



Introduction

Labor Studies Journal
2020, Vol. 45(1) 5–7
© 2020 UALE

Article reuse guidelines:
sagepub.com/journals-permissions
DOI: 10.1177/0160449X20904839
journals.sagepub.com/home/ljsj

This special issue of *Labor Studies Journal* brings together papers, under the theme of “‘Red for Ed’ Teacher Protests,” which were presented in Philadelphia at the April 2019 United Association for Education conference. The topic could not be more timely as teachers’ strikes and protests continue to galvanize the labor movement.

American public school teachers roared onto news headlines in 2018 as statewide teacher mass protests and strikes erupted in West Virginia, Oklahoma, Kentucky, Colorado, Arizona, and North Carolina. Following the example of the Chicago Teachers Union, whose militant leadership elected in 2010 led a successful 2012 strike and a 2016 one-day walk-out, across the country, educators wear red shirts to show their solidarity and chant “red for ed” as they strike and march by the tens of thousands in state after state. In the United States, 2018 saw the largest number of strikers involved in major strikes in more than three decades, close to half a million, and 78 percent of them were teachers and school staff. The year 2019 saw nearly as many strikers, with massive teacher strikes in Los Angeles in January and in Chicago again in October, along with walk-outs in West Virginia (again), Denver, Little Rock, Arkansas, and Oakland, California. Tens of thousands of teachers continued to mobilize at “Red for Ed” rallies at state capitols in Indiana, Virginia, South Carolina, and North Carolina.

There is breadth in our authors’ topics. Four articles focus on school teachers and two on college teachers. Three articles are about U.S. teachers, two about Canadian teachers, and one looks at an organization that brings together Mexican, Canadian, and American teachers. Two of the articles analyze the wave of 2018-2019 U.S. teacher strikes.

Adding depth to their analysis, the bulk of our authors write from their on-the-ground experiences. The papers are not simply descriptions of union battles. The authors analyze what went right and what went wrong, the challenges teachers’ unions faced, and how they succeeded or failed to overcome those obstacles. The papers analyze internal organizing strategies, labor-community coalition building strategies, messaging, striking illegally, and visions of social justice and social movement unionism.

Chantal Mancini’s “Austerity, Struggle, and Union Democracy: Bill 115 and the Ontario Secondary School Teachers’ Federation, An Insider View” is, as the title states, based on both the author’s own experiences as a secondary school teacher and union leader, and on her research. Her paper looks critically at the 2012-2013 response of teacher unions to the Ontario, Canada government passing an anti-union law that attacked teachers’ wages and retirement benefits, and banned strikes. The

paper discusses tensions over union democracy and rank-and-file members' disagreement with their leaders' concessionary approach.

In "Working women unite": Exploring a socialist feminist, non-hierarchical teachers union," Alicia Massie and Yi Chien Jade Ho discuss, also drawing on firsthand experiences and research, the Teaching Support Staff Union (TSSU) at Simon Fraser University in British Columbia, Canada. They argue that the TSSU helps us to "conceptualize social movement unionism, organize around and towards equity, diversity, and justice, and maintain a deep commitment to both feminist and class struggle." The bulk of the more than 1,500 TSSU-organized faculty are continent. While most case studies about a local labor union focus on a labor conflict or organizing drive, their paper aims at a deeper analysis of the local union and lifts up its feminist and social movement unionism history and character, while simultaneously looking critically at challenges facing the union.

Marcy Rein, Mickey Ellinger, and Vicki Legion in "Free City: Reclaiming City College of San Francisco and Free Education for All" also analyze a teacher battle at a college. The three authors were all participants in the struggle they describe, either as faculty or community allies. In 2012, a government-authorized agency threatened to terminate the community college's accreditation, "which would have effectively shut down the school by making its students ineligible for federal financial aid," and set off a five-year successful campaign to keep the college open and affordable for its working class students. The City College of San Francisco (CCSF) administration implemented mass lay-offs, closed departments, and gutted the college's historic mission statement to serve the working class and people of color as it implemented the corporate education reform agenda. The local responded with an intensive internal organizing campaign that "changed the culture of the local" and built a powerful labor-student-community Save CCSF coalition that was victorious in 2017.

Eric Blanc, in "Breaking the Law: Strike Bans and Labor Revitalization in the Red State Revolt," provides a fresh analysis of the momentous teacher strikes in West Virginia, Arizona, and Oklahoma in early 2018. Blanc was present during all three strikes as a researcher and writer. In addition to providing insights on the on-the-ground organizing in each strike and the context of waging illegal strikes in states with no labor law protections for teachers, Blanc's theme is that "by systematically organizing school sites, and winning the support of students and parents, activists were able to help school employees overcome their fears about being fired or being subjected to other forms of legal intimidation" and wage historic strikes. Blanc is particularly insightful in explaining why the Arizona and West Virginia strikes were far more successful than the Oklahoma teachers' strike.

In contrast to this issue's other papers focus on specific local unions or strikes, Joseph A. McCartin, Marilyn Sneiderman, and Maurice BP-Weeks in "Combustible Convergence: Bargaining for the Common Good and the #RedforEd Uprisings of 2018" provide a broader overview of one central theme of teacher strikes, and with a broader timeframe, analyzing teacher struggles over the past decade. The authors highlight bargaining for the common good, where unions use contract fights and strikes as an opportunity to organize with community partners around a set of demands

that benefit not just the bargaining unit, but also the wider community as a whole. These are campaigns for investing in communities, not just settling a union contract. From Chicago teachers in 2012 through multiple strikes leading to the 2018 teacher strikes, and culminating in the January 2019 Los Angeles strike, teachers and staff successfully sought “to redefine the aims of collective bargaining, recognizing the degree to which financialization, the slashing of taxes on the rich, privatization, and deepening inequality threaten both public services and the health of the communities that depend on them.”

Finally, Paul Bocking’s “The Trinational Coalition in Defense of Public Education and the Challenges of International Teacher Solidarity” is based on his decade-long personal involvement in addition to his research. His paper details the history of the formation in 1995 of the Trinational Coalition in Defense of Public Education by Canadian, American, and Mexican teacher unions, and its solidarity efforts over the past three decades. Although many “unions have participated in conferences, solidarity delegations and as co-signatories on official statements,” writes Bock, “the Trinational has never received the formal support or participation of the principal national teachers’ organizations” in the three countries. In the United States and Mexico, teacher involvement comes primarily from “left-led and dissident local unions and movements,” including the Chicago Teachers Union and the United Teachers of Los Angeles.

Steven K. Ashby
University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign, USA

Copyright of Labor Studies Journal is the property of Sage Publications Inc. and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.