

Labor & Politics

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As I distribute this plan for our January course, I anticipate that the 2008 election will result in a Democratic sweep – Barack Obama for president, a 55-to-57 Democrat majority in the Senate, and a significant increase in the Democrat majority in the House of Representatives. I also assume that the labor movement will play a large role in achieving this outcome, and that that role will be recognized within the party if not in the media. If I'm right, we will be meeting at the beginning of a potentially transformative moment, when it should be possible to implement policies and priorities long fought for by the labor movement. But regardless of the outcome, it will be a good time to reassess labor's new political strategies, its diverse array of policy priorities, and the role of politics in American unionism in the future. This is what you will be required to read and research about, think about, and write about for this course.

A series of general readings will provide background on labor's new political strategies, how some of them worked out in the 2008 election, and the current state of the economic policy universe as surveyed by the labor-backed Economic Policy Institute (EPI). You will be expected to research the political activities of one union (your own or the one with which you are the most familiar) and of the labor movement in one locality, to critically assess those activities, to relate them to what you know of the larger national labor movement's political efforts, and to make recommendations for the future. You will also be required to choose **three** policy areas (from EPI's nine) on which you think your union and the labor movement as a whole should focus in 2009-10 and to justify your choices.

The pre-session readings and assignments, our in-class discussions and activities, and the final paper will be organized around four issues:

- Post-election analysis: What did unions, both locally and nationally, do right and what did they do wrong in the 2008 election? What role did unions play in achieving the results? And, what do the election results mean for the prospects for a large-scale renewal of the American labor movement in the next decade?
- How real and effective is the shift in labor's political strategy?
- How far and how fast should the Big Shift from collective bargaining to organizing and politics go?
- What should be labor's policy priorities for 2009-10?

There are no right answers to any of these questions (though there probably are some wrong ones), but they are well worth thinking about, deciding upon your views, and articulating your reasoning for those views. That is the overarching requirement for this course.

READINGS for the course:

Books

Asher, Heberlig, Ripley, and Snyder. *American Labor Unions in the Electoral Arena* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2001).

EPI Policy Handbook: A Plan to Revive the American Economy (Economic Policy Institute, 2008), supplemented by *Agenda for Shared Prosperity* policy papers at www.sharedprosperity.org

Photocopied articles

All articles can be found on the Labor & Politics course site at <http://blogs.umass.edu/laborpol/>

No password is required.

Andy Banks & Jack Metzgar, "Politics and Public Relations," Chapter 6 of *Organizing for Collective Action: An Introduction to Labor Studies*. (unpublished manuscript).

Richard Oestreicher, "The Rules of the Game: Class Politics in the 20th Century," *Organized Labor and American Politics, 1894-1994: The Labor Liberal Alliance*.

Packet on "**Social Movement Unionism**":

- Lowell Turner & Richard Hurd, "Building Social Movement Unionism: The Transformation of the American Labor Movement," from *Rekindling the Movement: Labor's Quest for Relevance in the 21st Century*.
- Dan Clawson, "A New Upsurge?" from *The Next Upsurge: Labor and the New Social Movements*.
- Paul Johnston, "Organize for What? The Resurgence of Labor as a Citizenship Movement," from *Rekindling the Movement: Labor's Quest for Relevance in the 21st Century*.

Packet on Strategic **Debate within SEIU**:

- Andy Stern, 'Just Us' or 'Justice for All'?
- SEIU Executive Board, *Justice for All, Pass It On: Recommendations to the SEIU 2008 Convention*.
- United Healthcare Workers-West, SEIU Local 2005, "Justice for All" or "Control for Just Us?"

Debate on EFCA from *Labor Studies Journal*, Winter 2007:

- Roy Adams, "The Employee Free Choice Act: A Skeptical View and Alternative"
- Sheldon Friedman, "Why the Employee Free Choice Act Deserves Support"
- Julie Martinez Ortega, "Why We Should Support the Employee Free Choice Act"

Packet of short articles on **union plans for 2008** election:

- Harold Meyerson, "Sunday in the Dark with Labor"
- Jonathan Tasini, "Labor's Election Ground War—And How The Media Is Missing It"
- Harold Meyerson, "Labor: United and Divided"
- Karen Ackerman, "Labor 2008 Strategy Memo"

Packet of articles and links on **post-election analyses** to be distributed by December 1.

Pre-session readings & Assignments

The pre-session readings are organized around the four questions. Though in class we will follow the order presented below, you should plan your reading to focus initially on the two middle questions – which are broader strategic issues that will not be directly affected by the outcome of the election. Then in December do the readings and develop your thoughts on the election and your policy priorities for 2009-10. The three assignment sheets are meant to help you focus **your** thoughts (and some information-gathering) so that you are prepared to contribute to our in-class discussions. Though some information is asked for that we will aggregate in class, mostly these assignment sheets are for you to take notes that will be valuable **to you** in class discussions and potentially for your final paper. Since I will collect all three sheets at our first class session January 5, you should make copies and keep the originals for yourself. Though required, the assignment sheets will not be letter-graded, and your notes do not need to be make sense (or even be legible) to me.

The 2008 Election: Labor’s Role and What It Means for Future Prospects

Though we will discuss this first in our classroom sessions, you will not be able to do all the reading or to complete the assignment until after December 1, when readings and web links analyzing the election at the national level will be distributed. At our first class session January 5, you will be expected to make a brief oral report (and hand in your notes) analyzing the role unions (your own and others, your CLC and state fed) played in who won and why in your state and locality; how this relates to the national results; and your assessment of prospects for the immediate future. See *Assignment Sheet #1: Analyzing the Election*.

- Packet of short articles on union plans for 2008 election (available online).
- Packet of articles and links on post-election analysis to be distributed by December 1.

How Real and Effective Is the Shift in Labor’s Political Strategy?

There is no doubt that the labor movement has greatly improved its political action efforts in the last 10 or 15 years, but there are different ways to describe the fundamental shift(s) that has occurred. In broad terms, unions have moved from reliance on endorsing and funding candidates to broader, year-round political education and organizing around issues, while at the same time deepening its traditional commitment to the Democratic Party. The readings, though not up-to-date on the most recent elections, focus on the larger shift in labor’s political strategy since the mid-1990s and how this relates to more traditional practices. This is the largest block of reading for the course, and if possible, you should try and read most of it prior to December 1, as you will have other things to do after that.

- Andy Banks and Jack Metzgar, “Politics and Public Relations” (available online)
- Asher, Heberlig, Ripley, and Snyder. *American Labor Unions in the Electoral Arena*
- Richard Oestreicher, “The Rules of the Game: Class Politics in the 20th Century,” (available online).

The Big Shift from Collective Bargaining to Organizing and Politics: How Far and How Fast Should It Go?

Not only has labor shifted its political strategy, developing a variety of new tactics, but politics now plays a much larger role in American unionism than it has in the past. This involves a larger shift from a nearly exclusive focus on negotiating and enforcing collective bargaining agreements to more resources, staff time and attention being devoted to organizing new members and to politics and legislation at the local, state, and national levels. As the percentage of private-sector union workers approaches a mere 7 percent and increased attention to organizing has not yielded sufficient new members to reverse the decline, many are calling for a redefinition of unionism in the U.S. to give much greater emphasis to representing nonunion workers through broader political organizing not just in electoral politics but in building a broad social movement for economic and social justice. Such a “big shift” may require moving money and power away from local unions toward international unions that can organize new members and engage in political action where unions currently are weak or nonexistent. In addition to the readings for this section, *Assignment Sheet #2: Distribution of Money & Power in Your Union* asks you to find out or confirm what percentage of your members’ dues remain in the local union versus going to regional or international bodies.

- Packet on “Social Movement Unionism” (available online)
- Packet on Strategic Debate within SEIU (available online)

What Should Labor's Policy Priorities Be for 2009-10?

If the expected Democratic sweep occurs, the Employee Free Choice Act and everything else in the *EPI Policy Handbook* will be live possibilities. If that does not happen, the policy possibilities will be greatly diminished but not entirely nonexistent. This section asks you to make strategic decisions about what policies your union and the labor movement as a whole should focus on for the next two years.

Assignment Sheet #3: Policy Priorities for 2009-10 asks you to choose and prioritize your top three policies and to take some initial notes on your reasons for those choices. Based on the choices made by the class as a group, each student will be assigned to report on and analyze at least one policy and its prospects. (Note that if there is not a Democratic sweep, we will likely not devote an entire session to EFCA; therefore, the "Debate on EFCA" should probably be the last thing you read prior to class.)

- *EPI Policy Handbook: A Plan to Revive the American Economy*, supplemented by *Agenda for Shared Prosperity* policy papers at www.sharedprosperity.org
- Debate on EFCA from *Labor Studies Journal*, Winter 2007. (available online)

Post-session assignment

Each student will be expected to have read all the material assigned, including various articles and web links that will be distributed in December, and to do the various exercises and in-class reports. There is no additional research required for the final paper.

The post-session paper is a 20-to-25-page reflective essay (6,000-7,500 words) that gives your own answers to the four questions around which the course is organized; your reasoning in support of those answers; and your reasoning on how your answers are related to one another. The final wording of the essay question(s) will be based on how our discussion develops in class, and you will not receive that wording until our session on Monday, January 12.

- Your essay should demonstrate that you have intellectually engaged the various assigned readings, but it should not be a summary of that material. You should focus on developing your own thinking and decision-making on the major strategic, tactical, and organizational issues we will be discussing and your choices for policy priorities.
- In addition to the readings and our in-class discussions, your essay should draw on your own observation and experience (and your previous knowledge) to support or explain your answers. Though no additional research is required or expected, it is not prohibited. You are specifically encouraged to use this assignment to develop a strategic vision that will be most useful to your union and to your role as a union leader in the coming decade.
- You will not have to make up your mind on any of the questions until after the in-session classes are over, but you would wise to be taking notes on what you are thinking as you are reading and then as class discussions develop.
- The key to the essay as an assignment is to develop your own point-of-view and to then argue for it clearly and cogently to a general union audience, like your fellow students.

We will discuss this assignment in much greater detail in class, but it will help a great deal if you come to our first session with at least some of your answers and your reasoning for them clearly in mind (and in your notes).

Assignment Sheet #1: Analyzing the Election

Name: _____

At our first class January 5, you will be asked to report briefly (**in less than 5 minutes**): on the election results in your state and locality and to assess the performance of your union and local labor movement in comparison to what you've read about labor's national efforts. The various topics or questions below are meant to help you organize your thoughts. You are not expected to do any research on this for now, though you may want to do some for your final paper. Just address them as best you can, based on your direct observation and ready-to-hand information and knowledge. **Make a copy to turn in at our first class January 5 and keep the original for yourself.**

Your state and locality:

Union density in your state:

The most relevant results in your area:

President:

U.S. Senate (?) and House races:

Labor-targeted state and local races:

Your assessment of the most significant things that were done right and wrong by your union and the labor movement in your locality:

Your union (both the national union and your local):

Other unions in your area:

Central Labor Council & State Fed:

AFL-CIO or CtW in your area:

Comparison with what you've read about the labor movement's efforts nationally:

Assignment Sheet #1 (continued)

Please fill out the following survey to the best of your ability without doing any research. Except where relevant to your assessment, this information is **not** for your first-day report as outlined above. The results from all the students in the class will be aggregated and discussed in later class sessions.

Does your union (check all that are applicable):

- engage in legislative activism and issue advocacy in non-election years.
- have a “rapid response” system for generating e-mails and phone calls from members to legislators on issues of special concern to the union.

- have permanent community alliances or
 - community coalitions for emergencies only.
- have precinct or zip-code neighborhood political organizations.
- engage in public outreach to nonunion workers as voters.
(e.g., through Working America or Purple Ocean)

- pay lost-time for member-activists to do full-time political work.
- systematically have stewards do political education at the worksite.
- have at least 5% of members volunteering for union political activities.
- target state and local races to organize around.
- mobilize retirees for electoral and/or legislative campaigns.
- run union members for political office.

- do side-by-side comparisons of candidates on issues of concern to members.
If so, in your judgment were these:
 - fair and balanced
 - slightly tilted
 - strongly tilted
 - so one-sided as not to be credible

- engage in member-to-member political education and pre-election Get-Out The-Vote (GOTV) activities. If so, how:
 - house visits
 - worksite one-on-one
 - phone one-on-one
 - other _____

- engage in election-day GOTV. If so, how:
 - poll watchers
 - phone follow-up
 - van service to polls
 - other _____

- other electoral or movement-building political work:

Assignment Sheet #2: Distribution of Money & Power in Your Union

Name: _____

According to Dan Clawson in *The Next Upsurge* (page 24), for the American labor movement as a whole, 78% of members' dues money goes to "local, district, or regional bodies" while only 21% goes to the national or international unions – and only about 1% to the AFL-CIO (before the Change-to-Win unions left). But this can vary dramatically in different unions. The original AFL unions generally follow this general distributional pattern, for example, but CIO unions like the Auto Workers and Steelworkers are nearly the reverse of that general distribution, and some unions, like AFSCME, give the lion's share of dues money to their District Councils. This exercise asks you to use the LM-2 Reports at <http://erds.dol-esa.gov/query/getOrgQry.do> to figure the percentage of financial resources in control of your local union, your intermediate body, and your national or international union.

'Union Type'	Total Receipts	Total Members	Receipts Per Member	% of Total Receipts Per Member
Local union				
Intermediate body				
International				
TOTALS		Xxxxxxxx		~100%

Here's how to do it:

1. Go to the Dept. of Labor site at <http://erds.dol-esa.gov/query/getOrgQry.do>
2. On that page, you need to choose the "Union" button, the abbreviation for your "Union" and then on three separate occasions the relevant "Union Type." You do not have to access the actual LM-2 Report for the various union bodies, as you can get the numbers required from the online summaries provided.
3. For each level or "Union Type" (local, intermediate, and international), write down "Total Receipts" and "Total Membership" on the table above, and then divide the Total Receipts by the Total Members to get Receipts Per Member.
4. Add the Receipts Per Member from each of the three union levels to get a TOTAL.
5. Finally, to get the percentage distribution of receipts-per-member, divide the total from #4 above into the "Receipts Per Member" for each of the three union types.

[Note that though the international union may have a smaller percentage of "Total Receipts Per Member," it will have a much larger percentage of "Total Receipts" themselves because it is drawing money from all members.]

This is actually easier to do than it is to read my directions! Do the best you can, and we'll discuss in class. If, on the other hand, you should get fascinated with your union's relevant LM-2s, you might try to figure out what proportion of union budgets are spent on organizing new members and on politics. Good luck with that!

Assignment Sheet #3: Policy Priorities for 2009-10

Name: _____

After reading the *EPI Policy Handbook* and taking a glance at the supporting policy papers on EPI's *Agenda for Shared Prosperity* web site at www.sharedprosperity.org, choose the top three policy areas that you think your union and the labor movement as a whole should focus on for 2009-10. If your choices for your union conflict with your choices for the labor movement as a whole, how would you resolve that difference?

You should not complete this form until after the election because your criteria for prioritizing should involve BOTH desirability and feasibility. Your initial choices here do not commit you to anything in your final paper. **Make a copy to turn in at our first class January 5 and keep the original for yourself.**

Choose 3 (and only 3) policy areas from this list and prioritize them as 1, 2 & 3:

- Health Care for All
- Retirement Security
- Empowering Workers
- Investing in Public Infrastructure
- Manufacturing Jobs for a Green Future
- Pathways Out of Poverty
- Balancing Work and Family
- Immigration Reform
- Trade and Global Integration

Notes on your reasoning for picking these three:

Notes on your reasoning for your top choice:

In-session discussion plan

The 2008 Election: Labor's Role Then and Prospects Now

Monday, Jan. 5: Your union in your election

- Introduction to the class.
- Collect copies of Assignment Sheets #s 1 & 3 (and #2 where possible).
- Oral reports and discussion on 2008 election in students' states and areas, the role of labor in the process, and the results. See **Assignment Sheet #1**.
- Discussion of prospects for unions in your area.

Tuesday, Jan. 6: The national election and the larger labor movement

- Exercise on presidential exit polls on CNN web site at <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2008/>
- Discussion of pre-distributed analyses of the national election from AFL-CIO and other sources. These will be distributed after the election (by Dec. 1) and will be required reading for this class.
- Discussion of what it means for immediate and mid-term future.
- Assignments for student presentations on policies for January 12 session.

How Real and Effective Is the Shift in Labor's Political Strategy?

Wednesday, Jan. 7: What is new in the new political strategy?

- Discussion of Asher, et.al., *American Labor Unions in the Electoral Arena*, pp. 1-105
- Discussion of Banks & Metzgar, "Politics and Public Relations"
- Discussion of Oestreicher, "The Rules of the Game"

Thursday, Jan. 8: To what extent has labor's political strategy actually shifted? And how much more should it?

- Discussion of Asher, et.al., *American Labor Unions in the Electoral Arena*, pp. 107-174
- Also relevant are the materials and reports from the first two sessions.

The Big Shift from Collective Bargaining to Organizing & Politics: How Far and How Fast Should It Go?

Friday, Jan. 9: Social Movement Unionism and Unions as Issue-Advocacy Organizations

- Discussion of Turner & Hurd, Clawson, and Johnston (packet on "Social Movement Unionism")
- Discussion of Strategic Debate within SEIU
- Discussion of exercise on distribution of dues money and power. See **Assignment Sheet #2**.
- Preliminary discussion of your post-session papers.

Saturday, Jan. 10: Which way for unions now – back to "our real work" or deeper into politics and policy?

- Discussion of your views of the role of politics in 21st Century U.S. unionism.
- Same readings as for January 9, but stronger focus on students' strategic decisions and reasoning.

SUNDAY, JANUARY 11: NO CLASS

What Should Labor's Policy Priorities Be for 2009-10?

Monday, Jan. 12: What should labor's policy agenda be now?

- Discussion of *EPI Policy Handbook*
- Depending on responses to Assignment #3, each student will be assigned one policy area to report on in class at this session. The reports will assess the value of the policy; the prospects for it being enacted; and the implications for your union and the larger labor movement if it is enacted.
- The way this is done will depend on who wins the election. If, as expected, it is a substantial Democratic sweep, with union activism key in both battleground and deep blue states, we will have a separate session focused on EFCA, as below. If not, we may spread this larger policy discussion over two sessions.

Tuesday, Jan. 13: Can EFCA be a game-changer and can we get it now?

- Discussion of Debate on EFCA from *Labor Studies Journal*
- As explained above, we may not devote the entirety of this session to EFCA, depending on who wins the election, how big, and labor's role in it.

Wednesday, Jan. 14: Shortened Wrap-Up Session

- Brief, informal individual presentations on how you intend to answer each of the questions (for now) and your reasons for answering them that way.