This interview was conducted with Andrew Ross through a series of e-mail exchanges during June 2006. Ross has long followed, and been engaged in, issues of academic labor. He is author of *Fast Boat to China: Corporate Flight and the Consequences of Free Trade* (2006), *No Collar: The Humane Workplace and Its Hidden Costs* (2004), and *No Respect* (1989), among many other works. Ross comments here, in particular, on labor conflicts at New York University, where he is professor of American studies.

**Ashley Dawson and Malini Johar Schueller:** How would you evaluate the strengths and limitations of academic freedom as a guarantor of the perquisites of intellectual life in the United States today? The ongoing NYU graduate employee/student struggle for a contract, for example, underlines the increasingly large percentage of those working in the academy who do not enjoy academic freedom. How useful is academic freedom as an organizing tool given the downsizing of academia?

**Andrew Ross:** Academic freedom has to be a bedrock principle, and the institution of tenure, which is its guarantor, remains a key battleground. In the United Kingdom, for example, where tenure was abolished by Thatcher, the indirect result has been quietly catastrophic. The state’s rigid quotas for research assessment mean that most British academics spend their time churning out superfluous publications with no end in sight. The disinterested pursuit of knowledge—a precondition of academic freedom—no longer really exists as a matter of practice.

We also know, however, that the tenured academic is an endangered species in the United States, and that the de facto erosion of tenure here has been steady and systematic. Consequently, the majoritarian experience of academic teachers is not marked in any way by access to or contact with the promised land of security and freedoms. This experience is entirely out of synch with traditional academic culture, which takes such things for granted, and which continues to assume that the professional identity of academics is bound up in exercising these rights. The AAUP’s foundational “1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure,” for example, sees these two concepts as interdependent, almost
indivisible. But what does it mean today when most academic professionals are unlikely to see much of either? Solutions include more sensitivity to the situation and rights of contingent faculty, and more organizations that are open to all. It would be dangerous, however, to conclude that these key principles should be sidelined because they are out of reach for most university teachers. The same might be said of “shared governance”—the other AAUP pillar. Most faculty governance systems make no provision for representing the rights and interests of part-timers or full-timers on limited contracts (the biggest growth sector in academic labor). In this area, at least, reforms are well overdue, university governance should be expanded beyond tenure-track faculty and senior administrators to include contingent faculty and, for that matter, managerial professionals, whose expertise is crucial to matters of governance and who have an equally legitimate stake in the system.

**AD & MJS:** The culture wars returned with a vengeance after 9/11. Indeed, writers such as David Cole have compared the current moment to the McCarthy era. What similarities, if any, do you see with such earlier periods of dissent squelching? What are the limitations of such comparisons? What is particularly novel about the current moment?

**AR:** If the global geopolitical map was indeed redrawn by 9/11, then certain fields became hotspots, Middle Eastern studies most prominently, while other area studies disciplines, like East Asian, Slavic, and Latin American studies, which had been rigorously surveilled and policed during the Cold War, got some relief. The concerted pressure on Middle Eastern studies scholars by right-wing attack groups has been as noxious as anything seen since the McCarthy era; smear campaigns, threats on funding, demands on universities to withhold recruitment. And to some degree, the repression extends to anyone who departs from the very narrow spectrum of opinion that U.S. society permits on Israel/Palestine. The successful yanking of the play *My Name Is Rachel Corrie* from its New York run was a real eye-opener, as was the campaign against Ward Churchill for a stray reference to Eichmann, but you can take your pick on any day of the week from the available evidence. The moratorium on criticism of Israel extends back to the early 1970s, but it has been amplified since 9/11, especially since evangelicals fell zealously into line, and it has become an acid test in the United States (but nowhere else) for the new kinds of cultural warrior.

Yet few disciplines are immune. Because of the renewed interest in patriotism (both among boomer liberals as well as conservatives), my field, American studies, has been beset in all sorts of ways by charges of
anti-Americanism. Not long after 9/11 (and during the anthrax scare) I remember receiving letters at NYU addressed to the “Department of Anti-American Studies.” Around the same time, Thomas Friedman recommended that Saudi Arabia establish more American studies programs in their universities, unconsciously invoking the sorry history of the field’s Cold War manipulation by the state. Though I have no explicit evidence of this, I would imagine that overseas American studies programs are likely to be feeling some pressure from consulates and embassies to do their bit and support the State Department’s flat-footed campaign to combat the worldwide rise of anti-Americanism.

Whether the lobbying activities of groups like the American Council of Trustees and Alumni or the efforts of David Horowitz to push his Academic Bill of Rights legislation will result in a blanket silencing of voices (or alignment with state power), as was the case in the 1950s, remains to be seen. I am skeptical that self-censorship on that scale will materialize, but institutional intellectuals, for all their vaunted job security, do not have to look far for reasons to bite their tongues. The rewards for restraint may be relatively small—favors from your dean, grant renewals from your funding source, or recognition from the state—but, in our world, they are all too eagerly acknowledged. So, too, academic institutions today are arguably more vulnerable to political pressure because of their commercial ties than in the postwar heyday of the public university beholden to the state. The race to consolidate intellectual property (IP) claims and rights has significantly reduced the freedoms of academics involved in commercially viable research. Whether through nondisclosure agreements with corporate funders, or because universities themselves impose material transfer agreements on academics that are almost as rigid as the corporate restrictions, faculty voices are circumscribed. Most academic inventions are licensed on an exclusive basis, so the open pathways for exchange of academic knowledge are closed off at their source upstream. Much of this stuff is nonrivalrous research (like DNA sequences, medical procedures, or even mathematical formulae), funded by taxpayers, but the gold rush to propertize renders all these as private products. Faculty who don’t play along, or who violate the IP agreements in order to exercise their academic freedoms, are penalized accordingly. During the Cold War, the military-industrial complex sought out academic freedom as a convenient cloak with which to obscure the dodgy status of all that Cold War research funding. While the laundering may still apply in the case of industry paying for “objective” research to be done in science departments, the nature of the freedoms is now ever more complicated by the growing claims on IP, including those of universities themselves.
So the short answer to your question is that, politically speaking, the furniture has merely been rearranged, with some seats hotter, and others colder, but economically speaking, the rush to propertize knowledge may be changing the landscape more appreciably.

**AD & MJS:** The latest round of culture wars is concentrated, as was true in the past, in the humanities and social sciences. But what of the natural sciences? How has corporatization of the university affected the norms of free inquiry in ways that the mainstream media have tended to ignore?

**AR:** Good question. There has been much attention of late to the Bush administration’s willful selectivity when it comes to taking the advice of scientists. The trail of junk science ranges from big-picture topics like climate change to virtually any science-based criticism of the administration’s corporate paymasters. But that kind of conduct in and of itself is not a novelty, nor is it necessarily a threat to the everyday practices espoused by research scientists. In many ways, the real threat to “the norms of free inquiry” has been the long-term impact of the Bayh-Dole Act (1980), which was introduced as a response to the national deficiency in high-tech innovation vis-à-vis East Asia, and was written with a view to capturing IP-rich opportunities through intimate university-industry partnerships. Bayh-Dole encouraged universities to give priority to commercially relevant research in the applied sciences. Of course, faculty had to be converted to this way of thinking by including them in a profit-oriented, stakeholding role. Applied science and entrepreneurial sciences aimed at technology transfer became the frontline for funding as universities began to invest in start-ups, real estate holdings, and opportunities that would enable their ownership of intellectual property (copyrights, patents, trademarks). Today, U.S. universities hold most of the patents on DNA sequences, and most research scientists in IP-rich fields either sit on the boards of corporations or have close ties with such firms. Indeed, there are few research departments of this sort where faculty do not have such ties.

Inevitably, nonprofit institutions have taken on the character of for-profits, and well-established trends confirm that the research university (with science faculty in the lead) is behaving more and more like an adjunct to private industry: the steady concentration of power upward into managerial bureaucracies, the abdication of research and productivity assessment to external assessors and funders, the pursuit of intimate partnerships with industrial corporations, the pressure to adopt an entrepreneurial career mentality, and the erosion of tenure through the galloping casualization of the workforce. From the perspective of increasingly managed academic employees, the result is systematic deprofessionalization; the value of a
doctoral degree has been degraded. For most graduate students, the attainment of a degree is not the beginning but the end of their teaching career; they are not a product, but, as Marc Bousquet has put it, a by-product or waste product, of graduate education. Their degree holding is not a credential to practice; rather it presents a disqualification from practice while new divisions of labor have emerged that are corrosive to any notion of job security or peer loyalty.

As Clark Kerr once prophesied, academics are now more like “tenants” than “owners” of their university institutions, but today’s university is not quite the “knowledge factory” that he, and his critics, described. The research academy is undoubtedly a conduit for capitalizing and transmitting knowledge to the marketplace, but it is also an all-important guardian of the public domain. Indeed, the academic workplace is characterized by a tension that lies at the heart of knowledge capitalism. As the academy increasingly hosts property formation and incorporates the customs of the marketplace, ever greater care must go into maintaining its function as a guarantor of truth and unreservable knowledge. This is not just window-dressing, or money-laundering. Without an information commons to freely exploit, knowledge capitalism would lose its primary long-term means of reducing transaction costs. Nor, if all knowledge were propertized, could faculty entrepreneurs poach on the community model of academic exchange to advance their own autonomy and status as knowledge owners. Consequently, the traditional academic ethos of disinterested freedom of inquiry is all the more necessary not just to preserve the symbolic prestige of the institution but also to safeguard commonly available resources as free economic inputs, in much the same way as manufacturing, extractive, and biomedical industries all depend on the common ecological storehouse for free sources of new product.

**AD & MJS:** Thus far, most of the debates about academic freedom have focused on universities, even though public schoolteachers are most likely to be overwhelmingly affected by restrictions on the ways they teach. For instance, in early June 2006, Jeb Bush approved a law barring “revisionist history” in Florida public schools. Florida’s Education Omnibus Bill states, “The history of the United States shall be taught as genuine history and shall not follow the revisionist or postmodernist viewpoints of relative truth.” To what extent would it be useful to shift the debates on academic freedom to other arenas such as public schools? Does academic freedom take on a different resonance in this arena?

**AR:** Yes and no. One of the reasons that so many of the revisionist methodologies developed in the last few decades have been aimed at demystification is because the state of knowledge that university educators
“inherit” from the secondary tier is so systematically corrupt. Freshmen bring with them a head full of national mythologies, and it has been our task, as we experience it, to reeducate students’ minds, by overturning most of the presumptions that are established in the course of the average secondary education. This has been an entirely necessary task, and easier to accomplish in a milieu that is defined as in loco parentis. But the American public school system elicits the participation of parents and, combined with the role of local school boards, is all too susceptible to outside pressure on curricular decisions. The Christian Right has long taken advantage of this vulnerability. Back in the late 1980s, Ralph Reed pronounced the Christian Coalition’s goal of taking over school boards: “I would rather have a thousand school board members than one president and no school board members.” There are few public schoolteachers who have not had to deal with the bitter result of this effort to take over. In many instances, the boards have a direct line to state legislatures, while most schools have felt the impact in the form of challenges to the professional autonomy of teachers. Those who resist strongly get burned out easily, and the pressure to make compromises, especially if you live within the community, is immense. The potential of alliances with higher education professionals to resist the outside pressure is enormous, but actual networks are few and far between. The ASA (American Studies Association) has initiated a program of University/Secondary School Collaborations in California and Massachusetts, but the challenge of the “red states” is more formidable.

So while knowledge production originates within the elite research universities, the transmission flow down through the schools is all too often hijacked. Accordingly, while academic freedoms can be more easily secured at the top, the outcome of those freedoms doesn’t travel very far if the same freedoms are being denied in the public schools.

AD & MJS: Knowledge production in U.S. universities has often been geared to the needs of empire. The directives of Operation Camelot were perhaps the clearest in recent history about the political requirements of research, but fields like American studies have also arguably emerged as arms of U.S. imperialism. Is it possible for knowledge production to disengage itself from the aims of U.S. imperialism, and if so, how?

AR: As for American studies, the initial formation of the discipline was a wartime project—it was considered useful for the officer class to know something about the values of American civilization (the original name for the field) that they were fighting to defend. Appreciation of these values, soaked in the ideology of American exceptionalism that pervaded the discipline, also buttressed Washington’s fitness as a global overlord in
the postwar years. The international establishment of programs fell under
the purview of the State Department, and, like the other areas studies
fields, American studies abroad was heavily shaped by the needs of Cold
War policy makers. Once quite accurate as a map of power relations, their
geographical scope is now largely anachronistic.

After 9/11, I consulted the ASA listings for international programs,
institutes, centers, and addresses and found, in response to Thomas Fried-
man’s proposal, that there were indeed precious few entries in predomi-
nantly Muslim countries. So far, the State Department has chosen not to
invest in establishing new programs, after the Cold War model. This may
have something to do with the political orientation of the field. In most
U.S. locations where it is taught, American studies has a distinctly anti-
imperialist leaning, and this has been true for the best part of two decades.
Instead, Bush administration appointees like Charlotte Beers and Karen
Hughes have tried to use the government’s, and the military’s, own charm
school to propagate Americanism in Middle Eastern countries, usually
with farcical results.

But perhaps it’s only a matter of time (and, predictably, under a
Democratic administration) before efforts are made to induct academic
Americanists, by one means or another. Certainly, there are no fields
where intellectuals are immune to the blandishments of power. Even so,
it will be difficult, for example, to replicate the extensive network of CIA
recruiters and CIA research programs, many in the most elite Ivy loca-
tions, that once existed on campuses around the country. The truth of the
matter is that intellectual legitimation can be gotten outside the academy
these days. The establishment of the private, right-wing institutes and
think tanks, which did not exist (RAND and the Hudson Institute not-
withstanding) as a pervasive force in the Cold War, has made available a
hireling class of experts and a ready source of “expert” knowledge and
opinion tailored to domestic and foreign policy needs. There is no longer
any need for policy makers to draw on credentialed academic voices and
research for backing.

The more likely path for faculty is that academic complicity with
imperial adventures will be secured through commercial avenues when
institutional pressure to raise revenue puts our colleagues’ salaries, rather
than their patriotism, on the line.

**AD & MJS:** What might a discussion of academic freedom on a global
plane look like? What points of connection, if any, do you see between
concerns about academic freedom in the United States and, say, the
Indian government’s decision to purge history textbooks of references to
Hindu extremism?
Although there are networks like Scholars at Risk (hosted at NYU), there is no high-profile academic equivalent of PEN, unfortunately, and, of necessity, Amnesty International tends to focus on the more extreme cases of repression. The AAUP, AFT (American Federation of Teachers), and NEA have limited international ties (mostly through Education International) and, like any American NGO, have to operate in a context where any pressure from a U.S. advocacy group is received overseas with skepticism, if not hostility. There is no high ground available in that context. The willy-nilly use of rhetoric about “freedom” as a weapon of U.S. foreign policy has corrupted all such claims to the point of moral bankruptcy. This is unfortunate because strong public passions can be usefully mobilized against overt intellectual fascism of the sort evinced by the Hindu nationalist example that you cite. Widespread protests ensued in China and Korea in 2005 when officially approved textbooks in Japan (Atarashii Rekishi Kyokasho, or New History Textbook) whitewashed the Imperial Army’s wartime atrocities in East Asia. There’s no question that such efforts to hijack history can trigger mass sentiment. But it’s largely because of the potential strength of populist sentiment that the Left has had to learn to be wary of what happens when the shoe is on the other foot. This is the lesson of civic liberties, which a democratic left has had to fight to absorb.

That said, fears about disturbing the free exchange of ideas among academics can sometimes pose an obstacle to other kinds of political action. The much debated recent efforts of the British academic unions, AUT (Association of University Teachers) and NATFHE (University and College Lecturers’ Union) now merged as the University and College Union, to back the broad-based Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott is a case in point. The AUT’s initial vote of support was repealed after a massive campaign of pressure orchestrated primarily from the United States. Rather than presume that the academic freedoms of Israeli academics can and should be a priority, we might ask why the exercise of Israeli academic freedoms has not resulted in the censure of any institutions and individuals colluding with the occupation regime, whether as advisers or knowledge providers. As Omar Barghouti, one of the Palestinian boycott organizers, and Lisa Taraki put it:

But can they or should they be able to enjoy these freedoms (which sound more like privileges to us) without any regard to what is going on outside the walls of the academy, to the role of their institutions in the perpetuation of colonial rule? We are faced here again with the problem of Israelis seeing the world from their vantage point, and assuming—and demanding—that others do the same. Why does the world owe it to Israel’s academics to help them perpetuate their privileged position?1
In the United States, of course, any such boycott is not even remotely likely. Indeed, it is shot down on grounds of curtailing Israeli academic freedom almost as quickly as criticism of Israel is marginalized in the sphere of public opinion. In an intellectual environment where Edward Said’s basic formulations about Orientalism have been readily absorbed, it is much more rare for American academics to respond to his call to see “Zionism from the standpoint of its victims.”

The result has colored the entire question of boycotts. The AAUP leadership has tied itself in knots over whether boycotts can be considered legitimate under any circumstances. It is not the first time that fundamentalism regarding academic freedom has stood in the way of other kinds of political action. Historically, the AAUP had a hard time accepting that it had a role to play in academic labor organizing, in part because of fears that it would interfere with the organization’s commitment to protecting academic freedom. At NYU, we discussed whether it would be possible to distinguish between an economic and an academic boycott—we were looking for a means for non-NYU faculty to put additional pressure on the administration. The sticking point among many of our colleagues was whether any such call for action would be perceived, disastrously, from the perspective of public relations, as a threat to academic freedoms. We are finally putting out a petition for limited action, but it was supported by a minority of Faculty Democracy members, and it is not clear how much outside support it will garner.

It seems to me that there has to be a better way of balancing priorities and goals, especially in instances when the freedoms one might be striving to protect are being exercised to oppress others.

AD & MSJ: Assaults on individual professors such as those in David Horowitz’s “One Hundred Most Dangerous Professors” tend to obscure another dimension of the attack on academic freedom: the erosion of faculty sovereignty as a whole. The name of the NYU group with which you have been involved—“Faculty Democracy”—seems to recognize precisely such erosion. How has your group tried to address this situation? What are some of the principal strategic lessons of the last year’s battles at NYU?

AR: The erosion of faculty governance is a nationwide phenomenon, whether in public universities dependent on increasingly fickle state legislatures, or in private colleges where the faculty governance system was granted powers, after the 1980 Yeshiva decision, to compensate for having their unionization efforts legally blocked. The latter was the case at NYU, whose antiunion campaign against adjuncts in the late 1970s was the prototype for the Yeshiva defense. NYU has been typical of the
private university experience, but its sharp upwardly mobile path over the last decade has meant that nationwide trends have been magnified to the extreme; the concentration and centralization of power in the upper administration has been more pronounced, and especially so since the appointment of John Sexton (achieved by our trustees without any faculty consultation whatsoever) in 2001.

When Sexton came into office (and recruited many members of the outgoing Clinton administration as his leadership team), the legal battle to stop the accreditation of GSOC (Graduate Student Organizing Committee) was largely lost. NYU’s zealous nouveau-riche bid for acceptance by the Ivy League had suffered a setback (a true ruling-class institution would have known how to hold the line), and the pressure on Sexton from Yale, Brown, Penn, and Columbia (all facing down organizing drives that were spurred on by the success of GSOC) was intense. Under these circumstances, it was hardly surprising that an effort would be made to break the union after its first contract had run its course, but the means by which the campaign was waged came as an affront to a broad slice of the NYU faculty body. Even NYU antiunion faculty had found little to complain about during the three years of the contract. The administration made little to no effort to consult with faculty over its decision, and when pushed to solicit a wider circle of opinion resorted to tactics that were little short of manipulation. Reports in favor of the union-busting position were elicited from select (i.e., co-opted) committees within the faculty senate, none of which polled the general faculty on the question. Faculty requests for information and data were denied or stonewalled. By the end of the academic year 2004–5, it was clear to most of us that no volume of faculty opinion would make any difference, and it was at that point we formed Faculty Democracy as a pressure group independent of the governance system.

A group of us had been laboring in the vineyards with the AAUP chapter for several years, finding it difficult to rouse a typically apathetic faculty body. The mercurial rise of FD, to a membership of 230, over the course of the next few months was immensely gratifying. The group, which existed primarily as an e-list, but which met monthly as a plenary, clearly benefited from its spontaneous, nonorganizational nature, and it developed as a quicksilver vehicle for sharp critiques of the administration’s mode of governance. As a result, FD was able to mobilize a large and influential member base in opposition to the administration’s policies. Not all of our FD colleagues supported GSOC—the majority were comfortable with advocating neutrality and some were vocally antiunion. Unity came through a broadly shared perception that faculty prerogatives were being overridden or circumvented.
A strike is about learning solidarity, and the libertarian spirit of academic freedom does not always sit well with the labor culture of solidarity. Of course, this perception cut both ways, and, if anything, it was the first lesson we learned about the path of solidarity. To mobilize full-time faculty (in an upwardly mobile private university) it is strategic to appeal to their sense of eroded privileges. Nothing animates full-timers more than the perception that their entitlements are being ignored. However, you have to be careful what you wish for. The reassertion of these entitlements will likely come at the expense of those outside the guild. We certainly saw some of this occur in the course of the NYU strike. Faculty who expected a speedy resolution were unprepared for a prolonged action that might disrupt their schedules, and their initial willingness to play a supporting role wore thin after it became clear that the administration was digging in. Frustration gave way to paternalism, and the “we know best” attitude that pervades the academic relationship between faculty and graduate students took its toll on the strike. Several “third way” efforts were made by faculty to resolve the standoff. None involved consultation with the GSOC membership, and the result sowed seeds of distrust in many departments. While a faculty core (fifty to eighty) have remained firm in their support of the union, many FD members drifted away from their initial public positions and advised students to leave the picket line, and some even turned antagonistic toward students who would not heed their freedom to offer paternal advice.

A strike is about learning solidarity, and the libertarian spirit of academic freedom does not always sit well with the labor culture of solidarity. There were few of us, regardless of our leanings, who did not feel the tension between these traditions. Nor, it is fair to say, was the tension absent from the GSOC membership, many of whom found it difficult to sustain the discipline demanded by UAW/GSOC leadership. Some part of this difficulty was a direct result of habits of criticism — how much can a union meeting afford to resemble a graduate seminar where free critique is valued above all? How do you distinguish between the custom-bound critique of the academy and the kinds of self-criticism that every union needs and should encourage as a matter of healthy renewal? When you are under the pressure of strike conditions, it is not so easy to make that judgment.

Academic freedom has to be a prime component of labor organizing in the academy, if only because the denial of the right to organize is a violation of that freedom. But it can just as easily be an obstacle or a recipe for inaction when it is invoked as an a priori principle. The likelihood of the latter only increases under circumstances where only a privileged few enjoy the securities that are envisaged as part of the academic ideal. For example, while FD was open to all, it was widely perceived to be the voice of full-timers, especially those empowered by tenure, and who had most to lose in terms of their privileges.
AD & MJS: The recent strikes in New York by the TWU (Transport Workers Union) and UAW-affiliated graduate student employees at NYU have generated little meaningful support from the labor movement as a whole. What tactics might we adopt to forge common consciousness and action?

AR: This was another instructive lesson from the NYU strike. GSOC members voted to go out in the understanding that the broader labor movement would make their struggle into a top-level priority. The UAW made it known that the AFL-CIO’s big guns and deep pockets would be made available, and John Sweeney and other top brass came at the beginning of the fall semester to participate in a high-profile rally and civil disobedience arrests. As the first and only TA union at a private university, the GSOC cause was already a frontline struggle for academic labor, but it was understood that this could and would be turned into a test-case struggle for the labor movement as a whole. As for the UAW itself, the integrity of its much-prized white-collar New York local (2110—which also includes MOMA, Village Voice, Barnard, and New School members) was on the line. So there was every cause for optimism, every reason to expect the best kind of high-profile corporate campaign. After the strike began, a series of rallies featured national union presidents—from the UAW, the Teamsters, AFT, the steel workers, transit workers, and so on—alongside regional bigwigs, and a host of local politicians and celebrities. All of them promised the world to our students, and so you can appreciate that this attention was very flattering to graduate students. Last but not least, it was difficult to believe that a visibly liberal institution like NYU could actually succeed in busting a union in the heart of New York City.

As the strike wore on, students were hard pressed to see the resources promised by the UAW and others. It took several months, for example, to get the Teamsters to refuse to pick up NYU trash. The students grew cynical, and many concluded that the rallies had been more in the way of photo ops, the rhetoric little more than union boilerplate. By the time the UAW took over control of the campaign from the local’s leadership and pumped in resources (in April 2006), the strike had lost a good deal of member solidarity. Lack of follow-through from the big guns who spoke at the rallies had not only undermined expectations, it has weakened the perception that union belonged to its membership and that the rank and file could play a substantial role. The effort to resuscitate grassroots support was hugely successful but came late in the semester, as the summer recess beckoned.

On another equally relevant note, the combination of traditional union discipline with the strategy of a single, long strike did not always sit well
with members who had alternative, less orthodox, ideas about political action, or who had cut their teeth on social justice activism. Inevitably, some students came to conclude that the conventional strike tactics and the union’s culture of hierarchy were not the best fit for an academic milieu. The principle of academic freedom played some role in this kind of thinking, but perhaps more influential were the traditions of autonomous action that were more familiar to them from social movement activism. For others, the romance of being involved in a “real” labor strike remained quite potent, and the freedom to organize was held up as the paramount interpretation of academic freedom.

On the administration’s side, its claim (which was the chief legal argument for breaking the union) that GSOC had meddled with its right to adjudicate “academic affairs” was never substantiated, and the flimsy evidence put forth in its support was repeatedly exposed as such. President Sexton’s line about the union violating traditional academic rights got little traction, even among faculty sympathetic to his antiunion position. However, insofar as it formed the core of the legal attack on the union, it seems clear that, if the administration proves successful, this will play a persistent role in academic antiunionism for some time to come.

Faculty and student unions at public universities have shown that unions can coexist very happily with governance structures like faculty senates that are empowered to regulate academic affairs and safeguard freedoms. But it’s probably fair to say that this kind of environment — where the largely self-directed work life of employees is an integral part of their identity as knowledge producers — is not well understood within the labor movement. After the successes in organizing in public education in the 1960s and 1970s, the failure to make headway in high-skill private sectors of the knowledge industries has been a lost opportunity. It’s important, I think, to see the issue of academic freedom within this broader context, because it reminds us of the continuity between our labor and those of our counterparts in other knowledge industries that have fashioned a culture of free, open speech in direct emulation of the academic ethos, albeit in the cause of corporate profit.

But if the labor movement has not gotten very far in understanding our kind of workplace, neither have academic unions proved to be particularly innovative. For the most part, they are active only around issues relating to the contract and play little or no role in educational or intellectual activities. If the labor movement is to reinvent the spirit of a different kind of unionism (1930s social unionism, say, versus the business unionism of the postwar compact, for example), then it seems to me that academic unions are in a position to offer some new models. To do so, they clearly have to transcend the two-tier system of labor that is already well established...
within academe, the upper tier tied to the security still afforded to the tenure system, and for which the traditional cause of academic freedom is taken for granted; and the lower tier tied to conditions of contingency, sharing with other precarious workforces the kinds of priorities that have more to do with basic workplace rights of access to fair labor.

Academic unionism has yet to face its “CIO moment,” when unions acquire the will to include all members of the workforce—full-time faculty, staff, contract teachers, adjuncts, and TAs. As the research universities are more fully integrated into the corporate circuits, it will make more and more sense to see all those who work within them as a unitary workforce rather than as a full-time professional core, surrounded by preprofessional teachers, and white-collar and blue-collar support staff. If class divisions within the university workplace are to be properly confronted, then fully inclusive unions are the models to strive for, even for knowledge industries, which are basically structured along similar lines. The goal would be to stem deprofessionalization, on the one hand, which is shared by such disparate groups as medical professionals (struggling with HMOs) and high-tech engineers (Taylorized by global managers), and to erode the guildlike mentality of full-timers.

**AD & MJS:** Your recent work has dealt with the increasingly precarious character of contemporary knowledge work in the United States and in developing countries like China and India. What connections do you see between the struggles around academic freedom and labor today and the issues that arise in the broader world of contingent labor? How might we productively refine our understandings of intellectual labor to forge solidarity across professions and geographical spaces?

**AR:** While researching my book *Fast Boat to China*, I hung out a lot at the American Chamber of Commerce in Shanghai—it was a wonderful search site because every profiteer eventually passes through there looking to make a fast buck. Over the course of my year in the field, I lost count of the American university representatives who also showed up there, basically in pursuit of the same revenue-chasing, cost-cutting goals as the corporations. There are few colleges today not in the business of actively promoting their brand internationally or setting up shop in these offshore locations, and it is not always easy to distinguish the fiscal side of their operations from those of your average corporate outsourcer. In global study-abroad sites, teaching, drawn from a local, contingent labor pool, is infinitely cheaper (remember that the academy is intensely labor-intensive—labor accounts for up to 75 percent of costs) while the college can still collect top-dollar tuition fees. NYU, always in the forefront of such tendencies, already has seven such global sites—in Paris, Berlin, London,
Madrid, Prague, Florence, Accra—and is opening a new one in Shanghai. But we are no longer just talking about study-abroad campuses. Routine scientific research is already being outsourced to cheaper offshore sites, directly located, as in Dubai and Qatar, inside free-trade zones built to host global corporations. As the global networks get more established and the pursuit of revenue more desperate, more and more colleges will find it fiscally prudent to transfer other kinds of operations overseas, and this will undoubtedly include instructional costs. To put this in the perspective of international trade policy, education and training is the fifth largest services export in the United States (bringing over $12 billion in 2004) and figures prominently in the WTO’s efforts at services trade liberalization all over the world. No surprise that the U.S. Commercial Service, run by the Commerce Department, actively advises universities on how to exploit the emerging market for foreign educational service providers. As more and more overseas operations come online in countries where academic freedom is a fiction, the transfer of teaching overseas will inevitably involve the sacrifice of traditional securities and freedoms and the escalation of downward wage pressure on domestic salaries.

The prototype for these overseas transfers exists in the historical record of casualization over the last two decades. Just as corporate offshore outsourcing was preceded by domestic subcontracting, so too, in the academy, we are now likely to see a similar move from contingent teaching onshore to even cheaper labor offshore. It’s difficult for us to imagine right now what this dispersal will look like. After all, didn’t the online education crusade of the late 1990s fail? Actually, it didn’t—private, for-profit, online institutions like the University of Phoenix, Walden University, Kaplan University, Westwood College, and DeVry University are the biggest growth sector in academe, and their corporate parents—Apollo Group, Laureate Education Inc., Kaplan Inc., and the Career Education Corporation—are already huge investors in global distance learning. The Laureate group owns higher education institutions all over South America and Europe, often in de facto violation of a country’s laws prohibiting the establishment of for-profit private universities.

But, really, the move offshore is happening in all of the other professions, making the world of livelihoods a more precarious place by the minute. There’s no question that “knowledge transfer”—the corporate euphemism for high-skill outsourcing—will become familiar to us too. And when it does, it won’t necessarily come in the form of a transfer from one employee to another one offshore. Corporations have developed work-flow platforms and other business process technologies to slice up knowledge operations and disperse them to various global sites only to be gathered, coordinated, and reintegrated. These technologies, and the
modular units of information that they move around, are designed to minimize IP leakage or theft. Patent-rich universities will likely follow a similar path, and when the knowledge is dispersed in this disembodied manner, you lose the capacity of a single legal person to exercise traditional academic freedoms in and around the knowledge field.

Note
