

Unionizing for a More Democratic and Responsive University¹

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On 19 September 2003, four thousand workers at Yale University ended a two-and-a-half-year campaign for a fair contract, winning back subcontracted jobs, increasing wages, and nearly doubling pensions. The strike included dramatic actions by unlikely participants, beginning with an overnight sit-in by eight retired workers at the Yale Investments Office who demanded (and got) a meeting with Yale's endowment manager David Swensen, and ending with thirteen Latino temporary replacement workers, escorted by managers across a largely African-American picket line in the center of campus, deciding to join the strike. Strikes are nothing unusual at Yale, but rarely have they been so short and successful.² At a time when many workers were forced to accept take-backs, the unions at Yale pulled off a stunning victory while striking for less than a month. The reasons for their success included an aggressive campaign to support organizing rights for other Yale workers, and an ambitious alliance with local activists, church leaders, and politicians, aimed at making the University a better corporate citizen in New Haven.

The campaign at Yale was also able to draw strength from an unusual coalition taking shape within the national labor movement, which aims to reverse declining union strength by dedicating greater resources to organizing new groups of workers and pooling resources to take on large companies or to build union density by geographical area.³ Informally dubbed the "New Unity Partnership," the coalition came to life the weekend before strike's end as carpenters, Teamsters, health care workers and textile workers poured into New Haven by the thousands for a march that shut down the city for the afternoon. AFL-CIO president John Sweeney took an arrest in a mass civil disobedience with other national labor leaders and more than 150 rank-and-file union members.⁴ The Yale drive is a microcosm of this new organizing philosophy, both in the extent of community organizing that has accompanied the contract fight, and the intense cooperation between two international unions, the Hotel and Restaurant Employees International Union (HERE) and the Service Employees International Union (SEIU).

The movement growing in New Haven is nothing less than a fight to preserve the vitality and integrity of universities and unions, two of the basic building blocks of democratic society. Graduate teachers and researchers at Yale have played an integral role in this fight. Universities now face a crisis on several fronts. First, decreasing government funding has led university

¹ The ideas and analysis presented here have emerged from hundreds of conversations and meetings that are scarcely represented in the footnotes. I owe a special debt to David Sanders, who has challenged me to clarify my thinking over hours of patient organizing. I would also like to thank Jesse Lemisch for his comments on an earlier version of this essay.

² For example, the 1984 strike in which clerical and technical workers won their first contract lasted for ten-and-a-half weeks. The 1995-1996 contract fight involved two one-month strikes. For the history of labor struggles at Yale, see Cary Nelson, ed., *Will Teach for Food: Academic Labor in Crisis* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), especially John Wilhelm, "A Short History of Unionization at Yale," 35-43; and Toni Gilpin et al., *On Strike for Respect: The Clerical and Technical Workers' Strike at Yale, 1984-85* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995).

³ "Breaking Ranks with the AFL-CIO," *Business Week*, 15 September 2003.

⁴ New Haven Register, "10,000 Yale strike supporters rally in New Haven," 14 September 2003.

administrators to place increasing weight on economic criteria in evaluating academic research. Second, increasing corporatization is eroding freedom of speech and the intellectual community on campus. Third, universities have increasingly cut themselves off from the life and problems of the communities in which they are located and the larger society as a whole. Confronting these trends will require both organization of academic workers on a national scale, and strong local alliances between these teachers and researchers and others in their communities.

The importance of democratizing universities

The Graduate Employees and Students Organization (GESO) has fought for more than a decade to win union recognition for more than two thousand graduate teachers and researchers at Yale, organizing well before receiving official federal sanction to do so. Even since the 2000 ruling by the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) that extended employee protections to graduate students at private universities, Yale's president and provost have repeatedly expressed their determination to fight unionization efforts in the courts.⁵ GESO has therefore chosen a locally focused strategy, building strong alliances with Yale's two recognized unions, HERE Locals 34 & 35, and with the two thousand workers at the Yale-New Haven Hospital who also seek union recognition. The March 2003 one-week walkout marked a significant moment for the alliance, as graduate student employees, including a group of research scientists, joined members of the existing unions on the picket lines for the first time.

The academic organizing movement has exploded over the last decade, spurred by decision-making at universities that is increasingly indistinguishable from the corporate boardroom in its lack of democracy and relentless pursuit of profit. That there is a crisis in the academic labor market is by now common knowledge—an awareness due in no small part to organizing efforts. Grim statistics about the academic job market and the corporatization of universities fill the pages of professional association journals and *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, and are increasingly common fare in more popular magazines and major daily newspapers.⁶ The editorial boards at the *New York Times* and even the *Wall Street Journal* have written in support of graduate employees' efforts.⁷

But there is more at stake with the changes in the university than the future job prospects of aspiring academics. GESO's alliance with the other Yale unions has helped us to contextualize the casualization of our labor as part of a larger economic process through which corporations extract increasing profits at the expense of their workers through downsizing and

⁵ See for example, President Richard Levin's statement of November 1, 2000 in which he urges the NYU administration to appeal the NLRB ruling on graduate teaching assistants. Available at <http://www.yale.edu/opa>. GESO and the workers represented by District 1199 of the SEIU at Yale-New Haven Hospital have both asked the administration for card-count neutrality agreements. For documentation of the weaknesses in the NLRB election process, see Human Rights Watch, *Unfair Advantage: Workers' Freedom of Association in the United States under International Human Rights Standards*, August 2000.

⁶ Much of the work highlighting these changes comes out of the unionization movement itself. See for example, *Casual Nation* (Coalition of Graduate Employee Unions, 2000), available at www.cgeu.org; and *Casual in Blue: Yale and the Academic Labor Market* (GESO, 1999); *Postdoc Crisis* (GESO, 2002), both available at <http://www.yaleunions.org/geso>. Also, Gordon Lafer, *Organizing Graduate Students* (New York: Foundation for the Study of Independent Social Ideas, 2001).

⁷ The *New York Times* editorial of Nov. 25, 2000, argued that, "American graduate programs, the envy of the world, are not so fragile they cannot coexist with unions, or provide workers the rights they enjoy elsewhere in the economy." The *Wall Street Journal* on the one hand supports the claim that graduate teachers and researchers are underpaid employees, but on the other, questions the principle of unionization. The editorial uses the plight of graduate employees as a launching point to attack on tenure. See, "Class Struggle," 22 March 2002.

subcontracting.⁸ Because of universities' central place in an information economy, the patterns of employment and economic decision-making within the academy have larger ramifications for many other workers.

Equally urgent is the question of what role universities will play in our society. Will scientific and medical advances be available to a broad section of the public, or be restricted to a wealthy few? Will education be considered a basic right for all, a public good, or a rare privilege? It is no accident, for example, that corporatization of higher education has been accompanied by a rise of private schooling and decreasing public commitment to fund education at all levels.

Expanding corporate involvement and influence in research and the devaluing of teaching through innovations like distance learning and on-line courses both undermine the control of teachers and researchers, while emphasizing the profit potential of our work. Yale is at the forefront of both these trends.

The Patent and Trademark Act Amendments of 1980 (better known as the Bayh-Dole Act) allowed universities, for the first time, to patent discoveries that had been supported with public money. The result has been a sharp increase in the number of patents issued to universities, more than two thousand each year by the mid 1990s. Supporters of the legislation argue that it has made a growing number of discoveries available to the public and encouraged private investment in research at universities. But with the federal government providing more than 60% of the funding for academic science research, it is hard to escape the impression that Bayh-Dole has in fact made universities a conduit for converting public money into private profit.⁹

The consequences of such corporate partnerships have come under scrutiny at Yale with a controversy around d4T, a crucial anti-retroviral drug used to treat AIDS. In the spring of 2001, the international humanitarian group, Doctors Without Borders, launched a campaign to make d4T available more cheaply in South Africa. Although d4T was originally invented at Yale using primarily government money, Yale granted an exclusive license to Bristol Meyers Squibb to produce the drug, which generated more than \$2 billion in sales under the brand name Zerit. At the time of the campaign, Yale had received over \$120 million in profits from Zerit.¹⁰ As part of the campaign, GESO circulated a petition that was signed by over six hundred Yale graduate students and medical staff calling on Bristol Meyers Squibb and Yale to release the patent to the drug. One of the signatories on the petition was the inventor of the drug, Dr. William Prusoff, bringing into sharp relief scientists' lack of control over the results of their work in the current corporatized university environment. Under public pressure, Yale released the patent shortly thereafter.

If scientific discoveries are the most obvious and hotly contested sources of potential profit at universities, distance-learning technologies provide an opportunity to increase revenues in other fields as well. In fall 2002, a distance-learning venture (AllLearn) jointly backed by

⁸ For an eloquent formulation of the larger context, see David Montgomery, "Planning for Our Futures," in Steven Fraser and Joshua B. Freeman, eds., *Audacious Democracy: Labor, Intellectuals, and the Social Reconstruction of America* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1997).

⁹ By contrast, in 1997, industry provided 7% of funding for academic research and development (Council on Governmental Relations, "The Bayh-Dole Act: A Guide to the Law and Implementing Regulations," September 1999). For a more critical view of corporate influence in academic science, see Eyal Press and Jennifer Washburn, "The Kept University," *The Atlantic Monthly*, March 2000.

¹⁰ "GESO Pressures University to Make AIDS Drug Available," *The GESO Voice*, April 2001; and "Yale Researchers Respond to Global AIDS Crisis," August 2001. Available at <http://www.yaleunions.org/geso>.

Yale, Oxford and Stanford began offering ten-week enrichment courses. Although AllLearn is a non-profit company, one does not have to look far to see a potential future of greater corporatization. In June 2002, the *Chronicle of Higher Education* reported that the for-profit on-line educational consortium Universitas 21 “plans to offer its first *product*, a master's degree, throughout Asia in early 2003.”¹¹ Later in the article we learn that it “should cost about \$7,500 and take about 18 months to complete.” A Merrill Lynch study estimates the potential international education market outside the United States at \$111 billion per year. It is not surprising that the first degree available from Universitas 21 is an M.B.A. This is the logical endpoint to the trends of downsizing departments and casualizing academic labor: a faceless interaction over a computer in which the only courses offered are those with large market demand among a global elite who can pay for them, with educational value reduced to an assessment of “credible academic brand names.”¹²

Unfortunately, it seems that many leaders within the academy are more inclined to celebrate corporate models than to consider the dangers of such trends. Yale President Richard Levin has repeatedly referred to universities as “engines of economic growth.” In a May 2001 speech with that title at Tsinghua University, he made clear his fully market-driven view of how the academy should set its priorities.¹³ The speech celebrated the tradition of a broad-based liberal arts education as the perfect training for today’s business leaders. In this view, academic freedom and critical thinking are valuable insofar they meet a corporate agenda for quick response in a cut-throat world. In Levin’s laudatory description of universities as “America’s primary basic research machine” there was no acknowledgement of the ethical issues involved with the privatization of important scientific knowledge. Of the “active long-term projects with great economic potential” his first example was mapping the humane genome.

Levin’s speech in China fits into a larger vision for Yale as a global university. Globalization provides a central focus for the humanities at Yale, just as huge investments in biomedical research do in the sciences. At the core of these plans is the Center for the Study of Globalization, founded in 2001. Through a fellows program, the Center gathers potential leaders from around the world to be mentored by Yale faculty and to develop networks among themselves. The Center will also host “Track II” diplomatic negotiations to bring together opposing sides of political conflicts for informal discussion. Such an elite focus is not surprising given the model that Yale now provides to the international community: one of a wealthy institution with little internal democracy and a feudal relationship with the surrounding city.

But even proponents of corporate models for education occasionally admit the fundamental incompatibility between the search for profit and the educational mission. While celebrating the structure of American scientific funding for providing “a virtual free market in ideas,” Levin has acknowledged that it is precisely the lack of market pressures that makes scientific inquiry possible: “Universities, in their unending, unadulterated search to know, are uniquely situated to undertake such long-term research without worrying about its commercial

¹¹ Michael Arnone, “International Consortium Readies Ambitious Distance-Education Effort,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, June 28 2002 (emphasis is mine). The consortium includes seventeen universities around the world, including the University of Virginia. University of Michigan and University of Toronto were both initially members of the consortium that have withdrawn their support.

¹² *ibid.*

¹³ “The University As an Engine of Economic Growth,” May 2001. Available at <http://www.yale.edu/opa/president>. An earlier version of this speech, with the same title, is published in Richard C. Levin, *The Work of the University* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003), 87-94.

application and payoff — a luxury that profit-seeking private industrial firms cannot afford.”¹⁴ Left unanswered is what happens as the public space for basic research and inquiry erodes. This is the space where organized teachers and researchers can and must intervene. Today’s generation of young academics stand on the frontlines of a battle to maintain universities as invaluable repositories for democratic and non-corporate values.

The fight for free speech

Yale has become famous not only as a university where scholars conduct world-class research, but also as an institution unparalleled in the academy for its disregard and contempt for its workers and its surrounding community. The union fight exists at the nexus of this contradiction, fueled by the vision of academic excellence based on respect for, rather than at the expense of, human dignity. The systemic disrespect for workers at Yale was noted immediately by a consultant hired (and less than a year later, dismissed) by the university administration at the beginning of the most recent round of contract negotiations. The consultant suggested that fundamental change would be needed to turn around a “highly adversarial and dysfunctional relationship” (with one manager quoted describing the university’s labor strategy as “somewhere between union containment and union avoidance”), and recommended that Yale “manag[e] its own employees as if they were capable of independent thought.”¹⁵

The administration’s resistance to unions has gone so far as to undermine the basic values that should be at the core of university teaching. The administration has adopted a portrayal of union activity as outside of and even antithetical to the University’s educational mission. This was evident in the letter sent by the Dean of Yale College to undergraduates leading up to the March 2003 walkout. After assuring students that their classes would continue normally in spite of a TA strike, he continued: “Undergraduates will be expected to meet their academic responsibilities as scheduled. Students should understand that they are free to cross a picket line to meet their academic responsibilities.”¹⁶ In a similar vein, graduate students’ decision to boycott classes in support of that strike was characterized by several administrators and faculty as anti-intellectual.

Most troubling has been the attack on union speech and the use of police presence to limit free association. In September 2002, constables at the Yale-New Haven Hospital (YNHH) arrested eight union members for leafleting at the entrance to the building where they worked and charged them with first-degree criminal trespass, carrying a sentence of up to one year in prison. The NLRB had already upheld unfair labor practices charges against the Hospital for police harassment of its own workers. This time, Hospital administrator argued, because the workers were employees of the University, they were within their rights to arrest them.¹⁷ Although the Hospital eventually dropped the charges and the City of New Haven stripped YNHH constables of their arrest powers, abuses of police power to harass union members and supporters has continued. Just weeks after these incidents at the Hospital, two undergraduates

¹⁴ *The Work of the University*, 90.

¹⁵ Restructuring Associates Inc., *Assessment of the Relationship between Yale University and HERE Locals 34 & 35*, January 2002. Available at <http://www.yaleunions.org>.

¹⁶ Letter from Richard Brodhead to students of Yale College, 21 February 2003.

¹⁷ The University and the Hospital have strenuously argued that they are separate institutions, in spite of significant overlap in their governing structures—a number of officers of the University, including Yale President Richard Levin, sit on the board of the Hospital. Property boundaries are even more unclear, as the Hospital and University share use of a number of buildings in the Medical School complex.

were detained by Yale University police for handing out pro-union leaflets to parents outside of a Parents' Weekend panel.¹⁸

Private security guards (in March, their uniforms and cars declared them to be literally "Pinkertons") appeared at the entrances to Yale buildings and drove around campus during the 2003 strikes. During the September strike, GESO members were detained repeatedly when entering Yale buildings with pro-union signs. One member in the history department, wearing a sign that read "Stand up for Change at Yale," was stopped while entering the university medical center for an appointment. In response to a written complaint, the medical center director defended the policy of barring people wearing signs from entering the building because of its alleged "potential for disrupting the provision of health care."¹⁹ Several other graduate students wearing pro-union signs or distributing union leaflets were stopped by police and threatened with arrest at the entrances of academic buildings and in the library. In another case, a rank-and-file union organizer in the chemistry department was stopped in his building by Yale police after talking to colleagues about the union, detained for more than a half-hour in the central hallway of the building, and told that it was illegal to conduct union business on Yale property.

Reconnecting to the community

In his 1955 history of Yale, George Wilson Pierson described campus upheavals of the 1920s, when students protested against Trustees on the Yale Corporation who "seemed more concerned for financial stability than educational morale, more interested in buildings than in books," and who "[w]orst of all...were strangers."²⁰ The basic issues remained unchanged in the fall of 2001, when Reverend W. David Lee, an alumnus of the Yale Divinity School and pastor of the Verrick AME Zion Church in New Haven, petitioned for candidacy to become a Trustee on the Yale Corporation. Backed by a coalition of local clergy, community groups, and unions, Lee gathered signatures from more than four thousand Yale alumni to win a place on the ballot. His campaign focused on the need for a community-based voice on the Corporation, and he pledged to make himself accountable to students and residents of New Haven.

In spite of support from the local community, political leaders, and many alumni for Lee's election bid, the response of the Yale administration was swift and harsh. The Association of Yale Alumni nominated only one candidate to oppose Lee, rather than the usual five or six. Their choice, architect Maya Lin, whose projects include the Vietnam War Memorial and the Women's Table at Yale, seemed calculated to divide the sympathies of liberal alumni. Trustee Kurt Schmoke, who, legend has it, engaged in a hunger strike in support of labor struggles while a law student, led the official attack on Lee's campaign. In a June 2002 letter, after the conclusion of the election, Schmoke complained that Lee's campaign had tainted the alumni election process and proposed reforming the system to prevent such a threat in the future. A coalition of wealthy alumni ran full-page ads in the alumni magazine and sent out mailings criticizing Lee's "relative youth" and "lack of professional distinction." More unbelievably, they attacked Lee for being " beholden to special interests," a reference to his ties to the Yale unions. Many students, alumni and community groups would point out the irony of this charge, given the

¹⁸ "Union Supporters Leaflet at Parents' Weekend Panel," *Yale Daily News*, 14 October 2002.

¹⁹ E-mail correspondence from Dr. Paul Genecin to Ashley Riley Sousa, 12 September 2003.

²⁰ George Wilson Pierson, *Yale: The University College, 1921-1937* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955), 78-9. I am grateful to Michael Mullins for bringing this passage to my attention.

array of corporate interests represented by sitting Trustees.²¹ In the face of such institutional hostility, Lee lost the election.

Just as Yale's governing board has no room at its table for a leader of the local community, its vision of New Haven almost entirely overlooks the city's current residents. The contrast of Yale's wealth and New Haven's poverty has long been a sensitive topic for those on both sides of the university walls. One in fifty New Haven residents are incarcerated, and one in five live in poverty.²² Educational testing scores in the public schools are the lowest in Connecticut.²³ As New Haven has lost the manufacturing base that once provided the bedrock of the economy, residents have been left with low-paying service jobs, or no jobs at all. Yale, like many other universities, has become the economic hub for a de-industrialized city as well as a generator of wealth in the national and international information-based economy. Today, one in four jobs in New Haven is at Yale University and Yale-New Haven Hospital.

The Yale administration's plans for economic renewal in New Haven revolve around the development of a biotech industry. In spite of rosy predictions that sound suspiciously like Reagan-era trickle-down economic theories, the \$1 billion of investment in biotech so far has not generated many jobs or significant tax revenue for the city. Because many successful companies leave New Haven after taking advantage of development incentives, biotech provides only 1.6% of the city's tax base, and only 400 jobs.²⁴ Furthermore, university officials are vague about how a few high-tech jobs will translate into economic benefit and needed employment for the city's more than hundred thousand residents. Yale's profoundly undemocratic vision for economic development stretches beyond jobs into policies for real estate investment, housing and policing that are aimed at gentrifying the downtown area. Skyrocketing housing prices and the controversial proposed conversion of publicly-subsidized housing units into luxury apartments have prompted the local weekly newspaper to ask, "Whose Livable City Is It?"²⁵

The Connecticut Center for a New Economy (CCNE), a non-profit organization affiliated with the Yale unions, has been building an organized base across New Haven's neighborhoods to demand greater democracy in local economic development plans. As teachers and researchers within the university, GESO members have found that we can play an important role, working together with members of the community, in encouraging Yale to act more responsibly and to play a positive role in the social fabric of New Haven.

The work of CCNE has brought the unions together with community leaders to demand a new social contract between the Yale administration and New Haven. The planks of the proposed "contract" include improving access to Yale jobs for New Haven residents, expanding employee home-ownership programs, and increasing Yale's financial contribution to the local budget. Although Yale is New Haven's largest property owner, it pays less tax on its growing number of commercial properties in New Haven than it does to New York City.²⁶ A fair share

²¹ For a list of Trustees and their affiliations, see www.yaleinsider.org. In July 2003, union researchers uncovered evidence of a troubling correlation between members of the Yale Corporation and Yale Investment Committee, and the companies in which Yale chose to invest money. Of the twenty people on the Investment Committee between 1995 and 2003, at least six were themselves or had family members heading up companies in which Yale invested, a fact not disclosed in Yale's public filings with the federal government. [GET NEWSPAPER CITE]

²² Both figures are from 2000. According to the Connecticut Department of Corrections, 2800 of the state's almost 18,000 prisoners in January 2000 were from New Haven. Poverty figures come from census data.

²³ Connecticut Center for a New Economy, *Schools, Taxes and Jobs*, 2002.

²⁴ Connecticut Center for a New Economy, *Incubating Biotech: Yale Prospers, New Haven Waits*, July 2001.

²⁵ *New Haven Advocate*, August 8-14, 2002.

²⁶ *Schools, Taxes, and Jobs*, 9.

contribution would begin to address the revenue shortfall that New Haven experiences because of Yale's tax exemption on more than \$1 billion dollars of property.

The Yale administration has responded to these critiques by stressing its direct and indirect economic contributions to New Haven, and by pointing to the payment-in-lieu-of-taxes (PILOT) program, under which Connecticut taxpayers make up a portion of what Yale would owe in property taxes through an annual grant to the city. However, in spite of millions of dollars of advertising and the efforts of Yale's Office of New Haven and State Affairs, city residents appear unconvinced by Yale's declarations of its largesse. In July 2003, the Board of Aldermen passed a resolution calling on Yale to voluntarily make up the difference between the PILOT payment and what it would owe in property taxes (about \$12.5 million) and initiating an investigation into the possibility of repealing a special tax exemption held by Yale and several other Connecticut universities.

The issue that perhaps most galvanized the union-community alliance was debt collection practices at YNHH. In the spring of 2003, CCNE published a report, which found that the Hospital was employing unusually aggressive tactics in going after poor patients who were unable to pay their bills, including wage garnishment, property foreclosure, and adding court costs to patients' bills.²⁷ Between 1994 and 2003, YNHH filed liens on more than nine hundred homes in New Haven owned by hospital debtors.²⁸ In spite of a \$37 million dedicated "free bed fund" to provide free care to the indigent, many poor patients who might have been eligible for such aid had not been informed about its availability. State officials got involved as well, with the Connecticut Attorney General bringing charges against YNHH for misuse of free bed funds and the Connecticut legislature passing a new law cutting the maximum interest on hospital debt in half, to five percent.

Beyond Tenure

Because the problems that we face can seem monumental, it is important for graduate employees to realize the considerable power we hold. Even at a university with an endowment like Yale's, tuition and research grants make up 42% of the annual operating budget. Without us, much of the teaching and research simply do not occur. Unionization, by providing an institutionalized voice that is backed by the economic power of our labor as teachers and researchers, provides academics the opportunity to protect our futures, while pressuring universities to live up to their educational mission.

The structural changes that will come through increased union density in the academy are only a small part of the difference we will make. Even more important are the qualitative, personal transformations that occur through academic organizing. In my experience at Yale, it is rank-and-file GESO organizers who most tenaciously hold on to a stubborn idealism about what the academy can be, and who are most willing to take risks to safeguard the intellectual community.

The labor movement has two powerful lessons to offer academics: the necessity of collective action to secure personal freedom and the importance of respecting our work. Unionization encourages us to throw out the myth of the cloistered scholar and the illusion that we can individually win our right to a voice through hard work, brilliance, and a recognized, secure position within the university (tenure). We realize that we will not secure academic

²⁷ Connecticut Center for a New Economy, *Uncharitable Care: Yale-New Haven Hospital's charity care and collection practices*, March 2003.

²⁸ Connecticut Center for a New Economy, "Yale, Don't Lien on Me," September 2003.

freedom through personal dedication or bravery (although there is plenty of room for these), but will have to reclaim it through organization and collective action. By supporting each other and engaging with the *entire* community around us, we help create space where academic debate can thrive and scholars can afford to take risks in their work.

Even more importantly, unionization puts us back in touch with the truth that intellectual work is indeed *work* and should be respected as such. How many times have I heard (or even said) that what we do as academics is really mostly fun, just sitting around reading books? Who among us has not had our moments of thinking, “I can’t believe that they pay me for this!” But these kinds of attitudes denigrate the very thing that is most valuable about the academy—the opportunities it provides to do interesting and rewarding work in an atmosphere of respect and dignity. These are precisely the things that are most endangered within a capitalist economy. To downplay their value is to surrender to evaluating our work in market-driven terms and to fail to appreciate the crucial role universities play in safeguarding democracy. Worst of all, when we become convinced about the worthlessness of our own work, we are unwilling to fight for it and instead put ourselves more readily in the service of those in power.

Universities need to be public spaces where the needs of human beings come before the pressures of the market. Although some faculty worry that unionization could institutionalize the corporatization and casualization of the academy, my experience in GESO has instead encouraged me to think about the social importance of my teaching and research. For us to impart the humanistic values and ideas that lie at the heart of education to our students, we need to recover those ideas for ourselves. Today’s academics face a market-driven logic that discounts intellectual work as unimportant and views education as mere job training and credentialing. By taking seriously the work we do and developing strong alliances with fellow workers and residents in New Haven, GESO is training a new generation of socially-engaged young scholars with a strong vision for a transformed academy.