
Public Workers -- A Visual Reality Check
By David Bacon

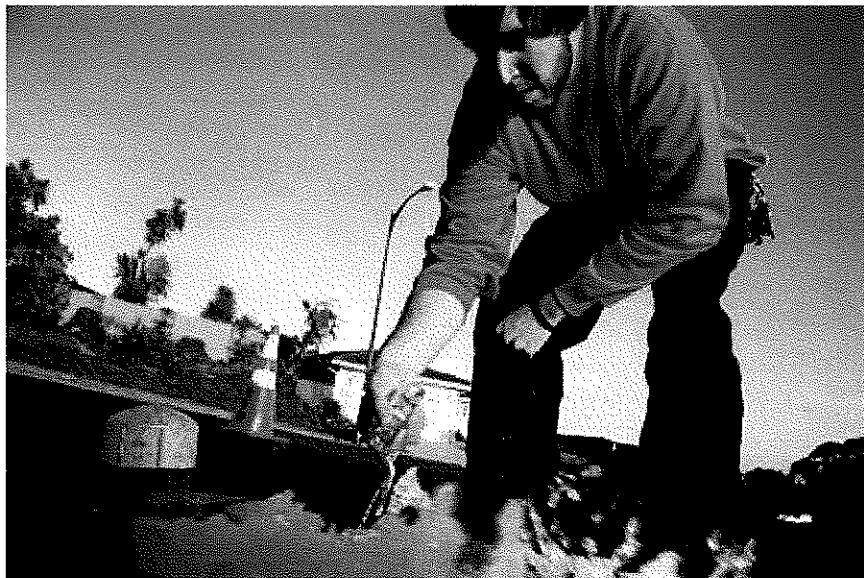
In California cities like San Jose and San Francisco, voters this election will decide on ballot measures to weaken the retirement system for public workers. These are the same kind of measures that have brought workers into the streets of France for weeks in protest.

Beyond the ballot initiatives, the election season of 2010 has been filled with rhetoric blaming public workers for the economic woes of cities and states. It's hard to understand, in an era of foreclosures by banks that pay their executives bonuses of millions of dollars, while getting bailouts from the Federal government, why public workers should be held responsible for the current economic crisis. Who contributes more to the welfare of our communities - a teacher or a hedge fund manager?

But perhaps the most important thing to remember is what these workers do. These photographs are meant to inspire some obvious questions. Can people do this work, if they're then cast adrift once they're too old? What would happen to all of us if they didn't do these jobs?



Sam Johnson, a worker for the City of Burlingame, prepares to tap a water main to provide water service to a home.



Nick Hackleman takes a water sample from a Burlingame hydrant, to test water purity.



Pamela Swim and Misael Apostol sweep up leaves at the maintenance yard for the Elk Grove schools.



Yesenia Galegos helps children of migrant farm workers learn social skills in a nursery school program run by Migrant Head Start.



A school bus driver in Colusa helps children get safely off the bus, and makes sure they don't get lost.



Carmelita Reyes teaches math at the Life Academy, a small public high school in one of the poorest areas of east Oakland.



Gabriela works on the line in the Food and Nutrition Services Production Center, which prepares school lunches for the Elk Grove schools.



A printer in the school district print shop in Anaheim, CA.



Judy Leyva runs the control panel for the sewage treatment plant for the City of Lodi.



Markus Brown is an intern at the San Mateo County Hospital.

For more articles and images, see <http://dbacon.igc.org>

See also *Illegal People -- How Globalization Creates Migration and Criminalizes Immigrants* (Beacon Press, 2008)

Recipient: C.L.R. James Award, best book of 2007-2008

<http://www.beacon.org/productdetails.cfm?PC=2002>

See also the photodocumentary on indigenous migration to the US
Communities Without Borders (Cornell University/ILR Press, 2006)
http://www.cornellpress.cornell.edu/cup_detail.taf?ti_id=4575

See also The Children of NAFTA, Labor Wars on the U.S./Mexico Border (University of California, 2004)
<http://www.ucpress.edu/books/pages/9989.html>

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David Bacon, Photographs and Stories
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