition to speaking with a number of reporters to convey the Association’s concerns, the staff gave advice and support to both Giljum and Judy Ancel, the course’s other instructor. Ancel remarked that “Your help was invaluable. I don’t know what we would have done without it. I’ve been singing your praises to the people organizing [an AAUP chapter] at UM St. Louis.” Giljum expressed gratitude to the AAUP as well, saying, “I can’t thank you enough for your help in this matter...Your organization is invaluable for college and university teachers.”

We are pleased to announce that Giljum and Ancel have accepted our invitation to speak at our annual conference in June.

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For more information, please contact Robert Kreiser.

AAUP general secretary Gary Rhoades today issued this statement:

Compromising Academic Freedom and Creating a Hostile Classroom Environment
Washington, D.C. – Andrew Breitbart is on the attack again. This time his targets are Judy Ancel, Director of the Institute for Labor Studies at the University of Missouri, Kansas City and her co-instructor in a labor studies class, Don Giljum, an adjunct lecturer at the University of Missouri, St. Louis. Breitbart has produced what purports to be a damming video of the class Ancel and Giljum co-taught. The video, selectively edited from more than thirty hours of classroom footage, has already cost Giljum his job.

The video posted on Breitbart’s BigGovernment website is entitled “Thuggery 101: Union Official, Professor Teach How-To College Course in Violent Union Tactics.” The violence that is
being done, however, is to the academic freedom and employment security of the instructors, and to the privacy and safe classroom environment of the students, some of whom speak on the video clip. When students voice their views in class, they should not have to fear that their comments will be spread all over the Internet. When faculty members rightly explore difficult topics in class, they should not have to fear for their jobs or their lives. (Death threats to the instructors have been posted on Breitbart’s blog).

Quality education in a democracy requires the free and open exchange of ideas by professors and students without fear of retaliation. It requires academic freedom. And it requires safe classroom environments. Those commitments and conditions are at the heart of the American Association of University Professors’ (AAUP) basic principles.

In his own words, in a recent appearance on the Sean Hannity show, Andrew Breitbart indicated that he intends to “go after” teachers and unions. That is in keeping with a current environment in which some politicians seek to make a name for themselves by attacking the rights of working people and the work of people whose inherent right (and responsibility) it is to explore a variety of ideas.

Breitbart has a right to voice his views; he does not have a right to his own facts. He does not have a right to distort the class in ways that are evident in the video clips and that are detailed by Judy Ancel in her response to the attack. Neither does he have the right to trample on the academic freedom of professors and their students, nor on the privacy rights of students in their classroom work.

The AAUP denounces the actions of Andrew Breitbart as compromising academic freedom, quality education, and the rights of students to a safe classroom environment. We call on the University of Missouri, Kansas City, the University of Missouri, St. Louis, and the University of Missouri System to speak out clearly and forcefully in defense of the rights of their professors and students. And we call on all people of reason in the academy and beyond to do likewise.