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5. The John McConnell Era

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5. The John McConnell Era

Abstract

The years 1959 through 1962 were full of ferment and sweeping change with striking developments in location, curriculum, and extension programs in the ILR School. Of primary importance in the school's history was the move, during the academic year 1961-62, from the old Quonset hut and barrack building on the engineering campus to the present location in the old Veterinary College.

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Cornell, school, labor, law, work, relation, industrial, faculty, student, ILR, program, graduate

Comments

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5.

THE JOHN MCCONNELL ERA

by John W. McConnell

The years 1959 through 1962 were full of ferment and sweeping change with striking developments in location, curriculum, and extension programs in the ILR School.

Of primary importance in the school's history was the move, during the academic year 1961-62, from the old Quonset hut and barrack buildings on the engineering campus to the present location in the old Veterinary College. While the confined space and dilapidated nature of the old buildings produced a sense of community among ILR faculty and students that was absent in the new quarters, the spaciousness and freshness of the new facilities promoted change in all phases of the school's program. Due to the superb organizational skills of Gormly Miller, who was charged with managing the move to the new location, the confusion and hyperactivity that usually accompany a major move were absent. Occupancy of the new buildings culminated in an outdoor ceremony in the quadrangle between the new administrative offices and the library at which Governor Nelson Rockefeller spoke, dedicating the buildings as Ives Hall.

Another Perspective [1961-62]

by John McConnell

The move to our own permanent buildings is a moment many of us have been looking forward to since 1948—12 years of high hopes and bitter disappointment. But, even as I contemplate the solid comfort of good classrooms, a library with plenty of table space, quiet offices, and a landscaped quadrangle, I am impressed with the potential dangers which more comfortable and efficient quarters may bring to our school. A complete roster of the problems we might encounter as we move to the new location would be quite long, so I will mention four things that trouble me:

- 1) How can we maintain a proper balance between academic excellence and practical know-how in the composition of an enlarged student body?
- 2) How can a faculty which will increase only slightly, if at all, teach a much larger student body effectively?
- 3) How can we prevent students, staff, and faculty from drifting apart when we have larger numbers and a separate faculty office building?
- 4) What will be needed to prevent smugness and complacency from destroying the pioneering goals of education in ILR?

The move also inspired poetry, witness the following:

by Charles Arthur ('61)
(1961)

Deep in the Cardboard
Kremlin, down its cardboard halls,
Deep in the Cardboard
Kremlin, through its cardboard
walls,

Comes the cry of the Dean:
"Pioneers, oh, Pioneers,

"Sincerely we hope you will
be our last pioneers!"

(A new building he has
promised for the past fourteen
years.

We might add: This, too, was
the hope of the engineers!)

It looks, at last, with no ifs,
ands, or buts,

That we are the last
Pioneers of the Quonset Huts.

Wonder will pursue us
beyond Cornell's reach:

What message of hope can
the Dean have in next fall's speech?

No more Cardboard
Kremlin, no more cardboard halls?
No more Cardboard
Kremlin, no more cardboard walls?

What will the new
frontiersmen do next fall?

They will miss some of the
things we now recall.

They'll suffer no floorboards
that squeak,

Or dodge pails when it rains
and roofs leak.

Their library, we assume,
will have ample space

So one who turns a page
won't elbow his neighbor's face.

They'll not be privy to a
men's room

Where friendship with
faculty bloom.

The most important change taking place in this period, at least from an academic point of view, was a drastic revision in the undergraduate curriculum. From the beginning of the school, it had been taken for granted that a strong liberal arts base was essential to advanced studies in industrial and labor relations. For that reason, the first two years of study for an ILR student were devoted to liberal arts courses taught by faculty in other schools of the university. Anthropology, history, economics, sociology, and English appeared to many students to have little relationship to industrial and labor relations, and there was constant haggling with the non-ILR professors who taught these courses to make them more relevant to contemporary conditions. Dissatisfaction with the existing course of study, among both the ILR faculty and their students, led to the appointment of a joint faculty-student committee on curriculum. As a result of this committee's recommendations, drastic changes were made in the four-year program. Introductory courses in the field of industrial and labor relations became part of the first two years' schedule, while courses in the junior

and senior years were expanded and rearranged to permit students to major in a given area, such as collective bargaining, labor legislation, or personnel management. In addition, one semester each of math and science became a graduation requirement.

Other Changes in the Curriculum

The early curriculum of the school also stipulated a work requirement: Each student had to work in paid employment for a period of 30 weeks. To help students meet this requirement, the school had established a fully staffed office under the administration of Kathryn Ranck to arrange employment opportunities. In the years following the war, this office had little difficulty in setting up such work experiences. Toward the end of the 1950s, however, jobs were hard to come by in private industry, and the office became increasingly dependent upon state government agencies to offer these short-term opportunities. The most accessible source of short-term employment was the New York State Workers Compensation Office, and the majority of students were funneled into jobs there. Unfortunately, the work was fairly routine, offering little opportunity for students to observe working conditions out of which labor relations problems generally arise. Consequently, dissatisfaction over the work requirement grew apace, and the faculty voted to eliminate work experience as a condition of graduation.

Another of the original concepts of education in industrial and labor relations was also discontinued in these years. One of the basic ideas Irving Ives had had about labor relations was that good communication would eliminate most sources of labor-management conflict. For that reason, he had insisted that the curriculum include requirements in composition and public speaking. Various devices for encouraging clear written expression were tried without success throughout the early years of the school, although courses in public speaking were never required. Widespread concern about the inability of most students to write a good grammatical sentence prompted the ILR faculty to make what turned out to be one last gallant effort to improve the writing skill of ILR students. As an experiment, Gormly Miller and Leonard Adams were asked to develop a one-semester course in report writing as a requirement for certain master's degree candidates in the school. The experiment was a disaster from the start. It proved to be an overburdening load for the teachers, and students were less than enthusiastic about the periodic writing assignments.

Along with the changes in curriculum, the move to new facilities resulted in substantial increases in both undergraduate and graduate enrollment, with corresponding increases in faculty. At the opening of the 1959-60 academic year, there were 294 undergraduate and 60-plus graduate students. In September 1962, there were 400 undergraduates and 80 graduate students. Meanwhile, with the opening of the 1961-62 academic year, ten professional appointments to research, extension, counseling, and the library and eight new appointments to the resident teaching faculty had been made.

New Faculty

Among the more notable of our faculty appointments during this period were George Hildebrand (in 1960) and George Brooks (in 1962).

by George Hildebrand

In those years I taught large lecture classes (Econ 101), medium-size classes as in my "controversial" course entitled Capitalism and Socialism, and small classes and seminars. My students never failed to inspire me to give my best. Even those who disagreed with me were usually courteous and respectful. In consequence, I always enjoyed teaching.

One of my most pleasant recollections of the school was the annual "picnic" or whatever it was called, which turned out to be a truly sumptuous luncheon, prepared by the women of the staff. Half the fun was talking to people you didn't see frequently.

George Brooks

by Alison McKersie ('91)

"Union Democracy? You bet... one of the best and most thought-provoking classes we've got going here at ILR... you bet I'm taking it! And I hear that George Brooks is a great instructor too!"

Such was the sentiment around ILR about George Brooks and his class "Union Democracy." Almost every ILR student, regardless of ideological belief, sought to be wooed by George Brooks's dynamic teaching style and even I found myself standing in long registration lines to secure a spot in his class. Curiously enough, I didn't quite know what union democracy meant. Weren't ALL unions inherently democratic? Weren't ALL unions built upon the premise that workers deserved decent working conditions, job security, and the opportunity to enjoy some of the fruits of the capitalistic system? Weren't ALL unions founded on the golden ideal of solidarity—the commitment of the union leadership and its rank and file to the cause, the movement, the struggle? Didn't ALL unions and democracy go hand in hand? I could not fathom what was to be discussed and explored for an entire semester in "Union Democracy." I prepared myself for redundancy.

I walked into class somewhat trepidly that first day and was greeted by intensely twinkling eyes. One could sense immediately with Professor Brooks that energy and passion for the subject of union democracy rested just beneath his surface. He was careful not to overly burden us, his students, early on with his zealousness for the subject; rather, he cultivated our interest slowly, over the

course of the semester, our interest in the concepts of unionism, solidarity, and democracy. Having spent years as a union official himself, Brooks spoke and taught with an energy and understanding not typical of most academics. He taught us how the bureaucratization of unions fostered a gulf between officials and workers that could not be bridged and how the corruption and ties with organized crime in some unions affected the labor movement's mission and its democratic foundations. Brooks presented unions as central institutions in American life—the embodiment of the collective aspirations of working people—gone awry.

Through his careful and often unforgiving exploration of unionism, we began to understand the economic dimensions of democracy and the implications that class identity and national loyalty have on union strength.

Alison McKersie is program coordinator for the Homeless Children's Network in Seattle, Washington.

Extension

The new buildings, a more clearly defined curriculum, and greatly increased numbers of students and faculty created an exhilarating atmosphere in the school that led to a decade of growth, both academically and professionally.

These exciting new developments were matched by far-reaching changes in extension. An emphasis on extension had been explicit in the original plan for the ILR School outlined by the Joint Legislative Committee on Industrial and Labor Conditions in Albany. Committee reports emphasized that education in industrial and labor relations should be made available where people work. Thus, at the outset of the school, an extension office was established in Buffalo, followed soon after by offices in New York City, Rochester, and Albany. Programs in a wide variety of subjects were made available to employees, managers, teachers, and administrators throughout the state, as well as on campus.

One problem that arose early on and proved virtually unsolvable was how to get resident faculty to take an active role in these extension programs. The major obstacles of travel, late-night courses, and what was seen as little contribution to one's professional career made it unlikely for a resident faculty member to be willing to be scheduled to teach an extension course, even though he or she might be the best qualified and most logical member to conduct the program.

As a consequence of this and other problems, an advisory committee on extension activities was appointed by the dean to consider relations between resident faculty and extension staff. The recommendations of this committee

were implemented with far-reaching effects on the adult education activities of the school. Greater responsibility for generating programs was placed upon the resident departments of instruction. To assist in coordinating the resident faculty efforts with extension staff, a new position was created, that of "extension teaching specialist." The qualifications for such a specialist were similar to those required in a resident faculty appointment: a doctorate degree or equivalent, experience in one of the school's academic departments, and experience and maturity sufficient to work with adult groups. This innovation was eminently successful, and programs concerning timely subjects and with a solid informational base were developed in all extension locations, Ithaca included.

Another experiment in resident faculty participation in extension did not fare so well: having resident faculty members devote full time to extension for a semester. Duncan MacIntyre tried this with George Brooks, one of the first extension specialists, focusing on developing programs and teaching courses. The workload was heavy, scheduling was difficult, and as a resident faculty member MacIntyre could not really free himself from the ongoing work of his resident department. The experiment was not repeated.

Most revisions of the plans for extension were highly productive, however. The long list of new programs—whether initiated by ILR resident departments, extension offices, union, or management—reflects both the advanced level of the courses' subject matter and the broad interests of program participants.

One of the long-range goals of extension was the development of programs in which labor representatives and management would participate together. A major effort in this direction was the school's sponsorship of the Wilhelm Weinberg Seminars, held annually in cooperation with the National Conference of Christians and Jews. Each of these seminars drew about 25 labor, management, and government officials to campus for a week to consider a subject of common interest. In 1961-62, the topic was New Roles of Labor and Management in a Time of Crisis. Political and community leaders addressed the seminar and participated in the intense discussion that followed. The Weinberg seminars continued for many years and attracted national attention. Eventually, however, the seminars proved too difficult to implement among people whose primary concern was their own job responsibilities.

There were other seminars that ran for some years. One was financed by a grant from the National Institute for Labor Education (NILE) and run under the direction of Ralph Campbell of the ILR faculty, along with four other universities. The NILE program called for a series of ten-week institutes on campus for full-time union officials. Emphasis in the institutes was upon liberal arts studies in such subjects as economics, political science, sociology, psychology, trade union history, and philosophy. Although the institutes were very successful, it proved impossible for the school and the trade unions to carry on the program without foundation support. Therefore the institutes were discontinued after two years, with the termination of the grant.

Another Perspective*by Bob Raimon*

Shortly after we moved out of the Quonset huts and our schoolwide single-department phase, I recall responding to a call from the extension division. I was asked to address a rather large group of adults (as distinct from students). I forget the identity of the group, the topic I was to talk about, as well as the identity of the extension chap who was to introduce me. He was a stranger to me and, I think, new to the school.

What I do recall is that with less than a minute to go before I was to move front and center and open my mouth, he asked me, "How shall I introduce you?" Consistent with the seriousness with which I regarded all my ILR responsibilities, I responded, "With some misgivings." And then he proceeded to the center of the conference room and in a perfectly straightforward manner introduced me with the words: "I now present Professor Robert Raimon with some misgivings."

The Liberian Project

The international projects that were commenced during the 1950s and expanded substantially during the early 1960s have been described in an earlier chapter. A milestone of special note, however, occurred as a result of one of these projects—when Milton Konvitz received a special citation from President Tubman of Liberia in September 1959. The citation read in part:

In 1952, having undertaken on behalf of Cornell University, by agreement with the Liberian Government to prepare a code of laws for Liberia, you came here to make a survey of our legal institutions and problems. You spent several months painstakingly collecting all the available statutes, Executive Orders, Proclamations, Administrative Rules and Regulations, from colonial times, that were in force. The first major accomplishment of this project, the Liberian Code of Laws of 1956, stands as a monument of legal scholarship and draftsmanship, a milestone in the legal history of Liberia and a boon to the legal profession of this country.

This achievement alone would have been sufficient to secure for you one of the most prominent positions in the legal history of Liberia, but you continued as if your work had just begun.

In concluding this brief summary, it is important to recognize another factor promoting the school's growth during this period, namely, the effective leadership of Martin P. Catherwood as the first resident dean of the school. His

shrewd insight into the way organizations work, his administrative skill, and his political connections enabled him to obtain special consideration for the school in Albany, with respect to building construction and annual financial support. He laid a solid foundation for the school's later growth, a foundation that has supported well the changes and expansions of the generations that followed.

Reflections on Education at the ILR School, circa 1958-1962

by Harry T. Edwards ('62)

When former Dean Robert McKersie asked me to write a brief commentary on any "major events," "turning points" and/or important "challenges" highlighting my years at the School of Industrial and Labor Relations, I was initially baffled by his request. I find it difficult to assess my time at Cornell from the perspective that I may have had as a student. I am not sure whether this is because, as a student, I did not view my life at the ILR School as affected by any "major events," or because my perspective has changed so much in succeeding years that I can no longer recall what I thought as a student. A bit of each, I suspect. In any event, it probably does not matter, because whatever I say will have the taint (or benefit) of middle age.

In many ways, life at the ILR School from 1958-62 was so settled and relatively serene, that nothing that I can recall stood out for me as a "major event." I thought that the school itself was *the* citadel of knowledge in undergraduate education relating to employment and personnel matters, industrial relations, collective bargaining and labor law. Indeed, I held great esteem for the place even though its scholars and students were housed in unseemly "Quonset huts" left over from World War II. As for my professors, I thought some were quite remarkable, all were undoubtedly competent and devoted scholars, and none was undeserving of my respect. I worried about exams and reveled in whatever successes I found in the classroom; I fretted over the availability of summer jobs; I prayed that my academic performance would remain at a level to warrant continued scholarship assistance; I pondered innumerable career options; and I agonized over a dismal social life that never found relief because of the 4:1 male/female ratio at Cornell, the scarcity of African-American undergraduates (numbering no more than ten while I was a student), and the unwritten proscription against interracial dating.

It is likely that I view my life at Cornell as relatively "serene" because the truly great events of that day did not arise until after I had graduated. The height of the civil rights struggles in the South (including the tragic murder of Mickey Schwerner, one of my closest friends at Cornell), the assassinations of Dr. Martin Luther King, President John F. Kennedy, Robert Kennedy and Malcolm X, the full involvement of the United States in the Vietnam war and the protests that accompanied it, and the fractious movements in society to

implement programs of "affirmative action," all arose after I had departed Ithaca. My time at Cornell was so strikingly serene in comparison with what was to follow after graduation that it seems almost facetious to characterize anything relating to my undergraduate years as momentous. If there were any pivotal occasions, my view of them has been blurred by the tumultuous events of the succeeding decades.

If anything, I often have asked myself why my generation at Cornell was so insensitive to the many social issues that obviously lay before us, and why we were mostly indifferent to social reform. Dr. Martin Luther King spoke at Cornell during my undergraduate years, but he was greeted with polite curiosity (with so many of my peers mostly amazed that a Negro could speak so eloquently without notes). We also witnessed a remarkable debate between Malcolm X and James Farmer, but the event was only lightly attended and few in the audience could grasp the significance of the moment. The biggest issue on campus when I was at Cornell was a special meeting of the student government to consider a proposal to desegregate the fraternities and sororities; a major lecture hall was packed by protesting fraternity and sorority members who accused the student government officials of threatening to destroy something that was for them a sacred tradition. It was a bizarre occasion, one that might cause a neutral observer to declare my generation to be utterly dimwitted. Although much of what we did (or failed to do) does appear inane in retrospect, there is more to the story. I suspect that, while we were at Cornell, our view of life was temporarily distorted by the good fortune associated with our stations in society. After all, we were students at a university for the *privileged*, mostly safe in the belief that our futures were secure. We had no obvious incentive to respond to moral imperatives when advantage was already in hand. We were designated to run society, so why change it? Fortunately, this shallow view gave way to the realities of the day, and we, the teens of the Fifties, eventually joined with the teens of the Sixties and Seventies in the ensuing battles for a better society.

These reflections may seem abstruse, but I guess my musings are intended to ask a question: In light of all of the many truly important things that happened just after I graduated from Cornell, can I honestly say that anything that happened during my undergraduate years *really* mattered? With the benefit of 32 years of hindsight, I believe that the answer to that question is "yes." As I reflect on it now, I think that my generation of college graduates had to commit to social change if it was to occur. We were the "young adults" of the Sixties, arguably with the most to lose. Serious resistance from my peers could have retarded the civil rights movement, the challenges to the war in Vietnam, and the political moves toward a more open and inclusive society. It goes without saying that our causes were not always uniform, nor were our deeds always righteous; indeed, my generation has been responsible for some glaring problems in society (which are now the subjects of concern for our children in the Nineties). But, upon graduating from Cornell, most of us did not remain apathetic. Our post-graduate efforts were invariably principled, often courageous, and frequently founded on humane concerns. And, in some

important respects, society was the better for it. This says something about the education that we received—which brings me to the question at hand.

In retrospect, I can now see that my entire education at Cornell was a "major event," for it was the "turning point" in my life. That education prepared me and my classmates to think seriously about hard issues (even as we wallowed in seemingly frivolous campus pastimes)—and not just issues affecting our careers, but also a number of issues affecting society at large. It gave us the training to address these issues, the confidence to pursue them, and open minds to consider all reasonable solutions to the problems that we were to face. And, most importantly, I think, it taught us how to assess our own efforts honestly, without kidding ourselves about the real worth of what we were doing. And, for me, the ILR School epitomized the best of this "education."

I had wonderful mentors at the ILR School: Professor Jean McKelvey, who challenged, encouraged and loved her students with energy and skill that defies description; and Professor Kurt Hanslowe, a quiet master of labor law, who, with great patience and thoughtful guidance, first caused me to understand how to pursue what has proven to be an exciting career in labor law. More generally, the ILR School made me learn how to write: the writing assignments were so numerous, consuming, and demanding, that one could not help but to improve. I honestly think that I wrote more in one year at the ILR School than many undergraduates today write in four years! We learned that good writing is not merely a vehicle for communication; fine writing invariably clarifies your thinking and forces you to abandon fuzzy-headed ideas that cannot stand the test of the written page.

There were other great benefits that flowed from our education at the ILR School. The teaching was quite splendid, and focused. When I left Cornell, I was amazingly well-grounded in the traditions, theories and practice of labor law, collective bargaining and personnel relations, so much so that I found it relatively easy to pursue a specialty in law school and thereafter. The best thing about our education at the ILR School was that it never lost sight of practical considerations and common-sense solutions—we never floundered in "theoretical models" that had no relevance to the subjects that we were studying. And the teaching at the ILR School never suffered from pointless disjunctions between "theory" and "practice," something that is, unfortunately, commonplace in modern education. One of the concrete benefits of this for me, and for several of my classmates, was a developed capacity to pursue advances in "alternative dispute resolution" when society started to consider the uses of mediation, arbitration, med-arb, negotiation, mini-trials, and the like, as alternatives to litigation in the 1980's.

Some final thoughts. The "education" of which I speak involved more than just book-learning. The students at the ILR School, circa 1958-1962, were blessed with a very special environment. We lived and learned together in ugly Quonset huts, but those huts kept our classes small, drew us together, and helped to make us distinctive (in our own eyes and in the eyes of others). There

was also a very "humane" quality about the place: people liked one another; professors spoke to the students; administrators and librarians were accessible. We also had the benefit of a powerful female presence: Professor Jean McKelvey and Professor Alice Cook were among the most important, serious and highly-regarded scholars on campus, and the female students were no less impressive in their roles. Many of the top students in my class were women and no one took them lightly. We assumed that the female students were going to be serious professionals upon graduation, and in that sense we were far ahead of other schools on campus. Equal employment opportunity for women was not something that we had to learn in succeeding years.

My years at Cornell may well have been "serene" in many ways, but my education at the ILR School prepared me for much more than a placid existence. The years since graduation have shown me that. I am grateful.

Harry T. Edwards is Chief Judge of the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit.

