

BUILDING BRIDGES

NEWSLETTER OF THE HARRY BRIDGES CENTER FOR LABOR STUDIES UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON VOLUME 15 SPRING 2007

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

AFTER YEARS OF WANDERING through the barren desert, labor must surely be inclined to muse whether its travails may finally be near an end. On the national level, both houses of Congress have approved a minimum wage increase, and the House of Representative has just passed the all-important Employee Free Choice Act limiting employer intimidation. These two hopeful votes suggest that major winds of change are blowing, though much more is needed.

Perhaps no legislative undertaking is so important as the Employee Free Choice Act, passage of which was nearly unthinkable with the House of just one year ago. Even if this bill is turned into law, labor faces an uphill battle. If, as we should expect, the Presidency switches to the Democrats and the Senate becomes bluer in 2008, this new law will still face a very conservative Supreme Court that would almost certainly find ways to ensure that card check-off provisions become more onerous than is currently anticipated.

Still, change is in the works, and anyone who teaches can gauge that change in the different ways that their students talk and act. We haven't returned to the sixties, but there is a decidedly new understanding that markets don't automatically solve every problem and that individual choice isn't as free as textbook models suggest.

So, it does appear that we have new opportunities. If we are to make the most of them, we'd better understand that they are not unlimited. As I see it, labor must contend with five difficult and fundamental challenges.

- We live in a global world in which many workers receive far less than US workers for efforts that are at least as great. If the US intends to sell its goods abroad, it cannot entirely avoid the effects of foreign imports, immigration or capital flows, all of which are likely to put downward pressure on wages and standards for American workers. Our challenge must be to raise worldwide standards, not beggar our neighbors.
- We live in a time in which technology increases the commodification of knowl-

edge. Automation and robotics offer ever-greater prospects for displacing manual workers. Software and expert systems similarly yield expanding opportunities to displace knowledge workers. Both trends hail greater instability and continued growth in insecure contingent employment. We can't assume that individual employers can provide the security workers need. Our challenge is to organize, not just workers, but industry itself in ways that enable collective responses to the challenges of the day.

- We live in an aging country. Ensuring health care and social security in a society increasingly composed of aging citizens will force major changes in employment, immigration and distribution. Care giving will continue to

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expand as one of the largest sources of employment. Increasingly society will be tempted to reduce support for “burdensome” elder citizens. Our challenge will be to fund a national solution to the looming old-age crisis.

- We live in a society where disadvantaged workers face increasing competition for low-skill jobs. It is likely that America will solve its health-care problems by encouraging low-wage immigrants to care and support (through social security taxation) older citizens. Our challenge is to ensure that immigration law does not formalize a two-tier



DAN JACOBY

society that exacerbates working class divisions along race, class, gender and national lines.

- We participate in a market society that—unchecked—produces disproportionate rewards for a relative few. Higher productivity yields the potential to enrich all citizens, yet vastly unequal ownership of assets and skills produces an inequality that is channeled into the production of luxury goods before basic needs are taken care of. Our challenge is to ensure that wealth is distributed in ways that enhance social efficiency.

An expanding labor movement is vital to these outcomes. Even so, a card check-off provision, such as is called for under the Employee Free Choice Act, is insufficient to change the underlying realities. Employers today can no longer commit themselves to their workers, and workers accordingly no longer see their futures tied to one employer. Increasingly, solutions to social and employment problems will need to be found in collective action across employers and unions.

For example, job progression or ladders have to be built to provide workers who begin in dead-end employment such as the fast-food industry with recognized ways to advance out of that industry. To meet such challenges requires a form of labor organization and cooperation that is not bound to a specific workplace or industry. It will be a slow process, but through my encounters and experiences at the Harry Bridges Center for Labor Studies, I've been encouraged to believe that the real demands of our economy are gradually forcing a rethinking about how to effect that change.

LATIN AMERICAN CHALLENGES TO THE NEO-LIBERAL ORDER

THE BRIDGES CENTER IS PRESENTING a lecture series in April & May at the University of Washington evaluating several Latin American governments. In particular, speakers will address the challenges to the U.S.-led neo-liberal world order, which emerged following the collapse of the Soviet bloc and the Soviet Union itself in the years 1989-90. Although all these Latin American governments have opposed, to one degree or another, the neo-liberal precepts of unrestricted free trade and foreign investment, privatization of many government activities, and rollbacks in social welfare programs, the origins of these governments and their relationships with the organized labor movements in their countries are in fact quite different.

Some of the leaders of these governments, as happened in the case of Luis

Inacio Lula da Silva in Brazil, began closely tied to the organized labor movement. Others, while claiming to speak for the poor, have been opposed by elements of the organized labor movement—this is the

THE TIES BETWEEN LATIN AMERICAN LEADERS AND WORKING PEOPLE HAVE CHALLENGED THE U.S.-LED WORLD ORDER.

case of Venezuela's Hugo Chavez. In other instances, such as the recently elected government of Evo Morales in Bolivia, organized labor has been supportive of the new president but his popular support reflects ethnic and cultural attitudes with roots deep in the era of Spanish colonial-

ism. Finally, as has happened in Chile, governments led by erstwhile Marxist parties with strong support in the organized labor movement have reinvented themselves following long periods of repression of labor and the left and now seek to moderate liberal capitalism through social policies aimed at ameliorating the condition of the middle and working classes.

The series brings to campus a distinguished group of scholars who have published widely on social movements, labor, and the left in Latin America. Running on five consecutive Thursday afternoons (3:30-5:00) between April 19 and May 17, the complete list of the lectures can be found in the calendar section of this newsletter. All of these talks are free and open to the public. [Free clock hours are available](#) for Continuing Education Credits for teachers who participate.

THE ROCKY ROAD TO ECONOMIC CITIZENSHIP

ALICE KESSLER-HARRIS, the preeminent US labor and women's historian, will participate in series of events at UW campus as a Walker Ames Scholar during the week of April 16th. Her Seattle Walker Ames lecture, entitled 'The Rocky Road to Economic Citizenship,' takes place Wednesday, April 18, at 7 pm in Kane Hall room 120. She will also speak at the UW Tacoma (April 16) and Bothell (April 17) campuses.

Kessler-Harris is a prolific author, whose numerous books and articles have won many awards including the highly prestigious Taft and Bancroft Prizes. Her book, *In Pursuit of Equity: Women, Men, and the Quest for Economic Citizenship in 20th-Century America*, explores how employment has substituted for citizenship so as to disadvantage women and limit the potential of the American labor movement. Her current research is on Lillian Hellman and McCarthyism. She will also present that work during the week of her residency in a talk titled 'Sex, Lies, and History: The Revealing Life of Lillian Hellman.'

Kessler-Harris' scholarship has been deeply influenced by her life experience. She is the child of Hungarian/Czech Jewish refugees, who fled to Britain to escape Nazism. She inherited a tradition of leftist politics from her family, and relied upon

those tightly knit relationships to cope with the immigrant experience. In an interview with Melanie Gustafson in 2000, she said, "I suppose many of us identify as outsiders, but I sometimes think it's the core of my identity. When people ask me where I'm from I always tell them I'm a DP — a displaced person — because I don't feel I can claim any particular nationality. . . I understand something of what it is not to belong, and that perhaps results in a

ALICE KESSLER-HARRIS VISITS THE UW APRIL 16-20



concern for those who don't fit in . . . I suppose if I were to think about it, it's not an accident that when I trained as a historian I chose to do immigrant history, nor that I learned Yiddish as a graduate student. I think that I then didn't fully understand how much the histories we write recuperate pieces of our own pasts."

Kessler-Harris' family moved to New Jersey when she was in High School where she won prizes as a public speaker and be-

came president of the International Club, even as her family struggled economically. Never expecting to become an academic, Kessler-Harris's path through higher education was not a straight one. Not only did she lack the resources to smooth the way, she was also subject to the discrimination that characterized the experience of women pursuing higher degrees in the 1960s. She says, "The politics of Vietnam, women, and civil rights came together just as I first started my first academic job." As her work in the emerging field of Women's history grew, she "was engaged by the interaction of history and all the politics around [her]."

In 1974, she was teaching at Sarah Lawrence College and became involved in the new labor college there. "I think those were moments for trying out new things, and this was an innovative, working-class history program that turned out to be enormously exciting and quite successful. . . I had since my dissertation been working on labor history in one form or another. I had moved from Jewish workers in the 1890s to female labor organizers at the turn of the century. The idea of doing a book that would explore the history of women wage earners was a logical extension of that." Ever since that time, Kessler-Harris has

BRIDGES CENTER SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS AND FACULTY

EACH YEAR, THE HARRY BRIDGES CENTER FOR LABOR STUDIES offers research grants, scholarships, and prizes to UW faculty, undergraduate, and graduate students to support and reward excellence in Labor Studies. Below is a short listing for each award. Complete details about how to apply for each of these can be found on our website at <http://depts.washington.edu/pcls/grantsandscholarships.htm>

GRADUATE AND UNDERGRADUATE

1) The Labor and Employment Relations Association Scholarship

The Labor and Employment Relations Association (LERA) generously funds an annual \$1000 scholarship for students who are committed to pursuing a profession in labor and/or labor management. *Application Deadline: June 1, 2007*

2) Best Undergraduate and Best Graduate Papers in Labor Studies

Prizes of \$250 are awarded to the best undergraduate and graduate papers written on a labor-related topic during the 2006-07 academic year. Students may submit their own papers, or faculty members may nominate outstanding papers. *Submission deadline: June 8, 2007*

UNDERGRADUATE ONLY

Martin and Anne Jugum Scholarship in Labor Studies

Each year the Bridges Center gives tuition scholarships to outstanding undergraduates who exhibit a commitment to labor research or practice. Scholarship winners must demonstrate high academic achievement and be enrolled for Autumn Quarter, 2007. Students may apply directly or be nominated by a faculty member. *Application Deadline: June 1, 2007*

GRADUATE ONLY

Martha H. Duggan Fellowship in Labor Studies

This Labor Studies Fellowship was created in 2004 to bring a focus on caring labor into the Bridges Center. The Duggan fellow will be asked to assist the Bridges Chair in maintaining this focus as a visible and ongoing part of the Center's program. The fellowship winner must demonstrate high academic achievement and be enrolled at the UW in Autumn Quarter, 2007. The fellowship has a value of \$10,000 to be applied to tuition costs or provide support for living expenses, books, fees, and other educational expenses. *Application Deadline: June 1, 2007*



RESEARCH GRANTS: FACULTY, GRADUATE STUDENTS, OR STAFF

The Bridges Center offers grants of \$1,500-\$2,500 to University of Washington faculty, staff, and graduate students for labor-related research. Research may focus on any dimension of labor in the United States or abroad, including but not limited to class relations, the social conditions of work, the labor process, working-class culture or politics, work and gender, work and race/ethnicity, the relationship between labor and the state, unions, or comparative international labor relations. *Application deadline: April 30, 2007*

RESEARCH GRANTS: FACULTY ONLY

Washington State Labor Research: Up to \$10,000 Available

The Bridges Center seeks proposals from University of Washington faculty for research on aspects of labor directly relevant to policy makers in Washington State. This can be a new study, or the application of ongoing national or global research to Washington State.

NOTE: These grants are dependent upon a legislative appropriation.

Application deadline: April 30, 2007

WORKING GROUPS

The Bridges Center offers funding to research groups focused on any dimension of labor in the United States or abroad. These groups are to be comprised of both scholars and labor/social justice activists and must include at least one member of the Center's Visiting Committee. A working group can also include faculty and/or students from any accredited educational institution. Working Groups receive seed money of approximately \$7,500, including a graduate research assistantship, for projects that create meaningful collaborations between our Center and the larger labor community. These groups may receive support from the Center for up to three years. Restricted Eligibility: Working group funding is available only to faculty in the History and Political Science Departments, to the Labor Center's Faculty Associates, and to other UW faculty who have previously received an award from the Center. *Application Deadline: June 1, 2007*

navigated the complex relationship between women's history and labor history.

The Harry Bridges Center for Labor Studies worked with the Departments of History, Sociology, Women's Studies, the School of Social Work, the Daniel J. Evans School of Public Affairs, and the College of Education to nominate Kessler-Harris as a Walker-Ames scholar, one of the University's highest honors. Her lecture on

April 18 is sure to draw upon her innovative work on welfare reform, gendered social policy, and what she calls 'the wages of patriarchy.' We hope you will join us to hear from this celebrated scholar whose work has so fundamentally shaped the way labor studies is conducted today. Her visit is a continuation of the Center's focus on caring labor, begun with the establishment of the Martha H. Duggan Fellowship

three years ago. If you would like to read more about Kessler-Harris, the interview from which the excerpts in this article were taken can be found in the journal *Labor*, from the Duke University Press, Volume 3, Issue 1, and read on-line at <http://labor.dukejournals.org/archive/> A complete list of her activities during the week of April 16-20 can be found in the calendar section of this newsletter.

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.

APRIL 16-20: Alice Kessler-Harris will be in residence as a Walker-Ames scholar.

Monday, April 16, 7 pm – Tacoma campus, Room WCG116

Tuesday, April 17, 4-5:50 pm – Bothell campus, Bldg 1, Room 391

Wednesday, April 18, 12-2 pm – West Coast Poverty Center/ Evans School seminar

Walker-Ames Lecture, Kane Hall 120, 7 pm
The Rocky Road to Economic Citizenship

Thursday April 19, 12:30-2:00 pm – Lecture: ***Sex, Lies, and History: The Revealing Life of Lillian Hellman***

APRIL 24: UW Speaker Kam Wing Chan, Department of Geography, presenting on **migrant labor in China**, 3:30-5:00 pm (Location TBA)

MAY 8: Visiting Speakers

Susan Christopherson, Cornell University

Steve Williamson, Strategic Campaigns Director, UFCW Local 21

Peter Olney, Director of Organizing, International Longshore and Warehouse Union

A panel discussion on the 'Walmartization' of the global economy (Evening event, location TBA)

APRIL/MAY:

Latin American Challenges to the Neo-Liberal Order

All lectures will take place on Thursdays from 3:30-5:00 pm in Communications 226. A number of these speakers will also lead informal, 'brown bag' discussions on the following Fridays from 12:30-2:00 pm. Check the website or call the office for this info.

APRIL 19: Forrest Hylton, Latin American history, New York University

Re-thinking Revolution and Reaction: Bolivia and Colombia in Historical Context

APRIL 26: John French, History, Duke University
Brazil's President as Working Class Fox: Lula from Trade Unionism to the Presidency

MAY 3: Steve Ellner, Universidad de Oriente, Venezuela
Anti-neoliberalism in Venezuela and its Implications for the Labor Movement

MAY 10: Brooke Larson, History, SUNY, Stony Brook
Indigenous Movements in Evo's Bolivia – In Search of Roots

MAY 17: Paul Drake, UC San Diego
From Revolution to Reform: The Socialists and the Workers' Movement in Chile from Allende to Bachelet

NOTE: Free clock hours are available for Continuing Education Credits for teachers who participate. Contact the Latin American Studies program for details – <http://jsis.washington.edu/latinam/>



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