

Andor Skotnes, History, The Sage Colleges

Candidate Biography

I am experienced in both academic life and labor activism.

As a veteran of the sixties movements, I was, in 1969-1970, part of a group of workers that organized Heath Ceramics in Sausalito, California, into the International Longshore and Warehouse Union. Subsequently, I went to graduate school at Rutgers University in the working-class history program, where I first joined the AAUP.

In the late 1970s, I left graduate school ABD and worked as an activist with several unions in California, including the Oil, Chemical, and Atomic Workers. In the mid-1980s, I returned to my dissertation, receiving my Ph.D. in U.S. history in 1991. Simultaneously, I returned to the academy, first as assistant director of the Oral History Research Office at Columbia University in NYC, then as a history professor at The Sage Colleges in Troy, NY. At Sage I re-encountered the AAUP and rejoined. Nationally, I became a founding steering committee member of Scholars, Artists, and Writers for Social Justice (SAWSJ), a group launched in conjunction with President John Sweeney and the AFL-CIO leadership.

In 1998, with deteriorating conditions at The Sage Colleges, a group of us mounted a successful faculty union drive, which, within a year, signed up 80% of the fulltime faculty. However, the NLRB denied us organizing rights, citing the Supreme Court's Yeshiva University decision. We then turned to our weakened faculty governance system as a vehicle for resistance, and for 6 years I served as chair

of the faculty. In 2008 we finally ousted the administration that was strangling Sage, and the colleges are now in recovery mode, with enhanced faculty governance power.

During my Sage years I continued scholarly work, and I am publishing a book on the labor and Black freedom movements in the 30s and 40s with Duke University Press next year.

Candidate Statement

I went into some detail in my biographical statement to indicate my experience with and my commitment to unionization in general, the rights of academic labor, organizing in private as well as public colleges, and using multiple strategies to strengthen faculty governance and power. I have long believed that the AAUP should be—and often has been—at the center of faculty organizing in this country. It also has been, and should continue to be the all-sided defender and promoter of US higher education. If I were elected to the AAUP Council, I would actively support the organization's efforts to extend academic freedom, faculty rights, and quality education. I would work to strengthen and broaden AAUP's collective bargaining activities in public higher education, among teaching assistants and graduate students, and in the private colleges.

However, in terms of private sector organizing, as we at The Sage Colleges learned when the NLRB refused our petition for collective bargaining rights, the Yeshiva University decision, which classifies private college faculty as management, continues to be a major obstacle. Here I believe the AAUP needs a vigorous two-prong approach. First, we need to enhance our efforts to lobby for legislation (long promised by liberal politicians) that would

negate the Yeshiva Decision. Second, we need to rethink our approach to non-collective bargaining chapters of the AAUP, and to experiment with new forms and strategies for these units. The last is of immediate personal interest to me, because, in the wake of our long but ultimately successful battle to overturn a disastrous administration at The Sage Colleges, it is now imperative that we build an effective AAUP advocacy chapter to defend and extend that victory.

We need to recognize that we are in the midst of particularly difficult times, with the ongoing economic crisis threatening higher education in general, and faculty rights in particular. A strong AAUP, with strong collective bargaining and advocacy chapters in all types of institutions, that is willing to reach out to and ally with organized employees of all types within the academy and without, is our best defense.