



## Dimensions

❖ JOYCE S. ANDERSON Special to the Jewish Times

### 'Robbed of Files, Young Chinese Lose Their Futures'

This was the headline of a front page article in the New York Times in late July. Although attention throughout the summer focused close to home on the escalating debate on Health Care Reform and the nomination of Sonia Sotomayor to the Supreme Court, the haunting story from China was one that deserved sharing in 'Dimensions.' Here it is.

Each student in China has a file, called a dangan, a sealed Manila envelope stamped top secret that contains test results, grades, and evaluations by teachers and fellow students. As students progress through high school and college, the Communist Party application is included, most important for

any future job prospects. The files, locked away in school, government or workplace cabinets, are irreplaceable and essential to the future of every student. During the past years, a growing number of college graduates from poor families have discovered that their files have been stolen. They describe this terrible event as having "lost their identities

**He was aiming at a job with an oil company that would pay \$735 a month. Then his Manila file disappeared. . . . Now, he earns a base salary of \$90 a month as a door-to-door real estate salesman.**

and their futures."

The town of Wubu is a case in point. Located on the banks of the Yellow River in north-central China, it is surrounded by steep hills and coal mines. Most families struggle with poverty and sacrifice to send their children to high school - some make it to college. Two years ago, a dozen college graduates with outstanding academic records, all from poor families, learned that their files had vanished. Local officials said the files were lost when state officials moved them from the first to the second floor of a government building. The graduates charge that the local officials stole them to sell to other students who were underachievers who would adopt the new identities. Similar incidents have been occurring across China with almost no recourse for the students and their families.

Xue Longlong, one of the Wubu students, is from a family who live near a dirt mountain path, cooking over a wood fire and drinking well water. They earn only \$450 a year growing dates and had hoped that education for their oldest son, Longlong, would be the way out of poverty. A strong student, he wore second hand clothes and skipped meals in high school. When he won admission to a university, 400 miles away, his parents borrowed \$1,500 to cover the expenses and Longlong worked while in college. He was aiming at a job with an oil company that would pay \$735 a month. Then his Manila file disappeared. "It was a catastrophe!" he said. Now, he earns a base salary of \$90 a month as a door-to-door real estate salesman.

Longlong also lost the woman he had hoped to marry when her parents said he would never have a good paying job. In his own family, his mother suffered a nervous collapse and his father said they now owed more than \$10,000 for his college expenses - more than twice what their property was worth. "What is the point of continuing to live?" he said. "Sometimes I want to commit suicide. These corrupt officials destroyed all our hopes." Longlong's younger sister, in 11th grade, now says, "I want to quit. My brother graduated from college. What good did it do him?"

The story of this one family is repeated across China as the corruption of local officials has been recognized as a national scandal in the Communist Party. In 2005, teachers in Jilin Province, caught selling two students files for \$2,500 and \$3,600 were suspected of planning to sell twelve more. In

see DIMENSIONS page 19 ►



### Op-Ed:

By Sybil Sanchez



### Celebrate Labor Day by Supporting a New Law

NEW YORK (JTA) — This Labor Day, take a moment to remember people like Lupe Hernandez.

When she toured a Jewish family's apartment in the Lower East Side Tenement Museum, she felt connected to our history as immigrants struggling to make better lives for ourselves and our families. Hernandez is one of the immigrant workers on strike in the 2007 film "Made in LA" struggling to receive a fair wage and stop sweatshop abuse by organizing.

Labor Day might seem like a quaint throwback, but the struggle for workers' rights is still being fought today in our own backyards.

Our community's relationship to labor is very different today than in yesteryear, but the Jewish obligation to remember our history remains relevant. As Jews, we must respect and support workers' rights, whether it's those of our ancestors or today's immigrants.

While most headlines are focused on health care reform, labor law reform should stay on our agenda - specifically, the Employee Free Choice Act. This much-needed legislation has three important principles: Workers would more easily be able to join or form a union; employers who break the law in efforts to stop union organizing would face more stringent penalties and workers who have chosen to form a union would have a clear path to an initial collective bargaining agreement with their employer.

Today, 44 percent of newly formed unions are unable to reach initial agreements, a serious problem the current law fails to address.

The majority sign-up route to union recognition provided by the Employee Free Choice Act has a long history and is in widespread use today in the United States and many other countries. But there's a catch: Under current law, workers can form a union via majority sign-up only if their employer agrees to it - which most employers refuse to do, even when worker support for the union is overwhelming.

Supporting this legislation is a no-brainer if one supports workers' right to collectively negotiate for decent wages and working conditions.

The Jewish Labor Committee has been a longtime supporter of the Employee Free Choice Act. We're not alone. A number of other Jewish organizations also have endorsed it, including the Progressive Jewish Alliance in Los Angeles, Chicago's Jewish Council for Urban Affairs, Philadelphia's Jewish Social Policy Action Network, Washington's Jews United for Justice and New York's Uri L'Tzedek. A visit to [www.Rabbisforworkers](http://www.Rabbisforworkers)

choice.org reveals the support of dozens of rabbis.

Ofer Eini, chairman of Israel's federation of labor, the Histadrut, also has weighed in on the issue, conveying his support in a recent letter to John Sweeney, president of the AFL-CIO.

"The Employee Free Choice Act will bring U.S. law for union recognition into conformity with Israeli law and international human rights standards on the freedom of association in the workplace," Eini wrote. "We believe that U.S. workers, and all workers, should have the same rights as Israeli workers, to organize unions free from employer interrogation, intimidation and harassment.

"In Israel, when workers seek to bargain collectively, they just join together into a union, in the same manner that they join any other organization," he added. "When a sufficient number of workers have joined a union, they can demand recognition from their employer. If the employer refuses, the Labour Courts of Israel can investigate, and when it has determined that the required number of the workers are union members, that they have joined freely and without coercion, the court can require the employer to recognize the union."

According to Eini, the Employee Free Choice Act will "reform U.S. labor law so that the U.S.

see LABOR page 15 ►

**Today, 44 percent of newly formed unions are unable to reach initial agreements, a serious problem the current law fails to address.**