

The National Jobs for All Network: A Brief History

Twice since World War II, the U.S. Congress has seriously considered enacting full employment or a federal Job Guarantee, the first of the economic rights that President Franklin D. Roosevelt proposed in his landmark “Second or “Economic Bill of Rights.” Both Congressional efforts resulted in legislation that fell far short of guaranteeing the right to a job.

The second of these Congressional attempts began with the goal of a job guarantee but ended with the Humphrey-Hawkins Full Employment and Balanced Growth Act of 1978 that had an interim, five-year target of 4 percent unemployment—hardly the right to a job for all who want one. At the five-year mark, unemployment was more than twice that target rate (9.6 percent), having been double-digit for more than a year in the interim. After that failure, full employment was not only in political eclipse but largely out of mainstream research and academic discourse as well. A few leading progressives even disdained it as a policy goal.

In the mid-1980s, some academics and activists were still convinced that full employment is a major means of coping with our persistent, formidable social problems. Consequently, they began to consider “New Initiatives for Full Employment (NIFE),” holding meetings, conferences, and writing some position papers on the subject. In 1987, Sumner Rosen, a Columbia University professor and leading member of NIFE, proposed and initiated a Seminar on Full Employment as part of the Columbia University Seminars program. Over the years that Seminar has contributed significantly to the development and refinement of thinking about the right to employment and the possibilities for its political resurgence.*The Seminar, which has been addressed by leading thinkers, including Nobel Prize laureates and one of the architects of Swedish full employment policy, has focused on the analytical and policy issues pertaining to full employment. Now titled, the Columbia University Seminar on Full Employment, Social Welfare, and Equity, it has been a resource for conferences, public meetings, and publication of works pertaining to full employment. One such conference was an all-day meeting at Columbia University: A 21st Century Economic Bill of Rights. <http://www.economicbillofrights.net/>

Seminar presentations and discussions during the early years of both the Columbia Seminar and NIFE influenced the content of a small book, published in 1994. That book served as a Manifesto for the founding of a successor to NIFE: the National Jobs for All Coalition (later Network). This book/manifesto--*Jobs for All: A Plan for the Revitalization of America*--set forth a plan for full employment with chapters on such topics as “Adequate Income for All”; “Rights of Workers”; “Environmental Sustainability and Preservation”; and “Sound Government Finance.” The *Jobs for All* authors acknowledged the contribution of the Columbia University Seminar on Full Employment which had “over the years, provided us with a forum for presenting research and testing ideas.” *Jobs for All* is available on the website of NJFAN: [Jobs for All: A Plan for the Revitalization of America \(1994\) – NJFAN \(njfac.org\)](http://www.njfac.org)

The National Jobs for All Network is *the* major national organization in the US that has as its principal goal or raison d’être the achievement of a federal guarantee of useful, living-wage employment for all who want to work. We publish an on-line *NJFAN Newsletter* that encourages a wide range of economic and social justice organizations to join a network that includes the fundamental right to living-wage work and prints reports of their actions. One of NJFAN’s signature efforts, the “Real Count,” challenges the official US definition of unemployment by showing that millions of unemployed, under-employed and working poor Americans are not counted in the unemployment figures released monthly by the US Department of Labor. Each month we release the “Real Count,” which includes the full count. And we emphasize the political consequences of this official *undercount* of a social problem. NJFAN members have written numerous position papers and pamphlets and have published books that make the case for full employment as a major solution to the problems of poverty, racial discrimination, and economic inequality. Under the leadership of economist and founding member Professor June Zaccone, NJFAN maintains a website that stores a wide range of material pertinent to full employment (www.njfac.org).

NJFAN Board member and Counsel, Professor Philip Harvey has served as the chief consultant for H.R. 1000, the Jobs for All Act, the only federal Job Guarantee legislation introduced in Congress since Humphrey-Hawkins. A revised version of that federal Job Guarantee bill will be reintroduced in Congress in the coming months. NJFAN will educate the public about the legislation and seek Congressional co-sponsorship for it--as we did for the earlier versions of that bill.

Under the leadership of NJFAN Outreach Coordinator Logan Martinez, NJFAN has led Jobs for All Town Meetings in four cities. These actions bring together a wide range of economic justice and human rights advocates and encourage their concerted action. The most recent NJFAN Town Meeting--“Good Jobs for All!”--was held in October in New Haven, Connecticut. We intend to hold more such meetings in the near future. As Outreach Coordinator, Logan Martinez maintains a Jobs for All Network consisting of participants from a number of US states that meets bi-weekly via Zoom.

In addition to the federal government, NJFAN has targeted New York City for Job Guarantee action--A New, New Deal for the USA and NYC featuring a series of events, including: an all-day conference co-sponsored by the important Professional Union of the City University of New York (PSC); the unveiling of a map of New York City sites created by the work relief and public works programs of the New Deal programs during the Great Depression (the map created by Living New Deal, a research project and online public archive documenting the scope and impact of the New Deal on American lives and the national landscape); a public meeting at New School University co-sponsored by the Columbia Seminar on Full Employment, Social Welfare, and Equity, NJFAN, and The New School. That meeting featured a proposed New York City Jobs for All Program, designed by NJFAN under the leadership of Philip Harvey and supported by former New York City Public Advocate Letitia James--then planning a campaign for Mayor of New York that terminated when she filled the vacated position of the New York State Attorney General.

In formulating his Economic or Second Bill of Rights, President Franklin Roosevelt referred to the right to remunerative work as the “first and most fundamental” of economic rights and the one that would make other economic rights easier to achieve--such as the rights to decent housing, quality education, and security in old age. NJFAN reaches out to organizations promoting these goals and others such as a sustainable or decarbonized environment. At this time, when democratic rights are seriously threatened—perhaps more so than at any time in our history--we know that the preservation and necessary expansion of economic rights are jeopardized by this attack on democracy and the right to vote. NJFAN recognizes that we must therefore join forces with those who are leading the fight to preserve democracy.

*For the Columbia Seminar’s contribution to the conceptualization and advocacy of full employment, see Gertrude Schaffner Goldberg and Sheila Collins, with Helen Lachs Ginsburg, “Keeping Alive the Dream: The Seminar on Full Employment, Social Welfare, and Equity, in Thomas Vinciguerra, ed., *A Community of Scholars: 75 Years of the University Seminars at Columbia*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1960, 62-76.