

Letter from the President, cont.

Using the buckets to ask other workers and onlookers to contribute to the relief effort, as I and other members of TUGSA did, was a truly moving experience; even though the members of TUGSA were marching near the end of the parade that morning, meaning that most of the people we passed had already given to others with buckets who had come past them much earlier in the parade, we were able to collect over \$50 in under an hour. Many of the people who gave to us had given once already that day, or had given much larger sums through their churches or places of employment. Still, they could not say no to donating as much as they could spare to help the most unfortunate among us. This spirit of good will and generosity is what has made our country not just strong, but proud, and it is this same spirit that should rightfully be the underpinning for all we do here as organized labor, and that organized labor should help to engender in everyone, not just those who join their ranks.

This tragedy has also focused a critical spotlight on an area of United States politics that is too often ignored: the relationship between race and economic class, and the tremendous gap between the most and least fortunate in this country. As the flood waters recede, it is evident that most of the people who were left behind in the wake of the evacuations were either poor or of color, and in most cases both. It is incumbent on all of us to heed the lesson that this tragedy has taught us so brutally: the fight to end economic and social division on the basis of race is far from over. In its round of forthcoming contract negotiations, TUGSA will work hard to ensure that the principles and protections set forth under the Equal Rights Act continue to be upheld, but this is larger than that. It is up to all of us to refuse to pretend that there is no economic or educational gap with respect to race in this country, or to avoid the issue because it makes us uncomfortable and perhaps even ashamed of our collective past. The first step in tackling any problem is recognizing one exists. It is unfortunate that it took something as disastrous as Hurricane Katrina to open the eyes of some of our politicians to the continuing realities of systemic racism still rampant in this country, but now that the problem has been laid bare for all to see, it will be us who are remiss if we do not hold our elected officials accountable for finally bringing to an end this most disturbing of injustices.

Hurricane Katrina has had catastrophic consequences, to be sure, but the response of good people in its aftermath has been a ray of hope amidst unspeakable tragedy. Seeing how easily, how eagerly all sorts of people from all walks of life -- all races, colors, creeds -- gave anything they could to help the victims of this disaster was a reminder of the essential goodness of people, and the greatness of which this country is capable. The key for all of us is not to allow our moment of understanding to fade like so much news coverage as the weeks become months; we all need to carry over the same spirit of cooperation to fighting the underlying problems that served to worsen the developing tragedy in its first days. By taking an active interest in our political process through every avenue available to us -- the polls, the union, local volunteer organizations -- we can move toward a day when natural disaster is not matched, blow-for-blow, by human indifference.

In Solidarity,



Andrew Dixon
Co-President

Editor's Note: The American Federation of Teachers, TUGSA's national affiliate, has also been involved in a massive drive to benefit Katrina victims. If you would like to contribute, you can send a check to the TUGSA office, c/o the Hurricane Relief Fund. Make checks payable to TUGSA with the notation "Katrina."

Temple University Graduate Students' Association / American Federation of Teachers

The TUGSA Tribune

United We Bargain! Divided We Beg.

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Upcoming Events

Oct. 5 Membership Meeting
Oct. 19 Panel Discussion

Union Parade Gives Thousands TUGSA Helps Raise \$10,000 for Hurricane Katrina Victims



TUGSA was among the unions at this year's Labor Day Parade raising money for the victims of Hurricane Katrina as they marched down Columbus Boulevard. Volunteers from the forty-plus unions represented carried buckets and solicited contributions from passers-by; the total amount raised was \$10,000, according to the Philadelphia Central Labor Council.

Featured on Fox 29's Evening News was TUGSA Co-President Andrew Dixon, as one of the most productive of the volunteers. "People were very generous," Dixon told Feature Reporter Gerald Kolpan. "They were giving fives, tens, twenties, without hesitation."

The parade was preceded by speeches from Mayor John Street and TUGSA Staff Organizer April Logan, among others. Street's brief peroration invoked both the historical involvement of unions in the Civil Rights Movement and the continuing efforts of unions to work against various forms of discrimination. "Philadelphia still needs unions," said Street.

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Health Insurance Update

Health insurance, particularly online enrollment, was the focus of a meeting held September 9th between TUGSA and Temple's Human Resources Department. Representing TUGSA were Andrew Dixon, Co-President, and April Logan, Staff Organizer; representing the University were Sharon Boyle, Director of Employee and Labor Relations, and GERALYN O'KANE, Manager of Human Resources.

Questioned as to why online enrollment was instituted when students still have to carry paperwork to the Benefits Office, Boyle responded that the old system was too labor-intensive to maintain. O'Kane added that Human Resources and the Graduate School have been working to make it possible to complete the enrollment process entirely online, a process that she said might be complete by the end of September; in the meantime, students can fax their paperwork to the Benefits Office. If you need any assistance filing your health insurance paperwork, or if you have any questions about the process, you can always contact TUGSA at 215-235-0512.

Dixon and Logan also pointed out that the health insurance information on the Human Resources website is at times either incomplete or misleading; for example, the website does not mention that students have the option of selecting nine months of Keystone coverage (fully subsidized) or that TAs and RAs with fractional appointments are still entitled to health insurance coverage on a pro-rated basis. O'Kane acknowledged problems, citing miscommunication between her and staff while she was away from the office, and stated that she would make the corrections suggested by TUGSA. (Complete health insurance information is available on TUGSA's website at www.tugsa.org.)

The fact that a number of students have experienced difficulty submitting an online enrollment because of the way their status is entered into different computer systems was addressed at a meeting held over the summer between Dixon, Logan, and Boyle. Boyle stated at that time that reconciling records regarding the status of graduate students will not happen until some time in the spring 2006 semester; that estimate remains in place.

Ask Ms. TUGSA



Dear Ms. TUGSA,

It sounds all well and good to ask for an improved contract, but let's be realistic here: it's simply not wise to rock the boat. Gaining more benefits will only backfire because it will just lead the University to cut back on TA and RAships.

- Prudence

Dear Prudence,

Actually, the facts are just the opposite. It's true that, over the past several years, the number of graduate students has decreased, as the University shifts its priorities from education to exclusivity and, it hopes, prestige. However, the number and percentage of graduate students receiving TA and RAships has actually gone up -- and steadily, too. In 2002, only 8% of graduate students had TA or RAships, compared with 10% in 2003 and 12% in 2004.

Letter from the President

To Our Members,

On September 5, Rebecca and I proudly marched alongside our brothers and sisters in TUGSA in Philadelphia's Labor Day Parade. As a unit, TUGSA's representatives joined thousands of others from the organized labor force in the Philadelphia area -- representing over forty different locals -- to celebrate the contributions of union labor to the workforce and to ensure that the voices of all working people will be heard now and in the future. It was a great reminder to both of us -- and to everyone who was there -- that organized labor is about more than just collective bargaining agreements and management-employee relations; organized labor is about creating, maintaining, and celebrating a community of workers in order to ensure the best and fairest possible conditions for everyone, not just the privileged few.

As part of this wonderful day, we were given the opportunity to participate in a frighteningly practical reminder of these principles to which we all pay lip service but which are all too easily forgotten amidst the stresses of the day-to-day necessities that seem to consume the lives of graduate employees. We were asked to help demonstrate labor's commitment to social justice across our country by helping to collect money from people participating in and watching the parade for the victims of Hurricane Katrina. This tragedy has touched all of us in some way; many of the people in our bargaining unit and among our members have family and friends in the Gulf coast region of the country. Even those who don't have felt deep sympathy for all affected, as the images of homes and lives washed away by cold floodwaters have painted an all-too vivid picture of the banality of human suffering. The simple grey buckets we were given to collect donations seemed a fitting instrument for combating the deplorable conditions so many suddenly found themselves forced to confront, through no fault of their own. The buckets served as a reminder that the most powerful tool of all is never anything flashier than the generosity and strength of people working together for a common good.

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Union Parade Gives Thousands, cont.

In one small example of such efforts, numerous volunteers collected signatures during the speeches for a petition against Wal-Mart, citing Wal-Mart's notorious gender discrimination and general treatment of its workers. "Don't shop at Wal-Mart," said Logan firmly. "When you do, you hurt workers across the globe because Wal-Mart is anti-union and makes money by exploiting its employees. Shop at Target."

Logan also spoke of the importance of unions in general and a union at Temple in particular. "75% of workers with unions get health benefits, while only 49% of non-union workers get health benefits. 69% of union workers are guaranteed a pension, compared to only 14% of non-union workers. For all of these reasons we must fight to protect workers' right to form unions."

Health insurance and other benefits are necessary not just because they benefit the worker, however, but because, quite simply, they allow the worker to do a better job. This is especially important, of course, for those whose work is education.

By using tax dollars to fight such TUGSA proposals as a salary closer to a living wage, the University's administration, said Logan, demonstrates its desire "to move towards a corporate model focused on a bottom line that is often at odds, not only with the good of TAs and RAs, but with the public good -- the good of this city."

TUGSA MEMBERSHIP CARD

Temple University Graduate Students' Association (TUGSA)
American Federation of Teachers, Local #6290
215.235.0512 union@tugsa.org

Yes! I support my colleagues in our efforts to build a strong union. I hereby become a member of the Temple University Graduate Students' Association, and I authorize TUGSA to be my exclusive representative for the purposes of collective bargaining with Temple University.

Name: _____
Address: _____ City, State, ZIP: _____
Email: _____ Home Phone: _____ Campus Phone: _____
Dept. Enrolled: _____ Dept. Employed: _____
 TA RA GA TG FFF PT instructor

No university funding Other, please specify: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

TUGSA runs on volunteer power. As part of my commitment, TUGSA can count on me to contribute 1-2 hours of my time to our union:

weekly bi-weekly monthly

TUGSA DUES AUTHORIZATION FORM

To: Temple University
Human Resources Office
Labor Relations

I, the undersigned, a member of TUGSA, authorize Temple to deduct all dues payments authorized by the TUGSA Constitution and Bylaws from my pay and to remit the amount so deducted to TUGSA, while I am employed in a bargaining unit position.

This authorization will remain in full force and effect until revoked by me, in writing. Such revocation must be a written notice sent to TUGSA and the Temple Labor Relations Office during the ten (10) business days preceding the expiration of a semester.

As of June 1, 2004, the TUGSA Bylaws set dues at 1.65% of income from employment within the bargaining unit. Dues levels are established by the membership and are subject to change according to procedures defined in Article Thirteen of the TUGSA Constitution. Copies of the TUGSA Constitution and Bylaws are available at the TUGSA office or online at www.tugsa.org.

Name (please print): _____

Department Employed (please print): _____ Social Security _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

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