

Marquette University
e-Publications@Marquette

Social and Cultural Sciences Faculty Research and
Publications

Social and Cultural Sciences, Department of

4-1-2008

Union Membership Trends: 2007

Michael A. McCarthy

Marquette University, michael.mccarthy@marquette.edu

Published version. In *Critical Solidarity*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (April 2008): 6-7. [Publisher Link](#). © 2008
American Sociological Association Section on Labor and Labor Movements. Used with permission.
Michael A. McCarthy was affiliated with New York University at the time of publication.

Having insurance is not the same thing as receiving care. Nothing proposed by the top-tier candidates of either party would end the thousands of horror stories of insurance companies denying needed care, access to specialists or diagnostic tests, even when recommended by a doctor.

Nothing in any of their plans, other than a vague reliance on the magic of the same market that created the present crisis, would hamper insurers from charging what they want - and pushing more families into bankruptcy from medical debt - or forcing them to self-ration care because of the cost.

As premiums have ballooned by 87 percent in the past decade, insurance-industry profits have climbed from \$20.8 billion in 2002 to \$57.5 billion in 2006. During that same period, health-care interests spent \$2.2 billion on federal lobbying, more than did any other sector, and as of last month, had flooded the presidential candidates with over \$11 million in campaign contributions to keep the present system intact.

There's one alternative that would guarantee coverage for everyone, protect choice of doctor, promote cost savings by slashing administrative waste, and get the insurance companies out of the way. It's called single-payer reform, as in an expanded and improved Medicare for all. The candidates should demonstrate the courage to talk about this one real reform.

Rose Ann DeMoro is executive director of the California Nurses Association/National Nurses Organizing Committee and a national AFL-CIO vice president. This article originally appeared in The Providence Journal (Rhode Island) on Tuesday, January 15, 2008. It can be accessed at <http://www.projo.com/opinion>.

Data Report

Union Membership Trends: 2007

Michael A. McCarthy
New York University

According to a recent Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) report, the number of workers belonging to a union in the U.S. rose by 311,000 to 15.7 million in 2007. In terms of overall union density, this represents an increase to 12.1 percent from 12 percent in 2006. While this may seem like a drop in the bucket, this is actually the largest single-year increase since 1979, when union density was about 27 percent. Since then, the union membership rate has declined steadily, so this at least appears to be a shift in the right direction. Below are the highlights from the BLS report.

The union membership rate for the public sector was 35.9 percent, nearly five times that of private sector workers (7.5 percent). In the public sector, local government workers had the highest membership rate, 41.8 percent. Educational workers had the highest unionization rates among all public-sector employees, 37.2 percent. In the private sector, industries with higher density rates included transportation and utilities (22.1), telecommunications (19.7), and construction (13.9). Some notably low unionization rates were sales and related occupations (3.7 percent) and food preparation and serving (4.9).

In terms of gender and racial demographics, the union membership rate was highest for black men (15.8 percent) and lowest for Latinas (9.6). Overall, the rate was higher for men (13 percent) than for women (11.1). However, this gap has narrowed considerably since 1983, when the rate for men was approximately 10 percentage points higher than women's. Furthermore, black workers were more likely to be union members (14.3

percent) than were whites (11.8), Asians (10.9), or Latinos (9.8).

In terms of union membership by state, 30 states and the District of Columbia had rates that fell below the U.S. average (12.1 percent), while 20 states had higher rates. Many Southern states, predictably, reported the lowest rates: North Carolina (3 percent), Virginia (3.7), South Carolina (4.1), Georgia (4.4), and Texas (4.7). Conversely, four states reported rates above 20 percent: New York (25.2 percent), Alaska (23.8), Hawaii (23.4), and Washington (20.2). The largest number of union members live in California (2.5 million) and New York (2.1).

Finally, union members earned higher weekly earnings than their non-unionized counterparts--\$863 versus \$663 on average.

The BLS report is available online at <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/union2.nr0.htm>.

Book Reviews

U.S. Labor in Trouble and Transition: A Review

Steven Sherman

Kim Moody, U.S. Labor in Trouble and Transition: The Failure of Reform from Above, The Promise of Revival from Below (London: Verso, 2007). 320 pages. \$29.95 paper.

Is there anyone with a deeper knowledge of the contemporary American labor movement than Kim Moody? He not only seems familiar with the strategies and outcomes of practically every strike and organizing drive of the last twenty years, he also appears to know the status of each union local, large and small, as well as every workers' center. If he says that a national union is largely bureaucratized and timid, he is also quick to mention the two or three locals that are exceptions to the rule.

Moody draws on this vast knowledge in his new book, *U.S. Labor in Trouble and Transition: The Failure of Reform from Above, the Promise of Rebellion from Below*. The text focuses on the course of working-class struggle over the last twenty-five years in the U.S., not exactly an inspiring time filled with bold movements and major victories. Nevertheless, the picture is not altogether without hope or bright spots. The book should be crucial reading for those concerned with rebuilding the Left, because a powerful union movement is important to such an effort. Precisely how important is a matter of some debate, which I will touch on below.

Moody begins by outlining changes to the U.S. economy in the last couple of decades. His take on this question is different than most on the Left. Although there has been a shift to more employment in services, industry has not left the U.S., for the most part. Rather, the industrial union bastions of the Midwest have been weakened mainly by two trends internal to the U.S.: corporations have employed technology to reduce the size of the industrial workforce, without necessarily reducing its output, and corporations have often moved industry to anti-union regions of the U.S., most notably the South. At one point he writes that unions complain of jobs moving overseas when in fact they have moved down the interstate. He does not altogether discount that some jobs have moved overseas, of course. But he also notes, as is often absent from these discussions in the U.S., that the process cuts the other way as well. Many foreign car companies have opened plants in the U.S., mostly in the South. Also significant has been the trend towards corporate mergers and acquisitions. This shifted over time from simple financial grabs to strategic purchases of competitors, in the process often weakening unions. For example, unionized UPS purchased non-union Overnite (which became UPS Freight).

Moody doggedly emphasizes the centrality of certain "traditional" industrial workforces in the U.S., in, for example, meatpacking, auto, and transportation. I don't think the words "dot com"