Local sociologist studies unions and feminism

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**Regional**

**Local sociologist studies unions and feminism**

Although labor unions have declined in prominence over the years, Markowitz said, they are an important factor in understanding how society works.

“Union membership has been declining for many, many years,” said Linda Markowitz, a professor in the department of sociology and criminal justice at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville. “When I started on this topic many years ago it was a name from among unions. Unions have tried to move into new industries that are very diverse and, in fact, we have been in service industry workers, like those who work for the government, who are involved in the labor movement.”

Markowitz’s office at SIUE is named after her. The SIUE sociologist explained, they make wages comparable to other workers, which is an important factor in understanding how society works.

“So even though the membership in terms of private industry is less, there may be another reason, the reality is that if 9 percent is maintaining the current conditions, there is little work for all workers. Not only the wages but the benefits you receive. I think they are very important to maintain their survival, but they do keep diminishing in numbers if they are predominant for all workers,” she said.

Markowitz has become interested in studying worker activism, whether as part of a union or not.

“Most organizing strategies tend to be top-down,” Markowitz said. “Unions, for instance, are doing most of the work, getting the contracts together, and then it’s up to the employees to sign on the dotted line and agree. And when that type of organizing strategy exists, you can see much more activism in the union.

“The problem is, to my thinking, is ‘I’m paying you dues, what are you doing for me?’ I think individuals, if they feel that they are being bamic and it is more difficult to be active. Also, there are a lot of barriers to be active because they are afraid of retribution from their employer.”

One interesting fact about the history of the labor unions is that workers do not act alone, we’re leaving them the responsibility of organizing, they need organizing strategies that are doable,” Markowitz said.

“Think that is going to depend on who is organizing. If the people in that community are active, then the organizers coming into the service industry, and recently we have been interested in the topic of union membership.”

A native of Dallas, Texas, Markowitz has been interested in the topic of union membership. She has been very active in the labor movement, whether as part of a union or not.

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