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We Ain’t Gonna Let Nobody Turn Us Around

Drawing on the inimitable Dr. King, Emari DiGiorgio, President of SFT Local 2275, tells us how a coalition of 14 labor unions fought state healthcare cost increases last month.

On March 18, 1968, Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his speech “All Labor Has Dignity” to an overflowing crowd of sanitation workers on strike and their supporters at the Bishop Charles Mason Temple of the Church of God in Christ in Memphis, Tennessee. A month earlier, a thousand members of AFSCME Local 1733 had walked off the job after two sanitation workers, Echol Cole and Robert Walker, were killed in a garbage compactor. As trash piled up in the streets of Memphis, the strike brought attention to years of poor pay, dangerous working conditions, and continued racial inequity.

King’s historic speech rallied the crowd. “Nothing worthwhile is gained without sacrifice. The thing for you to do is to stay together, and say to everybody in this community that you are going to stick it out to the end until every demand is met, that you are going to stick it out to the end, and that over 40 percent of the non-union workers have some interest in joining one. The last time union approval was this high was in 1965, when union membership rates were more than two times higher than they are now.

This past month, here at Stockton, we were reminded of the strength our local - AFT 2275 - yields and how much stronger we are when we work in collaboration with other unions across our campus and the state.

On Wednesday, July 13, 2022, Aon PLC, a financial services consulting firm hired by the State of New Jersey, proposed the NJ State Health Benefits Commission (SHBC) a 20-25% increase in premiums next year for healthcare benefits for public employees covered by the State Health Benefits Plan. This premium increase would translate to a 1-1.5% pay cut for employees across the state and saddle local municipalities and school boards with an untenable bill, as they can pay as much as 70% of the total premium on employee benefits.

Though the vote on this increase was originally scheduled for late July, it was postponed after a copy of the proposal was leaked. On Tuesday, September 13, 2022, thousands of state employees, a coalition of at least 14 labor unions, rallied at the Statehouse in Trenton, urging lawmakers to use a portion of the $1 billion in federal COVID relief money the state has at its disposal.

At Stockton, AFT, CWA, and IFPTE leaders sought President Kesselman’s support to bring members to the rally, and the President offered work release for eight staff members from each of the three unions to attend as representatives of the University.

As of Tuesday, October 4, 2022, the three unions have come to an agreement with the University for this year to trade two holidays - Indigenous Peoples Day on Monday, October 10, 2022, and Presidents’ Day on Monday, February 20, 2023 - for the four working days between December 26, 2022 through January 3, 2023, as the other days off are holiday observances of Christmas and New Year’s Day. This is a huge win for staff and professional librarians, who essentially have gained two paid days off.

Again, this labor victory would not be possible without the combined efforts of all three unions and the strength of their memberships.

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In solidarity,
Emari DiGiorgio, MFA
Stockton University
President SFT Local 2275
The fall semester is in full swing, and the SFT professional staff are working hard to share important information with their members. There are a few upcoming events that everyone should know about.

On October 21st, there was another tri-union workshop, where members from all three unions had the opportunity to meet. It is important for all staff members to know who the union executives are on campus so they know who can assist them with concerns regarding terms and conditions of employment.

On November 2nd, the Professional Staff Advisory Committee will be hosting a workshop on how to construct Reappointment Files.

I would like to give a shout out to the members of the Professional Staff Advisory Committee, Lauren Fonseca, Donna Hauer, Natalja Manger, Tara Marsh, and Barbara Tilelli, who volunteered their time and assist in making these events a reality. Together we have created the Professionally OURS Workshop Series, with OURS standing for Our Union Representing Staff.

We will be soliciting feedback for topics that members would like to see in the spring as well as offering a special workshop led by our Council. Keep a lookout in your email for this information. If anyone has any ideas they would like to share and/or are interested in being a part of the Professional Staff Advisory Committee and/or has any questions or topics that they would like to see addressed in a workshop, please contact me at maria.spade@sftunion.org.

I would also like to welcome the members of our Professional Staff Peer Review Committee, who will serve the committee by reviewing Performance Based Promotion Applications. Dayna DiFiore, Lauren Fonseca, Natalja Manger, Nathan Morell, and Diana Strelicky all ran unopposed and have been elected to the committee. Staff that are currently on a multi-year contract and are interested in going for a Performance Based Promotion can review the current MOA and reach out to the committee with any questions or concerns.

Maria Spade

SFT 2275
Scientific, Technical, and Professional Employees Union
315 E. Water Street
Stockton, NJ 08258

President:
Emari DiGiorgio
Vice President:
Tara Lake
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Maria Spade
VP of Adjuncts:
Stephanie Cawley
Grievance Officer:
Nazia Kazi
Lead Negotiator:
Tina Zappile
Treasurer:
Heather Perez
Communications Officer:
Justin Maciejewski
COPE Officer:
Erin O’Hanlon

Grievance Update

Our Grievance Officer, Nazia Kazi, explains what issues constitute an actual grievance and urges you to reach out if you are unsure.

You’ve heard me say a number of times (in this newsletter and at our membership meetings) that my role is to determine whether any of your contractual or employment rights have been violated. If they have, we might have a grievance or unfair labor practice (respectively) on our hands. Filing a formal grievance sets into motion a sequence of events in which the University and Union attempt to resolve the matter at hand and restore the losses you’ve incurred.

But what if there’s something else happening in the workplace, something you can’t point to in one of our Memoranda of Agreement and say “a-ha! This section was violated of our Memoranda of Agreement and something you can’t point to in one of our Memoranda of Agreement and say “a-ha! This section was violated”? Or what if a colleague of yours (another member of the SFT) has fostered a hostile work environment or infringed upon your job duties?

In the latter case, you usually do not have a grievance. We, the SFT, are prohibited from filing a grievance against another SFT member, only against University management.

This doesn’t necessarily mean you shouldn’t inform us of the matter at hand. I often make determinations as to whether or not a contractual violation has occurred. When it has not, SFT can help you navigate the procedures around reporting a code of conduct violation to the University.

Anyone who’s been through the formal grievance process can tell you: it’s not quick! The steps involved span several months, and a grievant will wait a long time to find resolution for these matters. To speed up the process, you will want to:

1) Notify me as soon as the violation has occurred. We have a very tight calendar in which to file grievances, and every day matters.

2) If you are able to, indicate which Agreement (state-wide or local) you suspect has been violated. If not, I will work with you to determine whether this has happened.

3) Attach any and all documentation (meeting notes, a timeline of events, emails documenting the matter) so that we can move swiftly with any formal action.

As always, contact me from a non-Stockton email address, for the sake of maximum privacy.

As always, Maria Spade, Vice President of Professional Staff, keeps us up-to-date on the latest concerning our treasured staff.

Professional Staff Update

As always, Maria Spade, Vice President of Professional Staff, keeps us up-to-date on the latest concerning our treasured staff.

Please welcome Lilia Yang O’Brien (杨本霖 Yang Ben Lin) to the SFT family.

She arrived on September 29, weighing 7lbs 8oz, at 19.75in long.

Kaite Yang & her partner Dan: “We’re all excited to be together!”
Welcome to the SFT Exec, Erin O’Hanlon, our new COPE chair who immediately brings good news about increased contributions.

The good news - the union’s financial accounts are in good standing. All the bills are getting paid, we are providing great services to you, our members, and we are saving for rainy days. We certainly look forward to resuming payday parties this year! We also received a $6,000 grant from AFT-NJ to reimburse us for organizing expenses.

The serious news - the union’s budget this year is a cautionary one. We all know that we need to keep an eye on your expenses as they are the primary factor in our financial success. Our voices are heard and that our needs are considered increasing contributions from our members has been successful. We are happy to report that our latest appeal to members to consider increasing their contribution has been successful. We are happy to report that our most recent appeal to members to consider increasing their contribution has been successful. Rodgers Jackson recently increased his contribution by 200%. This moved several other faculty members to increase their contributions.

I believe in the work that COPE does for all our members, and I am looking forward to ensuring that our voices are heard and that our needs are considered increasing contributions from our members has been successful. We are happy to report that our latest appeal to members to consider increasing their contribution has been successful. Rodgers Jackson recently increased his contribution by 200%. This moved several other faculty members to increase their contributions.

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I am happy to hand deliver a COPE form to you. Please let me know if you are interested in contributing and I will get the form to you. My email is erin.ohanlon@sftunion.org. Sue Burrows also has COPE forms in H320.

Erin O’Hanlon
Stockton University
COPE Chair SFT Local 2275

Welcome to Our New Vice President of Adjuncts

Introducing, Stephanie Cawley, our new Vice President of Adjuncts.

Greetings, SFT! I wanted to use my newsletter space this month to introduce myself as the new Vice President of Adjuncts. I was thrilled to be elected for this role from my dear friend Maxine Patroni, whose (much more stylish) shoes I hope to fill.

I was born and raised in Cape May County and am a Stockton alum, having graduated in 2011 with a B.A. in English Literature. I also hold an M.P.A. in Creative Writing from the University of Pittsburgh. I returned to Stockton in 2018 when I began working as an adjunct in GENS, and I later held a full-time staff position as the Director of Murphy Writing. Now I am again working as an adjunct here, teaching mostly first-year writing courses, and I also teach at the University of the Arts in Philadelphia where I live.

When I’m not teaching or doing work for the union, I am also a poet, so I spend a lot of time reading and writing. When I’m not doing any of those things, I like going on aimless walks, telling my cats they are the most beautiful creatures on the planet, watching horror movies, and going to karaoke.

While I know firsthand many of the challenges and struggles that adjuncts face at Stockton and elsewhere, I have spent my first few months in this role familiarizing myself with the specific issues Stockton adjuncts are facing. I hope to spend my year working to recruit more adjuncts to join the union in addition to supporting and representing our current members.

You might not see me around campus too much because I manage many adjuncts, my time is divided between Stockton and elsewhere, but I look forward to getting to know more SFT members better in the months to come and to working with my brilliant colleagues on the executive committee this year. I am proud to take on this role fighting to make our workplace more equitable for those of us who are most precarious, especially with a new contract on the horizon.

Stephanie Cawley
Stockton University
VP Adjuncts SFT Local 2275

Inflation Is Only Good for Balloons

SFT Treasurer, Heather Perez, is not trying to take the wind out of your sails. This financial report is so much more than just hot air.

The fun news - we have an SFT intern this semester! Tyneka Boggs, an American Studies student, is going to be helping me conduct an inventory of the SFT records and look at best practices for archives and records management for unions. Later in the semester, she’ll present her findings and recommendations to us so that we can make some changes in our collection policies.

I am happy to hand deliver a COPE form to you. Please let me know if you are interested in contributing and I will get the form to you. My email is erin.ohanlon@sftunion.org. Sue Burrows also has COPE forms in H320.

Erin O’Hanlon
Stockton University
COPE Chair SFT Local 2275

Our own Rodger Jackson and Erin O’Hanlon along with Tim Alexander are enduring the brutal weather—warm sun with a light breeze—so you don’t have to!
Dedication of Solidarity Park

Ron Caplan, Professor of Public Health at Stockton and long-standing AFT member, gives the dedication for Solidarity Park.

Good afternoon. As Emari said, I am Ron Caplan, Associate Professor of Public Health. But more importantly than that, I was Vice President of the union while Dave Emmons was president. Dave was a terrific mentor and the most important lesson he taught me was that the union exists to serve its members. And that is still true today! As Vice President, I helped resolve staff grievances and accompanied Dave to Council meetings and contract negotiations. And, nearly 20 years ago, I chaired the search committee that hired Sue Burrows as office manager! I also served as treasurer for over 12 years under four different union presidents. I guess they just couldn’t find anyone else to do it -until Stacy Rose and now more recently Heather Perez!!

But enough about me. Why are we here today? We are here today to honor many of the men and women who not only founded the SFT, but helped it to become one of the strongest, best run and most effective unions for faculty and professional staff in the state of New Jersey! The Stockton Federation of Teachers local 2275 was officially chartered on June 1, 1972 (almost exactly 50 years ago today). Since then, it has worked continuously, tirelessly, and effectively to maintain and improve the quality of education and working conditions at Stockton. In short, improving the lives of Stockton students, faculty (including librarians and adjuncts) and the professional staff has always been our union’s primary purpose.

Perhaps at various SFT events you have seen or heard the three words “We are Stockton”. This is not just some fancy logo or slogan. It is the truth! Without a strong and fearless union right from its start, Stockton College (later to become Stockton University) would not be the quality institution it is today. Shared governance has benefited all of us! But shared governance is not a privilege to be occasionally granted by the administration, but a right to be continuously and fearlessly demanded and protected. Shared governance has benefited everyone at Stockton! It has helped make both the union and the university not only bigger but better! Simply put, Stockton would not be Stockton without a strong and fearless SFT right from its very beginning! Please don’t let anyone forget or rewrite this glorious history!

And the time to begin your legacy is now! As you leave this hallowed ground today, please commit to honoring those who came before you by continuing their union-building efforts well into the future. Thank you for coming and I wish you all the very best! Be well! Stay Safe! And stay forever Stockton Strong!

Ron Caplan, Ph.D.
Stockton University
Associate Professor of Public Health