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## Public Employee Press

### Book review

## Beyond the \$15-an-hour movement: reviving labor power



By MOLLY CHARBONEAU

How to build genuine trust among labor, faith and community partners to create a powerful movement is the universal message of Jonathan Rosenblum's new book, "Beyond \$15: Immigrant Workers, Faith Activists and the Revival of the Labor Movement."

Rosenblum directed a groundbreaking Service Employees International Union campaign for a \$15 minimum wage in the Seattle-Tacoma area - the first major initiative in the country to win this demand. Soon after, the Fight for \$15 - which began when 100 fast-food workers walked off their jobs in New York City in 2012 - exploded nationwide.

"But the campaign was about a lot more than just fair wages," Rosenblum said. "It was, at its core, a struggle against the maldistribution of power in society." This vision, echoing the earlier Occupy movement, attracted community and faith partners to the fight.

In "Beyond \$15," Rosenblum describes how a unique coalition came together to improve the lives of low-wage airport workers - and stayed together through an audacious struggle that offers valuable lessons for union activists and leaders seeking a way forward.

The 2011 Seattle-Tacoma International Airport campaign in SeaTac, Wash., began after decades of airline deregulation, mergers and contracting-out of airport services turned formerly good-paying jobs - from ticketing and passenger services to ground transportation and baggage handling - into insecure, part-time work paying low wages to a predominantly immigrant workforce. Meanwhile, airlines and airport service contractors were reaping astronomical profits at the workers' expense.

"I saw community members and faith leaders extend the demand for a \$15 minimum wage into a broader call for justice," Rosenblum said, "deftly shifting an economic debate into one about the moral foundation of an economy."

That shift was fueled by airport workers who came from Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Ukraine, Russia, Mexico, the Philippines, Iran, Iraq and India. They brought the campaign to their churches, their mosques, their communities, their local elected officials - and right into corporate shareholder meetings.

"I became thoroughly acquainted with a largely immigrant workforce that, infused with a deep spiritual call for justice, took on major corporations and their political allies and, against all odds, beat them," said Rosenblum, who shares many of their moving stories in "Beyond \$15."

SeaTac workers won a \$15 minimum wage after voters approved a local ballot initiative in November 2013. Rosenblum's stirring tale of how they did it will have you rooting for these workers on every page. "Beyond \$15" is a must-read for anyone serious about worker organizing and coalition building. The book is available at the DC 37 Education Fund library, Room 211 at the union and from [BeaconPress.org](http://BeaconPress.org).