

Netta Berlin
Editor

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Design

#27

December 2016

In this issue

Halloran reflects on the past.

Wandmacher & Herold look ahead to the future.

Berlin & Manuel comment on the election season.



From the Editor

The Union's recent election inspired me to revive LEO Matters, even though the newsletter has been moribund for well over a year. With the decision of our first President to step down after a long period of service, the election has marked the transition to new leadership. Change is in the air. This is a moment to reflect on what the election signifies at this moment in time.

Two long-term LEO activists ran for President. Although they offered different visions for the future, they share an abiding commitment to the Union. Their race, showcased in the campus Town Halls, reflects the health of LEO as a democratic enterprise. Low voter turnout, however, suggests that something is amiss: only 19% of members (those eligible to vote) exercised their right to do so. That the outcome of the race was determined by a difference of 12 votes is noteworthy, all the more so in view of the fact that 10 of the 235 total ballots cast proved to be invalid.

With these issues in mind, I invited several LEO activists to write about where LEO stands in the wake of its election and as we head toward the rocky shoals of bargaining for our next contract in a right-to-work environment. This issue of LEO Matters comprises their responses. Our outgoing President considers the meaning of her work for the Union and calls attention to the decline of activism among our members. One of the presidential candidates makes the case for face-to-face conversation among members, citing the evidence of the Town Halls. LEO's Vice President highlights the likely battleground issues in next year's contract negotiations. A LEO member who specializes in American political thought examines emotional responses to the national election. Finally, as Chair of the LEO Elections Committee, I report on changes to the Union's elections process.

For those of us involved in the LEO election, our work played out against the backdrop of the U.S. presidential election. This is, of course, "to compare small things to big," as the poet Vergil noted when he likened bees busy at the work of making honey to the Cyclopes, fantastical giants blacksmithing at forges and anvils in Mt. Aetna's underground caverns. Such comparisons may be hyperbolic, but Vergil's essential point is worth keeping in mind: for a collective body to function well, everyone must work with a view to the "shared effort" (labor unus, to quote Vergil) of serving the interests of the community as a whole.

The Election Issue!

► Our Union, Ourselves

Bonnie Halloran

Serving as your president for the last 13 years has been a powerful and transformative experience for me. My LEO experience traces back to 2002 during the original organizing campaign, when I twice refused to sign a membership card because I was afraid to get involved. But those first encounters with union organizers got me thinking and moved me to admit how embarrassed I was about holding such a low paying teaching position at the University of Michigan. That realization tipped the scales for me, and when I was asked a third time to join the effort I signed on. That simple act changed my life and, I am proud to admit, improved the working conditions for over a thousand UM employees.

I quickly became an organizer myself, discovering that I was passionate about the issues and, to my surprise, good at talking to others about joining the union effort. And here I am now, reflecting on these 13 years, which have been amazing. Being LEO President transformed me from a mostly reserved person into a committed political activist who marched in protests, led rallies, spoke to national audiences, and stood up to injustice in ways that I never imagined I could do. I have met hundreds of lecturers on our campuses and across the nation, and the one thing that ties all of this together is the commitment to improve working conditions for adjunct faculty. I am proud of the work I have done representing you, supporting your employment needs, protecting you when you were treated unfairly, and challenging the abusive system that takes advantage of our skilled knowledge and valuable labor.

Since LEO's first contract we, working together, made major improvements for ourselves and served as a role model for adjunct faculty at other universities. We increased our incomes by negotiating annual raises and instituting two 7% raises tied to performance reviews. We extended health benefits through

the summer months, and came up with appointment averaging to help more of us reach benefits eligibility. We transformed a term-to-term and year-to-year appointment system to a quasi-tenure system based on "presumption of renewal," with three-, five-, and seven-year contracts, coupled with a seniority system where ongoing appointment fractions reflected past employment history. We also created a strong grievance policy that has protected many members from capricious and unreasonable actions by supervisors, department chairs, and deans.

Every one of us should be immensely proud of these accomplishments, but it's important to remember that no one person made these things happen. These victories came about because we came together, identified shared goals, acted in solidarity, and worked hard. Members are our strength. Many lecturers have volunteered to serve the greater good, as officers, committee members, and stewards. You and your fellow LEO members have participated in rallies, protests, and demonstrations, pressuring the university to act in more supportive ways. Many of you have helped with making phone calls, preparing mailings, and distributing flyers. Every one of these acts powered us to continuing improvement in our workplaces.

In the last few years, the wider political terrain around us has changed drastically. We find ourselves in a much more hostile and anti-union environment. The cost of health care has spiraled upward and the quality of our benefits have been cut. To my chagrin, we have also seen a gradual reduction in member engagement. I have some frustration that we were not able to reinvigorate the membership in the last two years, despite concerted efforts to do so.

These are huge challenges that we must address, as LEO moves towards the 2017-18 academic year, when we bargain our next contract. Our work as a union is not done. Our current situation, internally

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Our current contract ends in 2018...

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and externally, should provide the opportunity for all of us to re-evaluate our role in LEO and our willingness to participate in our own collective struggle. We were successful in the past because so many of us were active. I hope that you will take this opportunity, at this particular time in labor history and our own historical development, to reflect on how you can make an increased contribution to LEO. As I leave office, I humbly ask you to renew your support of LEO through action and assist your new President, Ian Robinson, and the newly constituted Union Council in building on the success of the past. I know that my involvement gave me great personal satisfaction. My departing wish is that you will experience the same kind of fulfillment that union work brought me.

► ~~Let's Not Inter-Face It:~~ We Need to Talk

Stevens Wandmacher

The past few weeks have given me time to reflect on the recent LEO election. I was humbled by the amount of support I received from the members (thank you very much). Of the whole experience, the Town Halls really stand out for me. I was struck by the concerns of the members as articulated through their questions and comments. It wasn't any particular comment or position, but rather the care and passion with which each was conveyed. Please don't take this as amazement that our members are capable of such thoughts – far from it. It should be obvious that university lecturers would have probing, nuanced concerns. What stood out is how infrequently we actually gather and discuss these concerns, and when we do, how few participate.

Thinking back on those exchanges, I realized how ordinary it seems to receive members' thoughts on issues via written surveys and questionnaires. Those methods of engaging the membership, while convenient and allowing all an opportunity to participate irrespective of their schedules, provide a very sparse understanding at times. People don't (often) write on these sorts of instruments to the depth they go to when they speak. When people speak, the back-and-forth of the conversation helps refine the ideas of all who are present. And we need refined ideas, ideas that reflect the well-considered thoughts of the membership as well as the solidarity that such mutual understanding generates. I know we won't all agree on everything, but having the actual discussions is important.

The bargaining season is almost upon us (one year away). There are challenges before us, both in improving our position through the contract and in the impending impact of right-to-work. So I urge you, fellow members, to attend campus LEO meetings, speak with other lecturers in your departments, meet up socially, or even become active on a LEO committee (!). Participate in LEO. Help develop with your colleagues the ideas that matter to you and that should matter to all of us. Such conversations and activities will build the understanding and strength across our membership we will need to be successful as we go forward. And go forward we will. Again, thank you for your support, and I look forward to more conversations with you.

► The Salary Thing

Kirsten Herold

With the LEO elections behind us and new leadership in place, we must now look ahead to our next contract negotiations. The current contract ends in 2018, and bargaining will start next fall. As LEO Vice President and Contract Administrator, I am familiar with the challenges we have faced for the past several years and what they indicate about the concerns of our membership as we go into bargaining next year.

For most people the major issue is our pay. Starting salaries are low and have not kept up with inflation. Only rarely do Schools and Colleges hire a new lecturer above the minimum mandated in the contract, even when the lecturer comes to the job with years of professional experience. There is a big problem when people with advanced degrees teach full-time at the University level but make substantially less than a kindergarten teacher in the public schools.

Moreover, there is little opportunity for a lecturer, once employed, to increase his or her salary via merit raises. Only recently has the College of LSA in Ann Arbor, which employs about 400 lecturers, indicated a willingness to consider lecturers for merit raises. That is a positive development, but we worry it will tend to benefit only the highest paid lecturers, who are few in number. We also don't want to detract from the guaranteed annual raises, which have been fairly anemic. Management's response has been predictable: they have no trouble hiring at the current salaries. While this is somewhat true, we also know that low wages lead to high turn-over, as lecturers seek other employment, which in turn creates more work for departments and affects teaching quality. In some disciplines, UM is even known as



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...and bargaining begins in fall 2017.

“a starter school.” In short, money is likely to be a contentious issue at the next round of bargaining.

Other issues are the high number of part-timers and the high cost of benefits for those with appointments between 50 and 75% (20-30 hours a week). Some of our members have made a deliberate choice to teach part-time. Many more would prefer full-time work; however, with the benefits structure, departments have an interest in keeping lecturers below 75%. Memorandum of Understanding 2 states that departments have to bring lecturers to full-time status “when practicable” rather than hire new part-timers. However, the Union has had trouble enforcing this memorandum, as departments have found several creative ways of getting around it. For instance, we are seeing an abuse of one-year LIII appointments to avoid giving extra work to existing LIIs. Clearly this provision needs to be strengthened.

A final problem is summer benefits coverage. Unlike tenure-track faculty, if a lecturer starts teaching in the winter semester and comes back for the following year, there are no summer benefits. What can be an unpleasant surprise for the lecturer would be a fairly inexpensive injustice for the employer to address.

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► Toward a More Perfect Election

Netta Berlin

Members who follow the work of LEO noticed several changes to the election process this year. Because these changes were substantive, I thought it would be helpful to explain how they came about and report on the response of members to them.

The Elections Committee comprised myself, Stephanie Gelderloos, Erin Lavin, and Marjorie Lynn. Erin and I teach in Ann Arbor, Stephanie in Flint, and Marjorie in Dearborn. Our work began on April 6 with a meeting that included Sonya Alvarado, an AFT Field Representative. At the outset, it became clear that LEO needed to run its elections with more in mind than what its constitution says on the subject. As we learned from Sonya, we needed to consider the kinds of issues that I have come to think of in terms used by the philosopher Julia Annas in her work on virtue ethics: what is required, what is forbidden, and what is permissible. The first two are a matter of law; the third avails itself of a delicate mix of principle and practicality. The salient take-away from the meeting was this: the Committee had a lot of work to do.

Consequently, the Committee met weekly in May and June to develop policies for the elections process and guidelines for candidates in time for the start of the nominating period on July 1. The purpose of these documents was to provide for a fair and transparent process and to inform candidates of their rights and responsibilities. While past LEO elections were not devoid of policies and guidelines, the Union sorely needed to ensure – and communicate – that its elections adhered to both the law and the interests of its members. We were aided in this work by a “NLRB Election Rules and Best Practices”

document as well as what we had learned from the LEO 2014 elections.

The fact of such policies may seem to suggest a certain degree of rigidity (and, indeed, some members reacted as if this were the case). However, the first action required of any newly constituted Elections Committee, according to the policies we created, is to review and amend the existing policies, taking into consideration but not limiting itself to the recommendations of the previous Committee. The current Committee has already compiled such a list for the 2018, some of which would involve changes to LEO’s constitution.

Not least among these changes is the timing of our elections, which our constitution stipulates we hold at the end of September. This creates difficulties for all involved: for candidates, who may have to gather signatures over the summer when most lecturers are not on campus, as well as for members, who must wait to vote until the last minute if they want to weigh what they learn at Town Halls into their decision. That the Town Halls can have an impact on voter choice is illustrated by the request we got from one member: having voted before she went to a Town Hall, she asked afterward if she could change her vote.

As national elections go, so went LEO’s election this year. No amount of considered thought and advance planning could stem an “October surprise” (technically, ours was in August). The Committee hadn’t anticipated that a candidate would want to raise funds to cover the cost of campaigning. So, the specter of PACs notwithstanding, we made a policy that both acceded to the right of candidates to ask for donations and guarded against external influence by restricting the pool of donors to LEO members.

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In addition, we were not immune to disgruntlement over the process. The majority of complaints arose from the policy that members sign their return mail envelopes in order to validate their votes. This requirement proved to be an obstacle to members who wanted to submit their ballots electronically; that any member may have felt disenfranchised because of the policy is regrettable. It also raised the ire of one member who felt that it exposed our members to identity theft and who then suggested that the policy was intended to suppress votes. Here lies an important message for the Union: the kind of conspiracy theories on display in the national election operate at the local level too.

In light of these complaints, one might well wonder why LEO didn't run an electronic ballot and why the current Committee will not recommend this for the future. The answer was supplied by Sonya Alvarado at our first meeting: online voting is more error-prone and easier to contest than paper balloting. Vive la print!

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“[This is] what the country needs — a sense of unity; a sense of inclusion; a respect for our institutions, our way of life, rule of law; and a respect for each other.”
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President Obama, the day after the 2016 national election
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► The 2016 Presidential Election: A Listicle of Emotions

Anne Manuel

Listicles are a low form but I love them. They capture the author's point of view and their simple structure is useful for bringing order, in this case to the swirl of the unprecedented national election. It has been a grim slog with an unexpected result. Here are some post-election emotions you may be feeling. Extend the list as you see fit.

1. Fatigue. It lasted too long. We have been subjected to a discourse that has been both disturbing—threats of violence, bullying, mocking—and inescapable since the summer of 2014. Yet we had and have a civic duty to pay attention, to engage, and to try to preserve something like a reality-based conversation. It is reasonable to yearn for a more constrained election calendar and to think about how a new calendar could be put in place.

2. Confusion. Why do we still have the vestigial, state-centered, anti-democratic Electoral College?

3. Pride. For a few days it looked like Hillary Clinton would win and the United States would have a woman in the executive office. It turns out we are still waiting to see a woman president. When this victory happens, it will be a symbol that women are finally recognized as equal citizens and fully integrated into public life. HRC may have been a less than ideal standard-bearer, but she was pretty good, tenacious, and with a well-crafted policy agenda, thanks in part to Bernie Sanders. She seemed qualified and she DID WIN the popular vote.

4. Sadness. What is going on with the white working class? We knew about their tendency to vote against their own economic interests from Thomas Frank's *What's the Matter with Kansas?* and George Packer's *The*

Unwinding. But, still, it is surprising and disheartening to see the level of alienation. Trump supporters seem to be compelled by the fantasy of restored dignity, order, and—dare I say it—patriarchy and race hierarchy. There is a gap between the fantasy of what Trump the strongman promises to do for his voters and what Trump can accomplish in office. The transition to a post-industrial economy has been happening for over 40 years, and one belligerent, dog-whistling-on-race, groping, anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim demagogue is not going to be able to do much about changes in the labor market. If anything, automation will increasingly constrict the demand for low-wage labor. Though anger is the high note, there is something tragic and moving about Trump supporters, people who are refusing to acknowledge that the loss that is driving their preferences will not be reversible. There will be no return to a fantasized past wholeness grounded in available work and a fixed racial, ethnic, and gender hierarchy. That said, is it possible for us “elites” on the left to witness and collaborate in a process of working through loss with the white working class?

5. Dread. What kinds of policies will flow from the Trump White House, Trump appointed cabinet members, and a Supreme Court with Trump appointees? How quickly will the strongman persona crumble? Republicans will likely come together to lower taxes on the rich, tinker with the Affordable Care Act, and do some infrastructure spending. Will they be able to overcome intra-party differences and accomplish anything else? If so, it could be bleak.



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