



Economic Crisis and New Social Realities: Bait and Switch and the American Dream—Presidential Address 2010¹

Rosanna Hertz²

The ESS was called to act during the fall of 2009. We faced a critical test: to stand beside the housekeepers at the hotel where we were supposed to hold the 2010 conference or to ignore their plight. I use the case study of breaking a contract with the Hyatt Hotel in order to locate the Hyatt layoffs in a broader context. This case is meant to illuminate two related issues. (1) The Hyatt Hotel used a traditional strategy of labor substitution in the context of a new global economy. During this ongoing economic crisis, housekeepers, who were promised good jobs and benefits, had worked hard on a steep climb toward fulfilling the American Dream. The resourcefulness of the unions, who saw the loss of these jobs as a threat to the entire industry, and articulate laid-off workers, who captured the media's attention, kept this newsworthy. (2) When faced with choices over "whose side are we on," our strategies for how to act need to be different than academic posturing. I answer the question of how we should act when we become actors in these situations, which is what the ESS was confronted with over the Hyatt's housekeeper firing.

KEY WORDS: conflict; economy; inequality; labor crises; unions; work.

INTRODUCTION

Four decades ago, Howard S. Becker (1967) used his presidential address to SSSP to point out something that is obvious to many of us now but that at the time required explicit discussion. He asked: "Whose side are we on?" Casting a skeptical glance at his positivistic colleagues in sociology departments across the country, Becker questioned whether this profession could

¹ I thank Emily Mahon and Harve Horowitz, without whose guidance, help, and friendship this story would not have been possible. Robert J. Thomas helped me figure out how to tell this story with amazing insight from across the world. I thank Howard Becker, Susan Reverby, and my colleagues in the Women's Studies and Sociology Departments for their critiques and suggestions for revision. I thank the 2010 Program Committee, Anita Garey, Nazli Kibria, Jonathan Imber, Chris Winship, Pamela Stone, and William J. Wilson for their dedication, hard work, and good company. A version of this article was presented as the Presidential Address at the 2010 Annual Meeting of the Eastern Sociological Society.

² Departments of Sociology and Women's and Gender Studies, Wellesley College, Wellesley, MA 02481; e-mail: rhertz@wellesley.edu.

legitimately claim to be value free—to be objective, to live apart from rampant social inequality, discrimination, and institutional racism.

His critique may read like old news now—what with so many of us exploring the myriad ways in which gender, class, race, ethnicity, sexual identity, culture, and personal history color and distort our lenses of social observation. “Whose side are we on?” seems obvious, a question that hardly bears repeating; yet, in those 44 years we’ve learned how complicated it is to answer the next question: Is it enough just to choose? Having chosen a side, don’t you need to act?

When I was elected to lead the ESS for a year, I didn’t anticipate that an ill-conceived decision by Hyatt Hotel management would add both depth and urgency to the conference theme, “Economic Crisis and New Social Realities.” Neither did I expect that such a development would put the ESS at risk of bankruptcy. Nor that it would cause me to ask Becker’s question again—this time from the perspectives of an elected official of this organization and that of an individual who had, like many of my friends, become admittedly somewhat accustomed to injustice by the daily flood of bad news from Wall Street and worse news from Main Street. Nor did I realize that it would force me to come up with a strategy that would enable us to do the right thing.

In the end, I believe we did the right thing. We walked away from our contract. We averted a lawsuit. We paid no penalty to Hyatt. We moved to a unionized hotel whose management and staff has been extremely gracious and helpful. Ultimately, the threat of a year without our meetings, without the opportunity to renew relationships and build new ones, without the chance for young scholars to reach a broader audience, and the recognition that we could at least publicize that a gross injustice was being done to women who labored behind the scenes at Hyatt enlivened the ESS council and the program team—gave them new energy and a sense of mission—and helped all of us, myself included, to shrug off the 2009 version of Jimmy Carter’s “malaise.”

I decided to devote this presidential address to a pivotal moment in the organization’s history—to unpacking the local and the global and the structural and the interactional dimensions of our decision to walk away from our contract with Hyatt Hotels. While talking about this move tonight was the furthest thing from my mind six months ago, it is one of those situations beyond our control that becomes an opportunity for learning—a defining moment when one has to decide to act or to ignore; to align/apply one’s beliefs and teaching with one’s actions. As the association’s president and its executive committee, we had to balance “being on the right side” and our responsibility to the association. Becker was writing about how sociologists can’t avoid taking sides in their *research*, the story I tell tonight is not about a research project; instead, I try to answer the question *how should we act when we become actors in these situations*, which is what we were confronted with over the Hyatt’s housekeeper firing.

SETTING THE STAGE

Where is the teachable moment in the Hyatt action? This is a story—rife with irony and paradox—that provides valuable insights into the way elements of the old and the new coexist in an era of declining empires and turbo-modernization. It is the story of a very traditional strategy of labor substitution in the context of a very new global economy. It is the story of invisible work and sometimes *invisible* workers—women workers—who have bought the American Dream lock, stock, and barrel even as they remit a sizable chunk of their earnings to their families in developing economies. It is the story of a company—one of thousands—that has shown remarkable skill at bait and switch—promising good jobs *and* benefits first to one group of women, *and* then subcontracting those jobs to another company who did exactly the same thing to another group of women. It is also the story of how, in the newest wave of globalization, the benefits of outsourcing are being enjoyed by owners of sovereign wealth funds (government-owned cash) in Singapore and Abu Dhabi. It is a story of how a professional association chewed itself free from a structural trap without, unfortunately, resolving the situation that had trapped it in the first place. Finally, it is also a story of *society as a negotiated order*—*literally a negotiated order*—in which my training as a sociologist made it possible to break a hotel contract.

It helps to start unpacking the story of the Hyatt 100 by understanding the key players. First, there are the 100—or the 98 to be exact—Haitian, Dominican, Chinese, and Ghanaian women—documented immigrants, who up until August 31, 2009 paid federal and state income taxes and Social Security and sent money home to their families while supporting other family members locally. Their job up until they were *replaced* was one of cleaning up after those who could afford to travel during difficult economic times: business men and women; parents of Harvard, BU, and MIT students; and members of the ESS (some of whom) still have the luxury of a travel budget.

The second key player was Hyatt Hotels: a family-owned corporation with annual revenues of \$3.8 billion in 2008, operating income of \$200 million, and 125,000 employees worldwide that was feeling the bite of global recession (like the rest of the hospitality industry).³ Hyatt's local Boston management was being squeezed by corporate headquarters to reduce operating expenses—a common occurrence in an industry where efficiency and brand are the key drivers of profitability. But, little known to many observers at the time, the Pritzker family (specifically 11 Pritzker cousins) based in Chicago was moving to sell company shares in an IPO that would net roughly \$100 million a Pritzker.⁴

³ See Wall Street Journal. Retrieved February 21, 2010 (http://online.wsj.com/quotes/key_facts.html?mod=2_0470&symbol=H&news-symbol=H&mg=com-wsj).

⁴ It is interesting to note that Penny Pritzker, a member of Hyatt's board of directors, served as finance chair for Barack Obama's presidential campaign.

One step removed from the Pritzker family, a trifecta of names familiar to the twenty-first-century version of globalization was snapping up shares in the IPO. Sovereign wealth funds from Singapore and Abu Dhabi, two of the world's largest government-owned caches of foreign currency, and Goldman Sachs walked away with roughly a quarter of the shares of Hyatt. The jury is still out on how skillful an investor the Abu Dhabi Investment Authority is, but suffice it to say that neither Goldman Sachs nor the Treasury of Singapore is known for making bets on companies whose existence (and worth) depended on beggaring their least-paid employees. Subsequent developments revealed Hyatt's excellent market position, which bears this out: with \$1.3 billion in cash infused through the IPO, Hyatt is now on the hunt for high-end properties in global gateway cities like New York, London, and Paris.

Still, to listen to Boston Hyatt management, it was essential to slash the housekeepers' wages from (upward of) \$15 an hour to \$8 in order to bolster razor-thin profit margins in an industry under duress from the global recession. So, how were local savings to be accomplished in a global economy? In a surprisingly traditional way. Unlike manufacturing or back-office jobs that have been internationally outsourced to far-flung places like Bangalore, Manila, Gdansk, or, increasingly, to Cairo, Johannesburg, and Ho Chi Minh City, the jobs of the Hyatt 100 had been domestically outsourced to a company, Hospitality Staffing Services (HSS), based in Marietta, Georgia. An international strategy of using the global South returned to a domestic tactic of using the U.S. South. Ironically, Hyatt management attempted to grab the high moral ground by issuing a statement to the effect that it had not *internationally* outsourced those jobs. In Hyatt's words: "The HSS employees serving our properties in Boston are living in the area. They are not from outside of the community. So the notion that jobs were exported to somewhere outside of Boston is inaccurate."⁵

HSS specializes in recruiting and managing employees for hotels, private clubs, and institutions. It has offices throughout the United States—many operating out of strip malls and apartment buildings—and proudly proclaims on its website to be "a woman-owned business committed to providing work environments that assure fairness, dignity and respect for all associates." The irony doesn't drip, it dribbles: a woman-owned company making money by substituting one group of women for another group of women; and in a recession played up by some in the media as a "he-cession" for its inordinate impact on men's traditional jobs (especially in finance and construction), which have declined faster than women's (especially in healthcare and the service sector).

⁵ Hyatt Press Release issued September 18, 2009, "Statement Regarding Boston Hotel Housekeeping Staff"; ESS is mentioned in the *Boston Globe* because we are among the first organizations to take the position that we would withdraw our business unless the chain reconsidered its actions (Woolhouse, 2009).

The term “he-cession” not only pits women and men against one another but it also implies that women’s job loss need not be taken seriously. Economist Heidi Hartmann (2008:2, 3) in her testimony to the Joint Economic Committee of the Congress spoke poignantly about how job loss for women has been particularly problematic, especially for mothers. Much of what Hartmann had to say applies to the Hyatt 100. That is, it is women’s labor force participation that continues to be ignored (and devalued) because men remain the ideological providers, even when the family is a single-parent mother. Women who had been pulled into the labor force as permanent workers may find it more difficult now to find comparable jobs—indeed, any jobs at all. Other social scientists have argued that the sexual division between men and women is a dichotomous category that reifies the power and privilege of men. In her 2005 ASA presidential address, Cynthia Epstein (2007:17) eloquently writes that while social science has interrogated the processes by which subordinated groups suffer because of race and ethnicity, gender continues to remain a category that we have not fully or as insightfully examined. She claims that this is because “so many people in the world have a stake in upholding it, that it [gender] is the most resistant of all categories to change.”

To fully understand the Hyatt housekeepers’ situation we need to examine the multiple inequalities of gender, race and ethnicity, and immigration that marginalized and exploited them. The layoff of these long-time employees is a critical example of the broader struggles those with lower incomes and education levels face.⁶ Eliminating these workers—who are at the bottom rung of the employment ladder—seemed to Hyatt an unnoticeable way to reduce costs; the very nature of their jobs is to be invisible (and silent) to an ever-changing clientele (who rarely stay for more than a few days). Further, the housekeepers worked as a group in a segregated system where their jobs included maintaining distance from the other hotel workers. Hyatt was banking on the fact that the traditional segregation of women in their employment and therefore their layoffs would be as invisible as their work.

Companies like Hospitality Staffing Services are the twenty-first-century equivalent of a phenomena familiar to agribusiness since the late 1800s: they are labor contractors—companies that bring a measure of order and control to an otherwise unruly part of the labor market characterized by seasonal work, low wages, and unskilled management, in which employers use every means available to offload the risks associated with market volatility. In the southwestern United States and in Florida, labor contractors are notorious for importing undocumented workers. In Boston, according to unionists and former Hyatt workers, many of the HSS employees (the newly hired replacement

⁶ The *Boston Globe* (Chase, 2010) quoted Andrew Sum, director of the Center for Labor Market Studies, who reported: “The rate of underemployment and unemployment among housekeepers and janitors is 25 percent—the third-highest among 60 occupations studied and far higher than the overall rate of 15.4 percent.”

housekeepers) are undocumented workers.⁷ Labor contractors like HSS leverage the political vulnerability of undocumented workers (as they are purported to be doing) but *they also use family networks to augment* direct supervision and to reduce workers' ability to negotiate. Hire the right matriarch and you can also leverage family bonds of respect and obligation to mete out paltry rewards like jobs that pay better than what's available in their home regions.

CRITICAL TURNING POINTS

The move by Hyatt might have remained yet another story of tough times in the global recession, another sad but seemingly inevitable development in a country and a city growing increasingly unmoved by the contrasts between multimillion dollar payoffs to rip-off artists at AIG and the privations of men and women hanging onto their homes by their fingernails, were it not for two factors.

One factor that brought the Hyatt 100 to the forefront was the zeal of local journalists and unionists who saw in this a gross injustice and adroitly combined traditional and social media to make the story viral. Within days of the layoffs, Massachusetts Governor Deval Patrick made the story front-page news and hinted at a boycott of Hyatt.⁸ City council members in Boston and Cambridge jumped on board. Taxi drivers declared that they wouldn't pick up or deliver fares to Hyatt properties in Boston. A local high school cancelled its prom rather than hold it at the Hyatt Cambridge—and no one is better at broadcasting dissatisfaction than a bunch of pissed-off teenagers with Facebook accounts. Stories multiplied online and in print with features in the Huffington Post, Slate, and CNN.com. Activists mobilized a dozen demonstrations in Boston, Chicago, San Francisco, Los Angeles, San Antonio, other parts of the United States, and in Vancouver—in some cases timed to coincide with local contract negotiations. (They can all be viewed on YouTube.com.) For example, the Chicago protest closed down a part of Michigan Avenue. The Boston Hyatt workers became symbols and were mentioned in demonstrations across the country: “These companies are greedy and *they decide*

⁷ A Chicago-based company called United Temps, after ESS had broken its contract, replaced HSS. Six wage-related complaints have been lodged and are pending against HSS in the Massachusetts Attorney General's Office. HSS also has pending suits in other states and a class action suit on behalf of janitors and housekeepers at the Pittsburgh Hyatt (Chase, 2009b). United Temps still pays \$8.00 an hour. The housekeepers' work is organized differently; housekeepers under Hyatt were assigned an area of the hotel that was “theirs.” Housekeepers who work through the outsourcing firms do not have a fixed area of the Hyatt that is their responsibility nor are they necessarily assigned permanently to any one hotel. This restructuring of housekeeping, critical to the hospitality industry, raises questions about accountability for clean, sanitary rooms. Corporate management with whom I spoke never clarified Hyatt management's relationship to a middle company. The outsourcing companies expect their new housekeepers to clean more rooms than Hyatt management did—sometimes almost double the number of rooms.

⁸ “Patrick ‘Troubled’ by Hyatt” (Chase, 2009a) is the lead article that propelled the plight of these laid-off housekeepers and the way they were fired into the public's attention. He asks the CEO to reconsider the outsourcing of these jobs especially at this difficult economic time.

where and when they want to help you provide a future for your kids. They're making money, cutting back on us, and we have to bail them out with our tax money. We're tired of it," said Cedric Harris, hotel worker (demonstrating in Chicago).⁹ This strategy forced attention on the hospitality industry, demonstrating that if the Boston and Cambridge Hyatts were "test" cases for outsourcing workers, the workers would take to the streets with their cause.

Although the fired Boston housekeepers were not covered by a union contract,¹⁰ the hotel workers local union understood immediately that this was a threat to the entire industry—union and nonunion alike. They offered solidarity to these workers, who, in turn, became representatives as the union called demonstrations across the country. "Onshore outsourcing" directly threatened the union's bargaining power.

*The second factor explaining why this story didn't get lost in the torrent of bad economic news was that the women of the Hyatt 100 proved "media ready" with articulate and compelling expressions of anger, frustration, and righteous indignation. With pride in their voices, they told the world that the American Dream had snared them hook, line, and sinker and here it was being torn away by people with whom they'd worked side by side, some of whom they'd even trained. Lucine Williams, a fired housekeeper who worked at Hyatt for 22 years, interviewed by the media said: "Everybody is in disbelief. People are still crying. After working here so long how can you treat people like that. How can you say I will not need you anymore?"*¹¹

Housekeepers were not asked to take a pay cut or a salary freeze; instead, the people most critical to the everyday work of the hotel industry were told that they were being laid off even though their jobs were not being deleted. Corpornia Belis, speaking through tears and in Spanish with simultaneous English translation at another rally, captured the essence of the whole campaign, "I left 25 years of my life, of my youth in that hotel ... my shoulders, my knees, my back stayed in that hotel and what did they give me a garbage bag so I could empty out my locker." The degradation of loyal, long-term service workers already at the bottom of the rung outraged people across the country. Locked in arms across Michigan Avenue, they chanted "Si se puede ... Yes we can!" during the Chicago demonstration. The rallying cry predated

⁹ Quotes from YouTube videos at the rallies.

¹⁰ Hyatt Cambridge and two Hyatt Boston Hotels are not union. However, Hyatt Hotels vary across the country as to whether their housekeepers and janitorial staff are part of a union or not. Even though union membership has declined since 1983, from 20.1% to 12.4% in 2009, the gap between men and women members has significantly narrowed to (13.3%) for men and (11.3%) for females in 2009. The percentage of immigrants (12.6%), Latino (12.2%), and Asian (4.6%) workers has increased among the total unionized workforce. Black workers are about 13% of the total unionized workforce, a consistent share since 1983 (U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010).

¹¹ Lucine Williams spoke on a thematic panel at the ESS meeting. Through tears of dismay about her job layoff, she told her story. She came to the United States from Barbados in 1987. Her unemployment check helps cover her rent but basically she is now in credit card debt. She worries about her son, who has asthma, and about paying for his medicine. As her extended medical benefits through the Hyatt were about to expire, she signed up for Mass Health (required of all uninsured Massachusetts residents).

Obama and harkened back to the days of Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers union. The very *ordinariness* of their plight made the housekeepers a powerful emblem for labor, and made Hyatt a symbol of corporate cruelty at the height of this new and serious great recession.

These two factors in combination—activists savvy enough to leverage news media and social technology and women courageous enough to tell their stories of personal loss—raised the potential for a secondary boycott, last seen successfully with the grapes and lettuce boycotts of the 1960s and 1970s when consumers (and sociologists) made a political statement simply by not buying iceberg lettuce, Gallo wine, or by checking the names of particular growers in the grocery stores (Friedland and Thomas, 1974). Through it all, Hyatt sought to portray itself as the aggrieved party, ultimately charging that union show-boating would cost the cities of Cambridge and Boston both tax revenues and jobs.

The ESS Connection

Where does the ESS fit in all of this? Well, as much as I might like to say that we pulled a fast one on corporate America, I have to admit that the main thing I learned was that when faced with structural traps, we have no choice but to choose sides. Some might call it “public sociology,”¹² but I prefer to think of it as doing the right thing. The events associated with the outsourcing of jobs at Hyatt forced us to recognize that acting is clearly riskier than sympathetic bystanding. The question with which we grappled was how to do the right thing.

Once the story made national news, I began receiving e-mails from our membership and sociologists across the country. I was warned—and I realize e-mail lacks nuance and tone—that people would boycott, that the meetings would be soiled, and that a decision to go ahead with the meetings would make the ESS complicit in this corporate strategy. For those members, the “right” side was clearly left and solidarity with the workers was the obvious course.

Unfortunately, ESS could not simply fire off a fiery e-mail denouncing the Hyatt management and decamp to another hotel. The ESS had a contract with escalating penalty clauses that made walking away far from problematic and not a simple decision. I needed a strategy that would satisfy the workers and the union, and also satisfy potential ESS participants. Breaking the contract at all costs was not a strategy. I admit, for a while at least, I calculated how many and which members we would lose. In some cases, I was sorely tempted to lose members. I imagined the moral dilemma some in our membership might face—solidarity with the boycotting sociologists or crossing the

¹² In this journal, Blau and Moncada (2007) and Hansen and Movahedi (2010) made a similar point with regard to human rights and greed, respectively.

picket line in order to present the paper you need on your resume because of the thin job market at universities and colleges that had not frozen their tenure-track lines. I *refused* to be the president who divided the association. Nor was I willing to be the president who bankrupted it. It was not a pretty picture. Here is what happened from the notes I had kept.

I was tired, driving home after teaching all day and thinking about where I could have done a better job when the car phone rang. Being a safe driver, I didn't check the caller ID. Turns out, it was the local Hyatt VP. He had been leaving me messages for a few days. I hadn't returned his call because I wasn't sure what I wanted to say.

Now I had no choice but to talk to him.

He introduced himself—politely—and said he'd heard that I had spoken to a VP at Corporate headquarters about the bind I felt Hyatt had put the ESS in by firing the housekeepers. He was concerned that we might break our contract. Could we talk over coffee? Did I know that Hyatt corporate was rolling out new offers to the fired housekeepers?

Everything about his tone told me that he thought of himself as a good guy ... a reasonable guy who had done nothing *personally* wrong. It was his job to defend headquarters' decisions. He really did sound sincere. Still, I couldn't help but ask if he'd heard that the Governor was still considering a boycott. That surely wouldn't be pleasant, huh?

Ignoring my taunt, he went back to the solution that Hyatt was about to offer: retraining and outplacement—the whole works. An announcement was going to be made soon.

I told him I was unsure I could wait. My members were really unhappy.

And then something critical happened—a penny dropped, so to speak.

He offered the ESS more time—until December 1, 2009 to break the contract at the present penalty rate. And suddenly I realized that this was a negotiation.

As an ethnographer I always ask people to repeat things so I understand the meaning. Or I repeat it back to them so we have a kind of “linguistic handshake.” He repeated what I thought I heard about extending the contract.

Well, if he could negotiate, why couldn't I? I said, “I need something more. I need you to extend the contract until December 1st and get rid of all penalties we owe to date and for the future should we break the contract.”

Silence on the other end.

We obviously were not handcuffed to this contract. It was a social construct (as over-used a concept as this is). To save face with his bosses—something I had inadvertently put at risk by calling headquarters—he needed something he could call a contract, whether or not he could enforce it. The ESS needed a contract that would keep us on the right side of the law but one that was vague enough that I could replace it with another contract.

To my delight, he agreed to get rid of financial penalties altogether. I didn't think twice about asking him to send me an immediate e-mail confirming our new agreement which eventually became a contract addendum.

Still important to him was my keeping a coffee date so he could explain Hyatt's position. He said, “You'll see that the threats of a boycott will go away. And we did

nothing wrong.” I realized that he wanted this social encounter for several reasons: to please his bosses (who obviously gave the order), to distance himself from the situation by shifting the blame, and to make an impression that would change my mind. As Goffman (1956:271) writes: “Instead of permitting the conflict to be expressed in an encounter, the individual places himself between the opposing principles. He sacrifices his identity for a moment, and sometimes the encounter, but the principles are preserved.” He and I both knew that the organizational principles we each represented were at loggerheads. I drank my coffee fast. I was uncomfortable, almost embarrassed, meeting him because I already knew I had chosen my side.

We do have to take sides. But we shouldn’t always announce that we are choosing sides. In fact, throughout the discussion over coffee I had with the management of Cambridge Hyatt and the phone calls with Hyatt’s corporate CFO and the exchanges of e-mails with our lawyers, I was a paragon of objectivity: no sides taken, just trying to find a way to placate members who are demanding a boycott and the prospect of being asked to cross picket lines. I was no different than the VP—just a representative of the ESS and I had to satisfy them, as he was satisfying his bosses.

LESSONS LEARNED

Fundamentally, I applied what I learned in other situations to maneuver around other social structures and to find ways to bend circumstances in my direction. Specifically, years of infertility taught me patience. Years of chairing a sometimes-fractious department taught me when to be silent and when to act. My training as a sociologist taught me to look for the holes where maneuvering would be possible. The real sociological lesson I learned was that despite the constant needling from our membership to be vociferously on the ride side (no matter the consequences), when we deal with real-world problems, we have to know, understand, and be able to deal with the very real constraints on our actions. It is not enough to just posture rather than get things done, nor is it reasonable to go down with the ship—in this case the Hyatt 100.

Of course, I had chosen sides and when the opportunity arose to negotiate to secure a commitment from Hyatt management to push out the date by which we had to decide—and to give us, unknowingly, time to find another site and still avoid breach of contract—I jumped at it. Now the question was timing. When could we, the ESS, make a move?

The housekeepers rejected the new offer from Hyatt to help them with temp job placements. Again, the housekeepers reiterated their statements on wanting their old jobs back.¹³ We believed the media coverage was enough to break the contract and exit the Hyatt. Conscious of the position that each side was in, I knew that ESS could not change the structure, but that we could pick the right hole and navigate through it.

We were able to support the former Hyatt workers, to honor our collective conscience, and to avoid financial penalty. However, no matter how deft

¹³ “Workers Reject Hyatt’s Job Offer” (Chase, 2009c).

our maneuvering, we cannot escape the realization that the American Dream hangs from a thread more slender and tenuous than ever before. At some point—probably in the not too distant future—the weight of financial indebtedness that has enabled the Dream for several generations will combine with the paradoxes we have seen—internal outsourcing and woman-owned companies exploiting women workers—to snap that thread.

The story is not over, of course. Hyatt's concession to extend health benefits for six months and to help in outplacement hasn't resolved the situation.¹⁴ UNITE and Local 26 don't have a contract and will find it tough to force a certification election while HSS puts a buffer between the replacement workers and union. Governor Patrick has not made good on his threat of boycott¹⁵ and while the Hyatt 100—less a few who took other jobs—continue to carry their message to the public, there are few prospects that they will be taken back. Yet, those women and the organizations that support them—which I am happy to say includes the ESS—retain their resolve and their deep commitment to do more than just observe the world but to change it.

Our obligation is not simply to bear witness to the processes by which subordinated groups suffer, but to actively take sides—even when taking sides exposes us to criticism, creates internal divisions, and illustrates how we, too, are active participants in a system of inequality—a system that as often privileges some of us as it punishes others.¹⁶ To that end, I'd like to close with a quote not from Karl Marx, but from Chilean poet and Nobel prize winner Pablo Neruda, who reminds us that “Changing the universe is an inside job.”

REFERENCES

- Becker, Howard S. 1967. “Whose Side Are We On?” *Social Problems* 14(3): 239–247.
- Blau, J., and A. Moncada. 2007. “It Ought to Be a Crime: Criminalizing Human Rights Violations,” *Sociological Forum* 22(3): 364–371.
- Chase, Katie Johnston 2009a. “Patrick ‘Troubled’ by Hyatt,” *Boston Globe*, September 19.
- Chase, Katie Johnston 2009b. “Hotel Staffing Company Faced Wage Complaints,” *Boston Globe*, September 26.
- Chase, Katie Johnston 2009c. “Workers Reject Hyatt’s Job Offer,” *Boston Globe*, September 29.
- Chase, Katie Johnston. 2010. “Ex-Hyatt Workers Find Job Market Hard to Penetrate,” *Boston Globe*, April 2.
- Epstein, Cynthia Fuchs. 2007. “Great Divided: The Cultural, Cognitive, and Social Bases of the Global Subordination of Women,” *American Sociological Review* 72(1): 1–22.
- Fenimore, Jillian. 2010. “Cambridge City Council Votes for Ban on Subcontracting Hotel Maids,” *Wicked Local Cambridge*, April 6.
- Friedland, William H., and Robert J. Thomas. 1974. “The Paradoxes of Agricultural Unionism in California,” *Society* 11(4): 54–62.

¹⁴ Seven months after the layoffs, the majority of fired housekeepers remain unemployed (Chase, 2010). The extended health-care benefits ended on March 31, 2010.

¹⁵ Governor Deval Patrick did encourage state officials not to attend events at the hotel chain. During the Cambridge City Council hearing on April 5, 2010, city elected officials mentioned that they would no longer attend events at this hotel.

¹⁶ On April 5, 2010, I was asked to speak as the former ESS president at the Cambridge City Council meeting by the local hospitality workers union, Unite Here Local 26. City council members voted unanimously to support a regulation by the License Commission that would prohibit hotels in Cambridge from subcontracting housekeeping services (Fenimore, 2010).

- Goffman, Erving. 1956. "Embarrassment and Social Organization," *American Journal of Sociology* 62(3): 264-271.
- Hansen, L. L., and Movahedi, S. 2010. "Wall Street Scandals: The Myth of Individual Greed," *Sociological Forum* 25(2): 367-374.
- Hartmann, Heidi 2008. "The Impact of the Current Economic Downturn on Women" [Testimony Presented to the Joint Economic Committee at the Hearing: The Employment Situation, June], *Institute for Women's Policy Research* B260: 1-11.
- U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. 2010. "Union Membership Annual." Retrived January 22, 2010 (<http://www.bls.gov/news.release/union2.toc.htm>).
- Wall Street Journal. "Company Research Key Facts. Hyatt Hotels Corp." Retrieved February 21, 2010 (http://online.wsj.com/quotes/dey_facts.html?mod=2_0470&symbol=H&news-symbol=H&mg=com-wsj).
- Woolhouse, Megan. 2009. "Firing Housekeepers Creates PR Mess for Hyatt: Effect on Bottom Line of Cancellations, Boycott Calls Unclear," *Boston Globe*, September 25.