

TEACHER UNIONIZING IN PHILADELPHIA

Class Notes

- Chicago Teachers Union is striking!

- Debriefing last week

- CCP - academics and administrators share a union. How do you advocate for one group's interest if they are in conflict? Or are they more often in solidarity?
- GET UP - questions around privilege and class dynamics
- Intergenerational, diverse group of teacher organizers - well done, Working Group!

- Themes from readings/listenings this week

- Ocean Hill Brownsville

- NYC DOE is largely white - how did government and administration mismanage the issue of teacher diversity and representation to begin with? Deliberate provocation and fostering of conflict between community and teachers, maintaining whiteness in power in education
- Invocation of anti-Semitism to villainize movement/experiment to diversity teachers in schools and divide people, despite history of solidarity between Jewish people and people of color. Invocation of anti-Semitism used to pivot conversation from racism.
- Tension around who is seen as the constituents of teachers and teachers unions - are their constituents teachers or students/community?
- Teachers unions and communities are not racially neutral nor fossilized historically - the demographic composition of both matter.
- The case is about the role of teachers and the role of education - not just about academics and performance, also about social transformation/liberation and community control, cultural empowerment beyond reading, writing, and arithmetic. Public education has often miseducated students of color. Teachers unions have been weaponized to make sure teacher workforce looks a certain way. Push for community control comes out of particular radical traditions.
 - Contemporary example: bilingual education
- What would community control look like in today's context? What about communities that might (or already do) use notion of community control to exclude?
- Teachers unions burdened with repeatedly having to correct public perceptions.
- Language of experiment - black people are always being experimented on.

- Language of extremism and binarism
- Unions focused on the common good have the potential to transform communities
- **Philadelphia Federation of Teachers**
 - PFT is currently in negotiations with the school district. Current contract will expire summer 2020.
 - School Reform Commission (2001-2017 state takeover of Philadelphia school district) - appointed school board of businesspeople, tasked with balancing the budget. School closing, budget cuts, program cuts. SRC proposed cuts to teacher salaries, health payment, enact larger class sizes. District is now controlled by mayor, school board appointed by mayor and city council. Tried to take away union's right to strike (right to strike means workers cannot be fired for striking).
 - Under SRC, not much opportunity to go beyond bread and butter issues - WE caucus wants to negotiate for more, to educate for the common good
 - What should be added to demands?
 - Protection of students from ICE
 - Black Lives Matter? Disaggregated in demands - restorative justice, culturally sustaining teaching, recruiting/retaining teachers of color. BLM has a broader set of demands
 - Teachers' salaries
 - Thinking about Penn - what is the gap between executive pay and other workers? Again, we have to think: what is the purpose of education, the role of universities?
- **Readings on Philadelphia Federation of Teachers and Chicago Teachers Union**
 - Social justice unionism
 - Collective bargaining group is focused on working conditions and wages, whereas social justice unionism is focused on gaining broader public support and connection. Protecting teachers' rights vs. creating the schools that students deserve.

Panel with WE Caucus!

Liza, Art Teacher at Barton School

- Connection to WE started before teaching.
- Schools that are trying to just keep the doors open - it's triaging. The school will eventually close. There's not investment in students' learning.

- Involvement in WE provided a way to build power and move forward structural change. Current PFT leadership is not committed to intellectual change.

Amy Roat, ESL Teacher at Feltonville Arts and Sciences

- Became a teacher, felt a call to serve
- Doesn't see union caring about great teaching, about membership and people served by members. Union runs itself like a business.
- PFT is part of American Federation of Teachers, conceptualizes itself as a "union of professionals," deradicalized union and separated teachers from parents and communities
- People leave teaching because they get sick, anxiety, depression - they fire themselves.
- "What if I taught like I don't care what my principal says? What if I organize like I don't care what PFT says? Why don't we do this radical act like we know best what to do?"
- Important not to over-intellectualize: lies were told and systems were set up that hurt children
 - standardized testing, school to prison pipeline, etc.

Bobbie Benjamin, school nurse at McCall School

Alison Stuart, teacher at McCall School

Phone Banking Training

- Will speak with PFT members, need more information on WE
- Our ask is: will you vote for WE in the upcoming election?
- Refer to list of demands
 - Of course, will demand salary raises and hold onto benefits. Woven into #12 and #7.
 - We are in a place where we can ask for more, too.
- Tips
 - Pick two talking points/demands that you can speak about sincerely and from the heart
 - Be a good listener, let them talk, respond sincerely
 - Then, get to the ask
 - When is the election? We don't know. They're keeping it a secret.
 - Smaller units (nurses, librarians, etc.) have felt marginalized. Ask calls what their role is in school.