



A dozen years ago, my book *The Working Class Majority* was published. In preparing the second edition, I am struck by two apparently contradictory realities. In one way, the world is a very different place compared with 1999, when I wrote the original book. In another way, the same forces are at work in shaping the underlying class dynamics that have given rise to the changing conditions we see. Detailing this combination of change and continuity was the basic task involved in creating the second edition. Here I will begin with a brief review of the most important changes and come later to the continuities, and implications for working people and working class studies.

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Compare 2011 with 1999. Then, the Glass-Steagall Act – passed in 1933 to prohibit commercial banks and investment banks from merging their activities, and so prohibit the sorts of financial manipulations that led to the Great Depression – had just been repealed with promises of a bright future in the midst of widespread U.S. prosperity and annual federal budget surpluses in the hundreds of billions of dollars. The Internet was relatively new, with no Google, let alone social media. The Euro hadn't yet replaced the French franc, the German mark, the Greek drachma, and other European currencies. September 11 hadn't happened, there was no war on terror, no wars in Iraq or Afghanistan, no Department of Homeland Security. China was only on the horizon as an economic challenge to the United States. There was no G20. The AFL-CIO

The values discussion in Chapter 5 is largely unchanged. But in response to some who asked for more concreteness, I have introduced into Chapter 6 what I call social “norms” that follow from working class values of mutual aid and mutual responsibility. These norms are bridges between abstract values and specific policy proposals.

“A society that gave priority to the values and interests of working people would assert the central importance of a job for all who want one. It would share the wealth created by labor with those who do the work, by providing its people with the resources they need for adequate food, shelter, health care, and education, either through wages paid or available social programs. It would provide dignity at work, and in retirement. It would protect the right of working people to unions and collective bargaining, and guarantee a democratic political process not dominated by the corrupting influences of corporate money. It would defend itself without dominating other countries and peoples.”

On the international front (Chapter 7), the basic point remains the same: there is no fundamental difference between the domestic and international economy, no clear dividing line between the “domestic economy here” and “globalization out there.” The revised chapter treats more fully the driving forces underlying immigration, in parallel with the new discussion of immigrants in Chapter 4, and updates some data, but otherwise remains much the same.

Imagination

Since the first edition appeared, the condition and near-term prospects of working people have deteriorated. Nothing guarantees a happy ending to this trajectory. Now as before, reversing these conditions will require the assertion of working class interests and power in every aspect of society – economy, politics, and culture.

The Powell Memo and other documents of the 1970s lay the foundation of a long-term, deliberate, strategic assault on working people for the explicit benefit of corporate interests. That agenda is still playing out. UAW president Doug Fraser resigned from a joint labor-management committee in 1978 with explicit recognition of the “one-sided class war” then already clearly underway which made “co-operation” an empty exercise. Yet the working class still has nothing of its own to match the Powell agenda – no strategic conception, no leadership engaged in developing one, no organizational vehicles committed to its formulation, elaboration, and implementation. Yet without a clear class-based strategy for the assertion of working class values, interests and power, the circumstances for working people are sure to deteriorate still further.

One part of the overall project needs to be a change in the frame for public discussion of the economic and social problems facing the U.S. today. Rather than continuing with the familiar distinctions between liberal and conservative, Republican and Democrat, red

and blue, native and immigrant, it will be important to popularize the frame of one-sided class war, following Doug Fraser’s lead from 1978. Deep political realignment, of the sort we now need to advance working class values and interests, requires new ways of understanding the issues and forces involved. We need a frame that restores working people to active instruments of social change, within a political process and economic institutions that enlarge their personal freedom and organizational capacity.

The field of working class studies has a clear and important role to play in promoting the intellectual and artistic work required to create this new frame and reverse the set of circumstances working people now face. The Working Class Studies Association is not a political party, but the people in it have an orientation that seeks to understand the world from the point of view of working people.

In preparing the second edition of *The Working Class Majority*, it became clear to me that its contents are subject to continual revision, as the world around us constantly changes, and as our understanding of the many complex aspects of class develops. As we describe and explore these continuous changes, we can also deepen our understanding of the underlying, largely unchanging, class structures that drive so much of our lived experience. I hope that discussions and debates about the many issues involved will help generate a rich, grounded and rigorous literature. I hope that faculty using the book in classes will ask their students to update one or another aspect of it as part of their course work. We should encourage a learning process that engages our students with primary sources and expands the numbers of people who are actively engaged with the material, updating and revising the text as it will appear in frozen form as a book.

I hope that the Website for the book on the site of Center for Study of Working Class Life will become a place where revisions and updates can find an outlet. And, more broadly, I hope that the Working Class Studies Association can develop publications that contain and stimulate the serious intellectual and artistic work still needed to carry us into a better future.

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