

# 25 Truths to Build Campus Power Despite Precarity

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*Power Despite Precarity* (<https://www.plutobooks.com/9780745345529/power-despite-precarity/>) is a book to build with. It arrives just in time, amid campus labor upsurges and the formation of a promising new progressive labor coalition Higher Ed Labor United (HELU), where there is a new chance for strategizing a national movement.<sup>1</sup> Drawing from lives of sustained practice, authors Joe Berry and Helena Worthen connect realms usually siloed apart. They sift through the fine grain of tactics, laws, and contracts, but at the same time offer sweeping analyses of adjunct experience, political strategy, and historical change.<sup>2</sup>

To help people engage the book's main ideas, below I review some of its key lessons, and seek to develop their implications. My goal is to encourage broad, deep, constructive discussion of its core insights, especially for those who may not yet have time to read the full book. As we would expect, Worthen and Berry's approach is rooted in the interests and needs of contingent faculty—the adjuncts, 'part-timers,' and underpaid *double*-timers that make up the core teaching force of most colleges and universities today. But they do not stop there. As they make clear, the stakes are high and extend beyond higher ed itself.

## 1. The struggle against faculty contingency is a key front in the struggle for a sustainable world.

"A living planet needs a sustainable means for producing and passing on knowledge," the authors write. And that means "sustainable institutions, providing jobs that can make life sustainable for the people who do the work" (233). This double call for sustainability—for the sake of *knowledge* and for *workers' lives*—takes on great urgency today, in the face of corporate misinformation campaigns and a spiraling climate crisis, both of which demand the mass democratization of critical and scientific thinking. Our higher education system could be a bulwark in this global effort. But the precarity of hundreds of thousands of higher educators at present hinders our ability to unleash the potential that flows through our classrooms every semester.

How can students learn to grasp the roots of complex and 'controversial' issues if their professors won't 'go there' for fear of retaliation? How can students develop the bonds that might turn mentors into collaborators when that trusted instructor is gone in the Spring? How can that much-needed climate justice or young socialist group get off the ground when their would-be faculty advisor faces non-reappointment? What adjunct professor will invest the effort such campus organizing requires in the first place when they lack assurance they will be back next semester?

While winning job security for professors alone is no guarantee that our classrooms will contribute decisively to the struggle for sustainability, precarity undercuts our pedagogical platforms. Further, I would add, so long as contingency is allowed to corrode the foundation of academic job security, even the 'lucky' few who land in the tenure stream have their power undercut, by the fear of falling: heaven forbid they engage in activism that might get their tenure nixed and send them tumbling back into the contingent sea below.

## **2. Contingent faculty problems emerged as admin “solutions.” (Beware the call for “flexibility.”)**

As Worthen & Berry put it, “our insecurity is our employers’ flexibility” (89). Contingent faculty goals of sustainability and administrative goals of “flexibility” are thus fundamentally at odds, but it’s not just because administrators are callous or greedy. Most often, Berry and Worthen suggest, administrators are passing on to us real problems that they have inherited from elsewhere...but that they are now trying to solve on our backs.

How did we come to the present situation, where upwards of 70% of college teaching is now done by faculty on contingent contracts (many without benefits, healthcare, job security, livable salaries, or meaningful academic freedom)? Growing pressures from the 1970s on— both inside and outside university walls—created new problems for system-administrators: from budget austerity (in the wake of conservative ‘tax reform’), to changing student demographics (enabled by the victories of the Civil Rights movement), and unpredictable enrollments (a product of both the expansion of first-generation student applicants and of rising tuition and fees). In each of these cases, contingency (or ‘casualization’) of the faculty helped ‘solve’ admin problems, bringing ‘just in time’ labor to a financially unstable situation.

This historical context drives home the difficulty of the task ahead. It’s not just this or that Dean or Provost we’re up against; it’s a deeper systemic problem. And the challenge is not getting easier: Over the past two years we have seen how further contingencies around COVID-19 and public health have further enabled campus administration calls for ‘flexibility’ for ‘uncertain times.’<sup>3</sup>

The movement against *faculty* contingency thus needs to take seriously the crises of contingency *elsewhere* (contingencies of state funding, of student enrollment, of working-class life) as well, as a matter of strategic necessity. The precarity of these *other* things, make *our* precarity appear ‘necessary.’ So long as student enrollments ebb and surge dramatically, and so long as state funding lags (making even public institutions heavily tuition-dependent and thus driven to invest in marketable amenities over front-line instruction), the pressures to exploit “flexible” contingent labor will remain.

To advance our own campus cause, then, we will likely need a broader reform movement, off-campus and on-. Building upon what *PDP* provides, such broader social reforms must include: 1) the return to full state funding for public higher education; 2) substantial reductions in student tuition; 3) the reduction of the erratic uncertainty of student enrollments; and 4), the return to progressive taxation, which can help fund #1-3. All this will also need to involve more broadly 5) a shift from a privatized to a public common good mission for higher education.<sup>4</sup>

In short:

## **3. There is no solving the faculty contingency crisis without also addressing the larger social situation that gives rise to it.**

This is *not at all* a reason to stop resisting the degradation of instructor working conditions, through unions, departments, and other associations. Recent contracts won by Lecturers in the University of California system and at Howard University show that it *is possible* to win significant gains, even against the austerity-tide.<sup>5</sup> Nonetheless, to really win what we want, we need to see our local struggles as part of the larger movement for *working-class sustainability*— for living wages, union rights, health care, quality education, and democracy for all.<sup>6</sup>

Berry and Worthen make the point forcefully:

“Our overarching goal is to abolish contingency and precarious work as a condition of our lives *and the lives of all workers*. Socially useful work, including our work, should carry with it security of employment commensurate to the social need for our work. This includes, *for all workers*, freedom of association and speech, a living wage, appropriate benefits, and the opportunity to choose to do this work on a full- or part-time basis for all who are qualified and ready to do it, as long as the need for the work (not necessarily the economic demand) exists (89, emphasis added).”

It’s a quote worth posting on your office door or union hall.

#### **4. Faculty precarity represents an organizing challenge, but also a potential bridge to broader social power.**

Worthen and Berry entitle their book, *Power **Despite** Precarity*, and for good reason—precarity is often a barrier to building power. But they also suggest how we can build power *through* our precarity. When organized, Contingent Faculty (CF) can become a bridge to broader working-class alliances and social transformation. After all, compared to Tenure-Track (TT) faculty, aren’t CF, on average:

**\*more familiar with the kind of working conditions experienced by other workers across society?**

**\*less prone to identify with our boss (or to aspire to become one)?**

**\*less subject to internal institutional enticements?**

**\*less prone to elitism?**

**\*less burdened with or invested in busy-body bureaucratic service?**

**\*less likely to be indoctrinated into meritocratic acceptance of hierarchy and inequity? \*less likely to be persuaded that “professionalism” must involve the suppression of political speech (or that “shared governance” is the only appropriate means for faculty to effect institutional change at work)?**

**\*more likely to be seen as ‘approachable’ by our often similarly precarious working-class student body and non-faculty co-workers?**

**\*more likely to be non-male and non-white?**

**\*more likely open to militant or disruptive tactics of struggle?**

Obviously, precarity entails disadvantages, too. We should not romanticize, as if increased marginalization automatically leads to heightened class consciousness (“the worse...the better” fallacy). As millions of us know, the pressures of contingency can paralyze and isolate. People who lack security often hunker down, clinging tightly to what little they have, afraid to rock the boat,

until they...burnout altogether.<sup>7</sup>

Nonetheless, by collectively centering the condition of contingency, the higher ed labor movement can become more in tune with broader working-class concerns, on campus and beyond. This can enable our faculty unions to engage and ally more effectively with other ‘gig’ and precarious workers on campus and off, people not usually seen as in the same category as ‘college professors’ but who in fact share many common concerns.

### **5. The Contingent Faculty struggle is a struggle for race and gender justice.**

Structural racism, sexism, and class bias helped create the contingent cauldron we are now. As Worthen and Berry review, with a focus on California, the diverse waves of students able to access higher ed for the first time in the wake of the Movements of the ‘60s and early ‘70s (when tuition was still near zero) fueled a massive expansion of higher ed. But they also made it easier for university and government officials to rationalize staffing practices that expanded adjunctification. The erosion of student learning conditions that followed from expanded faculty precarity were rendered ‘more acceptable,’ they argue, through race, gender, and class lenses that didn’t tend to see non-whites, women, or working-class first-generation students as requiring top-quality education in the first place. A growing share of the new faculty hired during this period were also themselves non-white, women, or from working-class backgrounds, as well. Racism, sexism, and class ideology thus helped to justify and normalize

increasingly degraded working and learning conditions, disproportionately affecting institutions such as community colleges and urban public universities, where historically marginalized students are the majority.

This insight allows us to grasp campaigns for contingent equity, respect, and security as important in the struggle against structural racism and sexism, not only because CF are more likely to be non-male and non-white than TT peers, but also because *more of our students are*, too. The implications here are worth making more explicit: improving the working conditions of even ‘only’ a cohort of mostly ‘white’ adjuncts could still be structurally anti-racist, insofar as it serves to improve the effective learning conditions of a disproportionately non-white and working-class student population.<sup>8</sup> Note how this approach differs from increasingly popular administration-led top-down “diversity, equity, inclusion” initiatives that tend to ignore entirely the massive inequities between CF and TT faculty, while seeking more racial or gender “diversity” near the top. However well-intended, such initiatives suffer from a major blind spot. If we centered *BIPOC and first-generation student learning conditions* rather than faculty headcount alone, campus campaigns for racial equity would look quite different than they currently do. They might be more powerful, too.<sup>9</sup>

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### **6. ‘Academic freedom’ should be defended for *all* faculty, as a public & working-class need, not a special elite privilege.**

As we have seen, Worthen and Berry frame intellectual and worker sustainability as pressing global needs in the context of corporate-funded reality-denialism as well as the climate crisis. Academic freedom then becomes an essential safeguard for a reason-based society, allowing faculty to impart knowledge, pursue inquiry, engage in critique, and speak out publicly on relevant social issues, even

(and especially) when that involves challenging powerful interests (92). *PDP* argues further for reframing academic freedom not as a privileged perk for elite specialists alone, but as one front in a broader struggle for workers' freedom of speech, on and off the job, especially when that speech is a matter of public safety or safeguarding of the common good (105). After all, for CF without tenure protections to achieve meaningful freedom of speech requires expanded worker rights and security *inside* the workplace, just as it would for most other workers elsewhere (167). CF don't just need protection from outsiders, but from our own bosses.

Framing "academic freedom" (and freedom of speech) as a broad democratic right that belongs to *all* workers allows us to think and link broadly with tens of millions of other essential workers who similarly work 'at will,' under constant threat of 'non-renewal' for any or no reason, and thus are effectively silenced from speaking their minds, both on and off the job. Such silence creates dangers, the authors remind us, not just for workers themselves but for society as a whole—the increased risk of on-the-job & public accidents being perhaps the most obvious example. How can precarious contract employees working on our vital public infrastructure, transportation, energy, or health systems speak up about matters of public importance when they must fear for their own jobs if they do? Workers in *every* profession need the right to speak out when the health, safety, or well-being of the public is at stake: this must include teachers and scholars, but it is by no means limited to them.

In stark contrast with how tenure and academic freedom are usually discussed, this broader approach helps outflank right-wing faux populist ideologues who like to paint professorial 'privileges' as a license to irrelevance (at best) or decadence (at worst).<sup>10</sup> Currently faculty often have a hard time getting public sympathy around academic freedom issues, namely because most U.S. workers live without any such protection. Berry and Worthen propose reframing this academic need in ways that would make its extension conceivable, and its social defense viable.

## **7. Contingent faculty need an "Inside/Outside" Strategy: Autonomy + Strategic Unity.**

Berry and Worthen's Inside/Outside (I/O) strategy involves two essential moves.<sup>11</sup> First, CF need to make use of existing organizational structures, from unions to professional and faculty associations, leveraging these groups, even though they may be dominated by those whose commitment to the cause of faculty equity is uncertain. Second (not necessarily in this order), CF must organize autonomously, carving out their own 'safe spaces' and strategic goals within and alongside the existing structures, to make sure that contingent concerns do not get sidelined or submerged.

To be clear, the authors are *not* endorsing union splits, sectarian antagonism that takes aim at an undifferentiated "union bureaucracy," or contingent separatism that attempts to separate off from TT faculty altogether. The "Outside" in the *I/O* is to be understood as *political*, not *organizational*.<sup>12</sup> They argue for contingent-led 'caucuses' that operate within the existing organizations, building political clarity and collective confidence so that CF can influence and leverage the power of the larger organizations. As much as we are the 'new faculty majority,' the fragmentation and dispersal of contingent faculty ranks requires this strategic focus.

In this Inside/Outside effort, Berry and Worthen take the long view, focusing on not just the success or failure of immediate demands, but the cultural and institutional shifts that sustained strategy can bring. Their account of the struggle to make the California Faculty Association (CFA) a strong advocate for the contingents demonstrates how important persistence on a compromised terrain can be. Following a contract that betrayed the failings of existing leadership, CF organizers did not abandon the union, writing off TT faculty tout court, but hunkered down and upped their organizing

efforts, eventually turning a low-point into a turning-point that led to what they call a “revolution” in the union.<sup>13</sup>

A long-range view, however, is not an argument against building militancy now.

**8. Building a “plausible threat of disruption” is necessary (even if it requires disrupting reigning faculty attitudes).**

A union’s collective bargaining power is drastically reduced when it lacks a credible strike threat (114). Some threat to ‘business as usual’ is needed. Without it, what means do we have of compelling an employer to consider demands they would rather ignore?

It’s such a basic recognition but taking it to heart can be a challenge for faculty. We have generally been trained to make change through patient reasoning—or backdoor networking— not through building mass public disruption. Members of our profession are often conflict averse, having learned to value politeness, internalize obedience, and put the needs of others ahead of ourselves—for better or worse.<sup>14</sup> Many faculty look askance at the very notion of public disruption, let alone the possibility of something like a *strike*—especially where state law may deem strikes “illegal.”

On this point, Berry and Worthen are refreshingly clear:

**9. “There is no ‘illegal’ strike. There are only strikes that are not strong enough” (207).**

Berry and Worthen model an irreverent but practical approach to the law, reminding us that unions and strikes historically *preceded* the creation of labor law that now ‘allows’ their existence (and defines their ‘limits’). The earliest unions and strikes were *illegal*. As Worthen and Berry put it bluntly: “The law generally changes after enough people break it.” The real question, then, is not about legality, but about collective power.

In this spirit, Berry and Worthen urge skepticism when dealing with (often risk-averse) union legal counsel, urging activists to see the law not as some absolute taboo (‘THOU SHALL NOT STRIKE!’), but in political and historical terms, as a terrain and tool of struggle. Rather than deferring to lawyers or outsiders regarding what ‘can’ or ‘cannot’ be done, Berry and Worthen encourage us to study the actual language of the law for ourselves, and to do so collectively. “Let’s look at the law,” as they write (208); such collective critical legal study itself can be itself empowering. The authors’ close reading of the National Labor Relations Act, for instance, reveals it as the only statute in the entire US Code that upholds the rights of *collectives* of people—not just individuals—to concerted action, making it, in their opinion, “the most radical provision in all of US legislative law” (209), Taft-Hartley notwithstanding.

For Worthen and Berry, the law should neither be bowed to blindly, nor dismissed out of hand. It is all three: a product of past historical struggles, a malleable terrain defined by power in the present, and a tool that can be used in our favor, once we grasp it.

**10. Faculty must get more comfortable with direct action (and can! with training and experience).**

Our local, state, and national unions can and must play an active role in helping faculty overcome disempowering institutional inhibitions. This can't just be a matter of *telling* faculty what to do or what to think. They must be *shown*, step by step. (As Marx famously said, "the educators need to be educated!") In part this involves learning that disruption and discipline are not incompatible; indeed, the direct action requires at least as much discipline as a classroom lecture—it's just a different sort of discipline. Such relearning won't happen automatically, though, so Berry and Worthen urge unions to provide training and education to help faculty learn these new forms of discipline.<sup>15</sup>

Once more faculty are open to direct action (or even striking), it becomes possible to push for more at the bargaining table. But what can and should we push for? Here again Worthen and Berry are refreshingly clear:

**11. "You can bargain anything you have the power to bargain. It is an issue of power, not law."**

We return to the basic political nature of the situation: "The power in question," the authors write, "is our power to force the employer to the table over anything that they don't want to bargain over." Worthen and Berry cite eye-opening examples where unions have brought broader community-based demands to the table, compelling employers to bargain over issues not required by law, but that members cared about.

Worthen and Berry offer tactical bargaining advice, as well. It is important to think strategically about the *sequencing of bargaining* itself, they emphasize, especially when it comes to the time at which the union plans to settle the contract. "You wouldn't pick a time when the trustees are on summer break, for example," they write. "You don't bring up your salaries here—where the leverage is low—you bring your salaries up here—where your leverage is close to the maximum. Then you sequence your bargaining according to the plan that you have." Again, they return us to strategy basics: "The moment you want to settle will never hit at the time that you want it to hit if you don't know what time you want it to hit. You have to pick a time and then you put your plan together to make it consistently worse for the other side as time goes on, right up to when you want it to hit" (47).

The point seems simple enough, but how many unions put it into practice?

Similarly fundamental is the need to insist on binding language (not "employer *may*" but "employer *shall*"), as well as language that *puts the burden of proof on the employer* to assure compliance.

Finally, Berry and Worthen drive home the importance of viewing contract negotiation not as a two-way but as a three-way struggle—with Faculty v. Admin triangulated to the broader public (128). This is an especially important point for public institutions, where the budget strings of our campuses are often held by governors and state legislatures.

**12. Our workplaces are not the same as private sector ones (even if they may increasingly sound that way).**

Capitalist entities besiege our 'non-profit' campuses. The twin forces of state austerity and privatization compel administrators to run higher ed 'like a business,' or else find literal for-profit entities to outsource university services: from the cafeteria to the dorm and bookstore. But these

sites of campus commerce are not stand-ins for the university as a whole, even if the ideologies of consumerism (among students) and neoliberal managerialism (among administration and trustees) give the *impression* that they are: that the student is a 'customer' and the college degree or course a kind of 'commodity' for purchase—*the college as shopping mall*. In this view, faculty are merely 'employees' whose labor happens to take 'intellectual' form, variously understood as 'the degree' or 'the transferrable credit hour.' It might seem 'radical' for our movement to recognize this economic 'heart' of the matter, dispelling the mystification of 'liberal arts' or 'humanities' to focus instead on the exploitative root.

But the strategic implications—and dangers—of such a view demand attention. For, as Worthen and Berry point out:

**13. Universities and colleges are not primarily sites for the immediate production of profit. They are contested sites of social *reproduction* (however much 'business' rhetoric reigns).**

Sky-rocketing tuition bills and managerial 'metrics' increasingly give education the *appearance* of a corporate commodity. But what we, the educators, are in fact producing is something quite different. We are tasked with (re)producing and transforming *human beings*—future workers (and managers), and future citizens: the labor power and polity of the future.<sup>16</sup> What our collective work produces, then, are not commodities to be sold for profit, but the people who will produce (or contest and reappropriate!) those commodities (and profits) elsewhere. Fundamentally, what we produce is not just the 'diploma' or the 'degree, but rather...*the transformation of human beings*. We help (re)produce people as subjects of one kind or another—altering their social relations, productive skills, and ideology.<sup>17</sup>

This is not a trivial difference. As Worthen and Berry suggest, at least two crucial strategic things follow from grasping our workplaces this way. First, it means that, unlike at a typical factory or store, *the withholding of our campus labor during a strike action does not have an immediate impact on the bottom line of our immediate employer*. The tuition has already been paid and the state allocations provided—inadequate as they may be. A strike at a (not-for profit) college or university does not translate immediately into *financial* pressure on our administration to give in to our demands.<sup>18</sup>

It follows that, second:

**14. The pressure we bring upon campus employers, through strikes or other disruption, need to be primarily socio-political, not financial.**

Add to this another complicating factor, implied but not explored in *PDP*. The people who *are* immediately impacted by the cessation of teaching during a strike or work-stoppage are *our own students*, who are not able to get refunds or 'do-overs' for the days or weeks of the semester that may be affected by a job action. Our students are already saddled with tuition bills, and many have been indoctrinated to see their education not as a chance for broad social and intellectual engagement, but as a narrow means to acquire skills and accreditation to lead to higher paid employment, period. Thus, there is the very real danger that an educators' strike, *if it remains*



*isolated from the broader campus and student community*, may provoke antagonism among students (and parents), driving them into the arms of our administrative or state opponents, who will of course ‘sympathize’ with their lost classroom time...and seek to take it out of our faculty union hides. In this way, a premature or isolated strike may not only fail to exert financial pressure on a local administration; it may embolden admin with the support offered by disrupted student or family resentment.

Thankfully, this structural liability is balanced by an advantage for our side:

**15. As workers at “common good”-serving institutions, faculty interests often coincide with those of other workers (including our students).**

“Our *working* conditions are student *learning* conditions!” It’s a mantra that rings true. Resisting layoffs and program cuts means preserving more course selections and scheduling options for students. Reducing class-size means reducing faculty workloads, but also giving students more chance for personalized faculty attention. Improving faculty pay, benefits, and job security also means that students will have more chances to build relationships with top- quality instructors over time, rather than losing them when the semester or year is done.

On these fronts and many others, faculty interests coincide with student needs.

Further, by serving our students, we also serve the broader population. Our students return to communities, bringing what they’ve learned. In this way, our teaching, research, and service pay dividends not to stockholders, but to the broader public.

But here we should add an important proviso: though our immediate faculty interests may reflect broader working-class interests, this identity of interests is seldom obvious to onlookers. It requires clear explanation, for our students, the public, and even sometimes faculty themselves.

The struggle today, then, is not just to mobilize faculty resistance at the point of (re)production, but to *transform the consciousness of our students*, their families, and the public discourse around higher education more broadly, so that our “common good” function as educators shines through from behind the official fog of grading and accreditation. Such translation needs to be an ongoing part of our work.<sup>19</sup> We must make the social stakes clear.

At the same time, Berry and Worthen, emphasize:

**16. Contingent faculty should assert our own needs, not only those of our students or community.**

Here the authors challenge the prominent liberal ‘social service’ faculty mindset. Asserting our own needs, they argue, may resonate more with the working-class public than we might expect.

Traditionally, higher-education faculty unions have gone out of their way to present their demands as student-centered, assuming that most people see college professors as an already privileged group and that to present our demands as workers would alienate the majority of the public, even the working-class public. In other words, traditionally, we as faculty unions have presented ourselves and our demands not as fellow workers to working-class public, but as ‘professors,’ professional academic service providers who are ourselves outside the working class and deserve

special deference—academic freedom and tenure—because of our special role with regards to students and research. The special academic service that we provide is the basis of our appeal for support. But the reality is that today, most academics are contingent workers who should not be embarrassed to put forward our own material needs as legitimate and as part of the working class, *as well as* linking our welfare to the welfare of the students we teach, since ‘our working conditions are their learning conditions,’ as we have said before. The contradiction is between professional elite service and working-class solidarity: Which do we seek to build? (emphasis added)

The authors appear to confront us with a contradiction, and yet, it seems to me that they offer a way out of impasse. In short:

**17. We need not choose *between* ‘fighting for ourselves’ and ‘fighting for our students (and the common good)’; we can and should do *both*.**

Can *community service* and *working-class solidarity* be synthesized, rather than pit against one another? Can we make our fights for improved conditions (even those conditions that aren’t expressly student- or community-centered) “teachable moments,” for both our students and the surrounding community?

Can’t we use our on-campus struggles to show students what it means to fight back in an organized way against exploitation, precarity, oppression, and marginalization? Considering that unionization rates *inside* schools are now far higher than outside of them, our students and community neighbors might learn valuable lessons from our public fightbacks.

In this way, the contradiction between fighting for our own interests and fighting for others might be transcended. *To fight for one’s own interests, while publicly clarifying the social and class nature of that fight, is to fight for the interests of all workers.* After all, *most of our students are workers, too (or will be soon).* We are not the only ones facing exploitative employers and economic precarity these days. Far from it.

The key is that *we carry out our struggles publicly*, in a way that helps others learn alongside us how they might better fight for *themselves*.

So then: let’s not just struggle to transform our classrooms. Let’s also turn our struggles *into* classrooms of class struggle.

Consider for instance faculty demands for *vacation time* or *health care* or *salary raises*, which might not seem so clearly ‘student oriented,’ at least on the surface. Imagine faculty posing these questions to students:

**“How many of you currently work for wages outside of school?”**

**“Do you currently get adequate vacation or healthcare from your job?”**

**“Don’t you think that *all* workers deserve more vacation? And healthcare coverage?” “Don’t you want these things for yourselves?”**

**“Do you have a union at work? Have you considered organizing one?”**

**“Do you see how supporting *others’* demands for healthcare or vacation time**

**can help make them possible for workers elsewhere, including yourselves?"**

**"In short: do you see how standing up with us now, can allow us to stand with you later?"**

Imagine a higher education landscape where questions like these are a matter of daily discussion in hundreds and thousands of classrooms around the country—and not just in the lead-up to a strike, but as a matter of ongoing pedagogical practice. Not just in Labor Studies courses, but in *all* disciplines, wherever faculty are found, and where conditions allow.

This also means showing up for others when they need us. It's crucial that faculty unions maintain good relations with fellow workers, and unions, on campus and off. (And inside the classroom as well as out of it.) Cultivating faculty humility, respect, and honest curiosity for non-academic workers remains critical if larger alliances are going to last. Faculty elitism remains a real danger.

### **18. Contingent Faculty must shed the "tenured gaze."**

Here Worthen and Berry draw upon the contributions of feminist cultural studies, which has long examined how the "male gaze" can structure and distort not just women's representation in society, but women's own self-consciousness and identity (63- 66). Contingent faculty are prone to a similar dynamic. Our professional training teaches us to defer, please, and aspire to 'be like' our TT faculty colleagues—even to see ourselves as 'failures' for having not achieved that tenured status. Further, many TT *are* authorities in their fields, which sometimes are *our* fields, too, and they often have more time to articulate their ideas and make their presence felt in union spaces. This means that, even when TT do not hold direct supervisory power, an internalization of TT superiority often restrains or distorts CF actions and words: whether out of desire for validation 'from above,' a fear of being 'put in our place' by 'superiors,' or a reluctance to be labeled 'un-collegial.'

But whatever the expertise or intellect of our better compensated TT colleagues, Worthen and Berry suggest that effective egalitarian intuitional change must be led by those at or near the bottom. The authors' late contingent comrade John Hess once said that TT faculty "have nothing to teach us." That may go too far; undoubtedly there is something somewhere to learn from any group of earnest colleagues. But there is a danger of CF lowering our horizons, stifling initiative, and suppressing militancy (or simple honesty) so as not to disappoint or alienate TT faculty.

We should welcome collaborators and comrades from anywhere. But we must also remember:

*We are the higher ed teaching majority. And our very marginalization gives us valuable insights on the institutions that exploit and exclude us.*

TT faculty sometimes express fear that the prestige aura associated with "the profession" will be tarnished if they fully admit contingents on an equal basis—into faculty unions, senates, or other organs of governance—bringing with us as we do all manner of unsightly 'issues' or 'lesser' qualifications. They may also see us as competition for the precious and often shrinking resources to which they currently have privileged access. Berry and Worthen highlight the unsightly history of such "guild" mentality, calling attention to the similarities between this elitist way of viewing CF as and the way that, through the mid-20th century, non-whites and women were often formally and informally excluded by labor leaders from crafts and professions (183).

Against a more elitist notion of 'professionalism,' Berry and Worthen propose grasping teaching as

both a “craft” and a fundamentally political act (184). Calling faculty “community professionals,” they urge us to frame our professional defense in inclusive and cooperative terms—admittedly something that the tiered structure of the profession and institutional austerity makes difficult. But foregrounding responsibility to the broader community opens an important path to transcending the scarcity mindset. Imagine all the un-matriculated millions who could be in our classes if tuition were again returned to near zero, with progressive taxation making up the difference. Faculty need not be so pit against one another for scarce resources if public funding can expand access and quality alike.

To stop acting so small, we need to think big.

#### **19. Tenured faculty are not the enemy, though they may sometimes appear to be.**

Berry and Worthen address the real power many TT faculty wield over contingent lives—and the emotional impact of that power. But they don’t stop there. Tenure-track faculty, though they may be obstacles, or even antagonists, are not our across-the-board enemies. Ultimately, contingency, and the faculty impotence that this divisive tiered system creates, harms TT, too— at least insofar as they are honestly committed to the profession to which they have devoted their lives. Sure, it’s easy to get angry about immediate insults and indignities, easy to dwell on the department chair who cancels your class last minute or evicts you from an office—even as we may know that their directives come down from higher up. Meanwhile, the people who really hold the power over us (and our TT colleagues, too) are generally not those we often get the chance to see in-person. Thus, Worthen and Berry emphasize, we need activist research that helps define the enemy, focusing attention on the actual power holders, not just those who carry water for them.

“We need to trace the power train up” (173), our authors write. By doing so, we may find that even some of those we’ve long seen as complicit with systemic mistreatment don’t like the system any more than we do, and that they share some (if not all) of our concerns and desires for change. The authors urge unions to do power mapping research to define the enemy concretely, down to specific persons and even residential or business addresses, and to do so regularly and in public (174). Contingents and TT colleagues alike, as well as our students and the larger community, need to be taught who the real power holders are, and how to get at them—otherwise, they may well assume that *we’re* the ones holding it, and blame us, just as we might blame our TT colleagues. When we orient in this way, broader alliances than we’ve previously imagined may become possible, even as important differences may persist.

While our organizations must surely harness the energy generated by immediate CF indignities, we must also find ways to channel that energy to where actual policy is set.

That said:

#### **20. Working with faculty allies across all tiers doesn’t mean we should accept the tiered system as is.**

Who ever said that academic “tracks” can’t converge? As Berry and Worthen show, unions can and should work to reduce inequality and separation within our own faculty ranks. They offer many examples, showing how we can use union contract negotiations to reduce the inequities between CF and TT faculty and to allow the “tracks” to touch.

They spotlight contract language granting CF rights to “first consideration” for new TT positions (102)—including language which puts a burden of proof on administration to make sure that that consideration actually happens. They also cite language that requires that a CF member currently doing the work be granted an interview for any new TT position in their field. Still stronger language exists in some contracts requiring that CF be granted the new TT job unless an outside candidate can be proven to have not just the same but *greater* qualifications than the person currently doing the work. As Worthen and Berry argue, “We should fight to make the union prioritize giving current contingents preferential access to tenure-line jobs on a seniority basis and to increase the number of tenure-line jobs if contingents have reasonable preference for those jobs” (224). They also point out myriad ways to “upgrade” existing CF positions so that they can achieve more of the protections and benefits associated with TT positions (101), including full pay parity and job security.<sup>20</sup>

**21. Our union contract campaigns should fight to reduce faculty inequality, not increase it.**

Here, most unions are in for an equity check. As Berry and Worthen remind us, the standard salary raises negotiated by faculty unions (even those with progressive leadership) *increase* rather than decrease pay inequity among tiered faculty. A 3% across the board raise, for example, in a unit containing both CF and TT faculty, means a raise of \$3,600 for a full Professor already making \$120,000 per year, but only a \$1,200 raise for a full-time CF making \$40,000. This “across the board” raise in *fact increases the absolute pay inequality* between these two faculty members, by \$2,400—a figure twice the total of the CF raise.<sup>21</sup> Thus, as Berry and Worthen state: “Percentage across-the-board pay raises are not a good way to get to equal pay. In fact, they increase the split between the bottom and the top.” It would be less regressive to offer all members in a tiered union a lump sum (in our example above, say \$2,000 annually per full-time equivalent faculty member); though such a lump sum raise would not reduce pay inequity, at least it would not increase it. Even better would be a progressively tiered raise scheme, where those at the bottom get a deliberately larger absolute sum (not just %) than those at the top.

This need not be a zero-sum game. As the authors show, it is possible to fight both for the faculty bargaining unit as a whole, so that everyone gets something, while at the same time prioritizing efforts to raise up the bottom and increase equality: to increase the ‘ceiling’ while prioritizing ‘raising the floor.’ But doing so requires a willingness to challenge established norms, norms which, though they may appear neutral, in fact compound (and naturalize) existing inequalities. One would hope that any faculty member, of whatever rank, who supports the basic principle of progressive taxation, would also be sympathetic to implementing progressive raises in their union. Such shifts in contract priorities, though ‘small’

in absolute dollar terms—and not enough to create full pay equity in the short-run—may nonetheless foster solidarity across ranks in ways that enable larger leaps.

**22. We need to substantively democratize our union structures.**

For such changes to occur, internal union representation often needs to shift. “As contingents,” Berry and Worthen argue, “our interest is in broadly democratizing unions and generating the maximum feasible participation.” What does that mean? It means not only “equal access to all elected offices,” but also “reserved seats for contingents on governing and decision-making

bodies.” Such affirmative action can create substantive, not merely formal, inclusiveness. “Since our [CF] active participation in the union is more difficult—timewise and financially, and because it involves political risk given that we do not have job security,” they argue, “we need conditions that facilitate our greater participation” (226). The authors thus argue for stipends specifically for CF union officers as well as contractual course releases from teaching, so that CF faculty can have the time and energy to enable meaningful participation in leadership. How can a CF member possibly consider taking up the round-the-clock job of a union president or bargaining team leader, if they still must teach a full or three-quarter course-load? And how can our unions expect CF to fully support union actions when they aren’t substantially included in leadership?

This question of internal representation intersects with another important reality:

### **23. The emotional turmoil of contingent faculty life is real and demands organizers’ attention.**

As Berry and Worthen painfully remind us, for CF, the positive feedback loop of a ‘normal job’ is constantly disrupted. Department colleagues we’ve shared the hall with for a decade may still not recognize us or know our names. Courses we’ve developed and taught for years may be taken away without notice. A crucial job benefit we’ve been counting on may turn out not to cover us due to our status. A stellar round of student evaluations at the end of the semester may nonetheless be followed the next day by a pink slip. Many CF thus suffer from a kind of ongoing “imposter syndrome,” struggling to reconcile the gap between the high status and low pay and support for our jobs. (‘Are we *really* faculty? Am I *really* a professor?’) The health impacts of the longtime stress stemming from such bouts of “catastrophic self-doubt” (190), can be extreme. As CFA organizer John Hess put it, “No contingent faculty member is ever more than three seconds away from total humiliation” (191).<sup>22</sup> It’s a quip to make you quiver.

Thus, unions must consciously work to create a climate that can help counter the damage done by such degrading and traumatizing contingent working environments. Most CF are routinely denied not just security, but respect and recognition—at jobs they may have spent close to a decade training for at considerable personal expense. We need symbolic and social support within the union. And beware. When such support is lacking, CF may react harshly: once again

our worst suspicions confirmed. Contingent validation can be generated in all sorts of ways beyond the bargaining table and the picket line: from campus conferences, social events, or union festivals of CF writing and research (171). But whatever the form, helping contingent faculty to recover our sense of being ‘real faculty’ is itself a key part of the struggle.

Here, organizer strategies of deep *listening* become crucial, as does *humor*, and even ‘games’ that can help to turn pain into laughter. As Berry and Worthen show, it is possible to transform private shame into public solidarity by sharing, objectifying, and thus de-personalizing, mortifying common experiences (192). But this takes deliberate organizing effort and creativity. And persistence, since just getting CF together as a group can be a challenge. Yet the atomization of adjunct life makes it even more important for our unions to deliberately construct such collective experiences, wherever we can (189).

Worthen and Berry offer organizers the metaphor of a Scale of Hope and Fear, where organizing can be seen as the work of “moving grains of sand from ‘fear and fatalism’ to the ‘hope and courage’ side of the scale.” It’s an incremental image that is also a transformative one, whereby the small gains can trigger big changes—quantity turning into quality. Successful organizing, as they put it,

patiently tips the scales from “fear and fatalism” to “hope and change.”

Taking up from where the authors’ leave off: Let us now turn to one of the premiere sites of both hope and of fear for many contingent faculty: *our own classrooms*.

#### **24. Students can be our best or biggest allies...but only if we let them know what’s going on.**

When it comes to academic alienation, few examples loom larger than that of the contingent faculty member who, though struggling to survive, racing from campus to campus, overburdened with grading and prep-work and maxed out credit cards to supplement poverty wages, nonetheless manages to stuff all that chaos into their tattered briefcase before class begins, hidden (we think!) from the students’ view. Countless contingent faculty do some version of this: hiding our material realities from our students, thereby maintaining the professional and pedagogical illusion that there is nothing amiss.

But what if we stopped doing that and instead let our students in on what’s really going on? What if we unpacked and exposed the contents of our bursting contingent briefcase?

Many contingent faculty undoubtedly tell ourselves that we are maintaining such professorial appearances—keeping our ‘merely personal’ issues hidden—‘for the sake of the students.’ But who or what is really being protected here? Is it really the students, whose learning conditions are undoubtedly still affected by our degraded working conditions, however hard faculty work to hide them? The students, who, chances are, are already quite familiar with the impacts of job precarity and exploitation from their own lives?

Perhaps what is being protected is in part... our own wounded self-image. Perhaps we dread admitting publicly what we already know deep down: that, notwithstanding our degrees or expertise, we are not at all in control of our working conditions or our careers. In this context, to focus strictly on the academic material at hand, aside from its educational value, offers exploited CFs a way of escaping—if only for an hour at a time—the material realities of our situation. After all: aren’t there much ‘bigger’ issues in the world to discuss than our personal exploitation? How insignificant are our local struggles against such Enduring Issues as found on our Syllabi (all five of them!)?

Many contingent faculty also feel afraid to confide in students about our contingency, especially during scheduled class time.<sup>23</sup> We may fear a negative political / ‘customer’ backlash if we ‘come out’ as exploited labor, especially on campuses where anonymous student course evaluations are cherry picked and wielded like scythes by admin seeking to cut down dissidents.<sup>24</sup>

#### **In short, the problem is not just internalized shame, but very rational fears.**

But such fear *must* be overcome if the transformation we need is to occur. If we contingent faculty are afraid to be open with our own students in our own classrooms, afraid to share the truth with those whom we are charged to help *seek the truth*, well then...who *will* we ever be willing to tell? How can we ever speak publicly about our conditions, and the struggles to change them, without overcoming this classroom self-censorship? (Won’t our students read about us in the newspapers eventually?)

It is difficult to envision anything like transformative improvement in contingent faculty power and equality so long as this sort of alienation and self-censorship reigns. Not only it because indicates that CF themselves are still somewhat in denial or disavowal of our actual conditions—living a kind

of schizophrenic life that tries to keep our material realities and psychological identities separate—but also because our students remain potentially a source of great power...but only if we allow them in.

**In short: To have a chance of unleashing the power of our students, we must remove the gags from our own mouths and let the stuffed contingent briefcase burst.**

Students, as Worthen and Berry argue, are great potential allies, but only when CF are willing to take a page from the gay liberation movement and “come out” as we are, letting them in on the conditions and struggles we face, so that they can understand, and sympathize with our position.

There is of course always some risk—both psychological and institutional—involved in such self-exposure. Might some of our students lose respect for our authority if they knew we are ‘just an adjunct’? Might an ‘out-ed’ contingent experience embarrassment or a loss of confidence at the lectern? Might the publicizing of our precarity increase the likelihood of a hostile student going behind our back to the dean? Such risks cannot be discounted. But in my own experience, letting students know about the political-economic conditions that surround our shared classroom has generally inspired curiosity, sympathy, and solidarity—often generating increased interest in the course as well, as students come to see the space we co-habit as more and more part of the ‘real world’ rather than some mystifying bubble separate from it.

Here it helps to remember, as Berry and Worthen remind us, most of our students are fellow workers, who share vital concerns with us, something they can themselves recognize once we make our situation clear (178). In this context, the widespread faculty attachment to liberal advocacy (fighting “for others” rather than ourselves) becomes a liability when our sense of being ‘above’ our students cuts short conversation that could lead to solidarity.

Faculty like to think that we are ‘lucky’ and ‘privileged’ compared to others (including our students); meanwhile our hourly salaries may clock in below a living wage, especially once our student loan debt is deducted from our pay. “Establishing the legitimacy of fighting for ourselves is not easy,” Berry and Worthen write. “Many of us still see ourselves as members of a privileged elite, floating intellectuals temporarily and unjustly shunted into precarious low- wage employment” (188). But the brute fact is that many of us are making less per hour than many of our students will be—or even than some of them are *now*—with take home pay that amounts for less than 5% or 10% of the total tuition that students are paying for the classes we are teaching them. (And what student wouldn’t want to know *that!*)

Nonetheless, contingent fear is real, and based in real dangers. We can’t just ‘tell’ people to ‘suck it up’ or ‘get over it.’ The situation that holds us back must itself be transformed.

How can such fear be overcome? What structures, relationships, and understandings can we construct together to enable greater and greater numbers of CF to overcome such fear and more fully speak truth, in our own classrooms and beyond?

## **25. We need to distinguish between “power we can influence” and “power we can control.”**

The distinction Berry and Worthen make here is useful, even fundamental. Yet it warrants reflection: What *is* the power that we *can* control? What are the ways in which that power might be best used?



It seems to be implied in *Power Despite Precarity* that the potential power we control most is to be understood negatively, as the power to withhold our labor. In short: the power to strike.

Without denying this essential point, I would like to supplement it: Perhaps our most important social leverage is our regular collective access to millions of students.<sup>25</sup>

### ***Where else do we have more power we can control than in our own classrooms?***

Embracing the social reproductive framework highlighted earlier, we can see our students not as the recipient-carriers of a depoliticized product known as a ‘course-credit’ or a ‘degree,’ but rather as fellow future (and often present) workers and residents in the communities that we also inhabit, and that we are trying to transform, defend, and democratize. Framed in such a way, faculty have not only the right, but the *duty* to let students know about important events and structures that exert force on their lives. Our students (and their families and peers) need to know what is really going on, in the world at large—including inside the institutions they presently inhabit.

### **Who better to educate them than us?**

Asserting our more direct power, then, might mean not just *refusing* to offer our labor of teaching (via a strike) at a key strategic moment, but redirecting our that labor-time while at work: liberating the classroom as a space of class struggle.

The questions from a union and organizer perspective then become:

What are the bridging structures, relations, and actions that can help faculty (especially CF, but also TT) to realize this latent classroom power, and to mobilize it collectively and strategically?

What can we do, at various levels—from departments to unions to colleges to professional associations to community networks and pedagogical strategies—to make it more possible (less shameful, less frightening) for faculty to ‘come out’ to our students, and to bring the suppressed ‘background’ of our contingent academic lives into the educational ‘foreground’?

How can we help each other unleash the too-often untapped power of our students, a formidable group once armed with the knowledge that contingent faculty can provide them?

These seems to me crucial questions for this moment.

As part of this larger process, I believe it would be a great thing if our unions, faculty organizations and associations—in alliance with student and community groups—could come together and issue regular *Calls to Teach the University*, giving support as well institutional protection for higher educators to devote, say, at a minimum, one full day (or one full week) each semester to critically discussing the state of higher ed, including the place of contingency within it. (The framework of “sustainability” with which we began could here provide a strategic umbrella with broader popular purchase: “Sustaining Higher Ed in the Face of Rising Contingency”.) Perhaps our major organizations could agree on a national “coming out” day for contingent faculty, stripping isolation from this difficult personal-pedagogical leap.

There are no shortage of openings or tactics that could be pursued once the strategic goal is accepted.

We might:

*\*organize intramural events, art displays, and “field trips” to provoke discussion;*  
*\*arrange guest speakers and speakers series, both during class time, and outside of it;*  
*\*produce and disseminate educational handouts, slide shows, or short videos, for classroom use;*

*\*organize roving campus ‘fly squads’ to deliver updates and kick off classroom discussions, perhaps during a class time allotted for ‘community announcements.’ (Such fly squads can be assembled across ranks: including not only faculty or staff visitors, but students themselves, creating a peer-to-peer learning dynamic that can prove quite effective.<sup>26</sup>)*

*\*coordinate campus- or system-wide efforts to socialize the educational process, along the lines of ‘Campus Equity Week.’*

*\*push public campus administrators to endorse state-wide “Higher Ed Advocacy” days, thus giving cover for faculty to broach such matters in the classroom with students, and to take them on collective action field trips.*

I propose normalizing teaching about the underlying conditions of the college or university in *every* class—not just Labor Studies or ‘education-related’ fields: all our fields are education- related. This can be justified in pedagogical terms—as well as political and moral ones—in most if not all fields of study. What academic discipline does *not* have a clear connection to the material state of the institutional fibers on which it depends? Certainly, even a Math class could spend time breaking down the implications of university or state budget allocations? Certainly, a Psychology course could devote time to the mental effects of job precarity or overwork? Certainly, a Political Science class could spend some time power-mapping the campus institution in which we all work and live? Certainly, an English Composition class could take time analyzing the rhetoric embedded in campus emails on labor issues and/or faculty union petitions?

Even enlightened public administrators should be with us here: for teaching about the precarious state of higher education ought to be seen as necessary institutional and disciplinary self-defense—a crucial part of orienting students honestly towards the institutions they inhabit, and of sustaining the institutions, period. Even our ‘customer’-students should surely be interested in how their tuition dollars are (not) being spent. And more working-class students should find plenty to connect with in our stories. Who knows, hearing ours may inspire them to tell theirs as well.

Our prime leverage, then, may be not just in *striking* our classrooms but in fully *occupying* them. In short: education for liberation.<sup>27</sup>

The coming mass strike against faculty contingency—and for true comprehensive sustainability—the one that will shake our campuses to the core, will be the one where students and faculty join together in the common recognition that, though the alienating institutions we inhabit often try to pit us against one another, our fundamental best interests and human needs are aligned. Our ‘strike’ then must be conceived as a massive teach-in, a disruption of business as usual that is at once a repurposing of our educational power, a reshaping of the teacher-student-community relationship.

Where, I repeat, do we really have power at our fingertips if NOT in our own classrooms? And why can’t our classrooms include a focus on contingent realities?

As the threat of online education and digital administrative surveillance grows, we best utilize our classroom space and power while we still have it.

After all, Higher Ed is now going through a major transformation—one whose endpoint is far from certain. Worthen and Berry remind us that this is far from the first such period of change; in their account there have been Four Transitions to date (encompassing early 20th century *Standardization*, post-WW2 *Expansion*, *The Movement* of the 1960s, and contemporary *Neoliberalism*). We are now entering the beginning of a Fifth. This latest Transition features the intensification of trends towards online education (accelerated by the COVID pandemic), higher ed globalization, the continued erosion of tenure protections and state funding, an increase in social and economic precarity and inequality more broadly across society, and a growing popular awareness that a college degree in the ‘new economy’ does not necessarily lead to a secure or good-paying job.

“[W]hat remains of higher education,” Worthen and Berry ask,

*when selling diplomas is no longer a quick way to turn a profit, when no number of credentials can get a graduate a job in an economy where there is between 15 and 30 percent actual unemployment, where universities are stripped of state support and parents are challenging the price charged for online classes? What does ‘higher education for the public good’ look like in this day and age? (3)*

These are crucial questions. And the answers are not clear. But one thing is certain:

What it *will* look like, and where the present crisis *will* bring us, will be in part decided by what we, the contingent faculty majority and our TT collaborators do now—or don’t. For, beyond the well-worn tales of grievance and victimhood, as I hope the above article makes clear, our contingent legions are not without leverage and potential power, if only we can bring ourselves to use it.

This will not happen automatically, just because of the increased pressures of our times. It will require coming together in new ways, forging alliances with students, workers, and the broader community, in part by unlearning the institutional habits and mentalities that have for too long held us back and kept us silent. (HELU, Higher Ed Labor United, is one such effort deserving of support: <https://higheredlaborunited.org/>.) By reflecting on our collective experience, applying its lessons, and shedding forms of internalized alienation, we can come to change that history.

## ENDNOTES

1 <https://higheredlaborunited.org/> . The Vision Platform of HELU, which has been endorsed as of this writing by 113 local unions and organizations, can be found here: <https://higheredlaborunited.org/about/vision-platform/> . Berry and Worthen are both involved in this new effort.

2 While examples discussed often come from the context of California—offering readers the example of CFA CSU contract organizing as a positive model of what can be achieved—the lessons transcend the local. Most are broadly applicable, and, for this reason, the book demands careful close attention, discussion—and flat-out application—across our higher ed labor movement.

3 We’ve seen hundreds of thousands of layoffs of contingent faculty across the country, often at institutions that in fact experienced *no significant loss of student enrollment or state revenue*.

4 On the problems with the privatized model and the possibilities for shifting back to a common good approach to higher education, see especially Christopher Newfield's *The Great Mistake: How We Wrecked Public Universities and How We can Fix Them*. (Johns Hopkins UP: 2016).

5 On the UC Lecturers reaching agreement, see: <https://calmatters.org/education/higher-education/2021/11/uc-lecturer-strike-2/>.

6 Such alliances can include not only fellow campus staff, grad students, and alumni, but current and prospective students and their families, community neighbors, and other public or unionized employees, not to mention the growing army of gig workers and precariously employed, many of whom have recently been—or still are—in our classrooms. How pervasive “part-time” work has become in recent years is clear from this recent *New York Times* article: <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/02/briefing/labor-shortage-part-time-workers-us.html> . Much can and must be done at the state and federal level, from winning adjuncts and other “gig” workers eligibility for Unemployment Insurance and Minimum Wage protections, to expanding state funding sources for public education generally through campaigns for progressive income tax.

7 For a discussion of this individualist fragmentation of working-class resistance as a feature of the capitalist class structure, see Vivek Chibber, *The Class Matrix: Social Theory after the Cultural Turn* (Harvard UP: 2022).

8 This is especially true when we consider that the more likely an institution is to be “minority serving,” the more likely it is to deploy a faculty that is largely contingent: with elite private liberal arts colleges at one end of the spectrum and community colleges at the other.

9 Of course, this is not to make light of the continued need to fight for increased representation for historically excluded and marginalized groups at all levels of the university workforce. Similarly, working to create the conditions for more inclusive and representative leadership for the CF and Higher Ed labor movement also remain important.

10 See for instance the campaign against ‘Critical Race Theory.’ While the need right now to counter right-wing suppression of “CRT” is clear, it also seems clear that the terrain of such a defense could be improved by drawing analogies—and finding allies—from other realms where top-down suppression of public discussion puts the public at risk. Just as civil engineers or contractors charged with the safety of our bridges must have the right to speak publicly when a project’s foundation is unsafe, we might argue, so to do scholars who exhume the buried structures of our shared social history.

11 The Inside/Outside strategy was previously elaborated by Berry in his important earlier book *Reclaiming the Ivory Tower*.

12 The related question of the advantages and disadvantages of all-adjunct unions vs. mixed unions of contingent and TT faculty remains an open one, which Berry & Worthen treat with respectful agnosticism. Regardless of the nature of a particular union, however, they emphasize that building collaboration and alliance between CF and TT groups is crucial.

13 Drawing from other realms to clarify the concept further, Worthen and Berry also cite the 2016 Bernie Sanders campaign as a successful I/O Strategy (146), drawing out how a tactical defeat (Sanders’s loss to Hillary Clinton) nonetheless enabled a strategic gain, shifting the national debate, centering issues of economic inequality, and changing both what could be said or considered ‘realistically’ possible, well beyond the original campaign ranks. One might then ask: what would be the equivalent of the Sanders 2016 campaign for the CF movement today? What would be an

analogous way of putting contingency front and center, on a nation-wide basis, in a way that would shift broader understandings and expand possibilities thereafter?

14 As my friend and comrade Jim Tarwood put it in conversation about this article: “Most academics began their careers as teacher’s pets.”

15 Worthen and Berry offer the fascinating success story of how their own union colleagues trained in nonviolent direct action with the help of the Ruckus Society, showing how direct-action techniques learned there played an instrumental role in important contract campaigns.

16 Faculty also produce research which can then be patented and commodified, often in conjunction with openly for-profit corporate “partners” of the university. Moreover, higher education campuses can be seen as a site for the (re)production of ideology not just for students but for society at large, a place where broader hegemony and legitimation is reproduced—or contested. Whereas the former point may complicate my argument for some sorts of research heavy, corporate-partnered universities, the latter point tends to amplify it further. I mean “citizen” broadly, without regard to nationality or government documents.

17 The “we” here can apply to faculty broadly, but especially to contingent faculty.

18 I hasten to add however that the threat of shutting down ‘business as usual’ on higher ed campuses *can* be a short- to medium- threat to the plans and profit margins of the local, national, or global capitalist entities that depend on the skilled, disciplined, and certified labor power that universities are charged with producing. Thus, one could imagine a higher ed strike that is aimed not just at the local campus administration, but at the broader array of capitalist interests who depend on our campuses for their future lifeblood of production and profit.

19 As my colleague Jim Tarwood put it after reading a draft of the present article: “Many students do not see their interests as being the same as CF; they see them as being “on the other side,” and they are not at the university to be transformed, but to get a credential with the minimum of fuss that will enable them to make a living. So not only would consciousness need to be raised among CF, but among students as well.”

20 Indeed, *PDP* contains an entire chapter devoted to what the authors call “Blue Sky Demands,” in which they recount a long list of crucial benefits and rights that faculty in the CFA have won, and which they argue can be achieved through future faculty organizing elsewhere. The early sections of the book are loaded with specific examples and stories from this California context.

21 For those tempted to dismiss such differences as insignificant, consider also how such disparities accumulate compound over time. Indeed, over the span of a 35-year career, a \$30,000 per year salary gap that may separate a TT from a full time CF salary (\$70 vs. \$40 k starting salary, \$100K vs. \$70K ceiling salary)—hardly an extreme case— adds up to a lifetime difference of over \$1 million.

22 For a powerful fictional exploration of this very real adjunct alienation, see the recent novel *Life of the Mind*, by Christine Smallwood. For an excellent explication of that novel in terms of this theme, see the forthcoming essay by Linda Ai-Yun Liu.

23 My point is not to ‘blame’ CF for their self-censorship—the pressures to silence institutional critique are real— but to make clear that it is a real problem, so we can get to work collectively uprooting and bypassing the obstacles to its overcoming.

24 A related problem, not discussed in *PDP* but certainly of concern, is the growing tendency among students to look to administration hierarchies, rather than to faculty or to democratic community-

organizing, for solutions to their various social justice related problems.

25 For a typical 3-credit, 15-week course = our time with students is around 45 hours in a semester (not including meetings outside class-time). This is time spent in a place that is relatively stable, equitable, and at least somewhat protected from distraction or interruption.

26 The need to cultivate and help sustain student organizing and activism itself remains a crucial one; it is a perennial problem in part caused by student turnover and a (lack of) institutional memory.

27 Berry & Worthen tend to imagine this power as a matter of abstract labor power rather than concrete labor, asserting (or assuming) that the most important thing about our labor is that it keeps the institution running, and thus that the “power” of academic labor is most known in its *withdrawal*, rather than in its strategic repurposing. Yet their analysis earlier in the book registers that higher ed institutions, for the most part, are different from the for-profit private sector entities from whose vulnerability the logic of the strike as disturbance of production/threat to profit is derived.