

The TUGSA Tribune

Volume 3, Issue 2

Winter 2000/2001

Inside this issue:

<i>Election in Spring</i>	1
<i>Victory Before the PLRB</i>	1
<i>First Person Plural</i>	2
<i>Town Hall Meeting</i>	4
<i>Ask Ms. Tugsa</i>	5
<i>City Council Resolution</i>	6

Union Election in 2001!

by Brian O'Sullivan

TUGSA has reached a major milestone in our ongoing campaign to secure collective bargaining rights for all Temple's graduate employees. Yielding to public pressure, the administration has consented to a state-supervised union election for a huge portion of the 1100 graduate students hired to work at Temple.

Graduate employees with instructional responsibilities (e.g., teaching, grading, tutoring, etc.), as well as those with research responsibilities not directly connected to their own academic work, will have the opportunity this spring to vote "UNION, YES!" After we win this election, the law compels Temple's administration to recognize our union and enter contract negotiations.

The administration has grudgingly begun to accept the inevitable only after a series of dramatic successes for TUGSA: the state labor board's recognition of our status as employees, the Town Meeting at which graduate employees solidified our ties to Temple's neighbors, and the Philadelphia City Council's resolution calling on the administration to recognize the union. Without any single one of these developments, Temple's lawyers might well have continued to hold us up in court, as they have done for close to two years now. We have dragged them to the table by the power of our solidarity and concerted action.

Although they have agreed to allow us to proceed with a union

(Continued on page 6)



Graduate Employees Win Legal Ruling!

by Shakti Jaising

On October 17, 2000, after a year and a half of legal struggle, the Pennsylvania Labor Relations Board (PLRB) unanimously ruled that graduate students hired by Temple as graduate assistants and teaching assistants should be considered employees of the university and should therefore enjoy protection under the Public Employee Relations Act.

In declaring that graduate assistants are Temple employees, the PLRB ruling cited a number of facts: "Graduate assistants perform vital teaching and research services for Temple. There is no requirement that a graduate student perform work for Temple as a graduate assistant in order to obtain a graduate degree. Graduate assistants receive

compensation from Temple and are required to perform services for Temple in exchange for that compensation."

The PLRB ruling sends a powerful statement to the university to heed our demands for a union representation election. TUGSA's platform

(Continued on page 4)

1st Person Plural: Why We Joined TUGSA

For this issue's "First Person Plural" — the column in which TUGSA members speak out about their jobs, their university, and their union — the *Tribune* asked a number of TUGSA's newest members to explain why they joined. Here is what they had to say:



"I joined TUGSA for one main reason. Temple's graduate employees need an advocate. Asking for representation does not mean that we are conducting a revolution against the administration. It's just that we want the administration to allow us to have input into the decisions which affect us."

—Vishal Verma, Mechanical Engineering

"Joining TUGSA was just a common sense move on my part, both as a student of education and as a teacher of future educators. The history of education in the U.S. is intertwined with the history of unions. Unions continue to operate as catalysts for change in the working lives of teachers."

—Martha Carey, Urban Education



"I come from China, where the workers' unions are controlled by the government. I joined TUGSA because it is controlled by the people — its members. Graduate employees need a strong union, and TUGSA is doing a good job representing its members."

—Hao Sun, Chemistry



“TUGSA is the only group on campus that is committed to struggling for representation through the collective efforts of all graduate students. I want to see the work of student-teachers valued as a vital part of Temple’s learning environment. I appreciate the work that TUGSA does in solidarity with area community groups who work on behalf of the surrounding neighborhood residents.”

—Tamara Xavier, Dance

“I joined TUGSA because I feel that the sense of community that the organization stands for is important to my being at Temple. I definitely believe that solidarity is the key for discussing and taking action towards being an empowered, informed community.”

—Laura Goldstein, Creative Writing



“There is strength in numbers, especially when dealing with an administration that does not want to talk to its own students. My most important reason for joining TUGSA was health insurance. The ‘plan’ that Temple offers is ridiculous. After the health issues that have come up in my family in the past month, I know that one should not go without real health insurance. It’s gambling with your life.”

—Todd Shilhanek, Music

“I really am very happy with my situation as a teaching assistant in the psychology department at Temple. I joined TUGSA to support my graduate employee colleagues who don’t seem to feel they are as fortunate as I am. I joined for the greater good of the entire graduate employee community.”

—Beth Bragg, Psychology



Town Hall Presents a People's Vision of Temple

by Ayanna Laney

On October 30, 2000, TUGSA held its first annual Town Meeting, which took place in the Women's Christian Alliance Center. At the meeting — the theme of which was, "A People's Vision of Temple" — TUGSA members and members of the local community discussed Temple's past, present, and future roles as educator, employer, and neighbor to residents city-wide and, especially, in North Philadelphia.

The preamble of TUGSA's constitution proclaims the union's commitment to the principles of participatory democracy, fair employee-employer relations, and social justice — on campus and beyond. The Town Meeting put this commitment into action by creating

a coalition to bring about a more just university. From this forum emerged four major calls upon Adamany's administration: to recognize TUGSA, to renew Temple's commitment to educate Philadelphian students, to address institutional racism, and to grant the surrounding community representation on Temple's Board of Trustees.

Speakers at the Town Meeting included Vicki Millhouse, a former childcare worker in Temple's daycare center; Tom Cronin, the president of AFSCME District Council 47; Darcell Waters, the president of the Nelson Brown/People's Village Community Association; Tara Colston, of the

Philadelphia Student Union; and TUGSA's own April Logan, a teaching assistant and union activist in the department of English.

More meetings will be scheduled in the spring to continue this dialogue and abide by TUGSA's mission statement. If you are interested in helping to build these types of coalitions, please join the Outreach Committee of TUGSA. For more information, please call the TUGSA office at 215.235.0512.

Ayanna Laney is a research assistant in Biochemistry and serves on TUGSA's Steering Committee.

PLRB Victory! (continued)

(Continued from page 1)

includes obtaining a living wage, improved health insurance for employees and their families, increased funding for graduate study, and renewed commitment to affirmative action programs.

Soon after the ruling was declared, a group of TUGSA members presented an open letter to President Adamany calling on him to meet to discuss the size and composition of the bargaining unit. The president had previously refused to meet with TUGSA. Meetings are now in progress to determine the composition of the unit.

The ruling came after 3 years of campaigning, in which TUGSA has

repeatedly demonstrated majority support for unionization. In February, 1999, with more than double the necessary number of signed authorization cards, TUGSA petitioned the Labor Board for a union representation election. University lawyers challenged the petition, contending that graduate assistants are not employees.

TUGSA is part of a national movement to improve the working and academic conditions of graduate students. On gaining recognition, ours will be one of twenty-five recognized graduate employee unions in ten states.

The PLRB ruling in TUGSA's favor comes within months of a

National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) ruling in favor of graduate assistants' right to organize at New York University. The NYU graduate employee union will be the first of its kind in a private university.

Shakti Jaising is a teaching assistant in Film and Media Arts and serves on TUGSA's Steering Committee.

Ask Ms. Tugsa: Will the Administration Go Negative?

by Ms. Tugsa



Dear Ms. Tugsa,

When we have our election next semester, should we expect the administration to fight us? Are they likely to run their own campaign and “go negative”? If so, how?

—*Campaigning in Curtis Hall*

Dear Campaigning,

In most union certification elections, the employer runs an aggressive anti-union campaign to try to persuade, cajole, or intimidate folks into voting against unionization. Given the gobs of dough Temple’s administration has already invested in this fight — in contesting our rights as employees they’ve spent hundreds of thousands in legal fees — it’s likely that, once we near the date of the election, Temple administrators will do everything they can to keep us from winning.

What will their campaign look like? It could consist in part of minor concessions designed to mollify us. It might also resort to allegations, rumors, and scare tactics. When Oregon State had its certification election in 1999, their administration sponsored a group calling itself “Concerned Graduate Students,” and paid for this bunch to send anti-union mailings to all graduate employees. Though billed as a student-run operation, OSU’s Concerned Graduate Students consisted of only about a half-dozen grad stooges working hand-in-hand with the administration to represent the employer’s — not the employees’ — concerns. But the graduate student-

employees of Oregon State weren’t fooled; they overwhelmingly voted in favor of unionization.

Next semester, we might hear the administration or its proxies telling some scary stories about unionizing. We’ll likely hear bone-chilling tales about expensive dues, about being forced to go out on strike, about “Big Labor” interfering with collegial relations at the university, about unionization threatening visa status. Topics such as strikes and dues can be intimidating, especially for those of us who don’t have much previous experience with or knowledge of how a union works, and you can bet the administration will try to exploit any and all uncertainties and anxieties.

Fortunately, though, the harrowing tales the administration will spin to spook us will probably have all the believability of a bad horror flick. We’re trained as scholars to ask questions and make informed decisions, so we shouldn’t be easily frightened or fooled. We know that a union isn’t some monstrous boogeyman; it’s simply a way for us to have a say in the decisions that affect our jobs and our lives.

When the time comes to vote, don’t get scared; get the facts. If you hear something that you have questions about, talk to your local steward; she should be able to help answer whatever question you have.

Dear Ms. Tugsa,

When our union gets recognized, will I lose the exemption from FICA taxes that I have as a full-time student?

—*Taxable in Tuttleman*

Dear Taxable,

No. Having union representation has no effect upon your tax status, unless of course we win a big enough raise to bump you into a higher bracket. We’re still students — and thus still exempt from FICA — even though the labor board now recognizes that we also have rights as employees.

Dear Ms. Tugsa,

As a TA in Political Science, I grade papers and exams for a large lecture course on electoral politics. The students didn’t do well at all on their midterm, and, when I returned the results to them, they demanded a recount. But it was a lot of work grading all those tests the first time. Should I really go through that whole stack of bluebooks again?

—*Put-Upon in Poli Sci*

Dear Put-Upon,

Contrary to what the anti-union campaign may have you believe about supposed threats to academic freedom, a union for teachers doesn’t involve itself in instructors’ individual decisions about course content or the evaluation of students. So Ms. Tugsa has little advice to offer in this matter; it’s entirely up to your judgment. I do know, though, that if we want to see real changes in our working conditions, we need to win our election in the spring decisively enough that no make-up exam is necessary!

Questions about life, love, or labor law? Write to Ms. Tugsa at ask-ms-t@tugsa.org.

TUGSA/AFT/AFL-CIO
1501 North Broad Street
First floor, side office
Philadelphia, PA 19122

Phone: 215.235.0512
FAX: 215.235.0513
Email: union@tugsa.org

<http://www.tugsa.org>

Union Election in Spring! (continued)

(Continued from page 1)

election for the bulk of the graduate employees, Temple's lawyers are still trying to exclude as many of us as they can. The administration, perhaps trying to save face, clings obstinately to its insistence that those of us who make Temple's offices work share no "community of interest" with those of us who make Temple's classrooms work. Graduate employees whose responsibilities are strictly administrative won't, therefore, be included in the election

to which Temple's lawyers have agreed. But TUGSA will not give up until we have won union representation for all graduate employees, and we are formulating strategies for securing the collective bargaining rights of those of us whom the administration has shut out of next term's election. TUGSA continues to fight for one big union for all of Temple's graduate employees, and next spring's election is a crucial step towards that goal.

This significant victory could not have happened without the determination and collective action of hundreds of Temple's graduate employees. Such action is needed now more than ever; the vote will be held soon, and we must now reach out to our fellow graduate employees to ensure an overwhelming "Union, Yes" majority.

Brian O'Sullivan is a graduate assistant and steward in the University Writing Center.

Philadelphia City Council Supports TUGSA

On November 2, 2000, Councilman David Cohen introduced a resolution in support of TUGSA into City Council. The resolution, co-sponsored by ten other members of Council, passed unanimously. The text of the resolution follows:

WHEREAS, Over three years ago Temple University's 1100 graduate employees joined together to form a union and demanded that the University recognize and bargain in good faith with their union; and

WHEREAS, For the third consecutive year a majority of Temple's graduate employees have signed cards in support of unionizing; and

WHEREAS, In spite of the strong majority support the university has refused to enter into negotiations or schedule an election, and has instead spent scarce resources, which include public funds as well as tuition, opposing the

right of graduate student employees to unionize; and

WHEREAS, Within the last three years, the number of graduate employee unions nationwide has grown from 12 to 22, due to the exploitative practices of colleges and universities, who demand that graduate students provide vital teaching services for grossly inadequate compensation; and

WHEREAS, Temple's graduate student employees provide thousands of hours of labor in the form of teaching, research, staffing of labs and offices, grading, and meeting with students. Moreover, Temple graduate student employees are the sole teachers for more than ten percent of classes and teach over half of the contact hours for the core undergraduate curriculum; and

WHEREAS, Temple University's administration recognizes and bargains in good faith with all other unions at the university; and

WHEREAS, The Pennsylvania Labor Relations Board recently ruled that Temple University's graduate students qualify as

by Councilman David Cohen, et al.

university employees and therefore have the right to unionize; and

WHEREAS, In light of Temple's receipt of millions of dollars of public funds and tax exemptions, it is important that Temple fulfill the public policy embedded in state law to bargain in good faith with the designated representatives of all of its employees; and

RESOLVED THAT THE CITY COUNCIL OF PHILADELPHIA hereby calls on Temple University to recognize the Temple University Graduate Students Association/American Federation of Teachers as the collective bargaining representative for its teaching assistants, graduate assistants, and research assistants and to bargain in good faith with that union; and

FURTHER RESOLVED, that a true and correct copy of this resolution be sent to Temple University President David Adamany and all members of the Temple Board of Trustees as evidence of the grave concern of this legislative body.