February 2, 2012

AAUP Statement on Indiana Right-to-Work Law

AAUP President Cary Nelson issued the following statement today:

As Indiana Goes . . .

This week Indiana became the first Midwestern state to pass so-called right-to-work legislation and see it signed into law. Hesitant to take on basic labor principles quite so directly, Michigan’s legislature has instead opted to consider a series of less comprehensive bills. Particularly insulting to Michigan’s storied labor community is a proposal to require the state’s workers to reauthorize dues deductions from their paychecks every year, as if their stated wishes cannot be honored without being repeated year after year. Standard practice is to let such authorizations stand until and unless they are withdrawn. Imagine if you had to reauthorize all your automatic utilities and insurance payments every year. If you forgot and were on vacation, it might not be so convenient to have your electricity turned off. It’s no more convenient to have your union deprived of the funds it needs to do its work. Of course what this is really about is an effort to divert union time, energy, and resources into annual dues reauthorization drives.

Some have asserted that the Indiana result presages more such victories after the 2012 elections. But that remains to be seen. The comprehensive union busting bill in Wisconsin met with a recall election campaign and another campaign, focused on its governor, is under way. Comparable anti-union legislation was meanwhile resoundingly defeated by Ohio’s voters, after a unified campaign by AAUP and other groups.

Fifty years ago the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. issued a characteristic clarion call for such legislation to be defeated. “Right-to-work,” he warned us, “provides no rights and no work. Its purpose is to destroy labor unions and the freedom of collective bargaining,” a right that is now also recognized by the United Nations. There is no evidence showing that right-to-work states do better a job creation, despite demagogic claims to the contrary.

The AAUP stands behind the right of all employee groups to decide for themselves whether to bargain collectively. Thus we oppose all legislation designed to deny or curtail those rights. We are committed to the effort to defeat of anti-union legislation anywhere and everywhere. As Indiana goes, so we believe, the rest of the nation need not go at all.