

In Critical Solidarity

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

Volume 8, Number 1

April 2008

Co-Chairs

Edna Bonacich

University of California Riverside

Jill Ebenshade

San Diego State University

Chair-Elect

Michael Schwartz

Stony Brook University, SUNY

Past Chair

Rick Fantasia

Smith College

Secretary-Treasurer

Bruce A. Nissen

Florida International University

Council

Carolina Bank Muñoz

Brooklyn College, CUNY

Jennifer J. Chun

University of British Columbia

Steven H. Lopez

Ohio State University

Student Representative

Rachel Meyer

University of Michigan

Section Homepage

<http://www.laborstudies.wayne.edu/ASA>

Website Editor

George P. Mason

Wayne State University

Newsletter Editorial Collective

Ruth Braunstein

Russell Ferri

Jeff Goodwin

Michael A. McCarthy

New York University

From the Chairs

The mini-conference on "Race, Labor and Empire" that our section is co-organizing with the Association of Black Sociologists is developing into a very exciting event. The program includes such prominent experts in the field as Rod Bush, Kelvin Santiago-Valles, and Steven Steinberg. We were also granted funding through the ASA's Fund for Advancement of the Discipline competition and are thus able to bring to the conference a number of incredible activists with long histories on the ground. These activists include General Baker and Jerome Scott of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers, and Bill Fletcher, Jr., long-time union activist, former Education Director for the AFL-CIO, and special assistant to John Sweeney.

The mini-conference will begin with a reception and opening plenary on the evening of Friday, August 1st, and will continue through the day on Saturday, August 2nd, concluding with a workshop on how to move forward, moderated by Bill Fletcher.

We encourage everyone to register as soon as possible at: <http://www.asanet.org/cs/conferences/conferences>. You can also find a fuller program and logistical details at the site. For planning purposes we hope people will register early. Also, the conference space is limited. We look forward to seeing as many people from the section as possible there!

Edna Bonacich and Jill Esbenshade

In this Issue

Campaign 2008	2
Data Report	6
Book Reviews	7
Section Announcements	13
New Publications	15

Campaign 2008

Labor's Political Game Falls Short Without Pressure From Below

Chris Kotalik



Photo: Jim West.

An RSDWU member supported Hillary Clinton at an AFL-CIO town hall meeting last year.

—and 2008 promises to set new records—labor’s political game plan appears stubbornly ineffective. A yawning gap exists on one hand between the resources (money, staff organizers, volunteers, and organization), media hype, and self-image of labor as a powerful political force, and the results on the other, with little to show on issues that matter most to working people.

The loss of union jobs, coupled with declining strength and bargaining clout in the unions’ primary arena, the workplace, only underscore this disconnect.

The noise, exhilaration, and sheer drama of horse races don’t lend themselves to sober reflection. As the political fortunes of the Bush administration have waned, many labor activists have been on their feet with excitement, watching the wide-open presidential primary contest unfold. But serious questions remain.

Although unions have marshaled unprecedented resources in recent elections

RESOURCES SPENT

To be sure, U.S. unions have beefed up their capacity for political mobilization over the last decade, a key goal of John Sweeney and his “New Voice” slate, which took over the AFL-CIO in 1995. The numbers are staggering, with each election outpacing the last.

Union electoral spending totals skyrocketed from historic highs of \$381 million over the 2000 and 2002 elections to a combined total of \$561 million in 2004 and 2006, according to the Center for Responsive Politics. Spending pledges made for the 2008 elections promise to top these sums.

Though business still outspends labor hands down, individual unions remain a key one-stop source of campaign contributions given directly to candidates. Indeed, unions account for six of the top 10 such contributors since 1989, with the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) topping the list with a combined total of \$38 million spent.

Beyond direct or “in kind” contributions, such as using staff organizers in political campaigns, unions are some of the biggest contributors of money to political advocacy organizations, known as 527 groups, which take their name from a section of tax code. The Service Employees (SEIU) for example was the largest 527 spender in 2006, giving out \$28 million. Unions made up five of the top 20 contributors to 527s in 2006.

This year the AFL-CIO has stated that it alone will pony up \$53 million behind an effort to put 200,000 union volunteers to work campaigning, sending them to door-to-door house visits, phone banking, worksite visits, and other “get out the vote” or “issue-oriented” activity. The federation said its 55 affiliated unions will put in an additional \$200 million in political spending.

READERS SPEAK OUT

The election is being treated as if it were the college football bowl championship series. The state primary system contributes to this media circus atmosphere by forcing candidates to raise enormous amounts of money to buy and maintain viability. Unions are forced to pay to play. The rank-and-file member is disengaged as union leaders are forced to commit financial resources early to maximize influence and visibility.

-Doug Baier
Firefighters Local 437
Poulsbo, Washington

I am a member of the Sheetmetal Workers. The International as well as local leadership are sold on Hillary Clinton. I am skeptical, period. Since George McGovern was unceremoniously routed in the first presidential election I could vote in, on through the travesty of the 1980s and the political hangover that's left behind, politicians have conspired to convince me that all this campaigning is just posturing. Real decision-making and power lie outside electoral politics. Will Obama get the streets plowed or the trash collected?

-Fred McColly
Sheetmetal Workers Local 20
Lake Station, Indiana

I am a former UAW local president who retired two years ago. I have been a Green Party member because I see the corporations controlling both major parties with their enormous resources. As local president, I disagreed with the UAW's support of the Democratic Party even when they pushed for NAFTA. I agreed with their support for universal health care, but felt more needed to be done to get the membership active around this issue.

-Wendy Thompson
United Auto Workers Local 235
Detroit, Michigan

FEUDING OVER CANDIDATES



Photo: Jim West.

AFSCME members urged Barack Obama to run for president at their 2006 convention.

Not all this money and energy is spent in a unified political effort. The battle over the Democratic nomination has furthered tensions both inside and between unions.

In the Iowa caucus, for example, AFSCME reportedly spent up to \$1 million on ads supporting Hillary Clinton and attacking Barack Obama.

Angered by the ads, seven mid-level AFSCME leaders (and supporters of Obama) published an open letter attacking AFSCME's top leadership, calling the decision to attack undemocratic.

In Nevada, the Nevada State Education Association (whose leadership is backing Clinton) filed a lawsuit in mid-January to block nine "at-large" Democratic caucuses slated to convene in casinos on the Las Vegas Strip. Holding the caucuses in casinos makes it easier for shift workers to participate in the time-intensive process of caucusing. UNITE HERE Local 226 (Culinary Workers), the 60,000 member casino worker local in the area and a key backer of Obama, launched a counter-offensive, claiming the lawsuit would prevent the participation of thousands of workers, largely women and people of color.

The lawsuit was dismissed in federal court, but left lasting animosity about the backroom moves.

CHANGE COMES FROM BELOW

With all the focus on candidates and money, the labor movement is missing a lesson from its own history, namely that meaningful political change starts with determined pressure from below.

In the heady days of the 1930s and 1940s, militant mass actions by workers and their unions helped create the political openings required to secure a range of labor law protections. Massive, city-wide strikes in Toledo, Ohio, Minneapolis-St. Paul, and San Francisco, along with thousands of smaller strikes and organizing drives in the early 1930s, paved the way for legislative advances like the National Labor Relations Act.

The limited legal protections that this legislation provided against anti-strike injunctions, company unions, and employers' refusal to recognize unions opened up space for more fights, such as the auto sit-downs of the late 1930s and the nation's biggest strike wave in 1946.

Over the next four decades unions settled into closer, more stable arrangements with employers and with the Democratic Party. Over time, the grassroots pressure slacked off, and so did the ability to win labor-friendly laws even when windows of opportunity opened.

In 1978, moves by unions to get labor law reforms—such as a rollback of the many disastrous provisions of the Taft-Hartley Act—floundered despite Democratic control of the White House and both houses of Congress. In fact, that same year Jimmy Carter became one of the few presidents to use the emergency powers of the Taft-Hartley Act when he slapped the Mineworkers with an anti-strike injunction during the 1978 national coal strike.

Another opportunity Democratic politicians had to move labor's agenda followed on the heels of Bill Clinton's election. From 1992 until the Republican landslide of 1994, labor-friendly

legislative efforts stalled, most notably around national health care reform. Worse, Clinton mobilized all the power of his early presidency to pass the North American Free Trade Agreement, despite opposition from virtually every union that had supported him.

HOLDING FEET TO THE FIRE

Many Labor Notes readers undoubtedly will agree on how much easier it would be to build labor's strength if we had new member organizing protections such as the Employee Free Choice Act, an end to permanent replacement by scabs in strikes, a stronger Social Security system, a rollback of the tide of unfavorable NLRB rulings, re-regulation of critical industries, a single-payer health care system, or any number of other worker-friendly political initiatives kicking around the grassroots in recent years.

We need all these reforms, but we won't get them without a political mobilization that goes beyond this election—and beyond probable Democratic victories in Congress and the White House. Neither Clinton nor Obama nor John Edwards backs a single-payer health plan, for example. And by themselves the labor law reforms we seek won't change the balance of power between working people and employers. The right to card check won't automatically translate into an explosion of new, vibrant unions, nor will banning permanent replacements ensure the ability to win more strikes.

Unions have shown themselves able to mobilize tens of thousands of members for short-term political goals. That same effort needs to be turned to mobilizing members at the union hall, at the many thousands of unorganized workplaces, and, most neglected of all, on the job.

This article previously appeared in the February 2008 issue of Labor Notes. It can be accessed online at <http://labornotes.org/node/1508>.

Obama-Clinton Health Debate Ignores Real Issue

Rose Ann DeMoro

The debate between Senators Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama on health care probably looks like a small nuance in two proposals that are remarkably similar. But the issue at the center of their dispute reflects a lot about our present health-care system and how to achieve genuine reform.

What's generating the heat is a concept called "individual mandate"—using the power of government to force uninsured individuals to buy health insurance.

Senator Clinton claims that the only way to achieve "universal" coverage is to require everyone to have insurance. Senator Obama says people don't have insurance not because they don't want it, but because they can't afford it. Both are skipping the main problem.

It's true that no plan can be called "universal" unless everybody is in. It's also true that skyrocketing costs have priced millions of Americans out of access to care. A Kaiser Family Foundation 2007 survey found that average family premiums are now \$12,106 - not including the additional charges for deductibles and co-payments for everything from doctor's appointments to prescription drugs to emergency care.

Costs are the central story today, cited by most Americans as their major worry about their health coverage, and are why health care is the leading domestic issue in the presidential race.

The trouble for most of these families is not the lack of insurance, though; it's the insurance they already have. Consumer Reports in August reported that four in 10 Americans are

"underinsured." Half postponed needed medical care because of cost. One quarter had outstanding medical debt. Only 37 percent said they were prepared to handle unexpected major medical bills.

It's hard to imagine how forcing more people to buy insurance solves these problems, especially when none of the top three Democratic candidates has advocated any cost constraints on the insurers, drug companies or other industry giants.

The individual-mandate fad started with two Republican governors—Mitt Romney, who made it a centerpiece of a Massachusetts law, and Arnold Schwarzenegger, who is trying to make it the law in California.

While some pundits laud Massachusetts, there's an underside. Despite the Dec. 31, 2007, deadline, after which everyone who was not insured now faces tax penalties, only about 6 percent of the uninsured who did not qualify for public assistance had bought insurance as of last month.

Why? Because of the high cost. In California, the governor and the Democrat-controlled legislature now both support individual mandates, but are not close to finding a way to make it affordable.

Their ideological argument is that individuals must be made responsible for their own health-care costs, rather than society as a whole. The underlying message is you're on your own. But, if Obama is right about the fatal flaw in individual mandate, he's still off base in his failure to take on the primary source of our health-care morass.

The major Democratic contenders are at least talking about large-scale reform—in stark contrast to the Republican candidates, who seem to think more tax breaks for the wealthy are the solution. But everyone is ignoring the gorilla in the room.

Having insurance is not the same thing as receiving care. Nothing proposed by the top-tier candidates of either party would end the thousands of horror stories of insurance companies denying needed care, access to specialists or diagnostic tests, even when recommended by a doctor.

Nothing in any of their plans, other than a vague reliance on the magic of the same market that created the present crisis, would hamper insurers from charging what they want - and pushing more families into bankruptcy from medical debt - or forcing them to self-ration care because of the cost.

As premiums have ballooned by 87 percent in the past decade, insurance-industry profits have climbed from \$20.8 billion in 2002 to \$57.5 billion in 2006. During that same period, health-care interests spent \$2.2 billion on federal lobbying, more than did any other sector, and as of last month, had flooded the presidential candidates with over \$11 million in campaign contributions to keep the present system intact.

There's one alternative that would guarantee coverage for everyone, protect choice of doctor, promote cost savings by slashing administrative waste, and get the insurance companies out of the way. It's called single-payer reform, as in an expanded and improved Medicare for all. The candidates should demonstrate the courage to talk about this one real reform.

Rose Ann DeMoro is executive director of the California Nurses Association/National Nurses Organizing Committee and a national AFL-CIO vice president. This article originally appeared in The Providence Journal (Rhode Island) on Tuesday, January 15, 2008. It can be accessed at <http://www.projo.com/opinion>.

Data Report

Union Membership Trends: 2007

Michael A. McCarthy
New York University

According to a recent Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) report, the number of workers belonging to a union in the U.S. rose by 311,000 to 15.7 million in 2007. In terms of overall union density, this represents an increase to 12.1 percent from 12 percent in 2006. While this may seem like a drop in the bucket, this is actually the largest single-year increase since 1979, when union density was about 27 percent. Since then, the union membership rate has declined steadily, so this at least appears to be a shift in the right direction. Below are the highlights from the BLS report.

The union membership rate for the public sector was 35.9 percent, nearly five times that of private sector workers (7.5 percent). In the public sector, local government workers had the highest membership rate, 41.8 percent. Educational workers had the highest unionization rates among all public-sector employees, 37.2 percent. In the private sector, industries with higher density rates included transportation and utilities (22.1), telecommunications (19.7), and construction (13.9). Some notably low unionization rates were sales and related occupations (3.7 percent) and food preparation and serving (4.9).

In terms of gender and racial demographics, the union membership rate was highest for black men (15.8 percent) and lowest for Latinas (9.6). Overall, the rate was higher for men (13 percent) than for women (11.1). However, this gap has narrowed considerably since 1983, when the rate for men was approximately 10 percentage points higher than women's. Furthermore, black workers were more likely to be union members (14.3

percent) than were whites (11.8), Asians (10.9), or Latinos (9.8).

In terms of union membership by state, 30 states and the District of Columbia had rates that fell below the U.S. average (12.1 percent), while 20 states had higher rates. Many Southern states, predictably, reported the lowest rates: North Carolina (3 percent), Virginia (3.7), South Carolina (4.1), Georgia (4.4), and Texas (4.7). Conversely, four states reported rates above 20 percent: New York (25.2 percent), Alaska (23.8), Hawaii (23.4), and Washington (20.2). The largest number of union members live in California (2.5 million) and New York (2.1).

Finally, union members earned higher weekly earnings than their non-unionized counterparts--\$863 versus \$663 on average.

The BLS report is available online at <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/union2.nr0.htm>.

Book Reviews

U.S. Labor in Trouble and Transition: A Review

Steven Sherman

Kim Moody, U.S. Labor in Trouble and Transition: The Failure of Reform from Above, The Promise of Revival from Below (London: Verso, 2007). 320 pages. \$29.95 paper.

Is there anyone with a deeper knowledge of the contemporary American labor movement than Kim Moody? He not only seems familiar with the strategies and outcomes of practically every strike and organizing drive of the last twenty years, he also appears to know the status of each union local, large and small, as well as every workers' center. If he says that a national union is largely bureaucratized and timid, he is also quick to mention the two or three locals that are exceptions to the rule.

Moody draws on this vast knowledge in his new book, *U.S. Labor in Trouble and Transition: The Failure of Reform from Above, the Promise of Rebellion from Below*. The text focuses on the course of working-class struggle over the last twenty-five years in the U.S., not exactly an inspiring time filled with bold movements and major victories. Nevertheless, the picture is not altogether without hope or bright spots. The book should be crucial reading for those concerned with rebuilding the Left, because a powerful union movement is important to such an effort. Precisely how important is a matter of some debate, which I will touch on below.

Moody begins by outlining changes to the U.S. economy in the last couple of decades. His take on this question is different than most on the Left. Although there has been a shift to more employment in services, industry has not left the U.S., for the most part. Rather, the industrial union bastions of the Midwest have been weakened mainly by two trends internal to the U.S.: corporations have employed technology to reduce the size of the industrial workforce, without necessarily reducing its output, and corporations have often moved industry to anti-union regions of the U.S., most notably the South. At one point he writes that unions complain of jobs moving overseas when in fact they have moved down the interstate. He does not altogether discount that some jobs have moved overseas, of course. But he also notes, as is often absent from these discussions in the U.S., that the process cuts the other way as well. Many foreign car companies have opened plants in the U.S., mostly in the South. Also significant has been the trend towards corporate mergers and acquisitions. This shifted over time from simple financial grabs to strategic purchases of competitors, in the process often weakening unions. For example, unionized UPS purchased non-union Overnite (which became UPS Freight).

Moody doggedly emphasizes the centrality of certain "traditional" industrial workforces in the U.S., in, for example, meatpacking, auto, and transportation. I don't think the words "dot com"

appear in the text, and he is indifferent to the vogue on some parts of the left for organizing "knowledge workers" (i.e. grad students) or "sex workers" (strippers, prostitutes). As I read the book, I couldn't help but wonder if the indifference on much of the left to industrial workers, notwithstanding their continued economic salience, has as much to do with class bias as to any dramatic shifts in the nature of capitalism.

The geographical shift in manufacturing to non-unionized parts of the country and the technological shift to a smaller, more productive workforce might not have been so devastating to the fortunes of U.S. labor if it had not been for the "business unionism" orientation of most of the labor leadership. In this view, unions are best off working closely with business, trusting that "what's good for General Motors" will ultimately benefit their membership. There is a broad logical problem with this orientation --business and labor are both struggling to maximize their chunk of surplus value, so their interests are fundamentally in conflict -- and there is also a political and historical problem. Since the 1970s, when profit rates fell, business has become much more aggressive about pursuing an anti-union agenda, both politically and in the workplace. The unions, with a leadership that has failed to absorb the implications of this, have been disarmed and ineffective in the face of the onslaught. Although successful strikes have occurred by employing such tactics as broadly disrupting the function of a metropolitan area (Pittston in 1989) or mobilizing the grassroots of a national union (UPS in 1996), the union leadership has not sought to generalize these tactics.

Additionally, Moody faults the unions for their embrace of the Democratic Party. Since the late forties, this has brought at best limited gains. In a first period, until the mid sixties, a considerable chunk of the party represented whites in the segregated South and was unsympathetic to an expansion of union-backed social demands. When this group mostly left the Democrats after the passage of civil rights legislation, the party

increasingly became the terrain for relatively wealthy liberals detached from the working class. Lip service to union hopes was barely being paid by the time the Clinton administration joined with the Republicans to push through NAFTA. The union response has been neither to move towards building a third party (the strategy Moody aligns himself with) nor towards developing a strategy which might push the Democrats to the Left through grassroots pressure. Instead, "reform from above" efforts (first through the election of John Sweeney to leadership of the AFL-CIO, then through the fracturing of the federation with the emergence of the Change to Win coalition led by Sweeney protégé Andy Stern) have focused on revitalizing organizing drives to expand membership, while political initiatives have largely settled for trying to elect more Democrats, whatever their politics. Additionally, there has been a wave of mergers and consolidations of unions. These reform efforts have not been successful in increasing union density or power, embedded as they are in an expansive union bureaucracy staffed by professionals rather than the creation of a working-class cadre who can both articulate the need for unions and develop workplace-based strategies of struggle. Indeed, Stern, while opening up SEIU to some of the activists who emerged in the Seventies and enjoying some success at organizing more workers into SEIU, goes even further than the traditional business union model, adopting an approach to union organization modeled on corporate America (and dismissive of union democracy) and strategies of "partnership" with employers that deeply compromise goals of working class solidarity. Furthermore, some other unions have altogether abandoned any concept of solidarity in favor of endorsing any politician, including Republicans, who can promise them progress on short-term demands.

The picture is not entirely hopeless. Moody calls attention to the expansion of workers' centers, which typically focus on unorganized workers, reform caucuses which focus on democratizing unions, and the immigrants rights movement which has combined political struggle with

workplace action (such as the work stoppage on May 1, 2006). He also highlights the activity of "non-majority" unions, which, while failing to win unionized status for an entire workplace, nevertheless hang in and continue to fight for their members. In a final chapter devoted to strategy, Moody emphasizes the potential of organizing in the South, particularly in major industries such as meatpacking and auto. He suggests that a more powerful union movement in the South will be necessary before Wal-Mart can effectively be confronted. He also calls for more democratic and militant unions and alliances with community groups. Regarding the latter, he believes that unions bring power to the community groups (citing Brazilian and South African examples), more than vice versa. Unions should also develop international ties to combat neoliberalism and empire. Finally, he advocates for third-party action, to break with the Democrats and offer a more substantially pro-working class agenda. Moody himself was involved with the forming of a U.S. Labor Party, which he concedes has not been particularly effective.

This is a valuable book, and I strongly recommend that anyone concerned with the future of the Left in the U.S. read it. Its emphasis on the industrial working class provides a bracing alternative to much contemporary radical theory, which finds various excuses to forget about them. In general, even the most politically left websites provide minimal coverage of the labor movement, although it is difficult to see how the Left can rebuild itself in the U.S. without engaging this question. This book is a superb place to start.

If there is a problem with it, it is what I would call Moody's "laborism." That the industrial working class is strategically positioned to disrupt the capitalist economy is difficult to dispute. But this is a separate question from the roots of a politically radical program. A few examples might help clarify this point. First, none of the three radical electoral governments in South America -- Venezuela, Ecuador, and Bolivia -- ascended through insurgency of industrial

workers. Instead, other groups, including indigenous people, slum dwellers, and reform officers movements, have successfully allied to create majority electoral coalitions. Not only in the U.S., but in many different countries, industrial unions have entered into knotty alliances with center-left parties that simultaneously consolidate some limited gains while rendering further offensives more difficult. The cases of Brazil and South Africa are relevant in this respect. In neither is the role of leading social movements challenging a neoliberal, center-left regime being played by industrial unions. In Brazil, this position is staked out by the landless movement, while in South Africa it is "the poor," rooted in the slums, who have moved towards a more confrontational stance. Radicalism is born not only of exploitation but also of political contradictions and deprivation. Often trade unions, precisely by virtue of their power, can make a deal with employers that is good enough, at least for a time, for their members, and their radical edge is blunted. Of course, the Left has been struggling with these questions since the time of Lenin.

In the U.S., the question of where a new radicalism might be grounded has to consider the historical role of African Americans. The Jeremiah Wright flap is just the latest evidence that this community provides the only mass basis in the U.S. for an anti-imperialist, left-social-democratic message (contrast Wright's rhetoric about the U.S. role in the world with what emanates from the labor movement about trade. In the latter, the U.S., the strongest state in the world, is typically portrayed as the victim at the hands of countries like China). While Moody brings up racism from time to time, this question is largely absent from the final chapter on strategy. It is worth noting that many of the struggles he writes approvingly of here in North Carolina (with the notable exception of Farm Workers, overwhelmingly immigrants) are led by African Americans. Meanwhile, under progressive leadership, the state NAACP has pulled together a coalition of social movements to struggle around a social-democratic and anti-

intervention platform. In North Carolina, as in much of the South, it is difficult to conceive of any union or coalition of unions playing this role. Although it is not a party (and third parties are an extremely tough sell in the U.S., given the winner-take-all nature of elections), the rallies of this movement are notable for the reduced role played by elected officials or candidates. African Americans not only face the brutal conditions in workplaces described by Moody, but, more directly than most white workers, confront the ruinous effects in schools, prisons, and their neighborhoods of neoliberal and imperial policies. Furthermore, there is a deep tradition of struggle to build on. A revitalized militancy among labor unions will have to align itself closely with the aspirations of this community if it is to have any teeth as part of a broader movement for change in the U.S.

Steven Sherman is a sociologist living in North Carolina. Sherman maintains the website lefteyeonbooks.org. This piece originally appeared at MRZine.org.

Moving beyond state regulation: Labor activism and NGOs

Russell Ferri
New York University

Gay W. Seidman, Beyond the Boycott: Labor Rights, Human Rights, and Transnational Activism (Russell Sage Foundation, 2007). 176 pages. \$26.00 cloth.

Seidman's book is an analysis of the shift away from state regulation of labor conditions towards one of independent monitoring. Researchers argue that labor activists have changed strategies, finding that attempts to compel weak national states to enforce labor laws are often fruitless; instead, the focus is now on creating independent monitors (NGOs) who call attention to poor labor conditions, alerting consumers who will feel a

sense of moral outrage and no longer buy products from the company responsible for those conditions. In an attempt to find out whether such approaches succeed or fail, Seidman compares three cases: the monitoring of multinationals in South Africa, the hand-woven carpet industry in India, and the apparel industry in Guatemala.

Efforts to enforce corporate codes of conduct in South Africa are frequently cited as the first successful example of independent monitoring. Corporations were at first opposed to the idea that they should be part of the effort to end apartheid, but due to pressure from religious organizations, American universities, and the Rev. Leon Sullivan (who had been appointed to the board of GM after pressure from activists to appoint some people of color) the Sullivan Principles were born, calling for American subsidiaries in South Africa to desegregate the workplace, give equal pay for equal work, train black employees, and to make efforts to improve the quality of life for their employees outside the workplace. Seidman observes the numerous flaws in this system, both in the creation of the principles (i.e., that workers had no say in what the standards were) and its implementation. Furthermore, she disagrees that in fact this was a "non-state" solution, as it is widely described. She claims, "social movement activism was centrally focused on reconstructing the state. Anti-apartheid activism was directly linked to the failure of the South African state to include or protect its citizens" (p.70).

While Seidman's analysis of the Rugmark campaign in India is similarly critical in terms of tangible effects on workers, she notes how social labeling has helped frame the debate around worker conditions, in particular child labor. However, the campaign has, according to Seidman, been co-opted by transnational organizations that lack awareness of the unique local conditions in the towns where these rugs are manufactured. The campaign also lacks the resources to consistently regulate manufacturers, calling into question what its true impact has been. Relevant to this particular example is that

the rugs are luxury goods, not necessities, and thus it is not a significant sacrifice for a middle or upper class family to avoid purchasing them. Therefore, even if this campaign can be considered successful, it is questionable whether the lessons can apply to other industries that manufacture necessities.

Attempts to regulate the garment industry in Guatemala have illustrated the inadequacies of “stateless” strategies. Thus, local activists have sought to implement monitoring as part of a larger strategy to implement democracy within the country. These efforts are still in very early stages and thus attempts to ascertain “success” are premature. Instead, what is relevant is examining the goals and how activists are achieving those goals.

By now it should be abundantly clear that Seidman is taking issue with the literature that suggests these are “stateless” solutions. She argues that stateless solutions are not very effective. Furthermore, activists in fact are aware of this, and the literature that suggests they are seeking “stateless” solutions is incorrectly analyzing their strategies. Even when attempting to engage civil society through boycotts, organizations are simultaneously engaging with states. For example, a key component of the Rugmark campaign was to convince governments (in particular Germany and the U.S.) to prohibit importation of goods (in this case, rugs) made with child labor. Seidman also claims that the Sullivan Principles were really an attempt to change the South African government’s policy of apartheid.

Her argument is convincing. The evidence that she presents clearly suggests that the strategy of these organizations is more than simply engaging with private agencies and civil society. If her portrayal of the literature is accurate, then she has indeed observed at least three examples that suggest the literature needs to do a reassessment.

What the book sometimes lacks is adequate discussion of how to pressure states to regulate

labor conditions, enforce existing labor laws, and also how to toughen them. For example, Seidman discusses the Child Labor Deterrence Act, introduced in the U.S. Congress by Senator Tom Harkin of Iowa, but gives us no indication of why Senator Harkin cared about this issue. Was he introduced to this issue by local constituents who learned of the atrocities that occur daily in the Indian rug industry? Was he pressured by local manufacturers who wanted to make it more difficult for foreign goods to enter the market? If, as Seidman argues, the groups do engage the state, and in fact need to in order to really accomplish anything meaningful, then it would be useful to have a better understanding of why states do get involved, and how to better get their attention to address labor issues.

To be fair, this is a minor example, and Seidman does do a more thorough job discussing engagement with the state, particularly in the chapter on Guatemala. Overall, the book is well written. Seidman uses diverse examples but does a successful job illustrating the common bonds between them in order to make a useful contribution to the literature, and possibly to teach organizations involved with labor rights which strategies to pursue.

Labor Protests in China

Jonathan Lassen
New York University

Ching Kwan Lee, Against the Law: Labor Protests in China's Rustbelt and Sunbelt (University of California Press, 2007). 340 pages. \$49.95 cloth, \$21.95 paper.

Against the Law is a qualitative comparison of worker protests in two regions in China that have witnessed significant labor unrest in recent years. The book details the very different conditions of workers from the two areas via in-depth interviews and some ethnography. It examines the

economic and institutional background of each group of workers, describes the protests, and then lists the range of subjectivities that each group adopted during the course of their struggle.

The terms “rustbelt” and “sunbelt” in the title refer to China's northeast (Liaoning) and south (Guangdong) respectively. Lee documents the very different histories and nature of protests in the two regions. In the “rustbelt,” Lee primarily finds laid-off state-owned enterprise workers protesting over issues of unpaid pensions and corruption, protests she calls “protests of desperation.” In China's “sunbelt” she describes the protests of migrant workers in industrial plants over issues of wages, working time, and working conditions, coining the term “protests of discrimination” to describe these protests.

The book is an attempt in many respects to reply to the question: why haven't Chinese workers protested on a larger scale? As many of the descriptions of working conditions read as they were pages ripped from Engels' *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, many readers will undoubtedly find themselves asking the same question. Lee answers this puzzle by first showing there has been an incredible amount of protest at the workplace/work unit. *Against the Law* – like no other work available in English – gives a wonderful sense of what is behind the fact that tens of thousands of “mass incidents” occur each year in China. Lee's argument is that the commodification of labor in China is the main source of these protests, and the long quotes culled from her interviews and ethnographic work with actors involved in this protests are an invaluable resource in illuminating this claim. Despite the high number of protests, Lee finds that protests have remained “cellular,” unable to extend beyond the local level. Why?

Lee has two responses to this question. First is the concept of “decentralized legal authoritarianism.” This refers to the decentralized form of accumulation in China, whereby local firms and local government officials share an interest in rapid economic growth. The concept also refers

to the strategy of legal legitimization on the part of the state. The social contract under Chinese socialism has been abandoned in favor of a legalized social contract. Workers in both regions are affected by “decentralized legal authoritarianism,” and this is what leads to a range of outcomes: cellular activism, workers deciding to target the local state when they protest, and the mobilization on the part of the workers of an ideology of legalism.

Lee's second answer to the “cellular” nature of protest is that workers have access to resources that mitigate the worst exploitation they face. Migrant workers to the city have control over rural plots of land due to their rural household registration, and laid-off workers in the northeast cities often own their old work unit flats. Lee's argument is that the workers' ability to rely on non-market resources for social reproduction affords them alternate ways of making a living, blunting their however is particularly strong for the workers in the “rustbelt,” where she is able to show through interviews the familial strategies of subsistence that the workers rely on. This argument is unfortunately less developed for workers in the “sunbelt.”

Against the Law does provide at least one example of workers that were able to organize on a much larger scale than a single firm or work unit: workers in Liaoyang in 2002. In that struggle, workers from many work units in the same city coalesced together, and began linking up their demands with larger social issues, particularly corruption. Harsh state repression followed, and the protests were quickly broken up. Lee curiously does not explicitly theorize the repression workers face, although in the narratives presented in the book, it seems plausible that repression – and the fear of repression – is a crucial element in leading workers to decide on what scale to organize, or what subjectivity to adopt. Indeed while the concept of “decentralized legal authoritarianism” does the heavy lifting of explanation in the narrative, the mechanisms by which it operates could have been presented more clearly.

Quibbles notwithstanding, *Against the Law* is a major achievement, and greatly increases our knowledge and understanding of labor protests in contemporary China. There is no comparable book-length treatment of the subject in English (or, to my knowledge, Chinese). Lee frames her book as a sharp critique of “transition studies” and an extended dialogue with labor studies, and scholars within the latter tradition will doubtless find a great deal to ruminate over.

Section Announcements

Now Accepting Applications

The Sociology Program
University of Houston-Clear Lake

The Sociology Program at the University of Houston-Clear Lake (UHCL) is now accepting applications for a one year visiting lecturer position (pending funding approval with a second renewal year possible) beginning August 2008. PhD, or ABD, in Sociology. Must demonstrate high potential for scholarly productivity; and be genuinely interested in teaching diverse students at the bachelor's and master's levels. All fields are open.

Review of completed applications begins immediately and continues until position is filled. Applications accepted only online at <https://jobs.uhcl.edu>. To apply, please complete the online faculty application and attach a letter of interest and vita. To complete your application file, please mail three letters of recommendation, graduate transcripts, and evidence of teaching effectiveness to: Chair, Sociology Search, University of Houston-Clear Lake, Box 416, 2700 Bay Area Blvd., Houston, TX 77058-1098.

UHCL is part of a six-campus system that serves Houston, Texas, which is the nation's fourth largest city as well as one of its most diverse. Our campus is located on the Southwestern side of Houston directly adjacent to NASA's Johnson Space Center. Proof of eligibility to work in the

U.S. must be provided. We reserve the right to not fill the position.

UHCL is an Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity Employer supporting workplace diversity. For more info, please visit:

<https://jobs.uhcl.edu/applicants/jsp/shared/frameset/Frameset.jsp?time=1204049863010>

Research Competition

Critical Sociology

Submission Deadline: May 5, 2008

The Sage journal *Critical Sociology* announces its **Research Competition**, to be awarded at the *Critical Sociology* Conference in August 2008. The goal of this award is to recognize and promote original critical scholarship that furthers the aims and goals of the journal. We wish to recognize the best paper written and so this competition is open to everyone. Over the past decade the journal has been home to articles informed by post-modern, feminist, cultural and other perspectives that critically evaluate the workings of the capitalist system and its impact on the world.

This year's award recipient will receive a monetary prize of **\$750** and registration for the 2008 *Critical Sociology* Conference in Boston, MA, where the winners will be invited to present their paper.

Papers must be submitted electronically in a format compatible with MS WORD and authors should ensure that they receive a confirmation of receipt for their submission. Papers of up to a maximum length of 30 double-spaced pages including tables and references may be sent beginning in March 2008 but must be received no later than May 5, 2008 to the Chair of the 2008 *Critical Sociology* Award Committee: Professor Graham Cassano, graham@xrgb.com.

Authors will be invited to submit their paper for publication in *Critical Sociology*.

Call for Manuscripts

Labour Across Borders

Labour studies once had a national and institutional focus that rarely allowed for "border crossings" that linked labour movements in different countries. New Labour History arose that challenged both the national and institutional narratives, focusing instead on gender, occupational, racial and regional divisions among workers. Much of this work ignored social class and new work on globalization also often dismisses any notion of labour as a social force within the thin air of a borderless world.

"Labour Across Borders" attempts to resurrect both social class analysis and the perspective of labour as a potentially liberating social force. The series features analyses that at once recognize the divisions among workers that the New Labour History examined and explore possibilities of overcoming them.

This is a peer reviewed book series. If you are interested in submitting a manuscript, you may contact Ingo Schmidt (ischmidt@shaw.ca).

The series will be published with:

AU Press

Athabasca University
Edmonton Learning Centre
1200, 10011 – 109 Street
Edmonton, AB
T5J 3S8, Canada
aupress@athabascau.ca
<http://www.aupress.ca/>

About the editors:

Ingo Schmidt

<http://www.athabascau.ca/html/staff/academic/ischmidt.htm>

Jeff Taylor

<http://www.athabascau.ca/html/staff/academic/jefft/jefft.htm>

Call for Submissions

Association for Humanists Sociology

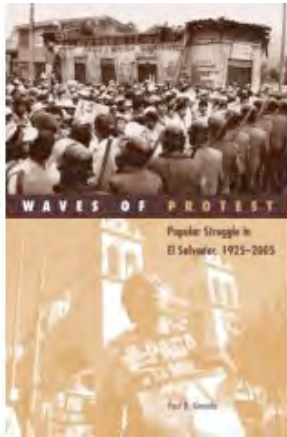
The Association for Humanists Sociology [AHS] would like to invite submissions for its 2008 Annual Meeting at the John Hancock Center in Boston, MA, November 6-9. The conference theme is "What is to be Done? Public Sociology in Theory and Practice."

While public sociology has attracted excitement in recent years, sociology as a resource for social action is not new. From Marx and Mills, to Du Bois and Jane Addams, to Al Lee and Francis Fox Piven, the reemergence of public sociology is really the product of a long march by politically interested and socially engaged scholars through educational institutions, professional associations and publications, and other places where sociology is done. Yet, public sociology remains a contested terrain, criticized as "too political" by some and "not political enough" by others. Since our inception in 1976, AHS and its members have been contemplating and practicing public sociology, mostly from the margins of the discipline. Now that public sociology is front and center, we ought to have much to say about it: historically, theoretically, ethically, politically, and practically.

This Annual Meeting is an opportunity to examine the past, evaluate the present, and begin to shape the future of a public sociology that matters. Paper submissions should address some aspect of public sociology and its relationship to teaching, activism, policy or community-based research, or other aspects of sociology as they relate to incorporating humanist goals with sociological work.

Please send papers, abstracts, posters or session/workshop ideas to: Program Director Daniel Egan (Daniel.Egan@uml.edu) or AHS President Corey Dolgon (cdolgon@worcester.edu).

New Publications



Paul Almeida, *Waves of Protest: Popular Struggle in El Salvador, 1925-2005* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

One of the first longitudinal studies of collective resistance in the developing world, *Waves of Protest* exam-

ines large-scale contentious action in El Salvador during critical eras in the country's history. Providing a compelling analysis of the massive waves of protests from the early twentieth century to the present in El Salvador, Almeida fully chronicles one of the largest and most successful public sector labor campaigns against globalization and privatization in the Americas.

Drawing on original protest data from newspapers and other archival sources, Almeida makes an impassioned argument that regime liberalization organizes labor unions and civil society and, conversely, acts of state-sponsored repression radicalize society. He correlates the ebb and flow of protest waves to the changes in regime liberalization and subsequent de-democratization and back to liberalization.

Almeida shows how institutional access and competitive elections create opportunity for labor and civic organizations that become radicalized when authoritarianism increases, resulting at times in violent protest campaigns that escalate to revolutionary levels. In doing so, he brings negative political conditions and threats to the forefront as central forces driving social movement activity and popular contention in the developing world.



Robin Archer, *Why Is There No Labor Party in the United States?* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007).

Why is the United States the only advanced capitalist country with no labor party? This question is one of

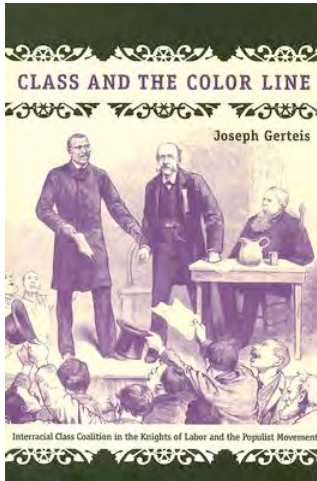
the great enduring puzzles of American political development, and it lies at the heart of a fundamental debate about the nature of American society.

Tackling this debate head-on, Robin Archer puts forward a new explanation for why there is no American labor party--an explanation that suggests that much of the conventional wisdom about "American exceptionalism" is untenable. Archer examines each of the factors that could help explain the American outcome, and his systematic comparison yields unexpected conclusions.

He argues that prosperity, democracy, liberalism, and racial hostility often promoted the very changes they are said to have obstructed. And he shows that it was not these characteristics that left the United States without a labor party, but, rather, the powerful impact of repression, religion, and political sectarianism.

Robin Archer is director of the postgraduate program in political sociology at the London School of Economics. He was previously the fellow in politics at Corpus Christi College, Oxford.

Mary Margaret Fonow and Suzanne Franzway, “Transnational union networks, feminism and labour advocacy” in Verena Schmidt, ed., *Trade Union Responses to Globalization: A review by the Global Union Research Network* (Geneva: ILO, 2007), pp. 165-176.



Joseph Gerteis, *Class and the Color Line: Interracial Class Coalition in the Knights of Labor and the Populist Movement* (Duke University Press, 2007).

In *Class and the Color Line*, Gerteis presents an analysis of social-movement organizing across racial lines in

the American South during the 1880s and the 1890s. The Knights of Labor and the Populists were the largest and most influential movements of their day, as well as the first to undertake large-scale organizing in the former Confederate states, where they attempted to recruit African Americans as fellow workers and voters.

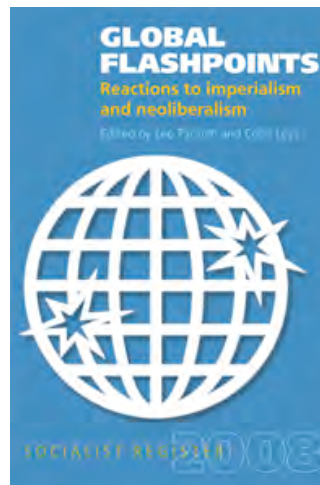


Jeffrey Haydu (University of California, San Diego), *Citizen Employers: Business Communities and Labor in Cincinnati and San Francisco, 1870–1916* (Cornell University Press, 2008).

We cannot understand America's "exceptional" class relations

without taking a closer look at the collective action and ideology of U.S. businessmen. *Citizen Employers* compares a typical and an unusual U.S. business community – Cincinnati and San

Francisco – to analyze bourgeois class formation in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It pays special attention to the ways in which the organization and language of citizenship provided grounds for class solidarity, sources for class identities, and templates for business views of labor.



Richard Roman and Edur Velasco Arragui (Mexican economist and trade unionist), “Mexico’s Oaxaca Commune,” in *Socialist Register 2008: Global Flashpoints—Reactions to Imperialism and Neoliberalism*, edited by Leo Panitch and Colin Leys (New York:

Monthly Review Press, 2008).

The Oaxaca state section of the national teachers union played a central role in this popular rebellion in 2006.

This article was also published as “The Oaxaca Commune: The Other Indigenous Rebellion in Mexico” by the *Socialist Project: Socialist Interventions* pamphlet series. For more information, see www.socialistproject.ca.



Lu Zhang, “Lean Production and Labor Controls in the Chinese Automobile Industry in an Age of Globalization,” *International Labor and Working-Class History* (2008) 73(1): 1-21. Zhang is a Ph.D. candidate in Sociology at Johns Hopkins University.