

You Won, Now What?

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Labour organizing in academic libraries is a site of struggle where workers come together to make demands on management about the distribution of capital through wages and benefits, the conditions of academic labor, and processes to address violations of the contract. These fights are never easy; wins are never automatic. Building collective power to push back against management requires a commitment to organizing that can be challenging--and gratifying--to sustain in the face of the losses that inevitably come in these broad fights. But sometimes, organizing gets the goods, and we find ourselves in positions of power.

This interactive panel session will address the challenges workplace organizers face when they get a win. The first panelist will describe the successful campaign to form a faculty union at Oregon State University -- and the process of building a healthy local from scratch while also bargaining a first contract. In organizing, a win leads to more work, as well as the need to draw more people in to be a part of it. A brand new union faces both opportunities and challenges in this moment of transition, from raising awareness of worker rights, growing a union culture, and keeping people engaged as contract negotiations go on and on.

The second panelist will discuss her path from rank and file union member to local president. Organizing in response to a faculty lockout in 2016 meant learning the skills of building power: defining demands, making and assessing lists, having one-on-one conversations, and developing an analysis of worker power. This work led to both exhilaration--large and public displays of solidarity--and despair at the difficulty of securing a good contract. In the wake of the controversial agreement, the panelist won election to president of the local. Winning means new access to structural power, and an intimate relationship with its limits.

While the moment of the big win can be emotionally and materially transformative, union wins also secure the right to continue the fight. Following brief presentations of their paths to academic labor victories, the panelists will lead attendees in the discussion of strategies for using power once you have built it. How is structural power best deployed to garner material wins for academic workers? How can we organize to consolidate victories? How do union activists continue to build power in the face of member apathy and anti-union employers? These and other questions will be addressed through collective conversations.