

## Australian Centre for Research in Employment and Work (ACREW) Research Seminar Series 2009

### THE RESHAPING OF LABOR-MANAGEMENT RELATIONS IN THE U.S.: THE EFFORT TO REFORM AMERICAN LABOR LAW

**Paul F. Clark, Penn State University**  
**Monday 10th August, 2009**  
**12.30 to 2.00pm**  
**Caulfield campus**  
**Building S. Seminar Room 2.32**

#### **About the speaker:**

Paul F. Clark is Head and Professor in the Department of Labor Studies and Employment Relations and Professor of Health Policy and Administration at Penn State University. He is the author, co-author, or co-editor of four books, including *Building More Effective Unions*, 2nd Edition, recently published by Cornell ILR Press, and numerous articles in leading industrial relations and applied psychology journals. In recent years much of his research has focused on the employment experiences of registered nurses, including the impact of the nursing shortage, nurses' attitudes towards unions, and union efforts to win greater voice for nurses in decisions affecting patient care. He has also studied the phenomenon of international nurse recruitment and migration. He is currently working on a book titled "Making the Case for Nurses' Unions: How Collective Action Can Benefit Nurses, Patients, and the American Healthcare System." Previous research has focused on employment relations in the coal and steel industries; union structure, government, and administration; and union member commitment and participation.

#### **Abstract:**

The last fifty years have seen union density in the United States (U.S.) decline steadily from a high of 35 percent in the mid-1950s to 12 percent today. This weakening of the American labor movement has had a profound impact on union-management relations in the U.S. and, more generally, on American society. Labor's bargaining power has declined precipitously, leading to growing income inequality and a shrinking middle class. Perhaps most telling is the fact that over the past decade, worker productivity rose significantly in the U.S. while real income fell for middle-class families. Central to the decline of American unions has been the ability of employers to exploit weaknesses in the primary law that established the rights of employees to organize, bargain, and strike--the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA). As the protections it provided workers were eroded, the playing field became tilted heavily in management's favor. The Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA), now being considered by Congress, is an effort to restore the balance of power in labor-management relations originally fostered by the NLRA. It would do so by making it easier for American workers to exercise their right to form a union and to bargain an initial contract. The EFCA would be the most significant change in American labor law since 1947. Congress is expected to take action on the bill in the next several months. To help us estimate numbers (for catering), please **RSVP by: Wednesday 5th August** to Clare Austin at: [clare.austin@buseco.monash.edu.au](mailto:clare.austin@buseco.monash.edu.au)

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