

When Push Comes to Shove: Strikes in Higher Education

By John Magney

Academic unions are no different than other unions in showdowns with management. When push comes to shove at the bargaining table, their ultimate weapon is the threat of a collective work stoppage.

In most cases, of course, faculty are able to reach a contract settlement without going out on strike. In 2000, though, faculty strikes shut down the entire system of higher education in Hawaii and also closed campuses in Illinois, Michigan and Pennsylvania. Between 1984 and 1996, 48 different faculty strikes occurred.¹

So how should faculty unions deal with the “strike question”? Last year, my own union grappled with this very issue. Curiously, very little has been written about the topic by labor researchers.² The practical literature is equally skimpy. The news media covers faculty strikes in some detail, but the focus tends to be on personalities and the day-to-day claims and

counterclaims made by unions and management.

To get a better sense of how academic unions handle a strike situation, I examined six unions, four in Michigan—Wayne State University, Eastern Michigan University, Ferris State University, and Gogebic Community College—and two in Illinois—Elgin Community College and Kaskaskia Community College—who, between 1996 and 2000, had gone through strikes.³

I interviewed leaders or staff in each of the six unions about how they prepared for and conducted their strikes; looked at their Web pages, press releases and other strike-related documents; and read news reports about the six strikes.

Located in the heart of Detroit, Wayne State University has approximately 31,000 students in its undergraduate, graduate and professional degree programs. Wayne is governed by a board of trustees elected statewide.

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Key issues in the strike were wages and benefits, control of intellectual property and the use of part-time faculty.

The full-time faculty at Wayne have been unionized since 1976 and are jointly affiliated with the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT).

There are about 1,700 in the bargaining unit, with almost half in the School of Medicine. The union does not have an agency-shop clause in its contract and has a dues-paying membership of about 530. There have been four faculty strikes at Wayne, in 1988, 1990, 1994 and 1999. The most recent strike grew out of a dispute about wages and fair share; it occurred the second week of September and lasted one day.

Eastern Michigan University is located in Ypsilanti, a small industrial city on the western edge of the Detroit metropolitan area. It has an enrollment of approximately 22,000, most in undergraduate programs. A board of trustees appointed by the governor oversees Eastern.

The full-time faculty there have been organized since 1972 and are affiliated with the AAUP. They have a fair-share agreement with the university and all but a handful of the approximately 650-member bargaining unit belong to the union.

A separate union for the 400 temporary lecturers at Eastern won bargaining rights about a year ago.

Eastern's full-time faculty have been on strike in 1976, 1978 and 2000. The most recent strike occurred at the beginning of the fall semester and lasted a week. Key issues in this dispute were wages and benefits, control of intellectual property, and the use of part-time faculty.

Ferris State University is in Big Rapids, a small city in western Michigan about 50 miles north of Grand Rapids. The school describes itself as "technically oriented" and has about 9,500 undergraduates. The governor appoints the board of trustees at Ferris.

The full-time faculty at Ferris has been organized since 1974 and is affiliated with the Michigan Education Association (MEA). A fair share agreement is in place, and only a small percentage of the 460-member bargaining unit pays an agency fee instead of belonging to the union.

The Ferris union has been on strike in 1978, 1986 and 1997. The 1997 walkout took place after the faculty had worked without a new contract for three years. Wages, job security and the faculty's role in academic decisions were the main issues in dispute in 1997. The strike began on the first day of the fall semester and lasted four and a half days.

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strike again until September 2000.***

Gogebic Community College is in Ironwood, a small town at the western tip of Michigan's sparsely-populated Upper Peninsula. The school has about 1,200 students and a governing board elected from a local district. Gogebic's full-time faculty has been unionized since 1972 and is affiliated with the MEA.

The union has 40 members, which includes everyone in the bargaining unit, and a fair share agreement is in place. After two walkouts in the 1970s, Gogebic's faculty did not go out on strike again until September 2000. Last year's strike grew out of a dispute about medical insurance coverage. The walkout began on August 31 and ended twelve days later.

Elgin Community College is on the western edge of the greater Chicago area. Enrollment at the college is about 9,600 and the governing board is elected from a local district.

The Elgin Faculty Association won union recognition in 1984 and is affiliated with the Illinois Federation of Teachers (IFT). A fair share agreement is in place, and almost everyone in the bargaining unit—118 full-time and 95 adjunct faculty—belongs to the union. A dispute over health benefits led to a four-day strike last February (2001), the first ever at Elgin.

Located just west of Centralia,

in the farm and coal-mining region of southern Illinois, Kaskaskia Community College has an enrollment of about 2,500 students. As at Elgin—and all other community colleges in Illinois—Kaskaskia has a locally-elected governing board.

Kaskaskia's full-time faculty has been unionized since 1987 and is affiliated with the Illinois Federation of Teachers. They have an agency-shop agreement and all but two of the 60-member bargaining unit belong to the union. The first and only strike at Kaskaskia happened in February 1996, after the faculty had gone without a contract for 18 months. Wages, benefits and layoff rules were the main issues in the strike, which lasted for 26 days.

These six cases point to some key issues that should be addressed as unions move toward and through a strike situation:

- *Identifying signs of trouble.* When are disagreements at the bargaining table likely to lead to more conflict
- *Getting prepared.* What practical steps do unions need to take to get their members mobilized and ready for the stress and travail of a strike?
- *Carrying out the strike.* What exactly needs to be done by a union and its members as a strike unfolds?

I was told about contractual problems, personality clashes, incompetent negotiators, and efforts to 'break the union.'

- *After the strike ends.* What problems does a union face once the picket signs are packed away and everyone is back at work?

When I asked people in the six unions what led up to their strike, I was told about contractual problems, personality clashes, incompetent negotiators, efforts to “break” the union and even state politics. In four of the cases, signs of trouble were evident long before the union sat down with the other side to begin negotiating a new contract.

At Wayne State, the most strike-ridden campus, the walkouts in 1988, 1990 and 1994 had created a climate of dissatisfaction—and militancy—that still existed when negotiations began for the 1999 contract.

Notes a Wayne State activist:⁴

We got a new president in '97...[who] is a lot better than David Adamany [Wayne's president during the three previous strikes]. He has a better reputation with the faculty...and doesn't have the kind of anti-union bias that Adamany had. But [in 1999] we still had issues left from the last contract that had to be addressed

At Ferris State, the situation began deteriorating in 1993, when a newly hired Vice-President for Academic Affairs announced plans to

eliminate some academic programs.

The union claimed he was violating the retrenchment provision of the contract and got a court injunction against the university. When the existing contract expired in 1994 with no new agreement, members of the union “were pretty unhappy.” But political pressure from Lansing dampened any talk of a strike, so the union agreed to an extension of the old contract.

Further, the Republican-controlled state legislature was “making serious noises” about passing a bill to impose severe penalties on anyone participating in a higher education strike.⁵ The threatened legislation never passed and became a moot issue when the Democrats regained control of the state House of Representatives in the 1996 election.

When the Ferris union sat down at the bargaining table again in 1997, it was in its third year of working under an expired contract. “Everyone was pretty fed up...and looking for us to take a tough line at the bargaining table,” says a Ferris leader.

A similar buildup of tensions and problems occurred at two of the community colleges. When the strike vote was taken last year at Gogebic Community College, there was lingering unhappiness with the language on medical insurance

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in the previous (1998) contract.

“We came pretty close to striking over it in ’98,” says a Gogebic leader. “All we did by not striking then was prolong the problem.” Another long-term problem on the campus was the college president’s style of supervision, which union newsletters described as “snooper-vision.”

At Kaskaskia Community College, when negotiations finally broke down at the end of 1995, the union had been working without a new contract for 18 months. After agreeing to an extension of the old contract, union negotiators had been continually frustrated in their efforts to get accurate information about the college’s financial condition. “We could never get straight numbers from her [the newly hired college president],” says a Kaskaskia leader. “She was our nightmare president; not very bright, but really intransigent.... We found out that we just couldn’t trust her.”

The situation at the other two campuses—Eastern Michigan University and Elgin Community College—was somewhat different. Here the signs of trouble didn’t become fully evident until the negotiations for a new contract had gotten underway. On both campuses, an unsuccessful effort was made to use the mutual gains method of bargaining.

Negotiations at Eastern Michi-

gan collapsed a month before the old contract expired, when the two sides were unable to make any headway on the issues of wages and benefits. “At that point our problem was that we’d been using mutual gains...letting everyone think things were going hunky-dory. And now they weren’t.... We had to change our message real fast,” recalls an Eastern leader.

At Elgin, after several months of fighting between the union and administration bargaining teams about how to use the mutual gains method, it was abandoned. “After that,” notes a member of the union bargaining team, “we got a good look at what we were up against. She [the vice president of finance and head negotiator for the administration] was a control freak... had a deep loathing of faculty, and really wanted to break the union.”

Two points came up when I asked how the unions prepared for their strikes: Unions must get their members psychologically prepared for the strike and come up with a detailed plan of activity and publicity for the strike.

Faculty—like all workers—become psychologically committed to a possible strike action through a process of mobilization by the union.⁶

This mobilization involves gathering information about what

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people want in the new contract, building a consensus around certain issues, and keeping everyone focused on these issues until the contract is settled.

The mobilization effort on the smaller campuses was relatively simple. At Gogebic and Kaskaskia, where “everyone knows almost everyone else,” information about negotiations—and the possibility of a strike—was a topic of everyday conversation.

“People generally knew what was going on,” says a Kaskaskia leader, “though we did set up a buddy system in the departments to get information out....I think we had two or three general meetings [of the whole union].”

On the two largest campuses—Wayne State and Eastern Michigan—the mobilization was carried out in a much more structured fashion—with surveys to find out what faculty wanted in a new contract, regular newsletters and bulletins for keeping members up-to-date on the negotiations and talking about a strike, special committees for strike planning, and various organized events, such as campus leafletting, informational pickets and solidarity rallies.

Several problems complicated mobilizing efforts on different campuses. At Ferris State, there was widespread discontent with the union president, who was seen as

being “too cozy with the administration.” The situation was resolved with the election of a new union president who called for a tougher stance at the bargaining table and serious strike preparations.

At Wayne State, half of the faculty on the main campus and more than 90 percent in the medical school did not belong to the union. “We had this [membership problem] with all our strikes,” recalls a Wayne State leader. The union’s solution was to include non-members in its bargaining surveys and send them all the newsletter updates about bargaining and a possible strike.

At Eastern Michigan, the union’s involvement in interest-based bargaining created a widespread—but mistaken—impression that everything was “hunky-dory.” Fortunately, the union had done some prior planning for a possible strike, and quickly got word out about the collapse of negotiations and the need for a strike vote.

Another concern at Eastern Michigan was that the union had not had a strike in over 20 years.” Noted a long-time member:

We had a lot of new members who’d never been through something like this before. Would they go out with us? Ultimately they did...[and] I think that’s a

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good reflection on the kind of job we'd been doing in educating them about the union.

Strike plans begin with a decision about timing. Higher education unions, like their counterparts in K-12 districts, often launch their strikes at the beginning of the school year. "That's when our contracts expire," one leader told me, "and we've just followed the old industrial union model of no contract, no work."

Three of the unions—Ferris State, Eastern Michigan and Gogebic—made exactly this choice in their strike plans. But at Wayne State, the union decided to stage a one-day walkout in mid-September and, if that didn't produce a settlement, continue with a conventional strike a week later.

Notes the chair of Wayne's strike committee:

This was a change in strategy for us. We'd always gone out the first day of classes, but there are problems with that. All the students are on campus, running around looking for their classes, more anxious than the teachers.... We thought we'd get more support by waiting and doing it this way.

At Kaskaskia, the union did not finally settle on a strike date until almost eight months into the school

year. "We'd never been through a strike before," recalls its current president, "and we just had problems in getting organized and ready for it."

At Elgin, after its contract expired at the end of December, the union agreed to a last-ditch mediation effort before setting a strike date in early February.

Other parts of the six unions' strike plans sounded as if they came from the same playbook.⁷ An off-campus location for strike headquarters was identified; picketing sites selected and a daily schedule for picketing drawn up; people were asked to sign up for picket duty; "captains" appointed to oversee picket lines; picket signs printed up; someone put in charge of public relations; press releases, leaflets and other materials written up; and contacts made with other unions, in the community as well as on campus.

Faculty in the Ferris State and Gogebic unions were reminded they would be eligible for strike pay from the MEA if their strikes lasted more than three days. None of the other four unions had access to a strike pay fund, although faculty at Kaskaskia and Elgin were eligible for low-interest loans from the IFT. The last formal step for each of the unions was a vote of their members on a strike resolution. On all six campuses,

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employees can't strike.'***

these resolutions passed by large margins.

Every strike unfolds somewhat differently. The 1997 strike at Ferris State began the first Monday of classes. The union "blanketed the campus" with faculty members carrying picket signs. The university issued reports that "half of the classes" were still being taught, but television news stories showed very few students on the campus.

According to one union leader:

There were some scabs, but not enough to have any significant impact on teaching... . Instruction was basically shut down. I knew this because I'd sent our secretary around to check classrooms.

On the second day of the strike, the union's chief negotiator took a conciliatory line at a press briefing, saying the union "was willing to look for creative solutions to this ... struggle." But a university spokesman ignored the offer and complained "this is an illegal work action...public employees can't strike."⁸

Two days later, the university sent a letter to all striking faculty telling them that if they didn't return to work by Tuesday of the following week, they would "be assumed to have resigned from the university." On Friday, as the two sides prepared to go back to the

bargaining table with a state mediator, the union announced it had agreed to a "temporary suspension" of the strike. A settlement was announced early the following week.

The one-day walkout at Wayne State got underway with the union sending a "dawn patrol" to picket two campus construction sites. "They were all union workers [and] nobody crossed our lines...we shut both of them down for the day," says a participant

For the rest of the day, a group of faculty picketers—"maybe 100 to 150 all together," recalls a participant—paraded around several "gateway" buildings on the main campus.

At a press briefing, the Wayne State Provost commented on the "low rate" of faculty membership in the union and claimed that very few classes had been cancelled because of the walkout. But television news reports showed pictures of a campus that was largely empty of students.

"We'd gotten some good media coverage about our [strike] plans, and a lot of students just didn't come to class that day," recalls a union leader. At the end of the day, a spokeswoman for the union reminded reporters that the strike would be resumed a week later, for an indefinite period this time, if a

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contract settlement was not reached.

After a week of hard bargaining had brought the two sides close to an agreement, the union's leadership had to make a decision.

We still didn't have a contract. Our executive board was split on striking, but our bargaining team insisted we had to call the university's bluff. So we sent out our dawn patrols again that morning. The cops were there this time to break our picket lines. So we just waved our signs...and we kept the construction guys out again....Half an hour later, we got a call from our bargaining team [on a cell phone] that we had an agreement with the university.

The strike at Eastern Michigan last year began the day after Labor Day. The previous weekend, the union had staged an informational rally at the Saturday football game between Eastern Michigan and the University of Connecticut (U-Conn).

The high point of the event came when a plane hired by the faculty union at Connecticut circled over the stadium towing a sign: "U-Conn AAUP Wants Fair Contract for EMU AAUP."

Bright and early Tuesday morning, union members marched out to set up picket lines around all

classroom buildings and at the main entrances to the campus. Most members joined the lines that day or later in the week, and

the campus was pretty well shut down.... we had only a handful scabbing... and even some of the part-timers [in a separate union that wasn't on strike] weren't meeting their classes.⁹

Twice during the week, solidarity rallies were held to review issues in the strike and hear speeches from outside union supporters. The two sides went back to the bargaining table with a state mediator at the end of the week; a tentative agreement was reached over the weekend and the strike was ended.

Last year's strike at Gogebic Community College came as something of a surprise to the college administration. "We caught them off guard," says the union president. "They'd expected a long protracted bargaining and didn't think we were to the point of striking yet."

The walkout began the morning of the first day of classes when the union posted picketers at the three entrances to the small campus. No union members crossed the line that day or any of the subsequent days of the strike, and many of the adjunct faculty stayed away from

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their classes, too. As in the Ferris strike, the Gogebic administration claimed the union was conducting “an illegal strike.”

As the strike ground into its ninth day, the Michigan Education Association president flew in from Lansing to walk the picket lines and give a pep talk to the strikers. Also that day, the union announced it would temporarily remove the pickets pending a mediation session the following Monday.

Over the weekend, the college ran an advertisement in the local paper for temporary replacements for all faculty and counseling jobs affected by the strike. Union leaders expressed “outrage” with the ad, and a staff attorney for the MEA questioned the legality of the college’s action. Despite the furor, the mediation session went on as scheduled and a tentative agreement was reached late Monday night.

The 1996 strike at Kaskaskia got underway on February 21st. Union pickets were posted at front and rear entrances to the small campus. Notes the current union president:

There were only four—three members and one fair share payer—who crossed the lines ... and there were a few night classes taught by part-timers that

met. But that was it. Otherwise, everything stopped when we went out.

In newspaper ads and leaflets handed out on the campus, the union repeatedly blasted the college president for her “administrative incompetence,” “poor leadership,” “self-promotion,” and “lies, lies, lies.”

During a spell of cold weather, picketers warmed themselves during the day around burn barrels and bonfires—like a scene from a 1930s strike. Several times, everyone got together after picketing for an evening meal and pep rally at a local Carpenters Hall, which the union was using as strike headquarters.

On March 14, a group of some 100 Kaskaskia students staged a sit-in at the college president’s office, where they demanded answers about when the strike would end. The following weekend, the union won a tentative settlement during a seven-hour negotiating session, and the strike was ended.

The strike at Elgin began about a month into the new semester, on February 6. As the picket lines went up at four sites around the campus, the college administration made no effort to maintain the normal class schedule.

Elgin's governing board refused to accept the settlement, claiming the agreement was a misunderstanding.

"School was closed down," said an Elgin leader. "If anyone had crossed the lines, that would have been death to their careers here."

Most members walked the lines sometime during the week, and allies from other nearby community college unions and from the Teamsters, Garbage Workers, and Building Trades locals joined them. Elgin's picket line coordinators kept in touch with one another and their strike headquarters in a nearby labor temple with cell phones.

The strike ended February 12th with a tentative agreement. Then something happened that bore out Yogi Berra's adage "it ain't over 'til it's over." Elgin's governing board refused to accept the settlement, claiming that its funding provisions for a wage increase were "based on a misunderstanding."

An effort to resolve the problem through mediation failed, and the union prepared to resume its strike on March 14th. At the last minute, though, the college board accepted a union proposal to submit the dispute to binding arbitration. Then, right before the first scheduled arbitration hearing, the union accepted a board offer to settle the dispute.

The stories I heard about these six strikes always included some account of how the faculty union

had been helped by other unions. Often the support came during the daily round of picketing, with other unionists walking the lines in a gesture of solidarity with the striking faculty.

"It was great having those people from the United Auto Workers (UAW), Teamsters and from other college unions out with us," said an Eastern Michigan leader. "It really boosted our morale."

There were also instances when members of other unions declined to cross the faculty picket lines to do their normal work. This happened twice with the construction workers at Wayne State and several times at Gogebic, Eastern Michigan and Elgin when Teamster drivers of UPS trucks were turned back from making deliveries on the campuses.

"I was standing next to this woman from the Carpenters union when a UPS truck came up and she said 'we can't let him come in here,' and she just jumped right out in front of it," recalls an Elgin leader. "Luckily the guy stopped and then turned around. It was a gutsy move. I was impressed with her."

Local unions also aided the Elgin and Kaskaskia faculty by providing them with meeting and headquarters space during the strikes.

Student response to the six walkouts was a mixed bag. At East-

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ern Michigan, the student government organized a rally in support of the faculty and a number of students came out to walk the picket lines. Sympathetic students also joined in the picketing during the strikes at Elgin, Gogebic and Kaskaskia.

Elgin's student council took a position against the faculty, however, when it appeared that the dispute over the first "settlement" might result in a resumption of the strike. The union subsequently held a campus-wide meeting, attended by several hundred students, to explain its side of the story.

Student frustration was also evident at the two campuses with the longest strikes. At Kaskaskia, a sit-in at the president's office was an expression of dismay with both the union and the administration, though it had the effect of focusing attention on the president's role in the dispute. At Gogebic, just before the final mediation session, a group of students went to court seeking an injunction that would order the striking teachers back to work.

Everyone I talked with emphasized the need to "keep students informed" during a contract dispute. But I also heard words of caution about getting students involved in a strike.

"It's a double-edged sword," notes a Ferris leader. "If students get involved on their own, come out and support you, that's fine. But to go out and actively solicit their support, no. There can be real problems with that."

Public relations always came up in discussions about the strikes. I was told repeatedly about the importance of developing a clear message on the union's position and getting this message accurately reported by the news media. Noted one leader:

More than anything else, you've got to have very clear sound-bite explanations of why you're striking, which is something we had a problem with. We really struggled for a while with getting our position on salaries clearly reported in the media.

Along with getting out the union's basic message, its PR coordinator also has to deal with the administration's version of reality.

At all of the campuses except Elgin, the administration claimed that the strike had a "limited effect" and that "students were still attending classes." This claim usually lasted only a day or so, and was effectively undermined when reporters checked out the campuses.

All six unions got their messages out more or less the same way, through a stream of press

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releases, background conversations and interviews with local reporters.

The Kaskaskia and Gogebic unions, both at small town/rural colleges, also made use of newspaper ads and the letters-to-editor column in local newspapers.

The public relations effort for the Wayne State union was especially challenging, partly because of the large number of media outlets in Detroit, but also because of an on-going strike at the Detroit News and Detroit Free Press.¹⁰

In addition to publicity, all of the unions tried to keep their members informed about strike developments through leaflets, newsletters, rallies and meetings and also—in the most recent strikes—through e-mail and web site postings. The technologically savvy Elgin union even included sound bites on its web site.

“You never get everything you want in a strike,” says a Michigan Education Association staffer about the contract agreement at Gogebic. This could have been said about the settlement at any of the six campuses. None of the unions racked up a total victory. But none of them suffered a serious setback either.¹¹

Here’s a brief look at what each of the unions got in their settlement—along with some evaluative comments by their leaders.

Faculty at Wayne State won a salary increase of 4 percent each year for three years; improved fringe benefits; no fair share, but the university agreed to include union material in packets for new hires. The union’s evaluation:

We did okay. Could have done better, but there were no losses like we had with early retirement back in ’94.

Eastern Michigan faculty got a four-year contract with salary increases of 4 or 5 percent each year and an additional equity adjustment of 1.5 percent; payment of \$2500 and royalties to faculty developing and teaching Internet courses; language restricting the use of part-time faculty. The evaluation:

It’s a good contract... No, we wouldn’t have gotten everything we got without [the strike], especially with compensation. Also with intellectual property...

Ferris State settled on a five-year contract, with retroactive provisions covering the three years of negotiations. The contract linked salary raises to enrollment increases until 1999 and provided for annual raises of about 3 percent for the next three years; the settlement also guaranteed faculty involvement in hiring decisions. The union evaluation:

When a union votes to end a strike, it does not necessarily bring an end to its conflict with management.

A tough contract... Main thing is that the board [of trustees] effort to break our union failed....We did the best we could under the circumstances, and as a union. We lived to fight another day.

Gogebic faculty won a three-year contract which increases the cap on health insurance and guarantees that the Michigan-affiliated insurance company would continue to be the insurance carrier.

Elgin won a two-year contract that allows faculty to retain their existing health insurance and provides for an annual salary increase about 5 percent.

Even after the June re-negotiation, we still have most of what was in the original settlement, which was...a good contract. Our people are pretty happy.

Kaskaskia faculty received an annual salary increase of 2.7 percent for three years; faculty begin paying part of medical insurance premiums, but with a cap; existing language on layoffs was retained.

Quite a fight, but it turned out okay. The money items were close to what we'd be asking for, and the college didn't get to cancel the RIF [Reduction in Force] language. . . She [the college president] wasn't able to break the union.

When a union votes to end a strike and accept a contract settlement, it does not necessarily bring an end to its conflict with management. Strikes are emotionally intense, and union members may go back to work with persistent feelings of anger and resentment towards the other side—even when they have gotten an acceptable contract settlement.

This was the case at Kaskaskia, the campus with the longest strike. When the college president made an appearance at a faculty meeting to announce the settlement, the atmosphere was described to me as "frigid...not at all friendly." Faculty anger was still evident a year later when many refused to work on assessment plans for a North Central accreditation.

At Ferris State, where the struggle for a new contract had also been quite difficult—three years of administrative stonewalling and a threat to hire replacement faculty when the union finally went on strike—there was a similar legacy of bad feeling after the strike. Union leaders continued to question the practices and priorities of the Ferris administration.

A longtime social work professor wrote in the union newsletter that she was retiring "not because I am of retirement age, but because I

Unions that have weathered a difficult strike sometimes opt for a less confrontational approach the next time.

am tired of the struggle...tired of an insensitive... administration... tired of the petty bureaucracy and the lack of respect our faculty experience every day."

Strikes can also have political consequences. Unions at colleges and universities with elected governing boards may decide to campaign to try to elect a "more sympathetic" board. This happened, in somewhat different ways, at Kaskaskia, Gogebic and Wayne State.

At Kaskaskia, "we were involved in electing two people to the board, one in '96 and another in '98. One of them was this guy, a leader, from another local union.... We'd actually recruited him to run for the board."

At Gogebic, the faculty union had been involved in board elections even before the strike. "We got a couple of good people elected in '99, but we still had a board chairman and three others who were hostile [during the strike].... you can be sure that we'll be targeting them in the next election."

For the Wayne State board of governors, candidates are chosen at state Republican and Democratic Party conventions and then compete in a statewide election. After the 1999 strike, the faculty union teamed up with its union allies to "de-select" one of the "problem" board incumbents at the state

Democratic convention.

A participant recalls: "The woman we then got nominated for that slot was from the UAW, works at Solidarity House... A good person. She and I were both arrested at the same Detroit newspaper [strike] demonstration.... She's one of the Democrats who won statewide last fall."

Finally, there's the question of what happens next time. Unions with a recent strike under their belt are certainly going to think about the possibility of a strike the next time they go to the bargaining table.

This is what happened at Wayne State after the strikes in 1990 and 1994. The union at Ferris State is already preparing itself for the next round of negotiations in 2002. The union newsletter has been running feisty articles about the need to "improve our salary equity" next time. The union president adds:

Tonight we have a membership meeting where we'll be doing some education, mainly for our new faculty, about the mechanics of bargaining...and what happens when you have problems and a strike, like the last time.

Unions that have weathered an especially difficult strike some-

times opt for a less confrontational approach for their next contract. This happened at Kaskaskia, where the union and college administration agreed to do “interest-based” negotiations in 1998.

She [the college president] had been told to get it over with this time. So we went through the kissy-feely, let’s be friends stuff, and it worked. We got a settlement in April, a four-year contract with a 4 percent increase each year.

What can be learned from these six cases? First of all, faculty unions should always go into contract negotiations with a well thought-out strike contingency plan. In most

cases, these plans will never be carried out. But the failure to have such a plan severely limits a union’s bargaining position.

Getting members mobilized for a strike is clearly something that cannot be done at the last minute. If a union does have to take that final step and “hit the bricks,” it should also be prepared for a public relations battle with the other side, since any administration that has been less than truthful at the bargaining table will surely be telling some tall tales during a strike.

Above all, faculty unions need to accept the reality of strikes, pay attention to the strike experience of other unions, and get everyone prepared. ■

Endnotes:

¹These data are from the annual Directory of Faculty Contracts and Bargaining Agents in Institutions of Higher Education, which unfortunately ceased publication with the volume published in 1997.

²I could find only two studies of strikes in higher education, by Ng (1991) and McClendon and Klass (1993). Both use faculty interview data in an effort to identify some of the statistical correlates of strike behavior.

³I don’t make claims about my selections being any kind of “scientific sample,” but—as will be seen in my subsequent description—these six cases do encompass real diversity (in terms of size of campus, type of educational institution, demographics of student body, and geographic location). I chose these six places partly because of this diversity, but also because I am closely familiar with the educational and union environment in Michigan and Illinois.

⁴Adamany’s problems with unions did not end when he left Wayne. In his next job, as head of the Detroit public school system, he had to deal with a teachers’ strike in 1999. This walkout took place despite a state law passed in 1993 which allows severe financial penalties to be imposed on K-12 teachers who go out on strike.

⁵This proposed law, Bill 4993, was very similar to the 1993 legislation dealing with strikes by K-12 teachers.

⁶For a very good general description of this mobilization process, see the CWA manual *Mobilizing to Build Power*.

⁷Which is not surprising; virtually every list I’ve seen on “preparing for a strike” (in labor relations textbooks as well as practical manuals) has hit on the same points. For two good examples, see the chapter on strikes in *The Troublemaker’s Handbook* and the IEA’s *Effective Crisis Management*.

⁸Although Michigan's labor relations law does prohibit "economic" strikes by public employees, a court decision in 1969 ruled that public employees can engage in a strike action if their union has filed an Unfair Labor Practice charge. The Ferris State union filed a ULP prior to its strike, as did the unions at Wayne State, Eastern Michigan and Gogebic Community College.

⁹The part-timers' actions' prompted a joint memo signed by the presidents of the AAUP union and the lecturers' union that urged lecturers to: "CONTINUE TO MEET YOUR CLASSES...DO NOT be a Martyr! If you do not continue to do your jobs, you could face termination with no legal defense to protect you!"

¹⁰Both papers had hired replacement workers and had been hit by a general boycott by Detroit-area unions. The boycott was aimed at subscribers and advertisers, but some unionists also felt that one should not even talk to reporters from the "scab papers."

¹¹The issue of losing faculty strikes came up in an interview with a Wayne State leader. He noted that "we lost our strike back in '94." Asking him what he meant by "lost," he replied: "Got a bad settlement. We couldn't keep our people out [striking], it kept dragging on...they were dropping away...so we agreed to something that wasn't very good."

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