

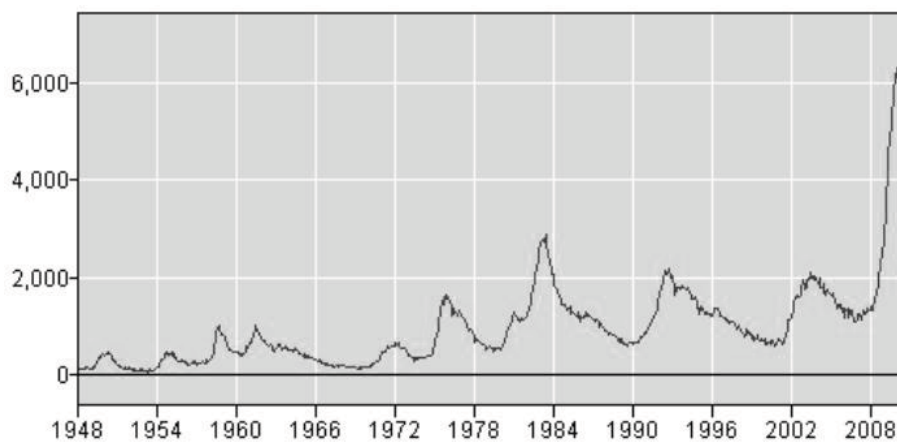
The Social Justice Column

From Social Injustice to Full Employment

By Fadhel Kaboub, Denison University

I am often asked to comment on the prospects for greater social justice through grassroots social and political activism. The way I see it, however, activism is important to a certain extent, but the most important aspect of social activism should be the full employment goal because full employment begets economic justice, which in turn begets social justice.

As we near the end of 2010, the United States is still experiencing its worst economic recession since the Great Depression. More than 7 million jobs were lost since the beginning of the recession in December 2007. The official unemployment rate has reached 9.5%, which is 14.6 million people. Of these, 44.9% are considered long-term unemployed (6.6 million); meaning that they have been actively seeking work for 27 weeks or more, an increase of nearly 5 million people since the beginning of the recession (Graph 1). Long-term unemployment is now the highest it has been since the 1930s.



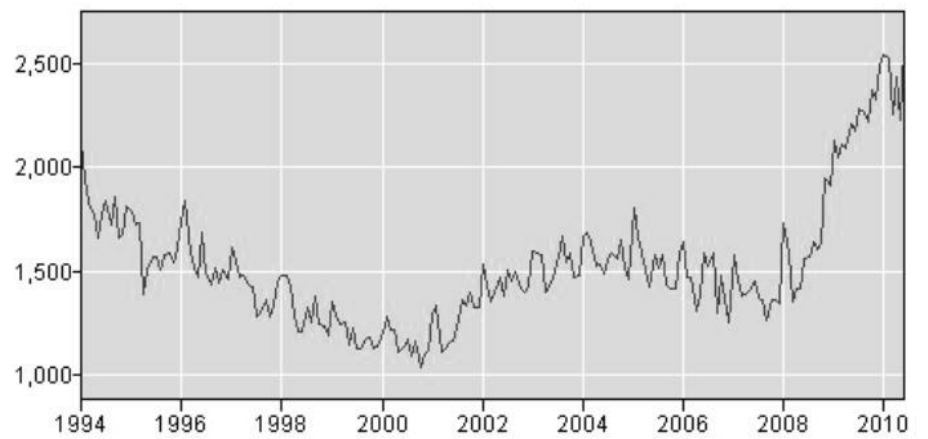
Graph 1: Number of unemployed for more than 27 weeks, in thousands (1948-2010). Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Unfortunately, these grim statistics tend to underestimate the extent of the unemployment problem. The numbers do not take into account the fact that there are 8.5 million involuntary part-time workers, and that 2.6 million people were marginally attached to the labor force (Graph 2). These individuals were not in the labor force, but wanted and were available to work, and had looked for a job sometime in the prior 12 months. They were not counted as unemployed because they had not actively searched for

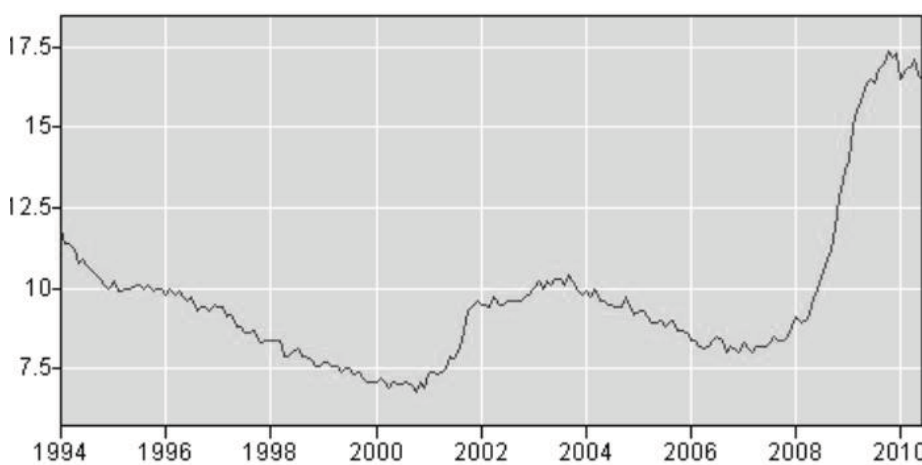
but it also includes the involuntary part-time workers, and those marginally attached to the labor force. This rate exceeds 23% for Blacks and Latinos, compared to 13.8% for Whites. The EPI also reports that there are 5 job seekers per job opening. This is one way to quantify social injustice.

One cannot even begin to think of social justice when more than 21 million people are jobless. The official unemployment rate in Columbus, Ohio has reached 9.2% in June 2010; that is more than 216 thousand people. Can we even speak of social justice when so many people and their families have no stable source of income? If the answer to social injustice is job creation, the question then is how can we reach full employment? Free market mechanisms can and do create some jobs, but not nearly enough to guarantee jobs for all. The very nature of capitalism ensures a certain amount of unemployment. Therefore, what social and political activism should aim for is a government policy that guarantees a useful and productive job opportunity at a socially-established living wage for everyone who is ready, willing, and able to work. Well-designed full employment programs are automatic stabilizers for the violent fluctuations of free markets.

Community organizations can play a crucial role in getting true full employment back on the policy radar screen through community organizing at the grassroots level. All that is needed from the federal government is financing, not management and control. Community organizations know the needs of their local community, they have better knowledge about the pool of available skills and resources, and they have a vested interest in the



Graph 2: Marginally Attached to the Labor Force, in thousands (1994-2010). Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics.



Graph 3: Underemployment Rate in the United States (1994-2010). Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics.

work in the 4 weeks preceding the July 2010 unemployment survey. The Economic Policy Institute (EPI) reports that the underemployment rate has now reached 16.5%; that is nearly double the level of December 2007 (Graph 3). The underemployment rate takes into account not only the officially unemployed people according to the official BLS definition,

economic success of their community projects. Financing full employment must be centralized, but the selection, implementation, management, and assessment of full employment projects must be community-based. This kind of full employment is democratic, inclusive, and just.

Of course, there are several questions that need to be carefully addressed: How much will a true full employment program cost? Can we afford it? What about the deficit and the national debt consequences? Isn't this going to create too much inflation? What kind of jobs will be created? All of these questions will be answered in future editions of *The Social Justice Column*. Stay tuned!

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Testing Time for White Sangomas (continued from previous page)

Thwasa also practice "seeing" and invoking ancestral spirits, with teachers constantly testing their abilities. Emphasis is placed on dream interpretation. The traditions of the North, the Zulu, Swazi and others believe that sangomas actually become possessed by their ancestors and much of the training is focused on teaching *thwasa* to channel these beings, working themselves into trance states through dancing and controlling this state of experience.

Humility and obedience to one's teacher underpin the *ukuthwasa* (training) period. Both Wreford and Hamersma caution that in this climate of utter subservience there is room for nefarious sangomas to abuse their positions of power. "Very often people are abused by their teachers, sexually abused. If your teacher isn't whole and happy they might take advantage of you," warns Hamersma.

The *goduswa* ceremony comes with its own set of challenges not for the faint-hearted. A bull and a goat must be sacrificed on behalf of the ancestors. In her book *Working With Spirit: Experiencing Izangoma Healing in Contemporary South Africa*, Wreford describes how, as part of her six-day graduation, the goat was anointed and then stabbed with a spear in the shoulder. She then had to put her mouth over the wound to suck the blood. Once the animal had been slaughtered the gall bladder was removed and her teacher squirted the contents into her mouth, instructing her to also rub it over her face and hands.

The bull's throat was slit in front of her. Both animals were skinned and dismembered; their carcasses, skins and heads placed at the foot of the mattress on which she and her teacher slept, where they remained for two nights, the pile growing smaller each time the meat was feasted upon. Such was the lead up to the main event, where she danced on her knees in what she depicts as an entranced "state of possession" before a "jury of *izangoma*". I put it to Wreford that surely, at this point, fly-by-nights and those not dead set on becoming a sangoma would opt out. Her answer is telling: "The people who have dropped out have dropped out at much earlier stages, they don't get that far."