

The Corporate Assault on Higher Education and Union Responses

By Gordon Lafer

Higher education is under siege by a barrage of policy initiatives that aim to fundamentally transform the academy.

The most visible and most sustained assault has come in the form of funding cuts. Nationally, funding for public higher education was 18 percent lower in 2016 than in 2008, amounting to a \$10 billion total disinvestment.¹ In many states, cuts to higher education funding were made not as a fiscal necessity but as an affirmative policy choice, often instituted at the same time that legislators created new tax cuts for corporations and the wealthy.

Beyond budget cuts, higher education has been hit from multiple directions by policy initiatives that threaten to radically alter what it means to teach or to learn in postsecondary institutions. At the University of Kansas, the Board of Regents erased the notion of academic freedom by mandating that faculty can be fired for social media comments deemed “contrary to the best interests of the university.”² Faculty tenure has been attacked in terms that until recently were reserved for K-12 teachers, with an Iowa lawmaker declaring that “bad professors should [not] have a lifetime position.”³ In Florida, the governor proposed a system of “differentiated tui-

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tion” that would raise fees on the humanities while keeping them low for business and computer science majors.⁴ And in multiple states, legislators are demanding that state universities use online courses to create a four-year degree that costs less than \$10,000.⁵

These and similar policies have raised cries of alarm and sparked widespread and worried conversation. But how should we understand them? What, if anything, links such disparate initiatives? Why are they

happening now? Are these the manifestations of cultural conservatives trying to impose a political order on young minds? The backlash from families sick of watching tuition grow ever-steeper while their wages stand frozen in place? Working-class resentment at arrogant eggheads?

In fact, these policies are part of a coherent and well-coordinated agenda fueled by the largest and most powerful political forces in

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the country: the nation's premier corporate lobbies. The key to understanding the attacks on higher education—and to revealing the bleak future toward which they lead—is understanding the ways in which these initiatives serve what the nation's biggest corporations believe is their self-interest.

The place to look to understand this agenda is not Congressional hearings nor presidential tweets, but the 50 state legislatures, where business lobbyists have spent the past decade engaged in an ambitious campaign to reshape the relationships between citizens and their government, and between employees and their employers.

The Supreme Court's 2010 *Citizens United* decision ushered in a new legislative era, shaped by the impact of unlimited corporate spending on politics. That fall's elections were the first conducted under the new rules, and they brought dramatic change. Eleven state governments switched from Democratic or mixed control to unified Republican control of the governorship and both houses of the legislature. Since these lawmakers

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The best-known effort came in Wisconsin, where Governor Scott Walker pushed through legislation that effectively eliminated the right to collective bargaining for his state's 175,000 public employees.⁶ Yet what happened in Wisconsin was part of a much broader pattern. In the five years following *Citizens United*, 15 states adopted bills restricting public employees' collective-bargaining rights.⁷ Labor standards were undermined for non-union workers as well during this time, with 12 states passing laws restricting the minimum wage, four easing limits on child labor, and 19 imposing new caps on unemployment benefits.⁸ Finally, the post-*Citizens United* era has also brought dramatic cuts to education, health services, mass transit, libraries, and other essential public services.⁹

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At the heart of this legislative activism are the country's premier business lobbies—the Chamber of Commerce, the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM), and the National Federation of Independent Business—along with the Koch-funded Americans for Prosperity. At the state level, corporate lobbying is coordinated by the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) and has brought together several hundred of the country's largest corporations, including Google, Facebook, Ford, GM, Verizon, ATT, and more. One-quarter of all state legislators in the country are members of ALEC, but legislators pay dues of only \$50 per year, accounting for less than two percent of the organization's revenue.¹⁰ The rest of the budget is paid by corporate sponsors. ALEC meets several times a year in posh resorts, where state legislators and corporate lobbyists work together to draft legislation, which is introduced in cookie-cutter fashion in statehouses across the country. The same corporations that write the laws then contribute to the campaigns of ALEC-member

politicians; fund state-level think tanks to promote their agenda; and run political advertisements on radio, television, and social media. In this way, the corporate agenda is carried out through a well-funded and highly integrated network that operates on multiple channels at once: funding ALEC to write bills, craft legislative talking points, and provide a meeting place for legislators and lobbyists to build relationships; supporting local think tanks in the ALEC-affiliated State Policy Network to produce

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white papers, legislative testimony, opinion columns, and media experts; contributing to candidate campaigns and party committees; making independent expenditures on behalf of lawmakers or issues; and deploying field organizers to key legislative districts.

WHY FOCUS ON THE STATES?

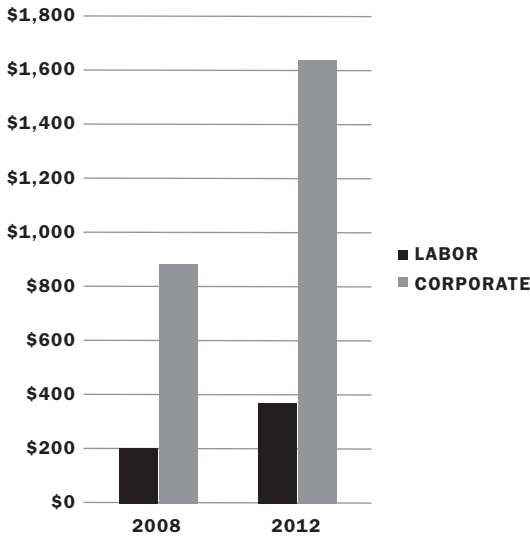
In a given two-year Congress, only a handful of significant policies are enacted. By contrast, ALEC

alone estimates that 200 of its sponsored bills are adopted every year in state legislatures. At the same time, many of the factors that strengthen corporate political influence are magnified in the states. First, far fewer people pay attention to state government, granting wider latitude for well-funded interests. Political scientist Martin Gilens notes that only when policy debates attract widespread public attention are politicians even modestly responsive to the bottom 90 percent of the population.¹¹ Yet if such attention is rare at the federal level, it is rarer still in the states. Less than one-quarter of adults are able to name their state representative, and less than half even know which party is in the majority.¹² Apart from unions and a handful of progressive activists, the corporate agenda encounters little resistance at the state level, because hardly anyone knows or understands the issues.

So, too, corporate lobbies' financial advantage is magnified in the states. *Citizens United* marked a sea change in state as well as federal pol-

itics. As of 2010, 22 states maintained bans on independent political expenditures by corporations or labor unions; all were overturned by the Supreme Court’s decision. The first major analysis measuring the impact of the legal change on state legislatures found that the net result was to increase the odds of a Republican being elected by four percentage points, primarily as a result of increased business contributions.¹³

**CORPORATE AND UNION SPENDING ON STATE ELECTION CAMPAIGNS,
2008 AND 2012 (IN MILLIONS)**



Source: *National Institute on Money in State Politics*

Because state legislative races are so much cheaper than federal elections, those contributions go further. Consider North Carolina, where a network of organizations overseen by supermarket executive and corporate activist Art Pope spent \$2.3 million on legislative races in 2010, single-handedly doubling the budgets of his chosen candidates.¹⁴ Republicans won nearly 80 percent of the seats Pope targeted in 2010, enabling the GOP to gain complete control of the state legislature for the first time since Reconstruction. As a result, North Carolina’s legislature has become one of the country’s most radical; among other initiatives, it has prohibit-

ed even voluntary payroll deduction of school teachers' union dues and has enacted new tax cuts for corporations and the wealthy, coupled with dramatic cutbacks in education funding.

WHAT IS PARTICULAR ABOUT THIS MOMENT?

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fought against the 8-hour work day, Social Security, and the minimum wage.¹⁵ An impressive body of scholarship has shown that the country's big business lobbies have consistently sought to minimize or reverse the accomplishments of the New Deal, starting shortly after it began.¹⁶ Yet the shape of the struggle changes, and we cannot understand corporate lobbies' aims in the 21st century simply by examining

their behavior in the 1940s or 1970s.

A distinguishing feature of the current U.S. economy is the increased degree of globalization. It may never have been entirely true that “what’s good for General Motors is what’s good for the country,” as the company’s president apocryphally suggested in 1953.¹⁷ But the alignment between corporate and national interests certainly was much closer when companies relied on Americans to make—and to buy—their products. Currently, a majority of GM employees and nearly two-thirds of the cars it sells are overseas, with the number of cars sold in China alone surpassing the U.S. total.¹⁸ General Motors remains highly engaged in American politics, as a member of NAM’s board of directors, a partner of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, and an active member of ALEC.¹⁹ This influence is now exercised on behalf of a company for which American workers’ skills and household incomes matter less than ever before.

GM’s situation is far from unique. For the first time, many of the country’s most powerful political actors are companies whose headquarters may be located in the U.S. but whose profitability does not primarily

depend on the fortunes of American society. Foreign sales now account for 48 percent of the S&P 500's total corporate revenues.²⁰ Among recent ALEC member corporations, Exxon Mobil, Caterpillar, Procter & Gamble, Pfizer, Dow Chemical, and IBM all earn more than 60 percent of their revenue outside the U.S.²¹ This marks a new departure in American politics: some of the most influential actors in the legislative process have political interests that are increasingly disconnected from the fate of the country's citizens.

This disconnect is reflected in the outlooks of executives. Every year since 2011, Harvard Business School has surveyed its alumni—among the elite of U.S. business leaders—on their views of the American economy.²² The responses suggest, above all, a divergence between corporate and public interests. These executives are simultaneously optimistic about the ability of American firms to compete in global markets and strongly pessimistic about what awaits American workers. The first survey revealed a flood of jobs going overseas—that year, Harvard's alumni reported 56 cases in which their companies moved at least 1,000 American jobs overseas, overwhelmingly motivated by cheaper labor. For remaining U.S. employees, a large plurality agreed that their firms would continue to outsource work and reduce wages and benefits in the coming years.²³

Many commentators have pointed to defunding education as an instance of political irrationality. Why would American corporations advocate cuts in education? After all, don't they need educated workers to staff their operations, and well-paid consumers to buy their products? It seems that today's answer to this question is yes, but less so than ever before. Sociologist Mark Mizruchi points to the corporate community's failure to provide a solution for the crisis of education as a sign that corporate lobbies have become dysfunctional.²⁴ But we need to face the fact that what is a crisis for us may simply not be one for them.

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Corporate politics in the 21st century are further marked by a fundamental pessimism about the American economy. The U.S. is an economy in decline, with an increasing number of Americans unable to support their families at a minimally decent standard of living. In 2013, for the first time in 50 years, a majority of students in American public schools were living in low-income families.²⁵ In just three years, the post-2008 Great Recession erased two decades of growth in average household

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income. But the larger concern is a longer-term trend: the dismantling of the New Deal policies that created a booming middle class for several decades in the mid-20th century. In the new economy, decline—gradual but relentless—has become the new normal for an increasing share of the country.

For the corporate lobbies, growing inequality poses a central political challenge: how to advance policies that are bound to exacerbate inequality, while avoiding a populist backlash. ALEC and Chamber of Commerce lobbyists are aware that much of their agenda is broadly unpopular. This problem was particularly acute in the heat of the 2008 financial crisis and during the onset of the Great Recession. Most of the country blamed the financial crisis on insufficient government regulation.²⁶ An overwhelming majority, including three-quarters of Republicans, believed the government should ban bonuses in banks that received federal assistance.²⁷ Throughout 2007–09, a significant majority of Americans not only supported a “public option” for health insurance, but wanted a single-payer system.²⁸ Finally, for at least a decade, two-thirds of the country has consistently held that corporations pay “too little” in taxes; in 2015, a majority supported the proposition that “our government should... redistribute wealth by heavy taxes on the rich.”²⁹

The corporate lobbies, understandably nervous about managing these sentiments, have sought to channel economic resentment in benign direc-

tions. The legislative record suggests that this concern has been embodied in four types of initiatives:

1. Laws that constrain or abolish the institutional vehicles through which working people challenge corporate power. This includes not only the elimination of labor unions, but restrictions on citizens' right to sue for corporate malfeasance and limits on government's authority to regulate corporate behavior.
2. Privatization of public services, removing focal points around which public demands or protest might coalesce, erasing the notion that government is responsible for meeting essential needs, and heightening the population's dependence on private employers.
3. Initiatives to restrict the public's right to vote on redistributive policies, making it illegal for city councils to vote to regulate natural gas activities such as fracking, police wage theft, or raise the minimum wage.
4. Finally, and most subtly, the corporate lobbies appear to be encouraging a broad cultural shift toward lowered expectations regarding what workers may demand from their employers and what citizens may demand from their government. In this sense, apart from their short-term impact on taxes or government, cuts in public services may serve a long-term political strategy: normalizing downward mobility.

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HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE CORPORATE AGENDA

Recent years have seen state legislative initiatives that aim to eliminate tenure; replace human instruction with technology; defund the liberal

arts; and eliminate the system of public higher education as a public service in which states have an obligation to provide affordable university education to academically worthy citizens.

In multiple states, higher education budgets have been cut even where there was no fiscal crisis, and often at the same time that new tax cuts were offered to corporations and the wealthy. In Kansas, lawmakers cut higher education funding at the same time that they reduced taxes for the

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state's wealthiest citizens by 25 percent—more than enough to keep the university system intact.³⁰ In Illinois, Governor Bruce Rauner has forced a 34 percent cut on the state university system and, for years, refused to sign a state budget until the legislature addresses the crisis of the faculty's "hugely expensive pensions [and] ... work rules."³¹

Disinvestment in higher education reflects, in part, the logic of globalization. Twenty years ago, Bill Readings' *The University in*

Ruins suggested that mass public higher education in the mid-20th century was the product of nation-building in which each of the major industrial democracies set out to produce a well-educated citizenry.³² But this commitment rested on a sense of national identity, and the organization of corporate profit-making along national lines. As national boundaries have become less economically significant, the logic underpinning this mission has withered.

Beyond slashing their financial support for public higher education, corporate-backed legislators have been fundamentally reshaping the academy. In Wisconsin—the only state where the right to tenure was written into state law—this legal protection was abolished in 2015. Under the new regime, any tenured faculty member can be fired “when such an action is deemed necessary due to a budget or program decision.”³³ In 2017, bills have been proposed eliminating tenure for all Iowa faculty, and for all new hires in Missouri.³⁴ Meanwhile, in North Dakota, the state

board of higher education recently approved a policy change that cuts down on the timeline to dismiss tenured faculty: in cases of “financial exigency,” the required notification period has been cut from one year to 90 days.³⁵ The proponents’ arguments are strikingly similar to recent attacks on K–12 teachers and public employees more generally. “Where else in any other industry do you have ... a protection to where after you work ... for so long you’re basically immune?” asks Missouri Rep. Rick Brattin. “That doesn’t exist anywhere except for our education system, and that’s just un-American.”³⁶

State officials and corporate lobbyists alike are calling for particularly heavy cutbacks in the liberal arts. In Florida, the governor’s higher education task force—chaired by the president of that state’s Chamber of Commerce Foundation—called for “differentiated tuition,” whereby students in STEM, business, and other majors demanded by industry would pay lower rates, while those who chose to study literature or philosophy would face higher tuition.³⁷ Even within specific disciplines, schools are under pressure to narrow curricula to focus on job skills rather than broader training. Following requests from corporate law firms, for example, a growing number of law schools are promoting courses on accounting and corporate finance rather than jurisprudence or the history of the U.S. Constitution.³⁸

Finally, ALEC proposes to erase the line between public and private education, in higher education as in K–12, through a voucher system that would allow in-state students to take their share of the state’s higher education funding and use it to attend private colleges or universities.³⁹ In North Carolina, the Pope Center—think-tank of the state’s leading Republican donor and Koch collaborator—argues for raising tuition in the public university system, and using state tax dollars for tuition grants usable at private schools.⁴⁰

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These pieces fit together in a coherent, if disturbing vision. For the corporate elite, mass higher education has become an expensive and unnecessary luxury. To the extent that university graduates are needed to staff corporate functions, this is more easily accomplished by targeting funds to specific programs. Not only are the liberal arts themselves superfluous, but the very idea of liberal education—universities as a place outside the competitive pressures of the rat race, where students and faculty

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are protected by standards of academic freedom—has become a hindrance rather than a help. The corporate vision of 21st century higher education is simply professional job training. This not only reduces the number of disciplines deemed deserving of public funds, but also fundamentally alters the meaning of education. Career training is not about broad-mindedness, critical thinking, self-discovery or personal expression; it is

about conveying facts and competencies. These do not require academic freedom—hence tenure comes to seem like nothing but an undeserved perk. This is the logic that led Wisconsin Governor Walker to propose stripping the University of Wisconsin’s mission statement of the notion that “the University exists to provide public service and improve the human condition” or that “the search for truth” is fundamental to the university’s purpose.⁴¹

Cutting education funding is not simply a means to facilitate tax cuts for the rich. It also serves to lower expectations for the masses. The institutions of public higher education embody the idea that people have a right—simply by dint of citizenship—to affordable post-secondary education. That sense of entitlement is itself a danger for the corporate elite. Thus, the proposal to turn higher education funding into vouchers not only drains public money into the private sphere—it undercuts the notion of higher education as a public good. Ultimately, if public and private schools are both simply alternative venues for professional job training,

why should there even be a public system?

RAISING OR LOWERING EXPECTATIONS

In 1970, an education aide to President Nixon warned that “we are in danger of producing an educated proletariat...We have to be selective about who we allow through higher education. If not, we will have a large number of highly trained and unemployed people.”⁴² Now, as then, one of the most dangerous things the corporate elite can contemplate is a large number of highly educated people who feel entitled to a standard of living they are being denied. For all these reasons, then, the reconfiguration of higher education as job training—devoid of protections of academic freedom, with no need for tenure and no rationale for state sponsorship, conceived not as an escape from the rat race but an essential component of it—fits the self-interests of 21st century American corporations.

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One of the most disturbing visions of how these pieces might fit together is offered by Yale computer scientist David Gelernter, under consideration to become Science Advisor to President Trump. “Over 90 percent of U.S. colleges will be gone within the next generation,” he declares, with institutions,

“...throwing out their arts and humanities departments—and offering better online-education options instead. Bachelor’s degrees will gradually be replaced by certified transcripts... Think tanks and major newspapers also make natural certifiers. If I saw a candidate for a job or graduate school whose college education was vouched for by the American Enterprise Institute... I’d be impressed. Then there’s the big world of tech-intensive companies, research hospitals and drug companies... [All of these could run] small ‘certification’ departments—in effect, granting degrees.”⁴³

For graduate students and non-tenure track faculty, Gelernter envisions the TaskRabbit-ization of academic work, noting that online courses “will have someone on call ... to answer phoned-in questions around the clock. Wherever they live, English-speaking teaching assistants contribute an hour or two when they have the time.” The groundwork for this dystopic future is already being laid by institutions such as Western Governors University, an online-only, “competency based” school that

offers credit for passing tests rather than instructional “face time” and that limits its degrees to a handful of pre-professional majors.⁴⁴

Missing from this vision is any place for academic freedom, intellectual exploration, or a commitment to a broad liberal education. All these things will remain in place for the children of the elite, who will continue to be taught by experienced faculty, face-to-face in small classes with a broad curriculum—but for the rest of the country,

higher education will be degraded to job preparation.

This is a gloomy vision of the future. But it is not a popular one. At the same time that corporate lobbies have won an impressive string of victories in state legislatures, Bernie Sanders mounted an effective presidential campaign, in large part, on the promise of free higher education. As we move into an uncertain future, it is the battle between these two visions that will shape the education and life chances of coming generations.

WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

There is no simple formula for reversing this sorry state of affairs, and any path forward rests less on smart ideas than the intensive and laborious person-to-person organizing needed to make them real. But there are two broad directions I believe we must go in to maintain a humane version of education. First, we need to articulate a pro-active vision of how higher education should work, and put that vision at the center of our bargaining

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demands and our strategic alliances with students, parents, and taxpayers. Second, higher education unions need to develop a new set of contract campaign strategies suited to confront the corporate university.

If we face the corporate assault with open eyes, it should be clear that there is no savior in the political class, no kind-hearted billionaire benefactor, and no uprising from outside the university that is going to save us. It is up to us—graduate students, staff, and faculty of all stripes—to do this. We are the only ones who can articulate the things that the corporate lobbies seek to erase from the national consciousness: what, after all, is the difference between professional job training and higher education? Why does it matter if you have a broad liberal education or take only career-related courses? What *is* supposed to happen in small-group interactions between faculty and students that is different from what you can learn in online courses?

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The most important moment for 21st century education unions came in the Chicago Teachers Union's strike of 2012—the first strike widely understood as a fight over the quality of education. Wages and benefits were, of course, important elements in the campaign—but teachers also struck for smaller class sizes, more social workers and nurses in schools, more art and drama classes, getting textbooks on the first day of school, and protecting teacher autonomy against the tyranny of standardized tests. Beyond the victories that teachers won, the strike marked a turning point in unions' own sense of mission. Teachers across the country have complained for many years about crowded classrooms and narrowed curricula. But too often, their union leaders have responded with sympathy—and an explanation that such issues fall outside the union's purview of negotiating wages and working conditions. In Chicago, issues of educational quality became core union issues.

Furthermore, Chicago teachers defined a clear set of demands related to educational quality. Until 2012, if you asked teachers' unions what was wrong with the school system, they could give you a long list of complaints. But if you asked 'what is our vision of how the school system should work' no one could give you an answer. In the lead-up to its strike, CTU organizers spent a year meeting with teachers, parents and community members, creating a document titled *The Schools Chicago's Children*

Deserve, which served as a blueprint for the union's vision, the basis for its bargaining demands, and the fulcrum for organizing community support.

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Higher education unions, both faculty and staff, stand today at the point occupied by K-12 teachers before Chicago. No one can better articulate a clear vision for how colleges and universities should run. Are small classes important? What should students learn? Does

it matter if classes are online? Should tuition and debt be capped? Is study abroad important? Is the job of faculty the same in all departments, and if not, how should the work be configured? The answer to these questions will not be the same on every campus, but there will probably be numerous common principles. Only after articulating such a vision can we organize effective alliances with students, parents and community members—because only then can we identify the ways in which our demands support the needs of students.

Part of our vision must entail upholding the profession of teaching as an intellectual endeavor. The reigning view of academics—assuming that the best faculty seamlessly combine research and teaching in a coherent mission—is nonsensical. Being an excellent teacher does not require one to conduct primary research, and being a first-rate researcher does not make one a good teacher. Generally, this tension is dealt with by valuing research and denigrating teaching. In research universities, the teaching load of tenure track faculty is typically half that of non-tenure-track col-

leagues, because the former are presumed to spend half their time engaged in the life of the mind while the latter are not paid to think but only to deliver content in the classroom.

Just as the boundaries between academic disciplines, slicing up the world into distinct domains labeled sociology, anthropology, history, and politics, are somewhat arbitrary products of historical circumstance, so too are the distinctions between teaching and research, and particularly the assumptions regarding the intellectual value of each type of work. These assumptions are a product of 19th century imagination and, as it happens, mistaken. It is up to us—the actual intellectuals who do this work—to reconceptualize our occupations. Most importantly, we need to create and promote a new classification of faculty, focused on being the best possible teacher, and make it understood that this is an intellectual

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profession. One model exists in some of the nation's elite private high schools, where students are often taught by academics who were unable to land university jobs. People in these positions are intellectuals in the full sense of the word: they are curious and argumentative about their fields, read the latest research, and engage in the same disciplinary debates as university faculty. They may occasionally publish articles. But rather than being driven to pump out journal articles, they practice the craft of teaching. The most privileged high school faculty participate in week-long summer "boot camps" located in foreign countries or on Civil War battlefields, dedicated to intensively exploring subject matter and exchanging pedagogical ideas on how best to teach it. Obviously, there is a difference between higher education and high school teaching, just as there is a difference between high school and kindergarten. But this is a model we should learn from, to create positions for teaching faculty—understood not as rote content-deliverers but as intellectuals committed to the life of the mind—with the same job security and academic freedom guaranteed

to research faculty. Elevating both the intellectual and pedagogical work of teaching is critical to constructing a positive vision of higher education and enabling us to build alliances with students and the public.

A CORPORATE CAMPAIGN FOR THE CORPORATE UNIVERSITY

For several decades, academic unionists have complained about the “corporatization” of higher education. But we have not taken our own words seriously.

In addition to articulating our agenda for higher education, we need to develop effective union tactics for dealing with the corporate university. For several decades, academic unionists have complained about the “corporatization” of higher education. But we have not taken our own words seriously. Too often we treat “corporate” as if it’s simply a bad name to call opponents rather than an actual description of university governance. At the University of Oregon, for instance, state funding accounts for

just eight percent of the budget, with the remainder coming from endowment earnings, alumni contributions, overhead on grants and contracts, and tuition. But union campaigns are conducted as if the state supplied 100 percent of the budget. We lobby legislators, shame administrators, and threaten to strike. It’s no surprise that these tactics are less and less successful—legislative support carries much less weight when it provides a small slice of the budget, and administrators are increasingly willing to endure an episode of public embarrassment as the price of corporate practices. If we dare to picture what it might take to roll back “corporatization,” for instance, restoring the intellectual property rights of researchers; guaranteeing small classes; or securing support for the humanities and basic science even if they don’t generate large grants or tuition dollars. We must develop a different form of power.

Over the past four decades, unions have developed a new generation of tactics designed to make workers’ actions stronger and community alliances more powerful. These union actions sometimes are dubbed “cor-

porate campaigns” because they start from a comprehensive analysis of a corporation’s business strategy. Employers typically want workers to think their only choice is to strike or to accept what the company’s offering. Strikes have been extremely powerful in many cases, but in other situations (including at universities) there is much less power in work stoppages, as they do not immediately impact the employer’s cash flow. Further, of all the weapons at workers’ disposal, striking takes the heaviest toll on employees themselves. Therefore, unions have looked to develop tactics that marshal additional forms of financial pressure—either as an alternative to striking or as a way to make a strike more powerful and therefore shorter. The ultimate goal of a corporate campaign, as of a strike, is to convince employers that fighting with workers will cost more in the long run than doing the right thing. Critically, corporate campaigns aim to improve workplace conditions not by appealing to the hearts and minds of executives, but by making it a rational business calculation to agree to fair terms.

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To some extent, corporate campaign tactics may be standardized across industries. But to a large degree, each industry has a unique set of pressure points. Figuring out how to appeal the tax assessment on a stand of timber; or how to withhold export-assistance benefits from companies that exploit migrant labor; or how to deny expansion rights to a hospital that endangers patients with insufficient nurse staffing—all of these things are particular to a specific industry. The unions that have made the most of such strategies—including the Service Employees International Union’s engagement with hospitals and cleaning contractors and UNITE HERE’s with hotels and casinos—have spent many years learning through trial and error the most effective means of confronting employers in their industry. This is the process that academic unionists need to undertake.

The traditional tactics of campus unions aim at generating financial pressure by striking (and presumably driving away tuition dollars), or by making public funding conditional on respectful treatment of academic employees. But this ignores some of the most important revenue sources and most sensitive university interests—including overhead funding on grants and contracts, endowment earnings and alumni donations, medical complex profits, real estate and athletics, and intellectual property rights generated from campus research. Simply put, even the best-organized workforce with the most robust community alliances cannot hope to change the trajectory of higher education while aiming at only eight percent of revenues and ignoring 92 percent. We need to aim the power we create at the points where it can have the greatest impact.

Figuring out how to do this is not a project that can be taken up by a single campus. Rather, a national union such as the National Education Association must shoulder the responsibility for creating a team of people committed to doing this work. The first few campaigns will be learning experiences, with mistakes and dead ends along the way. But as we accumulate expertise with what works in the world of higher education, campaigns will get easier and it will become more feasible to disseminate this know-how among academics across the country.

Like any proposal for how to move forward in this difficult time, this is a daunting undertaking with no guarantee of success. What we do know is that what we've been doing—what thousands of brave, bold, committed and creative scholars have been doing for the past few decades—will not get us where we need to go. To take seriously the corporate governance of our campuses, and to be appropriately ambitious about restoring a humane version of higher education, we need to articulate a clear vision of how our schools should run and what our students deserve; we need to use that vision to organize ourselves and our allies among students, parents and the public; and we must use the strength of that organizing to effectively pressure university managers to do the right thing.

ENDNOTES

1. Mitchell, et al., *Funding Down, Tuition Up: Funding Cuts to Higher Education Threaten Quality and Affordability at Public Colleges*.
2. Rothschild, "Regents Pass Social Media Policy in Wake of Guth Tweet."
3. The American Interest, "Midwestern Legislators Take Aim at Academic Tenure-for-Life."

4. Griswold, "Majoring in the Humanities Might Soon Cost You More in Florida."
5. American Legislative Exchange Council, *Affordable Baccalaureate Degree Act*.
6. While not technically outlawing unions, the bill is likely to lead to the same end. For a description of the bill's components, see Bybee, "After Proposing Draconian Anti-Union Laws, Wisconsin Governor Walker Invokes National Guard."
7. These states are Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Louisiana, Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, and Wisconsin.
8. A detailed account of this legislation appears in Chapter 3 of *The One Percent Solution: How Corporations are Remaking America One State at a Time* and, on preemption of local minimum wage standards, in the book's conclusion.
9. See Dillon, "Tight Budgets Mean Squeeze in Classroom," and Chingos, *Class Size Tradeoffs in the Court of Public Opinion*.
10. Center for Media and Democracy, *What is ALEC?* p. 173.
11. Gilens, *Affluence and Influence: Economic Inequality and Political Power in America*.
12. Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions, *Vanderbilt Poll*.
13. Klumpp, et al., "The Business of American Democracy: Citizens United, Spending, and Elections." The authors culled data from more than 38,000 state legislative races over seven election cycles—five preceding Citizens United and two following the decision. Their analysis compared the impact of the Supreme Court decision in states that had previously allowed corporate independent expenditures with those that had banned them before 2010. This differences-in-differences analysis provides the first rigorous statistical measure of the law's impact on state legislative elections. The data show that independent expenditures increased the likelihood of Republican incumbents seeking reelection, decreased the number of Democrats choosing to stand as candidates, and increased the odds of the Republican candidate winning.
14. Kromm, "How Much Did Art Pope's Network Really Spend On North Carolina's 2010 Legislative Election?" For a detailed account of Pope's political activities, see Mayer 2011. Author's calculations based on National Institute on Money in State Politics, overview of North Carolina 2008 election.
15. When the Washington State Senate proposed to mandate an eight-hour workday for women in 1911, the Spokane Chamber of Commerce predicted the law would lead businesses to leave the state, resulting in widespread economic hardship. In 1917, voters in the city of Cleveland approved a referendum to create an eight-hour day for police and firefighters; the city's Chamber of Commerce bitterly opposed the measure, with full-page ads insisting it posed an unaffordable burden on public resources.

As to Social Security and other New Deal measures, in 1936 Chamber of Commerce Vice President Philip Fay denounced the proposals as reflecting "philosophies of government control and foreign ideas of repression of the individual that have no place in this land of freedom." See Fay "Denounces Spread of Federal Power."
16. Among others, see Weir, *Politics and Jobs: the Boundaries of Employment Policy in the United States*; Phillips-Fein, *Invisible Hands: The Businessmen's Crusade Against the New Deal*; Domhoff, *They Myth of Liberal Ascendancy: Corporate Dominance from the Great Depression to the Great Recession*; and Waterhouse, *Lobbying America*.
17. The actual quote of GM president Charlie Wilson, in Senate confirmation hearings as President Eisenhower's nominee to become Secretary of Defense, when asked what he would do if he had to make a decision in which the interests of the country conflicted with those of GM, was that "I cannot conceive of one, because for years I thought what was good for our country was good for General Motors and vice versa." See Hyde, "GM's 'Engine Charlie' Wilson Learned to Live with a Misquote."
18. General Motors Company, *2014 Annual Report*.

19. In 2014, GM spent over \$1 million on direct, reportable contributions to Congressional candidates, and \$8.5 million in lobbying the federal government. See OpenSecrets.org, "Influence and Lobbying: Top Spenders."
20. Pollard, "S&P 500 Foreign Sales Up in 2014." The average foreign share of revenue for the S&P 500 as a whole was 47.8 percent in 2014, up from 41.8 percent in 2003.
21. Silverblatt, S&P 500 2014: *Global Sales*.
22. In 2013-14, 40 percent of survey respondents held the title of CEO or equivalent officer.
23. Tankersley, "America's Execs Seem Ready to Give Up on U.S. Workers": Porter and Rivkin, *Prosperity At Risk: Findings of Harvard Business School's 2011-12 Survey on U.S. Competitiveness*; Porter and Rivkin, *An Economy Doing Half Its Job: Findings of Harvard Business School's 2013-14 Survey on U.S. Competitiveness*.
24. Mizruchi, *The Fracturing of the American Corporate Elite*.
25. Southern Education Foundation, *A New Majority: Low Income Students Now a Majority in the Nation's Public Schools*. Low-income here is defined as families eligible for free or reduced-price meals in school. In 2013, a student living with a single parent was eligible for free meals if their parent made less than 135 percent of the poverty line (\$19,669) and for reduced-price meals if their parent made less than 185 percent of poverty (\$27,991). When low-income students come into school, one teacher explains, "the first thing I do is an inventory of immediate needs: Did you eat? Are you clean? A big part of my job is making them feel safe." See Layton, "Majority of U.S. Public School Students Are in Poverty."
26. McManus, "Americans Reluctant to Bail Out Wall Street."
27. Bowman, "The Public View of Regulation, Revisited"; Bloomberg, "Banning Big Wall Street Bonuses Favored by 70 percent of Americans."
28. Toner and Elder, "Most Support U.S. Guarantee of Health Care"; Knowledge Networks, "The Associated Press-Yahoo Poll, Wave 2, Conducted by Knowledge Works; Brohinsky and Schulman, "Time/Abt SRBI Poll: Most Americans Eager for Healthcare Reform" Abt/SRBI; New York Times/CBS News.
29. Gallup, "Taxes: Historical Trends." From 2008-10, much of the debate around taxation centered around the question of whether the Bush-era tax cuts should be extended for families making over \$250,000 per year. Throughout this period, a solid majority of the country consistently supported raising taxes on this population; in several polls this included a majority of Republicans. Montopoli, "CBS News Poll: Most Oppose GOP Tax Plan"; Pinto, "Polls Show Most Americans Support Raising Taxes on Wealthy."
30. In 2016, Kansas' per-student spending on higher education was 22 percent lower than it had been in 2008, according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. The new tax cuts for business and the wealthy came while legislators were enacting a new three percent cut in higher education spending. New York Times Editorial Board, "Kansas' Ruinous Tax Cuts."
31. Doubek, "Illinois Higher Education is on Path to Permanent Damage." (In July, as this issue of Thought & Action went to press, Illinois' legislature managed to overturn Rauner's latest veto of the state budget, clearing the way for state funding to public colleges and universities this fall.)
32. Readings, *The University in Ruins*.
33. Schuman, "The End of Research in Wisconsin."
34. Flaherty, "Legislation in Two States Seeks to Eliminate Tenure in Public Higher Education."
35. Haffner, "State Board of Higher Education Approves Change in Tenure Policy."
36. Both quotes are from "Midwestern Legislators Take Aim at Academic Tenure-for-Life."
37. Griswold, "Majoring in the Humanities Might Soon Cost You More in Florida."
38. Olson, "Law Students Leave Torts Behind (for a Bit) and Tackle Accounting."
39. ALEC, *The College Opportunity Fund Act*.

40. Purdy, “Ayn Rand Comes to U.N.C.”
41. Stein, et al., “Walker Forced to Admit UW Objected To Wisconsin Idea Changes.”
42. Moskowitz, “Professor Sees Peril in Education.”
43. Gelernter, “A High-Tech Rebirth From Higher Ed’s Ruins.”
44. WGU’s majors are teaching, nursing, business, and information technology. See Cook, “The Online College That Credits Life Experience.”

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