

On the Line

SSSP Labor Studies

Editor's Introduction

Welcome. It may be presumptuous to label this issue Volume 1, Number 1. I would ask anyone with more historical knowledge or copies of past newsletters pass them along. In fact, I'd like to dedicate a future issue of the newsletter to presenting a little historical overview of the section. Please contact me at cdolgon@worchester.edu

Similarly, if anyone has a brief "action" piece about organizing they're involved in or personal narratives about actions like Rueben Roth's article on Ben's Deli in this issue, please send it along. We are at our best when we are talking about how our work emanates from and adds to the struggle for labor rights and social justice

Finally, I hope to include interesting-



Newest Labor activist and member of Dolgon Family, Ruby Hannah . Please send info about other additions to the masses.

meetings, grant and research opportunities, calls for papers and publications, etc. that might be of interest to people in the section. Please feel free to send comments and any ideas for improving it in the future.

A Message From the Chair

Greetings from Wichita, Kansas. As I write on November 8, the day after the midterm elections, it is clear that United States citizens have voted to change course. In conservative Kansas, we ridded ourselves of State School Board members who wanted to ban evolution from being taught in schools, an Attorney General (Phil Kline) who had used his public office to wage a personal battle against abortion and a House Representative (Jim Ryun) who once impressed his followers by speaking in tongues at a campaign event. At the national level, Democrats have taken control of the House and Senate and Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, has resigned. (continued, p. 2)

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December 2006

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Message from the Chair (continued)

Many Democrats were elected based on a promise that they will not only change course in Iraq, but also improve the state of working America. At the top of their agenda is a proposed increase in the federal minimum wage, which would be the first since 1997. Health-care, social security and regressive taxation are also top issues of concern for the new Democratic majority. Will all the problems of workers be solved by a less conservative congress? Of course not, but today is the first day in a very long time that I am hopeful that my government will work to reduce at least some of them.

I hope when we meet in New York next summer, we can talk about progress that has been made as we direct our scholarship and activism toward future challenges. In Montreal I attended many interesting and informative labor studies sessions and next year's sessions look equally promising. I want to encourage everyone to respond to the call for papers posted online at the SSSP website and which you should have received in your mail. You can also view the information in this newsletter. Please submit a paper or volunteer to be a moderator or discussant. I'd like to see as many labor studies members as possible involved in next year's conference.

I am also soliciting members to serve on the selection committee for our Harry Braverman award for best paper by a graduate student. If you are interested, please e-mail me and attach a copy of your vitae (chuck.koeber@wichita.edu). Additionally, please encourage your graduate students to submit their papers. Details of the competition are listed in this newsletter.

Finally, please respond to the call for feedback for the article I am writing on behalf of our section for the updated edition of the SSSP publication, *Working Toward a Just World*. This will be a great opportunity to reflect upon and solidify the core ideas and values of our section.

Have a pleasant holiday season. I wish you all the best for 2007 and look forward to seeing you in the Big Apple. I hope we will be able to discuss the new federal minimum wage and other important U.S. policy changes that have taken place. Wouldn't that be a welcome change? Until then, keep hope alive!

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CALL FOR NOMINATIONS: LABOR STUDIES CHAIR (2007-2009)

The SSSP Labor Studies Division announces a call for nominations for the position of Division Chair. This position has a term of two years (effective 2007 at the meetings in New York and ends at the 2009 meetings). Nominees must be current members of the Society for the Study of Social Problems. The division encourages all members to either consider service in this position or to recommend other members who they feel would serve the Division well. All Labor Studies Division members will be eligible to vote in the Division Chair election. Please send your nominations to the current Division Chair: Charles Koeber; chuck.koeber@wichita.edu.

Looking for Deli in All the Wrong Places

By Rueben Roth

As a born and bred Montrealer, one of the things I could always count on was a city that fed me well and provided plenty of choices. But with all those gastronomic options it was possible to go wrong in so many ways. For example, in the historic Montreal neighborhood known as “The Main” (immortalized by author Mordechai Richler in his novels *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* and *St. Urbain’s Horseman*) our bagels were bought from Fairmount Bagel, not from its nearby competitor St. Viateur Bagel. Likewise, in my family it was almost a sin to buy our smoked meat sandwiches from anyplace other than Ben’s Delicatessen. When out-of-towners order up their ‘all fat’ sandwiches from say, Schwartz’s or Dunn’s, I can hear my inner self saying, “that *drek?* Feh.” For me, a meal at Ben’s was like eating at home, only without the guilt and interrogation.

This brings me to the recent mid-August SSSP and ASA conferences that took place in Montreal. I haven’t lived in my hometown for almost 30 years now, but I could hear the food beckoning. I *needed* a sandwich that had character and was brimming with tasty gobs of juicy fat. Nothing less than a Ben’s smoked meat would do. But my wife and I trekked there only to find, of all things, a picket line that consist about fifteen workers carrying signs garnished with handwritten contract demands and the logo of their union, the “CSN” (Confédération des Syndicats Nationaux or the Confederation of National Labour Unions – one of Quebec’s largest unions). It turned out that Ben’s staff had been on strike since July 20th. We stopped a small group of older workers and pelted them with questions. When I asked what the issues were I was told, almost in unison, “*respect*.” I expressed my surprise at the fact that restaurant staff (and incredibly, a standalone, non-chain restaurant) was unionized, and they told me that this had been the case for decades.

R-E-S-P-E-C-T

The upshot is that all 22 of Ben’s staff had been on strike for over three weeks over improved working conditions, better pay, and a measure of dignity. The striking workers explained that current management “lacked a feel” for the restaurant business and felt that management’s professionalism was in short supply. They handed me a leaflet that explained:

[m]any amongst us have worked at Ben’s for decades and we have helped build the Ben’s reputation that has lasted 98 years. Unfortunately the environment in which we work has deteriorated to the point where only a strike can get us the respect we deserve.

Striking Ben’s workers claimed that their former boss, (the son of Ben’s founder) had always treated them well, but after he passed away his heirs simply didn’t know how to treat people – both customers and workers alike. One 25-year employee, a cashier, described her embarrassment at the treatment of customers by management. She also recounted how workers had often stayed behind for hours, serving customers well beyond the end of their (now unpaid) shift out of a sense of obligation and respect for the history of a Montreal institution. These workers cared more about their restaurant’s reputation than Ben’s owners did. But it was equally clear that they also cared deeply about their own dignity and, in the interests of social justice, attaining a measure of respect from management. These are hopeful signs heralding a resurgence in working-class consciousness, and it’s reminiscent of the research I’ve conducted among Oshawa’s unionized autoworkers, members of the Canadian Auto Workers union (CAW) on their *oppositional* working-class consciousness (Roth, 2005). (continued, p.4)

Looking for Deli (continued)

What's Love Got to Do With It? The Dignity of Ordinary People

Workers have always hungered for more dignity than their employers have been willing to shell out. Sensitive ethnographers (see for example Kadi, 1996) have already documented the degradation of working peoples' knowledge and the difficult-to-shed images of working-class 'stupidity' that remains embedded in middle-class culture. Sennett and Cobb (1972) explored this question over 30 years ago in *The Hidden Injuries of Class* and came to the conclusion that:

... society injures human dignity in order to weaken people's ability to fight against the limits class imposes on their freedom (1972: 153).

Rather than weaken their resolve in the face of this onslaught, Ben's workers and their counterparts elsewhere refuse to give up their dignity, and so their current demands for respect from their employer aren't very surprising. After all, we may be witnessing a similar phenomenon with the success of the "Justice for Janitors" campaign. In fact, even in an era of precarious employment and globalization, workers located up and down the class/wage ladder have been demanding respect and recognition of their indigenous knowledge from their employers.

History teacher Bob Davis once noted that "exploitation is an ongoing fact of history)." He wrote that "battles over hunger, wages, work conditions, housing, children, schooling, politics, transportation, possession of property, etc. have always been a central part of the history of ordinary people." Davis reminded us that :

... if you take ordinary peoples' battles out of the mob violence category and put them in a category of a natural response to being exploited, you inevitably get into a coherent history of the riots, strikes and organizations ordinary people have formed to gain new rights or hold on to old ones.

I think we need to remind ourselves that what Ben's

workers are doing may well be a 'natural response' to workplace degradation.

While Ritzer's "McDonaldization thesis" (1998) might be applied to the rationalization of corporate eateries, globalized businesses and the like, it doesn't quite stick to the workers at Ben's Deli. Here is a caring group of people who want their labour and knowledge recognized, their efforts compensated fairly, and their professional integrity maintained. A little respect please. On the other hand, isn't that what most workers want?

Reuben Roth currently teaches Sociology at Laurentian University, located in Sudbury Ontario. See www.oise.utoronto.ca/~rroth for more information on his autoworker research. As of this writing, Ben's Delicatessen workers are still walking the picket line. To support Ben's workers contact CSN at www.csn.qc.ca.

A Commonwealth of Toil: Folksongs and the U.S. Labor Movement

Corey Dolgon, a Ph.D in American Culture and Sociology Professor for over 10 years, has put together a singing lecture on the role of folksongs in the U.S. labor movement. Corey is a long-time labor activist and organizer and has used folk songs to build solidarity on the line and engage students in the classroom. This lecture covers labor history from a multicultural perspective and examines the role of folk songs in workers' lives.

Corey Dolgon's "singing lecture" is a hit. Those who attended his presentation for the U of L Labor-Management Center from union retirees to active union member to academics and management were entertained and enlightened. A good time and good learning.--

John Ralston, Director
University of Louisville
Labor-Mgt. Center

For info contact Corey Dolgon
at cdolgon@worcester.edu



**Corey Performing at the
University of Michigan**

SSSP Call For Papers

Next year's meeting will be held at the Roosevelt Hotel in New York City from August 10-12. The Official theme is: **Research Matters: Creating Policy, Knowledge and Justice**. According to President Jenness' invitation, "The Society for the Study of Social Problems has been hosting annual meetings for over half a century in various cities throughout North America. These meetings, as well as the publication of *Social Problems*, bring an interdisciplinary community of scholars, practitioners, advocates, and students together for the purpose of disseminating and promoting research that critically examines problems of social life. Defined in objectivist and constructionist terms, the social problems of interest have changed over time, but the larger commitment to developing research-informed social policies that enable us to dismantle barriers to justice has remained constant..."

The Labor section will sponsor three sections:

Session 1: Participatory Research in Labor Studies - THEMATIC

Organizer: Chris Baker

W: 423-318-2578; chris.baker@ws.edu

Session 2: Labor Education

Organizers: Corey Dolgon

W: 508-929-8408; cdolgon@worcester.edu

and

Reuben Roth

W: 705-675-1151, ext. 4362; rroth@oise.utoronto.ca

Session 3: The Changing Nature of Work

Organizer: Chuck Koeber

W: 316-978-7147; chuck.koeber@wichita.edu

HARRY BRAVERMAN AWARD

LABOR STUDIES DIVISION BEST GRADUATE STUDENT PAPER

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: 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 and co-authored papers 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: Chuck Koeber, chuck.koeber@wichita.edu. Snail mail: Department of Sociology, Wichita State University, 1845 Fairmount, Wichita, KS 67260-0025.

Call for Syllabi and Teaching Resources

Walter F. Carroll (Bridgewater State College) and Lutz Kaelber (University of Vermont) are compiling the fourth edition of the *ASA Instructor's Resource Guide on Social Problems*. They welcome course syllabi, class exercises and assignments, online resources, examinations and evaluation instruments, computer software and film reviews, and essays on pedagogical challenges and opportunities involved in teaching Social Problems courses. Please send pertinent materials, as attachments in MS Word format, to Walter Carroll at wcarroll@bridgew.edu.

INPUT NEEDED FOR LABOR STUDIES ARTICLE IN UPDATED SSSP PUBLICATION, WORKING TOWARD A JUST WORLD.

The first edition of *Working Toward a Just World* was intended for SSSP members, their colleagues and their students who want to learn more about one or more areas of study and activism that are the foci of the SSSP Divisions. It was meant to provide those of us who are members of SSSP with a fuller understanding of the visions and work of our own and other divisions. It was also intended to offer colleagues who have as yet to join SSSP with a better idea of what we do within each of our divisions.

In 1997 Pam Roby, President of SSSP compiled a set of contributions from all of the Special Problems Divisions in response to the following call. In 2006 we again make this call and are soliciting input from Labor Studies members:

"The Society for the Study of Social Problems' mission is scholarship in pursuit of a just society. In this booklet, chairs and other members of the SSSP's seventeen Divisions address four questions in relation to their division's focus and the creation of a just world:

1. What is your vision of a just world in relation to your division's mission?
2. What are one or two demonstration projects, nations or states that have most effectively addressed your division's mission at any time in history and what are/were their important features?
3. What are the key difficulties that you and others working toward your division's mission face in your work toward a better world?
4. What are the five to ten key articles or books you would recommend to SSSP colleagues and their students who work outside of your Division's area but want to learn more?"

Please e-mail your response to, chuck.koeber@wichita.edu. Snail mail: Department of Sociology, Wichita State University, 1845 Fairmount, Wichita, KS 67260-0025

The UCLA INSTITUTE OF INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS is pleased to announce its 2007-08 POSTDOCTORAL FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM

The UCLA Institute of Industrial Relations' Postdoctoral Fellowship Program is designed to support a new generation of scholars engaged in research on issues of labor and employment. The program offers a unique opportunity for recent Ph.D.s to pursue research on labor and employment in an interdisciplinary setting. We will select two Postdoctoral Fellows for the 2007-08 academic year. IIR Postdoctoral Fellows will be selected on a competitive basis and awarded an annual stipend of \$52,000 (plus benefits) together with \$3,000 for research expenses. Fellows will be expected to teach a 1/4 undergraduate course while in residence and to participate in IIR colloquia.

Eligibility and Selection Criteria

Applicants must have earned a Ph.D. degree from an accredited university between 1/1/2003 and 6/30/07 to be considered for the 2007-08 fellowship year. Applications must be received by 1/10, 2007. The final selection will be announced in April 2007.

For further information and application forms, visit <http://www.iir.ucla.edu/>

American Drama And Working Class Experience Deadline: 31 December 2006 For Summer 2007

American Drama invites submissions for a special issue on Working Class Experience in American Drama. Original essays on play texts, scripts for TV and movies that explore the drama of American working class lives, the American sense of class, the spectacle of the American worker's struggle, the disappearance of the American working class, or the portrayal of the crisis of representation of class in the mass media. The essays may refer to working class experience as a physical, psychological, political or spiritual site of contestation, and they may reflect on any era of American working class history....We are interested in essays that expand ideas of "Working class drama" beyond the local to the global, that explore the pressures of commodification and reification on working class lives. Submissions for the Summer 2007 Issue are due by 12/31/2006.

All articles for American Drama should not exceed five thousand words in length and should be prepared according to the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, Fourth Edition, using parenthetical source references. On the recommendation of two readers, the journal accepts the best material it receives. The editor takes six to nine months to arrive at a decision. Manuscripts must be accompanied by return postage. Once accepted, authors will be required to send their text in digital form.

Contact americandrama@uc.edu.
