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## Employment, Poverty, and Social Welfare

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The welfare state is the major means by which governments reduce poverty and inequality. Most frequently associated with the welfare state are benefits such as Social Security, public assistance, and social services. Less frequently regarded as a welfare state benefit, but perhaps more important, is full employment or the assurance of living-wage work for all who want it. Full employment policies are directed against unemployment and low wages, major sources of poverty and inequality that, in the absence of government intervention, inevitably arise in capitalist or free market economies.

William Beveridge, a British economist and one of the chief architects of the welfare state, considered the guarantee of employment an even more important benefit than income support. The latter, he wrote, could relieve the problem of “want” but not the problem of “idleness.” According to Beveridge, full employment would result in more available jobs than job seekers, which would “ensure(s) to the people the first condition of happiness—the opportunity for useful service” (1945, p. 122). That so many Americans are denied that “first condition of happiness” must be considered a major failure of the U.S. welfare state and of a society that reveres the work ethic.

This chapter reviews employment policy in the United States from the Great Depression of the 1930s to the present. This history illustrates the paradox of a nation that pledges allegiance to the work ethic but too often fails to provide opportunities that enable individuals to adhere to that ethic—what Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. called “the creed of . . . [our] society” (1967, p. 55). Indeed, unemployment is a chronic problem, afflicting millions of people, even in relatively “good” times, not only in periods like the Great Recession when it reaches mass proportions. This chapter will also explore current employment conditions and their consequences, particularly the severe labor market disadvantages facing cer-

tain population groups. The quality as well as quantity of jobs will be addressed, and the components of good or decent jobs identified. An analysis of these problems will be followed by strategies for alleviating or, more expansively, preventing them in the future. Finally, the chapter concludes with a discussion of how human service workers can help individuals and families to cope with unemployment as well as to move beyond micro practice with individuals through advocacy for full employment or for the right of all individuals who want them to obtain decent, living-wage jobs.

### **U.S. Employment Policy in Historical Perspective**

#### **Government Job Creation in the Great Depression**

President Franklin D. Roosevelt (FDR) and Harry Hopkins, the gifted social worker who administered government relief programs during the Great Depression of the 1930s, preferred to provide work rather than welfare to able-bodied, unemployed persons. FDR disliked what he called “the dole” (welfare assistance); he held that continued dependence on relief “induces a spiritual and moral disintegration” (Roosevelt, 1935, para. 24). Thus, in proposing a massive government employment program in 1935, Roosevelt sought to “preserve not only the bodies of the unemployed from destitution but also their self-respect, their self-reliance and courage and determination” (Roosevelt, 1935, para. 29). This program was the Works Progress Administration (WPA), in which the federal government hired unemployed workers to build roads, bridges, airports, libraries, schools, parks, playgrounds and athletic fields; to make clothing and household goods for use by the needy; to record oral histories such as those of former slaves; to produce plays and concerts in remote areas of the country; and to create works of art such as murals, posters, and paintings.

The WPA was the largest and longest lasting of the New Deal work programs, but not the most innovative. This distinction belonged to the Civil Works Administration (CWA), an emergency measure created to provide work to millions of Americans during the severe winter of 1933–34. The CWA broke with tradition in several ways. It provided half of its jobs, not on the traditional basis of an income or a means test to determine whether an applicant was poor, but on unemployment alone. Further innovative was CWA’s wage policy; instead of being equal to or somewhat lower than relief benefits, CWA pay was often higher than employers in certain regions or industries were accustomed to paying (Harvey, 2013; Schwartz, 1984).

Conceived by Harry Hopkins and his dynamic assistant Aubrey Williams, also a social worker, the CWA was the first of the New Deal programs to challenge the age-old belief that the unemployed were responsible for their condition (Harvey, 2012). It was a challenge carried forward into the WPA by Hopkins and Williams. Embodied in Title III of the Social Security Act of 1935, *unemployment compensation* was a policy that, in effect, acknowledged that the risk of involuntary unemployment is inherent in industrial labor markets and that insurance against such a hazard is a right rather than a matter of charity.

Although path-breaking in important respects, the New Deal work programs were flawed by racism and sexism as well as low wages. African Americans were believed to be accustomed to low wages and were required to accept lower-paying jobs than whites; they were classified as unskilled labor no matter what their skill levels (Rose, 2009). Because it was administered locally, finding WPA jobs for African Americans was hard, particularly in the South, but, “despite these hurdles, WPA made a major breakthrough in providing work opportunities for blacks in the North and at least opened the door in the South” (Bernstein, 1985, p. 134). While women were one-fourth of the labor force, only one-sixth of WPA jobs went to women (Rose, 2009). When women did get a slot in a work program, they were paid lower average wages than white men (Kessler-Harris, 1982).

As ambitious as work programs were, they employed on average between one-quarter and one-third of the unemployed (Burns & Williams, 1941). According to New Deal historian William Leuchtenburg, “by any standard . . . [the WPA] was an impressive achievement, [but] it never came close to meeting Roosevelt’s goal of giving jobs to all who could work” (1963, p. 130). Consequently, the New Deal did not reduce unemployment below 14.6 percent until 1941, when it dipped slightly under 10 percent (still very high and comparable to the highest unemployment rate during the Great Recession) as a result of war production (for rates, Vangiezen & Schwenk, 2001; for war production, Ginsburg, 1983). Unemployment was high, though below peak levels in 1937 when the administration, motivated by a fear of inflation and deficit spending, made substantial cuts in federal expenditures. As a result, unemployment surged from 14 percent to 19 percent in the following year in what was called “the depression within the depression” (Ginsburg, 1983; Leuchtenburg, 1963). This is a grim reminder of what cutting expenditures can do during a severe recession or during a fragile recovery from such a downturn.

According to New Deal Labor Secretary Frances Perkins, who headed the committee that planned the Social Security Act, Roosevelt and Hopkins “had the idea of a permanent work-related program” (Perkins, 1946, pp. 188–189; see also Goldberg & Collins, 2001, pp. 58–61). Nonetheless, the only aid to the unemployed that found its way into permanent legislation was short-term unemployment compensation. This was the case even though Roosevelt’s advisors, including Hopkins, believed that for years to come the economy would not be able to absorb all of the unemployed. Temporary and insufficient though they were, the work programs, in addition to employing millions of jobless people, left a permanent legacy for the nation’s physical, social, and cultural resources—roads, bridges, schools, libraries, housing, parks, arts, cultural facilities, and much more.

Unexpectedly, massive government spending for World War II solved the problem of mass unemployment because the fear of deficit spending then gave way to the need to defend the nation against a foreign enemy. In the war years, unemployment fell to unprecedented depths, and the country enjoyed virtual full employment: 1.9 percent in 1943 and 1945 and 1.2 percent in 1944 (Ginsburg, 1983, table 1-1, p. 9). Instead of making peacetime products, millions of men and women were employed, either in the armed forces or in civilian industries serving the war effort. As economist Robert Lekachman observed, “It was World War II . . . that finally convinced the universe of the validity of Keynes’ emphasis upon the symbiosis between employment and total spending” (1966, p. 259). Lekachman was referring to the great British economist John Maynard Keynes, whose advice that government spending must compensate for sagging private sector spending had not been sufficiently heeded during the Depression. Nor has it guided government policy in the Great Recession and its aftermath of continuing high unemployment.

Wartime full employment was very beneficial to all—except for those individuals who paid the price on the battlefield and the families who suffered their losses or disabilities. It was especially advantageous to African Americans and women who not only left the ranks of the unemployed but were often hired for higher skilled and better-paying jobs. It was probably these advantages and the recognition that full employment might be feasible in peacetime that led Roosevelt, near the close of the war, to frame an Economic or “Second Bill of Rights” that began with the right to “a useful and remunerative job” or living-wage employment (Roosevelt, 1944a; 1944b). Indeed, when FDR repeated the Economic Bill of Rights in his

message to Congress in 1945, he held that “of these rights the most fundamental, and one on which the fulfillment of the others in large degree depends” is the right to a job (Roosevelt, 1945). The United Nations’ Universal Declaration of Human Rights, essentially a bill of rights for the world, includes economic as well as civil and political rights and was inspired by Roosevelt’s conceptualization of “freedom from want” or his view that “freedom without bread . . . has little meaning” (E. Roosevelt, 1990, 17, cited by Glendon, 2001, 43). The Universal Declaration that owed much to the leadership of FDR’s widow, Eleanor Roosevelt, includes a broad conception of employment rights: “Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment” (United Nations, 1948, Article 23; Glendon, 2001). The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is discussed in more detail in chapter 1.

#### **The Postwar Experience**

With the war ending, government leaders became concerned that demobilization and reduction of government spending could mean a return to high unemployment. Encouraged by the war’s lesson that expansive fiscal policy or sufficient government spending could cure unemployment, progressive legislators drafted a full employment bill that passed the Senate in 1945 and was endorsed by President Harry Truman (1945–1953). However, the following year full employment was defeated in the House of Representatives. At that time, the House was a more conservative body than the Senate, but there were other reasons for the defeat of the full employment bill: unemployment was not mounting as much as expected and anti-labor sentiment, fueled by a wave of postwar strikes, had risen. In addition, despite public sentiment in favor of it, there was no large-scale movement to press for the enactment of full employment (Bailey, 1950; Ginsburg, 1983).

Although postwar unemployment rose above wartime levels, it was initially held in check by a combination of factors: pent-up consumer demand owing to limited incomes during the Depression and the limited availability of products during the war; the G.I. Bill of Rights that provided income support and education to many veterans who would otherwise have become part of an army of the unemployed; and the departure of many women from the labor market as a result of firings, pro-family propaganda, or their preference for the role of housewife. Even so, by 1949, unemployment was about triple the wartime lows. Shortly thereafter, however, the Korean War (1950–1953) reduced unemployment, and subsequent military spend-

ing for the Cold War helped to keep it in check, although nowhere near full employment. Readers, however, should bear in mind what will be discussed in greater detail subsequently: official unemployment rates greatly underestimate unemployment, and indeed are about half the number of jobless workers, either full- or part-time (see below). In the postwar period, the Keynesian prescription for conquering unemployment through expansive fiscal or taxing and spending policies was influential in the developed countries of Europe and North America.

Although it did not commit itself to full employment, the United States did adopt some Keynesian measures. Its brand leaned toward military Keynesianism as exemplified by its large Cold War defense expenditures. However, a big highway construction program during the presidency of Republican Dwight Eisenhower (1953–1960) has been seen as partly intended for job creation (H. Wilson, 2009), and spending for social insurance and public assistance increased, although not commensurate with rising need. Even with this increased defense and civilian spending, unemployment averaged 5.2 percent during the seven peacetime years of the Eisenhower presidency, and African American unemployment climbed to over twice the Caucasian rate, averaging 9.5 percent (Ginsburg, 1983, table 2.5, p. 40). African Americans lost ground because they were largely excluded from the white-collar occupations that accounted for nearly all of the postwar job growth. In 1961, when John F. Kennedy became president, the unemployment rate was 6.1 percent, and in some months that year, 7.1 percent (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011).

Unemployment fell in the 1960s. One reason was across-the-board tax cuts that, unlike recent ones targeted to upper-income groups, did stimulate consumer demand. Other contributors were increased domestic spending for the War on Poverty and stepped-up expenditures for the Vietnam war. From 1966 to 1969, unemployment averaged 3.7 percent (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013d). This was relatively low but hardly full employment, and like all such periods of low unemployment, it was not sustained.

Even with low overall unemployment, studies conducted by the Department of Labor and by a Senate subcommittee found that ghetto rates were much higher, and if various indices of sub-employment to which we have already alluded, such as involuntary part-time employment and poverty-level wages were included, the ghetto rates averaged around 30 percent (Ginsburg, 1975; Spring, Harrison, & Vietorisz, 1972).

Although both unemployment and poverty afflicted millions of Americans during the thirty years after World War II, there were signs of progress and a general view that rising national income would be a “shared prosperity.” There were recessions but no depressions, a big change from the entire history of the United States prior to the 1930s. (There were depressions in 1837, 1857, 1873, 1893, 1907, and, of course, the Great Depression that began in 1929.)

In the three postwar decades, real wages rose steadily along with productivity. The shares of all income groups increased, but the bottom climbed faster than the top, and, at the end of the period, the grave political and civil inequalities of race and gender were being reduced through landmark civil rights measures. In addition, during the 1960s, there were government initiatives in health care, subsidized housing, food for the needy, and a large expansion of public assistance for single-mother families (Aid to Families with Dependent Children). For a time, there was some adherence to what earlier would have been considered an oxymoron, namely, “welfare rights” (West, 1981). According to liberal economist Robert Kuttner, the system “produced three decades of egalitarian economic growth” (2007, p. 64).

### **The U-Turn**

A change of course or U-turn occurred in the mid-1970s. A number of economic changes had contributed to a “profit squeeze,” a substantial drop in the after-tax profit rate of non-financial corporations between 1965 and the second half of the following decade. The response to these changes is important. Instead of capital investment or innovation to increase productivity and to make the U.S. economy more competitive with the resurgent industries of Western Europe and Japan, businesses adopted strategies that squeezed labor. These featured wage freezes and work arrangements that increased the flexibility with which workers could be hired, fired, and scheduled. Also damaging to labor, particularly in manufacturing, was globalization, or transferring U.S. capital and business operations to lower-wage areas of the world, a development encouraged by federal tax policies and later abetted by trade treaties like the North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) that was promoted and signed by President Bill Clinton. Still another strategy was to abandon production for paper profits, which also led to loss of manufacturing jobs. Through an unprecedented political mobilization, the business community and its allies moved on the ideological front, attempting to re-legitimize an unregulated free market and discrediting the government policies of the postwar

decades. Between the mid-1970s and the Great Recession, U.S. output per person grew 91 percent (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012a, table 1a). The nation became richer, but its prosperity was not shared.

Unemployment was a permanent feature of the U.S. economy, but it averaged 4.7 percent from 1947 to 1974, compared to 6.2 percent from 1974 to 2007 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, n.d.a). In the mid-1970s, unemployment rose to the highest level since the Great Depression, 8.5 percent in 1975 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013b). In the early 1980s, the Federal Reserve Board raised interest rates in order to cope with inflation. When interest rates rise, the cost of purchasing cars, houses, and other products rises, and thus fewer consumers can afford to buy them. With declining sales, employers lay off workers. With higher unemployment, employers can lower wages and workplace benefits, and workers in such a labor market feel obliged to accept these losses in order to avoid unemployment. Thus, the result of raising interest rates was an even higher rate of unemployment than the previous post-Depression high of the mid-1970s. The unemployment rate was almost 10 percent (9.7 percent) in 1982 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011). Once again, labor forcibly paid the penalty for problems in the economy, this time to fight inflation.

One response to high unemployment in the 1970s was a return to government job creation. The largest of these programs, the Comprehensive Employment and Training Administration (CETA), made it possible to extend the services of state public agencies as well as nonprofit social services, but CETA was much smaller in relation to total unemployment than the WPA (Ginsburg, 1983; Rose, 2009). The Ronald Reagan administration (1981–1989) repealed CETA in 1982, even though unemployment was nearly 10 percent. Another congressional response to unemployment was the Humphrey-Hawkins Full Employment and Balanced Growth Act of 1978 that set an interim target of 4 percent adult unemployment. However, the legislation was without teeth, and the average unemployment rate in the five years that followed was 8.0 percent, or double the interim target (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013d). Indeed, the nominal commitment to full employment did not stop the Federal Reserve from the previously mentioned policy of raising interest rates that led to higher unemployment.

Wages, like employment, changed course. Whereas real wages rose 75 percent between 1947 and 1973, they were stagnant between then and 2007, actually dropping 0.9 percent (Mishel, Bivens, Gould, & Shierholz, 2012, table 4.3). Due

to congressional inaction or failure to raise the minimum raise in tandem with increases in the cost of living, its real value declined by 30 percent between 1968 and 2006. The poverty rate, which had been cut in half from 22.4 percent in 1959 to 11.1 percent in 1973, thereafter began to rise, reaching a high point of 15.2 percent in 1982. Although it approached the 1973 mark in the low unemployment year of 2000, the average from 1974 through 2007, just prior to the Great-Recession-induced steep rise in unemployment was 13.0 percent (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011, table 2). This was the U-turn: from relatively low unemployment rates, rising real wages, and falling poverty rates to rising unemployment, stagnant wages, and rising poverty. Despite the worsening conditions for workers, the Democratic administration of Bill Clinton tightened work requirements in public assistance in 1996 with the repeal of Aid to Families with Dependent Children, the entitlement to relief of poor women and their children (this is discussed in more detail in chapter 2). Indeed, Democrats as well as Republicans had taken the U-turn. The impact of these strict work requirements was softened by a reduction in unemployment in the next four years that, like similar previous periods, was short-lived. A brief recession began in 2001 and was followed by a “jobless recovery” that took much longer than in past recessions to regain a prior employment peak (Mishel, Bernstein, & Allegretto, 2007).

During most of the time since the Great Depression, labor market conditions have fluctuated between recessions, some mild and others more serious, and better times that were still fraught with job and income losses for millions of workers and their families. With recovery from the previous recession still incomplete, disaster struck. The financial meltdown of 2008 greatly exacerbated the recession that had already begun in the last month of the previous year. Unemployment doubled between December 2007 and October 2009 and was over 9 percent in all but one month until September 2011 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013c). In December 2010, Federal Reserve Board Chairman Ben Bernanke warned that it could be four or five years until unemployment returned to a “normal” rate of 5–6 percent (Baranauckas, n.d.), a level that spells joblessness for millions of workers. Not only is unemployment high, much of it is long-term. By 2008, the proportion of the labor force unemployed for twenty-seven weeks or more had already reached its highest since the Bureau of Labor Statistics started keeping records of long-term unemployment in 1948, and it continued to climb (Rampell, 2010). The following section has a more detailed discussion of current and recent past labor market conditions.

### **Unemployment: Undercounted, Chronic, Disproportionate in Demographic Impact**

#### **Official and Hidden Unemployment**

One important criterion for determining whether a social condition is serious enough to be considered a social problem is its size or magnitude (Manis, 1974). By underestimating the size of unemployment, official government data reduce the likelihood that unemployment will be taken seriously by the general public, particularly the chronic unemployment in relatively good times. The government conducts monthly sample surveys of the population and counts the unemployed as only those who during what is called a “reference week” did not work at all, were available for work, and were actively seeking work. What does “actively seeking work” mean? Sending a résumé to an employer would count as actively searching, but simply reading newspaper advertisements would not. Even if they want work and would take a job if it were available, those who are not working but not searching actively are considered out of the labor force and are not counted in the official employment rate. The official count thus omits people who fall into two categories of “hidden unemployment.” First are those who are employed part-time or less than thirty-five hours a week, and want full-time work but are unable to get it. The Department of Labor refers to their status as “part-time for economic reasons” as compared with voluntary part-timers, but feminists point out that part-time work for a mother who cannot find or afford child care may be anything but voluntary. A second category of hidden unemployment is those who want jobs but are not looking, some of whom may have searched, not found a job, and become discouraged. If these “hidden unemployed” are included, then the numbers are at least double the official count (see table 3.1). These unemployment figures, large as they are, do not include the vast prison population (2.3 million in 2008) that is disproportionately comprised of young, unskilled minority men. If inmates were counted as unemployed, the official jobless rate would rise by about 1.5 percentage points (Ginsburg, Ayres, & Zaccone, 2010).

This underestimation of unemployment reflects indifference to the problem on the part of government officials and results in a lack of public concern. As labor economist Helen Lachs Ginsburg observes, “The implication of such undercounting is that policymakers aren’t going to be thinking as big as they should be” (Gogoi, 2010, para. 7). The official poverty standard, which is based on an

**Table 3.1. Official and hidden unemployment rates by race, ethnicity, sex, and age, June 2013 and June 2000**

	June 2013	June 2000
<b>Official Unemployment:</b>	7.6	4.0
White	6.6	3.5
African American	13.7	7.6
Hispanic	9.1	5.7
Persons with a disability	14.2	<sup>a</sup>
Men 20 years and over	7.0	3.3
Women 20 years and over	6.8	3.6
Teen-agers (16-19 years)	24.0	13.1
Black teens	43.6	24.5
Total officially unemployed	11.8 million	5.7 million
<b>Hidden Unemployment</b>		
Working part-time because can't find a full-time job	8.2 million	3.2 million
Wanting jobs but not looking, so not counted in official statistics	<u>6.6 million</u>	<u>4.4 million</u>
<b>Total Official and Hidden Unemployment</b>	26.6 million	13.3 million

<sup>a</sup>Data on the disabled were not collected until 2008.

Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2000; 2013a.

emergency food budget and has not been updated for changes in the standard of living since it was devised more than forty years ago, is a comparable example of undercounting, underestimating, and giving insufficient attention to a serious social problem.

A quiz by the National Jobs for All Coalition (NJFAC), “Can You Count the Unemployed?” illustrates and humanizes the unemployment undercount (see figure 3.1). In fact, some of the workers who are afflicted by unemployment such as those who take jobs that are beneath their skill levels would not even be counted among the hidden unemployed.

Table 3.1 not only shows that the problem of unemployment is much greater than the official count but that unemployment is a chronic problem afflicting millions of people in relatively good times as well as bad. In 2000, unemployment was the lowest it had been in thirty years. Nonetheless, between five and six million people were officially counted as jobless. Including the “hidden unemployed,” the number was more than twice that amount or 13.3 million people. This is almost as many people as live in the six states of New England. And this is unemployment in “good” times!

**Figure 3.1. Can You Count the Unemployed? An NJFAC Quiz**

1. Jack was laid off after seventeen years as a mechanic when his plant was relocated to Mexico. Unable to find a comparable job, Jack is working at Walmart at a fraction of his previous wage.  
*Answer:* Jack is a casualty of unemployment, but he is counted as employed, despite his downgrading.
2. Jill wants to work but stopped looking for a job because she can't afford child care for her daughter.  
*Answer:* Once Jill stops looking for work she disappears from official statistics.
3. Jerry, eighteen years old, no longer attends school and has no job. After repeated but unsuccessful attempts to get a job, Jerry stopped looking for work and now hangs out with friends who are in the same boat.  
*Answer:* Since Jerry is no longer looking for work, he isn't counted as unemployed.
4. John, sixty-two, lost his job last year. He continued to look for work long after exhausting his meager unemployment benefits. Then, as he watched his savings melt away, he despaired of finding another job because of illegal—but widespread—age discrimination. So he threw in the towel and now receives permanently reduced Social Security (early) retirement benefits.  
*Answer:* John is not counted as unemployed. He is no longer looking for work, and hence is out of the labor force.
5. Jane, a single mother, works full time, year round, at a minimum wage job that pays thousands of dollars less than what the government says is needed to support her and her two young children above the poverty level. She wonders if she will ever get a real job—one that pays a living wage.  
*Answer:* Jane is treated as employed even though a job that pays so little is a form of underemployment.
6. Mary can't find a full-time job as a college teacher. She is forced to take a part-time position as an adjunct at a local college.  
*Answer:* Mary is counted as employed even though she is forced to work part-time.

*Source:* National Jobs for All Coalition (NJFAC), n.d. <http://www.njfac.org/quiz-unem.htm>  
<http://www.bls.gov/cps/cpswom2008.pdf>.

**Populations at High Risk of Unemployment**

Table 3.1 shows the different demographic impact of unemployment. African Americans have more than double the unemployment rate of whites in “good” and bad times. Hispanics also experience unemployment more frequently than whites, though not as severely as African Americans, but they are more likely to be in low-wage work. Teen workers have double-digit unemployment, even in “good” times, and in 2013, even with some improvement in unemployment rates since the low point of joblessness in 2009, about one in four of these youth is officially jobless. The high unemployment suffered by teen workers is deeply discouraging at the outset of their working lives, and words fail in describing the catastrophic scope of black teen unemployment. People with disabilities are among those most affected

by unemployment, with a rate about as high as African Americans (see chapter 7 in this book for a full discussion of people with disabilities and poverty).

Since the early 1980s, men have had higher rates of unemployment than women during or immediately after recessions, but otherwise their rates were roughly similar. Men's higher unemployment was especially marked during and immediately after the Great Recession, 2007–2009 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012b). From the start of the recovery to June 2013, women gained back nearly 90 percent of the jobs they lost in the recession, compared to only 64 percent for men. Cuts in public service employment, however, fall almost exclusively on women, who lost nearly one-fifth of their job gains as a result (National Women's Law Center, 2013). If the assault on public-sector jobs continues, women will continue to be vulnerable to job loss. As subsequent discussion will show, certain groups of women, particularly single mothers and all mothers with young children, have greater labor market disadvantages, including unemployment, than men with comparable age offspring.

Older workers, fifty-five and over, have somewhat lower unemployment than younger cohorts, although their joblessness increased sharply in the "Great Recession." Further, the average duration of their unemployment is higher than that of young and middle-aged workers (Sok, 2010). The labor force participation of older workers and their vulnerability to unemployment has risen in recent years for good and bad reasons. The former include a change in Social Security policy that made it pay to work between the ages of 65 and 70 because a portion of earnings was no longer deducted from benefits. On the downside, not only was there a collapse of financial markets and consequent declines in retirement savings, but also a related trend that increased in the 1990s—employers' replacement of defined-benefit retirement plans with riskier defined-contribution plans. In the former, employees are assured a specific benefit upon retirement whereas they are not, in the latter. As economist Teresa Ghilarducci has written, "older people are working more hours, postponing retirement, and going back to work after being retired, mainly because of the collapse of the pension system" (Ghilarducci, 2008, p. 41). Still another push into the labor market is rising out-of-pocket health costs and declining employer coverage of retiree health benefits. A mixed blessing, longer life expectancy also requires more retirement income. This decline in the economic security of older persons illustrates the importance of workplace benefits, a component of good or decent jobs that will be taken up subsequently in this chapter.

**Good Jobs/Bad Jobs/No Jobs****No Jobs**

*Jobs Aren't Enough*, the title of a book that emphasizes the problem of low wages and limited economic mobility, implies that unemployment is not the only labor market deficiency that must be overcome (Iverson & Armstrong, 2006). It is true that much contemporary work is fraught with social as well as economic indignity. The social critic Barbara Ehrenreich, worked at low-wage jobs and wrote movingly of its assaults. "What surprised and offended me most about the low-wage work place . . . was the extent to which one is required to surrender one's basic civil rights and—what boils down to the same thing—self-respect" (Ehrenreich, 2002, p. 208). Nonetheless, although it may say more about how badly the welfare system treated them, women who leave the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) rolls, now Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), prefer even marginal employment to welfare and feel that work increases their self-esteem (Altman & Goldberg, 2007; Edin & Lein, 1997).

Those who viewed full employment as a key component of the welfare state held that the opportunity to work meant more than economic security for the individual. Sir William Beveridge's emphasis on work as an opportunity for useful service has already been noted. The Swedish welfare state, famous for generous welfare or income support, was, for many years, a full employment state, and that component was seen as more important than income support (Korpi, 1978, pp. 107–108). Swedish policymakers saw work as important to a normal life, a means of reducing isolation, loneliness, and alienation (Ginsburg, 1983, p. 123). In contemporary parlance, the approaches of Beveridge and the Swedish policymakers were directed against "social exclusion," a social as well as economic conception of impoverishment that implies, in addition to lack of income, "denial of access to employment, social benefits and services and other aspects of cultural and community life" (Kahn & Kamerman, 2002, p. 13; Paugam, 1996; Saraceno, 2002). Marginal work may not lead to social integration (Atkinson, 1998; Levitas 1996), nor is low-wage employment equivalent to "self-sufficiency," a catchword of welfare reformers in the 1990s. Nevertheless, unemployment certainly will not accomplish either of these goals. According to the Nobel laureate in economics, Amartya Sen, unemployment has "many far-reaching effects other than loss of income": "psychological harm, loss of work motivation, skill and self-confidence, increase in ailments and morbidity, and even mortality rates, disruptions of family relations and social life,

hardening of social exclusion, and accentuation of racial tensions and gender asymmetries” (Sen, 1999, p. 94; see also Kieselbach, Winefield, Boyd, & Anderson, 2010). Soon after the Great Recession began, the devastating effects of unemployment were being felt. A New York Times/CBS News poll of unemployed adults found that being out of work was “causing major life changes, mental health issues and trouble maintaining even basic necessities” (Luo & Thee-Brenan, 2009, para. 3). In addition to its effect on unemployed workers and their families, unemployment means that the economy is wasting the goods and services that jobless workers could have produced (Ginsburg, 1995).

Particularly troubling are high levels of unemployment in the urban ghettos, a condition aptly captured by the title of William J. Wilson’s book, *When Work Disappears* (1996). Wilson, in this and a later work (2009), distinguishes between social structural and cultural factors that contribute to joblessness, generally coming down on the side of structural factors such as employment opportunity instead of cultural attributes like education, skill, or attitudes. (The latter, it should be noted, often have their roots in such structural dimensions as racism and long-standing denial of economic opportunity.) Although Wilson’s later work (2009) gives more weight to cultural factors, he nonetheless lays strong emphasis on the studies of Paul Jargowsky, who found very positive responses to economic booms among the ghetto poor. For example, the number of people living in neighborhoods where the poverty rate is 40 percent or higher declined by about one-fourth in the 1990s and over one-third among blacks (Jargowsky, 1997, 2003). This is particularly striking when one considers that the boom lasted only a few years in the last part of the decade.

Other evidence supporting a structural interpretation of unemployment among populations assumed to have cultural deficits comes from the work of economist Richard Freeman (1991). He showed that when employment opportunities expanded in local labor markets, the percentage of economically disadvantaged young men who were employed rose substantially and that employment of black youth was particularly sensitive to the state of local labor markets. Similarly, Paul Osterman, who studied the impact of full employment in Boston in the 1980s, concluded, “it is very clear that the poor did respond to economic opportunity when it was offered” (Osterman, 1991, p. 130).

Although structural factors—and most importantly the availability of jobs—are critical, personal traits related to one’s socialization rise in importance during the

more typical non-boom periods when jobs are less available. These cultural factors also bear some attention, particularly for persons who are providing help to unemployed individuals. There is mounting evidence that for jobs at the lower end of the hierarchy, employers are more likely to seek and retain workers who have positive attitudes, problem-solving ability, flexibility, and the ability to relate and communicate well with others (Handel, 2003; Holzer, 1996; Moy & Lam, 2004; Regenstein, Meyer, & Dickemper-Hicks, 1998). Ghetto socialization, as compared to that of higher-income areas, is less likely to produce such traits, and so intervention to increase the employability of disadvantaged workers might well attempt to improve these cultural deficits.

Before turning to a discussion of good jobs or job quality, it is important to recognize the relationship between unemployment and wages, the sine qua non of good jobs. Chronic loose labor markets or unemployment have contributed to wage stagnation, for when unemployment is high and there are many more job seekers than available jobs, employers can hire the workers they need without raising wages or providing other workplace benefits. Conversely, tighter labor markets lead to improvements in wages. As economist Robert Pollin (2007) points out, when unemployment fell slightly below 4 percent in the second half of the 1990s, wages and benefits rose, including those at the low end of the labor market. Jared Bernstein and Dean Baker provide data showing that for the years 1995–2000, when the average unemployment rate was just below 5 percent, males in the bottom 40 percent of the wage distribution made wage gains (annual hourly gains) between 2.2 percent and 2.9 percent, compared to –1.3 percent to 0.7 percent in the years from 1979 to 1994, when the average unemployment rate was 7.0 percent. They also found that gains for low-wage women workers followed a similar pattern (Bernstein & Baker, 2003, p. 43). Needless to say, some other workplace benefits depend on the level of wages and often go along with better-paying jobs. For example, all things being equal, pensions rise with income levels.

### **Good Jobs**

What are the components of good jobs? These have been defined expansively to include not only living wages, good health and pension benefits, paid vacation, sick days, family leave, good working conditions, and job security (Mishel, Bernstein, & Shierholz, 2009). Affordable child care, job safety, a measure of autonomy or workplace democracy, collective bargaining rights, and reduced work time have also been included in the concept of good jobs or decent work (Bell, Ginsburg, Goldberg,

Harvey, & Zaccone, 2007). A more modest measure consisting of adequate pay, defined as at least the median male earnings in 1979, adjusted for inflation (\$17 an hour in 2006), health insurance, and a retirement plan has been used to track good jobs in relation to growth in national wealth (Schmitt, 2007, table 1).

Although the period of lower unemployment in the late 1990s resulted in wage gains, many workers remained poor. In 2000, nearly 17 million people—more than the total of official and hidden unemployment—were working full-time, year-round but earning less than the official poverty level for a family of four (estimated from U.S. Census Bureau, 2001, table 11). That standard, as already pointed out, is a low one, only \$17,603 in 2000.

Low wages fall heavily on women, especially minority women. In 2007, 31 percent of women workers earned less than the poverty level for a family of four; over a third of African American women and nearly half of Latinas were working poor. The rate for male workers is lower, 22 percent, itself a dismal record (Mishel et al., 2009, tables 3.8, 3.9, pp. 140–141). This is an indication that the male standard is not necessarily one to which women should aspire and that attention needs to be addressed to inequality of class as well as of gender and race/ethnicity. Class measures, as discussed later in this chapter, include full employment and increases in unionization, the minimum wage, and wage supplementation through the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC).

A conventional comparison of women's and men's earnings is the ratio of women's to men's full-time, year-round earnings or the wage gap (actually misnamed since the difference should be the gap). In 2010, this was 77 percent, up from 61 percent in 1960 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011, table p. 36). This full-time, year-round wage comparison underestimates women's inequality by omitting part-time employment in which women predominate and, more importantly, women's lesser continuity in the labor market. Women often take time out of the labor market for childbirth and child rearing. Thus, over a fifteen-year period from 1983 to 1998, women's earnings were only 38 percent of men's (Hartmann, Rose, & Lovell, 2006).

An important contributor to this continuity gap is insufficient, affordable child care. In the late 1990s, government child care subsidies were increased in response to strict work requirements in public assistance. Still, child care was far from an entitlement, with subsidies available to only 12–14 percent of income-eligible families

(Helburn & Bergmann, 2003). A survey by the National Women's Law Center in 2006 concluded that

there are still far too many low-income families who are unable to qualify for child care assistance, remain trapped on waiting lists, strain to pay their co-payments even if they are receiving assistance, or cannot find good care for their children because state reimbursement rates are too low. (Schulman & Blank, 2006, p. 6)

There is a need for cultural change, in which fathers take a larger share of family responsibilities, thereby helping to diminish the continuity gap. Paid parental and sick leave would also be beneficial, since women are more likely to take time off for the nurturing of very young children and when they are ill.

### **Motherhood, Single Motherhood, and Labor Market Disadvantage**

Women have been gaining some ground in the labor market, but motherhood generally and single motherhood, particularly, are substantial labor market penalties for many women. Perhaps as a result of employers' perception that their major responsibility for child care reduces their availability and productivity, mothers are much less likely to be hired than non-mothers with comparable credentials, and they are also more likely to have lower starting salaries (Correll & Bernard, 2007; Waldfogel, 1998).

Whereas the age of their children has virtually no impact on the labor force status of men, it bears a close relationship to women's employment (see table 3.2). The data in table 3.2 are from 2007, the year with the lowest unemployment rate in the new century and the one immediately preceding the financial crisis. Part-time employment, which means lower pay, often lower wage rates, less benefits, and less likelihood of mobility in the work force, is at least seven times higher for mothers than for fathers. Mothers' unemployment rate was considerably higher than fathers' regardless of the age of their children. While mothers' lower labor force participation is related to lack of suitable, affordable child care, and to the preferences of some to be full-time caregivers, the higher unemployment of those in the labor market who, by definition, are seeking employment but unable to find it, cannot be explained in this way. Rather, one is inclined to see mothers as more likely to be laid off because of lower seniority or the related factors of discrimination and employers' perception of them as less productive or reliable.

**Table 3.2. Rates of labor force participation, full- and part-time employment, and unemployment by sex and age of children, 2007**

	Labor Force Participation	Full-Time Employment	Part-Time Employment	Unemployment
<b>With children under 18</b>				
Women	71.0	75.7	24.3	4.6
Men	94.3	96.6	3.4	2.8
<b>With children 6–17</b>				
Women	77.2	77.8	22.2	3.8
Men	93.2	96.7	3.3	2.6
<b>With children under 6</b>				
Women	63.3	72.5	27.5	5.8
Men	95.7	96.4	3.6	3.0
<b>With children under 3</b>				
Women	59.2	70.7	29.3	6.4
Men	95.9	96.2	3.8	3.1

Source: Calculated from U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, unpublished data from the Current Population Survey, table 6.

Both the push of welfare reform and the pull of expanding employment contributed to the considerable increase in labor market participation of single mothers between 1994 and 2000. (See table 3.3.) Less likely than married mothers to be in the labor force prior to welfare reform, single mothers not only increased their participation but exceeded that of married mothers, and while their activity rate dipped after the peak employment year of 2000, it remained substantially above the 1994 rate, before the stiffening of work requirements in public assistance.

**Table 3.3. Labor Market Status of Mothers and Fathers with Children under 18 by Marital Status, 1994–2007**

	Single Mothers (%)			Married Mothers (%)			Married Fathers (%)		
	Labor Force <sup>a</sup>	Empl./Pop. <sup>b</sup>	Unemploy-ment <sup>c</sup>	Labor Force <sup>a</sup>	Empl./Pop. <sup>b</sup>	Unemploy-ment <sup>c</sup>	Labor Force <sup>a</sup>	Empl./Pop. <sup>b</sup>	Unemploy-ment <sup>c</sup>
1994	67.2	59.3	8.0	69.6	66.4	4.5	94.5	91.0	3.8
2000	78.9	73.0	7.5	69.8	67.8	2.9	95.1	91.0	2.0
2007	76.5	70.4	8.0	68.8	66.7	3.0	94.8	92.4	2.5

Sources: Calculated from U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, n.d.b, tables 6 and 8.

<sup>a</sup> Percent of the population either employed or unemployed and looking for work.

<sup>b</sup> Percent of the population employed.

<sup>c</sup> Percent of the population unemployed and looking for work.

Although single mothers are more likely to be in the labor force than their married counterparts, single mothers were more than twice as likely to be unemployed in both 2000 and 2007. There are several reasons why single mothers are at high risk of unemployment. As lone parents, they may be more likely than married mothers to be absent from work when children are sick or day care arrangements fail, or, as mentioned in relation to partnered mothers as well, employers simply perceive them as more undependable. Race may also contribute to their high unemployment rates. In 2007, black women, who were 30 percent of single mothers, had an unemployment rate of 10.4 percent, compared to 7.0 percent for white single mothers (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, n.d.b, table 6). Racism abets the other handicaps of black single mothers.

### **What Is to Be Done?**

Policies for reducing, perhaps even virtually eliminating unemployment, underemployment, and low wages can intervene on the supply side of the labor market or the demand side. A prime example of the former is education, which is a favorite proposed remedy for labor market disadvantage and an oft-prescribed route to occupational success. Whereas education focuses on the characteristics of workers or on the supply side of the labor market (are there enough skilled workers to fill open positions), policies that expand the number of available jobs intervene on the demand side (are there enough jobs). Supply-side measures assume that it is primarily the characteristics of workers that determine labor market advantages whereas the premise of demand-side measures is that the labor market, if left alone, will chronically produce too few jobs at livable wages. A tighter labor market tends to improve, though not eliminate conditions such as low wages and discrimination based on race, ethnicity, and gender. Therefore, measures directed specifically to overcoming such barriers are also necessary.

#### **Supply Side: Education**

Education is often seen as a panacea for occupational mobility and for access to good jobs. It is true that for both men and women the higher the educational level, the higher the income. Yet, it is also true that in all educational categories, women's hourly wages are still lower than men's (Mishel et al., 2007, tables 3.18, 3.19). The greatest difference in earnings is between those with some college and those with a college degree, and that is the case for both genders.

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Educational mobility is certainly a route to better wages and better jobs, but it is a difficult one. The barriers to higher education have become more formidable, particularly its steep cost, including study in the public universities. In reviewing the evidence on educational mobility, Mishel and colleagues (2007, pp. 97–101) find high correlations between children's educational attainments and their parents' incomes. Among children from high-income families, 74 percent of those who scored high on math tests in eighth grade finished college, compared to 29 percent of those from low-income families, a percentage about equal to college completion of children from high-income families who score low on these tests. Lower-scoring children from high-income families are ten times more likely to finish college than their achievement peers from low-income families.

Does this suggest the need to pursue an educational strategy? The answer is yes, but not because it will solve the big labor market problems that are discussed in this chapter. Educational attainment can be a promising individual strategy and a means to much more than economic rewards. However, a great increase in education might lead to an oversupply of applicants for good jobs that would tend to put downward pressure on earnings for some educated workers.

As it turns out, the demand for educated workers is not projected to increase in the near future. Calculations based on data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics found barely any increase in the number of jobs requiring a bachelor's degree or more (Dohm & Schniper, 2007). According to these projections, occupations that usually require only short- or moderate-term on-the-job training and little or no formal training will account for about half of all jobs in 2016. These include occupations such as retail salespersons, food preparation workers, and personal and home care aides (Dohm & Schniper, 2007). The workers who hold these jobs perform vital services in the economy. They are often our clients. Like all workers, they deserve living wages and other workplace benefits.

### **Demand-Side Measures: Job Creation**

Tighter labor markets, as already noted, tend to raise wages, but have always been short-lived. Sustained full employment would do even more to increase the number of good jobs. When full employment legislation was under serious consideration in the 1940s, proponents predicted that it would increase the bargaining power of labor and consequently the quality, not only the quantity, of jobs:

Our experience with periods of labor shortage indicates that its first effect is greatly to increase the bargaining power of labor, both individually and collectively. This results

in steady improvement of wages and working conditions, which means that employers must seek to make employment attractive, since the workers are no longer motivated by the fear of losing their jobs. A shift of workers from the less pleasant and remunerative occupations occur, so that standards are raised at the lower levels.

The status of labor will improve, since employers can no longer rely upon the discipline of discharge to enforce authority. The tendency will be for labor to have some participation in industrial and economic policy. (Eulau, Ezekiel, Hansen, Loeb, Jr., & Soule, 1945, p. 395)

Full employment, as this evaluation indicates, is “the worker’s best friend.” Employers would prosper from the expansion of consumer spending on the part of a well-paid and fully employed population, but the enhanced power of labor is quite another thing.

Insufficient jobs for all who want them can be dealt with through providing income support to unemployed workers or by measures to create more jobs. The former, typically met through unemployment insurance, is considered a passive labor market policy. Unemployment insurance benefits are vital for those who experience short-term unemployment. Benefits last twenty-six weeks or longer when state unemployment rises. With a vote of Congress, benefits can be extended in response to an increase in long-term unemployment, and that was the case during the Great Recession. However, during much of the period since 1990, the proportion of officially unemployed workers who got benefits was usually 40 percent or less (Stone, Greenstein, & Coven, 2007, figure 1). Unemployment insurance is the proper remedy for short-term unemployment and should be provided to *all* jobless persons who want to work, including those with no prior work experience.

An alternative to unemployment compensation for those workers who are unemployed for extended periods of time is to enact job creation programs modeled on those of the New Deal during the Great Depression. In contrast to unemployment benefits, this is an active labor market policy.

Plans for creating living-wage jobs that would reduce chronic unemployment and at the same time rebuild the nation’s depleted and neglected physical and social infrastructure were devised before the economic meltdown. Direct job creation, though similar to the innovative work programs of the Great Depression, must avoid the deficiencies of the New Deal model that were already noted: racism, sexism, low wages, insufficient coverage of all the unemployed, and limited duration. The core approach is to employ jobless workers to renovate dilapidated housing; provide

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child and elder care; expand recreation and cultural activities; improve parks and other public spaces; undertake energy conservation measures; repair bridges, weak dams, and levees; improve public transportation, and so on (Baiman et al., 2009; Bell et al., 2007; Ginsburg & Goldberg, 2008; for a later proposal, see Darity, 2010).

After a short period on unemployment insurance, those who remain jobless would have the opportunity to earn a living, maintain the habit of working, and perhaps learn new skills by working on projects that would also serve and better the nation. Conceived before the Great Recession as a permanent program to eliminate chronic unemployment, direct job creation by government is needed even more to combat the mass unemployment brought on by the economic meltdown of 2008. If this was a permanent program, expanding and contracting in relation to the extent of unemployment and available to all of those who are without work beyond a short term, it would realize an important goal of both the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Roosevelt's Economic Bill of Rights: the human right to a job at a livable wage.

The federal government's policy responses to our twenty-first-century crisis have helped to keep the economy from disaster but have done far too little to stem mass unemployment. It is estimated that without the government's interventions, especially the Obama job stimulus (American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, or ARRA) and the bank bailouts, unemployment would have climbed to 16 percent in 2010 rather than to just under 10 percent (Blinder & Zandi, 2010). Significantly, one of the economists who made this assessment, Alan Blinder, formerly vice chairman of the Federal Reserve Board, subsequently referred to the "jobs emergency" and called for New Deal-style hiring of workers onto public payrolls (Harwood, 2010).

A program of direct job creation like the New Deal work programs would have created many more jobs than the ARRA or Obama Stimulus and would have done so more quickly. Instead the ARRA took the indirect approach of stimulating private sector job growth through tax cuts and additional spending on health care, social welfare, and infrastructure. According to economist Philip Harvey (2011), the New Deal response to mass unemployment, inspired by the social workers who led it, was to provide unemployed workers with the jobs they needed in government programs like the WPA, rather than to require them to wait for jobs to reappear in the private sector. What the New Dealers did not realize, Harvey argues, is that in addition to providing temporary work for the unemployed, thereby meeting their

immediate needs, their direct job creation strategy also provided exactly the same boost to the private sector's recovery that Keynesian economists seek to achieve through tax cuts and increased government spending on other things. When the direct job creation effect of these programs (the jobs created in the programs themselves) is added to their indirect job creation effect (the jobs created in the private sector by increasing demand via jobs program spending), the total job creation effect of the New Deal strategy far exceeds that of other types of stimulus spending. Indeed, Harvey estimates that if the \$787 billion estimated cost of the Obama Stimulus had been spent instead on New Deal-style direct job creation programs, it would have created about 16 million jobs rather than the 3–4 million jobs the ARRA saved or created. Stated differently, the nation's unemployment rate could have been reduced to its pre-recession level of 4.5 percent immediately, while government spending on the jobs program would have generated more private sector job growth than did the ARRA.

**Reduced Work Time**

Another strategy to reduce unemployment is to reduce work time. This can be done by decreasing the length of the workday or increasing the number of vacation days. This strategy has been proposed as a means of dealing with chronic unemployment or reducing mass unemployment during a downturn such as the Great Recession. In the mid-1960s, when unemployment was relatively low by today's standards—5.7 percent in 1963 and 5.2 percent in 1964—the eminent manpower expert Sar Levitan evaluated reduced work time as a means of coping with what he referred to as “the persistent [*sic*] high level of unemployment which has prevailed for nearly seven years” (Levitan, 1964, p. 1).

In 2009, during the Great Recession, work sharing, made possible by a number of state unemployment insurance plans that paid benefits to workers whose hours were reduced, saved an estimated 166,000 jobs (National Association of State Workforce Agencies, cited by Schor, 2010). With official unemployment in the 14 million range and “hidden” unemployment taking a similar toll (table 3.1), the number of jobs saved by this means of work sharing seems minuscule. Nonetheless, the economist Juliet Schor (2010), a major current advocate of reduced work time who sees it as a means of dealing with a number of problems—overwork, environmental degradation, and unemployment—considers this a promising development, an “exit ramp” to a new and saner economy. This seems unduly optimistic.

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Reduction of work time was a major demand of the labor movement. Over the years, the rationale for reduced work time has varied. In the nineteenth century, improving citizenship was one of the reasons given: that industrial workers would have the time to “improve themselves and consequently exercise their rights as citizens more effectively” (Levitan, 1964, p. 1). However, “the principal considerations in cutting the 60-hour workweek were social in nature. Health and fatigue factors and a desire for leisure were key considerations” (Levitan, 1964, p. 1). Reducing unemployment has also been a consistent rationale for shorter work time. Samuel Gompers, founder of the American Federation of Labor, put the case powerfully: “so long as there is one man who seeks employment and cannot obtain it, the hours of work are too long” (1887, cited by Schnapper, 1972, p. 250). In a similar vein, a century later, social worker and social policy professor David Gil, wrote that

what we ought to do instead of arguing endlessly over job-creation, is to redistribute all presently undertaken work in a manner that assures everyone’s inclusion by varying the legal length of the workday whenever necessary, so as to ensure a continuous match between the number of available workers and the changing scope of production. (Gil, 1983, p. 8)

Due in large part to workers’ struggles, the workweek was dramatically reduced between 1860 and 1960—from 68 to 41 hours (Levitan, 1964). In the next decade or so, hours per week and the number of weeks worked per year fell somewhat. However, between 1973 and 2002, average weekly hours increased slightly and the number of weeks per year increased by a greater extent (over 7 percent) (Mishel, Bernstein, & Allegretto, 2005, table 2.2, p. 113). According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the average work week of full-time workers has ranged from 42.1 hours to 43.0 from 2003 to 2012 (2013a). In 1999 annual work hours were 4 percent higher than in 1980 and were higher than in any other industrialized country (Golden & Jorgensen, 2002; see also Gornick, 2010). Productivity growth or output per worker slowed after 1973, but in the next twenty years nonetheless grew significantly more than wages or compensation (Mishel et al., 2005). Productivity growth could have been used to reduce work time or increase workers’ pay. Instead, wages fell and hours of work rose. The decline of the labor movement no doubt contributed to this reversal of a century-long process.

While the average workweek is 40 hours, many work more than that. A decade or so ago, almost one-third of the workforce regularly worked more than the standard

40-hour week, and one-fifth worked more than 50 hours (Golden & Jorgensen, 2002). The Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, an important New Deal measure, penalizes overtime by requiring that workers covered by the act be paid an overtime premium of at least one-half the regular rate of pay for each hour exceeding the standard workweek. However, around the turn of this century about one-third of the workforce was not covered by this requirement (Golden & Jorgensen, 2002, citing Department of Labor estimates). Moreover, despite the penalty, many employers prefer to pay overtime rather than hire and train new workers. Another reason for eschewing new hires is that overtime does not increase the cost of some fringe benefits whereas these would have to be paid to new workers. Stiffer penalties and wider coverage of the law would seem an obvious means of reducing overtime. Further, the disincentive to shorter hours would be reduced by removing the cap on employers' payment for workers' benefits as well as shifting responsibility for benefits such as health care away from employers, for example to the government (Schor, 2005).

With more time on the job and particularly with the increase in two-worker families, many Americans are overworked. Although it means more money in the paycheck, overwork poses clear drawbacks for workers: stress, workplace accidents, sleep deprivation, less family time, including child care, and little left over for recreation, leisure, adult education, and community participation (Bianchi & Wight, 2010; Golden & Jorgensen, 2002; Schor, 1991). Thus, overwork creates many problems for individuals, families, and society. In the long run, workplace accidents, absenteeism, and workers' health and mental health problems are detrimental to employers, but nevertheless many favor the short-term advantages of overtime.

At the same time that some employed Americans are overworked, many others, as discussed earlier in this chapter, are unemployed, not only in bad times but in better ones as well. The sociologist Herbert Gans (2011, p. A35) has pointed out that the jobless "recovery" from the Great Recession is increasing the number of "superfluous" workers. Among other policies, Gans has called for work sharing: "reducing working time—perhaps to as low as 30 hours a week, with the lost income made up by unemployment compensation."

How effective is reduced work time in lowering unemployment? Several European countries have pursued the policy, and in general, it does create jobs but not in direct proportion to the amount of work time reduction (Askenazy, 2007; LaJeunesse, 2009). For example, if the 40-hour week were reduced to 35, a

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five-hour reduction for seven people would not make room for one full-time, 35-hour-a-week job. Based on review of an econometric analysis of the 7 percent reduction in work time in France between 1999 and 2001, economist Robert LaJeunesse concluded that “half of the ‘job-creating’ potential of work time reduction can be viewed as being offset by greater labor productivity” (2009, p. 216). Just as recent work-time reduction in the United States has been underwritten by public subsidy, that is, unemployment benefits, the French experience depended on contributions from the state. According to economist Philippe Askenazy (2007), the effort to achieve a 35-hour workweek in France was not carried out fully, and if it had been, the cost per job to the government would have been about the same as that of compensating a nurse or police officer. Askenazy asks whether the money would be better spent in developing public services—in other words, direct job creation. Insofar as public monies would be used, it may be preferable to choose what kinds of jobs to subsidize.

One might apply this reasoning to the assumed, yet unproven effects of reduced work time on the environment. Direct creation of jobs that would make residential and commercial buildings more energy efficient might be a more certain approach to sustainability. Job creation in the social infrastructure such as education and child, elder, and health care is compatible with sustainability. Moreover, work sharing might well preserve jobs that contribute to environmental degradation. Since there are compelling social reasons to reduce overwork, it seems important to pursue both work time reduction and direct job creation. Why not create 35-hour-a-week jobs? This, of course, is unlikely to occur without significant political change.

### **Reducing Workplace Discrimination**

Earnings are low for the three-fifths of women who are employed in female-dominated occupations, even in “good” jobs such as supervisors in food service and retail work (Hartmann, Allen, & Owens, 1999), and the occupational segregation of minority workers, both women and men, is similarly disadvantaging. Thus, affirmative action that moves women and minorities into higher-paying, [white] male-dominated occupations is one form of redress. Pay equity that raises the wages in female- and minority-segregated occupations is another. However, affirmative action has suffered serious setbacks (Anderson, 2004; Kellough, 2006; Messer-Davidow, 2002). Pay equity improved some wages in unionized employ-

ment, but it never gained ground in the private sector and was limited in public jurisdictions as well (Figart & Hartmann, 2000). Subsidized child care, an income transfer, or social welfare benefit is an important means of reducing the inequality of women and the penalty of motherhood, including single motherhood.

With gender and race strategies in retreat and the white male standard less than it used to be, class strategies, as already noted, should also be pursued. While not addressed directly to gender or race, they nonetheless benefit women of all races and African American, Latino, and immigrant workers of both genders disproportionately. Full employment is par excellence a class strategy, but there are others. One study of the “collapse of low-skill wages” places responsibility not on decreases in workers’ skills or the higher demands of technology but on the weakening of wage-setting institutions, especially unions and the minimum wage (Howell, 1998). Union density has declined precipitously since the mid-1950s, but unions are still boosters of good jobs. Unionized workers earn 14 percent more than nonunion workers, and the gains are especially high for minority men and new immigrants and for immigrant men who have been in the country more than ten years (Mishel et al., 2007, table 3.32). Union premiums (differences between union and nonunion workers) are substantial in coverage of health, retirement, and paid leaves (Mishel et al., 2007, table 3.33). Union organizers feel that without passage of the Employment Free Choice Act that presidential candidate Obama promised to support but which is no longer on the agenda, employees who attempt to organize fellow workers will continue to be at risk of firing and other harassment by their employers.

The minimum wage should be a living wage. An increase in the statutory minimum not only raises the wages of those whose earnings are below the new minimum (nearly 60 percent of whom are women) but also tends to spill over to workers with wages just above (Mishel et al., 2009). Another means of raising wages are living-wage campaigns that require employers who do business with city governments to pay their employees adequately. These ordinances have been enacted in many cities across the country but are sometimes not fully implemented because of government officials’ reluctance to offend business (Luce, 2004). By definition, they are confined to government contractors but can have spillover effects to other employers who may, as a result, need to raise their wages in order to attract competent workers.

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The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), which supplements the wages of low-income workers with children, is an important antipoverty program. When Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) was repealed, the federal government was already spending somewhat more on the EITC than AFDC, and federal spending for the EITC was projected to exceed combined AFDC and TANF expenditures by nearly 50 percent in fiscal year 1997 (Goldberg & Collins, 2001, 408, note 150). The EITC can raise the income of a family with two or more children about 40 percent if the worker's income falls within the range of the poverty level, and many states and some cities supplement the credit. It is a refundable tax credit that is granted regardless of whether the worker pays federal income taxes, and most recipients do not, making the EITC essentially public assistance. However, since it is for the working poor and administered through a universal agency, the Internal Revenue Service, it is not stigmatized. Unlike traditional public assistance, benefits are lower for very low-paid workers than for those near and within the range of the poverty line, and unlike wages, EITC benefits are not included in calculating unemployment insurance or Social Security (Cherry & Goldberg, 2000; Gitterman, 2010; Goldberg, 2010). The EITC provides only minimal benefits for workers who do not support children but could be expanded to provide them with higher supplements.

Not surprisingly, the EITC is popular, expanding even during hard times for other entitlements. Why would employers not like a measure that pays part of their wage bill, and which they think holds down pressure on wages (Perez-Peña, 1998, p. B24)? Regardless of whether it does, the rise of the EITC has been accompanied by a decline in the value of the minimum wage. The 2006 value of the minimum wage plus the EITC for a family of three with two children was only 94 percent of the three-person poverty standard. Even with the rise in the minimum wage in 2007, its value plus the EITC is still below the 1968 value of the minimum wage alone, which was equivalent to 120 percent of that three-person standard (Goldberg, 2010). The EITC subsidizes any low-wage job, whereas direct government job creation uses public funds to create jobs that simultaneously invest in human and physical resources.

### **What Can Social Workers and Helping Professionals Do?**

#### **Helping Individuals and Families**

Helping individuals and families, referred to as "micro practice," addresses the many problems that stem from unemployment, underemployment, low wages, and blocked mobility. Such practice should be guided by recognition of the systemic

roots of many individual and family problems. Human service workers with a systemic perspective would, for example, avoid the confusion abetted by welfare reform ideology of equating any job at all, regardless of the wage, with “self-sufficiency.” By calculating the costs of “necessities”—food, shelter, transportation, health and child care—in various areas of the country, social worker Diana Pearce and her colleagues have done much to show that most jobs taken by former welfare recipients fall far short of the wages necessary for “self-sufficiency” (Center for Women’s Welfare, n.d.).

Individual or group work that addresses the guilt or self-blame as well as shame or the actual or anticipated loss of social respect from unemployment is an important part of practice with this population. Workers can help reduce debilitating self-blame through what is, in effect, political socialization; that is, helping clients to reframe their problems in terms of systemic dysfunction. Such work not only counters disempowerment and the “slings and arrows” of their class position but prepares clients for empowering involvement in social reform. The next step is for human service workers to refer and facilitate clients’ involvement in organizations that are attempting to raise wages, expand workplace benefits, and advocate for fuller employment. Also important are organizations that champion women’s and minority rights, providing that their efforts to improve the conditions of their constituents emphasize workplace discrimination, occupational segregation, and other forms of labor market inequities as well as limited access to affordable child care. Referral to resources such as these are an important part of individual work with labor market problems, and it is important that human service workers add these resources to the more traditional ones that facilitate their direct-service goals.

The families of unemployed, underemployed, and poorly paid workers suffer the economic and social disadvantages of their breadwinners’ positions in the labor market. Children and spouses may well resent and blame their family breadwinners for consequent economic deprivation. Human service workers may reduce some of these family tensions by helping the dependents of marginal workers to understand the roots of the problem, here again engaging in some political socialization.

Although part of the usual repertoire of referrals for individual and family problems, social agencies specializing in vocational training and guidance as well as those that provide information and case advocacy in relation to workers’ benefits such as unemployment insurance are especially important for practice with

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employment problems. Practitioners, of course, need to be thoroughly informed about eligibility and access to the major income support programs that increase the incomes of workers afflicted by one or more labor market inadequacy, especially the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly Food Stamps), EITC, unemployment compensation, Disability Insurance, workers' compensation, and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) (discussed in chapter 2). In addition, they need to be prepared to advocate for their clients when they are denied benefits to which they are entitled as well as to collaborate with organizations that specialize in such advocacy.

There are, of course, instances where problems in the workplace are not primarily systemic in origin although they may well be exacerbated by some of its indignities and inequities or more generally by the assaults of class, gender, and racial or ethnic inequality. The workplace problems of some employees may well be consequences of both structural and cultural factors. One approach is for human service workers to develop individual and group interventions geared to the development of the types of workplace skills that employers are seeking, or they may refer those they help to agencies that specialize in such services, always making quite certain that the focus is on such skill development. Also important, where clients clearly manifest behavior that is problematic in the workplace like alcohol and drug abuse, interventions would draw on practice with populations exhibiting such interpersonal problems and would also make use of appropriate referrals to agencies specializing in these problems. Where appropriate, counseling should, of course, encourage and facilitate occupational mobility through education and training, here again making use of appropriate referrals.

An attempt to spell out these interventions brings to mind the lack of a well-defined practice in relation to labor market deficiencies in the field of social work. This is a reflection of the profession's greater interest in welfare than in work. The social work profession—direct practitioners, researchers, and educators—needs to devote more resources to the development and evaluation of innovative practice directed to employment problems and to the enhancement of services that are potentially needed by millions of individuals and families.

### **Social Change Practice**

Social workers are obligated by their Code of Ethics to engage in social change on behalf of oppressed individuals and groups. The code specifies unemployment as

one of the forms of social injustice on which social action should focus (National Association of Social Workers, 2008). In the broadest terms, social workers should take part in organized efforts to reduce the labor market disadvantages that beset so many of their clients. Although not obligated by this Code of Ethics, other human service workers are equally likely to recognize the extent to which injustice accounts for many of the problems of their clients. Consequently, they will feel obligated to engage in the efforts to change social conditions discussed in this section, even though some of the discussion is directed specifically to social workers.

Human services workers should take action to ensure that the organizations to which they belong such as the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) make employment issues a priority, and not only during severe economic downturns. Indeed, clients often fall into the group that suffers from the chronic failure of the labor market to provide enough jobs, much less good ones, and whose plight is often submerged beneath a general prosperity that they certainly do not share. Human service workers should be aware of whether organizations promoting the rights of women give more than “lip service” to the public subsidy of child care for all who need it. If they belong to trade unions, they should press them to pay attention to the problems of the working class as a whole, not simply their members. Even though a tight labor market is a strength at the bargaining table, the U.S. labor movement, surprisingly, has not been a strong champion of full employment and has done little to mobilize workers on behalf of that goal. Human service workers can also take part in the social change organizations to which they refer their clients that are dedicated to the resolution of the various labor market problems that have been identified, such as extension and improvement of unemployment benefits, living-wage campaigns, and advocacy of job creation.

Practice with individuals can prepare human service workers to bear witness to the harsh realities of the labor market and the resultant burdens that so many of their clients experience. Public education is an important ingredient of efforts to change social conditions, and workers’ firsthand knowledge of these problems should position them to assume this role. They can also groom their clients to bear witness effectively to the impact of unemployment, low wages, and workplace indignities. Human service workers should add to their knowledge of the consequences of these problems an understanding of their causes and of desirable and feasible solutions like government job creation that can both aid the victims of the labor market and enrich the nation’s social and physical infrastructure. In doing so, these

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workers can move from case to cause, that is, from individual advocacy on behalf of clients to efforts to change conditions that harm a whole group of clients.

Some social workers have shown leadership in the pursuit of social justice in the labor market. They have been among the leaders in the founding of the National Jobs for All Coalition, the only national organization whose primary goal is to secure the right to living-wage jobs for all (for more information, see [www.njfac.org](http://www.njfac.org) and [www.jobscampaign.org](http://www.jobscampaign.org)). The Coalition for Human Needs is a social work-led organization that has successfully defended low-income social programs and has increasingly taken action on employment issues (for more information, see [www.chn.org](http://www.chn.org)).

Labor market problems afflict a large swath of the population but especially the very populations to which social workers and human service workers have a special obligation. Unemployment is a drain on the economy, reducing the tax base and wasting the goods and services that jobless workers could have produced. Social workers and human service professionals, generally, should be dedicating more individual and community interventions to reduce the scourge of unemployment and the many workplace deficiencies associated with it. Is it too much to hope that we will once again rise to the occasion of mass unemployment and show leadership, if not commensurate, then at least worthy of those social workers who inspired and led the stirring employment programs of the New Deal?

### **Concluding Comments**

The assurance of decent, living-wage jobs, this chapter has argued, is a critical component of the welfare state because it reduces poverty and economic inequality, not only boosting income but providing an opportunity for useful service and social inclusion. A brief history of employment conditions since the Great Depression demonstrated that the U.S. welfare state falls far short of providing decent work to all who want it; indeed, even in relatively good times, millions suffer various forms of unemployment and low wages. Readers learned how the government defines unemployment and how this official undercount both reflects and exacerbates public indifference and failure to recognize the seriousness of this social problem and to address it effectively. Unemployment, it was shown, disproportionately afflicts certain population groups: both partnered and single mothers, minorities, the young, the elderly, and the disabled. Many of those who work, moreover have

low pay and few, if any workplace benefits such as pensions or paid parental or sick pay; in short, they lack what were referred to as decent or good jobs.

Measures that benefit the unemployed as well as improve the conditions of disadvantaged workers and contribute to decent work were identified: increase in the minimum wage and wage supplementation through the earned income tax; strengthening collective bargaining rights; increasing subsidized child care; and enacting or upholding anti-discrimination laws and affirmative action. Unemployment insurance, usually available to only a minority of officially unemployed workers, should cover all who experience short-term joblessness. Preferable to this passive labor market policy for those who remain jobless for extended periods of time, are active labor market policies—job creation by the federal government that would not only provide the opportunity to work but improve the nation’s neglected physical and social infrastructures.

Finally, examples of micro, mezzo, and macro practice will be presented. Micro interventions are those that help individuals and families to cope with the consequences of unemployment. Mezzo and macro measures include advocacy to benefit the unemployed but more importantly to reduce unemployment, increase the quality of jobs, and secure the economic human right to decent work.

## **Case Studies**

### **Micro Level**

Ms. Sanchez, overwhelmed with multiple stressors, referred herself to a community-based preventive program to receive supportive services, advocacy, and linkage within the entitlement systems. Ms. Sanchez is a 46-year-old Hispanic woman, the mother of three boys, ages 17, 8, and 7. She has been a victim of domestic violence and is currently in the United States under a U non-immigrant-status visa (referred to as a “U visa”), which offers protection for victims of crimes who help law enforcement and government officials in prosecuting or investigating the crime. Ms. Sanchez is employed earning minimal wages and experiencing major housing and financial difficulties.

Ms. Sanchez has been in the United States over twelve years; her eldest son, José, is also in the United States on a U Visa. Both mother and child fled a domestic abusive relationship in El Salvador, where to date José’s father remains. The two younger children were born in the United States and have the same father.

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Ms. Sanchez was a victim of domestic violence in both of these marital relationships and has sought services from the Coalition Against Domestic Violence. The whereabouts of these fathers are unknown, and efforts to file for child support have been unsuccessful.

Although the children are meeting developmental milestones, there are many unresolved issues that should be addressed. All have witnessed domestic violence and would benefit from counseling and tutorial services, and these are being explored.

Ms. Sanchez earns approximately \$700 a month as a house cleaner. Her salary varies each week depending upon new clients and cancellations. With the assistance of the preventive program, she now receives \$268 worth of food stamps per month and \$299 in public assistance. Due to her reported income increase of \$100 last month, Ms. Sanchez has been advised that her public assistance will now be terminated because her income is over the federal eligibility limits. The family resides in a crowded two-bedroom apartment on a busy street, over a deli. Their rent is \$1,200 a month, electricity is \$70, and gas is \$40. Last month, the local church assisted the Sanchez family in paying their rent. The month before, Ms. Sanchez took in friends of friends for three weeks, to help pay expenses. Although adequate and with no safety hazards, the apartment is small and minimally maintained by the landlord. It is not ideal for a single parent raising three children, but it is a place to call home.

Affordable housing in the county where the family resides is very difficult to obtain. Ms. Sanchez has searched for more affordable housing, and has been unsuccessful. She would move out of the county, but is fearful she will not secure employment.

Ms. Sanchez is a wonderful mother to her three children and works hard to meet her family's needs. The realities of her financial struggles impact the overall functioning of this mother as well as her children. Lack of stability and fear of homelessness dominate their minds daily.

### **Questions**

1. Ms. Sanchez's public benefits have been cut since she is earning an extra \$100 per month. What is the incentive for Ms. Sanchez to earn the extra money?
2. If you were working with Ms. Sanchez, would you encourage her to continue working despite her benefits being reduced? Why or why not? If yes, how would you encourage her?

3. What services could be provided to Ms. Sanchez's oldest son (age 17) to prepare him for education or vocational training after high school?
4. Are there any additional services in your community that could be offered to Ms. Sanchez to help her with her family?
5. What is the benefit for Ms. Sanchez if the fathers of her three children were located and paid child support?

**Mezzo Level**

In accordance with the Personal Responsibility Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) (explained in detail in chapter 2), clients who are eligible for financial assistance and are deemed employable are required to actively seek employment in order to continue receiving benefits. Clients must provide their local Department of Social Services (DSS) with documentation on a regular basis that they are actively seeking work.

DSS clients with criminal histories have particular difficulty securing employment. Many employers do not want to hire someone who has been incarcerated. In order to address issues such as this, local Reentry Task Forces have been created. These task forces engage individuals prior to their release from prison or jail in order to make the transition from incarceration into the community easier. Prisons notify local reentry task force personnel with the dates of release, particularly when individuals have limited resources in the community. Prior to release, the task force personnel reach out to these individuals to obtain additional information, including living arrangements, if any, and previous work history. In cases where a person is released without housing, the task force notifies the local DSS office and advises of the person's discharge date and that they are homeless.

Given the difficulties associated with reentry into the community, groups have been established to assist people who are newly released from prison. The groups focus on common issues such as employment and housing as these interventions can reduce recidivism.

During employment-related meetings, the participants are split into two groups in order to role-play a job interview. Half the group plays the role of the interviewer and the other half the role of the interviewee. Through role-playing, the participants learn how to conduct themselves during job interviews by accentuating strengths and answering questions about gaps in work history due to incarceration.

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These strategies assist this population in building their confidence during interviews, making them stronger candidates in the job market.

Similarly, the task force educates potential employers about the rehabilitation many individuals undergo while incarcerated in order to reduce the stereotypes associated with this population. In response education and advocacy, some employers have hired individuals who had been incarcerated and have found them to be hard-working and dedicated employees.

### **Questions**

1. Should prior incarceration matter to a potential employer?
2. If no one will hire individuals due to a previous incarceration, should they be entitled to receive benefits from DSS regardless of PRWORA regulations?
3. What other interventions could a reentry task force do to help this population (with issues such as securing housing and employment)?
4. If you are an employer, would you consider hiring someone who had been incarcerated?
5. How does society judge individuals who have been incarcerated? Does the type of crime matter?
6. If you are a helping professional working with this population, how might you prevent them from feeling discouraged in seeking employment?

### **Macro Level**

An interdisciplinary group of social activists and academics, including veterans of the national struggle for full employment in the 1970s, became concerned about this latent social problem of unemployment, latent in the sense of being at odds with current interests and values but not recognized as such by the general public (Merton, 1976). Social work academics were prominent in this group of initiators, remaining in leadership positions throughout its history. Based in New York City, this group, first called New Initiatives for Full Employment (NIFE), began to meet regularly, study the problem, consider solutions, write position papers and policy proposals, and organize conferences in which the problem was addressed by leading social scientists and social reformers.

By the mid-1990s, the NIFE initiators had defined the problem and developed a plan of action in the form of a manifesto that they circulated widely in search of endorsements. They used this document to convene a conference at a New York City university. Attending this conference were interested people with a range of backgrounds—a future Nobel laureate in economics and other distinguished social scientists and educators, trade unionists, clergy, and grassroots organizers. The conference participants decided to form the National Jobs for All Coalition (NJFAC) that would raise consciousness of the issue through publications, public speaking and the like and, in time, engage in political action on behalf of full employment.

The name of the new organization, National Jobs for All Coalition, seemed more descriptive of its goals than “full employment” and less dated than the latter term. NJFAC later published the manifesto as a book, *Jobs for All: A Plan for the Revitalization of America* (Collins, Ginsburg, & Goldberg, 1994). NJFAC is the only national organization that has as its primary goal a living wage, or decent work for all who want it.

The NJFAC had no funds at the time but soon after was provided with space and part-time staff in the Urban Ministries unit of the National Council of Churches. One task of staff and a volunteer executive committee was to recruit an advisory board of distinguished scholars, public officials (including two past secretaries of labor), religious and labor leaders, and entertainers. The NJFAC executive committee consisted of the volunteers who had founded the organization, some of them giving near full-time to the cause. NJFAC began *Uncommon Sense*, a series of popular educational publications, organized “Full Employment Weeks” (small demonstrations and teach-ins at universities), solicited members throughout the country, secured small grants for special projects, raised money through appeals to members, and lobbied successfully for a demonstration Job Vacancy Survey in the Department of Labor that required a small authorization of federal funds.

With a nation still uninterested in unemployment—despite the fact that millions were unemployed, underemployed, and working poor even in “good” times—the group used the strategy of tying joblessness to issues that were on the mind of the public and on the political agenda. For example, in the case of Social Security, NJFAC gathered information to refute the program’s alleged financial shortfall, emphasizing at the same time that the best *insurance* for Social Security is full employment or more people working and paying taxes and less therefore requiring

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public income support, not only unemployment insurance but disability benefits when, particularly as older workers, they lose hope of becoming reemployed. In time the organization's website became a valuable resource visited by many, including academics, public officials, and activists seeking information on employment, unemployment, and related issues.

One of the most visited sections of the NJFAC website is its full report of monthly unemployment statistics, which includes the numbers of hidden unemployed and the working poor. It attempts to arouse public interest and involvement by showing that the problem is of far greater magnitude than the official unemployment figures lead us to believe. NJFAC's various publications also emphasize that unemployment is a primary problem resulting in poverty, social exclusion, and a host of mental and physical ills. The organization also points out that unemployment is literally throwing away the national product or potential goods and services—those that the unemployed could have produced had they been working.

When unemployment reached crisis proportions in the past decade, NJFAC proposed that those who were jobless beyond the usual time limit for receipt of unemployment benefits should be provided with work in the service of the nation. During the crisis NJFAC has maintained that direct job creation by the federal government is the most efficient and effective way of reducing mass unemployment and at the same time improving the quality of life in the United States. In fact, it has maintained that had the \$787 billion stimulus enacted early in 2009 been used in this way, it would have provided jobs for all officially unemployed workers. That would have been a lower rate of unemployment than the nation has ever reached in peacetime.

In the wake of the financial collapse of 2008, NJFAC took the lead in organizing a National Conference to Create Living-Wage Jobs, Meet Human Needs, and Sustain the Environment (New York City, November 2009) that was attended by activists from a number of states and cosponsored by labor and faith-based organizations, advocacy groups, academic departments, and so on. NJFAC and its part-time organizer, based in Ohio, have sparked "First Friday" events, observances in a number of cities on the day the Department of Labor announces the unemployment statistics of the preceding month. Among the organizations that have joined these "First Friday" events are women's organizations that have seen the liabilities for women, particularly in the cutbacks of public service workers. These and the

national conference have enabled NJFAC to build ties with a wide range of organizations concerned with reducing unemployment, extending unemployment benefits, advocating government job creation, and a human right to employment.

Through a national clearinghouse for economic justice on one of its websites, NJFAC hopes to coordinate actions on behalf of the unemployed and job creation and to provide ideas for action and knowledge of pending legislation and other proposals to reduce unemployment. NJFAC has also worked with the office of Representative John Conyers (D-MI) in framing the Humphrey-Hawkins Full Employment and Training Act (H.R1000 in the 113th Congress), a comprehensive and innovative federal and local government job creation and training bill that would create millions of new jobs for the nation's unemployed. Although passage of the bill is extremely unlikely in the near future, this legislation is an important means of increasing public knowledge and support for job creation that would not only aid the unemployed but the nation as a whole.

NJFAC, like any other advocacy group, requires the knowledge of experts and the skills of organizers. It has drawn on interdisciplinary expertise in economics, political science, and social policy. Throughout its history, NJFAC has benefited from the leadership of social workers who have contributed their knowledge of social policy and of the effects of unemployment on individuals and families as well as their skills in advocacy and community organization.

### **Questions**

1. What are the significant issues connected to unemployment?
2. What are some of the advantages and disadvantages of forming an organization such as NJFAC?
3. What other methods for addressing the effects of unemployment on individuals and families could NJFAC try?
4. How does interdisciplinary collaboration benefit the change effort?
5. What types of knowledge and skills are needed to influence policy at the macro level?
6. In times when the public and/or public officials are unreceptive to the reforms proposed by an organization like NJFAC, what strategies should NJFAC adopt?

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### **Internet Resources**

**Economic Policy Institute:** <http://www.epi.org/>

Research on jobs, wages, living standards, and retirement.

**National Jobs for All Coalition:** [www.njfac.org](http://www.njfac.org)

Research and information on unemployment, employment, strategies for achieving full employment.

**National Employment Law Project:** <http://www.nelp.org/>

Research on policies to enforce workers' rights and create good jobs.

**Chicago Political Economy Group:** <http://www.cpeonline.org/>

Research on federal job creation paid for by a financial transaction tax.

**Center on Economic and Policy Research:** <http://www.cepr.net/>

Research on jobs, minimum wage, social security, and retirement.

**Institute for Women's Policy Research:** <http://www.iwpr.org/>

Research on women's employment, pay equity, discrimination, family leave, social security.

**U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics:** <http://bls.gov/>

Current and historical data on employment, unemployment, working conditions, foreign nations. For data on specific states, see [http://www.bls.gov/regions/news\\_release\\_finder.htm](http://www.bls.gov/regions/news_release_finder.htm).

**U.S. Bureau of the Census:** <http://www.census.gov/>

Current and historical data on characteristics of the U.S. population—income, poverty, health care.

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