

COGS IN THE CLASSROOM FACTORY

The Changing Identity of Academic Labor

Edited by
Deborah M. Herman
and Julie M. Schmid

Foreword by David Montgomery

PRAEGER

**Westport, Connecticut
London**

56. Ibid.
57. Herman, interview.
58. Deborah M. Herman, electronic mail correspondence with author, March 21, 2001.
59. Margaret Loose, interview by author, Iowa City, Iowa, March 20, 1998.
60. R.D.G. Kelley, *Yo mama's dysfunctional!: Fighting the culture wars in urban America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997): 143–144.
61. Stritecky, interview, January 13, 1998.
62. Evces, interview.
63. Schmid, interview.
64. Herman, interview.
65. Loose, interview.
66. Stritecky, interview, March 13, 2001.
67. Schmid, interview.
68. Deborah M. Herman, interview by author, Iowa City, Iowa, June 11, 2000.
69. Ibid.
70. Ryan Downing, interview by author, Iowa City, Iowa, January 24, 2001.
71. David Colman, interview by author, Iowa City, Iowa, June 23, 1998; Loose, interview.
72. Evces, interview; Herman, interview, June 11, 2000.
73. Stritecky, interview, January 13, 1998.
74. A. Coutee, "Walking the line with strikers," *Daily Iowan*, June 10, 1998, pp. 1A, 7A; Herman, interview by author, Iowa City, Iowa, July 15, 1998.
75. "AFSCME, COGS, SEIU show solidarity at Regents' meeting," *Daily Iowan*, September 14, 2000, p. 2A.
76. Michael E. Evces, electronic correspondence with author, June 7, 2001.
77. Evces, interview.
78. Ibid.
79. Loose, interview.
80. Ricker, interview.
81. *Solidarity and democracy: A leadership guide to UE history*, 2d ed. (Pittsburgh, PA: United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers of America, 1996): 81–83.
82. *Proceedings of the UE 61st National Convention* (Pittsburgh, PA: United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers of America, 1996): 147.
83. Downing, interview.
84. Evces, interview.
85. Stritecky, interview, January 13, 1998.
86. Evces, interview.
87. "UE activists discover union sisterhood is powerful, despite borders," *UE News*, February 20, 1998, p. 7.
88. M. Crippen, "UE FAT representatives visit UE locals across the midwest," *COGNITION*, union newsletter, November 1998, p. 5.
89. "Biggest-ever Iowa political action day," *UE News*, February 20, 1998, p. 4.
90. "COGS issues political endorsements," *COGNITION*, union newsletter, November 2000, p. 3; J. Sherer, "Delegates report on national convention: UE sets union priorities, endorses Ralph Nader," *COGNITION*, union newsletter, September 2000, p. 2.
91. Evces, interview.
92. Schmid, interview.

Chapter 5

Pyrrhic Victory at UC Santa Barbara: The Struggle for Labor's New Identity

Richard Sullivan

A spirited dialogue is occurring concerning issues of union transformation, organizing the unorganized, promoting union democracy, and developing new strategies to re-establish unions as a powerful voice for workers (Mantios 1998; Nissen 1999; Tillman and Cummings 1999). Several developments provide reasons for optimism: the rise of reform-minded John Sweeney as president of the AFL-CIO, a new commitment by some unions to dedicate resources for organizing, and several highly visible union victories.

The organizing efforts of graduate employees are indicative of this renewed enthusiasm—both embodying the promise of a new labor movement and serving as laboratories where much needed experimentation is taking place. Among the more notable recent examples was the United Automobile Workers' (UAW) campaign to organize graduate employees at the University of California (UC). Having gained union recognition and a contract covering over nine thousand graduate workers on eight of the system's nine campuses, the campaign represents one of largest recent victories for labor—in or outside of the academy. UAW vice president Elizabeth Bunr has called it "an inspiration to the labor movement." Labor scholar David Montgomery agrees "that the victory of the UAW in California gave a great shot in the arm to graduate employees trying to win recognition elsewhere."¹

Our eagerness to find evidence of labor's rebirth and to identify movement victories is understandable. But it is the job of labor scholars to critically examine the quality of these victories. What do the worker-activists have to say about the UAW's victory? On the UC Santa Barbara (UCSB) campus, where I was a participant observer, I found that the graduate employees and campus activists there, who stood to benefit the most from the successful campaign, are not

celebrating. Therefore, in this chapter, I attempt to explain from their perspective why this is the case. What follows are two accounts of the union drive at UCSB that occurred two years apart that will demonstrate why a more critical examination of this union success is needed.

In spring 1998, the graduate employee union at the Santa Barbara campus of the University of California seemed to fit the description of what is being called the "new labor movement." Graduate employees had built a union based on the principles of rank-and-file democracy and collective empowerment. In May of that year, they organized a strike vote to force the UC administration to recognize their union. At the time, their membership numbered more than one thousand, and a dedicated group of fifty volunteer activists were busy organizing, holding department meetings and talking to fellow graduate employees about the union. After months of organizing, six hundred members turned out for the vote—five hundred of whom voted to strike. Activists were inspired by this success, which seemed to validate their belief that democracy and grassroots activism are essential elements of union strength. Confidence was growing among graduate employees, there was a palpable sense that they were making history, and there was no doubt that they were a union.

But two years later, the situation was much different. Although graduate employees had gained recognition and secured a contract, the mood within the local union was somber. Missing were the energy and commitment that had characterized the union. Nearly all of the activists who had worked so hard to build the union over the preceding six years had disengaged entirely. Among the rank and file, enthusiasm for the union was at an all-time low. Support had eroded so much that the UAW had to resort to sending paid staff to Santa Barbara whenever a public presence was required at UCSB. When the UAW called a one-day strike during contract negotiations, only two members walked out. And when the contract was presented for ratification, fewer than 150 members voted to approve it. Six months later, union membership at UCSB had dwindled to just fifty-three. In the span of two years, despite gaining union recognition and a contract, the dynamic pro-union culture was gone.

In this chapter, I examine the events leading to this dramatic change at UCSB. In light of the labor movement's current effort to transform itself, this story raises doubts about whether it can—or should—count such outcomes among its victories. Many unions and their leaders continue to resist change despite growing recognition within labor's ranks for the need to expand the mission of the movement, promote greater democracy within it, and increase rank-and-file participation. Those seeking reform and those resisting it are essentially engaged in a struggle over the identity of the labor movement. The UCSB case illustrates what this struggle looks like on the ground and identifies some of the challenges workers face when trying to incorporate new visions for the movement into existing union frameworks.

My primary goal is to examine the UCSB organizing drive from the point of view of graduate employee activists who played leading roles in the campaign.

Collectively, these activists' stories highlight the critical need for labor to welcome innovation. Their experiences demonstrate how organized labor's resistance to change undercuts the efforts and undermines the commitment of those who answer the call to help rebuild the movement. From a distance, the UAW's campaign at UCSB might appear to have been a victory, but closer scrutiny reveals that a promising pro-union culture was destroyed in achieving it.

METHODS

This chapter focuses on events occurring at UC Santa Barbara during 1998–2000. The data on which it is based come from semistructured interviews with graduate employees active in the campaign during this two-year period. I interviewed fifteen (former) activists from nine different academic departments between April 2000 and March 2001. The tape-recorded interviews ranged in length from forty-five to ninety minutes. I identified interview subjects based on my personal knowledge of who was most involved during the period being examined. Each of the interviewees agreed to allow me to use their names. I drew additional data from union newsletters, web sites, campaign literature, e-mail correspondence, and newspaper stories related to the events.

In order to situate the Santa Barbara case and to corroborate certain statements made by UCSB informants, I interviewed five current and former graduate employees who had been activists or UAW staff members on other campuses. Because some subjects in this group continue to work for organized labor, they will remain anonymous. Despite occasional references to the UC-systemwide campaign or the drives at individual campuses, it is beyond the scope of this chapter to draw conclusions about the campaigns at other campuses, and I make no claims to do so. I am also unable to speak to the motivations and perspectives of UAW employees. The aim of this study is to give voice to the perspectives and experiences of the UCSB graduate employee activists.

Finally, I witnessed and actively participated in many of the events described. I joined the union when I came to UCSB in the fall of 1997 and was an active member of the organizing committee until spring 2000. I held elected positions on the strike committee in 1998 and the bargaining team in 1999. As such, I draw extensively from personal notes and my own recollection of this period.² Although I was personally involved during many of the events, for the sake of clarity I will retain the third-person voice throughout except in instances that warrant otherwise.

GRADUATE EMPLOYEE ORGANIZING AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

The University of California system comprises eight campuses providing education to over 137,000 undergraduate students.³ It is one of the largest public

research universities in the country, producing 10 percent of the nation's PhDs annually.⁴ The largest and more widely known campuses, Berkeley and UCLA, each have enrollments of over thirty thousand while the smallest schools in the system, Riverside and Santa Cruz, have total enrollments of just over eleven thousand. Santa Barbara, located on the state's central coast approximately ninety miles north of Los Angeles, ranks as one of the mid-sized UCs, with twenty thousand undergraduate and graduate students.⁵

Although the campaign to organize UCSB's seventeen hundred graduate student employees began in 1992, it was part of the effort to organize more than nine thousand graduate employees throughout the UC system that began at Berkeley in 1983. That year, the recently formed Berkeley union filed an unfair labor practice with the state's Public Employee Relations Board (PERB) after the administration refused to negotiate with graduate employees. This marked the beginning of a seventeen-year struggle for union recognition—eventually involving eight UC campuses—that would not be resolved until 1999 when PERB ruled decisively in favor of the union and ordered certification elections to be held at each campus.

But for nearly two decades, the UC administration used the courts in an effort to block the unionization of graduate student workers by arguing that they were not actually employees. UC administrators maintained that the work done by teaching assistants, readers, and tutors was a central part of their academic training and as such made them student apprentices, not employees. This distinction was crucial since under California's Higher Education Employee Relations Act (HEERA), student workers do not have collective bargaining rights. The administration spent millions of dollars litigating the effort to thwart unionization.⁶ Even in the current era of employer resistance to unions, the opposition of the UC was remarkable. That a prestigious public institution of higher learning engaged in such rigorous resistance indicated the extent of antiunion sentiment shared by the UC president and Board of Regents.

In 1987, the Berkeley union affiliated with District 65/UAW, partially motivated by the need to meet the UC's court challenge. District 65 was an independent union based in New York that organized workers in a wide range of occupations, including large numbers of "knowledge" workers. It had a reputation as one of the more socially progressive and democratic unions in the United States. In 1979, financial troubles prompted District 65 to form an alliance with the UAW (Hoerr 1997). The arrangement between the two unions allowed District 65 to retain much of its autonomy while benefiting from the UAW's superior resources. For the new graduate employee unionists searching for a national affiliate, it seemed to be a good combination—the financial strength of the UAW with the more democratic tradition of District 65. In 1994, after District 65's financial condition failed to improve, it was fully absorbed into the UAW. In the process, all of 65's locals became part of the UAW's Technical and Office Professionals (TOP) division, including the UC's graduate employee unions.

While the court cases dragged on, graduate employees at each of the other campuses began their own organizing drives. One of the first things campus activists did was conduct membership card drives. Not only was this a way to build early momentum for the union, but it also increased pressure on the UC in an arena outside of the courtroom. Once membership surpassed 50 percent of a bargaining unit, the union could file the cards with PERB. PERB would then certify that a majority of graduate employees wanted collective bargaining and inform the employer they could voluntarily begin negotiating with the union. Berkeley gained this state-certified majority status in 1988, followed by Santa Cruz in 1990, San Diego in 1991, Davis in 1993, Los Angeles and Santa Barbara in 1994, Riverside in 1996, and finally Irvine in 1997.⁷ Initially, each campus's activist group conducted its own campaign independently from one another and, for the most part, from the UAW as well. The UAW supported the individual drives primarily by directing the legal battle, but also by allocating funds to hire graduate employee organizers at each campus to coordinate the local campaigns. Nevertheless, the campaigns were conducted almost entirely by local graduate employee activists.

The eight campus locals were loosely affiliated with each other through an informal coalition called The California Alliance of Unionized Student Employees (CAUSE). "The Coalition," as it was more commonly called, was an ad hoc collection of activists from each campus who met roughly every six weeks to discuss strategy and coordinate actions. The Coalition had no formal guidelines regarding its operations nor did it have authority to set policy for the campus locals. The decisions it reached were regarded as recommendations to be taken back to local campuses for consideration.⁸ Having been left to their own devices for many years, most campuses operated on the assumption that they were independent locals with the autonomy to make decisions and implement strategies. This assumption would ultimately cause problems for graduate employees at UCSB.

THE UCSB CAMPAIGN: A VISION DENIED

In 1992, a group of graduate employees at UCSB began organizing the seventeen hundred graduate employee workers at their campus. They founded the Associated Student Employees (ASE/UAW). The activist group, called the ad hoc organizing committee (AHOC), became the nucleus of the new union. Starting with a handful of volunteers, by the time the local achieved its state-certified majority in 1994, the membership had grown to twelve hundred.⁹

The issues motivating UCSB graduate employees to unionize were similar to those that concern other academic workers—desire for a voice in the decisions that affected them, respect for the contribution they made to the university, decreased workloads, better pay and benefits, and a belief that achieving these goals

would improve the quality of education at the university. Winning recognition was the necessary first step. These goals may not have been unique, but the methods used to achieve them were noteworthy.

Perhaps the defining characteristic of the ASE was its uncompromising commitment to democracy. For the organizing committee, democracy was more than an abstract ideal. It represented the source of union strength; it shaped the way they structured their organization and conducted its affairs; it was a value around which union identities could be formed; and ultimately it was the process used to achieve their goals. In the words of Glyn Hughes, a veteran activist from sociology at UCSB, "there was a . . . realization that whatever outcome we wanted was going to have to come from a process that we believed in as well. And that was going to have to be collective."¹⁰

The commitment to democracy had a strategic as well as moral logic. The organizers felt that union strength and success was predicated on having a broad base of rank-and-file participation. This perspective was consistent with their goal for the university to become an institution in which the people who did the work had a say in the way it operated. The activists at UCSB possessed a critical understanding that without high levels of member participation, the union's actions would be prone to fail. Relying on a handful of militant leaders would not produce a vibrant union and would appear weak to the UC.¹¹ However, understanding this in theory was one thing; achieving it was another.

Activists sought to increase participation by developing a union culture on campus and cultivating union identities among graduate employees that could sustain the struggle and eventually form the foundation of a more equitable relationship with UC administrators. As one of ASE's founders remembered: "We were committed to a more educational approach . . . to develop union identities among graduate employees who typically identify with their research or their mentors. We felt we needed to develop this identity with the union."¹² If graduate employees identified with the union and felt a sense of ownership of the campaign, there was a better chance they would be willing to actively participate.

One of the more challenging tasks activists faced was figuring out how to get graduate employees to identify with the union. Campus organizers had to confront existing attitudes of many graduate employees who did not view unions as relevant to their work lives. Most identified as professionals and saw themselves as soon-to-be professors with no need for organized labor. For others, it seemed incongruent for academics to be joining a union (the UAW) that traditionally represented auto workers. They also held many of the typical conceptions of unions as outsiders interested solely in dues and as bureaucratic, corrupt, and potentially detrimental to collegiality among graduate employees and faculty.

Activists addressed these concerns by defending the affiliation with the UAW as a strategic alliance that would enable graduate employees to fight the costly legal battle the UC was waging. They also pointed to the UAW's reputation as

one of the more democratic national unions. Perhaps the most effective means of allaying the concerns of would-be members was assuring them that the union would be run democratically. The idea that a union would bring greater democracy to the workplace, which would improve graduate employees' working conditions, and in turn improve the quality of education at the university, was a vision that most graduate employees could support.

Trust played a crucial role in developing a pro-union culture. Skeptical graduate employees were persuaded to join and participate in the union largely because they knew and trusted the people who were organizing it. Laura Holliday, an AHOC member from the English department, pointed out, "We had a real union culture . . . people would know who we were and would ask us about the union."¹³ When activists told friends and colleagues the union would be run democratically, they believed it because of the way activists organized. The organizing committee demonstrated that for them, talk of democracy was more than a campaign platitude. In many ways it prefigured what their union would be.

The organizing committee's commitment to building a strong base of active support was demonstrated by the way they conducted the campaign. For years, organizing committee meetings, open to all members, were held every Friday night without fail. Meeting facilitators rotated to increase participation in leadership positions. A group of activists published a regular newsletter and maintained a web site to keep members informed and to solicit feedback. Major strategy decisions were put to a vote of the membership. Even seemingly trivial matters—like how their paid organizer's time ought to be allocated—were subject to member approval. As Seth Rosenberg, an activist from the physics department, recalled: "Basically there were a number of times in the campaign where we were trying to figure out the best way to do things and inevitably the answer we came to is that we weren't really qualified to make that decision ourselves. We needed to find out what direction our members wanted to go."¹⁴ Although their model seemed to be working, the fledgling union's methods and values were put to the test in spring 1998 as each of the UC campuses mobilized for a vote to authorize a strike to gain recognition. The walkout, which was planned for the following fall quarter, would be their most ambitious action to date. UCSB campus leaders were determined to show that a democratic, rank-and-file led union could be successful, so they began organizing for a strong turnout in the authorization vote. Santa Barbara set a quorum requiring at least half of all members to vote for the election to be valid.¹⁵ Although the UAW constitution did not require them to do so, the AHOC felt setting the bar high was critical for two reasons. First, for a strike to be effective, it needs broad support among the membership. Therefore, allowing a potentially low turnout of mostly union supporters to determine the outcome seemed counterproductive. Second, a strong turnout would signal the union's resolve to the UC and increase the chances of bringing the UC to the table without a strike. Up until that time, the UCSB union had no elected campuswide leadership, so they used

this opportunity to establish a strike committee that would be responsible for officially calling and coordinating the strike.

For strategic purposes, the UAW urged that the authorization vote be conducted in the spring. However, doing so created a problem because new grads coming to campus in the fall would essentially be asked to strike without having a say in the matter. Activists hoped the strike committee would act as democratic mechanism by which to reassess support six months hence. The organizing committee did not want to jeopardize the union and its members by following through with an ill-advised strike if support for the job action were to wane or circumstances change.

In the weeks preceding the vote, more than fifty activists worked feverishly conducting phone banks, holding meetings, and educating their fellow graduate employees about the proposed action. Their hard work paid off. Not only did they meet the quorum, but support for a strike was overwhelming. Over six hundred members cast ballots, five hundred of whom voted to strike. The activists were encouraged by the success. Joe Bandy, one of ASE's founders, characterized it as the high point of his involvement with the union: "I felt hopeful that we could illustrate to the other campuses that democracy works. No other campus had turned out such high numbers as had UCSB. I think it validated our efforts and our system."¹⁶

This sense of optimism was not to last. Within months, hope and enthusiasm gave way to feelings of disillusionment and betrayal. A series of events in the months leading up to the anticipated strike demonstrated to members at UCSB that they were no longer in control of their union.

THE FALL

On September 8, 1998, Mary Ann Massenburg, the UAW field representative overseeing the statewide UC campaign, called an emergency meeting of the UCSB Ad Hoc Organizing Committee. Tensions had grown in the preceding months between local activists and UAW staff involving differences in organizing style and methods. Massenburg said she summoned the activists because she was disturbed by their intentions to implement a modified version of the organizing plan that had been proposed at a coalition meeting over the summer. She began the meeting by accusing ASE activists of insulating themselves from the Coalition and its own rank-and-file members. She claimed that UCSB activists were suffering from a "disident complex" and finished by announcing she had hired a new staff person from outside to replace the UCSE graduate employee who had been their paid organizer.¹⁷

Massenburg's actions blindsided activists. The charges did not make sense coming on the heels of their successful strike vote that spring and the fact that Santa Barbara's proposed modifications to "the plan" (as it would be pejoratively

called) were minor—pertaining to methods of implementation.¹⁸ The UAW plan called for organizers to arrange a single one-hour long meeting with each member to discuss the upcoming strike. They were to communicate the legal concerns related to striking, instruct graduate employees how to avoid them, and ask if they intended to strike. The UCSB modifications called for four, fifteen-minute conversations with each member over the months leading to the strike, beginning with a discussion about what it means to strike and why solidarity is crucial, and then, in subsequent contacts, discussions about the legal ramifications and their intentions to strike.¹⁹ But most troubling to activists was Massenburg's unilateral decision to replace a trusted local leader with a recent college graduate who had no experience leading a union and was totally unfamiliar with UCSB graduate employees. It made little strategic sense to risk alienating activists who had been instrumental to building pro-union sentiment on campus. It made even less sense to do it on the eve of their most ambitious and risky action. When an activist expressed concern that this move would alienate many activists, Massenburg replied, "Too bad."²⁰

In addition to the strategic concerns, this act raised a set of moral issues for activists. Massenburg's decision represented an abrupt departure from the way important decisions had been made throughout the six-year campaign. It also contradicted their assumption that local members would have control of their union. For the next few weeks, shell-shocked activists tried to make sense of what had happened and, more importantly, to figure out how to proceed with the work of organizing toward the strike. Activists soul-searched as they tried to make sense of the UAW's behavior and decide what to tell members. Airing "dirty laundry" might undercut support for the strike, but not doing so would entail deceiving people who trusted them.

By October, the activists had decided to carry out their modified organizing plan. They found the new UAW staff organizer ineffectual and believed the strike would not happen without the campus activists taking a leadership role. Activists reasoned that if "they were the union" they ought to act like it, so they began organizing, aware that critical time had been lost. They established an elaborate phone-tree system to efficiently connect with each member of the union several times before the strike. As they resumed organizing, a degree of optimism was restored within the AHOC, but in a few weeks, the rug was again pulled out from under them.

On October 30, just before a scheduled AHOC meeting at the home of two lead activists, Massenburg, her lieutenant Mike Miller, and two other UAW staff members arrived early. They confiscated all union records and documents kept there.²¹ Then, as the meeting began, activists were handed a letter from Massenburg in which she accused the AHOC of having "deliberately implemented a counter-organizing plan at Santa Barbara."²² She claimed that activists refused to work with the new staffer, and by the use of the phone tree system, had implemented significant and unauthorized changes to the organizing plan approved

by the UAW. The letter went on to say that if the group chose not to organize using approved methods, "they may not act, write or speak in the name of ASE/UAW, ASE or UAW, and may not use any resources, lists or other information belonging to the Union."²³

The events of that evening, thereafter referred to as the "Halloween Massacre," had a devastating effect on activists—and the new members for whom this was their first union meeting. Several were reduced to tears. Activists were outraged. It was one thing to disagree about organizing tactics, but it was quite another to enter someone's private residence and charge the people who had built the union with "counter-organizing." Activists found it inconceivable that the UAW seemed willing to undermine all the activists had built because of a phone tree, or because they insisted on holding open membership meetings, or because they preferred to foreground the importance of solidarity during a strike rather than its legal ramifications.²⁴ On November 7, a week after the Halloween Massacre, delegations of activists from each of the eight campuses met in Santa Barbara to discuss strategy for the final weeks before the strike. The eighteen representatives from UCSB saw this gathering as an opportunity to tell their story and perhaps get support from other campus representatives. They were quickly disabused of that idea. Staff member Miller, who conducted the meeting, allowed only fifteen minutes for discussion of the "UCSB problem." Members wishing to speak were limited to one minute. It became clear that a story had already circulated explaining the "intransigence" of the UCSB activists. Several current and former UAW staff members again charged UCSB with counter-organizing and with jeopardizing the strike. Staffers monopolized the allotted time for discussion and then quickly moved to have the UCSB contingent barred from the remainder of the meeting.²⁵ The motion passed narrowly. Twenty minutes after it began, the well-orchestrated purge was complete.

Immediately following the meeting, UCSB activists spoke with representatives from other campuses. From these conversations they learned that although many of their counterparts resented them for not submitting to the UAW plan, others supported UCSB and disapproved of the way the UAW had treated local activists. Several sympathizers refused to participate in the reconvened coalition meeting held without UCSB, and at least one UAW staff member resigned in disgust.²⁶

Now utterly demoralized and with the strike less than a month away, activists had one remaining reason to be hopeful that a successful strike could be pulled off. The local strike committee, composed of eleven activists from eleven different departments, had been elected to "officially call the strike and facilitate the logistics of the strike."²⁷ In the eyes of activists and the rank and file, this body had the final say as to whether or not UCSB would join the systemwide strike—in light of recent developments, this was no longer a foregone conclusion.

The strike committee, like the AHOC, had been told by UAW staff that it could not represent the union if it employed methods not consistent with the

systemwide plan. This meant phone trees, e-mail communications, outreach to faculty, and membership meetings were prohibited. Furthermore, all documents intended for distribution were required to have Massenburg's approval. These restrictions essentially left the committee unable to perform its duties as mandated. Nevertheless, the strike committee disregarded these instructions and forged ahead in an effort to assess the level of graduate employee support for the strike. To do so, the committee relied on the results of the AHOC phone tree, which continued despite being hampered by the UAW confiscation of membership lists. They also held department-level and campuswide meetings, both to gauge the sentiment of the members and to disseminate vital information regarding the strike.

One of these campuswide meetings poignantly illustrated that rank-and-file solidarity was still strong despite the atmosphere of distrust and disillusionment. When UAW staff announced a meeting to be held at the same time and in the same building as the one previously scheduled by the strike committee, it appeared to activists that they were attempting to draw unsuspecting members away from the strike committee meeting. Despite this subterfuge, over one hundred members attended the strike committee meeting, while not a single person attended the one sponsored by the UAW.²⁸ During the meeting—after UAW staffers had been invited to join—several members declared they would not participate in the strike unless the local strike committee made the call. Others asked the UAW to recognize the authority of the strike committee. The room filled with moans of disgust when UAW staff refused.

The events of that evening contradict UAW claims that the Santa Barbara union had been taken over by a tiny faction of counter organizers. What the staff and members witnessed that night suggested something more dynamic was going on within the union at UCSB than a "dissident complex." That at such an historic juncture of the campaign to have over one hundred members come out in support of the local elected officers, while none identified with the UAW, suggests that the graduate employees knew that they were the union.

A week later, the strike committee officially called the strike. They knew the union was in rough shape because activist energy had been focused on the disputes with the UAW rather than on organizing. Nevertheless, members still wanted to win recognition, and this strike was seen as the best way to achieve it. The committee's decision ultimately reflected its desire to stand in solidarity with the members at the other seven campuses.²⁹ They reasoned that if UCSB did not walk out, it might weaken the impact of the strike elsewhere in the system.

The strike began during the last week of the academic quarter, on December 1, 1998. Despite all that had taken place, an estimated two hundred members walked off their jobs. Graduate employees formed lively picket lines at each entrance to campus, and for days, picketers received supportive honks from the stream of cars leaving and entering campus. The strong support from the campus community—especially from undergraduates who were most directly

affected by the strike—buoyed the spirits of striking graduate employees. Meanwhile, legislative leaders were trying to broker a deal between the UAW and the UC for a cooling off period to suspend the strike. The UCSB strikers were unaware that talks were taking place and were surprised when on the evening before the seventh day of the walkout they learned, while watching the eleven o'clock news, that the strike had been called off.

FALLING OUT

Over the next several months, union activists tried to make sense of their recent experiences and to find ways to rekindle their enthusiasm for building the union. At the beginning of January 1999, Massenburg met with UCSB members in an attempt to smooth over relations. Her tone was matter-of-fact. She began by diagramming the organizational hierarchy of the UAW, pointing out the official relationships between the international executive board, local unions, officers, staff, and the rank-and-file membership. She also informed them of the rights and responsibilities each of these groups had under the UAW constitution. As for the position of the graduate employees organizing at UCSB, Massenburg stated that because they were not yet recognized, they, in fact, were not actually members of the UAW and therefore were not entitled to the democratic rights outlined in its constitution. She suggested that this misunderstanding helped explain the problems occurring in Santa Barbara. Her analysis of the situation was that the protracted battle with the UC led local graduate employees to mistakenly assume they were full members. Massenburg expressed regret that she had not made their status more clear earlier.³⁰

For the activists, that meeting was a watershed. For years, they had persuaded their friends and colleagues to join the union, to sign union cards “declaring themselves members of the ASE/UAW.” They mobilized their fellow students for union elections, took to heart the assurances about “being the union,” sacrificed incredible amounts of time and energy, and even risked their jobs by going on strike. After that, to hear that their own international union did not “recognize” them was too ironic, too devastating to bear. Several longtime activists resigned from the UAW, saying they could no longer reconcile their belief in democratic unionism with the UAW’s actions. Although these sentiments were shared by all who had been involved, activists were divided over how to proceed. Some AHOC members wanted to break from the UAW and form an independent union, while others thought it better to stick with UAW and seek to reform it from within. Unlike earlier disagreements within the local, this one did not lend itself to compromise, let alone consensus. For the first time in the union’s history, factions formed. The activists, who had derived their strength and resolve from the unity within the organizing committee, were now divided. The union was crumbling.

Activists of the AHOC, who had been the glue holding the union together, began to disassociate from the project to which they had been so committed. For

these activists, it required increasingly difficult contortions of logic to reconcile the experiences of the last year with their vision of a democratic union, let alone convince others to support the UAW.

In spring 1999, PERB ruled in favor of UC graduate employees and ordered certification elections to be held at each of the campuses. Santa Barbara’s turn came in June during the final days of the spring quarter. Activists had worked for years to arrive at this point, but now that they were on the brink, the mood was cynical and ambivalent. None of the remaining activists on campus were willing to publicly support the UAW or mobilize toward getting out the vote. Because most graduate employees still looked to the AHOC for leadership, they held a few meetings in which sullen graduate employees discussed how they should vote. The most visible union activity leading up to the vote were efforts of some former ASE/UAW activists who had formed a rival independent union called United Student Labor (USL). They promoted USL as a locally controlled, democratic alternative to the UAW and encouraged graduate employees to vote against the UAW by voting no in the election.

These were pro-union people—who had worked for years for the right to have this election—conflicted over whether or not to vote in favor of union representation. Many viewed it as an unsavory catch-22: vote “yes” and endorse the UAW, which had proven itself to be manipulative and undemocratic; or vote “no” and support the UC administration that had denied graduate employee rights for years.

Some of the few remaining ASE/UAW activists, who still hoped the union election could be salvaged, made a last-ditch effort to engineer a truce. They requested that Massenburg make an overture to the members that would give them some indication to believe that once officially within the UAW fold, relations would improve. Characterizing the requests as attempts to blackmail the UAW for their votes, Massenburg’s staff refused.³¹ After weeks of agonizing over their decision, one group of members grudgingly decided to vote for the UAW while another decided to vote no. About fifty graduate employees of both persuasions withheld their votes until the last day of voting and went to the polls together in a defiant act of solidarity. It had been exactly one year since the strike authorization vote had taken place in which five hundred graduate employees declared their willingness to walk off their jobs to gain union recognition. Now that they were in a position to achieve that goal by simply casting a ballot, fewer than two hundred felt strongly enough to walk to the polls and vote yes. The UAW prevailed: 184–135.

BIRTH OF A BUSINESS UNION

In many ways, the events after the certification election represent the final touches of a process in which the original vision that propelled the UCSB union was undermined and replaced by one nearly antithetical to it. The ironic outcome

is symbolized by the ratification of a contract in the name of workers who, as far as they were concerned, were no longer a union.

A week before the results of the certification election were to be announced, UAW staff called a meeting to elect a bargaining team for the Santa Barbara campus. They did so over the objections of activists who felt that after all they had gone through, the local union needed time to regroup, heal the divisions, and restore trust in the UAW. Activists were forced to hastily mobilize in self-defense, knowing if they did not elect a bargaining team, the UAW would appoint one. Members elected eight veteran UCSB activists—essentially the only ones still willing to work with the UAW—to serve as the campus' bargaining team.

Each UC campus represented a separate bargaining unit, for which eight separate contracts would be negotiated. This fact offered some hope to the UCSB team that they would have the ability to negotiate a contract that reflected the interests of local graduate employees. Almost immediately however, the UAW began moving to centralize bargaining for the whole system. Although doing so made sense, as there were many issues that affected all campuses, it represented a loss of control of the process for individual bargaining units. Despite the repeated objections raised by UCSB, the UAW and other campus teams began acting as if the plan had been ratified. Sensing a repeat of the events of the previous fall, the Santa Barbara team balked. At a heated meeting in September 1999, they demanded the time necessary to gauge membership support for the systemwide bargaining plan before agreeing to it.

UAW staff and the other coalition teams eventually assured UCSB that any issue without unanimous agreement among all eight bargaining units would be negotiated separately at each campus. Referring to a document that specified the terms of the systemwide arrangement, Massenburg confirmed that any disputed issues would be negotiated separately by the campus units. This seemed like a workable compromise and the UCSB team agreed. For three weeks, this arrangement worked wonderfully, until a dispute arose between UCSB and the coalition over the issue of the right to strike: While the other campuses were content to follow the common union practice of giving up the right to strike in exchange for grievance and arbitration, Santa Barbara was reluctant to do so.³² Several factors motivated the UCSB position. First, they believed that the source of union power rests on the ability of workers to withhold labor. The prospect of giving up their only leverage was unattractive enough, but to do it so early in the negotiations seemed especially unwise. Second, Massenburg had previously warned them about the UC's history of securing rigid no-strike clauses in its contracts that they used to prevent workers from participating in campus protests that were unrelated to their status as employees.³³ UCSB wanted to avoid that scenario. As their agreement with the coalition stipulated, UCSB had already started negotiating the strikes issue locally. Then, without warning, Massenburg announced that the union would give up the right to strike systemwide as a gesture of good-faith bargaining. She instructed the Santa Barbara

team to change its position to conform to the coalition. When UCSB steadfastly refused to give up the union's most valuable bargaining chip as a "gesture," they were told that the coalition would proceed as if it had. The entire UCSB bargaining team resigned in protest. The resignation of the bargaining team and their subsequent withdrawal from union activism left a complete void on campus. No one remained who was willing to participate in the UAW project.

After October 1999, negotiations proceeded without elected representation for members at UCSB. The process became increasingly centralized with the statewide bargaining team hammering out the majority of issues affecting the individual campuses. In the winter, the UAW and UC negotiators reached an impasse after each side accused the other of bad-faith bargaining. The UAW called for a strike vote. For UCSB members and former activists, it seemed as if the chickens had come home to roost. After being denied a voice in the union at nearly every turn, they were being asked to walk off the job. There was little chance that UCSB members would walk the line for a contract being negotiated without them. Even worse, the strike authorization vote that took place in March 2000 was tainted by suspicions that the UAW had fixed the vote. A local team of election monitors, composed of twenty-three volunteers from the Graduate Student Association, United Student Labor, and members of the UAW, observed 185 people casting ballots in the two days of polling. The UAW, however, announced that 278 members had voted—204 in favor and 74 against authorizing a strike. This discrepancy added to the growing mistrust of the UAW, leading many members of the UCSB local to publicly question the legitimacy of the election and to refuse to honor its validity.³⁴ In April, when the UAW called a one-day strike, only two people walked the picket line at Santa Barbara.³⁵

In May, the union and the UC reached a tentative contract agreement. UAW representatives hailed the settlement as a success and urged members to ratify it, but many at UCSB were unconvinced. Although it provided for phased-in tuition waivers, improvements in job posting and notification, and binding grievance and arbitration, it fell short in other areas: no improvement in health benefits, the most prohibitive no-strike clause the UC had signed with any of its unions, and a pay increase that was largely a chimera. The UAW had secured a 1.5 percent immediate wage increase. But the UAW also claimed to have "won" an additional 2 percent for each of the next three years, although the state legislature had already mandated that increase. In fact, the state had been giving graduate workers the annual raise for years. That the 1.5 percent increase would just cover the 1.15 percent in dues members would now pay was not lost on the graduate employees. Essentially, the contract codified existing arrangements—which in some ways was a victory—but maintaining the status quo was not what had inspired unionists at UCSB. In a vote that local members were neither allowed to conduct nor witness, the contract was ratified 146–97.

Over the following summer, the UAW announced its decision to combine all eight UC campuses into one large statewide local headquartered in Berkeley, now called UAW Local 2865. This arrangement is geographically vast, extending over

five hundred miles from end to end, and numerically massive, covering more than nine thousand graduate employees. Although locals of this size and scope have become common in the United States, such arrangements inhibit rank-and-file participation. As an activist from the history department wryly observed, “I have to drive three hundred miles to attend a membership meeting.”³⁶ By October 2000, as students were returning to campus, by-laws had been drafted and presented for ratification. Across all eight campuses, only 238 members participated in the systemwide vote to ratify this defining set of governing policies.³⁷ A few weeks later, a slate of union officers were “elected” by acclamation. Of the eleven local offices, not a single race was contested.

Concurrent with these developments, a new California law (SB645) established “agency shop” for all public employees in higher education. The law, which took effect in 2000, requires all employees covered by a collective bargaining agreement to pay fair share fees regardless of union member status. For most UC graduate employees who are not union members, that translates to approximately thirteen dollars a month, compared to full membership dues of eighteen dollars. Such laws are common and are welcomed by organized labor as a way to more equitably distribute the costs of negotiating and enforcing contracts. There are, however, some undesirable consequences. Fair share policies—by essentially guaranteeing a revenue stream—tend to reduce the incentive for unions to organize workers and also minimize the need for union leaders to be responsive to demands from members. This “labor-friendly” legislation, when combined with a remote and centralized organizational structure, may actually undermine union strength by contributing to rank-and-file apathy and reducing the membership base. By winter 2001, with this legislation and the governing apparatus of Local 2865 in place, the number of card-carrying union members at UCSB was fifty-three. A business union had been born.

LINGERING QUESTIONS

It is important here to ask this question: Where were graduate employee allies and comrades on other campuses when UCSB graduate activists were flourishing? Although a definitive answer is beyond the scope of this chapter, I can provide some thoughts, based on interviews with UCSB activists and five interviews with activists from other campuses. First, it is difficult to prove whether or not rank-and-file graduate employees at other campuses were supportive of the UCSB approach. In truth, it is likely that most of them had no knowledge of it or the ensuing conflicts. What we do know is that with a few exceptions, the graduate employees in leadership and staff positions from other campuses in the 1998–2000 period tended to support the UAW program and consistently joined them in opposing UCSB initiatives. Two of the most likely contributing factors were organizational dynamics and fundamental differences among graduate employees over the mission, goals, and methods of the union.

Organizations tend to promote and reward those who uphold institutionally dominant views while they discourage and discredit those who dissent, and the UAW is likely no exception. One UCSB activist, who was actively recruited by the UAW in an effort to usurp the AHOC as the local’s leadership, described being “seduced” by the power he had been given and by the affirmation he received from staff and coalition members.³⁸ Additionally, the organizational structure of the eight-campus coalition required considerable commitments of time and energy, and extensive travel. If activists dissented or felt uncomfortable, chances are they would leave the union and return to their academic work rather than stay on when their presence and views were not appreciated. This process leaves only like-minded activists to chart strategy. Additionally, the centralized decision-making structure inhibited direct communication between members at different campuses. Most communication between campuses was mediated through the UAW in some way, so, for example, when conflicts between UCSB and the UAW erupted, the other campuses learned about it from the UAW, rather than from one another.³⁹ UCSB activists eventually recognized this structural dynamic and realized the need to reach out directly to members at other campuses, but by that time the dye had been cast.

It is also fair to ask if UCSB was exceptional in its opposition to the UAW tactics. Again, because activists on different campuses were largely isolated from one another, we don’t know. Some interviewees familiar with the drives at other campuses did mention that, in the course of the seventeen-year campaign, activists at Berkeley, Davis, Santa Cruz, and Riverside fought with the UAW at one time or another over a variety of issues—including union democracy and organizing tactics. Each time those disputes became critical, the local campus leadership was forced to submit to the UAW or were replaced by more amicable activists.⁴⁰

ANALYSIS: STRUGGLE FOR LABOR’S IDENTITY

Decades of union decline have led to increasingly widespread recognition that something needs to be done to bring labor back to life, but there is intense disagreement within organized labor over precisely what corrective action to take (Nissen 1999). The events at UCSB can be understood ultimately as part of this larger struggle over the identity of the labor movement. It is a microcosm of the battle between two distinct visions for the future of labor. One orientation—business unionism—has been the dominant model of the U.S. labor movement for more than fifty years. Social movement unionism, on the other hand, draws its inspiration from the pre-World War II labor movement and seeks to incorporate many of its qualities into the labor movement of the twenty-first century.

From a business unionism perspective, the goal of organized labor is to work within existing political and economic institutions to improve working conditions

and the standard of living for union members. The preferred method of achieving these goals is collective bargaining. Proponents of business unionism view securing a contract as the best way to guarantee members a voice in working conditions and a larger slice of the economic pie. For business unionists, a contract is both a goal in itself and also part of a larger strategy of establishing a baseline from which future gains can be won. In order for the collective bargaining system to function for unions, the state must oversee and enforce the laws governing the process. Therefore, one of labor's principal political interests is ensuring the collective bargaining apparatus is preserved and administered fairly. Political activity of unions is typically confined to the existing two-party system—with its support traditionally going to the Democrats—by way of endorsements, campaign contributions, members' volunteering, and lobbying for legislation favorable to unions. Business unions are characterized by centralized and hierarchical governing structures, and they rely heavily on paid professional staff to negotiate and enforce contracts, handle grievances, and conduct the day-to-day business of the union.

Proponents of social movement unionism place much of the responsibility for labor's current anemic condition on the business union model (Brecher and Costello 1999; Eisenscher 1999). They argue that organized labor's bureaucratic structure and its fixation on the narrow goals of collective bargaining, as well as its political timidity, have rendered the movement defenseless against corporate assaults on labor and have done nothing to stem the tide of membership decline. Critics argue that the business union model has fostered a dependence on professional staff, which hinders meaningful member participation and in turn contributes to workers viewing unions as little more than insurance policies—paying dues in exchange for “benefits.” Finally, business unions are criticized for failing to organize new workers. Critics assert that for decades (business) unions' narrow focus on servicing existing members has contributed to the decline in union density.

As the label implies, social movement unionism seeks to reinject unions with the qualities of a social movement that once made them a powerful voice for progressive social change. The key to salvaging the labor movement is to expand its narrow focus on workplace goals and to address issues of social justice concerning the wider community. By linking the labor movement to struggles against discrimination and environmental degradation, for instance, labor can regain its relevance as a vehicle for social change. Social movement unionism requires a dramatic increase in active participation among rank-and-file members. Eschewing the rigid top-down orientation of business unions, social movement unionists seek instead to empower workers via decentralized structures that promote grass-roots activism and participatory democracy (Eisenscher 1999).

Although dividing the labor movement into business unions and social movement unions might seem simplistic, it does offer a way for us to understand the events at UCSB. The UAW executed the strategy with which it was most fa-

miliar. From their perspective, there is no union without a contract, thus, securing the contract is paramount, and all other concerns are secondary. With this in mind, it is easier to see why any opposition to a speedy acquisition of a contract might have been viewed as evidence of antiunion sabotage. Furthermore, the success of the UAW's campaign rested on waging effective battles in the courts and in the state legislature; therefore, any signs of militant or spontaneous action emanating from the rank and file that might jeopardize this strategy might have been of genuine concern to union staff.

Over the seventeen-year struggle, the UAW invested a tremendous amount of resources fighting the court battle, lobbying the state legislature, and installing staff organizers at several campuses. From their point of view, activists at Santa Barbara who demanded to have control over the union must have seemed ungrateful. During critical moments in the organizing drive and contract negotiations, UCSB activists may have struck their more seasoned counterparts as naïve, overly idealistic, or dangerously ignorant. But the overarching goal of securing a contract meant that time to discuss larger issues of union values and methods was sacrificed.

Differences in the concepts of union democracy also came into play. Stanley Aronowitz describes two models of union democracy: “democracy by consent, where the rank and file has formal, but little substantive, power over union affairs” and what he calls “strong or participatory democracy” (1999). The UAW is firmly committed to democracy—of the first type. They hold elections and allow members to ratify contracts. But the other type of union democracy—which inspired the UCSB members—demands that workers get to establish union priorities, make decisions, and determine the contents of the contract. We can see how these two distinct definitions of democracy might have led to frustrated UAW staff and workers alike. When UCSB activists demanded union democracy, UAW staff could respond “you have a democratic union.” A bargaining team member from Berkeley, in trying to convince me that Santa Barbara did not need to seek direction from its members, told me, “That's what democracy is. We convince the members that our ideas are right.”⁴¹ Clearly, there were fundamental differences about the meaning of union democracy.

Despite the pain and anger expressed by many of the UCSB activists toward the UAW, there is little reason to assume that they acted with malicious intent. As loyal union staff members, they had a defined set of goals, a toolbox of trusted methods, and were no doubt armed with the confidence that they were fighting the good fight. And they probably believed the UCSB activists were taking the campaign in directions that were dangerously far afield.

Those who embrace, or are at least sympathetic to, the business union model of the labor movement are likely to view the UC campaign as a significant victory. After all, a contract has been secured, an additional nine thousand workers can be counted among union ranks, a revenue stream has been established (strengthening financial health of the organization), and the visibility of the campaign will likely increase the UAW's credibility as a legitimate union for

academic workers. It is not surprising that from UAW vice president Elizabeth Bunn's perspective, it is indeed "an inspiration."⁴²

But it should also be clear, despite Bunn's enthusiasm, why those who advocate a social movement approach to unionism do not share her sentiment. The graduate employees at UCSB had different expectations for their union. They cultivated a pro-union culture, characterized by widespread participation, a sense of empowerment, and pride in ownership, but instead they got a local distinguished by apathy, cynicism, and distrust of organized labor. The collective power they struggled to achieve was usurped by a bureaucratic organization intent on exercising power for them. As Corina Kellner, a long-time activist from the anthropology department, put it: "We've traded one paternalism for another."⁴³

CHALLENGES FOR LABOR

In order to rebuild itself, the labor movement will need to innovate. Movement organizations unwilling or unable to learn adaptive strategies are prone to decline (Klandermans 1997; Schwartz 1976). Innovation requires a willingness to learn new approaches—even whole new orientations—to building and running unions. Yet despite AFL-CIO president John Sweeney's vision of the perfect labor movement being "one which consistently re-examines itself and corrects its own imperfections" (Sweeney 1998, 325), accomplishing change is not easy. In any large institution, efforts to implement change are almost always met with resistance (Blau 1983). Organized labor is no exception. Its failure to change can be attributed to three related dynamics: institutional inertia, the formation of a siege mentality, and the development of union staff as experts.

As union membership declines and the labor movement is under increasing attack from many sides, it is understandable that a sort of siege mentality might form within its organizations (Markowitz 2000; Sherman and Voss 2000). But that mentality makes unions reluctant to accept criticism and to treat challenges from members as disloyalty. These responses inhibit the ability of unions to adapt to changing circumstances. Furthermore, spending time and energy on new strategies are seen by many experienced labor organizers as luxuries unions cannot afford when they so desperately need immediate victories (Markowitz 2000; Sciacchitano 2000).

This organizational mentality is buttressed by the increasing professionalization of union staff. As organized labor has come to rely on grievance and arbitration, sophisticated contractual language, and labor law to exercise power, the skills and technical knowledge required to function in this arena become necessities. This leads to the view of union staff as "experts," reinforcing workers' attitudes that they should leave union decisions to the professionals. In turn, when union staff embrace this identity, they are more likely to dismiss proposed strategies and ideas from the rank and file as naive or impractical. Together, these

dynamics contribute to a type of institutional inertia that makes existing movement goals and approaches to organizing sacrosanct.

At Santa Barbara, the UAW had an opportunity to learn from graduate employees' experimentation. Students created a new union that achieved wide support. They were democratic and successful. But time and again the UAW seemed threatened by these innovations, choosing to discredit them as signs of disloyalty rather than to learn from them. Years later, the behavior of UAW staff suggests they have little interest in learning from their experience at Santa Barbara: When organizers come to UCSB, they address members' concerns about this sordid history by disparaging former activists.⁴⁴ In the sparsely attended union meetings, staff refuse to acknowledge how the UAW legacy on campus may be hampering current efforts to organize graduate employees.

The UCSB story reminds us that building unions is an inherently personal endeavor. Labor advocates frequently lament that it too often takes incredible acts of courage for people to join unions. Not only must workers overcome the negative perceptions of unions that pervade our culture, but they must also begin to think of themselves less as independent actors and more as part of a collective—no small feat in a society that celebrates individualism. For workers not already disposed to unionization, overcoming these psychological barriers involves undergoing a fundamental shift in identity. This shift is especially dramatic for white collar and professional workers—including academics—who must also overcome assumptions that unions are not meant for people like themselves.

Much of union organizing involves encouraging and facilitating these shifts in identity. Establishing trust is crucial to this process. Workers essentially take a leap of faith when joining unions and are more likely to do so if they know and trust the people asking them to jump (Klandermans 1997). Trust takes a long time to develop, which is one reason why coworkers and workplace activists prove to be the most effective organizers (Bronfenbrenner and Juravich 1998). They are able to draw on their existing relationships with fellow workers and are more likely to be seen as credible sources of information about the union. But trust operates in two directions. When workers agree to accept the risks that come with organizing, they expect the union to live up to the vision it promotes.

For years, the UAW assured UCSB activists that the union would operate democratically and be run by the members, telling them repeatedly "the members are the union." UAW staff reinforced this claim every time they insisted that activists adhere to the union's constitution, held elections, and endorsed campaign literature espousing the union's commitment to democracy. Graduate employees demonstrated how deeply they believed these promises with each of the countless hours they volunteered for the cause. As it became clear that UAW directives would usurp democracy and member control, activists felt deceived.

The experience with the UAW had an even more invidious dimension for activists. In addition to feeling manipulated by the UAW, they had unwittingly

misled their friends and colleagues who had trusted them. The comments of Samara Payse, a graduate activist from the English department, are illustrative:

I had a feeling of, gosh, what have we done to these people . . . who trusted us all these years, telling them, . . . "You may have problems with the UAW, or . . . you may have problems with big labor, but we can do whatever we want, we'll have a say in the contract, we'll have autonomy," you know, promising them that, and then just watching that evaporate was a real feeling like, "Oh my god, we've betrayed these people."⁴⁵

If organized labor carelessly exploits this emotional commitment in the pursuit of short-term gains, the long-term effects on the movement may be difficult to overcome. At UCSB, among those I interviewed, none remain active in the union. One former activist commented, "I don't have the stomach for it . . . I don't organize anymore because I don't believe in it."⁴⁶ These sentiments were shared by many others. Although remarkably (and to their credit) nearly all remain "pro-union" in principle, their support of organized labor has been tempered. It is significant that among the activists who voted in the 1999 certification election making the UAW the recognized bargaining agent, only half voted yes. Among them, all said they would vote no if the election were held today.

CONCLUSION

The struggle over the direction of the labor movement is not new. Tensions between the interests of union organizations and the desires of local members are a well-documented feature of the U.S. labor movement (Aronowitz 1973; Moody 1988; Rachleff 1993). In the UC systemwide campaign, similar conflicts between the UAW and graduate employee organizers took place at various times during the campaigns at Berkeley, Davis, Santa Cruz, and Riverside. Furthermore, the graduate employee union at University of Massachusetts, Amherst, was recently placed in administration by the UAW over related issues. These examples are not to suggest that such problems are unique features of the UAW and its academic unions. Rather, these are recurring patterns throughout organized labor. In our efforts to reshape labor's identity and mission, we would be remiss to ignore the ways our traditional modes of operation perpetuate the problems that hinder renewal.

Organizing academic workers must be seen as more than an opportunity for unions simply to add members to their existing organizations. Graduate employee organizing represents a tremendous opportunity for unions to experiment with—and learn—new approaches to building unions. As newcomers to organized labor, graduate employees are unencumbered by its traditional and ineffective practices. If the labor movement embraces their enthusiasm, creativity, and idealism, the unions they build can become examples of labor at its best. Winning recognition and contracts are tremendous achievements insofar as they are not gained at the cost of workers' pro-union commitment. Such

Pyrrhic victories will not be enough to preserve the vestiges of the labor movement, much less contribute to its rejuvenation. The question remains: Will labor be satisfied with hollow successes, or will it support and encourage organizing efforts that seek to produce strong, vibrant, and democratic unions that have the potential to transform not only the lives of workers, but society as well? The answer, as always, is in our hands.

NOTES

I wish to thank Judith Taylor, Richard Flacks, Nelson Lichtenstein and Christopher Kollmeyer for their thoughtful feedback and encouragement on earlier drafts of this chapter. I am especially grateful to all the former activists I interviewed who gave so generously of their time and emotion. Finally, to all the people who over the years contributed their integrity and passion to the project of building a democratic union at UCSB, I dedicate this piece.

1. David Montgomery, e-mail communication to Deborah Herman and Julie Schmid, August 3, 2001.
2. See Paul Johnston's discussion of "observer as chastened participant" (1994, 48–54).
3. In this paper, the UC system refers to the eight undergraduate campuses: Berkeley, Davis, Irvine, Los Angeles, Riverside, San Diego, Santa Barbara, and Santa Cruz. There are actually nine campuses in the system. The San Francisco campus, however, is primarily a graduate and professional school with fewer than one hundred undergraduates and was not included in the unionization drive. A tenth campus is scheduled to open at Merced in 2004.
4. University of California Office of the President web site <<http://www.ucop.edu/ucophone/commserv/profile/>>.
5. University of California Office of the President figures for fall 1999, <<http://www.ucop.edu>>.
6. *ASE/UAW Union News*, "Why vote to strike?" Spring 1998, p. 5.
7. Special Issue of *ASE News*, Fall 1996; Ralph Armbruster-Sandoval, interview with author, March 29, 2001; *ASE/UAW Union News*, "Majority at Irvine," Spring 1998, p. 6.
8. *ASE/UAW News*, "CAUSE convention recommends strikes in fall," June 1996, pp. 3–5.
9. *ASE/UAW* web site archived at <<http://www.angelfire.com/ca4/usl/MainFrames.htm>>.
10. Glyn Hughes, interview with author, March 7, 2001.
11. *ASE/UAW* strategy primer, 1997–98, p. 1.
12. Joe Bandy, interview with author, April 28, 2000.
13. Laura Holliday, interview with author, February 28, 2001.
14. Seth Rosenberg, interview with author, April 30, 2000.
15. The UAW constitution does not stipulate a quorum requirement for such votes, requiring only a two-thirds majority of votes cast. Indeed, in previous strike votes on other UC campuses, the vote was often held during a meeting with only those in attendance determining the outcome. The low turnouts produced by this method motivated UCSB to institute a more rigorous standard.
16. Bandy, interview.

17. Author's meeting notes, September 8, 1998.
18. Samara Payse, interview with author, February 27, 2001.
19. The differences in the two proposals were minor in terms of content, but significant in terms of logic of implementation. Based on their years of experience organizing on campus, UCSB activists felt it impractical to try to arrange a one-hour face-to-face meeting with each graduate student. Secondly, the UAW plan meant that each member would be contacted by an organizer once. AHOC felt a better strategy was to increase the number of contacts and to keep each discussion brief. Furthermore, the idea of focusing an hour-long meeting on legal ramifications would do little to inspire graduate employees to participate in the strike. Such a discussion was better to have as the action approached and workers were committed to the strike.
20. Author's meeting notes, September 8, 1998.
21. Sara Mason, interview with author, March 9, 2001.
22. Letter dated October 30, 1998, to ASE/UAW activists at Santa Barbara from Mary Ann Massenburg, UAW international representative.
23. *Ibid.*
24. Samara Payse had this reaction: "The [UAW] just did everything . . . they could, like breaking in and confiscating all our organizing materials, databases, things like that . . . actively sabotaging all our organizing here. Again, it was just shocking that they would go to those lengths. It was almost like the FBI . . . response to Left groups in the '60s, active sabotage, active disruption, trying to discredit, personally discredit: organizers here and activists here." Payse interview, February 27, 2001.
25. Rani Bush, interview with author, March 7, 2001.
26. Michael Bourgeois, interview with author, April 12, 2001; Author's notes, November 8, 1998.
27. ASE/UAW strike authorization vote ballot instructions, 1998.
28. Bush interview; Corina Kellner, interview with author, February 13, 2001; Payse interview.
29. ASE/UAW Strike Committee announcement to members, November 18, 1998.
30. Author's meeting notes, January 7, 1999.
31. Author's notes of conversation with UAW staff representative Mercedes Ibarra, June 7, 1999; Bourgeois interview.
32. A "no strikes/no lockouts" clause is contract language that states that no represented employee will strike or engage in work stoppages during the term of the contract and that the employer will not engage in lockouts during the term of the contract.
33. Author's notes, October 3, 1999.
34. *Santa Barbara News-Press*, March 15, 2000, "Legitimacy of strike vote at UCSB questioned," by Scott Hadley, pp. B1, B3; KEYT Television Evening News, March 14, 2000; Open letter and petition from ASE/UAW activists to campus community, March 16, 2000. After an investigation by the UCSB Graduate Student Association General Council into the complaints, they issued a policy statement condemning the UAW's recent election practices for "failing" to meet basic standards of legitimacy and [being] potentially fraudulent" (full text at <<http://www.gsa.ucsb.edu>>). Several ASE/UAW activists sought redress from the international's headquarters in Detroit. For two months, their requests went unanswered until—the day after the contract was ratified—they received a letter from the office of UAW president Stephen Yokich informing them that since they were not officially members they could not "process an election protest from this office" (letter dated May 17, 2000).

35. *Santa Barbara News-Press*, April 19, 2000, "2 students heed call for strike at UCSB," by Scott Hadley, pp. B1, B8.
36. Mark Hendrickson, interview with author, March 19, 2001.
37. Local 2865 Election Committee, October 28, 2000.
38. Bourgeois interview
39. Hughes interview.
40. Ralph Armbruster, interview with author, March 29, 2001; Bandy, interview; Hughes, interview; Nathan Newman, interview with author, March 8, 2001.
41. Author's notes, September 19, 1999
42. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, July 2, 1999, p. A12.
43. Kellner, interview.
44. Erik Noonburg, interview with author, March 25, 2001.
45. Payse, interview.
46. Kellner, interview.

REFERENCES

- Aronowitz, S. 1973. *False promises: The shaping of American working class consciousness*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- . 1999. Unions and democracy: A reply to Steve Fraser. *Dissent* 46: 81–84.
- Blau, P. 1983. *On the nature of organization*. Malabar, FL: Krieger Publishing.
- Brecher, J., and T. Costello. 1999. A new labor movement in the shell of the old? In *The transformation of U.S. unions: Voices, visions and strategies from the grass roots*, ed. R.M. Tillman and M.S. Cummings, 9–26. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner.
- Bronfenbrenner, K., and T. Juravich. 1998. It takes more than housecalls: Organizing to win with a comprehensive union-building strategy. In *Organizing to win: New research on union strategies*, ed. K. Bronfenbrenner, S. Friedman, R.W. Hurd, R.A. Oswald, and R.L. Secker, 19–36. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Eisenscher, M. 1999. Critical juncture: Unionism at the crossroads. In *Which direction for organized labor? Essays on organizing, outreach, and internal transformations*, ed. B. Nissen, 217–245. Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press.
- Hoerr, J. P. 1997. *We can't eat prestige: The women who organized Harvard*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- Johnston, P. 1994. *Success while others fail: Social movement unionism and the public workplace*. Ithaca, NY: ILR Press.
- Klandermans, B. 1997. *The social psychology of protest*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers.
- Mantios, G., ed. 1998. *A new labor movement for the new century*. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Markowitz, L.J. 2000. *Worker activism after successful union organizing*. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe.
- Moody, K. 1988. *An injury to all: The decline of American unionism*. New York: Verso.
- Nissen, B., ed. 1999. *Which direction for organized labor? Essays on organizing, outreach, and internal transformations*. Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press.
- Rachleff, P. 1993. *Hard-pressed in the heartland: The Hormel strike and the future of the labor movement*. Boston: South End Press.

- Schwartz, M. 1976. *Radical protest and social structure: The Southern Farmers' Alliance and cotton tenancy, 1880–1890*. New York: Academic Press.
- Sciacchitano, K. 2000. Unions, organizing, and democracy. *Dissent* (Spring): 75–81.
- Sherman, R., and K. Voss. 2000. "Organize or Die": Labor's new tactics and immigrant workers. In *Organizing immigrants: The challenge for unions in contemporary California*, ed. R. Milkman, 81–108. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Sweeney, J.J. 1998. Afterword. In *A new labor movement for the new century*, ed. G. Mantsios, 329–335. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Tillman, R.M., and M.S. Cummings, eds. 1999. *The transformation of U.S. unions: Voices, visions, and strategies from the grassroots*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

Chapter 6

Unfinished Chapters: Institutional Alliances and Changing Identities in a Graduate Employee Union

James Thompson

This chapter critically evaluates the recent history of Graduate Assistants United (GAU), the collective bargaining agent for twenty-nine hundred graduate employees at the University of Florida (UF) in Gainesville. Whether union members or not, graduate employees at UF are part of the GAU "bargaining unit" — meaning they are covered by our contract with the Florida Board of Regents (BOR). As part-time researchers and teachers on short-term contracts, whose obligations include their own academic work, they function as both employees of the university and, more nebulously, as "students" and "apprentices" serving under faculty supervisors. Given that our unit operates in a southern "right-to-work" or "open-shop" state¹, UF-GAU has encountered almost the entire range of obstacles to unionism: legal constraints on organizing and bargaining, diminishing monetary resources, and, of course, challenges from within the culture of the academy and its organized labor. During recent years of rebuilding our union, GAU has also encountered roadblocks common to young academic unions and the newly organizing service sectors. Yet the peculiarities of our institutional context within Florida's open shop and alongside our parent union combines with our troubled co-identification as students, apprentices, professionals, and workers to make UF-GAU an interesting case for comparison with any union.

The peculiarities and structural features of our organizing environment are reflected in the institutional practices of GAU, its parent union, and its adversaries. It is my contention that these institutional practices operate alongside changing identities within the graduate employee sector at UF and that neither can be understood without the other. It is one thing to convince graduate "students," who obviously do much of the basic teaching and research at UF, to iden-