

# In Critical Solidarity

## Newsletter of the Labor and Labor Movements Section American Sociological Association

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### Author Meets Critic: *Forces of Labor*

Edited by Heidi Gottfried  
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This Author Meets Critic section features Beverly Silver's new book, *Forces of Labor: Workers' Movements and Globalization since 1870*, published by Cambridge University Press, 2003 (\$23.00 paper).

Reviews by Michael Burawoy, Ching Kwan Lee and Ian Robinson, and a rejoinder by Beverly Silver, raise issues of central importance

### Newsletter Contents

#### Author Meets Critics: Beverly Silver's *Forces of Production*

Heidi Gottfried, editor's Introduction, p. 1  
Michael Burawoy: Where Next for Labor?, p. 2  
Ching Kwan Lee: Beyond Historical Capitalism, p. 4  
Ian Robinson: Race to the Bottom?, p. 6  
Beverly Silver: Rejoinder, p. 8

**ASA 2004 convention sessions**, p. 3

#### Awards Nominations solicited

Distinguished Scholarly Article, p. 5  
Best Student Paper, p.7

**New journal announcement**, p. 10

**Past Chair's report**, Kim Voss, p. 11  
**Chair's report**, Ruth Milkman, p. 11

**New books by section members**, p. 12

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not only to the study of labor, but also to debates over the future of labor movements and the prospects for workers' transnational solidarity. The book mines a new lode of historical data on labor unrest worldwide and conducts in-depth analyzes of both 'old' and 'new' economy industries. Its daring theoretical ambitions and sweeping empirical scope provide much grist for the intellectual mill. That the book could provoke such diverse comments testifies to the richness of the argument and data. We welcome further comments in our newsletter or on our listserve.

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**WHERE NEXT FOR LABOR?**

Michael Burawoy

University of California at Berkeley

Forty years ago Robert Blauner published his classic monograph, *Alienation and Freedom*. Combining objective and subjective measures of alienation, he compared workers in four industries: printing, textiles, auto and chemical. He showed that levels of alienation followed an inverted U curve, with lowest levels in printing and highest in auto industry, while he conjectured that the continuous flow technology of the chemical industry was the harbinger of non-alienating work. This was a far-reaching break from the previous human relations concerns with enhanced productivity. Ten years after the publication of *Alienation and Freedom* Harry Braverman inaugurated Marxist studies of the labor process that dismissed Blauner as utopian – alienation was part and parcel of capitalist work and could only disappear with capitalism. Another decade and a half passed before labor studies took another leap forward, this time to the examination of the labor movement. Rick Fantasia's *Cultures of Solidarity* marked the point of departure, followed by a range of studies on the past, present and future of labor, including the work of sociologists Howard Kimmeldorf, Kim Voss, Ruth Milkman, Marshall Ganz, Gay Seidman, Judith Stepan-Norris, Dan Cornfield, Edna Bonacich, Maurice Zeitlin, Bruce Western, and Dan Clawson.

Beverly Silver's new and long awaited book *Forces of Labor* brings a refreshing clarity and world historical perspective to the analysis of labor movements. Her question is stark: Has the labor movement come to the end of its road or is it undergoing renaissance? By excavating the processes that underlie the gloomy figures of US labor movement decline, she offers some grounds for optimism. She adopts an elegant model of capitalism as beset by the contradiction between the search for profit and the need for legitimacy. Capitalists compete with one another, driving down the costs of labor threatening their legitimacy and generating struggles to which capitalism responds with various "fixes:" spatial fix (relocation to new sources of cheap labor), process fix (technological innovation), product fix (turning to

a new product or industry where profits are initially high), and finally financial fix (in which excess capital turns to financial outlets). However, these fixes are all temporary. Capitalism continues to lurch between profitability crisis and legitimation crisis.

Silver assumes that the legitimation crisis will express itself in labor unrest but whether labor is successful in its struggles depends upon its power. There are two sources of power: structural power rooted in the workplace and the labor market and associational power founded in labor's organizational capacity. That's the theory. The data that is illuminated by this theory comes from a coding of events of labor unrest all over the world between 1870 and 1996, as reported by the *New York Times* and *The Times* (London). For all the data's limitations this is a remarkable venture in substantiating a historical and global approach to the study of labor movements. Although, like Blauner, her study is based on major industries, her focus on collective action rather than alienation, on the whole world rather than the US, with a time span of over a century rather than the contemporary, and embedded in a theory of the dynamics of global capitalism rather than empiricist description marks the progress of four decades of labor studies.

Silver begins with the auto industry where the interdependence of assembly line labor process gives labor structural power vis-à-vis capital, continually breaking out into the most intense class struggle. First in the United States in the 1930s, then in Europe in the 1960s and 70s, then in the semi-periphery (South Africa, Brazil, South Korea) in the 1980s, wherever the industry relocated it stimulates a new wave of strikes and labor unrest. The spatial fix does not work and nor, it turns out, does technological innovation. Struggle is contained only in Japan with its flexible work organization and security of employment for the privileged. The Japanese anomaly suggests that we should pay as much attention to the interests of labor as to its power.

Silver contrasts the quintessentially 20<sup>th</sup>. century auto-industry with the quintessentially 19<sup>th</sup>. century textile industry where workplace bargaining is limited and power comes from effective trade union organization, i.e. from

associational power. Falling rates of profits in textiles led to the outflow of capital not only to other parts of the world but also to other industries, auto in particular. This is the “product fix” response to competing logics of profits and legitimation. If auto comes after textiles what comes after auto? Where does capital flee after auto reaps diminishing returns? Will there be a dominant 21<sup>st</sup> century industry from which labor struggles will radiate? This is not clear. For now, capital is being parked in the financial sphere but from there where will it be deployed? She considers the information industry, transportation and service sectors. She notes, in particular, the rising importance of the service sector, where workplace power and community organizing have converged. The prototype here was the Justice for Janitors campaign whose success depended on the vulnerability of corporate capital and the solidarity of immigrant communities. Global cities as the locus of capital’s financial and informational infrastructure could then be the fulcrum of a new round of labor struggles.

#### **LABOR AND LABOR MOVEMENTS SECTION SESSIONS AT 2004 ANNUAL MEETINGS**

The section will have two paper sessions and a roundtable session. Here are the titles and organizers:

##### **Union organizing in the service sector:**

Rachel Sherman, Yale University,  
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##### **Student activism and the labor movement:**

Kim Voss, UC Berkeley,  
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**Roundtables:** Sarah Hernandez, New College,  
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Silver does not confine herself to a sectoral analysis, she also examines the effects on labor of the national political terrain. Her data show how in the run up to the two world wars of the 20<sup>th</sup>. century, labor militance increased, during the wars it declined significantly, only to increase dramatically after the wars. Indeed, wars give workers structural power vis-à-vis the state, the

leverage of threatened non-participation in mobilization at the front but also strikes in military industries. Concessions are won that only feed pent-up postwar demands. Wars highlight the need to elicit the consent from the citizenry, which in turn gives it leverage. If wars require less and less sacrifice and, more generally, if consent is less essential to contemporary capitalism, working class power declines. That’s at the national level but Silver also considers politics at an international level. Here she writes of the rise of United States global hegemony after WWII, which involved concessions to workers in advanced capitalism and the ideology of development, i.e. the promise of concessions, in the rest of the world. This hegemony failed, entered into crisis and gave rise to combined political repression and market reassertion in the global south.

But why so little development in the Third World? Here the elegance of Silver’s model of capitalism shines forth. Adopting Vernon’s product cycle theory she argues that in its inception an industry generates super-profits, which working class struggle can turn into material concessions, but then competition sets in, production is standardized and profits are squeezed dry. They can only be secured through exporting industry to sources of cheap labor, held in place by repressive political regimes. Thus, we have a neat explanation as to why despite industrialization across the world, the bifurcation between rich and poor countries is as deep as ever. Can this be countered? What chance for working class solidarity across national boundaries?

This brings me to Silver’s underdeveloped and underemployed distinction between Marx-type struggles and Polanyi-type struggles, between struggles against exploitation in production and those against commodification in the market. Although Silver makes this distinction, *Forces of Labor* is largely about Marx-type struggles. She invokes Polanyi-type struggles as a residual only when Marxian explanations don’t work. She tends to assume that workers organize themselves against exploitation, mobilizing structural power to resist the intensification of work or low wages, rather than against unrelenting commodification. That is, workers organize themselves when they have

power (whether structural or associational) rather than when they are powerless, when they have nothing to lose but their chains. She subscribes to the conventional sociological wisdom that resources are a sine qua non for collective struggle rather than the Polanyian idea that struggle springs from needs, and that collective mobilization leads to the accumulation of resources. Today, one might argue that with the neoliberal dispensation struggles against capitalism are taking a sea change from Marxian-type struggles based on power in production to Polanyian-type struggles based on resistance to the commodification of land, labor and money. The anti-globalization movement is a struggle against resurgent markets by a coalition of actors who have an interest in expanding human rights, in sustaining a healthy environment, in a minimal standard of living. The advantage of Polanyi-type struggles is that they easily find a broad coalition of support whereas Marx-type struggles against exploitation remain particularistic. In the final analysis, we may go even further, to argue that workers have an interest in their own exploitation as the source of their livelihood – the one thing worse than being exploited is not to be exploited -- whereas markets will be resisted precisely because they do endanger that livelihood. We may be witnessing then a sea change from Marxian to Polanyian struggles. In focusing on power rather than interests Silver may be missing the significance of her invocation of Polanyi -- a most profound shift in the impetus behind anti-capitalist movements.

*The Forces of Labor* establishes a new research program into labor movements that takes seriously both history and the global. It challenges us – both scholars and activists -- to shed the narrow parochialism that eternalizes the present and seals labor in national containers. Like Braverman's *Labor and Monopoly Capital* it has a simple, powerful, overarching argument that reconfigures what we know, in her case about the historical and geographical dynamics of labor movements. It reveals the underlying terrain for labor struggles, opening up the future that others would close down. Like Braverman its every assumption, its every leap of logic will be held up for examination, interrogated and superceded. In

the end it too will be absorbed, but not before we have reimagined the future of labor.

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## BEYOND HISTORICAL CAPITALISM?

Ching Kwan Lee  
University of Michigan

This *tour de force book* has a bold and parsimonious argument at its heart. Linking global patterns of labor unrest over the past 130 years with the economic and political dynamics of global capitalism, Silver deftly shuttles between fine-grained historical narratives and powerful theoretical assertions. She seeks to show that as capital pursues spatial, product and financial fixes to resolve the contradiction between a crisis of profitability and a crisis of legitimacy inherent in historical capitalism, workers react against the tendencies of commodification and proletarianization with what she calls respectively the "Polanyi-type" and "Marx-type" labor unrest. The book's staunch commitment to a Marxist, structural, materialist world-system framework is refreshing, even stunning, in an age of post-communist, post-colonial and culturalist theorizing. Her return to a production-, workplace- and class-centered analysis of labor politics recaptures a core but often eclipsed dimension of globalization, i.e., this ostensibly unrelenting and agent-less process has been limited and shaped by global labor reaction. This provocative study makes a convincing case for a probable resurgence of labor activism and the continuing significance of labor studies.

However, the proof of the pudding is in the immensely engaging historical details which, ironically, threaten at times to unravel Silver's structural framework. Her data consistently show a wide range of workers' interests and capacity, although her theory steadfastly assumes they are constant and structurally rooted in production. Using the fascinating case of the global auto industry, Silver follows the cycle of capital relocation and labor militancy moving from the United States, to Western Europe, Brazil, South Africa and then to South Korea and Mexico. Whereas she argues that capital's spatial fix spreads labor unrest to new

sites of production as workers acquire "workplace bargaining power" to disrupt

**DISTINGUISHED SCHOLARLY ARTICLE AWARD**

The Labor and Labor Movements section will give an annual award for distinguished scholarship. The award will alternate: one year to the best article, the next to the best book. This year the award will go to the best article published between January 1, 2001 and December 31, 2003. Please nominate your own article, or any favorite article. The nomination deadline is March 31, 2004. For nominations, at an absolute minimum send the reference for the article. Ideally, send a message explaining why this article should win the award, a copy of the paper, your contact information, and the author's contact information (if it's not a self-nomination). Send copies of the message (by email or hard copy) to all committee members:

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production at the plant, corporate and industry levels, her data reveal a more complex picture. Her national cases suggest a wide range of societal factors (e.g., cross-class alliance, community support, patriarchy in family, generational status of immigrant workers, workers' association power, etc) that may combine with, compensate or counteract the logic of capitalist production to produce diverse worker interest and capacity. Silver's theory

completely obliterates the role of society, as well as the state, in mediating class relations, organizing consent or compromise, as Erik Olin Wright<sup>1</sup> and Michael Burawoy<sup>2</sup> have shown. Confronted, and indeed disciplined, by the rich variations in her own data, she sometimes retreats from her more deterministic moment, wavering between her predictions of, on the one hand, a strong and independent labor movement arising in China, the site of the latest round of global auto investment (p. 65), and on the other hand, the decline of autoworkers' role in labor militancy together with the loss of the industry's leading role in capitalist development (p.73). In any case, recent studies of Chinese labor unrest suggest that the most restive sectors are not those in the more regulated and integrated mass production sector like automobile joint ventures, but those who are least incorporated in the capitalist order such as peasant migrant workers and veteran state workers in bankrupt socialist enterprises who are deprived of legal and contractual rights.

Besides the eclipse of society, Silver also fails to engage post-colonial labor studies that challenge the orthodox Marxist assumption of capitalism as a universalistic, singular, Euro-centric master process shaping labor unrest everywhere. I am thinking here both of Dipesh Chakrabarty's suggestive notion of "historical difference" in non-Western societies, of a history "outside the life process of capital,"<sup>3</sup> and of the specific history of Chinese labor. Silver interprets Chinese labor politics during the 1920s as part of a global narrative of intensified competitive pressure among textile industrialists whose cost-cutting rationalization of production unleashed a major wave of unrest among textile workers. She attributes its demise in the 1940s to the Second World War, which was in turn the result of great power rivalry. Yet, as Elizabeth same period suggests, labor militancy was fanned as much by the revolutionary movements

<sup>1</sup> Erik Olin Wright, "Working-class Power, Capitalist-Class Interests and Class Compromise," *American Journal of Sociology* 105(4): 957-1002, 2000.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Burawoy, *The Politics of Production*. London: Verso, 1985; and "For a Sociological Marxism: The Contemporary Convergence of Antonio Gramsci and Karl Polanyi", *Politics and Society* 31(2): 193-261, 2003.

<sup>3</sup> Dipesh Charkrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001.

Perry's<sup>4</sup> seminal work on Chinese labor in the and nationalist mobilizations, led by the Chinese Communist Party and the Nationalist Party in competition with each other, as by workplace conflicts. Moreover, the working-class swept up in this wave of unrest included far more than textile workers. The participation of rickshaw pullers, tramway workers, prostitutes and night-soil carriers in labor protests in this period was only remotely related to global capitalism. In a similar vein, Silver conveniently ignores several waves of labor unrest under Communism, in China and elsewhere, which would have led her to recognize alternative trajectories of labor resistance under state socialism. There, the state, rather than the market and commodification, was a potent catalyst for and target of labor rebellion.

Finally, by self-consciously adopting a structural analytic, Silver eschews analysis of the "living labor" subject that has pre-occupied feminist and post-colonial labor scholars. Their work has criticized the Marxist notion of the worker subject as universal, liberal, abstract and masculine. More recently, David Harvey<sup>5</sup> advances a broader definition of class relation to encompass workers' "multiple positionalities" and therefore multiple political interests and identities with respect to different moments of capital circulation and accumulation: including production, exchange, consumption and reproduction. Workers are laborers, but they are also consumers, savers, lovers, bearers of culture, even occasional employers and landed proprietors. The market has alienating but also liberating effects on workers, and their reaction to commodification is not necessarily one of resistance and unrest. Again, using China as an example, the new generation of industrial workers reacts ambivalently to labor commodification. These Chinese peasant workers who produce for the world market want further commodification of their labor power and freer access to the labor market both of which allow them to break their bondage to a state

<sup>4</sup> Elizabeth J. Perry, *Shanghai On Strike: The Politics of Chinese Labor*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993. See also S.A. Smith, *Like Cattle and Horses: Nationalism and Labor in Shanghai, 1895-1927*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2002.

<sup>5</sup> David Harvey, *Spaces of Hope*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000.

imposed, ascribed second-class status of "rural residents". Without considering the society, history and subjectivity that go into the making of these Chinese workers, Silver's high hope for a resounding labor movement with world-historic significance to arise in China (just because global capital invests there) may have been misplaced.

To her credit, Silver announces early on in the book that she is not dealing with social organization or dispositions of workers, and that to identify the global pattern she must focus on commonality rather than differences among national cases. Yet, if national cases have their internal dynamics that defy or exist outside the logic of the totality to which they allegedly belong, one wonders whether the totality is as totalizing as it seems. And if historical capitalism only implies a *potential* for labor unrest to occur in particular times and places, we also need theories that point to the conditions for the realization of such potential. This would require more explicit theorizing of the variations in social organization, local history and the labor subject.

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## RACE TO THE BOTTOM?

Ian Robinson

University of Michigan

It is impossible to do justice, in the space allowed, to a book that has the scope and sophistication of Beverly Silver's *Forces of Labor*. This *tour de force* explores the reciprocal relations between forms of national and global economic regulation and three types of labor movement power, as they have evolved around the world over a period of some 130 years. Anyone interested in the past, present and future of the world's labor movements should read this book. It does not get everything right, but like all excellent intellectual efforts, even the things it gets wrong stimulate deeper reflection and understanding. In that spirit, I will now engage one of Silver's more provocative arguments: her claim that Southern workers are not harmed much, if at all, by "race to the bottom" (RTB) dynamics in which workers in different countries bid down one another's compensation and job security in vain efforts to attract or keep the jobs provided by private investors.

Most of those who believe that there is a RTB dynamic argue that its principal cause is increased international capital mobility. Silver partly rejects this position, arguing that if increased capital mobility were the only factor in play there would be a redistribution of union power from the global North to the global South, but no net reduction in the amount of union power in the world [165, 169]. On this view, increased international capital mobility is an important cause of decline (at least in sectors where capital can exit) in the North. However, RTB cannot explain the decline in union power that has occurred in the global South in the last decade, even in the countries where labor movements enjoyed the most dramatic increases in economic and political power in the 1980s and early 1990s (e.g., South Korea, South Africa, and Brazil).

Silver argues that this decline is explained by a combination of the Third World debt crisis and the resulting structural adjustment conditions imposed by the IMF, and the growing volume of speculative international currency trading and capital flows (the “financial fix”) that give rise to an increasingly crisis-prone global economy [165-6]. I agree that these developments have had profound negative impacts on Southern labor movements' power. However, it is a mistake to focus exclusively on this aspect of the problem, while ignoring South-South RTB pressures. Dani Rodrik argues that increases in international capital mobility increase the price elasticity of the demand for labor (i.e., they make employers more sensitive to increases in the price of labor than they were before) in Southern countries as in Northern ones. The fact that factories must go somewhere in the global South does not mean that workers and unions in all Southern countries are not subject to this intensified downward pressure on their wages. In other words, instead of a North-to-South power shift within the global labor movement, the current system engenders a power shift from global labor to global capital in both parts of the world. This destructive dynamic would exist even if the IMF and the speculators were brought to heel, and this aspect of the global economy effectively reformed.

This reformulation has implications for two aspects of Silver's analysis. First, it suggests that her rather disparaging treatment of efforts to

#### **NEW: BEST STUDENT PAPER AWARD**

The Labor and Labor Studies Section gives an award for an outstanding graduate student paper written in the three years prior to the award. Submissions are solicited for papers written by students enrolled in graduate programs at the time the paper was written. Students can self-nominate or they can be nominated by a section member. The winner gets \$150 for travel to a professional meeting. The nomination deadline is March 31, 2004. For nominations, send a copy of the nominee's paper, a justification letter of the nomination, and nominee contact information (including email, if possible) to each committee member.

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promote international worker rights needs to be re-thought. If the main problem facing South Korean unions today is not Northern protectionism/exclusion, but the loss of

investment and global market share to China, then demands for trade agreements -- and/or other effective international institutions -- that protect Southern workers in countries with strong worker rights from Southern countries that repress those rights cannot be dismissed as unnecessary or counterproductive. Closely related, if Rodrik is right and all workers are harmed (in this important respect) by the current global market regime, then the prospects for North-South labor solidarity -- rooted in a determination to find a mutually acceptable way to advance this common interest -- may be better than Silver seems inclined to believe.

This common interest extends to workers in China and Mexico, where foreign investment in auto production has grown most rapidly in the last decade. Silver argues that, based on past experience, we can expect the auto sectors of these countries to develop strong, autonomous, democratic unions in the near future without any external pressure for worker rights. But in Mexico, with a more democratic and less labor repressive state than China, there has been little if any movement in this direction, despite the five-fold increase in motor vehicle production since 1984 [65]. Real wages in this sector remain lower than they were before the crisis of 1982, and wages in the newest, most productive plants near the border remain lower than those in the older plants built near Mexico City during the Import Substitution Industrialization era. To justify her optimism about the future of democratic unionism, in the absence of changes in the international rules of the game, Silver needs to supply an analysis of why such an upsurge did not materialize in Mexico in the 1990s, and why factors explaining this failure are likely to change. *A fortiori* for China. I hope she will take up the challenge.

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### Rejoinder Beverly J. Silver

Needless to say, this rejoinder can only scratch the surface in responding to the broad range of important issues raised by Michael Burawoy, Ching Kwan Lee and Ian Robinson. Burawoy's review offers an impressively succinct and accurate summary of the main line of argument of *Forces of Labor*. In the

penultimate paragraph he lays out his central critique. The book focuses largely on Marx-type labor unrest, invoking Polanyi-type unrest only as a residual explanation. As a result, it misses the fact that, in this era of neo-liberal globalization, we may be in the midst of a "sea change" in the nature of labor movements.

It is fair to say that there is a disproportionate emphasis in the book on Marx-type struggles as opposed to Polanyi-type struggles—disproportionate, that is, relative to their overall importance in the history of world labor unrest. The reasons for this disproportion are partly theoretically driven, partly empirically driven, and in part quite pedestrian in nature. Yet, I would emphasize that, while my discussion of Polanyi-type labor unrest is far too compressed, it is nevertheless central to the book's theoretical framework, rather than a residual explanation.

As Burawoy correctly notes, the book conceptualizes historical capitalism as being beset by a contradiction between crises of profitability and crises of legitimacy. I argue that this contradiction has produced in the twentieth century what might be called a "Polanyian pendulum swing" between periods characterized by a move towards the relative decommodification of labor and the establishment of social compacts, and periods characterized by a move toward intensified labor commodification and the breakdown of established social compacts. As the pendulum swings toward commodification (as it did in the late-nineteenth century, and as it has been doing in the late-twentieth century under "neo-liberal globalization"), the tendency towards crises of legitimacy intensifies along with Polanyi-type labor unrest—that is, the struggles of workers mobilizing against the undermining of established ways of life and livelihood. Whether, how and when the pendulum swings back toward the decommodification of labor and the establishment of new social compacts depends, among other things, on how Polanyi-type and Marx-type labor unrest combine.

Chapter 4 describes world labor unrest in the twentieth century as being embedded in one-and-a-half full swings of this "Polanyi pendulum". It points to the ways in which this process played out in different but analogous and inter-

connected ways in First, Second and Third World countries. Yet, the chapter provides only the broad outlines of an argument that might best be seen as “agenda setting” for future work.

Thus, I *mostly agree* with Burawoy’s suggestion that we are in the midst of a “sea change” (or pendulum swing) in the character of labor unrest. I say “mostly agree” because Burawoy seems to suggest that Marx-type struggles are becoming largely irrelevant and, moreover, that this is not such a bad thing given their “particularistic” nature compared to the ease with which broad coalitions are formed around Polanyi-type struggles. On these points I disagree.

First, I should clarify that I am not conceptualizing Marx-type labor unrest as struggles at the point of production—even though I derive the concept from the first volume of *Capital* in which Marx’s focus is decidedly on the point of production. Rather, I conceptualize Marx-type labor unrest as struggles by newly emergent working classes in-formation—working classes often being created at the same time, and through the very same transformations in the organization of production and social relations that are undermining or “unmaking” established working classes. This approach suggests that, even in periods when the pendulum swings towards the commodification of labor, and thus when we would expect significant Polanyi-type labor unrest (such as the widespread resistance to the smashing of the “iron rice bowl” by workers downsized from state-owned enterprises in China), our eyes should be open for early signs of new working class formation and the potential for Marx-type labor unrest.

Second, Marx-type labor unrest is not necessarily particularistic in nature (even if we just focus on struggles at the point of production). One of the recurrent themes that emerges in chapter 2 is the way in which the particularistic struggles of autoworkers tended to become “hegemonic”; that is, in fighting for themselves they were also fighting for issues that were seen as being in the more general “societal” interest (e.g., for democracy, the right to form autonomous organizations, economic justice, racial equality). To be sure, not all Marx-

type labor unrest takes on this hegemonic quality. Whether it does in part depends on how the protagonists of such struggles are embedded in society—including workers’ “multiple positionalities” as workers, consumers, neighbors, family members, citizens, etc., as Lee points out. It also depends on the way in which the contradiction between legitimacy and profitability is resolved at the firm- and industry-level—including the ways in which “boundary drawing strategies” divide workers—and thus, the ways in which labor unrest is shaped by what Burawoy and Lee call workers’ interests.

Conversely, there is no reason to assume that Polanyi-type struggles are more likely to be hegemonic, or for that matter, in some way politically progressive. Indeed, for Polanyi, fascism and various forms of national-chauvinism (including cross-class alliances in favor of protectionism at home and colonial expansion abroad) were among the many and varied manifestations of the double-movement against the self-regulating market.

This brings me to the question of labor internationalism and the North-South divide. Robinson argues that I downplay the role played by intra-South competition in explaining the crisis of labor movements, and therefore, I also underestimate the prospects for successful North-South labor internationalism. To be sure, as I argue in the book, the crisis of labor in, say, the ABC region of Sao Paulo, is partly due to the movement of manufacturing capital to other Third World countries (*and* to other parts of Brazil) with cheaper and less militant labor. Nevertheless, as I also argue in the book, the weight of such South-South competition pales in importance relative to other processes.

To some extent, this is an empirical question that cannot be resolved here. In such a discussion I might point to the fact that in the past two decades the movement of capital (both foreign direct investment and financial flows) has been overwhelmingly to the North, and most especially to the United States. Indeed, the devastating collapse in employment levels in the Sao Paulo area’s automobile industry in the 1980s went hand-in-hand with the rapid expansion of the automobile industry in the United States and the United Kingdom. Part of

the explanation for this re-centralization in core countries is to be found in “technological/organizational fixes” that re-established the competitiveness of high-wage areas. An equally important part of the explanation is to be found in the political success of cross-class alliances demanding trade protection from the state.

Since Southern workers (and capitalists) are no less likely than Northern workers (and capitalists) to pursue protectionist strategies, I can envision the possible emergence of an international coalition that cuts across the North-South divide in support of trade sanctions against China. Whether this could be labeled labor internationalism, however, I sincerely doubt. Moreover, in a world characterized by a highly militarized and aggressive sole superpower, which openly states that one of its central strategic goals is to stop the emergence of any alternative economic or military power (read China), the strategy of building such an international labor coalition makes me very uncomfortable, to say the least. The US labor movement faces a historic choice in these matters—one that will have a major impact on labor internationalism, but also on the global dynamics of war and peace. Thinking through this issue soberly, I would argue, is one of the most important tasks facing intellectuals who find themselves “in critical solidarity” with the US labor movement.

I have already tried to respond to several of Lee’s points, although in a far too compressed and indirect manner. Let me conclude by turning to two of her methodological points. First, I agree that the “totality is not totalizing”. On the one hand, the totality does impose very real constraints on the range of possible action open to local actors. At the same time, however, I tried to show how the system itself is constructed over time through local action, and how local movements (including in peripheral locales) have shaped global economic and political dynamics as much as they have been shaped and constrained by those dynamics.

Second, I should clarify that my research strategy does not privilege commonalities over differences among national cases. Rather, what I argue is that in explaining *similarities and*

*differences* among cases, we should not limit ourselves to an examination of the cases’ similar/different preexisting internal characteristics. If we don’t explicitly examine the relationships among the cases, and the relationships between the cases and the totality, they become a lurking (unexamined) variable, and we therefore risk misattributing observed cross-national variation in outcome to pre-existing (and internally produced) differences among the cases. By focusing attention primarily on the above-mentioned relational processes, *Forces of Labor* seeks to redress a major imbalance in the existing labor studies literature. I hope it will also be seen as opening up space for a healthy tension and cross-fertilization between different perspectives and research strategies in the field.

#### **LABOR: STUDIES IN WORKING CLASS HISTORY OF THE AMERICAS**

A new name but not a new journal, *Labor: Studies in Working Class History of the Americas*, publishes the best work on labor history. *Labor* was created as a result of a walkout by the entire editorial board of *Labor History*. The editorial board took this labor action in response to the commercial publisher’s attempt to dictate operational terms of the journal. In the words of the new editorial committee: “The journal – itself a product of a labor movement comprising intellectuals who dared to protect the fruits of their labor when endangered by corporate mandate—is uniquely positioned within the expanded framework it suggests.” The former *Labor History* continues publication under a whole new editorial committee.

*Labor* has expanded its purview to pay more attention to an array of labor systems, ranging from agricultural work, slavery, unpaid and domestic labor, the informal sector, and the professions, and to social contexts including race, gender, class, and ethnicity. Submissions can be sent to Leon Fink, Editor of *Labor*, and for new subscriptions contact, Duke University Press.

**Report of the Past Chair: Kim Voss**

At the ASA meetings in Atlanta this year the labor and labor movements sessions were on the last day of the meetings, in the very final time slots. And yet, a sizeable audience came to hear about "Coalitions and Alternative Forms of Labor Organizing," and "New Perspectives on Labor Movement Theory and Research," the two sessions we sponsored, and to participate in our roundtables. At the business meeting, held literally as they were cleaning up the conference, people delayed their departure to offer many ideas for future sessions and activities. A friend of mine, and chair of another section, spoke longingly of trying to generate the same level of engagement in his much larger and more established section.

We've come a long way in a relatively short time. In 1997, at the ASA in Toronto, a few of us met to discuss how we might promote more research on labor and labor movements, and establish meaningful ties with labor activists. By 2000 we had become a section-in-formation. A year later we attained formal section status, having grown to be 300-hundred strong. And our members have been active on the research front, heartened to be part of an intellectually stimulating and growing community of labor scholars. One indication is the several new books written by section members, which Ruth Milkman lists in her message. Another marker is the many dissertations our graduate student members are researching.

I've learned a lot being Chair of the section this last year, and have been very impressed with the research and teaching our members are doing. Thanks to everyone who helped make Atlanta a success, especially the session organizers, Gay Seidman and Ruth Milkman, and the roundtable organizer, Joel Stillerman. Thanks, too, to the section officers: Heidi Gottfried, our Secretary-Treasurer, and council members Edna Bonachich, Jill Esbenshade, Harland Prechel, and Daisy Rooks. Dan Clawson, our newsletter editor deserves special recognition for the great job he's done, as does George Mason, web master extraordinaire.

**Report of the Current Chair: Ruth Milkman**

Our fledgling section on Labor and Labor Movements is thriving! The past decade's efforts to revitalize the organized labor movement in the U.S. have captured the imagination of a new generation of sociologists, and also stimulated veteran scholars to undertake new research in this field. Several important new books in the area appeared in 2003 including Judith Stepan-Norris and Maurice Zeitlin's *LEFT OUT* (Cambridge); Beverly Silver's *FORCES OF LABOR* (Cambridge), and Dan Clawson's *THE NEXT UPSURGE* (Cornell). More are forthcoming in 2004, including Steven Lopez' *REORGANIZING THE RUST BELT* (California), Rick Fantasia and Kim Voss' *HARD WORK* (California), Chris Rhomberg's *NO THERE THERE* (California) and Ruth Milkman and Kim Voss' edited volume, *REBUILDING LABOR* (Cornell), which includes contributions from section members Leslie Bunnage, Marshall Ganz, Steven Lopez, Robert Penney, Daisy Rooks, Preston Rudy, Teresa Sharpe, and Judith Stepan-Norris.

Our section has established two new awards. The 2004 Distinguished Labor Scholarship Award will be designated by a committee chaired by Dan Clawson for the best article on labor and labor movements published between January 2001 and January 2004. (In 2005 the award will be designated for the best recent book on labor, and thereafter alternate between articles and books.) In addition, the section now has a Best Student Paper Award. For 2004 the selection committee chair is Harland Prechel.

The program for the 2004 ASA annual meeting in San Francisco features a record seven sessions on labor topics, as well as our section roundtables. In addition to the two sessions sponsored by our session (see details on p. 2), there will be an "Author Meets Critics" session on Clawson's *THE NEXT UPSURGE*, a regular session on labor and labor movements, a thematic session on transnational labor movements, a regional spotlight session on the California Labor Movement, and a session on labor and environmentalism (co-sponsored by the sections on Environment and Technology and on Collective Behavior and Social Movements). The theme of this meeting, "Public

Sociologies,” makes it an especially hospitable one for our section, and the overall program, assembled by a committee led by ASA President Michael Burawoy (who is also a member of our section) is extraordinary and not to be missed. Looking forward to seeing you there!

**Mini-Conference:**

PEWS and Labor and Labor Movement Section will jointly sponsor a Mini-conference on “**North/South Social Movements: Bases for Alliances and Tensions**” to take place on the day before the beginning of ASA in 2005 (a year and a half from now). The committee consists of members from both sections including: Gay Seidman (seidman@ssc.wisc.edu), Bob Ross, Jennifer Chun and Joel Stillerman.

**New and forthcoming labor books by section members:**

Dan Clawson. *The Next Upsurge: Labor and the New Social Movements*. Cornell 2003.

Daniel B. Cornfield and Holly J. McCammon, eds. 2003. *Labor Revitalization: Global Perspectives and New Initiatives*. Volume 11, Research in the Sociology of Work. Amsterdam: Elsevier.

G. William Domhoff. *Changing the Powers That Be: How the Left Can Stop Losing and Win*. Rowman & Littlefield 2003.

Rick Fantasia and Kim Voss. *Hard Work: Remaking the American Labor Movement*. California 2004.

Mary Margaret Fonow. *Union Women: Forging Feminism in the United Steelworkers of America*. Minnesota 2003.

Jeff Goodwin and James Jasper, eds. *Rethinking Social Movements*. Rowman & Littlefield 2003.

Richard Krooth. *A Century Passing: Carnegie, Steel, & the Fate of Homestead*. University Press of America 2004.

Steven Lopez. *Reorganizing the Rustbelt*. California 2004.

Jeff Manza. *Locking up the Vote*. Oxford 2004.

Ruth Milkman, ed. *State of California Labor*. California 2003.

Ruth Milkman and Kim Voss, eds. *Rebuilding Labor*. Cornell 2004. Includes essays by section members Leslie Bunnage, Marshall Ganz, Steven Lopez, Robert Penney, Daisy Rooks, Preston Rudy, Teresa Sharpe, and Judith Stepan-Norris.

Sean O’Riain. *The Politics of High-Tech Growth*. Cambridge 2003.

Thomas Reifer, ed. *Globalization, Hegemony & Power: Antisystemic Movements and the Global System*. Paradigm, 2004. Includes contributions by section members Edna Bonacich, Tom Reifer, William Robinson, and Immanuel Wallerstein.

Christopher Rhomberg. *No There There: Race, Class, and Political Community in Oakland*. California 2004.

Deirdre Royster. *Race and the Invisible Hand: How White Networks Exclude Black Men from Blue-Collar Jobs*. California 2003.

Art Shostak. *The CyberUnion Handbook: Transforming Labor through Computer Technology*.

Beverly Silver. *Forces of Production: Workers’ Movements and Globalization since 1870*. Cambridge 2003.

Judith Stepan-Norris and Maurice Zeitlin. *Left Out: Reds and America’s Unions*. Cambridge 2003.