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**THE  
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## **THE STONY BROOK WORKER**

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# GSEU'S UPCOMING CONTRACT NEGOTIATION

## Stony Brook Worker Editorial

All graduate students who are paid employees as TAs, GAs, or RAs at Stony Brook are represented by the Graduate Student Employees Union (GSEU) and Research Assistants Union (RAU). GSEU and RAU collectively bargain for and negotiate with New York State and the Research Foundation (respectively), over our labor contracts that govern our employment here at Stony Brook University. This contract determines our pay, benefits, and working conditions. GSEU safeguards our rights as workers, and it ensures that our employers cannot take advantage of, harass, overwork, discriminate against, or unfairly dismiss us. GSEU is also the reason that we have benefits like health, dental, and vision insurance as part of our employment package.

Thanks to our GSEU organizing, we are currently benefiting from the Fee Scholarship, which we won in 2020. With this Fee Scholarship, all grad student employees in terminal degree programs no longer have to pay “broad-based fees” back to the university, which had been roughly 10-15% of our annual salaries. It is also thanks to GSEU that we receive a contractually guaranteed 2% raise every year. In the last year, GSEU’s Living Wage Campaign won an additional \$2,500 pay raise, in addition to the aforementioned annual 2% raise. We will continue our Living Wage Campaign until grad student workers at SBU receive a fair stipend that is commensurate with the cost of living in this region.

The current contract between GSEU and New York State expires in June 2023. To get the best possible results for all grad student workers in our next contract negotiations, it is essential

that all graduate workers join their respective union, either GSEU for all TAs and GAs, or the RAU for all RAs. Higher union membership rates here at SBU means our position in these contract negotiations will be stronger. Put simply, if you want better pay, better benefits, and better working conditions, join our union and take an active role in organizing especially in the upcoming months, for instance by encouraging non-member grad workers to join the union.

There are many reasons why joining our union is imperative for a better workplace in terms of our pay, benefits, protections, now more so than ever. As we approach contract negotiations, it is imperative to remind ourselves that none of the wins mentioned above would have been possible without the strong membership and organizing activity of grad workers. As a union, we are not an entity that provides services from above, but an organization made up of all of us as workers who collectively attain pay, rights, protections and benefits. Contract negotiations are a significant strategic opportunity to determine our working conditions as organized workers. In these negotiations, we have the opportunity to increase our pay, safeguard our previous wins, and obtain new benefits. The scope of our success in these negotiations will be determined by the level of organizing that we put in.

These negotiations are a power struggle between us as organized workers and SUNY management. In this struggle, we have many different strategic avenues and tactics of putting pressure on SUNY. But one of the most important factors that will determine our power

Left: Stony Brook GSEU Living Wage Campaign Organizers at the “Scare-in for a Living Wage” on October 31, 2022

is our membership rate. The state has the data on how many grad workers support the union as members, and this illustrates the level of organization in our workplace. This data also determines the degree of leverage we will hold at the negotiating table. As our membership increases, we increase the possibility of earning and winning more concessions.

In the upcoming months, we will send a contract negotiation survey, asking members to communicate their priorities and demands for the negotiation process. This survey will allow us to gather strong empirical data to determine our priorities in these negotiations and to learn about what grad workers are concerned about. In order to make the most of this, we advise everyone to familiarize themselves with our current contract. You can find it on our website: <https://www.cwa1104gseu.com/understanding-your-contract>.

At the same time, we are currently forming contract bargaining teams, which will be an active part of the negotiation process. If you are interested, or if you are not happy about certain aspects of the workplace or the actions of the union, this is your chance to take an active part in making your voice count! Email us at [sbugseu@gmail.com](mailto:sbugseu@gmail.com) if you would like to join our contract bargaining teams!

After we have determined the priorities of our membership, we will send a request to bargain to the state when our contract expires. However, there is a likelihood that when the contract expires we will not immediately begin the bargaining process. Bargaining takes place between GSEU, the Office of Employees Relations (OER) and SUNY. Currently, the Governor's Office of Employee Relations (GOER) is negotiating contracts with United University Professions (UUP), which is the SUNY Faculty and Staff Union. Later on, new contract negotiations will also take place with the CUNY Professional Staff Congress (PSC). Since the UUP contract expired at the beginning of

the 2022 fall semester and negotiations are still underway, it is likely that our negotiations might be delayed.

This delay is not an immediate cause for alarm. Even when the negotiations do not take place immediately, our previous contract and benefits will remain in place for the time being, with the exception of fund monies. This continuation of contractual provisions was part of the Triborough Amendment. While fund monies might be put on hold in the future, we have already secured fund monies for SEVIS reimbursement and the Professional Development Fund (PDF) for next year. In the past, delays like this caused a sense of rush to quickly ratify a contract, but we do not believe that a rushed process has been beneficial for our unions to secure strong contracts. This time, we believe that patience will pay off, and we are aiming for a long contract negotiation campaign from which we can earn significant wins. Therefore, we advise all our members to be prepared for an extended negotiation period wherein we will keep applying pressure to earn a dignified contract!

If you are employed and paid as a TA or GA, please become a GSEU member through this link: <https://www.cwa1104gseu.com/become-gseu-member>.

If you are employed and paid as an RA, you are required as part of your employment to become a member of your union: <https://cwarauunion.org/become-rau-member>.

The more grad workers become union members, the better our chances as grad workers to protect the benefits we have and to push for more! So, join your union today!

## GSEU CAMPUS UPDATES

### The Stony Brook Worker Editorial



SUNY GSEU Organizers

Stony Brook is just one of sixty-four institutions in the SUNY system—the largest state university system in the United States. We spoke to graduate worker representatives from GSEU chapters at SUNY Buffalo, SUNY Albany, and SUNY Binghamton to learn about recent and current campaigns, difficulties, and victories.

#### SUNY Buffalo GSEU

Fall 2022, the University at Buffalo GSEU continued to fight for a stipend floor of \$22k and no broad-based fees in the \$22k in '22 campaign. While graduate workers were quite pleased with last year's success in the abolition of fees, this change did not affect all graduate workers equally, since it excluded Master's students and graduate workers not working academic departments. With the continuation of the \$22k in '22 campaign, we emphasized that every graduate worker deserves

a livable wage that is not reduced by broad-based fees. At the beginning of December, and only 24 hours after GSEU members read a statement at the UB Council meeting about their campaign, the university raised the stipend floor to \$23,000.

To support this campaign, members attended the State of the University event, where we handed out pamphlets detailing graduate workers' state of the union, specifically calling for fair workloads, increased stipend floors, and an end to broad-based fees. Notably, President Tripathi's speech at the State of the University extolled the virtues of only the most academically successful graduate students while refusing to address our roles and difficulties as workers.

President Tripathi also mentioned the opening of the new One World Cafe multiple times while failing to mention that the cafe's construction went \$23 million dollars over budget. Graduate workers

protested the opening of the cafe in March to call attention to this misallocation of Funds.

While we have tried to meet the deans of the colleges at UB to discuss the kinds of support they would need from the university to better support their graduate workers, we have found these efforts blocked at every turn. Although several deans initially agreed to meet with us, they quickly rescinded their offers. Each dean then emailed us to inform us they would not meet, referring us to Employee Relations instead. Regardless, we have continued to request meetings via an email-writing campaign that members of the GSEU participated in. Luckily, our campaign has been receiving increased public attention, particularly from the Buffalo News, who will soon be publishing a story about the campaign.

#### SUNY Binghamton GSEU

This semester, Binghamton GSEU started its Living Wage Campaign! Their campaign has received wide support,. We held a postcard writing event to the board of trustees, plan a protest for the first week of the semester, and will circulate our petition. GSEU at BU has been working on cases involving discrimination, overworked and pay discrepancies.

#### SUNY Albany GSEU

At SUNY Albany, all graduate workers are still paying fees. Only doctorate graduate workers who work directly for their departments have received stipend increases and waived a small portion of the fees they must pay. We are disappointed with the University's remorseless reaction in facing graduate workers' minimal wages, not to mention the inflation they have had to bear. In Fall 2022, Albany GSEU hosted four fee protests, sought fee-elimination support from the University Life Council and the Graduate Student Association, and started distributing the fee petition. In 2023, while we will continue fighting for our members



On October 15, GSEU UAlbany former organizer Rachel Rampil, UUP ally David Banks, ACCFL president Ibrahim Pedriñán, and other community allies and alums showed up for the Fees protest at the Homecoming Pregame event outside the football stadium at UAlbany.

on fees and living wages, we look forward to the promising contract negotiation ahead of us. We aim to bring more rights and benefits to our members for the first four years.

Along with Albany GSEU's persistent advocacy for fee abolition was the University's unlawful acts. One of Albany's campus organizers, Amie Zimmerman, was physically attacked by Todd Foreman, the University's VP for Finance and Administration Executive Council, during the outdoor Homecoming Weekend Protest on Oct. 15, 2022. Ironically, the University disciplined the same Organizer for violating community conduct by using a megaphone during the protest. Mr. Foreman's physical attack was unjustifiable, and the discipline was considered a more retaliatory move from the university. Amie's lawyer is currently suing a lawsuit for retaliatory battery with Mr. Foreman's physical attack, and the recent discipline will be added as more retaliation.

We made solid progress by achieving partial fees scholarship and stipend increases for the doctorate departmental-line workers. However, we are far from being satisfied with the current result and are outraged with the University's retaliatory reactions to our advocates. We hope 2023 will be a more rewarding year.

## INTERVIEW WITH SBU UNITED UNIVERSITY PROFESSIONS (UUP)

**Stony Brook Worker Editorial and Andrew Solar-Greco**



United University Professions (UUP) Organizers

*SBW = Stony Brook Worker;*

*ASG = Andrew Solar-Greco*

*SBW: Can you introduce UUP, who you represent, the structure of the union, and how many members you have?*

*ASG:* We represent the faculty and staff at the main campus, Stony Brook West Campus. We have about 2,400 members, and we represent full-time faculty, part-time faculty, faculty who are not tenured or on the tenure track, and the professional staff in academic departments advising, athletics, et cetera.

*SBW: Can you talk about some of the main issues your members are facing right now, the main issues you're trying to address, and the campaigns you have going on?*

*ASG:* We're trying to advocate for folks' telecommuting rights—the ability for those workers to telecommute at least once a week. We're trying to win more job security for our members who are in non-tenure track or part-time faculty positions; we're trying to increase their pay and increase the base stipend for adjuncts. We're also trying to help establish a kind of formalized promotion structure for those non-tenure track faculty, similar to the

one that tenured faculty or tenure-track faculty have. And we're trying to address the swelling course sizes that a lot of these faculty are dealing with. There are really poor wages—not a living wage for Long Island.

*SBW: You're talking about contingent faculty.*

ASG: Correct. Contingent faculty defined as faculty who are not on the tenure track and are ineligible for tenure.

*SBW: Can you tell me more about the conditions they're facing? What is their financial situation and what are the ideal goals for addressing this problem in more concrete terms?*

ASG: They're struggling with those swelling class sizes. If their class size surges, they're sometimes given a tiny bit more money that does not even remotely address the extra workload that having more students entails—more papers to

grade, more emails to answer. They're not given additional teaching assistance. It's a big challenge. We have some folks that have worked here for five, ten, fifteen, twenty years, and they're still in a very precarious level of employment that doesn't reflect what one would expect in higher education. We have some adjuncts who make only \$3,750 per semester to teach a course, which is just baffling—so incredibly low.

A lot of students think that they're being taught by a full-time faculty member who is on the tenure track or tenured, when in actuality they're being taught by someone who's being paid a poverty level wage. We're trying to get the administration to raise the base stipend for these adjuncts to \$7,000, which is still far too low for the amount of work it takes to teach a course and the amount of value they give to those students and the university.

*SBW: Right now this is \$3,750?*



United University Professions (UUP) Organizers

ASG: The minimum that a department can pay us for our contract is \$3,750. We're hoping to get that significantly increased, because that was a poverty level wage even before inflation, even before all the new challenges that we're facing financially in society right now.

*SBW: How many courses do your adjunct faculty usually teach to be able to get by during a semester?*

ASG: Part of the problem is that they're also teaching at Suffolk Community College or Farmingdale or St. John's or all these other schools to just cobble together a livable income. And when you're trying to be there for students and give them the best education possible but you're having to work at multiple institutions — juggling multiple user interfaces and systems and traveling to all these different places, adjusting to different classrooms — it affects the quality of education that our students get. Our admins care deeply about the work they do in serving our students, but it's a major, major challenge to be able to do your best when you have to endure these horrific conditions. Most of these folks would absolutely leap at a tenure track position, or would leap at a full-time lecturer position, or would love to have the option to be able to say, I only work at Stony Brook. But they aren't given that choice. They don't have that option because they're stuck in this part-time loop.

There are some adjuncts who teach here who have the same teaching load as a full-time professor, which would be a two-teaching load. They're told, "well, you're not doing research, you're not doing service." But they actually are, they are doing service for the university in one form or another. They are doing service for their department. They are doing research and writing books and doing all the same things that full-time faculty do, and they're making a tenth or even sometimes a fifteenth of what those full-time faculty are making.

And they bring just as much value to the university and to the students. This is really a problem in all higher education. But if we're a flagship university, if we are claiming to be the number one public university in New York State now, then this administration needs to invest in its part-time faculty. It needs to pay them a much fairer wage and help set up the structures that enable them to grow and promote themselves within the university. That just doesn't really exist right now. Or if it does, it's some form of a provisional policy, which, like anything that is not in our contract, can be selectively applied.

*SBW: What are some of the different pathways to promotion you are working toward? What kind of demands do you have there? How can these positions be made more secure?*

ASG: For someone who's a full-time lecturer, they can get promoted to a senior lecturer, and then they can get promoted to an advanced senior lecturer. That's nice, but no wage increases come with these title changes. When you get those promotions, you don't get an increase in the length of your terms, and you don't get a salary increase at all. If someone is an assistant professor and is promoted to an associate professor, they obviously get tenure and they get a salary increase also when they become full professor. A lot of those full-time lecturers are also writing and doing research and doing service to the university. The classic three-legged stool that a faculty member is responsible for—service, teaching, and research—a lot of our non-tenure track faculty, whether they're part-time or full-time, are doing that work too. They contribute to making us the number one public university in New York State, but they're not being rewarded for that. And it's really, really unjust.

*SBW: What happens when a lecturer is promoted to these positions? Is it just a status? Is it just a name?*

ASG: Yes. It's pretty much just status—it's just a name and that's obviously not enough.

SBW: *So, are you asking for these promotions to be accompanied by salary increases and longer terms?*

ASG: That's correct.

SBW: *Do you see this trend towards "adjunctification" on our campus too? Are tenure-track positions increasingly being replaced by contingent faculty?*

ASG: Yes. And it's not something that's been happening in the last two years—it's been happening for the last twenty-plus years. This trend is absolutely happening in all of higher education, and Stony Brook is no different. In the same period, we've seen upper administrative growth, so we know the university has the money. If you have an adjunct who's making more than that minimum of \$3,750, and some but not all of them are, let's say they're making \$5,000, we're asking the university to invest another \$2,000 in them. It would not be a hardship for the university to invest this kind of capital in what is roughly 400 people. It's not that significant of an expense, and it would make such a difference in the lives of our members who are not earning a living wage right now—it is completely within the university's power to rectify. The cost of living in general, but especially Long Island, is preposterous.

SBW: *What do you think is the ultimate goal, then? How should higher education unions strive to solve this problem of "adjunctification"? Would it be for these positions, not to exist as they are, to go back to a time when the vast majority of the positions were tenure track?*

ASG: Yeah, going back to the vast majority of the tenure track, ultimately. There are some adjuncts out there who sincerely want to teach just one course. They might have a day job and this is

just a fun thing that they do on the side, or this is just something that they enjoy doing. But the vast majority of them want a full-time position or want the ability to have that as an option. So, we're hoping to get people that choice—to have the choice to be promoted, to have the choice to be full time. But right now they don't have that choice. Right now, their only option is to rely on the goodwill of their department or their supervisor in the hope that they will get a promotion, in the hope that they will be considered for a full-time position, if one is even being offered. Often management in these areas—the deans—are very, very intentional with those decisions. There could be someone who's been a non-tenure-track faculty member in the department for five, ten, fifteen years, and an assistant professor position will open up and that faculty member won't even be considered, that's not right.

SBW: *What do you think will be the most effective way to achieve this goal?*

ASG: We've approached the administration with a memorandum of understanding to try to address this issue, and it's currently being reviewed. I think they're crunching the numbers, but we're hoping for an answer soon. We understand that one has to force the hand sometimes. If they don't respond in a timely fashion or make no effort to rectify this major inequity, we're going to have to get much more public and engaged with this campaign. For now, we're letting the process play itself out, but if we must, we will put ourselves in the position of increasing our mobilization and our outreach and our statements about these conditions.

And like I, like I said earlier, we have how many of our students realize that they're not necessarily being taught by someone who is actually a professor, who is actually being paid a fair wage for the work that they do. How many of our students don't realize that their instructor is someone

who's also an instructor at six other campuses and is absolutely struggling to make ends meet. And maybe that's why they might feel like they're not succeeding as much as they should because neither the instructor nor the students have been set up for success. How many students realize that? I don't know. But that's something that we need to talk about more. And we're hoping we don't have to necessarily be as explicitly public about this, but if we have no choice in the matter, then so be it. But right now, management is completely within their ability to rectify these issues.

SBW: *I understand that you are in contract negotiations. Are there general things you can share about that?*

ASG: We're trying to address a lot of these same issues in our statewide negotiations as well at the big table in Albany. I'm not at that table, so I'm not privy to all the details.

SBW: *How can our members support your campaigns and help you resolve these issues?*

ASG: As TAs and GAs, they can talk to their faculty and the PIs that they work with and say, "Hey what's going on here?" They can figure out, how could we help? You know, are you aware of this campaign? Some TAs might not realize that the person they're a TA for earns less money than them, right? They might think, "oh, they're a professor." So, figuring out how to manage that and learn who they're working with and say, "Hey TAs working on this, are you aware, are you a part of these efforts? You should think about getting involved seeing what we could do together." Encouraging their involvement and then of course, thinking about how they can potentially help out.

SBW: *How do you think we can develop labor solidarity at Stony Brook, not only among us, but with other labor unions?*

ASG: Having that frank conversation about what we're paid and about our job security is important. And doing the best we can to try to overcome the silos we find ourselves in—breaking down of departmental isolation and establishing actual interdisciplinary solidarity. This also requires trying to think about how we can overcome professional hierarchies—graduate students versus adjunct faculty. It doesn't matter to me what they're dealing with; we all face challenges with the university. We need to bring people who have some shared experiences into dialogue together and into solidarity and think about how we can address issues holistically as one broad, powerful labor movement.

SBW: *Thank you so much. Is there anything that you want to add for our readers?*

ASG: The main thing is to think about how we can come together as one labor movement with broad mutual interests to address all these issues. How can we holistically work together to improve what it's like to work at SUNY—whatever your job is?



United University Professions (UUP) Organizers

# BARGAINING UPDATE FROM FORDHAM GRADUATE STUDENT WORKERS (FGSW)

**Benjamin Van Dyne, FGSW Coordinating Committee**

This fall, after a landslide victory in the election for recognition of our union in April, Fordham Graduate Student Workers (FGSW, now also part of CWA 1104) began bargaining toward a contract with Fordham University. In our first five bargaining sessions, Fordham responded to our comprehensive proposals with stonewalling, willful misunderstanding, deception, and a patronizing attitude. We are going into the spring more determined than ever to build our power and to demonstrate to Fordham that our members should be—and will be—treated with respect.

More than 60 members of FGSW have attended our open bargaining sessions, led by our elected bargaining committee and our Vice President for the Education Division of CWA Local 1104, Andrew Dobbyn. The development of

our proposals has happened collaboratively with the entire bargaining unit, in open meetings, one to ones, and with a commitment to securing the best possible contract. We've been able to do this because we are the ones who know best what it takes to function well in our jobs.

Fordham's bad faith approach began in our very first bargaining session when Fordham's outside lawyer presented us with proposed ground rules, which either patronizingly restated what it means to negotiate ("negotiation is the process of making proposals and responding to them") or insisted that we commit to being "respectful and professional." Once we made clear that we would not accept these patronizing ground rules, we moved on to our first set of proposals.



Above: FGSW's Deemberg 12 bargaining session with flyers informing members of the Fordham community that Fordham uses NDAs to silence voters crime of harassment and discrimination  
Right: FGSW organizers

The first major proposal we presented was to ban the use of nondisclosure agreements (NDAs) in cases of harassment and discrimination. This is a health and safety issue, because the use of NDAs anywhere at the University means that bargaining unit members are not adequately informed about a potential health and safety danger in their workplace. For more than four hours over two sessions, Fordham insisted that they occasionally need to be able to silence harassment and discrimination survivors, for the survivors' own good—but Fordham also insisted, bizarrely, that they are committed to the right of survivors to speak. They claimed our proposal was rooted in naïveté and misunderstanding about how these agreements work. They insisted that they should have total discretion on how to ensure that Fordham is a safe workplace.

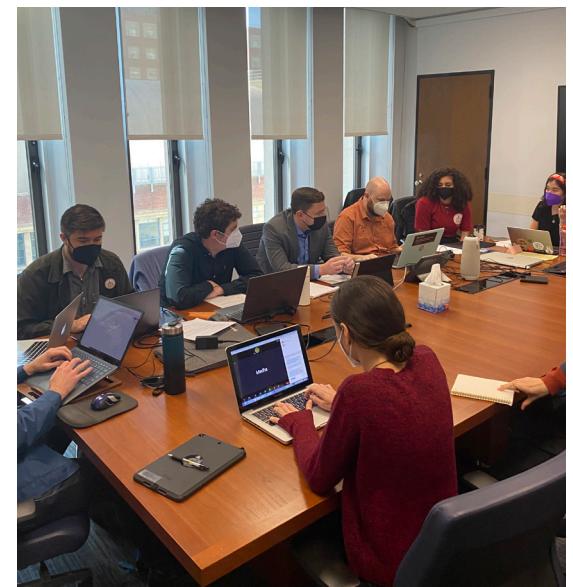
Fordham has responded in the same way to our other major proposals, with a combination of self-contradiction, misrepresentation, and condescension. For example, we brought up cases in which graduate workers were informed of teaching assignments with mere days left to prepare a new class. This clearly constituted unreasonable working conditions and put the quality of undergraduate education at risk. In response, we proposed a firm, but flexible process for ensuring timely teaching assignments. Fordham's representatives insisted that these last minute teaching assignments do not often happen and sometimes are unavoidable, but they didn't respond to the actual process outlined in our proposal.

We proposed that graduate workers be supplied with the necessities for their teaching work, and Fordham's team insisted that they always had supplied such necessities, even after many of us in the room testified otherwise. Here, again, Fordham's answer amounted to "trust us." We also made a proposal that would set a new standard for support and protection of international graduate

student workers—and Fordham hasn't even responded to this.

Aside from the specifics of each proposal, the dismissive, patronizing attitude of Fordham's representatives, especially their outside lawyer, Ray Pascucci, did not go unnoticed by all who have been present. Every FGSW member who has attended bargaining sessions left angry about Pascucci's disrespectful attitude, but was determined to fight for a strong union and a good contract.

This entire process has made one thing clear: Fordham will make concessions at the bargaining table when we demonstrate that we have the strength to push them accordingly. We can do so and win a strong contract by building our capacity to mobilize, forging relationships of solidarity with our colleagues, and collaborating with our contingent faculty comrades at Fordham Faculty United as they prepare to go on strike at the end of this month. This spring, expect to hear more about our escalating actions toward a contract we can be proud of.



# NYU ADJUNCTS WIN A FAVORABLE NEW CONTRACT: WHAT ACADEMIC UNIONS CAN LEARN

## Stony Brook Worker Editorial

On Friday November 4, New York University Adjuncts Union, ACT-UAW Local 7902 held a victory rally at Schwartz Plaza on NYU's West Village campus. The rally was originally planned as a picketing event, but union members had just approved a new tentative agreement hours after the previous contract expired on November 1. The union prevailed in bargaining and won significant improvements to their pay and benefits after authorizing a strike with 95% of voting members in favor. With the raises guaranteed by their new contract, NYU adjuncts are now some of the highest paid unionized contingent instructors in the U.S., according to their press release announcing the tentative agreement.

The contract addresses issues that are unique to contingent faculty, requiring NYU to pay adjuncts if their courses are canceled before the start of the semester, and retroactively compensating their labor for moving courses online in 2020-2021. These and other improved benefits and policies represent major progress for NYU adjuncts, who first voted to unionize in 2002 and approved their first contract in 2004. Prior to unionization, NYU policy required adjuncts to hire substitutes in the event of illness. Not only was there no sick pay, sick instructors also had to bear the cost of keeping their classes running.

In recognition of the wins in the new contract, speakers at the rally talked about the victory in the context of the broader labor movement and the recent history of NYU. Kristen Gonzalez, New York State Senator-elect representing

District 59 characterized this event as part of the “larger message” that the labor movement and the working class are sending to powerful institutions and corporations. Adjunct instructor Gordon Beeferman spoke about the importance of mobilizing and how a strong and motivated group of organizers was able to keep their coworkers informed throughout the contract process. This effort, along with support from other campus unions, raised awareness of NYU’s anti-worker tactics and brought out a majority of union members to vote in favor of authorizing a strike. Andrew Ross from NYU’s chapter of AAUP emphasized the power of the strike threat in winning concessions from the administration—where bargaining failed to achieve an agreement the union could approve, the possibility of a disrupted semester was more convincing. Management can avoid the trouble of a strike authorization and the appearance of refusing to bargain in good faith by recognizing that workers across the university are organized and ready to fight.

NYU successfully avoided a strike by taking the threat seriously and meeting the union’s demands. NYU YDSA leader Lauren Munoz recounted how administration had tried to position undergraduates and their instructors in opposition to each other when graduate students went on strike last year, and how students can wield power through their tuition dollars when the university pushes anti-worker policies.

Given that our universities are deliberately structured in such a way as to fragment the



Rob Lesko (Union of Clerical, Administrative & Technical Staff) in costume at the rally

instructor workforce into full time and contingent faculty, post docs, and graduate students, we need our unions to fight for improvements in the circumstances of our specific roles and to act in solidarity with each other across these divisions. Administrators may think that the “adjunctification” of so many teaching lines and the increased reliance on cheap grad student labor are useful financial strategies, but until we are all fairly compensated for our labor in planning, teaching, and grading, these are nothing but austerity measures that hurt students and the entire academic community.

Less than two months after NYU adjuncts won their contract, ACT-UAW Local 7902 siblings at The New School voted to accept a new tentative agreement. Across the country, University of California graduate workers and postdoctoral

researchers made history with the largest higher education strike, gaining benefits in healthcare, childcare, and unprecedented wage increases. These movements were made possible by support from campus coalitions and union workers across sectors, from undergraduate students at The New School to Teamsters and construction workers on UC campuses. We can shut these institutions down when we work together, and our actions get results. Each win in our sector is a win for all of us and raises the standards for graduate workers and adjuncts everywhere. We will continue learning from these experiences, growing in our solidarity until all academics have the means to live with dignity and comfort.

## SBU GSEU'S LIVING WAGE CAMPAIGN - A BIOGRAPHY

**Anna Zarra Aldrich, Debjani Chakrabarty, Matthew Dickinson, Matthew Heidtmann, and Amy Kahng**

It is no secret that wages for working people have remained stagnant for decades, while the cost of living has precipitously increased. As one of the most vulnerable classes of workers, graduate students at U.S. universities are no exception to this trend. While our employers have fully embraced neoliberal axioms and premises under which they continue to marketize and commodify higher education, many graduate students are unable to sustain themselves. Grad student workers at Stony Brook University in particular feel the pinch of rising living expenses and inflation. Between stipends that are far below poverty thresholds and a cost of living index that is about 150 percent of the national average, SBU grad student workers have been vocal about the unsustainable nature of these developments. Our efforts to achieve a living wage reflect all of these struggles. This article outlines a timeline of the Living Wage Campaign.

### October 2020 - Abolition of Broad-Based Fees

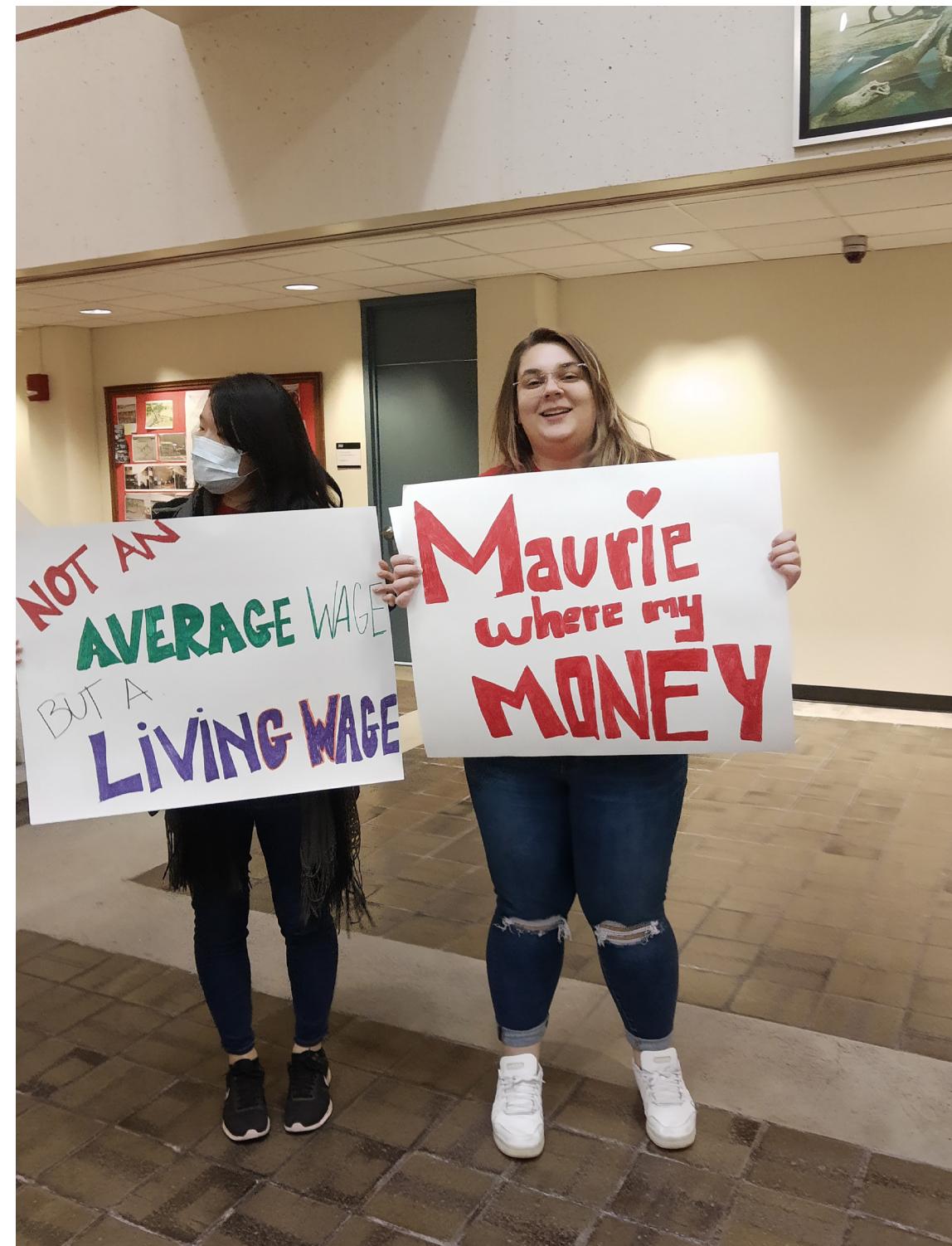
One of the major wins of recent years for grad student workers at Stony Brook was the abolition of the university's "broad-based fees." Following a culmination of several years of organizing on the part of the Graduate Student Employees Union (GSEU), and a particularly intensive few months in the fall of 2020 during which over 550 graduate students withheld paying their fees that cumulatively amounted to over \$600,000, Stony Brook administration announced that "the university will provide scholarships to cover the broad-based fees of all students on graduate tuition scholarships in terminal degree programs beginning Spring 2021." This fee scholarship

was a huge victory for grad student workers, and it essentially amounted to the equivalent of a 10 percent pay raise for most grads. While this was a massive win for graduate organizing at SBU, Stony Brook graduate worker wages still only ranked 57th out of 63 members of the Association of American Universities, when taking into account the cost of living (a/o November 2020).

### April 2021 - Living Wage Campaign Launch

Facing the reality of these unsustainable wages and the concomitant hardships experienced, grad student workers led by GSEU began organizing their Living Wage Campaign. The first step was to collect data. To this end, a survey of Stony Brook graduate student workers revealed harrowing statistics:

- 85% of respondents indicated that their stipends are not enough to sustain themselves;
- 99% of respondents indicated that their stipend is not enough to "live comfortably, and to focus on one's research, without financial worry and stress";
- 79% of respondents have suffered financial problems during their time at Stony Brook;
- 68% of respondents had their teaching or research impacted because of financial problems;
- 71% of respondents had their mental health impacted by financial problems;
- and 99.6 % of respondents think that the base stipend is lower than what could be considered a living wage (a/o 4/5/21).



Graduate workers at a sit-in for a living wage in the Administration Building



Former SBU GSEU Business Agent, John Klecker, reading a statement while delivering a 10ft-long Living Wage Campaign petition

Following this survey, GSEU formally launched the Living Wage Campaign on April 5, 2021 with a petition for a living wage and an email action to the President's office, demanding a living wage.

#### September 2021 - Email Actions

In the fall semester, the Living Wage Campaign ramped up with several email actions to the president's office as well as promotion of the Living Wage Campaign petition.

#### September 2021 - Delivery of 10 ft-long Living Wage Campaign Petition

By the end of September 2021, there were already over 600 signers of the Living Wage Campaign petition. GSEU members printed off the 10 ft-long list of signers and hand delivered it to President McInnis's office. This action brought publicity, including coverage from the Statesman.

#### October 2021 - Boycott of President McInnis' Inauguration Symposium on "Tackling inequality in Higher Education"

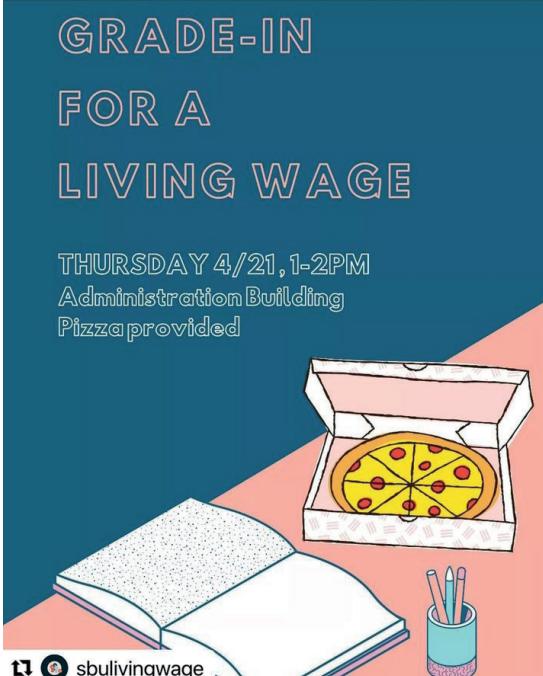
President McInnis was given ten days to respond to the hand-delivered list. After receiving no response, on the eleventh day (October 11th, 2021) GSEU announced the boycott of the President's symposium on social media. On the same day, GSEU received a response from the administration requesting a meeting in order to discuss the living wage and the boycott. While GSEU revoked the initial boycott, thirty GSEU members made themselves known by attending the October 23 symposium wearing red union t-shirts.

#### November 2021 - Wage Increase Announced

On November 15, the President's office sent



Graduate workers at President McInnis' Inauguration Symposium on "Tackling inequality in Higher Education"



Instagram post promoting the Grade-in for a Living Wage

an email instituting a wage increase as a result of the GSEU Living Wage Campaign. This increase raised the base-stipend level for 9-month appointments to \$22,500. The GSEU appreciated that this was a step in the right direction, but still not a living wage. As a result, GSEU announced that the Living Wage Campaign would continue, and the next step would be participating in a campus-wide rally on November 17.

#### November 2021 - Rally For Respect And Fair Wages

The SBU Labor Council organized the "Rally for Respect and Fair Wages" in order to discuss and collectively work toward fixing stagnant wages and declining working conditions, addressing the rise in the cost of living, and finding solutions to dwindling state support. The rally was held at the fountain in front of the Administration Building and was attended by GSEU, CSEA Local 614, UUP Health Sciences and UUP. Speakers from

each participating union spoke on each of our specific wage and labor issues.

#### April 2022 - Grade-in for a Living Wage

On April 4, the GSEU organized an in-person action in the Administration Building as part of the Living Wage Campaign. The campaign presented a public press statement, and grads marched to President McInnis' office to submit a demands letter. Workers then remained in the Admin Building, where we held office hours, graded assignments, and discussed the campaign.

#### May 2022 - May Day Protest

As part of a "May Day Action for Living Wage," GSEU organized an open mic, in front of the Admin Fountain, for graduate student workers to share their experiences of financial struggles.

#### May 2022 - Launch of The Stony Brook Worker

The inaugural May Day edition of The Stony Brook Worker was published in Spring 2022. Editors in chief Doğa Öner and Kaya Turan worked with Assistant Editors Lindsay DeWitt and Amy Kahng, Consulting Editor Dr. Matthew Heidtmann, and Designer Amy Kahng to create the publication. The issue introduced the SBU GSEU, covered SBU and labor news, and featured articles on local housing issues, the graduate fee elimination victory, and May Day. The publication concluded with reviews on the art exhibition, Printing Solidarity: Tricontinental Graphics from Cuba and the Global 60's in the Global South Conference, which were both hosted at Stony Brook University.

#### Fall 2022 - Email Actions

Beginning September 8 and following throughout the semester, GSEU began a series of email actions directed at administration, informing that graduate worker wages are well below the lowest poverty level noted for Suffolk

County and demanding an immediate increase to stipends. Utilizing data from the Department of Housing and Urban Development, these actions highlighted that the base stipend fell \$7000 short of the lowest poverty level income bracket as well as conveyed findings from the GSEU's internal surveys that revealed ninety percent of responding graduate students believed the base stipend was far too low to subsist on.

#### **September 2022 - Launch of Union Mondays: Solidarity for a Living Wage**

In mid-September, GSEU began a series of weekly actions taking place each Monday. Union members gathered in front of the Administration Building and distributed flyers, informational material, and copies of The Stony Brook Worker. Members informed campus community members of the Living Wage Campaign. These actions continued throughout the semester. As of the first week of the spring semester, the weekly actions have taken place for nineteen weeks.

#### **October 2022 - Picketing at University Senate Meeting**

GSEU members picketed the University Senate Meeting that was attended by President McInnis, administrators, and faculty. GSEU members informed those in attendance of the financial conditions as grad workers, reiterating calls to end these unacceptable circumstances.

#### **October 2022 - Action at the Presidential State of the University Address**

Prior to the SOTU address, GSEU members gathered outside of the Staller Main Stage to chant and distribute flyers informing attendees of the financial conditions under which Stony Brook graduate students are working as they entered the Staller auditorium. GSEU members then took seats in small groupings scattered throughout the auditorium. During a pause in President McInnis's



Graduate workers chanting and handing out flyer at the entrance of the State of the University Address

address, graduate workers one by one began announcing various hardships that occur because of living in poverty wages. The declarations by graduate workers forced the campus president to delay the remainder of her speech until these student speeches were completed.

#### **October 2022 - Scare-In for a Living Wage**

On Halloween, GSEU held a "Scare-in" action inside the Administration Building. Members gathered, some dressed in costumes related to the Living Wage Campaign such as blood-plasma selling grad students, vampire administrators, and, Maurie Moneybags. Graduate workers made a

public address describing the "horrors" of living on poverty wages.

#### **November 2022 - University Senate Meeting on Zoom**

While initially organized to be an in-person meeting, the format was changed last minute to

a virtual meeting. Over thirty graduate workers joined the Zoom senate meeting sporting Zoom backgrounds and profile icons that read, "Graduate Workers Deserve a Living Wage."

#### **November 2022 - Petition Launch, "Make the Next Raise a Living Wage, not an Average Wage"**

In early November, GSEU organizers launched a new petition to "Make the Next Raise a Living Wage, Not an Average Wage," in response to Provost Lejuez's suggestion of providing graduate students with a maximum \$2,000-\$3,000 raise to bring the stipends up to the average of AAU public universities. While acknowledging that Stony Brook University graduate student workers' stipends are not competitive compared to peer institutions and low compared to the cost of living, his proposal for stipend increases does not sufficiently address these facts. This proposal, which would raise stipends to \$24,000-\$25,000 over the next two years, would still put graduate student workers below the \$30,500 extreme

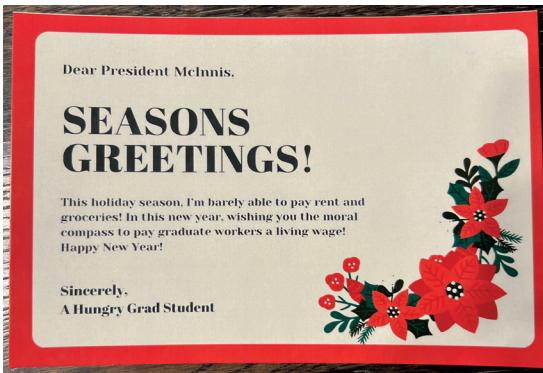
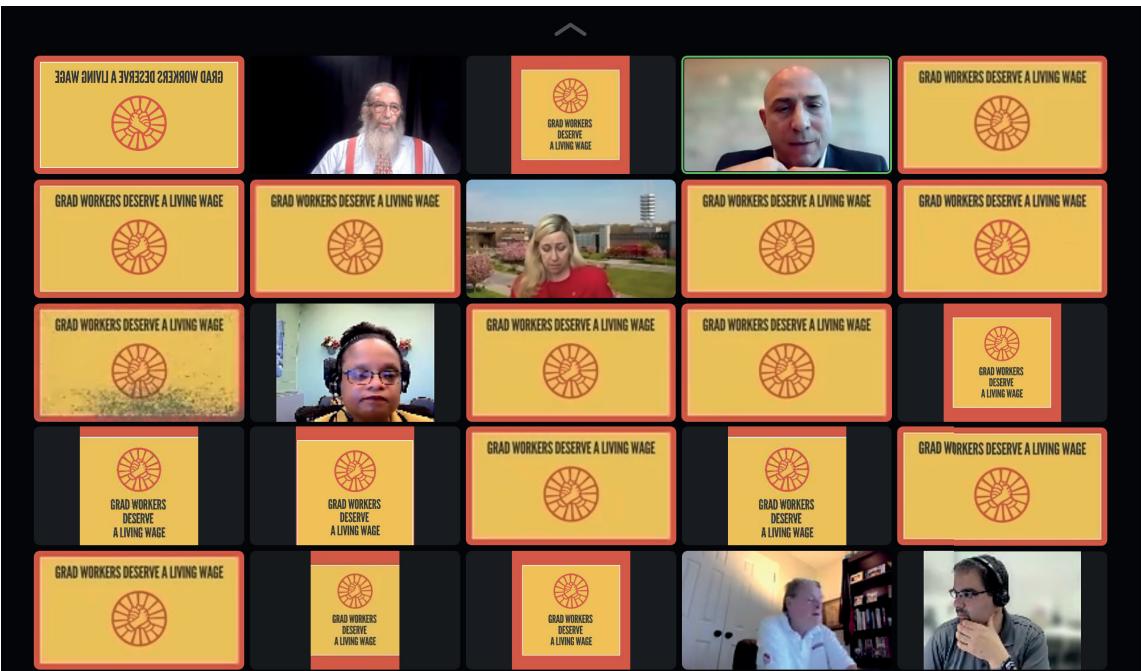
poverty level for Suffolk County. The petition calling for a living rather than average wage has gathered more than 500 signatures.

#### **November 2022 - Sit-in for a Living Wage, Not an Average Wage**

GSEU members held a series of sit-ins in the Administration Building to continue to put pressure on administrators to acknowledge needs for a living, not average wage. Members chanted in the halls and held signs with slogans such as "Don't Undervalue Me."

#### **November 2022 - Meeting with Provost Lejuez**

GSEU and RAU leadership met again with Provost Lejuez to discuss raises to grad worker stipends. The Provost informed union leadership that the administration is considering raising stipends by \$3,000-\$4,000 over the next two years. These meager raises would not begin to take effect until the upcoming summer. Provost Lejuez's calculation is based on the average wage



Above: A holiday card sent to President McInnis  
Below left: Graduate workers attending the December 2022 University Senate Meeting on Zoom

of public AAU universities. By the time this proposed increase would take effect, the average stipends, as well as the cost of living, will increase rendering the raises null.

#### **December 2022 - Action at the University Senate Meeting**

GSEU members gathered before the December 5 University Senate meeting and marched to the Wang Center where the meeting took place, chanting messages and holding signs. The action continued right outside the meeting room location, and grad student workers handed out flyers to attendees and passers-by. GSEU had a spot on the meeting's agenda and addressed administrators' poverty wage plan to increase stipends to between \$25,000 and \$26,000 over the next two years. During the meeting, grad workers received support from Prof. Jonathan Sanders (School of Journalism) who called on President McInnis and the administration to do something for Stony Brook's struggling grad students. GSEU Business Agent Doğa Öner asked the University Senate and meeting attendees how grad student workers should sustain themselves if they are not paid a living wage while also being restricted from taking up other sources of income, an issue that is particularly problematic for international grad

student workers. Öner's question was rejected with the remark that "speakers are not able to ask questions during the University Senate meeting."

#### **December 2022 - Holiday Postcards to President McInnis**

During the holiday season, GSEU organized an action to send President McInnis holiday postcards encouraging her to pay graduate student workers a living wage and describing the financial hardships we face without one.

#### **Concluding Thoughts**

Since the formation of our union, the GSEU has worked to improve the lives of graduate workers. Years of actions and united effort led to victories, like the elimination of broad-based fees. Graduate workers know they are underpaid, in each survey overwhelming majorities agree that we are not paid adequately for the work we do. The GSEU's ongoing actions to advance our shared goal of obtaining a living wage will continue in 2023, leading us into our upcoming bargaining with the university.

# INTERVIEW WITH BRANDWORKERS STAFF UNION

## Stony Brook Worker Editorial and Brandworkers Staff Union

*Brandworkers Staff Union include Emith Escobar (Brandworkers Campaign Dept. Community and Digital Organizer), Yolanda Santoni (Brandworkers Lead Organizer), Joe Seider (Brandworkers New Organizing Coordinator), Cody Eaton (Brandworkers Organizer), Christa Tandana (Resource Mobilization and Operations Coordinator), Lani Defiesta (Director of Resource Mobilization and Development), Raquel Florez (Event Coordinator).*

*SBW: Can you tell our readers about Brandworkers?*

Cody: Brandworkers is a nonprofit worker center that supports food and beverage production workers to build their own unions.

*SBW: You recently founded the second solidarity staff union in NYC for the nonprofit sector, shortly after NY Met Council. What were some of the reasons and observations that showed you the necessity of such a union?*

Emith: At first it started as a practice in the theory of what we were trying to do with other workers. And then it quickly evolved into us realizing that there were a lot of issues, internal issues, with Brandworkers. I think some of those issues were about how it dealt with its workers, specifically workers who are gender non-conforming, people of color, and part-time. I fell into two of these categories, I am a person of color and I'm also a part-time worker. I felt oftentimes that I was going way over my hours and I was being asked to

maintain a stable schedule and then roll my hours to the next week. So in theory, eventually I would just roll them until I guess I leave and then who knows what happens to those hours. But I was still working 30 plus hours a week and only getting paid for 25 and sometimes, not even on time.

The way that it worked is you had to track your own hours and there wasn't a designated day when you'd have to submit your hours for the week, for the two weeks that you worked. Because we used to get paid biweekly. So sometimes the person who's in charge of that would kind of message you, "Hey, it's due on Tuesday, or due on Thursday, or whatever other day." And you might not be working that day or you might not have scheduled that in to look back and track exactly what your hours are. So some weeks you wouldn't get paid until the following payroll, essentially another two weeks after, other times you would get paid maybe a few days later. But either way, it was kind of difficult to figure out when I'm getting paid just because I didn't know when those hours were gonna be due. This made it difficult for myself financially.

I also think there were some issues with some of the management and Brandworkers. Specifically my supervisor was someone who didn't really respect me, my time or my ideas. The person would constantly contact me before and after hours, they would take over some of my ideas and kind of remix them as their own. There were also some inappropriate comments and physical actions that occurred. So those are some of the things that led me to believe that a staff union would be able to change that dynamic and be able

to actually protect myself from having to be put in that position.

Cody: I started doing this to learn how it would work to build this type of solidarity as a process. But by the time we had our first meeting, it became very real and became clear that there were issues I didn't know about that needed to be addressed urgently. And that quickly became the driving motivation and force behind this effort to continue.

*SBW: How many people in the workplace are involved in the union now?*

Yolanda: 95% of the staff is involved in the staff union.

*SBW: What was the response in general from Brandworkers when you started this union and in terms of addressing these problems as a whole?*

Emith: I think we did the march on the boss, the virtual march on the boss on September 30th. We did it at our staff meeting. We all came in, multiple different people, read out different sections of our demands and then we just left the meeting afterwards saying basically you guys have a certain amount of time to respond. And literally the day after, so on October 1, we got a text back from management and our executive director saying that Brandworkers voluntarily recognizes the staff union. Then, following that, we scheduled a meeting to negotiate on some terms and clarify some demands. Since then, I think most of them, a good portion of those demands have been met. Other ones are in the process of being worked out. But overall, I think it's been so far a positive response from management. What do others think?

Yolanda: I mean, I agree. We came into our staff meeting that we usually have. We laid out the

demands, they listened to all of our demands and they came back very quickly recognizing the union. And we haven't had any resistance. I wish it was like this in everybody's processes, but so far there has been no need for public action. All demands are being met in a timely fashion and if they can't be met on the time set, they are discussed and we assess and review and have been moving forward.

*SBW: What does the staff union aim to change in the nonprofit sector beyond Brandworkers?*

Joe: We organize with the IWW (Industrial Workers of the World), and with that comes kind of a different model than you would get out of an AFL-CIO style union or a union that has staff. We put this all together ourselves, which is a topic for another day. But we have full control over our vision with the exception that it has to fit into the constitution of the IWW. We did not go for an election, we went for recognition based on the power we had. And likewise, we are not going for a contract. We have a workplace agreement, with a kind of a ceasefire with management, meaning as long as management is moving on our demands, we won't take direct action. But if there's a stall or we feel that they're doing things in bad faith, we have an escalation plan ready.

So we're hoping that this model gets all of our demands met and then we would be able to tell other nonprofit sector workers in New York City, "Hey, this worked for us!" This model might be better than going the traditional route of shopping around for a union, having their staff come in and run an election, going to the boss to negotiate for an extended period of time. That's fine. That works for mostly every union in the country and that's a model that people should still pursue. We've taken a different route and if it does work and we get our demands met in a timely manner, I think it could provide a model for other nonprofits.

A much, much longer term goal would be to turn a network of IWW unions at nonprofits in the city into an industrial union where we're all together in one union and we're kind of moving demands forward as multiple shops at a time to raise the standard across a geographic location. Maybe that's New York City, maybe it's the tri-state area. But that's a model that the IWW has. We would be trying to implement that if what we're doing in one shop works, have it work at another shop, at another shop, et cetera, and then kind of take an industrial approach.

Emith: One of the reasons why we decided to go with the IWW is that this is the problem with a lot of other nonprofits, that they're just too small to be taken in by some of the larger unions. If we had hit some of those larger traditional unions, I don't think they would've given us much support since there's only really nine of us. I think that this type of organizing, the one that we did partnering with IWW, is probably a more viable option for a lot of small New York City nonprofits. I think most of the labor nonprofits are about our size, if not maybe just a couple extra employees. But I think most New York City nonprofits would be too small for a larger traditional union to actually engage in their campaign.

*SBW: You made the distinction between a traditional contract and a workplace agreement. Would you have some more things to add on this matter; what are the advantages of a workplace agreement in the IWW vision? How can it be more effective?*

Joe: I would say that the first thing you have to look at is how much density your union has in the workshop. If you have 100% of non-management in agreement and in solidarity together, you can try something like this. If you have only one section of the workplace or you have 65% in the union or supporting the union, then I don't know

how effective that model would be. But since we were in a position where it was all of the non-management workers in agreement, we have the solidarity to pull off going for an agreement rather than a contract. So that's the first step, that's what you should think about before you make that decision. How much power do you have? If you're wall-to-wall you could try this, try the workplace agreement. What separates a workplace agreement from a contract legally is that it's not gonna have a no-strike clause. So we did not give away for any portion of time while the agreement stands our right to take direct action. If you don't have 99% support and solidarity, maybe you have support, but you still have infighting on the committee, you have to be together to do this, you have to be 100% together.

*SBW: What do you think are some of the unique challenges that workers in the nonprofit sector face?*

Emith: I think that it's a little easier sometimes to be rooted in the cause. You start doing things not for, it's not the traditional, "hey we're a family," or "Oh you should do this 'cause you want to move." It's a lot of, you should do all this work and you should do all this extra stuff and put up with certain things that you might not be comfortable with because it's for the greater good and they try to exploit your vision and what you want to do for the gains of the organization. At the end, you do want to move the vision forward but not by sacrificing yourself.

Yolanda: Working for such a small nonprofit organization is very different from working for a huge bureaucratic union. They have their departments, everybody focuses on their work. In a small organization like ours, like Emith said, most of the work that's not picked up or if there's a staff who's not available, it's picked up by

the workers. So there is not a clear departmental distinction. I would say, because we all have to be involved, because we believe in the vision, we sometimes overcommit our time and that becomes a problem because when you start overcommitting your time, you lose yourself in that and before you know it you're fried and burnt out.

*SBW: Can you let us know of some campaigns that you're planning to do with this union in expanding it, or campaigns in your workplace for bettering the conditions of your workplace, or any campaigns that you have for going forward?*

Yolanda: I think right now we're in the middle of our process and we would like to see it through so that we can use it as a model moving forward and involve other nonprofit organization, having the capacity to be able to detail from A to Z, the steps that we took to get there, and being able to share those tools.

Emith: Just adding on to what Yolanda said, I think personally the vision for our union now and Brandworkers, and it was part of one of our demands, was to move to a cooperative model here instead of the traditional nonprofit model, business model, we're trying to become a worker-self directed nonprofit. Personally I'm really interested in continuing to organize other nonprofits. I think that there's a lot of other people out there who are in nonprofits who don't know that what they're experiencing is exploitation and abuse for the cause, especially here in New York. I think there's a lot of organizations that are ready to be activated into a campaign similar to ours.

Yolanda: We really get lost because the people who do this kind of work do it because it's a commitment to society to help make change in the world. Sometimes we have that which you may

call hero syndrome, where you want to take on the world and you lose yourself. I mean you even lose the attention toward your family because you've made this commitment. This is not a nine to five job. This is a job that comes with passion, that comes with real life commitment. And it's really easy to lose the line where you separate what life is and what work is without feeling guilty. I think one of the steps that drove us was the fact that we were all seeing that and you know, you sit there and you say, I'm out here fighting for those that don't have a voice and shit. I'm being, excuse the French but, I'm being exploited. We should lead by example.

*SBW: What recommendation would you have to nonprofit workers who might be reading this or those who want to start organizing in their workplace or address similar issues? How can they get in contact with you?*

Emith: I guess I would say the best way to start organizing is just talk to your coworkers. I think that's the building block of any good campaign, is to start talking to your coworkers, especially those who are not the ones you don't interact with as often. A lot of what organizing is building a community. I think a lot of us are pretty new to Brandworkers, but after going through the process, I think we all know each other pretty well and consider each other friends and if someone wants to get in contact, I'm going to send you our email and our Twitter handle and whoever else is interested in organizing their nonprofit can reach out to us and we can lend some support.

*SBW: What do you think is the role of the nonprofit sector or nonprofits like Brandworkers, in the class struggle as a whole?*

Joe: I would say like any other industry, it should be in the control of the workers. The question of where the industry stands in the class

struggle, it definitely has issues of being captured by capital and being a place where money comes in and then is given out based on a set of criteria. But the more control that workers have over that, the more equitable it'll become. Right now, probably it has very little chance at helping the class struggle, but the more unions that are in this sector, the more we can shift that to where that money starts ending up helping and developing programs that do help class struggle. So I would say the less union density it has, it'll never be an option. We're hoping that what we're doing here moves it towards class struggle.

Emith: I think that the way that Brandworkers could contribute is by starting to lead the transformation of our economy from being so focused on just capital instead of making the workers an actual center piece of it, making sure that the workers have fair wages, that they have a livable wages, that they have what they need to be able to live. That it's not focused on creating products, but it's focused on making sure that people are actually living a life.

Yolanda: I would add that it would be amazing to see other nonprofits join in the same journey. I think it'll strengthen us and it'll make us a powerful force where we would have the capacity to make change collectively in a society that's lacking. And that's just something that I'll continue to think about beyond this.

Cody: I think it's important for nonprofits to be self-critical about the way they engage as a part of the nonprofit industrial complex. Because if you're, let's say supporting workers, but your fundraisers get all that money from corporate banks and whatnot, that supports worker exploitation, it feels all a bit cyclical. So I think that's something that our donor organizing team is doing really well, is making sure that the money we accept

aligns with our values and that we're organizing donors as opposed to just trying to counteract the broader forces of the corrupt donors that fund so much of the nonprofit industry.

*SBW: Do you have anything to add in closing for our readers?*

Cody: One thing I would say is they should reach out to the Brandworkers staff union. If they want support in forming a union of their nonprofit workplace, we would be happy to talk, share notes and support them in organizing.

Joe: What I would add is, don't get caught up in thinking, "but a union's not good for my shop." Maybe it's the job that you've wanted for a long time, maybe you worked a whole bunch of other jobs you didn't like until you got into the perfect nonprofit that you wanted to get into. You still deserve a voice and you still deserve dignity. And there's going to be a common thing framing from management, "well think about the constituent. If the workers and the boss are fighting, how are we going to be helping our community that our nonprofit is serving?" That's a conversation that happens after the union. The workplace has to be safe, the workplace has to be dignified before any good work is going to come out of it in the public. So I would just encourage anyone to think beyond that pitfall of, "but not my shop." Everybody deserves this at their job.

Emith: I would just suggest people talk to each other. I think that harassment and abuse and exploitation come in many different shapes and sizes and sometimes it's hard to recognize when it's happening until you start talking to other people and you realize that a trend starts to form. And if you start feeling a little weird about that, it's because there's probably something wrong going on there. I know that was the same way with

me. I didn't want to believe in it until multiple people started talking about it. We all recognized that there were some major issues that we needed to tackle.

Yolanda: And I would just say to end it all, if Sunday night your stomach hurts because you are dreading going to work and dreading the week,

there's definitely something wrong. So stand up for your rights, you have them, and don't allow anybody to shut your voice.



Brandworkers Staff Union Members

## CHILE'S 2019 SOCIAL UPRISING: SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AS DRIVERS OF PUBLIC OPINION

**Ignacio Urbina**

October 18, 2019, marked the start of the largest wave of protests experienced in Chile in the last 30 years. After one week of protest, more than a million Chileans marched along the main avenue of Santiago, the capital of Chile. Hundreds of thousands more joined protests in the country's main cities and towns. In December 2019, at least

two out of ten citizens declared having participated actively in joining protests, and more than half of the country expressed support (Centro de Estudios Públicos, 2019). In parallel, the right-wing government of President Sebastián Piñera had fully deployed the police, with the special aid of the military corps, all around the country to quell the

dissenters. Injured and detained citizens piled up dramatically within days while the press and social media documented brutal human rights violations at the hands of state agents. Tanks and armed soldiers marched through the streets, vividly reminding Chileans of the horrors of Pinochet's dictatorship (1973-1990).

The so-called "estallido social" (social uprising) lasted about five months, but its sequels still influence the country's political trajectory to this day. Many have called the wave of protests a turning point in the country's political and social landscape. Among many consequences, the most salient one is its effect on delegitimizing the

current constitution, which was born from the minds of the neoliberal ideologues that backed Pinochet's dictatorship. The uprising triggered a process of constitutional change that was formally concluded in September 2022. Although it concluded unsuccessfully, as a majority of Chileans rejected the proposed draft in a national referendum, it continues to unfold in hopes of a definitive constitutional reform. In fact, after it ended, politicians have been bargaining for its continuation, as approximately two-thirds of Chileans think the country still needs a new constitution (CADEM, 2022). In this article, I examine the causes of the Chilean social uprising, its development, and impact on Chilean society to highlight lessons and reflections that can inspire our tactics and mobilizing actions.

As members of GSEU, there are several reasons why studying the 2019 Chilean social uprising is relevant. First, the Chilean case vividly illustrates the effects and contradictions of capitalism, in its neoliberal form, as a model of wealth allocation in society. As workers living in precarious conditions, we understand the hardships imposed by a resource allocation model that favors structural inequality. Then, by learning more about this social movement (and others), we express our solidarity and can find inspiration from the mobilization efforts carried out by others who share our pledge for dignified and fair living conditions. Seeking inspiration and collective learning should not be underappreciated. We get stronger if we realize that we are not alone, given that millions of others worldwide share our struggles against structural inequality, oppression, and power asymmetries.

A second reason, perhaps even more important, is that we should study social movements to inspire and inform our discussions about our own mobilization tactics and strategies in the campaigns we are currently engaged with as members of GSEU.



Protesters at Baquedano Square, or "Dignity Square," as protesters symbolically renamed it

The social uprising originates from a student-led evasion boycott campaign to oppose a \$0.04 metro ticket raise (30 Chilean pesos according to the exchange rate at the onset of the uprising). Over the third week of October 2019, high school students organized a massive fare evasion, sit-ins, and some vandalism across multiple metro stations around Chile's capital (Santiago). The protests were met with fierce police repression, which caused an escalation in the disruptiveness, support, and attendance of the protest. On Friday (October 18th), unauthorized marches happened across the city to express support for the movement. That day students' boycotts were so disruptive that the whole metro network in Santiago had to close early during rush hour, resulting in massive commuting chaos. Later in the day, news reports revealed that unidentified arsonists had attacked several metro stations. Multiple stations and metro cars had been torched, and similar levels of violence happened in other

parts of the city, with extensive public and private infrastructure losses.

As the hours went by, additional news reports came from various parts of the country, revealing that civil unrest had also diffused across Chile's main cities. In response to these events, Chile's right-wing President issued a full national deployment of the police with the special aid of the military corps. Additionally, the President declared a nationwide curfew. The next day, in a press statement, the President declared, "we are at war with an invisible enemy." However, there was no real enemy to point out as responsible, as it was that the Chilean people had been "awakened," and their actions were fueled by their anger about the country's state. What followed next was an unprecedented and large-scale wave of peaceful demonstrations, boycotts, strikes, and civil unrest (including riots and vandalism). The most intense period of civil unrest happened between October to December of 2019, and the civil un-

rest finally dissipated in March 2020. Although the initial spark was the protest to oppose the rise in the metro fare, the movement's grievances quickly coalesced into a profound critique of the stark and persistent social and economic injustices that had plagued Chilean society for years. The problem was not 30 pesos but 30 years of indignity and injustice.

How unequal is Chile? While Chile's GDP per capita sits at approximately \$25 thousand (measured as PPP dollars), ranking Chile as a middle-income country, its inequality indicators reveal a completely different story. According to the GINI index, a standard measure of the concentration of income distribution within a country, Chile belongs to the top 10% of countries with the highest inequality. In fact, a Chilean who places in the top 10% of the income distribution earns approximately 9.6 times more than a Chilean who belongs to the bottom 40%, on average. Hence, it is no surprise that most Chileans do not believe the country provides enough conditions for social mobility. According to a nationally representative survey conducted by the Catholic University of Chile (Encuesta Bicentenario, 2019), only 16% of respondents stated that a poor person has a "very high" or "quite high" chance of getting out of poverty. Furthermore, only 24% of respondents stated that a middle-class person has a "very high" or "quite high" chance of reaching a very good economic situation. The reality is that most Chileans live under relentless vulnerability, a consequence of persistent structural inequality that arises as a symptom of an economic and social model that systematically reproduces class inequalities.

In the first two months of the protest, the civil unrest and the mobilization actions had extended massively across the country. Large-scale actions such as marches and labor strikes were coupled with localized actions such as plaza meetings, municipal decentralized citizen-run assemblies, pot-banging coordinated actions, political street art paintings, and others. At the same time, al-

though peaceful demonstrations represented the vast majority of participant turnout, there were also some disruptive and more violent actions, such as riots, destruction of public infrastructure, and improvised barricades made of burning tires and wood. Notably, the protest efforts rose organically under a bottom-up and decentralized structure characterized by the movement's lack of singular leaders. Thus, communications of heterogeneous and diverse activist groups via social media and private networks, in the context of a diversified repertoire of mobilization strategies, provided support for the movement. Figure 1 shows how the count of protest actions and labor strikes sharply peaks in the first two months of the uprising. The figure reveals that Chile had around 200 monthly peaceful demonstrations before the uprising on average. However, in the first two months of the uprising, these actions rose to almost 1,000 actions on a monthly average.

Moreover, the social uprising not only disrupted the normal functioning of cities and public services. It also induced a substantial temporary shift in the political conversation across the country, influencing fundamental political attitudes and increasing interest in politics. Figure 2 illustrates the google search trends in Chile for some of the key terms related to the grievances associated with the social uprising. Most notably, google searches for "constitutional assembly" experienced an 80-fold increase in average search popularity at the peak of the uprising compared with its search popularity prior to the protests. The same pattern happened for the term "constitution," which also experienced new localized peaks in search popularity in 2020 and 2022, related to the constitutional reform process triggered by the uprising. Also, other key terms, such as "Dignity," "Human rights," "Inequality," and "Pensions," experienced a temporal increase in search popularity between 190% and 290%. Hence, not only did the social uprising cause massive civil unrest, but it also swiftly shifted the political conversation and public opinion.

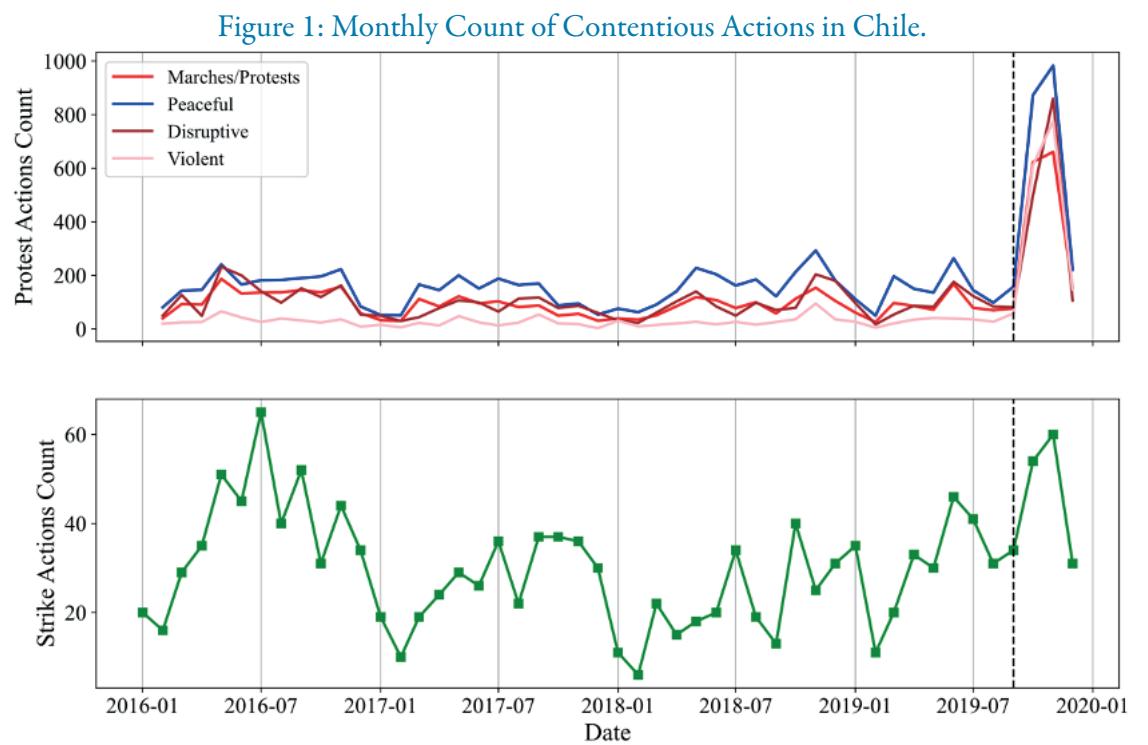
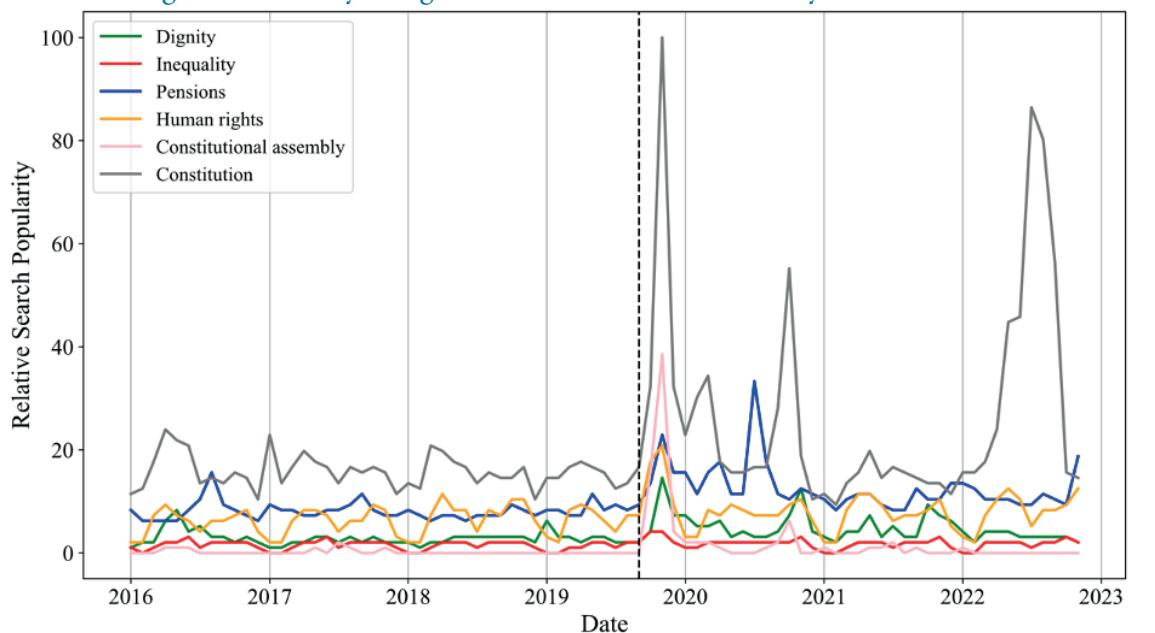


Figure 1: Monthly Count of Contentious Actions in Chile. Source: Centre for Social Conflict and Cohesion Studies (COES, for its acronym in Spanish). Note: the dashed black vertical line is placed at one month previous to the starting month of the uprising.

Figure 2: Monthly Google Search Trends of Political Keywords in Chile.



Source: Google Trends Data. Values represent search interest relative to the highest point on the chart for the given region (Chile) and time. A value of 100 is the peak popularity for the term. A value of 50 means that the term is half as popular compared to a term that reached peak popularity. Hence, the figure illustrates relative search popularity trends among the included terms.

The call for a fundamental change in the constitution operated as a focal point for the heterogeneous and abstract demands claimed by the citizens who participated in and supported the protests. While many of the authoritarian enclaves of Pinochet's constitution had been reformed over the last 30 years of sustained democracy, still some structures persisted that provided the foundations for Chile's neoliberal capitalism. A strong bias for a laissez-faire and market-based approach in the provision of public goods persisted deeply in the constitution's institutional arrangement (e.g., in areas such as pensions, education, and health insurance). In addition, the constitution imposes high quorums for introducing amendments, thereby giving the right-wing politicians in Congress a historical veto power that protected the neoliberal capitalistic economic and social model inherited from the dictatorship times. All in all, the uprising influenced citizens' alignment around the need to curb the country's inequality,

and changing the constitution was perceived as a means necessary to that end. A poll by the Center for Public Studies (December 2019) found that 55% percent of respondents claimed that high-income inequality was the first or second most important reason behind the uprising. In addition, respondents pointed to low pensions, high costs of living, and poor quality of public health and education as further reasons.

Undoubtedly, the most disturbing aspect of the social uprising was the state agents' brutal and widespread repression. A report by the Senate's human rights commission revealed that between October 18 and December 2019, more than 25,000 people were arrested and more than 3,500 injured by state agents, with 347 of them suffering from eye injuries from the weapons employed by the police. The National Institute of Human Rights filed 3,151 lawsuits against state agents to provide legal support to the victims. Of these, 551 were associated with torture, 660 for unnecessary violence,

2,232 for unlawful detentions, and 8 for deaths by state agents. However, as of October 2022, only 9.5% of these have been indicted, and only 38% of the victims have even taken their statements.

In November 2019, the President faced himself cornered against the wall. His efforts to curb civil unrest coercively had failed, and a mounting pile of human rights violations by state agents had his head on the line. With an approval rating that fell from 31% to 13% and a disapproval rating that rose from 55% to 79%, Congress filed an impeachment vote that turned out to be unsuccessful. However, the country was in a state of general disarray, and an urgent solution was needed. A worsening factor of the crisis was that Chileans long mistrusted their political leaders. A poll by the Center of Public Studies in 2017 revealed that 91% expressed "low" or "almost zero" trust in Congress, and 92% expressed the same attitude toward political parties. At the same time, up to 73% of respondents did not identify with any political parties. In desperation, on November 15th, Congress approved the bill "An Agreement for The Peace and a New Constitution." Congress approved the bill in record time and set a path to rewrite the constitution from a "white slate" by a fully democratically elected body of representatives, meaning the constitutional writing starts from scratch, only requiring a quorum of 2/3 for articles approval. In the bill, Congress included unique dispositions to allow and foster the election of women, pure independents, and indigenous groups. Current congress members were banned from participating in those elections.

The initial national referendum that kickstarted the constitutional reform process resulted in 78% of voters expressing their approval for a constitutional change in October 2020. This result was notable but not entirely unexpected, as the new constitution had turned into the focal point for the hopes of meaningful future reforms. Turnout, as is the norm in Chilean elections, was voluntary and reached 50.95%. Elections for members of the soon to be established Constitutional Con-

vention happened in May 2021, in which the traditional political parties, especially the right-wing parties, faced a catastrophic defeat. Hence, after a rough and troublesome article-writing process, a proposed draft that would replace the new constitution was to be ratified by citizens in a national referendum. Nevertheless, in September 2022, 61.89% of voters rejected the draft in an election that had mandatory voting, in which voter turnout reached 85.86%.

The reasons for which the constitutional reform failed are multiple, and their examination merits a detailed and profound analysis that falls out of the scope of this article. Nevertheless, the social uprising crystallized a consensus among Chilean society that the current constitution's legitimacy is over and needs urgent change. The extent to which Chilean politicians will deliver on these expectations is uncertain. Most probably, new waves of mobilization will be needed to catalyze the process to a satisfactory end. Generally, those who hold power are not particularly inclined to give away their power willingly.

In conclusion, several insights can be suggested as we study this case and others. First, social movements can dramatically influence public opinion. Second, while the volume of attendance of protests matters, a diversification of mobilization strategies and communication channels are also of importance to exercise pressure. Third, inclusive grievances and claims can ignite transversal support among heterogeneous groups of people, especially among non-participant supporters. Fourth, social movements can influence the societal perceptions of the target of the claims (e.g., diminish support to the government). Five, repression can induce backlash and fuel even stronger unrest. In the end, powerful elites care about the public opinion of their relevant constituencies. Hence, by shifting public opinion, social movements can induce intense pressure on elites who otherwise favor the status quo.

## SOLIDARITY WITH PINDAR FARM WORKERS

**Stony Brook Worker Editorial**



GSEU Members in Solidarity with Pindar Farm Workers

On November 20, 2022, SBU GSEU members José Manuel Baeza Zúñiga, Daniel Greeson, and Valentina Pucci joined in solidarity with protesting organizers from Local 338 in front of the Pindar Vineyards outlet store in Port Jefferson. Despite the cold temperatures and brief backlash from outlet store staff, the protest was successful in raising awareness and support for the cause on Long Island.

Pindar Vineyards farm workers, based out of the North Fork of Long Island, unionized just over a year ago in 2021 to become the first farm workers' union in New York State. Despite this massive victory for workers, the union has met resistance from Pindar management in their efforts to ratify a contract. In a November 20th

interview with JD Allen for WSHU public radio, Local 338 organizer Noemi Barrera said that Pindar management had thus far refused to join organizers at the bargaining table, leaving farm workers without a contract. In the same interview, Local 338 organizer Yomaira Franqui added that Pindar had not been acting in good faith in the negotiation process.

Importantly, the protestors present at the Port Jefferson Pindar outlet in November were neither blocking access to the store nor encouraging a boycott. Instead, they sought to raise awareness about the farmworkers' precarious contract-less situation. Port Jeff locals repeatedly voiced their support of the Pindar workers in their negotiation efforts; the "Honk if you sup-

port farm workers!" sign was met with nonstop honks from passing traffic.

Although Pindar is essentially in SBU's backyard, the issue of fair contracts and representation for farm workers extends state- and nationwide. Agricultural laborers in the US, the majority made up of migrant workers from Mexico and Central America, have historically been made to work long hours in tiring and often unsafe conditions with little to no access to legal protec-

tions, all for little pay. The Pindar farmworkers' union, being the first of its kind in the entire state of New York, has the potential to open doors to fair representation and compensation in the workforce for laborers in all of New York and nationwide. SBU GSEU will continue to maintain contact with organizers from Local 338 and Pindar Vineyards and hopes to lend support and solidarity to the fight for a fair contract.

## INTERVIEW WITH UNITED WORKER CONVENTION IN TURKEY

**Stony Brook Worker Editorial**

*SBW: Could you tell our readers about what the United Workers' Congress (UWC) is and about its formation process?*

**UWC:** The United Workers' Congress (UWC) is a workers' organization with a revolutionary socialist perspective, whose formation was spearheaded by class-conscious workers who came together with the belief that "the emancipation of the working class will be its own work". UWC is a product of discussions and evaluations based on the concrete situation of the working class and unions in the Anatolia region.

In terms of the UWC's formation, we can summarize the discussions and evaluations as follows:

The working class, which was deprived of its most advanced and revolutionary forces with the counter-revolution attack of September 12, 1980,

gradually moved away from fighting for its own class interests.<sup>1</sup> It ceased to be a force whose words and actions are taken into account in the social arena after it began following the tropes of the bourgeois parties.

After the September 12, 1980 attack, and after the collapse of the USSR, an international wave of neoliberal policies were implemented in the 1990s. With all public domains being enlisted in service capital interest, with increasing privatization, and issues such as subcontracting and less stable work patterns, a great offensive was launched against trade unionism and against all kinds of organizations among the working class. In this state of affairs in which the unions lined up on the side of the state and capital interests, the working class lost its political influence, and the revolutionary movement was weakened. The working class saw its gains eroded step by step, and in the process it

was condemned to conditions of misery.

There was occasional resistance against this all-out assault on working class interests, but brands of unionism that aligned with state and capital interests, succeeded in neutralizing these resistances. Among those organizations were worker confederations such as Türk-İş and Hak-İş,

While there are still some unions that are more radical and combative, they have limited influence, and the majority of unions in the country are organizations that are friendly toward capital and the state. Therefore, it is an essential duty and the responsibility of class-conscious workers to

push back against these forces, and to organize the working class around its own class demands. Unfortunately, the existence of many workers is marred by unemployment, severe violations of their rights, de-unionization, oppression, hunger and poverty, and even violence and the death of workers.<sup>2</sup> All of these issues stand in the way of workers uprooting the parasites that have afflicted their unions, and turning their unions back into organizations that represent workers' interests.

The UWC was organized based on all of these assessments. It was founded by the Worker News-paper, one of the main components of UWC, and



ULC at May Day rally in 2019

its founding meeting was held in Istanbul on April 8, 2018. The meeting, which lasted all day, was held with more than 200 delegates from across many workplaces from different regions and provinces of Anatolia. After the meeting concluded with various decisions and recommendations, UWC was formed and its formation was made public.

A year later, in accordance with the decisions made at the founding meeting, UWC held its second congress with the delegates selected from various regions and provinces. After evaluating the first year of its existence, UWC determined its operating principles and chose its executive bodies.

*SBW: In which industries do you usually organize with workers?*

UWC: We aim to organize in all industries, especially in those areas where millions of workers are uninsured, without representation, and face insecurity, and in those which many unions ignore. Undoubtedly, industries such as metal, chemistry, and textile have a special significance in terms of the number of people they employ, but also in terms of their long-standing struggles and their weight in the country's economy. We need to apply a more patient and long-term organizational approach towards these areas.

*SBW: Could you explain the general situation of the working class struggle in Turkey and your place in it?*

UWC: In order to better understand the general situation, it would be useful to share the concrete picture of the current situation of the working class and unions. A summary can be made as follows:

#### \* Workers are unorganized

The population of the country is around 85 million. According to the official data from the state, as well as academic studies and information obtained from various reports, the total number of

workers in the country exceeds 39 million when adding up and including the numbers of insured workers, public workers, but also unregistered (uninsured) workers, child laborers, and the unemployed. This data does not include migrant workers whose numbers are unknown because they are not registered

According to the statistics on labor unions for July 2022 published by the Ministry of Labor and Social Security, the total number of workers is 15,987,428, and the number of workers who are members of unions is 2,280,285. According to this data, the unionization rate is around 14 percent.

Of course, official data do not take into account informal workers, whose number is around 10 million. The Revolutionary Workers' Unions Confederation Research Center (DİSK-AR), is drawing attention to this fact, and it argues that the number of workers covered by Collective Bargaining Agreements (CBA) is around 1,600,000, and that hence only 10% of workers can benefit from CBAs. DİSK-AR also draws attention to the fact that the rate of workers covered by collective bargaining agreements in the private sector is around 5-6 percent.

These numbers indicate disorganization. Considering the fact that 90 out of every 100 workers are not unionized, and that the majority of unions function as pro state and pro employer unions, the "misery table" that we will describe below will become more clear.

#### \* 14 million people in the country live on social benefits

According to TUIK<sup>3</sup> data, while the number of people receiving pensions, such as the elderly, widows, orphans, and disabled people within the scope of social protection was around 14,000,089 in 2019, it increased by 1.4% to 14,288,000 people in 2020.

#### \* The poverty line is four times the minimum wage\*

According to the hunger and poverty line data by Türk-İş for September 2022, the monthly food expenditure (hunger limit) required for a family of 4 to have a healthy, balanced and adequate diet rose to 7,245 Turkish Lira (TL).

The total amount of food expenditure and other mandatory monthly expenditures for clothing, housing (rent, electricity, water, fuel), transportation, education, health and similar needs (poverty limit) rose to 23,599 TL.

The 'cost of living' for a single employee rose to 9,469 TL per month.

#### **The minimum wage isn't even the average rent!**

The minimum wage, which was announced as 4,253 TL at the beginning of 2022, fell behind the wages of 2021 in less than 2 months. As a result of an economy based on plunder and war, real inflation (70-80 percent according to the state) rose rapidly and reached around 200 percent. Money turned into stamps. They had to raise the minimum wage again in the second half of the year, (albeit to dampen the backlash), to gross 6,471 liras, net 5,500 liras.<sup>5</sup> This amount is 1000 TL behind the 6,500 TL announced as the average rental price in Istanbul!

Perhaps we should make a comparison to better understand the extent of loss of income suffered by workers: In 2003, 25.4 full gold coins could be bought with the annual amount of one year's net minimum wage.<sup>6</sup> In 2021, the net minimum wage was equivalent to only 10.4 full gold coins, and by June 2022, the value of the net minimum wage had decreased even more to merely being equivalent to 8.07 full gold coins. In 19 years, 16.7 full gold coins were stolen from our pockets!

The minimum wage has turned into the average wage in Turkey. And about 10 million workers are employed at this wage.

#### **\*Workers have to organize in order not to die!**

One of the striking dimensions of the misery

of the working class is the 'worker deaths' that are explained away as "work accidents" or "fate." The latest example is the worker massacre in Bartın, Amasra, where 41 miners lost their lives!

In the true sense of the word, the capitalist class feeds on the blood of workers. The Occupational Health and Safety (OCS) Assembly publishes a report on this issue every month. According to the report published by OCS in October, at least 157 workers in September 2022 and at least 1359 workers in the first nine months of 2022 lost their lives in 'worker deaths.' It is not possible to determine the number of workers injured and disabled in work accidents.

Worker's lives are easily put at risk when construction bosses, who operate based on the speedy completion of the work, count even the simplest precautions to protect workers as 'cost items'. Ofentimes basic precautions are not taken, and as such lack of ventilation, masks, helmets, cables, unused belts, missing materials, or broken service tools can all be factors in costing workers their lives. Inadequate training, improper use or lack of protective equipment, and chaotic work environments also contribute to workers' deaths. In addition, occupational diseases are slowly killing them.

In other words, workers have to organize not only for a wage, social rights, or secure jobs that pay just enough to make a living, they also have to organize in order not to die.

#### **\*Suicides are on the rise!**

Suicide cases due to economic crisis, poverty, unemployment and anxieties over the future are increasing day by day in Turkey. According to the statement of the Ministry of the Interior, in response to a parliamentary request, between 2015 and 2020, a total of 14,530 people (10,094 men, 3,281 women, and 1155 people under the age of 18) committed suicide!

#### **\*The workers are in debt!**



ULC Convention

Workers are severely in debt. According to the reports of the Banks Association of Turkey (TBB), as of May 2022, there are over 4 million people who have not paid their loan or credit card debt. In the first five months of 2022, the number of people with legal claims against them over unpaid debt has risen to 748,347, which is an in-

crease of 83 percent compared to the same period of the previous year.

According to data shared by the Banking Regulation and Supervision Agency (BBSA) for the first quarter of 2022, the amount of loans for which follow-ups due to non-payment have been initiated is 163 billion TL.



ULC statement for a living wage in Kadıköy, İstanbul. The banner reads 'Not a minimum, a human, living wage!'

Debt is a factor that hamstrings the fighting power of the working class. It can cause the workers to accept unfavorable working conditions and to shy away from organizing. Just like in unemployment and subcontracting, ongoing debt depresses wages and decreases social rights and benefits.

#### \* Working conditions are severe

Workplaces and working environments have become a hell for workers. Based on recorded employment data, Turkey ranks highly in terms of work hours amongst the countries surveyed by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). With an average weekly work time of 47.7 hours, it ranks second among OECD countries after Colombia. However, in less formal industries which represent around 35 percent of all workers, the daily work time reaches 12-14 hours, and workers in these industries have almost no security. Workers in this situation continue their struggle, and their main demand is:

"We want to work with the wages and essential rights of contracted workers".

#### The general situation of the working class struggle in Anatolia

I think the points above gives a not so heartwarming idea of the general situation. This picture, which we call the "picture of misery," is like a document of our disorganization as a whole. Of course, we cannot accuse the capitalists of 'ruthlessness'. We cannot reproach their state as if it could be ours. They are one and they are right in front of us in all their nakedness.

Despite this depressing picture, we should also emphasize that there is a dynamic struggle going on in which workers are trying to find a way for themselves. After all, working and living conditions are getting harder day by day. These conditions push workers towards struggle, and towards organization. Workers who once carefully avoided revolutionary socialist ideas and organizations, are

now becoming more open, understanding, and conscious of these developments.

While smaller, more radical unions who expose the dominant state/capital unionism through their actions and words remain small, they are becoming more and more effective, and the labor leaders that they produce are becoming more prominent. Although their impact is still limited, organizations like the UWC are beginning to have influence on the general situation in the class struggle.

We say, "resistance teaches, organizes, and wins." Wherever there is an organization, there are opportunities to win. We already saw organized workers take decisive actions in dozens of instances, such as strikes, occupations, sieges of their bosses' house, blocking roads and bridges, and resistance in the workplace. Many of these actions have already resulted in gains, and workers are determined to continue these actions, in which they also learn from each other.

If we look at it as a whole, the working class is now trying to get up from where it has fallen. Its unions do not belong to it yet. The working class is still under the influence of bourgeois ideology. It still has a long way to go. However, we also know that development does not follow a straight line. Change can happen and things can be turned around here just as anywhere else. The global proletariat fills the streets with more widespread and massive demonstrations, and strikes and resistances are becoming more frequent. The wheel of history is turning!

**In terms of UWC's place in the process**, we are at the beginning of the road. In addition to the regular organizing activities at factories and workplaces, BIK, within the scope of its strengths and possibilities, also influences and participates in the general national agenda and the developments of the workers' movement. Given its combative stance, we can describe the UWC as being within the "small minority," which differs from the gener-

al clumsy structure of unions. It is known in this minority and has a unifying and preemptive function.

Systematic execution of propaganda (poster, notice, bulletin, social media) activities in accordance with the needs of each local area; similarly, training meetings, panels, and seminars are routine activities of UWC.

*SBW: There are many workers' resistances and protests in your region. Can you share with us the prominent ones?*

UWC: Actions are common. As one action ends, a few more actions come to the fore. For example, at the time of this writing, the struggle for unionization at Pulver Kimya in the chemical industry in Gebze has been going on for three months. The Petrol-İş Gebze Branch exhibited a successful organization effort in the four factories located in an area belonging to the same company. Workers there won the necessary majority for union authorization in those four factories. The union has been approved by the Ministry of Labor in one of the factories. The boss filed a lawsuit to object to the authorization by using the 'right to object' granted to him in the law. After that, workers took action to push back against the company, and as a result, the first meeting with the union took place. Workers firmly support the union, which intervenes in the process correctly and demonstrates a determined leadership. It seems certain that this will end with gains for workers. But by the time you're reading this article, maybe another act of resistance, for instance in a metal factory, could come to the fore.

Generally speaking, we can list some of the prominent actions in recent times as follows:

A health workers strike was very effective. Health workers, who had begun their organizing process after the Palace<sup>7</sup> government's withdrawal of a proposed law to improve the personal rights of physicians and dentists, went on a strike across the

country. There was a high degree of participation in their actions, and as a result hospitals could not provide anything other than emergency services.

Standart Profil workers in Düzce started an action wherein they did not leave the factory in demanding additional raises. The action, which was attended by almost all of the 1000 workers at the factory, resulted in more gains.

Despite firings, the actions of thousands of workers in the two factories of the US-owned TPI Composites in Izmir also resulted in gains, and the workers who stopped production at both factories got their fired friends re-hired.

Construction workers who are members of the unions Dev Yapı-İş (which is affiliated with

DISK), and independent İnşaat-İş, are two of the more radical unions in the construction industry. In one of their actions, members of these two unions closed the Istanbul Bosphorus Bridge to traffic to protest the erosion of their rights. While they did get detained, their bosses agreed to everything that the detained workers demanded.

A group of cleaning workers, working under a subcontractor at Koç University, took action when they were subjected to harassment after they had made demands. After nine days of organized resistance with the active support of students and UWC, the workers earned their rights and ended the resistance.



United Labor Convention organizing activities in Ankara

For months, ETF Textile workers resisted the attack of the boss, who wanted to close the factory under false pretenses of fraudulent bankruptcy, and who sought to take away the workers' severance pay. Police repeatedly detained these workers, but due to their organized resistance, they were still able to collect their severance pay after their dismissal.

*SBW: What are the outstanding demands and problems of the working class?*

UWC: We can express the most general demands as follows:

- Make the minimum wage suitable to sustain life and worthy of human dignity!
- Remove the barriers to union organization!
- Workplaces should be inspected, and penalties should be given to bosses who do not comply with occupational health and safety rules!
- Subcontracted work should be prohibited!
- Reduce working hours! Give workers two days off per week! Implement a 35-hour work week!
- Lower the retirement age!

In addition to the problems reflected in these demands, we can also point toward an additional list of issues: There is uninsured/informal employment, frequent dismissals, maximum production pressure with a minimum number of workers in the workplace, forced overtime, low wages, wages not being paid on time, intense workplace harassment, non-payment or underestimation of overtime wages, seniority in dismissals, reporting, not giving or underestimating wages for days such as vacation days, prevention of union organization even though it is a constitutional right, and finally, lawlessness that causes death, injury, and disability

of workers as a result of failure to implement necessary occupational health and safety measures.

*SBW: What are the most important shortcomings you see in the working class struggle and how do you fight against them?*

UWC: The ideological axis forms the basis of all 'deficiencies'. This is a universal problem. You cannot escape from misery by staying within the limits drawn by the capitalist system, which has condemned you to misery in the first place. It is imperative to leave this space. Intellectually, you should be clear that capitalism is immoral, contrary to man and nature, illegitimate, and harmful, and you then need to raise awareness that this system must be abolished. This consciousness gives you the basic route. It also forms the basis of how and in which ways and methods you will fight.

The fact that the working class is the main force that will abolish capitalism and change the world is the other aspect that completes the break with capitalist ideology. So, it is imperative that you devote all your energies to the organization of the working class, based on the concept of 'class versus class.'

The 'business administration' that is at peace with the state and capital interests dominating the unions, and the general attitude steeped in wage unionism (even here their words and actions have no value) is another problem. The 'left' party that presents itself in favor of labor, the 'Eurocentric democratic' understanding that dominates labor organizations, and the ignorance that these factors produce among the working class, all originate from the ideological issue we mentioned above.

Of course, the class struggle is not one-dimensional. As UWC workers, we are organizing on the one hand to develop the economic demands of the working class, while on the other hand, we are trying to foster unity and solidarity among the working class, based on the politicization of said

working class and the goal of ideological clarity.  
*SBW: What are the most important obstacles you encounter in your organizational efforts, how do you fight against them?*

**UWC:** Our main problem is time and financial limitations. Almost all of us have jobs. For example, in a metropolitan city like Istanbul, it is a serious problem to physically get together for organizing meetings after one gets off work in the evening.

Moreover, organizing in workplaces has to be carried out in 'semi-secret' or completely 'secret' ways. This requires a minimum of discipline, awareness, and experience. It's a 'problem' that will always confront us. It is important to maintain a discourse that has the right approach towards reaching the workers. This approach cannot be more political than it needs to be, but it also should not be too detached from the concrete words and actions needed to address people's needs, all while trying to avoid evoking backward modes of consciousness (such as racism or nationalism) among the workers who are so heavily influenced by bourgeois ideology. These are the themes and challenges of our struggle.

Of course, we also come across unionists who have the statist / pro-capitalist understanding of

unions that we have criticized above. Their mindset is a problem, but we are also learning how to fight these ideologies in practice and through experience.

*SBW: What is necessary to achieve international solidarity among the working class, and what steps can we take in this regard?*

**UWC:** In fact, our knowledge of the existing international workers' organizations is limited. We would like to establish ties with workers' organizations that have a revolutionary socialist perspective, even if it is just for the sharing of knowledge and experience. We think that mutually sharing the developments and experiences in our countries, being aware of the demands of the working class, and carrying out solidarity actions, will move us forward.

1. Translator: The date of the 1980 coup in Turkey.
2. Translator: common phrase in Turkey to refer to workplace deaths due to improper or non-existent safety measures and regulations.
3. Statistics agency of the state.
4. The minimum wage when this article was written was 5,500 TL, it increased to 8,500 in December 2022.
5. The minimum wage was increased to 8,500 TL in December 2022.
6. A gold coin of 7.21 grams.
7. A concept used to refer to the current government.

## FOUNDATIONS OF MARXISM'S VIEW OF UNION

### Doğa Öner

For Marx and Engels, the labor union struggle is necessary for the development of the working class, but must be considered as part of the development of the political and revolutionary struggle of workers. Maintaining that purely economic and local struggles should be overcome in the labor union struggle, Marx and Engels emphasize the role of labor unions in developing workers' class consciousness and unions' importance in developing the working class into a class capable of waging a holistic political struggle. Marxism reviews labor unions as a necessary tool that functions as schools of socialism and class struggle that nevertheless should overcome limited economic aims and transcend itself towards superior forms of struggle.

Marx and Engel's writings on unions are scattered across many works, and their views on unions can be reviewed through principles they found most important in different forms of class struggle. The article "Marxist Union View: Complex and Critical" by Dan La Boltz, co-founder of the Teamsters union, investigates the historical development of Marx and Engels' writings on unions. During Marx and Engels' time, the country where trade union struggle first began to develop was in England. The reasons for this were the rapid progress of capitalist economic development in England and the fact that workers were able to gain the right to unionize in 1824. Engels, speaking of trade union struggle in *The Conditions of the Working Class* in 1844, particularly highlights the role of unions in developing the moral and fighting spirit: "[Workers] must protest against every [wage] reductions ...; because they feel bound to proclaim that they, as human beings, shall not

be made to bow to social circumstances, but social conditions ought to yield to them as human beings..." What Engels emphasizes is the preservation of being a social subject as a condition of being human, through labor struggle, and against the overwhelming social dominance of the bourgeoisie. Economically, trade union struggle keeps the exploitation of workers within certain bounds, although Engels suggests that more than trade unions and strikes are needed (La Boltz 2013, 14-15). In this work, the real importance of unions and strikes for Engels is that they are "the working class's first attempt to abolish competition" (La Boltz 2013, 14-15).

In similar terms, in *The Manifesto of the Communist Party*, Marx and Engels write that class struggle sometimes brings gains and sometimes defeats, and note that the main achievement of the struggle is the developing solidarity amongst workers: "Now and then the workers are victorious, but only for a time. The real fruit of their battle lies, not in the immediate result, but in the ever-expanding union of the workers" (Marx and Engels 1975, 48). This is also emphasized in "Marx and the Trade Unions" by B.T. Randive, communist unionist and the general secretary of The Communist Party of India during 1948-50. He quotes Marx' *The Poverty of Philosophy*, where Marx says when workers' struggles first arose, the aims of the workers' struggle were centered on salaries, but later on "maintenance of association becomes more necessary to them than... wages" (Randive 1986, 4). Hence, the expanding union of workers, and the formation of the working class as a class through this solidarity are more



Workers at a demonstration, banners read “Overthrow the Capitalist System” and “Fight for Noncontributory Unemployment Insurance”

important gains of the movement than the singular achievements of the struggle. This solidarity, of course, goes hand in hand with the abolishment of capitalist competition among workers that Engels emphasizes. In this developing solidarity, unions and other forms of class struggle can in many times serve as the first practical challenge of capitalist ideology of competition and they share the same interests as a class.

For Marx and Engels, the unions should not remain limited in their struggles both in terms of geographical limitation and in their aims. As organizations of the working class, they should strive to advance and represent the universal interests of this class. In his instructions to the delegates in the 1866 meeting of the International, Marx comments on the future of the trade unions. He writes that for “total emancipation,” unions must “aid every social and political movement tending in that direction”. Unions must see themselves as “champions and representatives of the whole working class, they cannot fail to enlist the non-society men into their ranks.” They should convince ev-

eryone that their aims are “far from being narrow – and selfish, aim at the emancipation of the downtrodden millions” (Marx 1866, 8). Hence, Marx states that unions should fight not only for their own members but also for the interests of the most oppressed and marginalized workers in society. They should not limit the aims of their actions only to their “members” but work for the most marginalized in the society. As such, unions should also take part in any political and social movement that aims towards social emancipation and demonstrate that their aims are universal.

In order for the working class to achieve this “total emancipation,” political organization of the working class as a class and its progress towards the revolutionary struggle with its independent parties is necessary. After the defeat of the 1848 revolutions, we see Marx emphasize this point in particular, in advocating for a worker’s party that represents the demands of the working class against the bourgeois democrats and takes action against private property (La Boltz 2013, 11). At the Hague Congress of the International in 1872,

Marx notes:

“This constitution of the proletariat into a political party is indispensable to ensure the triumph of the social revolution and of its ultimate goal: the abolition of classes. As the lords of the land and capital always make use of their political privileges to defend and perpetuate their economic monopolies and to enslave labour, the conquest of political power becomes the great duty of the proletariat.” (Randive 1986, 16)

That is, the independent political party of the working class is an indispensable step, and the fact that the bourgeoisie always uses political power for its own ends presents one of the reasons for the necessity for the proletariat to seize this power.

Two years before this, in *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels expressed this necessity clearly. In this text, all of the struggles within the state, “between democracy, aristocracy and monarchy... the struggle for franchise, etc.” are seen as a reflection of the struggles between classes. They add: “every class which is struggling for mastery...must first conquer for itself political power in order to represent its interests in turn as the general interest” (Marx and Engels 1975, 160-161). The proletariat, like any class who would like to take power, must come to power with the seizure of political power, even if its own governance should aim to bring about the eventual disappearance of classes.

In Marx and the Trade Unions, Solomon Abramovich Lozovsky, a high-ranking member of the union of trade unions in the Soviet Union who also took a myriad of positions in the Bolshevik Party, looks at the 1872 Hague Congress of the International. Lozovsky draws attention to the following lines by Marx: “The consolidation of the workers’ forces attained in the economic struggle will also have to serve as a lever in the hands of this class for the struggle against the political power of its exploiters” (Lozovsky 1935, 21). The economic struggle here is taken as an instrument for the political struggle, which is regarded as a higher end.

This is what Lozovsky calls the primacy of politics over economy, which he notes is the foundation of the approach of the Bolsheviks and the Comintern (Lozovsky 1935, 25). Still though, Lozovsky emphasizes that for Marx, the workers movement aims ultimately for “economic emancipation,” which means the revolutionary transformation of the entire mode of production (Lozovsky 1935, 22).

In their own time, too, Marx and Engels were supporters of social movements that they thought represented the political interests of the working class. In England, suffrage was enacted in 1832 to exclude the working class. Workers united behind the Chartist movement to abolish the property criterion for suffrage. Both Marx and Engels were strong supporters of the Chartist movement and working class voting rights and they saw the Chartist movement as the political representative and union of the working class of the time (La Boltz 2013, 12-13).

While Engels criticizes the isolated state of the struggles of the trade unions in England, he describes the Chartist movement as the form of the struggle of the working class that starts from the consciousness of a class struggle and opposes the capitalist society in a holistic manner as a class. The working class united behind the Chartist movement was behind the achievement of the ten-hour working day law (La Boltz 2013, 15-16). This type of political movement represent a higher form of struggle than limited union struggles in that workers recognize their common interests as a class (achieve class consciousness) and challenge bourgeois political power in the state, which is the mechanism through which bourgeois establish and perpetuate their dominance.

Although Marx and Engels highlight the positive aspects of the trade unions in these articles, they also observed how unions were institutionalized and became an apparatus of the bourgeoisie in their own time. In his analysis of the current situation of the unions in his instructions during the

International's meeting in 1866, Marx criticizes the trade unions' confinement to local and immediate struggles and their isolation from general social and political movements in the society (Marx 1867, 7). In his article "Wage, Price and Profit," Marx advises the trade unionists in England whose struggles are constrained to mere local, economic gains: "Instead of the conservative motto 'a fair day's wage for a fair day's work,' they ought to inscribe on their banner the revolutionary catchword 'Abolition of the wage system'" (Randive 1986, 10). The revolutionary slogan is one that targets the main basis of worker exploitation and highlights that the ultimate aim must be achieved not only by local, workplace struggles, but by a revolution that targets the whole. Marx shows the same approach in the Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844, when he describes salary increases as "better payment for the slave" and states that workers cannot gain their dignity as human beings until capitalist exploitation ends (Marx 1975, 80).

As early as the 1850s, the prospering of the trade unions especially in England and the tendency of the English working class to become "bourgeois" prompted Engels to write in the following lines: "The British proletariat is becoming more and more bourgeoisified... For a nation that exploits the whole world, this as a matter of fact is more or less natural." Later in 1883, Engels described the same situation as follows: "Participation in the domination of the world market is was and is the economic basis of the political nullity of the British workers." In addition, Engels states that the bourgeoisie's recognition of unions and the small benefits it could provide the workers with the wealth they gain from international exploitation distracts the labor struggle from higher goals (La Boltz 2013, 17). So, as early as the 1850s, Engels recognized the pacifying influence of imperial profits on the labor movement in the West, and especially its bureaucratizing influence on labor unions. Later in the 1870s, Engels realizes

that "once established, legalized and more or less accepted by the capitalist class, had become part of the political economy of the capitalist system serving to regulate wages" (La Boltz 2013, 33). This represents Engels' view of how unions simply become a part of the functioning and continuity of the system, losing their oppositional functions.

Engels also saw that the "working class aristocracy," representing workers who were able to obtain certain privileges, started guiding the working class towards more politically conservative goals (La Boltz 2013, 19). Seeing this trend in the trade unions, Marx also notes in a letter to Liebknecht in 1878 that "the leadership of the working class of England has passed into the hands of the corrupted union leaders and professional agitators." The close relations of the trade unions with the bourgeoisie and bourgeois parties limit the struggle of the working class to regular cycles of strikes focused on salaries, which could not evolve into a higher movement that challenges the fundamental exploitative structure of capitalism. Along with these, Marx and Engels strongly denounced former trade unionists and representatives of the Chartist who joined the ranks of the bourgeois Liberal party (La Boltz 2013, 19).

As La Boltz puts it, Engels saw the solution to unions and working class losing its political force in the working class parting ways with the bourgeois parties, getting their representatives into parliament, and fighting with its class party to end the wage labor system (La Boltz 2013, 34). Engels writes at the end of his "Trade Unions," also quoted by La Boltz: "For the full representation of Labour in Parliament, as well as for the preparation for the abolition of the wages-system, organisations will become necessary, not of separate Trades, but of the working class as a body" (Engels 1975, 377). So, for political representation as well, Engels points towards the unity of the working class.

It is clear that today's trade unions have a lot to learn from Marx and Engels. They show that unions, which are limited to economic gains and

cannot overcome the limits of the daily struggle to comprehend and oppose the whole through political struggle, are in danger of becoming institutionalized into a tool of the bourgeoisie and an instrument of the system. Hence, there is a necessity for the working class to wage a holistic struggle, especially concerning changes that need to be achieved at the political level.

This struggle can start from local, economic demands in union organizing, and in many cases it might need to. However, for Marx and Engels, unions need to move to higher levels of struggle in both consciousness and practice, towards struggles and aims that increasingly represent the whole of worker's interests and target the whole of capitalist society. Unless the working class moves in this manner, Marx and Engels warn that local gains are always in danger of losing their importance. For example, workers in a workplace that received a salary increase as a result of a strike (or any other form of struggle) may lose their gains in a short time against a united bourgeois class that can increase prices by using its monopoly power, that is, that can create profit through inflation. For example, according to a recent EPI research, more than half of inflation in the US in 2020-2021 is due to increased profit margins (Bivens 2022). Here, a holistic and higher political goal can be represented in the struggle to pass a law that enacts increases to the minimum wage that corresponds to increases in inflation, or adjusts salaries based on the cost of living to have a dignified life. Reaching to this presupposes strong organization of workers, who in many cases first organize in their workplaces to develop on the level of practice and consciousness. This political struggle, still, needs to be taken as part of the ultimate ascension to power of the working class.

We have seen in this article that these principles also shape Marx and Engels' views of unions. Not disdainful of the everyday and urgent economic demands for trade unions, Marx and Engels nevertheless do not treat them as the ultimate

goal. Instead of economic gains, the important thing in this daily struggle is the development of the working class as a class, gaining the spirit of struggle, realizing itself as a political force and expanding the solidarity of workers. Workers are also able to abolish the competition among themselves in this struggle. Lastly, as Marx and Engels emphasized, in this struggle, workers are in the process of becoming active social subjects, taking into their own hands the forces that direct their life that seem independent of them and dominate them in the form of the laws of bourgeois economy.

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## INTERVIEW WITH AUSTIN LOCKE FROM STARBUCKS LABOR UNITED

The Stony Brook Worker Editorial

*SBW: Thank you so much for agreeing to talk with us about your experience working at Starbucks. You were illegally fired from the Starbucks Union at a Starbucks shop in Astoria. Can you introduce yourself and walk us through what happened?*

Austin Locke: I've worked with Starbucks for six years and I've been a member of the Restaurant Workers Union for over a year. It's a small, independent, democratic union in New York City. I've been working to unionize my shop and recently, we had a little crisis that we were able to use to our advantage. One day, there was a problem at the store and no one could reach management. It was then that people realized that we needed a union. I came in to work the next day ready to talk to everybody seriously about it. I was approached by one of my coworkers and she asked me if I knew anything about Starbucks Workers United. We exchanged information and had a nice conversation and then we just started talking to everybody.

We collected a list of frustrations, grievances, and we tried to synthesize those into demands and then make it clear to everyone that the only way to solve these issues is with a union, and people got on board. They eventually wanted to go with Starbucks Workers United instead of Restaurant Workers Union, and we got most union cards signed. The National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) then went back and forth on our election date. We ended up having a mail-in ballot, which was a difficult process, but we won seven-to-four. Five days after we won the election, I was fired. Starbucks gave two completely bogus reasons: they said I falsely reported workplace violence,

even though I had provided all the evidence and they refused to release the video footage; and then they used the fact that I once didn't fill out our Covid-log —I had recorded my temperature and had no symptoms but forgot to sign — something other workers have forgotten before and were nev-

er disciplined for. It was clear that Starbucks was targeting me because I was the most public person with the union at that store.

Since then we've had a rally, we've gone to different events, we've gotten awards. But we're still going through the legal process to have me rein-



Students demonstrated as part of a campus-wide "Student Strike" in May 1969, photograph by Jook Leung. Courtesy of Special Collections and University Archives, Stony Brook University Libraries

stated. Starbucks violated just cause law—a New York City law that requires a company to give just cause or a legitimate business reason to fire employees. In my case, Starbucks did not do this. But, even so, they can't fire someone without bargaining.

*SBW: They basically saw you as the leader, as the public-facing figure in the unionization progress? Did they target anyone else or was it just you?*

Austin Locke: No, just me. I was the only person in the media and in public and I'd been interviewed multiple times, so, they knew I was one of the main organizers. We tried to keep our leadership in the background so that they wouldn't retaliate against a bunch of us.

*SBW: Can you tell us about the status and process of the lawsuit?*

Austin Locke: It's filed with the Department of Consumer Workplace Protections; they deal with labor violations. The just cause law went into effect last year, so it's new and the city wants to show that it's effective. It's still taking six or seven months to get me reinstated.

*SBW: After you were fired, you said that you received awards and public support. Can you share a little bit about the kind of support that you received and the people who stood by you and continue to help you through this process?*

Austin Locke: Immediately after I was fired, the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) reached out to me and supported me. Even earlier, before we got all the workers on board for the union, we were in contact with the store right down the street from us that had already unionized. I've been in contact with them and they've been helping me get a union representative, to get all the resources and materials available. So, many organi-

zations have reached out and given us support and have raised funds for other workers that have been fired. Members of SBWU, including me, accepted an award from Brandworkers, the Champions of Economic Justice Award. Luigi Morris and Left Voice have been very helpful and supportive. Jenna from the Independent, The Guardian, VICE, and more have interviewed me about being fired and the situation at my store.

*SBW: What were some of the challenges and anti-union activities you witnessed during your unionization process? What was Starbucks's reaction when you first told them that you were unionizing, and how did they try to make this harder for you?*

Austin Locke: We tried to keep it from the company until we went public, until we filed with the NLRB. Up until then they knew there were talks of unionization, but they didn't know how serious it was. They were posting information on the wall that linked to anti-union websites from Starbucks with standard anti-union rhetoric. They were intentionally trying to misinform workers about unions, saying that the dues are going to affect your income and things like that.

Once we solidified our demands, we posted them around the store. They stayed up for a little bit, but once management saw it, they took them down—they were trying everything in their power.

*SBW: Can you talk about the general conditions faced by Starbucks workers, either in your store or in the others? What are the conditions that workers are fighting against and what are some of the core demands?*

Austin Locke: The main demands from our store is around scheduling and staffing, having enough people staffed and then also having people scheduled when they want to be scheduled. If they can't work on a particular day, then they can't work that

day and Starbucks shouldn't schedule them. Or if they want to work 40 hours, Starbucks shouldn't give them only 30 hours. Even though we're consistently short staffed and the labor is intensifying, they just continue to short staff us because they want to make as much money as possible.

*SBW: We are also curious about the relationship between your local Starbucks store and citywide and nationwide unionized Starbucks stores. Can you tell us what the relationship is, if there is one?*

Austin Locke: We do have communication on a regional level. All the Starbucks shops in New York, which includes the five boroughs and the metro area, even some people from Long Island. We coordinate regional organizing committee meetings, and we have different committees for coming up with contract language. There's leadership from the national union and all that stuff, but they definitely try to give workers as much

range as possible.

*SBW: The wave of Starbucks unionizations has received a lot of attention in the national labor movement in the US. What do you think prompted this wave and why was it so influential for so many other workers in other industries?*

Austin Locke: Our generation has had all these promises made to them by the ruling class, their parents, higher education. We've been told to rack up debt to go to school, and then we'll get a great job with a six-figure salary. And, on top of that, there's a global economic crisis. I think the material conditions are mostly what's catalyzed the latest labor movement.

*SBW: Are there any lessons that you can share for labor organizers on our campus? Even though you're in a very different industry, is there anything that you think will be valuable in our fight to improve our working conditions?*



Students demonstrated as part of a campus-wide "Student Strike" in May 1969, photograph by Jook Leung. Courtesy of Special Collections and University Archives, Stony Brook University Libraries

Austin Locke: I don't know the specifics of Stony Brook, but I think the most important thing is listening to the workers, taking note of what their grievances are, and then synthesizing them and telling them, "Hey, this is how we have to go forward if we want to achieve these demands." I think the most important thing is that, if you're trying to organize people, you have to listen to them in order to help get them what they want.

*SBW: How can our readers support you and how can we develop a stronger labor solidarity between such different industries and workers?*

Austin Locke: I think the best way to build solidarity, to build a vibrant labor movement, is educating people. These labor issues are not limited to Starbucks, or to New York, or to Stony Brook; they are international problems, and the labor

movement has to be international. It's a lot worse in other places, but it's also really terrible here in the United States. Unless we link those struggles, there will never be a resolution to these problems.

*SBW: Is there anything else you would like to share with our readers?*

Austin Locke: I think we all need to read more, me included. Pick up a book, read about where you live, about the labor movement in the US to understand the problems affecting working people and then go out and do something.

over \$6000 a year for their mandated meal plan. Students without unlimited meal plans must pay \$8.75 for breakfast, \$15 for lunch, and \$16 for dinner at the dining halls or an average of \$11.06 per meal at retail locations according to the Stony Brook meal plan website. Students who use dining dollars get only a small discount of 10% off at dine-in locations. Just as SBU is able to take advantage of student reliance on dorms to charge exorbitant prices, the dining halls also have a captivated market. This allows the many businesses that sell meals on campus to charge these high prices for low-quality food.

In addition to the high food prices, undergraduates who don't live in apartments must still contend with high housing prices. Some students, mostly freshmen, are even forced into rooms in H, Mendelsohn, and Roosevelt with two additional people in them. While many of the rooms are only meant for two people, they still hold three residents. Students who live in three-person rooms that were originally designed for two people must pay the normal \$1139 per month. These prices are very high as the median cost for a one-bedroom apartment is \$1030 for two people and \$686 for three people according to the HUD. Of course, in most one-bedroom apartments, residents don't share bathrooms and have their own kitchen. However, undergraduates who live in these dorms do not have such amenities and must share bathrooms and cooking areas with large sections of their floor and thus pay a lot more for much less.

In H and Mendelsohn in particular, Stony Brook University has removed some of the end hall lounges, which are vital spaces for students to study, have some privacy, and socialize, and replaced them with more dorm rooms. These removals were opposed by a student petition that garnered over 150 signatures, yet the university ignored the backlash and removed the lounges all the same. These removals have not served to lower the cost of dorming, even though students are getting fewer amenities. Instead, these remov-

als have increased the money that Stony Brook University makes while increasing the burden on students who are already struggling with the cost of their education.

In sum, Stony Brook University holds a captive market over undergraduate housing and charges far above the market rate, especially considering the reduced amenities and crowded living conditions. Similarly, the dining halls charge high prices for their relatively low-quality food, taking advantage of the limited outside options for undergraduates. With these immensely high prices for the basic necessities of housing and food that students need to continue their education, it is no wonder that Americans collectively hold \$1.75 trillion dollars in student loan debt. As a public University, Stony Brook should set the example for providing better value for students rather than taking advantage of their limited access to housing and meal options.

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## PRESSING UNDERGRADUATE HOUSING CRISIS AT STONY BROOK UNIVERSITY

### College Socialists

It is no secret that dorming at Stony Brook is expensive. Undergraduate students in particular are often forced to dorm due to their distance from school, expensive off-campus housing, and the inconvenient and expensive commute. As such, the school has an effective monopoly on undergraduate room and board, and students are forced to pay the high costs of dorming.

According to the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the medi-

an monthly rent for a six-bedroom apartment in Suffolk County is \$756 per person. However, a student living in a single room with 5 other people in West Apartments pays \$1415. Although these lodgings are the most expensive undergraduate housing on campus, every apartment has a kitchen so students often choose to live here to not have to buy food at the dining halls.

The meal plans at our university are very expensive. First-year students, for example, must pay

## 1969: A YEAR IN CAMPUS ACTIVISM AT STONY BROOK UNIVERSITY

Elise Armani, Amy Kahng, and Gabriella Shypula

Eight years after the opening of the Stony Brook campus of the State University of New York, undergraduate and graduate students alike on the young campus organized around a number of issues ranging from logistical and bureaucratic concerns to local issues in housing and labor, as well as national and international social movements.

The university was growing rapidly under the leadership of University President John S. Toll and, like many campuses in the late 1960s, Stony Brook was an ideological and literal battleground between students and administration. In response to the burgeoning protest culture on campus, university administrators imposed a three-day moratorium in the fall of 1968. Toll canceled classes from October 22nd to 24th to hold a discussion between students, faculty, and administration regarding the young college's future and to develop a series of initiatives to address student concerns. However, over the following year, student reporters noted little to no satisfactory change, prompting continued student organization and disruption.

From January to December of 1969, students and faculty assembled in support of several causes, including the development of a Black Studies Program on campus, the condemnation of policing and criminalization of drug use on campus, the prevention of military recruitment of students and university research in support of the War in Vietnam, and the unionization of campus laborers. As student journalism from the year demonstrates, Stony Brook undergraduate and graduate students understood their activism in relation to the activities of peers at other universities throughout the SUNY system and beyond, sharing resources and solidarity with student organizers around the nation.

On the occasion of Revisiting 5+1, an exhibition that examines a historic display of Black artists on Stony Brook's campus in 1969, currently on view at the Zuccaire Gallery in Staller Center for the Arts, we've compiled a timeline of activities of student and faculty organizers at Stony Brook in the year 1969 drawing from articles published in the Stony Brook Statesman.<sup>1</sup> Original ephemera from the Statesman and other 1969 documents speaking to these events is presented alongside works of art in the exhibition.



Students demonstrated as part of a campus-wide "Student Strike" in May 1969, photograph by Jook Leung. Courtesy of Special Collections and University Archives, Stony Brook University Libraries

## Text Of Black Students' Demands

### January

The spring semester of 1969 opened with debates about fees and police, not dissimilar to recent graduate worker protests on our campus. Opening new campus tuition bills to find new fees under a vague "University Deposit" line, students stormed the campus business offices to contend with the new FSA charges. A year after what was widely condemned as an unnecessary demonstration of police power, when 200 Suffolk County officers raided campus to make drug possession charges in the middle of the night, students continued to call for the decriminalization of marijuana and that the administration "aid not raid" students.<sup>1</sup>

### February

In February of 1969, a nascent student group Black Students United (formed in 1968 and now known as the Black Student Union) presented demands to President Toll. Among the principal demands were the formation of a degree granting program in Black Studies, an increased admission of Black and Puerto Rican students, and the development of resources on campus dedicated to Black students. In the weeks following, Toll assembled a committee of sixteen students and faculty members to develop an interdepartmental program in Black Studies, which would offer its first classes in fall of 1969 and ultimately develop into our contemporary Department of Africana Studies.

That same month, students marched through Port Jefferson for open housing, joining a demonstration alongside legendary labor activist Dolores Huerta in support of an ordinance ending racial discrimination in housing.

The month ended with a dramatic confrontation between 200 students and an army recruiter, Charles Gott, holding the recruiter hostage in a gymnasium office for three-hours in protest of the university policy allowing military recruiting on campus. Following the demonstration, approximately 80 students and faculty gathered to discuss

the formation of an "anti-imperialist opinion" against "University complicity in imperialism."

### March

In March of 1969, tensions between the administration and students regarding the university's proximity to military activities came to a head, culminating in the arrest of several students.

On March 4th, State University at Stony Brook faculty joined scientists at universities around the country in a one day research boycott for peace. Six days later, on March 10th, students protested again against the recruitment of their classmates towards the war in Vietnam, this time on the occasion of Dow Chemical recruiters visiting the campus. The demonstration blossomed into a full scale condemning of university complicity with military imperialism and, in an effort to prove these claims, approximately 100 students forced their way into the Graduate School office in pursuit of files containing documents on faculty research projects, photo-copying several folders of research grants and research-related papers.

The following evening, Michael Cohen and Glenn Kissack were arrested on campus. Cohen, a former student, had been granted "persona non grata" due to his political beliefs and actions against acting Vice-President Scott Rickard and was approached by patrolmen in the cafeteria. Kissack, a current student, attempted to intervene in the arrest and was forcibly removed alongside Cohen. Two days later, on March 13th, 500 students in support of Kissack and Cohen staged a rally outside the administrative offices, then located in the library, demanding that the persona non grata status be abolished, the charges dropped, and that university research files be open for public inspection.

As the administration attempted to quell the disturbance, several students moved into the administrative offices, staging an eighteen-hour sit-in that ended in the arrest of 21 additional students, who were ultimately given a fifteen-day jail sentence. A unanimous statement from the

The following is the complete text of the demands presented by Black Students United to President Toll:

On October 24-25, 1968, Stony Brook University did hold a MORATORIUM, at which time constructive proposals were submitted by BSU and other concerned student organizations, for the implementation of certain curriculum and necessary changes in the University structure. To this date, the Governing Powers that be in the University have not acted on these all-too-few meaningful proposals. After months of patience and good faith we the BLACK STUDENTS UNITED at Stony Brook do make the following demands:

**A. BLACK INSTITUTE**  
We, the Black Students United at Stony Brook, demand a signed agreement by the Administration to provide the necessary resources to establish a Black Institute.

The aims, definitions, courses, policies, organization and development shall be decided by a Committee set up by B.S.U. composed of chosen faculty and outside advisors. That upon receipt of our proposals and signed agreement by the University upon such proposals, machinery shall immediately be set in motion so that the Black Institute will be established as a functioning unit by September 1969.

**B. SPECIAL OPPORTUNITIES PROGRAM**

Black Students United is aware that the "Special Opportunities Program" (S.O.P.) serves no purpose as it is set up presently and therefore demand that to make it meaningful, the "Program" satisfies the following needs:

1. Tuition
2. Room & Board
3. Insurance - student health & medical
4. Fees - (a) preliminary

(b) college  
(c) books and materials

In addition to this, B.S.U. also demands the final approval in the hiring of the Director(s), and all persons responsible in the governing of this program. B.S.U. will also have representatives on the Board of the S.O.P. in all matters pertaining to admissions, governance, etc.

### C. ADMISSIONS

The membership of Black Students United is intensely aware of the unjustifiably small percentage of Afro-Americans and Puerto Ricans included in the student, faculty, and administrative bodies of State University at Stony Brook. Any people, any institution which professes to be just recognizes this deficiency, unintentional or otherwise, to be intolerable, and its continuation to be reprehensible.

The Black Students United addresses itself to the immediate rectification of the underenrollment of Afro-American and Puerto Rican students on the following basis:

1. The society of which State University at Stony Brook is part has systematically denied to Black peoples the education which has been their right and due.
2. Black students qualified and motivated to attend Stony Brook University do

exist in greater numbers than present enrollment figures presume to indicate.

4. An advisory committee should be selected by B.S.U. and would be set up to advise and direct the students involved in the most meaningful way.

### E. UNIVERSITY REQUIREMENTS

We, the Black Students United demand the abolition of the University requirements; so that the undergraduate student may find more freedom to choose courses that meet his interests and needs.

We feel the abolition of University requirements would entail the abolition of the present system of prerequisites, and a decrease in the number of required courses and the accumulation of a gross amount of credits presently needed for graduation.

We expect to receive notice of the approval or rejection of the TOTAL of our demands by the President of the University, and other members of the Administration by February 17, 1969. This reply will be presented in the gymnasium where reservations have been made to serve this purpose. The date of this public presentation will be Feb. 17, 1969, at 8 p.m. before the members of B.S.U. and other Concerned Students.

"Text Of Black Students' Demands," Statesman 12, no. 28 (February 11, 1969): 7. Courtesy of Special Collections and University Archives, Stony Brook University Libraries

Student Council calling for Toll's resignation followed shortly after. An article in the Statesman on March 18th connected the activities on campus to a wider phenomenon of "campus repression" under the Nixon administration targeting the activities of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS).

At the same time, economics professor Michael Zweig faced legal action after refusing to testify against students in relation to the January drug raid. As the first faculty member called to testify, Zweig set a precedent of faculty solidarity with the students and was subsequently sentenced for contempt. The faculty senate swiftly moved to

back Zweig, calling for "the discontinuation of legal action against faculty members who refuse to testify against students." The faculty senate also took the opportunity to formally declare opposition to any state "anti-riot" legislation, which would take away financial aid from students engaging in demonstrations.

Demonstrations continued, with picketers confronting President Toll once again on March 24th, this time about the possibility of the university participating in the Department of Defense's Project THEMIS grants.

## April

Student journalism from April of 1969 shows a continued interest in demonstrations happening at other universities, including major events at Harvard, Stanford, and SUNY Buffalo.<sup>3</sup>

Dedicated attention to the concerns of Black students on campus were spotlighted, with the April 15th issue of the Statesman featuring a four-spread feature titled "Stonybrook Black Voice." In the insert, student writers addressed experiences of harassment and bigotry on campus and reported on their participation in the first of a series of intercollegiate Black Student Conventions, held at New Jersey City State College.

Days later, Black Students United released a statement condemning what they identified as

a segregated workforce on campus construction sites and proposed that "direct pressure be put on those unions and companies to force them to recruit and train more minority workers." The Student Council followed the statement with a call for a construction moratorium until an integrated workforce could be developed.

Opposition to Project THEMIS continued with SDS presenting President Toll with a petition opposing Stony Brook involvement and holding a rally to demand the banning of "all military and corporate recruiters involved in the oppression and exploitation of the Third World and American people" from campus. Shortly thereafter, it was announced that Stony Brook's bid for the grant was rejected by the Department of Defense.



Pictured in the 1969 Stony Brook Specula Yearbook, Black Students United present Stony Brook University President John S. Toll with their demands, February 17, 1969. Courtesy of Special Collections and University Archives, Stony Brook University Libraries

## May

In the final month of the spring semester, students were targeted by yet another drug raid, resulting in the arrest of 18 students on narcotics charges, including two arrested for dealing by undercover officers. Following the arrests, fires were set across campus, burning down a gatehouse and toppling a police car on campus. At 1:30 in the morning, an emergency convening of the Student Council led to the issuing of a statement demanding the indefinite cancellation of classes and a full student strike in response to the continued policing of students on campus.

A general strike and picketing that targeted the administration and Suffolk police followed suit as strikers called for an end to political abuse of unjust drug laws. On May 16th, a general statement on behalf of the entire student body was printed in the Statesman, with intentions to "make clear that [students] recognize the political nature" of the arrests and stating that, "because of the atmosphere of repression" on campus, students would act to suspend "all normal functions for the remainder of the semester."

The following week, students attended a conference on campus repression at Stony Brook, featuring Zweig, Socialist mayoral candidate Paul Boutelle, and Black Panther Zayd Malik Shakur.

The final days of the semester saw students infiltrate the Suffolk Air Force base on "Open House Day" and picket the Hauppauge Police Station to condemn "politically motivated enforcement."

## September

After months away from campus, students returned in September to continued debates over the nature of student fees and continued fallout from the drug raids of the previous semester. As new students joined the student body, Residential Assistants in the dormitories came out in unanimous opposition to new drug regulations adopted by the university, which included the threat of expulsion for any students convicted of drug

use. Student Government called for all freshmen attending orientation to refrain from taking student ID photos, citing the use of the photos by a Suffolk County Grand Jury. Student Council followed with a statement calling for the confidentiality of student records and the prevention of their use by the police.

## October

In October, continued opposition to American presence in Vietnam was front and center in an issue of the Statesman titled "THE WAR." Professors from the Departments of History, Sociology, and Economics contributed to the issue with articles on the war's history, its psychological impact on American teens, and the funding of American militarism.

October 15th, 1969 saw the "Moratorium to End the War in Vietnam" event, with demonstrations and teach-ins across the nation. At Stony Brook, students canvassed the county and conducted a reading of the names of "Vietnam war dead" at the Smith Haven Mall. Students for a Democratic Society participated in a welfare demonstration demanding the restoration of the welfare allowance of 100 dollars per child and the immediate withdrawal of troops. On campus, an "Ad-Hoc Faculty-Student Committee on October 15" sponsored two teach-ins led by History Professors Joel Rosenthal and Gene Lebovics.

The following day, on October 16th, the art exhibition 5+1 opened in the Humanities Building on campus, organized by Professor of Art Lawrence Alloway with artist Frank Bowling. Featuring six Black artists (Bowling, Melvin Edwards, Daniel LaRue Johnson, Alvin (Al) Loving, Jack Whitten, and William T. Williams), the exhibition was co-sponsored by the new Black Studies Program and corresponded to the nationwide movement for Black Studies on college campuses.

On October 28th, Black Students United occupied a study lounge in the basement of O'Neill College and claimed it as a Black Cultural Center and dedicated space for Black Students. A college

meeting the following day led to the room being formally given to the student group.

On October 30th, students rallied across campus in support of campus cafeteria workers fighting their managing company, Ogden Foods. Led by SDS, students called for workers to be reimbursed for parking permits, an end to sexual harassment of employees, and measures to prevent layoffs and overworking.

#### November

Student support for cafeteria workers continued into November with the formation of a Campus Worker-Student Alliance Committee and efforts to unionize the workers with Local 1199.

On November 15th, 1969 a second Anti-War Moratorium was staged and students from Stony Brook took buses to Washington D.C. to join thousands of other marchers.<sup>4</sup>

#### December

As the fall semester reached its close, unionization efforts continued and student involvement culminated with a demonstration sponsored by BSU, SDS, and the Oriental Students Society to protest Ogden Food's exploitation of Black and Latino workers. Meanwhile, graduate students fought a proposed Brookhaven Town housing ordinance that would severely limit off-campus housing for students.

#### 1969 to Today

As we continue to press on in our organizing for a living wage, racial justice, international student support, and many more issues pertinent to our campus community, it's imperative to reflect on the extraordinary activism and organizing accomplished by Stony Brook undergraduate and graduate students in 1969. We can take inspiration from their efforts to build solidarity across campus groups, faculty, staff, students, and the local community and their incredible resilience and persistence in the face of a hostile administration.

1. Unless otherwise noted, all quotes and information detailing campus life and activism at Stony Brook throughout the academic year of 1969 are sourced from *Statesman* articles published during the corresponding month detailed in this article's timeline. See an archive of all back issues from the Stony Brook Statesman at: <https://dspace.sunyconnect.sunys.edu/>.

2. For detailed account of increased policing at SUNY campuses during this period, including Stony Brook University, see Yalile Suriel, "Stony Brook and the Landscape of Public Higher Education," in *Revisiting 5+1* (Stony Brook, NY: Paul W. Zuccaire Gallery, 2022), 84-88.; and "The War on Drugs Shapes Campus Police" in *Cops on Campus: Critical Perspectives on Policing in Higher Education* (University of Washington Press, forthcoming).

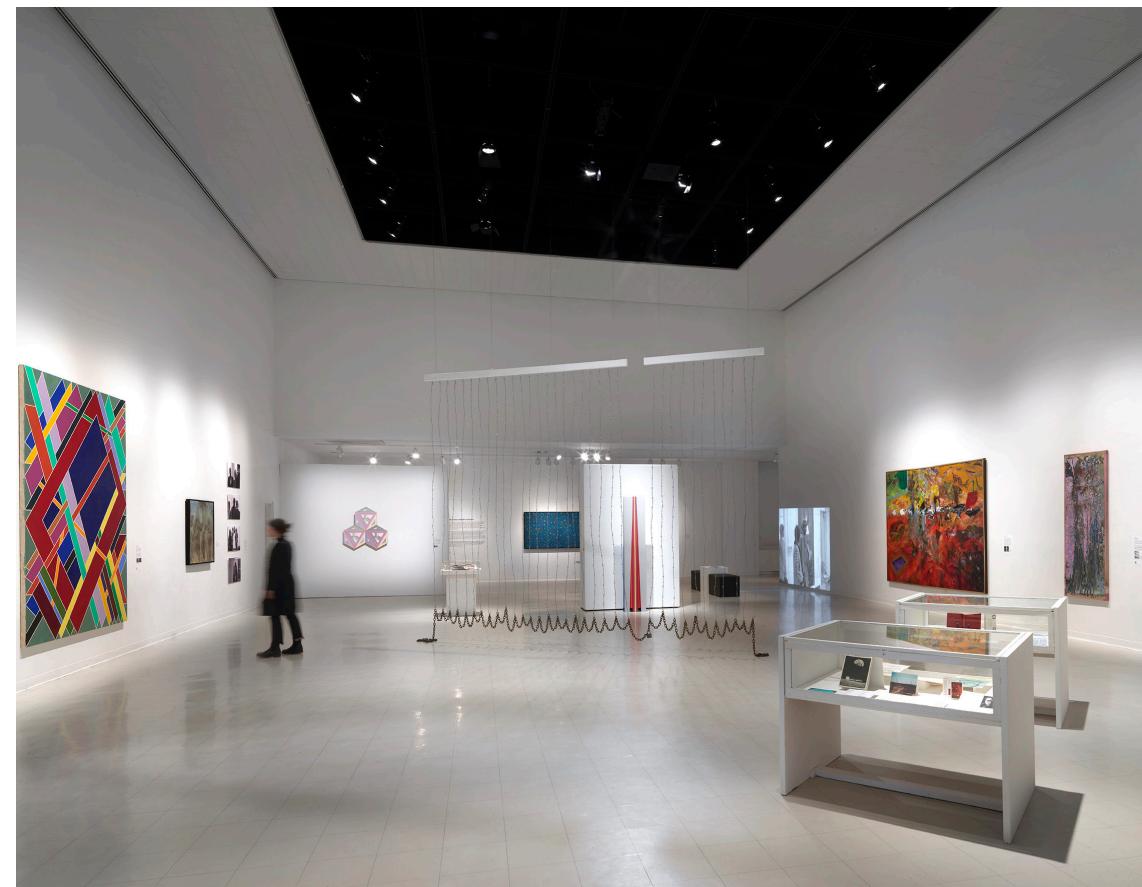
3. The Stony Brook Specula yearbooks for the academic years 1968-69 and 1969-70 include multi-page spreads of student photographs taken at local and national protests.

4. Photographs and documents from this event and others can be accessed in the Special Collections and University Archives, Stony Brook University Libraries. Special thanks to Kristen Nyitray, Stony Brook University Libraries' Director of Special Collections and University Archives and University Archivist, for her generous assistance.

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*Presented at Paul W. Zuccaire Gallery at Stony Brook University, and in concert with the MFA Boston's Frank Bowling retrospective that will travel to SFMOMA, Revisiting 5+1 reexamines the 1969 Stony Brook University exhibition 5+1, a show of six Black abstract artists organized by Frank Bowling at the invitation of Lawrence Alloway. The exhibition, on display until March 31st, 2023, brings together spectacular art by the original artists with archival material that illuminates the contexts of art world discourse and student activism addressing racial justice. Paired with this historical revisiting is a complementary group of work by six Black women artists, selected by and including Howardena Pindell. Together, the art works, along with photographs and archival materials, unfold experimental painting, sculpture, and film from the 1960s and 70s, and also urgent social issues that continue to resonate today.*

*The accompanying catalog includes archival photographs of 5+1 by Adger Cowans and from the Frank Bowling Archive, four scholarly essays, including*



*Revisiting 5+1* at the Zuccaire Gallery, Stony Brook University. Photo by Dario Lasagni.

*two on activism at Stony Brook and university campuses, and illustrations of artworks and archival ephemera. The catalog also includes profiles of artists included in the exhibition, an interview with Howardena Pindell, as well as a tribute to Pindell's achievements by Lowery Stokes Sims.*

*The exhibition is co-curated by Elise Armani, Amy Kahng, and Gabriella Shypula, three PhD candidates in art history at Stony Brook University, under the guidance of Distinguished Professor Katy Siegel and Karen Levitov, Director and Curator of the Zuccaire Gallery, and in collaboration with Distinguished Professor of Art Howardena Pindell, who also has work in the exhibition.*

For more information about Revisiting 5+1:  
[https://zuccairegallery.stonybrook.edu/exhibitions/revisiting\\_5\\_plus\\_1.php](https://zuccairegallery.stonybrook.edu/exhibitions/revisiting_5_plus_1.php)

To purchase a copy of the exhibition catalog: <https://stallercenter.showare.com/DonationAddToBasket.asp?camp=15>

## ART REVIEW: PROJECTING IDENTITY: BODIES OBJECT AT SUFFOLK COMMUNITY COLLEGE

by Kaya Turan

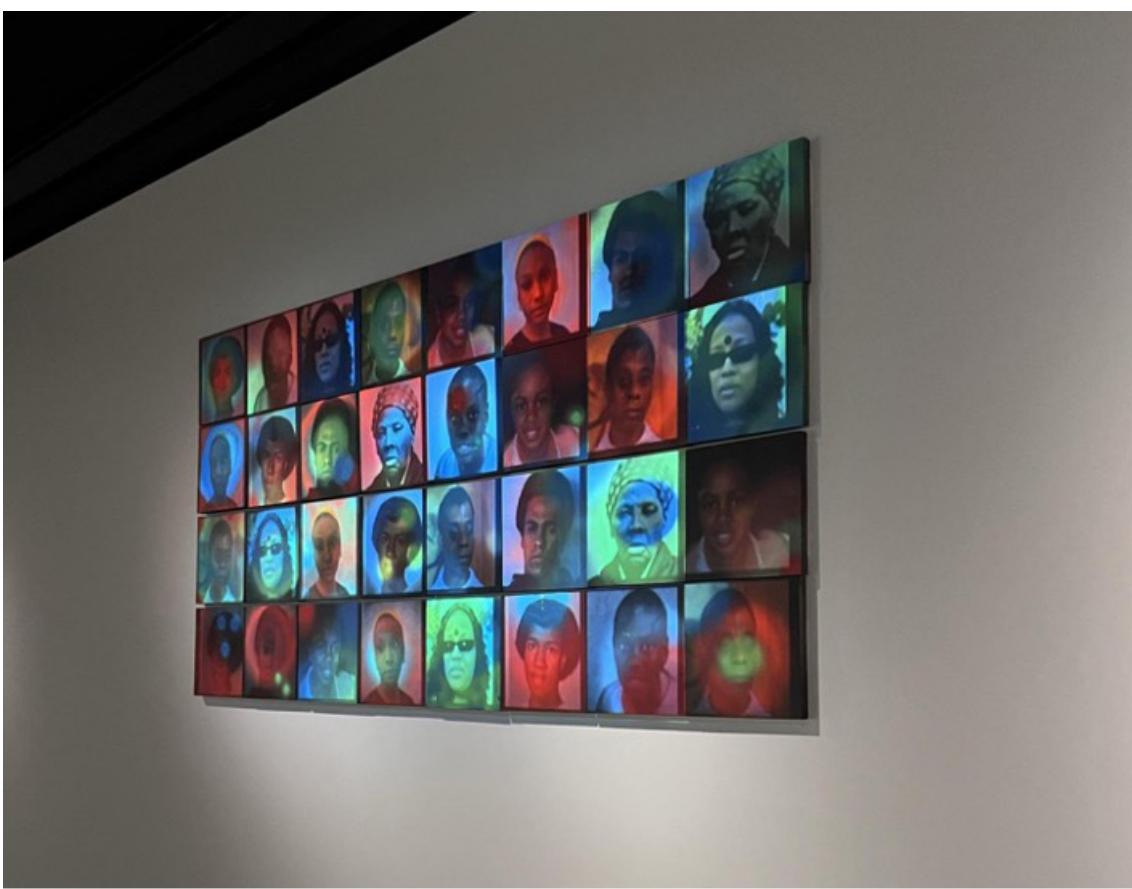
On view at Sagtikos Art Gallery at Suffolk Community College from September to October of 2022, the exhibition *Bodies Object* presented a strange conglomeration of materials, including HD video, hot and sour soup, AI generated imagery, wood, and a mattress. The exhibition presented the work of four artists from Stony Brook's Future Histories Studio, including two graduate workers, Josie Williams and Diana Mulan Zhu, and two faculty members of the Art department, Coleman Collins and Stephanie Dinkins. The show examined the mediation of physical bodies in digital space, exploring the ways in which identity is altered and transformed in the immaterial. Projecting and printing the virtual back onto the physical, *Bodies Object* reveals the material underpinnings of the digital. Beyond observing the obfuscation and disfiguration of bodies and identities in the virtual, the exhibition examines the complex entanglement of the material and the immaterial, framing projection as a critical and resistant act.

The first piece encountered in the exhibition, directly adjacent to the introductory wall text, was Josie Williams' *together here*. AI-animated faces of historical figures (including Harriet Tubman and James Baldwin), the artist herself and people of personal significance to her, and nonexistent (computationally generated) individuals were projected onto a grid of small, square wooden blocks. These transhistorical visages were set into motion, blinking and slightly swaying as they were illuminated by brightly colored lights. In the gallery space, these virtual faces—some no longer existing and some never having existed—

were given material form in their projection onto wood. A tension emerges between the supposed immateriality of the virtual and the fragile composition of wood, vulnerable to axing, rotting, and decomposition. Through the act of projection onto a mutual wooden plane, together here combines the disparate temporalities of past, present and future in a single space of interaction. The material becomes a place to creatively and productively combine the infinitely flexible temporalities of the digital.

Diana Mulan Zhu's *Consumed* is a large sculptural installation that occupied the center of the room. A film made by the artist, composed of vintage pornography clips featuring Asian women, is projected onto a Chinese-takeout-stained mattress. Referencing her traumatic experience of being exposed to pornography as a young child, the piece finds connections between different modes of consumption: binge-watching and binge-eating. Projecting pornography back onto the bed on which they are both produced and (often) viewed, *Consumed* resists the abstraction and instrumentalization of Asian female bodies. The piece challenges Western mediation of Asian culture by projecting (and thus re-mediating) images, anchoring them to a specific location rather than letting them drift aimlessly.

*Dispersion*, a video by Coleman Collins, occupied a gallery wall in the rear of the space. The video loops footage of a small motorized boat traveling from the former slave port of Badagry, Nigeria to the open water. As the brief clip loops, it gradually degrades, becoming increasingly pixelated and abstracted. Overlaying text slowly



Stephanie Dinkins' *A \_\_\_\_\_ Woman Smiling* in *Bodies Object*

emerges, reading: "Dispersion seemed inevitable." Projecting HD video directly onto the gallery wall, *Dispersion* placed the digital in and on the material. The "dispersion" of the image – its falling apart, degrading and decaying – reveals that it, like the people and places it depicts, is vulnerable to violence and death.

The final piece included in the exhibition was Stephanie Dinkins' *A \_\_\_\_\_ Woman Smiling*. Dinkins fed prompts to a text-to-image machine learning algorithm, filling the blank in *A \_\_\_\_\_ Woman Smiling* with various phrases such as "African-American," "Black," and "null." Dinkins' piece differs from the others in the

show in that it involves printing rather than projection - the resulting portraits were printed onto metal canvas and hung on the wall. Printing, though technologically and aesthetically distinct from projection, nonetheless functions to give material form and format to the digital. Taking up AI's fragmented and biased understandings of identity, *A \_\_\_\_\_ Woman Smiling* explores the entanglement of human and machinic agency. Data and aesthetic production, caught between the human and the non-human, are hung on the wall for all to see.

Cutting through myths of the digital as immaterial (with metaphors like "the cloud") and

as offering a post-identity space, *Bodies Object* projects and prints mediations of bodies back onto and into the material. The increasingly fragile status of bodies as objects is explored, complicated, and questioned. Rather than strictly separating and binarizing the immaterial and

material, the virtual and the physical, *Bodies Object* demonstrates the ways in which these domains are mutually constitutive and inseparably enmeshed.



Diana Mulan Zhu's *Consumed* in *Bodies Object*

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