

On the Line

SSSP Labor Studies

Editor's Introduction

I'm swamped, help! It's been one of those summers where the work load seems to be even heavier than during the semester. All this to say that this issue will be brief and to the point. But feeling this way always reminds me of the bumper sticker: *The Labor Movement: We brought you the Weekend.* I always thought it so trite and almost pandering. I guess I still do. Yet, I have to admit that it's biggest flaw is probably that, like many things won by the labor movement, it seems dated. We've lost the weekend in many industries and we've lost paid vacation time, and we've lost the sense that the labor movement gave workers a modicum of control in the workplace and a decent quality of life outside the workplace.

Maybe I've always been a bigger fan of the labor cry, "Bread and Roses, Too!" But regardless how we frame it, the fight continues. Those of us on the academic ends of these movements not only have much information and research to offer the movement, but as wage workers ourselves, we need to keep our eyes on the prize. For most of us, our teaching loads and admin responsibilities are increasing

while Cost of living increases disappear. Such pressures mean our summers and our weekends disappear as well. In Massachusetts, State College and University faculty have not received our quid pro quo for supporting Democratic Governor Patrick. We can't count on a new President either. It's in our hands—regardless of who wins I remind myself as well as you all: "don't moan, organize."



Now isn't this what we all really want?

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July 2008

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A Message From the Chair

Greetings to our Labor Division members, both old and new – I hope that you're enjoying your summer. Our 2008 Annual Meeting is fast approaching. It takes place on July 31-August 2, at The Boston Park Plaza Hotel and Towers. Boston is a beautiful city and the hometown of our past President and newsletter editor, Corey Dolgon. I know that Corey extends a warm welcome to each one of you and I'm sure he won't mind if you bunk at his place! [ed. Note...Hey, wait a second!...] The economy, gas prices, credit crunch, and housing market collapse have been top-of-mind issues. These were cited by General Motors (GM) CEO Rick Wagoner, when he announced the restructuring of the world's largest automaker early in June (and he announced more severe restructuring once again, only six weeks later). Taking the brunt of the job losses were four GM plants that produce gas-guzzling trucks – two plants in the U.S., and one each in Mexico and Canada. The Canadian plant is located in Oshawa, where I live, and the reaction of Oshawa GM autoworkers was by far the most forceful. Despite signing (an admittedly concessionary) collective agreement barely three few weeks earlier, GM ignored several contract clauses that guaranteed talks with the union prior to any downsizing of production or plant shutdown announcements. [continued, page 2]

Message from the Chair (continued)

One day after Wagoner’s announcement, Oshawa autoworkers chained the doors of the corporate headquarters of GM Canada and blockaded the entrance to the building. For 12 days Oshawa autoworkers, members of the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW) union, continued their barricade and prevented 900 salaried employees from entering the building, and yet these unionized workers were disciplined enough to continue production at all GM plants throughout the city.

I spent six days at the barricade, supporting the union’s efforts as well as interviewing these worker-activists, and it was an inspiring time for me. Workers spoke about their feelings of betrayal, their pride in producing vehicles that consistently won awards for quality and production, their worries for their future and their fears for their children’s job prospects. One woman told me that her father had experienced a GM van plant shut-down in 1993, and it was the first time she’d seen him cry. Now she’s about to face a similar heartbreak as she sees her job vanish.

What impressed me most was the determination and discipline of these condemned workers. They treated the event as they would a strike, but it was possibly the most orderly picket line that I’ve seen; not a single episode of violence ensued, no vandalism occurred, and all drinking was prohibited. The barricaders even swept the roadway clean in anticipation of being ordered off the property via a legal injunction. The media was present throughout the event, and I was proud of how expertly these workers presented their case to the cameras.

Several days after a solidarity rally that saw thousands of people converge in front of the Oshawa truck plant; a judge ordered an end to the blockade. The blockaders expressed open surprise that the judge took so long to rule. In his ruling he reprimanded General Motors for their ‘near deceit’ in negotiating, signing and breaking a contract in a matter of 2½ weeks. His ruling stated:

“Considering all of the evidence including but not restricted to the deceit-like behaviour [of General Motors Canada] that induced CAW concessions and the almost immediate breach, without apology, of a newly signed agreement, I find without hesitation that GM Canada does not come to court with clean hands.”

The judge added that the CAW would likely find it difficult to negotiate “confidently and trustingly” with GM Canada in the future. He even gave the blockaders almost three days to dismantle their barricade.

What was the story as the media spun it? Undoubtedly the press treated the court ruling in an overly-simple and highly misleading way. Headlines read: “CAW must dismantle blockade, judge rules” and “Judge orders union to end GM HQ blockade by Monday.” Almost every news outlet missed the real story, which is why I’m glad that I was there to record the events as a recent milestone of sorts in labor history.

This ruling was a stinging rebuke to General Motors and a lesson that Labour Studies academics and activists have an important role to play. I hope to share some of these stories with you in Boston. You’ll find the Labor Division sessions elsewhere in this newsletter, but I’d like to point out a particularly interesting roundtable that I encourage all of you to attend. On Thursday, July 31 at 10:30 a.m. in the Hancock Room, we’re presenting “*Labor, The Dems and the ‘08 Election: Prospects and Peril*” with Robert Ross of Clark University and Steve Early from the Communications Workers of America (CWA). This is a particularly apropos session during an exciting election year. Hopefully this will be the first of many future collaborative sessions that mix union activists and representatives with academics.

The Labor Studies Divisional Meeting takes place on Friday, August 1 at 12:30 p.m. and lasts about an hour before we continue our meeting with a beer in hand. The Divisional Meetings are a great way to meet like-minded folks and it’s our portal to becoming active in the Division. Take a moment to join us.

I also encourage you to submit a resolution that will be debated (and hopefully passed) at the 2008 Annual Business meeting. SSSP resolutions are one way that our activist and academic members can publicly declare a position on an important issue that will give it greater visibility. I encourage you to submit a resolution to me or the Vice-President for discussion, debate, and ratification by the SSSP membership. See the “Call for Resolutions” section of the SSSP website for more information on constructing a resolution.

This Division is a collective enterprise and couldn’t operate without our army of volunteers. First, I’d like to thank our Division session organizers, presiders and discussants: Corey Dolgan, Amy Schulz, Chris Baker, Jennifer Johnson, and Li-Fang Liang. Ted Brimeyer also stepped up to the plate when asked. Our gratitude goes out to each of you.

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Book Review

A Country that Works: Getting America Back on Track, by Andy Stern. (New York: The Free Press, 2008). 240pp.

Reviewed by Arthur Shostack

Drawing on my 50-plus years as a student of unionism, my 25 years (1975-2000) as the adjunct sociologist at the AFL-CIO George Meany Center, and other related matters (consulting posts, 11 union-focused books, etc.), I want to call overdue attention to the one union-related book I believe you should read if you have time and energy for only one: Written by SEIU president Andy Stern, his cogent 2006 semi-autobiographic volume, *A Country that Works: Getting America Back on Track*, tells more about labor realities, warts and all, than we have any right to expect. Mixing unexpected candor, warranted pride, rare personal intimacy, and intriguing visionary politics, it stands out as a must-read for sociologists seeking distinctive leads to labor gains, losses, and prospects.

Sociologists will find three features of the SEIU of special interest: First, Stern, raised in a non-union, middle-class household, and a graduate of an Ivy League college, has the union he leads opt, whenever necessary, for cooperation rather than conflict. Tough when necessary, it prefers to first offer to cut a deal, and only later rattle the cage. While careful to keep the union's powder dry, and well-known for employing dramatic militancy when left with no alternative, the SEIU offers to dampen shop floor militancy, aid employer productivity, and add value to work processes. In return, it expects better contracts, a fairer share of profits, and a sort of union-employer partnership based in mutual respect and appropriate wariness ("Trust, but verify"). Second, Stern does not hesitate to support a very small number of maverick Republicans the union finds situationally worthy, and he has sharp disagreements with lofty Democrats who mistakenly and condescendingly take Labor for granted.

Above all, Stern stands out among his peers in being an avowed far-sighted futurist. A close reader of Alvin Toffler's popular books about tomorrow, and a bold friend of Newt Gingrich (a Toffler devotee), Stern would upgrade unions into problem-solving and future-oriented organizations. He breaks ranks by daring to rue in public the meagerness of imagination of most top labor leaders, and he challenges them to join him in considering eclectic ideas uncommon in their mental world and comfort zone.

Stern, for example, calls on unions to consider acting as outsourcers for benefits administration, compliance, hiring, training, and the setting of industry standards. He can imagine unions becoming a new permanent partner of employees whose work is transitory, a type he expects to greatly expand. Unions could advise, invest, and oversee retirement funds, as well as offer lifetime health care benefits at low cost.

Stern envisions global unions capable of supporting coordinated organizing campaigns aimed at the far-flung operations of multinational firms. He also dreams aloud about a day when

global movements, Labor, environmental, and other Do-Good operations - might combine in one synergistic body. The new organization would take groups that now focus separately on corporate social responsibility, the environment, human rights, labor, and sustainability, etc., and help them morph into something better, something we can only now glimpse (and wonder at the audaciousness of the notion, given all the organizational challenges it poses). Best of all, Stern has task forces actively promoting all of these ideas, and many more.

Stern, to be sure, has his fair share of detractors, and more all the time. In 2008 he has been attacked as being high-handed, dictatorial, imperial, and insufficiently militant, among other things. It is difficult for outsiders like Labor Academics to weigh the merits of the opposing sides in the controversy, as, in much such disputes, things are not always what they seem to be. Almost everything that appears in the media has a spin attached, and an attentive neutrality is probably the best stance at present for concerned academics. Taken altogether, the Stern/SEIU situation links to what nearly everyone in Labor has long understood—the status quo is not an option. The split in 2005, on the very eve of the 50th anniversary of the merger of the old AFL and the CIO, attests to the depths of hunger for profound change. Change to Win, the organization formed at that time, is guided in large part by Andy Stern's futurism, and it looks for help from two fast-improving sources—computer power and applied sociology.

Computer use is helping to bring members and officers together as never before in real-time communications of consequence. It adds muscle to boycott and strike projects across time/space borders, and it fosters the creation of overdue "electronic communities" (local, national, and global) with empowering heart, mind, and soul. Unions may yet achieve by 2015 what I call CyberUnion status, and thereby help assure their endlessly energizing renewal (Shostak, 1999; 2002).

Likewise, the chances of Labor's recovery gain as more and more applied sociologists use their expertise. This is not easy, as trust must be earned (slowly and earnestly) and advice given on request and with great diplomacy. You will probably have to pass what the SEIU calls the "hang test," [the ability to "hang out comfortably with a social service worker, school aides, or janitors, or have lunch at a diner or a beer in a neighborhood bar" (Stern, p. 122)]. Assisting the Labor Movement isn't for every academic, but those who do come to "carry a card" help everyone gain on our shared dream of Bread and Roses too.

SSSP Annual Meeting

Labor Studies Division Session Schedule

Date: Thursday, July 31

Time: 8:30 AM - 10:10 AM

Session 1: Working in the Health Care Sector

Room: Cabot

Sponsors: Health, Health Policy, and Health Services Division
Labor Studies Division

Organizers: Corey Dolgon, Worcester State College
Amy Schulz, University of Michigan

Presider &

Discussant: Corey Dolgon, Worcester State College

Papers:

“The Effect of Nurses’ Networks in the Delivery of Patient Care,” Marcia Marx, California State University, San Bernardino

“Beyond Band-Aids: A Study of the Health Care Workforce Shortage in Southwestern North Carolina,” Kathleen M. Brennan, James W. Picker and Peter P. Nieckarz, Jr., Western Carolina University

“Contesting Time: Contract Professionals and the Implicit Critique of Standard Employment,” Debra Osnowitz, Clark University and Kevin Hensen, College of San Mateo

Date: Thursday, July 31

Time: 10:30 AM - 12:10 PM

Session 15: Labor, The Dems and the ‘08 Election: Prospects and Peril

Room: Hancock

Sponsor: Labor Studies Division

Organizer, Presider &

Discussant: Corey Dolgon, Worcester State College

Roundtable Title: Labor, the Dems and the '08 Election: Prospects and Peril

Robert J.S. Ross, Clark University

Steve Early, Labor organizer, author, freelance writer

Date: Friday, August 1

Time: 8:00 AM - 9:40 AM

Session 51: Participatory Research in the Labor Movement

Room: Holmes

Sponsor: Labor Studies Division

Organizer: Chris Baker, Walters State Community College

Discussant: Reuben Roth, Laurentian University

Papers:

“Community-Based Education and Postsecondary Institutions: Three Case Studies,” Reuben Roth, Laurentian University

“Social Closure, Race and Labor Unions,” Jason Kendra, North Carolina State University

“Organizing the Elusive: How the Global Economy Fragments Community Participation,” Baijayanta Mukhopadhyay, McGill

“Latinos and Labor Movement Participation in Appalachia,” Chris Baker, Walters State Community College

Date: Friday, August 1

Time: 02:30 PM - 04:10 PM

Session 74: Global & Domestic Labor: Race, Ethnicity, Gender

Room: Holmes

Sponsor: Labor Studies Division

Organizer & Presider: Jennifer A. Johnson, VCU

Papers:

“Collective Labor Rights and Market Flexibility in East European Postcommunist States,” Linda Cook, Brown University

“Globalization and Transnational Labor: Race, Ethnicity, and Gender Issues,” Nancy Plankey Videla, Texas A & M University

“Does Raising Consciousness Change Behavior: Exposure to Information on Work Conditions and Consumer Habits,” Jynette Larshus and Ted M. Brimeyer, Georgia Southern University

“Income Advantaged Wives: How Men and Marriages Respond,” Paul Stevens, Virginia Commonwealth University

“Housewives for Working Women: How American Women’s Participation in the Capitalist Workplace Perpetuates the Exploitation of Immigrant Domestic Workers,” Amanda Glover, VCU

Date: Saturday, August 2

Time: 02:30 PM - 04:10 PM

THEMATIC

Session 133: Politics of Crossing: Labor Migration in Global/Transnational Context

Room: Lexington

Sponsors: Institutional Ethnography Division
Labor Studies Division

Organizer & Presider: Li-Fang Liang, Syracuse University

Papers:

“Through the Glass Wall: The Border-Crossing Work of New Immigrant Women in Knowledge Sector Jobs in Canada,” Liza McCoy, University of Calgary

“From Highly Skilled to Highly Schooled: Immigrant Professionals Crossing Borders in Canada,” Bonnie Slade, University of Toronto

“Musos, Musos, Musos: Women’s Reproductive Labor in Accumulation,” Cheryl Deutsch, Women In and Beyond the Global

“Ethnic Networks in the Context of Globalization,” Maria Morales, University of Texas at El Paso

“From ‘Temporary’ to ‘Offshore’: Segmentation and Migration of Attorney Labor,” Robert Brooks, Worcester State College

***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@worchester.edu
617-298-0388



Harry Braverman Award

Each year the Labor Studies Section selects the Braverman Award for the best student paper submitted to the section. Braverman was long-time editor of the *Monthly Review* and author of one of the most influential books in labor studies, *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century*.

This Year's Harry Braverman Student Paper Winner is: "Individual Barriers and Neighborhood Context: Exploring Determinants of Employment and Welfare Receipt Among Unmarried Urban Women" by Timothy J. Haney of the *University of Oregon*. According to Hanley, "the paper is particularly appropriate for the award because of its focus on the labor market situation of unmarried urban women prior to 1996's welfare reform legislation, which sent many disadvantaged women into the labor market, despite a number of personal barriers. The article bridges two normally distinct literatures in the social sciences. The first is the literature on the barriers to employment and AFDC/TANF use of single urban women, a topic that has been explored at some length. In an attempt to build on this body of work, however, I draw from the "neighborhood effects" research within urban sociology that seeks to explore how neighborhood contexts affect residents. This literature, however, often relies too heavily upon a theoretically barren approach that utilizes only a measure of the neighborhood's poverty rate to assess its "effect" on employment."

Hanley continues, "To move beyond this problem, I employ multiple neighborhood-level measures. Although the method I employ is relative simple (multinomial logistic regression using a robust standard error correction for clustering), I hope you will agree that the findings are quite interesting; while several individual factors are predictive of employment in lieu of AFDC use (education, work history, nativity, children living at home, English proficiency, health, etc), these individual factors do not erase the significant effects of neighborhood context. Specifically, living in a neighborhood with a higher joblessness rate, more physical disorder, and older buildings is associated with less employment and more AFDC use."

We would like to congratulate Timothy and wish him the best of luck in the future!

Tell Trader Joe's to Chuck the Excuses

United Farm Workers last week launched a campaign asking food retailer Trader Joe's to toughen its vendor policies. The labor union is connecting the grocery chain to the May 16 death of Lodi resident Maria Isabel Vasquez Jimenez, who collapsed May 14 while pruning in a West Coast Grape Farming vineyard in Farmington. The connection: West Coast Grape Farming is owned by the Franzia family, which also owns Bronco Wine Co., which produces Charles Shaw wines. The selection of wines, sometimes known as Two Buck Chuck, is exclusively sold at Trader Joe's.

Jimenez, 17, was under the supervision of Merced Farm Labor, the contractor who supplied the vineyard's labor. "We commend Trader Joe's for having a cage-free policy for eggs sold. It speaks to the concerns for the chickens. We simply ask that they consider a dialogue with us, so they enact a similar policy for farm worker employees. Farm workers deserve the same type of protection," said Roman Pinal, a union organizer.

The union's "Tell Trader Joe's to Chuck the Excuses" campaign asks supporters to sign a statement and send it to the grocer via e-mail. Go to <http://www.ufwaction.org/campaign/traderjoes/> for more info.





***What is to be Done?
Public Sociology in Politics and Practice.***

***The Association for Humanist Sociology
2008 Annual Meeting November 6th-9th
Boston, Massachusetts***

While public sociology has attracted excitement in recent years, sociology as a resource for social action is not a new idea. From Marx and Mills, to Dubois and Jane Addams, to Al Lee and Frances Fox Piven, the reemergence of public sociology is really the product of a long march by progressive and engaged scholars through educational institutions, professional associations, and other structural representations of sociology as a discipline. Meanwhile, public sociology remains a contested terrain, criticized as "too political" by some and "not political enough" by others. Since our inception, however, AHS and its members have contemplated and practiced public sociology, mostly from the margins of the discipline. Now that public sociology is front and center, we ought to have much to say about it: historically, theoretically, ethically, politically, and practically. This Annual Meeting is an opportunity to examine the past, evaluate the present, and begin to shape the future of a public sociology that matters. Paper submissions should address some aspect of public sociology and its relationship to teaching, activism, policy or community-based research, or other aspects of sociology as they relate to incorporating humanist goals with sociological work.

The Association for Humanists Sociology invites submissions for our 2008 Annual Meeting in Boston, Massachusetts, November 6-9. Our conference theme is *What is to be Done? Public Sociology in Politics and Practice*. Abstracts or full papers are welcome. Deadline for submissions (abstracts or complete papers, full sessions, workshops, or individual papers) has been extended to August 15th or by arrangement with Program Chair, Daniel Egan, Daniel_Egan@uml.edu or, Corey Dolgon, cdolgon@worchester.edu. Submissions can be sent via e-mail or by regular mail to:

Daniel Egan, AHS Program Chair
Department of Sociology
University of Massachusetts-Lowell
Coburn Hall, 404K
Lowell, MA 01854

Corey Dolgon, AHS President
Department of Sociology
Worcester State College
486 Chandler St.
Worcester, MA 0160