

## Labor Activism in the U.S. Trade Publishing Industry - Harper Collins workers on Strike

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In the context of the contemporary rise in labor mobilization and unionization in the U.S., the working conditions in the trade publishing industry have become openly discussed and politically challenged. The strike at the Harper Collins office in NYC in the winter of 2022/23 is probably the most prominent example of a vast array of labor actions ranging from unionizing efforts and working with paid union staff, to solidarity funds, public statements, and the founding of collectively organized and owned presses. All these struggles not only address the industry's normality of low pay and long hours but have also been drawing our attention to unequal access, a homogenous workforce, and how the labor of publishing is unequally exploited due to gender and racial divides.

Based on interviews with unionized Harper Collins employees, protest ephemera, and news coverage, I analyze how the strike at Harper Collins addressed and challenged the

exploitative strategies of multinational media conglomerates. I am furthermore interested in how the striking workers (re)narrated the labor of publishing and defied the idea of publishing as a labor of love, which makes workers prone to exploitation and sustains the industry's elitist and exclusionary mechanisms.

Yet activist strategies and knowledge always need to also be seen as susceptible to corporate and capitalist appropriation. Thus, my talk conceptualizes forms of labor activism in constantly restructuring publishing landscapes within gendered and racialized post-Fordist regimes of production as not just unruly and disruptive but always contested and caught up in contradictions.

**Hauptautor:** SCHÄFER, Carla

**Vortragende(r):** SCHÄFER, Carla