

# American Academic Labour Unions: When the Struggle is Not So Local

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Chapter

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# Why the Struggle is not so Local?

- The role of the US in training academics for the global academic marketplace
- Research: Questions asked, methods and framework of analysis employed
- Academic hegemony of the US in multiple fields
- Corporate model and lack of workplace democracy impact training and research and perpetuate undemocratic academe in the US
- Is this the template for the developing world?

# Declining Unionization in the US

- Trajectory of Decline of unions in the US: economic change and neoliberal economic orientation have driven down union density.
- Many Southern states are right to work states or “at will”
- Strong union states have been in economic decline or : MI, NY, OH, and PA

# Unionization of Faculty

- PA, MI, OH, and NY are the major states with strong academic unions
- In several states, including KY, “public higher education unions are illegal”
- The Taylor Law and NYS unionization
- Hostility of the NLRB and Republican leaders at the federal and state levels
- UUP

# Impediments to Unionization

- NTESU conference: striking parallels-  
academic lethargy or fear of joining,  
perceived lack of relevancy of the union to  
the professional and academic life of  
members
- How can we study global “change” and  
“justice” without becoming a part of the  
process locally?
- Administrative exploitation and co-optation

# Who pays Academics?

- The public taxpayers. It is a public trust and public good. Pay increases do not come from the largesse of administrative goodwill or perceptions of professorial or professional achievements
- They are contractually negotiated!
- Becoming part of the process and using political power to right injustice

# The Case of an Academic at Oneonta

- Climate of fear and vindictive behavior to remove person.
- Administrative response: "I wish you knew what we know" "Can't talk about it, it's personnel."
- Through political pressure and the raising of consciousness, we were able to overturn decisions and we have now been vindicated.

# Partnership with Administration?

- We can be loyal friends and have strong partnerships, but we are terrible enemies.
- Union righteous indignation- forums, evaluations, and dissemination of information
- We have activated numerous academics on our campus. Link professional live to union work.



# Examples of Empowering Academics and Professionals through Union Work

- Psychologist and conflict resolution: Grievance Officer
- Directory of the Center for Community and Social Responsibility: flood relief, Habitat for Humanity, Saturday's Bread
- Accounting: union budget
- Political science: advocacy
- Sociologist: economic development
- IT: webpage design, Sentinel
- Human ecology: Green program
- History: history of unionism and the need to honor Labor Day
- Commonality: We all work toward a common goal: social justice through union work. What ties us together is genuine friendship that transcends the disciplinary or professional boundaries
- It helps academics and professionals develop self-confidence, leadership skills, and allows us to incorporate "democratic ethos" into our service, research and teaching.

# Knowledge and Power

- Knowledge will not set you free unless you have the will and capacity to act on it. If you don't have the capacity, create it.
- Miserable academic who is knowledgeable about his/her field but knows nothing and contributes nothing to the life of the community. My definition of a failed academic.
- Feeling of disempowerment.

# Conclusion

- Fact: unions in academe are weak
- Fact: unions are its members
- Fact: you have the power to change the environment
- Myth: unions are inevitably corrupt
- Myth: you don't need a strong union and they've outlived their usefulness
- Fact: union principles impact the way we approach our research and the way we teach.
- Fact: unions can help us to connect local to international