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Daniel B. Cornfield

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RANDY HODSON, AGENT OF A NEW SOCIOLOGY OF WORK: REMEMBRANCE, REFLECTION, AND CELEBRATION

Daniel B. Cornfield

ABSTRACT

In eulogizing Randy Hodson, I reflect on and celebrate the development and deepening of Randy's intellectual legacy as I have seen it unfold and intersected with it at different points over the years. Our careers commenced in 1980 as labor sociologists were turning their attention toward worker agency in an emerging post-bureaucratic era of neo-liberalism. Our careers next intersected two decades later in an era of globalization through our initiative in building a transnational sociology of work. Randy triumphed as an agent of worker agency as he moved the field into the globalizing, post-bureaucratic epoch of the discipline's intellectual history.

A few months after Randy Hodson and I launched our careers in 1980, Ronald Reagan was elected President of the United States. It was an abrupt awakening to the arrival of neo-liberalism and employment precarity in a post-bureaucratic age. The awakening would compel our generation of labor sociologists to fashion a new sociology of work. No longer

an era of organization men and women employed in stable internal labor markets, workers were increasingly employed casually in an emerging two-tier service economy and an era of sharpening income inequality. As the manufacturing economy gave way to a service economy, and civil rights and human rights movements were tackling discrimination and social exclusion, labor unions were declining with globalization; safety nets were shredding with deregulation; and workers, rather than the New Deal, were increasingly asked to shoulder the risks of joblessness and upward mobility. If C. Wright Mills and his colleagues of the 1950s announced the crystallization and triumph of bureaucracy over entrepreneurial individualism, history seemed to be summoning our generation of labor sociologists to make sense of the new post-bureaucratic moment. We set out to create a new sociology of work for comprehending the widening disparities in life chances by race, gender, and class; status degradation and worker alienation; and the possibilities for reconstituting inclusive democratic communities in workplaces and labor markets in a post-bureaucratic age.

For years, I have admired Randy for his leading role in creating a new sociology of work. A prolific and creative writer and sociologist, Randy addressed a wide range of themes with his research, including worker resistance and labor activism; disparities in labor market outcomes such as income inequality; cross-national variations in worker identities; workplace bullying; worker alienation; and management citizenship behavior, to name only a few. He also developed a new sociological method − "the quantitative analysis of ethnographic accounts" (Hodson, 2001, pp. 53−59) − for testing and generating hypotheses based on a systematic and rigorous comparison of hundreds of ethnographic studies of work, workers, and workplaces.

Our friendship and collaborations began in 1980. Over the years, we have commented on and edited each other's rough drafts for publication, written together, collaborated on the editorial team of *Work and Occupations*, and supported each other's professional development. In 1990−1991, Randy lectured in one of my undergraduate sociology courses during his leave and his spouse Susan Rogers' internship in Nashville. Our colleague was the colleague's colleague, empathetic, humorous, and generous with his time for others, and, ever conscious of the wider social and political context, a great mentor through his exemplary participation in our scholarly community. A vast corpus of work, Randy's lasting legacy provides us with a pathway for examining the possibilities of worker agency in determining life chances, and for building a transnational scholarly community.

ENLIVENING THE NEW SOCIOLOGY OF WORK

"Enlivening the new sociology of work" is the subtitle of Randy's sagacious and prescient 1995 essay, "The Worker as Active Subject: Enlivening the 'New Sociology of Work'." I assigned the essay in my undergraduate sociology courses because it not only introduced a new typology and model of worker agency, it also captured a transformative moment in the intellectual history of a discipline that was re-equilibrating its position on the structure-agency balance beam.

At the start of our careers, our generation of labor sociologists critically engaged the status attainment model of social stratification with a new institutional analysis of social inequality. Status attainment had been largely attributed to achieved and ascribed characteristics of individuals, including education, family background, and demographic characteristics. The new institutional analysis, often referred to as labor market segmentation theory and dual economy theory, attributed individual differences in labor market outcomes to worker locations in an economy and labor force segmented by industry structure, firm size, unionization, and other institutional factors that influenced the market competitiveness of firms and sectors, employer profitability, and worker power. Randy's 1983 *Workers' Earnings and Corporate Economic Structure* pioneered in the new institutional analysis, showing as it did institutional effects on individual earnings independent of the effects of gender, race, and other individual variables.

By the mid-1990s, sociologists of work were addressing the agency of both workers and managers as each endeavored to control production and labor market outcomes in the workplace. The origins and impact of workplace control initiatives − such as quality circles and worker participation arrangements − across and within workplaces of the same industrial sector could not be easily explained with an institutional analysis sociologists increasingly regarded as an overly deterministic theoretical regime. Randy captured this transformative moment in his essay, "The Worker as Active Subject," when he proclaimed that "[a] new sociology of work that includes both structure and agency has the potential to reestablish for industrial sociology a leading role in addressing questions at the mainstream of sociology" (Hodson, 1995, p. 254).

A champion of the new sociology of work, Randy and his former Texas colleague Teresa A. Sullivan in 1990 released their pathbreaking textbook in the sociology of work, *The Social Organization of Work*. In 1951, Delbert Miller and William Form, with whom Randy would become

a department colleague at Ohio State some four decades later, introduced and canonized the field of "industrial sociology" with their iconic textbook, *Industrial Sociology*. Writing at the bureaucratic moment, the era of the "organization man" [sic], and the Golden Age of collective bargaining, Miller and Form peered deep inside the bureaucracy as they outlined an industrial sociology focused primarily on "work groups and work relations, … the role the worker plays in work groups, and … the social organization of work plant society" (Miller & Form, 1951, p. 16).

Hodson and Sullivan's textbook, appearing in the neo-liberal era, defined a sociology of work for a globalizing and polarizing "post-industrial" era. Not only was the manufacturing economy transforming into a multi-tier service economy in which women and minorities were disproportionately employed in the lowest tiers (Hodson & Sullivan, 1990, pp. 26−27), but "[m]arket forces," they wrote, "have entered almost all areas of social life and have exerted a profound influence on the way we live in modern society" (Hodson & Sullivan, 1990, p. 29). The sociological study of work, for Hodson and Sullivan, used multiple qualitative and quantitative research methods for analyzing individuals, groups, labor forces, occupations, industries, firms, labor unions, government regulatory agencies, and the demographic characteristics of labor force participants and non-participants (Hodson & Sullivan, 1990, p. 57). Hodson and Sullivan noted that each type of method had its place in the sociological enterprise. Ethnography reveals "what workers actually do on the job and how they interact with their fellow workers"; "[c]ompared with ethnographies or case studies, surveys have the advantage of being more easily generalized to the population that they were designed to represent" (Hodson & Sullivan, 1990, p. 32, 37).

In "The Worker as Active Subject," Randy developed a new typology of worker behaviors and a new model for explaining variations in worker behaviors (Hodson, 1995, pp. 254−257). The typology distinguished worker behavior in terms of the worker's orientation toward the goals of the worker herself, the work group, and the work organization. This yielded a typology of eight types of worker behavior that ranged from a "pro," whose behavior was simultaneously oriented toward individual, group, and organizational goals, to the "wimp," whose behavior was not oriented toward any of these goals. In gendered labor-management terms that seemed to describe worker behaviors in the large bureaucratic corporation of the 1950s, the "regular guy/union man" was oriented toward individual and group goals, but not organizational goals; and the "company man" was oriented toward only organizational goals.

The "saboteur," who was oriented only to work group goals, captured the enduring theme of retaliatory worker alienation and broadened the theoretical space for the analysis of deviant behavior in the workplace. Randy and Gary Jensen, with Jensen's expertise in crime, law, and deviance, subsequently pursued this theme in their co-guest-edited, February 1999 special issue of *Work and Occupations* on "Crime and the Workplace." In their introductory essay, the guest editors discussed a wide range of synergies between criminological theory and the new sociology of work, including those generated from treating the workplace as a "microlevel social system." "The analysis of the workplace," they wrote, "as a microlevel social system … has important implications for understanding the workplace as a potential site of deviant or criminal behavior. Microlevel studies in the sociology of work focus on workers' attitudes … and behaviors … Citizenship and resistance, coworker relations, the sexual division of labor, and the social construction of the meaning of work are important topics in the microlevel analysis of individual experiences in the workplace" (Jensen & Hodson, 1999, p. 16). The special issue consisted of articles on white-collar crime, sexual harassment, drug-dependent pharmacists, and whistleblowers, themes that anticipated social issues of diverse workplaces in a two-tier service economy.

Indeed, as recent as 2013, the same labor-crime sociological duo opined that the advent of neo-liberalism had proven to be fertile ground for the study of white-collar crime and the continuing synergy of criminological theory and the new sociology of work. Looking back, they wrote that "[i]n research on sources of crime or deviance in the workplace, the most common use is 'perceived' injustice, which can generate worker anger and potentially underwrite workplace deviance. However, the concepts of injustice and the abuse of power can be applied at the corporate or organizational level, as well as at the individual level. At the corporate level the focus is less on crime as a response to injustice than on unconstrained power as a source of immoral and even criminal corporate behavior. Historically, the thirty years since the ascension of Reagan's and Thatcher's conservative revolution with its attendant neo-liberal ideology and its commitment to deregulation have brought into full fruition an era of rampant corporate malfeasance and criminality" (Hodson & Jensen, 2013, p. 5).

Randy's new model of worker behaviors presented in his 1995 essay addressed the antecedents and consequences of worker behaviors. The model attributed variations in worker agency across the eight types of the typology to such structural variables as job and workplace characteristics,

to worker subjectivity such as reference groups, and to the availability of alternative employment opportunities (Hodson, 1995, pp. 257−259). Informed by prior research on collective action and small-group process, Randy wrote that these antecedents of worker behavior "create motivations and provide resources that eventually become translated into behaviors" (Hodson, 1995, p. 257).

Randy generated five hypotheses from his model that would help define a collective research agenda in the new sociology of work. Together these hypotheses examined the cultural and solidaristic sources of worker collective and individual action; the development of worker resistance inside hierarchical bureaucratic work organizations; and the impact of worker behaviors on work attitudes and worker productivity (Hodson, 1995, p. 271).

Subsequently, Randy endeavored to develop a mixed-method methodology for examining worker agency. Ethnography illuminated worker subjectivity and informal group relations and actions in workplaces that were not easily discernible with large statistical data sets; large statistical data sets were most conducive to hypothesis testing and to generalizing beyond individual cases.

Randy succeeded in developing a mixed-method methodology for examining worker agency: "the quantitative analysis of ethnographic accounts" (Hodson, 2001, pp. 53−59). Specifically, Randy's masterful methodological innovation consisted of creating an empirical data base of all published US and UK workplace ethnographies that he and his team of graduate students have coded to allow for systematic, rigorous multivariate statistical comparisons of worker agency across a wide range of workers, workplaces, geographical areas, and time periods. The data base itself is unique, as are the systems of data coding and data analysis. The data forms the empirical basis of much of Randy's subsequent empirical work, as well as that of his many faculty and graduate student co-authors. Randy diffused and generalized his methodology of coding and analyzing organizational ethnographies beyond sociology in his methodological publications, including *Analyzing Documentary Accounts* (Hodson, 1999) and "A Meta-Ethnography of Employee Attitudes and Behaviors" (Hodson, 2004).

In *Dignity at Work*, Randy's monumental treatment of worker agency, he deployed his workplace ethnography methodology to examine the antecedents and consequences of worker behavior. His focus was on a "quest for dignity and on the creation of a world where dignity at work is possible for all … Dignity," Randy argued, rested "on the opportunity to exercise agency − to operate purposively and effectively in one's environment. For

this reason we have focused on the active behaviors of resistance, citizenship, and coworker relations. Dignity, however, depends not just on agency but also on the *realization* of specific goals that define the lived experience of work. These goals … include job satisfaction, a liveable pace of work, and creativity and meaning in work" (Hodson, 2001, p. 237; Randy's italics).

BUILDING AN INTERNATIONAL SOCIOLOGY OF WORK

Globalization was the historical moment when our career biographies next intersected. In 1990, Hodson and Sullivan predicted that the "international division of labor between nations specializing in agricultural and extractive products, manufacturing products, and services will generate continuing tensions and conflicts that could produce important changes in the international organization of production" (Hodson & Sullivan, 1990, pp. 28−29). Noting the rise to prominence of the multinational corporation in the world economy, the variety of paths to development, and global unevenness in economic development, Hodson and Sullivan concluded their chapter on "Work in a Global Economy" opining that "[n]o single way of organizing is best for every situation; each has its own set of problems and potentials. Only through accepting and encouraging such experimentation and innovation can we hope to improve our systems of industrial production" (Hodson & Sullivan, 1990, p. 411). Having assumed the editorship of the annual book series *Research in the Sociology of Work* in 1996, Randy dedicated the 1997 volume to the theme of "Globalization and Work" (Hodson, 1997). He co-edited his last two books with several European authors (Korczynski, Hodson, & Edwards, 2006; Sekulić et al., 2004).

Jointly exercising our agency, Randy and I set out to further the development of an international scholarly peer community in the sociology of work. Our planetary pursuit of fellow sociologists of work culminated in our 2002 co-edited volume, *Worlds of Work*, whose subtitle "Building an International Sociology of Work" is the subtitle of this section of this article. We endeavored to assemble a volume with indigenous authors from as many world regions as our social networks, internet, and e-mail would allow to describe the history, practice, and institutionalization of our field in their nations. We discovered considerable variation within and between nations of several, if not most, world regions, and between geographically proximate nations, in the practice of the sociology of work. This discovery

led us to adopt a book title that reflected the emergence of a plurality of sociologies of work accompanying globalization, and a subtitle that acknowledged incompleteness in, but expressed optimism about, the realization of a *trans*national sociology of work.

Notwithstanding these international variations in the sociology of work, the field, we discovered, also enjoyed common characteristics. At the time, "core topics" included industrialization and attendant changes and dislocations; democratization and the economic and political role of trade unions; work attitude formation; increasing women's labor force participation; immigration and work; and, marginalization, underemployment, and poverty accompanying the transition from manufacturing to services (Cornfield & Hodson, 2002, pp. 4−5). In terms of methodology, we discerned that "[e]mpirical analysis of workplace issues has always been at the heart of the sociology of work and is our most universal tie to other sociologists" (Cornfield & Hodson, 2002, p. 6). From the accounts by the contributors to *Worlds of Work*, we also discerned a convergence on the use of mixed methods, noting that "the methodological focus of the discipline has clearly shifted to firsthand empirical accounts using both qualitative and quantitative methods" (Cornfield & Hodson, 2002, p. 6).

Our international inventory led us to formulate a typology of sociologists themselves as agentic actors. Three types of sociologists of work — based on variable relationships between the discipline, on the one hand, and such societal institutions as universities, the state, civil society, labor movements, and corporations, on the other hand, constitute this typology: (1) objective social scientist; (2) trusted advisor; and (3) advocate for less privileged groups (Cornfield & Hodson, 2002, pp. viii, 7). Treating these as ideal types, we wrote that, in practice, "[s]ome sociologists specialize in one role, while others move between roles with relative fluidity. Similarly, sociology as an area of study within a nation may take on predominantly one approach or operate in all three arenas" (Cornfield & Hodson, 2002, p. viii).

In assembling *Worlds of Work*, we hoped to "provide a starting platform for the development of a truly international sociology of work" (Cornfield & Hodson, 2002, p. viii). The author-meets-critics session for *Worlds of Work* at the 2002 quadrennial convention of the International Sociological Association in Brisbane, Australia proved to be a reaffirming forum for advancing the mission of the book, and for many of the contributors an opportunity to meet one another for the first time.

* * *

Randy's election as a Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in 2012 is recognition of his lasting intellectual legacy. It is a legacy produced by a creative, prolific, and humanitarian sociologist, an exemplary member of our scholarly peer community, and an agent of a new sociology of work.

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