

# Long Island Chapter

Labor and Employment Relations Association

*Newsletter*

## SHAPING THE WORKPLACE OF THE FUTURE



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### PRESIDENT'S PERSPECTIVE:

The labor relations community is in the midst of a challenging period. Long Island LERA is a chapter of the national organization that is exploring the options to deal with these challenges. One solution is to create a Labor Relations Specialist certification program. The plan would address the growing need of employers and unions for professionals who are truly competent in the areas of negotiations, dispute resolution, compensation and benefits administration and a variety of related subjects. The national organization also provides a forum for those who wish to publish and present papers. My report on the national conference will be available at the LI LERA annual conference on May 8, 2009 at the de Seversky Center, at New York Institute of Technology.



The conference theme is: *Shaping the Workplace of the Future*. The keynote speaker is, Jerome Lefkowitz, Chairperson of New York State PERB. Committee co-chairs, Amanda Barker and Richard Roth, and their committee planned an exceptional day with panels to discuss The Employee Free Choice Act and The Future of Labor in America, and The Proposed Property Tax Cap in NYS: How Would It Affect Collective Bargaining for Public Sector Unions. Featured panelists are: Alan B. Lubin, Executive VP of NYSUT, Assemblyman Michael Fitzpatrick of the 7<sup>th</sup> District, John Diviney of Portnoy, Messinger, Pearl and Assoc. and Max Zimny, former General Counsel of UNITE. For additional information please call 516-621-7793.

This year our chapter celebrates its 30th anniversary. Ex-president Peter Bee has agreed to chair the

committee that will plan the celebration. His committee consists of several other past presidents including Hezekiah Brown, Tom Lilly, Jr., and Ellen Schuler-Mauk. Tony Giustino will also serve.

Tom Lilly, Jr. introduced CLE credits, increased student participation and membership and several other initiatives for our chapter. I will strive to do the same as well as keep a steady hand on the rudder of this organization. It is the dedication of our executive board and individual members who understand the importance of promoting full discussion and exchange of ideas, networking, research and the sharing of best practices at our quarterly meetings. Our programs are educational and entertaining.

Don't forget, this is your newsletter. You may list your job openings, announcements, promotions, wage settlements, client acquisitions and other announcements of special interest. Email them to the editor, Jerry Grayson ([jerryarb@optonline.net](mailto:jerryarb@optonline.net)).

### FRIDAY, MAY 8, 2009 LERA SPRING CONFERENCE NY INST OF TECHNOLOGY

- 8:30-9:00 Registration and Continental Breakfast
- 9:00-9:15 Welcoming remarks
- 9:15-9:30 Presentation of scholarships
- 9:30-10:30 Panel: The Employee Free Choice Act
- 10:30-11:00 Coffee Break
- 11:00-12:00 Panel: The Pros and Cons of a Property Tax Cap
- 12:00-12:30 Keynote Speaker: Jerome Lefkowitz
- 12:30-2:00 Buffet Lunch presented by the Culinary School of NYIT

**UPCOMING CHAPTER  
MEETINGS  
JUNE 10 -- NASSAU  
SEPT 16 -- SUFFOLK**

Some of those who attended our last meeting on March 11 at the Black Forest Brew Haus in Farmingdale.

President Beverly Harrison with ANOTHER STAR award that the chapter received at the national LERA meeting in January in San Francisco.



## BOOK REVIEW

Steven Greenhouse, *The Big Squeeze*  
by Michael J. Anzelone, Nassau Community College,  
English Department, NCC Federation of Teachers

Published by Knopf in 2008, Greenhouse's *The Big Squeeze* captures the spirit of the current social, economic, political and ideological moment in the United States today. The book's subtitle, *Tough Times for the American Worker*, could not be more prescient. Tough times indeed! Not since FDR and the New Deal of the 1930s has America been in such dire straits.

In one of his opening epigraphs Greenhouse quotes FDR in his Second Inaugural Address in 1937 when FDR said, "The test of our progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who have much; it is whether we provide enough for those who have too little." In the sixteen chapters that follow, Greenhouse speaks for those who have too little. As I read his book, I anticipated his Dickensian descriptions (chapter 4 is entitled "Downright Dickensian"). How sad I was to read his vivid descriptions of the overworked and underpaid; moreover, his argument is so well-documented, forceful and accurate that readers come to accept this Dickensian imagery without hesitation. As the labor correspondent for *The New York Times* for many years, Greenhouse speaks with authority and conviction. He is genuinely saddened by those in this country who "labor in dismal swamps" ("Introduction," xi). His basic thesis, that there has been a broad decline in the status and treatment of the American worker in the last thirty years, seems indisputable.

New to this evident decline would be the inclusion of white collar workers and the decline in the middle class. He vehemently argues that the American workforce is now "on a lower plane than in decades past, with health coverage, pension benefits, job security, workloads, stress levels, and often wages growing worse for millions of workers." Most troubling is the notion that while the workforce has been in decline, "corporate profits have been soaring." In his opening chapter, Greenhouse uses facts and statistics to bolster his case for worker decline and corporate greed. He documents the wage stagnation of workers, the subprime mortgage crisis, health insurance problems, etc. It all adds up to people working longer hours, second jobs or more overtime to compensate for the corporate squeeze on American workers. He sums up his findings with the amazing revelation that the United States in its income inequality "resembles the inequality of a third world country."

Greenhouse documents workers locked up in a Walmart store in Panama City, Florida, where they witnessed rats "as big as dogs" during their night shift work. They were also threatened that they would be fired if they left the building during their night shift, and management, taking no chances, locked them in the store. The lesson from the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire of March 25, 1911 seems to be lost on corporate America even today!

In chapter five, "The Rise and Fall of the Social Contract," Greenhouse points to FDR and the New Deal legislation that helped put America back to work. In an ironic twist, given the big three automakers' economic decline today, he quotes Charles E. Wilson, then president of GM, who said, "What was good for our country was good for GM and vice versa." Today, the big three automakers need to make serious adjustments to their

current business practices. So, what has been good for the big three automakers lately has not been good for the country. Also in this same chapter another ironic note is struck with the reference to a book by Peters and Waterman entitled *In Search of Excellence* (1982). The authors state that "You must treat your workers as your most important asset." Those of us who are pro-labor could not agree more. American workers today seem to have to fight even harder now for the right to be treated with dignity and respect in the workplace. Perhaps we should listen to Peters and Waterman when they tell us, "We see...full employment policies in time of recession .... Caring runs in the veins of the managers of these institutions" so that workers remain loyal to the firm.

One major problem for today's American workers concerns the shift from "allegiance to the worker" to the "allegiance to the shareholder." This phenomenon is known as investor capitalism. This shift in attitude can be summed up in one comment by Charles Smith, a Kodak spokesman who said, "You cannot ignore important constituencies like shareholders." The American worker becomes just another disposable part in this paradigm. Judd Everhart, a Xerox spokesman, said, "It is the new reality." And part of this new reality includes UAW's president, Ron Gettelfinger, arguing that we are "... dismantling America's middle class by importing third world wages to the United States." This sea change results in "a generation of more demanding, more unforgiving and, too often, more cold-hearted managers." The list of American companies that live up to having cold-hearted managers includes but is not limited to: Walmart, Federal Express, Taco Bell, and HP. Greenhouse has a solution: he suggests that Sam Walmart's heirs take some of their combined \$80 billion—the world's richest family—and donate some of it to improve health care for Walmart's poor."

In the second half of Greenhouse's book, he offers suggestions for improving the sorry state of corporate America's workplaces: he proposes that companies take the high road. A skeptical reader might ask: what motivation do companies have for taking the high road? By way of example, he details Costco's business practices. They offer some of the best wages and good benefit plans for their workers. While this may seem to fly in the face of corporate America's cost-cutting measures, Greenhouse cogently argues that a good employer leads to good employees and lower turnover which, in turn, saves the company money. It also leads to "a dedicated and productive workforce." In chapter nine, "Taking the High Road," he argues for such simple work practices as office Christmas parties and care for workers' children. In turn, companies feel more like a big family which produces better results in the end. Furthermore, employee turnover is lower in these union jobs.

What does the future hold for American workers? We are offered an answer in chapter fourteen with its title – "Starting Out Means a Steeper Climb." For the next generation (or generation X) they are faced with

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“entry-level wages and benefits that have languished while housing costs and college tuitions have risen.” One expert has said, “The next generation is starting their economic race fifty yards behind the starting line.” One book title that tells their story is entitled *Generation Debt* (2006).

In the final two chapters, “The Not-So-Golden Years” and “Lifting All Boats” Greenhouse offers his perspective on the problems facing aging American workers and solutions to these same troubles. One dire prediction by retirement specialist professor Theresa Ghilarducci holds that “We are now shifting from lifetime pensions to lifetime work. It’s the end of retirement.” In his last chapter, Greenhouse pushes for a return to a national conversation about the American worker. How refreshing it must be for all Americans now to know that President Obama has been able to return the American worker to the forefront of national debate in his presidential campaign! Perhaps Mr. Greenhouse has already had his wish fulfilled with the election of Senator Obama to President Obama. One telling signal that President Obama has already anticipated much of Greenhouse’s call to action is his investment in a greener America and a promise of a careful new scrutiny of America’s health care system among some of his new administration’s new initiatives. Finally, President Obama has also called for a reinvestment in America’s future by providing more funding and better direction for education. With this new American administration now in office, it is almost as if the Obama administration has already read, absorbed and implemented much of Greenhouse’s suggestions for a better, stronger and more productive American workforce.

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### THE PEGGY BROWNING FUND

by Joseph A. Harris

Each year, the Peggy Browning Fund supports summer fellowships for law students, providing the NLRB, unions, labor rights organizations, and workers centers with eager young talent. Since its founding in 1997, the Fund has helped more than 270 law students; in 2009 it expects to place at least 45 law

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### ANNOUNCEMENTS, NOTICES

If you have an announcement or job posting that you would like to have published, send it for consideration to our editor at:

[jerryarb@optonline.net](mailto:jerryarb@optonline.net)

students. Participating law schools number more than one hundred. The Fund’s mission is to educate law students about the rights and needs of workers.

Additionally, the Peggy Browning Fund sponsors an annual National Law Students’ Workers’ Rights Conference. The next one will be held in October 2009, in Silver Springs, MD.

The Fund held its annual fundraising dinner on January 28, 2009 at the Yale Club in NYC. More than 250 people attended. Honorees Gwynne A. Wilcox, Esq. and Christopher Shelton received enthusiastic applause as did those who introduced them: Daniel Silverman, Esq., Mark Gaston Pearce, Esq., Edward F. Ott, and Steven P. Weissman, Esq. Fund President Joseph Lurie chaired the event.

Ms. Wilcox is a partner at union-side law firm Levy Ratner, P.C. She is the Associate General Counsel of 1199 SEIU United Healthcare Workers East and also represents the Utility Workers Union Local 1-2. Ms. Wilcox is a member of the Board of Governors of the College of Labor and Employment Lawyers and has served as Associate Editor and Chapter Editor of *Developing Labor Law* (American Bar Association). Importantly, Ms. Wilcox helped to establish and continues to be a leading force in the Minority Caucus of the Lawyers’ Coordinating Committee of the AFL-CIO. Her accomplishments also include a term as president of the NYC chapter of LERA.

Mr. Shelton is the Vice President of the CWA District One, the largest district of the Communications Workers of America. District One has 180,000 members in more than 300 CWA locals from New Jersey to Canada. Mr. Shelton is also a member of the regional Operating Committee of the United Way of America, the Board of Directors of the Appliance for Employee Growth, the Executive Council of the NYS AFL-CIO, and a Vice-President of the NYC Central Labor Council. A political

**The Long Island LERA Newsletter** is a quarterly publication of the Long Island Chapter of the Labor and Employment Relations Association.

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