



February 12, 2018

Recently, a concerned graduate employee at The Pennsylvania State University (PSU) informed the Temple University Graduate Students Association (TUGSA AFT Local #6290) of an effort by the PSU administration to undermine unionization efforts at State College through the use of selected and non-contextual information gleaned from the collective bargaining agreement negotiated by TUGSA. The cynicism required to attempt to exploit the efforts of innumerable, selfless individuals who have and continue to be part of TUGSA's graduate employee community for the purposes of union-busting is unconscionable and deserving of nothing more than our strongest condemnation.

In the wake of the recent Pennsylvania Labor Relations Board decision to allow PSU graduate employees to vote on unionization, the administration has deployed a deliberately misleading comparison to TUGSA. Aside from the purposeful and glaring omissions—no mention of yearly wage increases, health insurance subsidy increases, guaranteed employment protections such as comprehensive grievance procedures, etc., as well as the all-important process of collective bargaining (which TUGSA is engaged in currently) — the most sinister aspect of this agenda is the implied assertion that Temple graduate employees were somehow better off before unionization. On the contrary, prior to our first contract in 2002, the average stipend for a graduate employee was \$11,000 per academic year; our health insurance consisted of a \$400 *per year* allotment usable only in the case of catastrophic injuries or severe medical issues; there was no grievance procedure to allow graduate employees to contest instances of being overworked, underpaid, sexually harassed, terminated without just cause, etc.; and, contracts for teaching and research assistantships could be voided at any time, leaving graduate employees in a precarious state of permanent anxiety regarding both their present and future employment. With all this in mind, it would require an absurd degree of willful ignorance to not see the obvious benefit that unionization has brought to the graduate employee community of Temple University. Additionally, when we see that the 2017 operating budget for PSU was \$5.7 billion while Temple's was \$1.45 billion, the manipulation behind this comparison becomes even more apparent, particularly when taking into account the hundreds of thousands of dollars the PSU administration has already spent in legal action attempting to deny its graduate employees the right to unionize.

PSU's administration has repeatedly suggested that its own graduate employees would suffer were attempts at unionization successful. Such an argument has been so widely circulated by university administrators around the country, at places as vaunted as Harvard University, the University of Pennsylvania, and Princeton University (among others), that the argument now borders on administrative cliché. What this neglects to mention is the sore reality that when employees at any organization come together to form a labor union, it is, in fact, a rejection of this

oft-repeated narrative by those in management, who have heretofore erroneously believed that their system of governance is good and just rather than admitting it was all along self-serving for the sake of profit. Too often, university administrators are happy to cut one-on-one or backdoor deals with a grievant while preserving their power and carpeting over a serious issue with little to no oversight or accountability on their part. In fact, a collective bargaining agreement negotiated between the University and the graduate employee labor union is *specifically* designed to introduce accountability in the system; both parties are bound by a system of rules and regulations designed to formalize a working relationship. If PSU's administration believes it cut graduate workers a fair deal, then what does it have to lose from a collective bargaining agreement with its graduate employee labor union? What PSU's administration, as well as the management of any organization, does not want to admit is that with a collective bargaining agreement in place, business cannot go on as usual (i.e. management can no longer do what it pleases without regard to the financial and social security of employees). Moreover, the collective bargaining process lays bare the intentions of management, which have either been privy only to an exclusive cadre of administrators or are too taboo to be said out loud. Thus, this deliberately misleading graphic and discussion by PSU administration is nothing more than a thinly veiled threat to its graduate employees: give up your right to unionize and collectively bargain with us, or we will punish you. Perhaps the greatest irony here is that universities get the union they deserve. For too long, universities have been happy to "talk the talk" when it comes to issues of social justice, democratic participation, reducing inequality, and advocating for marginalized individuals. Now it appears PSU administration does not have the inclination to "walk the walk".

We encourage our colleagues in State College to not be swayed by these manipulative tactics and scare mongering. Your union will belong to the community of graduate employees and no one else. TUGSA AFT Local #6290 stands with all graduate employees at The Pennsylvania State University and the world over, and strongly encourages our colleagues at PSU to continue in their ongoing efforts. Congratulations on the PLRB decision! Now, get yourselves a contract, one that renders this absurd effort by PSU's administration meaningless, and guarantees the benefits, wage increases, and protections you are all entitled to receive.

In Solidarity,

The Executive Board of the Temple University Graduate Students' Association (AFT Local #6290)

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