

# On the Line

SSSP Labor Studies  
December 2009  
Volume 3 Issue 2

## New Labor Studies Newsletter Editors

### ISSUE HIGHLIGHTS

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We are happy to announce a new newsletter editorial team. Due to Corey Dolgon moving on to an assistant editorship with the journal *Theory in Action*, Daniel Tope and Ted Brimeyer have taken the helm.

Daniel Tope is an assistant professor of Sociology at Florida State University. He received his Ph.D. in 2007 from Ohio State University. He studies politics, work and labor movements. His most recent paper, "The Politics of Union Decline," appeared in the October 2009 issue of *American Sociological Review*.

Ted Brimeyer is an assistant professor in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Georgia Southern University. He received his Ph.D. in 2005 under the tutelage of Robert Perrucci and JoAnn Miller at Purdue University. His research interests include labor studies, work and organizations, and social stratification.

We look forward to maintaining this informational forum and hearing from all of you. We strongly encourage and welcome submissions from section

Please see *New Editorial Team* on pg. 2

## Message from the Chair

*By Kendra Jason, Labor Division Chairperson*

As the health care debate rages on from living rooms to Capital Hill one thing is for sure - beyond the politics and the costs, Americans are concerned with access and quality of healthcare. On the ground level, however, healthcare access and quality are delivered through a skilled and secured healthcare workforce. The U.S. Department of Labor gives promising reports that the healthcare industry, one of the fastest growing in the nation, will generate more new wage and salary jobs than any other industry between now and 2016. This statistic is juxtaposed by the fact that a portion (about 34%) of the healthcare industry is plagued with high turnover, job vacancies, and overworked and underpaid frontline healthcare workers.

The healthcare workers who provide the most direct care to patients - medical assistants, personal and home care aides, dietary and transportation workers, for example - often find themselves ill-equipped to provide the best quality of service to patients because of staff shortages, a lack of cross-training and unsupportive management. In

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## Employee Free Choice, Health Care Reform and Economic Inequality

*By Ted M. Brimeyer and Rebekah Cole*

The percent of private sector employees covered by union contracts has been on the decline over the last 40 years. At the same time income inequality has increased to levels not seen since the 1920's. At the 2009 annual meeting of the SSSP a resolution in support of the Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA) was passed (see resolution below). The EFCA was introduced on March 10, 2009 and calls for changes to the National Labor Relations Act to counter management tactics that make organizing perilous for many workers. These changes include requiring the National Labor Review Board to allow unionization, without an election, if the majority of employees request union membership (commonly known as "card-check"), implementing mandatory arbitration if the two sides are at an impasse for the first contract, revising enforcement requirements regarding unfair labor practices during formation of a union, and requiring priority be given to cases in which unfair labor practices may have occurred in the time between the requested formation of the union and the time it enters into its first collective bargaining contract (summary obtained from THOMAS/Library of Congress<sup>1</sup>.)

The EFCA has subsequently been overshadowed by the health care debate. A quick content analysis using Lexis-Nexis and the key phrase "Employee Free Choice Act" found 57 articles and transcripts between March 10, 2009 and November 23, 2009 from The New York Times, The Washington Post, and National Public Radio addressing the legislation. Only 13 of these articles have appeared since the introduction of the

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*"We are reminded that we, the people, cannot sit back and hope for legislative action to bring about change; we need to make change happen."*

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members. If you have a forthcoming or recently published book we want to publish an abstract of it.

We also encourage submissions of dissertation abstracts and other alerts of our members' excellent scholarship. Please send information on conferences, political activity, workplace issues, labor oriented activism, and any other relevant material(s).

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addition, they most often have little or no specialized education and training, are living under or just at the poverty level, and face other socioeconomic barriers that complement racism and sexism that leave them without means to provide for their individual welfare, not to mention that of their assigned patients. In fact, a study by PHI reported that in 2008, more than 1 in every 4 direct care health care workers did not have health coverage and direct healthcare workers under the age of 65 are found to continuously have higher rates of uninsurance than the general public (26.1% and 17.3% respectively). There are hospitals, long-term health care facilities and other community and behavioral health centers that have acknowledged the structural disadvantage their workers face. These organizations often desire to train and promote their in-house workers by partnering with progressive workforce development programs, but these efforts often negate the core issues of the working poor and working-class - labor inequality that constrain these workers' life options. Union organizing is critical.

*Message from the Chair* continued on pg. 3

## 2010 SSSP Labor Division Paper Competition

### 2010 Call for Student Paper Competitions and Outstanding Scholarship Awards

#### LABOR STUDIES DIVISION

#### Deadline 5/1/2010

One of the most important activities of the Labor Studies Division is to recognize the work of graduate students. As in the past, the division is soliciting graduate student papers that build on the legacy of the late Harry Braverman. The Award consists of a \$200 cash prize and a ticket to the annual SSSP awards banquet. The Braverman tradition includes work in a variety of areas, including (but not limited to): labor process studies, critical organization studies, research on the intersections of gender, race, and class at work, technical and organizational change and its impact on work culture, labor movements and resistance in the workplace, critical perspectives on labor markets and occupational transformation. Papers co-authored with faculty members will not be accepted. Single authored papers by graduate students and papers co-authored by graduate students are welcome. All papers will be evaluated by a committee composed of at least three Labor Studies Division faculty scholars. E-mail your paper and a short letter of submission identifying your graduate program to: Kendra Jason [kjjason@ncsu.edu](mailto:kjjason@ncsu.edu).

### Student Paper Competitions and Outstanding Scholarship Awards Committee Needed

The Labor Studies Division is in need of 3 faculty members to serve as committee members to judge our student paper competition, The Harry Braverman Award. Please contact Kendra Jason ([kjjason@ncsu.edu](mailto:kjjason@ncsu.edu)) if you are interested.

#### *Message from the Chair from page 2*

Currently about 10% of workers in the healthcare industry are unionized. There is a great push for organization by the nation's two largest health care unions, the SEIU and National Nurses United (a recent merger between the California Nurses Association/ National Nurses Organizing Committee, United American Nurses, and Massachusetts Nurses Association) to multiply efforts to pass the Employee Free Choice Act and generate a louder voice for nurses and other direct care workers. Setting the stage through rallying, conventions, and legislative advocacy, the demand for safe workplaces and fair employment compensation cannot be ignored.

The healthcare industry is a model of low union membership and fragmented union efforts; however, as exemplified by the nurses' associations and unions, the strength of organization remains powerful and effective. As sociologists and advocates of the working-class and workers' rights we should increase our efforts to pass the Employee Free Choice Act, support the NNU and promote Senate bill, S 1031, the National Nursing Shortage Reform and Patient Advocacy Act, which is modeled after the successful California law establishing RN-to-patient safe staffing ratios, and remain vocal and active about union organizing.

I would like to take a moment to sincerely thank Reuben Roth, Michelle Koontz and Michael Schwalbe for assisting in my transition into the role of chair for the Labor Studies Division. I would also like to thank, our co-editors, Ted Brimeyer and Dan Tope for volunteering and doing a great job on our newsletter. I hope you enjoy this edition and I encourage you to contribute to the next newsletter. Enjoy the holidays and a happy new year!

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*“As sociologists and advocates of the working-class and workers' rights we should increase our efforts to pass the Employee Free Choice Act, support the NNU and promote Senate bill, S 1031, the National Nursing Shortage Reform and Patient Advocacy Act...”*

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**RESOLUTION #2: THE EMPLOYEE FREE CHOICE ACT (EFCA) of 2009**  
**Society for the Study of Social Problems (SSSP) August 2009**

From: the Labor Division of the Society for the Study of Social Problems (SSSP)

WHEREAS: Federal labor laws established in 1935 protecting workers' rights to unionize have eroded over the years and are poorly enforced; AND

WHEREAS: The freedom to form or join a union is internationally recognized by the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a fundamental human right and the internationally respected organization Human Rights Watch has identified the Employee Free Choice Act as a human rights imperative; AND

WHEREAS: Public opinion polls indicate that a majority of U.S. workers say they would join a union now if they had the opportunity; AND

WHEREAS: Union membership provides workers better wages and benefits, and protection from discrimination and unsafe workplaces, while benefiting whole communities by strengthening tax bases, promoting equal treatment and enhancing civic participation; AND

WHEREAS: A significant portion of employers across the nation routinely violate workers' right to unionize through surveillance, interrogation, harassment, intimidation, coercion, harassment and discharge of workers exercising this fundamental freedom; AND

WHEREAS: When employers violate the right of workers to form a union, everyone suffers; wages fall, race and gender pay gaps widen, workplace discrimination increases and job safety standards disappear; AND

WHEREAS; Nothing in the EFCA alters the rights of employers to provide information on unionization to their employees; AND

WHEREAS: A worker's fundamental right to choose a union must be guaranteed by law,

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED: That the Society for the Study of Social Problems (SSSP) supports bipartisan legislation introduced in Congress, the Employee Free Choice Act, that will (1) give employees the choice to form a union by majority sign-up (commonly known as "card check") or secret ballot, (2) provide for first contract mediation and arbitration, and (3) establish meaningful penalties when employers violate workers' rights to join a union; AND

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED: That we urge Congress to pass the Employee Free Choice Act to help rebuild the middle class and invigorate an ailing economy by protecting America's employees' freedom to choose for themselves whether or not to form a union and provide them with the opportunity to improve their economic situation; AND

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED: That the SSSP officially and publicly add its name to the growing list of organizations which support the Employee Free Choice Act; AND

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED: That a copy of this resolution be forwarded to the President of the United States, all our federal elected representatives, and any other interested parties.

## Solidarity at the speed of light (well kind of)

*By Robert J.S. Ross, Clark University*

On Saturday October 19, the Boston Globe carried a report that the Governor of the Commonwealth, Deval Patrick, upset at earlier reports of the firing of 100 Hyatt Hotel housekeepers, would direct executive branch employees to stay away from the hotel chain. Hyatt, which has three hotels in the Boston area had asked the housekeepers to train workers from an outsourcing agency as substitutes in case of illnesses, etc. That was a lie. The staff housekeepers, earning about \$15/hour were fired, and a Georgia based agency, which pays about \$8/hr, became the housekeeping contractor.

Having read that report, I recalled that the Eastern Sociological Society (ESS) was planning to meet at the Hyatt Cambridge. I am scheduled to speak at an invited thematic session on “The Informal Economy: Migrants and Citizenship.” That morning I wrote to the panel organizer, as follows:

I am writing to alert you to a situation that could possibly effect our panel, and also a way that we can be proactive. The news article here:

[http://www.boston.com/business/articles/2009/09/19/patrick\\_troubled\\_by\\_hyatt/](http://www.boston.com/business/articles/2009/09/19/patrick_troubled_by_hyatt/) gives a bare bones version of another attempt to break a union and victimize largely immigrant workers. The Hyatt chain has fired ALL of its housekeepers (union) and immediately replaced them with an outsourced contractor (perhaps 50% of the wages of the first group). The labor movement has called for a boycott. I certainly hope there is a positive resolution of this matter by the time of our meeting, but I certainly will not enter the Hyatt Regency Cambridge if the workers have not in some way been satisfied.

There are two things we can do:

1. Immediately try to book a meeting room at neighboring MIT. I am guessing I can help find a sympathetic faculty member who can do it for us at no cost, but that is but a guess.
2. More importantly, if Nazli [the panel organizer], on our behalf, reports both to the whole program committee of ESS and to the Hyatt CEO that her panel is in jeopardy because of Hyatt's policies, that would in fact give the workers more leverage.

My fellow panelists almost immediately wrote back supporting this appeal. I sent copies of the message to labor activists and professors in our area, including one, Dan Clawson, who was also organizing a panel at the ESS on unions and organizing. My message was time-stamped 9:32 a.m., Saturday September 19. I received the first encouraging responses from labor sympathetic professors and organizers within one hour. The union staffer designated to work with the workers from the Hyatt (they are not union, but had sought out UNITE HERE's assistance ) wrote back by email (having been contacted by two people in my network) by 10:53 am. Rosanna Hertz, president of the ESS, wrote to me and the panel of which I am part by 5:40 pm Saturday afternoon saying she was working on the matter.

During the next week, on September 22, amidst what the Globe described as a “firestorm” of criticism Hyatt extended the health care benefits of the workers by three months. On September 25, the Globe reported that the Taxi Drivers Association said it would boycott (not drop fares at) the hotel and the National Employment Lawyers Association cancelled its contract at the Hyatt Regency, and the ESS was reported to have said it would withdraw its business unless the chain reconsidered its actions.

One week after the Governor's threat and the beginning of the ESS response, Hyatt offered the workers jobs at the contractor agency at their old rate of pay for one year. Still under fire for their blunder, Hyatt's latest offer was rejected by a vote of the workers – they want their jobs back.

On October 7, Rosanna Hertz of the ESS sent the following nested email:

*Dear Colleagues: Thank you for expressing some of the first email I received about the Hyatt hotel. I look forward to your thematic session, even more so, in light of what has just transpired (and is ongoing). I have been working on this quietly. We now feel we can release this statement. You can do with it what you would like. Best, Rosanna*

*----- Original Message -----*

*October 7, 2009*

*Dear Colleagues,*

*As most of you are aware, ESS has encountered serious labor issues at the Hyatt Regency Cambridge, our original conference headquarters hotel. In light of three Hyatt hotels located in the Boston area dismissing nearly 100 housekeeping workers, and with no resolution of a labor dispute in sight that seems satisfactory to the workers, the union or the Massachusetts Governor, the ESS Executive Committee has concluded that it would be best for ESS to terminate its group contract and to immediately address planning our annual meeting in an alternative facility.*

*We have been ... securing quality proposals from great hotels in the heart of downtown Boston for our exact same meeting dates: March 18-21, 2010. ...*

*The newly selected hotel in downtown Boston will be convenient to great restaurants, stores and public transportation. ...So, take a deep breath and finish your plans to participate in the 80th Annual Meeting. ... We ask that you be sure to stay at the conference hotel. More than ever we need to meet our room night commitment – not only to protect ESS from a potential contractual financial penalty but also to support the hotel that so quickly supported ESS in a time of urgent need.*

*We look forward to seeing you in Boston! Please let your colleagues know about this change in venue for our 2010 Annual Meeting!*

*Rosanna Hertz*

*President, Eastern Sociological Society*

*Emily Mahon*

*Executive Officer, Eastern Sociological Society*

As of this writing (October 27) there has been no further word about Hyatt's offers to the workers. Hyatt did change contractors, but there has been no further public change in the position on the firings. It is probably noteworthy that the Hyatt chain does not appear to be in distress. Unite Here researchers claim that "Hyatt made over \$1.3 billion in profit between 2004 and 2008. According to documents filed with the SEC as of early August, the company had over \$1.2 billion in cash and cash equivalents."

While proud of our little fuse-lighting effort, we are more pleased by the solidary response the Hyatt workers got from many points on the compass. We look forward to hearing that they have won even more than they already have.

## Do We Need a Federal Jobs Program?

How much do we need to increase total American jobs in 2010-2015 just to get back to the November of 2007 employment level?

1. Decline in Total Jobs in 2008-2009

8 million

2. Jobs not added in 2008-2009 to accommodate labor force growth of 1.5 million a year:

3 million

3. Jobs needed in 2010-2015 for labor force growth of 1.3 million a year:

7.8 million

=

4. 18.8 million, or 3.1 million per year additional jobs needed to get us back to November of 2007 (5% official unemployment) by December, 2015

How have we done recently without much direct government job creation?

5. Annual job increase during strong Clinton boom (1993-2001):

2.3 million

6. Annual job increase during weak Bush boom (2001-2007):

1.3 million

A Clinton job boom would leave us 5 million jobs short of 2007 rates. A Bush recovery would fall 11 million jobs short. Without federal action, we probably will not even match the Bush record. Economists predict that unemployment will rise for another year

*By Frank Stricker    frnkstricker@aol.com*

*Brimeyer and Cole* Continued from page 2

“Healthcare Reform Bill” on July 14, 2009.

The declining fortunes of the working class, watering down of health reform, and inaction on the EFCA make this year’s theme, Social Justice Work, timely. We are reminded that we, the people, cannot sit back and hope for legislative action to bring about change; we need to make change happen.

## Books and Articles of Interest

### **America at Risk: The Crisis of Hope, Trust, and Caring**

*By Robert Perrucci and Carolyn C. Perrucci*

Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2009

This book is the latest effort in a long-term project by the authors to understand the most significant transformation of American society since the Industrial Revolution. First identified in the early 1980s when many major corporations began closing their facilities in the United States and transferring production abroad to countries that provided lower production costs, the practice has accelerated and continued for over 30 years. The result has been the loss of millions of high wage jobs, often unionized and in manufacturing, increased job insecurity, and wage stagnation. The center of the “new economy” shifted from manufacturing to finance, from producing cars and household items to creating new schemes for financial investments.

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As more and more high-wage blue collar and white collar jobs were lost to offshoring and technological change, it became apparent that the U.S. class structure was also being reshaped into a polarized system with a prosperous privileged class, a disappearing middle class, and an insecure working class. Income and wealth disparities reached historic levels, accompanied by declining opportunities for a better life within and across generations.

The authors argue that the cumulative impact of this transformation over the past 30-40 years has been the loss of hope for a better future, the decline in trust for mainstream institutions, and the declining support for government programs that provide support for those who live on the fringes of mainstream society. The far-reaching effects of economic change, technological change, and organizational change extended to all levels and sectors of the workplace, family life, and community life. Thus, *the crisis of hope, trust, and caring*, which are viewed as essential for a healthy human being and a healthy society.

Solutions to the current crisis that are presented in the book are guided by the view that hope, trust, and caring are part of an integrated whole, and that solutions to the problem of hope must be designed carefully so as not to erode trust while increasing hope. The authors try to avoid the pitfalls of some current mainstream solutions that breed divisions rather than unity among Americans.



## Books and Articles Continued

**Marketing Dreams, Manufacturing Heroes:  
The Transnational Labor Brokering of Filipino Workers**

By Anna Romina Guevarra

Rutgers University Press 2009: <http://rutgerspress.rutgers.edu>

Paper \$24.95 | ISBN 978-0-8135-4634-6

Cloth \$72.00 | ISBN 978-0-8135-4633-9 | 274 pages | 6 x 9

In a globalized economy heavily sustained by the labor of immigrants, why are certain nations defined as “ideal” labor resources and why do certain groups dominate a particular labor force? The Philippines has emerged as a lucrative source of labor for countries around the world. In **MARKETING DREAMS, MANUFACTURING HEROES: The Transnational Labor Brokering of Filipino Workers**, Anna Romina Guevarra focuses on the Philippines and the multilevel brokering process that manages and sends workers worldwide. Guevarra unravels the transnational production of Filipinos as ideal migrant workers by the state and explores how race, color, class, and gender operate. At the core of **MARKETING DREAMS, MANUFACTURING HEROES** is the experience of Filipino nurses and domestic workers—two of the country’s prized exports—depicted by interviews with employees at labor brokering agencies, state officials from governmental organizations in the Philippines, and nurses working in the United States. Guevarra reveals the disciplinary power that state and employment agencies exercise over care workers—managing migration and garnering wages—to govern social conduct, and brings this isolated yet widespread social problem to life.

**Wilensky, Harold L. 2009. "U.S. Health Care and Real Health in Comparative Perspective: Lessons from Abroad." *Forum* 7(2):1-18.**

Among the 19 rich democracies I have studied for the past 40 years, the United States is odd-man out in its health-care spending, organization, and results. The Obama administration might therefore find lessons from abroad helpful as it moves toward national insurance. In the past hundred years, with the exception of the U.S., the currently rich democracies have all converged in the broad outlines of health care. They all developed central control of budgets with financing from compulsory individual and employer contributions and/or government revenues. All have permitted the insured to supplement government services with additional care, privately purchased. All, including the United States, have rationed health care. All have experienced a growth in doctor density and the ration of specialists to primary-care personnel. All evidence a trend toward public funding. Our deviance consists of no national insurance, a huge private sector, a very high ratio of specialists to primary-care physicians and nurses, a uniquely expensive (non)system with a poor cost-benefit ration. The cure: increase the public share to more than 65% from its present level of 45%. In regards to funding the transition cost and the permanent cost of guaranteed universal coverage: no rich democracy has funded national health insurance without relying on mass taxes, especially payroll and consumption taxes. Whatever we do to begin, broad-based taxes will be the outcome. Three explanations of “why no national health insurance in the U.S.?” are examined.

## LABOR SESSIONS DURING THE 2010 MEETINGS IN ATLANTA

The 2010 SSSP lineup includes a number of exciting and timely topics. Please remember to submit your papers to the contacts listed below by January 31<sup>st</sup>, 2010.

### SSSP LABOR SECTION SESSIONS FOR THE 2010 MEETINGS

#### **SESSION # 35: PERSISTENT INEQUALITIES: CONSIDERING INTERSECTIONALITIES**

SPONSOR(S): DISABILITIES, LABOR STUDIES, POVERTY, CLASS, AND INEQUALITY, RACIAL AND ETHNIC MINORITIES, AND SEXUAL BEHAVIOR, POLITICS, AND COMMUNITIES

ORGANIZER: GUIDROZ, KATHLEEN [ [GUIDROZ@MSMARY.EDU](mailto:GUIDROZ@MSMARY.EDU) ]

#### **SESSION # 84: LABOR MARKET REORGANIZATION: IMMIGRATION, GLOBALIZATION AND RACIALIZATION**

SPONSOR(S): INSTITUTIONAL ETHNOGRAPHY, LABOR STUDIES, RACIAL AND ETHNIC MINORITIES

ORGANIZER: NG, ROXANA [ [ROXANA.NG@UTORONTO.CA](mailto:ROXANA.NG@UTORONTO.CA) ]

#### **SESSION # 88: SOCIAL JUSTICE WORK THROUGH ORGANIZING - THEMATIC**

SPONSOR(S): LABOR STUDIES

ORGANIZERS: BRIMEYER, TED M. [ [TBRIMEYER@GEORGIASOUTHERN.EDU](mailto:TBRIMEYER@GEORGIASOUTHERN.EDU) ] AND TOPE, DANIEL [ [DTOPE@FSU.EDU](mailto:DTOPE@FSU.EDU) ]

#### **SESSION # 89: LAW AND THE WORKPLACE**

SPONSOR(S): LABOR STUDIES, LAW AND SOCIETY

ORGANIZER: TRAUTNER, MARY NELL [ [TRAUTNER@BUFFALO.EDU](mailto:TRAUTNER@BUFFALO.EDU) ]

#### **SESSION # 90: NEW LABOR, UNION MOVEMENTS AND SOCIAL JUSTICE**

SPONSOR(S): LABOR STUDIES, POVERTY, CLASS, AND INEQUALITY

ORGANIZERS: ALESSIO, JOHN C. [ [JOHN.ALESSIO@MNSU.EDU](mailto:JOHN.ALESSIO@MNSU.EDU) ] AND JASON, KENDRA [ [KJJASON@NCSU.EDU](mailto:KJJASON@NCSU.EDU) ]

#### **Calls for Assistance**

I am writing to let our membership know that I will be writing a paper entitled Employer Accommodation for Domestic Violence Victims -- What Must the Employer Do? What Can Be Done?

Although taking a spin from the perspective of the recently passed NY statute making it a Human Rights violation for employers who discriminate against their employee involved in a domestic violence situation, I would welcome feed back from our members as to how things are managed in their respective states.

As background, I am a 3L part-time evening law student at Hofstra Law and have been a member of SSSP for about 3 years.

Thank you.

- Luz E. Gonzalez (luzeneida1@gmail.com)