The New Realities of Working-Class Jobs:

Employer Practices, Worker Protections, and Employee Voice to Improve Job Quality

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Abstract

Changing employer practices over the last forty years have led to deteriorating job quality by introducing instability and insecurity into working-class jobs and limiting employee voice in the employer-employee relationship. Although the decade after the Great Recession was characterized by slow and sustained economic growth, this growth did not benefit workers in working-class jobs. We argue that an economic recovery is unlikely to significantly improve the quality of working-class jobs without policies that rebalance the terms of employment toward worker interests. Such an approach would likely require federal level policies that expand public insurance programs, establish minimum standards of job quality, and include avenues for collective employee voice in employment and public policy debates to improve job quality. The paper considers policy innovations and worker campaigns to improve working-class jobs and the economic security of workers and families.

Key Words: Working-class jobs, Employer practices, Work schedules, Labor flexibility practices, Employee voice

Introduction

Prior to the arrival of the novel coronavirus in the United States, researchers lamented that the strong economy emerging out of the Great Recession was not yielding the same benefits for workers as previous economic recoveries. The post-2009 economic growth largely continued a forty-year trend of deteriorating job quality in working-class jobs.[1] Individuals with less than a college degree only saw slight wage benefits, if at all, after the Great Recession even as GDP continued to rise (Howell and Kalleberg 2019; Freeman 2013). Now, the COVID-19 pandemic has erased even modest post-recession economic gains, and it continues to cause devastating harm to the health and wellbeing of millions of workers and their families.[2]

What would it take for an economic recovery to improve the quality of working-class jobs? This article takes up this question in four parts. First, we consider how changing employer practices over the last forty years have introduced instability and insecurity into working-class jobs and limited employee voice in the employer-employee relationship. We argue that these micro-level factors are critical but sometimes overlooked dimensions of job quality in today's labor market. Our contention is that the preponderance of bad jobs across periods of growth and contraction over the last four decades are not only the result of macro-economic conditions. They are also due to the increasing power of employers in the US labor market to contain labor costs by externalizing risk onto workers. During recessionary periods, this imbalance tips even further toward employers as employees have less leverage over the conditions of their work. An economic recovery is unlikely to significantly improve the quality of working-class jobs without explicit policy attention to rebalancing the terms of employment toward worker interests.

[1] For the purposes of this article, we define working-class jobs as those that require less than a 4-year college degree.
[2] The focus of this paper is on the United States; but, of course, the novel coronavirus has disrupted the economies across the globe and at this writing has caused over 1.4 million deaths worldwide.

Second, we consider the limitations of stimulus efforts focused on direct relief programs to improve job quality in the long run. While relief measures during the Great Recession were critically important to reducing poverty and hardship, they were not primarily designed to improve job quality. New stimulus funding in response to the COVID-19 pandemic could serve as a base for the expansion of existing programs and the creation of new ones that operate to relieve hardship caused by unemployment and underemployment while also improving the quality of working-class jobs through social insurance and minimum job standards. Third, we illustrate how recent policy innovations – that were attracting great interest prior to the COVID-19 pandemic – are designed to protect workers through the establishment of minimum standards for basic employment conditions such as wages, hours, and benefits. These policies may represent a promising path toward improving the quality of working-class jobs by guaranteeing a quality floor; but only if they are based on efforts that rebalance power toward workers. Finally, we close with a discussion of the critical roles that workers themselves play – through unions and other organizations – in shaping employer practices and contributing to the public policy debate to improve job quality.

The Employment Context before COVID-19

Since 1979, macro-economic changes enabled by public policy choices and new managerial strategies have disadvantaged low and moderate-income workers (Howell and Kalleberg 2019; Kalleberg 2011; Lambert 2008; Bernhardt, Boushey, Dresser, and Tilly 2008). Broad structural forces – financialization, deep declines in unionization, fissured employment – have led to stagnant and deteriorating wages, rising wage inequality, weakened job protections and declining employer-provided benefits (Howell and Kalleberg 2019; Kalleberg 2011; Weil 2014; Bernhardt, et al 2008; Hacker 2006). There has also been a shifting balance of power in the employer-employee relationship over this period. An increasing share of economic risk has passed from firms and the government to individuals and families (Appelbaum and Batt 2014; Hacker 2006; Kalleberg 2011; Kalleberg and Vallas 2017; Lambert 2008; Standing 2011; Weil 2014). These processes are fundamentally reshaping workplace arrangements and employer practices, especially in working-class jobs (Howell and Kalleberg 2019; Weil 2014; Lambert 2014).

Nonstandard Workplace Arrangements. Although data limitations make it hard to accurately estimate trends in alternative work arrangements over time, an increasing proportion of workers are in various forms of nonstandard employment such as part-time work, independent contractor arrangements, and "gig" jobs, and are combining standard employment with "other ways of making money" to supplement low and unstable earnings (Abraham, Haltiwanger, Sandusky and Spletzer 2017; Farrell and Greig 2016; Golden 2016; Howell and Kalleberg 2019). While some nonstandard jobs come with high pay and job autonomy and control, many are poorly paid and highly insecure and few come with fringe benefits or labor protections (Howell and Kalleberg 2019).

Employer Scheduling and Staffing Practices. As a cost containment strategy, employers across most industries have adopted flexible labor practices that aim to minimize labor costs (Lambert 2008). For example, scheduling managers regularly vary the number and timing of employee work hours, provide limited advance notice of work schedules, change starting and ending times, cancel or add shifts without notice, and provide employees limited input into how much or when they work (Lambert, Henly and Kim 2019; Schneider and Harknett 2019). In the decade since the Great Recession, new technologies have accelerated employers' utilization of these "just-in-time" labor strategies (Lambert 2014), hour variability has increased (Finnigan 2018) and unpredictable hours have become commonplace (Lambert, Henly and Kim 2019;

Schneider and Harknett 2019). A related strategy to reduce costs and maintain labor flexibility is to keep staffing headcount high by minimizing the number of full-time staff and maximizing those hired in a part-time status (Lambert and Henly 2012). Indeed, involuntary part-time employment has grown in several key sectors of the economy (Golden 2016).

Employer practices around hours and schedules contribute to income volatility and economic insecurity (Lambert, Henly, and Kim 2019), difficulties aligning work responsibilities with personal and family responsibilities (Clawson and Gerstel 2014; Henly and Lambert 2014; Stanczyk, Henly and Lambert 2017), and negative health effects on workers, including disrupted sleep, negative mood and psychological distress (Schneider and Harknett 2019; Ananat and Gassman-Pines 2020). Because eligibility for public benefits are often contingent on working a minimum number of hours, these scheduling practices can also compromise employee access to public benefits (Lambert and Henly 2012; Mills et al 2014; Nicholson and Needels 2006).

<u>Employer Violations of Employment and Labor Laws</u>. Cost containment is also realized by some employers through noncompliance with employment and labor laws (Bernhardt, Spiller and Theodore 2013). Bernhardt and colleagues (2013) argue that noncompliance with basic labor protections "is becoming a key feature of employers' competitive strategy at the bottom of the U.S. labor market" (p. 829). Their research demonstrates a high prevalence of employer violations, for example payment below the minimum wage and requiring work "off the clock," across the low-wage labor market, but especially among employers that adopt nonstandard payment systems and management strategies that emphasize cost containment.

Enter COVID-19 into this Employment Context

It is into this employment context that the COVID-19 virus entered the United States in March 2020. The pandemic has fundamentally transformed paid work for all of us, although not in the same ways or with the same consequences. A stunning number of workers in the U.S. have lost their jobs (Cortes and Forsythe 2020). Employers have laid off workers in high numbers, in all industries and in every demographic group. But twice as many workers in the bottom quintile of the earnings distribution have lost jobs as compared to workers in the top quintile (Cortes and Forsythe 2020), and these same workers have also experienced the brunt of employer decisions to cut hours (Golden and Kim 2020). Black and Latino/a workers, immigrants, women and less-educated workers have faced disproportionate job losses and hour reductions throughout the pandemic, in part because of the employment sectors in which they work (Alon, Doepke, Olmstead-Rumsey and Tertilt 2020; Borjas and Cassidy 2020; Couch, Fairlie, and Xu 2020). Women's disproportionate caregiving responsibilities have also contributed to work hour reductions, rather than the work hour increases they experienced during the Great Recession (Kashen, Glynn, & Novello 2020). Well into a second wave of the pandemic, workers in the US are facing new layoffs and hour reductions; unemployment insurance applications are again on the rise (Stone, Zippel, Mazzara, Nchako, and Sherman 2020).

The inequalities exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic are also visible inside workplaces and homes. Front-line workers, who are disproportionately workers of color, especially African American, Latino/a, and immigrants (Blau, Koebe and Meyerhofer 2020), continue working onsite despite exposure to a contagious and deadly virus, reporting to their jobs in hospitals and nursing homes, food processing plants, restaurants and bars, and grocery stores, or driving buses, delivering packages, and providing home-care services (Kinder, Sateler, and Du 2020). Significant numbers of workers in these jobs were financially insecure prior to the pandemic, with high levels of food insecurity and economic hardship (Schneider and Harknett 2020).

Other workers remain employed but carry out their work from home (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2020). The BLS reports that in October, 2020, one-fifth of employed persons were "teleworking" because of the pandemic. White workers, more highly educated workers, and workers with higher incomes are more likely to hold jobs that allow them to work from home. While working at home provides some protection from exposure to the virus, it also blurs the boundaries between work and home, and may cause interferences that create stress and reduce productivity, especially for individuals living in crowded households or with caregiving responsibilities. Women are especially affected (Kashen, Glynn, and Novello 2020).

The pandemic continues in full force at the time this article was written; its full effects on the labor market and the health and economic wellbeing of workers and their families is unknown.[3] However, the COVID-19 pandemic, like the Great Recession twelve years before it, is not responsible for turning stable working-class jobs into precarious ones. The declining quality of working-class jobs had begun at least forty years earlier. The policy response to this economic and health crisis will be consequential to the lives of millions of working-class families. Public policies have the potential to relieve the immediate suffering of workers and their families, as well as improve the quality of working-class jobs and working-class lives into the future. Whether the policy response has these effects depends not just on the size of expenditures but also their substance.

Improving Working-Class Jobs to Better Working-Class Lives

Lessons from the policy response to the Great Recession and COVID-19

Research indicates that interventions enacted in response to the Great Recession were effective at alleviating hardship and preventing further economic decline. They did not, however,

[3] Other papers in this special issue discuss how the COVID-19 recession is different from other recessions and the implications of those differences for the course of the economic recovery.

reverse the longer-term economic forces contributing to growing inequality and job precarity. In particular, dramatic spending increases on relief programs, especially the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), and Unemployment Insurance (UI), largely made possible by the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) resulted in meaningful reductions in poverty and hardship at a time of considerable economic pain experienced by millions of Americans (Bitler, Hoynes and Kuka 2017; Bitler and Hoynes 2016; Blinder 2013; Moffitt 2013; Wimer and Smeeding 2017). But there is agreement among economists that the premature ending of relief provided through the ARRA stimulus bill, coupled with state and local spending cuts, slowed the recovery and especially harmed workers at the bottom of the labor market (Blinder 2013; Campbell and Sances 2013; Danziger 2013; Moffitt 2013). More to the point of the current paper, the stimulus response to the Great Recession did little to address the systemic forces that had contributed to decades of deteriorating job quality, heightened job precarity, and declining worker power.

With passage of COVID-19 stimulus measures including the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, we once again see massive new spending. The CARES Act includes a combination of direct stimulus to households, greatly expanded unemployment insurance (UI) benefits, mandatory paid sick leave and paid family and medical leave, some fiscal relief to states, and a variety of different programs to small and large employers. Like with ARRA, there is reason to be concerned about a premature end to federal government stimulus spending. The CARES Act is set to expire the end of 2020 (some measures have already expired) without extension or additional spending measures passed into law. Should it be continued and expanded, several provisions in the CARES Act, which recognize the changing nature of working-class jobs, could protect the economic security of workers who have been excluded from safety net protections in the past.

The expansion of UI in the CARES Act is particularly relevant to our focus on working-class jobs and workers. The CARES Act temporarily broadens eligibility for UI to self-employed, independent contractors, partially employed, and those unable or unavailable to work because of COVID-19-related health and caregiving reasons. It also allows UI recipients to apply for an additional 13 weeks of UI and it provided a flat $600 per week payment in addition to the standard benefit level (but this ended in July). These UI expansions are large, resulting in a 3-fold increase to the benefits that a full-time minimum wage worker would normally receive (Bhutta, Blair, Dettling and Moore 2020). Given the expansion of nonstandard employment arrangements, growing fluctuations and scarcity in work hours, and increases in long-term unemployment over the past four decades, these changes to UI eligibility bring millions of additional workers into the UI program. If made permanent, these expansions could help ensure the economic security of these same workers into the future.

Although the CARES Act has been criticized for giving insufficient attention to the health aspects of the pandemic itself (Romer 2020), there are three related provisions that deserve attention in our discussion of improving working-class jobs. The CARES Act recognizes the caregiving roles and health conditions of workers by treating separations from work due to caregiving as a legitimate reason for UI application, mandating that certain employers provide two weeks (up to 80 hours) of paid sick leave under conditions related to quarantine, COVID-19 infection, and caregiving, and mandating that covered employers extend family and medical leave up to an additional 10 weeks at two-thirds of employee’s regular rate of pay if an employee is unable to work due to a child's school or child care provider being closed or unavailable for reasons related to COVID-19 (Department of Labor 2020).

By recognizing that illness and caregiving are fundamental aspects of workers' lives, with these three measures, the CARES Act puts in place what could serve as a model for national paid sick leave and paid family and medical leave insurance. Workers in working-class jobs, like all workers, need access to paid sick days and paid family and medical leave not only to weather the current economic decline but also to ensure that they are able to take part in the recovery that follows. All workers, especially but not only working parents, need jobs that provide them access to adequate benefits such as child care, paid sick days, and paid family and medical leave and health insurance. Thus, building on these components of the CARES Act (including expanding emergency supports to child care programs and schools) would improve the quality of working-class jobs and lives by helping ensure that workers at the bottom of the labor market have access to benefits already available to more advantaged workers, such as paid sick days and UI, and to future initiatives to support caregiving through accessible child care and paid medical and family leave, as discussed by others in this volume.

Directions for Improving Job Quality Beyond Stimulus Spending

Employment Regulation

One avenue for improving jobs directly is to require employers to meet minimum standards for basic employment conditions such as wages, hours, and benefits. Laws regulating employment are full of exemptions for employers and minimally enforced by government, leading scholars to classify the U.S. employment system as a regime of unilateral employer control (Berg, Bosch and Charest 2014). Policy analysts and scholars are calling for strengthened federal standards on wages and hours and new standards for previously unregulated conditions of employment, such as paid leave (see Fortman 2014). Recent policy innovations, occurring in progressive urban centers as part of a renewed federalism, are being looked to as models for federal efforts. These municipal and state regulations target a host of employer practices including employee scheduling (Fair Workweek Laws), hiring (Ban-the-Box), wage rates (the Fight for $15 and a Union), and paid leave (Earned Sick Time and Paid Medical and Family Leave). Assessing the promise of these recent policies to set standards that raise the floor on job quality requires a careful consideration of how business and labor interests are balanced in policy provisions.

The 1938 Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA), the primary federal law intended to set standards for wages and hours, is a prime example of how business interests have long been structured into legislation in ways that undermine the setting of universal labor standards for U.S. workers. The FLSA targets problematic job conditions rampant at the turn of the twentieth century: child labor, long hours and low wages. Its core provisions – minimum wage, overtime premium, restrictions on child labor, and recordkeeping – and their enforcement are needed as much today as in the past (Bernhardt, Spiller, and Theodore 2013; Weil 2014). But, even if the FLSA were perfectly implemented by employers, it would still fall short of delivering universal standards of job quality. From the beginning, jobs outside of a conventional employer-employee relationship have been excluded from FLSA protections; employers have never had to be concerned with how much independent contractors earn per hour. Employers have been allowed to pay some groups of workers – those with tipped income (only $30 per month), teens, and workers with a disability – a sub-minimum wage, regardless of the worker's job performance. And, although the FLSA was extended to cover domestic service workers in 1974, many occupations that are disproportionately filled by workers of color continue to be excluded from minimum wage and overtime provisions, notably farm workers.

The fingerprint of employer power is most apparent in the absence of standards on work hours. The FLSA does not require employers to provide employees with even a single hour of work or to inform employees of their work hours even one day in advance. Except for restrictions on maximum hours for a few occupations (pilots, truck drivers, medical school residents), federal laws do not restrict the number of hours employers can require employees to work each day or week. Under the FLSA, employers only need pay their direct-hire employees a premium for the hours they work beyond 40 per week (originally beyond 8 hours per day); all but the lowest paid salaried workers are part of the "exempt" (from overtime) workforce. The FLSA preserves ample labor flexibility for employers.

"Fair workweek" ordinances provide a sobering assessment of how employer power continues to wield itself to restrict standard setting in America's workplaces and to protect labor flexibility for employers. Since 2014, five major cities – San Francisco, Seattle, New York, Philadelphia, and Chicago – have enacted scheduling legislation that incorporates similar core provisions, for example, a good-faith estimate of number of hours at the point of hire, two weeks advance schedule notice, and a "predictability premium" (commonly one extra hour of pay) for employer-driven schedule changes (see Lambert 2020).

If we are serious about setting standards that improve job quality for all, then it is equally important to look at what municipal-level ordinances do *not* do and who they do *not* cover. Under current fair workweek laws, employers are not required to guarantee workers minimum hours or restricted from changing employees' work schedules. When employers cancel shifts or add hours, they just have to pay a bit more – an extra hour of pay when adding hours and half the remaining time when cancelling or shorting a shift. The focus of the laws is thus more on reducing schedule unpredictability than volatility. Labor flexibility for employers is protected at the cost of the stability of workers' schedules, and their earnings. Moreover, although Chicago's new Fair Workweek Ordinance expands coverage to low-paid workers in health care, warehousing, manufacturing, and cleaning services, current laws are primarily limited to large corporations in retail and food services, leaving many marginalized workers outside their protection. Workers in nonstandard arrangements, such as independent contractors, are excluded from coverage under all current ordinances, continuing employer exemption practices of the past.

Our critique is not intended to fault fair workweek laws; indeed our research has helped inform them. Instead, our goal is to prompt reflection on how state- and municipal-level policy initiatives are incorporating employer interests. In good times and bad, thriving businesses that have the capacity to offer good jobs are essential to the health of workers, families, and civil society. And business and worker interests need not be at odds; a randomized experiment at the US retailer Gap, Inc. that improved scheduling practices for hourly associates also increased store sales and labor productivity (Kesavan, Lambert, Williams, and Pendem, in review). The stakes are too high, though, to rely solely on voluntary employer efforts to improve the quality of jobs and to neglect the possibility that the unparalleled power of business is once again tempering the potential of employment regulation to set universal standards for job quality (Lambert 2014). In the face of progressive movements in municipalities, business is wielding power through state law, as evidenced by passage of so-called "right to work" laws that undermine the power of labor and pre-emption laws that preclude municipalities from raising the minimum wage beyond the state's minimum or enacting fair workweek legislation. Federal labor standards are needed that put workers on at least an equal par with business. Public support for doing so may never be stronger.

Worker Organizing

Workers are not simply the subjects of employer practice and policy context, they are also agents in their creation. Workers, often through their unions, have the collective ability to constrain or resist employer strategies and reshape firm response to market pressure. But also, organized workers contribute to and shape the public policy debate around issues critical to workers. We contend that workers' bargaining and political power are essential resources in improving job quality both by shaping employer practices and the policy context. Unfortunately, the scales are tipped heavily toward employers.

If organized workers help hold up labor standards, it is no wonder that we have serious issues with job quality. Across the 1970s, one-in-four U.S. workers were covered by union contracts. Since then, unionization rates have fallen steadily, covering 11.7 percent of the workforce (Shierholz 2020). Unlike the Great Depression, which expanded the reach of labor unions, the Great Recession did not reverse or even forestall unions' downward trajectory. Indeed, it may have ushered in a period of deunionization in the public sector (Milkman and Luce 2017).[4]

Still, unions remain important for the 16 million workers they represent and for working people more broadly. Union members earn wages 11.2 percent higher than their non-union counterparts and, importantly, unions close gender and race wage gaps (McNicholas et al 2020). Unions can also help non-union workers, especially when union density is high in a sector and wage standards are established by union standards (McNicholas et al 2020). Finally, unions have a role in politics, pursuing economic policies that support working people. As unions decline,

[4] Milkman and Luce further point out while the national decline in overall unionization has been driven by declines in private sector rates, the restructuring of public bargaining rules (as for example, in 2011 in Wisconsin) has had dramatic impact on public sector union rates.

their capacity to improve workers' wages, raise floors in specific sectors, and strengthen policy for working people falls.

The decline of unions is itself in part a product of public policy and, importantly for our argument, reflects employers use of power to pursue business interests by limiting workers' collective power. The proliferation of state "right to work" laws, the undermining of public sector unions through privatization of public jobs and, as perhaps most notably in Wisconsin in 2011, the restructuring of the terms of public unionization, are all markers of the sustained press to make worker organizing and union representation less likely and less meaningful. In 2018, in Janus v AFSCME, the Supreme Court further constrained public sector unions.

The decline of union power surely tips the balance toward employers. Even so, traditional and new forms of organizing have continued in the recovery from the Great Recession. "Alt-labor" – worker solidarity carried outside traditional union structure by worker centers, sector and occupational organizing, and community alliances – describes new forms of activism and organizing that are achieving concrete progress on job quality (Fisk 2020). These strategies are rooted in the work of worker centers which have proliferated. Now more than 200 workers centers are securing basic labor standards for workers (Milkman and Luce 2017). The centers work at many levels: advocating for specific workers, organizing actions against chronic violators, and working with city and state policy makers to enforce and strengthen labor laws. While some worker centers are community based, the reach has grown through networks and occupationally focused work for restaurant workers, day laborers, and domestic workers. The National Domestic Workers Alliance, having passed Domestic Worker Bill of Rights in nine states, provides evidence of the reach and impact of this sort of organizing (Fisk 2020).

In the most notable instance of successful worker organizing, the Fight for $15 has changed the national conversation on the minimum wage and lifted the wages of 22 million workers (Lathrop 2018). In 2012, fast food workers struck in New York City for "$15 and a union" but over time, the fight moved towards increasing the minimum wage through legislation rather than bargaining. On the November 2020 ballot, Florida became the eighth state to adopt moving toward a $15 minimum hourly wage (joining California, Connecticut, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, and New York). The Service Employees International Union (SEIU) has supported this campaign, though the mobilization tactic of one-day strikes and strong social media presence are not traditional labor union organizing (Milkman and Luce 2017). With financial support from an existing union, the mobilization of thousands of workers across the country secured a transformation in labor standards and minimum wage discourse. Employers (some moving voluntarily to $15 in response to the movement), policy makers, and researchers have followed (and often resisted) the movement, not created it. Even when unions' strength measured by membership is at an all-time low, visionary worker organizing and mobilization have raised wages for the lowest paid workers.

In another sign that workers are still in the game, work stoppages surged in 2018-19 to a 35-year high (Sheirholz and Poydock 2020). Teachers walked out of classrooms in West Virginia for nine days to protest the underfunding of public education in the state. At the end of their strike, teachers secured a raise and sparked a movement of teachers across the nation. In cities, teachers struck over public funding, and winning "common good" demands for smaller classes and increased nurses and counselors (Blanc 2019). This work is especially notable as it focuses attention on the problem of job quality in public jobs. The gendered work of taking care of and educating the young, the infirm, the aging is often public work (or paid for by public dollars); the teachers who walked out of their classrooms (some unionized and others without unions) bypassed school boards and took their campaign straight to the statehouses that set public education funding levels.

Like so much else, this worker organizing has been curtailed by COVID-19. The pandemic has made organizing harder even as it has revealed how important collective voice in the workplace is for protecting workers. Union workers have had a voice in navigating the pandemic, securing paid sick time, premium pay, and negotiating the terms of furlough (McNicholas et al 2020). Some workers without unions have had to work without appropriate equipment and procedures, but when they complain, some have been retaliated against or even fired (McNicholas et al 2020). “Essential workers” who are exposed to the virus in their work, need a seat at the table to help design workplace processes, procedures and policies to stay safe. The weak infrastructure for low-wage workers and the lack of unions across the board leave too many workers without a voice in these critical questions.

Employer practices are set in a context. We contend that the collective strength of workers – expressed through traditional unions and increasingly through alternatives to the traditional structures – is a critical factor in setting the terms and structure of employer practices. The relentless public and private assault on unions (and indeed their own failings) leave workers with weaker institutions to carry their interests in private employment, in public services, and more broadly in public policy. Even so, workers continue organizing to improve jobs and strengthen wage floors, for the right to protective equipment and safe jobs, for public funding for our schools and social services. If we’re interested in making employer practices work for working people, policies that support worker organizing and power will be a critical.

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