

Singing in Center City

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At first it was awkward. A group of West Chester and Cheney professors met at the corner of 8th and Market in Philadelphia on Wednesday October 7: we were the Center City picket line. Faculty living in town, our task was to spread the word about the APSCUF strike in the heart of the city, marching outside a mall where PASSHE rents a floor for graduate courses. To passersby who saw us, it wasn't obvious what we were doing there. It looked like we were picketing W.D. Ross, but sounded like we were picketing for public education.

To us, it wasn't obvious either. It was our first strike. Many of us hadn't participated in a picket line before. We had signs, fliers, and a line captain. We had t-shirts and buttons. But we lacked that energy and force that only comes with years of experience in the labor movement, and experience on the line.

We would find that energy and force however, and this is the story of one way we did it: through music.

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After an hour of walking in a circle on the first day, we called a huddle to talk message and strategy.

Given the abrupt final offer that Frank Brogan had put on the table the previous night, which our bargaining team had

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rejected, what were we striking for exactly? What did we want to communicate? Standing on the corner in the sun, an unusual warm streak flowing through the city, we brainstormed slogans.

We were next to a busy bus stop, and we talked about how the PASSHE system's proposal was trying to divide adjuncts from full time faculty, so we chanted:

Adjuncts are us, don't throw them under the bus!

The state system's attempt to create a two-tiered faculty also inspired:

Two-tiered not fair, public educators care!

Then ideas started coming more easily. Our commitment to being public educators for working people, not the super wealthy, led to:

We teach the 99%!

Then there were direct demands we'd learned from strike trainings:

Fair contract now!

And when families with children walked by, we chanted:

*Why strike?
For our students!
Why strike?
For our future!*

*Your children,
Our students!*

We started hitting our stride. We chanted with more feeling, the confidence of a strong analysis in our minds. One chant that got us moving and kept our spirits high was the song-like looping refrain of "We Are The Union":

*We are the union
The mighty mighty union
Everywhere we go
People want to know
Who we are
So we tell them
We are the union...*

The singing was a clue to finding that energy on the picket line.

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I'm not much of a performer, but I do like to play music for political purposes. The night before the strike I emailed our line captain to ask whether I should bring my banjo to the line and he was very encouraging. So I brought the banjo to the picket Wednesday, and prepared two songs to teach folks if they were interested. There was excitement about singing together, and around mid-day I took out the banjo and stood in the middle of our picket circle to play. One song that particularly galvanized us was the African-American spiritual used during the Civil Rights movement, "We Shall Not Be Moved," whose chorus is:

*We shall not, we shall not be moved
Like a tree planted in the water
We shall not be moved*

Like so many strikers before us, we used our slogans from the chants we'd come up with to rewrite the lyrics of the song for our moment:

*We're fighting for education
We shall not be moved*

*We're fighting for a contract
We shall not be moved*

*We're fighting for our students
We shall not be moved*

*Students and teachers together
We shall not be moved*

*We're fighting for our adjuncts
We shall not be moved*

We sang "Ain't Gonna Let Nobody" with the slogans too:

*Ain't gonna let Frank Brogan
Turn me around*

*Ain't gonna let Frank Brogan
turn me around*

*Gonna keep on walking
Keep on talking
Marching up to freedom land*

A third song our picket line sang with feeling was an adaptation of "She'll Be Coming Around the Mountain":

*We'll be fighting for our students
As we strike*

*We'll be fighting for our students
As we strike*

*We'll be fighting for our students
We'll be fighting for our students
We'll be fighting for our students
As we strike*

Near the end of that first day, something changed. Singing and making music brought a sense of joy, togetherness, and courage to our small group. It felt good to sing about our work, to lift our voices in the city and hear ourselves echoing off the walls of the concrete buildings. It felt good to make noise, create a new rhythm together as we fought for our contract and our values. Pedestrians smiled at us a bit more, nodded their heads, asked us what we were about.

Singing—music in general—was one thing among others that turned the Center City picket from awkward to beautiful, and gave birth to something powerful.

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At first, many of us were not comfortable leading chants. One or two of us would start one, and then others would suggest a chant to those who were comfortable speaking out. By the third day, though, every person on the line was comfortable shouting out a slogan or chant, and every person knew how to follow each other's lead. People on the street noticed this and joined us.

One passerby, a young father pushing his daughter in a stroller, marched with us for a time. Just before he left he addressed us and we listened to him talk about education and the importance of our strike.

On the last day we used the human microphone, a tactic made famous during Occupy Wall Street movement. Standing in the center of a circle, we would make short speeches, the group repeating each phrase after the speaker said it. It was like the music: we thought and acted with a cohesion, listening and thinking together.

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Something was born on that picket line, at least for me. It was a sense of power combined with an interest in unionism that goes beyond a contract, beyond securing some kind of healthcare or benefit. It felt like our union was more than just a contract negotiating organization. The union felt like a fighting body with a mind and a heart, an organization that negotiates a contract *for a reason*.

Maybe it was the singing, but I think it's what some theorists and activists call solidarity. Out on the line we experienced a solidarity, a collectivity, while fighting for our contract and manifesting our conviction that public education is important. We weren't just getting a contract, we were fighting to save public education from the constant onslaught of legislation trying to break up the PASSHE system. I experienced firsthand the power collective action has to protect public education; the contract was just an occasion to rise up.

When the strike ended, though relieved and happy, there was a sadness that our fight had ended. We were ready and willing and even wanting to stay out there and sing more, to keep fighting, not just for a contract but to make sure that conservative legislators would fail in their attempts to suffocate and eradicate the public good which PASSHE provides statewide.

The feeling of singing together to protect public education lives on at West Chester, where a number of folks involved with the Center City picket have become interested in making APSCUF more than just a contract negotiation body, but rather a union that protects public education. We want a union that doesn't only hold info sessions, but also gets actively involved in the struggle for working people and the marginalized around Pennsylvania. This vision is more urgent now given the incoming Trump administration, the Republican legislature, and Governor Wolf's vulnerability. The power conservatives have to weaken public education has never been greater. Our power has never been more important to develop and wield.

Singing on the sidewalk for those three sunny days inspired me, and I wonder if others throughout the state felt similarly. Did you feel it? If so, can we keep singing? Can we continue the fight beyond this one battle, to win the war to protect public higher education? Can we keep singing together for justice? I hope so. Having felt such a precious energy emerge during the picket in Center City, it would be a great loss if we didn't.



APSCUF to Rally at State System Headquarters Oct. 6

Oct. 3, 2016

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

For more information, contact:

Kathryn Morton, kmorton@apscuf.org or 717-236-7486

Faculty members will stand together Oct. 6 to encourage their employer to bargain a fair contract and prevent a strike. Members of the Association of Pennsylvania State College and University Faculties plan to rally 8:30 a.m. to noon at Dixon University Center in Harrisburg, where the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education's Board of Governors is scheduled to meet.

Faculty members have been working under an expired contract for more than 450 days.

"We hope the Board of Governors seeing our members in person will help them realize the contract we negotiate affects real people who teach real students," APSCUF President Dr. Kenneth M. Mash said. "We have more negotiation sessions scheduled after the rally, and we hope the event encourages the State System's negotiations team to get serious about a contract that is fair to students and faculty. The clock is ticking."

APSCUF announced last month that faculty members will go on strike Oct. 19 if the parties do not reach an agreement by that date. APSCUF will not strike if the State System negotiates a fair contract.

APSCUF will provide transportation for faculty members from all 14 of its campuses. Members interested in attending should contact their chapter's office manager immediately.

Members of other unions also are welcome.

APSCUF will not provide transportation to students, but any who attend on their own may join those rallying

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Attendees should tweet with the hashtag #withAPSCUF.

APSCUF represents about 5,500 faculty and coaches at the State System universities: Bloomsburg, California, Cheyney, Clarion, East Stroudsburg, Edinboro, Indiana, Kutztown, Lock Haven, Mansfield, Millersville, Shippensburg, Slippery Rock, and West Chester Universities of Pennsylvania.

Three Days on the Strike Line: A New Faculty Member's Perspective

Glen A. Ishoy

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On October 19, 2016, the faculty of the Pennsylvania State University System went on strike when contract negotiations reached an impasse after over a year of negotiations. I had just started my first semester as a faculty member at Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP). The purpose of this essay is to provide the perspective of a new faculty member on these historic events and try to provide some advice for new PhD graduates seeking appointments at unionized institutions.

I graduated with a PhD in Criminal Justice from Georgia State University in December 2015. I entered the PhD program there after a nearly ten-year policing career, which meant I was what some refer to as a “nontraditional student.” This seemed to mostly mean that I was older than everyone else in my classes. I interviewed for a tenure track appointment at IUP in November 2015. While I was going through the traditional gauntlet of interviews, meetings, and research presentations, I was made aware by several people of the expired status of the union contract. I was not quite sure what to think of what I was told, mostly because I had never worked for any organization in which there was a labor union. Being that I was interviewing nearly one year prior to

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the start date of any job I might be offered, I assumed that whatever problems existed with the union negotiations would surely be resolved long before I arrived (this was a poor assumption, as it turned out). In due course, I was offered a position at IUP in the department of criminology, which I accepted. I did not give much thought to the contract negotiations until I arrived at my new institution in fall 2016.

A New Beginning

When I started my new job, I became aware quickly that no progress had been made on contract negotiations since my last visit, and there were already discussions of the possibility of a strike among the faculty. It was not long before I found myself voting on whether to authorize the union to set a strike date. The measure passed overwhelmingly, and in due time, the strike date was set for October 19, 2016. As the strike date neared, several faculty members, more seasoned than me, from various departments on campus expressed sympathy for my arrival at such a tumultuous time and simultaneously assured me that there was nothing to worry about, because in the past these issues had always been resolved by a last minute “heroic” intervention by the governor. I resolved to continue teaching my classes and functioning as I normally would since there was nothing I could do to affect the outcome of negotiations or whether a strike would occur. I did, however, start paying close attention to updates from the faculty union and attending union meetings to become as informed about what was happening as I could. Despite my best efforts to act “normal,” I must admit that I became increasingly stressed as the strike date neared, seeing that there was no real progress in contract negotiations. Looking back now, the stress was most likely a result of the unknown. No one seemed to have any definitive answers about anything with regards to the potential strike, except for the date on which it would occur if no contract agreements were reached. I even found myself wondering, as a brand-new faculty member, if

I had made the correct choice as to which job offer I should accept in deciding where to launch my new career in academia. I also found that as the strike date neared, the looming threat of a strike (which I was convinced was going to happen despite other people's opinions to the contrary) changed the relationships I had with my students, my new colleagues, and to a certain extent, members of the Indiana, PA community in general.

Students' Search for Answers

As the strike date came closer, I started having students, with increasing frequency, ask me, in and out of class, if the strike was going to happen and what the effects would be on their grades, credit hours, and class schedules. The only answer I could honestly give was, "I don't know." This was not due to a lack of effort on my part to figure out the answers to these questions. The reality was simply that nobody knew the answers to these questions. There was no way to know if the strike would last three days or three months, if it happened at all. In addition to the anxiety I felt over these issues, I was also moved by the concerns that students had who were in their last semester of college and trying to graduate. I could tell that they were quite distressed over the possibility, however remote, that if things did not go well, their graduation could be delayed. I did my best to reassure these students that I was confident that the semester would finish out in some fashion, although in the back of my mind, I knew it was possible that I could be totally wrong about that. These conversations with students seemed to place me into a role that I was not accustomed to. Normally, I saw myself as the subject matter expert with all (or at least most) of the answers about whatever a student might ask about the class I was teaching. Conversations with students about the effects of the looming strike made it painfully obvious that, despite my best efforts, I had no better information about what might happen than they did.

Solidarity with Colleagues

Despite assurances from several colleagues that a strike was unlikely, I became increasingly convinced, based on my observations, several weeks before the strike date that it was going to happen. This was one time I would have been happy to be wrong. Despite the fact that no one really knew if the strike was going to happen or not, there was a growing feeling that regardless of what happened, we were all in this together. Admittedly, I did not perceive that I had been around long enough to have strong opinions about the issues at stake in the contract negotiations, but I was aware that my new colleagues were strongly vested in the debates about the various issues at stake. I was also keenly aware that regardless of my lack of passion about the issues being debated, the results would certainly affect me and everyone around me. I decided that whether I had been around long enough to have strong opinions or not, it was my obligation to support my colleagues and participate fully in the coming job action. As a result of this decision, I signed up to stand on the strike line for at least four hours each day. Although being on strike was not something I would describe as fun, it did provide a unique opportunity to get to know some of my colleagues more quickly than I might have otherwise. During normal working hours, stopping by someone's office unexpectedly to chat for an extended period is likely to be seen as an inconsiderate waste of someone's time. In stark contrast, while standing on the strike line, there was not much to do beyond talking to each other, and while I did not have the chance to engage all of my new colleagues in a lengthy conversation, I did have that opportunity with a few. Looking back on the experience, I have come to see this opportunity as a silver lining in the midst of the strike.

Community Reactions

I live in the center of Indiana, PA a short distance from the IUP campus. Because of the location of my residence, I

have frequent opportunities to interact with local business people, residents, and other members of the Indiana community. Because I am new in town, people frequently ask what brought me to Indiana. In the days and weeks leading up to the strike, when I responded that I was here to work as a professor at IUP, the topic of the potential strike came up with increasing frequency as the strike date approached. Members of the community expressed sentiments ranging from sympathy to full support in regards to the problems facing IUP faculty members. Many people echoed the sentiments expressed by my new colleagues regarding my misfortune of arriving at IUP just in time to participate in a strike. Although I usually made a joke out of that issue (as other options seemed less palatable), it was clear that people I talked to in the community understood the stress on everyone involved regardless of where they stood on the issues being debated. People always wished me well as we parted ways, but I always had a distinct feeling that most people were thinking “that poor guy” as I walked away.

Parting Thoughts

The three-day strike was a time filled with uncertainty and stress for many faculty members, but my personal experiences and discussions with fellow new hires at IUP indicate that this time was particularly stressful for new faculty. The strike ended relatively quickly, and all seems right with the world again (until the next contract negotiation). Despite some of the negatives of this experience, there were also positives. The focus of this essay has been on how the events surrounding the APSCUF strike affected the new relationships I formed as a new faculty member at IUP. While I do not presume to speak for people at other campuses, or even other people in my university or department, the opportunities the strike gave me to get to know my colleagues a little better and to make connections within the surrounding community stand out as important and valued experiences. While this was not how I would have preferred these things happen,

it was the hand I was dealt. Now, with the contract settled, the strike is beginning to feel like a distant memory, and there seems to be a shared bond between people who have endured hard times together.

As a final thought, I offer some free advice to those seeking jobs in academia. If you are considering taking a position at a university that has a unionized faculty, educate yourself as to what that means. I would not venture to say whether it is better or worse to work in a union shop. As with many decisions in life, there are advantages and disadvantages to both options. It is up to each individual to decide which set of pluses and minuses they like best, but if you do not know what you are getting into in advance, that can create its own set of problems.



APSCUF Chapter Offices Prepare to Move Off Cam- pus for Possible Strike

Oct. 11, 2016

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

For more information, contact:

Kathryn Morton, kmorton@apscuf.org or 717-236-7486

APSCUF chapter offices will move off campus 10 a.m. Thursday, Oct. 13, in preparation for next week's possible Association of Pennsylvania State College and University Faculties strike.

APSCUF offices at all 14 state-owned universities will relocate so faculty members will not need to cross picket lines.

“We will be going to the negotiations table Friday with every intention of trying to reach an agreement, but we will be ready for every contingency,” APSCUF President Dr. Kenneth M. Mash said. “We are preparing for the worst while hoping for the best.”

APSCUF announced last month that faculty members will go on strike 5 a.m. Oct. 19 if the Pennsylvania State System

of Higher Education does not bargain a contract APSCUF believes is fair to students and members. APSCUF objects to State System proposals that would affect the quality of education faculty members could provide to their students.

The negotiation teams are scheduled to meet Oct. 14–16. APSCUF offered to meet Oct. 8–9 — a weekend faculty negotiators weren't teaching — but the State System rejected those dates.

The faculty contract expired June 30, 2015, and negotiations have been ongoing since late 2014.

APSCUF represents about 5,500 faculty and coaches at the State System universities: Bloomsburg, California, Cheyney, Clarion, East Stroudsburg, Edinboro, Indiana, Kutztown, Lock Haven, Mansfield, Millersville, Shippensburg, Slippery Rock, and West Chester Universities of Pennsylvania.

**A Graduate Student's Social Media
Experience of the October 2016 Strike:
#withAPSCUF**

Abigail Hennon

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

I have experienced educational strikes twice, once as a freshman in high school and once as a graduate student. My high school teachers went on strike in 1988. As a teenager, I was delighted to have the days free from school, but understandably grumpy when we had to go halfway through the summer to make them up. Time passed. I returned to school to pursue my B.A. in English, discovering a love for education and a desire to teach. I completed my M.A. in English in North Carolina, but returned to Pennsylvania to pursue my doctoral degree, so that I could become a professor like those who inspired me.

In my first semester of coursework, contract negotiations between Pennsylvania State University's State System of Higher Education (PASSHE) and Association of Pennsylvania State College and University Faculties (APSCUF) came to a stalemate and the professors went on strike. Everything came to a halt. For a brief minute, I was glad to have that extra day to read the three novels I needed to finish before Monday. I can get ahead, I thought, surely the strike will only last a day or two, but then panic set in, for me as well as other graduate students. What if the strike lasts longer than a few

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days? Would we still receive our stipends? Would we have to redo the semester? How would our financial aid be affected? But then an even bigger concern became clear. We realized that the professors were fighting for the future of our profession, the profession we were in fact pursuing. The extra days for schoolwork did not seem as important anymore.

Living too far from the picket lines to experience it in person, I followed events online. I read all the APSCUF press releases. I read the news articles from different news sources. On social media, I proudly posted a “#withAPSCUF” badge on my profile picture, “liking” all the status posts from fellow graduate students and former professors, and clicking the appropriate emoticons on news stories that either glossed over the truth or explained the situation clearly. I watched videos of drenched professors standing in the rain. In the days of the strike, I sought out what was going on, but when I watched the news, the strike seemed of passing interest. What they did broadcast was skewed in favor of PASSHE. At six and eleven o’clock, they replayed news clips of angry parents and drivers shouting obscenities at well-educated, well-respected professors. My professors.

My Facebook friends posted status updates based on the information gathered from media news sources that did not focus on the entire situation: *let my child go back to school, you are denying them the education we are paying for, you are already paid too much*. I sat in my nice, warm office, dry and comfortable, while professors walked the picket lines, cold and wet, but as I read these posts, I realized that many of my friends did not understand what was going on, as the media coverage was slanted to show PASSHE trying to end the strike and APSCUF holding out for more demands. I started answering these posts, waging my own war on Facebook. I explained to my friends that it was not about money, but rather, about the future of higher education. This strike did not happen lightly. The professors tried for four years to resolve the issues before it came to this. Some of my Facebook friends did not see the unfair treatment of adjunct pro-

fessors and that the state was demanding even more of the professors' time with ever growing service commitments. Professors stretched too thin cannot give students the required level of dedication needed to teach effectively. My friends did not see these things. They only saw that it was about pay raises and supposed tuition increases. They did not see that the funding to the Pennsylvania state schools has been cut to alarming amounts. It was not the professors who did not support the students. In my eyes, it was PASSHE.

The strike ended with concessions being made on both sides and everyone returned to school, but what might seem to have been a passing thing was really a wake up call to the future of higher education. The profession I am entering is in danger of being trampled on by government cuts. I witnessed professors fighting for the future of this profession and their solidarity makes me proud to say that I will one day join their ranks. The strike of October 2016 was just the beginning. When it happens again, I will walk with them, because the future of higher education depends on it. We need experienced professors to teach students, because without them, the future of America is very bleak indeed.



APSCUF Begins Marathon Negotiations Session ‘Disappointed’ but Committed to Fair Contract

Oct. 14, 2016

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

For more information, contact:

Kathryn Morton, kmorton@apscuf.org or 717-236-7486

A three-day bargaining session begins today between the Association of Pennsylvania State College and University Faculties and the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education.

“We’re returning to the table because we are committed to our students and quality education, and it’s time to get this done,” APSCUF President Dr. Kenneth M. Mash said. “Our students and faculties have been through enough. We will do all we can to get a contract that is fair to students and to members. That’s our goal: A fair contract, not a strike.”

But APSCUF negotiators head into these talks deeply disappointed, Mash said.

“Yesterday the State System published proposals on its website that reiterate their team’s desire to cut the pay of our adjunct faculty, who are our most vulnerable colleagues,” he said. “Officially they call it a ‘change in workload,’ but everyone can see through that spin. The fact is that the State System wants to cut adjunct pay 20 percent.

“Eighty percent of adjuncts are at the bottom of the instructor pay scale, and they’ll always be at the bottom. And 60 percent are women. We will not stand for a contract that treats our adjuncts so unfairly and that could, should they have families, put them below the poverty line. We remain shocked that anyone involved with the System or our universities would advocate such a proposal.”

Talks are slated to continue at least through Sunday at a neutral location. If an agreement is not in place but the teams are making progress, APSCUF will remain at the table, Mash said.

APSCUF faculty members will go on strike 5 a.m. Oct. 19 if the State System has not bargained a contract APSCUF believes is fair to students and members by that deadline. APSCUF objects to State System proposals that would affect the quality of education faculty members could provide to their students.

The two sides last met Sept. 29. APSCUF offered to meet Oct. 8–9 — a weekend faculty negotiators weren’t teaching — but the State System rejected those dates.

The faculty contract expired June 30, 2015, and negotiations have been ongoing since late 2014.

APSCUF represents about 5,500 faculty and coaches at the State System universities: Bloomsburg, California,

Cheyney, Clarion, East Stroudsburg, Edinboro, Indiana, Kutztown, Lock Haven, Mansfield, Millersville, Shippensburg, Slippery Rock, and West Chester Universities of Pennsylvania.