

June 15, 2016

Dear Colleagues,

As you are undoubtedly aware, SEIU has petitioned to represent the diverse array of non-tenure-line faculty at Northwestern University, there is a looming hearing and the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB)—a federal entity that oversees these processes—will be handling the pending vote on whether or not we wish to unionize.

While we have received a variety of information about why we should or should not unionize, there are several of us who are concerned about the timing and implications of unionizing. The crucial issue here is that several of us are on the fence, and do not feel that we have sufficient information to be able to make an informed vote, and understand all of the implications of what we are voting for or against.

The most immediate concern is that the SEIU elected to push forward the petition after the last faculty senate meeting, which ultimately would push a vote during the summer, and likely within the next couple of weeks. In practice, from the information we have been able to garner, this means that the NLRB will be mailing paper ballots to our home addresses, which we will have 2 weeks to return. As you undoubtedly know, a very large proportion of the contingent faculty at Northwestern will not be available to cast a vote because they will not be home. Several of them are out of the country running study abroad programs, on NU business, taking time for their research or other professional pursuits, or spending valuable time with their families. In practice, the timing of the vote compromises the ability of the vote to be representative of what the contingent faculty wants.

Meanwhile, an equally important concern is how the SEIU decided to include eligible voters in this process. Based on what has been outlined by university administration, anyone not teaching during the spring quarter is ineligible to vote in this important issue. This means that all contingent faculty that were on sabbatical (which takes 9 years to earn, so being left out is really an insult!), those that were on parental leave (a gender parity issue), and those who were mainly administrative even if this was a circulating duty and they teach on campus, would not be eligible to vote. This takes out of the voter pool people with long-standing commitment to the work that we do, whose votes and voices should be included in the process.

Finally, there has been a significant lack of transparency throughout this process of organizing in order to unionize, which gives us pause. Several of us have been told that there have been “public meetings,” and that a vast majority of contingent faculty support unionization at Northwestern. However, several of us have asked SEIU representatives for open forums in which the contingent faculty themselves could come together and increase a mutual understanding of the conditions we have in common, and issues that are particular to certain positions. Those kinds of meetings, to our knowledge, have not come to fruition. If they have, we were not made aware of them.

We believe a decision to unionize should be held off until the next academic year, with a series of public forums for contingent Northwestern faculty to be able to discuss the prospect with one another in the

collegial way that is so common at Northwestern. We do not believe at this moment that there is a sufficient proportion of contingent faculty who are eligible to vote that are adequately informed about the implications of this decision. Therefore several votes would necessarily be cast ‘blindly,’ simply due to a lack of good information. We also are deeply concerned that the voting timing and eligibility requirements will exclude a large proportion of voters whose voices also deserve the option to be heard in this process. We do not know the particulars of what a union like SEIU has to offer the very differently-situated contingent faculty on campus, from visiting assistant professors, to adjuncts, postdocs, and continuing line faculty, and how the SEIU would be able to unify us on the things that we have in common, and deal with the particularities of those positions at the same time.

We would therefore like to urge you in two directions: first, please vote ‘no’ during the pending unionization election, not because you oppose unionization per se, but in the spirit of giving us more time to be able to make this process more transparent and ensure that all of the contingent faculty understand the implications of the decision before we have to vote; and second, please write to SEIU, NLRB and your college administration expressing concerns about the timing and exclusions of the voting process so that it is on the record from the outset that this vote, should it go through on the fast timeline planned, would not be a representative vote. There can not be any solidarity if such a large proportion of contingent faculty are unable to vote.

A vote for ‘no’ does not necessarily mean a vote against unionization. A ‘no’ vote can also buy us time so that we can actually decide, in *true solidarity*, what is best for all of us.. We are thankful for the people whose efforts have taken this movement as far as it has as it has opened up spaces for more communication about a very complex issue. We would simply like to urge everyone to give the issue its due by delaying the vote until we have had some time to consider all of the implications, and to ensure the widest possible number of contingent faculty can participate in future communications, and in the voting process. The only way we can see to do this would be to vote ‘no’ in order to allow us the freedom, without commitment, to take this forward in a more inclusive way.

Sincerely,

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