

In Critical Solidarity

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

Volume 8, Number 3

November 2008

Chair

Michael Schwartz
Stony Brook University, SUNY

Message from the Chair

Chair-Elect

Kate Bronfenbrenner
Cornell University

Past Co-Chairs

Edna Bonacich
University of California Riverside
Jill Ebenshade
San Diego State University

Secretary-Treasurer

Hector Delgado
University of La Verne

Council

Jennifer J. Chun
University of British Columbia
Anna Guevarra
University of Illinois at Chicago
Steven H. Lopez
Ohio State University

Student Representative

Barry Eidlin
University of California, Berkeley

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

Since the 2009 San Francisco meeting will fall on the 75th Anniversary of 1934 General Strike in the Bay Area, the Section has decided to organize most of our convention activities around the strike. With help from ASA Program Committee members, the Section proposal for a Regional Focus session on the historical and sociological significance of the San Francisco General Strike was accepted and will be a featured session at the convention. We are now working on a walking tour of historic sites related to the strike and a photo exhibit at the convention hotel of the 1934 events. If our current planning is successful, the section reception will be held in a meeting hall of the ILWU, the key union in the strike.

In addition, all of the section sessions will relate in some way to the 1934 strike. Our three regular sessions will be on *Political Strikes* (the 1934 strike was an exemplar of political strikes), *Bridging Ethnic, Gender, and Racial Divides in the Labor Movement* (the ILWU has been one of the few unions with a history of successfully addressing these issues), and on *Activism in the Classroom* (the 1934 strike, like so many important union activities, has been virtually invisible in history and sociology courses). Hopefully, our roundtable discussions, where we are making a special effort to attract work in progress around relevant

continued on page 2 ...

In this Issue

Calls for Papers	2
Stronger Together in Fresno	3
President-Elect Barack Obama and Labor	6
Publications	21

issues, will also feature fresh scholarship on this event and other political strikes, papers that address the most important divides in the labor movement, and new ideas for integrating organizing issues into university curricula.

We expect a scintillating set of events at next year's convention.

Michael Schwartz

Call for Nominations for Best Student Paper Award

The Labor and Labor Movements section gives an annual award for the best paper written by a graduate student. Published papers, papers under review, and unpublished article-length manuscripts are eligible. The paper must have been written between January 1, 2007 and December 31, 2008, and the author must have been enrolled as a graduate student at the time the paper was written. The winner receives \$150 for travel to the ASA annual meeting, plus an additional \$250 from Critical Sociology, which is jointly underwriting the award. If the winning paper is an unpublished manuscript, the author will also receive editorial feedback from Critical Sociology and an invitation to submit the paper to that journal. All methodological orientations and substantive topics related to labor and/or labor movements are welcome. Section members can nominate articles for the prize. Self-nominations are welcomed. We particularly hope that faculty members of the section will nominate and encourage students to submit promising work. Nominations must include an electronic copy of the paper and must be received no later than March 31, 2009 by the chair of the awards committee, Steven Lopez,

lopez.137@sociology.osu.edu.

Call for Nominations for Distinguished Scholarly Article

The Labor and Labor Movements section gives an annual award for a distinguished scholarly article. For 2009, the award will go to the best article published between January 1, 2007, and December 31, 2008. The award is open to articles with qualitative and/or quantitative orientations and articles may reflect work that is U.S.-based or global in scope. Section members may nominate articles for the prize. Self-nominations are welcomed. All nominations must be received no later than March 31, 2009, to the chair of the awards committee, Anna Guevarra, guevarra@uic.edu.

Best Book Award

The Distinguished Book Award Committee is soliciting nominations for the 2009 best book. In addition to nominations from publishers, we strongly encourage section members to nominate titles to consider. Books published in 2007 and 2008 are eligible.

The work of our committee depends in large part on the quality of the books nominated. We hope you will take the time to select worthy candidates and forward them to us. As always, the winner and worthy runners-up will be publicly announced at the ASA annual meeting in August 2009.

The deadline for nominations is February 15, 2009. Please email your nominations to committee chair Jennifer Chun at

jjchun@interchange.ubc.ca

Stronger Together in Fresno

Union Democracy and Solidarity with Hospital Workers Helped Homecare Workers Make Gains

Charlie Eaton
Political Coordinator
SEIU – United Healthcare Workers West

Fresno County lies in the heart of California's San Joaquin Valley where an enduring tradition of union-busting and conservative politics once inspired John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath*. Nevertheless, 8,000 homecare workers who care for low-income seniors and people with disabilities in Fresno County recently won significantly better wages and benefits than their counterparts in Los Angeles.

The Service Employees International Union (SEIU) has brought together homecare workers with nursing home, hospital and other healthcare workers in unified statewide or multi-state local unions of healthcare workers in all but a handful of states, with California as the main exception. In most of northern California, including Fresno, homecare workers are part of SEIU – United Healthcare Workers West (UHW), a statewide, unified local of healthcare workers. However, in all of southern California and a portion of northern California, homecare and nursing home workers are part of a separate statewide United Long Term Care Workers (ULTCW) local. Homecare workers in Santa Clara and San Mateo Counties are members of SEIU Local 521, a public services local. SEIU's President Andy Stern has argued that homecare and nursing home workers should be moved out of UHW and into one statewide long-term care workers union.

A comparison of homecare workers' struggles in Los Angeles and Fresno Counties, however, demonstrates why a single healthcare workers union may be better for homecare workers in California. The ways that homecare workers participate in the integrated local democratic

functions of UHW reveal how being in a unified healthcare workers local can allow for greater levels of solidarity and joint action with an enlarged group of healthcare workers from different sub sectors of the healthcare industry. The democratic process of interaction between hospital and homecare workers within UHW in Fresno contributed to a sense among hospital worker activists that they should support homecare workers because "we are all healthcare workers." In the case of Fresno, despite a conservative and anti-union political environment, this sense of solidarity was a marked advantage in the efforts of homecare workers to win significant wage and benefit improvements.

How California Homecare Workers Unionized

The quasi public sector structure of homecare employment in California, the familial links of many homecare workers to homecare consumers, the isolation of homecare workers from each other, and the life-and-death need for the services of homecare workers are significant obstacles to industrial actions by homecare workers. Absent structural power in the labor market, homecare workers have turned to associational power and electoral politics. Homecare workers had to win the support of state elected officials to change California law to permit them to bargain collectively with county-by-county Public Authorities governed by County Boards of Supervisors. At the same time, homecare workers had to get federal, state and county funding allocated to finance wage and benefit improvements. Homecare workers, with support from SEIU locals, the International and their existing membership lobbied legislators, formed community alliances that included senior and disability advocates, conducted public education campaigns and led major electoral campaigns.

In "Breaking the Iron Law of Oligarchy" (*American Journal of Sociology*, Sept. 2000), Kim Voss and Rachel Sherman address these kinds of campaign innovations saying, "Significant organizational changes in local unions have accompanied this radicalization of

goals and tactics” (313). They detail how SEIU revitalized new organizing in California locals in the 1990s with mandates for local spending on organizing and financial subsidies to support the effort (333-335). In Northern California, SEIU encouraged UHW’s predecessor local and our hospital and nursing home members to lead homecare organizing efforts in most counties, including Fresno.

Union-wide comparisons with ULTCW show that UHW has won superior wages and benefits while uniting healthcare workers in one unified local. UHW homecare members received an average hourly combined wage and benefit contribution rate of about \$11.55 in April 2008. ULTCW homecare members received an average hourly combined wage and benefit contribution rate of about \$9.83 or \$1.72 less an hour (CAPA Wage and Benefit Survey).

Hospital Worker Solidarity in Fresno

The 8,000 UHW homecare workers in Fresno enjoyed active support from Kaiser Fresno hospital workers throughout their 2006 contract campaign. Kaiser Fresno employs roughly 1,000 workers and has a well-organized, active Steward Council – the shop floor organizational structure of UHW. Kaiser worker support enabled homecare workers to expand their public campaign activities, escalating the cost to County Supervisors for opposing significant wage and benefit improvements. Joint participation in internal UHW democratic functions, especially candidate endorsement and local Political Action Committee meetings, provided key social interactions between homecare and Kaiser workers contributing to active support from Kaiser workers.

Kaiser participation in the campaign for Cynthia Gonzalez against incumbent Supervisor Judy Case in 2006 invested key Kaiser member leaders in the homecare workers’ contract fight. Case, one of four Republicans on the Board, had opposed the previous increase in wage and benefit rates from the minimum wage of \$6.50 in

2004 to a combined rate of \$8.75 an hour. Homecare workers enjoyed reliable support from only one Republican and one Democrat Supervisor. Workers needed to replace or win the support of one of the three other Republican Supervisors. Approximately 20 UHW homecare members and 10 Kaiser members attended the candidate endorsement interview and vote meeting. Flo Furlow, a homecare worker, remembers Case clearly. “She said we shouldn’t be paid to take care of relatives... She said you really couldn’t qualify (sic) homecare workers with hospital workers. That homecare workers only do menial jobs like cooking and cleaning.” (Interview, October 19, 2008). But Case’s disdain towards homecare workers offended several of the Kaiser members present. “We’re all healthcare workers. It’s all fundamentally the same work. It’s just different places,” explains UHW Steward and Kaiser Medical Assistant Robin Blake in rejecting Case’s logic (Interview, October 17, 2008). Furlow recalls, “Kaiser workers said we should get better wages because we do a lot of the work.” Homecare workers and Kaiser workers voted unanimously to endorse Gonzalez, despite reservations about her viability, and followed through with a public campaign against Case.

Homecare workers and Kaiser workers together approved plans presented by union staff to UHW’s Fresno area Political Action Committee meetings. The process facilitated deeper involvement by Blake and a half-dozen other Kaiser members in the campaign against Case. The Fresno PAC committee approved plans to make thousands of phone calls and door knocks to union members and the voting public about the Supervisor election and to recommend to UHW’s executive board that it fund \$20,000 in direct mail against Case. UHW’s Executive Board subsequently voted to approve the funding.

Kaiser workers participated in the election campaign in important ways and at even higher rates than homecare workers. The 100 member Kaiser Fresno Steward Council agreed to phone bank around the campaign after a passionate

request from Blake and other Kaiser activists. The Kaiser division completed 83 volunteer phone banking and canvassing shifts. Homecare workers completed 137 shifts.

The collective show of strength by homecare and Kaiser workers in the election positioned homecare workers favorably to win major improvements. Case won reelection by a substantial margin on June 6, 2006, but the robust campaign against Case made clear that other Supervisors facing reelection would face significant opposition if they opposed improvements to homecare jobs and services.

Kaiser workers assisted homecare workers again as the campaign transitioned to get Republican Supervisor Bob Waterston to provide the swing vote for wage and benefit improvements. Waterston, facing reelection two years later, provided critical support for a contract settlement. The agreement, implemented October 1, 2006 raised the combined wage and benefit rate to \$11.10 an hour over two years.

UHW, Kaiser and homecare member leaders recognized that they were stronger together over the course of the 2006 campaign. Rick Fantasia theorizes in *Cultures of Solidarity* (California, 1988) that collective actions and “processes of mutual association” themselves embody solidarity and its cousin, class-consciousness (11). Yet the “process of mutual association” won over the attitudes and cognitive beliefs of a significant core of UHW’s member leaders. Blake, a former Republican and union skeptic, demonstrates her transformed beliefs saying, “We helped support homecare workers because we believe that we’re one union. We’re all healthcare workers. We can bring our support and expertise to their fights. And they can bring theirs to us. Because we’re all healthcare workers... their fight is our fight” (Interview, October 17, 2008).

Challenges in Los Angeles

ULTCW has not sought support from rank-and-file hospital workers for the 130,000 homecare

workers it represents in Los Angeles. This complicates what we can learn from a comparison with ULTCW about the advantages and disadvantages of uniting homecare, hospital and nursing home workers in a unified local. Being a separate local to begin with affects the choice by the local’s leaders not to seek the support of hospital workers. The *LA Times* recently exposed corruption and ineptitude on the part of the ULTCW leadership, another contributing factor to the low levels of member participation in political action and the general ineffectiveness of the local. A review of ULTCW’s failure to lift its combined wage and benefit rate above \$9.51 would show that the absence of broad support from hospital workers is only one contributing factor.

ULTCW’s leadership has argued that it cannot raise rates higher because the prior leadership of its predecessor local 434b supported a detrimental provision in the county ordinance creating a process for recognition. The provision of the ordinance stipulates that the county will take on no additional costs for workers’ wage and benefit improvements, using only immediately available state and federal funds. ULTCW has been unable to secure from LA County’s majority Democrat board the three votes necessary for wage and benefit improvements despite spending hundreds of thousands of dollars on political activity in the county.

Low levels of associational political activity by ULTCW members have been one weakness in the effort to raise homecare wages and benefits in LA. Homecare members from ULTCW and its predecessor local 434b participated at low rates in election campaigns important to homecare workers like the 2006 gubernatorial general election. The 2006 Gubernatorial election was a critical fight for homecare and healthcare workers because of state funding for homecare and healthcare services. Local 434b reported to the SEIU State Council only 87 total staff and member shifts in the LA area for the 2006 gubernatorial general election. 434b may have paid more members to join in election activities

but did not report it to the State Council. By contrast, UHW completed 627 shifts in the LA area where it has just over 30,000 members. UHW rank-and-file members performed 373 of those shifts. In Fresno, UHW completed 253 shifts. Rank-and-file members completed 139 of those shifts.

Possibilities for Unified Healthcare Worker Locals

Los Angeles homecare worker Karen Linzy has spoken out along with several dozen other ULTCW members to call for a state-wide, unified healthcare workers' local. Linzy works a second job as a sterile processing technician at Saint Francis Medical Center in Los Angeles County where she is also a UHW member. She explains her support for a unified healthcare workers local by comparing her involvement in the two locals, "We have a stronger voice [in UHW]... we all make a decision... together about bargaining, about what we want. We vote and we decide on politics. I don't even know who 6434 endorses because I can't even get involved" (Interview, October 31, 2008).

Linzy's comparison articulates how engaging in democratic interactions builds solidarity among workers, and her two jobs as a homecare and hospital worker reveal another facet of the special connection between different types of healthcare workers. A unified healthcare workers local can do more than bring larger numbers of workers together, enlarging the pool of workers to do political action work that builds associational power. A unified local can bring workers together who are capable of a greater connection and commitment to each other because of their common identity as caregivers. The success of homecare and hospital workers in Fresno makes unified healthcare locals seem like natural units of organization for democratically building solidarity among workers.

EFCA, the Economy, Obama, and Labor

Steve Early

Thirty years ago, unions came closer to strengthening the Wagner Act than at any other time since Congress enacted labor's "Magna Carta" in 1935. During Jimmy Carter's first and only term, they had the benefit of big Watergate-related Congressional victories by the Democrats in 1974 and, four years later, 61 Senate Democrats. Yet, when a bill was introduced that would have speeded up National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) elections, helped fired organizers, and penalized union-busting employers, labor law reform got filibustered to death in the Senate, after tepid White House lobbying on its behalf. Three decades after that political set-back, and partly because of it, American unions now represent only 12.1% of the total workforce. In the National Labor Relations Act-covered private sector, union density is down to 7.5%.

Thanks to the popular backlash against our current discredited Republican administration, Congress once again changed for the better, in 2006, raising new hopes for labor law reform. This year, union members have been urged to elect even bigger Democratic majorities in the House and Senate, plus a new president, so legislation called the Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA) can be enacted in 2009. Since many in labor believe that amending the NLRA is more critical to union survival today than 30 years ago, it's worth examining the current campaign for EFCA.¹ Have the lessons of past defeats been well applied in labor's renewed bid to strengthen the right to organize? Can the AFL-CIO and Change To Win (CTW) win on this issue when organized labor's size and political clout has been so much diminished since the late 1970s? Even if enacted, will EFCA enable unions to overcome widespread employer resistance to collective bargaining in the U.S.?

As a dress rehearsal for their push for labor law reform next year, unions forced a House vote on EFCA in March, 2007, even though their Democratic allies lacked a filibuster-proof "super-majority" in the Senate and President Bush would have vetoed the bill anyway. At hearings, rallies, and press conferences around the country, union officials and fired workers explained how EFCA would make a difference in union organizing and first contract bargaining. Management would be compelled to recognize new bargaining units based on a showing that a majority of workers (in an appropriate unit) had signed union authorization cards. Employers would no longer be able to insist on NLRB elections, taking advantage of the accompanying delays and opportunities for legal (and illegal) anti-union campaigning. Workers fired for organizing would be eligible for "treble damages" – three times their lost pay – rather than just "back pay" minus "interim earnings." Other employer unfair labor practices—now "punished" with a mere notice posting—could result in a \$20,000 fine (if found to be willful or repeated violations of the Act). Finally, EFCA would create a Canadian-style process of first contract mediation and arbitration. Unresolved first contract negotiations could, at union request, become the subject of binding arbitration leading to imposed contract terms. This would make it harder for employers to use bad faith bargaining as their second line of defense against unionization—as many do after losing a contested representation election.

EFCA opponents launched a well-coordinated drive against the bill in 2007—in a dry run of the even bigger management counter-campaign anticipated next year. In op-eds, paid ads, anti-EFCA mailings, speeches, and websites, industry lobbyists defended the sanctity of secret-ballot NLRB representation votes, depicting labor's "card check" alternative as deeply flawed, undemocratic, and even "un-American." The result was a 241 to 185 House vote in favor. Three months later, 51 members of the Senate moved to bring it to a vote on the floor—far fewer than the 60 necessary to stop a Republican filibuster. Meanwhile, on the presidential

campaign trail, every Democratic candidate endorsed the bill, although only John Edwards ever talked about EFCA much in front of non-labor audiences. When he was pursuing the "labor vote" in Ohio's Democratic primary, the eventual nominee, Barack Obama told a blue-collar crowd in Lorain:

"If a majority of workers want a union, they should get a union. It's that simple. We need to stand up to the business lobby and pass the Employee Free Choice Act. That's why I've been fighting for it in the Senate and that's why I'll make it the law of the land when I'm president of the United States."²

Obama's primary rival, Hillary Clinton, also pledged her support for EFCA, although in a private meeting with top AFL-CIO officials in early 2007, she suggested (somewhat gratuitously in light of her own "high negatives") that labor's public image might be an impediment to its passage. As a candidate, Clinton carried the taint of her husband's dismal record on labor law reform. During his first term, fourteen years after Carter's attempted overhaul of the Wagner Act, Bill Clinton put labor's top legislative priority on the back burner by creating a presidential study commission. The "Commission on the Future of Worker-Management Relations" spent 1993-4 collecting testimony and trying to document links between "employee representation" and "economic competitiveness." Unfortunately for labor, this two-year period was the only time when the Democrats had a majority in both the House and Senate—and, thus, the ability to enact pro-worker legislation. Dunlop Commission proposals, some of which weren't even helpful to unions, ended up being dead on arrival due to mid-term election victories in 1994 that gave Republicans control over Congress for the rest of Clinton's presidency.

Having learned from that fiasco, labor law reformers now hope that their preparatory activity in 2007 and continued agitation during the 2008 race will force a vote on EFCA early in Obama's administration. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Democratic Majority Leader George Miller have

committed to pushing the White House forward on the issue without any Clinton-style commissions, delay, or political "triangulation." But not all of their colleagues, old or new, will necessarily be as reliable as the House leadership. In a recent message to members of the United Electrical Workers, the union's political director Chris Townsend warned "against political phonies who want us to think they are in support of EFCA but who will get cold feet when big business lobbyists (and campaign contributors) lean on them hard when the bill comes before Congress again."³ The 2007 House and Senate roll-calls were an important stepping stone to labor law reform—but, in terms of outcome, these were votes that "didn't count." Everyone knew that EFCA wasn't about to become law then, which made it possible for labor's more lukewarm "friends" to take a "pro-union" stand of no actual consequence.

In addition to their campaigning for Obama, private sector unions have spent much of 2008 shoring up the shakier Senate Democrats and trying to insure that any Democratic candidates who join them in January are already committed to EFCA. (In labor's best-case election scenario, Democrats will gain nine additional Senate seats on Nov. 4 and, at long last, the ability to overcome a Republican filibuster.) Members of the Communications Workers of America (CWA) and other unions have been deployed around the country to educate politicians about the experience of workers already covered by EFCA-type procedures for "card check" recognition. In Arkansas, for example, AT&T wireless customer service reps visited U.S. Senator Blanche Lincoln, a past EFCA fence-sitter, to recount how management had used threats, intimidation, and harassment to thwart past union activity. When ownership of their call center in Little Rock changed, workers were able to unionize, without interference, under a negotiated agreement that obligated management to remain neutral and authorized the American Arbitration Association (AAA) to certify CWA based on its "card majority."

Among the 20,000 or more AT&T workers who have won bargaining rights in similar fashion since 2004 is a group of 600 located in Dover, New Hampshire. Their CWA organizing committee had a meeting with former N.H. governor Jean Shaheen, who pledged to become an EFCA during her 2008 race against a GOP incumbent, Senator John Sununu. The Dover workers explained to Shaheen how CWA Local 1298 was became their bargaining representative after a AAA card count in October, 2007. (This win was the biggest private sector organizing victory in the "Live Free or Die" state in three decades.) However, negotiations on a first contract with AT&T were delayed for several months due to the new notice posting and waiting period requirement imposed by the NLRB in its Dana/Metaldyne case decisions.⁴ In those rulings, Bush appointees to the Board tried to undermine privately negotiated recognition agreements by giving anti-union workers 45-days, after certification via card check, to petition for a decertification vote. Thus if 30 percent of the workers in a new unit sign up, they can bring in the NLRB to hold an election—even after a majority of the workforce has just authorized a union to represent them! At AT&T in Dover, an effective in-plant campaign thwarted any minority bid for a decertification vote; but a year later, several hundred workers have been laid off and the survivors still have no first contract, illustrating the difficulty of getting one even at a firm regarded as "union-friendly". (In Dover, AT&T is not serving telecom customers but rather acting as a passport processing contractor for the U.S. State Department, which has complicated the bargaining by threatening to take the work elsewhere.)

By placing a new obstacle in the path of card check recognition and, potentially, forcing more organizing back into the arena of NLRB elections, Dana gave unions most involved in "non-Board organizing" an additional incentive to win passage of EFCA. Even if NLRA reform fails again in Congress, the Dana decision could be reversed eventually, without amending the law, through Democratic control of the White

House. But any broader overturning of anti-worker rulings by the "Bush Board" requires the presidential appointment of more labor-friendly NLRB appointees and several years of case-by-case adjudication and/or agency rule-making. In addition, as Nation writer Max Fraser notes, "Democratic labor board majorities have had little positive effect on organizing" in recent decades. "Private-sector union membership dropped steadily and by more than half between 1977 and 2000, while the two parties spent equal time in the White House. The Reagan years were particularly dismal, but labor didn't exactly thrive under the Carter and Clinton boards either."⁵

That's why EFCA backers believe unions won't be able to build on the success of card check and neutrality agreements (negotiated by SEIU, UNITE-HERE, CWA, IBT, UAW, UFCW, and others) without changing the NLRA itself. This confidence is not shared by all academic researchers, however. As Cornell University professor Richard Hurd noted in *New Labor Forum* in the Spring of 2008, "even a cursory review of the Canadian experience under provincial laws that parallel EFCA indicates that...expectations of union deliverance from organizing purgatory may prove to be overly optimistic."⁶ Hurd cites the work of Canadian labor relations scholar Roy Adams, who points out that "union density and bargaining coverage are falling even in such provinces as Saskatchewan and Quebec that have card check and first-contract arbitration clauses." Adams predicts that U.S. management—like Canadian firms—will find new ways to resist unionization, even if EFCA is enacted, and that its net impact will be minimal.⁷ Other EFCA skeptics point out that "a genuine rights movement relies primarily on the activity of its rank-and-file members...and not on ordinary lobbying or staff-driven campaigns....[E]very major workers rights statute has been preceded by widespread collective action demanding and exercising workers rights."⁸

Key EFCA campaign strategists are not oblivious to this protest history. While "organizing unions"

can't summon up a social movement out of thin air, they can try to build on their collective experience of strikes, lock-outs, and membership mobilization on behalf of organizing-related demands. Some recent "bargain to organize" struggles have succeeded, over time, in raising rank-and-file consciousness about the importance of winning EFCA-type card check language (plus employer neutrality) in new contracts.⁹ Past labor law reform efforts—such as the failed 1977-78 bid—had much less of a grassroots orientation than the current effort, relying instead on consultant-driven Capitol Hill lobbying. The Carter Administration, in turn, backed changes in the NLRA like it was just doing a favor for a nettlesome special interest group—providing a quid pro quo for past election support not much different than Congressional Democrats' perennial introduction, years ago, of "common situs" picketing legislation. (Long viewed as a sop to the building trades, these ill-fated AFL-CIO-backed bills never succeeded in loosening restrictions on worker solidarity on construction sites.)

In key 2008 Senate races, business groups are now spending an estimated \$50 million on ads depicting labor law reform as a dangerous "Big Labor" power grab, fueled by union donations to the Democrats.¹⁰ (No matter how much unions have shrunk, in the imagination of www.unionfacts.com and like-minded sources of disinformation, the bogeyman of "Big Labor" still stalks the land, just like it did in the late 1940s when Taft-Hartley was required to tame it!) In the January, 2008, issue of *HR Magazine*, former management lawyer Rick Berman, now executive director of the Center for Union Facts in Washington, D.C., warned employers that if, EFCA passes, "private sector union membership could double." In the same article, well-known union busting consultant Stephen Cabot sounded the alarm about the proposed law's higher penalties for management misconduct. "Currently, many employers engage in initiatives to counter union campaigns they wouldn't dare do under EFCA," Cabot said. "With EFCA, it will be very costly." HR's conclusion: "If EFCA passes,

it would be the most significant pro-labor legislation in more than two decades"--employers should rightly fear that it "will open the floodgates for organizing."¹¹

To broaden support for EFCA, unions are depicting it, more accurately, as essential to their institutional survival. Friends of labor have been reminded that, without NLRA reform, unions will be further weakened as a defender of working class living standards and an historic ally of progressive causes. For example, defending existing pension and medical benefits—not to mention protecting Social Security and replacing job-based health insurance with a Medicare-For-All system—will be increasingly difficult, if not impossible, without greater union density. The U.S. mortgage market meltdown and accompanying recession provides yet another compelling reason for Congressional action on EFCA, since workers' rights could be a helpful part of any real "economic stimulus" package. As economist Dean Baker, from the Center for Economic and Policy Research, explained prior to the crisis on Wall Street:

"While suppression of workers' right to organize may appear to have little direct relationship to the collapsing housing bubble that is the cause of this recession, on closer examination they are closely linked...If workers are able to form unions and get their share of productivity growth, it can again put the country on the path of wage-driven consumption growth, instead of growth driven by unsustainable borrowing....Restoring a wage-driven growth path will provide workers and businesses with much more stability than the current bubble economy."¹²

Yet policy arguments like Baker's – so redolent of the Depression-era rationale for passing the Wagner Act in the first place and so compelling again today – won't gain any traction in Washington, D.C. without many more labor "boots on the ground" (and the accompanying sound of marching feet). At least that was the theory behind the AFL-CIO's "Million-Member Mobilization" for "bargaining rights worth working for

and voting for" in 2008. Undertaken at the urging of CWA President Larry Cohen and others on the federation's executive council, the AFL-CIO resolved to get ten percent of all union members signed up on pledge cards demanding that Congress and the White House take action on EFCA. To reach this proclaimed goal of one million petitioners, labor's campaign had both an internal and external component:

"Every national union, state federation, central labor council trade department, constituency group, local union and allied organization commits to massive membership mobilization about the assault on collective bargaining, the middle class, and our unions...We must educate, mobilize, and enlist our members in the movement to pass the Employee Free Choice Act.

"Every segment of the labor movement also commits to engage and cultivate more allies, religious leaders, civil rights leaders, academics, think tanks, and other opinion leaders to speak out about the importance of restoring the freedom to form unions to build a just society."¹³

Organized labor is very adept at "resolutionary activity" like this, which papers over an inevitable gap between rhetoric and reality due to lack of follow-up. In the case of the "million member" mobilization, one reality noticeable so far has been rather light campaigning by several major unions rooted in the public sector who won't benefit much, if at all, from private sector labor law changes. EFCA is also largely irrelevant to current strategies for regaining "union market share" in construction (although a few building trades unions have worked hard for it). Ditto for airline industry labor which is covered by the Railway Labor Act, rather than the NLRA. Among the industrial, (non-airline) transportation, service and retail unions with the biggest stake in EFCA, the follow-through on effective membership education and internal mobilization has varied widely. For some, having such an issue-oriented focus added a new wrinkle to political work during a presidential election year.

In March, 2008, a core group of AFL-CIO unions stepped forward to provide initial leadership in the "Million Member" campaign. CWA, the UAW, the United Steelworkers, and the much smaller International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers (IFPTE) formed an alliance based on a professed shared commitment to "unprecedented workplace activity" on behalf of EFCA. All four, with a total membership of two million, had earlier balked at paying a \$1 per member special assessment sought by the AFL-CIO to fund its more diffuse GOTV drive. The Alliance was critical of that plan because of its "deficient emphasis on laying the groundwork for enacting EFCA."¹⁴ So, as part of labor's overall \$300 million political effort, CWA, USWA, UAW, and IFPTE decided to pool resources to reach and engage 15% of their own members on the job, plus run a coordinated field campaign. Among the states now targeted for worksite leafleting, door-to-door canvassing, and phone-banking by the Alliance are Virginia, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Kentucky, Louisiana, Minnesota, and Mississippi.

As Cohen of CWA argued earlier this year: "Our own history, as well as that of other labor movements around the world, teaches us that we must act to create change—not sit back and hope for it, or hire others to make it happen for us."¹⁵ Subsequently, Cohen became a bridge-builder to Change to Win unions as well. He urged them to join Alliance union members in grassroots activity that would inject EFCA into 2008 races and build public support for its passage in 2009, by pushing candidates to talk about workers' rights, in front of non-labor audiences. (In three presidential or vice-presidential debates so far, neither Obama nor his running mate, Joe Biden, have mentioned EFCA once. Nor do they bother to make the simple point that Cohen does in his EFCA campaigning, namely that greater unionization would be a "rescue package" for workers, by enabling them to boost their incomes during a recessionary period.)

To raise EFCA's profile, a group of seven unions, acting through American Rights At Work, is

spending \$5 million on cable TV ads designed to counter big business saturation of the airwaves with anti-EFCA propaganda. (There is also a quite lively op-ed page war going on about EFCA in newspapers all around the country.) With a month to go before the election, CWA is nearing its own goal of signing up 15% of all members on EFCA pledge cards; it has 97,842 ready to be displayed in the U.S. Capitol in January, at the swearing-in of the new Congress. Around the country, some organizers are trying to put a human face on the EFCA cards they are gathering. They have photographed rank-and-file endorsers of the bill so their pictures can be posted on campaign websites and sent to Washington too—demonstrating to legislators that EFCA is a real worker priority, not just a project of the labor bureaucracy and its paid lobbyists.

In early 2009, the Employee Free Choice Act will clearly face plenty of competition for inside-the-Beltway attention, due to economic troubles that have now become scarily systemic. Even after union workers help put Obama in the White House, through their exertions in key "battleground states," the new president will not be spoiling for a knock-down, drag-out fight with corporate American over labor law reform. If recent history is any guide, he may instead be tempted to take a Jimmy Carter-style dive or start bobbing and weaving like the inimitable Bill Clinton. Only bottom-up pressure on the Democrats, now and after Nov. 4, can insure that this bout even occurs, not to mention ends favorably for labor during Obama's first term.

Notes

1) Actually, not everyone does agree that EFCA would make that big a difference. See, for example, the provocative arguments of James Pope, Peter Kellman, and Ed Bruno, "The Employee Free Choice Act and a Long-Term Strategy For Winning Workers' Rights," *WorkingUSA: The Journal of Labor and Society*, Vol. 11, March, 2008, pp. 125-144.

2) Brian DeBose, "Obama Banks on Union's Support," *The Washington Times* March 3, 2008, p. 14.

3) Chris Townsend, "The Deck's Stacked Against Labor," *The UE News*, February 2008, p. 15.

4) Kim Moody, "Card Check Takes A Hit," *Labor Notes*, December 2007, pp. 4-5.

5) Max Fraser, "Beyond the Labor Board," *The Nation*, Jan. 21, 2008, pp. 6-8. For a critique of the performance of the NLRB during the Clinton years, see Steve Early, "How Stands The Union?" *The Nation*, January 22, 2001 pp. 25-27.

6) Richard Hurd, "Neutrality Agreements: Innovative, Controversial, and Labor's Hope for the Future," *New Labor Forum*, Spring, 2008, pp. 35-44.

7) See Roy Adams, "The Employee Free Choice Act: A Reality Check," Labor and Employment Relations Association, Proceedings of the 58th Annual Meeting, 2006.

8) Pope, Kellman, and Bruno in *WorkingUSA*, March 2008, p. 135.

9) See for example the 2005-6 "Hotel Workers Rising" campaign which, according to UNITE-HERE president Bruce Raynor, produced neutrality agreements that have added 6,000 new members to the union. (Cited in Hurd above. For an account of the strike by 75,000 CWA and IBEW members against Verizon in 2000 which occurred, in part, due to a long-running (and still unresolved) union fight over organizing rights at Verizon Wireless, see Steve Early, "Verizon Strike Highlights New Union Role," *The Boston Globe*, Sept. 3, 2000, p. E7.

10) Kris Maher, "Labor Dispute Takes To Airways," *The Wall Street Journal*, July 16, 2008, p. A6.

11) Robert J. Grossman, "Reorganized Labor," *HR Magazine*, January 2008.

12) See Dean Baker, "The Recession and the Freedom to Organize," posted February 6, 2008 by AFL-CIO at http://www.aflcio.org/mediacenter/speakout/dean_baker.cfm.

13) For full text of AFL-CIO Executive Council's March 10, 2008 statement, see: <http://www.aflcio.org/aboutus/thisistheaflicio/uncil/ec030420081.cfm>.

14) See Harold Meyerson, "A Fractured Labor Movement is Throwing Everything Into Its Campaign For Obama," *The American Prospect* (web edition only), August 28, 2008 (<http://www.prospect.org/cs/articles>). The author doesn't approve of the Alliance. He finds this "political action sub-group" to be further disappointing evidence of the "splintering of a movement whose watchword, supposedly, is solidarity."

15) See "Employee Free Choice Act is Within Reach," *The CWA News*, January-February, 2008, p. 8.

Steve Early worked as a CWA organizer for 27 years. He is the author of a forthcoming book called *Embedded With Organized Labor: Journalistic Reflections on the Class War At Home* (Monthly Review Press, 2009). A longer version of this article, entitled "Labor Law Reform Thirty Years Later: Back To The Future With EFCA?" will appear in that collection and is being published in *Labor: Studies in Working Class History of the Americas*, Volume 5, Number 4, November, 2008. For subscription information, see <http://labor.dukejournals.org/>. This article originally appeared at ZNet (www.zmag.org/znet).

Wooing Unions for Obama

David Moberg

On a rainy afternoon in early September, Jeff Ampey, a member of the Communications

Workers union, knocked on the door of Frances Brady's home in Galesburg, part of the historically conservative "Dutch Triangle" in southwest Michigan. He was walking through the neighborhood as part of an AFL-CIO effort to contact union members about the presidential election.

Brady, an 81-year-old former paper worker who retired before most of the area's many paper mills closed, said she was "not 100 percent sure" about whom she would support. Ampey politely left some brochures, one rebutting common false rumors about Barack Obama (such as that he's a Muslim), the other about Obama "building an economy that works for all."

When I called back the next day, Brady had made up her mind. "I'm a Democrat in my heart," she said. "Last time I voted for Bush, and I said I'd never vote for them again. I've got a grandson who was in Afghanistan three years, and they could call him back. On the economy, I think Bush looks the other way. Obama, I'm a little bit unsure sometimes because he doesn't have experience, but he's for the average American person and the poor, and I think he's a very smart man."

There are a lot of wavering voters, especially older whites like Brady, who lean Democratic but aren't sure about Obama. In the final weeks of the campaign, the labor movement could play a critical role in winning them over and tipping the race. Despite their dwindling ranks, voters from union households make up about a quarter of the electorate (in this battleground state, that figure is around 37 percent). Organized labor can also reach out to the 2.5 million members of Working America, the AFL-CIO's new community affiliate, as well as to millions of retirees like Brady (many of whom will learn from the union-affiliated Alliance for Retired Americans that McCain wants to privatize Social Security).

Union membership – and labor's education and mobilization efforts – make a big difference in how people vote. In the 2006 House elections, for

example, white men voted Republican by nine points, according to Hart Research, but white men who were union members favored Democrats by thirty-nine points.

But this election, with the nation's first African-American presidential candidate, is different. Since Obama polls lower than a generic Democrat and lost the white working-class vote to Hillary Clinton in key primaries, many analysts wonder whether Obama has a white working-class problem that could jeopardize his bid for the presidency. The answer is up in the air--and much depends on the labor movement's political operation this fall.

It's worth remembering that no Democratic presidential candidate has won a majority of white votes since 1964. And today, with the growing Latino and Asian populations, Obama needs only to do well – but not necessarily win – among white workers. Late summer polls showed that Obama was scoring better among all whites than Kerry or Gore did, winning more support from lower-income than high-income voters, leading McCain 47 percent to 37 percent among low-wage white workers (in an August *Washington Post* poll). According to an August Lake Research poll for the Change to Win labor federation, white non-supervisory workers younger than 65 were split evenly between Obama and McCain, with 13 percent undecided. So there are signs that Obama is doing relatively well among white working-class voters after all.

But there are problems – and opportunities. Voter identification and the views of independents have shifted toward the Democrats in recent years. That trend suggests that Obama should be doing better, but he still lags among self-identified Democrats. Much of the resistance comes from older whites. But it also comes from specific regions like Appalachia, as AFSCME (public employee) union president Gerald McEntee argues, or Macomb County, the largely white Catholic Detroit suburb whose residents epitomized working-class Reagan Democrats. Pollster Stanley Greenberg returned in July and

found Obama trailing McCain by seven points, doing worse than either Gore or Kerry had done. Macomb County's white union members favored Obama, but only by a 47 percent to 34 percent margin.

Polls of union members over the summer typically showed that they supported McCain less or about the same as Bush in 2004, but compared with four years ago, there was a larger fraction of undecided union voters. "Among folks who feel they know something about him, he's winning by more than two to one among union members," says AFL-CIO deputy political director Michael Podhorzer. "Among those who don't know much, he's only ahead by a few points. In our minds it's coming down to a persuasion election" to reach undecided voters, most of whom dislike Bush.

Like many undecideds, Macomb voters were "less comfortable" with the idea of Obama as president than with a generic Democrat or McCain. It's easy to translate discomfort as prejudice, but Greenberg argues that race is a diminishing factor for Macomb voters.

In decades past, surveys on racial attitudes, whatever their flaws – showed that better-educated Americans believed fewer racial stereotypes and expressed more sympathy for policies to redress past discrimination than people with less education. Now the groups have converged, according to University of Illinois sociologist Maria Krysan, with both groups rejecting stereotypes but also rejecting redress. To the extent that racism is still a problem, it's most likely more evenly distributed by class, perhaps more concentrated among middle-income workers. But race clearly remains a problem for Obama. At least 6 percent of likely voters in a late August *Washington Post* poll expressed strong discomfort with a black president. Conservative politicians also win support when they promote some positions that are not explicitly racial - like acting tough on crime or disparaging aid to cities - because they trigger lingering subconscious racial resentment.

The new climate on race means that white voters want to be sure Obama is a champion for everyone, not just blacks, Greenberg observes; Macomb voters largely, but not fully, see him that way. Recent research (such as Harvard postdoctoral fellow Daniel Hopkins's study of 133 elections from 1986 to 2006) suggests that the infamous Bradley effect – voters telling pollsters they are undecided or support a black candidate but voting for a white in the polling booth – is probably diminishing. For example, although ads with a clear racial subtext hurt Harold Ford in his 2006 bid for the Senate in Tennessee, his final vote slightly exceeded the last pre-election polls. The Republicans can exploit subterranean racial fears by portraying Obama as "the other," but if their appeals are too overt, they could backfire, especially among women.

Union leaders are engaged in a frank debate about how to deal with the issue of race as they drum up support for Obama. "Obviously in the United States, whether union members or not, at a conscious or unconscious level, race is a significant factor in this election," Podhorzer says. "But I don't think it's bigger, or smaller, for union members than the general public."

Unions favor broad, class-based economic appeals, but many leaders have decided union members must confront racism directly. Steelworkers gave AFL-CIO secretary-treasurer Richard Trumka a standing ovation at their convention when he told them, "There's not a single good reason for any worker, especially any union member, to vote against Barack Obama. There's only a bad reason: because he's not white."

But labor's strategy for confronting the race issue reflects the complexity of people's hesitations, which are not just racial, McEntee argues. For example, even though strong majorities agree with Obama that the Iraq War was a mistake and that we should withdraw troops as fast as possible, McCain has played the POW card to make himself the symbol of national security.

And some voters identify with Sarah Palin and her union-member "first dude" as being more like them (even if they are more likely to think Obama cares about people like them). Unions want to recast the debate, transforming McCain into Bush III and focusing on his continuation of despised and, as is increasingly obvious, ruinous economic policies. Months before the AFL-CIO endorsed Obama in June, it began a campaign to debunk McCain's maverick claim, linking him to Bush. At the same time, it attacked McCain's record, especially his proposal to tax workers' healthcare benefits as income. The AFL-CIO also established a Veterans Council to argue that whatever McCain did in Vietnam, he was no hero for working families - nor a supporter of adequate benefits for veterans.

Most important, "we're talking about issues of economic self-interest," says AFL-CIO political director Karen Ackerman--jobs, the right to organize unions, inequality, pensions, trade, healthcare. Union strategists want the Obama campaign to focus more on pocketbook issues. "Part of what he has to do is pound the economic message," says one union official. "He has to say very specifically what kind of change he means, practical proposals that fundamentally change people's lives and give their kids a better future." The polling by Greenberg and Lake Research indicates that the Obama campaign can move many undecided white workers into his column with a strong populist economic message. But Laborers president Terry O'Sullivan says, "They're doing what they need to do. I put the challenge on us to make sure our members understand what he stands for."

"A lot of our members will have a hard time with the choice," says Painters union president James Williams. "But when you put the issue of their paycheck and pension on the table, I think they'll make the right decision." As Greg Junemann, president of the Professional and Technical Engineers, says, "On every policy resolution in the last two conventions, Obama is with us, McCain against us. How could we say, 'Yeah, but

he's black'? Obama walks the picket line. McCain doesn't believe we should have picket lines."

And at the same time, unions try to knock down the persistent rumors and to make union members see Obama as someone like them, who had to work hard for what he's got. "There is some unease with Obama, as not a familiar entity," Ackerman says. "We take that seriously and have created a program to give those voters a degree of comfort voting for Obama."

The labor movement is making a massive effort, spending altogether almost \$300 million for this political cycle, compared with around \$200 million four years ago, according to McEntee. But it's been frustrated by delays and divisions. The June AFL-CIO endorsement of Obama, coming after a long primary during which many union leaders favored Clinton or John Edwards, slowed the AFL-CIO effort to educate members about Obama.

Change to Win (CTW) unions, with a combined political budget of \$125 million, endorsed Obama in February and began developing a more independent operation than in 2006, when the breakaway group relied more heavily on the AFL-CIO political program (as the Laborers, part of CTW, still do). The two federations have tensions in their relationship that sometimes make collaboration difficult. Differences over strategy, moreover, have cropped up within the AFL-CIO. In March, the Steelworkers, Auto Workers, Communications Workers and Professional and Technical Engineers formed the Alliance, a more workplace-focused campaign, to complement the AFL-CIO operation. "Just trying to go deeper," as CWA president Larry Cohen explained, they also wanted to put more emphasis on trade, the Employee Free Choice Act (which would permit workers to unionize when a majority in a workplace sign up), healthcare and pensions. And they wanted to focus on Senate races, such as in Mississippi, where they might boost the Democratic majority to assure passage of EFCA. Steelworkers president Leo Gerard, whose union has trained an army of 10,000 activists who

mobilize members at work, says, "This is not about division. We believe it's a simple issue: a lot of our unions spend time together on the ground, and we concluded we could be more effective this way than simply doing Labor '08 [the AFL-CIO program]. We're going to do Labor '08 plus more."

Beyond the work on elections, unions are simultaneously attempting to build union member and public support for issues they hope an Obama administration will embrace, especially universal health insurance (though the proposals and strategies vary), the EFCA (unions plan to deliver 1 million signatures in support when Congress meets in January) and infrastructure investment. Then unions plan to shift their election mobilization into a movement to hold Congress and Obama accountable, assuming he is elected. For example, Anna Burger says that the Service Employees, after committing \$5 million to the election, have budgeted \$10 million for their accountability campaign.

In the final weeks, tens of thousands of union volunteers will leaflet their workplaces, phone union members and go door to door. The more personal the message, the more it's repeated in different ways, the more it's tailored to specific workers' interests, the more persuasive it will be. And if AFL-CIO organizing director Stewart Acuff has his way, members will carry labor's political message to nonunion neighbors as well. Within the limits of campaign finance laws, he argues, "We've got to see union members as important messengers in their communities."

To a significant degree, Obama's success will hinge on how well unions convert their wavering members. And much of their success will depend on workers like Connie Couch, a 49-year-old nurse, single mother and new union member who came out in the rain in Galesburg to knock on doors. "I want change. We really need change," she explained. "I back Barack."

David Moberg, a senior editor of *In These Times*, writes frequently for *The Nation* on labor issues.

This article originally appeared in the October 13, 2008 edition of *The Nation*.

Will Obama Inspire a New Generation of Organizers?

Peter Dreier

Americans are used to voting for presidential candidates with backgrounds as lawyers, military officers, farmers, businessmen, and career politicians, but this is the first time we've been asked to vote for someone who has been a community organizer. Of course, Barack Obama has also been a lawyer, a law professor, and an elected official, but throughout this campaign he has frequently referred to the three years he spent as a community organizer in Chicago in the mid-1980s as "the best education I ever had."

This experience has influenced his presidential campaign. It may also tell us something about how, if elected, he'll govern. But, perhaps most important, there has not been a candidate since Bobby Kennedy and Eugene McCarthy who has inspired so many young people to become involved in public service and grassroots activism.

Through his constant references to his own organizing experience, and his persistent praise for organizers at every campaign stop, Obama is helping recruit a new wave of idealistic young Americans who want to bring about change. According to surveys and exit polls, interest in politics and voter turnout among the millennial generation (18-29) has increased dramatically this year. But Obama isn't just catalyzing young people to vote or volunteer for his campaign. Professors report that a growing number of college students are taking courses in community organizing and social activism. According to community organizing groups, unions and environmental groups, the number of young people seeking jobs as organizers has spiked in the past year in the wake of Obama's candidacy.

Whether or not he wins the race for the White House, Obama, through his own example, has already dramatically increased the visibility of grassroots organizing as a career path, as well as a way to give ordinary people a sense of their own collective power to improve their lives and bring about social change.

Obama's Organizing Experience

In 1985, at age 23, Obama was hired by the Developing Communities Project, a coalition of churches on Chicago's South Side, to help empower residents to win improved playgrounds, after-school programs, job training, housing, and other concerns affecting a neighborhood hurt by large-scale layoffs from the nearby steel mills and neglect by banks, retail stores, and the local government. He knocked on doors and talked to people in their kitchens, living rooms, and churches about the problems they faced and why they needed to get involved to change things.

As an organizer, Obama learned the skills of motivating and mobilizing people who had little faith in their ability to make politicians, corporations, and other powerful institutions accountable. Obama taught low-income people how to analyze power relations, gain confidence in their own leadership abilities, and work together.

For example, he organized tenants in the troubled Altgelt Gardens public housing project to push the city to remove dangerous asbestos in their apartments, a campaign that he acknowledges resulted in only a partial victory. After Obama helped organize a large mass meeting of angry tenants, the city government started to test and seal asbestos in some apartments, but ran out of money to complete the task.

Obama often refers to the valuable lessons he learned working "in the streets" of Chicago. "I've won some good fights and I've also lost some fights," he said in a speech during the primary season, "because good intentions are not enough, when not fortified with political will and political

power." (Recently, right wing publications, radio talk shows, and bloggers, such as the *National Review* and the *American Thinker*, have sought to discredit Obama as a "radical" by linking him to ACORN and other community organizing groups.)

The American Organizing Tradition

The roots of community organizing go back to the nation's founding, starting with the Sons of Liberty and the Boston Tea Party. Visiting the U.S. in the 1830s, Frenchman Alexis de Tocqueville, author of *Democracy in America*, was impressed by the outpouring of local voluntary organizations that brought Americans together to solve problems, provide a sense of community and public purpose, and tame the hyper-individualism that Tocqueville considered a threat to democracy. Every fight for social reform since then—from the abolition movement to the labor movement's fight against sweatshops in the early 1900s to the civil rights movement of the 1960s to the environment and feminist movements of the past 40 years—has reflected elements of the self-help spirit that Tocqueville observed.

Historians trace modern community organizing to Jane Addams, who founded Hull House in Chicago in the late 1800s and inspired the settlement house movement. These activists—upper-class philanthropists, middle-class reformers, and working-class radicals—organized immigrants to clean up sweatshops and tenement slums, improve sanitation and public health, and battle against child labor and crime.

In the 1930s, another Chicagoan, Saul Alinsky, took community organizing to the next level. He sought to create community-based "people's organizations" to organize residents the way unions organized workers. He drew on existing groups—particularly churches, block clubs, sports leagues, and unions—to form the Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council in an effort to get the city to improve services to a working-class neighborhood adjacent to meatpacking

factories. Alinsky's books, *Reveille for Radicals* (1945) and *Rules for Radicals* (1971), became the bible for several generations of activists, including the civil rights movement, the environmental movement, and many other reformers.

There are currently at least 20,000 paid organizers in the United States, according to Walter Davis, executive director of the National Organizers Alliance. (Nobody knows for sure, since "organizer" is not an occupation listed by the Census Bureau). They work for unions, community groups, environmental organizations, women's and civil rights groups, tenants organizations, and school reform efforts. Unlike traditional social workers, organizers' orientation is not to "service" people as if they were clients, but to encourage people to develop their own abilities to mobilize others. They identify people with leadership potential, recruit and train them, and help them build grassroots organizations that can win victories that improve their communities and workplaces. According to organizer Ernesto Cortes, they help people turn their "hot" anger into "cold" anger – that is, disciplined and strategic action.

The past several decades has seen an explosion of community organizing in every American city. There are now thousands of local groups that mobilize people around a wide variety of problems. With the help of trained organizers, neighbors have come together to pressure local governments to install stop signs at dangerous intersections, force slumlords to fix up their properties, challenge banks to end mortgage discrimination (redlining) and predatory lending, improve conditions in local parks and playgrounds, increase funding for public schools, clean up toxic sites, stop police harassment, and open community health clinics. A key tenet of community organizing is developing face to face contact so people forge commitments to work together around shared values. (The Internet has become a useful tool to connect people in cyberspace and then bring them together in person).

For years, critics viewed community organizing as too fragmented and isolated, unable to translate local victories into a wider movement for social justice. During the past decade, however, community organizing groups forged links with labor unions, environmental organizations, immigrant rights groups, women's groups, and others to build a stronger multi-issue progressive movement. For example, the Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy (LAANE) has created a powerful coalition of unions, environmental groups, community organizers, clergy, and immigrant rights groups to change business and development practices in the nation's second-largest city. At the national level, the Apollo Alliance – a coalition of unions, community groups, and environmental groups like the Sierra Club – is pushing for a major federal investment in "green" jobs and energy-efficient technologies.

Although most community organizing groups are rooted in local neighborhoods, often drawing on religious congregations and block clubs, there are now several national organizing networks with local affiliates, enabling groups to address problems at the local, state, and national level, sometimes even simultaneously. These groups include ACORN, the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), People in Communities Organized (PICO), the Center for Community Change, National People's Action, Direct Action Research and Training (DART), and the Gamaliel Foundation (the network affiliated with the Developing Communities Project that hired Obama). These networks as well as a growing number of training centers for community organizers—such as the Midwest Academy in Chicago, the Highlander Center in Tennessee, and a few dozen universities that offer courses in community and labor organizing—have helped recruit and train thousands of people into the organizing world and strengthened the community organizing movement's political power.

The "living wage" movement is an example of both coalition-building and linking local and national organizing campaigns. In 1994,

BUILD—a partnership of a community organization and a local union—got Baltimore to enact the first local law, requiring companies that have municipal contracts and subsidies to pay its employees a “living wage” (a few dollars above the federal minimum wage). Since then, more than 200 cities have adopted similar laws, helping lift many working families out of poverty. Most of their victories grew out of coalitions between community organizing groups, labor unions, and faith-based groups. These coalitions have gotten more than 20 states to raise their minimum wages above the federal level. These efforts helped build political momentum for Congress’ vote last year to raise the federal minimum wage for the first time in a decade.

Organizing and the Obama Campaign

Although he didn’t make community organizing a lifetime career—he left Chicago to attend Harvard Law School—Obama often says that his organizing experience has shaped his approach to politics. After law school, Obama returned to Chicago to practice and teach law. But in the mid-1990s, he also began contemplating running for office. In 1995, he told a Chicago newspaper, “What if a politician were to see his job as that of an organizer—as part teacher and part advocate, one who does not sell voters short but who educates them about the real choices before them?” Since embarking on a political career, Obama hasn’t forgotten the lessons that he learned on the streets of Chicago.

This is reflected in his campaign for president. Community organizers distinguish themselves from traditional political campaign operatives who approach voters as customers through direct mail, telemarketing, and canvassing. Most political campaigns immediately put volunteers to work on the “grunt” work of the campaign—making phone calls, handing out leaflets, or walking door to door. According to Temo Figueroa—Obama’s national field director and a long-time union organizer—the Obama campaign has been different. “When I came on board what attracted me was his history as an organizer,”

says Figueroa, who was working as AFSCME’s assistant political director. “At the time I wasn’t sure I was joining the winning team. Most of us thought we were jumping on the little engine that could. We were believers. We wanted something bigger than ourselves. A movement.”

Obama enlisted Marshall Ganz, a Harvard professor who is one of the country’s leading organizing theorists and practitioners, to help train organizers and volunteers as a key component of his presidential campaign. Ganz was instrumental in shaping the volunteer training experience.

Many Obama campaign volunteers went through several days of intense training sessions called “Camp Obama.” The sessions were led by Ganz and other experienced organizers, including Mike Kruglik, one of Obama’s organizing mentors in Chicago. Potential field organizers were given an overview of the history of grassroots organizing techniques and the key lessons of campaigns that have succeeded and failed.

“Organizing combines the language of the heart as well as the head,” Ganz says, reflecting on his experiences as an organizer with SNCC in the civil rights movement and as a key architect of the United Farmworkers’ early successes. Not surprisingly, compared with other political operations, Obama’s campaign has embodied many of the characteristics of a social movement—a redemptive calling for a better society, coupling individual and social transformation. This is due not only to Obama’s rhetorical style but also to his campaign’s enlistment of hundreds of seasoned organizers from unions, community groups, churches, peace, and environmental groups. They, in turn, have mobilized thousands of volunteers—many of them neophytes in electoral politics—into tightly knit, highly motivated and efficient teams. This summer, the campaign created an “Obama Organizing Fellows” program to recruit college students to become campaign staffers.

This organizing effort has mobilized many first-time voters, including an unprecedented number of young people and African Americans during the primary season. Now that Obama is the presumed Democratic nominee, he faces pressure to resort to more traditional electoral strategies, but so far Obama and top campaign officials have continued to emphasize grassroots organizing. It is evident in Obama's speeches, his continued use of the UFW slogan, "Yes, we can/Si se puede," his emphasis on "hope" and "change," and the growing number of experienced organizers drawn into the campaign.

Obama's stump speeches typically include references to America's organizing tradition. "Nothing in this country worthwhile has ever happened except when somebody somewhere was willing to hope," Obama explained. "That is how workers won the right to organize against violence and intimidation. That's how women won the right to vote. That's how young people traveled south to march and to sit in and to be beaten, and some went to jail and some died for freedom's cause." Change comes about, Obama said, by "imagining, and then fighting for, and then working for, what did not seem possible before."

In town forums and living-room meetings, Obama says that "real change" only comes about from the "bottom up," but that as president, he can give voice to those organizing in their workplaces, communities, and congregations around a positive vision for change. "That's leadership," he says.

Organizer-in-Chief?

If elected president, will Obama's organizing background shape his approach to governing?

Obama can certainly learn valuable lessons from President Franklin Roosevelt, who recognized that his ability to push New Deal legislation through Congress depended on the pressure generated by protestors and organizers. He once told a group of activists who sought his support

for legislation, "You've convinced me. Now go out and make me do it."

As depression conditions worsened, and as grassroots worker and community protests escalated throughout the country, Roosevelt became more vocal, using his bully pulpit—in speeches and radio addresses—to promote New Deal ideas. Labor and community organizers felt confident in proclaiming, "FDR wants you to join the union." With Roosevelt setting the tone, and with allies in Congress like Senator Robert Wagner, grassroots activists won legislation guaranteeing workers' right to organize, the minimum wage, family assistance for mothers, and the 40-hour week.

After his election in 1960, President John Kennedy encouraged baby boomers to ask what they could do for their country. At the time, JFK meant joining the Peace Corps and the VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) program. He could not have anticipated the wave of protest and activism—around civil rights, Vietnam, and later feminism and the environment—that animated the sixties and seventies.

President Lyndon Johnson was initially no ally of the civil rights movement. However, the willingness of activists to put their bodies on the line against fists and fire hoses, along with their efforts to register voters against overwhelming opposition, pricked Americans' conscience. LBJ recognized that the nation's mood was changing. The civil rights activism transformed Johnson from a reluctant advocate to a powerful ally. LBJ's "Great Society" program—although criticized as too tame by United Auto Workers leader Walter Reuther and other progressives—provided some community organizing positions with anti-poverty agencies, job training groups, and legal services organizations in urban and rural areas. Many of today's veteran activists got their first taste of grassroots organizing in the anti-poverty, civil rights, and farmworker movements.

Now comes Obama, a one-time organizer, who consistently reminds Americans of the importance of grassroots organizing. If he's elected president, he knows that he will have to find a balance between working inside the Beltway and encouraging Americans to organize and mobilize. He understands that his ability to reform health care, tackle global warming, and restore job security and decent wages will depend, in large measure, on whether he can use his bully pulpit to mobilize public opinion and encourage Americans to battle powerful corporate interests and members of Congress who resist change.

For example, talking about the need to forge a new energy policy, Obama explained, "I know how hard it will be to bring about change. Exxon Mobil made \$11 billion this past quarter. They don't want to give up their profits easily." Another major test will be whether he can help push the Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA)—a significant reform of America's outdated and business-oriented labor laws—through Congress against almost unified business opposition. If passed, EFCA will help trigger a new wave of organizing that will require enlisting thousands of young organizers into the labor movement.

If Obama wins the White House, progressives within his inner circle will look for opportunities to encourage his organizing instincts to shape how he governs the nation, whom he appoints to key positions, and which policies to prioritize. Meanwhile, a new generation of volunteer activists and paid organizers will be looking to join President Obama's progressive crusade to change America. But if it appears that is veering too far to the political center, they will—inspired in part by Obama's own example, and perhaps with his covert support—mobilize to push him (and Congress) to live up to his progressive promise.

Peter Dreier is professor of politics and director of the Urban & Environmental Policy program at Occidental College, where he teaches a course on community organizing. He is coauthor of *The*

Next Los Angeles: The Struggle for a Livable City, Place Matters: Metropolitcs for the 21st Century, and several other books. This article originally appeared at www.dissentmagazine.org.

Recent Publications

Ariel Ducey, *Never Good Enough: Health Care Workers and the False Promise of Job Training* (Cornell University Press, 2008).



Frontline health care workers have always been especially vulnerable to the perpetual tides of health care "reform," but in the mid-1990s in New York City, they bore the brunt of change in a new way. They were obliged to take on additional work, take lessons in recalibrating their attitudes, and, when those steps failed to bring about the desired improvements, take advantage of training programs that would ostensibly lead to better jobs. Such health care workers not only became targets of pro-market and restructuring policies but also were blamed for many of the problems created by those policies, from the deteriorating conditions of patient care to the financial vulnerability of entire institutions.

In *Never Good Enough*, Ariel Ducey describes some of the most heavily funded training programs, arguing that both the content of many

training and education programs and the sheer commitment of time they require pressure individual health care workers to compensate for the irrationalities of America's health care system, for the fact that caring labor is devalued, and for the inequities of an economy driven by the relentless creation of underpaid service jobs. In so doing, the book also analyzes the roles that unions--particularly SEIU 1199 in New York--and the city's academic institutions have played in this problematic phenomenon.

In her thoughtful and provocative critique of job training in the health care sector, Ariel Ducey explores the history and the extent of job training initiatives for health care workers and lays out the political and economic significance of these programs beyond the obvious goal of career advancement. Questioning whether job training improves either the lives of workers or the quality of health care, she explains why such training persists, focusing in particular on the wide scope of its “emotional” benefits. The book is based on Ducey's three years as an ethnographer in several hospitals and in-depth interviews with key players in health care training. It argues that training and education cannot be a panacea for restructuring—whether in the health care sector or the economy as a whole.

Ariel Ducey is Assistant Professor of Sociology at the University of Calgary.

Carolina Bank Muñoz, *Transnational Tortillas: Race, Gender and Shop Floor Politics in Mexico and the United States* (Cornell University Press, 2008).



This book looks at the flip side of globalization: How does a company from the Global South behave differently when it also produces in the Global North? A Mexican tortilla company, “Tortimundo,” has two production facilities within a hundred miles of each other, but on different sides of the U.S.-Mexico border. The workers at the two factories produce the same product with the same technology, but have significantly different work realities. This “global factory” gives Carolina Bank Muñoz an ideal opportunity to reveal how management regimes and company policy on each side of the border apply different strategies to exploit their respective workforces' vulnerabilities.

The author's in-depth ethnographic fieldwork shows that the U.S. factory is characterized by an “immigration regime” and the Mexican factory by a “gender regime.” In the California factory, managers use state policy and laws related to immigration status to pit documented and undocumented workers against each other. Undocumented workers are subject to harsher punishment, night-shift work, and lower pay. In the Baja California factory, managers sexually harass women—who make up most of the workforce—and create divisions between light-

and dark-skinned women, forcing them to compete for managerial attention, which they understand equates with job security.

In describing and analyzing the differences in working conditions between the two plants, Bank Muñoz provides important new insights into how, in a globalized economy, managerial strategies for labor control are determined by the interaction of state policies and labor market conditions with race, gender, and class at the point of production.

Carolina Bank Muñoz is Assistant Professor of Sociology at Brooklyn College–City University of New York.

Patrick F. Gillham and John Noakes, “More Than a March in a Circle: Transgressive Protests and the Limits of Negotiated Management.” *Mobilization* (2007) 12(4): 341-357. This article examines the different organizing and tactical repertoires used by labor, environmental and anarchist groups during the 1999 WTO protests, and the failed police response to those engaged in transgressive protest tactics.

Notice

Art Shostak, Emertus Professor of Sociology at Drexel University, collected many hundreds of outstanding and often hard-to-find labor and union books over 47 years as a labor educator (25 years as the Adjunct Sociologist at the AFL-CIO George Meany Center). He is now trying to find a college or university library home for any or all of the books—and offers them at no charge (except for flat rate postage). Please contact him at shostaka@drexel.edu. He has a list ready to immediately e-mail out.

Art also has available copies of his latest paperback book, *Anticipate the School You Want: Futurizing K-12 Education*, a pragmatic blueprint

for bringing attention to tomorrow's major choices into the schooling of young learners. This a cause he hopes Organized Labor soon recognizes as a priceless opportunity to help gain salience in the lives of members. Priced by the publisher at \$25 plus \$5 shipping and handling. Art has copies at \$18 plus \$3 shipping and handling.

Call for Submissions

Societies Without Borders: Human Rights and the Social Sciences welcomes submissions from scholars and scholar-activists working in the following areas: human rights and social justice, public sociology, global studies, critical social theory, environmental and health studies, public anthropology, migration and border studies, radical economics, labor studies, culture and political economy, urban & regional planning, critical media, and film studies. *Societies Without Borders* is a sociological journal that welcomes contributions from all disciplines which seek to blend the quest for truth and expert knowledge with a commitment to social justice, peace, and societal transformation.

<http://www.brill.nl/default.aspx?partid=212&pid=26203>

Farshad Araghi

Chair of Sociology and Director of the Graduate Program

Department of Sociology

Dorothy F. Schmidt College of Arts and Letters

Florida Atlantic University

777 Glades Road

Boca Raton, FL 33431

TEL: 561-297-0261

954-236-1139

Co-Editor, *The International Journal of Sociology of Agriculture and Food*

Co-Editor, *Societies Without Borders: Human Rights & the Social Sciences*