



ACT-UAW Union Holds Rally

In Response to a Dozen Fine Arts Faculty Dismissals

FRONT AND BACK PHOTOS: MARTHA BURGESS; BILL PHIPPS



On April 23, ACT-UAW held a rally in front of the New School Administration Building to support faculty and draw attention to what the university had done.

ACT-UAW Provides The Spine To Help Us Help Ourselves

By Susan Hambleton

IN THESE TIMES of economic instability, nothing can be taken for granted, and that includes the existence of our union. After almost five years of our contract with NYU, and four years since the contract began with The New School, perhaps you assume our yearly increases in salary and health insurance will stay in place, that without question the union will be there when a grievance arises, and that a desirable dialogue with our schools, such as that established with the New School administration through the Labor Management Committee, will continue to unfold.

Faculty Dismissals

You can bet our universities would like nothing more than an inattentive faculty as they make decisions based on their own desire for centralized control to the detriment of our students and our jobs. When we rally in full voice, as we did on April 23, in support of 12 dismissed faculty of Parsons The New School, we're telling bosses we're ready to fight in defense of our colleagues (*see adjoining article*). In order to win the next contracts we want and deserve, we'll need to demonstrate that same sense of tenacity and conviction when our Bargaining Committee members face management at the negotiating table. The New School's outrageous decision to dismiss devoted faculty in such an arbitrary and secretive fashion was (*continued on next page*)

By Deloss Brown and Susan Hambleton

ON THE NIGHT of March 10, just before spring break, 12 out of the 28 part-time Fine Arts faculty at Parsons The New School for Design received e-mails from the department's Chair. Nine were told that they would not be teaching in the next academic year, and three that they would be reappointed, but in some undesignated positions, not in the Fine Arts.

ACT-UAW Local 7902, which represents part-time faculty at the New School and NYU, immediately filed grievances for

every faculty member covered under The New School contract with the goal of reversing the firing for all 12 (*one of whom has been teaching at Parsons for 22 years*). On April 23, ACT-UAW held a rally in front of the New School Administration building to support faculty and draw attention to what the university had done.

No Confidence

Since December, the full-time faculty has twice voted "no confidence" in President Bob Kerrey. Students and faculty have felt they have no influence over the school's curriculum. The (*continued on next page*)

profiles

Stewards play a vital role in guiding our faculty through grievances.

Below are profiles of four who have done their share.

LAURA MARIA CENSABELLA a playwright/screenwriter teaching Playwriting and Colab for New School's Drama Division since 1995, has been a steward since the



Laura Maria Censabella

New School ACT-UAW contract began. "90% of New School teachers are part time. Someone has to safeguard our rights." Laura's father, an Amalgamated Clothing Union steward, told

her workers have rights not because their bosses give them, but because unions fight for those rights. Laura gets help from other stewards and joint council members. Her goal is always to come to agreement if possible; however "If I see injustice, I can work up a head of steam."

JOE HASKE

teaching drawing at New School Parsons since 1981, has been a steward since ACT-UAW contract ratification. "I felt it needed to be done,"



Joe Haske

he says. "If I didn't do it, maybe no one would." He emphasizes The New School teachers worked hard to get the union after a defeat in the 1980s. They went with UAW because The New School had become so (continued on next page)

New School Union Holds Rally

(continued from page 1) university has had four different provosts in the last five years. Firing the Fine Arts faculty was another aggravation. But interim Provost Tim Marshall claimed that nothing extraordinary had happened. "This is not a disciplinary action — no one's been fired," said Marshall, and he added that this was business as usual (*New York Times*, April 3).

New School faculty and union members felt that if this was indeed business as usual, it is disastrous. An exasperated faculty member, Matthew Freedman, described the administration's decisions as "steeped in mystery, arbitrary, without explanation, cruel, inhumanly bureaucratic, and designed to change the culture of the school without improving it."

Solid Rally Success

ACT-UAW New School Unit Chair Marie Dormuth led the rally. Also on hand were local union President Joel Schlemowitz and NYU Unit Chair Chris Rzonca, and Greg Tewksbury (Eugene Lang College), more than 300 New School and NYU faculty and students. They listened and cheered as a host of other irate though eloquent faculty, alumni, Teamsters Local 1205 (New School staff) AFM Local 802 (Jazz faculty), and several other supportive unions. Local politicians spoke out against this disgraceful behavior on the part of The

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New School.

On the eve of the rally, April 22, Interim Provost Marshall sent out an e-mail apologizing for the university's lack of communication and announcing the formation of a task force to review the "curricular changes" and their consequences. Working with this task force, which includes nine part-time faculty, your union has been able to resolve favorably the appointments of many of the fired faculty. Most are returning to the FA Department. On May 7, *The New York Times* reported: "Bob Kerrey will step down as President of The New School when his contract expires July 1, 2011." ■

ACT-UAW Provides The Spine To Help Us

(continued from page 1) a prime example of how a university can make unilateral moves in spite of the extraordinary dedication of those who are penalized.

Grievances

The contract enabled us to fight back. We filed a number of grievances, assigned stewards to the stricken faculty, and provided advice and support. Paralleling the filing of appropriate grievances, the Fine Arts faculty petitioned the school, aroused the press, and alerted artists and academics until the injustice of the administration's move reverberated across the country.

Meanwhile, ACT-UAW released its own public statement protesting the dismissals, followed by the rally on April 23. Without the moral support and practical recourse offered by a presence of a union on campus, it seems unlikely that a handful of faculty members, however brave and dedicated, could have gotten far in their opposition to

such a flagrant wrong.

Contract Negotiations

When The New School contract is renegotiated starting at the end of May, three of the 10 faculty members on the Bargaining Committee will be veterans of this tough process — Joel Schlemowitz, President of ACT-UAW, Jan Clausen, 2nd Vice President, and Marie Dormuth, Unit Chair for The New School.

The whole committee needs our backing to stand up to a university administration that has shown its disregard for fiscal transparency and sharing control over curriculum.

What they accomplish will be the prelude to NYU's contract negotiations, set to commence a year from now. If you want the union there to fight for you, it's vital that you give something back. Contact ACT-UAW at (212)432-2120 and ask what you can do. ■

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PHOTOS: ROBERT SCHAEFER, JR.

The Employee Free Choice Act

What we can learn about it from our own union experience

By Joel Schlemowitz

THERE IS NOW A BILL before the House and Senate called The Employee Free Choice Act, which if passed would make it easier for workers to form unions. No surprise, many right-wing groups like the Heritage Foundation are firmly against it. However, in forming our local union, we have witnessed first-hand the need for such legislation. And, judging from that experience, we fully understand its benefit to workers everywhere.

At NYU, negotiations for our first union contract dragged out for 18 months. Ultimately, it took the use of a mediator to facilitate a reasonable agreement. It is not uncommon for employers to delay improvements in working conditions and pay, simply through delays in the negotiation process itself. The Employee Free Choice Act provides for federal mediation if no agreement is reached in 90 days. At NYU we achieved a first contract after 18 months with use of a mediator. However, the critical difference is the loss of valuable time in access to the pay increases, health insurance, and other benefits of the contract we rightly deserved.

At NYU, one of the key organizers was let go by the university. This was termed “restructuring,” but seemed calculated purely to remove an adjunct faculty member/union leader who was an effective voice for NYU’s adjunct faculty. The union successfully won the restoration of her job with back pay. Shockingly, the current law provides no penalties for employers’ actions in these situations other than back pay, which gives little incentive for employers not to just break the law as a routine practice.

The Employee Free Choice Act would force these employers to think twice before violating the National Labor Relations Act through fines for their illegal actions. Also

workers could seek damages when they are illegally fired.

Administration Challenges

At New School, using the current NLRB process to slow down our ability to begin bargaining, the administration challenged the union’s right to exist for more than two years. First, they insisted on an NLRB election. Then, when the union won, the New School immediately objected to the very election they’d pressed for. During this period, management used the time to disseminate a barrage of anti-union letters, dominated “information meetings,” and formed “vote-no” committees.

Regrettably, such tactics are not uncommon in strategy when employers hope to win NLRB elections, even where the majority of employees decide to form a union. But this sort of action was a shocking rebuke by New School management of the progressive ideals that are the cornerstone of the New School’s founding.

Equally outrageous, The University’s 990 tax forms revealed \$3.5 million dollars spent on legal fees to an outside anti-union law firm during this process, money that could have greatly benefited the university’s educational mission. As with those of NYU, our part-time faculty ultimately won, but not before

Joel Schlemowitz

President, Local 7902, ACT-UAW

great delays in receiving our union-negotiated improvements in pay and benefits.

The Employee Free Choice Act provides the majority of employees the right to form a union without fear and intimidation. Not only as educators but also as experienced union members, we owe it to other workers not to have to endure what we went through to achieve our union. Please join me in supporting The Employee Free Choice Act. Go to <http://www.uaw.org/efca/action/> and take action! ■



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profiles

(continued from page 2) corporate; only a union with corporate negotiating experience would work.” For grievances, “I go in prepared, but I don’t argue. Often, telling the administrator there’s a problem resolves the issue. The contract is very straight forward. And the faculty is so grateful. It’s tough to talk to your boss by yourself.” To have the union with you, someone has your back.

JOE GILFORD, teaching undergraduate Screenwriting at NYU’s Kanbar Film and TV Dept. since 2000, a steward for only six months, has helped resolve several



Joe Gifford

faculty issues before they became grievances. Since he was an undergrad in his department and knows the faculty, “I’m a ‘go to’ guy when adjuncts have issues.” Joe became a steward when the union helped resolve his own grievance. “I encourage colleagues to speak out because they’re protected by union and statutory labor practices.”

KATHY BISHOP has taught humanities in the FAS Liberal Studies Program for 15 years, won a 2008 Liberal Studies Teaching Award, edits and writes books in her field, and is on the UAW Executive Board as First Vice President. In her four years as an NYU steward, Kathy has handled about 25 grievance cases. She became a steward because “NYU



Kathy Bishop

is increasingly corporate. With the union, we’re standing up for human rights against this giant entity.” Her goal is to settle issues early in that process. She uses the word “we” often

when dealing with NYU administrators rather than being confrontational. “Sometimes I just ask them, ‘Is this how we treat our teachers?’”

— by Donna Drewes

To sign up for steward training, call the union office at 212-432-2120.

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