

Chapter 6. Conclusion: Fighting for a Democratic Workplace at the Gig Academy

To conclude this book, I want to examine what my analysis of precarious faculty working conditions and organizing can tell us about the broader labor market and employment structure in higher education. In fact, what most people do not know is that higher education has been one of the greatest producers of new models of labor exploitation. From unpaid internships to undergraduate peer teachers, universities and colleges never seem to tire of creating different ways to get workers to do their jobs with little or no compensation. My argument is that since these institutions have helped to create the current predicament, they may also help us to envision a different future. As I have argued throughout this book, one key element for positive social change is employees who demand more workplace democracy.

● The Real Roots of the Gig Academy

In Kezar et al.'s *The Gig Academy*, we see how the casualization of the labor force has moved to all areas of the academic economy. The key components of the new employment structure include “a fissured and misclassified workforce; unbundled, deprofessionalized, and atomized roles; forced micro-entrepreneurship; managerial influence over labor supply and demand; offloading costs onto workers; technological means of reducing labor costs; and increasing structural discrimination” (20). I have been arguing that we can trace many of these changes in how workers are treated to the ways universities turned to a casualized labor force after World War II. If we want to understand the roots of our current employment structures, we have to look at how liberal, middle-class professionals responded to government-sponsored incentives by turning themselves into careerist entrepreneurs (Hedges). My argument is that the original cause behind the gig academy was not just the development of external neoliberal policies in the 1970s; rather, these transforming employment practices were partially developed out of an internal restructuring of labor relations starting in the 1950s.

The reason why I believe it is so important to understand the roots of the casualization of the academic labor force and the broader economy is that if one wants to fix current problems, one has to see that we cannot simply blame neoliberal ideology, state defunding, technological transformations, or a corporate administrative takeover. All of these key aspects of our contemporary gig economy were made possible in part by liberal middle-class professionals trading in their shared public missions for a focus on individual careers, prestige, and profits (Ehrenreich 5-6).

One of the main ways that professors during the Cold War helped to usher in the gig academy was by unintentionally splitting off teaching and service from research (Nisbet). In other words, they unbundled their own profession by concentrating their efforts and attention on the competition for government-funded research. In *The Gig Academy*, Kezar and her colleagues offer a different framing narrative:

...unbundling is a crucial arrow in the quiver of Gig Academy managers. This trend developed directly out of the discourse on “scientific management,” also known by the moniker “Taylorism,” after its creator. The key is to study complex work processes and devise ways to reproduce them by disassembling the tacit expertise of highly skilled workers into the simplest components. Each of these components is standardized in order to distill the process down to a mechanical sequence that can be delivered far more cheaply by substituting or supplementing low- to middle-skilled labor. In this manner, the contemporary university has managed to break down complicated professional roles like those of academic faculty, which paved the way to displace large portions of work onto contingent hires. (23)

This common way of seeing the causes of the unbundling of the professions blames top-down managers for imposing a discourse of scientific management, yet I have been arguing that in the case of research universities, the picture is much more complicated because it was the faculty themselves who unintentionally spun off their roles in teaching and administration. From this perspective, the protections of tenure were not used to protect a public good; instead, tenured professors were able to use their academic freedom and autonomy to pursue their own careers. Thus, tenure was perverted from the inside as faculty willingly restructured their own jobs and moved from a collective mission to a more individualistic understanding of academic work.¹⁰

It is therefore not very surprising that professors like Bérubé and Ruth reveal a distrust in the ability of NTT faculty to act in a collective manner, even though the truth is that tenured professors themselves have often been trained to be self-interested careerists who rely on the labor of others to focus on their own prestige and compensation. My goal here is not to deny the importance of contingent faculty working with tenured professors to build a more democratic and just workplace; rather, I want to argue that we need to begin with a frank assessment of the origins and effects of our current labor system. After all, if we simply blame the state or neoliberal ideology rather than addressing the class conflicts inherent to universities and colleges themselves, we will not be able to make important improvements. For instance, in the current labor structure

10. For a discussion of the pros and cons of individualism vs. collaboration in the tenure and promotion process, see Kemp.

at research universities, tenured professors often rely on graduate students to take their graduate seminars, teach their undergraduate courses, and work in their scientific labs (Bousquet, “The Waste Product”). These professors are then structurally reliant on a class of exploited workers in order to maintain their own class positions. Moreover, since the same universities that produce Ph.D.s also hire these credentialed students off of the tenure track (Bousquet, “Introduction” 1-2), the institutions are creating their own source of surplus labor to be exploited. While I do not think that much of this structure is intentional, what has been created is a system where professors are incentivized to turn a blind eye to their own role in deprofessionalizing their profession, a process similar to one described by Nina Toren as having happened in relation to other professions.

Since some research professors in the sciences are so busy doing their research and competing for funding, they may not only step away from instruction but also administration (Washburn). Furthermore, research projects require a great deal of staffing and oversight, so they contribute to administrative bloat (Newfield). While federal and state grants often include a certain amount of funding for staff and other forms of overhead, it is unclear whether research usually pays for itself. In fact, there is a lot of evidence pointing to the fact that undergraduate instruction often subsidizes research, and one reason why institutions have to rely on exploited contingent and graduate student labor is that they have to generate a “profit” to pay for expensive research projects (Samuels, *Why Public Higher Education*).

As I mentioned in the introduction of this book and as I address in *The Politics of Writing Studies*, the Cold War funding system helped to create a structure containing several related hierarchies: research over teaching; the sciences over the humanities; theory over practice; graduate education over undergraduate education; professors over contingent faculty; and careerism over public mission (10-11). By responding to specific incentives, science professors were able to restructure higher education from the inside in an unintentional fashion, and while it is true that only a small percentage of higher education institutions are designated as Research I schools, these universities train and influence faculty from a wide range of institutions. One of the main ways the Cold War science professors helped to transform the faculty was through their focus on their individual careers. Even though many of these faculty members were participating in the national effort to defend the United States against perceived threats coming from the Soviet Union and other communist states, the fight for funding and prestige created a type of individualistic ethos:

Individualism can serve as an ethic that disrupts the collective consciousness necessary for questioning and disrupting unequal power conditions. With the breakdown of community also comes many other problematic outcomes, including disengagement, poor morale, and alienation, that are hindering higher education in meeting its outcomes and being effective. (Schmit 6)

Here we see how a careerist mentality focused on individual rewards and prestige can undermine the ability to make the workplace more fair and just. Furthermore, since many professors do not have a collective understanding of their own profession, they may ignore the poor working conditions of their fellow workers. Not only does this system make contingent teachers feel disempowered and alienated, but it can also lead to the disaffection of the research professors themselves. My goal here is not to demonize research professors in the sciences; rather, I want to show how since the root causes of the academic gig economy have to be traced back to the actions of the liberal academic professional class, the solutions will have to take into account this constituency and ideology.

● Tenured Allies?

One way that I have seen TT and NTT faculty work together is by focusing on projects of shared interest, such as addressing the increase in administrative costs and the reduction of state funding for higher education. Although some professors may not want to confront the exploitation of contingent labor, they might be willing to enter into a shared alliance with contingent faculty over other issues. My experience has been that once TT and NTT faculty start to address issues together, they start to build relationships that can lead to a raising of consciousness concerning labor conditions.

An example that I have witnessed of TT and NTT faculty working together was the fight over online education in California. After the Great Recession, many higher education administrators and state officials believed the best way to increase graduation rates and reduce spending was to turn to massive online courses (Vardi 5). The UC system union worked with other unions and different faculty groups to fight this change because it knew that it would probably increase costs and eliminate many faculty jobs. In partnering with faculty senates, the union was able to use research concerning online education to resist the changes that were being promoted from above. During this process, the union built lasting relationships across faculty lines, relationships that were later used to fight the attempted restructuring of pensions. One thing the union learned from these joint ventures is that working with people holding different faculty positions helped to build a more collective mindset that could later be used to address issues concerning working conditions and labor exploitation. However, the recent turn to online education due to the COVID-19 pandemic reveals how the good work accomplished by the alliance between TT and NTT faculty was easily undone in a state of emergency where almost everyone relinquished power to administrative control.

The move to remote education through administrative fiat is just one example of how a growing administrative class, as documented by Jay Greene and his colleagues (14), can result in a more powerful administration. Additionally, TT professors have ceded power as they have focused on their research careers at

the expense of service in the shape of administrative duties. As a result, professors now feel disempowered, as noted by Kezar et al. in *The Gig Academy*:

Power is a pervasive theme. Faculty and staff have lost power, and administrators are centralizing and gaining power. Postdocs and graduate students are asserting power as they find themselves as laborers. We argue that the consolidation of power among administrators does not serve higher education institutions. Our ultimate recommendations are centered around workplace democracy that is based on notions of power redistribution to ameliorate existing labor problems. (7)

The question we must ask about this situation is, did faculty give up their power or was it taken from them? I have been arguing that in many cases, the administrative power was taken from them because they gave it up by focusing on other areas of their jobs.

In response to this labor dynamic, those of us working in higher education have witnessed during the last couple of decades a revolution from below as the most disempowered faculty and staff workers have tried to organize and resist what they see as the corporate administrative takeover of their institutions, but this process is bound to fail if it does not also address the structural hierarchies that support the dominance of the liberal professional academic class. The problem I have with simply blaming the restructuring of higher education on neoliberal ideology is that it fails to address the role played by liberal professionals in creating many of the conditions and structures that made neoliberalism possible. For instance, in their discussion of neoliberalism in *The Gig Academy*, Kezar and her co-authors focus on the post 1980s political ideology of the Right, stating, “General neoliberal tendencies include prioritizing individual freedoms over collective liberty and personal responsibility over shared welfare. They also include a preference for shifting responsibility over the provision of basic needs and public goods from democratic institutions to private enterprises” (14). The counter-narrative I have presented argues that this shift from liberal democratic institutions and policies to a right-wing vision of free market determinism was actually initiated by liberal middle-class professionals. Ironically, public institutions of higher education were transformed into quasi-private enterprises through a form of Cold War welfare for scientific research (Lowen). However, instead of seeing this transformation as merely the imposition of a government-based funding model, it is vital to look at how liberal professionals responded to new funding incentives by restructuring their own jobs in an effort to chase prestige and enhanced compensation. From this perspective, those of us working in higher education will never make its labor system just and fair if we do not confront the institutional hierarchies that were mainly generated from within.

One possible solution would be for the federal government to tie research funding to the fair treatment of all employees associated with the research. In fact, research grants already impose several strict requirements regarding

spending and budgeting (Noll and Rogerson 5), so it should be possible to force institutions that receive federal support for research to rely on non-exploited labor. Likewise, Pell grants and other forms of federal financial aid could require that institutions with students who receive such aid have minimum standards for pay and job security. Additionally, state governments can play a role. Since teachers at public institutions of higher education are state employees, states can require fair working conditions for all faculty. While some movement has occurred in certain states to legislate protections for contingent faculty, there is much work that can be done (Schneirov). It is worth noting that since more workers in the overall workforce are participating in the gig economy, legislatures are being forced to rethink employment law and state policies regarding precarious labor (Lobel).

● We're All Contingent Now

As Kezar and her fellow authors stress in *The Gig Academy*, the entire economy is turning to the casualization of the labor force,

...the contingent workforce has increased by more than 50 percent... rising from 10.7 percent of the total workforce in 1995 to 15.8 percent in 2015.... Intuit, owner of TurboTax software, recently estimated that more than double that percentage work contingently, based on an analysis of the data it has from 2016 tax filings. Perhaps more ominously, researchers found that expansion of this labor segment accounts for around 95 percent of the net growth in employment in the two decades since 1995. (16-17).

This move to precarious labor in the general economy means that the issues facing contingent faculty in higher education are evident in many other professions. Likewise, many of the solutions we have seen regarding improving the working conditions of contingent faculty can also be applied to issues concerning workers outside of higher education. For example, all workers need a fair and transparent hiring and promotion process. They also need to be compensated for all of their work, and the government has to guard against the misclassification and the proliferation of new exploited classes of workers (De Stefano). Moreover, as I showed in my discussion of the UC system contract, employees should be given support for professional development, and they need a say in how their work is defined and assessed.

Those of us working in higher education can use knowledge we have gained from working to improve the labor conditions of contingent faculty to help other precarious workers by demonstrating the power of collective organizing and coalition building. Too many gig workers see themselves as isolated, independent contractors without any rights or benefits. Luckily, in California, a bill was passed that prevents companies from hiring people as “independent contractors”; instead, they must be treated as regular employees, which gives them full

protection under the law (Semuels). Changing independent contractors to regular employees helps eliminate job misclassification. As Kezar and her colleagues highlight in *The Gig Academy*, the problem of job misclassification has many side effects:

These misclassifications matter, particularly to workers on the receiving end, who lose basic protections of employment, including minimum wage and overtime protection, as well as social safety net protections, such as workers' compensation and unemployment insurance, because independent contractors do not contribute to those funds. But they also matter to the polity, since misclassified workers can be used to craft exemptions from payroll taxes, which would otherwise cycle back into the public coffers. (22)

This use of misclassification, or the wrong job title, is very common in higher education and may be an innovation that has spread throughout the labor market (Bensman 7-10). In other words, while many people see universities and colleges as liberal institutions, these organization have led the way in producing new ways of exploiting workers. Not only do universities rely on producing their own surplus labor, but through their creation of internships and student employee positions, they have helped to develop ways to hide labor exploitation (Braun 281-287).

Universities also rely on convincing workers that because they are pursuing a higher calling, they do not need to be treated fairly, and this ideology has now spread to the general gig economy. Kezar and her co-authors of *The Gig Academy* explain how this reasoning works, writing, "Gig work conjures the image of the artist and bohemian, who seeks to remain untethered and therefore free to pursue activities of passion—a freedom which may be culturally signaled at least in part by a rebellious indifference to long-term planning for financial security" (24). This combination of artistic and academic values can be seen best in the use and abuse of graduate student instructors who are socialized to see their labor exploitation as a way of developing their career as they pursue their creative interests; however, not only are these students exploited as graduate workers, but some will later be exploited as contingent faculty, and in many ways, their graduate education helps to normalize for them their future precarious labor.

Fixing the use and abuse of graduate student instructors is therefore a key part of transforming the working conditions of contingent faculty because these workers are not only exploited while they are students but also often conditioned to accept such working conditions later when they are teachers. Furthermore, the trend of having students pursue post-doctorate fellowships prior to being hired in TT faculty positions adds another level of potential labor exploitation, as post-docs often are poorly paid, receive little or no benefits, and do not have long-term contracts (Stephan 245). At this point, we have to ask why do so many liberals and liberal institutions participate in this process of the deprofessionalization and casualization of the higher education labor force? I believe that one

answer to this question involves the unconscious psychology of liberal people, which involves the need to be seen by the self and others as being moral and good; since liberals desire to have their good self recognized by others, any bad actions or bad effects have to be repressed or denied (Samuels, “(Liberal) Narcissism”). Thus, liberal professors may fail to see that they are exploiting their graduate students because they do not want to believe that their good intentions can lead to bad effects. Moreover, the desire to blame the problems of higher education on evil administrators and state budget cuts may serve to shield liberal professors from seeing their own role in a destructive system.

Perhaps the ultimate contradiction of these liberal institutions is that they are often obsessed by the conflicting missions of equality and prestige. Liberals want to believe that their institutions support the goals of building a more just and equal society, but they also want to be recognized for their high status (Samuels, *Educating Inequality*). In fact, the conflicting desires for equal opportunity and recognized talent embodies the idea of a meritocracy, and in the structure of higher education, professors striving for increased prestige and compensation often hide behind the belief that they are contributing to the common good by promoting a meritocracy (McNamee and Miller). This self-deception, then, blinds many liberals from seeing the labor exploitation that makes their lives possible.

● Rate Your Employee

Not only do liberal professors often turn a blind eye to the workers around them, but also they have instituted and maintained a system of faculty evaluations based on student feedback that has been shown to be highly biased and discriminatory (Scherr and Scherr). Similarly, as Kezar and her colleagues reveal in *The Gig Academy*, the use of customer ratings in the general gig economy is problematic:

But as Hannák et al. recently uncovered in their study of bias in app-based freelance work, women and people of color face significant job discrimination, as structural social biases also get aggregated in the form of negative customer feedback and lower ratings, which ultimately reduces their earnings. Worse, these services often enforce minimum rating standards, meaning workers can find themselves permanently banned from the platform at a moment’s notice and without recourse if they fail to meet the minimum level of customer satisfaction, undoubtedly a fate more likely to befall those who already experience arbitrary social bias. (31)

It is interesting to think about the ways the use of student evaluations in higher education is similar to customer ratings in the gig economy. In both cases, employers outsource their role in assessing the effectiveness of their workers, and both systems rely on using unqualified evaluators to make judgments based

on bias and personal reactions. It's also interesting to note that the problematic anonymity of student evaluations seems similar to the sometimes problematic use of anonymity in online discussions and comment sections, the latter of which is discussed by Hiroaki Morio and Christopher Buchholz. Here we see how universities and colleges have not only been innovators in practices that undermine workers, such as through the use of anonymous student evaluations of faculty, but also innovators in technologies that harm social equality by allowing anonymity in discussion forums. Yet, since we believe that these liberal institutions are shaped by good intentions, we often deny their role in destructive social practices.

The fact that universities and colleges continue to use student evaluations after they have been proven to be unscientific and biased points to the failure of liberalism to protect workers against discrimination and exploitation. As Kezar and her co-authors relate in *The Gig Academy*, student evaluations are a troubling application of free market principles:

In a 2015 interview with the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, the founder of Udemy (a prominent MOOC platform) argues that student ratings are the ideal form of instructional quality control: "In an open marketplace where there is competition, if you're an instructor and you can't teach well or you don't know what you're talking about, students will say so with ratings...*If you're not providing value, you won't make money*—only the best teachers go to the top." The most obvious problem with this statement is that there is a great deal of empirical evidence to show that student evaluations of teaching are not always measures of instructional quality, and they show clear bias on the basis of race, gender, and perceived political orientation. (31-32)

Not only does the practice of student evaluations as described in this passage transform the assessment of teaching by qualified professionals into a popularity contest fueled by biased students, but this invention is coupled with de-professionalization through the celebration of the amateur; since any student is seen as qualified to judge professional experts, expertise no longer matters, and, as Peter Sacks explains, the student is positioned to be the customer of a provided educational service (xiii).

Once again, it is important to stress that student evaluations were not imposed by interfering states or corporatized neoliberal administrators but were instituted by the liberal faculty themselves (Trout). Of course, many research professors do not have to worry about these evaluations because they are promoted primarily for their research, grants, and publications rather than for their teaching, but for NTT faculty, these faulty tools are often used to form the basis of decisions about teaching assignments or even firings (Heller A8). Any talk about having a diverse faculty and promoting a more equal society is undermined by the use of assessment tools that have been shown to be highly biased. In fact, when the UC-AFT union tried to bargain over the elimination

of student evaluations, it was told that no one wanted to spend the time and resources on a different method. Fortunately, there is a growing movement calling these evaluations into question. Once again, a change may occur because people first organized from below, and then later, people with more power took on the fight.

● Hiring Fairly

Coupled with this question concerning how contingent faculty are assessed is the issue of how they are hired and how they are let go. As I documented in Chapter 2, the UC-AFT contract requires schools to provide a clear career path with specific guidelines concerning under what conditions a lecturer can be let go and what type of warning is necessary for a layoff. However, there are still many faculty in their first six years who are simply not rehired for no stated reason. Since precarious positions exist in part to give management flexibility in the face of fluctuating enrollments, it is hard to see how to fix some of these problems, yet, due to the threat of lawsuits concerning discriminatory workplace practices as described by Susan Bisom-Rapp (970), many campuses have started to require national searches for all positions, and these searches have to follow strict guidelines. We have found that one effect of this administrative change is that institutions are forced to make a much stronger commitment to contingent faculty in order to attract viable candidates.

A key in stabilizing these positions is to make sure that all faculty are hired through a clear and rigorous process so that the positions become more regularized and predictable. Unfortunately, as Kezar and her co-authors explain in *The Gig Academy*, fair hiring and dismissal practices for contingent faculty in higher education are the exception and not the norm:

With little or no job security they are typically hired semester-to-semester or year-to-year, often within weeks or days of the semester's beginning, so they have very little ability to predict their work schedules, obligations, and even income. In fact, a study by the Center for the Future of Higher Education found last-minute hiring to be rampant, with more than a third of contingent instructors reporting they were hired within just three weeks of the start of classes and more than a sixth within two weeks. (43)

It should be clear that these common hiring practices expose institutions to the potential for lawsuits regarding discriminatory practices.

One of the major pushes the UC-AFT union and other unions and professional organizations around the country have undertaken is to motivate institutions to hire their faculty on a full-time basis. Not only do full-time faculty have more stable careers, but they can spend more time with students because they do not have to run between jobs at different schools. In many cases, fringe benefits kick in once someone has at least a 50 percent appointment, so it does not

cost more to have one full-time position instead of two half-time positions, and money can be saved by cutting down on the cost of hiring and training so many part-time faculty. FTNTT positions offer a middle ground between pure contingency and tenure, and although some may see these positions as representing an erosion of the tenure system, these positions may be an effective compromise balancing institutional and employee needs.

By creating a career path for contingent faculty, academic institutions can not only stabilize their workforce, but they can also help to make these jobs functional by providing raises and promotions based on clear and fair assessment practices (Schwartz). This emphasis on creating stable, full-time positions clearly goes against many of the current practices that Kezar and her colleagues describe in *The Gig Academy*: “Part-time faculty typically lack any promotional opportunities or bridges to secure employment. This means they have little recourse to substantially grow their salary or earn rewards for good performance” (46). To counter this system of casualized labor, faculty need to work together to change the policies and practices at their institutions. A way to enact some of these changes is to seek to rewrite the faculty handbook or notify human resources about potential lawsuits stemming from discriminatory hiring practices.

● Privatizing the Public

One of the central arguments of Kezar and her fellow authors in *The Gig Academy* is that the underlying force reshaping higher education and other professions is the role played by an anti-social mode of capitalistic individualism: “Academic capitalism leaves behind notions of a public or collective good, worker empowerment and participation in decision-making, community among workers, unions and organizing among workers, and public-sector employment relationships, and instead privileges a radical individualism and the privatization of institutional operations” (77). As I have argued, the root causes of this privatization of higher education can be traced to the way that individual professors in the sciences were incentivized to focus on their own careers and not their institutions or their students. One problem with injecting such a market-based system into a social institution is that people may choose to focus on their own desires for more power, prestige, and profit while they eliminate the social and collective spirit of the institution’s mission. While some professors did agree to join unions, many professors helped to create an ideology of free agency, which broke the bonds they had to the larger academic community.

One thing I want to stress is that the type of contingent positions I have been documenting throughout this book represent a middle ground between the professional liberal class of the TT faculty and the working class of the adjunct faculty. The kind of FTNTT employment I have been calling for also calls into question many of the binary oppositions that structure higher education hierarchies. This is because FTNTT positions represent a liminal space

between teaching and research, careerism and public mission, and at-will hires and tenured security. Moreover, when people who hold such jobs are represented by a union or some other collective organization, the unions can help to counter the tendency to pit each contingent worker against the other. In fact, as Kezar and her co-authors explain in *The Gig Academy*, a defining aspect of the gig academy is the replacement of group solidarity with an ethos of competitive individualism:

Individualism is achieved by promulgating values of entrepreneurialism so that people see themselves as solely responsible for areas of educational work and as competing with others. Privatization is achieved through market-based values that defund public higher education and encourage a competition for scarce resources, which also reinforces individualism. Inherent in the individualistic logic and the privatizing logic is a move away from collective or community values for organizing higher education. (77)

One way to counter this privatization and individualization of higher education is through the collective organizing of workers from below. Since contingent faculty are often forced to enter a desperate competition for scarce employment, they are pushed into a hyper-competitive market system, but when they become part of a union or professional organization, they have the opportunity to work together on a shared mission of democratizing education.

In states where unions are allowed, teachers can go on strike, which happened with the K-12 teachers in Chicago in 2012, for example (Uetricht 2). However, even when states do not allow contingent faculty to be represented by unions and collective bargaining agreements, teachers can still increase their power and their sense of democratic solidarity, and they will likely find support in their local communities:

In many states such as Tennessee, West Virginia, Arizona, and Oklahoma—all “right-to-work” states—there are very few labor protections in place. For public-sector workers, striking is a crime. Yet despite the aggressive efforts of many conservative lawmakers and commentators to demonize those who recently participated in statewide teachers strikes as prioritizing their own enrichment over students, communities in these states overwhelmingly sided with their children’s teachers, largely due to being well organized. (Kezar et al. 155)

Although unions often provide the best path for protecting the working conditions of precarious faculty, within the current political climate, it is sometimes necessary to take collective action outside of the collective bargaining process. As we have seen, sometimes this means a group of faculty join together and write a petition or show up uninvited to a departmental meetings; the important thing is that precarious workers band together so that they do not accept being reduced to acting as isolated individuals competing for scarce resources.

● Fighting for a Democratic Workplace

In countries such as Germany, with its federal work life programs, when workers are given a greater voice in decision making, workplaces not only become more productive, but the programs also function to protect workers against unemployment and under-employment, and within this structure, workers sit on the boards of most corporations, and they are given the rights of democratic participation in all levels of their employment (Fricke). For Americans, the idea of a democratic workplace sounds absurd; yet, it occurs in many different places throughout the world (Pausch 16).

One reason why American workplaces are not more just is that we do not even think it is possible to have a democratic working environment. However, a growing body of international research has demonstrated the viability and need for workers to play an increased role in decision-making in all aspects of their occupations. Since we live in a democratic society, the same principles of equal citizenship should be applied to the institutions in which we spend our working lives. As Robert Mayer explains, from the perspective of Robert Dahl, it makes no sense to have a democratic political order but a largely authoritarian workplace (222).

As I have argued in this book, progress for improving the working conditions of precarious workers often occurs through the accumulation of small collective acts that build on each other and create a space for the formation of collective coalitions. Part of this process requires overcoming the stereotypes and prejudices that reinforce institutional hierarchies. It is also vital to recognize where improvements have been implemented so that people have hope in an enhanced way of doing things. By learning about examples of better practices and policies for contingent faculty, we can think about how to improve the working conditions of all people laboring in our contemporary economic order.