

The University of Maine

DigitalCommons@UMaine

---

Social Justice: Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion

Special Collections

---

1-25-1991

## Labor in the 1990s: Recognizing a Community of Interests

Maine Perspective

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/social\\_justice](https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/social_justice)



Part of the [Gender Equity in Education Commons](#), [Higher Education Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

---

### Repository Citation

Maine Perspective, "Labor in the 1990s: Recognizing a Community of Interests" (1991). *Social Justice: Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion*. 716.

[https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/social\\_justice/716](https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/social_justice/716)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@UMaine. It has been accepted for inclusion in Social Justice: Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@UMaine. For more information, please contact [um.library.technical.services@maine.edu](mailto:um.library.technical.services@maine.edu).

# Recognizing a Community of Interests

In the throes of a national recession, budget deficits and layoffs, "working people by and large are very scared," according to a University of Maine labor education specialist. But they are not alone.

"The Donald Trumps out there are also running scared," said John Hanson, director of the University of Maine Bureau of Labor Education. "In the '80s we were building a crystal palace. Now we're finding out how brittle crystal can be."

As a new decade begins, the country is "paying for the excesses of the previous decade," Hanson said. And no one is paying a higher price than the middle class workforce.

"During the Reagan Administration, federal programming that benefitted the middle class diminished, leaving federal programs that were of benefit if you were really poor or rich," Hanson said. "And while less was available to the middle class, more responsibility was put on the middle class to pay taxes and bear a heavier burden in supporting the federal system.

"The interesting thing is now we're into a recession and finding out that funds are not available to pay for the excesses that a few enjoyed in the '80s. Now the bill is due. The very people who were not invited to the party of the '80s are the very people paying for it - and the very working people who are being laid off."

The UM Bureau of Labor Education, established by the Maine Legislature in 1966, is charged by the University of Maine System Board of Trustees directing that "appropriate

*continued on page 8*

# Labor in the 1990s *continued from page 1*

and specialized educational programs be made available to members of the Maine labor force, both organized and unorganized." In so doing, the Bureau keeps its finger on the pulse of the state's labor force.

As 1991 begins, the Bureau says that the pulse is there, but in need of adrenaline.

"Working people are the backbone of our economy," said Hanson. "They are working men and women, small business people - Mom and Pop storeowners - who pay taxes and consume goods by working for a living. They do not have a lot of disposable income. They spend most of what they earn, and don't have a lot of luxuries. To a large extent, they are people who must juggle finances when their kid needs a new pair of shoes.

"Most working people are at a systematic disadvantage by not having the resources to enable their needs to be heard in public policy debates."

Organized labor, which has long had its roots in Maine, has sought to represent the best interests of workers, Hanson said. The labor movement has been involved in such fights as those for the civil rights legislation and increased minimum wage. But through a series of

events in the past two decades, the challenges confronting organized labor have intensified due to the loss of traditional industries that once were the bastions of labor, and a resulting decline in memberships.

"There was an effort during the Carter years to take a serious look at the national labor law and bring it up to date. However, this effort failed as a result of a U.S. Senate filibuster. That was a major, yet not insurmountable setback for organized labor. Then Reagan set the tone with the unprecedented firing of 12,000 air traffic controllers during a labor dispute. This sent a signal to the nation that labor's concerns were not to be considered, and that such action was the means of dealing with insurrection."

It is in such critical economic times as these that the need for collective addressing of issues becomes blatantly clear, and the recent examples of Poland and other Eastern Block countries are illuminating. "There is a need to recognize the fundamental community of interests - the needs, wants and desires - that Maine workers have," he said.

"Labor organizations in the state are doing things to illustrate and dramatize the plight of workers," Hanson said.