

# On the Line

Volume 4, Number 1

## From the Desk of the Chair

By Reuben Roth, Chair, SSSP Labor Studies Division



As I pen my last column as our Divisional Chair, Canadians have experienced job actions or strikes by General Motors autoworkers, auto parts manufacturers, Vale Inco nickel miners, lengthy strikes by municipal services workers in both Windsor (3 months) and Toronto (6 weeks) Ontario – all to a chorus of taxpayers and editorialists alike who loudly decry the greed of unionized workers who enjoy their ‘fat’ pay packets, expensive pensions, sick leaves and other benefits.

Yes, in the past nine months, the compensation earned by wealthy trade unionists has become an all-important issue in the land (on both sides of the 49th parallel). I’d like to devote a few words here to compensation.

But it’s executive compensation that I’d really like to focus on. For example, according to a report on CEO pay by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) “Canada’s best paid 100 CEOs tallied one billion in average total earnings” (see: [www.policyalternatives.ca](http://www.policyalternatives.ca)). That’s right, your poor cousin to the north has finally made the big time in greed.

This is the time of year that we’re inundated by the conservative media’s annual pronouncements of ‘Tax Relief Day’ – the symbolic day of the year when average workers annual tax obligation ends. So the CCPA decided to do the same for our corporate brethren. According to the CCPA “Canada’s richest CEOs pocket the average Canadian wage of \$40,237 by 9:04 a.m. January 2nd – before most Canadians have booted up their computer for another year of work.” By suppertime on January 2nd the average top-100 CEO has earned about \$75,000 – nice compensation for a day’s work.

Over the same period that saw Canada’s top CEOs increase their pay by about 28 percent, the average Canadian’s earnings rose by only 3.2% – that’s the best increase in the past five years, and barely keeps up with inflation, but even relatively speaking, it’s a tiny fraction of the top CEOs’ pay hike.

As it turns out, many of the top 100 include CEOs who work for Canada's largest banks, including those who recently received billions in federal government bailout money to purchase mortgage loans. It also includes CEOs in Canada's energy industries who, until recently, were surfing the big wave of crude oil price increases.

But I can't help but to notice that when it comes to Canada's unionized workers the story shifts somewhat. For example, this letter-writer to a Toronto newspaper wrote:

"You don't have to feel sorry for those GM workers as their UI [Unemployment Insurance] will kick in right away, unlike the rest of us who have to wait for months to get it. No matter what, they are still better off than the rest of us."

Here's another:

"It galls me that these people believe they have some inalienable right to earn this kind of money and have job security for almost nothing in return..."

This one came from a newspaper's internet commentary section:

"Are you kidding me? It's called working for a living. My husband does not work in a unionized workplace and neither do I. We work 40 hour weeks at half the wage of the unionized workers, and we have to really watch our budget. You sniveling about making a "decent" living is like a spoiled rich kid whining about how much he "needs" to survive."

While it's nice to see a rudimentary form of class consciousness alive and thriving, it's shocking to see what used to be envy of unionized wages and benefits has now been transformed into a torrent of anger of anger directed at the women and men who fought for, and won, a comparatively decent working-class wage.

Today in my national newspaper, I noticed an article headlined "In Wall Street's meltdown, 5,000 made a million," which explains that about 5,000 bankers pocketed bonuses of \$1 million or more during the recent economic meltdown. That's right, even during the bleakest period experienced by financial markets in decades, bankers have still, er, 'made-off' (Madoff?) like bandits.

While unionized autoworkers and miners are being asked to open their collective agreements and dig into their worn pockets, we're told that corporate executives' contracts can't be touched. Great ironies abound in the dissolution of capital markets, but the constant we can count on is the battle among the classes.

We meet this year from August 7-9, 2009 at The Stanford Court Hotel, San Francisco. San Francisco is a city whose history of labor struggle has shown us that conflict produces tangible change for working people. Let's learn some of its lessons.

You'll find the Labor Division sessions listed elsewhere in this newsletter. I encourage you to attend these sessions *and* the Labor Studies Division meeting. That meeting takes place on Saturday, August 8<sup>th</sup> at 12:30 p.m. and will be hosted by our incoming Division Chair, Kendra Jason. Remember that our Divisional meetings are a great way to meet like-minded folks and it's your opportunity to become active in the Division. Please take a moment to join us.

Now, I'm sure that you'll join me in warmly welcoming our new Division Chair Kendra Jason, who is organized, young and dynamic – all traits that are particularly appreciated as we pass the leadership torch to a new generation of activist academics.

This Division is a collective enterprise and could not operate without our small army of volunteers. My thanks to our session chairs and discussants, to our fantastic newsletter editor, Corey Dolgan, who doggedly pulls together the newsletter that you now hold in your sweaty palms (volunteers are welcome if they'd like to continue this valuable work), to Michele Koontz, the SSSP's Administrative Officer and the brave soul who makes all of the arrangements for our Annual Meetings, and to those of you who contributed articles and announcements for this newsletter.

I'll see you in San Francisco.

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## **Greetings from the Incoming Chair**

By Kendra Jason, SSSP Labor Studies Division



The 2009 Annual Conference in San Francisco, CA is sure to be an exciting and productive event for our division. The conference will be held August 7-9<sup>th</sup> at the Stanford Court Hotel. This year's theme is "Race, Ethnicity, and the Continuing Problem of the Color Line." Our division has met President Barkan's call to celebrate diversity, problematize the color line, and propose solutions for social inequities. We have three dynamic sessions with a strong interdisciplinary front on this year's program. One is partnered with the SSSP division, Youth, Aging and the Life Course. Another is in collaboration with the divisions Health, Health Policy and Health Services, Global, and the Marxist Section of ASA. The final Labor Studies session is a panel session. These presentations will speak to the challenges of building a more just social order utilizing labor politics.

The current state of the economy has brought renewed attention to labor. The recession has left many workers without jobs and many people struggling to make sense of their personal and community situations. Some conservatives have also tried to blame labor for the troubles of mismanaged corporate giants, such as General Motors. Under these conditions it is more important than ever for labor scholars to

offer cogent analysis to unions, policy makers, and the general public. If you haven't done so already, now would be a good time to write up an op-ed on a labor related issue.

As scholars, practitioners, students, and advocates of labor, know that we are in a key position to provide many of the answers the public needs to make sense of the current crisis and can offer suggestions to help industries, and the workers in them, rebound. The ears of the nation are open and we must press government officials, community leaders, business owners, and corporations to have a heightened sensitivity to our cause for equality, justice and respect for those who work.

In other news, I am saddened to inform you that our editor, Corey Dolgon, is ready to pass the torch and will be resigning as editor of the Labor Studies Division Newsletter. Corey has done a wonderful job at creating an entertaining and informative newsletter over the years. We thank him for the time and energy he has put in to making a delightful newsletter. That being said, if you, or someone you know, would like to manage the newsletter please let me know as soon as possible. We urgently need someone.

This year's program showcases the interests and energy of our division members. We want to build on that energy to recruit members and further diversify the Labor Studies Division. SSSP membership is growing and we want to ensure that our division is visible and attractive to new members. There are many with a shared interest in labor, work, and jobs. To help increase membership, I ask that you to bring colleagues and students to our sessions.

Budget cuts may prevent many of us from attending the 2009 conference, but I encourage you to stay informed and participate in our division affairs. Contact me at [kjjason@ncsu.edu](mailto:kjjason@ncsu.edu) for any reason and I will be sure to promptly respond. I am thrilled to take on the duty of Chair for the Labor Studies Division. It was an honor to be nominated and voted in by my peers. I would especially like to thank Reuben Roth, Corey Dolgon, and Chris Baker for their encouragement and assistance with my transition into this new office. I look forward to meeting many of you in San Francisco.

## **A Note From the Editor**

By Corey Dolgon, SSSP Labor Studies Division



A heartfelt and solidarity infused welcome to Kendra Jason, our new Chair. I have been impressed with her energy and insight very quickly and I predict the Labor Division will continue to thrive under her

leadership. I also want to thank Reuben Roth for his past years of leadership. We have steadily increased our presentations and alliances with other sections under his reign and, I am confident that had it not been for this year's budget slashing around the nation (and Canada as well), we would have continued the trend. I myself am one of those lost soldiers this year and I hope to be able to return next year and pass the editorship torch on in person. As Kendra suggested, I must step down this year as editor and I sincerely hope someone with creativity and passion has a few hours every few months to spare. It is an important and worthy task—made easier and more significant by the Division Chair and the members. Thanks to all of you who have sent me notes of appreciation and encouragement over the years—you both know who you are. (just kidding... }

One of the reasons I need to move on from this editorial position is that I have become an Assistant Editor for a new journal entitled, *Theory in Action*, published by the Transformative Studies Institute. TSI describes itself in the following way:

“We foster interdisciplinary research that will bridge multidisciplinary theory with activism in order to encourage community involvement that will attempt to alleviate social problems. As part of the mission, scholars, activists, and other concerned individuals in fields such as social sciences, humanities, and law will be invited to conduct research and become involved in like-minded various grass roots organizations. The Institute is concerned with issues of social justice and related activism, and its aim is to provide a working model of theory in action, through shared research, governance, and operation of the center. As such, the institute may provide a working laboratory for evolutionary socioeconomic forms of organization. Further, we invite literary participation through our independent, peer-reviewed journal *Theory in Action*, through which research associates, scholars, activists, and students may disseminate their research and expand thematic social dialogue. TSI also welcomes opportunities to work with national and international scholars who serve as research associates and fellows. In addition, the institute plans on collaborating with various worker education programs, labor centers, universities, think tanks, advocacy groups and non-profit organizations. TSI is managed and operated by a dedicated global team of academic scholar-activists, grassroots activists, and the concerned public. Many of TSI's members have multiple graduate degrees, multiple years of secondary and college level teaching experience throughout most disciplines. TSI also provides consulting services, custom policy papers and projects, and operates a speakers' bureau.

**Editor in Chief**

Dr. John Asimakopoulos, CUNY-Bronx

**Editor**

Dr. Ali Shehzad Zaidi, SUNY-Canton

**Assistant Editors**

Deric Shannon, University of Connecticut  
Dr. Corey Dolgon, Worcester State College

I want to encourage anyone looking for places to publish their more engaged and political work to consider this peer-reviewed journal. You can check out the website at [www.transformativestudies.org/](http://www.transformativestudies.org/) and ask for a review copy. Tell them Corey sent you.

And with that, on with the show.

# San Francisco Meeting Labor Division Sessions

## **Session 44:**

FRIDAY, AUGUST 7 4:30-6:10 PM

*Session 44:* Learning to Labor? Schools as Sites of Inequality and Struggle

Room: SCH-Fournou's Oven

## ***Sponsors:* Labor Studies and Youth, Aging, and the Life Course**

*Organizers:* Heather E. Dillaway, Wayne State University

Reuben N. Roth, Laurentian University

*Presider:* Peter Riley Bahr, Wayne State University

## *Papers:*

"Success of Low Income Students in Higher Education: Preparations, Pathways, and Choices," Ted Brimeyer, Georgia Southern University

"Teachers' Perceptions, Race, and Student Outcomes," Morgan Millar, Washington State University

"The Cooling Out Function in Higher Education: Do Financial Aid Policies Reproduce Inequality?" Terry Weiner, Union College

"The technologies of risk & safety: Education as training for work," Lindsay Kerr, OISE/University of Toronto

"Making Sense of Disparities in Mathematics Remediation: What is the Role of Student Retention?" Peter Riley Bahr, Wayne State University

## **Session 50**

SATURDAY, AUGUST 8

*Session 50:* Contemporary Issues for Workers at Home and Abroad

Room: SCH-Rincon Hill

## ***Sponsors:* Global Health, Health Policy, & Health Services, Labor Studies, ASA Marxist Section**

*Organizers:* Bhavani Arabandi, University of Virginia

Corey Dolgon, Worcester State College

Emily S. Ihara, George Mason University

*Presiders:* Bhavani Arabandi, University of Virginia

Emily S. Ihara, George Mason University

*Papers:*

“Frontline Supervisors in Health Careers: Role Strain, Stress, and Worker Compromise,” Kendra J. Jason, University of North Carolina Institute on Aging and North Carolina State University

“Globalization, Inequality, and the Legal Services Industry,” Adam Sechooler, University of Wisconsin

“One Nation, Interdependent: Exploring the Boundaries of Citizenship in the History of Social Security and Medicare,” Brian Grossman, Erica Solway, Brooke Hollister and Carroll Estes, University of California, San Francisco and Leah Rogne, Minnesota State University, Mankato

“Positive and Negative Family-to-Work Spillover: The Pros and Cons of Family,” Jennifer Puentes, Indiana University Bloomington

**Session 66 \*\* NOTE: MOVED TO SUNDAY AUG. 9th @ 4:30pm – 6:10pm**  
SUNDAY AUGUST 9

*Session 66:* Current Controversies in Labor Politics and Reform  
Room: SCH-Rincon Hill

***Sponsor: Labor Studies***

*Organizers:* Robert J.S. Ross, Clark University Steve Early, Labor Notes

*Presider:* Robert J.S. Ross, Clark University

*Discussant:* Peter Olney, International Longshore and Warehouse Union

*Panelists:*

Richard Flacks, University of California Santa Barbara

Judith Stepan-Norris, University of California Irvine

Robert J.S. Ross, Clark University

Steve Early, Labor Notes

Pub. Date: April 2009

## **More Information for San Francisco Meeting**

### **From our Brothers and Sisters at *Critical Sociology***

At the *Critical Sociology* conference being held at the SSSP Hotel in San Francisco this year, the day after the SSSP meetings, we have included a workshop on organized labor in conjunction with some local unions. The focus is on the crisis and meltdown in the newspaper industry and the imminent threat of closure of the city’s main paper, the *San Francisco Chronicle*. So far, we have a key spokesperson for a major union local lined up and will perhaps have another. We are going to throw the session open to local union members and so we would like to invite you and

everyone from your division to participate in the discussion. All SSSP members registered for the annual meetings are already automatically entitled for free registration to the *Critical Sociology* since the SSSP is a joint sponsor (for all others, registration is \$45. at the SSSP website). If you or anyone from your division would like to be listed onto the workshop, please let me know.

R.A. Dello Buono, SSSP Global Division and *CRITICAL SOCIOLOGY*

PS: During a recent visit to San Francisco, I learned that the Hearst Corporation signed a deal with a Canadian firm to sub-contract the printing of the paper in the Bay Area with non-union labor while laying off the *Chronicle's* production divisions. It would be useful to explore this and other company practices during the panel.

## ***CRITICAL SOCIOLOGY CONFERENCE***

Monday, August 10

9:00am – 6:15pm

**The Stanford Court Hotel**  
905 California Street, San Francisco

9:00 - 9:15	<p><b>Welcome and Introductions</b></p> <p>David Fassenfest, Editor and Richard Dello Buono, Latin American and Caribbean Editor Critical Sociology</p>	
9:15 - 11:00	<p><b>SACRIFICING NEOLIBERALISM TO SAVE CAPITALISM? PROSPECTS AND OPPORTUNITIES IN A MULTI-DIMENSIONAL GLOBAL CRISIS</b></p> <p>Ximena de la Barra International Development Consultant and Social Policy Analyst Former Public Policy Advisor, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)</p> <p>Discussants:</p> <p><b>NEOLIBERALISM AND THE GLOBAL CRISIS AS A SOCIAL PROCESS</b> Raewyn Connell, University of Sydney</p> <p><b>WOMEN, GENDER AND NEOLIBERALISM</b> Joan Acker, University of Oregon</p>	
11:15 - 12:30	<p>California Blue Room</p> <p>Moderator: Victoria Carty, Chapman University</p> <p><i>Participatory planning in a rural Mexican village: Lessons for community development and professional education</i></p>	<p>California Gold Room</p> <p>Moderator: Vida Bajc, Queens University</p> <p><i>Exploitation, Capital's Innovations, and the Obscuring of Social Class: Notes on an Intellectual History of the Labor Theory of Value</i> Stephen Adair, Central Connecticut State</p>



	<p>Mercedes Arce, la Universidad Autónoma de la Ciudad de México, Marie Kennedy, Chris Tilly, UCLA</p> <p><i>The Geography of the Family of Anti-systemic Movements: Activists at the World Social Forum</i> Chris Chase-Dunn, Rick Niemeyer, Preeta Saxena, Matheu Kaneshiro, James Love and Amanda Spears, UC-Riverside</p>	<p>University</p> <p>A Progressive Vision of Interpersonal Racial Inequality Theory Chavella T. Pittman, New College of Florida</p> <p>Of Innovations and Fluctuations: A Critique of the Philippine Criminal Justice System and Restorative Justice Movement Diana Veloso, Loyola University Chicago</p>
12:30 - 1:45	Lunch Break	
2:00 - 3:15	<p><b>RACE AND POLITICS IN THE OBAMA ERA</b></p> <p>Bob Newby, Central Michigan University</p> <p>Discussant Martha Gimenez, University of Colorado</p>	
3:30 - 5:00	<p>California Blue Room</p> <p>Moderator: Gregory Pratt, University of Illinois-Chicago:</p> <p>'Change We Can Believe In,' You Better Not Believe It: Politics as Usual in a Different Style Johnny E. Williams, Trinity College</p> <p><i>Corporate Status, Neo-liberalism and the Obama Administration</i> Christopher Doran, University of Newcastle</p> <p>The Changing of the Guard 2006-2009: The Rise of the Immigration Industrial Complex and the Prospects for Progressive Immigration Reform Under the Obama Administration Jesse Diaz, Jr., UC-Riverside Luisa Heredia, UC-Riverside</p> <p><i>Civil Rights after Obama</i> Suzanne Goodney Lea, Trinity University</p>	<p>California Gold Room</p> <p>Movements and Visions for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: The US Social Forum and World Social Forum</p> <p>Walda Katz-Fishman, Howard University Thomas Ponniah, Harvard University Rose Brewer, University of Minnesota Jackie Smith, University of Notre Dame Lauren Langman, Loyola University Melanie L. Bush, Adelphi University Rod Bush, St. Johns University Jerome Scott, League of Revolutionaries for a New America</p>
5:15 – 6:15	<p><b>***** SPECIAL LABOR WORKSHOP *****</b></p> <p>The Crisis in the Newspaper Industry: Possible Responses of</p>	

## Organized Labor

Carl Hall, Local Representative

California Media Workers Guild, Local 39521, TNG-CWA

*A few words from some of our members...*

### **Struggles at the bottom of the pyramid**

By Robert J.S. Ross, PhD <sup>1</sup>, Clark University



In the midst of the last Great Depression, in 1933, Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins said: "The red silk bargain dress in the shop window is a danger signal. It is a warning of the return of the sweatshop, a challenge to us all to reinforce the gains we have made in our long and difficult progress toward a civilized industrial order."

Depressions wreak havoc on labor standards. As unemployment grows workers become less able to turn down offers of jobs – even at substandard wages – and employers enjoy more leverage with their existing workers. Benefits are taken back, raises are deferred or wages are cut. Legal residents and citizens now out of work will “drop down” in the labor market; competition for low wage jobs will increase.

Many of the jobs that now pay low but legal wages are considered unskilled or semi-skilled – and many are really hard. Today’s immigrants, legal as well as undocumented are a large fraction of low wage workers – about 14 per cent of the US labor force, but 20 per cent of low wage workers., according to a 2003 study by the Urban Institute. Both native born workers and immigrants will experience pressure on their living standards as unemployment increases and endures. The restaurant workers and janitors and retail clerks --who earn \$11/hr and below -- will have to fight hard to keep their heads above water. Middle income workers will experience their living standards as sliding downwards.

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<sup>1</sup> Ross is the author *Slaves To Fashion: poverty and abuse in the new sweatshops* (2004) and Director, International Studies Stream

Some will identify the source of their difficulties as fellow workers. Blaming immigrants or minority groups was the unhappy choice of some in the 1930s, like Father Coughlin, the radio priest from Michigan – who then blamed Jews for the Depression and admired Hitler’s “solution.” Others will try to address their job problems by joining together – in unions and politics. In either case the coming days will see struggles at the bottom of the pyramid.

As there was 75 years ago, there is also a change in public mood, more sympathy for labor, and a more sympathetic administration. President Obama has appointed official to the Dept. of Labor (both the Secretary and people under her) who are historically advocates of labor law enforcement. We can hope that the proposed budget’s addition of almost 300 labor law enforcers will rein in the blatant violations of the minimum wage law and overtime abuses that have characterized the recent past.

One of the most important ways that conditions at the bottom of the pyramid were improved in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century was through the birth of the modern labor movement. Now more than ever wage workers need each other and their freedom of association to combat the pressures of the unforgiving market. But the law that “freed” the labor movement in the 1930s – labor’s Magna Carta – the Wagner Act of 1935, needs, as do many 75 year-olds, more teeth. The Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA) will allow unions to more easily be formed and it will press employers to come to terms with unions that gain legal recognition. The difference in pay for union v. nonunion restaurant workers could be about 25%, for janitors as much 50%.

Even in white collar occupations the pressures on wages and benefits is mounting. At the middle of the pyramid the same rule holds as at the bottom: As we enter a period of hard times the way out is together, the way down is division.

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## **Workers’ Rights**

**By Chad Alan Goldberg**

**Associate Professor of Sociology, University of Wisconsin-Madison**



The key issue at stake throughout most of American labor history has not been wages or working conditions, but the very right of workers to form and join unions. Whenever workers have asserted this right, employers have vigorously opposed it. Their attempts to defeat union organization have frequently involved coercion, violence and even deadly force, often backed and sometimes exercised by the government on employers’ behalf. But employers also have sought to exercise what the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu called symbolic power, “the power to make people see and believe, to get them to know and recognize, to impose the legitimate definition of the divisions of the social world and, thereby, to make and unmake groups.” This form of power became especially significant following the enactment of the 1935 National Labor Relations Act (NLRA). Following decades of struggle, the NLRA finally affirmed and guaranteed workers’ rights to organize and bargain collectively. Protecting these rights, the law’s preamble declared, helped to “ensure a wise

distribution of wealth,” “maintain a full flow of purchasing power,” and “prevent recurrent depressions.” Moreover, insisted Sen. Robert Wagner, the law’s architect, unions were good for democracy as well the economy. “Democracy,” he declared, “cannot work unless it is honored in the factory as well as the polling booth; men cannot be truly free in body and spirit unless their freedom extends into the places where they earn their daily bread.” (These truths are important to remember now, in the midst of the country’s worst economic crisis since the Great Depression, when advocates of the right-wing economic policies that created the crisis shamelessly seek to make unions scapegoats for it.) Employers were unconvinced. Confident the U.S. Supreme Court would strike down the law, they brazenly flouted it in the meantime. The Supreme Court upheld the law in 1937, but it was not until after World War II that business leaders stopped calling for its repeal.

Struggles over workers’ right to unionize did not end there, however. Ironically, the NLRA provided new opportunities for employers to wield symbolic power against union organizing because the law’s protection was selective. The NLRA did not cover government employees, domestic servants or agricultural laborers—exclusions that were racially significant at a time when domestic and agricultural labor accounted for most of black employment. Later amendments excluded independent contractors and foremen. Furthermore, the jurisdiction of the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), the body charged with enforcing the law, was limited to industries engaged in interstate commerce or whose operations affected that commerce, leaving out employees of purely local business enterprises. Writing in the *Industrial and Labor Relations Review* in 1951—during the heyday of American unionism—sociologist Robert Rosenthal estimated the NLRA covered only 56 percent of the 1948 labor force. Given the large numbers of American workers excluded from its protection, Rosenthal concluded that the NLRA could “scarcely be called either ‘labor’s Magna Carta,’ or the ‘labor law of the land,’” nor could it “accurately be called a national labor law.” Moreover, the law failed to define many of the excluded occupational categories, leaving the task to the NLRB and the courts. Consequently, Rosenthal added, “the definitions of ‘employee’ ...are for the most part changing definitions, subject to the varying temperaments and the degree of discretion of board and court personnel.” Under these circumstances, the classification of workers becomes vitally important, for it determined whether their right to unionize would be legally recognized and protected.

In my book, *Citizens and Paupers*, I show how struggles over the classification of workers were an essential dimension of their struggles to organize, bargain collectively and claim the protection of minimum wage and maximum hours laws in two revealing cases. The first case involved the efforts of the Workers Alliance of America to organize Works Progress Administration workers in the 1930s. The second case involved the efforts of community organizers and labor unions to organize tens of thousands of workfare workers in New York City in the 1990s. In both cases, powerful opponents insisted that the workers in question were not really employees—and thus not entitled to the rights and protections of state and federal labor laws. Both times, their rights were denied not because they were government workers, but because their employment was defined as a form of relief or welfare and thus not a “real” job. And, in both cases, workers understood that to secure government recognition and protection for their rights, they would need to contest their classification and establish a new vision of the social world. These kinds of classification struggles, readily apparent in the 20th century, remain a prominent aspect of labor conflicts in the 21st century. In 2004, for instance, the NLRB—with new members appointed by former President George W. Bush—overturned a previous decision and ruled that graduate student employees at private universities are not “primarily” employees and therefore not protected by the NLRA. As a result, private universities no longer have to recognize their unions.

In the 1930s, union leaders called the NLRA “labor’s Magna Carta.” Today, employers—the same employers who once opposed the law and now routinely violate it—describe it this way, eager to convince workers that any reform of the law is a threat to workers’ rights. In fact, the NLRA is hardly sacred or untouchable. It has been amended in the past, sometimes in ways that benefited workers, more often to the advantage of employers. It is both an object and terrain of struggle—and hence always subject

to change—as well as a legal and regulatory framework that will shape future struggles between labor and management. With Congress poised to vote on the most progressive labor law reform in decades, the [Employee Free Choice Act](#), American workers' historic struggle for the fundamental freedom to form and join unions continues.

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## **Secret ballot is a red herring**

By Chad Alan Goldberg

The Employee Free Choice Act would make it easier for workers to organize by strengthening the penalties for unfair labor practices, ensuring mediation and arbitration when newly certified unions cannot get a first contract, and allowing employees -- not their employers -- to choose how they form unions: casting ballots or signing cards authorizing union representation.

The bill's majority sign-up provision draws the most criticism. Employers oppose the Employee Free Choice Act to protect their power and profits, but they appeal to democratic principle to undermine public support for it. In a typical denunciation, a Wal-Mart spokesman warned (incorrectly) that the bill "would effectively eliminate ... the right to a secret ballot election." Likewise, the Coalition for a Democratic Workplace, a federation of business groups, decried the hypocrisy of lawmakers who "use a secret ballot to protect themselves" but would allow its circumvention in union-organizing elections.

Such high-sounding principles notwithstanding, it is employers who show hypocrisy and disregard for democratic practices. To say that the majority sign-up option would invite illegal intimidation of workers implies that the current system is free of such intimidation. But according to the National Labor Relations Board, corporations have in recent decades increasingly engaged in unfair and illegal labor practices, threatening, interrogating, spying on, suspending, and outright firing workers for pro-union activities. Such extensive intimidation and retribution by employers shows that the current system is neither free nor fair and that the secret ballot fails to provide the protection that employers claim.

Moreover, secret voting is not as indispensable to democracy as opponents of the Employee Free Choice Act suggest. States did not begin to adopt the secret ballot until 1888, which means that for more than a century it was not even a part of American democracy. Even today, there are many contexts in which Americans continue to vote openly without questioning the legitimacy of the results: school boards, town meetings, roll-call votes in Congress, and even (in contested elections) Wal-Mart shareholders' meetings. None of this means that Americans should never vote secretly, only that we do not and need not take the rigid position that secret voting must be mandatory in every situation.

Finally, in their zeal to attack the majority sign-up option as undemocratic, opponents of the Employee Free Choice Act recall only the abuses of public voting and not its democratic benefits. Perhaps the most eloquent statement of those benefits was provided by John Stuart Mill, the British philosopher celebrated for his defense of representative democracy, individual liberty, and women's rights.

Secret voting, Mill lamented, encourages the view that one is "under no obligation to consider the wishes or interests of any one else." This view is deeply opposed to the ideal of solidarity at the heart of both democracy and unionism. How one votes, Mill pointed out, does not concern oneself alone; voting always involves the exercise of power over others, which makes it a public trust. Accordingly, the vote must express the voter's consideration of what is best for all, not merely a personal preference. Publicity, Mill argued, ensures this kind of public-spirited voting.

While the secret ballot isolates citizens and privatizes the voting process, open voting encourages citizens to discuss and justify their views and decisions to the political community of which they are a part and to

orient their preferences to the public good. In this way, citizens educate one another, hone their judgment, and develop the virtues they need to participate effectively in self-rule.

Through their unions, American workers have struggled to extend democracy from the polling booth to the workplace. The Employee Free Choice Act would reinvigorate this endeavor -- not despite public methods of organizing, but because those methods dovetail with democratic ideals of transparency, publicity, and public-spiritedness.

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## **The U.S. Needs a New Improved WPA, Now and Forever**

By Frank Stricker, CSUDH and NJFAC



Obama's stimulus bill and financial programs may have saved us from a second Great Depression, but they haven't done much to create jobs. In May, the official unemployment rate hit 9.4% and it will keep rising, possibly into 2010. In case, we have forgotten, Obama is a Democrat. Where is the new New Deal for workers? We need a real federal jobs program for today and for years to come. Job markets are in particularly bad shape right now, but they have been lousy for thirty years.

### **Job Growth Too Weak even in Good Times, like the "recovery" of 2001-2007**

We have long had a jobs deficit and it worsened in the last decade. Population growth makes the labor force increase by about 2 million a year, so we need a lot of new jobs just to keep up. Meanwhile, the job recovery from the 2001 recession was the worst on record. In the 90s (1993-1999) non-farm jobs increased by 17,755,000 (16.2%); they grew by 4,711,000 (3.6%) over 2001-2007. So in 2007, just before the meltdown, we were already way behind in job creation. And then came **The Big Meltdown**. In 18 months, the total number of jobs has fallen by 7 million. The official unemployment rate is climbing toward 10% and is already higher in many cities and states. If you add people who want work and have stopped looking and those who are working part-time and want full-time work, the real national unemployment rate is over 18%—almost 30 million people. (For more on this, check the site of the National Jobs for All Coalition at [njfac.org](http://njfac.org).)

That's very bad, but even in boom times job growth has been weak. Not too long ago, when official unemployment appeared to be a comfortable 5%, real unemployment was 10%. And for three decades now there have been too few jobs, and as a result, employers have not had to raise pay to attract workers. So wages stay low. That's why the average real hourly wage is where it was in 1973. That is a huge change from strong wage gains of 1945-1973. Years of strong demand for workers would lift pay levels, even for low wage workers. And more income for average consumers would help the economy: less debt

for daily purchases, fewer sub-prime mortgages, and less dependence on speculative bubbles like the one that just brought us the Second Great Depression. In other words, a more egalitarian boom would be good economics. Shared prosperity works better than extreme inequality.

We need permanent government jobs program—real federal jobs (RFJs), not workfare or work relief or government as the employer of last resort, but real jobs that come with decent wages and benefits, a career ladder, and the prospect of job security. What would people do? There is no shortage of things that need fixing. Conservatives and free-market liberals have restrained public investment for many years and the results are crumbling streets and bridges, not enough slots in child-care and early childhood education, and not enough affordable housing.

**Can it be done?** The U.S. made a start in the 1930s. The Works Progress Administration employed more than 2 million people a month for 6 years. The Civil Works Administration had 4 million workers in a program that was created in less than three weeks. These workers added immensely to the cultural and physical capital of the nation, from better roads and new schools to beautiful murals and the conservation of natural resources. Yet these programs were flawed: the jobs were temporary, people were paid low wages, and the stigma of welfare clung to the workers. But the thirties had something we do not: mass movements that pushed FDR and moderate Democrats to create jobs and good social programs. Can we do it again? Can the union movement, church groups, liberals, anti-poverty organizations, the civil rights movement, environmental groups, and organizations working for gender equality unite around a program to create jobs and jobs that improve our society for the long range?

## **Some New Books and other Publications of Note from our Members**

\*\*Carolyn C. Perrucci and Dina Banerjee, 2009.

"Race, Work Experience and Perceived Promotional Opportunity"

*International Journal of Contemporary Sociology*, Vol. 46, No. 1, April 2009: 77-92;

\*\*Robert Perrucci and Carolyn C. Perrucci, 2009

***America at Risk: The Crisis in Hope, Trust and Caring***, Roman and Littlefield Publishers.

In *America at Risk: The Crisis of Hope, Trust, and Caring*, the authors identify the broad economic and technological changes that have led to the loss of high-wage jobs, declining opportunity, and increased income and wealth inequality. Taking data from a thirty-year period, they apply a critical sociological lens to view the dominant economic, political, and cultural institutions that are responsible for the decline in hope, trust, and caring

\*\*Mark Thomas. 2009.

***Regulating Flexibility: The Political Economy of Employment Standards***. Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press.

In a contemporary labour market that includes growing levels of precarious employment, the regulation of minimum employment standards is intricately connected to conditions of economic security. With a focus on the role of neoliberal labour market policies in promoting "flexible" employment standards legislation - particularly in the areas of minimum wages and working time - Mark Thomas argues that

shifts toward "flexible" legislation have played a central role in producing patterns of labour market inequality. Using an analytic framework that situates employment standards within the context of the broader social relations that shape processes of labour market regulation, Thomas constructs a case study of employment standards legislation in Ontario from 1884 to 2004. Drawing from political economy and using a qualitative research methodology, he analyses class, race, and gender dimensions of legislative developments, highlighting the ways in which shifts towards "flexible" employment standards have exacerbated longstanding racialized and gendered inequities. *Regulating Flexibility* argues that in order to counter current trends towards increased insecurity, employment standards should not be treated as a secondary form of labour protection but as a cornerstone in a progressive project of labour market re-regulation

\*\*Bill Barry, 2009.

*Union Strategies for Hard Times*, Union Communication Services.



I am happy to tell you that my new book has been published this week and I hope it will be part of an urgent discussion on how workers and unions deal (or not) with the current recession. The book has chapters on how to handle grievances, negotiate contracts without concessions, how to make your union the center of activity for active and laid-off members, and their communities. There is a brief historical discussion of how we got where we are and how unionism is the solution, and not the problem, for the current economic crisis. This book is part of a discussion on what we need to do so UCS has set up a web site <http://unionstrategiesforhardtimes.com/> that will let each of you send in new bits of information or opinion. The site should be really up and running in a week.

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## How to Submit Op-Ed Articles and Letters to the Editor

### Submitting Opinion Editorials (Op-Eds)

**Most newspapers accept op-ed pieces from guest writers who are prominent figures or members of their local community. An op-ed piece typically runs 600 to 850 words in length.**

- Target the correct paper. Newspapers are much more likely to run a piece from a local person than from someone in another city or state, even if that person is an expert. When possible, publish in your hometown paper. You also could consider publishing in the paper of the town where you grew up. You could also co-author with someone locally.
- Call the newspaper's op-ed page editor, introduce yourself, and say you would like to submit an op-ed article and describe the topic. Ask them if they're interested. Some newspapers don't accept unsolicited pieces, but most will. If you get a voice mail or assistant, leave a message letting them know who you are and when to expect the piece. Most places ask you to e-mail pieces.
- If you are offering the piece as a national or statewide exclusive, make that clear. They will be



more inclined to accept it if they know they have an exclusive, at least in the immediate media market.

- If your piece is time sensitive (it needs to run before the election, for example), make that clear when you submit.
- If the paper has been covering your topic or has published opinions counter to your opinion, make that point to the editor.
- Send the piece to the editor including all relevant titles and positions as well as the address and phone number of the writer.
- Expect that the op-ed page editor may wait a week or two to publish your piece. Keep in touch and offer to supply any extra information they need. You may call about once a week without worrying about being a pest, and more often if it's very time sensitive.

### **Submitting Letters to the Editor**

- Keep it short - - letters to the editor should be about five or six sentences.
- Find out how the paper prefers to receive letters to the editor – often it's done by e-mail.
- Make sure the author's address and phone number is included.
- If you're responding to an article that ran in the paper, respond within at most a week. Refer to the original article and the date it ran in your first sentence. Avoid being too negative.