

POWERFUL COMPASSION: THE STRIKE AT SYRACUSE

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It is worth the trip to Syracuse University (SU) just to see Ben Shahn's sixty-by-twelve-foot outdoor mural, "The Passion of Sacco and Vanzetti." Unveiled in 1967, the mosaic tile mural tells the story of Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, executed in 1927 for a crime which they probably did not commit. Witnesses placed them miles from the crime scene when the murder of a paymaster occurred at a shoe factory in Braintree, Massachusetts.

After fleeing to Mexico in 1917 to avoid the draft, both Italian immigrants returned to the United States at the end of the First World War. At the time of their arrest in 1920, Sacco and Vanzetti were under surveillance for their involvement in strike activities, and their radical beliefs were used against them during their trial. Despite demonstrations and petition-signings in many countries, Alvin Fuller, the Governor of Massachusetts, sent Sacco and Vanzetti to the electric chair based on the findings of a commission that included the presidents of Harvard and MIT.¹

Shahn's mural consists of three connected panels. In the first panel, a group of protesters symbolize the tumult that both led to and followed the arrest of Sacco and Vanzetti. In the second, Sacco and Vanzetti, handcuffed to one another, tower over the background in a symbolic representation of their moral stature. Their shadows slant accusingly towards a courthouse. Standing behind them, a diminutive governor Fuller, casting no shadow, reads his verdict. In the third, members of the commission, in top hats and academic garb, hold flowers over coffins containing the bodies of Sacco and Vanzetti.

Shahn wanted to create, as he put it, "works of art in which powerful compassion is innate, or which... will serve ultimately to dignify that society in which it exists."² On either side of Shahn's mural are famous words from a Vanzetti letter which conform more to the grammar of the heart than of the schoolmaster. "If it had not been for these thing, I might have live out my life talking at street corners to scorning men," wrote

¹ Martin H. Bush, *Ben Shahn: The Passion of Sacco and Vanzetti*. Syracuse University Press, 1968.

² Stan Pinkwas, "Ben Shahn: Portrait of the Artist," *Daily Orange*. March 4, 1968.

Vanzetti to his son from prison, “I might have die, unmarked, unknown, a failure. Now we are not a failure. Never in our full life could we hope to do such work for tolerance, for joostice, for man’s onderstanding of man as now we do by accident. Our words -- our lives! -- our pains nothing! The take of our lives -- lives of a good shoemaker and a poor fish peddler -- all! That last moment belongs to us -- that agony is our triumph.”

The powerful compassion emanating from Shahn’s mural could serve equally to define the SU experience in the aftermath of the unusual September 1998 strike. In the belief that current labor unrest and the erosion of the humanities at universities spring from a common cause, I visited SU for five days in September in order to research the strike and its origins.

In the summer prior to the strike, 750 unionized dining service workers, groundskeepers, janitors, and library employees at SU had found themselves without a contract. Negotiations between the SU administration and the union, Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 200A, had foundered over the abuse of temporary workers, pay equity for library workers, the use of unskilled labor, and above all, subcontracting.

Claiming that “modern institutions need flexibility,” the administration had demanded the right to subcontract any department with less than twenty-five employees -- in effect, virtually all SU dining halls and residences -- in return for higher wage increases. It claimed, furthermore, that no union employees had lost their jobs as a result of subcontracting. The union disagreed, maintaining that one hundred union jobs had been lost to subcontracting within the last seven years.

Over the summer, SU Chancellor Kenneth Shaw told a group of concerned professors that while outsourcing was undesirable, SU did not want a contract that restricted it. As physics professor Rafael Sorkin later explained, the administration “wanted the flexibility to do the things they didn’t want to do because they might want to do them at some point.”³

Another concern was the abuse of temporary workers who were contractually permitted to work a maximum of twenty hours a week for eighty days at a single job. The

³ Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations in this essay are from interviews conducted with the author in September 1998.

workers were being shuttled between short-term jobs at different dining centers to get around the contractual limitation.

The union also wanted to halt the substitution of unskilled for skilled labor, which threatened the status and safety of workers. Union representative Coert Bonthius maintained that an unskilled maintenance worker who tried to fix a boiler was almost killed when it blew up. The incident recalls the times of James Roscoe Day, SU chancellor from 1894 to 1922. Upton Sinclair in *The Goose-Step* (a 1923 romp through the nightmare of higher education) describes him this way: “The chancellor even carries his hatred of labor unions to the point of crippling the university. Workingmen have been changed two or three times in one week; the chancellor set the maximum price that a workingman is worth at twenty-eight cents an hour, and as a result, the boilers of the heating plant were ruined, and the cost was four thousand dollars.”⁴

Additionally, the union proposed to increase the low pay of library workers in order to attain gender equity. SU ranked ninety-fifth out of 109 university libraries surveyed by the Association of Research Libraries in 1996-97 for average salary of professional library staff. Women held 70 percent of library jobs at SU, but received 20 to 25 percent less pay than men in comparable jobs.⁵ One serials cataloguer, who had worked at SU for twenty-three years, was only making around twenty thousand dollars a year. In his June 1997 annual report, Head Librarian David Stam called for higher salaries for library workers, noting that “for some it is less than a living wage ... and is a particularly demoralizing factor when combined with higher expectations of productivity, more work with fewer people, and often the requirement to attain new technological skills within the old classification framework.”⁶

On July 28, against the wishes of a federal mediator, SU negotiators presented a final offer (which would have strengthened the administration’s ability to outsource SU jobs) to the union. On August 16, union members voted, for the first time in twenty-four years, to strike. After the vote, Shaw refused to meet again with concerned faculty.

⁴ Upton Sinclair, *The Goose-Step*. Pasadena, California, Self-Published, 1923: 285

⁵ *Unity News* (SEIU Newsletter at SU), April 1998: 1

⁶ David H. Stam, “Annual Report. Syracuse University Library. July 1996 to June 1997.” June 20, 1998: 7-8

Sensing the distance between SU's rhetoric and reality, some professors urged Shaw to negotiate in good faith with the union. "As a teacher who ponders a great deal over the implicit social values I am responsible for communicating to my students," wrote English professor Gregg Lambert to Shaw, "I cannot take lightly the situation in which I am asked to convey the university's self-proclaimed values of mutual respect, fairness, and equity in a context where these basic principles are not honored by the university itself in its dealings with all its members."

Ironically, in late July, weeks after the expiration of the contract, SU completed its four million dollar purchase of Marshall Square Mall, a commercial retail establishment near the university. A SU public relations official described the investment as "a real good opportunity to invest in the community and university." Students were concerned that the acquisition of the mall, which contains the only local competitor to SU's bookstore, might make them captive consumers.⁷ Employees wondered why SU had money to acquire real estate but not to pay them a living wage.

Shortly before the strike, a memo which apparently originated in the office of the Director of Student Activities stated that union representatives were not allowed to distribute information on campus and that students could not do so as individuals, but only through recognized student organizations that supported the union as a whole. The memo reminded graduate students that they held teaching assistantships and fellowships as university beneficiaries. Some wags noted that SU, which prided itself on being the "number one student-centered university," had become the "number one student-censored university." The SU administration later issued a clarification stating that the memo had been based on the second-hand report of a conversation. Free speech, however, remained at issue throughout the strike.

As classes began at SU, about 630 physical plant, food service and library workers formed picket lines at fifteen locations on campus. Only 10 to 15 percent of union employees reported for work. Some professors decided not to cross the picket lines and held classes instead at churches, a performing arts center, the Westcott cinema, or at home.

⁷ Joy Davia, "SU Moves Into M-Street With Mall Purchase," *Daily Orange*. August 31, 1998: 12

The administration brought in temporary workers to replace the strikers. Recruiters set up booths in student dormitories. “Need a job?,” inquired an advertisement for dining services in the *Daily Orange*.⁸ The administration maintained that students were being hired not as replacement workers, but for the College Work Study Program.⁹

On September 1, fifty faculty members organized a picket line and held a press conference in front of Bird Library. When SU security officers informed them that they could not hold strike signs on campus, the professors sat down for an hour and a half, courting arrest.¹⁰ At a forum that evening, student dissatisfaction grew when Neil Strodel, SU’s Associate Vice President for Human Resources, dodged questions about SU policy on free speech and about the purchase of Marshall Square Mall.¹¹

The next day, three hundred students, including members of the Cornell Organization for Labor Action, gathered for a teach-in on the quad where they heard poems, speeches, and live music. One thousand people marched in protest to the residence of Chancellor Shaw. Students demonstrated the following afternoon in front of the administration building, chanting for Shaw to be hired part-time, hoping that he too might someday have the opportunity to experience life without health benefits, job security, or a living wage. Approximately a dozen students broke from the main group to blockade the building’s entrances by lying or sitting in front of them until closing time.

With momentum building, ninety six percent of the employees voted to continue the strike. As news of the unrest spread, parents logged on to SU’s “Q & A Strike Information For Parents” webpage, which reassured them that this union did “not have a propensity toward violence.”

The administration’s stance toward the union recalled Chancellor Day’s iron hand. “The strike is a conspiracy and nothing less,” thundered Day in his 1920 classic of oligarchic kitsch, *My Neighbor The Working Man*. “We deal promptly and effectively with conspiracies against property and persons in other matters. What delusion has closed our eyes to the true character of the labor strike which is one of the most glaring forms of conspiracy the world has known?” Day goes on to explain, in his hymn to big business,

⁸ Advertisement. *Daily Orange*. August 31, 1998: 6

⁹ *Negotiation News*. “The Myth of the ‘Memo’,” September 3, 1998: 1

¹⁰ Sapna Kollali, “SU Faculty Hold Sit-In,” *Daily Orange*. September 2, 1998: 1, 3.

¹¹ Dave Levinthal, “Strike Forum Features SU, Local 200A,” *Daily Orange*. September 2, 1998: 7

how disorder is inherent in strikes: “The character of a strike is seen in destruction of property, assaults and murders. The call for soldiers and an extra police guard tells the story. The strike stands for everything which America opposes. It is violence. It is riot. It opposes liberty. It is dangerous to life by exciting men to unrestrained and dangerous passions.”¹² While passions were high during the 1998 SU strike, only one minor strike-related injury occurred, as a supervisor hit an employee while driving through a picket line at high speed.

The administration accused union officers of acting against the interests of SU employees. “It is important to note that none of the University’s offers have been voted on by the union membership,” wrote Shaw in an August 28 message to the SU community. “Paid agents of SEIU and designated union officers have consistently refused to allow the membership to ratify or reject the proposed contract.” In response to Shaw, the parent of a SU student wrote: “I assume that by ‘designated union officers’ you mean ‘elected union officers.’ Why not say so and admit that the SEIU has a democratic structure. Unions are generally more democratic than universities. When was the last time that the workers, students and faculty got to elect you or the governing board?” Union members found Shaw’s accusation ludicrous, since three of them had been elected to serve on the bargaining committee along with the union officers. Vanessa Dismuke, union steward for the library workers, said that the members had instructed the bargaining committee not to bring back an unacceptable offer.

After a week-long strike, union members overwhelmingly ratified a new contract granting significant wage increases for library workers and modest raises for other union workers. The contract also included protections against subcontracting, limiting temporary workers to twenty hours a week and one thousand hours a year.

Both sides pledged not to take reprisals. The union agreed not to fine those who crossed the picket line while the administration agreed not to withhold tuition benefits from strikers. Some workers complained, nonetheless, that they were not being allowed to take breaks. Joan Hart, a picket captain, was written up three times within three days and demoted a pay grade for such infractions as wearing a union cap to work. SU’s

¹² James Roscoe Day, *My Neighbor The Working Man*. New York: The Abingdon Press, 1920: 101, 372

Office of Human Resources investigated the allegations of reprisals, and determined that supervisors had simply taken routine disciplinary actions.¹³

In his September 23, 1998 address to the faculty, Shaw asked professors who had refused to cross picket lines “to voluntarily inform their deans of the time missed so that their paychecks can be adjusted accordingly.” Shaw reassured them that he was “motivated not by a desire to punish, but to ensure that the lesson of civil disobedience is not lost on our students.” That lesson, intoned Shaw, was that “passionately held beliefs are worth sacrifice.”

The strike was the first campus-wide challenge to Shaw since he took office in 1991. SU had welcomed its new chancellor with an extensive renovation of the chancellor’s nine-thousand-square-foot, twenty-room mansion. Simultaneously, SU instituted a salary freeze for its staff and prepared a restructuring plan that would cut 15 percent of SU’s 4,300 employees and thirty-eight million dollars out of its 452 million dollar annual budget by 1995.¹⁴ Nearly 20 percent of SU’s tenured faculty -- 120 professors -- opted for SU’s “supported resignation program.”

In February 1992, Shaw wrote in the *Syracuse Herald American* that “in order to ensure their survival, institutions of higher learning must now devote their energies to the enterprise of sausage making.” Elaborating on this metaphor, Shaw observed: “Even with the most carefully chosen and healthful ingredients -- turkey, organic cereals, natural spices -- sausage making is an ugly process to witness. But after all the slicing, chopping, blood and gore, the end product can be delicious, nutritious and of remarkable quality. In short, America’s colleges and universities must now pursue -- and a number of them, indeed, have already been forced to begin -- the kind of painful restructuring that is akin to sausage making and has been taken up in earnest by many U. S. corporations, from Chrysler and IBM to Time Inc. Ugly in the process, but, if done well, healthy in the outcome.”¹⁵

The day after the essay appeared, Shaw presented the restructuring plan to students and faculty in Hendricks Chapel. As he was speaking, a series of loud chopping

¹³ “Memo Underscores SU’s Commitment To Fairness, Healing,” *Negotiation News*. Sept. 25, 1998: 2

¹⁴ Robert L. Smith, “Cutbacks Target SU Administration Along With Academics,” *Post-Standard*. December 17, 1991: A4

noises suddenly rose from the central aisle. Joanna Spitzner, a performing arts major, and Michael Waddell, an illustration major, were kneeling on the chapel floor, slicing oranges on a cutting board.¹⁶ University security quickly led the seniors away. “The chancellor is very good at talking around questions,” said Waddell afterwards. “It’s pretty pathetic to just let things happen.”¹⁷

Soon afterwards, students and professors at the School of Music occupied a dean’s office for a night to protest the cuts to their school; a dean, perhaps a relic from a bygone age, angrily took issue with Shaw’s sausage making metaphor.

Shaw took such reactions in stride. “Institutional restructuring, as I’ve stated, resembles sausage making in its ugliness,” he wrote in his sausage-making essay. “And institutions undergoing major changes will experience a grief cycle just as individuals do, with phases of denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. In reporting on educational restructuring, the media will be able to report truthfully that faculty and staff morale is at an all-time low, people have never been more vicious to one another, and special interests have never been more in evidence. This should be understood as an honest part of the sausage-making process and of the grief cycle.”¹⁸

It was to restore the smooth functioning of an educational organization, to help it cope with its grief cycle, that a corporate management strategy such as Syracuse University Improving Quality (SUIQ) entered the picture. “Our internal customers are first our students and also members of the faculty and staff,” explained Shaw in his November 1991 convocation speech. “A total quality management approach leads to knowing whom we serve and how we can better serve them. It can lead to excellence in our processes and in the product.”¹⁹

Thus, as employees lacked participation in the workplace and outsourcing deprived employees of even the fiction of institutional identity, total quality management (TQM), with its emphasis on communication, helped dissipate pent-up frustrations that might otherwise have turned nasty. By “listening” to the worker, TQM allowed

¹⁵ Kenneth Shaw, “SU Aims To Cut With Finesse, Not Brutality,” *Syracuse Herald American*. February 16, 1992: B7

¹⁶ “Searching for Words,” *Syracuse New Times*. February 16-26, 1992.

¹⁷ Frank Herron, “Downsizing SU,” *Syracuse Herald-Journal*. February 18, 1992.

¹⁸ Shaw, “SU Aims To Cut”: B7

¹⁹ Kenneth Shaw, “Building On Strength: Values For The Future,” *Syracuse Record*. November 18, 1991: 9

authoritarian universities to appear caring, to create an illusion of participation and a semblance of satisfaction in the workplace.

Union organizer Larry Alcott said of SUIQ that “allegedly it is to drive down decision-making to the point of production, to accept that the people who do the work have the knowledge, and that we should draw on that and flatten the bureaucracy.” In practice, SUIQ rigorously quantifies the hours of training that employees undergo in a never-ending quest for “quality improvement.” As Shaw explained to SU faculty, SUIQ “not only sought to change the processes by which we serve and support our students, but also to create a new mind-set.”²⁰

That new corporate mind-set was ultimately responsible for the strike at SU. Most corporations exist primarily to make a profit. In contrast, a SU faculty committee stated a decade ago that “the fundamental mission of Syracuse University is to advance knowledge and to preserve and transmit humanity’s cultural heritage. It is through the continuing pursuit of this mission that the University makes its essential and unique contribution to society.”

Faculty members typically oppose the importation of the corporate model into the university. “Our students are referred to officially as ‘customers’,” said Sorkin in a tone of disbelief. “Can you imagine? Customers!” Sorkin believes that a university ought “to be a community of scholars dedicated to the search for truth, with a great concern for the well-being of everyone in society.”

Philosophy professor Linda Martin Alcoff also deplores the supremacy of the market at SU. “The philosophy department had to prove, like every department, that we supported ourselves,” she said. “They had this arcane system showing how many students were in your class and how much revenue they provided, and then matching that with the revenues of the budget, which is insane for a liberal arts institution, because you need some departments that don’t support themselves.”

Former SU professor Bill Readings describes the symbolic displacement of culture in *The University in Ruins*: “Interestingly, during my time at Syracuse, the University logo was changed. Instead of the academic seal with its Latin motto affixed to University letterhead and other documents, a new, explicitly “corporate” logo was

²⁰ Kenneth Shaw, “What Is Quality?” *Syracuse Record*. September 23, 1996.

developed, and the seal reserved solely for official academic documents such as degree certificates. This seems to me directly symptomatic of the reconception of the University as a corporation, one of whose functions (products?) is the granting of degrees with a cultural cachet, but whose overall nature is corporate rather than cultural.”²¹

SU’s corporate reorientation led to the recent suspension of graduate programs in German, foreign language teaching, and humanities. The classics department, reduced to only two professors, no longer offers graduate programs. Classics professor Donald Mills laughed when asked to explain the importance of classics to a liberal education. He inquired, “Have you got about three hours?” If the purpose of university education is to prepare one for the future, said Mills, then it helps to know where one has been. The classical world, Mills observed, is the source of such words as ‘republic’ and ‘democracy,’ and for the very concepts that those words denote. I pressed Mills for a specific example of what the past might teach us. “The Roman Republic came to an end,” said Mills, “when Roman politicians discovered ways of using the judicial process to embarrass and humiliate their opponents.”

As Mills sees it, universities, trying to justify their ever-increasing tuition by convincing students that their degrees will lead to well-paying jobs, are becoming vocational schools. “I personally rebel at that. I think that’s misguided,” Mills said. “I tell my students, freshmen in particular, ‘you’re here for four years. Your job is to get an education. After that, you’ve got the rest of your life to find a job’.”

Mills recalled how the previous chancellor, Melvin Eggers, would often refer to “our product.” In his 1988 address to the Greater Syracuse Chamber of Commerce, Eggers said, “The private nature of their business may have in the past made them wary of public government, but now the two are working in a partnership. Business and education are now partners. It’s clear that those of us in higher education need you.”²² The Chamber of Commerce was appreciative of Eggers, and once named him “The Businessman of the Year.” “It says so much,” Mills sighed.

In 1991, Shaw replaced Eggers on the board of the Greater Syracuse Chamber of Commerce and became the vice president of the Metropolitan Development

²¹ Bill Readings, *The University In Ruins*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1996: 10-11.

²²Adriel Bettelheim, “SU Chancellor Says Private, Public Sectors Must Cooperate,” *Syracuse Herald Journal*. June 2, 1988.

Association (MDA) which provides tax abatements and other incentives for corporations. At the time of the strike, MDA's president was none other than H. Douglas Barclay, the former Republican State Senator who stepped down as chair of the SU trustee board in May 1998.

In the material shift underway in higher education, skills training has replaced the education needed for critical thinking, citizenship, or understanding the human condition and our obligations to the natural world. SU's future is decidedly high-tech. The newly established Center for Really Neat Research recently won a 1.6 million dollar contract from the Defense Advance Research Projects Agency to help build a mine-detection system.²³

Another recent innovation at SU is the Center for Study of Popular Television. While the relationship of TV to corporate interests and the destruction of communal bonds merit scrutiny, it is difficult to comprehend the replacement of the classics with the study of popular television. The predicament is summed up in the title of a new book from Syracuse University Press: *Bonfire of the Humanities: Television, Subliteracy and Long-Term Memory Loss*.

In *The Moral Collapse of the University*, Bruce Wilshire ponders the implications of long-term memory loss:

The numbness and stasis and disconnectedness so often seen in students are palpable and need to be explained and addressed. There seems to be no sense of being part of history, of sharing a common venture with those in power. The disintegration of a sense of historical community is amazing... Missing is any sense that anything is missing. Few students have... a clear awareness that there might be segments of human development which, when laid down, lead up to themselves and point beyond, and for which they have responsibility as the group of living human beings.²⁴

Jamie McCallum, a sociology major and animal rights activist, was among the few SU students with such awareness. McCallum edited a zine called *Conformicide* and covered the strike as a photographer for the *Daily Orange*. The employees who clean

²³ "Revolutionary Robotics," *Syracuse University Magazine*. Fall 1998: 5

²⁴ Bruce Wilshire, *The Moral Collapse of the University*. Albany: SUNY Albany Press, 1990: 11-12

floors and serve food represented for him the physical reality that makes academic life possible at SU.

While McCallum regretted the “dearth of knowledge of the importance of the labor movement and its relevance to students,” he believed that the strike did much to create an awareness of labor history at SU. “The university did not consider for one second the possibility that we as students could learn more from the workers on strike than we could from the professors in class,” said McCallum. “I can’t tell you the number of kids that went out and saw the people on strike and talked to them, and learned in minutes the history of labor and how important it was to these people’s lives.” McCallum said that SU needs alternative means of educating students and collectivizing life on campus, including democracy teach-ins. While at SU, McCallum expressed his concern for others by collecting food for strikers in Watertown and handing out free vegetarian lunches with Food Not Bombs.

Ultimately, the strike was about the search for identity, which made the fight over outsourcing particularly bitter. Outsourcing deprives employees of institutional identity, making them transients in the workplace. As universities strip their employees of identity, they strive to create an illusion of community for students and alumni. At Syracuse, pride in the football and basketball teams goes well beyond the university. In a 1988 interview, then chancellor Eggers called SU’s sports program “a vitality-generating activity, vitality-sharing activity” that “does provide a unifying theme, certainly more than anything I’ve seen in the community.”

SU’s mascot, Otto the Orange, an orange ball with a face, looks as though it might have escaped from an M&Ms commercial or a Tom Tomorrow cartoon strip. It is supposed to represent the school spirit that has powered SU sports to great heights. Sociology graduate student Katherine Gregory described the mascot’s omnipresence on campus as a sort of “forced frivolity.” “They’re reproducing identity through their sports, their athletic teams, and... this orange man, whatever it is,” said Gregory. “They want to instill it in their students so that they will eventually send their alumni checks.” In a letter to Shaw in support of the strikers, Gregory wrote: “After years of temporary positions at numerous institutions of higher education, on the most personal level, I grasp the feeling

of ‘disposability’ in the workplace. I spent over eight years without health insurance or benefits.”

While Gregory appears to have few illusions about the university in general, or about SU in particular, she says that she came to SU in search of a “refuge.” That search may well prove futile. At his convocation, Shaw quoted the University of Pennsylvania’s Robert Zemsky who said: “We are coming to the end of sanctuary. The end of a time in which America’s colleges and universities were sheltered from the cold winds that buffeted other institutions.” Shaw then went on to say that SU was now “part of the larger action” and that “clearly, ‘the end of sanctuary’ includes Syracuse.”²⁵

One cannot help but be struck by the composition of the SU trustee board. Missing are the historians, poets, artists, scientists, heads of cultural institutions, and educators. SU trustees represent top investment firms, banks, and power companies. In 1998, honorary SU trustees included Roy Bernardi, the mayor of Syracuse whose budgets devastated local schools and Governor George Pataki, who enacted the largest cuts to higher education in the history of New York State.

Professor Sorkin views the conflicts at SU as systemic rather than local. “You think that some particular conjunction of events has happened at your university, that some particular administrator got in and followed this corporate model,” he said. “But every place you go, you find the exact same phenomenon has occurred. The language is the same, the rationales are the same. It would be interesting to see the mechanism by which this is achieved.” Sorkin believes that a long-term process is underway “for universities to be absorbed into the capitalist economy, into capitalist culture, and the capitalist way of organizing things,” since “it’s natural for capitalism to penetrate every institution and reorganize it along its own lines.” Gregory sees events at SU in a similar light. “What’s being said here is being said at a dozen universities throughout the northeast. The same story. The same dehumanization,” she said.

Even so, faculty, employees and students spoke of a new feeling in the air, of exchanged looks of complicity in hallways, dining halls, and parking lots. “They [the

²⁵ Shaw, “Building On Strength: 7

administration] thought the strike would fracture this campus, but it has actually brought everyone together,” said union representative Coert Bonthius.²⁶

The union victory surpassed the guarantees in the new contract. The strike ended the invisibility of those who clean the floors, prepare the food, mow the lawns, and fix the heaters. It revived a sense of identity and community, bringing Shahn’s powerful compassion to our remembrance, and his mural to life.²⁷

²⁶ Sapna Kollali, “Faculty Leads Chapel Protest,” *Daily Orange*. September 3, 1998: 1, 3

²⁷ An earlier version of this essay was published in the September 1999 issue of *Monthly Review*. A sequel to this story, “‘I’m Lost But I’m Making Record Time’: A Successful President Transforms Syracuse University,” appeared in *New Politics*, Vol. IX, No. 1 (New Series), Summer 2002, pp. 180-192. For a recent view on the militarization of SU, see Linda Ford and Ira Glunts, “Syracuse University Enlists in the Global War on Terror,” August 3, 2007, *Counterpunch*, online at: www.counterpunch.org/ford08032007.html.