

# **What Standing Together Can Accomplish**

Many of you may be aware that the administration of Long Island University—Brooklyn announced on Labor Day weekend that it was abruptly locking out all bargaining-unit faculty because of an extended impasse in their contract negotiations.

This lockout was unprecedented in the history of American higher education, and it not only attracted national attention but also provoked considerable outrage. Last week, after starting the semester with administrators and newly hired adjunct faculty hastily assigned to as many classes as possible, the university administration finally relented.

What follows is a debriefing by one of the faculty actively involved in resisting the lockout. For those of you who have not been following the story very closely, there is then a series of links to other posts to the *Academe Blog*.

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## **Back to Class with Lots of New Lessons: Debrief on the LIU Lockout**

By DEBORAH MUTNICK

Saturday, September 17, three days after the LIU administration ended its lockout of faculty in the midst of contract negotiations, I feel a little like Wile E. Coyote running off the edge of a cliff. I can't stop running.

As I hover over that abyss, before resuming the more or less normal functions of life as a professor, I need to think through what the lockout taught us. And given its significance as an unprecedented case of what could happen elsewhere, those of you following the news about it are also probably wondering what happened.

As reported in the press, our old contract was extended until May 31, 2017, our demand for a mediator was met, any health insurance expenses are to be reimbursed, and negotiations are to resume immediately. At our union meeting on September 15, the day we returned to campus, we heard more details.

We learned about two conditions proposed by President Kimberly Cline and swiftly rejected by our incredulous LIUFF team: the first was that we issue a joint statement announcing the end of the lockout; the second, even more preposterous, was that we sign a “non-disparagement” clause. As a member of our team put it, first she locked us out, now she’s threatening our First Amendment rights.

We also got a copy of a letter to Cline from the NYS Deputy Commissioner for Higher Education warning her that media reports and complaints alleging the use of unqualified replacement workers could lead to an on-site review of the University’s compliance with state regulations and to deregistration of programs.

The crisis of the lockout thrust LIU into the national spotlight. Together with amazing support from labor—especially the AFT and its crew of experienced staff—elected officials, colleagues, friends, and alums, LIU Brooklyn faculty and students stood up for higher education and won a major victory.

Had we gone on strike—an action decided against well before the lockout—it would have been newsworthy but not extraordinary. Once the lockout was implemented, students and faculty were cast into history-making roles defending our campus against the president’s neoliberal, union-busting tactics and her assumption that it was okay to replace 450+ professors with reassigned administrators and scabs hired on Monster.com.

The lockout transformed the LIU Brooklyn faculty from a diverse group of intellectuals across the political spectrum into a more or less unified, disciplined local willing to fight collectively not only for ourselves but also for the other four unions on our campus without contracts, the students, the right to unionize, and the future of our university. Next we need to figure out how to maintain unity, focus, and resolve now that the crisis has ended.

Students were likewise transformed by the lockout and the fraudulent replacement of their professors. They rose up in unified protest that forced the administration to buckle. Simultaneously, they began to understand discrete instances of their own mistreatment (e.g., cuts to scholarships and stipends) in qualitatively different terms as linked to larger structural assaults on education and democracy. They learned they have power when they act collectively.

We emerged victorious in this round of attack but that is clearly insufficient. We have immediate work to do at LIU—negotiating a fair contract and mounting a campaign for new university leadership. The future of LIU, however, is inextricably linked to the long-term, systemic problem of the evisceration and corporatization of education.

None of us anywhere will be able to fight these battles alone. The LIU lockout is already fading from headlines but the ubiquitous struggle continues. Many of us have researched and lamented neoliberal trends in education, from privatization and austerity to high stakes testing and how international conglomerates are writing curricula and controlling classroom pedagogy.

We know that Bill Gates and other big private donors have discovered what he has publicly called “a uniform base of customers.” *The question remains how to build a national, activist movement—one that goes beyond think tanks and the publication of research—of students and teachers across disciplines, institutions, grade levels, and localities that can fight for education as a human right essential to democracy.*

To end on a lighter note, during the lockout I was assessed a late fee for an unpaid credit card. I wrote a message to the bank explaining I had been one of over 450 LIU

faculty locked out of the university. I suggested the clerk reading my query might have heard about it on the news, indeed, might have heard me on the news. The message I got back telling me the fee had been waived also stated: “We are aware of the unfortunate circumstances and hope things get better.”

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Links to other posts to the *Academe Blog* on the LIU—Brooklyn lockout, arranged chronologically from the earliest to most recent:

“LIU Lockout Scheduled for Midnight”: <http://academeblog.org/2016/09/02/24861/>.

“Locked Out on Labor Day: Faculty at LIU Brooklyn Fighting for a Fair Contract and the Future of Our Campus”: <http://academeblog.org/2016/09/03/locked-out-on-labor-day-faculty-at-liu-brooklyn-fighting-for-a-fair-contract-and-the-future-of-our-campus/>.

“Why Does the New York Times Ignore the LIU Lockout?”: <http://academeblog.org/2016/09/04/why-does-the-new-york-times-ignore-the-liu-lockout/>.

“Lockout Lessons”: <http://academeblog.org/2016/09/04/lockout-lessons/>.

“Front Lines of the Academic Precariat: LIU Brooklyn Faculty Still Locked Out”: <http://academeblog.org/2016/09/05/front-lines-of-the-academic-precariat-liu-brooklyn-faculty-still-locked-out/>.

“Administrator Oversteps and the Threat to the Faculty: LIU, Northwestern and More”: <http://academeblog.org/2016/09/06/administrator-oversteps-and-the-threat-to-the-faculty-liu-northwestern-and-more/>.

“LIU Lockout [Statement from national AAUP]”: <http://academeblog.org/2016/09/06/liu-lockout/>.

“Who Is the College?: Straight from the LIU Lockout”:

<http://academeblog.org/2016/09/07/who-is-the-college-straight-from-the-liu-lockout/>.

“Lockout of Faculty at LIU: Looking Down into the Abyss”:

<http://academeblog.org/2016/09/08/lockout-of-faculty-at-liu-looking-down-into-the-abyss/>.

“Scenes from the LIU Student Walkout”: <http://academeblog.org/2016/09/08/scenes-from-the-liu-student-walkout/>.

“One Week and Counting: More Lessons from the #LIUlockout”:

<http://academeblog.org/2016/09/09/one-week-and-counting-more-lessons-from-the-liulockout/>.

“How to Destroy College: The Long Island University Method”:

<http://academeblog.org/2016/09/09/how-to-destroy-college-the-long-island-university-method/>.

“The Logic of the LIU Lockout: Does the Goldwater Rule Apply to University

Presidents?”: <http://academeblog.org/2016/09/13/the-logic-of-the-liu-lockout-does-the-goldwater-rule-apply-to-university-presidents/>.

“LIU Lockout Is Over”: <http://academeblog.org/2016/09/14/l-i-u-lockout-is-over/>.

“LIU Lockout Is Over”: <http://academeblog.org/2016/09/14/liu-lockout-over/>.

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