

**Minutes
of a Meeting of the
American Sociological Association Council**

Monday, March 31, 2003

Members Participating: William Bielby (President), Michael Burawoy, Craig Calhoun, Esther Chow, Robert Crutchfield, Jennifer Glass, Arne Kalleberg, Deborah King, Rhonda Levine, Victor Nee, Barbara Reskin, Barbara Risman, Lynn Smith-Lovin.

Members Unable to Participate: Linda Burton, Elijah Anderson, David Grusky, Bernice Pescosolido, Ivan Szelenyi, Pamela Walters.

Staff Participating: Sally Hillsman (Executive Officer), Michael Murphy.

1. Call to Order

The ASA Council met by telephone conference call at 8:00 pm on Monday, March 31, 2003. Upon obtaining a quorum, the meeting was called to order by President Bielby at 8:06 pm.

2. Member Resolution

Bielby reported to members that several ASA members had prepared a resolution on the current US-led war in Iraq, and had circulated that resolution among members seeking their support. Earlier that day, the sponsors submitted the resolution along with 784 names in support of the resolution.

ASA Bylaws require that member resolutions have at least 3% membership support in the form of signatures on a petition in order to be considered. Staff reviewed the names offered in support of the petition on behalf of Secretary Kalleberg who certified based on this review that, while not all names provided were current members of ASA, more than the necessary 3% had been provided.

The resolution submitted reads:

The American Sociological Association comprises sociologists and kindred professionals who study, among other things, war and peace, democracy and totalitarianism, conflict resolution and violence, systems of inequality and their effects, states and legal orders, nationalism, and nation building.

We believe that foreign interventions that do not have the support of the world community create more problems than

solutions. President Bush's and Prime Minister Blair's decision to invade Iraq against the wishes of most of the nations of the world will undermine the already weakened UN, the League of Arab States, and the rule of international law, and will bring more harm than good to the Iraqi people.

We also believe that the threat of terrorism is not ameliorated by this intervention in Iraq. Instead of lessening the risk of terrorist attacks, this invasion could serve as the spark for multiple attacks in years to come.

This statement is not issued, and should not be construed in any way, as supporting the dictatorship of President Hussein or his regime. Our major concern with Bush and Blair's policy is not the stated end but with the means.

Hence, the American Sociological Association calls for an immediate end to the war against Iraq.

President Bielby led Council's discussion of the options available in response to this member-initiated resolution. He indicated that because the Members Resolution had been signed by 3% of the eligible voting membership, the By-laws required that the resolution go to the membership for a vote in the upcoming election ballot unless Council voted to endorse the statement as written as the official position of the Association. Bielby called for a non-binding straw poll of Council members to get a sense of Council's initial position on endorsing the Members Resolution. Council members participating were unanimously opposed to Council endorsing the statement contained in the member resolution as ASA policy without further discussion as to its content and available options.

While Council was uniformly against Council accepting the Member Resolution forthwith, members reasons were numerous and varied. Most Council members, however, agreed that they did not think Council should take such an action without additional information on where the general membership stands on the question of ASA taking an official position on the war. Other concerns expressed included the following: that the statement did not display specifically sociological knowledge and scientific expertise brought to bear on an important policy issue; that the lack of a sufficient sociological basis for taking such a stand could undermine the credibility of the Association and the discipline; that it was not clear whether a scholarly association should take positions that are not directly related to the profession or discipline or based on scientific expertise and thus many other associations were not taking official positions on the war; that there might be a backlash from federal agencies affecting sociology funding; and that there was no clear distinction drawn between an Association stand that was morally-based and one that was scientifically-based.

Council members felt uniformly that an issue of this magnitude required the fullest possible discussion among and input from the Association's membership. When asked about electronic options to facilitate such discussion, Executive Officer Hillsman reported that there is currently a system for "threaded discussions" on the ASA website. That mechanism, however, has not been utilized recently. She reported that this discussion system could be activated, made prominent and easily accessible to members via the ASA homepage, and that a discussion could be stimulated by inviting members with different perspectives on the issues raised by the Member Resolution to offer initial comments.

A member of Council suggested that perhaps Council could draft an alternative statement that would address the concerns raised by members of Council. Others, however, felt that sociology was probably not in a position to make claims about the consequences of this war, and even if it could make a credible scientific statement, it would be a difficult job to assemble a committee of scholarly experts to undertake this task in a timely manner.

Several members expressed feelings of ambivalence, noting personal opposition to the war, but reluctance to have the Association take an official policy stand. One member expressed dissatisfaction that the Association had not used sociological knowledge and expertise more frequently in the past to bring scientific knowledge to bear on important public policy debates. Yet the same member agreed that the current issue was substantially different from Council's recent decision to submit an amicus brief to the U.S. Supreme Court on the issue of considering race in university admissions and to craft an Association policy statement on the importance of continued public collection of data on race.

Burawoy proposed that rather than Council taking a position for or against the Member Resolution that Council assist the Association's members decide the question by helping them frame the issues presented by this resolution when they cast their vote for or against the Resolution in the upcoming election. In addition, he suggested that Council also provide members with the opportunity on the ballot to express their personal opinions about the war in a vote that was independent of their vote on whether the Association should accept the Members Resolution as official ASA policy.

Hillsman reported that in the 1968 when the ASA confronted the member concerns about the Vietnam War, the membership voted *both* on whether the Association should take a formal position on that war and on what the membership's opinions were on whether the US should withdraw from Vietnam.

Burawoy suggested that Council provide members with a list of the key issues that had been raised by Council in its own discussion of the Resolution and ask members to think about those points while deciding how to vote on this question.

Council members expressed agreement, noting that while it is a personal obligation of citizens in a civil society to oppose the actions of their government if they disagree with those actions, members may disagree about whether a policy statement by the ASA

was the best means to do this. Hillsman reviewed the guidelines that had been adopted by Council in 2001 about criteria to be used in making policy statements on behalf of the Association's membership. Members of Council agreed that the language utilized in that report would be useful as part of the framing of this issue for the membership.

Bielby called for a vote of those in support of Council framing the issue for members; nine members were in favor, two were opposed, and one abstained.

Council continued the discussion, ultimately accepting general framework provided by Burawoy, in which Council would frame the issue for members along the following lines: "In light of the gravity of this issue, and in the interest of public debate within the Association, Council proposes to send the Member Resolution to the entire membership, encouraging members to consider the following issues in deciding how to vote on the statement as official ASA policy." Burawoy suggested that the issues listed could include, among others, scientific evidence in support of the statement, whether all ASA positions should be of a scientific nature, the risk of retaliation, and the risk of damaging the legitimacy of the society.

Bielby again called for a vote of Council; 11 members were in favor on the plan outlined by Burawoy; one member abstained.

Following consideration of this option, Council voted unanimously to support the idea of presenting members with an additional question which would provide them with an opportunity to give their opinion on the war.

3. Appointment of Sub-Committee

Bielby appointed a sub-committee of Council composed of Michael Burawoy, Deborah King, Jennifer Glass, and Victor Nee, with Michael Burawoy as facilitator, to draft the framing statement for the Member Resolution on the ballot and to draft the second question on the war to be presented to the members. The Sub-committee is to report back to the full Council to review the drafts. Given the timetable for completion of the ASA election ballot, the sub-committee will proceed immediately with the intent of have language ready for Council review this week. Since Council has decided on an approach, there is no need for an additional conference call or vote to ratify the sub-committee's language.

4. Adjournment

With no additional business for consideration, Bielby thanked the members of Council for their attention to this issue and thoughtful participation. The meeting was adjourned at 9:30 pm.