

BUILDING BRIDGES

NEWSLETTER OF THE HARRY BRIDGES CENTER FOR LABOR STUDIES UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON VOLUME 14 WINTER 2007

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR: REPORT ON THE FORUM 'ORGANIZING OUR FUTURES: LABOR, KNOWLEDGE, AND THE ECONOMY'

AS NEW POLITICAL FORCES BEAR DOWN on Washington DC, we all sense possibilities for a new labor era. The last time the Democratic Party had a chance to influence public policy on issues relating to labor, the larger political environment still trended towards market-driven policy orientations. Welfare was being pulled apart, tensions over the sustainability of social security were in the air, and President Clinton was even pushing educational accountability.

Perhaps, it is our perverse good luck that George W. Bush has pushed these kinds of policies so far to the right that the limited consensus behind them is now quite fractured. Yet, outside of the clear-cut rejection of the administration's Iraq policies, it is not yet clear that the November election rebuff represents a consensus about what the future should look like. The Harry Bridges Center for Labor Studies Oct 13-14, 2006 public forum, 'Organizing Our Futures: Labor, Knowledge and Economy,' provided an opportunity to think through some of the new policy dimensions labor must contend with.

Our keynote speaker, Robert Kuttner, founding editor of the *American Prospect*, put forward an optimistic case that the election would herald a new populist agenda enabling working people to rebuild their lost power base. Kuttner argued that our "new economy" is not so much a result of new

technology or globalization, but rather the outcome of the systematic dismantling of labor's countervailing power to ensure that working class interests are protected in and through these kinds of changes. Cuts in education, a disastrous trade policy, and the systematic undermining of organized labor are responsible for the insecurities and inequalities of the "knowledge economy."

For Kuttner, the problem before us is not technology, but power. How technology is deployed ultimately depends upon how power is dispersed through-

For more information about 'Organizing Our Futures: Labor, Knowledge, and the Economy,' go to <http://depts.washington.edu/pcls/lke.htm>.

DVDs of all panels are available to borrow from the Harry Bridges Center for Labor Studies.

out society. This point was clearly reinforced at the breakout session on Waterfront Issues and Technology organized by Gene Vrana, Director of Educational Services at the ILWU.

The ILWU has always understood that employers have the right to deploy new technology, but that technology shouldn't be used to shift work outside of the union's jurisdiction. When the ILWU accepted containerization, it did



DAN JACOBY

so with the understanding that displaced workers would benefit through ample severance arrangements funded under their modernization and mechanization agreements.

Today, the ILWU worries over new inter-modal technologies that sustain a just-in-time supply chain across the country, even over the globe. The new technologies bypass the docks and shift work towards unorganized distribution centers. The ILWU is now grappling with the supply tactics of retailers like Wal-mart that have already wreaked havoc in the retail sector, substituting new, low-paid and dead-end jobs for positions that had been formerly held by organized workers. Labor's power in transportation will depend upon understanding and controlling the new dynamics made by supply chain technologies.

Other forum panels focused discussion on the commonalities and differences in industries where technology has increased demands for skills by a few, while leaving low-paid service jobs

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CHARLES BOFFERDING AND ANTHONY D'COSTA



CHRIS BENNER



JOAN FITZGERALD AND GINA NEFF

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR... (CONT'D)

for the many. Joan Fitzgerald, Director of the Law, Poverty and Society Center at Northeastern University, explained that some unions have begun to turn this process around by controlling the acquisition of skills and ensuring that their members had career ladders to climb, where otherwise there would be none. In sectors like home health care or janitorial services, unions like SEIU are working to ensure that workers control or access knowledge that enables them to benefit.

The forum made it clear that significant changes have occurred that require labor to regroup and rethink basic questions. Gina Neff, UW Department of Communications, indicated how and why new technology workers appear to accept jobs without security.

Emboldened by high wages, such workers frequently see temporary jobs as an investment in new skills that will foster their careers. Until or unless career opportunities fail to materialize as envisioned, these workers tend to reject traditional union models, assuming that their skills and knowledge alone will be sufficient to shelter them from difficult times. Indeed, Marcus Courtney of WASHTECH, argued that the number of high tech jobs is declining and many of those that remain are increasingly occurring within the confines of two-tiered wage systems that punish contingent or contract workers.

Chris Benner, of Pennsylvania State University, explained why technology is producing short term, project-based work that generates contingent employ-

ment. The new professionals who take that work are seizing, or will have to seize a different form of organization in order to control their work destinies. Benner demonstrated how the relatively unstructured work of today may require the merger of traditional craft union structures like hiring halls and dispatching with a new social movement unionism focused on crucial community needs not met by the new contingent work.

The prospects for organizing are shifting, in part because social spaces are themselves being redefined by technology. A new geography in employment relations is created by the offshore outsourcing of call centers, back office functions, and programming work. These changes create an entirely new challenge as we attempt to understand the newly dispersed communities within which workers perform their jobs. These challenges were nowhere so well highlighted as in the globalization panel discussions between Anjana Susarla, UW Business School, Anthony D'Costa UW Tacoma Comparative International Development, Owen Herrnsstadt, IAM, and Charles Bofferding, SPEEA. When Herrnsstadt spoke of labor solidarity, his emphasis on stemming offshore outsourcing brought reactions from Susarla and D'Costa that made clear how foreign workers (and perhaps even some US interests) viewed these prospects quite differently. Ultimately, international solidarity will require that cross-border employment interests be reconciled in ways that are mutually respectful.

'Organizing Our Futures: Labor, Knowledge and the Economy' reminded us how much work we have yet to do if we are to seize the political opportunities made possible by November's election. The Harry Bridges Center for Labor Studies is proud to play a role in helping to articulate these issues and forcing discussions over issues that must be addressed if labor is to regain the power to set a course towards social justice for working people.

Cuts in education, a disastrous trade policy, and the systematic undermining of organized labor are responsible for the insecurities and inequalities of the "knowledge economy."



HIGHER EDUCATION PANEL

UPCOMING LABOR STUDIES EVENTS

More information about these and other events can be found at our website, <http://depts.washington.edu/pcls/>
You can contact the Harry Bridges Center for Labor Studies at pcls@u.washington.edu or 206-543-7946.

JANUARY 12: Visiting Speakers **Caleb Southworth**,
(University of Oregon, Sociology) and **Judith Stepan-Norris**
(UC Irvine, The Center for the Study of Democracy)

12 noon-1:30pm in Savery Hall, Room 209

Competitive Situations and Union Growth: How Splits in the American Labor Movement Influence Membership Gains, 1894-2004.

JANUARY 18: Launch of the new book by **Michael Honey**
(UW Tacoma, IAS — Ethnic, Gender, and Labor Studies and American history)

Presentation from 4:00-5:20pm in Smith Hall 102
Reception from 5:30-6:20pm in Smith Hall 105

Going Down Jericho Road: The Memphis Strike, King's Last Campaign

JANUARY 23: Walker-Ames lecture by **Nancy Folbre**
(University of Massachusetts at Amherst, Economics)

6:30pm in Kane Hall 120

Greed, Lust, and Gender: A History of Economic Ideas

JANUARY 29 OR 30: Visiting Speaker **Michael Hiscox**
(Harvard University, Department of Government)

(Time & place TBA)

The Demand for Labor Standards: Online Experiments with Social Labelling of Imported Products

FEBRUARY 13: Visiting Speaker **Andy Stern**, President,
Service Employees International Union

(Time & place TBA)

FEBRUARY 21 & 22: Visiting Speaker, **Rachel Sherman** (Yale University, Sociology)

Wednesday, Feb. 21, 11:30am-12:50pm
UW Seattle, Mary Gates Hall Room 389
Thursday, Feb. 22, 6:00-7:30pm
UW Bothell, UW1 Bldg, Room 315

Class Acts: Service and Inequality in Luxury Hotels

FEBRUARY: Conference

(Time & place TBA)

Chicano/a Movement in Washington State History Project

APRIL 18: Walker-Ames lecture by **Alice Kessler-Harris**
(Columbia University, History)

7:00pm in Kane Hall 120

Kessler-Harris will be a scholar in residence from April 16-20.
Other events during that week to be announced.

APRIL/MAY: Lecture Series – ***Latin American Challenges to the Neo-Liberal Order in the Americas***

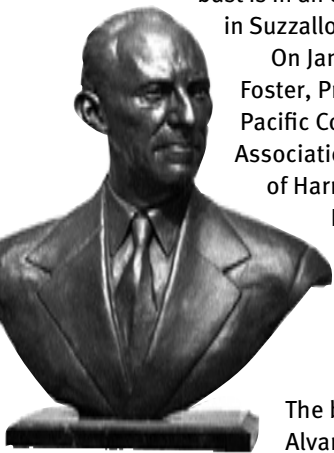
This lecture series will take a hard look at the so-called “Leftist” turn in Latin American politics. Speakers will address two sets of questions: What is the role of organized labor and working people generally in these regimes? What are the challenges these regimes pose to international capitalism and U.S. foreign policy? These lectures, offered as part of Professor Charles Bergquist’s advanced undergraduate course HIST 449 “Issues in Comparative Labor History,” will be open to the public. **All lectures will take place on Thursdays from 3:30 - 5:00**, locations TBA.

- April 19: *Polar Cases in the Neo-Liberal Order: Colombia and Bolivia*
Speaker: **Forrest Hylton** (independent scholar based in New York) will begin this lecture series by comparing the histories and current governments of Colombia and Bolivia.
- April 26: *Lula's Brazil*
Speaker: **John French** (Duke University, History)
- May 3: *Chavez' Venezuela*
Speaker: **Margarita López** (Venezuela’s Universidad Central, social scientist) will analyze the government of Hugo Chavez.
- May 10: *Evo Morales in Historical Context*
Speaker: **Brooke Larson** (State University of New York at Stony Brook, History) will place current events in Bolivia in historical context.
- May 17: *Chile's Socialists Today*
Speaker: **Paul Drake** (UC San Diego, Dean of the Division of Social Sciences) will analyze the trajectory of the Chilean Socialist party.

BUST OF HARRY BRIDGES RELOCATED IN SUZZALLO LIBRARY

IN THE FALL OF 2006, the bust of Harry Bridges at the University of Washington was relocated. The initiative to make this change came from members of the ILWU pensioners association who noted that, in its original location, the bust was not accessible to people in wheelchairs. We are proud to have successfully worked with the ILWU and the leadership of the UW library and disability services to make the bust of Harry accessible to all. In its new location, the bust is in an even more prominent place in Suzzallo Library than originally.

On January 28, 1994, James Foster, President of the ILWU's Pacific Coast Pensioners Association presented a bust of Harry Bridges to then UW President Gerberding.



The bust, by sculptor Henry Alvarez, is an exact replica of one located at the entry to the ILWU's International Offices on Franklin Street in San Francisco. In June of 1994, the donated bust of Harry Bridges and a bronze plaque listing the names of all donors to the Harry Bridges Chair was installed at the West entry to Suzzallo Library. At the ceremony receiving the Bridges bust, President Gerberding formally apolo-

gized for university administrative complicity in the early 1950s 'Canwell Affair,' when four UW faculty lost their Professorships due to the "Red Scare." The Center for Labor Studies made a video of the bust presentation, and Gerberding's speech, which quickly sold out.

From June of 1994 to June 2005 the Bridges bust resided in its original spot, until two members of the pensioners association, one in a wheelchair, tried to visit the bust. In usual ILWU style, as soon as the problem of access was identified, action was taken to remedy it. Jon Halgren of the pensioner's association contacted the Bridges Center. This began the process of relocation, ultimately stewarded to completion by Bridges Chair emeritus David Olson.

Generous donations were made to this effort by all parties.

The relocation ceremony took place on October 13, 2006. The bust was unveiled by Phyllis M. Wise, UW Provost & Vice President for Academic Affairs; the ceremony was attended by numerous ILWU members and supporters, including many original donors to the Harry Bridges Chair. The current holder of the Chair, Dan Jacoby, spoke, and the rededication was also attended by former chairs David Olson, Margaret Levi, and Michael Honey.

The bust of Harry now sits in the main entryway to the Suzzallo library, still looking out over Red Square — a tribute to the struggles of the men and woman on the waterfront, and to workers everywhere.

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ILWU MEMBER, PENSIONERS, AND SUPPORTERS AT THE BRIDGES BUST RE-DEDICATION CEREMONY

HARRY BRIDGES CENTER FOR LABOR STUDIES
UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON
BOX 353530
SEATTLE, WA 98195-3530

65-4294

