

ASA Labor and Labor Movement Newsletter

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Notes from the Chair

Chris Rhomberg
Fordham University

This has been an eventful year, in more ways than one. In the U.S., the news is dominated by the election of Donald Trump as president with all the drastic changes that foretells in the environment for labor. To reflect on what that means I’ve invited three section members to address some of the issues for this edition of *In Critical Solidarity*. For now, though, let me take a moment to review some of our work as a section over the past year, and some of what we can look forward to in 2017.

First, we can look back on a very productive year within our section. We have built up our mentorship program to help support the next generation of scholars of labor and labor movements, and we have helped promote more exposure of our research through the [Work in Progress blog](#), in cooperation with the sections on Organizations, Occupations and Work; Economic Sociology; and Inequality,

Poverty and Mobility. In the spring, section leaders spearheaded the submission of an *amicus* brief to the National Labor Relations board signed by more than 40 leading labor-related scholars in support of graduate worker collective bargaining.

Our section was the prime sponsor for a highly successful [mini-conference on Precarious Work](#), held in Seattle just before the 2016 ASA meetings, co-sponsored by the sections on the Political Economy of the World System, Collective Behavior and Social Movements, and Organizations, Occupations, and Work. More than 100 persons attended [the conference](#), with over 50 scholars from 13 countries presenting research on the structure, regulation and resistance to precarious work in the US, China and around the world.

The conference was supported by generous donations from the Puffin Foundation, the UCLA Institute for Research on Labor and Employment, Critical Sociology/Sage Publications, and the Society for the Study of Social Problems (SSSP), along with many others. With our resources we were able to support the participation of a delegation of eight scholars from the China Association for Work and Labor (CAWL), furthering the relationship between our LLM section and CAWL, and broadening scholarly awareness of the struggles over precarious work around the world.

We also organized a great set of panels for the Seattle ASA meetings, including an invited session on "Power by Disruption: Strikes, Comprehensive Campaigns, and Beyond." Other section sessions included one on "Barriers and Opportunities for Building a Labor Movement across Differences of Race, Gender, and Legal Status," and an open submission session.

As the new academic year got underway in September, we succeeded in getting our membership above 400, which allows us to have three sessions in addition to our round tables at next year's ASA meeting in Montreal. We will have themed sessions on "Challenges Facing Canadian Labour" and "Global Labor Protest" along with an open topic panel (see p. 9, below); all are open submission. We encourage members to send in their papers by the deadline of **JANUARY 11, 2017 at 3:00pm EST** through the ASA portal at <http://www.asanet.org/annual-meeting-2017/submit-2017-call-papers>.

Looking to 2017, we continue to seek to build ties with other groups and reach out to new members. The Montreal meetings are an opportunity for us to develop exchanges between American and Canadian labor studies scholars, and the following year the International Sociological Association will hold its forum in Toronto in 2018. We can build on the Montreal meetings to further the dialogue and strengthen our ties with the RC 44. Internally, we can improve our communications within the section and find ways to broaden our scope nationally and globally. The years ahead promise great challenges for workers and their movements worldwide, and we will have our work cut out for us.

Symposium: The Trump Presidency

Few of us truly imagined we would now be preparing for a new regime governing labor and labor movements under President-elect Donald Trump. In this symposium, three members of the LLM section provide their views on the outcomes of the US presidential election. Former section chair Shannon Gleeson contemplates the impact of the Trump administration on immigrant communities,

including students within our own institutions of higher education. Former section chair Peter Evans analyzes the politics of the voting results and the implications for the future of labor organizing. Finally, current section secretary-treasurer Jeff Rothstein provides a reaction to the events from his perspective amidst the de-industrialized Rust Belt in western Michigan.

The Work Ahead

Shannon Gleeson
Cornell University, ILR School

For the last month, I and many colleagues like you across the country have spent inordinate amounts of time putting out institutional fires created by the 2016 election. Many of these are fires I frankly didn't know existed, or was too naïve to think had been stoking all along. This has become increasingly apparent, having come to my current institution from my previous job at a large public university that serves hundreds of undocumented and DACA-mented students, from a department where the majority of my colleagues were fierce women of color, and a region where immigrant rights were regularly publicly defended by elected officials (even if in name only).

Taking a step back from the email lists, committee meetings, petitions, and various private discussion groups, there are many lessons starting to emerge as the national scene becomes more twisted each day and universities scramble to respond. I will focus here on immigrant communities, with the full understanding that women, Muslims, LGBTQ individuals, and persons of color all over have come under attack, literally and figuratively as well.

First, as in any social movement, disagreements abound, even amongst allies. These are both challenges and opportunities. One of the clearest of these has been how far to push administrations on the specifics of *sanctuary*. Well-meaning [critics](#) argue that a focus on campus

(and perhaps even city) sanctuary is misguided, with energy better spent on more impactful policies, and ultimately legally unattainable in a framework of federalism where immigration officials have supreme power to carry out directives as they see fit. Advocates are also concerned about the false sense of security such policies will provide. Meanwhile, [proponents](#) of this approach insist instead on the symbolic importance of sanctuary which represents the ideals of our country and many of our universities' founders.

My response is that context matters, and battles will take different forms across each of our campuses. Speaking as a faculty member on a campus influenced heavily by wealthy alumni and trustees, where colleagues have railed to me

about the perils of illegals flooding across the border, where College Republicans recently hosted Rick Santorum, and in a liberal county situated in a sea of Trump-supporters, explicit calls for sanctuary and the protection of other marginalized communities are an important message to students, faculty and staff that they unequivocally belong. Alternatively, vague calls for free speech and inclusivity are damaging (perhaps unintentionally) in that they send a message that white supremacy, misogyny, and homophobia are to be tolerated in a democratic society.

Second, and connected to questions of strategy, are to what extent we will champion the rights of a few, while sacrificing the well-being of the masses. To date, it remains thoroughly unclear what a Trump administration will do to reverse gains under the Obama administration for undocumented students in particular, or rather build on the progress made by the most successful deportation strategy in U.S. history under Obama. As we speak, senators in Congress are making a last-ditch effort to protect individuals who qualify under the same type of criteria as the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. Currently, with [741,000](#) individual DACA-recipients (who Trump [may](#) or not protect), this approach pales in comparison to the more than 11 million undocumented, and the 2-3 million Trump insists are criminals and his [target](#) for deportation.

"Context matters, and battles will take different forms across each of our campuses."

Meanwhile, many undocumented and DACA-mented students are refusing to claim victory at the expense of their families. Similarly, many of us are fighting with administrations to move beyond protections and resources for our DACA-mented students, and to also recognize the plight of non-eligible undocumented students as a whole. I hear concerns from colleagues concerned about the status of [federal funding](#) that benefits a wide swath of the most vulnerable students on campuses, were we to overstep our bounds. Yet, given our political trajectory, the same may one day be true for a whole host of communities who rely on civil liberties we currently take for granted. Where will we draw the line?

Lastly, those of us who study immigrant labor are called to extol the contributions of immigrants, and the [economic loss](#) this country will most certainly face in the wake of mass deportations. As I have written [elsewhere](#) we must walk a fine line here, making clear the importance that immigrants play as workers but without premising their access to rights and humanity solely on this limited and often exploited role. Just as we as educators are conditioned to extol the virtues of the high-achieving student, as labor scholars we must take care to not reify the labor market as a gatekeeper for rights.

As a cynic on an elite and isolated campus, whose students, family, and friends are touched by Trump's impending immigration policies, I remain torn. The pragmatist in me sides with the exclusionary narrow approach, while the idealist in me is disgusted with the thought of saving a few at the expense of the masses. Ultimately, my unsatisfactory conclusion is that we need both. We need strong and bold calls for sanctuary that we are willing to immediately hold up for debate for their omissions and failure to address specifics. We should champion the contributions of students who benefit from DACA, while rejecting the legitimacy of the violent and racist border their parents crossed. We need economic analyses of the fiscal folly of mass deportation, while refusing to quantify the value of immigrant lives. We need to be willing to work in tandem, supporting allied approaches, or at least getting out of the way of those that opt for strategies that aim higher and more long-term.

For at least the foreseeable future, research progress, writing projects, and grant proposals, and will be both delayed and inspired by this work.

NOTE: in this essay I have used terms that remain up for debate, including *undocumented*, *DACA-mented*, and *DREAMer*.

Reflecting on Electoral Catastrophe: What Lessons Can We Take Away From Trump's Victory?

Peter Evans

Watson Institute, Brown University

Even before the inauguration, President-elect Trump's minions have already made it clear that organized labor will be among their immediate targets. Public sector workers who are the main pillar of organized labor's strength will be attacked early, as they were in Wisconsin and Michigan under Scott Walker and Rick Snyder. Turning the National Labor Relations Board into a thoroughly anti-labor organization will make union certification via officially sanctioned elections close to impossible. A national "Right to Work" law removing the requirement that workers represented by a union pay to support it is another obvious agenda item. I will not try to set out an exhaustive of likely attacks here, even though projecting the details of disastrous effects of Trump's regime is will become a crucial part of figuring out how to mount some kind of defense.

Trying to think about how it might be possible to change the political landscape is a different sort of task. It requires a careful debate on the structural circumstances that produced so many Trump voters. Theories of the "Trump Voter" abound and sorting them out will require a careful, detailed analysis of exit polls that has yet to be done. In the meantime, two preliminary themes have already emerged. The first centers on the "basket of deplorables": Trump gave racists, white nationalists, xenophobes and misogynists a clear champion and they responded. The second is the "revenge of the rustbelt" theme: having been battered by neo-liberal capitalism, white working class men

(and many women) finally found a political outsider who would condemn the full gamut of established politicians (Democratic or Republican) that working class voters held responsible for their declining communities and beleaguered families.

Racism and xenophobia were fundamental to Trump's success, but the electoral effectiveness of racism was constructed in the course of the campaign. Survey data shows racism among white Americans holding steady or decreasing over the last quarter of the 20th century and the early years of the 21st century. Trump's shameless exploitation of racism for political advantage built an explicitly racist xenophobic constituency and rode it to power. If there is anyone left in the ranks of organized labor who doubts that labor must put a priority on fighting racism and xenophobia in order to defend its long term collective interests, the success of Trump's strategy should be a wake-up call.

Responding to racism and xenophobia is essential, but ignoring the economic dynamics of disaffection would be a "head in the sand" mistake. The economic shifts propelled by neo-liberal capitalism have pounded the economic well-being and self-esteem of the working class (understood not as former industrial workers but as all ordinary workers) for half a century. No one denies that the real minimum wage has fallen by 1/3rd in the last half century, after having increased more than 2 and ½ times in the prior 30 years. Those who joined the workforce in

the mid-20th century expected their economic well-being would improve over the course of their working lives. For the lowest paid workers wages fell instead. Real household incomes for the majority of U.S. households are lower today than they were at the turn of the millennium. The shrinking life expectancy of the least educated white Americans (about 4 years of decrease between 1990 and 2008) is a hard indicator that the globalized economy is delivering negatives, not positives.

U.S. voters are not economic reactionaries. When they had the opportunity in the 2016 election to endorse positions clearly in the economic interests of working people, they generally responded positively. They voted to increase the minimum wage in all four states where it was on the ballot. A proposal to reduce the minimum wage in South Dakota was crushed by a 71 percent margin (despite the fact that voters simultaneously went for Trump over Hillary 60 percent to 30 percent).

"The contradiction between expectations of better lives and disappointing economic realities creates anger. The political question is where the anger is directed."

Nonetheless, the contradiction between expectations of better lives and disappointing economic realities creates anger. The political question is where the anger is directed. The Occupy Movement successfully fingered the 1% whose incomes rose obscenely, but had a harder time dramatizing the fact that the rising incomes of the 1% and the distress of the 99% were a natural product of a global economy run in the interests of large corporations (aka global capital), corporations that have an interest in

minimizing their expenses (aka workers' wages). The anti-capitalist extension of Occupy never made it into political debates. Advancing the proposition that a capitalist economy, dominated by those whose wealth and incomes come from their ownership of (primarily financial) property, might be the culprit in the woes of ordinary Americans goes beyond of the limits of what the U.S. political establishment is willing to consider.

The lack of debate over "globalization" is a telling example. Long before Bill Clinton and extending seamlessly to Obama, Democratic politicians have faithfully argued that a global capitalist economy benefits everyone and that trade agreements that reduce "government interference" in the flow of global investment and trade are good for the people of Michigan and Wisconsin. Careful economic analysis does not support this claim, but liberal political elites follow the Chamber of Commerce anyway. Bernie Sanders, one of the few who felt free to be a heretic, won both Wisconsin and Michigan in the democratic primaries. Hillary was a post-Sanders convert to trade skepticism. Trump took full advantage of her latecomer status.

Once the anti-capitalism option is off the table the disaffected find other targets. Blaming immigrant workers of color is a simple option. "The Government" is a long standing favorite American target, a theme that comes through clearly in the exit polls. Only a third of all 2016 voters (Democratic and Republican) felt positively about their government and only one out of 6 among these (5% of all voters) were enthusiastic. Seven out of ten voters felt negatively toward their government and two thirds of these described themselves as "angry." Of those who were negative, about 4 out of 5 voted for Trump.

What about the labor movement? Faithful support for the Democratic Party has seemed like the only option given the rapacious reaction

that prevails among their Republican opponents. But, this strategy has resulted only in the most limited defensive victories. At the same time, labor's political clout has been gradually undercut by declining membership and relentless ideological attacks. 2016 represented a new 21st century low in the electoral effects of union membership. Union households are now a minor portion of the electorate and in 2016 the votes of union households were more similar to those non-union households than in any election in a generation.

To improve its lot, labor must take the sources of Trump's success and turn them around. If racism and xenophobia are key resources for reaction, the energy and determination of workers of color are key resources for the labor movement. The success Las Vegas Culinary Union Local 226 in the 2016 election in Nevada illustrates the point concretely. The Culinary" is not only the largest union in Nevada; it is also the largest immigrant organization and the largest African-American organization in Nevada. The Culinary's 60,000 members knocked on 350,000 doors and talked to 75,000 voters. They helped turn a "battleground state into one of the few 2016 bright spots. Trump lost the

state and Nevada elected the first Latina to the U.S. Senate.

The second thread is more controversial, but may well be unavoidable. Fighting for the immediate interests of members must always be the foundation of labor's struggles, but without an overarching political analysis that goes beyond electing liberal politicians, labor will always be on the defensive. Lack of an anti-capitalist analysis robs progressives in the labor movement of the sharp edge that they need in order to energize the angry and disaffected. If established political elites are unwilling to offer an analysis that critiques the consequences of private economic power, labor may have no choice but to take the initiative in introducing the debate. Who better than the labor movement to blame the power of corporate capital for the failure to deliver sustained improvements in welfare to ordinary Americans?

The debate over what is to be done is just getting started. Its contours will shift as the specifics of the Trump regime's attacks are revealed. One thing is clear: the ability of the labor movement to formulate and execute a counter-strategy will be a key determinant of how bad things get and for how long.

How the "Blue Wall" Crumbled

Jeff Rothstein
Grand Valley State University

From the sofa of my home in West Michigan, election night brought both surprise and distress, and not just because Hillary Clinton was losing, but because she was losing in the upper Midwest – both in my state and Wisconsin, where I lived for ten years during graduate school. That the "Blue Wall" was crumbling was unexpected given that the polls had predicted a fairly comfortable

victory. The distress - which lingers - stems from the realization that so many of my neighbors voted for a candidate who spewed racism, misogyny, and xenophobia, mocked the disabled, placed all Muslims under suspicion and peddled anti-Semitic imagery to rally his supporters. I won't accuse all Trump voters of embracing such

sentiments. But they do share a discomfoting tolerance of intolerance.

While that distress remains, the surprise has dissipated (though not entirely). In retrospect, notwithstanding the polling, the signs were there. Anyone who has been paying attention to state level politics over the last decade has seen Michigan and Wisconsin become increasingly reliable Republican territory. Republicans hold the governorship and control of both houses of the legislature in each state.

In fact, both Michigan and Wisconsin have become proving grounds for conservative, anti-labor policymaking. In Wisconsin, the Koch brothers funded and guided the rise of Governor Scott Walker, whose anti-union policies have decimated the labor movement. And in spite of well publicized protests and a takeover of the capital building in Madison, Walker handily won both a recall attempt and then re-election. Fully mobilized, the left in Wisconsin simply did not have the numbers to defeat their arch nemesis.

In Michigan, where Detroit and the eastern side are far more liberal than Grand Rapids and the western side of the state where I live, we have seen the influence of the UAW wain and the right wing Mackinac Center – Michigan’s own little Heritage Foundation - grow. Nothing could be more indicative than the passage of right-to-work legislation four years ago, immediately after voters rejected a labor backed ballot initiative to ingrain the right to a closed shop in the state constitution.

Still, presidential election years have been good to Democrats in these states. Both states elect governors in off years when turnout is lower. And in both states Republicans have successfully jerrymandered electoral districts to maintain congressional and state legislative majorities beyond what actual vote tallies might portend. President Obama won both states twice. So the Clinton campaign paid little attention to Michigan and Wisconsin. And pretty much everyone

expected Russ Feingold to make a triumphant return to the Senate. Like Clinton, he lost convincingly.

What changed – and one lesson of this election to which Democrats should take heed - is that in Michigan and Wisconsin, and perhaps Pennsylvania and Ohio as well – the so-called “Rust Belt” – Donald Trump outflanked Hillary Clinton for the working class vote. Barack Obama was clearly more in-touch with working class concerns than John McCain or Mitt Romney. But Donald Trump’s anti-globalization, anti-NAFTA, anti-China, anti-free market rhetoric spoke to the heart of working class concerns in the upper Midwest in a manner Hillary Clinton could not touch.

“Both Michigan and Wisconsin have become proving grounds for conservative, anti-labor policy-making.”

As sociologists we study and teach our students the trends. Wages have been stagnant for forty years. The middle class has been shrinking as income and wealth flows to a tiny percentage of the richest Americans. Stable, middle-class manufacturing jobs have been replaced by precarious service sector employment paying poverty wages. There are real people behind the statistics. And if you take a drive across lower Michigan, from Detroit in the east – through Flint - to Muskegon on the Lake Michigan coast, passing through the rural towns along the way, you see ground zero for the decline of the working class. Hillary Clinton lost Michigan and Wisconsin twice this year, first to Bernie Sanders in the Democratic primaries and then to Donald Trump. The overlap between their two campaigns was the clear message that globalization and trade have been a disaster for blue-collar workers – a fact so obvious here that few Michiganders

would argue otherwise with a straight face. So it's no small wonder that Trump's clear anti-globalization message gained traction during an election in which Clinton herself felt pressure to renounce her support for the Trans-Pacific Partnership. And if his economic policies don't exactly add up, Trump's validation of both the legitimacy and the source of working class anger perhaps meant more than promises to raise the minimum wage and make college free.

In some ways we've come full circle. In the 1990s, Bill Clinton and his Democratic Leadership

Council kissed-off the working class, selling NAFTA and trade with China as opportunities to open foreign markets for American goods – though they knew the economic calculus was far more complicated than that. Instead, here in the upper mid-west, we got WalMart, meager support for displaced workers, and declining standards of living for many. So a couple decades later the working class threw their support behind the guy who said it had all been a big mistake. Democrats should take that to heart as the Clintons settle into retirement.

ASA in Montreal: Submit Your Papers!

For next year's ASA meetings in Montreal, the Labor and Labor Movements section will have two themed sessions on Canadian labour and global labor protest, respectively, as well as an open topic session and open topic round tables. All the sessions are open submission, and we encourage everyone to submit their research.

The deadline is JANUARY 11, 2017 at 3:00pm EST. You can submit through the ASA portal at: <http://www.asanet.org/annual-meeting-2017/submit-2017-call-papers>.

1. THEME PANEL: "CHALLENGES FACING CANADIAN LABOUR"

The Canadian labor movement may seem relatively robust but it is not immune to the serious problems facing labor around the globe including hostile employers, neoliberal efforts to rollback government protections and entrenched racial and gender divisions. We invite scholars of Canadian labour and labour movements, broadly defined, to submit their current research. Papers could address formal labour movement organizations, such as unions, as well as informal and/or alternative forms of worker organizations. We also welcome a variety of methodological approaches, addressing historical or contemporary themes.

2. THEME PANEL: "GLOBAL LABOR PROTEST"

We invite submissions focused on diverse forms of labor protest beyond the U.S. These could include case studies or comparative work on Europe, East Asia, and/or the Global South focused on anti-austerity protests and mobilization in expanding manufacturing and service sectors. Additionally, papers could focus on the strategies and outcomes of transnational labor activism. We encourage submissions on formally employed, unionized workers and precarious workers mobilizing through formal organizations or informal networks. We welcome analyses of diverse institutional

settings and innovative protest forms.

3. OPEN TOPIC PANEL: All subjects relating to Labor and Labor Movements are welcome.

4. OPEN TOPIC ROUND TABLES: All subjects relating to Labor and Labor Movements are welcome.

2017 ASA-Labor and Labor Movements Section Awards

Distinguished Scholarly Book Award *DEADLINE: 2/1/2017*

The LLM's section's book award goes to what the Book Award Committee judges "the best book published in the sociology of work, the labor process, the working class, labor unions, or working class movements, based on original research." To qualify, the book must have been published between January 1, 2015 and December 31, 2016. No more than two book nominations per person. Please send your nomination(s) to the committee chair, Jeff Sallaz at jsallaz@email.arizona.edu, **no later than February 1, 2017.**

Distinguished Scholarly Article Award *DEADLINE: 3/01/2017*

The LLM section is sponsoring the Distinguished Scholarly Article Award for outstanding scholarship for the best article published between January 1, 2015 and December 31, 2016. The article is open to both qualitative and quantitative orientations and can reflect work that is U.S.-based or global in scope. Section members are strongly urged to nominate articles for the prize. Self-nominations are welcome. **All nominations must be received no later than March 1, 2017.** Please send all nominations to the chair of the award committee, Joshua Bloom at joshuabloom@pitt.edu.

Distinguished Student Paper Award *DEADLINE: 3/01/2017*

The LLM section is sponsoring the Distinguished Student Paper Award for the best paper written by a graduate student between January 1, 2015 and December 31, 2016, who was enrolled at the time the paper was written. Eligible papers: published papers, papers under review, and unpublished article-length manuscripts. Winners of the student paper award in the previous 3 years are ineligible. The winner receives \$300. All methodological orientations and substantive topics related to labor and/or labor movements are welcome. Section members may self-nominate, and faculty should encourage graduate students to submit promising work. Nominations must include an electronic copy of the paper and **must be sent no later than March 1, 2017** to the Distinguished Student Paper Award committee chair, Penny Lewis, at Penny.Lewis@cuny.edu.

Labor Relations in Our Own House

Our section members study diverse sites of labor and mobilization, yet our own institutions of higher education are themselves a center of both industrial conflict and labor activism. The past few months have seen strikes of [faculty at state colleges and universities in Pennsylvania](#) and [dining hall workers at Harvard](#).

In September, faculty and alumni of the University of Massachusetts Labor Center raised alarms about [serious cuts and program changes](#) imposed by the university administration. Friends of the Center from the labor studies community and the Massachusetts union movement responded with strong support, and a meeting with the stakeholders led to a settlement to allow the Center to continue its vital work. The details are discussed in a Dec. 7 letter sent by section member and Interim Labor Center Director Tom Juravich, which we reprint below.

Finally, in December in an historic election the graduate workers at Columbia University voted overwhelmingly in favor of their union, the [Graduate Workers of Columbia – United Auto Workers \(GWC-UAW\)](#). The vote followed the landmark case that the union pursued before the National Labor Relations Board that restored union rights for graduate workers at private universities nationwide. Below is the statement from the union.

A Letter from the UMass Labor Center Committee

Dear Alumni and Supporters,

By the end of the spring 2016 semester, the future was looking dire for the Labor Center. The Dean had suspended admissions to our full-time Labor Studies degree program; we were informed that our Teaching Assistant (TA) positions would be eliminated and externships would not continue to provide tuition waivers; and our part-time faculty budget had been eliminated.

As this news became public, our alums and allies stepped up and mounted a campaign of a scale that UMass Amherst has never seen. You built a website, held conference calls, used social media and the press, and organized over 5,000 signatures to a petition to ask the administration to restore the cuts to the Labor Center.

As a result of your efforts and other expressions of support for the Labor Center, including a letter of support from the Sociology Department, the UMass Chancellor met with Steve Tollman, President of the Massachusetts AFL-CIO and Frank Callahan, President of the Massachusetts Building Trades along with other labor leaders in September and publicly affirmed his support for our Labor Center. In October he met with over two dozen Labor Center stakeholders and agreed to make a proposal to address our concerns about the Labor Center within 30 days. Subsequently the Chancellor and his staff met with In-

terim Director Tom Juravich and we would like to outline what the Chancellor has guaranteed.

The top priority of the Labor Center faculty, the labor leaders and stakeholders was to fight for support for our graduate students so that they would not be required to pay full tuition. We are pleased that the Chancellor has restored all 6 of our 10-hour TA positions that provide both a tuition waiver and a stipend as negotiated by their union, GEO/UAW.

Additionally, the Chancellor agreed to waive tuition for up to 12 externships, now renamed internships. He agreed to convert these externships -- where unions paid students directly -- to internships -- where unions or other organizations would pay the University. Under the new internship system up to 12 new students will now be GEO members. Furthermore, as a result of our meeting, the Dean will now convert all externships to internships in the College. We are confident that the labor movement will step up and support the Labor Center by hiring our students as interns.

The Chancellor has agreed to fund these positions for three years with funds from his office, which speaks to his commitment to the Labor Center. We would have liked to have had a longer commitment, however, with this kind of student support coupled with the support of the labor movement, we feel that three years from now we will be able to make a strong case for the continuation of support moving forward.

We have also resolved the process for selecting the next Director of the Labor Center. Labor Center faculty will play a key role in selecting who will lead the Labor Center. This search process will begin shortly.

While we are pleased about the large commitment the Chancellor has made to our students, we didn't get everything that we asked for. We had requested a new faculty position, which the Chancellor did not support. We were also not able to secure any additional staff support for the Labor Center. In the short term, the Labor Center will use its own reserve funds to hire the part-time faculty necessary to cover required courses and to fill out staff needs.

A number of issues remain about the University's priorities and budget models. As part of this process the Chancellor has recognized that not all graduate programs are the same, and that some graduate programs, such as the Labor Center, require additional resources. But there is still much work to be done.

In the final analysis, while we didn't get everything we asked for, we got a commitment from the university about the importance of the Labor Center to the mission of the university, and significant support for our graduate students to build a new foundation for the Labor Center. No doubt there is a lot of hard work ahead but we hope we can count on you to be part of that process moving forward. We will be convening a new advisory board for the Center, and discussing ways that our alumni and community allies can be more involved in the life of the Labor Center.

None of this would have been possible without the huge outpouring of support from our alumni and friends and we are especially grateful to Steve Tollman and Frank Callahan for their efforts. We are proud to call you our sisters and brothers.

In Solidarity,

Members of the Labor Center Committee

Tom Juravich
Eve Weinbaum
Jasmine Kerrissey
Clare Hammonds
Dan Clawson
Ofer Sharone

The Chancellor's Press Release can be found at:

<http://www.umass.edu/newsoffice/article/chancellor-kumble-subbaswamy-announces>

Tom Juravich
Professor of Labor Studies and Sociology
Interim Director Labor Center
UMass Amherst

Columbia Graduate Workers Win Their Union

NEW YORK – Columbia University research assistants and teaching assistants – whose landmark case restored union rights for graduate workers nationwide – voted 1602 to 623 in favor of joining Graduate Workers of Columbia-United Auto Workers Union (GWC-UAW). With broad-scale support from members of Congress, New York elected officials, community leaders, faculty and students, graduate workers at Columbia are the first in the country to form their union in the wake of the National Labor Relations Board's August ruling.

"Today, 3,500 RAs and TAs like me have won a voice to make sure Columbia University is the best place possible to learn and work," said **Addison Godel, a teaching assistant in the Architecture School at Columbia University**. "This marks a major victory for the entire Columbia community – we care deeply about the world-renowned teaching and research that happens at our university and are ready to tackle the issues that matter most to us, our students and our neighbors."

In just the past few weeks, support for graduate workers' unions has poured in, including from Senator Chuck Schumer, Senator Kirsten Gillibrand, [Senator Bernie Sanders](#),

[Senator Elizabeth Warren](#), Congressman Jerry Nadler, [New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio](#), [Columbia faculty](#), other [members of Congress](#) and many more.

“We bring in nearly \$1 billion each year in grants and contracts and teach courses from chemical engineering and applied physics to biology and religion, but for too long Ivory Tower administrators have been calling all the shots,” said **Olga Brudastova, a research assistant in Columbia’s Department of Civil Engineering and Engineering Mechanics**. “We came to Columbia because we value inclusive and accessible learning and teaching. We look forward to getting to work on the improvements that will make sure Columbia stays a competitive, world-class institution in the 21st century.”

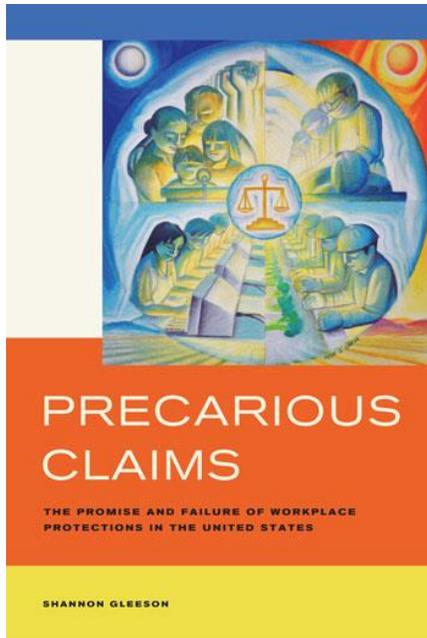
By working collectively, Columbia graduate workers have already [won numerous improvements to parental leave, childcare and pay](#), but continue to face constant insecurity and unpredictability of working conditions – growing teaching loads, late pay, unreliable health benefits and [sexual harassment](#), with little meaningful recourse. With their union, Columbia graduate workers have a voice on the job to protect these hard-won improvements and bargain for protections that will make their jobs and the university better.

“This is just the beginning of great things to come for the Columbia community and we’re proud to stand with graduate workers to bargain collectively for important improvements to pay and benefits that strengthen academic quality and student success,” said **Julie Kushner, the Director of UAW Region 9A**.

Columbia graduate workers’ successful union vote follows a landmark labor ruling by the National Labor Relations Board that restored their union rights. The [New York Times](#) said that with their union rights restored, “life for many graduate students is about to change for the better.” Since then, graduate workers across the country have been uniting to from their unions and improve their workplaces.

“The UAW has a proud history of helping higher education employees win respect on the job and union rights at public and private universities from coast to coast,” said **UAW President Dennis Williams**. “More than 38,500 teaching assistants and research assistants have formed their unions with the UAW, cementing real improvements on the job and for their families. Today, we celebrate Columbia graduate workers as they embark on a new journey to build a brighter future at one of our nation’s most prestigious universities.”

New Books by Section Members

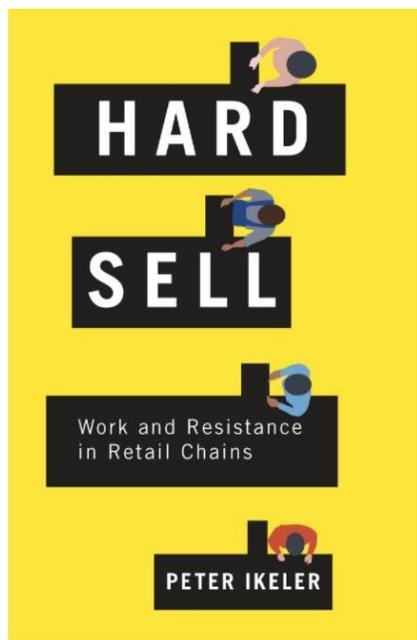


[Precarious Claims: The Promise and Failure of Workplace Protections in the United States](#)

Shannon Gleeson, University of California Press.

Precarious Claims tells the human story behind the bureaucratic process of fighting for justice in the U.S. workplace. The global economy has fueled vast concentrations of wealth that have driven a demand for cheap and flexible labor. Workplace violations such as wage theft, unsafe work environments, and discrimination are widespread in low-wage industries such as restaurants, retail, hospitality, and domestic work, where jobs are often held by immigrants and other vulnerable workers. Despite the challenges they face, these workers do seek justice. Why and how do they come forward, and what happens once they do? Based on extensive fieldwork in Northern California, Shannon Gleeson investigates the array of gatekeepers

with whom workers must negotiate in the labor standards enforcement bureaucracy and, ultimately, the limited reach of formal legal protections. Gleeson also tracks how workplace injustices—and the arduous process of contesting them—have long-term effects on their everyday lives. Workers sometimes win, but their chances are precarious at best.



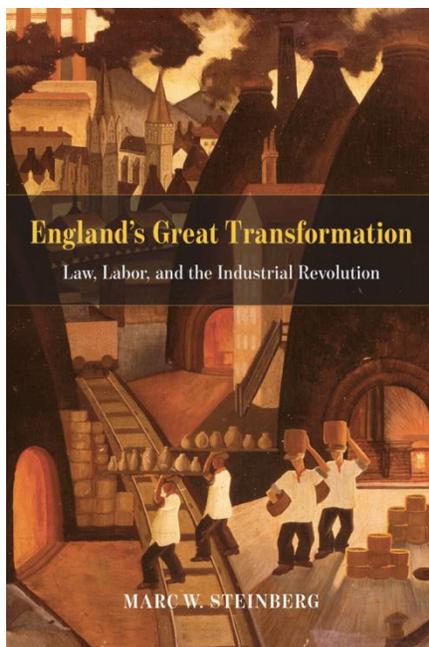
[Hard Sell: Work and Resistance in Retail Chains](#)

Peter Ikeler, ILR/Cornell University Press.

Along with fast-food workers, retail workers are capturing the attention of the public and the media with the Fight for \$15. Like fast-food workers, retail workers are underpaid, and fewer than 5 percent of them belong to unions. In *Hard Sell*, Peter Ikeler traces the low-wage, largely nonunion character of U.S. retail through the history and ultimate failure of twentieth-century retail unionism. He asks pivotal questions about twenty-first-century capitalism: Does the nature of retail work make collective action unlikely? Can working conditions improve in the absence of a union? Is worker consciousness changing in ways that might encourage or further inhibit organizing? Ikeler conducted interviews at New York City locations of two iconic

department stores—Macy's and Target. Much of the book's narrative unfolds from the perspectives of these workers in America's most unequal city.

When he speaks to workers, Ikeler finds that the Macy's organization displays an adversarial relationship between workers and managers and that Target is infused with a "team-work" message that enfolds both parties. Macy's workers identify more with their jobs and are more opposed to management, yet Target workers show greater solidarity. Both groups, however, are largely unhappy with the pay and precariousness of their jobs. Combined with workplace-generated feelings of unity and resistance, these grievances provide promising inroads to organizing that could help take the struggle against inequality beyond symbolic action to real economic power.



England's Great Transformation: Law, Labor and the Industrial Revolution

Marc Steinberg, University of Chicago Press.

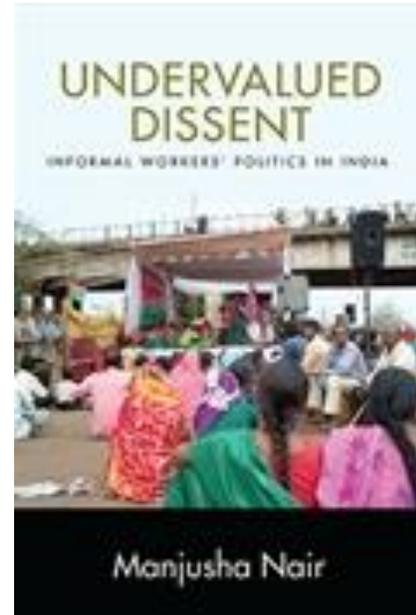
With *England's Great Transformation*, Marc W. Steinberg throws a wrench into our understanding of the English Industrial Revolution, largely revising the thesis at heart of Karl Polanyi's landmark *The Great Transformation*. The conventional wisdom has been that in the nineteenth century, England quickly moved toward a modern labor market where workers were free to shift from employer to employer in response to market signals. Expanding on recent historical research, Steinberg finds that to the contrary that labor contracts, centered on insidious master-servant laws, allowed employers and legal institutions to work in tandem to keep employees in line.

Building his argument on three case studies—the Hanley pottery industry, Hull fisheries, and Redditch needle-makers—Steinberg employs both local and national analyses to emphasize the ways in which these master-servant laws allowed employers to use the criminal prosecutions of workers to maintain control of their labor force. Steinberg provides a fresh perspective on the dynamics of labor control and class power, integrating the complex pathways of Marxism, historical institutionalism, and feminism, and giving readers a subtle yet revelatory new understanding of workplace control and power during England's Industrial Revolution.

Undervalued Dissent: Informal Workers' Politics in India.

Manjusha Nair, SUNY Press.

Historically, the Indian state has not offered welfare and social rights to all of its citizens, yet a remarkable characteristic of its polity has been the ability of citizens to dissent in a democratic way. In *Undervalued Dissent*, Manjusha Nair argues that this democratic space has been vanishing slowly. Based on extensive fieldwork in Chhattisgarh, a regional state in central India, this book examines two different informal workers' movements. Informal workers are not part of organized labor unions and makeup eighty-five percent of the Indian workforce. The first movement started in 1977 and was a success, while the other movement began in 1989 and still continues today, without success. The workers in both movements had similar backgrounds, skills, demands, and strategies. Nair maintains that the first movement succeeded because the workers contended within a labor regime that allowed space for democratic dissent, and the second movement failed because they contested within a widely altered labor regime following neoliberal reforms, where these spaces of democratic dissent were preempted. The key difference between the two regimes, Nair suggests, is not in the withdrawal of a prolabor state from its protective and regulatory role, as has been argued by many, but rather in the rise of a new kind of state that became functionally decentralized, economically predatory, and politically communalized. These changes, Nair concludes, successfully de-democratized labor politics in India.



Special thanks to Shay Chang for her help in producing this issue of *In Critical Solidarity*. Please check out our section web site at <http://asalabormovements.weebly.com/>