

Having a Say & Making Peace

Renae Shawgo

Clarion University of Pennsylvania

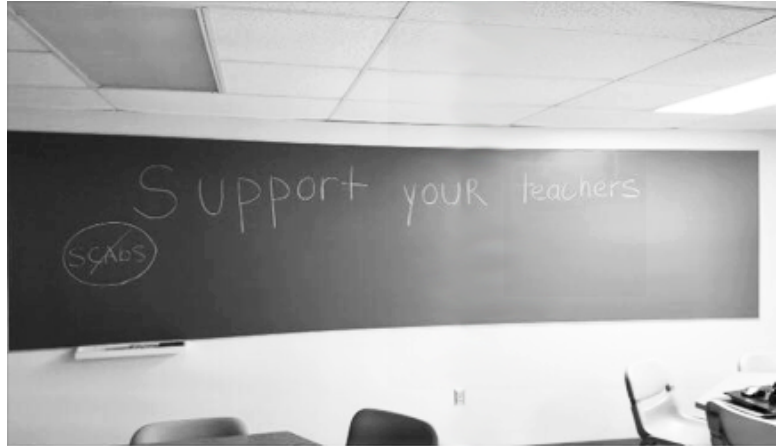
It was a buck an hour
and we didn't have money
for Christmas,
so I made the peace
with a shit fork...
– Bill Boggs, "Pitchin' Shit"

"A story is not just a story. Once the forces have been aroused and set into motion, they can't simply be stopped at someone's request. Once told, the story is bound to circulate; humanized, it may have a temporary end, but its effects linger on and its end is never truly an end."

– Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Woman Native Other*

For me, the APSCUF Strike of 2016 will always be linked to the unique group of students I was teaching during that fall semester. I teach writing and literature at a branch campus of Clarion University in Oil City, Pennsylvania. Our student population at the Venango campus is small, filled with many non-traditional, returning adult students, students who are usually proud members of the working-class, typically those from Venango County, Pennsylvania. What made the strike experience even more meaningful to me, however, relates to a particular class that I was teaching at the time of the strike; the class consisted of a group of "displaced" workers from the community (largely those back in the classroom

WORKS AND DAYS 69, Vol. 35, 2017



due to downsizing and plant closures at Joy Global and General Electric). They were a cohesive cohort of students, all enrolled in English 110, a prerequisite course designed to help students get more comfortable with college-level writing before taking English 111. Most of the students in that section of English 110 knew each other “from work” and had ended up in the same English class in the fall of 2016 in hopes of forging paths toward new careers.

In all, I had 20 students in that class, and 90% of them were back in college due to the unresolved labor disputes that had left them jobless and without financial stability. This after most of them had been gainfully employed for many years. These “Trade Act” students had accepted government funding to attend college, and while they were somewhat worried about what a strike at the university might mean to them personally (in terms of losing their funding, etc.), there was never a moment when they expressed anything other than support for the faculty and the strike. More than any other group on campus, these students stood on the picket lines with us because it was highly important for them to show their solidarity.

During the days of the strike, many of these students wore their own union t-shirts and stood proudly with us as we walked the picket line. They were more than ready to wear

their red shirts on Friday. They proudly carried picket signs. They brought us food. And coffee. They comforted us. They talked with us and told us their stories. They wanted us to know that they had been “there,” but most of all, they wanted to show support for workers standing up for their rights (despite any personal hardship it might cause). This was such a memorable experience for me, for not only did it bring me closer to my colleagues, but the experience certainly brought me closer to my students as well. During that semester, they became part of my own story, and I became part of theirs. While they now know bits and pieces of my working-class background and my own work history, I also know parts of their personal stories; we shared a lot during those three days. In turn, many of these same students are now in the sections of English 111 that I am currently teaching, and they remain vigilant with their attempts to forge new career paths despite the odds; they know also, that I am on their side and want them to succeed. As part of conversations since, both verbal and written, we have continued to bond over the APSCUF Strike of 2016. Their stories have indeed become part of my story and vice versa; we share a vision of a future where workers will be treated fairly. As part of our on-going conversations, pre- and post-strike, I continue to learn a great deal from these students.

Rehabilitative Sciences major, Dave Burk is back in the classroom this semester after being laid off from Joy Global (Franklin, Pennsylvania). Dave attributes the lay-off to labor disputes and downsizing and comments that he had worked union jobs most of his life, from Trinity to Joy: “I come from a family that was strong into the union, too, and that’s why I wanted to support the faculty.” Dave now also knows that my dad, Gene Applegate, was a member IUE-CWA LOCAL 717 for 44 years, and he respects that shared union legacy. Dave reflects on the significance of the unions and the APSCUF Strike: “They [faculty] support me in the classroom, so I want[ed] to support them. I believe in fairness, and that’s all they [were] asking for . . . and I know they didn’t want to go

out on strike, but they had to stand up or get walked on.” Dave was one of those students who showed up the first day of the strike with donuts; he also stood on the picket line with us for several hours each day. Because he’s also a Trade Assistant Act student, he was concerned about his funding and his education, but more than anything Dave was supportive of faculty; he has noted many times since the strike how important those three days were, for solidarity and also for building a stronger sense of community.

Wes Miller, another non-traditional student who’d been laid off as a welder from General Electric, comments about his own work ethic and his transition from the work force into the classroom, as well as his support for the strike: “I’ve been in that situation. I can relate. I wanted to let them [faculty] know what they were fighting for was a good thing.” I had several other students who were former GE employees, all laid off and back in the classroom in search of new careers; their stories and experiences are diverse, but their message unified. A diverse group, this cohort consisted of several students who’d worked for General Electric for two decades or more to more recent employees, like Evan Wedekind, who’d worked at GE for 2 ½ years before being laid off. Evan thought it was important to support faculty because, “they’ve worked hard to get where they are and deserve the right to better their lives.” Marshal Pike, another former GE employee, states, “I support [faculty] for the simple fact that they are in a union, and with a union you at least have a voice and a vote. Union members earn that right, pay for that right. Without unions, we are at the mercy of our employers.”

Scott Eells, another student from the cohort shares that he was an employee at GE in Erie until, “corporate greed led to 3,500 of us getting laid off.” He continues, “Now I am here at Venango attempting to earn a bachelor’s degree in business, so that I can own my own business and work for myself.” He continues, “I strongly believe in unions and even more so for unions that are fighting for a good cause. Our professors are fighting to . . . give students a better educa-

tion,” [and for that reason, I support them]. He continues, “I bought the strike line lunch [because] I remember long days of standing up for my beliefs. . . . That can make for a long day, when you’re standing up for your beliefs . . . I wanted to show appreciation for what they were doing.” Fellow classmate, Jon Burrows concurs, “I personally come from one of the oldest unions around. I know the struggles toward fairness. . . . I am currently unemployed because of unfair decisions by management. I am here at Venango College of Clarion University to try and better myself. . . . I believe that without a union, our professors . . . would be paid and treated unfairly.” Jon concludes, “I will always stand with those who are being treated unfairly.”

Mike Dunder, one of the more vocal students and a union member for over 26 years, stood with us each day, and even took his message of solidarity to the faculty-less classrooms the first morning of the strike by scrawling “No Scabs” and “Support Your Teachers” on each of the chalkboards in Montgomery Hall. Mike states, “I have always been a union worker, always union jobs. . . . Being pro-union, I support all unions. I’ve been out on strike twice in my life, so I knew how they felt. I’ve been there and done it.” Mike concludes his thoughts about being unemployed and standing up for workers’ rights, “It’s like in [the poem] ‘Pitchin’ Shit’; I went from making 80K a year to 24K a year [after the lay off], but damn it, I got respect because I stood up for my rights.” Fortunately, we’d been reading the poem “Pitchin’ Shit” by Bill Boggs (English Professor at Slippery Rock University) in our English class the week before the strike occurred, as part of an exercise on literary analysis. In that singular moment, during that that post-strike conversation, everything came together for me, what we do in the classroom and how it impacts our everyday lives, yes, those intersections matter; it sure was a proud moment to have one of my students quote a poem back to me as support for his point!

During those three days, I learned so much from my students; I heard their stories and shared my own, and during

those three days, I do believe we carved out a whole new level of respect for one another, just as Dr. Bill Boggs writes, in “Pitchin’ Shit”:

No breaks, one pen after
another, and Ernie gave me
twenty-seven dollars.
My mother went to get
groceries—a whole
turkey and yams too.
Respect.
It’s been more than forty years
and on some winter days
the shit smell still seeps-out of my skin,
my privileged skin,
born into poverty
into a life of doing other folks’ shit jobs.
Dammit, we had Christmas,
And Aretha still sings.

Works Cited

Boggs, Bill. “Pitchin’ Shit.” *Florida English* 7 (2009).
Minh-ha, Trinh T. *Woman Native Other*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1989.





Day 1 of Bargaining Yields No Progress - 10/14/2016

Oct. 14, 2016

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

For more information, contact:

Kathryn Morton, kmorton@apscuf.org or 717-236-7486

Negotiators are no closer to a faculty contract after they returned to the table today. The Association of Pennsylvania State College and University Faculties and the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education began talks at 10 a.m. and concluded at 8 p.m. at a neutral location. The parties are slated to reconvene 10 a.m. tomorrow and have a Sunday session scheduled as well.

APSCUF went into today's talks deeply disappointed, APSCUF President Dr. Kenneth M. Mash said in a statement this morning. He reported no progress in today's session.

The faculty contract expired June 30, 2015. Negotiations have been ongoing since late 2014.

APSCUF faculty members will go on strike 5 a.m. Oct. 19 if the State System has not bargained a contract APSCUF believes is fair to students and members by that deadline. APSCUF objects to State System proposals that would af-

fect the quality of education faculty members could provide to their students

.
APSCUF represents about 5,500 faculty and coaches at the State System universities: Bloomsburg, California, Cheyney, Clarion, East Stroudsburg, Edinboro, Indiana, Kutztown, Lock Haven, Mansfield, Millersville, Shippensburg, Slippery Rock, and West Chester Universities of Pennsylvania.

Modes of Production

Todd Thompson

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

An interpellated Hyundai clatters by the picket line, backseat dog waving his windblown tongue. The driver leans out his window to lecture the professors: “On strike from what?”

The man does not want an answer. What is it that you *do*? What product do you make?"

(This commodity fetishist might have heard our chancellor testify that academics only work seventeen hours a week.) I'm set to stammer some bland nicety, but the English major passing out donuts is quicker: "They made *me*."

My use-value laid bare, shimmering there
like sidewalk mica, I feel new. But who made whom?
“What is it that we *do*?” Are we dialectic?
Thesis, antithesis, synthesis,
and then begin again,
next period. Students and teachers make
and remake each other, each exhale an afflatus

WORKS AND DAYS 79, Vol. 35, 2017

that can change the world. Breathe in the surplus
value of school. We learn, like so many Adams
in corduroy or cargo shorts, to name new
galaxies into being,

together, every semester,
and still get the grades in on time.



**“I’d Rather Be Teaching”
(an Ekphrastic Poem)**

Todd Thompson

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

By day strike three the shine
has worn off. Gone October sun
and jubilant chants, here swollen
feet and raw throats. Wednesday
we were in shorts, today 36
and raining sideways.
That other October.

Dr. Farrington is layered up:
heavy-ply parka, fly-fishing
waders, waterproof socks, thermal
undies, Gore-Tex jacket, ball cap.

Quality matters. (“I’d Rather Be
Teaching,” the other side reads.)
He walks, sign held high, six hours,
pins in his heel from a lover’s
fracture that never healed. The nerve
endings in his feet send impatient
missives to his brain: Stop.

He walks because it’s easier
on his tangled back
than standing still.

Three students have set up camp
between two oaks as old as IUP.
He walks because they cheer
from underneath a tarp
each time he passes by.
Solidarity is a pain
in the ass for everybody.

He walks because he loves
words, the right words
in the right order.
But for three days now just
the rustling arrhythmia
rhythms of his limping
left right left. He walks because
he'd rather be teaching.

Disrupting the Routine: Going on Strike

Peter Faziani

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

The APSCUF strike. It is a thing. It's a thing that has affected everyone at IUP as well as the thirteen other PASSHE schools. It's a milestone in the near thirty-four-year-old state system because for the first time, we actually went on strike. Certainly, strike authorization votes have occurred before, but the faculty have never had to strike. Those three days in October were uncharted territory. In many ways, the faculty are still navigating the post-strike territory, though the effects are, especially since the end of the Fall 2016 semester, becoming less noticeable. The strike became a reminder of the relationship between faculty and students. It became a visual reminder, through the signs and banners, of the mechanized laboring expected from the faculty by the larger state system. One sign became my inspiration for this piece; it read "We are not teaching machines." As I stood in solidarity with my fellow strikers, often without a sign because there weren't any available, because I am part-time faculty and a graduate student who was afraid to stand out, and mostly because my feelings on strikes are complicated, this sign demonstrated to me that in the eyes of the PASSHE system, faculty were not seen so much as teachers or instructors, but machines oper-

WORKS AND DAYS 79, Vol. 35, 2017

ating in a daily routine that can be pushed until they break without fear of consequence.

These machines, on paper, operate in the classroom to a set of standards, and do so promptly with the freedom to operate anywhere within the set margins of normalcy, habit, or perhaps better, everyday life. This concept of the everyday is one that when examined becomes immediately familiar, but without clearly explaining why. Perhaps more important, within the construct of daily living, APSCUF faculty also operate on an established routine that echoes that daily familiarity without an explanation. They get up, eat, wash, dress like everyone else, but when it comes to the work faculty performs we must add teaching, grading, prep, research, teaching again, prep, attending meetings (after meeting, after meeting), and of course publishing. The routine varies, of course, but overall, each faculty member has a routine. It is that very routine which becomes the mechanization process and also the fear against striking. Our habit (the things we choose to do) may be one of research, teaching, and writing, but our mechanization (the additional activities expected of us) is rooted in the necessity to produce and the expectations to aid in administrative process on top of the increased teaching loads and class sizes. Ben Highmore suggests that the relationship between the individual and group standardization relies on a mechanized sense of time; “from the ‘emptying’ of time in the modern factory to the extensive bureaucratization of governance, from the atomized working practices in the office to the industrialization of the home, the modern world seems characterized by routines, by systems and regulatory techniques” (4). Certainly, Higher Education has not been immune to Highmore’s implied understanding of society, but instead has also become a reflection of that regulated and routinized modern world. The mechanization of the faculty by the system is also indicative of a larger, systemic issue within the concept of higher education. As previously stated, as faculty face larger teaching loads and higher class enrollment caps (even in times of lower state-wide enrollment in

higher education), we are still expected to take part in those same service activities. The more tasks and activities faculty must be engaged in to compete in our fields, the more we become alienated from the very reason we took these faculty positions.

If the strike was a rejection of the larger mechanization process that is a major part of modernity's ritualized daily habit, then in the same breath, the strike is also an action that relies on an awareness of both the workers and the consumers. During my time on the picket line at one of IUP's most heavily traveled locations, on the sidewalk in front of the famed Oak Grove, the striking faculty members were met with an immense show of support (namely in physical presence and an enormous amount of food) from students and even local businesses. Though both the presence of the students and the food were a welcome surprise, the abundance of food became a strange commodity. Donut boxes, pizza boxes (some with entirely intact pizzas), cases of bottled water, and boxes of coffee lined the sidewalk all belonging to those of us unable to work and none with names of people to thank. These items became signifiers of our struggle. Of course, those of us on the lines were not starving, but as our daily lives were interrupted, this food represented a value that students recognized in their faculty. Certainly, the food is not a direct representation of its monetary worth or of the faculty's importance. Students shared a connection with their faculty, and their ability to express it was limited by a physical barrier in addition to the more figurative barrier that exists between student and teacher. On the picket line, the students felt connected to their faculty, but were relying on the ability to support through food, a commodity we did not need, on the line. Arguably, the food became a representative commodity of the bigger social reliance on material culture as part of our daily routines. Because our culture is inundated with material products that constantly influence the way we manage our routines and habits, the strike's breakdown of that daily life and habitual living, allowed students to offer

support through one of the only means they share in common with faculty – food.

The presence of students and food certainly play a larger part in the breakdown of the routine through the sheer fact that the strike became a sensationalized event. Much like other historical events that children ask their parents about later, the strike's success relied heavily on the social awareness of the event and their ability to understand the rationale for striking in the first place. The problem with this necessity is that there are other factors (namely weather) that were at odds with strike organizers. Thankfully, the strike only lasted three days, but judging by the students' Oak Grove turn out on days two and three, the strike's power to interrupt the daily routine of IUP's campus had already started to turn into a new routine. To see the development of the strike as routine, campus must be understood as an everyday space. In de Certeau's assessment of the city, he suggests that the city is a place we can only 'see' from outside; "When one goes up there [above city streets], he leaves behind the mass that carries off and mixes up in itself any identity of author or spectator" (92). In that same sense of perception, students saw campus one way, and when we struck, they saw a different place, one where arguably their faculty members are not a fairly treated as they had previously assumed. However, the very forces that the faculty tried to bring awareness to, the mechanization of our work, had seeped into our actions on the picket lines. In understanding this sense of new perspective or new routine, it's important to return to Ben Highmore. In his evaluation of Britain's Mass-Observation movement, Highmore suggests that the tension that quickly developed in the M-O project stems from the social perspective that existed in the observers themselves; Mass-Observation was seen as an act that "fashions and fixes its identity by copiously describing another group...as exotic...in relation to itself, which is taken as the norm" (78). If that is to be logically layered on top of the student's perception of the strike, it can be understood that strike was at first exotic and something to take note of,

but as it continued students and seeing their faculty on the sidewalk became less of a sight to see and campus shifted to expect the faculty there. In fact, on a personal level, I came back to the picket line on days two and three expecting the same faces, the same signs, and the same student response. When those expectations were not met those of us took to other means of drawing attention to the cause.

On the second and third days a colleague and close friend engaged the strike by reciting parts of Ginsberg's *Howl* on a megaphone. This act, unscripted and unplanned, gave the strike a voice, and a loud one at that. Arguably, the very purpose of a strike's picket line is to draw attention and awareness to the plight of the worker, but as the students started to accept the reality of the strike, they found other sources of engagement. This is not to say that students no longer cared about their faculty, rather that they knew what was going to happen and they found something else to do, especially in the rain. When the megaphone amplified *Howl*, however, it brought attention back to the cause by bringing attention back to the new and appropriate expression of the strike. Certainly, there were fewer students in the Oak Grove those days, but when the megaphone crackled to life, people gathered to hear what was happening. By changing the terms of this new strike routine, his actions changed the strike itself through the addition of new ways to express a reality – faculty are not machines.

Perhaps the low turnout on the third day was because it was raining, but also perhaps it was because the strike had already started to lose its sensational appearance. Students had witnessed their faculty pacing Oakland Avenue and had accepted that this is where to find their faculty when needed. The reality is we never had to find out whether the students had modified their routine to accept the strike or not because APSCUF and PASSHE reached an agreement and the everyday lives of students and faculty across the state system could get back on track. Even though the strike is over, it clearly has not left the system unaffected, and this is most evident in

the sheer existence of this volume of *Works & Days*. At its very core, this volume is a rejection of a routine in the name of representing the voices of the worker.

Works Cited

- de Certeau, Michel. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Trans. Steven Rendall. Berkeley, CA: U of California P, 1988.
- Highmore, Ben. *Everyday life and Cultural Theory*. New York: Routledge, 2002.



Heading Into Second Day of Talks, APSCUF Hopes for Progress - 10/15/2016

Oct. 15, 2016

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

For more information, contact:

Kathryn Morton, kmorton@apscuf.org or 717-236-7486

After a first round yielding no progress, faculty negotiators remain frustrated but committed to reaching an agreement as they head into the second of three days of bargaining between the Association of Pennsylvania State College and University Faculties and the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education.

“We continue to negotiate because we are committed to doing everything we can to reach an agreement,” APSCUF President Dr. Kenneth M. Mash said. “We hope today will be the day the State System reaffirms its commitment to our students by finally dropping their proposals that degrade academic quality. We will not be complicit in the destruction of quality public higher education in Pennsylvania.”

Faculty continue to object to the State System's intent to dramatically increase the number of temporary — or adjunct — faculty in lieu of permanent faculty.

“We have great temporary faculty who do an excellent job teaching our students,” Mash said. “But students must have faculty whose secure positions allow them to give students their full attention — and who will be at the university long-term to guide students into their futures.”

The State System last month withdrew its proposal to have new graduate students teach courses. However, the System continues to pursue other proposals that damage public higher education, Mash said. These proposals include transferring faculty into departments for which they have no expertise, discouraging faculty from doing research that they can bring into the classroom, and diluting the academic aspects of internship experiences.

“We believe our students and their families deserve full credit for speaking up and demanding that the System withdraw the proposal about graduate students,” Mash said. “We hope the System will side with students by withdrawing all of its proposals that diminish the quality of our universities.”

APSCUF will remain at the table, at a neutral location, after tomorrow's scheduled session and until the strike deadline, as long as progress is being made, Mash said.

“But we will not stay at the table just so the State System can get publicity points,” he said. “We should all be focused on getting a deal this weekend.”

APSCUF faculty members will go on strike 5 a.m. Oct. 19 if the State System has not bargained a contract APSCUF

believes is fair to students and members by that deadline. The faculty contract expired June 30, 2015, and negotiations have been ongoing since late 2014.

APSCUF represents about 5,500 faculty and coaches at the State System universities: Bloomsburg, California, Cheyney, Clarion, East Stroudsburg, Edinboro, Indiana, Kutztown, Lock Haven, Mansfield, Millersville, Shippensburg, Slippery Rock, and West Chester Universities of Pennsylvania.

