

About This Issue

One doesn't have to possess an advanced degree in economics to see that there is something definitively out of alignment when it comes to job creation in the United States. Multinational corporations with no national, much less local, allegiances are given billions of dollars in tax subsidies in a shell game, which moves an ever-shrinking number of manufacturing jobs from city to suburbs, and state to state. Big box retail stores are destroying locally-owned small businesses in shopping districts across the country, and the largest employment growth is taking place in low-paying service sector jobs. Real wages are stagnant and fundamentals, such as overtime pay, health insurance, retirement benefits, job security, even regular paid vacation, are swirling away at hurricane speeds.

In this issue, Greg le Roy, Anmol Chaddha, Manning Marable, and Barbara Ehrenreich contribute compelling portraits of the economic crisis at hand, detailing the scope of corporate subsidies and the breadth of economic dislocation. Steven Pitts provides a succinct overview of neo-liberalism and the advance of privatization as a path to profit for corporate owners—at the expense of the rest of the population.

Manel Kappagoda takes a look at the health dimension of the question and discovers that unemployed people live fewer years and have higher rates of cardiovascular disease, hypertension, depression, and suicide than the employed. So just what will it take to win quality jobs for the communities we are committed to? Our contributors come back with an age old solution: Organize, organize, organize. But in the global economic system in which we now live, figuring out effective targets, successful coalitions, and winnable campaigns is more challenging than ever. To start looking for solutions, we look at notable strategies from the past and present. Howard Zinn reviews the history of the Flint sit-down strikes, Terry Messman considers mass civil disobedience, and David Bacon looks at immigrant labor, the most inspiring new movement in decades.

Immigration “reform” proposals that would create a new class of guest workers with even less rights than undocumented people currently inside the United States are a malevolent manipulation of the desire to protect United States-based jobs. Gerald Lenoir and Stephen Lerner unmask the lie that immigrants are stealing United States workers jobs. It's unregulated capital—United States-based and multinational—that is depriving workers on both sides of the border of the ability to do work that benefits our communities and our environment.

Further, the very conditions which activists have denounced overseas, prison labor and coerced reproductive choices, are again rearing their ugly heads in the United States as welfare-to-work and prison labor policies become ever more stark. Jaron Browne describes the history of United States slave labor; Gopal Dayaneni and Aaron Shuman examine prison recycling industries; and Linda Burnham and Bill Berkowitz write about the impacts on women—10 years after the so-called welfare “reforms” of 1996. The low-wage low-benefit economy is indeed booming.

But of course, organizing efforts to turn bad jobs into well paid work with benefits are underway in many sectors, from domestic labor to healthcare. We present six organizing profiles that show how worker centers, unions, and community labor coalitions are opening new avenues for worker solidarity to challenge the power of unregulated capital. And we offer portraits of a half-dozen local efforts that demonstrate how to create good jobs for low-income communities of color, showing that the solutions to complex economic problems can be found right in our own communities.

Paradoxically, organizing for increased localization requires us to act in solidarity with our counterparts throughout the world. The impact of capital flight must be confronted at both ends of the transaction. Until we have won an international living wage and the right to organize freely for worker rights and union representation, capital will continue to press for the low-road option in economic development. But history has shown that courageous unified action by dedicated activists can have a transformational effect that far exceeds our numbers. Clearly, the time for that action is now.



Ben Jesse Clarke

Editor

Race, Poverty & the Environment

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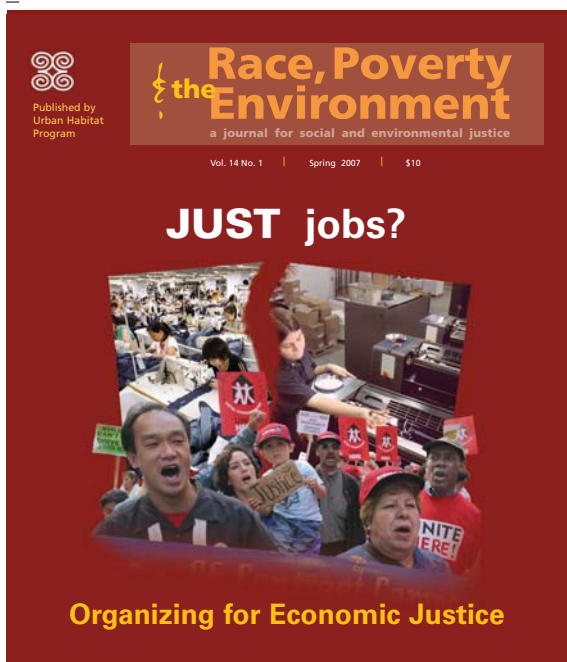
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