



# The ASI Bulletin

from the Albert Shanker Institute  
Summer 2004

## *What's New at the Institute*

### **Sandra Feldman Steps Down as President of AFT**

Citing health reasons, Sandra Feldman stepped down after seven years as the American Federation of Teachers' top leader. During the AFT's National Convention in July, Ms. Feldman delivered her last keynote address as the union's president. She called on all of AFT's 1.3 million members to continue to work to fulfill the union's mission and agenda: "for a just and equitable society; for public institutions that are democratic and that serve, equally well, both the poor and the middle class. And especially for quality public schools that are the bedrock of a society that holds so much promise for its citizens." During Sandy's tenure, the AFT experienced unprecedented growth – increasing by over 300,000 members since the last convention alone — and worked steadily toward better wages and benefits for workers and a "level playing field" for children. She has served as president of the Albert Shanker Institute since its founding in 1998. Ed McElroy, the new AFT and Institute president is delighted to report that Sandy has agreed to serve as the Chair of the Institute's Board of Directors.

### **ILGWU Heritage Foundation Grants \$25,000 to the Institute**

This grant will be used to support the first activities of the Shanker Institute's Center for Education on Democracy. Planning is underway for a seminar for union leaders focusing on the role of unions in a democratic society and how they can support each other internationally in strengthening this role. The discussion could include such topics as the right to freedom of association, strategies for promoting union and worker rights, distinguishing legitimate unions from those controlled by employers, parties or governments, the impact of globalization on union structures and functions, and the historic role of trade unions in sustaining and promoting healthy democratic institutions.

### **National Press Club Forum on Preschool Assessment set for October 5<sup>th</sup>**

The newly implemented National Reporting System devised by the Bush Administration's Head Start program has created both a scientific and philosophical stir among early childhood educators and experts. The Institute, using an informal peer consultations system that taps experts in the topic, has come up with a star line up for the discussion. AFT Secretary-Treasurer Nat LaCour will host the event, which will be moderated by Barbara Bowman, President Emeritus of the Erikson Institute.

### **Task Force Report on Workforce Development Released**

The recently released report, [\*Learning Partnerships: Strengthening American Jobs in the Global Economy\*](#), boldly calls for a \$3 billion federal investment in workforce skills and training programs to enable Americans to keep the jobs they have and prepare for new ones. It urges the development of "bottom up" partnerships between labor, business, higher education and others that can assess job and skill needs and lobby for resources to supplement federal funding. It points to the successes of the British Trades Union Congress in working with employers to get government support for an infrastructure of learning representatives at the worksite who can assist workers in obtaining further education. This report was issued in April by the Task Force on Workforce Development, a joint project of the [Albert Shanker Institute](#) and the [New Economy Information Service](#), and is the result of a year-long study by labor, business and policy leaders.

### **Program Director Burnie Bond to Go on Maternity Leave**

On June 11, 2004, Burnie gave birth to Jacob Marshall Bond. Jacob was 8 weeks early and weighed 2 lbs., 11 oz. Despite his early arrival, there were no serious complications and both Burnie and Jacob are now at home and doing fine (he's now over 5 lbs.). Burnie is expected to return to work, at first on a part-time basis, near the end of 2004.

## *Education Notes*

[“Teaching Interrupted: Do Discipline Policies in Today’s Schools Foster the Common Good?”](#)

[Prepared by Public Agenda with support from Common Good, May 2004](#)

In support of its contention that “too many students are losing critical opportunities for learning and too many teachers are leaving the profession because of the behavior of a few persistent troublemakers,” this report argues that teachers operate in a culture of “challenge and second-guessing.” Forty-nine percent of teachers surveyed in the study report that they have been accused of disciplining a child in an unfair manner and seventy-eight percent believe that “there are persistent troublemakers in their school who should have been removed from regular classrooms.” Consequently, concludes the report’s authors, “students pay a heavy price academically when schools tolerate the chronic bad behavior of a few.” Proposed solutions include alternative schools and limits on litigation.

*ASI has devoted a great deal of attention to the issue of classroom discipline and its impact on teaching and teachers through its Forum series.*

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[“Ready for Leadership: Public Attitudes Towards Standards and Schools in Two New Economy States.”](#) Report by the Mass Insight Education and Research Institute, May 2004

This study focused on two states with comparable priorities in the arena of education reform: Massachusetts and Washington. In 1993, both states passed laws that sparked standards-based reform efforts, and both have been determined to implement a challenging high school exit exam as a benchmark of student achievement. The states are “peas in a pod,” according to the report, which determined that residents in both states “believe higher standards can improve schools—but that funding cuts are undermining that improvement.” Particularly in math, schools are widely considered to be failing to impart the skills required by a new global economy. The report concludes that the public is ready for government to take action on these issues, and that there is support for raising education standards nationally.

*Educational standards are a long-standing concern of the Shanker Institute, as reflected in its latest commissioned work on the subject, **Educating Democracy: State Standards to Ensure a Civic Core**, by Paul Gagnon, which was published in Spring 2003, and continues to attract attention and praise from the educational community.*

## *Labor Notes*

[“Economic Pressures Are Impetus Behind Education Reform,”](#) by Tom Ewing  
[Educational Testing Service News, 26 April 2004](#)

This new report concludes that “America’s premier economic position and global competitiveness” is directly related to the degree to which American students are prepared for postsecondary education and have access to college. Statistics used to support this include the fact that, “since 1973, the share of all jobs that require at least some college has risen from 29 percent to more than 60 percent.” The report also warns that shortages of college-educated workers could lead to increases in outsourcing of many important jobs or the importation of highly skilled workers from other countries.

## ***Labor Notes*** *(continued)*

[“The Workplace: Rewarding Employees and Bosses,” by Anne Bagamery  
International Herald Tribune, 11 May 2004](#)

Worker training initiatives are gaining popularity in corporate Europe, where “companies are treating their training programs as power tools to keep workers happy, and their business humming.” This change is particularly pertinent in the face of what many consider to be the “scourge of outsourcing,” since increased training programs improve the skills of domestic workers and help keep jobs within a nation’s borders. In the United States, too, such notions are meeting with approbation, as a proposal to offer tax credits to companies that invest in technology skills training programs gains momentum.

*The Taskforce on Workforce Development report, **Learning Partnerships: Strengthening American Jobs in the Global Economy**, which is highlighted on the first page of this Update and co-sponsored by ASI, focuses on the issue of education and competitiveness in an era of rapid technological change and globalization.*

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[“Half the World’s Workers Denied Fundamental Workers’ Rights”  
ICFTU OnLine, 24 May 2004](#)

This new report contends that workers’ rights, primarily the freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining, are still not guaranteed to over half of the world’s workers. “Alarming,” notes the report, “large countries as [sic] Brazil, China, India, Mexico and the United States have still not ratified fundamental ILO Conventions on freedom of association.” The report catalogues many abuses of workers’ rights, including an instance where a Korean textile worker was threatened with a gun by his employer and told to resign from his trade union.

[“Workers’ Right to Organize Gaining Globally, International Labor Organization Concludes”  
Daily Labor Report, 21 May 2004](#)

The ILO has concluded that, “despite killings, detentions, violence, and threats against workers seeking to organize, the global trend toward workers’ rights is improving and is more encouraging than it was four years ago.” The number of member countries that have ratified the convention on freedom of association and protection of the right to organize has risen from 135 to 142 in that time, according to the ILO. The convention on the right to organize and collective bargaining has now been ratified by 154 member countries, “up from 149 four years ago.”

*The Shanker Institute has just received a grant from the ILGWU Heritage Foundation to pursue these issues, as reported on the first page of this Update. This project will fall under the Center for Education on Democracy, which will include programs on workers’ rights and democracy as well as programs designed to promote sound history and civic education in classrooms worldwide.*

# Democracy Notes

[“Listen to the Arab Reformers,” by Jackson Diehl](#)  
[Washington Post, 29 March 2004](#)

In his editorial column, Jackson Diehl extols what he considers to be one of the under-reported virtues of America’s engagement in the Middle East: “the emergence in public of homegrown civic movements demanding political change.” He asserts that “two years ago they were nonexistent or in jail. Now they are out in the open in even the most politically backward places in the region: Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Syria.” Diehl contends that these groups are made up of diverse individuals—students, journalists, women—and that “they will tell you frankly: The new US democratization policy, far from being an unwanted imposition, has given them a voice, an audience and at least a partial shield against oppression.” An Egyptian political scientist quoted in the piece sums up Diehl’s argument for him: “The point is that for the first time in many years, there is a serious debate going on in the Arab world about their own societies. The United States has triggered this debate, it keeps the debate going, and this is a very healthy development.”

*As reported in an earlier Update, ASI has contracted with the Ibn Khaldun Center for Development Studies, directed by Egyptian dissident Saad Ibrahim, for a reader focusing on Muslim reformers fighting for democratic ideals in the heart of the Middle East.*

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[“China Rejects Wider Elections for Hong Kong,” by Philip P. Pan](#)  
[Washington Post, 27 April 2004](#)

[“China Fires Back at Critics of its Hong Kong Policies,”](#)  
[by Keith Bradsher](#)  
[International Herald Tribune, 28 April 2004](#)

[“China Gives Hong Kong a Rare Show of Might,” by](#)  
[Keith Bradsher](#)  
[International Herald Tribune, 6 May 2004](#)

[“Huge Crowd Marches Again for the Vote in Hong Kong,”](#)  
[by Philip P. Pan Washington Post, 2 July 2004](#)

China has taken a strong stand against democratic reforms in Hong Kong recently. Beijing’s sudden refusal to allow Hong Kong to elect its next chief executive in 2007 elicited outrage among Hong Kong’s pro-democracy groups, many of which are expected to organize massive protests in response over the next few months. In explaining its decision, the Chinese government said that “Hong Kong’s residents have not had enough experience with elections and remain divided about the pace and substance of political reform.” This decision elicited criticism from the international community as well—particularly from the United States and Great Britain—to which China angrily responded by accusing both countries “of holding China to a double standard that ignores the lack of democracy in Hong Kong when the British ruled it.” Then, as if to reassert its resolve, the People’s Liberation Army marched a flotilla of Chinese warships through the Victoria Harbor only a few days later, an action interpreted by many as an act of intimidation. The Army claimed that the visit was in honor of the navy’s 55<sup>th</sup> anniversary, though no such visit took place for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1999. On July 2, citizens staged a march protesting China’s refusal to expand elections in Hong Kong. Over a half-million marchers participated in the protest.

*Workers’ Rights and democracy are core concerns for the Shanker Institute, as reflected in our programs with Chinese dissident Han Dongfang and the developing work of the new Center for Education on Democracy. Szeto Wah, a leader in Hong Kong’s democracy movement, gave the Albert Shanker Lecture on May 15, 2002.*

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