Introduction to “The State of Public Sector Unionism: Challenges and Opportunities”

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There is little doubt that the US trade union movement is confronting a severe crisis at the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century. Undoubtedly, this crisis was the major factor which led to a number of large and influential unions leaving the American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) in 2005 and subsequently forming the Change to Win Federation (CTW) in hopes of reviving a flagging labor movement. With overall union density in the United States continuing its decades-long downward trajectory, declining from 12.4% in 2008 to 12.3% in 2009, labor organizations shed some 771,000 members during the last year bringing the total number of union members found in all labor organizations to 15.3 million in 2009. In spite of this overall loss in union membership, private sector and public sector union densities continued to diverge in 2009 with the former rate falling to 7.2% while the latter rate was more than *five* times higher, increasing from 36.8% in 2008 to 37.4% in 2009 with the addition of 64,000 new members. This decrease in private sector union membership, due, in part, to the Great Recession of 2008–2009, has reversed historical trends apparent from the US trade union movement’s inception in the latter part of the eighteenth century. For the first time in US history, there are more public sector union members (7.9 million) than private sector union members (7.4 million) in labor organizations. Assuming that this relationship remains steady for at least the near future, a trade union movement composed of a majority of government employees will undoubtedly adopt different strategies and tactics than a movement historically dominated by private sector union members. In this well-written and timely essay, three prominent industrial relations scholars, Dr. Marick F. Masters, Director of Labor@Wayne and Professor of Business at Wayne State University; Dr. Robert R. Albright, Associate Professor of Management at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute and Dr. Ray Gibney, Assistant Professor of Management at Pennsylvania State University at Harrisburg, analyze the current state of US public sector unionism, arguing that although such unionism on the surface appears to offer some hope in compensating for a declining US private sector unionism, public sector union density has most likely reached its peak in

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the United States. They argue that the most likely scenario for US public sector unions in the coming decade will be one of stagnation.

I welcome employment relations scholars from all nations around the world to contribute future essays analyzing either public sector unionism, private sector unionism or both in postindustrial, industrial and industrializing countries from any one of a variety of theoretical perspectives. Moreover, if any of the journal's readers would like to respond to particular essays published in the "Perspectives" Section or would like to write on any topic in the field of employee relations, please do not hesitate to contact me with your proposal. I welcome both practitioner-based and scholarly-based articles. I hope that you enjoy this essay and find it most illuminating.

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