Panel: Organizing Outside the Law

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Communications Workers of America
United Campus Workers

Organizing Outside the Law

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Our Model: Organization Building

- We organize public higher education employees in Southeastern states.
- We organize wall-to-wall, with workers at every level, including staff, tenured and contingent faculty, and undergraduate and graduate workers.
- We organize without official recognition from our employers, and without a legal bargaining framework.
- We organize for change at many levels through taking collective action around critical issues we face.
- We organize to build long lasting membership organizations that are made up of run by members. We pay union dues through a bank draft system to help sustain our organization.

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Our Project: Organizing the SEC

- **A statewide strategy.** United Campus Workers are statewide locals. Public higher education governance is centralized, so having a statewide organization is critical for leveraging our power to pressure our higher ed bosses.

- **Building political power.** All the Southeastern states we are organizing in are governed by a majority (or super majority) Republican legislatures. Public higher education institutions are located in rural and urban communities, and in between, so having a statewide organization is critical for leveraging our power to pressure our legislative bosses.

- **A regional strategy.** Many public higher education issues: trends towards privatization and corporatization are modeled in one state and carried out in another. They often look to regional peer institutions for “best practices.” Regional campaigns and legislative work allow us to understand the share important lessons about our targets and how best to leverage our power to win.

- **A national strategy.** We are working towards a national strategy and platform to address public good issues from the perspective of Southern public higher education employees.
- CWA history of non-majority organizing model outside of the collective bargaining context.

- State Employee Unions since the 1980’s (Texas, Oklahoma, Missouri); and Campus Worker Unions since the early 2000’s (Tennessee, Georgia, Mississippi).

- UCW was born at the University of TN in Knoxville from a campus Living Wage campaign started by housekeepers in the dorms, with support from faculty, staff and student allies.

- From there they affiliated with CWA and expanded to over 20 public universities across the state of TN. Today they have over 2,000 members.
UCW GA was founded by staff and faculty at the University of Georgia in the aftermath of the 2016 implementation of federally mandated guidelines of the Fair Labor Standards Act. Workers aggravated about the lack of representation and consideration of the interests of employees by administrators formed the union.

Over 3,000 staff were reclassified and through that process received a mere half of their regular monthly paychecks, just before the holiday break, and on very short notice.

UCWGA has now spread across GA, with over 350 members now on 9 campuses across the state with active organizing committees and campaigns.
UCW Expands Across the Southeast

- MS United Campus Workers was founded in late 2018 at the University of Mississippi in Oxford. They have close to 100 members and are just getting started with listening sessions, trainings, and supporting racial justice campaigns, including a student led effort to take down the prominent Confederate statue on campus.

**University employees organize first labor union in campus history**

Organize!

Join United Campus Workers MS for a workshop on your legal right to organize for fair wages, respect, and a campus that works for everyone.

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Effective Campaigns

1. Take collective action! Always have at least one campaign going at a time to engage directly affected members and non-members. Create as many points of entry as possible for people to take action. Use solidarity across job classifications to alleviate fear.

2. Build the union! Everything we do must be able to add to the strength and power of the union through recruitment of new members.

3. Be strategic! Systematically identify our targets: campus based, university system, and/or government level decision makers and understand who really has the power.

4. Pick a fight! Choose a combination of specific winnable issue based campaigns and longer-term systemic visionary goals. We need small victories to keep us going and a vision of change worth fighting for in the long term.

5. Develop leadership capacity! Use campaigns as a training ground for members to step up as leaders, and build key organizational infrastructure and decision making processes.
EFFECTIVE CAMPAIGNS

1) FAIR PAY and LIVING WAGES
2) TN is NOT FOR SALE
3) ORGANIZING on THE SHOP FLOOR
FAIR PAY AND LIVING WAGES

- Living Wages: targeting individual campuses to raise the base pay for the lowest paid campus workers.

- Cost of Living Raises: targeting the state and campuses to give raises; and as across the board amounts instead of % raises.

- Pay equity – race and gender: target campuses, system, and state legislatures.
TN IS NOT FOR SALE

- Governor’s proposal to privatize of all facilities workers across the state of TN.

- Thousands of already low wage higher education employees targeted for job cuts.

- 2 year long campaign ended in victory: stopped the privatization effort by getting campus administrators to opt out of the plan.
ORGANIZING ON THE SHOP FLOOR

- Representing members in campus and departmental level grievance procedures.
- Fighting for transparency, democracy and a voice in a specific workplace.
- Shining a light on injustice: Hep C vaccines; abusive supervisors.
Do you know people that work in public higher education in the Southeast?

Contact us:
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Want to build cross regional worker solidarity?

Connect with us on social media:
- United Campus Workers of GA
- Mississippi United Campus Workers
- United Campus Workers in TN