

diminishes when the bulk of the faculty are poor, alienated, vulnerable, and scared.

These forces can likely be checked only by a democratic revolution within the institution. The City University is not “controlled by the popular will” in any meaningful sense of the phrase. Ultimate decision making lies in the hands of a political establishment for whom investment in public higher education is not a priority. Many of us feel we have reached the limits of moral persuasion. Our union, the Professional Staff Congress (PSC), has established a \$7,000 per course minimum salary for adjuncts—nearly double the current rate—as a central demand in ongoing contract negotiations. Other public sector unions in New York, however, including the one representing faculty at the State University of New York, have accepted raises that total around two percent per year. It is unlikely that CUNY management, saddled with limited budgets by the state, will wish to radically alter this pattern by doubling the salaries of its 12,000 adjuncts.

For this reason, like increasing numbers of educators across the United States, we will likely be forced to turn to direct action if we are to compel a living wage for adjuncts, check the erosion of faculty governance in one of the country’s greatest universities, and stand up for the needs of students for whom the City University is a key vehicle for achieving their dreams. There are serious obstacles. Our union, afflicted by gaps in sympathy and understanding between tenure-track and contingent faculty, is in some ways a victim of the administration’s divide-and-rule strategy. In addition, New York’s Taylor Law forbids public employee strikes and provides incentives for union leaders to eschew militancy in favor of moral appeals. And we need to mount an intensive campaign to enlist students, our most powerful allies, in a quest to remake the university into a vehicle for the satisfaction of our shared goals—a task that involves making tuition, class sizes, facilities maintenance, and adequate advising part of our bargaining agenda. The growing wave of teacher direct action across the United States, including the recent strike by educators in Los Angeles, offers models we should heed.

As a rank-and-file activist, I can report that sentiment for direct action is growing among faculty at CUNY, as evidenced by a near-unanimous strike authorization vote in 2016 and sympathy for a “\$7K or Strike” campaign emanating from more militant corners of the union. The future of CUNY as a genuinely public institution depends on our willingness to organize and to stand fast in service of a democratic vision. ■

## REFERENCES

- Board of Education of the City and County of New-York. 1849. *Addresses Delivered on the Occasion of the Opening of the Free Academy, January 27, 1849*. New York: Wm. C. Bryant & Co.
- Brenner, Robert. 2006. *The Economics of Global Turbulence*. New York: Verso.
- Chen, David W. 2016. “Dreams Stall as CUNY, New York City’s Engine of Mobility, Sputters.” *New York Times*, May 28. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/29/nyregion/dreams-stall-as-cuny-citys-engine-of-mobility-sputters.html>.
- CUNY Rising. 2016. “New York Needs Free, Quality Higher Education: A Case for Increased Investment in CUNY.” [http://psc-cuny.org/sites/default/files/CUNYRisingWhitePaper\\_12.7.16.pdf](http://psc-cuny.org/sites/default/files/CUNYRisingWhitePaper_12.7.16.pdf) (October 15, 2018).
- Mitchell, Michael, Michael Leachman, and Kathleen Masterson. 2016. “Funding Down, Tuition Up: State Cuts to Higher Education Threaten Quality and Affordability at Public Colleges.” Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. <https://www.cbpp.org/research/state-budget-and-tax/funding-down-tuition-up>.

## AN INSIDE/OUTSIDE FORMATION: COCAL

Vincent Tirelli, *Brooklyn College, CUNY*

DOI: 10.1017/S1049096519000477

The idea of an “inside/outside strategy” in social movement and labor organizing is not new, and it can take various forms, depending on the circumstances (Moser 2015). For example, the role played by the old ethnic labor councils, such as the Italian–American Labor Council formed in 1941, was to bring together groups that did not readily find a voice within the union structures that existed at the time. These formations were able to operate outside of these structures and speak to an unmet need of a particular community, thereby providing greater flexibility in terms of ideas and action, and sometimes positively influencing the more permanent labor organizations from which they emerged. Participants and leaders of the Coalition of Contingent Academic Labor (COCAL) have aspired to play such a role within higher education (Berry 2005; Berry and Worthen 2014).<sup>1</sup>

COCAL is a loosely-knit group of part-time, temporary, graduate, adjunct, and non-tenure-track faculty and their supporters. It was conceived at the December 1996 “National Congress” organized by graduate students from George Washington University as well as activists from the Modern Language Association’s Graduate Student Caucus, which was having its annual conference in Washington, DC at the same time. This was followed by the New York National Congress in April 1998, and that is where COCAL was born. With help from various student government organizations—most notably the Doctoral Student Council of the City University of New York Graduate Center—and the energy of graduate students from around New York City, we emerged as a determined association of scholar-activists facing an uncertain future. Twelve conferences later, COCAL continues to develop the communication networks that help to build solidarity around issues facing faculty, students, administrators, and, we soon discovered, our entire global academic community. In the summer of 2020, COCAL XIV is scheduled to take place in Querétaro, Mexico.<sup>2</sup> In addition to the contingent academic labor participants from Mexico, Canada, and the United States, efforts are being made to invite academic labor activists from South America, Central America, and the Caribbean.

In part, COCAL was a result of the lack of attention given by the major labor unions to the growing use of part-time faculty. The growth of higher education in the post-war United States, combined with funding instabilities during the 1970s fiscal crisis era and beyond, left the university system in crisis. Many labor unions responded to pressure from management by allowing an increasingly large, flexible, and multi-tiered work force to develop, ostensibly as a temporary measure to protect their full-time core group. However, the use of part-time and other classifications of non-tenure-track faculty became a permanent feature of the landscape. The strategic difficulty in organizing a fragmented work force composed of “temporary” part-time workers who are somewhat isolated from one another necessitated a different approach. From the earliest discussions at COCAL there emerged an understanding that a better means of communication and networking among contingent faculty might help to shift the discussion as well as the focus of labor unions. The growth in the use of the World Wide Web at that

time facilitated these efforts, and the communications were supplemented by an email list, now known as [adj-l@adj-l.org](mailto:adj-l@adj-l.org), which currently has more than 650 subscribers from the United States, Canada, and Mexico, including numerous journalists from several major higher education periodicals.

Over time, COCAL has developed into an expanding network of activists. One coordinated activity, Campus Equity Week (CEW), was initiated at the January 2001 COCAL conference in San Jose. It was modeled after the week of activities known

*The outside status of COCAL has allowed for a space where contingent academic labor activists could meet others in the same boat and share their grievances and strategies with a receptive audience. This has helped to build camaraderie and solidarity among the participants.*

as Action 2000 (A2K), which was a campaign to raise awareness of contingent faculty issues in California. CEW has evolved into an annual week of activism which has garnered media attention and has helped contingent faculty activists and their supporters to be part of a continuing dialogue. The major academic labor federations in the United States—American Federation of Teachers, National Education Association, and American Association of University Professors—and many of their local chapters have coordinated and provided resources for these events.

In terms of practice, COCAL has survived through a combination of organization and anarchy. It is not a membership organization and it does not collect any dues. There is a loosely structured steering committee that comes into play when it is needed, mostly to assist the local organizations with running the COCAL conferences and to decide where the next one will be held. Money raised for the conferences comes from conference fees and union donations. However, all decisions regarding the agenda and other conference matters remain with the local organizing committee supported by the steering committee. The conferences put a spotlight on local issues every time and allow for ongoing network building through face-to-face discussions. Participation in COCAL has allowed activists to raise questions that are not always heard inside the larger labor federations or in their local union chapters. The outside status of COCAL has allowed for a space where contingent academic labor activists could meet others in the same boat and share their grievances and strategies with a receptive audience. This has helped to build camaraderie and solidarity among the participants. In a small way, COCAL has played a role in raising consciousness about contingent faculty issues, and it has raised the level of dialogue as to how these inequities shape the function and role of the modern system of higher education. ■

#### NOTES

1. The author is one of the founders of COCAL and was a steering committee member for 16 years. His reflections presented here are supported by those experiences. He is also the founder and co-administrator of the Contingent Academic email list ([adj-l@adj-l.org](mailto:adj-l@adj-l.org)).
2. Maria-Teresa Lechuga, co-coordinator of COCAL Mexico. Personal email correspondence with the author, October 11, 2018.

#### REFERENCES

- Berry, Joe. 2005. *Reclaiming the Ivory Tower: Organizing Adjuncts to Change Higher Education*. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Berry, Joe, and Helena Worthen. 2014. "COCAL: A Tri-National Workforce Self-Organizes to Abolish Contingency." *Academe Blog: The Blog of Academe Magazine*, posted August 29. Available at <https://academeblog.org/2014/08/29/cocal-a-tri-national-contingent-workforce-self-organizes-to-abolish-contingency>.
- Moser, Richard. 2015. "What Is the Inside/Outside Strategy?" *Be Freedom*, posted April 9. Available at <https://befreedom.co/introduction-to-the-inside-outside-strategy>.

#### REPORT ON THE COALITION OF CONTINGENT ACADEMIC LABOR (COCAL) XIII CONFERENCE

Julia M. Lau, *Independent Scholar*

DOI: 10.1017/S1049096519000453

The Coalition of Contingent Academic Labor (COCAL) held its biennial conference in San Jose, California, in August 2018. It featured panel discussions and workshops for contingent faculty working in higher education and in K–12 institutions, and it included activists and union leaders involved in challenging precarity in the teaching profession. On its website, COCAL is described as "a grassroots coalition of activists in North America working for contingent faculty: adjunct, part-time, non-tenured, and graduate teaching faculty"; it is run entirely by volunteers. COCAL originated in the 1996 Annual Conference of the Modern Language Association and the first National Congress of Adjunct, Part-time, Graduate Teaching Assistants, and Non-Tenure Track Faculty, which were held concurrently in Washington, DC, that year.<sup>2</sup> COCAL's members and the 150 attendees of this conference share common challenges in finding workable strategies to gain recognition and to secure fair working conditions for contingent faculty and staff in the United States, Canada, and Mexico.

The relevance of this conference to the APSA is that it dovetails with APSA's ongoing efforts to acknowledge the challenges of and hear from contingent and adjunct faculty who teach political science. COCAL XIII also provided learning points specifically for APSA's Committee on the Status of Contingent Faculty in the Profession. My role as a representative of this committee and as a first-time attendee was to learn from COCAL about the broader picture of precarity in the teaching profession and to convey lessons learned to APSA and the political science community.

#### Plenary Sessions on Working Conditions of Contingent Academic Labor

The first half of the conference featured panels on the working conditions of contingent academics—which, in COCAL's definition, includes K–12 teachers and university professors—and current efforts of unions and other groups to lobby for improvement in wages and other recognition. Plenary speakers from various