



Carter, C. (2002). Introduction: Formal opposition in the casual academy. *Workplace*, 8, 10-13.

INTRODUCTION:

Formal Opposition in the Casual Academy

Chris Carter

Campus Equity Week signifies, above all else, the collective desire of contingent academic workers to control the conditions of their labor. At once celebration and protest, it has combined the joy of international solidarity with the rage for local transformation. It has amplified the voices of those members of the academy who, though providing the bulk of classroom instruction, have long been institutionally voiceless. Those voices now call for an end to exploitative labor practices, a nation-wide implementation of equal pay for equal work, and in many cases, the recognition of a collective bargaining unit. Unsatisfied with the incrementalism of managed reform, contingent academics across the United States and Canada have articulated their struggles in ways both conclusive and generative. At once a voicing and a *connecting*, that articulation is partly the resounding result of committed organizing, partly a promise of future action. In the essays that follow, contingent labor activists recount the history and context from which Equity Week emerged, and offer important insights for furthering the struggle.

In “Contingent Faculty Make News,” Joe Berry emphasizes the level of self-determination necessary for generating solidarity among adjuncts, part-timers, and non-tenure track faculty. Rather than relying on administrative benevolence, or waiting for unions to court them, contingent laborers have organized from the bottom up. Berry traces contingent worker self-organization from local New York bargaining to the state-wide California Part-time Faculty Association, from the national Conferences on Contingent Academic Labor to the international Campus Equity Week. These efforts, according to Berry, have relied on multiple communications technologies for purposes of advertisement and coalition-building. Barbara Wolf’s splendid documentary videos, *Degrees of Shame* and *A Simple Matter of Justice*, have played an important role in spreading the news of casual exploitation and formal opposition. A growing number of websites have also helped publicize the contingent labor movement, prompting the creation of CEWACTION.org. That site, while featuring the experiences of adjuncts from varied locales and backgrounds, has moved beyond narrative exchange to the initiation of large-scale action. The question of whether such action can be sustained remains vexed, yet the implementation of a Chicago COCAL, the linking of CEW to graduate labor, and the support of militant Canadian activists suggests that a long-term campaign is forthcoming.

Nick Tingle, who’s been a “visiting” lecturer at the University of Santa Barbara for twenty years, suggests that long-term action strategies ensure the survival of organizations. If not for the willingness to fight battles for respect and recognition over and over again, he suggests, the union would stagnate and dissolve. In “Collective Contingency,” Tingle holds that labor victories are not won only at the bargaining table, but through the extended commitment of similarly-positioned workers to “think union.” This mode of labor consciousness requires oppositional vigilance, the dedication to worker dignity over and against managerial prosperity. Since university managers value production more than education, it becomes the responsibility of the very workers they exploit to promote critical thought in the face of mass

corporatization. That responsibility, though often painfully difficult to fulfill in light of inadequate pay and working conditions, is nevertheless one that helps unify the agenda of organized contingent educators. Their organizations emerge in response to capitalist avarice, while celebrating a form of value other than profit, a kind of social exchange outside of the "market."

Like Tingle, Chicago activist Helena Worthen emphasizes the importance of developing long-term bargaining tactics when mobilizing contingent teachers. She argues in "Defending the De-Scheduled Instructor" that while the establishment of a union is itself a victory, contingent workers must immediately begin building the internal structure of their organization and learning to read their contract strategically. They must recognize that though both the union and the administration are responsible for upholding the contract, the two bodies have fundamentally different goals. Management typically privileges cost-efficiency and public image, while the teacher's union values such things as fair pay, healthy working conditions, and job security. Stewards and other union members should learn to use the language of their contract to protect their workplace values, and this often means interpreting ambiguities creatively, or weaving several clauses into one multi-layered argument. Worthen suggests that though single clauses rarely ensure the job security of adjuncts, the careful linkage of multiple clauses can help to defend the "de-scheduled" instructor against the rationalizing imperatives of university management. Since strong tactical readings depend on the specific circumstances of each adjunct, those readings should not be performed by the steward in isolation. Contingent teachers themselves need to rise in their own defense, working closely with their stewards to set precedents for protecting workplace dignity. Each new labor struggle represents an opportunity for further organization. Rather than "servicing" teachers, stewards can strengthen the union by helping teachers secure their own interests, which in turn secures the interests of the collective.

Strong stewardship depends on a strong collective. Yet the establishment of an organization that fairly represents the interests of both full-time and contingent teachers has historically been a difficult undertaking. At some schools, the establishment of any sort of union has been an immense challenge. As Eric Marshall reports in "A Tale of Two City Universities: Internal and New Unit Organizing in New York City," New York has seen poor union representation of adjuncts in some locations, and no union representation at all in others. At CUNY and NYU, however, two campaigns are underway to link the struggles of adjunct and tenure-track faculty. The new leadership of CUNY's Professional Staff Congress (PSC) has prioritized the recruitment of adjuncts, thereby winning the favor of the once-rival organization CUNY Adjuncts Unite (CAU). PSC recognizes that the desire for workplace dignity transcends job description, and that the segmentation of teachers suits not labor but management. At NYU, management has long ensured the invisibility of adjunct faculty, but competing drives by the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and United Auto Workers (UAW) have brought adjunct issues into public focus. Marshall argues that the opposition between unions, rather than merely dividing the loyalties of adjuncts, has instead led to their greater representation by both organizations. The contest has sparked intense interest in the upcoming labor election, increasing the likelihood that adjuncts will opt for union affiliation. By intensifying labor's commitment to the concerns of contingent educators, the present struggle between organizations prepares labor for its later, more rigorous struggles with management.

Winning those struggles requires trust and solidarity among tenured and contingent educators, teachers and students, academic labor and other sectors of the workforce. Independent filmmaker Barbara Wolf documents the upsurge of academic labor consciousness among contingent educators and the larger public in *Degrees of Shame* and *A Simple Matter of Justice: Contingent Faculty Organize*. In her recent Workplace interview, she explains how the first video helps illuminate the institutional abuse of contingent academics, while the second highlights the various collective attempts to curb that abuse. In *Degrees of Shame* she demonstrates a deep concern for contingent teachers, showing her willingness to listen, and to focus attention on stories that our corporate administrators would prefer to see suppressed. *A Simple Matter of Justice* traces the deepening of Wolf's concern as it celebrates the emergence of various forms of organized action. The introduction to the video has already been screened at CEW events across

the country, and has sparked interest in the upcoming episodes, which concern the importance of national organizations, regional coalitions, and local unions for adjunct equity. These episodes will dramatize how collectives flow out of particular circumstances and local contexts, and how organizational dynamics depend on the experiences of different educators bound by the same desires. The video will show how specific organizations suit specific environments, while exploring their often untapped potential to energize each other. In significant contrast to the NYU turf struggles described by Eric Marshall, Wolf considers how different collectives can move beyond competition to mutual reinforcement. Such reinforcement is necessary not only for organizations, but for the various people within each institution. Only when diverse workers assert common interests will unionization lead to systemic change.

As Joel Westheimer demonstrates in the lead piece of our Campus Equity Week section, systemic change has rarely been more urgently needed. The current system sustains the hollow managerial notion of corporate "excellence," promoting standardization and economically profitable research while rarely rewarding critical consciousness in the classroom or among faculty. Public expressions of critical consciousness not only diverge from the dominant agenda of the university administration, they can undermine job security. Few academics know this better than Westheimer. "Tenure Denied: Union Busting in the Corporate University" recounts how his support of graduate student organizing cost him his teaching position at NYU. Though his bid for tenure received unanimous support from his department and from seven outside experts, it was finally rejected by the university's upper administration. The committee ostensibly based the denial on "inadequate" scholarship, yet even a brief look at his enormous output of nationally recognized scholarship renders their logic suspect. In light of the administration's attempts to undermine graduate student unionization, the refusal indeed appears reactionary and punitive. Westheimer's solidarity with graduate workers, along with his National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) testimony on behalf of their right to organize, threatened managerial flexibility and challenged corporate business-as-usual. His bravery, though less than revolutionary in his own eyes, nevertheless panicked the vanguard of academic capitalism at NYU. Academic management tolerated Westheimer's radical thought when confined to the classroom, but as soon as it translated to radical action, they quickly moved to protect the bottom line. Since graduate labor pads that bottom line, neither student organizers nor their supporters escape administrative wrath. In his appearance at a CEW panel with Marc Bousquet and Barbara Foley, Westheimer alerted adjuncts to the increasing shamelessness of such administrators. Having become what Helena Worthen calls a "de-scheduled instructor," he supports the struggles of adjuncts for job security, while enlisting their support of his own fight for justice. Echoing Barbara Wolf, he contends that our varied struggles in the academic workplace are not only complementary but integral. For Westheimer, the NYU grads, and a host of determined adjuncts, the questions become: *What is good for all workers? How do we achieve it together?*

In the managed university, exercising the basic right to organize looks strangely revolutionary. As neoliberal economic policies work to naturalize flexible labor, the collective self-determination of workers appears an alien, even alarming prospect to administrators. They hope that the public will be similarly alarmed and endorse the administrative desire to cut costs and deliver friction-free information in mass quantities. They further assume that the public will recognize the "necessity" of contingent academic labor for achieving corporate success. Yet Equity Week activists envision a different kind of public—one less willing to ratify corporate essentialism, and more eager to see hard-working teachers fairly compensated. They imagine a public that would resist, if properly educated about the labor practices of their universities, the rampant exploitation of part-time and non-tenure track academics. In the following essays, Joe Berry and Nick Tingle argue that though the processes of public education have already begun, they require us all to continually re-learn old lessons about grassroots initiative. The same is true, according to Helena Worthen, for collective bargaining. She suggests that bargaining, like public activism, takes lasting commitment and creativity, along with agitation by and for workers. Eric Marshall explores how inter-organizational struggles can build public interest in the unionization of adjuncts, while Barbara Wolf encourages solidarity among multiple organizations and diverse educators. In the opening story, Joel Westheimer sets the tone for the rest of the pieces by describing the potential consequences of

our opposition to the union-busting corporate university, and he thereby exemplifies the general courage of Campus Equity Week campaigners. The collective expression of such courage remains the key strategy for creating a more equitable workplace.

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