

URPE Newsletter

2007 URPE Summer Conference

Friday, August 10—
Monday August 13

Camp Deer Run, Pine Bush, NY

Global Migration and the Logic of Capitalism

Plenaries:

**The Changing Nature of
Labor Struggles in the United States**

**Causes and Consequences of
Transnational Migration**

David Gordon Lecture:

**Jim Stanford, Economist, Canadian Auto Workers
Union; and Columnist, *Globe & Mail***

“Radical Economics and Social Change Movements:
Strengthening the Links between Academics and
Activists”

We hope you will plan to attend and we extend an invitation to members to sign up to participate in workshop presentations so that you can share your knowledge with others.

For more information, including updated program listings, visit www.urpe.org, or contact Frances Boyes in the URPE national office, 413-577-0806 or email: urpe@labor.net. To participate in the program, contact Paddy Quick, paddyquick@aol.com.

Chicago ASSA Report

Laurie Nisonoff

URPE panels and URPErs were well represented at the Chicago ASSA meetings January 4-7, 2007. There were eighteen well-attended panels sponsored or co-sponsored by URPE on topics ranging from Lula's economic policies in Brazil and the Turkish economy, to micro foundations of Marxian economics and of heterodox macroeconomics. There were three panels co-sponsored with IAFFE on gender and development: one on measurements, one on HIV/AIDS, and one on migration. At a lively party at the conference hotel, the political economy program at the University of Notre Dame was presented with a plaque from the *RRPE* board; and Robin Hahnel and Kristen Sheeran were presented with a book by the Steering Committee, thanking them for their coordination of the ASSA sessions for the past three years. URPE shared an exhibition booth with other member groups of ICAPE.

The *RRPE* board met with our publisher from SAGE.

There were several political issues at the meetings. The steering committee held meetings with other groups to strategize about the targeted cuts in sessions for heterodox groups. However, the AEA unilaterally ended the annual breakfast meeting of all constituent ASSA groups' program chairs so there was no public forum for this issue.

There were many meetings within NEA, IAFFE and URPE and with the AEA about the censorship of diversity language in JOE ads. Many wore the maroon ribbons supporting diversity suggested by Deb Figart. The AEA executive committee is creating a new policy.

As many URPE members are also members in good standing in other heterodox groups, the Steering Committee and the new ASSA coordinators (Fred Moseley and Laurie Nisonoff) would appreciate any contacts and help in resisting cuts and in co-sponsoring panels and other events for New Orleans and subsequent meetings. Unlike other groups in the ASSA, URPE's annual business meeting takes place at our summer conference rather than at the ASSA. The Steering Committee and the ASSA coordinators will include these issues in the agenda for subsequent SC meetings and the business meeting this summer.

2006-2007 STEERING COMMITTEE**Elected members**

Cyrus Bina (04-07) Dept of Economics/Management, University of Minnesota-Morris, 600 East 4th Street, Morris, MN 56267; (320) 589-6193; <binac@mrs.umn.edu>

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Women's Caucus Representative

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Newsletter Editor: Jenny Brown, jbrown72073@cs.com

Economy Connection Coordinator Ruthie Indeck; 201-792-7459; soapbox@comcast.net

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URPE

The Union for Radical Political Economics (URPE) is a membership organization of academics and activists who share an interest in a radical analysis of political and economic topics. Founded in 1968, URPE's members use this analysis to advance various progressive political and social agendas. URPE publishes the *Review of Radical Political Economics*, runs a set of presentations at the academic professional meetings of the Allied Social Science Associations, sponsors a resource/speakers bureau called Economy Connection, and holds a Summer Conference on political and economic topics at a family-friendly summer camp. Its members are active in a wide array of professional and activist projects.

The URPE Newsletter

The **URPE Newsletter** is published quarterly by the Union for Radical Political Economics. The Newsletter is a place for URPE members to publish shorter articles and speeches as well as make announcements of upcoming events that might be of interest to members. Articles and announcements can be sent to the Newsletter Editor in the body of an e-mail message, or as an attached file; send to jbrown72073@cs.com, or by regular mail to: *Jenny Brown, 1701 NE 75th St., Gainesville, FL 32641.*

Permission to reprint material from the Newsletter is granted for non-commercial uses, provided that the Newsletter is credited as the source, and that two copies of the publication are sent to the URPE National Office. For permission to reprint for commercial purposes, contact the National Office.

The URPE Newsletter is a good place to publish advertisements for new books! Rates are \$300 per full page (7.5W x 9.3H); \$160 for a half page, and \$85 for a quarter page. Exchange ads are also considered. Please write or call the National Office for more information on this.

Deadlines for submission to Newsletter are January 7 for winter issue; April 7 for spring issue; July 1 for summer issue, and October 7 for fall issue.

Union for Radical Political Economics

Call for Papers - ASSA Annual Meeting

New Orleans, January 4-6, 2008

URPE invites proposals for individual papers and complete sessions for the URPE at the Allied Social Science Associations annual meeting. URPE welcomes proposals on radical political economic theory and applied analysis from a wide variety of theoretical traditions.

The **deadline** for proposed papers and sessions is **May 1, 2007**.

Proposals for **complete sessions** are encouraged and should include the session title, a brief description of each paper, and the names, institutional affiliations, and email addresses of the chair, discussants, and presenters. Proposals for sessions should contain four papers. If you are proposing a complete session, please arrange to have discussants for your papers and a chair for your session. As the organizer of this session, you are responsible for conveying administrative information to session members, including confirmation that the session has been accepted, the time and location, and deadlines.

Proposals for **individual papers** should include the title, the abstract, and the author's name, institutional affiliation, and email. Individuals whose papers are accepted may also be expected to serve as a discussant for a different paper at the meetings. If you list the areas you prefer to discuss, all attempts will be made to match your preferences. Individual papers that are accepted will be assigned to sessions and each session will have an assigned organizer. It is the organizer's job to convey administrative information to session members, including confirmation that the session has been accepted, the time and location, and deadlines. URPE has no paid ASSA staff, so those presenting papers must share the burden of organizing.

We regret that high quality individual papers may be

turned down due to the inability to place them in a session with papers with similar themes. For this reason, we strongly encourage proposals for full sessions. The number of sessions we can accept is limited by ASSA, and we regret that high quality sessions may be turned down as well.

Please note that the date, time, and location of sessions is assigned by ASSA, not URPE. You should receive word from URPE that your paper/session was accepted by mid-June. ASSA will not assign dates and times until much later in the summer.

Please note that anyone who presents a paper (but not the chairs or discussants) must be a member of URPE (except at joint sessions with other groups, in which case they can be a member of the other organization). Contact urpe@labornet.org or 413-577-0806 for membership information. We will confirm membership for accepted proposals.

A completed copy of the Program Registration Form (below) is required with your submission. Submissions will **NOT BE ACCEPTED BY EMAIL**. **Only applications received by the May 1 deadline will be considered.**

If you have any questions, please contact one of the URPE at ASSA coordinators:

Fred Moseley, Mount Holyoke College
fmoseley@mtholyoke.edu

Laurie Nisonoff, Hampshire College
lnisonoff@hampshire.edu

URPE AT ASSA
New Orleans, January 4-6, 2008
PROGRAM REGISTRATION FORM

Please fill out this form for each panel participant.
Mail your completed form to:
URPE at ASSA Program Committee c/o Fred Moseley, Economics Department,
Mt. Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA 01075

Name: _____

Address: _____

Email: _____

Ph: (Office) _____ (Home) _____

Summer address and phone (from _____ to _____):

Institutional Affiliation: _____

I am proposing a session/paper (circle one) entitled:

I wish to participate as a discussant. My interest area(s) are:

Are you or your co-author(s) a member of URPE? (yes/no). Please give the name of the registered URPE member:

Anyone who presents a paper (but not the chairs or discussants) must be a member of URPE (except at joint sessions with other groups, in which case they can be a member of the other organization). Please contact the URPE national office for membership information: urpe@labornet.org or 413-577-0806 and complete your membership or renewal before you submit the proposal.

Update on Economy Connection, URPE's Resource/Speakers Bureau

by Ruthie Indeck, Coordinator (201-792-7459 or soapbox@comcast.net)

Utopia in the Bronx

"Pretty dystopian!" was the response of one Lehman College student when asked what she thought of capitalism after a presentation by EC member Renee Toback on the basics of our economic system.

This discussion took place November 4 in a Lehman College English class taught by Tanya Radford. She had contacted Economy Connection to find a speaker for her seminar, "Perfect America: the Utopian Impulse in American Literature and Culture." Tanya was looking for a speaker who could give a critique of capitalism and lead a discussion of possible alternatives. The students had been reading descriptions of U.S. utopian experiments, and were in the midst of discussing Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward*, an 1888 novel about an aristocrat who is scornful of poor people and workers. He is hypnotized and wakes up in the year 2000 to a changed U.S. without hunger or poverty, and characterized by equality, nationalized industry, and good feelings among people. "This week, my students have been thinking about the core beliefs and values that will anchor their utopian government and society. Then they are writing a letter in which they describe the 'good government' that they live under in their utopian community. So the next thing is to think about how the economic system works and might work differently."

Prior to the class, Renee put together a detailed handout describing how various elements of capitalism developed historically, and how laissez-faire capitalism is supposed to work. "Economics is not about money," it began. "It is about how people organize to produce and distribute the necessities and luxuries of life. It is about who gets what and how that is decided. The economy is a system that organizes how people participate in production and receive its benefits." Intrigued by the creative combining of economics and literature, I accompanied Renee to the class.

We arrived while the students were discussing the utopian societies they had been reading about. Much of the discussion centered around fears that a future "utopia" would be regimented, that people would have to be tightly controlled to get them to put the common good before their own wishes, that they would all wear the same clothes and would no longer be able to make personal choices. The students wanted to be able to explore their own individuality, to dye their hair green if they felt like it, and to wear clothes that defied current fashions. Tanya pointed out that some kinds of choices are more important than others.

Renee gave a lively and humorous presentation that started with the historical points in her handout, but went on to include the ways in which a profit-driven economy can create problems for the general population. She noted that one of the freedoms that workers have under capitalism is "freedom" from any way of supporting themselves other than working for their boss. And our many choices do not include the "choice" not to pay our bills. Meaningful work is not always attainable under capitalism. Re-

nee made this point through an anecdote about a friend who had worked in a factory producing things that were going to be thrown away after one use. The woman felt that she was spending eight hours a day producing garbage. Renee also talked about changes that occurred when capitalism matured and large firms gained extensive market power. She described the Great Depression, the adoption of Keynesian measures to alleviate some of the effects of a malfunctioning "invisible hand," and the ending of the Depression by the demand generated by World War II.

The students agreed that capitalism can cause hardships, although one student said, "I want to get rich and capitalism is the best way to do that!"

Political Economy of the U.S. Health Care System

On November 16, the St. Francis Economics Society hosted Jerry Joffe, who teaches in the Health Care Administration Program of St. John's University. Jerry gave a thorough description of the U.S. health care system and its many problems. He focused on its structure, and the processes that tie the various parts together. Highly imperfect markets mediate the interactions of large employers, managed care insurance companies, health care providers, pharmaceutical manufacturers, and a government insurance sector that is becoming increasingly privatized. Jerry described how this system, which absorbs an enormous amount of resources and generates much new technology, also creates millions of uninsured and underinsured people whose access to care is very limited.

Jerry then proceeded to discuss the limits to disease prevention in a capitalist environment. Production processes are largely unregulated and often create diseases. Unhealthy consumption patterns disproportionately affect the working class and millions of poor people. In spite of the largest per capita health care expenditures among the advanced industrial countries, the U.S. recently ranked 35th in infant mortality, and also ranked low in disability-adjusted life expectancy.

Paddy Quick, who teaches at St. Francis and attended Jerry's talk, noted that most students were struck by how badly the US compares with other countries in infant mortality rates and other measures of health care outcomes. She reports that one student said, "This really helped me get a handle on how the health care system works in the US—he was terrific!" Paddy agreed.

Capitalism, Consumerism, and Garbage

Marc's Place Coffeehouse is located in "the Cave"—the basement of a church in Highland Park, NJ. On one Friday a month, people gather there to hear music and poetry, listen to a speaker or two on a timely political topic, and engage in a free-ranging discussion for an hour or so. December seemed to be the right season for a discussion of consumerism. The environmentally-conscious activists on the coffeehouse organizing committee had been engaged in an internal debate about tactics—whether activities like Buy

Nothing Day, simple living, etc. are politically effective or merely distractions, "lifestyle," and antipolitical. So they contacted Economy Connection!

After hearing anti-consumerist parodies sung by the NJ Industrial Union Council's Solidarity Singers, and poetry by David Sklar, I diverged from my usual URPE activities and talked about the importance of consumption and growth to capitalism. I wasn't sure I was the right person for the job, having been spotted in the malls of New Jersey on occasion, but couldn't resist the chance to share my *Wall St. Journal* clippings. Later Heather Rogers talked about how the amount of garbage we create is augmented by capitalist methods of production and sales promotion, and how this garbage is destroying the environment. Heather produced a film, and later a book, called *Gone Tomorrow: The Hidden Life of Garbage*.

In an attempt to assess the likelihood of being able to produce less junk under capitalism, I described capitalism as an interconnected system that is constantly in motion, that moves at a rapid pace, that makes it hard for individual companies to break out of the profit-seeking mold without being taken over, and that needs to keep growing. I brought along a Monopoly game to show how inequality develops and how the "losers" (like people living in New Orleans, Harlem or Africa) are dropped from the game. The Monopoly rule book exhorts players to "Vie to own it all and bankrupt your opponents to win!"

I also brought a handout with statistics on inequality of wealth and income, debt, and corporate concentration and size, as well as excerpts from radical economics textbooks about the need for growth. And a big pile of *Wall St. Journal* articles on profits, inequality, corporate power, financial speculation, and corporate takeovers.

Heather Rogers then spoke about garbage, capturing the audience's attention with graphic statistics about the amount of garbage we are producing and its effect on the environment. For example, each person in the U.S. throws away four and a half pounds of garbage a day, and the amount has doubled over the last generation. "The middle of the Pacific Ocean is now six times more abundant with plastic waste than with zooplankton." And industrial waste dwarfs household waste. The huge amount of garbage we are creating is depleting our resources, infecting our air and water, and contributing to global warming.

Heather placed the blame for the tremendous increase in waste squarely on an economic system that needs to keep producing more and more goods for profit, and her historical explanations were illuminating.

She explained the advent of planned obsolescence in the late 1950s, whereby manufacturers faced with a threat of overproduction (because by then most consumers had already bought a car, a house, and all the appliances they needed) decided to produce goods to wear out faster than they needed to. She told the story of a plastics industry conference in the late-1950s where a speaker announced to the polymer makers in the room, "Your future is in the garbage wagon!" Heather also talked about how the public had to be educated to accept and practice disposability, it wasn't just something that came naturally. She described an advertisement for one of the first mass marketed disposable glass bottles that looked more like a list of instructions telling the consumer to drink the beverage and to not save the bottle, but instead throw it in the trash can. Perhaps the most encouraging part of her talk concerned the history of recycling in the U.S. In earlier times, before World War II, it was common to compost, reuse bottles, feed garbage to hogs, and scavenge for items that could be used again. We had to be taught NOT to recycle!

Calls for Resources

Two students in Morgan State University's MSW program

Continued on back cover ...

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URPE Membership

There are two types of membership in the Union for Radical Political Economics:

Full Membership with RRPE journal and Newsletter subscription

Limited Membership with Newsletter subscription only.

Both types of membership carry equal voting rights in URPE. (To participate in the URPE sessions at the Allied Social Science Associations meetings, you must be a member of URPE.)

Circle option chosen, and make checks payable to URPE.

Full Membership (includes one-year subscription to the *Review of Radical Political Economics* and the quarterly URPE Newsletter. Please note that RRPE subscriptions are entered on a calendar year basis.)

Low-income/student \$30

All other individuals \$55

Send **Full Membership** dues to:

Hazel Dayton Gunn
Dept. of City and Regional Planning
106 W. Sibley Hall
Cornell University
Ithaca NY 14853

Limited Membership (Includes subscription to the quarterly URPE Newsletter)

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Address: _____

Institutional Affiliation: _____

E-mail: _____

Phone: _____

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Economy Connection, continued from page 6 ...

contacted EC for sources of information for a social policy class project on the history of welfare reform and welfare's current incarnation, TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families). Their class was divided into three sections, presenting radical, liberal and conservative views of how TANF should be changed. These students were preparing a paper and class presentation from the radical point of view, and devising policy recommendations that could conceivably be presented to a legislative body. EC provided the students with a list of URPE members specializing in welfare, and also forwarded a number of articles and papers. The students reported that they had found conversations with Avis Jones-DeWeever and Dawn Saunders very helpful. They also appreciated papers by Heather Boushey and Avis, and links sent by Randy Albelda. In their final report the students recommended that TANF's current time limits be totally removed, that resources and jobs be made available to recipients, and that recipients be allowed to go to college so that they would be able to become independent. The students also felt that TANF should ultimately be replaced with a better system.

A Green Party member in Upstate NY sent EC a copy of a proposed "right to farm" ordinance, wanting to know our opinion. The bill was presented as a measure to preserve local agriculture, although some Greens suspected it was really meant to protect giant agribusiness against any attempts at local control of their practices. Fred Magdoff, who is a Professor of Soils at the University of Vermont and has written extensively on political and economic issues surrounding agriculture, gave suggestions on how to change the wording of the bill to protect residents against abuse by agribusiness.

**Visit the URPE Website at
www.urpe.org**
