

TEMPLE ASSOCIATION OF
T A U P
UNIVERSITY PROFESSIONALS

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Phil Yannella memorial – May 3, 2017

by Art Hochner

[These are the remarks that Art Hochner delivered at a Memorial for Phil Yannella (1940-2017), held at the Center for the Humanities at Temple.]

Phil was an important part of Temple's history. Let me start by reading a few passages from the Temple *Faculty Herald*.

Headline in the November 9, 1984 edition – **AAUP Heads Toward Nov. 15 Strike Deadline**

"If there is no contract by November 15, then AAUP will go on strike." AAUP President Yannella revealed the union executive board's decision at a news conference on Friday, November 2 claiming that while some progress had been made in the negotiations, the overall pace and tenor of the proceedings had bogged down and had reached impasse on several important issues.

The executive board action came ten days after the membership had overwhelmingly authorized a series of steps, including a strike, in order to receive a just and equitable contract. At Oct. 23 meeting, the rank and file was given a progress report on the contract talks.

While this was a group effort, Phil led the way. This was the first strike threat in the 11-year history of the union. That strike was averted by a settlement in the wee hours of November 15 that brought a two-year contract.

From the *Faculty Herald* edition of October 24, 1986, the headline read:

TEMPLE FACULTY ON STRIKE!

At 12:01 a.m., Monday, October 6, the bargaining unit represented by the American Association of University Professors went on strike. The strike of 1100 Temple faculty, librarians, and academic professionals was the first in the 102-year history of Temple University and came after fourteen years of collective bargaining experience at Temple. The immediate effect of the strike was the near total shutdown of most parts of the university.

Strikers gathered at 7:30 Monday morning in front of McGonigle Hall for a mass rally. The first moment of drama came when campus police, aided by the Civil Affairs unit of the Philadelphia Police Department, cleared all striking faculty from the entrance. Regrouped on the sidewalk, the strikers shared a festive feeling, even as chill breezes whipped their placards about. Members of the local media circulated in the crowd harvesting quotes, and tape cameras whirred, collecting images of well-dressed, primarily middle-aged scholars and teachers rehearsing their new roles as strikers.

Dr. Philip Yannella (CAS/English), AAUP President, addressed the 100 picketers. Unlike the narrowly-averted strike two years earlier, he explained, there was no “midnight miracle” because the two sides were too far apart. ... Dr. Yanella, perched on the stone wall and clutching a bullhorn, advised the strikers that no settlement was in sight and that administration was interested only in breaking the union.

Rallying the crowd, Dr. Yannella told his members that the administration never believed AAUP could organize the strike, but that they were clearly mistaken. He warned, however, that the walkout could last for weeks unless the strike remained firm and pressure from all sectors (AAUP, students, other unions on campus, and the larger community) were exerted on the administration. The crowd cheered enthusiastically, then proceeding to their picketing stations.

I, of course, was part of that crowd. Indeed, I was the coordinator of the strike, organizing the picketing, training and working with the picket captains, meeting with strikers out in front of Temple buildings on the Main, Health Science, Ambler, and TUCC Campuses.

I had met Phil before the 1984 almost-strike through the union membership meetings held in early fall, wanting to get involved. However, I was up for tenure review that semester, so I got the advice to lay low. Phil impressed me and many others with his ability to persuade, to get faculty who were reluctant to even contemplate a strike to vote overwhelmingly in favor of one.

Of course, the anger among faculty was palpable. The administration of President Marvin Wachman in April 1982 had issued letters of retrenchment, informing 52 tenured and 5 untenured faculty they would be fired by the end of October 1983. Thirty-five of the letters went to Education faculty, 14 to Liberal Arts, 4 to Tyler, 3 to Pharmacy, and 1 to Allied Health faculty. The reaction by the overall faculty was first of shock and horror, and then became anger.

Phil's presidency was born out of this crisis, due to the ineffectual response by the local AAUP leadership. By the end of 1983, Phil had gotten himself elected AAUP President. He and his team turned the union in a radically different direction, away from the previous AAUP leadership's too-mild approach towards a much more militant union.

He and his team rewrote the union's constitution, doing away with the indirect election of the officers by the Executive Committee and instituting direct election of officers by the members. They researched where the money was being spent by the administration and wrote of the skewed priorities of the by-then Liacouras administration. And they talked the language of rank-and-file faculty.

Before we went on strike, we held informational pickets outside Sullivan Hall. We picketed outside Veterans Stadium at the Temple Homecoming football game. Overhead, a small plane that Phil had hired flew with a long banner calling on Temple to negotiate with its faculty. We had radio ads on KYW-NewsRadio1060AM highlighting faculty who were having trouble making ends meet or whose professional dignity was being undermined by administrative decision-making.

After the 1986 strike ended – with a whimper in a settlement forced on us by a judge in his chambers at Common Pleas Court in City Hall – Phil told me I should run for president. He got other members of the EC to talk me into it as well. So, I ran and won a contested election, becoming president exactly 30 years ago this week.

Now I am an ex-president, and I join Phil in that status. I want to say that I owe – we all owe – Phil a great debt of gratitude for showing us what guts, leadership, eloquence, organization, research, and unity could accomplish.

Thank you, Phil, wherever you are.

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