

A recipe for building social movement teachers unions - and fig cake too

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There's no strict recipe we can follow to build social movement teachers unions though the process will require some indispensable ingredients, robust democracy for one. Another element is creating relationships among people who inhabit very different social spheres. While the principles on which we organize are key, so are the ways we struggle together, creating friendships.

In my experience, helping to build the AFT local in Hayward California in the early 1970s, sharing food is an important part of community and movement-building. We have to reach people through social media, for sure, but let's not underestimate the value of face-to-face meetings and the draw of really good refreshments.

Building the movement we need is arduous. It should also be joyous. To push both along in 2014, I'm contributing a recipe for fig cake I cut out of Sunset magazine in my California years. Most people don't know this, but I am a credentialed, experienced teacher of home economics. In my first teaching job I taught cooking and "apartment living" to high school boys.

For the fig cake you can substitute dried figs for fresh. I use Kalamata figs from Greece and these days think about the heroism of Greece's teachers, who are leaders in the movement against austerity. Just soak the dried figs longer, about 25 minutes. I also use dried ginger instead of cinnamon because I find cinnamon too prosaic – but that's just my bias. I also use 1/3 cup of whole wheat flour for 1/3 cup of the white flour. Don't use all whole wheat or the cake will be too heavy. Vegans can use an egg substitute, probably not banana or tofu. The cake needs the egg for loft. To be fancy, bake the cake in a well-greased and floured bundt pan but start checking to see if it's done after 1 hour.

The cake is fragrant and a bit chewy, perfect for eating after a long day of teaching and organizing. Or maybe serving at a house party to raise money for your favorite union reform caucus?

Happy 2014!

I invite reader responses at drweinerlo@gmail.com. Is there a subject you want me to tackle? Let me know. You can follow me on twitter and Facebook, as well as my blog every Wednesday here at New Politics. Except next week - I'm taking a break from my blog to work on a critical look at where we stand now in pushing back against the neoliberal project.