

APSA Labor Project Newsletter Winter 2009/2010

FROM THE EDITORS

In this newsletter, we open a conversation about the crisis of higher education that we hope will continue at this year's Annual Meeting. Most of us are feeling the pain of budget cutbacks, increased workloads, and stagnant if not falling salaries. The decisions that colleges, universities, and legislatures make about how to confront the crisis will have profound consequences for academic freedom, working conditions on campus, and access to a quality education. What will the university of the future look like and what role can we play in shaping its future? To begin to focus our thinking, Isaac Kamola, Labor Project Secretary, has written a brief analysis of the current state of affairs. We have also compiled a list of materials for further reading on academic labor and the challenges that confront higher education. The Labor Project's leadership has submitted a proposal for a theme panel, "Higher Education in Hard Times," that we hope will appear on the conference program.

The Labor Project was launched at the 2004 APSA annual meeting. Our aim is to harness the efforts of a working group of political scientists to encourage the study and research of labor issues and to promote labor research to the public at large

We would like to thank The Caucus for New Political Science, of which the Labor Project is an affiliated group, for its continued support of this project and for providing web space, resources, and members.

Beyond the university, the loss of the Massachusetts Senate seat to the Republicans means that getting the Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA) on the legislative agenda this year will be even more challenging. Meanwhile, the NLRB continues to operate with just two of its five members, due to the blocking of the Obama administration's nominees by Senator John McCain (see the NLRB Update for more information). We are in contact with American Rights at Work about how Labor Project members can contribute to efforts to empower workers and to improve the economic welfare of working people.

Teri Caraway
and
Susan Orr
Labor Project Co-Chairs

Table of Contents:

1. APSA 2009 Report
2. Feature Article: Isaac Kamola, The University of California and the State of Academic Labor
3. NLRB Update
4. Putting PS in Practice
5. Teaching and Learning Resources
6. Member news

1. APSA 2009 REPORT

The Labor Project sponsored three panels at the 2009 Annual Meeting in Toronto. Through co-sponsorships with New Political Science and Comparative Politics, we leveraged our allocation of two panels into three panels. Unfortunately, panels were poorly attended, so our allocation of two panels in 2009 was reduced to just one panel for 2010. We hope that higher attendance in Washington, DC in 2010 will help us to reclaim the panel that we lost. With just one panel, we are far more limited in our ability to support labor-oriented research and discussions at the Annual Meeting, so we ask that members try to attend at least one panel sponsored by the Labor Project in 2010. We will announce the panels that the Labor Project has sponsored in the summer newsletter.

At the Business Meeting, we elected Isaac Kamola as Secretary. Susan and Teri are excited about Isaac joining the leadership of the Labor Project. A recent Ph.D. from the University of Minnesota and Visiting Scholar at Dartmouth College, Isaac was deeply involved in campus labor struggles at Minnesota. He participated in the effort to unionize graduate students in 2004-5 and helped to organize strike support activities when AFSCME workers on campus went on strike in 2003 and 2007. His research focuses on the political economy of higher education, both in the US and globally. Teri Caraway was also re-elected as co-chair. The award for best labor-related paper at the 2008 Annual Meeting was presented to Brian Greenhill, Layna Mosley, and Aseem Prakash, for their paper "Trade-based Diffusion of Labor Rights: A Panel Study 1986-2002."

(A revised version of this paper was published in *APSR* in November 2009.) The main business item at the meeting was a discussion about the sourcing of the conference bags with Rob Hauck, Deputy Director of APSA. We had a productive discussion and laid out a plan of action for putting in place a better sourcing policy for the bags. (Please see the update below.)

2. FEATURE ARTICLE

The University of California and the State of Academic Labor

Isaac Kamola

Academic workers have been under assault for many years. As corporate models of university administration gain prevalence, workers across the university have felt the effects. Janitors, foodservice workers, grounds keepers, and university healthcare employees are seeing stagnant and even declining wages as unions representing these workers become primary targets of university administrators. Graduate employees have seen university administrations—even at supposedly liberal institutions like NYU—ruthlessly oppose unionization. Furthermore, as Marc Bousquet documents in *How the University Works*, the number of undergraduate student workers has radically increased, taking over jobs at wages much lower than non-student university employees. In addition, under-paid adjunct and contingent faculty carry out increasing amounts of teaching.

This crisis in academic labor has been exacerbated by the current financial crisis

as institutions look for ways to offset failed investments, drying up endowments and philanthropic giving, and drastic cuts in state funding. Maybe no example stands as a greater example of the effects of the financial crisis than the University of California system. In November the Board of Regents of the University of California system approved a measure that would increase student fees by 32% to \$10,302, roughly triple the cost a decade ago. The \$813 million budget cut to the UC system has also meant mandatory furloughs, hiring freezes, and lay offs. As reported by Tamar Lewin in the New York Times (Nov. 20), “1,900 employees [have been] laid off, 3,800 positions eliminated and hiring deferred for nearly 1,600 positions, most of them faculty.”

These cuts and tuition increases have not gone unchallenged, however. There have been numerous protests, petitions, teach-ins and building occupations, most notably at the Santa Cruz and Berkeley campuses. Many of those involved in protesting tuition increases and hiring freezes argue that the crisis brought about by the cuts are only a magnification of an already existing, structural crisis within higher education. As higher education, including public universities, become commercial enterprises expected to operate in a competitive market, it is not surprising that public support of higher education is the first to go. Some have even argued that the language of “crisis” provides an opportunity to transform the UC system into a public university that functions like a private institution.

In this way, the current crisis in the UC system is not an exception but instead a particularly extreme manifestation of

gradual and structural changes taking place within higher education over the past few decades. As such, those of us inhabiting the university as faculty, students, and staff should not assume that the crisis in the UC system is simply the effect of an unexpected collapse of financial markets. Instead, the crisis of the university—in the UC system and elsewhere—is a crisis brought about by the financialization of higher education itself. It is now more important than ever to respond both to the particular policies of the State of California and UC President Mark Yudof while also forcefully making the argument that the University is a public good, one that must be de-linked from financial capital and stratified economic markets.

While the full-scale resistance to the deep cuts imposed upon the UC system is impressive, it is important to recognize that the most vocal challenges come from those in the most vulnerable positions—undergraduates, graduate workers and staff. Unfortunately, this political division is not uncommon. Tenured faculty members often avoid political confrontations over the future of the university, despite being the most secure in their position. For example, at my home institution of the University of Minnesota, faculty often served as curious on-lookers and occasional speech-givers while staff and students did much of the organizing, rallying, picketing and union building, often at great risk to their economic and academic futures. The crisis in the UC system, however, offers a chance to take stock of the trajectory that most institutions have experienced in the recent past or will experience in the not-too-distant future. I am hopeful that the brave and inspiring activism in California might help galvanize a movement that

demands that higher education be treated, funded and respected as a public good. However, for this to happen everyone must roll up his or her sleeves to get to work.

3. NLRB UPDATE

Currently the NLRB is operating with two members Chairman Wilma Liebman (D), and Republican member Peter Schaumber. The constitutionality of the NLRB operating with just two members is currently being challenged. However, the Obama administration's three nominations that would bring the NLRB up to a full compliment of five members are being held up in the Senate. Obama has nominated two "labor-side" lawyers and one employer oriented lawyer, as is the tradition. It is also tradition for the president to nominate, and the Senate to approve, new members as a package. Two of Obama's nominees, Buffalo labor lawyer Mark G. Pearce (D) and Senate staffer Brian E. Hayes (R), present no problem in securing Senate approval. However, the nomination of the third member, Craig Becker, was stalled in the last congressional session by a hold placed by Senator John McCain. Obama has renominated Becker and this time McCain has requested a hearing on Becker's nomination in the Senate HELP Committee. Although it is highly unusual to hold such a hearing on an NLRB appointee, the hearing has been granted and will take place in February. Craig Becker has been an associate general counsel for the Service Employees International Union since 1990 and also a staff counsel for AFL-CIO since 2004. He has the backing of 66 labor lawyers who wrote to the Senate expressing their

support for his nomination. However, he has written academic articles that question the role of employers during union recognition elections. Republicans and interest groups such as the Chamber of Commerce therefore argue that, if appointed, he would try to enact parts of the Employee Free Choice Act via NLRB decisions. Hence many observers see the nomination hearing as a proxy fight over the Employee Free Choice Act.

4. PUT YOUR PS IN PRACTICE

Bag update: Former Labor Project Co-Chair Maggie Gray and current Co-Chair Teri Caraway held a conference call in December 2009 with APSA staff to discuss the sourcing of the conference bags. APSA asked the Labor Project to prepare a list of producers that the Labor Project deemed to be sweatfree. After many hours of work, Maggie Gray compiled a list of about a dozen producers, which we gave to APSA in early January. APSA is now in discussions with sponsors. Our expectation is that APSA will require sponsors to source bag production at one of these facilities.

Labor on Wikipedia: Although we seldom encourage our students to use Wikipedia, they often do, especially when learning about a new subject. As a gateway to other sources of information, Wikipedia can profoundly affect what students and curious individuals learn about labor-related topics. There is a small but dedicated labor interest group on Wikipedia:http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Portal:Organized_Labour

Although company personnel are not supposed to edit articles about their own

company, they often do. Wikipedia blocks access to these individuals, if reported, but persistent people create new accounts to get around the blocks. Union busting firms such as the Burke Group, and other anti-labor organizations, can afford to pay people to edit labor-related content, especially that which may reflect badly on a particular corporation. Vigilance is required to assure that Wikipedia does not become a venue for the corporate view of labor's struggles, both historic and contemporary. Look up a few labor-related topics on Wikipedia, and if what you see disturbs you, consider getting involved with the labor interest group on Wikipedia.

Editing Wikipedia articles requires the acquisition of editing skills, but anyone can learn them. Basic skills can be learned in a week or two; proficiency may take a few months. If there is interest among Labor Project members, we can help to facilitate an APSA short course on how to edit Wikipedia articles. The deadline is approaching quickly, so please contact Teri Caraway (caraway@umn.edu) as soon as possible if you are interested in organizing or participating in a short course. You can read more about short courses here: http://www.apsanet.org/content_4650.cfm

EFCA and beyond: The Labor Project is communicating with Nancy Wiefek at American Rights at Work about how we can be supportive of union efforts to pass EFCA. Although EFCA will probably not be on the legislative agenda this year, we still want to compile a list of experts that can be called on for EFCA and other issues—e.g. the hearing in February on Craig Becker's nomination to the NLRB will be heated and may offer opportunities for commentary by political scientists. If you

would like to be on the list, please contact Teri Caraway (caraway@umn.edu) or Susan Orr (sorr@brockport.edu) with the following information: 1) affiliation and contact information, 2) brief description of area of expertise, and 3) the kind of help that you are willing to offer (write letters to the editor, write op-eds, participate in campus events (e.g. public debates, teach-ins), radio or television discussions/interviews).

5. TEACHING AND LEARNING RESOURCES

Short course on integrating labor into the curriculum: We are considering organizing a short course on how to incorporate labor themes into general courses (e.g. Intro to American Politics) or on teaching classes on labor and politics. Before doing so, we would like to assess whether such a short course is of interest to members. If you would like to participate in a short course on how to integrate labor into the curriculum, please contact Susan Orr (sorr@brockport.edu).

WorkingUSA: A cross-disciplinary journal, WorkingUSA: The Journal of Labor and Society explores the economic, political, and social dimensions of work and labor throughout the world. The journal publishes articles directed to an open and critical analysis of the global and U.S. labor movements, organizations, and the working class as well as thoughtful and penetrating analysis of the historical, contemporary, and future prospects of workers that advanced beyond the narrow goals of individuals. The journal editors see a strong and robust labor movement as a force that is central to the immediate and long term social, economic, and political interests of

the working class. The journal is edited by Labor Project Advisory Committee member, Immanuel Ness. Subscription information is available at:
www.wileyinterscience.com/journal/wusa

Portside Labor: A listserv of (mostly U.S.) labor news and analysis for interest of those on the left. Subscribe at:
<http://lists.portside.org/cgi-bin/listserv/wa?A0=PORTSIDELABOR>

Labor films: The DC Labor Filmfest has coordinated with LabourStart to create The Online Film Database. The searchable website includes almost 1,500 films, some with links for online viewing:
<https://laborfilms.dabbledb.com/page/laborfilms/ePjMknLk#>

Another excellent source is Tom Zaniello's *Working Stiffs, Union Maids, Reds, and Riffraff: An Expanded Guide to Films About Labor* (Cornell/ILR Press).

Resources on Higher Education:

A coalition of students, faculty, and staff at the University of North Carolina have put together a fantastic pamphlet on the crisis and how it affects their university. It could provide a useful template or model for activists on other campuses:
http://www.countercartographies.org/component/docman/cat_view/32-zines

On December 14th, the California Coordinating Committee released a National Call for a March 4 Strike and Day of Action to Defend Public Education. Two days later, on December 16th, an ad-hoc body of students, workers, and other activists from many states, including California, released a call of their own for a March 4 National Day of Action to Defend Education. You can read more

about the National Day of Action here:
<http://www.defendededucation.org/>

On the crisis in University of California system, see Judith Butler's excellent essay in The Guardian:
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/cifamerica/2009/sep/30/california-university-berkeley-budget-protest>. Also see the online journal, *Reclamations*:
<http://www.reclamationsjournal.org/>

The following are useful resources for further reading on the challenges that higher education is facing. The list focuses on relatively recent publications.

Marc Bousquet, *How the University Works: Higher Education and the Low-Wage Nation* (New York: NYU Press, 2008).

Edu-factory Collective, *Toward a Global Autonomous University: Cognitive Labor, the Production of Knowledge and Exodus from the Education Factory*.
<http://www.autonomedia.org/node/92>

Cary Nelson, *No University Is an Island: Saving Academic Freedom* (New York: NYU Press, 2010).

Christopher Newfield, *Unmaking the Public University: The Forty-Year Assault on the Middle Class* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008).

Bill Readings, *The University in Ruins* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1996).

Gaye Tuchman, *Wannabe U: Inside the Corporate University* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

6. MEMBER NEWS

Mark Anner has a forthcoming book chapter, "The Challenge of Economic Restructuring and the Limits of Labor Reform in Latin America," in *Market, State, and Society in Contemporary Latin America*, William C. Smith and Laura Gómez-Mera eds., Wiley-Blackwell, 2010.

Teri Caraway's "Labor Rights in East Asia: Progress or Regress" was published in *Journal of East Asian Studies* 9. She also contributed to a Critical Perspectives discussion in *Politics & Gender* 5(4) on Michael Ross's "Oil, Islam, and Women."

Laurence Davis has a new book out with Manchester University Press: *Anarchism and Utopianism* (2009) (coedited with Ruth Kinna).

Maggie Gray and **Shareen Hertel's** "Immigrant Farmworker Advocacy: The Dynamics of Organizing" was published in *Polity* 41(4).

Susan Kang published "Forcing Prison Labor: International Labor Standards, Human Rights and the Privatization of Prison Labor in the Contemporary United States" in *New Political Science* 31(2).

Yoonkyung Lee recently published "Migration, Migrants, and Contested

Ethno-Nationalism in Korea," in *Critical Asian Studies* 40 (3). She has also developed a graduate seminar on Democracy and Labor. (The syllabus is available on the Labor Project web page.)

Damien Raess has joined the Political Science Department at the University of Geneva as a lecturer. He also recently published an article with Brian Burgoon, "Globalization and Working Time: Working Hours and Flexibility in Germany" in *Politics & Society* 37(4).

Dorothy J. Solinger has a new book out with Cornell University Press: *States' Gains, Labor's Losses: China, France, and Mexico Choose Global Liaisons, 1980-2000*.

Lowell Turner won the James Scoville Best International and Comparative Industrial Relations Paper Award for 2009 from LERA (Labor and Employment Relations Association) for "Institutions and Activism: Crisis and Opportunity for a German Labor Movement in Decline," published in *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, April 2009.

Hal Wilensky recently published an article about lessons for the Obama administration's effort to reform health care: "U.S. Health Care and Real Health in Comparative Perspective: Lessons from Abroad." *The Forum: A Journal of Applied Research in Contemporary Politics* 7 (2).

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