

5.

The Pseudonym College Fair Labor Campaign

In this chapter I investigate the orientation of the Pseudonym College Fair Labor Campaign towards power. My concern is broadly structural. How did the students' activism reflect their perspectives on power in the institution? How did classed knowledges and practices affect the Campaign's overall strategic approach? What are the ideological implications of rooting solidarity activism in student privilege?

This is neither an oral history nor an ethnography of the Fair Labor Campaign. While I begin the chapter with a short account of the basic events in the Campaign narrative, I have not attempted to thoroughly document the specifics of the timeline, the tactics, or even the issues of contention. A more exhaustive examination of all this would surely provide fascinating material for a much longer, more ambitious project than the present study. In this volume, I am concerned primarily with the relationship of student activism to worker empowerment at the College. This chapter draws on topics in the Campaign's story that I feel help to illuminate the dynamics of that relationship.

The basic elements of the Pseudonym College Fair Labor Campaign story, drawn from various interviewees' accounts, are these: A small group of (mostly white, mostly male, mostly middle-class¹) students involved in an Amnesty International chapter, along with their faculty advisor, grew interested in working to improve the wages and working

¹ Following the sociologist David Croteau, whose book *Politics and the Class Divide: Working People and the Middle-Class Left* has played an important role in the development of this chapter, I use the terms "working class" and "middle class" in this chapter to denote roughly a "manual/mental division" and a wage/salary division. (Croteau xii) I do so ambivalently, bearing in mind the complicated and contradictory character of class relationships in the institution. For a longer exploration of students' class position, see Chapter 1; for a fuller discussion of the changing class relationships and contested criteria

conditions of the College's janitorial and food service staff. (These workers were all employees of Unnamed Contractor, a well-known company with whom Pseudonym College had a contract.) According to some accounts, students originally had the idea of trying to unionize the workers, but after speaking with union representatives who advised them that the local climate was very anti-union, the students decided to organize a living wage campaign instead. They began talking with employees of Unnamed Contractor, in both formal and informal ways, and writing a comprehensive research report, filled with annotated data and strongly-worded recommendations, about wages and other workplace issues involving Unnamed Contractor—both specific to Pseudonym College and on a national level.

The students released their report to the college and threatened to publish it more widely, and the administration responded by agreeing to put Unnamed's contract out for bid rather than just renewing it. Then the President of the College appointed a committee of college staff members, students, and faculty members—but no employees of Unnamed Contractor—to look at the recommendations. The Campaign had no representation on the committee but shared a lot of information and advice with its members. Eventually this committee issued its own set of recommendations, including a new College minimum wage of \$13.07 per hour. The President responded that these recommendations were too expensive, and ended up implementing a compromise proposal which included raising the College's minimum wage—affecting Unnamed Contractor employees as well as direct employees of the College—to \$9.64. (According to the report, the starting wage for janitors had previously been \$7.50.)

among different groups of employees at Pseudonym, including faculty, exempt and non-exempt staff, and subcontracted employees, see Chapter 3.

From early in the campaign, students focused a great deal on the tone of their interactions with the administration and the public. They deliberately kept everything on the level of civil, rational, academic discourse. A number of students and others told me that they saw this as an important strength of the campaign, something that distinguished it from previous student activism at the college and helped make it uniquely effective.

One student told me that the Campaign always expected to have to get more confrontational once the administration flatly turned them down, but that the administration kept surprising the activists with its cooperation, and in the end it was never necessary to move from working within the system to working outside it. The students also never did extensive mass mobilization. Although they gathered signatures of supportive students, polled the student body regularly, and kept supportive students updated through a website and other means of publicity, most sources I spoke with agreed that a small core group did most of the work of the campaign, and that most of this work involved such activities as research, writing, and meeting with administrators, rather than mobilization or recruitment.

In the field of social movements, the Pseudonym College Fair Labor Campaign presents a definitional ambivalence, an instance where some would argue that the very term “social movement” does not apply. Of course, this depends in part on which definition one chooses. In the introduction to their book *The Social Movements Reader*, sociologists Jeff Goodwin and James M. Jasper write:

A social movement is a collective, organized, sustained, and noninstitutional challenge to authorities, powerholders, or cultural beliefs and practices. (3)

The Pseudonym College Fair Labor Campaign was certainly organized and sustained, and while they were a fairly small core group their work was certainly collective. A certain ambiguity hangs around the word “noninstitutional” in this definition, however. The group was an autonomous student organization, explicitly working to express opposition to policies of the College administration. At the same time, as a student organization, it received institutional funding for its expenses. As students, its members all had a particular kind of privileged access to the institution and even to the administration. What concerns might Goodwin and Jasper be raising when they say “noninstitutional?” What issues might arise for a movement that—while not exactly institutional—is inextricably tangled up with the institution it challenges? Please, bear these questions in mind for a moment—they will arise again.

Political scientist Sidney Tarrow gives a more complex definition, claiming that social movements are

those sequences of contentious politics that are based on underlying social networks and resonant collective action frames, and which develop the capacity to maintain successful challenges against powerful opponents. (2)

Central to this definition, it seems to me, is the idea that a social movement somehow transforms the structure of social organization. Tarrow goes on to explain:

The irreducible act that lies at the base of all social movements, protests, and revolutions is *contentious collective action*.... Collective action becomes contentious when it is used by people who lack regular access to institutions, who act in the name of new or unaccepted claims, and who behave in ways that fundamentally challenge others or authorities....

Contentious forms of action are different than market relations, lobbying, or representative politics because they bring ordinary people into conflict with opponents, elites, or authorities. They have power because they challenge powerholders, produce solidarities, and have meaning within particular population groups, situations, and national cultures. (3-4)

A social movement produces social change, not just political results—it empowers people and democratizes institutions. Presumably, at least some of the time, people’s “new claims” in fact include gaining “regular access to institutions.” This provides an interesting counterpoint to the work of movement scholars Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward, who claim that people produce change by disrupting (only) those institutions to which they already have regular access; very poor people, for instance, have access to the streets and can disrupt them by rioting. (23)

What, though, is “regular access,” in Tarrow’s sense? Recall our ambivalence about students’ relationship to the College administration. Surely no one could doubt that students have regular access to the College itself. However, they do not usually have access to influencing its financial decisions. In this era of increasing corporatization, students are often described as a college’s customers—but, to carry on the corporate analogy for a moment, there is a great distance between concerned customer and board member, or even stockholder. Are students “ordinary people” in this context, or are they members of the elites? Is the Fair Labor Campaign a case of students asserting new power in decision-making, or acting on their existing privilege in the institution?

In a sense, both are true. As we saw in Chapter 3, students² are surely more powerful than staff members, yet less powerful than the administrations at their colleges. Their mobilizing to claim a role in shaping the values that underlie the institution’s finances is, in a sense, a bid for a more communal and democratic, as opposed to corporate, institutional structure. At the same time, structurally their action is only

² or faculty members, for that matter.

democratic on the level of the student-administration relationship. It has no direct democratizing implication for the roles of staff.

This is not to say that students and staff could not come to see their empowerment in the institution as linked together, symbolically and practically. Sociologist Corey Dolgon describes just such a bond developing out of a coalition struggle to save custodians' jobs at Southampton College of Long Island University:

The issue for students had become more than just the custodians' mistreatment by the college administration; it had evolved into a question of who had power to make campus decisions.... The linkage between the custodians' self-interests and the students' self-interests raised larger questions of social justice: Who should have power and authority to make decisions in a democratic society, and how might we democratize our own community to increase the level of control and dignity in all people's lives? (225)

However, such a link between students' and workers' democratic interests is not automatically present. Unless a coalition works to frame the issue as one of collective interest, there is no reason that increasing student power would necessarily increase the power of staff.

In talking about power relations at Pseudonym College, one student activist who spoke with me drew a distinction between hard power—the ability to compel people to do what one wants—and soft power—the ability to talk them into it.

So I don't think we had any hard power, which is the traditional sense, but I think that when the student body sort of as a whole makes some sort of a moral statement, that that gets listened to. So we decided that we couldn't force [the College administration] to do anything, but that we could probably persuade them.

Access to meetings with the administration—and the freedom to speak their minds without fear of losing their jobs—are privileges available to students, though not necessarily to low-wage employees on campus. But even when they use these privileges,

students have often failed to achieve their objectives. Various people told me that this student campaign was unprecedented in its effectiveness at the College—for instance, a few years earlier, students had unsuccessfully campaigned for an end to the contract with Unnamed Contractor on the grounds of the company’s involvement with privatized prisons. Winning concessions towards a living wage, then, was not a matter of simply flexing students’ access, but rather of strategically targeting authorities. In this sense the students were certainly involved in what Tarrow calls “contentious politics.” (3) It was, however, a peculiar kind of contentious politics, a quasi-movement form that has begun to appear, not only at Pseudonym, but at other colleges around the United States.

Movements theorists John McCarthy and Mayer Zald use the term “conscience constituents” to describe those who do not stand to be directly affected by a victory. (175) In a traditional grassroots organizing effort, one might expect that workers would lead the organizing to increase their own pay, while students, as conscience constituents—or, to loosely translate into activist parlance, “allies”—would play supporting roles. In this case, however, it was students who were the primary actors in the struggle. Recall, too, that the Fair Labor Campaign never sought to galvanize a mass mobilization, choosing instead to get as much political mileage as possible out of strategically deploying the privilege of a small group of members. In a sense it was not so much a social movement as it was a lobbying campaign by students in solidarity with campus workers. Indeed, I think a self-reinforcing cycle was at work: because they were mostly students to begin with, the activists chose strategies that fit their student skills and worldviews—but these choices of strategy, in turn, tended to exclude most workers from involvement in the campaign.

This situation of conscience constituents leading a campaign is not unique to Pseudonym College, but it is a fairly novel phenomenon that has begun to appear with the recent rise of campus living wage campaigns around the country. As an activist with the Swarthmore Living Wage and Democracy Campaign, I grew interested in studying other campaigns precisely out of a desire to work out the implications of this structural issue. To be sure, not all campus living wage campaigns in the United States can be described this way—some are led by workers, or by strong coalitions of workers and students—but a number of colleges are to some degree like Swarthmore and Pseudonym.

Labor movement scholar Dan Clawson cautions that, although the living wage movement is a promising new direction for labor, it could do more harm than good if students and other allies of labor take on the paternalistic role of advocates for workers, substituting their own leadership for worker self-determination:

If this new form of struggle were to become doing things for workers, it would undercut the greatest, most democratic premise of the labor movement: that workers have both the right and the capacity to get together, organize, decide for themselves what is in their own interests, and then go out and fight to win.... Any group, *any* group that argues that it acts *on behalf of* workers, and that therefore workers do not need to organize and select representatives of their own choosing, is not to be trusted. (emphasis in the original, 188-9)

Clawson describes how students at Wesleyan University took the lead in organizing a union there, then grew concerned about their own overbearing role in the process, and have begun developing strategies for backing off and supporting worker empowerment. (189-90) At Pseudonym, where students chose to advocate what they perceived to be staff members' interests rather than trying to organize a union, workers had even less power in the process. Some Pseudonym students who spoke with me acknowledged this issue, but for most it did not seem to be a primary concern. Indeed, one student activist

told me in positive terms how, over time, students had come to be able to intervene with administrators on behalf of individual workers:

And now we're at the point where if I hear a problem, I have my high-level contacts in the administration, people like [an administrator], who I'll go to and say, "Here's a problem with this manager, this is the person who told me, you should go talk to that person." Because I know that [the administrator]'s now going to protect that person's identity and deal with the problem that way.

This student drew on an established personal relationship of trust with administrators to try to address workplace conflicts. In the student's experience of privilege, calling upon one's "high-level contacts" is likely often an effective problem-solving strategy; certainly this approach proved to be part of the successful strategy by which Pseudonym Fair Labor won the wage increase. However, even conceptually, this is a problematic strategy for coping with the unequal power dynamics of a worker-manager dispute. The student believes that administrators can impose effective top-down solutions; this implies that the student fundamentally sees workplace conflicts as isolated and personal. Even assuming that the administrators fully cooperate, student intervention with administrators does nothing to transform the power inequalities that make workers vulnerable to mistreatment by managers. Furthermore, this strategy makes students and their privilege continually essential to the process, without making the students at all structurally accountable to the staff members to whom they become self-appointed representatives. As Clawson points out, worker-led organizing and representation is a far stronger solution, because it has the potential to actually shift power into the hands of workers. Routinizing a process of unaccountable representation by students certainly does nothing to empower workers. Arguably, it even helps disempower them, by obscuring the need for worker-led organizing and drawing legitimacy away from such efforts.

That said, in counterpoint to the student's account, I heard a very different story from two senior administrators who spoke with me together in a joint interview:

—I think what was very tough here, especially for the management people—they had two audiences. They were trying to get a good job done, clean up buildings, meet our expectations—and at the same time, they had a lot of people—and again, we hire them to manage their employees—and then there was a lot of this, "Well, their supervisors aren't good," and there was a lot of activism. So I think it was very tough and difficult, and I'd say there were some of the management people for a while became pretty gun-shy. And they came back to us and said, you know, "Are you going to the administration? I mean we're hired to do a job and we feel we can do a good job, but we can't have every time a supervisor has to make a difficult decision with an employee, the custodian doesn't like it, the custodian goes to a student and complains."

—And we had several cases we took clear through to the conclusion that we found the employees were wrong. And we had to terminate several of them for theft. They were using the students, in a way that wasn't appropriate.³

As confident as the student quoted was in their relationship with the administrators, they didn't take into account the competing relationships to which the administrators would also answer. The College's relationship to its custodians is mediated by Unnamed Contractor, and the administration sees itself as primarily responsible to the managers and supervisors of Unnamed Contractor, not to its workers. Meanwhile, because the College also plays a parental role to students, administrators are able to invoke a paternalistic concern ("they were using the students") to dismiss what students say.

By bringing up "several cases we took clear through to the conclusion," one administrator invokes the trope of an objective, judicial process. The philosopher Michel Foucault has argued perceptively against the court system as a mechanism for enacting justice. He objects to the idea that "someone who can remain quite detached... an intellectual, and expert in the realm of ideas" should be the arbiter. (30) Instead,

³ These two paragraphs come from two different administrators whom I interviewed together. The one paragraph did follow immediately on the heels of the other, as shown here.

Foucault advocates a justice, not backed by state (nor other) authority, but simply carried out by the people, who “do not rely on an abstract universal idea of justice, they rely only on their own experience, that of the injuries they have suffered, that of the way in which they have been wronged, in which they have been oppressed.” (9) Workplace justice, Foucault would say, is to be found not in supposedly neutral arbitration by College administrators, but in a general empowerment which would free workers as a group to enact their own justice unconstrained by legitimized College authority. In this workplace context, the way to best approach Foucault’s ideal of popular justice would be to form a democratic and non-hierarchical union. By bringing workers’ and managers’ conflicts to the administration for arbitration and accepting the outcomes, students reinforce the legitimacy of the supposedly neutral authority dispensing justice over justice as a socially agreed-upon concept by all parties.

I was alarmed at what I perceived to be a wide gap of communication between students and administrators. The student I have quoted appears to believe their ability to call on administrative allies is an effective strategy for solving workplace problems, whereas the administrators seem to be saying that they have come to reject as inappropriate these patterns of communication over the heads of managers. I wondered whether the student was aware that some of the situations they had brought to the attention of administrators had ended in firings of workers they sought to defend. What seems clear is that the situation is utterly lacking in accountability. Just as the students are structurally unaccountable to the workers they seek to represent, so too are administrators structurally unaccountable to the students who appeal to them. Whatever

persuasive power students exercise depends entirely upon the administrators' consent to be influenced.

At Pseudonym College, the strategies that students in the Fair Labor Campaign chose—and the tactics that followed from these strategies—played into the power norms of an institution that valorizes calm, well-researched, academic reasoning. The students consciously avoided activist images or rhetoric, preferring to sound too moderate rather than too radical. One student described it to me as “a very special dynamic, which was very rooted in research and facts.” This emphasis on information enabled the students to take advantage of the special legitimacy accorded to intellectual discourses in an academic community.

Sociologist David Croteau has written that middle-class, college-educated activists often focus on “information politics.” He notes:

Middle-class activists do not see daily life experiences of workers as an adequate source of information about politics. Instead, they tend to emphasize formal schooling as a central site for political education.... [S]uch references are always to *college* education—a sphere more readily available to middle-class students. (155)

It is not surprising that middle-class people place so much value on college education, since for many it is a defining personal experience as well as an important signifier of class membership. At the same time, it is also unsurprising that many working-class people find this attitude alienating. Croteau quotes William Greider: “[O]rdinary citizens are silenced and demoralized—made to feel dumb—by the content of information politics.” (154) Working people do not lack information or knowledge, but a college

education trains people to produce and understand information in particular formats that others may find intimidating or hard to decipher.⁴

By making the academic presentation of information the primary tactic of persuasion for the Pseudonym College Fair Labor Campaign, students excluded employees of Unnamed Contractor from major involvement. After all, as one student activist told me;

So we certainly talked with a ton of workers, but there was very little in terms of worker leadership. Because most of the workers we started off dealing with was, ah, food services and housekeeping. And to do a really public-policy type research paper, while they—you can add anecdotal evidence—that's the type of work that, you know, students and academics do very, very well. And so you have to talk and make sure you know what the important issues are, but in terms of writing a high-quality paper, those aren't the skills these people tend to have, and if they had those skills they wouldn't be working in those jobs.

Of course, workers have many other life skills that can be applied to workplace organizing. Plenty of workers, in plenty of historical moments, have been involved in workplace organizing without having been trained in public policy research. One can conceive of many different ideological approaches to the living wage project, some of which would center on collective ideals of justice and workers' own experiences and knowledges. Foucault writes about what he calls "subjugated knowledges," of which one category is "local and specific knowledges," those that are considered to be "naïve knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity." (82) These local knowledges, he says, are one important source for recovering "a *historical knowledge of struggles*." (83) Working people's lived experiences could certainly prove a rich source of rhetorical and tactical grounding for a living wage campaign. Indeed, from my perspective, a living wage is in essence a

⁴ This thesis, for example.

compelling moral principle drawing on a radical political perspective on history, far more than it is the logical result of rational or economic analysis. However, the students chose to approach the project through tactics such as academic research papers—in other words, to communicate as one elite to another. It was an exclusionary choice.

It was also in some ways a very effective choice within the cultural context of the College. As Jasper points out, one's credibility is a resource, a form of cultural capital that can be mobilized. (350) In an elite academic institution, credibility is closely linked to deploying sophisticated academic discourses, and the students very successfully mobilized this resource for their cause. The administrators I interviewed universally spoke in laudatory terms about the intellectual acuity of the student activists, frequently using words like "brilliant." They also spoke glowingly of the Campaign's rational and civil tone—sometimes contrasting this with what they saw as the counter-productive tone of many other student activist groups. Said one administrator:

I guess one of the nice things about working in higher education is, students bring issues to you that are complex issues, and I've got to indicate about this, I didn't know a lot about the sustainable and living wage part, but I got a real education out of the process. So one of the nice things here at Pseudonym is students do it.

The other I think that's so important here is the good research and sane conversation we were able to have with students. There were a couple times initially where it was sort of the old activism thing of beating you over the head type of thing, and what I really appreciate is that, when we began having good conversations and sharing research and putting an all-campus committee together to deal with it, it was a good tone. But if they had come and said, "We're going to have a boycott of food service," then there would have been no conversation. So I think what I appreciate here is the responsible manner in which our students and other interested members of the community sat down and had good conversations and discussions to try to find a solution.

In celebrating the cordial, reasoned, conciliatory approach the students took, the speaker implicitly condemns confrontation and impassioned emotion as socially inappropriate.

The disparaging comments about “the old activism thing of beating you over the head” and about boycotts makes this attitude even more explicit. It is not entirely clear why there could not have been conversation in the context of a boycott—would the administrators have refused?—or whether this is a bluff. Nonetheless, the administrator clearly communicates comfort with the Campaign’s chosen tactics and a distaste for the kind of polarized tactics made famous by community organizers like Saul Alinsky, who wrote, “Pick the target, freeze it, personalize it, and polarize it.... [A]ll issues must become polarized if action is to follow.... One acts decisively only in the conviction that all the angels are on one side and all the devils on the other.” (227-8) Certainly a conciliatory approach falls easier on middle class sensibilities—mine as well as this administrator’s—than does Alinsky’s Manichean approach. At the same time, the idealization of objective, unemotional deliberation is part of a long and oppressive tradition in which the rational European man is posed in opposition to the hysterical woman and the illogical non-European. More to the point, the fiction of the neutral intellectual is constantly used to discredit the validity of people’s real interests and emotional investments in issues, and to elevate to judge status those whose privilege makes them appear disinterested. Civility “and sane conversation,” so praised by the administrators, can be a code for maintaining the kind of friendly middle-class social solidarity in which, by unspoken agreement, the intensity of people’s real interests and the searing injustice of the distribution of wealth will not be invoked. As Jeffrey Goldfarb writes,

[T]he commitment to civil society and civil discourse, unquestioned, without disruptions such as those of Malcolm [X], becomes a force for the continued subjugation of the marginal, in the US particularly the continued functioning of racism. (181)

And yet, despite the passionate force of that quotation, Goldfarb does not reject civility—only civility unaccompanied by subversion. In his book *Civility and Subversion: The Intellectual in Democratic Society*, he argues that both of the titular elements are essential to the work of progressive scholars. Subversion cannot stand alone any more than civility can, for “[t]he task is not only to speak truth to the powers, but also to set up the conditions for such address to occur, to provide the time and space for public deliberations...” (219) Progressive students, too, must walk this line as they pursue both integrity and effectiveness in their activism.

One possible reading of the administrators’ apparent comfort is as evidence of what Jasper would call a “virtuosic” maneuver on the part of the student activists, who deployed an effective dose of civility to win a major concession. (319) The students knew the culture of the college and how to play it successfully—charming, convincing, and pressuring the administrators in ways that would allow the power-holders to save face. Indeed, for some administrators, it seemed that not only their public image, but also their own good opinions of themselves were at stake. I was startled at how personal and emotional were the terms in which they spoke about their roles in the process, pleading for acknowledgement that administrators are “people too,” as one put it. Another said,

It’s tough at times to still see reports that come out, and there was one recently, there was sort of a retreat down in March that I think was still pretty critical, and feeling like our Human Resources hadn’t been responsive, and in some cases we hadn’t been responsive. And, you know. And that bothered me. We think we’ve really worked hard.... But I think it’s tough sometimes to see the criticism, when people don’t feel they’ve been involved, and don’t think they’ve got it as good as they’ve got. Maybe if you were to walk up, in some cases, and ask a custodian, how does he feel about life here at Pseudonym, he might not realize everything that we’ve done for him.

It appears that the student activists did a masterful job, framing their issue in a way that created a problem of conscience for the administrators but simultaneously also provided a solution that would allow the administrators to retain their self-image of benevolence. Indeed the administrators and student activist leaders remained on friendly terms, even entertaining one another socially. I am reminded of a rule of etiquette that I learned at my middle-class hearth: one should always leave some socially graceful avenue open to the other person. Indeed, these administrators' apparent desire for students to like them reminds me of my own visceral impulse to make figures of authority approve of me, even when it contradicts my political and intellectual convictions. Our shared class conditioning kindles in us a kind of social solidarity. As Croteau writes, "The effective socialization of students into a role of compliance is perhaps best achieved with middle-class students, who identify with teachers and authority figures and learn to play the system effectively to reap its rewards." (156) Students deployed this relationship with the College's administrators as a tool in their progressive reform project. At the same time, they reinforced the relationship and the shared class privilege that it signifies.

I find the administrator's last two sentences very troubling:

But I think it's tough sometimes to see the criticism, when people don't feel they've been involved, and don't think they've got it as good as they've got. Maybe if you were to walk up, in some cases, and ask a custodian, how does he feel about life here at Pseudonym, he might not realize everything that we've done for him.

These lines reveal important limitations to the students' approach. This administrator, it appears, views the wage problem as temporary and the solution as complete. They imply that the increase was an act of generous charity rather than of compensatory justice. The successful campaign does not seem to have led them to a broader analysis of the ongoing

wage inequalities at the college, nor to a deeper consideration for the validity of workers' accounts of their own workplace issues. In fact, most ominously, the speaker seems to be suggesting that they now feel justified in placing less stock than before in what workers have to say. They claim that they have access to an objective truth about how good the workers have it, while the workers themselves might be mistaken. And, somehow, a custodian's own account of how they "feel about life here at Pseudonym" would be less valid because they don't know what the administration has "done for" them.

Of course, I do not know whether the administration really listens to workers any less than they used to. They may have used a different excuse, or no excuse at all, to ignore workers' concerns before the advent of the student campaign. The possibility of a negative change, however, must be taken very seriously by students interested in promoting democratic campus workplaces. It is one thing to campaign for material gains even while acknowledging that you do not know how to promote worker empowerment; but it is quite another thing to actually contribute to the dismissal of workers' voices. Recall Foucault's critique of the specious neutrality of the disinterested intellectual judge. In a sense, Foucault's conception of popular justice also describes the ethos of a democratic social movement, where legitimacy derives not from any kind of hierarchical authority but from the lived personal truths of all the people. By participating in the championing of academic knowledges and reinforcing the system in which intellectuals collude to decide the objective truth about workers' realities, students risk worsening the classist anti-democracy of their College. Even though winning a stronger role for students in College decision-making seems like a democratic victory, winning on the

grounds of students' academic knowledge and social class solidarity with the administration also re-inscribes oppression.

Perhaps, in this sense, those students who would have liked to see a movement for democracy allowed themselves to be co-opted. The Campaign did win an increase in the wage, but rather than “develop[ing] the capacity to maintain successful challenges,” as Tarrow would have it—rather than laying the groundwork for further action, rather than creating more long-term space for labor concerns at the college—they left administrators feeling more self-righteous and reluctant to move than ever. (2) This does not negate the very real victories won, nor does it necessarily prevent the decision-makers from being persuaded to do more in the future. Indeed, activists in reform movements do not expect to win everything they are asking for, all at once. As Tarrow says, this is the way change happens in such movements—“a portion of their message is distilled into ‘common sense’ of public or private culture while the rest is ignored or discarded.” (175) A movement can move forward because, in a series of intermediate victories, activists not only win material objectives, but also gradually transform the social reality. Material victories without social transformation to back them up are unstable and vulnerable to being undermined or rolled back.

In an account of student pro-diversity coalition organizing at Indiana University sociologist Christopher Bickel analyzes what he learned about the danger of co-optation by the administration:

[I]nstitutions of higher learning achieve legitimacy by partially integrating student concerns into the overall institutional framework. In short, they strive to incorporate student opposition by winning students' consent. This is often accomplished through the use of moderate reforms. An often unmentioned pitfall of liberal, and even progressive, reform is that it tends to incorporate opposition without significantly changing oppressive power

relations. Reform sets the stage for cooptation of organized resistance, and ultimately strengthens the institution by winning the consent of oppositional movements. As a result, student movements are usually co-opted at the very moment when they have the most strength to affect university policy. (210)

In a world of compromise, organizations can experience these reforms as important victories—but unless the relations of power are changed, Bickel argues, the chain from reform to co-optation can quickly lead to the undoing of even these reforms. This is what happened at Indiana, writes Bickel:

Although the administration publicly stated that it had met all the demands, in reality, it only agreed to begin the implementation process—a process that tied up the Student Coalition in countless administrative meetings. The greater and more important call for democratic transformation that we had hoped would lead to future progressive action was overshadowed by our concrete demands, which, like the demands of previous student movements, were far too moderate to significantly affect power relations at the university.... It was incredibly difficult to keep the coalition together, especially when so many of the core members were graduating.” (216)

Indeed, one student activist at Pseudonym spoke to me grimly about this very problem. The student predicted the impending end of the Fair Labor Campaign, arguing that all the concessions would soon be lost when the last few students involved had graduated. More of a long-term, mass mobilization would have been necessary to sustain the progress, this student argued:

And that's why you need a kind of institutionalized student group with constant recruitment and this type of thing, to kind of hold their feet to the fire. I have no doubt that, once [the last couple students who had been involved in the campaign] graduate, in eleven months or so, ten months, that the business department and the college administration... if the economy goes on a downturn again, and they start to cut costs, they're going to, you know, go to the easiest cuts first.

This activist, at least, harbored no illusions that the reforms equaled any kind of long-term transformation, nor that the friendly administrators could be relied upon to hold to their conscientious positions.

Why, then, did the students not choose more democratically minded, socially transformative organizing strategies? They tended to feel that the strategies they chose were the only effective, or the most effective, ones; many student activists I spoke with contrasted the effects of this campaign favorably with other, more traditional activist efforts at their school. These tactics might mean compromise and moderation, but they argued that more confrontational, movement-style tactics would yield no concrete results at all. Even the pessimistic student quoted above was sure that the small, carefully choreographed, strategically businesslike group had been essential to the victory:

But, you know, getting a broad-based group—and that was the thing, I mean, we didn't really want a broad-based group, because you lose that kind of control, and you may succumb to the people who aren't on your same level. And when you're kind of operating within a very—you know who the elites of the college are, and you have to operate with them on a face to face basis all the time. If you have a bunch of bomb-throwers, kinda ideological bomb-throwers, who won't take no and they won't take compromise and they want immediate results, it's just not gonna work. And I think that's really—you know, on the one hand, yeah, it's gonna—once [the last couple of students from the campaign] graduate, there's no more. On the other hand, if it was broad-based and a big activist group, it might not have happened at all. So it's kind of damned if you do, damned if you don't.

Damned if you do, damned if you don't, indeed. By all accounts, the students of the Pseudonym College Fair Labor Campaign were very skilled, and very effective, at what they did. They mobilized their educational capital and their middle-class social capital to win significant reforms in the cause of social justice. But what if it should turn out to be true that their victories would not last because they did not rest on a base of social

transformation? What if, in fact, by re-inscribing privilege and de-legitimizing workers' voices, the students' strategies were fundamentally at odds with a democratizing project? As one faculty member remarked to me, "although the students who were involved in it had many extraordinary skills, community organizing was not one of those skills." Where, after all, would they have acquired such skills? Strategies for organizing for democracy across the divides of class and for supporting worker empowerment in an oppressive institution are not, after all, such standard elements of middle-class social training. (If these knowledges are to be found anywhere, surely they are part of Foucault's subjugated knowledges.) What *should* well-meaning, progressive, privileged college kids do? A responsible answer must surely hinge upon a close analysis of democratization and the meanings of staff empowerment.