
In Critical Solidarity

*Newsletter of the American Sociological Association's
Section on Labor and Labor Movements*

Vol. 6, No. 1

March 2006

The Mighty, Mighty Union: New York City's Transit Strike

Carolina Bank Muñoz

On December 20th 2005, over 30,000 transit workers walked off the job, paralyzing New York City's transportation system right before the holidays. It was the first New York City transit strike in over 20 years. Why did they strike? To say no to givebacks. Despite the fact that the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) had more than a billion dollar surplus, it was trying to impose major concessions on transit workers. The main sticking points in negotiations were around wage increases and retirement pensions. The issue of pensions was particularly important because the MTA was demanding that future workers pay more toward their retirement funds.

In the months preceding the December Transit Workers Union (TWU) contract expiration date, many of the New York City public sector unions settled concessionary contracts. Unions representing police officers, teachers, and sanitation workers ended up with more work and less pay as well as losing some workplace rights. These concessionary contracts were bargained during a period in which New York City had an unprecedented budget surplus of over two billion dollars.

Resisting this concessionary logic, many of the workers I spoke to on the picket line said that the strike was not just about their contract; rather, they were on strike for all New Yorkers. They believed that city and state workers had been disrespected far too long without anyone taking a serious stand. They were on strike to maintain their good unionized jobs and to send a message to Mayor Bloomberg and Governor Pataki: that the City and State needed to start treating New York's workers with respect and dignity. This was a very courageous stance in light of the high penalties for
<continued on page 5>

It's Not Too Late to Nominate!

2006 Section Award Nominations
due April 31

MOST OUTSTANDING STUDENT PAPER

For the best graduate Student Paper on Labor and Labor Movements completed or published during the past year (since January 1, 2005). Submissions are solicited for papers written by students enrolled in graduate programs at the time the paper was written. Papers should be of normal article length (circa 10,000 words). Students can self-nominate or they can be nominated by a section member. The winner gets \$150 for travel to a professional meeting. Electronic copies of the articles or papers being nominated or submitted for the award should be sent to:

Michael Schwartz (Chair, Student Prize Committee) mschwartz@ms.cc.sunysb.edu with copies to: David Fitzgerald (dfitzger@ucla.edu); Piya Pangsapa (pangsapa@acsu.buffalo.edu); Nancy Plankey Videla (plankeyvidela@tamu.edu); Marisa Friedman (cliofurie@hotmail.com).

DISTINGUISHED SCHOLARLY ARTICLE

For the best article on labor and labor movements published between January 1, 2004 and December 31, 2005 (the award is given only every other year). Electronic copies of the articles or papers being nominated or submitted for the award should be sent to:

Steve Lopez (Chair, Scholarly Award Committee) lopez.137@sociology.osu.edu with copies to: Jeff Sallaz (jsallaz@email.arizona.edu); Matthew Mahutga (mmahutga@uci.edu); Leslie Bunnage (lbunnage@uci.edu)

Research & Activism

Global Unions Conference Advances Corporate Research and Cross-border Organizing

Angela Jamison

The opening plenary of the Global Unions Conference on February 9th packed a New York hotel ballroom with union researchers, organizers and leaders, NGO representatives, and academics. As Coordinator Kate Bronfenbrenner introduced the Belgian, South African, Mexican and US union leaders who spoke, participants from 53 countries cocked their heads like UN representatives, listening to the Russian, Portuguese, Spanish, English and French translations in their headsets.

The conference, three days of meetings on corporate research and campaign analysis, sought to globalize the labor movement vis-à-vis the globalization of firms, finance, and labor markets. It was meant for networking as much as for strategic analysis, with presentations shifting easily into impassioned exchanges that spilled out into hotel halls and on to the capitalist carnival of Times Square. About 560 people were in attendance, more than half union leaders or staff researchers. About 200 academics were there, and NGO leaders, community activists and reporters rounded out the crowds.

Three plenaries focused on the possibilities for cross-border campaigns, the importance of strategic research for such campaigns, and building both research and organizing capacity for the future. Among other plenary speakers were Harry Katz (Cornell University), Guy Ryder (International Confederation of Free Trade Unions Secretary, Belgium), Richard Trumka (AFL-CIO Secretary), Harris Raynor (Vice President, UNITE-HERE), Bertha Lujan (Mexico City Comptroller and former Authentic Labor Front Coordinator), Cedric Gina (Vice President of National Union of Metal Workers of South Africa), Tom Juravich (UMass Amherst), Kenneth Zinn (Director, AFL-CIO Center for Strategic Research), Ron Oswald (International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations Secretary, Switzerland), and Hsu-chung Chang (Chunghwa Telecom Workers Union President, Taiwan).

The theme of the relationship between research and organizing pervaded the conference. In her plenary talk, Meg Casey, Change to Win's Director of Strategic Research, discussed both the logical relationship between and the difficulties of reconciling these two themes. A challenging aspect of research is that it requires her to "put on a capitalist hat" to anticipate how corporations will seek profit. Then she has to gauge which information will resonate with allies and concede, for example, that one executive's cruelty to animals might not mobilize others like it does her. *<continued on page 6>*

PATCO, NATCA, & Labor Studies

Art Shostak

On August 3rd we will mark the 25th anniversary of what is arguably the most consequential and best-known labor dispute in modern American history, the strike of the Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization (PATCO). As with all such seminal events, mining for applicable lessons remains a vital, controversy-rich exercise, and I hope with this brief note to draw more students of Organized Labor into the fray.

My involvement began in 1980 when I was invited to moonlight as the union's first (and last) Survey Researcher. Part of my job was to use my six national membership surveys (at three month intervals) to track membership priorities in proposed contract changes. Equally important was measuring willingness to "hit the bricks," and the last of my surveys accurately signaled that four out of five PATCO members were ready, as borne out later on August 3, 1981.

With speed that still amazes me 25 years after the event, despite over a year of exacting preparation just about everything that could go wrong did. But that is the part of the story undoubtedly familiar to you (the mass firing of 11,345 media-pilloried strikers and their subsequent blacklisting from federal employ; the decertification of the union; the spread of striker-replacement actions by anti-union employers in both the private and public sectors; the demoralization of unionists coast-to-coast, etc.). There are also things we know to be untrue, which ought to be corrected – such as the mistaken idea that Organized Labor gave no aid (the AFL-CIO, international unions, and locals provided food, funds, and job referrals, with the AFL-CIO almost pulling off a compromise settlement behind the scenes). What I propose to

highlight are three far less well-known matters rich in pointers for sociologists and our allies in Organized Labor.

1) We would do well to study a well-financed and earnest effort the FAA made immediately after “cleaning house” to assure it would never again have to deal with a union of its controllers. The FAA hired university and consultant types who claimed to have nostrums to prevent unionization. This was a major trial of union-avoidance gimmicks, and its abject failure begs for attention. It may tell us something of value about the fundamental indispensability of unionization. It may also reveal more about weaknesses in glossy gimmicks (seminars, online courses, etc.) still being promoted by certain anti-union academics and “hired gun” consultants.

2) After several revealing years of union-avoidance nonsense, the new work force made up of permanent replacements actually themselves unionized. The National Air Traffic Controllers Association (NATCA) started off in 1986 seeking collaboration with the FAA (much as had PATCO in 1968), only to find much opposition (as had PATCO). To the union’s relief, in the 1980s a Clinton appointee actually helped create the sort of “win-win” relationship many controllers only dream about, a Golden Age plainly too good to last. Today, not surprisingly, there is all-out war between the Bush-led FAA and NATCA, as each charges the other with a dizzying array of shortcomings reminiscent of the old PATCO-FAA wars. NATCA wants immediate and significant hiring, modernization of equipment, improvement in the culture of the workplace, and so on. NATCA points out that in 2005 its members handled 64 million takeoffs and landings with 1,000 fewer controllers than in 2003, a situation it deems unsafe: In fiscal 2004, only 13 new controllers were hired. As well, NATCA contends the agency wants to cut wages 30% by reclassifying controllers. The FAA, in turn, insists it has everything under control, although the situation would be better with a five-year wage freeze.

We would do well to study why this work culture reverts over and again to no-holds-barred conflict, especially as the controllers resemble in many key ways what is expected of the technical workers of tomorrow – prime candidates for unionization (they are assertive, bright, collaborative, and confident). In situations as mired in conflict as this one, <continued on page 7>

NYU Grad Students on Strike

Mikaila Mariel Lemonik Arthur

On November 9th, 2005, the members of GSOC/UAW Local 2110, the union representing graduate research and teaching assistants at New York University, went out on strike. As of this writing, the strike has lasted four months (120 days).

In 2001, the GSOC and NYU negotiated the first labor contract between graduate employees and a private university in the United States, a contract made possible by a landmark bipartisan National Labor Relations Board decision making graduate employees eligible for unionization and collective bargaining. In 2004, however, the Bush administration and its new Republican NLRB appointees reversed that decision, declaring that private universities are no longer mandated to negotiate with such unions, though they are still permitted to do so. When the contract expired last year, NYU announced it would not negotiate with the union.

In response to NYU’s refusal to negotiate, a supermajority of GSOC members voted to strike. Throughout the strike, GSOC has been supported by other academic and non-academic unions, the American Association of University Professors, and significant groups of faculty and undergraduate students at NYU. In addition, local and state elected officials have offered considerable support to the union, including threatening to withhold appropriations that NYU depends on. The administration, however, has been steadfast in its refusal to negotiate. They have continually characterized the research and teaching work done by graduate employees, including serving as sole instructor for a stand-alone course (as about 25% of teaching assistants do), as not “work,” thereby portraying graduate employees as not “workers.” At the same time, the administration has fired 21 graduate employees for the semester, and a number of these 21 are blacklisted from working in one or more future semesters.

For information on how you can help and to stay up-to-date on the GSOC struggle, you can visit the UAW Local 2110 website at <http://www.2110uaw.org>.

Mikaila Mariel Lemonik Arthur is a Ph.D. candidate in sociology at New York University and a member of GSOC. Her dissertation concerns student movements for curricular change in higher education.

Section Election Preview: Meet the Candidates

The information ASA publishes about section candidates includes only past accomplishments and activities. The Labor and Labor Movements section thinks that our members might find it helpful to know a little more about how candidates view the section and its priorities, and what they might bring to our activities. Here are some excerpts from their statements, focusing on each candidate's vision for the section. Full statements can be found on the section's website, at <http://www.laborstudies.wayne.edu/ASA>

Edna Bonacich and Jill Esbenshade *Candidates for Chair*

We are actually running as co-chairs. Although the bureaucracy of the ASA does not allow for such alternatives, we have decided to go forward with this unorthodox step.We feel that we will be more effective combining our ideas, experience and energy. ...We would like to put effort into continued recruitment in order to reach the 400 members needed for another regular session. Considering how young the section is we feel that we have made great progress and hope to recruit students as well as through "sister" sections. We also want to foster the teaching of labor studies in more universities. To this end we would like to expand the collection of syllabi available through the section, compile a list of colleges and universities with labor study programs, and have a roundtable to discuss the teaching of labor studies. Since we both come out of the anti-sweatshop movement, one vision for the section might be to develop a closer link with the United Students Against Sweatshops (USAS), and to work against this scourge of global capitalism....Another clear area of interest is the withdrawal of the seven unions from the AFL-CIO and what this means for the AFL, for organizing and for solidarity.

Steven Lopez *Candidate for Council*

What does the "labor" in "Labor and Labor Movements" mean?.... I'm happy to have it mean many things to many people.□But I do want to suggest one other possible meaning that I think the section should be open to: perhaps "labor" means wage labor.□Allowing it to be read this way (in addition to other ways) puts a bit of a new gloss on

the section: work and workers' movements.□This opens up the possibility that studies of work would also fall under the purview of the section.□But why should we read it this way?□Can't people who study work find a home in Occupations, Organizations, and Work?□Well, perhaps they can. But it seems to me that there's something useful about *connecting* studies of workers' movements with the study of work itself, of rooting the one in the other, of understanding how class conflict is rooted in the labor process.□Therefore I think our section should clarify its openness to studies of work itself, especially if they are explicitly or implicitly relevant to questions of collective mobilization and struggle (or the absence of these).

Ellen Reese *Candidate for Council*

Given the current assaults on workers and unions globally and nationally, I think the Labor and Labor Movements section has an important responsibility to support the labor movement (broadly defined) as well as scholar-activists involved in labor struggles both within their universities and outside of them....What I have enjoyed the most about the Labor and Labor Movements section is that it brings activists and scholars interested in labor issues together to think critically about the issues, challenges, and opportunities that workers and the labor movement currently face. ...As a member of the Council, I would promote more of these dialogues, and encourage greater participation of community as well as union activists fighting for economic justice within them. I would also like to help to organize workshops on strategies for strengthening the connections between universities and the labor movement and continue the section's efforts to promote pro-labor policies and practices within the ASA (e.g., using unionized hotels and printers and supporting local workers' campaigns during conferences). Finally, I think the recruitment, development, and active participation of young and emerging labor scholars is absolutely crucial to the vitality of our section and would work to further develop the section's mentorship and inclusion of these scholars.

Rachel Meyer *Candidate for Student Member of Council*

My ties to the labor movement are rooted in my experience as an organizer with the United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America (UE) and my later involvement with the Graduate

Employees Organization at the University of Michigan. ... I am committed to building the section to advance a research agenda for labor studies and class analysis, while at the same time addressing the practical problems facing working people and the labor movement. In committing ourselves to bettering the lives of workers, the section should support an independent research agenda that casts an analytical and critical eye on both the internal dynamics of labor organizations and changes in the larger political economy that have profound implications for labor's future. My vision for the section is of a public sociology that encourages an exchange of ideas with trade unionists and other practitioners. Our sociological imagination should both support the labor movement and be inspired by it.

Francisca Oyogoa

Candidate for Student Member of Council

While I am somewhat new to the organized labor movement, since the age of 15 I have always been a part of the U.S. working-class. My experiences have run the gamut from burger flipping 80 hours a week for tuition money to managing a research department in a Fortune 500 corporation. Regardless, I have always identified with the working class....As a student member of the ASA Labor and Labor Movements section, I would be committed to encouraging the section to sponsor sessions that focus on workforces that are demographically highly heterogeneous and "unconventional" in other regards. Workplaces around the "industrialized" world are and will continue to rapidly change to include more diverse populations. I think, studying these workers can help the labor movement be more pro-active (instead of being reactive) to the challenges that lay ahead for Labor in the global economy.

Please note: Only people who are members as of March 31, 2006 can vote in this election, so send those renewals in! Keep an eye out for your ballot to arrive in May.

<transit strike, from p. 1>
striking under New York's Taylor Law, which prohibits public sector workers from striking. As a result of violating this law, the TWU was fined 1 million dollars a day and workers were fined two days' pay for every day on strike.

New Publications of Interest

- Nelson Lichtenstein, ed. *Wal-Mart: The Face of 21st-Century Capitalism* (New Press, 2006)
- Immanuel Ness, *Immigrants, Unions, and the New U.S. Labor Market* (Temple, 2005)
- Work & Occupations*, November 2005 issue, focuses on union organizing
- Send your publication announcements to the editor at rachel.sherman@yale.edu*

Before the strike, Mayor Bloomberg launched an intense media campaign against TWU Local 100 in order to thwart public support. This campaign intensified during the three days of the strike and pitted non-union and unionized workers against each other. Bloomberg argued that the well-paid transit workers were preventing the poorest New Yorkers from getting to work. The message was that transit workers should stop complaining and that they should be happy with what they got. The media campaign orchestrated by Bloomberg was also racially charged. Bloomberg called TWU leaders "thuggish." The TWU is a majority Black and Latino union. Calling the union "thuggish" fuels the stereotype that Black and Latino men are angry and violent.

In fact, support for the union's demands in general was intensely racially divided. According to a NY1 (a local cable TV channel) poll, only 38% of whites thought that the union's demands were fair, but 75% of Blacks and 71% of Latinos thought so. Compared to 12% of Blacks and 17% of Latinos, 35% of whites blamed the union for the strike. Many white workers interviewed in the media expressed feelings of outrage. They argued that practically everyone has to pay for health benefits and pensions, and why should "they" (referring to Black and Latino transit workers) get special treatment. What is interesting about this idea is the increasing sense among the general population that because everyone has to pay for health care, it's not legitimate to resist it.

On the other hand, during the two hours that I and other CUNY faculty spent on the picket line with the transit workers, only three people walking by (all white) made negative comments. Most people gave us the thumbs up. Several teachers told the workers that they hoped that they would get a better contract than the teachers did. Many passing cars honked, including taxi drivers and police officers. While the general perception both inside and outside of New York City was that the strikers did not have a lot of public support, I think this

was skewed by television media reporting that focused more attention to inconvenienced commuters than the reasons workers were striking.

On the third day of the strike, Union President Roger Toussaint, considered a progressive, announced that there was a framework for an agreement and that the workers should return to work, despite initially having said he wouldn't send workers back without a contract. The workers went back to their jobs with no contract. Several days later, the agreement was announced to the public and to the workers. In the new agreement the pension issue was off the table. However, for the first time all members would have to pay 1.5% of their salaries towards medical benefits (and this percentage would almost certainly rise substantially over the life of the contract because of the increased costs of health insurance). Wage increases in the new agreement were the same as they had been before the strike. The union also agreed to push the contract expiration date from December to January for the new contract, thereby giving up a key point of power that had made this holiday-time strike so effective.

Because many unions are losing the pension battle, getting the pension issue out of the contract was heralded as a victory by union leaders, many people on the left, and the media, even though workers would have to pay for healthcare. However, many transit workers felt that it was a deeply concessionary contract, since workers were beginning to pay for their own health care and in effect subsidized the monetary gain they did get. Many questioned why they had gone on strike in the first place. As a result of the agreement, a group of workers began a "Vote NO" Coalition to organize against the contract. On January 20, 2006, members of the TWU rejected the contract by seven votes (11,234 to 11,227).

As of this writing the MTA and the TWU have started negotiations once again. It is still too early to comment on whether the TWU will be able to win a good contract in the context of the State's concessionary bargaining model and a leadership that's willing to settle. It has been a very bad contract year for public sector workers. We are continuously losing ground because our leaders are caving in to the City and State's austerity regime, in a time of prosperity in New York. The demoralization of public sector workers will be greater if the transit workers get a worse contract in this second round of negotiations. That being said, I am hopeful about the solidarity that the

transit workers showed us. Even if the transit workers do not win a better contract, they have built union power in their workplace and have been empowered by their strike.

For a critical perspective from the rank and file, see Steve Downs, "After Shutting Down the Big Apple, New York Transit Workers Reject Proposed Contract." *Labor Notes*, 2006. www.labornotes.org

Carolina Bank Muñoz is Assistant Professor of Sociology at Brooklyn College (CUNY), and a member of the Professional Staff Congress of the AFT.

<global labor, from p. 2>

Bookending the conference were strategy sessions on 10 corporations, including Exxon-Mobil, Starwood, and Wal-Mart. The presentations on the first day highlighted new research by academics and unions, and the concluding discussions two days later explored how to use that research in campaigns. In the Wal-Mart session, Bill McDonough of the UFCW described that union's Wal-Mart initiative as a response to its 2003-04 Southern California supermarket strike, which it fought with picket lines and arbitration. A terrible loss demonstrated that such traditional methods are no match for global corporations. Taking on a behemoth with a 1.4 billion annual ad budget requires more creativity and allies, both of which Wal-Mart Watch is generating (<http://walmartwatch.com>).

The 48 smaller sessions, covering a wide range of topics in global industries, from steel to entertainment, showed that some social scientists do collaborate across borders, producing research unions can use. For example, Humberto Juárez (Autonomous University of Puebla) and Steve Babson (Wayne State University) described their collaboration to study NAFTA, which led to international conferences where Mexico's independent unions (lacking their own research departments) learned about NAFTA's effects and forged new organizing networks. Also collaborating with Juárez, Wayne Lewchuk and Don Wells (McMaster University of Ontario) showed how one corporation has adapted its union-preemptive management practices from Canada to Mexico and outlined possibilities and limitations for organizing its plants.

Organizers asked presenters to minimize their comments and focus on creating dialogue. I saw this happen dramatically at a panel on Latin American experiences of international campaign. Homero Fuentes of Guatemala's Commission for Verification of Codes of Conduct argued that our globalization agenda should not obviate the *local* nature of campaigns, because "La solidaridad viene... y se va." *Solidarity comes and goes*: when campaigns' drama wanes and U.S. allies withdraw attention, Guatemalan activists become vulnerable to local power as they implement U.S.-made practices for monitoring labor rights. About 25 Americans, Nicaraguans, Mexicans and Filipinos responded passionately, several of us leaning close to give and receive Spanish-English translations. We stayed after the 6:30 ending time, breaking into groups of three or four to discuss everything from alliances of union women to the effect of free trade agreements on organizing. It was a warm moment for building understandings among people who would not see each other again. Leaving the room, someone said that in-person conversation makes clear our commonalities in a way e-mail cannot. Just the excitement of seeing your campaign ally's face and eyes deepens the connection that otherwise you and she would forget.

Angela Jamison is a PhD student at UCLA. She studies union-grassroots coalitions, strikes and media politics, and is writing a dissertation on the labor politics of free trade.

<PATCO, from p. 2>

Organized Labor would do well to consider if it should champion fresh options, such as Alternative Dispute Resolution, likely to appeal to such workers.

3) Finally, we should pay overdue attention to certain ethical and morale problems exemplified by the PATCO-NAFTA relationship. Several thousand of the ex-strikers sought rehiring after Pres. Bill Clinton lifted the ban in 1993, but the FAA stalled for several years, and only about 800 have since earned a post. The question remains – What should NATCA do here, as its own members understandably want to hold onto their jobs, and not surrender them to returning ex-strikers. As well, they dread being damned as strikebreakers or "scabs" by bitter returnees, albeit this remains speculative, given how few PATCO strikers have actually been rehired.

This situation may become more common. Impending labor shortages and a current slight increase in the number of strikes could have employers in general increasingly rehire ex-strikers back alongside (nervous) striker replacements. Labor sociologists like ourselves might help unionists draft a Code of Conduct, a pre-strike clarification of both striker and striker replacement rights and responsibilities, to try and head off more PATCO-NATCA-like animosities.

A final reason (though there are many more) to immediately look more closely into this 25 year old dispute is the fast-passing availability of aging combatants still able to uniquely explore with us valuable lessons from Labor's "Perfect Storm." *For information on the union, visit:* <<http://www.patco81.com>>.

Art Shostak, Professor Emeritus, Drexel University, taught for 25 years at the AFL-CIO Meany Center, and has 31 books out, including The Air Controllers' Controversy: Lessons from the PATCO Strike, co-authored with David Skocik; the only book-length account by insiders (1986). Contact him directly for further PATCO-related references at <shostaka@drexel.edu>.

2005-2006 Section Officers

Chair: Peter B. Evans (UC-Berkeley)
pevans@socrates.berkeley.edu

Chair Elect: Rick Fantasia
(Smith College) rfantasi@email.smith.edu

Past Chair: Dan Clawson (UMass-Amherst)
clawson@sadri.umass.edu

Secretary-Treasurer: Bruce Nissen
(Florida International Univ.) nissenb@fiu.edu

Council Member: Carolina Bank Muñoz
(Brooklyn College)
cbmunoz@brooklyn.cuny.edu

Council Member: Michael Schwartz (SUNY-Stony Brook) mschwartz@notes.cc.sunysb.edu

Council Member: Teresa C. Sharpe (UC-Berkeley) tsharpe@socrates.berkeley.edu

Council Member: Joel Stillerman (Grand Valley State) stillejo@gvsu.edu

Newsletter Editor: Rachel Sherman