

# “Three Cheers for the United Aggregate Tribunal!”: Confronting Anti-Union Discourse, Then and Now

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ON Tuesday, September 27, 2022, Skidmore College’s non-tenure-track (NTT) faculty voted to unionize. As one of the lead organizers of the campaign, I sat in my sweaty, windowless office with our liaison from the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), watching on Zoom as a representative from the National Labor Relations Board counted the ballots. Our victory was the culmination of years of effort—in late 2018 a small band of faculty organizers began reaching out to NTT colleagues across campus, from all walks of life, to build support for a union. To avoid endangering ourselves by alerting the employer and to form a strong community network, the process entailed an infinite series of one-on-one meetings with colleagues in which we had difficult, emotional conversations about the most intimate details of our economic and professional lives. The constant turnover of NTT faculty and, then, the challenges of the pandemic made it feel like we were getting nowhere until, suddenly, it worked. Seeing the victory secured was one of the best moments of my life. Crying and hugging fellow organizers in the hallway that afternoon and at the party that night, I felt the thrill of successful teamwork in a way that I never had before. The next day I left for NAVSA, where I presented a paper on the temporalities of religion in Charles Dickens’s *Barnaby Rudge* (1841).

This whiplash experience reflects the way that my life as a union organizer and as a Victorianist has often felt sharply divided. Academic labor activism must swim upstream of the ideological currents of individualism and meritocratic hierarchy that define the academic ethos. Not unique to higher education workers, these challenges stem from the larger “do what you love” mentality that, as Miya Tokumitsu observes, not only discredits workers in socially necessary but unlovable jobs but also encourages those in desirable high-status jobs to accept poor

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working conditions.<sup>1</sup> A colleague from another Skidmore department once explained, “The difference between you and me, Ruth, is that for you, it’s just a job, but for me, it’s a career.” Academics tend to see our work as a profession, a calling, a form of intellectual entrepreneurship—anything but work.

Yet to be a *Victorianist* and a labor activist adds another wrinkle. Arguably, it is to study the enemy. The Victorian industrial novel is one of the great conduits for the incorporation of anti-union sentiments into a liberal mainstream. I’d stick by that broad claim, but for the moment, I’ll ground my discussion in Dickens’s *Hard Times* (1855). I am not the first to lament the novel’s searing critique of trade unionism.<sup>2</sup> But, as I’ll sketch briefly, the novel outlines several claims that directly comprise modern anti-union discourse and that I saw straightforwardly rehearsed during the unionization campaign in which I participated. *Hard Times* does not just register the management counterdiscourse that emerges alongside organized labor in the nineteenth century. Rather, it slightly revises that discourse to offer a more palatable but equally anti-union message that has remained remarkably resilient within the liberal mainstream, despite dramatic changes over time to the structure and characteristics of work. As an organizer and a Victorianist, I argue that we have ethical obligations in studying and teaching this text, and others like it, in light of the afterlives of its anti-union rhetoric. Any comparison between the struggles of the nineteenth-century handloom weaver and today’s contingent faculty member risks appearing ungrateful for the improved living standards achieved—often by unions—in the intervening years. But the comparison gets at a basic and yet consistently denied truth about being a scholar: that academic work is work and needs to be fairly compensated.

### THIRD-PARTYING

Key to the anti-union ideology of *Hard Times* is a distinction between the laborer and the union organizer. *Hard Times* loves the laborer Stephen Blackpool but hates the organizer Slackbridge. Book 2, chapter 4 (“Men and Brothers”) introduces Slackbridge through an uncredited monologue of heady exhortations addressed to an assembly of “down-trodden operatives of Coketown” and reminiscent of the ruthlessly empirical schoolmaster Mr. Gradgrind’s opening panegyric to “facts, the one thing needful.”<sup>3</sup> The contrast between the organizer and the laborer could not be more emphatic:

As [Slackbridge] stood there, trying to quench his fiery face with his drink of water, the comparison between the orator and the crowd of attentive faces turned toward him, was extremely to his disadvantage. Judging him by Nature’s evidence, he was above the mass in very little but the stage on which he stood. In many great respects he was essentially below them. He was not so honest, he was not so manly, he was not so good-humoured; he substituted cunning for their simplicity, and passion for their safe solid sense. (131)

Notwithstanding the Slackbridge/Gradgrind comparison, the narration exhibits a Gradgrindian redundancy and insistence in distinguishing Slackbridge from the laborers. Slackbridge is not—I repeat *not*—one of the Hands. Standing on a platform, he is physically separated from the workers he seeks to organize, elevated above them in a way that reverses the true hierarchy, as the novel ponderously explains.

In modern organizing circles, this emphasis on the outsider status of the union and its representatives is called “third-partying.” It serves to suggest either (in management’s view) that the union parasitically inserts itself between employer and employee for its own gain or, alternately (in this novel’s view), that the union represents a rock to the employer’s hard place, with the worker stuck between them. These two ways of triangulating the relationship among management, labor, and the union differ in their attitude toward management but share a hostility toward the union. Dickens promptly illustrates that Stephen is caught between the rock that is Mr. Bounderby and the hard place that is Slackbridge. Slackbridge neither says nor solicits anything about the wages or working conditions at Bounderby’s mill before urging the Hands to “resolve for to subscribe to the funds of the United Aggregate Tribunal, and to abide by the injunctions issued by that body for your benefit, whatever they may be” (132). Thus the union extorts dues and imposes arbitrary rules onto its members, providing little in return. By organizing the hand-loom weavers of Coketown, Slackbridge would subordinate their needs to those of the United Aggregate Tribunal, a shadowy external organization about which we learn nothing.

As a union organizer, I have seen this exact same logic in action. Skidmore College leadership sought rhetorically to distinguish NTT faculty from “the union.” After our campaign went public, they repeatedly emphasized that NTT faculty are “valued contributors to our community as teachers, scholars, advisers, facilitators, and coordinators,” as the college president put it in an email on May 2, 2022. At the very same time, the office of the dean of the faculty hastily produced a website that attempted to discourage NTT unionization under the guise of

providing neutral answers to frequently asked questions. Before being revised under pressure from tenured allies, the website initially defined a labor union as “a *business organization* that derives revenue from membership dues in return for negotiating a labor contract with an employer on behalf of a designated group of employees” (emphasis mine). This false characterization of a union as a “business” implies a financial motivation that sets it apart from the assumed benevolence of the educational institution, when in fact both are nonprofit organizations that raise revenue to meet their expenses and further their missions.

In fact, Skidmore NTT faculty ourselves led the campaign to unionize—I was there when the idea was first suggested. We contacted SEIU, which provided helpful guidance and coaching as we gathered the support of our colleagues. Yet the involvement of SEIU, though limited in reality, remained an anti-union refrain throughout the process. Echoing the narrator of *Hard Times*, a few coworkers described our contacts from SEIU—thoughtful and compassionate people in their twenties and thirties—as “childish,” “slimy,” or “pushy.” “He is not one of us,” someone emailed, after meeting an SEIU organizer at our campus rally.

#### “UNION RULES”

In *Hard Times*, Stephen’s reasons for not supporting the union are overdetermined but also a little unclear. Like the narrator, he finds Slackbridge meddlesome: “’Tis this Delegate’s trade for t’ speak . . . an’ he’s paid for ’t, an’ he knows his work. Let him keep to ’t. Let him give no heed to what I ha’ had’n to bear. That’s not for him. That’s no for nobbody but me” (134). Stephen is suspicious of the union as a professionalized organization and values his privacy over the cooperation that collective action requires. Dickens again keeps the conversation away from the underlying dire working conditions that remain an absent presence in the novel yet did motivate countless brave labor actions during this period. Stephen doesn’t defend the status quo but instead objects to Slackbridge’s interference, as though the problem were the union itself rather than the exploitation to which it is an imperfect response. In an impressive feat of worker organization, Stephen is apparently the *only* holdout. Asked to explain, he offers: “I’m th’ one single Hand in Bounderby’s mill, o’ a’ the men theer, as don’t coom in wi’ th’ proposed reg’lations. I canna’ coom in wi’ ’em. My friends, I doubt their doin’ yo onny good. Licker they’ll do yo hurt” (134). In this way, Stephen expresses a vague fear that the effort will backfire or prompt reprisal,

reflecting a skepticism, lingering still today, toward the well-supported premise that unionization can improve working conditions.

Again, I'm familiar with this line of thinking from my work as an organizer. “I'm sorry to hear that, Stephen. Would you mind telling me a little more about your concerns? What is it that you're worried about?” He isn't always willing to talk. At this point some coworkers would abruptly end the conversation, citing its dangers. (Did this change of subject reveal that the real problem was fear, or that the backfire argument was hard to support?) But often Stephen can be drawn out. In a series of long conversations, a sympathetic but particularly anxious colleague took me through several vivid and elaborate “what if” scenarios. He worried that unionization could lead from X to Y to Z, the final result being the financial collapse of Skidmore College and the loss of all our jobs. These fantastical eventualities—from which the non-union status quo did not protect us—relied on the false premise that vulnerable workers have less control with a union than without. The colleague eventually admitted that he was fearful of what would happen if we all came together to make a difficult decision, since he didn't know many people and felt awkward speaking in front of a group, but was trying to come out of his shell a bit and had appreciated talking it through. In the end, he voted to unionize.

Stephen's reference to “regulations” is a subtle part of the novel's anti-union stance too. The question on the table at the assembly is whether the Hands should unionize with the United Aggregate Tribunal. Stephen assumes that doing so would necessitate adopting their (unspecified) regulations, perhaps the “injunctions” Slackbridge mentioned. Thus the novel presents a false choice between accepting the employer's treatment and accepting preestablished regulations imposed from the outside. The novel doesn't consider other possibilities—all of them dim in this time and place, I know. Would the United Aggregate Tribunal be willing to waive the specific regulations that aren't helpful at Bounderby's mill? Could the Coketown hand-loom weavers work with a different union? Could they forgo the support of a larger organization and attempt a labor action on the level of their workplace?

As an organizer, I was occasionally asked, “Why SEIU? Aren't they for janitors?” Answer: “SEIU represents thousands of contingent faculty, including at other private liberal arts colleges in upstate New York, like Siena, Bard, Vassar, Colgate, and Saint Lawrence. They've achieved significant improvements to pay, security, and benefits. Do you have in mind a different union that you'd prefer to work with? United University Professions (UUP), which represents faculty at the SUNY

schools, operates only within the public system. (And what exactly is the problem with janitors anyway?)” Once, this question was posed by a coworker with union experience and a detailed knowledge of what distinguishes one union from another. But more often, it seemed intended to imply that SEIU was taking advantage of us, and the questioner looked disappointed that there was an answer.

Even after workers have chosen to join a particular union (and there are good reasons to pick one over another), the unionization vote occurs prior to committing to any specific “regulations,” which are determined subsequently through collective bargaining. During organizing conversations with skeptical colleagues, I heard a lot of fear about theoretical future regulations, ominous “union rules” that might someday come into play. People would make third-hand references to what happened at General Electric (headquartered just down the road in Schenectady) or Kodak (in Rochester), and I would need to call in another organizer with a better knowledge of local labor history.

This suspicion of rules and standards glossed over the fact that Skidmore’s pre-union NTT labor practices desperately needed regulation. The 117-page faculty handbook that functions as a quasi-governing document included precious little reference to the “terminal” (that is, fixed-term) contracts on which most NTT faculty were employed. There were very few policies, the policies seemed to conflict, and most weren’t being upheld. Salary disparities among NTT faculty were egregious (to say nothing of their relationship to tenure-line salaries or to the local cost of living); service expectations varied wildly between departments; and, in violation of AAUP guidelines, the college was relying heavily on serial terminal contracts to fulfill its long-term instructional needs. Bring on the “union rules.”

#### TRAUMA AND FEAR

The most perplexing part of Stephen’s resistance to the union, and what seems like the real reason, has something to do with his love interest, Rachael—he says only, “I ha’ my reasons” and later “I ha’ passed a promess” (134, 139). In a passage that appears in the manuscript but not the printed novel, Stephen references an earlier episode in which Rachael’s sister’s arm is torn off by machinery. In the aftermath:

“Government gentlemen comes down and mak’s report. Fend off the dangerous machinery, box it off, save life and limb, don’t rend and tear human creeturs to bits in a Christian country! What follers? Owners sets

up their throats, cries out, ‘Onreasonable!’ Inconvenient! Troublesome!’ Gets to secretaries o’ states wi’ deputations, and nothing’s done. When do *we* get there wi’ *our* deputations, God help us! We are too much int’rested and nat’rally wrong, t’ have a right judgment. Happly we are; but what are they then?”

“Let such things be, Stephen. They only lead to hurt. Let them be.”

“I will, since thou tell’st me so. I will. I pass my promise.” (292)

In this passage, Stephen offers a perceptive account of the way that government oversight caves to industry pressure to maintain an exploitative status quo, meaning—he explains—that reform requires worker activism. One might observe that the story of Rachael’s sister does not actually show worker activism leading to hurt, and its omission from the published novel may reflect a recognition that it demonstrates the necessity of unions. Nonetheless, Rachael doesn’t want to go there. Perhaps fair enough.

In organizing conversations with my colleagues, I learned about the most traumatic moments in people’s lives and how unions did or didn’t help. With some reason, I had assumed that most faculty were like me. A child of upper-middle-class professionals, I didn’t know much about unions until I became a member of the Graduate Employees Organization at the University of Michigan while getting my PhD. I appreciated the union and occasionally attended meetings but was never heavily involved. It wasn’t until years later—struggling to make ends meet, living in constant precarity, with little hope of a tenure-track job in our shrinking field, and radicalized by the yet-worse treatment of others—that I resolved to help unionize my workplace. For some of my colleagues, though, talk of unions raises emotional early memories. I heard about friends and family illegally fired for union activity and mass layoffs that a union couldn’t prevent. Toward the end of the long campaign, bedraggled and exhausted, I cold-emailed a colleague I had never met from another department suggesting lunch without revealing my agenda, since we were still underground; I was surprised when she agreed. After a few minutes of wide-ranging small talk, I delicately shifted the conversation to our unionization campaign for probably the hundredth time. She began to tear up—and then so did I—as she explained that unions were the reason her family had enough to eat when she was growing up, and so yes, she would join us. Where Rachael turned inward, my colleague turned outward.

Stephen is shunned for his anti-union stance. Dickens movingly depicts the pain of being outside of the solidarity, denied the smallest

signs of human fellowship, “a nod, a look, a word.” Although “the prohibition did not yet formally extend to the women,” Stephen avoids Rachael to protect her (136, 137). For me, one consequence of the organizing process is that the hostility I used to feel toward anti-union NTT colleagues has evanesced. Organizing my workplace drew upon the deepest wells of empathy that I could find. The whole thing started for me, probably, when a part-time colleague disclosed that her family was relying on WIC benefits—the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children. I just couldn’t fathom that a college that charged \$80,000 in tuition had instructors relying on America’s meager federal safety-net programs. From there, it was ultimately just a skip and a jump to recognizing that even the few hardcore anti-union hold-outs were survivors of the same exploitative system, older people who had made big personal sacrifices over the years to make an NTT career work. I know they are terrified that whatever they have eked out will be taken away, and I try to treat them with kindness and respect. I say hello to everyone; a few don’t say hello back.

#### THE FAILURES OF DISCOURSE

Once Boucherby hears about the organizing drive, Stephen is brought in for an interrogation, just the kind of singling-out that collective action is designed to prevent. Of course, Boucherby’s special interest in Stephen’s perspective reflects the way that management seeks out anti-union voices. Skidmore’s president frequently repeated the questionable claim made by a few anti-union NTT faculty that they hadn’t been contacted before the campaign went public (they had, and had indicated their opposition). Similarly, the dean’s FAQ page plainly amplified anti-union talking points—like the technically true statement that unionization itself does not immediately guarantee higher pay. Even the prompts to which it responded did not resemble the thoughtful questions that colleagues frequently asked when considering the campaign—for example, about maintaining what has been good about Skidmore’s labor practices, or how our unionization might impact the college’s poorly paid staff.

After a few preliminaries, Boucherby stages what is intended as an informative show dialogue between Stephen and himself for the edification of the visiting sleazebag parliamentarian, James Harthouse. Despite having been ostracized by the other Hands, Stephen offers a courageous partial defense of their union activity before ultimately placing the responsibility to solve social problems squarely on the shoulders of the



governing classes—the crux of Dickens’s argument. Stephen’s remarks reflect a plainspoken eloquence, astutely drawing upon the language of empiricism that should move Bounderby: “Look how we live, an’ wheer we live, an’ in what numbers, an’ by what chances, and wi’ what sameness.” Yet the conversation quickly devolves, with Bounderby threatening to “make an example of half-a-dozen Slackbridges” (141, 142). Insofar as other Victorian novels feature scenes of meaningful dialogue across class lines, that does not happen here. In this way, the novel gets absolutely right the stark limits of persuasive language under hierarchy.

For years, Skidmore NTT faculty risked our careers to raise concerns about the consequences of our precarity and low pay. At department and faculty meetings, at forums with the deans, and in the president’s open office hours, we argued again and again that our poor working conditions were an existential threat to the college’s mission and a grave disservice to our students. When I first began speaking in these settings, I anticipated a spirited and respectful “They Say, I Say” debate of the kind that I encourage students to cultivate in their writing in my first-year writing classes. I expected that my arguments would be met with formidable counterarguments: that the college’s NTT labor practices were actually good in certain respects, that they met the industry standard, or that they were expedient given limited resources. The Skidmore College administration never threatened us and always behaved professionally, but they were no more able than Bounderby to engage in meaningful dialogue. Instead, the response was anemic or, more often, absent. Department chairs and deans seemed at times unaware of basic facts, “in what numbers” and “by what chances” the college employs NTT faculty (142). No one even attempted to defend the status quo. In those rooms, we won the argument, over and over, every single time. Meanwhile, our working conditions continued to decline, and I began to doubt the purpose of teaching persuasive argumentation when it is so ineffectual.

Enraged by Stephen’s patient and distinctly unradical remarks, Bounderby fires him. Yet the novel goes out of its way to remind readers of the union’s role in Stephen’s downfall. In the scene’s absurd climax, Bounderby sputters: “You are such a waspish, raspish, ill-conditioned chap, you see . . . that even your own Union, the men who know you best, will have nothing to do with you. I never thought those fellows could be right in anything; but I tell you what! I so far go along with them for a novelty, that *I*ll have nothing to do with you either” (143). Thus the novel plays out the structural comparison it suggested earlier between union and management—two cruel, dogmatic forces whose

apparent opposition belies their unwitting cooperation to destroy Stephen's life. After all, Stephen is brought in for questioning *because* he has broken with his fellow workers over the union, and thus, in the novel's contorted logic, the presence of the union renders the individual dissenter more rather than less vulnerable to employer reprisal.

Stephen is forced to leave town with little chance of finding more work. When Bounderby tells him, "You can finish off what you're at . . . and then go elsewhere," Stephen responds, "Sir, you know weel . . . that if I canna get work wi' you, I canna get it elsewheer" (143). Thus, he articulates a lack of mobility that is very familiar to academics today, for whom the loss of one job can often force a career change and a reduction in income—as it has for some former Skidmore NTT organizers over the last few years. Notwithstanding breathless recent journalism hailing the power of the worker in the postpandemic economy, nearly all academics could not continue working in academia if they left their current jobs.

#### SHADOWS OF THE LABOR MOVEMENT

Framed for bank robbery, Stephen ends up dead after falling into the "old Hell-shaft," an abandoned coal pit on the outskirts of Coketown, the former site of another exploitative workplace. In his dying speech, Stephen meditates on this history, alluding to the government's long-term failure to regulate dangerous working conditions:

I ha' fell into th' pit, my dear, as have cost wi'in the knowledge o' old fok now livin, hundreds and hundreds o' men's lives—fathers, sons, brothers, dear to thousands an' thousands, an' keeping 'em fro' want and hunger. I ha' fell into a pit that ha' been wi' th' Fire-damp crueller than battle. I ha' read on 't in the public petition, as onny one may read fro' the men that works in pits, in which they ha' pray'n and pray'n the lawmakers for Christ's sake not to let their work be murder to 'em, but to spare 'em for th' wives and children that they loves as well as gentlefok loves theirs. When it were in work, it killed wi'out need; when 'tis alone, it kills wi'out need. (251)

Here, at least, the novel references a specific, fictional example of the reality that collective action does not always succeed. The coal miners' public petition was ignored by lawmakers. Stephen evinces a remarkable sense of class consciousness under the circumstances, rightly drawing a connection across time between the suffering of a previous generation of coal miners and the ongoing public hazard represented by the abandoned, unmarked mine. He thinks also of Rachael's sister: "Thy little

sister, Rachael, thou hast not forgot her. Thou’rt not like to forget her now, and me so nigh her. Thou know’st—poor, patient, suff’rin’, dear—how thou didst work for her, seet’n all day long in her little chair at thy winder, and how she died, young and misshapen, awlung o’ sickly air as had’n no need to be, an’ awlung o’ working people’s miserable homes” (252). In his last moments, Stephen imagines himself along with Rachael’s sister—in the published novel, this is her only mention—as a casualty of industrial exploitation.

As an organizer, I saw colleagues moved to support unionization by what they knew about labor struggles in other times and places, romanticizing the worker in ways the Victorian novel encourages. I thought about Stephen a lot. Yet despite his wide sense of solidarity with other victims of Coketown’s industrialization, all of them dead, Stephen’s fellowship never in the end extends to his actual coworkers, his “own fellow weavers and workin’ brothers” by whom he still feels “so mistook” (252). I also met colleagues who would speak with misty reverence about the nineteenth- and especially twentieth-century history of the labor movement, but who were at least initially reluctant to support our union here and now. People would tell me that unions *were* a great idea in theory but *today* are somehow usually problematic in practice. When asked to elaborate, they would wave their hands in the direction of rare, well-publicized abuses—often also from the past—before usually coming around to supporting us.

#### SOLIDARITY IN HARD TIMES

Although it could hardly compete with the thrill of the union victory earlier in the week, that NAVSA conference in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, was great too. Friends were indulgent of my voluble enthusiasm, even missionary zeal for contingent faculty unionization. And yet reconnecting with colleagues from across North America reminded me that the practical ability and legal right to organize a union are themselves privileges. Throughout the organizing experience, I called upon every privilege I had—whiteness, an upper-middle-class background, a supportive and tenured partner, no dependents, and a financial safety net in my parents. I am not Stephen or Rachael. Nor am I my fellow Victorianist at another institution in another state. At NAVSA, I spoke with scholars working in states that heavily restrict union activity and at institutions teetering on the brink of financial collapse—tenured faculty, even, whose jobs are as precarious as mine. As nearly impossible as unionizing was for

Skidmore's NTT faculty, it drew heavily upon the college's reputation for liberal values, progressive student body, institutional wealth, and location in New York State. The administration also knew this. At one point the dean's FAQ page stated, "A majority of states now have 'Right-to-Work' laws protecting individual choice, but in states like New York, workers in a unionized setting can be required to pay the union or lose their job." This was the nadir, for me, to see Skidmore College straightforwardly endorse a Republican political agenda that succeeds elsewhere in this country in limiting the power of unions to protect the most vulnerable workers.

Activism requires a reorientation around collectivity that can be hard for academics, perhaps especially for those of us with a formative love of Victorian literature. Ironically, it is a standard practice of Victorianist scholarship to critique texts that privilege individualism at the expense of structural political action and to celebrate moments that do reflect collective energies. NAVSA 2022 featured a moving performance of John Watkin's Chartist tragedy *John Frost* (1841), directed by Greg Vargo and Catherine Quirk. And yet the quest for individual excellence and personal recognition is so inherent to our professional lives, so necessary for our livelihoods, that it can be hard to bring one's extracurricular, progressive political commitments into the workplace (and this is to say nothing of the painful fact that many academics do not have such commitments). Whatever my individual scholarly merit, it is not what entitles me to the basic job security and fair pay that all instructors need.

The challenge of this reorientation around collectivity is surely evident in the awkwardness with which I have described my role in the unionization campaign. In terms of the overall number of signatures gathered, I was the most prolific organizer. I coordinated the outreach of the other organizers during the ten months prior to our victory, and before that, when it seemed like we had stalled out during the pandemic, I was the one (or maybe one of two) keeping our effort alive. In the past, I had to conceal this leadership role for the urgent practical reason that I did not want to lose my job. Now I am inspired by the values of the labor movement to self-abnegate in precisely the way I have been trained not to do with respect to my scholarship. Notwithstanding that scholarship is ideally understood as a collective labor and a service to the profession, I was initially uncomfortable discussing these experiences in a piece of academic writing that will appear on my CV. That discomfort waned as I remembered that it is essentially impossible to leverage publication into material reward or job security anyway. I've written this

piece as a call to my fellow Victorianists: first, to support union activity categorically and without reservations, and second, to understand ourselves (*all of us*) as academic workers that need to come together collectively, on our campuses and in our field, to demand better working conditions for ourselves and learning conditions for our students. Third, and at the very least, worker solidarity needs to define our approach to Victorian representations of industrial workplaces.

When I teach *Hard Times*, students are far likelier to criticize Stephen’s anger toward his abusive wife than his opposition to the union, so successful is this novel at foreclosing that question. Its virulent hostility to unions now strikes me forcefully in a way that it didn’t when I first read the novel years ago. As organizers, we should be disturbed—but as scholars, intrigued—by the strange resilience of the exact same anti-union arguments made by this text despite the rise, fall, and rise again of the labor movement in the many intervening years. The Victorian industrial novel needs to be studied (and taught) from an explicitly pro-union perspective, by unionized workers. Let’s do that together.

#### NOTES

1. Tokumitsu, “Love.”
2. See, for example, George Bernard Shaw in 1913 (“Introduction,” 33–34); F. R. Leavis in 1948 (*Great Tradition*, 245); and Patrick Brantlinger in 1969 (“Case against Trade Unions,” 48–49).
3. Dickens, *Hard Times*, 131, 7. All subsequent references to this edition are noted parenthetically in the text.

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