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ORGANIZING DEMOCRACY

Reading the Watkins and Christensen articles we see how academic workplace organizing requires a democratic movement to be effective. In Texas, the keys for change are developing active members, mounting lobbying efforts, and pursuing legal channels even where no contract struggle exists. In my own local experience at Rutgers, building positive change for TAs/GAs (graduate student employees) and PTLs (part-time lecturers or adjuncts) has always revolved around negotiating and enforcing the collective bargaining agreements. Collective bargaining isn't the essential thing — organization is.

Burns and Navarrete in California show us another example of an organizing effort / democratic movement. Their article reminded me just how crucial alliances and coalitions can be in this process. We also learned this at Rutgers through contract struggles. With full-time faculty and TAs/GAs in one bargaining unit and PTLs (part-time lecturers or adjuncts) in another, we face a variety of "divide and conquer" tactics from our administration. In the end we settled contract disputes that took years to resolve by forging strong ties between programs involving faculty, grad student employees, and students.

A glowing example came right after the Rutgers full-time faculty and TAs/GAs finally settled their contract. The Rutgers administration assumed that ignoring PTLs would cause them to fall into a crack, with little visibility or support. So when full-time faculty, TAs/GAs, and students all descended en masse on the Board of Governors meeting to demand a settlement to the PTL contract, there may have been some surprise. Within a few weeks, a settlement was reached. This victory for PTLs is particularly sweet since renegotiations were underway for three-plus years and the Part-Time Chapter of the AAUP is one of the few independent units of organized adjuncts across the nation. We won annual across-the-board increases of 5% and 25%, an arbitration provision for the grievance procedure, and an agency shop. We also managed to line up the expiration date with the full-time faculty/TA/GA contract, which makes it easier to continue mutual support in renegotiations.

Mutual support of this kind grows most powerful when it's understood as common interest. Some of the problems that Eric Marshall describes at CUNY could develop at Rutgers too if adjuncts outnumbered full-time faculty, if they became disenfranchised within the same bargaining unit, and if competition rather than cooperation trends emerged. But organizing an effective caucus inside an organization can closely parallel building an effective organization. Two of the central things you do either way, as Julie Schmid points out in the Iowa constant campaign, are: 1) maintaining an ongoing organizing mode, and 2) emphasizing member education. This is advice we find in one form or another in all the articles.

One thing that tends to slip from focus in the crunch of organizing efforts is the problem of the job market. Ed Fox reminds us in his short piece on Indiana — mentioning the "uncertain professional future." Ending exploitation for graduate student employees and adjuncts won't mean too much if full-time positions

continue to decline, if the profession of scholar-teacher wanes into extinction.

This is the issue that can link the interests of adjunct, grad student employees, and full-time faculty. Organizing to raise the status and compensation for adjuncts diminishes the economic incentive to exploit them and to replace full-time faculty lines with adjunct lines. That means graduate students can perhaps hope to find full-time (rather than adjunct) positions, when they complete their programs, if heavy workloads don't prevent them from doing so (another focus of organizing.) With less adjuncts and grad student exploitation, more full-time faculty are needed. Sounds simple, but somebody has to make it happen. That is, everybody has to make it happen.

This is why producing an "organizing kit" has become the major project of National AAUP's Committee G on Part-Time and Non-Tenure-Track Appointments which I chair. Putting together a variety of documents, articles, and policy statements, the idea is to put some tools and encouragement into the hands of those academic employees interested and willing to take some initiative. (Copies are available for \$15 from AAUP in Washington D.C., 800-424-297) The articles we have here, as well as the most recent news reports, suggest that graduate student employees are the most actively organizing sector of academic workers these days. (There are some glimmers of activity among full-time faculty and adjuncts, University of Alaska for instance.) Graduate student employees are probably less vulnerable than adjuncts and less complacent than full-timers. But they are also uniquely situated as student employees to catalyze coalitions between faculty, students, adjuncts and other university employees. These coalitions, as pointed out in several of the articles here, will be crucial in preserving the educational missions of our colleges and universities as well as protecting the well-being of the people who make them work.

AFFILIATIONS

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