

# In Critical Solidarity

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

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## Message from the Chair

These have been interesting times for the Labor and Labor Movement Section and the movement we study and teach about. I am pleased to say that our Section is doing well. We not only got our membership up to 414 but we also had a lot of senior faculty recruiting and sponsoring graduate students to join and become active in the Section.

We got all our sessions accepted for Atlanta which promises to be a great session including our regional spotlight chaired by Cynthia Hewitt and me on **Race and Labor Organizing in the South, Old and New**, with dynamic panelists including Will Jones, Ruben Hernandez-Leon, and Stewart Acuff. We have a joint panel session with the Teaching and Learning Sociology Section on **Dissenting Voices Under Fire -- Academic Freedom at Risk** and three paper sessions: **Disparate Impacts; Race Labor, Gender and the Environment** (co-sponsored with the **Race, Class and Gender Section**); **Fighting for Labor and Justice; Workers, Rights and Movements around the World**; and **Unions as Citizens; Labor, Politics and the Obama Program**.

But that was just one small piece of what our program committee accomplished this fall. It finally learned to play by the rules, and to

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do that it had to do a lot of catching up because it turns out that we were supposed to be submitting proposals for Regional Spotlights and Thematic Sessions 1 1/2 years earlier than we had been. So this year we submitted all our sessions for Atlanta, but we also had two proposals for thematic sessions tentatively accepted for the 2011 meeting in Chicago, **Legacies of 1886: U.S. Class Formation and Class Conflict in Historical Perspective**, proposed by Barry Eidlin, and **Bread and Roses; Dignity and Respect as a Dimension of Labor and Working Class Struggles**, proposed by Robert Ross and are about to submit our proposal for the 2011 Chi-cago regional spotlight in time for the February 5, 2010 deadline. Now that we are caught up and know the rules we can try to stay that way.

At the same time we have been putting together these programs we have all been very distracted and troubled by what has been going on in the world around us. There are without a doubt many reasons to be discouraged about our government, the economy, the labor movement, and the world. But, as someone who has spent the last year neck deep in data that tells a great deal about labors' strengths and weaknesses, accomplishments and vulnerabilities I still see much to hope for. Unions making mistakes yes, but they are still out there trying to change and working extremely hard to find a way to organize the workers who are not organized and keep representing those they already represent. The problem is that they must make fundamental changes if they are going to succeed -- in how they position themselves in the world, strategically engage with capital, see issues like race, and gender and class, interact with each other and their allies in the community, and most of all how they relate to workers, both those they are organizing and those whom they already represent.

And that is where the members of the Labor and Labor Movements Section come in. With our research and writing and with the kinds of sessions we are doing at the meetings we can try to ask and answer the most difficult questions so

we don't get stuck in disappointment with what didn't happen this year and instead move on to tackle the future with a wiser more critical edge.

Best wishes for the New Year,  
Kate Bronfenbrenner

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## Labor and Labor Movements' Section Awards

### DISTINGUISHED CONTRIBUTION TO SCHOLARSHIP AWARD (BOOK)

The Labor and Labor Movements section is soliciting nominations for the 2010 Distinguished Contribution to Scholarship Award (Book). In addition to nominations from publishers, we strongly encourage section members to nominate titles to consider. For the 2010 award, the best book published between January 1, 2008 to December 31, 2009 will be chosen by the Distinguished Book Award Committee. In addition to nominations from publishers, we strongly encourage section members to nominate titles to consider. Self-nominations are always welcomed.

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 2010.

All nominations must be received no later than **March 31, 2010**. Please email your nominations to committee co-chairs Barry Eidlin at [eidlin@berkeley.edu](mailto:eidlin@berkeley.edu) and Steve McKay at [smckay@ucsc.edu](mailto:smckay@ucsc.edu). Please consult the [nomination process guidelines](#) for submission details.

The committee members for the 2010 award are:

- Barry Eidlin, Committee Co-chair  
**2006 Outstanding Student Paper Award Recipient**  
University of California, Berkeley  
[eidlin@berkeley.edu](mailto:eidlin@berkeley.edu)
- Steve McKay, Committee Co-chair  
**2007 Distinguished Scholarly Book Award Recipient**  
Univeristy of California, Santa Cruz  
[smckay@ucsc.edu](mailto:smckay@ucsc.edu)
- Steve Lopez  
**2005 Distinguished Scholarly Book Award Recipient**  
Ohio State University  
[lopez.137@sociology.osu.edu](mailto:lopez.137@sociology.osu.edu)
- Rina Agarwala  
Johns Hopkins University  
[agarwala@jhu.edu](mailto:agarwala@jhu.edu)
- Clare Hammonds  
Brandeis University  
[hammonds@brandeis.edu](mailto:hammonds@brandeis.edu)
- Jason Stanley  
New York University  
[Jason.Stanley@nyu.edu](mailto:Jason.Stanley@nyu.edu)
- Belinda Lum  
University of San Diego  
[b.lum@sandiego.edu](mailto:b.lum@sandiego.edu)

**DISTINGUISHED CONTRIBUTION TO SCHOLARSHIP (ARTICLE) AWARD**

The Labor and Labor Movements section gives an annual award for the Distinguished Contribution to Scholarship (Article). For 2010, the distinguished scholarly article award will go to the best article published between January 1, 2008 to December 31, 2009. The article is open to both qualitative and quantitative orientations and can reflect work that is U.S.-based or global in scope. Section members can nominate articles for the prize. Self-nominations are always welcomed.

All nominations must be received no later than **March 31, 2010**. Please send all nominations to the chair of the awards committee, Jennifer Chun, [jjchun@interchange.ubc.ca](mailto:jjchun@interchange.ubc.ca)

The committee members for the 2010 award are:

- Jennifer J. Chun, Committee Chair  
University of British Columbia  
[jjchun@interchange.ubc.ca](mailto:jjchun@interchange.ubc.ca)
- Paul Almeida  
**2008 Distinguished Contribution to Scholarship (Article) Award Recipient**  
Texas A&M University  
[almeida@tamu.edu](mailto:almeida@tamu.edu)
- Moon-Kie Jung  
University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign  
[jung3@illinois.edu](mailto:jung3@illinois.edu)
- Chad Gray  
Cornell University  
[cwg22@cornell.edu](mailto:cwg22@cornell.edu)
- Daniel Tope  
Florida State University  
[dtope@fsu.org](mailto:dtope@fsu.org)

**LABOR AND LABOR MOVEMENTS / CRITICAL SOCIOLOGY DISTINGUISHED STUDENT PAPER AWARD**

The Labor and Labor Movements section gives the Labor and Labor Movements/Critical Sociology Distinguished Student Paper Award annually as an 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, 2008 and December 31, 2009, 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 the award committee and an invitation to submit the paper to Critical Sociology if the author makes the revisions suggested by the Award Committee. 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, 2010** by the chair of the awards committee, Anna Guevarra at [arpgue@gmail.com](mailto:arpgue@gmail.com). The committee members for the 2010 award are:

- Anna Guevarra, Committee Chair  
University of Illinois at Chicago  
[arpgue@gmail.com](mailto:arpgue@gmail.com)
- Anna Wetterburg  
**2009 Distinguished Student Paper Award Recipient**  
University of California, Berkeley  
[a\\_wetterberg@hotmail.com](mailto:a_wetterberg@hotmail.com)
- Joshua Bloom  
**2009 Distinguished Student Paper Award Recipient (Honorable Mention)**  
University of California Los Angeles  
[joshuabloom@ucla.edu](mailto:joshuabloom@ucla.edu)
- John-Paul Ferguson  
**2009 Distinguished Student Paper Award Recipient (Honorable Mention)**  
Stanford University  
[ferguson\\_john-paul@gsb.stanford.edu](mailto:ferguson_john-paul@gsb.stanford.edu)
- Preston Rudy  
San Jose State University  
[preston.rudy@sjsu.edu](mailto:preston.rudy@sjsu.edu)
- Kim Scipes  
Purdue University North Central  
[kscipes@pnc.edu](mailto:kscipes@pnc.edu)

## Labor and Labor Movement Section Awards for 2009

### Distinguished Scholarly Monograph:

Edward Webster, Professor of Sociology and Director of the Sociology of Work Unit (SWOP) University of the Witwatersrand; Rob Lambert, Chair of Labour Studies, Business School, and Director of the Australian Global Studies Research Centre University of Western Australia; and Andries Bezuidenhout Senior Researcher in the Sociology of Work Unit (SWOP) University of the Witwatersrand for ***Grounding Globalization: Labour in the Age of Insecurity***. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Press, 2008.)

### Distinguished Scholarly Article

Paul Almeida, Associate Professor of Sociology, Texas A&M University, for "**The Sequencing of Success: Organizing Templates and Neoliberal Policy Outcomes.**" *Mobilization: The International Quarterly*, 13(2): 165-187.

### Distinguished Graduate Student Article

Anna Wetterburg, UC Berkeley, for "**Codes, Coercion and Culture: Explaining Labor Self-Regulation in the Apparel Industry.**"

### Honorable Mention (a three way tie):

Joshua Bloom, UCLA, for "**Ally to Win: Black Community Leaders and SEIU's LA Security Unionization Campaign.**"

John-Paul Ferguson, MIT, for "**Space Invaders: Social Valuation and the Diversification of Union Organizing Drives, 1961-1999.**"

Gabriel Hetland, UC Berkeley, for "**Labor in Movement: Contradictory Articulation of Union, Community, and State in Neoliberal New York.**"

## **Organizing Home-Based Workers**

### **Invitation to a Home-Based Worker Organizing Forum**

**Sponsored by *Labor Notes*  
April 23-25, Dearborn, Michigan**

Dear Brother or Sister:

We are writing because of our shared interest in the challenge of organizing and representing home-based workers.

As labor activists, direct care providers, or academic researchers, we have all been involved in aiding or studying organizing work among publicly-funded personal care attendants and child care providers, plus other types of domestic workers.

Largely female, people of color, and very often foreign born, these workers have been the largest single source of new union members--more than 500,000 in the last ten years.

We believe that the work done by SEIU, AFSCME, AFT, CWA, UAW, and OPEIU to create new bargaining units among direct care workers--often previously classified as "independent contractors"--strengthens on-going efforts by the National Domestic Workers Alliance to win new legal rights and protections for privately-employed home-based workers as well.

In recent months, however, adequate funding for home health services in California and other states has been threatened by local budget cuts. Changes in Medicare reimbursement practices--as part of President Obama's "health care reform"--may also affect these programs adversely. Inter-union competition for home-based workers has intensified in places like Fresno County, California, where the outcome of a vote involving

10,000 home care workers last June is still being contested. In Illinois, 3,000 Illinois workers who provide in-home care for the severely disabled recently voted to reject representation, despite having a choice between two unions on the ballot.

That's why we think this is a particularly good time to step back and assess our collective efforts to create a "voice-at-work" for home-based workers, while improving the conditions of domestic labor generally. During the weekend of April 23-25, at the Labor Notes conference in Dearborn, Michigan, there will be a wide-ranging discussion of the challenges facing unions and workers centers as they try to build durable, effective, and member-driven organizations among men and women employed in such "non-traditional" workplaces.

We hope you will join us in shaping the agenda for this meeting, helping to publicize it, and participating, if you can. On a rare cross-union basis, we will be exchanging information about home-based worker organizing and bargaining, rank-and-file leadership development, other job-related training programs, plus on-going legislative/political campaigns for union recognition and program funding. We hope to learn from each other's union building successes and setbacks, while identifying "best practices" that might be replicated more widely.

To make suggestions for additional content or speakers at our planned home-based worker panel/workshop at the Labor Notes conference, please contact Steve Early at [Lsupport@aol.com](mailto:Lsupport@aol.com) or 617-930-7327.

You can register now for the overall April 23-25 conference, at [www.labornotes.org](http://www.labornotes.org)

Please share this invitation with union co-workers or academic colleagues in California, Washington, Oregon, Illinois, Michigan, Missouri, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, or any of the other states where home-based worker organizing has contributed so

much to union membership growth in recent years.

Sincerely,

Steve Early, Labor Notes Policy Committee member and former organizer, CWA District 1; Ken McNamara, president of CWA Local 1037, Newark, New Jersey; Ken Allen, Executive Director, AFSCME District Council 75, Portland, Oregon; Priscilla Gonzalez, Director, National Domestic Workers United, New York City; Barri Boone, home health care aide and member of SEIU Local 6434, Santa Cruz, California; John Vellardita, organizer, National Union of Healthcare Workers, Oakland, California; Jennifer Klein, Professor of History, Yale University, and co-author, with Eileen Boris, of *Caring For America: How Home Healthcare Workers Became The New Face of Labor*; Dana Simon, organizer, UNITE HERE Local 26, Boston, Mass. and former home-care organizer and negotiator for United Healthcare Workers-West/SEIU; Wade Rathke, founder of ACORN and chief organizer, ULU Local 100; Clare Stacey, Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Kent State University.

## **Union Membership Drops 10%**

**By Kris Maher**

*The Wall Street Journal*, Jan. 23, 2010

Organized labor lost 10% of its members in the private sector last year, the largest decline in more than 25 years. The drop is on par with the fall in total employment but threatens to significantly limit labor's ability to influence elections and legislation.

On Friday, the Labor Department reported private-sector unions lost 834,000 members, bringing membership down to 7.2% of the private-sector work force, from 7.6% the year

before. The broader drop in U.S. employment and a small gain by public-sector unions helped keep the total share of union membership flat at 12.3% in 2009. In the early 1980s, unions represented 20% of workers.

Labor experts said the union-membership losses would have a long-term impact on unions and their finances, because unions wouldn't automatically regain members once the job market rebounded. In many cases, new jobs will be created at nonunion employers or plants.

"The bad news for unions is twofold. When times are bad they lose members, and when times are good they don't recoup those members," said Gary Chaison, a professor of industrial relations at Clark University in Worcester, Mass.

The manufacturing sector and construction industries—both of which tend to be heavily unionized—were hit particularly hard in the recession by the credit crisis and global downturn, which damped demand for industrial goods. Private sector construction lost 237,000 union members, while manufacturing lost 253,000 union members, representing more than half of the loss of private-sector union jobs.

The report caps a week of bad news for organized labor, as Democrats lost a filibuster-proof majority in the Senate, dashing union hopes for passing legislation to ease union-organizing rules, and putting the union-backed health-care bill into question.

Unions also suffered a big setback with a Supreme Court decision on campaign financing that removed limits on corporate spending. While unions are also free of certain limits, companies and business groups could outspend labor in the future.

Some labor experts said labor's focus on politics came at the expense of organizing. "It's a year when the labor movement focused its energies on labor-law reform and health care," said Kate

Bronfenbrenner, a Cornell University labor expert.

With those issues on shaky ground, unions are now expected to focus their political energy on job creation, in hopes that new jobs will be union jobs.

"We're focusing on job creation," said Josh Goldstein, a spokesman for the AFL-CIO. "And we need to make sure that workers have the ability to bargain and make sure those jobs are good jobs."

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*A note from the editors: We do not usually reprint lengthy articles (as opposed to opinion pieces) in ICS. Given the importance of its topic, however, we are making an exception for the following piece by Steve Early on the recent controversies involving the Service Employees International Union (SEIU). We invite readers' responses and reactions.*

## **The Progressive Quandary about SEIU**

**By Steve Early**

*Abstract:* The terrain of "progressive labor" in the U.S. has shifted dramatically in recent years. The two-million member Service Employees International Union (SEIU)--long associated with the remaking of labor as a force for social justice--has become embroiled in a series of controversies that have alienated past campus, community, and political allies. A union that once commanded almost automatic support in left-liberal circles now finds many "friends of labor" arrayed against it, rhetorically at least, and, in some cases, actively assisting organizational rivals such as UNITE HERE and the new National Union of Healthcare Workers (NUHW). The following article reviews the history of the labor-intellectual alliance that emerged in the mid-1990s, in response to changes in the national

AFL-CIO leadership. It assesses the current state of relations between labor-oriented academics and leading unions that formed the Change To Win coalition in 2005.

In late June, 2009, the garment workers and hotel employees union known as UNITE HERE held its national convention in Chicago. There, the fellow labor organization recently described in New Labor Forum as our "most dynamic, fastest growing, and (many would argue) most progressive union" was widely condemned.[i] John Wilhelm, the new president of UNITE HERE, once shared NLF's view of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), when he worked closely with SEIU to create Change To Win (CTW) and leave the AFL-CIO in 2005. But, in Chicago on June 29, Wilhelm went to the podium and bitterly denounced his former ally as "the bosses' lackey union." Mike Casey, the widely-respected president of San Francisco's central labor council and head of Hotel Employees Local 2, reported to the convention that his members were "battling both SEIU and the employers." Guest speakers from other unions expressed similar outrage over SEIU's encroachment on hotel worker jurisdiction, which began after a minority faction in UNITE HERE--now known as "Workers United"--defected to Andy Stern's union.

"For another union to come onto your turf and take advantage of what you've built, that is piracy on the seas of organized labor," declared Gerry McEntee, president of AFSCME. "What SEIU is doing is bullshit," McEntee shouted, before leading delegates in a chant of "Bullshit! Bullshit! Bullshit!" In his convention speech, Vince Giblin, president of the Operating Engineers, repeatedly referred to SEIU president Stern as the "Darth Vader of the labor movement." Stern's AFL-CIO critics were joined by Terry O'Sullivan, president of the Laborers, a fellow CTW founder. He told the delegates: "What happens in this fight we have with SEIU will determine what kind of labor movement we have...We didn't join Change to Win to raid and hijack another union's members." [ii]

Meanwhile, top officers of the AFL-CIO also weighed in on Wilhelm's behalf. More than 20 different labor councils, including those in Los Angeles and San Francisco, had already adopted resolutions critical of SEIU's behavior. In Chicago, fifteen national labor leaders from both CTW and the AFL-CIO-representing over 10 million workers-released a public statement pledging their full "support, both materially and morally," against any poaching of UNITE HERE members by SEIU.[iii] Among the signers were CTW leaders James Hoffa of the Teamsters, Joe Hansen of the United Food and Commercial Workers, and Douglas McCarron of the Carpenters, along with O'Sullivan-which left only one small CTW affiliate still in SEIU's corner, the 10,000-member United Farm Workers. In a post convention press conference, Wilhelm cited the breadth of this backing as evidence of the impending "demise of Change To Win." How did Andy Stern respond to such widespread and unprecedented public censure by his organizational peers? In the month following UNITE HERE's convention in Chicago, SEIU brushed off the above-mentioned labor complaints but defended itself before a very different audience. For \$10,000, Stern bought the whole back page of *The Nation* to inform its 160,000 readers-most of whom are not even union members-that "the conflict between UNITE HERE and Workers United/SEIU" was all John Wilhelm's fault. In case *Nation* subscribers didn't get the message the first time, Stern spent another ten grand on a similarly positioned, three-color display ad, one issue later, urging these same "friends of labor" to go to [www.putworkersfirst.com](http://www.putworkersfirst.com) and sign an on-line petition supporting SEIU's side of the dispute with UNITE HERE.[iv]

The public relations priorities of Stern and his two million-member union were not surprising. For several decades now, SEIU has devoted more resources than any other labor organization to wooing students and professors, progressive think tankers, mainstream journalists, "new media" bloggers, labor educators, religious leaders, and a wide range of community organizers. According

to Washington Post columnist and American Prospect editor Harold Meyerson, no trade unionist has more "rapport with non-union liberals and intellectuals" than Andy Stern. The SEIU president is "the most articulate and heterodox union leader in American labor today," Meyerson says. "His organization put considerably greater resources-about \$85 million-into the effort to elect Barack Obama than any other. It funds more progressive groups and causes than any other institution in liberal America."[v]

SEIU's many non-labor allies have, in addition, long applauded its organizational focus on the "most oppressed"-low-paid, non-white, and often foreign-born nursing home workers, child care providers, and home health care aides. Proponents of social justice, diversity, and empowerment of the poor have been drawn to SEIU's Justice for Janitors and security guard organizing campaigns. In academia, they have encouraged young activists to work for the union, on campus and off, and provided sympathetic portrayals of SEIU in numerous books, articles, and reports. Alone in American labor, Stern's union has been highlighted favorably in a Hollywood movie--Ken Loach's *Bread and Roses* about the recruitment of Latino janitors in Los Angeles. As noted above, SEIU has generously reciprocated for many years. It regularly showers its campus, community, and political supporters with donations for their conferences and research projects, single-issue campaigns, on-line initiatives, hard copy publications, and low-budget organizations--in some cases, purchasing lasting loyalty.

For example, Barbara Ehrenreich, the renowned author and journalist, received \$100,000 from Stern to launch a "still small and struggling" on-line networking group called *United Professionals*.[vi] Elsewhere in the blogosphere, various lesser-known labor and political commentators have been similarly subsidized, via grants or all-expense paid trips to SEIU's 2008 national convention. In New York City, New Labor Forum has never had a more reliable



source of bulk-order subscriptions than 300,000-member United Healthcare Workers-East; the union's former officer and now SEIU Executive Vice-President, Gerry Hudson, serves on the journal's editorial advisory board. To organize on campuses and maintain a national office in Washington, DC, United Students Against Sweatshops has likewise been a major beneficiary of SEIU financial largesse. Five years ago, the union paid for scores of student activists to come to San Francisco, mix with its convention delegates, and march for health care reform.

As labor's civil wars intensified in 2008-9, however, SEIU's once-strong brand as the paragon of progressive unionism began to fade. Its signature color-purple-lost considerable luster in liberal circles due to organizational misbehavior that left many friends of labor angry, disappointed, or just plain confused. In California, longtime SEIU backers in politics and community groups found themselves confronted by angry health care workers demanding to know "which side are you on?"-when Stern put the highly regarded United Healthcare Workers-West (UHW) under trusteeship in January 2009.[vii] Soon thereafter, ousted leaders of 150,000-member UHW formed a competing union, the National Union of Healthcare Workers (NUHW), which has been vying for local political support-and members-ever since. Meanwhile, other labor allies were caught in the middle of external feuds between SEIU and UNITE HERE, or SEIU and the left-leaning California Nurses Association (before that conflict ended in an uneasy truce earlier this year), or SEIU and the Federacion de Maestros de Puerto Rico (FMPR), a militant teachers union which became, in 2008, another controversial target of SEIU raiding. As these interrelated disputes grew more costly, time-consuming, politically embarrassing and distracting, some labor observers even began to blame SEIU for endangering key legislative goals like health care reform and the Employee Free Choice Act.[viii]

The deepening disillusionment with SEIU in campus and community circles-as reflected in the

account below-has multiple causes and manifests itself in both public criticism and private dismay. The high-profile controversies in and around Stern's union have made life particularly uncomfortable for university-based labor educators, a key segment of labor-oriented academia. In California and elsewhere, labor studies specialists depend on union lobbying clout to keep their embattled programs afloat, particularly when under attack by university budget cutters or conservative legislators.[ix]

For good reason, labor researchers fear that getting drawn into intra- or inter-union disputes will deprive them of institutional support they need to survive. Such controversies might also endanger union access, consulting opportunities, and worker participation in classes or seminars. That's why most labor center staff have shied away from taking sides-unlike their more secure counterparts in other academic departments-and a few even remain reliable SEIU boosters anytime a reporter calls for their "expert" opinion. In contrast, their own labor-oriented students-particularly recent graduates now employed by unions-have become increasingly vocal about the troubled state of the labor-academic alliance that SEIU has, in the past, done so much to promote.

In one open letter to SEIU leaders in 2008, circulated by undergraduates affiliated with United Students Against Sweatshops (USAS), leaders from four campuses noted "a disturbing pattern in SEIU's relationship with students and campus workers" and expressed concern about the future of "student labor solidarity." According to the fifteen signers, SEIU organizers often treat workers and student allies "as little more than pawns to use as they see fit." The students faulted SEIU for union recognition campaigns "that bring new members and dues into the union in the short term but keep workers in poverty and actually hurt our collective efforts to help unions grow on a massive scale." [x]

One of the campus-based campaigns cited in this letter involved food service contractors like Compass and Aramark. Less than a year later, as

the rift between John Wilhlem and his UNITE HERE co-president Bruce Raynor deepened, Wilhelm himself echoed these concerns, blasting both Stern and Raynor for conceding too much to the employers of SWU members, in return for future organizing deals. Soon, Raynor and his 100,000-member faction were out the door of UNITE HERE and affiliated with SEIU, which began laying claim to workers in hotels, gaming, and food service companies. "Stern's messianic mindset has led him to seek membership growth by conquest," Wilhelm declared in March of 2009. "His undemocratic practices threaten the entire labor movement." In a letter of protest issued soon thereafter, forty recent college and university graduates—all former campus labor activists now employed by UNITE-HERE—joined Wilhelm in decrying "the corporate-style takeover campaign that Stern is running against our members." [xi] The signers of the letter went on to say:

"Many SEIU members and staff, as well as other unions, are as disgusted and disheartened by Andy Stern's recent choices as we are... The attack on UNITE-HERE comes at the very moment when the labor movement, student movements, and all progressives should be united in the effort of turning our country in a new direction." [xii]

In July, 2009, nearly 250 labor-friendly academics sent their own "letter of concern" to the SEIU Executive Board sounding similar themes and emphasizing their past support for SEIU and its local unions. Members of the Labor and Working Class History Association (LAWCHA) and other college professors lamented that SEIU had chosen "a path so at odds with its worthy traditions." According to the signers:

"SEIU's attempts to discredit UNITE HERE leaders, to lure workers out of UNITE HERE and into SEIU, and to interfere in the constitutional process of UNITE HERE will not help the cause of democratic unionism and progressive reform. On the contrary, we are concerned that these

actions are undermining the principle of union democracy and dividing the progressive movement at a critical moment in history." [xiii]

### **A May Day Message to Andy**

Fourteen years ago, some of the same academics who signed letters of protest to SEIU in 2008-9 applauded happily when John Sweeney and other SEIUers took over the AFL-CIO. As union democracy advocate Herman Benson notes, "back in 1995, when radical academics rallied at labor 'teach-ins' around the country, life seemed simple. No need for intellectuals to over-intellectualize. They responded to Sweeney's call for change; they offered moral support to the new labor movement; they volunteered services; they helped restore labor's image as a force for social justice... In the euphoria of those days, little debate was in order; everything would surely work out; labor was newly on the march; it was enough to rally support."

By early 2008, trends within SEIU had become sufficiently disturbing for 94-year-old Benson to pen an essay in *New Politics*, asking "Where Is That Labor-Intellectual Alliance" today? "Cheerleading is not enough," Benson declared. "It's time for those same scholars, artists, and writers to take another look at what's happening in our labor movement." According to Benson, Stern and SEIU were "constructing the model of a new labor movement" that is "more bureaucratic, more highly centralized, and more remote from the grassroots than ever before." Can a union so bereft of "participatory democracy"—so committed to "insulating union power from the influence of the rank-and-file"—actually function as "a powerful force for social change?" Benson was personally skeptical. But he challenged the labor intelligentsia to join him in grappling with this question and, where necessary, acting as "outspoken, independent-minded critics" of union misbehavior. By serving as "labor's conscience," he argued, union-friendly faculty could best fulfill their desired role as advocates for social and economic justice. [xiv]

University of Massachusetts/Amherst Professor Stephanie Luce became one of the first labor-oriented authors and academics to meet Benson's challenge. In April, 2008, SEIU protestors tried to crash a national conference of 1,000 rank-and-file activists meeting in Dearborn, Michigan under the sponsorship of Labor Notes. Luce joined AFL-CIO president John Sweeney and others in chastising the union for its disruptive intervention, which touched off a widely-publicized brawl.

In his published reply on MRZine, SEIU/1199 leader Dave Regan from Ohio (who is now EVP of SEIU) brushed aside such criticism. He displayed little patience for "the larger philosophical and theoretical discussions of labor policy Luce would prefer to engage in" before an audience of Monthly Review readers. In Regan's view, Luce's article was full of "lazy speculation," "cheap smears," "fabricated claims," and "casual insults about our integrity." [xv] Sociologist Dan Clawson, a colleague of Luce's and Labor Notes supporter who locked arms with others to repel SEIU gate-crashers, soon took the lead in soliciting endorsers on a letter to Andy Stern about another controversial topic-SEIU's threatened trusteeship over United Healthcare Workers-West (where the same Dave Regan today serves as a Stern-appointed co-trustee).

Clawson had been blogging about the conflict between UHW and Stern but seemed to have resigned himself to the inevitability of trusteeship. I suggested to Clawson that we should at least try to stay the International's hand, for as long as possible, if that was possible. The result was an ad hoc committee composed of Luce, Robert Ross at Clark University, and two west coast helpers, Cal Winslow and Ellen David-Friedman, Clawson and myself. We drafted an appeal that we thought friends of SEIU would be comfortable endorsing and sending. We decided to leave longtime critics of the union off the signatory list. As subsequent open letters to Stern did as well, the endorsers emphasized their "longstanding ties to SEIU" based on "research, writing, or labor education work involving its members, organizers

and local leaders." The letter also cited the signers' past role in steering graduate students or undergraduates toward "internships or full-time job opportunities with SEIU." The letter stated:

"We believe that there must always be room within organized labor for legitimate and principled dissent, if our movement is to survive and grow. Putting UHW under trusteeship would send a very troubling message and be viewed, by many, as a sign that internal democracy is not value or tolerated within SEIU. In our view, this would have negative consequences for the workers directly affected, the SEIU itself, and the labor movement as a whole. We strongly urge you to avoid such a tragedy." [xvi]

Using a variety of email contact lists but drawing most heavily on former members of the now-defunct Scholars, Artists, and Writers for Social Justice (SAWSJ), we quickly lined up about 100 signers. More trickled in after our message was sent to Stern on May 1, 2008, and then widely publicized, on the internet, with the help of an accompanying press release. Among the writers, activists, and academic luminaries who approved the use of their names were Stanley Aronowitz, Elaine Bernard, Eileen Boris, Noam Chomsky, Mike Davis, Bill Fletcher, Jr., Robin D.G. Kelley, Jennifer Klein, Nelson Lichtenstein, Nancy MacLean, David Montgomery, Frances Fox Piven, Adolph Reed, Michael Yates, Steffi Woolhandler, and Howard Zinn. Some younger intellectuals, doing research in labor-related fields, were eager to join their better-known colleagues. In a typically enthusiastic response, Dorian Warren, an assistant professor in political science at Columbia University, emailed Clawson, as follows: "Hi Dan, YES, please include my signature to this letter. Thanks very much for coordinating this effort." Labor educators were, as a rule, much harder to recruit; Cornell researcher Kate Bronfenbrenner was the only School of Industrial Relations staffer, upstate or downstate, who signed on; others failed to respond or formally declined, apparently out of fear of alienating SEIU/1199 (now known as "United Healthcare Workers-East"), a 300,000-

member "local" that has become one of Cornell's biggest clients for consultant services.

SEIU itself didn't wait long to respond. Within 24-hours, media relations staffer Andrew McDonald emailed Clawson asking him to forward President Stern's reply to all the letter signers, along with two lengthy documents explaining the union's new "Justice For All" program.[xvii] After reading Stern's letter, even academics initially skeptical about influencing SEIU behavior expressed greater optimism. This is one "pre-emptive strike that might work," declared Stanley Aronowitz. "Stern has already responded and waffles on the trusteeship issue, but is quite defensive. Yet his tone is moderate and looks forward to further 'dialogue' with the signers." [xviii] Clawson was likewise encouraged by SEIU's initial response, characterizing it as "serious and engaged." He expressed hope that there might actually be some "much-needed dialogue."

But that was before a classic academic "tempest in a teapot" erupted, in the wake of UHW's high-profile recycling of the May Day letter. The ensuing controversy revealed both the intensity of SEIU efforts to cultivate and shape academic opinion, plus the continuing ambivalence of some academics about being identified with the "more outspoken, independent-minded" criticism advocated by Herman Benson. Readers of The New York Times on Saturday, May 3, opened their paper to find, on page A9, an unusual half-page ad. It reproduced the entire open letter to Stern, nicely boxed and with all the signatories listed. The ad invited readers to get more information at [www.seiuvoice.org](http://www.seiuvoice.org), a website started by UHW to promote reform of SEIU.

After SEIU officials saw The Times ad, the union's "reaction....changed significantly," Clawson reported to his fellow signers. "I expect to receive a second, follow-up letter from Andy Stern, one with a sharper tone." Clawson rightfully disclaimed any prior knowledge of the ad buy and expressed some ambivalence about the May Day letter's wider circulation. "No one

consulted me or informed me in advance, and, as far as I know, none of the other signers were told in advance. On the one hand, it was an open letter; on the other hand, I feel somewhat used and manipulated....." [xix]

In fact, no one who initiated the letter anticipated the large numbers of endorsers it attracted or that UHW, when similarly surprised and impressed by the list, would spend \$75,000 on quickly turning it into an ad. If the latter move had been planned all along, anyone whose name was solicited would have been told, up front, about this possible use. Some of the bigger names involved, like Chomsky and Zinn, were old hands at appearing in The Times in 10-point type, as part of a long, nearly unreadable list of progressives protesting one thing or another; for others, it was apparently a new and more unsettling experience. A year later, one signer, Nancy MacLean from Northwestern University, was still fuming over the airing of labor's dirty linen in a "boss paper," an act which left her feeling "violated and betrayed."

SEIU's reaction was fast and furious. Its national executive board was meeting in New York City the weekend that the UHW ad appeared and they were not pleased to see it. The "sharper-tone" Clawson anticipated came not from Stern, but from two of his best-known EVPs, who criticized the May Day letter as "an organized part of UHW-W's campaign to publicly discredit the work of SEIU." Gerry Hudson and Eliseo Medina (now serving as co-trustee over UHW, along with Regan) chided the signers for their "misleading allegation" regarding trusteeship, which was based on "very inaccurate information." They faulted the academics for taking sides "without any real inquiry or fact finding" or "engaging in honest consultation with us or 56 other members" of "the most diverse Executive Board in the history of the labor movement.[xx]

A second 3-page, single-spaced letter, sent May 5, came from 47 other SEIU leaders. This letter described the UHW trusteeship threat as just a "straw man issue," hardly worthy of anyone's

concern. Instead, the SEIUers declared, people with "important, progressive voices" should be "engaging with us on any of the many real issues affecting the livelihoods of workers and the survival of unions today." The signers—three of whom were removed from office later in 2008 due to corruption scandals in California—claimed there was "no retaliatory trusteeship under consideration nor would we ever vote to approve one." [xxi]

While these counter-missives were whizzing around cyberspace and landing in faculty mailboxes, SEIU board members and staff started working the phones, in systematic fashion. Stern's headquarters operatives had quickly determined what past or present relationships key people in SEIU had to various of the May Day letter signers (i.e., as former students, labor center board members, longtime friends, or fellow adherents to the same 1970s left-wing "political tendency," etc.). Targeted one-on-one calls were then placed to signers informing them that they had made a big mistake, didn't have all the facts, and/or had jeopardized important institutional ties with SEIU locals in their area.

SEIU's whole counter-campaign was eerily familiar. It reminded me of every employer-contested organizing effort I had ever worked on for the Communications Workers of America (CWA). Whenever we produced a leaflet, newsletter, petition, or organizing committee "mission statement," that openly identified CWA supporters for the first time, the supervisory screws were immediately tightened. Invariably, someone (often more than one person) who had previously authorized the use of their name quickly developed "signer's remorse." They demanded, under duress, that CWA remove them from any future listing of union supporters. Since these workers couldn't easily acknowledge a sudden change of heart on the substantive question of unionization, most claimed to have been misled about the public use of their name. (A few always went further, privately begging management for a "second chance" to prove their loyalty to the company.)

The first May Day letter endorser who broke ranks in such fashion was Cornell's Director of Labor Education Research, an expert on employer tactics to discourage unionization. By Monday morning, May 5, Kate Bronfenbrenner was imploring Clawson to remove her name "from all current postings of the scholars' letter" even as she expressed continuing "concern that SEIU not rush into trusteeship with UHW." Bronfenbrenner said that she planned to spend "the next week apologizing to every union for having made the serious mistake of signing on to a letter that put my independence as a scholar in jeopardy." [xxii] She was joined by fellow-researcher, Dorian Warren from Columbia, who dashed off an urgent "Dear Andy" letter the same day. Warren reminded Stern that he had "been almost always a cheerleader for SEIU and other progressive unions, as well as a tough and constructive critic." But, now he wanted nothing to do with an "open letter" that had become "absolutely devalued and de-legitimized."

"I am writing to apologize for a huge mistake on my part, ...I never passed judgment on you, the International, or UHW, though I realize that this is how the intent of the letter is now being interpreted. To be clear....obviously, you and your staff are in the best and only position to assess the issue of trusteeship." [xxiii]

Twenty-five other letter endorsers scrambled to get their own mea culpa, of a milder sort, into the "letters to the editor" column of *The Times* itself. According to Eve Weinbaum, Director of the U-Mass Amherst Labor Center, that group statement "was instigated by Labor Center people" like herself "who felt that they were in a different situation from other academics who study labor but aren't directly involved with workers/unions." The signers of this letter (never published by *The Times*) wanted everyone to know that they "did not give permission for our names to be used in a national newspaper." [xxiv]

"We signed [the letter to Stern] as part of an internal debate within the labor movement about strategies, tactics, and our vision of the future.

We did not intend to choose sides, only to express ideas and concerns....SEIU's members and staff across the country have done incredible work at a time when the labor movement desperately needs to grow and organize the unorganized. We are proud to support that work."[xxv]

SEIU, of course, was playing up any sign of individual or group back-peddling from the anti-trusteeship stance of the original May Day letter, which clearly did take sides in an internal union dispute. Meanwhile, most May Day letter endorsers took no steps to disavow their support for "principled dissent" within labor. One such signer, who holds a secure tenured position at a state university, explained the defector phenomena as follows: "Others signed without thinking how even they (protected academics) could be vulnerable, and then tried to back out....It's relatively cheap for me to be bold and brave; others who were less visible, but whose labor center depended on active cooperation with an area's labor movement, took larger risks and paid higher costs."[xxvi]

An endorser from the Midwest sent the organizers an email thanking them "for soliciting me, as it was a pretty illustrious list. Despite the bailer-outers (some of whom are friends of mine), the SEIU letter was great-and seems to have had a much more positive effect than we could have hoped for."[xxvii] Bill Fletcher, a former SEIU education director, an ex-headquarters staffer at the AFL-CIO, and co-author of *Solidarity Divided*, tried to reassure other signers that they had done the right thing:

"On the matter of the ad, while I would have appreciated being contacted by whoever put the ad in the NY Times, let us keep in mind that this was an 'open letter.' It entered into the public domain. Had it been a private letter, this would have been an entirely different matter. In signing onto an open letter, I assumed that this letter would get very broad distribution, whether electronic or hardcopy. I think that to assume anything else was mistaken."[xxviii]

Fletcher urged concerned academics to "continue the fight for open and safe space for legitimate debates on the future of the working class, generally, and organized labor in particular."

### A New Cause Arises: SEIU v. UNITE HERE

In the Spring of 2009, it was like "déjà vu all over again," for labor-oriented academics. SEIU's messy internal dispute of the year before had now been supplanted by an embarrassing rift within Change To Win. This new imbroglio pitted one of CTW's Ivy League-educated founders against the other two. Describing all three-John Wilhelm, Bruce Raynor, and Andy Stern-as "baby boomer radicals" and "brilliant organizers," Peter Dreier recounted for *Nation* readers the rise and fall of UNITE HERE's troubled marital relationship. Their "Divorce-Union Style" was, according to Dreier, now pitting talented organizers against each other, while both sides "lined up supporters among unions, civil rights groups, clergy, and academics."[xxix] In an interview with *American Prospect*, Cornell's Kate Bronfenbrenner lamented the same "devastating" polarization between "two groups of people who actually share so much" (while claiming, modestly, that "at least 200 of them are my former students").[xxx]

Just twelve months after labor-oriented academics beseeched Stern to spare UHW (advice he ultimately spurned), some of the same cast of characters-influenced by their campus ties to UNITE HERE-met in Chicago in late May to discuss how they should respond to the latest SEIU controversy. Their discussion took place at a restaurant near Roosevelt University where the annual conference of the Labor and Working Class History Association (LAWCHA) was underway. Historian Nancy MacLean, the main convener of the group, expressed her anguish about the current "division and crisis" within Change To Win. "We always thought of these unions as our friends and allies," she said. But now SEIU was raiding HERE locals and disrupting their activities, behavior that was "very

scary to all of us committed to a progressive labor movement."

Jennifer Klein from Yale then told the fifty participants about her pre-trusteeship interaction with "women, immigrants, and people of color" who comprise much of UHW's membership. She said that Stern's decision to dismember their local "reflected total disrespect for the social world they had created," a union with a "strong shop steward system" and a "vision that was not merely local." She reported on a seminar at Yale where SEIU Secretary-Treasurer Anna Burger had, in contrast, boasted about all the management consultants SEIU was using nationally to build its "21st century unionism." Klein warned against union restructuring and functioning based on a "corporate model" that "is a disaster in politics and economics, so why should we embrace it in labor?"

After Klein spoke, the focus quickly shifted to Stern and Burger's latest takeover target, UNITE HERE. MacLean had arranged for Andrea van den Heever, a 27-year veteran of HERE-backed clerical worker unionism in New Haven, to speak to the group. She reported on the harassing "robo calls," leaflets, and mailings that hundreds of HERE members at Yale had been getting, encouraging them to leave the union that Wilhelm had helped them build through years of difficult struggles with the university. In the hotel industry and other HERE jurisdictions, "SEIU is going in and becoming a company union, making sweetheart deals," van den Heever said. "Whether UNITE HERE survives is up in the air." [xxxix]

This news was quite disconcerting to some in the room. Much hemming, hawing, and political hand-wringing soon followed. One eminent historian took a plague-on-both-their-houses attitude, cautioning against getting in the middle of a clash between "serious strategic concepts." A later speaker sounded the same note, arguing that "there's plenty of blame to go around," "they're all democracy-challenged," and no one involved should be "romanticized."

"I find it repugnant what SEIU is doing with HERE," declared one labor educator, who works closely with Stern's union. "I found their conduct at Labor Notes repugnant. But what I'm hearing tonight is that SEIU is the devil incarnate....worse than the Carpenters or Machinists?" According to this LAWCHA member, everyone should remember that "Justice for Janitors is one of the greatest movements we've had in the last twenty years. The strike of janitors at the University of Miami was brilliant and [SEIU's] Stephen Lerner is one of the most brilliant organizers in the country."

Someone else then argued that the issues involved were "much more complicated" than critics had made them out to be. After all, wasn't Eliseo Medina, Stern's co-trustee over UHW, "an honest militant" worthy of great respect because of his heroic record as a farm worker organizer? At this point, Eileen Boris, from the Feminist Studies Department at UC-Santa Barbara, broke in with the observation that "part of our dismay is that so many of us were in awe of SEIU." Friends of labor "expect bad behavior of the Teamsters," she said, but how can it be that SEIU is now "doing things to hurt people?" After all, "they were progressive."

"They are progressive!" insisted another participant, from a private university in Connecticut. And so it went until Klein and MacLean steered the discussion back to a reading of their proposed draft "letter of concern about SEIU's interference with UNITE HERE." They passed out forms for endorsers to sign, and perhaps a third of the group ended up doing so on the spot. Drawing on her own experience working with Yale faculty members, van den Heever cautioned against trying to re-write the statement to please everyone, because time was of the essence. By mid-June, the list of signers was well on its way to being several hundred names long, from half as many colleges and universities in the U.S., Canada, and the U.K. But, no doubt remembering the recriminations surrounding the 2008 May Day letter, Klein and MacLean--now joined by Nelson Lichtenstein--emailed all

signers to warn them that UNITE HERE was about to post their appeal on its website

Despite these careful efforts to avoid procedural, if not substantive, controversy, both erupted soon thereafter. Joshua Freeman, from City University of New York, professed to be "startled" that anyone could be asking "LAWCHA members to sign a letter criticizing SEIU for its actions." He immediately contacted 80 other academics with a last-minute appeal not to endorse the "partisan attack" engineered by Klein, MacLean, and Lichtenstein. Freeman likened it to "throwing oil on a fire," arguing that:

"Academics should refrain from inserting themselves in disputes among unionists. If they choose to do so, they should at least make sure that they act in a fair manner, on the basis of full information.... Over the past fifteen years, there has been enormous progress in deepening the relationship between organized labor and progressives in the academic world. The moral presumptuousness and factional purpose of this letter can only harm that relationship." [xxxii]

Freeman's intervention quickly won support from Roger Horowitz, an archivist and historian, who reported, to the same list of email recipients, that he was now glad he hadn't signed because "it seems, as in most inter-union disputes, the truth is far from obvious." [xxxiii] A worried LAWCHA president, Mike Honey who teaches at the University of Washington, reminded everyone that the proposed communication with SEIU was not an official "LAWCHA project." [xxxiv] In a strong riposte to Freeman, Dan Clawson questioned whether the New York historian was really being "neutral." Argued Clawson:

"I don't dispute your right to be partisan, nor your right to choose not to be involved, but in this case I think you ARE actively involved, and are making a partisan appeal to oppose the side supported by the letter writers, and support the SEIU analysis, argument, etc. ...[A]lthough we may have been told, as scholars, to stay out of internal labor disputes (a position I didn't support

for the Teamsters, and don't here), the world at that time also involved unions not leading raids on each other, trusteeing locals for disagreeing with the national leadership, and so on." [xxxv]

Randy Shaw, a San Francisco lawyer, community organizer, and author of a University of California Press book about the United Farm Workers, joined the on-line fracas by firing a volley from the "left coast." Based on his own interviews with the parties involved, plus his reporting on UNITE HERE's convention in Chicago, Shaw disputed Freeman's depiction of the struggle as one "in which SEIU is not the main actor." Shaw found it unbelievable that "anyone familiar with the history of this conflict" could make such a claim, and pointed out that Freeman had recently authored an article in *The Nation* which similarly downplayed SEIU's role, while touting the "social unionism" of its new Raynor-led Workers United affiliate. [xxxvi]

Shaw also took aim at *The Nation* itself, accusing it of remaining "troublingly silent" about SEIU misbehavior, as part of a larger pattern of denial among other "progressive activists and organizations." According to Shaw, Washington Post columnist Harold Meyerson, Steven Greenhouse of *The New York Times* "and a whole bevy of academics and journalists has spent so many years promoting SEIU as the vanguard of a revitalized labor movement that they cannot accept, or publicly acknowledge, that the union has changed." [xxxvii]

For his part, Stern seems to have misjudged SEIU's own change in academic standing. In March of 2009, he told Shaw that SEIU wasn't worried about east coast reactions to any conflict with UNITE HERE because progressives in New York, unlike those on the west coast, backed Bruce Raynor's faction and its affiliation with SEIU. [xxxviii]

Even before SEIU's trusteeship over UHW, Stern had hired ChangeCommunications-a New York City PR firm run by Jo-Ann Mort-to act as his emissary to wayward academics on both coasts.



Mort is an editorial board member of Dissent magazine and a former garment workers' union newspaper editor. In 2008, her ChangeCommunications was paid over \$300,000 by SEIU for consulting work that included having its CEO, Mort, invite intellectuals to lunch so she could explain SEIU policies to them. With her help, she assured them, SEIU leaders were "putting together an on-going mechanism for dialogue with the academic community." [xxxix]

Unfortunately, Mort's role in that initiative became more problematic when PerezStern (a "blogspot" which regularly blows the whistle on SEIU political gaffes) posted a private email exchange showing what SEIU insiders really think about academic critics. [xl] This embarrassing but revealing postscript to the pro-UNITE HERE letter unfolded after a janitors' local president in Minneapolis took charge of SEIU's latest campus clean-up. Yale-educated Javier Morillo briefly taught history at Macalester College but, instead of remaining in academic life, became-within a few short years-a rising star within SEIU. By July, 2009, his prominent roles included being Local 26 president, a national executive board member (elected on Stern's slate in San Juan) and an SEIU ethics commissioner as well. Morillo apparently felt that SEIU's official reply to his former colleagues was not sufficiently personal or persuasive. In their 2-½ page, single-spaced rebuttal, sent on July 23, 2009, Stern and Raynor suggested, rather politely, that faculty signers had "not been told all the facts" (notwithstanding Josh Freeman's last-minute email tutorial). [xli]

Morillo emailed MacLean the very next day with a more pointed observation, namely that she and her fellow signatories had "signed onto a set of arguments without doing some of the research and fact-checking you require, when producing work in your own fields." Morillo's dissing of the signers did not sit well with MacLean, particularly when she received several unintended attachments to his message. These included private emails in which Morillo, Mort, and SEIU Media Relations Director Michelle Ringuette

debated what kind of "general info spam" the academics should receive from SEIU. Morillo argued for "shaming them just a little bit" because "nothing guilt trips an academic more" than a reminder of his or her isolation "from the world of policy, politics, and activism."

Ringuette responded, more dismissively, that "most of these academics really are not worth it-but spamming them sounds like what they deserve!!" She reported from Washington that:

"[L]ast night, we discussed setting a few workers loose and letting them call some of the academics. I know these aren't high value targets, but I firmly believe people shouldn't be permitted to do drive-bys. They are all getting a letter this am [the Stern-Raynor response] and they all bought a spot on our spam list."

To earn her reported \$1,600-a-day fee, Mort emailed that she was eager to help sort out the "academic/lefty mess re WU and SEIU." Although traveling in Israel at the time (where she was also working for SEIU), Mort recommended having Morillo and "a couple of other SEIU/WU leaders meet with academics and others on the left to talk about moving forward-in a serious fashion." She had been examining the list of 200 names on the letter, however, and discovered that most are just "Labor Notes-types" (a finding not supported by any perusal of Labor Notes' actual subscriber list, which includes very few LAWCHA members). Mort ticked off the names of four or five more important people who "we do need to reach out to...for better or worse" (including Lichtenstein and Klein). She expressed amazement that Alice Kessler-Harris, an esteemed Columbia professor of American history, was among the signers: "We need to get to her too." [xliv]

When this material was all leaked and posted, MacLean was furious. She dashed off any angry reply to Morillo, pointing out that the insider "exchange spoke as crudely and instrumentally of your own members (e.g. the plan for "setting a few workers loose" on us) as it did of the faculty

signers of the letter." [xliii] On July 29, Stern called MacLean to apologize personally. As a result of that conversation, the Northwestern professor reported, "it looks likely that a delegation of our signers will hold a meeting with Stern and Bruce Raynor to discuss our concerns about their conduct and the broader issues at stake." In addition, "Stern gave me his word on that call yesterday that, as a sign of good faith, SEIU would stop spamming our signers in what was clearly a hostile response..." Based on this phone call, it was clear to MacLean "that our voices mattered to SEIU's leadership."

As of this writing (Fall, 2009), the promised face-to-face exchange between a delegation of letter signers and the SEIU president has yet to materialize. (In September, a small private discussion was held in New York between Raynor, Klein, and Lichtenstein-with non-signer Josh Freeman attending as well.) MacLean may have unintentionally complicated matters in this regard by suggesting, in her rebuke to Morillo, that since "Mort has depicted us as 'Labor Notes types,' we might well want to invite to the meeting some actual Labor Notes types and others vitally concerned with the current situation." Before posting their letter about UNITE-HERE, MacLean and a number of other labor historians did have a long meeting with SEIU International Vice-President Tom Balanoff, one of the union's more accessible executive board members. In that discussion, according to MacLean:

"There was a frank and not unfriendly exchange of views. While all of us respect Tom's long history of dedicated service to the labor movement, his rationales for Bruce Raynor's actions and SEIU's conduct were unpersuasive. They deepened our concern rather than alleviating it." [xliv]

### Can This Relationship Be Repaired?

Thanks to the current political trajectory of SEIU, the terrain of "progressive labor" in America has become more complicated in recent years. One of

the leading unions long associated with the remaking of labor as a force for social justice, has developed a serious image problem of its own, causing many past intellectual allies to question its current direction rather than simply march in line behind its well-known purple banner. As Herman Benson notes, the ability of intellectuals "to help shape public opinion" and "provide a stamp of moral approval" has made them highly valued to SEIU in the past. With their endorsement, the liberal wing of organized labor has sometimes been able to project itself as "a broad people's movement," rather than a "narrow self-interest group." [xlv]

Now, however, campus and community opinion has shifted from applause to public criticism and serial acts of collective protest. In response, SEIU officials and headquarters staffers are scrambling to repair tattered relationships with the professoriate anyway they can. Wooing the departed back into the SEIU fold becomes harder every day. Some past friends of the union have already aligned themselves with its organizational rival in California. They are raising funds for the National Union of Healthcare Workers and organizing a support network for the new union around the country. Others continue to be estranged because of SEIU's bitter dispute with UNITE HERE which, at this writing, has not been settled. [xlvi] It remains to be seen whether a flurry of apologetic phone calls, along with promised meetings with top-ranking officials, will be sufficient to quiet Stern's outside critics. Their ranks continue to swell, joined by disillusioned former SEIU staffers like Fred Ross, Dana Simon, Audra Makuch, and Andrew Tripp, plus the seventy well-known Los Angelesans who, despite being "longtime friends and allies" of SEIU, called on Stern last summer to cease all activity aimed at "undermining the work of another union we admire: UNITE HERE." [xlvii]

Most telling to many observers is SEIU's persistent refusal to participate in any public forums, on campus or off, where its conduct vis-à-vis its own members or behavior involving other unions might be debated and discussed. The

free exchange of information, opinions, and ideas is supposed to be a hallmark of intellectual life among the students and professors it has assiduously cultivated. Yet, when the controversial topic is SEIU itself, the union tries to stay above the fray or focuses on damage control behind the scenes. The problem with remaining on a pedestal all your own has already become manifest, particularly in California. Admiration and respect have to be earned and maintained, not just commanded. SEIU's reliance on the latter approach has already led to a backlash within its own membership. Now, the union can no longer count on cheers and salutes from friends of labor either.

### Footnotes

[i] Max Fraser, "Labor's Conundrum: Growth vs. Standards," *New Labor Forum*, Winter, 2009, pp. 49-57.

[ii] Randy Shaw, "Labor Movement Backs UNITE HERE Against SEIU Raids," *Beyond-Chron*, June 30, 2009.

[iii] See OneuniteHere.... There ended up being 27 prominent national union leaders who endorsed this statement pledging support for Wilhelm's union, which rejoined the AFL-CIO in September, 2009.

[iv] See SEIU back page advertisements in *The Nation*, entitled "An Open Letter to Friends of the Labor Movement," and "When Unions Fight Each Other, Workers Lose," July, 2009.

[v] See Harold Meyerson, "Labor's Real Fight," *The American Prospect*, February 1, 2009.

[vi] See Steven Greenhouse, "From Author, Help for White-Collar Workers," *The New York Times*, September 14, 2006, or Ehrenreich's personal website: [http://www.barbaraehrenreich.com/barbara\\_ehrenreich.htm](http://www.barbaraehrenreich.com/barbara_ehrenreich.htm). For more information on the group she helped start with SEIU funding, see [unitedprofession-als.org](http://unitedprofession-als.org). Ehrenreich has, so far, refrained from signing any letter of concern

to Stern from labor-oriented intellectuals. When Stern's book, *A Country That Works*, appeared in 2006, she declared, on its back cover, that "the future of the American dream" is now safely "in the hands of Andy Stern" who has a "vital agenda for change" and "a bold vision for reform."

[vii] Many local labor-oriented public officials, academics, and community leaders ended up on the UHW side of its dispute with SEIU. See, for example, Nov. 9, 2008 "Open Letter of Concern to Andy Stern From California Educators, Academics, Writers, and Worker Advocates," <http://www.indybay.org/newsitems/2008/11/15/18551487.php>. See also Chris Rauber, "More than 240 lawmakers, community leaders urge SEIU to hold off on UHW takeover," *San Francisco Business Journal*, November 17, 2008. See also Randy Shaw, "Progressive Outpouring for Rosselli, SEIU-UHW," *BeyondChron*, Nov. 19, 2008.

[viii] See, for example, Michael Mishak, "Card check might be union war's collateral damage," *The Las Vegas Sun*, June 3, 2009, or Steven Greenhouse, "Infighting Distracts Unions at Crucial Time," *The New York Times*, July 8, 2009.

[ix] See Peter Dreier, "Labor Pains at UCLA," July 17, 2009, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/peter-dreier/labor-pains-at-ucla\\_b\\_238723.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/peter-dreier/labor-pains-at-ucla_b_238723.html).

[x] See "An Open Letter to Andy Stern and the Leadership of SEIU," from fifteen student labor activists at Stanford, University of California Irvine, Santa Clara University, and UNC-Chapel Hill, May, 2008, at <http://www.thenation.com/special/pdf/SEIU/StudentLetter.pdf>.

[xi] See "Statement of UNITE-HERE General Executive Board" issued in Washington, D.C., March 13, 2009.

[xii] A Message from UNITE HERE to Student Allies About Andy Stern's Raid On The Union,

April 10, 1009, <http://www.indybay.org/news/items/2009/04/10/18587441.php>.

[xiii] See "An Open Letter of Concern about SEIU's Interference with UNITE HERE," July 22, 2009, <http://www.seiuchangecourse.org>

[xiv] Herman Benson, "After Twelve Years: Where Is That Labor-Intellectual Alliance?" *New Politics*, winter 2008, pp. 106-116.

[xv] See Stephanie Luce, "The Future of the Labor Movement: Reflections on the Labor Notes Conference," MRZine, April 22, 2008, <http://mrzine.monthlyreview.org/luce220408.html> and response by Dave Regan, "Why We Demonstrated in Dearborn," MRZine, May 2, 2008, <http://mrzine.monthlyreview.org/regan020508.html>.

[xvi] See version of this letter which appeared as an advertisement in *The New York Times*, May 3, 2008, A9. Also posted at <http://www.reformseiu.org/>.

[xvii] Email from SEIU's Andrew McDonald to Dan Clawson, with "Stern answer to letter from 100 academics," May 2, 2008.

[xviii] See Stanley Aronowitz message to Center for Labor Renewal list-serve, May 3, 2008.

[xix] Dan Clawson email to May Day letter signers, May 4, 2008.

[xx] See May 5, 2008 "Dear Educators" letter from SEIU EVPs Eliseo Medina and Gerry Hudson.

[xxi] See May 5, 2008 "Dear Educators" letter from 47 SEIU local union leaders, most of them members of the union's international executive board. In January, 2009, almost every other signer of that letter, who was then still serving on the SEIU international executive board, voted to approve the UHW take-over.

[xxii] May 5, 2008 email from Kate Bronfenbrenner to Dan Clawson and Robert Ross re "Scholars letter to SEIU."

[xxiii] See letter, dated May 5, 2008 from Dorian Walker to Andy Stern.

[xxiv] July 12, 2009 email from Eve Weinbaum to the author.

[xxv] See May 6, 2008 email from Eve Weinbaum to Tyler Prell in SEIU's media relations department, including the text of letter to editor of *The New York Times* that the paper did not publish.

[xxvi] Email to author from May Day letter signer, Nov. 14, 2008. [xxvii] Email to author from May Day letter signer, May 8, 2008.

[xxviii] May 7, 2008 email from Bill Fletcher, Jr. to May Day letter organizers and signers. [xxix] See Peter Dreier, "Divorce-Union Style," *The Nation*, August 12, 2009.

[xxx] See Bronfenbrenner interview with Jake Blumgart, *American Prospect*, February 26, 2009, [http://www.prospect.org/cs/articles?article=the\\_new\\_terms\\_of\\_the\\_labor\\_dialogue](http://www.prospect.org/cs/articles?article=the_new_terms_of_the_labor_dialogue). Bronfenbrenner did not sign endorse the July, 2009, letter to SEIU initiated by LAWCHA members and endorsed by nearly 250 labor-oriented academics.

[xxxii] van den Heever's message was later echoed in an emailed appeal to "members of the academic," from other UNITE HERE rank-and-filers urging them to endorse the Klein/MacLean draft letter. See <http://www.seiuchangecourse.org/UniteHereWorkersAppealtoAcademics.pdf>.

[xxxiii] See "Dear Friends and Colleagues" email sent June 24, 2009 by Josh Freeman, City University of New York.

[xxxiiii] Email from Roger Horowitz to other LAWCHA members, June 24, 2009. [xxxv] See email from Michael Honey to "Roger and all," June 24, 2009.

[xxxv] See June 24, 2009 email from Dan Clawson "Re: Open Letter about Unite-Here."

[xxxvi] Randy Shaw, "The Nation Turns to SEIU Partisan on Dispute With UNITE HERE," *BeyondChron*, July 9, 2009, <http://www.beyondchron.org/news/index.php?itemid=7118>. For the article in question, see Joshua Freeman, "Social Unionism Lives," *The Nation*, June 15, 2009. pp. 6-7. For Shaw's book on the UFW, see *Beyond the Fields: Cesar Chavez, the UFW, and the Struggle for Justice in the 21st Century*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008.

[xxxvii] Randy Shaw, "An Open Letter to *The Nation* on the SEIU-UNITE HERE Struggle," *BeyondChron*, July 6, 2009, <http://www.beyondchron.org/news/index.php?itemid=7101>. [xxxviii] See Randy Shaw, "SEIU's Misplaced Priorities," *BeyondChron*, May 18, 2009.

[xxxix] "Dear All" email from Jo-Ann Mort, CEO, ChangeCommunications, Feb. 6, 2009.

[xl] See PerezStern, July 28-29, 2009 at <http://perezstern.blogspot.com/>.

[xli] See July 23, 2009 email addressed to Professor Nancy MacLean from Andy Stern and Bruce Raynor.

[xlii] See July 30, 2009 group email from Nancy McLean entitled "Recent SEIU exchanges about our Open Letter of Concern." In addition to Stern's call apologizing and promising not to send anymore SEIU "spam," Ringuette also sent MacLean a July 27 note of apology "for what Javier accidently forwarded to you" and "my snarky use of the term spam." Due to being tired, the SEIU spokesperson said, her email "tone was flip...[It] was in no way meant to convey contempt...but I certainly see how it reads that way...Again, I apologize for what reads like dismissiveness."

[xliii] Nancy MacLean email to Javier Morillo, July 27, 2009. [xliv] MacLean email to Morillo,

July 27, 2009. [xlv] Benson, *New Politics*, Winter, 2008, page 113.

[xlvi] For more on recent outside fundraising for NUHW, see Steve Early, "How a New Union Is Staying Afloat (with a Little Help from Its Friends)," *Labor Notes*, August, 2009, No. 365, (web edition only) <http://labornotes.org/node/2375>.

[xlvii] The May, 2009 letter from "Los Angeles Community Leaders" to Andy Stern and Fred Ross Jr.'s open letter explaining why he resigned from SEIU can be found at <http://www.wrongwayseiu.org/>. For more on that resignation, see also Fred Ross, "SEIU President Andy Stern Has Crossed the Line," *Beyond-Chron*, May 7, 2009. For a more recent round-up of California labor, community, and political figures who have turned against SEIU, see Randy Shaw, "SEIU Wages War on Progressives," *BeyondChron*, Nov. 17, 2009.

*Steve Early is a longtime labor activist, journalist, lawyer, and author of Embedded With Organized Labor: Journalistic Reflections on the Class War at Home (Monthly Review Press, 2009). This article is excerpted from a forth-coming book entitled, Purple Haze: Andy Stern, Anna Burger, and The Civil Wars in American Labor. It was reprinted at Znet.org on December 15, 2009, and is reprinted here for educational purposes.*

## Book announcement

### ***America at Risk: The Crisis of Hope, Trust, and Caring***

By Robert Perrucci and Carolyn C. Perrucci  
(Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2009)

This book is the latest effort in a long-term project by the authors to understand the most significant transformation of American society since the Industrial Revolution. First identified in

the early 1980s when many major corporations began closing their facilities in the United States and transferring production abroad to countries that provided lower production costs, the practice has accelerated and continued for over 30 years. The result has been the loss of millions of high wage jobs, often unionized and in manufacturing, increased job insecurity, and wage stagnation. The center of the “new economy” shifted from manufacturing to finance, from producing cars and household items to creating new schemes for financial investments.

As more and more high-wage blue collar and white collar jobs were lost to offshoring and technological change, it became apparent that the U.S. class structure was also being reshaped into a polarized system with a prosperous privileged class, a disappearing middle class, and an insecure working class. Income and wealth disparities reached historic levels, accompanied by declining opportunities for a better life within and across generations.

The authors argue that the cumulative impact of this transformation over the past 30-40 years has been the loss of hope for a better future, the decline in trust for mainstream institutions, and the declining support for government programs that provide support for those who live on the fringes of mainstream society. The far-reaching effects of economic change, technological change, and organizational change extended to all levels and sectors of the workplace, family life, and community life. Thus, *the crisis of hope, trust, and caring*, which are viewed as essential for a healthy human being and a healthy society.

Solutions to the current crisis that are presented in the book are guided by the view that hope, trust, and caring are part of an integrated whole, and that solutions to the problem of hope must be designed carefully so as not to erode trust while increasing hope. The authors try to avoid the pitfalls of some current mainstream solutions that breed divisions rather than unity among Americans.

#### Some early reviewers write:

“Essential reading for the new Obama administration and for all Americans in the current crisis. This book connects the breakdown in trust with the corporate global policies that have stripped Americans of their jobs and dreams. Robert Perrucci and Carolyn C. Perrucci exemplify the sociological imagination we need for the twenty-first century.” CHARLES DERBER, Boston College.

“Hope, trust, and caring—three indispensable ingredients for a secure and democratic society. Perrucci and Perrucci argue that these ingredients have been eroded by institutional restructuring and an ever-growing cultural crisis over the last thirty years. Analyzing employment, educational, community, and familial experiences as they vary by class, race, age, and gender, *America at Risk* proposes an agenda that places hope, trust, and caring at the center of social life. It is highly readable and accessible.” VICKI SMITH, University of California, Davis

“*America at Risk* is the culmination of two lifetimes of rigorous research and nuanced thought about the multiple crises facing the United States today. As Perrucci and Perrucci fit together the jigsaw pieces of the socioeconomic devastation we are now facing, a portrait emerges of the policies that set in motion the fast-acting processes that have robbed our society of its economic vitality. In developing this portrait they direct our attention to perhaps the most dire consequences of this decay—the severe erosion of hope, trust, and caring at the ground level among ordinary citizens.” MICHAEL SCHWARTZ, Stony Brook University

## WORLD WIDE WORK

We are republishing in this issue of ICS the latest edition of the free bulletin *World Wide Work*, published by the American Education Labor Center. The American Labor Education Center is an independent nonprofit founded in 1979. Please share this bulletin with others and encourage them to subscribe, which they can do at [TheWorkSite.org](http://TheWorkSite.org), our site that provides free, adaptable tools for grassroots education and organizing. Subscribing to the bulletin is free, and we never share our email list with anyone.

### New and worth noting...

#### FILMS

*A Crack in the Pavement* and *The New Neighbors* are two related half-hour documentaries. The first shows how many of America's first inner suburbs are falling apart as government policy supports further sprawl rather than maintenance of existing infrastructure. The second focuses on a diverse group of residents of Pennsauken, New Jersey, that is working to promote and maintain integration in their community.

*American Faust* is a thoroughly researched 89-minute documentary about Condoleezza Rice from her childhood during the civil rights era in Birmingham to her authorization of illegal torture during the Bush administration. It shows her turning her back on affirmative action for others after she herself benefited from it, lying to the American public about Iraq, and lending P.R. cover to Chevron to the point that it named an oil tanker after her. Today, Stanford University students are trying to get her ousted as a professor because of her role in illegal torture.

*The Yes Men Fix the World* shows the key stunts that two activist performance artists have pulled off by impersonating corporate or government officials in television interviews or conference

speeches and making the announcements those officials ought to make if they put the public interest first. The film's release is quite timely, given that in October the Yes Men pulled off a similar action by announcing at the National Press Club that the U.S. Chamber of Commerce had decided to endorse strong action on climate change. The announcement was carried by Reuters and the New York Times web site, until the Chamber came forward awkwardly to deny that it supports climate change solutions.

*The Exiles* is a restoration of a tragic but beautifully made 72-minute film first released in 1961. It portrays one night in the lives of Native Americans who were uprooted from their land by official U.S. government policies and exiled with no future to Los Angeles (as well as other urban centers).

*Crossroads on the Columbia* is a 24-minute documentary about the response of a small Oregon community to a plan by Texas financiers to install massive liquefied natural gas terminals on the Columbia River.

#### BOOKS

*The Long River Home* by Larry Smith (Bottom Dog Press). A rare find, this engaging and authentic novel follows four generations of a working class family, rooted in Ohio, as they move from rural life to industrial work.

*A Woman Among Warlords* by Malalai Joya (Scribner). Joya is a young woman elected to Afghanistan's parliament in 2005 at the age of 27 and then suspended from her post because of her outspoken criticism of the regime. "We Afghans remain trapped between two enemies," she writes, "the Taliban on one side and U.S./NATO forces and their warlord hirelings on the other." The Karzai government, she says, is no better than the Taliban, and Afghans must be allowed to determine their own destiny. "I hope President Obama in particular will be made to understand that more troops, more bombs, and an expanded war will solve nothing," she concludes.

*Teaching for Joy and Justice* by Linda Christensen (Rethinking Schools). Another indispensable resource from Rethinking Schools, this one focuses on inspired, practical, and proven ways to help students draw on their own lives and the world around them as they learn read and writing skills.

*The Union of Their Dreams* by Miriam Pawel (Bloomsbury). Cesar Chavez led a movement that inspired millions – but that never built a functioning union for farm workers. At a time when many in the union and progressive movements seek lessons from decades of defensive battles and an overall decline in strength, a pro-labor reporter sympathetically profiles eight individuals from diverse backgrounds who played important roles in the United Farm Workers' early successes and ultimate failure. One major theme is that a cult of personality around the top leader and a lack of democracy contributed significantly to the movement's loss of direction.

*Waiting on a Train* by James McCommons (Chelsea Green). The author spent months riding rail routes throughout America. His account, filled with entertaining anecdotes, combines history, travelogue, and discussion of public policy. With air and auto travel increasingly unsustainable, McCommons argues that the nation's passenger rail system must be revitalized.

Rebecca Harding Davis' *Stories of the Civil War Era*, edited by Sharon Harris and Robin Cadwallader (University of Georgia). Long before anyone spoke of "people's history," Davis roamed the states most ravaged by war, profiling working people of all backgrounds and showing the war's effects.

*No Place for a Puritan* edited by Ruth Nolan (Heyday). These essays, stories, and poems by more than 80 writers all have something to do with the history and culture of California's deserts.

*Cursing Columbus* by Eve Tal (Cinco Puntos). This sequel to the wonderfully written Double

Crossing is another novel for high school age and up about Jewish immigrants in New York in the early 1900s. Besides telling interesting history, it deals with themes that are relevant to immigrants' experience today.

*Black Body* edited by Meri Nana-Ama Danquah (Seven Stories). Thirty writers – most, but not all, black – speak honestly and often with humor about their experiences related to the black body in American culture.

*To Die for the People* by Huey Newton (City Lights). This re-release of writings by the Black Panther leader grapples with issues that remain current today. Newton writes, for example, about how he came to believe that African Americans should support the gay rights movement.

*Moral Underground* by Lisa Dodson (The New Press). Workers talk about the human impact of the poverty-wage economy, and some of their supervisors, health care providers, and school teachers discuss how they bend rules in response to injustice – keeping a worker on the clock while they take their child to the doctor, sending food home with a restaurant or food store worker, providing care to someone who is uninsured, and more.

*Mexico City Noir* edited by Paco Ignacio Taibo II (Akashic). It's hard to imagine a city more suited to be the focus of the latest in Akashic's series of newly written noir stories set in a particular metropolitan area.

## MUSIC

*Live at Passim and Classics* by Susan Werner ([www.susanwerner.com](http://www.susanwerner.com)). A talented and original songwriter has produced two interesting albums. Live at Passim includes a brilliant song about old-school men called "Barbed Wire Boys," a lament to a spouse or partner that "I Can't Be New," and a wry speculation on making a "Movie of My Life," as well as a group of previously released songs about the disconnect between her religious feelings and the established church. Classics is an



album of rock songs from the 1960s and 1970s that are reinterpreted with chamber music instrumentation.