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## The Number of 'Globalized' Workers Has Quadrupled Since 1980

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**Editor's Notes:** The PPI "Trade Fact of the Week" is a weekly email newsletter published by PPI's Trade & Global Markets Project. To sign up for a free subscription, [click here](#). (Just make sure to check the box next to "Trade & Global Markets.")

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### The Numbers:

	1980	2005
World labor force:	2.0 billion*	3.4 billion**
'Global' workers:	225 million	900 million

\* IMF

\*\* World Bank; "labor force" includes unemployed and informal workers and is thus above the ILO's 2.9-million count of employed people.

### What They Mean:

Counting from the first parade sponsored by the pioneering New York trade-union group Central Labor Union, in association with the Knights of Labor, in 1882, next Monday marks the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the U.S.' Labor Day holiday. On their day off, America's 138 million workers make up about 5 percent of a world workforce now standing -- on the broadest measure, including permanently employed workers, temporary workers, and unemployed job-seekers -- at about 3.4 billion people.

A report this spring by the International Monetary Fund, meanwhile, finds the world of workers more "globalized" than ever. IMF's calculators count the "global labor force" as including workers who make products and services for export, or cross borders for work. There is no typical global worker; but examples would range from Indonesian and Filipina maids in Hong Kong to currency traders in Tokyo, New York, and London, and on to *The Simpsons Movie* animators in Seoul, seamstresses in Mbabane, Guangzhou, Irbid, and San Pedro Sula; chip designers in California and Taiwan; Burmese ship-hands in the container trade, and so on.

Overall, the report estimates that the number of "globalized workers" has quadrupled, from 225 million in 1980 to about 900 million as of 2005. Meanwhile, the total world labor force, according to the World Bank's *World Development Indicators* series, has risen over the same period from 2 billion to the current 3.4 billion. In effect, about one in nine workers was "global" on the 100<sup>th</sup> Labor Day; on the 125<sup>th</sup>, it is one in four.

### Further Reading:

More from the ILO -- The most recent *Global Employment Trends* report finds 2.9 billion people on the job as of 2006. A (very) broad sectoral breakdown divides the total as follows: 39.7 percent in services, which evidently includes government workers; 39.3 percent in farms and farm work, below the services total for the first time; and 21.3 percent in factories, construction, and timber sites, and other "industrial" occupations. More

- Today's poor-world workers are earning a bit more money. Workers paid less than \$2 a day made up 55 percent of the global workforce in

1996; but after a decade of global growth, and a continuing developing-country shifts from rural to urban work, the figure has dropped to 47 percent as of 2006.

- World unemployment totals about 195 million as of 2006. The world unemployment rate is 6.3 percent; by region, the lowest unemployment rate is East Asia's 3.6 percent, and the highest is the Middle East's 12.1 percent. America's 4.6 percent unemployment rate, reflecting 7 million people looking for work, remains on the low end of the rich world's 6.2 percent average, but is closer to the median than it was in the 1990s.

*Global Employment Trends 2007:*

<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/strat/download/getb07en.pdf>

IMF on globalization of labor and its implications for GDP growth, living standards, wages in poor and rich countries:

<http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2007/01/pdf/c5.pdf>

The Bureau of Labor Statistics has data on American employment, unemployment, wages, job loss, and job creation, nationally and by state and industry:

<http://stats.bls.gov/>

Labor Day -- The U.S. celebration of an early-September Labor Day began with the Knights' first New York City parade in 1883. It became a national holiday in 1894, under the administration of Grover Cleveland. The Department of Labor explains:

<http://www.dol.gov/opa/aboutdol/laborday.htm>

The May Day ceremony held elsewhere in the world commemorates an event in the United States -- the execution of six trade union organizers after the so-called "Haymarket Riot" in Chicago in 1886. The date comes from protest marches held in Europe in 1890. Background from the Chicago Historical Society:

<http://www.chicagohistory.org/dramas/overview/over.htm>