10-3-2018

Do Unions Belong on College Campuses? The State of Labor in Higher Ed

La Salle Young Democratic Socialists

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Do Unions Belong on College Campuses?

The State of Labor in Higher Ed

Brought to you by the La Salle Young Democratic Socialists
What Do We Already Feel About Unions?

1. Are you in a union?

2. Do you have a family member or close friend in a union?

3. What ideas and opinions about unions do you bring into this discussion? Why do you think you have those opinions?
LABOR UNIONS:

THE FOLKS WHO BROUGHT YOU THE WEEKEND.

CHILD LABOR LAWS, OVERTIME,
MINIMUM WAGE, INJURY PROTECTION,
WORKMEN'S COMPENSATION INSURANCE,
PENSION SECURITY, RIGHT TO ORGANIZE . .ETC.
Victories of Labor Unions

1890: Government began tracking workers hours. Average full time manufacturer worked 100 hours a week. Labor organizing and pressure led to 40 hour work week in specific fields until the Fair Labor Act was passed by congress in 1938 (44 hour) and amended in 1940 (40)..

1929: Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America was the first union to demand and receive a 5-day work week. Included in the expansion of the Fair Labor Act in 1940.

1881: First meeting of American Federation of Labor passed a resolution to focus on abolishing child labor. According to the 1900 US Census, 1 in 6 children between the ages of 5 and 10 were gainfully employed. Union organizers founded the National Child Labor Committee in 1904, which focused on educating the public about child labor conditions and advocating for legislation. They are credited with designing the child labor provisions passed federally in 1938.
A Brief History of Labor

1945-1970: Labor unions were at their strongest in the post WWII era. Over this period, collective bargaining contributed in manufacturers wages tripling, securing against old age and illness through workers compensation and pensions.

1981: President Reagan fires over 1,100 striking air traffic control workers and breaks their union. Viewed as a precedent setting moment as other major employers would close factories, fire workers, or hire scabs rather than negotiate with unions in the years to come.

2000-2018: Right to work laws and dismantling of unions has contributed to historic lows in union membership (10.7% in 2017).
Union Membership and Income Inequality

Source: Author’s analysis of Historical Statistics of the United States, unionstats.com, Piketty and Saez 2003, and The World Top Incomes Database
2018 may be the most significant year for the labor movement in decades thanks to the wave of teachers’ strikes that have swept the country.

We saw large-scale strikes in West Virginia, Oklahoma, Arizona, and elsewhere—including recent mobilizations in Washington state. Educators rallied for better pay, increased school funding, and fixes to endangered health insurance programs.

Notably, these strikes have enjoyed widespread popular support. In an August poll by USA Today and Ipsos, an overwhelming majority supported teacher’s right to strike and favored increased salaries. This included majorities of both Democrats and Republicans.
Video from Vice
Have you been following the teachers’ strikes this year?
Do you support them?
Should teachers be earning more money?
Organizing on Campus

Activists have also been working recently to organize workers on college campuses. This includes graduate students, who often also work as researchers and teachers, adjunct faculty, and service workers in facilities and dining.

United Students Against Sweatshops have worked to win higher minimum wages for workers on campuses like Rutgers, University of Washington, and New York University.

Demands include affordable healthcare, a living wage, job protection, and more benefits.
What do Schools Owe Their Workers?

How much do workers deserve to make?
Is it fair for any worker to be making less than 10 dollars an hour?
What about less than 15 dollars an hour?
Do workers deserve paid sick time, maternity leave, and health care?

Does the answer to this depend on what job they do—so, does a professor, or an administrator, deserve more than someone who cleans their office?

Philip Randolph: labor leader, Civil Rights activist, and founder of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters
How could unions help workers on campus?

In what ways can unions help address the questions we’ve just discussed? What should they focus on?

How can this make the university a better place for everyone?

Dolores Huerta: labor leader, civil rights activist, and one of the founders of the National Farmworkers Association
What Does La Salle Owe Its Workers?

How does our position as a Catholic school, espousing religious values, inform the way we treat our workers?

Does La Salle have a unique responsibility to care for its employees because of our principles?
What can students do?

“If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.” - Lilla Watson

Frances Perkins: Secretary of Labor during the Great Depression, and first woman in the cabinet.
What can students do?

How can students, professors, and campus workers work together towards unions, solidarity, and better working conditions?

How much does the culture on campus matter?

How can university administration be proactive in caring for its workers?
What Does YDS Believe?

As a branch of the Democratic Socialists of America we support strong, democratic unions. Workers should have a prominent role in determining how their workplace is run, and they should always be afforded dignity and respect. We believe all workers, regardless of the job they hold, deserve to make a living wage, receive healthcare, and have benefits like maternity leave.
Thoughts, Questions, and Reactions: What is the Role of Unions on the Campus?
Sources


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United Students Against Sweatshops: http://usas.org/about/mission-vision-organizing/


DSA Labor Commission: http://www.dsausa.org/working-groups/labor/