

## LABOR STUDIES AND THE SOCIETY FOR THE STUDY OF SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The labor studies division of the Society for the Study of Social Problems (SSSP) held its annual sessions on September 2-5, 1977, in Chicago. The SSSP is a group that is primarily but not exclusively made up of sociologists. It was established in 1951 by liberal and left-leaning academics as a counter-organization to the American Sociological Association (ASA). The SSSP has never fully achieved its goal of becoming a focal point of alternative academic research, but over the years it has provided a meeting ground for those dismayed by the often conservative thrust of the ASA. The labor studies division became an official subsection of the SSSP in the early 1970s. Since labor studies has never enjoyed particular attention or legitimacy in sociology, the founding of the division was conceived as a way of encouraging further research and communication among those working in the area. In the past the labor studies sessions have characteristically included presentations both by academics studying labor movements in the United States and abroad and by active union members engaged in organizing efforts.

This year's labor studies sessions covered three themes. One set of papers focused on unions and working class organizing, and included presentations by Sam Friedman (SUNY, Old Westbury) on rank and file resistance to trusteeships in the Teamsters Union, Roslyn Feldberg and Evelyn Glenn (Boston Univ.) on the consciousness and work experience of clerical workers, and Lynda Ann Ewen (W. Virginia Inst. of Technology) on wildcat strikes in the United Mine Workers. Jim Lincoln (USC) gave a very different style of presentation with an analysis of the relationship between community structure and strike activity in a sample of the largest U.S. cities.

A second session on labor and politics included a very diverse set of papers. Nora Hamilton (USC) spoke on the incorporation of the labor movement into the Mexican state during the Cardenas period, Nancy DiTomaso (Northwestern) discussed the political maneuvering involved in the establishment and termination of Department of Labor programs during the 1960's, and Ed Johnson (Wisconsin) presented the results of a statistical study of labor's political influence at the state level. Rick Hill (Michigan State Univ.) generated the most audience comment and discussion with a paper on the role of the Detroit labor movement in the context of that city's fiscal and social crisis. Hill is engaged in a long-term study of the political economy of Detroit and his paper was particularly interesting because of the inclusive nature of his analysis of the role of the labor movement.

The third session covered topics related to workers' control and workers' job skills. Peter Dreier (Tufts Univ.) analyzed the reasons for the failure of the Newspaper Guild to deal with workers' control issues, with a particular focus on the role of the union in Chicago. Frank Lindenfeld (Cheyney State College) spoke more generally on the concept of workers' control, and Phil Kraft (SUNY, Binghamton) discussed the distinction between productive and unproductive labor. The final two papers dealt with workers' job skills. Ken Kusterer (American Univ.) argued in a paper titled "The Working Knowledge of Unskilled Workers" that workers such as bank tellers and certain kinds of factory operatives require considerable "working knowledge" in order to be able to perform their jobs competently. Because this working knowledge is not reflected in formal educational or training requirements, Kusterer argued that its significance has been understated by sociologists. In the final paper, Julia Wrigley (UCLA) discussed the connection between education

and occupational skills

As a new section of the SSSP, the labor studies division has had occasional problems in the past in generating interesting papers and stimulating discussion among the members. This year's sessions worked well in these respects. There was lively discussion at the meetings, and, in spite of the diversity of topics, the sessions were successful in generating a sense of common work. The informal nature of the meetings compared to the ASA helped to foster this sense of participation.

Plans for next year's meeting include one session focused on public employees and one on women in the labor force. The third session will be left open. People are encouraged to submit papers to Sam Friedman, Department of Sociology, SUNY, Old Westbury, New York 11568. Next year's meetings will be held in San Francisco in the first week of September. Papers should be submitted by January 15.

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