

## Reports on COCAL X

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The tenth bi-annual conference of the Coalition for Contingent Academic Labor met at UNAM, the National Autonomous University of Mexico campus hosted by AAPAUNAM (Association of Autonomous Academics of UNAM). UNAM is the major, public university of Latin America and is virtually free. The conference is an international convocation with three languages spoken (English, French and Spanish) and included academic speakers from four countries (United States, Canada, Mexico and Korea).

This organization and conference began 20 years ago when contingent faculty from community colleges and universities throughout the United States and Canada realized they had similar issues and struggles. It then expanded to include Mexico and this year expanded to include Korea. COCAL International will continue to expand as the attack on higher education and contingent, non-tenure track faculty throughout the industrialized world continue to be exploited in the workplace.

The conference began with a televised lunch with opening remarks by the Mexican University unions and the University Chancellor and Provost. Speakers included: Elizabeth Perez (professor of UNAM/Organizing Committee in Mexico), Agustin Rodriguez (Secretary-General of the STUNAM), Maria Auxilio Heredia (Secretary-General of the SUTUACM), Angel Balderas (Secretary-General of the SUPAUAQ), Raul Perez (Secretary-General of the SUTIEMS), Bertha Guadalupe Rodriguez (Secretary-General of the AAPAUNAM), and Dr. Jose Narro Robles (Chancellor of UNAM who declared the inauguration of the X COCAL Mexico open). This was followed by the first Plenary: "Changes in the academic labor in the context of the neoliberal globalization" with speakers from each country. Part of this presentation was the documentary: "The peccary academic labor in the higher education system of Mexico."

The other general plenaries were: #2 "Organization and new forms of struggle by the academic staff. Challenges and strategies for the 21st century," #3 "Culture and identity of the new academic subjects of the higher education of North America," and #4 "Perspectives of organization and COCAL's struggle." There were also various thematic workshops throughout the conference including topics on teaching/research; health/social security and retirement; academic advancements/evaluations and recognition; unions/federations; labor rights/contracts; union/political/cultural rights; forms of struggle and achievement; academic culture and identity; multicultural/intercultural identity and issues of diversity; and relation of the academic labor with other sectors of the university's community.

The following quotes and facts were gleaned from the various plenaries and workshops and where possible I will identify the country from which they came. It should be noted that most of the speakers are leaders in their respective countries and typically come from universities as opposed to community colleges. Many of the speakers have PhDs and are professional, career educators. It should also be noted that in most other states and countries they do not use the term “temporary or part-time” --- typically they use the term “adjunct”, “non-tenure-track” or “contingent” and in Canada and Mexico they typically use the term “precarious faculty” as their life, working conditions, health, retirement and ability to work in a professional manner is considered “precarious”.

At the opening of the “congress” numerous speakers from the Mexican unions, organizations and faculty spoke. Some of the quotes included: “Teaching is a strategic profession and it should not be marginalized.” “Teaching is not a hobby and should never be treated as one.” “The victims of precarious workers are students.” “Precarious workers in academia is who COCAL represents.” “Education is public property.”

It was made clear that the central job of every country and union is to “professionalize” all faculty because that is what is necessary for student success. Although this is certainly a labor issue, it must become a student issue first. That ‘faculty working conditions are students learning conditions.’ That it is the rise of “neo-liberalism” (market capitalism) and globalization that is driving the move toward more precarious workers and ultimately toward privatization.

How do we change the argument that the reason we are failing students is because we are failing teachers and our institutions of education? Teachers need professional development, livable wages, and institutional support. Privatization and market driven education just for jobs is not the answer. We need responsible people to develop our high expectations. The more we require and support faculty, the more we will get and the more that students will get a better education. Students need knowledge for both jobs and critical thinking to be part of humanity and the global world. How do we revolutionize away from the economic model?

The first major plenary dealt with the growing neo-liberal view of education and the world. The plenary started with the documentary on Academic Labor in Mexico. UNAM is the only public University in Mexico and the top-rated and largest in Latin America. It serves over 300,000 students. 71.5% of the professors are adjunct. Of the other 30% of tenured faculty 15% only do research, meaning that only 15% of tenured faculty are actually teaching students. But only 16.6% of the universities budget is used to pay for the salaries of the 71.5% adjunct faculty. Adjunct faculty are not given a living wage and earn approximately one tenth of a tenured professor [basically \$8/hour]. Yet half of the 71.5% adjunct faculty have PhDs and most consider themselves professional, career teachers.

It should also be noted that the Mexican Constitution states that students have a right to higher education. Currently 30% of Mexican students of college age attend the university compared to 100% in Cuba and 65% in Argentina.

Mexico also has similar issues to Canada and the United States: lack of pay for preparation, grading, and a high number/density of students. The professor speaking stated that adjuncts can only spend 8-15 minutes per student in outside time due to the number of students per class and that this affects the quality of teaching activities. Adjuncts are also being required to tutor as well as teach. This also makes the job more time intensive. The faculty should be compensated in proportion to the number of students and workload. He also stated, "Our nation needs quality professors and that must happen through freedom within the context of the university."

A typical Mexican adjunct professor works 40 hours a week (that is actual face time) and is always on campus. They have larger class sizes and the interaction with students is less personal often meaning the quality goes down. They see themselves as "Educational Factory Workers."

A major concern surrounds evaluations, which can cause professors to not be hired or re-hired due to student or personal issues and not based upon academic issues. When evaluations are used to "punish" faculty it takes away the freedom of teachers. He said that in Mexico adjuncts are called "country dogs" because when you need help you "call out the dogs", but when you don't need them, they are ignored.

They also face problems in public perception, which is that faculty do not work. To Mexicans, work is "hard labor" and they don't recognize academics as laborers. The public does not recognize that instructors must continue to educate themselves so that they can educate others. Even the university does not support this. So without adequate instruction students are the victims, they become confused, not motivated and often drift away from education altogether. Dignity is based upon being respected AND compensated; but with excessive workloads and precarious working conditions that are not based upon respect, there is more uncertainty and instability.

Another Mexican speaker put it this way: "Me Precarious? Yes, I am part-time. It is personal how I spend my time. We are dying slowly since we don't have fair wages. Our time is not valued. At least we don't have suicides, yet. (This was in response to the suicides occurring in Korea, which I will touch on later). We are not paid on "real" time invested, but only \$6-8 per hour in the classroom and that is typically 9 hours a day. There is not time to request resources and time to work. We must work multiple jobs and travel from one to the other. We are often called "Foot Race Professors" because we have no choice but to freeway fly. We also don't have time for updating our knowledge and none of this is mentioned in our contract. Yes, this is a profession we have chosen: it is noble, but it does not

deserve to be exploited. I always wanted to be a professor. I started at 20, finished a PhD and am still non-tenure-track.”

Another Mexican faculty member stated: “The fragile nature of the work is due to the fragile conditions of the protected against the non-protected. It is a perverse policy designed to set one against another and it makes the “collective” fragile. All education is going through crisis, and it seems that the most educated generation is the least valued. What does that tell the next generation? We work for the common good, yet they (the powerful) talk about merits to justify inequality.”

Globalization is affecting education throughout the world. Current circumstances in society and the world economy have been altered and impacted with awareness and subjectively also affected. Research is being killed by the rise of adjuncts with huge differences in students requiring differences in methodologies. And yet, students seem to be resilient with young people showing creativity even in the light of difficulties and availability of teachers. “We are the new academics of the 21st century.” “We are not second class professors.”

The American speaker from SUNY mainly spoke to the rise of neo-liberalism in the United States. He commented that neo-liberal arguments are resonating throughout the US due to the economy with more adjuncts, less resources to teach, and a sustained unrelenting attack on public institutions and public workers. That ‘austerity’ is the natural plan wanted by capitalists with a market based model to privatize public services and education. Austerity policies (beyond neo-liberalism) will move us to Fascism and “barbaric capitalism”.

We are facing the fact that in the last 40 years there has been a huge increase of part-time or contingent labor. Many of these are in specific niches, but many are taking the place of the general professoriate. They have been exploited through low salary and lack of benefits. Statistics show that nationally in the U.S. there has been a 60% growth in PT staff in the last 12 years while simultaneously increasing tuition representing both the starvations and exploitation of labor.

Is the next stage more PT labor in for-profit education and the expansion of the for-profit universities? We are building a higher education system on cheap education and this is not educationally, socially or culturally sustainable. An important point made by an adjunct professor from New Hampshire was that the United States only spends 5.3% of its GDP (Gross Domestic Product) on higher education as compared to Burundi who spends 9.8% of its GDP. Statistically the U.S. spends much less on education than most other industrialized nations, so should we be surprised that our students rate lower in English, Math and Science scores than other industrialized nations? Are we destined to be an educational third world nation because we care so little about appropriately funding public education?

If we continue to reduce the tax burden on the wealthy it can only be at the expense to starve the public sector. That ultimately it will lead to less professionalism, less pay, less benefits for ALL faculty. That unless FT faculty step up to the plate --- adjuncts will continue to be the cheap labor force to fund starving institutions and the academy as we know it will cease to exist. Current tenured faculty may have their jobs, but there will not be tenured or appropriate educational jobs for their children or grandchildren. Or do we really want to see highly educated professors on food stamps and working on the weekend bussing tables next to their students? If not, then it is everyone's battle.

Therefore, we need alliances with the full-time, tenured faculty. We must recognize that we have "shared interests." No one wants to see the erosion of our education system and this erosion will eventually affect full-time faculty and their ability to do their jobs effectively. There must be recognition of the joint or cross experience shared agenda and we must, together, build independent political muscle. We (all faculty) need to build alliances outside of the university and develop "power with principles".

The speaker from Canada (Quebec) related the current struggles occurring in his province. [In Quebec there are 10,000 FT faculty and 30,000 PT/adjunct faculty.] The students, faculty and public took to the streets in major demonstrations over a period of 37 days in regards to increases in tuition as well as taking away the right of faculty to strike. This resulted in a meeting with the government in which they stopped these government policies. Quebec has always supported free public education and it was the students who brought light to the crisis.

It showed that joint mobilization works.

They are facing the same problems as the U.S., which is a move toward privatization, increased health care costs and increased infrastructure costs. They are also fighting for the same interests as we are: democratic governance, more FT professors and education as a "human right."

The Canadian speaker from British Columbia described the "ghettoization of faculty" and how it bodes sadly for the future. In BC they use a variety of terms from non-regular faculty to adjuncts, contingents, provisional and part-time. There has been no recent hiring of full-time/tenure track faculty in order to save money. However, they have been increasing administrative staff. Sound familiar?

The problems they face are not uncommon or unfamiliar: integration of non-regular faculty into the community, the marginalization of faculty who cannot make financial commitments, and a negative atmosphere of the academic institution in general. That said, they do have some form of regularization after a specific time, but they fear to push for more rights. BC is working toward prorata salary while facing the fact that all employers are looking to save money on the back of faculty. It is important to share strengths and strategies! One person the BC faculty used to help them gain some regularization

was Joe Berry (a retired activist now living in Berkeley, CA --- a good resource). Also the students of BC also held events to support the students of Quebec in their fight against draconian political policies. Vancouver Island, BC faculty (FT and PT) did a 5 weeks strike which lead to "right of first refusal" job security for the part-time/contingent faculty. This group action of support proves "what happens to one affects the other" and we must work together support each other's needs.

For the first time COCAL invited a guest speaker from Korea. Her name was Kyung-Ae Oh and she represented the Coalition of College Lecturers of South Korea. The status of academic labor in Korea is just as precarious as Mexico, but for different reasons. There is a bigger problem in Higher Education than K-12 because the Higher Education unions are not as good as K-12; also major shifts in politics have greatly affected educational policies. In 1948-49 Higher Education founded a strong faculty union. But in 1977 there was a military coup and faculty status in a union was made illegal. In 1989 the unions were reestablished. In 2009 a law was written to enact the protection of non-regular workers including part-time lecturers. Today unions are legal in S. Korea.

There are 104,000 part-time lecturers who teach 40% of all Higher Education classes (actually a better statistic than CA). 40% of them have PhDs and they are on 6 months renewable contracts. However, they are forced to move from university to university every 2-6 years and are forced to retire at age 50. This has caused a problem with academic suicide. There have been 8 suicides in Korea since 1998 by part-time lecturers who reach age 50 and see no future. Most part-time lecturers do not want to join the union over fear of retaliation. Currently there are 2000 members of the Korea Irregular Professor Union. At the top 10 Korean Universities the part-time lecturers earn \$442/month while the FT earn \$5,500/month. The earning level is below survival income with harsh working conditions, no respect, and little hope of a full-time job. Korea is slowly getting rid of all tenured faculty. Sung Kyun Kwan University is replacing all tenured faculty in the undergrad school and replacing them with lecturers by 2020. The Choong Ang University is planning on hiring 1600 lecturers instead of full time faculty.

According to the AAUP (Association of University Professors) the most pressing issue today facing Higher Education and workers in general is the precarity affecting all countries. "Temporary Migrants", who are disposable and are "non-citizens" like the expulsion from nation-states or "statelessness (from Germany), have become the norm and acceptable. AAUP stated that contingency is a standard operating procedure of academic institutions of Neo-Liberalism and corporatization. Contingent Adjuncts are the vast majority of faculty and until the full-time faculty stand up to fix and support adjunct equality it will continue to get worse and undermine the total future of education! Full-time faculty are the privileged elite minority that can marginalize the precarious majority and than can affect the private sector as well. This is a "bad example to teach students." Ultimately this will give students a sense of helplessness about their own future. We push PhDs with no hope of real jobs. The 1970's started the corporatization model with its Marxist policies. It is a return to the proletarian, elitist faculty model of the 19th century. Contingent faculty represent the faculty workers. Marx predicted this erosion! Precarity will ultimately lead to Social Insurrection. We need class solidarity because it is not just about us, but also about a new democratic society!

The COCAL experience is one where all faculty can gain insight into the plight of higher education and the global future of progressive thought. The struggle of adjunct or part-time faculty and professors is the struggle for all faculty, students and higher education in general. The COCAL speakers are articulate professors and national activists who have been subjected to the exploitation of market capitalism in education and yet maintain their professionalism, integrity and enthusiasm for educating students. It is urged that more faculty be encouraged to attend COCAL and learn from the experiences, struggles and strategies that are being considered and implemented throughout the United States, Canada, and Mexico.

The next COCAL will occur in early August, 2014 and will be hosted by CUNY and held in New York City, NY.