

UNION ORGANIZING: HISTORY, DYNAMICS AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

In recent years “organize or die!” has become a rallying cry for many in the labor movement. Yet a full understanding of how workers have organized successfully in the past, and under what conditions they might do so in the future, remains elusive. This course is designed to explore that topic systematically. After an initial overview of the contemporary contours of union density and the attitudes of U.S. workers toward work, unions, and management, we turn to an historical perspective. First we will examine the origins of the U.S. labor movement in the 19th century, when unions were relatively weak and faced conditions that in many respects resemble those that we confront currently. We then turn to the period of massive union growth that began in the 1930s, with special attention to the economic, social, political, and cultural conditions that made it possible. Then we will look at the business counterattack that helped to precipitate de-unionization starting in the 1970s, the effects of which unions are still struggling with today.

Against this background, we will explore the dynamics of efforts to rebuild unionism over recent decades through new forms of organizing (though as we will see, they are not always as new as they appear!), as well as through union restructuring. In this part of the course we will also discuss the problem of unorganized workers’ ambivalence about unionism, as well as alternatives to traditional forms of labor organization, such as worker centers.

Requirements. The most important requirement for this course is to carefully read the assigned texts prior to each class meeting. You should come to class prepared to summarize and discuss what you have read and to actively participate in the group discussions. Please bring your copies of the readings to class along with your notes, comments, and questions. Those notes, comments and questions will make up your class journal, a copy of which should be submitted to the instructor at the end of each class meeting. In addition, each student will be assigned to help lead the collective discussion for one of the sessions (as part of a small group). Class participation and journals will make up half of the course grade. (Journal entries will be graded on a pass/fail basis.)

The other major requirement for this course is a 20-page (double-spaced, 12 pt font) research paper analyzing an organizing campaign, or a comparison of two campaigns. Students may focus on recent campaigns or on cases from the past (provided sufficient historical material is available). Details for this assignment will be discussed in class, and each student will have a one-on-one meeting with the instructor to discuss her/his topic. A one-page paper proposal is due on July 28, and the final paper is due on December 1, 2010. The paper will make up half of the course grade.

Before the first class meeting, please read chapters 1-7 of the Freeman and Rogers book, *What Workers Want*, as well as the article by Schmitt and Warner, and write a short summary (no more than a page) of your reactions to this material, which you should bring to class on Monday July 19.

Schedule of Topics and Readings

NOTE: All readings should be completed before the date for which they are listed below. The readings marked with an asterisk (*) are available on electronic library reserve or on the web; all the others are in one of the two books you have already received.

Date	Topic	Readings (to be completed before class meeting)
Monday July 19	<i>Worker Attitudes and Unionism Today: What is the Potential for Future Growth?</i>	Richard Freeman and Joel Rogers, <i>What Workers Want</i> (Russell Sage Foundation, 1999), chapters 1-7 *John Schmitt and Kris Warner, "The Changing Face of Labor, 1983-2008" (Washington, D.C.: Center for Economic and Policy Research, November 2009) available at http://www.cepr.net/index.php?option=com_content&id=2551&view=article
Tuesday July 20	<i>Class Formation and the Origins of Unionism in the U.S.</i>	*Martin Shefter, "Trade Unions and Political Machines: The Organization and Disorganization of the American Working Class in the Late Nineteenth Century," in <i>Working-Class Formation</i> , edited by Ira Katznelson and Aristide R. Zolberg (Princeton University Press, 1986), pp. 197-276.
Wednesday July 21	<i>Labor's Giant Step? The New Deal and Union Expansion</i>	*Lizabeth Cohen, "Becoming a Union Rank and File" (excerpt) and "Workers' Common Ground," from her <i>Making A New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939</i> (Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 301-360. *Christopher Tomlins, "AFL Unions in the 1930s: Their Performance in Historical Perspective," <i>Journal of American History</i> , vol. 65 (March 1979), pp. 1021-42.
Thursday July 22	<i>The Business Counterattack and Union Decline from the 1970s to the Present</i>	*"The Failure of Labor Law: A Betrayal of American Workers" Report of the Subcommittee on Labor-Management Relations, Committee on Education and Labor, U.S. House of Representatives (U.S. Government Printing Office, October 1984), pp. 1-31. *Steven G. Allen, "Developments in Collective Bargaining in Construction in the 1980s and 1990s," in <i>Contemporary Collective Bargaining in the Private Sector</i> , edited by Paula B. Voos (Industrial Relations Research Association, 1994), pp. 411-445.
Friday July 23	<i>Rebuilding Unionism: Organizing Strategies for the 21st Century</i>	*Kim Voss and Rachel Sherman, "You Just Can't Do It Automatically: The Transition to Social Movement Unionism in the United States," in <i>Trade Unions in Renewal: A Comparative Study</i> , edited by Peter Fairbrother and Charlotte A.B. Yates (Routledge, 2003), pp.51-77. Joshua Bloom, "Ally to Win: Black Community Leaders and SEIU's L.A. Security Unionization Campaign," pp. 167-190 in <i>Working for Justice: The L.A. Model of Organizing and Advocacy</i> , edited by Ruth Milkman, Joshua Bloom and Victor Narro (Cornell University Press, 2010), pp. 167-190.

(July 23, cont'd.)		<p>Kate Bronfenbrenner and Robert Hickey, "Changing to Organize: A National Assessment of Union Strategies" and</p> <p>Daisy Rooks, "Sticking it Out or Packing It In? Organizer Retention in the New Labor Movement,"</p> <p>both in <i>Rebuilding Labor: Organizing and Organizers in the New Union Movement</i>, edited by Ruth Milkman and Kim Voss (Cornell University Press, 2004), pp. 17-55, 195-222.</p>
Saturday July 24	<i>Challenges from Within: Worker Ambivalence and Union Democracy</i>	<p>Teresa Sharpe, "Union Democracy and Successful Campaigns: The Dynamics of Staff Authority and Worker Participation in an Organizing Union";</p> <p>Robert A. Penney, "Workers Against Unions: Union Organizing and Anti-Union Mobilization"; and</p> <p>Steven H. Lopez, "Overcoming Legacies of Business Unionism: Why Grassroots Organizing Tactics Succeed,"</p> <p>All three of the above are in <i>Rebuilding Labor: Organizing and Organizers in the New Union Movement</i>, edited by Ruth Milkman and Kim Voss (Cornell University Press, 2004), pp. 62-132.</p>
Sunday July 25	No Class	
Monday July 26	<i>Low-Wage Immigrant Organizing and Advocacy: Case Studies from Los Angeles</i>	<p>Ruth Milkman, "Introduction"</p> <p>Jong Bum Kwon, "The Koreatown Immigrant Workers Alliance: Spatializing Justice in an Ethnic 'Enclave'"</p> <p>Nazgol Ghandnoosh, "Organizing Workers along Ethnic Lines: The Pilipino Workers' Center"</p> <p>Jacqueline Leavitt and Gary Blasi, "The Los Angeles Taxi Workers Alliance"</p> <p>Karina Muniz, "The Janitorial Industry and the Maintenance Cooperation Trust Fund"</p> <p>The above articles are all in <i>Working for Justice: The L.A. Model of Organizing and Advocacy</i>, edited by Ruth Milkman, Joshua Bloom and Victor Narro (Cornell University Press, 2010), pp. 1-70, 109-124 and 211-31.</p>
Tuesday July 27	<i>The Current Crisis and Future Prospects for U.S. Labor</i>	<p>Kari Lydersen, <i>Revolt on Goose Island: The Chicago Factory Takeover and What It Says about The Economic Crisis</i> (Melville House, 2009)</p> <p>*Stephen Lerner, "An Injury to All: Going Beyond Collective Bargaining as We Have Known It," <i>New Labor Forum</i>, Spring 2010</p>
Wednesday July 28	<i>Wrap-Up and Evaluation</i>	Research Proposals Due