

New Scholars

**SERVING FOOD JUSTICE: A UNION
CAMPAIGN FOR FRESH FOOD, HEALTH,
AND SUSTAINABILITY**

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ABSTRACT

The local and sustainable food movement has grown in the past 30 years, and universities, schools, and other public institutions are incorporating local and fresh foods into their cafeterias and dining services. Yet discussions of organic food often leave out issues of race and class, and the people who grow, transport, cook, and serve the food are often invisible. Work in food service is done by a largely female and person of color labor force and dominated by low wages, scanty benefits, precarious work, subcontracting, and a lack of access to health care and nutritious foods—conditions endemic to the broader service sector. The UNITE HERE Real Food Real Jobs campaign is an attempt to bring together issues of sustainability, nutrition, and food access with worker justice and transform the food system from the shop floor. Drawing on participant observation and discourse analysis of UNITE HERE campaign materials, I use the campaign at American University of Washington, DC (AU) as a case study to explore the food issues facing workers and how sustainability measures can be incorporated into collective bargaining to improve working conditions, increase job security, and engage workers in promoting safe and local foods. The campaign provides opportunities to build alliances with students, food activists, and health advocates. I contextualize the campaign within the broader literature on union revitalization and coalition building as well as food justice.

INTRODUCTION

The mainstream movement for local and organic food is largely driven by concerns about taste, health, and environmental sustainability, and the discourse of the dominant food movement is often framed around neoliberal notions of consumption and choice—emblematic in popular food advocate Michael Pollan’s (2006a, 2006b) call to “vote with your fork.” Universities have responded to this call for “good” food and adopted programs to increase the use of fresh and local foods in their dining services as part of their broader sustainability initiatives (Barlett, 2011). However, scholars and activists have criticized the dominant food movement for being largely white and upper-class (Guthman, 2007, 2008a). Often overlooked in the mainstream food movement and in university sustainable food programs are issues of accessibility and the workers who grow, cook, and serve food but struggle with low wages and limited benefits. Food service work, including such work at universities, can produce and reproduce class, gender, and race inequalities in food access and nutritional health while failing to contest power relations in the neoliberal industrial food system.

In order to incorporate workers’ issues into the food movement and create better working conditions in food service, UNITE HERE, a union representing service workers, began the Real Foods Real Jobs campaign in 2012. The campaign is bringing the often-overlooked struggles of institutional food service workers to light and attempting to bridge the food and labor movements. UNITE HERE is calling on universities to adopt holistic approaches to sustainability that recognize the linkages between environmental and social well-being. Through contract negotiations, the union is pushing companies to provide more fresh food cooked from scratch and to include workers in monitoring food sourcing and sustainability and to provide livable wages and decent health care that will help workers access healthy food. American University (AU) and the Washington, DC, area have been a focus for the campaign since the Fall of 2012 when contracts expired for UNITE HERE Local 23 members at AU, Catholic University, George Mason University, Georgetown Law, and Trinity Washington University. AU was a lead target because the school contracts out food service to Bon Appétit Management Company, which markets itself as a national leader in local and organic food. In January 2013, UNITE HERE Local 23 won a contract at AU followed by contracts at Gallaudet and Howard universities, which guaranteed pay raises, health care improvements, a joint worker-management student food committee, sustainability training, and food safety whistleblower protections.

In this article, I will explore the tactics and discourse of the Real Food Real Jobs campaign at AU through a food justice framework to assess issues of race, class, and power in the context of the neoliberal food industry. I apply social movement theory about collective action frames, cross-movement coalitions, and union revitalization to assess the efficacy of the campaign and show how the union framed the campaign and employed social movement strategies. I use

participant observation based on my involvement with the campaign and draw on my experiences at events and meetings and interactions with student activists, union leaders, and workers. I also conduct qualitative discourse analysis of the campaign's blog. I am interested in how the union constructs the public image of the campaign and how this framing is or is not reflected in the union's actions and the attitudes of rank-and-file workers and student allies.

FOOD JUSTICE AND THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF FOOD SERVICE

Food justice provides a framework for analyzing structural inequalities, racism, and exploitation in the food system, particularly food production and service, as well as white and class privilege in the dominant food movement. Food justice extends the concept of environmental justice, unequal race and class exposure to environmental hazards, and a social justice approach to environmentalism to issues of food and nutrition (Gottlieb & Joshi, 2010; Novotny, 2000). Food justice calls on all levels of the food system to be equitable, including justice for those who grow and cook food (Gottlieb & Joshi, 2010). Thus, food justice examines the racial, gender, and class disparities in access to healthy and culturally appropriate food (Alkon & Norgaard, 2009). Billings and Cabbil (2011) contend that both the consumption and the production of food are racialized and embedded in the historical legacies of slavery and colonization, which created sources of cheap agricultural land and food labor. The mainstream food movement has also been critiqued for being predominantly white and middle-class and for ignoring issues of privilege, accessibility, and social justice while focusing on the protection of farmers and small producers (Allen, 2004; Guthman, 2008a; Slocum, 2006). Allen (2008) asserts that Americans have long been concerned about justice in the food system but these interests are often disconnected from practice. Thus the U.S. food system continues to reproduce inequalities, although activists are beginning to make connections between food and social justice.

Food justice scholars have examined the political economy of the industrial food system and the ways in which the processes of neoliberalism—privatization, deregulation, and commodification—has shaped food production, supply chains, and working conditions (Guthman, 2008b; Lo & Jacobson, 2011). A report by Oxfam International claims the global food system is in crisis due to the intersecting challenges of economic inequality, unfair trade policies, ecological and resource pressures, and climate change (Bailey, 2011). Yet the food crisis is not only due to agricultural production and hunger, but also due to the exploitation of farm and food retail and service workers across the world. The industrial food system has become global and, as Lo and Jacobson (2011) argue, violates food chain workers' human rights and reproduces race, gender, class, and immigrant inequalities. Consolidation in the food industry has led to a few companies dominating food production, retail, and service, which has given

companies such as Walmart, Smithfield Foods Inc., and Aramark both market and political power (Lo & Jacobson, 2011).

The food service industry is indicative of the neoliberal postindustrial economy and relies on exploitative labor conditions and a largely female, African American, and Latino/Latina workforce (Yen Liu, 2012). Food service work is often precarious, with limited job security and irregular hours along with low pay and few benefits such as health care and paid sick days (Allen & Sachs, 2007). According to 2002 U.S. Census data, women comprised 77% of the 6.5 million workers in food preparation and service (U.S. Department of Labor, 2005). However, whites and males dominate management and higher-paid occupations and positions. According to the 2010 Current Population Survey's Annual Social and Economic Survey, 22% of workers in food preparation and serving occupations live in households that lack consistent and dependable access to adequate amounts of food, 13.2% live in households that receive food stamps, and 31% are at risk for diet-related illnesses (Bohner, 2011). A survey by the Food Chain Workers Alliance (2012) found that people working in the food supply chain have double the rate of food stamp use than the rest of the U.S. workforce.

SOCIAL MOVEMENTS, COALITIONS, AND UNION REVITALIZATION

Social movements develop and learn a set of tactics, actions, skills, and strategies, which Charles Tilly (1995) terms collective action repertoires, and which they draw on to advance their demands and contest authority. The set of actions can become routinized and static, but groups can also adapt to develop new tactics and borrow strategies from other movements. For cross-movement coalitions, collective action framing is particularly important for motivating solidarity and constructing shared identities as well as providing a rationale for action that connects to people's values, emotions, and ideologies (Benford & Snow, 2000; Novotny, 2000). Framing emphasizes the micro level strategies of social movements and the way people and organizations negotiate shared meanings, identities, and grievances, often around injustice (Gamson, 1992). However, the efficacy of frames depends on broader ideologies and discourses and political opportunities (Marullo, 1996; McAdam, McCarthy, & Zald, 1996). According to Snow et al. (1986), framing involves defining a problem and its causes, articulating a solution, and then constructing an identity for movement participants. Resource mobilization theorists have also argued that movements need to leverage resources, which include economic resources, political connections and power, and relationships to other organizations and the media (McCarthy & Zald, 1977). Thus, coalition building is an important tactic for social movement organizations to use to expand their power and resources.

Linking the labor and food justice movements requires the fostering of collaboration among groups and people that have not traditionally worked together. Thus, creating shared identities and values through framing, personal relationships, and bridge builders is important for sustaining labor-environment coalitions (Gordon, 1999; Mayer, 2009). Frames of occupational health and corporate accountability have been effective for labor-environment alliances (Edwards, 2011; Mayer, Brown, & Morello-Frosch, 2010).

Scholars have examined tactics and strategies for revitalizing the U.S. labor movement after 40 years of decline, particularly focusing on social movement strategies, wider political and social mobilization, and innovative forms of organizing among new types of workers. Since the mid-1990s, the labor movement has put more energy and resources into organizing new members particularly in service and retail sectors, including university campuses (Walsh, 2000; Wilton & Cranford, 2002), and among women, immigrants, and people of color who have traditionally been underrepresented by unions (Voss & Sherman, 2003). Researchers and activists have highlighted the efficacy of social movement strategies, particularly coalitions (Tattersall, 2010), connections to the community (Nissen, 2004), political action (Johnston, 2000), and acting as advocates with regard to broader working-class and progressive social and economic issues (Krinsky & Reese, 2006). Organizing workers across the global food supply chain and across boundaries of race, gender, and immigration status is vital to building worker power and connecting up the complex food system (Lo & Jacobson, 2011). Groups like the Food Chain Workers Alliance are beginning to connect workers in different sectors of the food system, while initiatives by food activists are increasingly incorporating social justice and attempting to create solidarity between consumers and workers (Allen et al., 2003).

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

In this article, I use participant observation and discourse analysis to assess the collective action framing and strategic actions of UNITE HERE's Real Food Real Jobs campaign. This research approach allows me to assess how the union discursively frames the campaign and food issues through written materials while also developing nuanced understandings of the campaign's tactics and the actions and attitudes of workers and students. I am interested in how the public image presented by the union reflects broader ideologies and how strategic framing has been used and played out on the ground through interaction between students, workers, and union organizers.

I draw on observations from my involvement with the campaign during the Fall 2012 and Spring 2013 semesters. I canvassed, gave in-class presentations with workers, attended rallies and meetings, and interacted with union organizers

and workers. I also coordinated a group of undergraduates working on a collaborative research project with UNITE HERE on food access. I reflect on these experiences to assess the campaign's strategies and the attitudes of workers in order to contextualize the campaign within the theory on union revitalization and social movements. Participant observation allows me to observe the complexities of social life and interactions and to gain deeper understandings through engagement in the campaign (Daly, 2007).

Participant observation requires researchers to step back and analyze while considering their active role in shaping and interpreting social interactions (Daly, 2007). I attempt to limit my preconceived notions, but I do not think that neutral or unbiased research is attainable or a necessary goal as researchers are inherently involved in shaping and interpreting social reality. My analysis is influenced by my personal political views and commitment to the labor and environmental justice movements. I have worked for unions and developed contacts at UNITE HERE through my personal networks and connections. My position of privilege as a white male graduate student influenced my interactions with union organizers who were middle-class white women and working-class black union members. My interactions with undergraduate students were also shaped by my relative position of power as a teaching assistant. I also attended large public events on which my presence likely had little impact.

I also analyze written campaign materials from the Real Food Real Jobs blog on the campaign's Web site. I collected blog articles from November 2012 to March 2013, which covered the peak of the campaign at AU, and excluded articles that were not related to the campaign at AU or in the DC area. This resulted in a sample of 10 articles. Online communications have been used in social movement research and are an important component of organizations' communications and framing (Kahn & Kellner, 2004; Lawson-Borders & Kirk, 2005). Through the Real Food Real Jobs blog, the union attempts to construct its public image and gain community support, but the blog might be less important for mobilizing AU workers, who likely do not rely on the Web site to learn about their union or participate in the blog's production.

I used qualitative discourse analysis and Ervin Goffman's frame analysis to examine the selection of details, the use of style, and the use of language that frame issues (Goffman, 1974). According to Goffman (1974), frames are employed to render an event meaningful and allow people to identify, label, and classify. Frames are part of larger cultural systems and reflect dominant values, but social actors create, negotiate, and use frames, and thus have agency in shaping them. I used analytic induction and grounded theory to identify patterns and develop theoretical explanations to contextualize the data within broader processes (Gibbs, 2007). I investigate how the discourse in the blogs reflects the collective active framing of the union and also relies on broader discourses and ideologies.

ANALYSIS

Through my analysis and observation, I found that the Real Food Real Jobs campaign utilized tactics indicative of social movement unionism that also advanced fundamental union goals of job protection and re-skilling of work. The union developed a repertoire of collective actions that was emblematic of social movements and democratic unionism—worker committees, petitions, and delegations. The union framed the campaign around good jobs and good food through broader issues of health and sustainability, and it focused on expanding the campaign beyond narrow economic demands and presenting food service workers as professionals dedicated to serving students. Thus, workers, students, and food activists were presented as having shared interests, which constructed a mutually beneficial student-worker alliance that went beyond students simply fighting for the rights of exploited workers. The public framing of the campaign aligned the union with the goals and language of the environmental and food movements, but this framing and rhetoric did not necessarily resonate with workers. The official rhetoric of the campaign also avoided issues of race, class, and gender as well as labor-management conflict and the anger that appeared to motivate some workers. Still, the frame of good jobs and good food helped build a diverse coalition and campaign that won a successful contract.

Building an Activist Union

The campaign's tactics of building coalitions, mobilizing rank-and file-leaders, advocating for broader social issues, and taking public action were emblematic of social movement unionism (Voss & Sherman, 2003). Public events and demonstrations brought together students and the wider campus community while creating a visual presence for the campaign. On December 7, 2012, a group of over 100 workers, students, faculty members, and a few community activists marched through the AU campus chanting and carrying signs. Workers then confronted the top Bon Appétit manager and delivered hundreds of petitions. The interaction momentarily flipped power relations as the black and Latino/Latina workers were able to publicly express their demands for dignity to a white male manager. The rally was a powerful display of student and community support for the campaign and the unity of black and Latino/Latina workers and predominantly white college students. The event disrupted the typical spatial relations on campus, in which workers and students interact only in the cafeteria and workers remain in select spaces. I also joined workers in giving classroom presentations, which brought service workers of color into academic spaces and gave them a voice to share with students.

The organizing of delegations in which workers delivered complaints to management became a regular practice of the union, which empowered workers to assert their rights and contest management. During a conversation I had with a manager in March 2013, he lamented the large number of grievances

that had been filed and told me he was aggravated by the campaign and was cautious about sparking more anger among the workers and shop stewards. Thus, the campaign appeared to be effective at mobilizing workers and getting under the skin of management, but these tactics also contributed to tense labor-management relations.

Union organizers embraced the concept of social movement unionism and often described their efforts as rebuilding the local union to be an active social movement rather than a business union. Organizers talked about empowering worker leaders and building a committee of union activists and shop stewards who would actively stand up for their rights rather than relying on union leadership. The white and college-educated organizers also complained about the difficulties in mobilizing workers and at times talked about workers as instruments in their broader strategy. Left unmentioned was the privilege and power of the white middle-class organizers who were able to be professional activists. The campaign's blog made almost no references to race and did not employ a civil rights or racial justice frame. Yet, in my personal interactions with organizers they discussed the need to address racial disparities and the lack of people of color in the food movement.

Working for the Public Interest

Through the Real Food Real Jobs blog and Web site, the union attempted to present the campaign as advocating with regard to broad public issues through collective action frames of health, sustainability, good food, and good jobs that would resonate with students and food activists. The language of healthy and fresh food was a common theme, which framed the campaign as working to improve the health of workers, students, and the DC community and aligned the campaign's goals with the rhetoric of the food movement. The blog referred to the campaign as a "fight for greater access to fresh, healthy food" (O'Donnell, 2013a). The framing created space for cross-movement coalitions, and the blog emphasized the importance of coalitions and community support.

In my observations and interactions, workers did not routinely articulate the message about nutritious, fresh, and local food but rather focused on providing students with the food they wanted—regardless of nutrition. Conducting surveys of AU workers with a group of undergraduates revealed that some workers were unfamiliar with terms such as "organic" and some even had a negative perception of the word. Thus, the language of the food movement, and even some of the official rhetoric of the campaign, might not resonate with food service workers at AU.

The blog also presented the campaign as positive and noncombative, which was strategic in counteracting typical management claims about unions being self-interested. The union portrayed workers as enjoying their jobs but wanting respect, which contributed to constructing the campaign's positive and harmonious image.

“I love my job,” says Jacqueline Stills, a food service worker at Howard University. “It’s like leaving home in the morning to come to another place called home.” (O’Donnell, 2013b)

Workers are framed as loving their jobs, which contradicts dominant images of angry and confrontational unions but also reproduces capitalist ideology about the value of work. Instead of making demands for wages, the blog presented workers as wanting respect—in some ways a neoliberal claim to rights rather than a desire to take power and contest exploitation. Ironically, the blog portrays the workplace as a family, which draws on traditional paternalistic management rhetoric.

The positive public image offset the labor-management conflicts that I observed and the role of anger and injustice in mobilizing workers. I heard workers and organizers complain about management abuse and haphazard decisions—a top manager was referred to as an “asshole” several times. The public framing attempted to build support among potential partners and put public pressure on the company; while internal conversations were connected to workers’ experiences and frustrations in order to motivate action. Surprisingly, the blog did not rely on an injustice frame and instead emphasized the workers’ desire to participate in sustainability and serve students good food.

Students and Workers United

The frame of good food allowed workers and students to see their shared interests and presented workers as standing up for the interests and health of students, rather than reflecting the more typical student-worker solidarity in which students fight for the rights of low-wage workers. A common theme across the articles was the workers’ connections to students and their desire to serve students good and nutritious foods, which counteracted company claims that increased wages could hurt students by increasing costs.

“Students here are like our family,” said Christine Hamlett-Williams, a cashier with Bon Appétit at American University. “We want to use our experience, use our skills and give them great food, and this agreement lets us do that.” (O’Donnell, 2013b)

This quotation is used to present workers and students as family and position management as potentially standing in the way of workers providing students with good food. A worker was said to be “fighting for real food to protect her students’ health in the hopes that they can avoid . . . diet-related illnesses” (O’Donnell, 2012b). The image of the caring and motherly cafeteria worker reflects gendered notions of service work and presents workers as enjoying work, but it also contradicts stereotypes of the lazy, mean “lunch lady” (Weaver-Hightower, 2011: 16). The image of caring workers also constructs a human and personal presence for workers rather than representing them as invisible and replaceable.

During a classroom presentation, a middle-aged black woman who worked in the bakeshop talked about getting more fried chicken in the cafeteria so students could eat as much as they wanted without the food running out. Giving students the unhealthy food they want contradicts broader messages and policies around controlling school food to promote nutritional health. Union organizers were often worried about keeping workers “on message,” particularly when talking to the press or making public speeches. However, by straying from the campaign’s official message about nutrition and health, workers were able to make connections and engage with students. Workers did not reproduce moralizing messages to “eat healthy,” and they drew on their knowledge, from daily interactions with students about the foods students enjoy, to make personal connections and engage with students in meaningful ways.

Workers were able to engage students on a personal level, in ways that I or other student activists could not. I spent part of an afternoon canvassing on the quad with an older black female cashier who knew many of the students. We had conversations with students who I assumed would be uninterested in campus politics—“preppy” white students wearing fraternity T-shirts. My assumptions might have led me to avoid these groups, while these students might have read me as a typical student “activist” and ignored my advances. The presence of a worker disrupted the typical social interactions and created an opportunity for dialogue. However, these students got excited talking about the food they wanted in the dining hall such as avocados—arguably a prime example of a nonlocal and unsustainable food. Thus, at what level were workers and students connecting, and could this lead to meaningful political action?

The framing left out race and class tensions between workers and students, and I observed challenges in sustaining student-worker coalitions. Attempting to coordinate a collaborative research project with students and the trade union was difficult because students’ schedules do not fit in with those of union staffers or workers. Also, the schedule of the semester did not fit in with the timeline of contract negotiations, and the union wanted to organize actions at times when students were busy or not on campus. Race, class, and age differences also created barriers to developing relationships and different norms around activism and communication. However, the Student Worker Alliance and UNITE HERE incorporated social events into the campaign that helped build bridges and personal connections, particularly through the experience of sharing food.

Classic Union Demands

Through the frames of sustainability and fresh food, the union was also able to advance the fundamental union goals of creating and protecting jobs and re-skilling of work. The union was able to get buy-in from workers and other union officials, while also constructing the campaign as connected to wider community and environmental issues. Union leaders talked about the possibilities

of replacing frozen and processed food with freshly prepared meals, which would require more workers and more work hours and counteract job loss due to automation. The deskilling of food work and the increasing commodification and industrialization of food has contributed to job loss and to food workers being “replaceable” as well as to declining wages and unionization rates (Guthman, 2002; McMichael, 2009). Through the fresh food frame, the union was able to present its desire for more jobs and members, as a broader environmental and health issue of providing access to fresh and nutritious food.

The fresh food frame also allowed the union to present food service workers as skilled professionals who are necessary for cooking healthy and sustainable foods. Blog articles emphasized that workers wanted more training and wanted to use their knowledge.

Anthony Randolph, who recently testified about his experience of food insecurity, called for training on scratch cooking and sustainable food preparation. “I want the training to be able to do what you know I can achieve.” (O’Donnell, 2012a)

In this quotation, a worker emphasized that he wants training in cooking and “sustainable” practices, which frames job training as a way to promote broader goals of environmentalism and improvements in nutrition.

Blog articles emphasized that workers wanted to be involved in sustainability efforts and decision making, which framed workers as concerned about the environment, health, and working conditions rather than material economic issues.

Workers and Bon Appétit Management Company signed a new union contract that significantly improves working conditions and paves the way for increased worker participation in campus sustainability efforts. (O’Donnell, 2013a)

The campaign and the new contract are presented as a way for workers to engage in sustainability, which frames workers as actively supporting environmentalism and fresh food. Workers are also presented as having skills and expertise, which allow them to contribute to decision making and have more authority and control in the workplace.

CONCLUSION

The Real Food Real Jobs campaign embraced a social movement approach to unionism by employing the tactics of building coalitions, empowering worker leaders, and organizing public demonstrations. The campaign integrated new creative tactics and social and environmental issues into traditional union collective bargaining actions around bread and butter issues. Publicly the union used collective action frames of health, sustainability, good jobs, and good food in order to construct shared interests between workers, students, food activists, and

the DC community. These frames were also used to present union interests of job protection and re-skilling in broader terms. However, I observed that workers, and even students, did not completely embrace the rhetoric of health and nutrition. This reveals the possible disconnect between union leadership and rank-and-file workers, and a potential challenge for coalitions between the labor and food movements. Thus, different frames are employed publicly and internally, and by leadership and rank-and-file members, which displays the differing demands of creating a public image and internal messaging to mobilize collective action.

My analysis reveals how unions representing workers across the food system can use framing of sustainability and healthy food to advance collective bargaining and worker organizing, while also making links between the food and labor movements. Rather than being a challenge to workers' interests, environmental sustainability and fresh local food can be used as a broader framing for union demands for re-skilling of work and protecting and creating jobs in all types of food service and production sectors. Schools and universities in particular provide an opportunity to incorporate workers into the broader debate around nutrition and food access while linking the demands of union members for meaningful work with the desires of students and parents for tasty and nutritious school meals. Good food and good jobs is also a frame that can unite workers and consumers in other food service sectors, including institutional settings such as airports and health care facilities, and fast-food restaurants as well as food retail and food production. Producing and selling local and fresh foods could require more skilled labor and more workers while opening up space for coalitions between environmental and health conscious consumers. Frames of good food and health also contest stereotypes of narrow-minded unions and unhealthy and anti-environmental low-wage workers and people of color.

Another innovative tactic of the Real Food Real Jobs campaign was to create a coordinated geographic campaign in Washington, DC, that was also part of a national effort. This helped generate wider mobilization that put pressure on companies and created institutions and relationships that would exist after a particular contract negotiation had been concluded. Focusing beyond a single workplace helped bring in a wider coalition of organizations, particularly urban farms and food banks, because the campaign addressed broader issues around food access and health facing the DC community. By coordinating contract negotiations at five universities, UNITE-HERE was able to build momentum and excitement while making connections between workers and students at different universities, which also helped revitalize a local union with members in different workplaces with different employers. The use of geographic and issue-based campaigns is not new, but it appears to be effective when connected to food and environmental issues and targeted at universities and possibly other public institutions that contract out services.

Contracting and subcontracting is a challenge for worker organizing, but UNITE-HERE was able to leverage this relationship by putting pressure on AU to be an environmental leader and hold Bon Appétit accountable. Unions representing and organizing workers at contracting and subcontracting companies in various service industries can target the principal employers to uphold sustainability standards, which might be particularly effective with universities, public institutions, and companies that have environmental and health goals. Universities are attempting to be leaders in sustainability, and having a green campus has become part of many schools' public relations and recruitment strategy, which can be threatened by public campaigns and coalitions between unions, environmentalists, and food activists. Food service companies compete to win contracts from universities, and when large institutions make demands, these companies can be pushed to provide fresh cooked foods and innovative sustainability practices that incorporate workers and equitable food access. By using the language of healthy food and sustainability, unions are also able to contest corporate green washing and hold companies and institutions accountable to their environmental and health goals while inserting social justice into debates around sustainability.

The efficacy of the diverse coalition and student-worker alliances at AU was partially due to the commitment of union resources and organizers to the campaign. Union organizers were regularly on campus: they facilitated connections between workers and students and ensured accountability and follow-up. Campaigns at other universities would likely benefit from having union organizers playing an active role on campus to serve as bridge builders and ensure a continuous link between students and workers. UNITE-HERE had a mix of young white organizers who could connect with college students but also older union staff members and rank-and-file leaders who had relationships with the workers. UNITE-HERE staff created a line of communication between workers and students and helped facilitate links to the other nearby universities and the wider DC food and environmental movement. Yet direct interaction between students and workers helped develop relationships and spur collective action and empowerment. However, the strength and sustainability of these connections remains to be seen, as power inequities and racial and class divisions still remain and were largely unaddressed by the union's public rhetoric.

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