

from the editorial team

Beginning with this issue, *New Labor Forum* is inaugurating some exciting changes—at least the editors think they’re exciting and hope our readers will as well. Here we depart from the normal format of our editorial team statements to introduce to you these new developments.

First of all, two new columns begin now. One is called “Under the Radar” and is produced by Ben Becker. So much happens that concerns those interested in the labor movement and the fate of working people that the mass media never notices. Some of the bigger stuff we try to cover in feature-length articles. But there are a ton of smaller tell-tale developments—an outrageous, or mordant, or comic remark by someone high and mighty; an invisible, but significant, organizing victory or defeat; a painfully funny cartoon; a hidden, but portentous, wrinkle in some old or looming law; a missed, but meaningful, statistic—which Becker is dedicated to uncovering. We hope you will find “Under the Radar” always useful, and sometimes even amusing.

Our second new column is called “In the Rearview Mirror” and is co-written by Steve Fraser and Joshua B. Freeman. We live in a notoriously amnesiac culture, focused most of the time on what one historian called “the windowless room of the current event.” The ambition of “In the Rearview Mirror” is to open up windows where there aren’t any, to illuminate something going on now in the light of what once happened. It is crippling—like losing a limb or a vital brain function—to try and grapple with the dilemmas of the present without some sense of their relevant past. In this issue, for example, Fraser and Freeman take a look at the flood tide of congressional investigations into the malfeasance of the business elite during the

Great Depression and the New Deal, as a way of speculating on why we see so little of that today.

We also announce the birth of a new feature. It is called “On the Contrary.” As that rubric suggests, it is intended to rile up people. We live in tumultuous times. Some may think they portend a big breakthrough in the way our society and economy is organized, a transformation of underlying values and behavior. Who knows? But that can’t happen without daring to open our political imaginations and challenge cherished assumptions. In each issue of the journal, “On the Contrary” will do just that by presenting provocative arguments, out-of-the-box ideas, or a reimagining of possibilities. This time, Rick Wolff argues that the whole strategy of the Left and labor—for well more than a generation—has been fundamentally misguided. In our Spring 2010 issue, Walter Benn Michaels and Richard Kim will face off on what they each think ought to be the future of identity politics in an age of economic crisis. We invite our readers to tell us what they think as “On the Contrary” stirs the pot.

Our regular columns will continue, as readers of this issue will see. But there is one important changing of the guard that we want to make note of now. This will be the last time Kim Phillips-Fein writes the “Caught in the Web” column. She is drawn away by other commitments, but we hope to see her back again as a writer for the journal. Kim has done a magnificent job of making “Caught in the Web” a place readers can count on to get

useful information, available on the web, about an extraordinary range of issues. The journal is extremely fortunate that Liza Featherstone has agreed to pick up where Kim has left off. Liza's first column will appear in our Spring 2010 issue.

We have also entered into a collaborative relationship with the Working-Class Studies Association (WCSA). Born just six years ago, the WCSA brings together a remarkable collection of scholars from many disciplines, dedicated to exploring the role of the working-class in our economic, social, cultural, and political life. Each issue will contain an article by a member of the association. These articles will be selected or solicited in joint discussion with the editors of *New Labor Forum*. We begin in this issue with a memoir essay by Margaret Costello called "Following a Father's Footfalls: Love and Estrangement in the Alleghenies."

With this issue, *New Labor Forum* is also pleased to announce an expansion of our editorial board that will enable the journal to benefit from the work of an even broader group of activist-intellectuals concerned about the future of organized labor and allied movements. Our new board members are: Barbara Bowen, Amy Dean, Janice Fine, Marie Gottschalk, Lisa Jordan, Ai-jen Poo, Katie Quan, Adolph Reed, Daisy Rooks, and Andrew Ross.

The issue at hand appears on the first anniversary of the Obama inauguration. The new administration is still very much a work in progress. Whether it augurs change we can

believe in or not remains an open question. But there is no question in our minds that the articles included herein may contain some of the answer.

Four articles examine international developments—particularly in Latin America, Europe, and Asia—in light of the current global economic crisis. Looking back home, another essay systematically dissects the long-term decline of the social wage which predates by many years the more recent financial meltdown and "Great Recession." That picture is further elaborated in an article based on a widely publicized report, by The Workplace Violations Survey Project, about the deliberate abuse of the nation's labor laws across broad stretches of American industry. A stirring and meticulous piece of social analysis looks at one place—the Smithfield meatpacking plant in Tar Heel, North Carolina—where that kind of super-exploitation was brought to an end. One of the fallouts from the financial collapse was the wiping out of assets held by union benefit funds. Here our writers examine how labor's own neglect and incompetence are in part to blame, and make the case for root and branch reform of the relationship between benefit funds and Wall Street.

Variety is the theme of our "Books and the Arts" section. It includes a reflection on the movie *Milk*, as well as reviews of: two anthologies of writing about work and working-class life; a book on rampant wage theft in the U.S.; and a novel and its place in an emerging genre of deindustrialization literature. Finally, our poetry section offers a beautifully sketched picture of Korean-American working-class life by Ishle Yi Park.