



LABOR on the *Bimah*

*A Special Resource for Synagogues
as part of the National Labor in the Pulpits Program*

This Labor Day weekend, many in your congregation will be enjoying one last hoorah in the sun, and planning for family gatherings around the High Holidays. Many will be reviewing their actions of the past year. But how many will take note of Labor Day, and what the holiday means?

In recent years, through the “Labor in the Pulpits” project of the National Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice (NICWJ), countless thousands of members of congregations around the country have listened to clergy, union leaders and activists speak about workers’ issues during Labor Day weekend worship services. In the Washington, D.C. metro area alone, where a group called Jews United for Justice (JUFJ) introduced the program to the local Jewish community, 19 synagogues—Conservative, Orthodox, Reform and Reconstructionist—have taken part in Labor in the Pulpits. This year, through the efforts of the National Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice (NICWJ), Jews United for Justice (JUFJ), and the Jewish Fund for Justice (JFJ), “Labor on the Bimah” is being launched as a national program for synagogues.

We are deeply encouraged for the long-term success of this program by the fact (perhaps it’s *basherte?*) that every third year or so, Labor Day weekend falls on Shabbat Ki Tetze, when we read the commandments, “You shall not abuse a needy and destitute laborer, whether a fellow countryman or a stranger in one of the communities of your land” and “You must give him his wage on the day it is due, and not let the sun set with him waiting for it” (Deut. 24:14-15). This year, on the Shabbat of Labor Day weekend, 2000/5760, we read in Parshat Shofetim the reminder—particularly salient in the context of this secular holiday—that we are meant to always, actively, pursue justice.

Whatever the year, Labor Day weekend provides a unique opportunity for the Jewish community and the labor movement to rediscover their common bonds: social justice, equality, the dignity and respect of all persons, economic justice, and fair treatment in the workplace. In this booklet, you will find essays from esteemed rabbis from all the major denominations and from a prominent labor leader; tips on how to get your congregation involved; ideas for Divrei Torah for the Labor Day weekends between this year and 2005/5765; and names and phone numbers of organizations that can help you in your planning.

We hope you will find this resource useful this Labor Day, throughout the year, and in years to come!

Toward a meaningful Labor Day and Shabbat,

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As this booklet contains the name of God, please treat it respectfully and dispose of it in an appropriate manner.

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The Jewish Fund for Justice (JFJ) is a national, publicly-supported foundation that acts on the historic commitment of the Jewish people to seek and uphold social and economic justice. JFJ provides a vehicle through which Jews can express their commitment to the cherished values of *tzedakah* and *tikkun olam*. JFJ's grant-making supports grassroots community organizations that work directly with low-income people to combat the causes and consequences of poverty in their communities, as well as Jewish groups that address social and economic justice issues in their cities. This year JFJ awarded over \$1.3 million to community-based groups working to conduct living wage campaigns, advocate for job training, create job linkage programs, improve conditions in the work place, promote community economic development, and more. JFJ also educates and involves American Jews in the fight against poverty through educational materials and programs, curricula for religious schools and Jewish day schools, and by building partnerships between synagogues and local community organizations. For more information, contact the Jewish Fund for Justice, 260 Fifth Avenue, Suite 701, New York, NY 10001, (212) 213-2113, fax: (212) 213-2233, www.jfjustice.org.

JEWS UNITED FOR JUSTICE

Jews United for Justice (JUFJ) seeks to educate and mobilize Jews in the Washington, DC area on issues of social and economic justice. Working in partnership with area organizations, JUFJ helps build a community in which Jews can explore and strengthen their commitment to both Judaism and activism. JUFJ set the national standard for synagogue involvement in the "Labor in the Pulpits" Program when they involved 19 local synagogues in 1998 and 1999; organized a "Rabbinic Forum on the Living Wage" that brought more than 200 members of the Jewish community together to place Jewish ethics, text and tradition in the heart of the living wage debate in Montgomery County, MD; became the first Jewish organization to join the Washington Interfaith Network's efforts to improve education, housing, job opportunities and working conditions for the residents of Washington, DC; and worked closely with residents and local environmentalists to defeat a proposal to build a privately-operated prison in Southeast DC. For more information, contact Jews United for Justice, P.O. Box 53317, Washington, DC 20009, (202) 939-0115, fax: (202) 939-0116, jufj@earthlink.net.



The National Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice is a network of people of faith and 56 local interfaith groups that mobilize U.S. religious support for issues and campaigns to improve wages, benefits and working conditions for workers, especially low-wage workers. As a means for strengthening ties with unions and raising worker justice issues, the National Interfaith Committee began a national "Labor in the Pulpits" program that is jointly run with the AFL-CIO. Over 60 cities had organized programs in 1999. This Labor on the Bimah initiative is designed to strengthen outreach and ties with Jewish congregations. For more information, contact NICWJ, 1020 West Bryn Mawr, Chicago, IL 60660, (773) 728-8400, fax: (773) 728-8409, www.nationalinterfaith.org.

Labor on the Bimah

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Getting your Congregation Involved:

There are many ways to involve your congregation in worker justice issues—around Labor Day or at other times. A few suggestions are:

- **Focus your D'var Torah on labor issues** (see Parshiot, p. 4).
- **Invite a member of your congregation**—who has been involved in the labor movement past or present—to speak from the bimah.
- **Invite a speaker from outside your congregation**—a worker struggling to get by; a labor organizer; an economist or other labor expert—by calling your local AFL-CIO labor council, Jobs with Justice chapter, Interfaith Committee, Jewish Labor Committee or Worker's Support Committee (see Resources, p. 14).
- **Host a special Labor Day weekend Havdalah service** at your congregation, or offer the enclosed materials to members so they can devote their Havdalah services at home to labor issues (see Havdalah, p. 8).
- **Have someone read in the children's service**, or at Hebrew school that week, a book for young people (there are many) about the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire of 1911.
- **Encourage your colleagues at other synagogues**—as well as colleagues in other faith communities—to follow your lead by putting the "labor" back into Labor Day Weekend at their congregation, as well.

Labor on the Bimah, 2000

by Rabbi Jack Moline

There is a temptation to justify every effort of social conscience by a verse from the beginning of Parshat Shofetim (Deut. 16:20).

Rabbi David Saperstein calls it the “Justice, justice shalt thou pursue” rationale, that is, “We are commanded to pursue justice, therefore, we must...(insert your favorite cause here).”

When it comes to supporting fair labor practices, no such manipulation of text is necessary. Throughout the Torah there are specific instructions on the proper treatment of workers. They are generally framed by a reminder from God that we know how it is to be slaves, and we must therefore show both justice and compassion for those who labor on our behalf. Wages must be fair and promptly paid (Deut. 24:14-15). A garment given in pledge must be returned each evening (Deut. 24:12). “Slaves” (really indentured servants) must be fed and sheltered, paid a wage and eventually released (Ex. 21:2, Deut. 15:12-14).

While it is true that Torah and subsequent tradition does not endorse a specific economic system, it is pretty clear from the very beginning—the story of Eden—that productive labor, designed to improve the lot of the worker and the community, is part of the dignity and purpose of human existence. When the first human beings are expelled from the garden and sent into the world, God instructs them, “by the sweat of your brow shall you eat bread” (Gen. 3:19). Far from being a curse, it is a manual for survival. And that which we value for the individual should be reflected in the practices of the society in which we live.

At the risk of falling subject to my own parody, I return to the verse first cited above. If we have a contribution to make to America as Jews, it is to share the wisdom of our system of values—including the protections afforded by Jewish tradition to those who earn their daily bread by the sweat of their brows (See Lev. 5:20-23, 19:13, Deut. chapters 15, 24). Honest work should produce, at a minimum, adequate results. Just as the Biblical slave-owner was obligated to provide for the needs of his workers before meeting his own, so should contemporary employers place the living wages of their workers ahead of any but the most necessary profit margins. Our just society should expect no less.

We look around our cities today, large or small, and we see that the ideal has not been met. Not a one of us wishes for workers to be

exploited, for honest people to be forced to live in poverty. Yet, we are shielded from both cause and solution by layers of bureaucracy and confusion. As individuals, our temptation is to reduce the problem to cases: we help to stock food banks, we write checks to legal aid services, we offer a dollar to the unemployed person on the street corner—well-intentioned and commendable actions, to be sure, but actions which address the symptoms and not the causes of poverty. Who, after all, can be held responsible?

One answer is at the end of the Torah portion with which I began—Shofetim—discussing not labor, but, of all things, murder. The discussion concerns the discovery of a murder victim in the fields between two cities. With no evidence at hand, it might be possible for people to throw up their hands in all innocence, decry the crime and go on with their lives. But Torah demands instead that the leaders of the nearest city, representing all of the residents, go through a complex ritual assuming responsibility for the crime and seeking God’s forgiveness. Presumably, they will be inspired to take steps to ensure the safety of residents and strangers alike so that their regret will not be hollow.

Workers are most often victimized not in fields between cities, but in the netherworld between competing interests, decentralized corporations and geographically scattered investors. With no one at hand to take responsibility for low wages or inadequate benefits, we might reasonably throw up our hands in all innocence, decry the crime and go on with our lives. But until we take responsibility for our neighbors and strangers alike, seeking for them the protections from this anonymous neglect, we have not fulfilled the mandate of Torah.

We all know that not every worker is righteous and not every employer is evil—and vice versa. But we who live in privilege know the lengths to which we go to provide for ourselves and the ones we love. We hope to be rewarded for our effort and intention, fairly and adequately, whether we meet an ideal of righteousness or not. Gathered here as we are to offer thanks for God’s blessings, we must earn those blessings by pursuing a just society in which all people can depend on the dignity of their work as a reflection of the purpose for which they were created.

Jack Moline is rabbi of Agudas Achim Congregation, a Conservative synagogue in Alexandria, VA.



“You shall not abuse a needy and destitute laborer, whether a fellow countryman or a stranger in one of the communities of your land.”

***Deuteronomy
24:14***

Parshiot for Labor Day Weekends, 2000-2005 (5760-5765)

2000/5760—Shofetim

“Tzedek tzedek tirdof”-“Justice, justice, shall you pursue” (Deut. 16:20). Perhaps nowhere in Jewish tradition is our task put so succinctly as in this one line from Parshat Shofetim. And according to Bachya ben Asher, the 13th century Spanish author of the Kad HaKemach, the duplication of the word justice suggests the broadest possible interpretation: “Justice, whether to your profit or loss, whether in word or in action, whether to Jew or non-Jew.”

Among the litany of more specific commandments in this parsha, issues of profit and loss, and of the treatment of laborers, are not explicitly discussed. And yet, from what would appear the most unlikely place—a pesuk about not moving a boundary marker (Deut. 19:14)—the rabbis derived an injunction against infringing on another’s livelihood. Interestingly, this line also became the proof text for the rights of both business owners and tradespeople to form associations and fix prices. On this Labor Day weekend, we might turn to this line as both proof text and reminder of the basic rights of workers—in their own effort to pursue justice—to form unions and set fair, standard wages.

“He who withholds an employee’s wages is as though he deprived him of his life.”

**-Baba Metzia
111a**



2001/5761—Ki Tetze

It is here, in Parshat Ki Tetze, where we find the basis for much of the literature on the rights of the laborer (expanded upon in many of the essays in this booklet): “You shall not abuse a needy and destitute laborer, whether a fellow countryman or a stranger in one of the communities of your land. You must pay him his wages on the same day, before the sun sets, for he is needy and urgently depends on it; else he will cry to the Lord against you and you shall incur guilt.” (Deut. 24:14-15)

2002/5762—Nitzavim-Vayelech

This Shabbat Nitzavim-Vayelech and this Labor Day weekend, we look to the first lines of each of our double parshiot for inspiration. In the first lines of Parshat Nitzavim we read, “You stand this day, all of you, before the Lord your God—your tribal heads, your elders and your priests...even the stranger in your midst, from woodchopper to water-drawer...” (Deut. 29:9-10) From the priests to the laborers—even the laborers who are “strangers” among us—we are all equal in God’s eyes. And who are today’s woodchoppers and waterdrawers? Perhaps the janitor who cleans your office when you’ve left for the day, the parking lot attendant who parks your car, the garbage collector... In the opening lines of Vayelech, Moses voices the words that would be echoed in 1968 by Martin Luther King, Jr, the night before he was killed, at a rally for striking garbage collectors in Memphis, Tennessee. (At this point, late in his tragically short life, Dr. King had gone both beyond and deep within the issue of race to attack the problem of economic injustice in his “Poor People’s Campaign.”) I’m not going to make it with you—both Moses and King say, essentially—but we as a People will make it to the Promised Land. This year, let us do what we can to make sure that “we”—all laborers of all backgrounds and circumstances—are able to work for fair pay, safe and fair working conditions, and a decent life.

2003/5763—Ki Tetze (see 2001/5761)

2004/5764—Ki Tavo

Prior to issuing God’s promise and threat of blessings and curses to the community of Israel (including the blessings and curses over their means of production and the fruits of their labors), Moses announces that the Levites will issue a blanket curse to individuals who have violated certain precepts. Many are stated quite plainly, and literally: cursed are those who dishonor their parents; who pervert justice to the stranger, fatherless and widow; who engage in incest or bestiality, in murder undetected or murder for hire. One is also quite plain, though in the form of metaphor: cursed are those who lead the blind astray. The one remaining seems oddly out of place: “Cursed be he that removeth his neighbor’s landmark” (Deut. 27:17).

What does it mean, to move a neighbor’s landmark? The rabbis tell us that it is a form of stealing property. So, why wouldn’t Moses simply say “Cursed be he that steals”? In point of fact, when this injunction first appears—in Parshat Shofetim (see above)—the rabbis argue that it can’t mean “don’t steal,” because that would be redundant; we’ve already been told not to steal. So it must mean something else. In the end, they determine, it means that one must not infringe upon one’s neighbor’s livelihood—whether by slashing prices to oust a competitor, or performing a particular kind of work for far below the wages of one’s fellow laborers. Today, this line can be seen as a proof text to support the rights of workers to organize and set fair, standard wages for their industry.



2005/5765—Re'eh

“Do not shut your heart against your needy kinsman,” we read in Parshat Re'eh. “Rather you must open your hand and lend him sufficient for whatever he needs.... Give to him readily and have no regrets when you do so, for in return the Lord your God will bless you in all your efforts and in all your undertakings. For there will never cease to be needy ones in your land, which is why I command you: open your hand to the poor and needy kinsman in your land.” Elsewhere, we are told to provide not only for our kinsman, but for the stranger and others left vulnerable in our society.

And how must we provide? According to Maimonides, the highest form of tzedakah is to offer someone a job, or to train someone in a livelihood, so that person can then support himself or herself. Maimonides' position, of course, is based on a presumption that having a job or trade enables one to support oneself. But can one really support oneself on minimum wage, for instance? How, in our society, can we make sure that there are decent-paying jobs for all—or that the most needy, both kinsman and stranger, are adequately trained for the jobs that exist?

**“...open
your hand
to the poor
and needy
kinsman in
your land.”**

**-Deuteronomy
15:7-11**

The Commandment for a Living Wage

by Rabbi Mordechai Liebling

For Jews around the world the bible reading for the week of this Labor Day contains the following passage from Deuteronomy 24:14-15. “You shall not abuse a needy and destitute laborer, whether a fellow countryman or a stranger in one of the communities of your land. You must pay him his wages on the same day, before the sun sets, for he is needy and sets his life on it; else he will cry to God against you and you will incur guilt.”

This is a clear call for a living wage and treating workers justly. The phrase “he sets his life on it” has always been interpreted as the worker needing the wage to pay for the necessities of life for self and family. The law is designed to protect a worker's dignity and physical needs. The workers must be paid on the same day (read in a timely fashion) so that they and their families do not go hungry and do not have to beg for food.

There are many jobs in our economy that do not pay a living wage—forcing workers to take two or even three jobs or work great amounts of overtime. In some cities there are movements to pass living wage bills. The bills would provide that the city does not contract with anyone who does not pay a living wage to its employees. Churches and synagogues have a biblical basis for supporting these campaigns.

The language of the text makes it clear that we have to give special attention to poor workers. We are not to abuse them. In this economy it is poor workers who are the most exploited. They are the ones that do not have health benefits, job security, or pension plans. They receive the least amount of respect, yet God hears their voice. We too need to hear their voice and fight on their behalf.

The rabbinic commentary on this text stresses the seriousness of this law. Anyone violating it is considered

guilty of oppressing a neighbor, stealing, and oppressing the poor in addition to violating the expressed laws about paying wages promptly. These are very serious offenses. We don't often think of underpaying workers as stealing, but the rabbis rightly understood it as theft. They say it as stealing one's life. I think that it can be understood as theft on three levels. If someone is not being paid a living wage, then he or she is not able to provide for the essentials of life—food, shelter and clothing—robbing them of being able to lead a normal life. It is also stealing money from them, by profiting from their labor and not giving them their due share. It is, also, a theft of their dignity, their hard work is not good enough to support themselves.

The rabbis underlined the gravity of this law by reversing normal contract law. Normally the burden of proof is on the one who is owed money; in this case the burden of proof is on the employer. The worker is assumed to be owed the money unless the employer can prove otherwise. Workers' wages are given higher rights than other types of debts.

Christian and Jewish religious institutions—nursing homes, hospitals, schools—need to heed the principles of a worker's right to a living wage that their traditions teach. And we as faith members need to remind them of their responsibilities.

As we take the time to acknowledge and celebrate the contribution that all workers have made let us also take the time to make sure that all workers have the dignity of a living wage.

Rabbi Mordechai Liebling is the Director of Torah of Money, Shefa Fund, and Consultant to the Jewish Reconstructionist Federation.

My Father was a Wandering Garment Worker...

by Rabbi Marc Israel and Rabbi David Saperstein

One of the hallmarks of Passover is when we read each year at the Seder that “My father was a wandering Aramean.” In this passage, we recall our people’s meager roots, our history as slaves in Egypt and God’s great redemption.

Today in America, as the generations that are the children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren of the great wave of immigrants from the turn of the 20th Century, we would do well to say each year at Labor Day that “My father was a garment worker, who came over from Europe with nothing but the clothes on his back. He came to America and worked in sweatshops and there he helped to form unions which fought for the rights of all workers and redeemed them from their bondage.” In America, the Jewish community’s connection to the history of the labor movement could not be stronger. But this is only because we have a long history of protecting the rights of workers.

The Torah’s mandate to protect workers’ rights is clear:

You shall not defraud your fellow. You shall not commit robbery. The wages of a laborer shall not remain with you until morning. (Lev. 19:13)

You shall not abuse a needy and destitute laborer, whether a fellow countryman or a stranger in one of the communities of your land. You must pay him his wages on the same day, before the sun sets, for he is needy and urgently depends on it; else he will cry to the Lord against you and you will incur guilt. (Deut. 24:14-15)

The Talmud expounds on these passages to teach that employers who withhold wages are guilty of six violations: oppressing a neighbor, stealing, oppressing the poor, delaying payment of

wages, failing to pay wages at the due date and failing to pay wages before sunset. It continues to teach that “one who withholds an employee’s wages is as though he deprived the worker of his life.” (Baba Metzia 111a; 112a)

Our tradition clearly recognizes the value of hard work, but it also demands that the rights of the workers be protected. As we celebrate Labor Day, we must remember, as we do on Passover, our own ancestors’ hard toil. More importantly, we must take the additional step of using our collective memory as a reminder of our obligations—both as a community and as individuals—to work for the rights of all workers, “whether a fellow countryman or a stranger in one of the communities of your land,” and to seek positive actions to protect the rights of unions and laborers.

What does this mean? For starters, it means enacting a real national minimum wage increase so that a family with a full-time wage earner is not struggling below the poverty line. It means working to pass livable wage ordinances in our communities. It means speaking out in our communities, our synagogues and our companies to demand that workers are treated fairly and compensated justly.

We, who know well what it means to be oppressed and, thank God, what it means to be free and prosperous, must continue to strive towards a society in which all its inhabitants, and especially the most vulnerable, are able to live their lives free of the shackles of poverty and the bondage of slavery.

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Official Statements on Worker Rights

Union of American Hebrew Congregations

At its December 1999 Biennial, the UAHC passed a resolution calling on congregations to get more involved in local living wage campaigns. The Union resolved to:

1. Support living wage ordinances and bills to bring wages to at least the poverty line, preferably higher;
2. Encourage our congregations across North America to become involved in living wage campaigns in their local communities;
3. Urge members of the community, including supporters of a living wage, to commit themselves to advocate for and help raise necessary funds to enable non-profits to pay living wages without curtailing their services; and
4. Call upon our congregations, and all arms of the Reform Movement to examine their employment and contracting practices to ensure they reflect the spirit of this resolution.

For more information, contact the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism (RAC) at (202) 387-2800; rac@uahc.org; or <http://rj.org/rac/>.

Orthodox Union

The Orthodox Union and its member congregations reaffirm their support for the United Farm Workers in their struggle to bring justice to all agricultural laborers. The Orthodox Union strongly supports legislation to ban sweatshop labor and to hold contractors responsible for any subcontractor exploiting their workers.

(Approved, Orthodox Union Convention, 1998)

Central Conference of American Rabbis

“Jewish leaders, along with our Catholic and Protestant counterparts have always supported the labor movement and the rights of employees to form unions for the purpose of engaging in collective bargaining and attaining fairness in the workplace. We believe that permanent replacement of striking workers upsets the balance of power needed for collective bargaining, destroys the dignity of working people, and undermines the democratic values of this nation.”

(Preamble to the Workplace Fairness Resolution adopted at the 104th Annual Convention, 1993)

Blessing, Stealing, and Labor Day

by Rabbi Toba Spitzer

The Talmud teaches that a Jew should say 100 blessings a day. Many of the blessings we say are simple and short—a blessing over a piece of fruit, or a cup of tea, or a sandwich. The formula is simple: “Blessed are You, YHWH, our God, Source of Life, who creates the fruit of the tree,” or “by whose word all comes into being” or “who brings forth bread from the earth.” What is the point of these blessings? Why say them?

The Talmud records a fascinating discussion on exactly that question. After a debate in which the rabbis attempt (and fail) to find a Scriptural basis for saying a blessing before one eats, we find the following teaching:

Rabbi Judah said in the name of Samuel: Whoever has enjoyment of something from this world without [saying] a blessing, it is as if s/he had [improper] enjoyment of things sacred to Heaven...Rabbi Hanina bar Pappa said: Whoever has enjoyment from this world without [saying] a blessing, it is as if s/he has robbed the Holy One and the community of Israel. (Brachot 35a-b)

According to this text, what is a blessing over food? It is an acknowledgment of the ultimate Source of that food—of the One who made the earth, who created the tree, who makes all things. This acknowledgment allows us to make use of something which would otherwise be off-limits to us. Eating something *without* acknowledging its source is, therefore, tantamount to stealing from God. But why does Rabbi Hanina add that it is also like stealing from the community?

Rabbi Hanina seems to understand the act of blessing as acknowledging not only the divine source of that which we consume, but the human source as well. To consume without acknowledging the people who have helped to bring a particular item to our table is to “steal” from them, and from the community at large, just as it is “stealing” from the Holy One when we fail to acknowledge the ultimate Source of all things. While the traditional food blessings do not explicitly refer to human labor, Rabbi Hanina infers the human dimension of the act of blessing.

In this understanding, saying a blessing is an opportunity for a particular kind of awareness. If I were really to think about all that it has taken to bring a plate of vegetables to my table—all the natural elements of sun and earth and rain, and all the human elements of planting and harvesting and transporting and selling, as well as the Godly power that underlies the whole process—I would feel a profound connection every time I sat down to eat. I would have a better realization of the myriad ways that my life is intertwined with people all over this planet—the people who farm my food and make my clothes, who assem-

bled my computer and built my home. At the same time, somewhere else on this globe, there may be someone saying a blessing over the product of the work of my hands.

Jewish tradition affirms, in more explicit ways, that human labor is sacred and essential, and Jewish law affords workers many protections. But there was no need for a “Labor Day” in the time of the Torah and Talmud, for in those days the work that it took to sustain a community was far more visible to all who shared its fruits. The farmer, the shoemaker, the butcher, the teacher, the seamstress—all were community members and were known to one another. In our modern, global economy, work and workers are hidden from us as consumers. As workers, we are isolated from one another. The act of blessing, in this context, is a way of making the invisible visible, and a way of reconnecting ourselves both to God and to a human community that makes our existence possible. Labor Day is, like the traditional food blessings, also a way to remind ourselves not to “steal” from others in the human community. As consumers or as stockholders we are often pitted against workers—if wages go up, then so do prices; if workers are laid off, it’s good for Wall Street. But ultimately we are just “stealing” from ourselves, whether we consider ourselves workers or not. To understand the meaning of blessing is to understand that my well-being is dependent, ultimately, on the well-being of all workers—that is, on all residents of this planet. And acknowledging my dependence on the labor of others also means acknowledging those laborers’ rights: to a decent wage, to safe and sanitary working conditions, to dignity and the right to organize.

And so perhaps Labor Day can be the occasion, as we pick up something to eat or as we shop at a Labor Day sale, to stop for a moment and think about how this particular item arrived in our hands. Who worked the soil or the machinery that produced this? Was it a small farmer, a factory worker or a migrant laborer, a child in a sweatshop? In what conditions did that person work, and how much were they paid? How did this food item get from the farm to the store, and who were the people who handled it along the way—the packers, the truckers, the stock person at the supermarket? How did this shirt arrive on my shelf, and who were the people who helped it get there? What are their lives and their work like?

And, finally, what is the blessing I can say, and what are the actions that I can take, to honor each of these people, and in so doing to give proper due both to the Creator and the community of which we all are a part?

Toba Spitzer is rabbi of Congregation Dorshei Tzedek, a Reconstructionist synagogue in West Newton, Massachusetts.



Havdalah Service

by Rabbi Robert J. Marx



Responsive Reading: (Adapted from Psalm 141)

Lord I call unto you; answer my call, O God

Let my prayer be as a sweet offering unto you; the deeds of my hands as a willing offering.

O Lord, guard my mouth that it not speak evil; my lips that they bless and not hurt.

Turn my heart away from evil; the exploiting of friends and those who work.

Keep me far from those who would exploit the weak; take advantage of the powerless.

From their table may I not eat; from their abuses may I not prosper.

Keep me far from those who gain from their iniquity, spare me from the snare which they would spread before me.

For you are my refuge and my hope, my joy and my salvation.

(The leader lights the candle)

Shabbat begins with the lighting of candles and it ends with the lighting of candles. How different they are. Two separate candles inaugurate Shabbat. One intertwined candle marks its close. These candles speak of those who work. Justice for the worker calls us to listen to the message of the candles.

The Shabbat candles tell us that it is time to rest, that it is time to turn from our daily routine, and set a limit to our labors. The Havdalah candle lights our way back to the tasks that lie before us. Both candles are to be blessed. It is a mistake to take either work or rest for granted. Both are to be sanctified by light. Both are to be blessed.

O God, Creator of us all, bless us with the memory of Shabbat rest. May we remember how precious is the calming presence of Thy spirit. Despite our worries and problems, the peace of Shabbat has been a calming presence in our troubled lives. And for those who labor, that calming presence offers the blessed promise that the eternal Shabbat for which we pray will tolerate no exploitation of works, no seizing of pensions, no revoking of health care benefits or time to rest. For who can really look back upon a Shabbat where these injustices were allowed to remain unquestioned, allowed to stand unchallenged?

(The cup of wine is raised)

This wine is the symbol of joy and of life. But the grapes which produced this wine were not always the harbingers of either joy or of life. How many of those who produced this wine received too little of wages and too much of pesticides. Just as we look to grapes that are clean and called kosher, so we would demand, no we would expect that the working conditions, the health conditions, the salary conditions, the life conditions of those who produced these grapes be clean and kosher.

ברוך אתה, יי אלהינו, מלך העולם, בורא פרי הגפן.

Blessed is the Lord our God, Ruler of the universe, Creator of the fruit of the vine.

(The spice box is raised)

This moment brings its sweet scent into our fading day. The spices of Havdalah remind us of life itself and its many promises. But can we inhale the sweet spices of Havdalah without remembering those whose nostrils are clogged with scents of a more threatening origin, the choking odor of dangerous industrial waste, the fumes of noxious fertilizers sprayed upon those who harvest our grapes or glean our fruit trees? O Holy One, let there be sweetness for all Thy children. Keep far from them both the odors of life threatening pollutants and the odorous practices of those who would rob them of the dignity of their labor.

ברוך אתה, יי אלהינו, מלך העולם, בורא מיני בשמים.

Blessed Is the Lord our God, Ruler of the universe, Creator of all the spices.
(The spice box is circulated)

ברוך אתה, יי אלהינו, מלך העולם, בורא מאורי האש.

Blessed is the Lord our God, Ruler of the universe, Creator of the light of fire.
(The candle is raised)

And now as we prepare to extinguish this intertwined candle, we pause for a moment to think of those whose lives are intertwined with our own, whose labor makes our life more meaningful. (Pause for a moment to mention those whose work we all too often take for granted, and those who may be exploited through our indifference. Workers in sweatshops, men and women in the poultry industry, those overseas who are obliged to work long hours at minimal pay, day laborers, etc.)

May we never take these children of God for granted. Have we done all we can to make their future a promise of hope and joy rather than of oppression and desperation?

With clean hands, with pure hearts, may we come before our Creator as this new week begins. We will not rest, we cannot rest until there is justice; justice for those who are near; justice for those who are far away; justice in our homes, and in our factories and in our fields. Justice! Justice! Thou shalt pursue.

(The candle is extinguished)

**ברוך אתה, יי אלהינו, מלך העולם, המבדיל בין קדש
לחול, בין אור לחשך, בין יום השביעי לששת ימי המעשה.
ברוך אתה, יי, המבדיל בין קדש לחול.**

Blessed is the Lord our God, Ruler of the universe, who separates sacred from profane, light from darkness, the seventh day of rest from the six days of labor.

Blessed is the Lord, who separates the sacred from the profane.

(The candle is extinguished)

El-li-ya-hu ha-na-vi, El-li-ya-hu

ha-tish-bi; El-li-ya-hu, El-li-ya-hu,

El-li-ya-hu ha-gil-a-di.

Bim-hei-ra ve-ya-mei-nu, ya-vo

el-lei-nu; im ma-shi-ach ben

Da-vid, im ma-shi-ach ben

David. El-li-ya-hu....

**אלהו הנביא, אלהו
התשבי; אלהו, אלהו,
אלהו הגלעדי.
במרה בימינו, יבא
אלינו; עם משיח בן
דוד, עם משיח בן
דוד. אלהו . . .**

A good week. A week of peace. May gladness reign and light increase....

Sha-vu-a tov....

שבוע טוב . . .

Robert Marx is rabbi of Congregation Hakafa, a Reform synagogue in Glencoe, Illinois.



Jews and the U.S. Labor Movement

by Morton Bahr, President

The history of the U.S. labor movement is very much a part of the history of Jewish life in this country. In fact, at the start of the last century many of the sweatshop workers who built unions to improve their lives and their families' lives built those unions in Yiddish. The Jewish immigrant success stories that dot the last one hundred years of our history provide a thread that weaves a common fabric with the successes of the US labor movement over the same period of time.

Prior to this recent history we find Jewish text and tradition spills over with everything from interpretation of parables that suggest a pro-union predisposition to explicit instruction to be fair and just in dealings with workers. From the earliest passages of Genesis up through the interpretations of the 20th century Conservative Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel we see the basis for why Jews and the labor movement have consistently made common cause. What follows are a few of the textual gems where Jewish tradition provides spiritual context and grounding for labor's movement and for my 40 years in this tikkun olam vocation.

We read in the earliest passages of the Bible that God created this world in six days and on the seventh day God rested. "Three acts of God denoted the seventh day: He rested, He blessed and He hallowed the seventh day (Gen. 2:2-3)." Heschel, building on this, links the vision of the labor movement to the commandment to honor the Sabbath when he writes, "Labor without dignity is the cause of misery; rest without spirit the source of depravity."

This fundamental connection between work and rest has long been at the forefront of labor's agenda. In fact the struggles of the 1930's for the eight-hour day and the forty-hour week were struggles for the dignity of both work and rest. Today's struggle to create full-time family-supporting jobs rather than part-time low-wage jobs is the contemporary terrain for the same struggle to honor work and rest. The Jewish contribution of the Sabbath to our society cannot be overstated and labor has heeded this call as we say of ourselves: "Unions—the folks that brought you the weekend."

Jumping forward to the Book of Exodus we find in our people's liberation story a story that strikes me as a wonderful union organizing analogy. In addition to Moses' courageous leadership and the power of the plagues, we bear witness to the first work stoppage in recorded history. When the slaves choose to withhold their labor and walk off the pyramid-building site we can imagine that they are in essence going on strike; and offering a tremendous liberation story that generation after generation will rejoice in. As important as the decision to withhold their labor because the working and living conditions were intolerable, I find noteworthy two other characteristics of this liberation story. Characteristics that I see year in and year out as working women and men build unions in their workplaces.

First, the decision to walk away from the known, no matter how bad it is, for an unknown future and the terrible risks and hardships that may await you is a tremendous act of faith. Although conditions in Egypt were abysmal, they were known; as compared to the distant "promised land" for which the Israelites were leaving their lives behind. To join Moses and choose this unknown future is a brave and faithful choice and that spirit carries thousands of working people out of "tight spots" today. Tragically, for many working people when they put their faith into action pursuing an unknown "promised land" by building their union they often face aggressive attacks.

Eight in ten employers hire consultants to advise them on how to defeat workers' organizing efforts. Half of employers threaten to shut down if workers organize. Over three in ten fire workers who are active in organizing with their fellow employees.

But win or lose, the choice to leave is liberating in and of itself and this is the second characteristic to which I'd like to draw attention. In fact as the Exodus story teaches, when the Israelites came upon the Red Sea it didn't part immediately. It was only when Nachshon acted as a free man and stepped into the sea that it parted and allowed safe passage. This liberated action is what we see with each new group of workers who organize into our union. By choosing the unknown future, with its promises of improvements and security, working people come to act as free people. They daily then step into the sea and see it part. At our best, our union is a vehicle that harnesses people's faith in a better future and provides them with the tools they need to act effectively and powerfully as free people.

Clearly the prophets echo this impassioned justice sentiment when Amos says, "Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream." He is not calling on us to consider lightly the injustices around us and seek out cautious change. The prophets are outraged and they are outraged because of the world around them. Heschel writes:

Why should religion, the essence of which is the worship of God, put such stress on justice for man? Does not the preoccupation with morality tend to divest religion of immediate devotion to God? Why should a worldly virtue like justice be so important to the Holy One of Israel? Did the prophets overrate the worth of justice?

Perhaps the answer lies here: righteousness is not just a value; it is God's part of human life, God's stake in human history. Perhaps it is because the suffering of man is a blot on God's conscience; because it is in relations between man and man that God is at stake. Or is it simply because the infamy of a wicked act is infinitely greater than we are able to imagine? People

"Labor without dignity is the cause of misery; rest without spirit the source of depravity."

-Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel

Jews and the U.S. Labor Movement (continued)

act as they please, doing what is vile, abusing the weak, not realizing that they are fighting God, affronting the divine, or that the oppression of man is a humiliation of God.

It was our righteous indignation at injustice that led us, in 1987, to help found an organization called Jobs with Justice. Jobs with Justice builds local coalitions among religious and secular institutions, clergy, concerned citizens, students and union members, and mobilizes them to stand up for worker's rights, and against the worst abuses of corporate greed. In 1996, the National Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice was founded, which has extended the ties with the religious community.

And it is in this spirit of righteous indignation that our union constantly strives to bring to economic injustices and violations of workers' rights. In a booming economy which requires that many people work 60 hour weeks and more, when they are working two and

three jobs to try to make ends meet and still millions of children are living in poverty—how can we help but hear the prophets warning us that we affront God and undervalue and stunt the great potential in all of us?

We must demonstrate day in and day out that we stand in solidarity with others, we are not just for ourselves. This too is in the great Jewish tradition identified most famously with Rabbi Hillel. In Pirke Avot 1:14, Hillel is remembered to have said, "If I am not for myself, who will be for me? And if I am for myself alone, then what am I? And, if not now, when?" It is this phrase more than any other—and the values behind it—that inspire us to work as allies in building a strong movement. By being there for one another's struggles, let each of us never have to answer the ignoble question, "...then what am I?"

Morton Bahr is the President of the Communications Workers of America and President of the Jewish Labor Committee.



“Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream.”

-Amos 5:22-24

In Action:

Jewish Pressure Helps Win Workers' Rights in a NYC Neighborhood

Manhattan's Upper West Side is known throughout the nation as the quintessential liberal Jewish neighborhood, whose residents are also known for their taste in appetizing foods. A conflict between gastronomic passion and ethical values was exposed in the fall of 1996, when three workers were fired by Citarella, one of the neighborhood's finest food stores, after they signed United Food and Commercial Workers Union authorization cards. Many of the largely-immigrant workers in the "downstairs" kitchen at Citarella were paid less than minimum wage, and worked up to 66 hours per week with no overtime pay.

Jews for Racial & Economic Justice, a local New York City community education and advocacy organization, joined a boycott of the store initiated by the UFCW. JFREJ activists participated in a weekly picket at the store, invoking Jewish labor history and halachic strictures advocating the fair treatment of workers such as Deuteronomy 24:14 which says, "You shall not abuse a needy and destitute laborer, whether a fellow countryman or a non-citizen in your communities." Exercising basic First Amendment rights didn't prove easy, as one JFREJ activist was arrested for picketing

on charges that were later dismissed.

Many of the neighbors crossed the picket lines, but many were swayed by JFREJ's presence. The vocal and visible reminder of the Jewish responsibility to ensure that our enjoyment does not come at the expense of the oppression of others, pushed many of the neighbors to shop at union stores while the conflict was going on.

Six months later, the fired Citarella workers gained a victory, getting reinstated with back pay, and exacting a promise from the owner to post "right to unionize" signs throughout the shop. The union especially thanked JFREJ for increasing community pressure on the owner of the store, who admitted that his business had substantially dropped during the boycott. This victory was just one example of aiding the many domestic workers, grocery workers, restaurant workers, who work in sweatshop-like conditions to provide a high "quality of life," to middle-class folks. JFREJ is eager to support the efforts of the Jewish communities across the country to expose and rectify these conditions. JFREJ can be reached at 212-647-8966, or at jfrej@igc.org.

Remembrance and Labor

by Rabbi Saul J. Berman

The central event of Biblical history is the Exodus. More space is devoted to it than to the narrative of creation. It is referred to more frequently than the revelation at Sinai. It is used as the rationale of many other Mitzvot of the Torah—of Shabbat and the Holidays, of Tefillin and tzitzit, and of many interpersonal Mitzvot. God identifies Himself as the Deity of the Exodus, and it is the only Biblical event which the Torah itself commands to be verbally affirmed daily (Deut. 16:3).

What precisely is it that we are required to remember in our daily verbal expression about the Exodus?

Deuteronomy 7:18 instructs us that we are to remember that God was the one who took us out of Egypt. Exodus 13:3 suggests that we are to remember that we, the Jewish People, chose to leave when God offered us the opportunity. Then, in five separate passages in the Book of Deuteronomy, the Torah implores us to remember that we were slaves in the land of Egypt (Deut. 5:15; 15:15; 16:12; 24:18 and 24:22.) In the first of these instances, the Torah uses this remembrance as a motive for the observance of Shabbat. In the other four, the remembrance of what it was like to be slaves in Egypt, is to serve as the vehicle through which we shape our ethical behavior in relation to the poor, the oppressed and the disadvantaged.

So long as we clearly recall the character of our own oppression at the hands of our Egyptian taskmasters, the Torah expects that we will be moved in our personal conduct to emancipate slaves, to include the poor in our rejoicing on our Holydays, to avoid bias against the weak, and to make our gleanings available to the stranger, the orphan and the widow. In sum, the memory of our own pain will be a constraint on our causing similar pain to other vulnerable persons.

What then was the character of the oppression and pain which we suffered, the vivid recollection of which will impact so

directly on our own behavior? The Torah refers to that labor as “*avodat perach*”, rigorous or ruthless work (Ex. 1:13,14.) The horror of such ruthless labor is so intense in the Torah that later verses explicitly forbid a Jewish person from assigning “*avodat perach*” to his or her bondsmen, servants or laborers (Lev. 25:43 and 46.) But what is the nature of such labor?

The Sifra, the Midrash Halakhah to the Book of Leviticus (commenting on Lev. 25:43), offers a definition of this horrendous and evil form of work, by illustration. “*Avodat perach*”, says the Sifra, is telling a laborer to bring you a cup of water when you don’t really intend to drink it, or telling him to rake leaves in this area until you return to instruct him to stop. This is ruthless labor? This is the paradigm of evil in the relationship to vulnerable people?

The Rabbis are here teaching us a profound lesson. The most demeaning form of oppression of a laborer is to assign to him meaningless work. The most ruthless form of abuse of a laborer is to have him engage in an activity which serves no productive purpose and, therefore prevents him from having any pride in his achievement.

The measure of proper treatment of labor is not simply the physical rigors to which the employee is exposed. The employer has a responsibility to preserve the dignity of the employee through assuring that he or she can achieve a sense of meaning in the labor which she performs.

The remembrance of the Exodus calls to our consciousness not only the physical protection of laborers, but their emotional and spiritual protection as well.

Rabbi Saul J. Berman is the Director of Edah, a modern Orthodox movement. He is Associate Professor of Jewish Studies at Stern College and Adjunct Professor at Columbia University Law School where he teaches seminars in Jewish Law.

In Action: Jews Fight Sweatshops in Los Angeles

The Los Angeles Jewish Commission on Sweatshops was formed to respond to the return of sweatshops to the LA garment industry, and in particular to the prominent role played by Jewish employers in that industry. The Commission is composed of leaders from several Jewish organizations, including the Progressive Jewish Alliance, American Jewish Committee, the Jewish Labor Committee, and Union of American Hebrew Congregations, as well as influential rabbis from the Reform and Conservative movements.

In 1999, after a series of hearings, the Commission issued a thorough report of its findings. It found that the number of apparel workers in Los Angeles had increased to over 160,000 due to Los Angeles’ unique role as a design and fashion center, and the availability of a low-wage immigrant workforce. The report found widespread substandard working conditions due primarily to the pyramid-like system of subcontracting that characterized the industry and insulated retailers and manufacturers from responsibility. The report criticized the systematic violation of minimum

wage and overtime laws, employer interference with the right to organize, and deplorable health and safety violations.

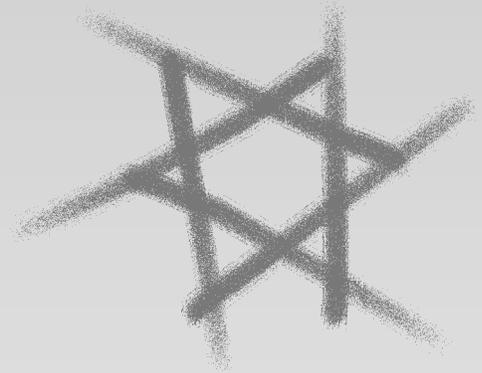
The Commission also adopted a series of recommendations for action that could be taken from within the Jewish community. Those recommendations are now being implemented by the Commission in conjunction with other activist organizations, including Sweatshop Watch. A legal clinic within a new Garment Workers Center in Los Angeles will be created, and a “Care What You Wear” campaign will promote the purchase of Chanukah gifts that are not made in sweatshops.

The Commission is also working to develop educational curricula for Jewish religious and day schools and summer camps, focusing on the history of Jewish labor and the sweatshop issue. Additional future programs may also include labor oriented Shabbat services and public Passover Seders targeted at increasing awareness of the this alarming problem. For more information, contact the Progressive Jewish Alliance at (323) 761-8350.

גדולה מלאכה שמכבדת את בעליה.

Great is labor for it gives honor to the laborer.

—Nedarim 49b



by Rabbi Rachel S. Mikva

What else can labor “give”?

Balance...

“A worker’s sleep is sweet, whether he has much or little to eat; but the rich man’s abundance doesn’t let him sleep.” (Eccl. 5:11)

Ecclesiastes laments the fact that our possessions seem to possess us, that pursuing and hoarding wealth leave us unfulfilled. As a society, too, we will be “sleepless” if we cannot recover the fundamental sense of purpose in labor—not for the things it buys, but for the hearts and minds and passion poured into it.

Perfection of spirit...

“The primary reform that the life of labor in the midst of Nature institutes within man, is perfection... the perfect unity, the complete participation and unification of all spiritual forces within him, in every aspect of life. Perception, emotion, instinct, physiological powers and physical powers of the body—all partake simultaneously and harmoniously... of the combined vastness of life.” (A.D. Gordon)

Advancement of society...

“A vital culture, far from being detached from life, embraces it in all its aspects. Culture is whatever life creates for living purposes. Farming, building, and road-making—any work, any craft, any productive activity—is part of culture and is indeed the foundation and the stuff of culture. The procedure, the pattern, the shape, the manner in which things are done—these represent the forms of culture. Whatever people feel and think both at these situations, combined with the natural surroundings—all that constitutes the spirit of a people’s culture. It sustains the higher expressions of culture in science and art, creeds and ideologies. The things we call culture in the most restricted sense, the higher expression of culture —this is the butter churned out of culture in general, in its broadest sense. But can butter be produced without milk?” (A.D. Gordon, “People and Labor”)

What else does a laborer require?

A Living Wage...

“The wages of a laborer shall not remain with you until morning.” (Lev. 19:13)

Torah teaches that wages must provide for a worker and his or her family. If the family needs the wages for food that night, they must be paid that day. It is assumed that wages paid weekly or monthly will be sufficient to provide food, housing, clothing and other necessities for that period.

A stake in the fruits of the labor...

“They who sow in tears shall reap with songs of joy. Though he goes along weeping, carrying the seed-bag, he shall come back with songs of joy, carrying his sheaves.” (Psalms 126:5-6)

It is no accident that our messianic dreams are presented in the language of labor. We sowed in tears when we were ripped from our land, made homeless. As the prophets had warned, we labored on the land only to have some other people reap the benefits. Our vision of redemption is not simply a return. Redemption—full value being restored to each human being—requires that we own the fruits of our labors. The sheaves are ours.

Our “song of ascents” to the messianic Jerusalem suggests that our world can be made whole when we all can reclaim our share in the fruits of the labor. The utter joy and laughter that spill out of our mouths in our dreams are not from the entertainment value of harvesting, but from knowing what it is like to be “home”: secure, whole, able to reap the benefits of the work of our hands in freedom and equality.

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•**OHIO** Central Ohio Religion-Labor Network, Diocese of Columbus, Columbus, OH 42315; (614) 241-2541; Mark Huddy

Cincinnati—Interfaith Committee on Worker Justice, 100 E. 8th St., Cincinnati, OH 45212; (513) 421-3131; fax: 421-1582; Thomas Choquette

Cleveland—Cleveland Jobs with Justice, 20525 Center Ridge Rd., Rocky River, OH 44116; (440) 333-6363; fax: 333-1491; Steve Cagan

Dayton—Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice, 1512 Cory Dr., Dayton, OH 45406; (937) 277-7102; Dick Righter

•**OKLAHOMA** Oklahoma City—Religion-Labor Community Forum, 5315 S. Shartel, Oklahoma City, OK 73109; (405) 634-4030; Tim O'Connor

•**OREGON** Eugene—Springfield Solidarity Network, 4355 Pinecrest Dr., Eugene, OR 97405; (541) 345-3253; fax: 346-2790; Charles Spencer

•**PENNSYLVANIA** Pittsburgh-Area Religious Task Force on the Economy, 5125 Penn Ave., Pittsburgh, PA 15224; (724) 238-3702; Rev. Ted Erickson

•**TENNESSEE** Nashville—Middle Tennessee Jobs with Justice, 2001 Elm Hill Pike, Nashville, TN 37210; (615) 872-8792; fax: 874-1253; Dillard Tabors

Knoxville—Religious Outreach Committee, Central Labor Council, 311 Morgan St., Knoxville, TN 37917; (865) 523-9752; fax: 523-9478; Sylvia Woods

•**TEXAS** Brazor Valley—Interfaith Alliance for Worker Justice, St. Mary's Catholic Church, 603 Church St., College Station, TX 77840; (409) 846-5717; fax: 846-4493; Maureen Murray

Dallas—Dallas Jobs with Justice, c/o Camp Wisdom UMC, 1300 W. Camp Wisdom Rd., Dallas, TX 75232; (972) 224-4556; fax: 228-9434; Rev. Charles Stovall

Houston—Houston Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice, c/o Worklife Ministries, 7100 Regency SQ., Suite 210, Houston, TX 77036; (713) 266-2456; fax: 266-0845; Rev. Diana Dale

•**WASHINGTON** Washington Religious Labor Partnership, c/o WA Association of Churches, 419 Occidental Ave. South, #201, Seattle, WA 98104; (206) 625-9790; fax: 625-9791; Rev. John Boonstra

•**WISCONSIN** Faith Community for Worker Justice, 2128 N. 73rd St., Wauwatosa, WI 53213; (414) 771-7250; fax: 771-0509; Bill Lange

South Central, WI—Interfaith Coalition for Worker Justice of South Central Wisconsin, P.O. Box 1104, Madison, WI 53701; (608) 246-4355; fax: 246-4349; Ann McNeary

Contacts (continued)

In addition to the previously listed groups that will be conducting Labor in the Pulpits programs, all of which do outreach to synagogues as part of their general outreach work, the following groups have a special interest in and commitment to outreach to synagogues for Labor on the Bimah:

Jews United for Justice
P.O. Box 53317,
Washington, DC 20009
(202) 939-0115
fax: (202) 939-0116
Contact: Jevera Temsky
for outreach efforts in the
metro-Washington, DC
area. jufj@earthlink.net

**Jewish Council on
Urban Affairs**
618 S. Michigan
Chicago, IL 60605
(312) 663-0960
Contact: Rabbi Bruce Elder
will work with the Chicago
Interfaith Committee for
Worker Justice to reach
out to synagogues in the
Chicago metroland area.

Jewish Fund for Justice
260 Fifth Ave., Ste. 701
New York, NY 10001
(212) 213-2113;
fax: (212) 213-2233
Contact: Julie Weill will
work with the New York
City Religion-Labor Coal-
ition to reach out to syn-
agogues in the New York
City area.

**Jewish Community
Action**
2375 University Ave. W.,
#150,
St. Paul, MN 55114
(612) 822-1442
Contact: Rachel Breen

Resource Organizations and Materials

AFL-CIO

815 16th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20006
(202) 637-5000
www.aflcio.org

The AFL-CIO is the federation of most unions in the country. It has an excellent website that helps workers understand how to organize and explains workers basic rights in the workplace.

Jewish Fund for Justice

260 Fifth Avenue, Suite 701
New York, NY 10001
(212) 213-2113
(212) 213-2233 (fax)

As well as supporting economic justice work, the Jewish Fund for Justice provides educational resources for synagogues, including:

Tzedakah Fellowship Curricula
(youth curricula)

Purim, Women and Poverty
(adult study session)

Passover Reading
(for the Passover Seder)

Helping the Stranger in our Midst
(a Shavuot study session).

Workers' Rights in the Jewish Tradition
(a Yom Kippur study session)
and others

Jewish Labor Committee

25 East 21st Street
New York, NY 10010
(212) 477-0707
(212) 477-1918 (fax)

The Jewish Labor Committee has represented the organized Jewish community on questions relating to trade unionism and human rights since 1934. Offers a superb resource, *Labor Rights in the Jewish Tradition* by Michael Perry.

Jobs with Justice

501 Third Street, NW
Washington, DC 20001
(202) 434-1106
www.jwj.org

Jobs with Justice (JWJ) builds religious and community support for worker struggles. JWJ initiated the Worker Rights Boards around the country that usually involve religious leaders. JWJ's *Religious Action Kit* offers sample worship materials, action flyers, and examples of local organizing. Order for \$10.

Los Angeles Jewish Commission on Sweatshops

www.isber.ucsb.edu
Read and download the excellent *January, 1999 Report of the Los Angeles Jewish Commission on Sweatshops*.

National Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice

1020 West Bryn Mawr
Chicago, IL 60660
(773) 728-8400
www.nationalinterfaith.org
The National Interfaith Committee educates and mobilizes the U.S. religious community on issues and campaigns to improve wages, benefits and working conditions for low-wage workers. Its newsletter sent to members provides updates on religious work on labor issues around the country. The organization has many helpful materials, including:

Why Unions Matter
Congregational Building Projects and Religious Values
What Faith Groups Say about the Right to Organize
Building Local Interfaith Groups for Worker Justice
Challenging Sweatshops Organizing Kit

Shalom Center

Alliance for Jewish Renewal
6711 Lincoln Drive
Philadelphia, PA 19119
(215) 844-8494
www.shalomctr.org

The Shalom Center has been leading an initiative to look at the negative consequences of overwork in society. Sign on to the Center's "Free Time, Free People" statement by visiting the website.

United for a Fair Economy

37 Temple Place, 2nd Floor
Boston, MA 02111
(617) 423-2148
www.ufenet.org
United for a Fair Economy develops popular educational materials on the disparity of wealth and income in the society. A few excellent resources are:

Teaching Economics as if People Mattered

The Growing Divide Workshop Kit
Campus Living Wage Manual

The Activist Cookbook: Creative Actions for a Fair Economy

10 Things You Can Do to Help Workers

Workers need you. Heed the prophetic call and advocate with them on their behalf.

- 1) Include workers in your prayers, especially those who work in sweatshops, are on strike, are attempting to unionize, are downsized, or are locked out. In addition to blessing God when you recite the *HaMotzi*, also bless the workers whose labor has helped to put the food you eat on your table.
- 2) Seek to ensure that all workers employed by the synagogue are paid wages that can support families and provide family health coverage.
- 3) Develop a construction policy for your synagogue to make sure that repairs and construction work is done by contractors that treat workers justly. (Order a copy of Building Projects and Religious Values from the National Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice.)
- 4) If you are in a position to pay workers—those who work in your home or those who work in your workplace—ask yourself whether they can make an adequate living and support their families on the wages that you pay them.
- 5) When deciding where to give your *tzedakah*, consider giving a portion of it to groups that are supporting the unionization of workers and/or are advocating for a Living Wage ordinance, improved worker conditions, and health benefits.
- 6) Encourage synagogue members to advocate for public policies that seek justice for all workers, including decent wages and health care benefits for all workers.
- 7) Boycott products produced by companies where workers are organizing to improve conditions and where boycotts are viewed as an effective means for enduring a just resolution to the workers' problems. For a list of boycotted products, visit <http://www.unionlabel/org>.
- 8) Invite a union leader to speak to your synagogue membership at an appropriate time.
- 9) Investigate sweatshops in your own community. Many of us think about sweatshops as garment factories in Indonesia or Chinatown, and there are plenty of sweatshops in those places. But there are also sweatshops in our midst. Some are garment sweatshops, but others can also be considered sweatshops because of routine violations of labor laws—in cities like New York City, Los Angeles, and Chicago. Talk with nursing home workers, restaurant workers, farmworkers, landscapers, teachers at your child's school, poultry workers or other food processing workers. It is important to find out about sweatshops in your midst!
- 10) Organize a meeting, or even a time during Kiddush, after services, for synagogue members to talk about how they practice Judaism on the job. Many workers face challenging ethical questions at work. Structure opportunities for synagogue members to talk about their work lives and find support for ethical dilemmas. Issues such as taking off from work due to religious holidays, and expressing religious beliefs within the workplace are often good starting topics.



1020 West Bryn Mawr, 4th Floor
Chicago, IL 60660-4627

Phone: (773) 728-8400

Fax: (773) 728-8409

E-mail: info@nicwj.org

Website: www.nicwj.org