

# On the Line

SSSP Labor Studies  
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## ISSUE HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 Message from the Chair
- 1 Braverman Award
- 2 Workplace Safety
- 3 Ontario Mine Strike
- 5 Member Articles
- 6 SSSP Labor Sessions
- 9 SSSP Newsletter Editorship

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*“The UFCW charged Smithfield management with spying on workers, confiscating union materials, threatening to fire workers who joined the union, threatening to freeze wages, and threatening to close the plant.”*

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## Message from the Chair

*By Kendra Jason, Labor Studies Division Chairperson*

Smithfield Packing Company, in Tar Heel, North Carolina, is the largest pork processing factory in the world. Every day, Smithfield’s 5000 workers kill and butcher 34,000 hogs. Smithfield Packing is also the site of one of the longest-running, and recently won, labor battles in the United States. The Tar Heel plant was built in 1992. By locating in an economically depressed area in the least unionized state (3.1%) in the nation, Smithfield hoped to enjoy low labor costs and a compliant workforce.

Conditions at Smithfield were some of the most severe and hazardous in the industry. On the ironically named “picnic line,” sweating workers, standing in pools of gore, disassembled a hog carcass every seventeen seconds. As knives got dull (no time to sharpen them), they got more dangerous. Beyond the physical hazards, workers were victims of unfair employment practices in hiring, promotion, job assignment and firing.

Soon after the plant was built, the United Food and Commercial Workers of America began a campaign to organize Smithfield’s Tar Heel plant workers. The union lost elections in 1994 and 1997. In both cases, the UFCW filed charges of unfair labor practices against Smithfield. The UFCW charged Smithfield management with spying on workers, confiscating union materials, threatening to fire workers who joined the union, threatening to freeze wages, and threatening to close the plant.

*Continued on Page 2*

## Harry Braverman Award

We would like to thank the graduate students who entered our division’s Harry Braverman Student Paper Competition. They each entered timely, thought provoking, and progressive papers. Our student winner will be awarded at the annual banquet at our annual meeting, Saturday August 14. The award includes \$200 cash prize and a ticket to the annual banquet among other perks. We wish our students luck!

## Workplace Safety: A Pressing Research Agenda

*By Daniel Tope and Ted M. Brimeyer, Newsletter Editors*

The recent Upper Big Branch mine tragedy as well as BP's Deepwater Horizon oil drilling disaster are vivid recent events that draw our attention to workplace health and safety issues. It is true that accidents happen. But it is also the case that some corporations have concealed the risks of work or abdicated their responsibility to create and maintain a safe working environment. For example, for decades miners were systematically misled about the respiratory threats of various mine particulates and it took many years to impose regulations. In another well-known example, the asbestos industry suppressed damning research on the cancer-causing potential of their product. The lack of clear warnings needlessly exposed millions of workers to this toxic substance.

We hear an awful lot about the competition imperative and the seemingly ever-present drive to cut the costs of doing business. But in the popular media we hear much less about the human costs that are associated with the contemporary workplace. It is plausible that under market fundamentalism and the associated pressure to reduce expenses workers and their families increasingly bear the risks and financial burdens of illness, injury, and even death. There are many levels of social risks and costs associated with corporate cost-saving measures (from faulty to toxic products to hazardous work environments). Researchers too have paid inadequate attention to corporate malfeasance as it relates to workplace safety.

*Continued on page 3*

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### *Message from the Chair , continued from page 1*

In addition to managerial obstruction, the Smithfield campaign faced other obstacles. When they began to demand better working conditions, Smithfield's Latino workers, many of whom were undocumented, faced a management-invited crackdown by ICE officials. As a result, about 1500 workers were forced to leave their jobs. At other times during the campaign, Smithfield management tried to pit workers against each other by assigning jobs based on race (i.e. Blacks were butchers and whites were mechanics) and having Latinos supervise Black workers, and vice versa.

In 2006, the U.S. Court of Appeals and the NLRB upheld the charges against Smithfield, ruling that management had violated workers' rights. The NLRB ordered a new election. For months, the UFCW and Smithfield managers negotiated to come up with an election procedure that would be fair and free from intimidation. In December 2008, Smithfield workers won one of the biggest private-sector union victories in labor history and chose the UFCW as their official bargaining agent.

Under the first contract, ratified in July 2009, benefits and job security have improved, though more remains to be done. Smithfield workers have nonetheless shown what a public and unwavering fight for justice can yield. As sociologists and advocates of labor we can play helpful roles by rigorously documenting violations of human rights and by putting local struggles into national, global, and historical context. In the end, it's a matter of using our knowledge and skills to help working people get back more of the wealth created by their labor and gain more control over the conditions of their lives.

## Strike at Northern Ontario Mine and Smelter inches to the 10-month Mark

By *Reuben Roth, Laurentian University, Sudbury Ontario*

By the time you read this newsletter, members of the United Steelworker (USW) Local 6500, located in Sudbury (Ontario, Canada), will have been on strike against the giant Brazilian-based mining corporation Vale Inco, for ten months – since July 13, 2009.

Once the largest nickel mining operation in North America, this northern-Ontario mine, located about four hours north of Toronto Ontario, produced 10 percent of the world's nickel, used in everything from cars to stainless steel kitchen appliances.

The strike by 3,100 USW Local 6500 members in Sudbury and 120 refinery workers in Port Colborne, Ontario passed the previous record of eight months – in 1978-79. But this time around the owners of the mine and smelter operation aren't Canadians, but the transnational corporation Vale Inco, who purchased Inco in 2006 with a promise of the status quo, including no layoffs.

Despite guarantees to the Canadian government prior to the purchase, Vale Inco quickly broke that promise, only three years into their ownership of the huge facility, Vale Inco management now claims that it must be “sustainable in all pricing cycles,” and needs a “unified approach to compensation” in its operations around the world.

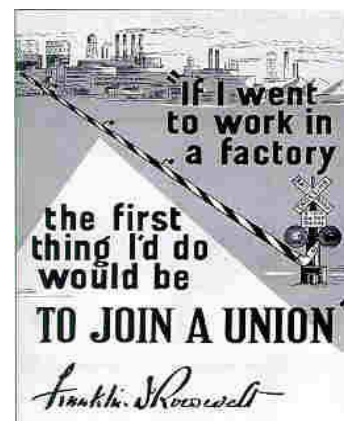
Vale Inco management offered a concessionary contract that stripped provisions related to employee transfers, retirement pensions, and nickel bonuses – a longstanding profit-sharing scheme that kicks in when nickel prices are high. Now they're asking that “Canadian workers become more competitive with workers in less developed countries,” which USW 6500 claims will bring on increased risks in workplace health and safety. All of this takes place in an atmosphere of cutbacks that have seen company demands for the erosion of pensions, wages, bonuses and working conditions.

Last October, Vale Inco managers restarted their operations with employees who are members of the office and technical workers local, USW 2020. In January 2010, Vale Inco ramped up production with the assistance of hired scabs (‘contractors’) – a first in this company that has a 100-year history of mining operations in Sudbury.

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### *Workplace Safety, continued from page 2*

For graduate students or scholars looking for new projects we suggest that engaging in a research program that explores the many factors that play into workplace safety would be a fruitful endeavor. The potential substantive topics are numerous – regulatory politics (such as OSHA and the EPA) and the legal environment, quality management practices, the quality and implementation of technology, multitasking, multiskilling, shift work, contingent work, firm relocation, workforce characteristics (such as multilingual worksites), the role of organized labor and bargaining processes, formal employee safety programs, productivity rates, and consumer pressures (just to name a few). This is an important and potentially fertile area for research that lies at the nexus of scholarship and real world application. More work should be done in this area.



*Ontario Mine Strike, Continued from page 3*

Sudbury USW members have brought out their community in several demonstrations that have brought thousands into the streets of this mid-sized city. USW 6500 members are touring, marching, picketing and calling for support from workers and communities around the globe. But in this case success really only counts at the picket lines the mines and smelters and the bargaining table, where meetings between both negotiating committees have been sparse, to say the least. After months of silence at the table, there was a flurry of bargaining in March, with Vale Inco taking a 'final offer' (barely distinguishable from last summer's first offer) to Local 6500 members, who rejected the offer by an astounding margin of almost 89%.

Vale Inco's strike-breaking and their use of scabs has been an ongoing target, with the union website filled with photos of identified scabs and calls to shun them. In the provincial Ontario legislature, a bill to re-establish an anti-scab law (Ontario workers enjoyed anti-scab protection during the social democratic New Democratic Party government's short reign in the early to mid 1990s) passed first reading in late April. The bill still has to pass second and third reading before becoming law – a highly unlikely possibility where the Liberal government has a solid majority.

Vale Inco will soon appear before the Ontario Labour Relations Board – a government tribunal – to defend itself against bad-faith bargaining complaints filed by the USW, who rightly claim that Vale Inco has refused to negotiate with the union for the better part of nine months. Local City of Sudbury councilors have recently condemned Vale Inco's hiring of scab labour and their refusal to negotiate in good faith.

Vale Inco has also been charged by City of Sudbury officials with the violation of municipal housing bylaws – because Vale Inco has been housing over 200 scabs in their corporate offices which are deemed illegal accommodations and are obviously non-residential. Plus, Sudbury city councillors voted unanimously to demand that Vale return to the bargaining table to negotiate a fair settlement. Councillors also urged the provincial government to quickly pass the anti-scab legislation now being debated in the Ontario Legislature.

Similar to the historic USW strike of the early 1990s against the Ravenswood Aluminum Company located in West Virginia, this struggle between USW 6500 and Vale Inco has taken on an international solidarity phase, with workers from Brazil, the U.S. and everywhere that Vale Inco has a presence.

But just as the two-year old strike at Ravenswood, W.V. was eventually won, so too will workers at Vale Inco's mines win. Their slogan "one day longer" has been keeping workers' hearts and hopes high for almost ten months, and given their overwhelming commitment and solidarity, workers at Local 6500 will surely last 'one day longer' than Vale Inco once this strike has been settled and they can finally claim victory.

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## Membership / Retention

If you have not renewed your 2010 SSSP membership, please do so as soon as possible. Don't forget to choose THE LABOR STUDIES DIVISION as one of your special problems divisions. We have less than 200 members and want our division to thrive. We also ask that you do at least one of the following to ensure our division's success:

- \*sponsor a membership for a student;
- \*sponsor a membership for a colleague or friend;
- \*ask for SSSP brochures and make them available at your department and/or workplace;
- \*encourage fellow SSSP members to join the Labor Studies Division;
- \*promote SSSP to your students, colleagues, and peers;
- \*become (or continue to be) active at annual meetings;
- \*contribute to our newsletter with a book review, announcement, op ed, essay or special writing.

## Recent and Forthcoming Articles from Our Members

Crowley, Martha, Daniel Tope, Lindsey Chamberlain and Randy Hodson. "Neo-Taylorism at Work: Occupational Change in the Post-Fordist Era." Forthcoming, *Social Problems*.

Gonos, George (SUNY Potsdam), "Taming the Employment Sharks: The Case for Regulating Profit Driven Labor Market Intermediaries in High Mobility Labor Markets" (with H. Freeman), *Employee Rights and Employment Policy Journal* 13:2, pp. 285-360 (2009).

Hough, Phillip A., "Global Commodity Chains and the Spatial-Temporal Dimensions of Labor Control: Lessons from Colombia's Coffee and Banana Industries," *The Journal of World Systems Research* (Forthcoming, Volume XVI, No. 2, 2010)

Rhomberg, Chris. 2010. "A Signal Juncture: The Detroit Newspaper Strike and Post-Accord Labor Relations in the United States," will appear in the May 2010 issue of the *American Journal of Sociology* (v. 110, n. 6).

Rhomberg's essay uses a deviant case analysis of the 1995–2000 Detroit newspaper strike to critique and revise theories of strike activity. As the formal institutions regulating industrial relations in the United States have declined, workplace struggles have expanded or reentered into other arenas of the state and civil society. In addition, the essay develops the methodological concept of a "signal juncture," that is, moments of conflict that reveal a "collision" of underlying developmental paths. Unlike the more familiar concept of the critical juncture, a signal juncture reveals ongoing structural tensions and conflicting actors within otherwise continuous trends.

## 2010 SSSP Labor Studies Division and Co-Sponsored Sessions

*Date:* Friday, August 13

*Time:* 10:30 AM - 12:10 PM

**Session 15: Social Justice Work through Organizing - THEMATIC**

*Room:* Georgia 12

*Sponsor:* Labor Studies

*Organizers & Presiders:*

Daniel Tope, Florida State University

Ted M. Brimeyer, Georgia Southern University

*Papers:*

“Building Peace through Partnerships: The Israel Palestine Case,” Michelle I. Gawerc, Department of Sociology, Boston College

“Native American Mobilization and the Power of Recognition,” DaShanne Stokes, University of Pittsburgh

“The Clothesline Project: Political Consumerism in the Collegiate Anti-Sweatshop Movement,” Meredith A. Katz, Virginia Tech

“Worker Centers and the struggle for social justice: New community-based approaches in organizing undocumented immigrants,” Alice B. Gates, University of Michigan, Joint Program in Social Work/Sociology

“Workers under Disorganized Despotism - A Case from State-Owned Shipbuilding Industry,” Lefeng Lin, UW-Madison Department of Sociology

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*Date:* Saturday, August 14

*Time:* 8:00 AM - 09:40 AM

**Session 47: Labor Market Reorganization: Immigration, Globalization and Racialization**

*Room:* Georgia 12

*Sponsors:* Institutional Ethnography  
Labor Studies  
Racial and Ethnic Minorities

*Organizer & Presider:*

Roxana Ng, OISE/University of Toronto



*Papers:*

“Do We Leave? Mexican Immigrants and the Economic Crisis in Elkhart County, Indiana,” Lynda D. Nyce, Bluffton University

“Globalization, Flexibility, and New Culture of Workplace in the Services Sector in U.S. and India,” Bhavani Arabandi, George Mason University

“Immigration History and Work-Related Wellbeing Among English Speaking Residents of Toronto,” Janani Umamaheswar and William Magee, University of Toronto, Sociology

“The Postindustrial-Era Opportunity Structure and Low-skilled Black Women Workers,” Katrinell M. Davis, University of Vermont

“Thinking through Immigrant Women’s Paid and Unpaid Work Transnationally: An Exploration in Using Institutional Ethnography to analyze Transnational Migration and Globalization,” Roxana Ng, OISE/University of Toronto, Guida Man and Tania Das Gupta, York University and Kiran Mirchandani, OISE/University of Toronto

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*Date:* Saturday, August 14

*Time:* 4:30 PM - 06:10 PM

**Session 78: New Labor, Union Movements and Social Justice**  
*Room:* Georgia 12

*Sponsors:* Labor Studies  
 Poverty, Class, and Inequality

*Organizers:* John C. Alessio, Minnesota State University, Mankato  
 Kendra Jason, North Carolina State University

*Presider & Discussant:*  
 Kendra Jason, North Carolina State University

*Papers:*

“Temporary Scabs: The New Strikebreaking Industry and the Transformation of Work in America,” Erin E. Hatton, SUNY Buffalo

“Striking a Delicate Balance: Autonomy, Collectivity and the Coalition of Immokalee Workers,” Jane M. Walsh, University of Pittsburgh

“Setting the Stage for Contemporary State Minimum Wage Legislation: Labor Policy and Federalism from the New Deal to TANF,” Michael F. Thompson, Indiana University Bloomington

“Unionization and Frontline Healthcare: The Role of Workplace Climate in the Effectiveness of Job Training Programs,” Kendra Jason, North Carolina State University

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*Date:* Sunday, August 15

*Time:* 12:30 PM - 02:10 PM

***Session 104:* Persistent Inequalities: Considering Intersectionalities**

*Room:* Georgia 8

*Sponsors:* Disabilities  
Labor Studies  
Poverty, Class, and Inequality  
Racial and Ethnic Minorities  
Sexual Behavior, Politics, and Communities

*Organizer:* Kathleen Guidroz, Mount St. Mary's University

*Papers:*

“Examining the Latino Graduate School Choice Process: Towards an Intersectionality Framework,” Elvia Ramirez, California State University, Sacramento

“Gender, Race and Job Satisfaction,” Carolyn Perrucci and Dina Banerjee, Purdue University

“Going Beyond Poverty, Parents’ Decisions about Schooling and Child Labor in Guadalajara, Mexico,” Patricia Murrieta Cummings, University of Guadalajara

“Persistent Inequalities: Welfare-to-Work Managers’ Perceptions of Clients and the Quantity and Quality of Services Offered in North Carolina,” Tiffany Taylor, Kent State University, Elizabeth Seale, North Carolina State University, Tina Norris and Sarah Samblanet, Kent State University .

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*We wish everyone safe travels to Atlanta*





**Call for Applications  
Editor, Social Problems Forum  
The Newsletter of SSSP**

The Editorial and Publications Committee of the Society for the Study of Social Problems is seeking applications for the position of Editor of the Society's newsletter, Social Problems Forum. The Editor's three-year term will begin following publication of the last issue of Volume 41 in the fall of 2010. Members of SSSP are encouraged to apply for the position and/or nominate colleagues who are (or will become) members.

The Newsletter has become a vital means of communication among SSSP members. Among other items, it includes official reports and announcements of the Society; exchanges between members; and special features, such as book reviews and debates. Beginning with Volume 42 in winter of 2011, the Newsletter is expected to be available in electronic format only. The Newsletter Editor will thus have the freedom to exercise considerable creativity in producing the Newsletter and may include video and audio clips in each issue. The Board of Directors of the Society wishes to ensure that the Newsletter remains an effective vehicle for generating interest and involvement in the Society, for facilitating communication across Divisions and among the membership, and for providing service to the Divisions and the members.

The Newsletter Editor is responsible for preparing three newsletters per year (winter, summer, and fall). The Society provides a stipend for the Editor and a budget to pay for preparation expenses and a student assistant. Additional support from the host institution, including office space, a computer and other equipment is expected; release time is desirable. Because the Editor must coordinate with the Administrative Office and with officers of the Society and Division chairs, she/he must be able to work well with others. Familiarity with the operation of the Society is highly desirable.

Individuals interested in applying for the editorship should submit their curriculum vitae with a cover letter detailing their relevant experience, the support their institution is willing to provide, and a proposed budget not to exceed \$12,000 per calendar year. Letters from the applicant's department chair, dean, or other authorized university administrator confirming specific institutional support should also be included.

Please direct all questions, nominations, expressions of interest, and application materials to:

Claire Renzetti, Chair, SSSP Editorial and Publications Committee, Email:  
[Claire.Renzetti@notes.udayton.edu](mailto:Claire.Renzetti@notes.udayton.edu). All applications should be submitted electronically.  
**Deadline for applications is July 1, 2010.**