ILR Labor Advance, Fall 2009

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Global Labor Institute Rallies Unions on Climate Change Threat

Multicolored labor banners lit up the stately New York Society for Ethical Culture on September 21, when more than 700 union members and leaders, environmentalists and international figures rallied to send a strong message to world leaders assembled at the United Nations:

“A fair and ambitious international climate change agreement is urgently needed!”

Cornell’s Global Labor Institute (GLI) organized the rally as part of Climate Week NYC. “Unions all over the world are linking with other movements to call for determined global action on climate change—action that creates good ‘green’ jobs and advances social justice,” said GLI Director Sean Sweeney. “For the past two years, the GLI has helped U.S. unions engage the UN process and thus become more aware of the need for a global agreement that’s fair, ambitious and binding.” The event’s co-sponsors were Realizing Rights: The Ethical Globalization Initiative, spearheaded by Cornell ILR’s Global Labor Institute. Headed by Mary Robinson, former president of Ireland, and the Global Campaign for Climate Action’s tcktcktck Campaign.

Keynote speaker, AFL-CIO President Richard L. Trumka, declared “The AFL-CIO … and all the unions in North America … are strongly on board the global campaign to reduce carbon emissions and stabilize climate change.” At the same time, Trumka addressed the complex nature of the challenges ahead and the importance of developing new cleaner coal technologies. “Working together with environmental organizations … we hope to reverse practices that put our very survival at risk,” said Trumka. (Full speech text at http://www.aflcio.org/mediacenter/prsptm/sp09212009.cfm)

Mary Robinson moderated the program, which included interactive dialogue between representatives of environment and labor organizations, government and green business groups, and performances by singer Judy Collins and musician Kaki King.

After hearing from Mohamed Naheed, President of the Maldives and leader of the “V10”—the 10 vulnerable countries and regions where climate change has already harmed agriculture and flooded coastlines—one activist at the rally said, “People don’t understand. Those 10 countries will be completely underwater very soon if we don’t solve this climate problem…”

The enthusiastic crowd showed broad representation from New York’s unions, including Laborers (LIUNA), SEIU, AFSCME, IBEW, Utility Workers, Actor’s Equity, Seafarers, AFT, Bakery and Confectionery Workers, Domestic Workers United, Musicians, UFCW, Screen Actors Guild, Writers Guild, Carpenters, and Transport Workers (TWU). National TWU Vice President Roger Toussaint explained the need for more sustainable and climate-friendly transportation systems. Kevin Knobloch, President of the Union of Concerned Scientists, decried the gulf between what is regarded as politically feasible and what science says is necessary to avert climate disaster, emphasizing that now is not the time for small plans or small thinking.

GLI Joins Unions on the Road to Copenhagen

The “Jobs, Justice, Climate” rally September 21 in New York City “helped set the stage for historic union participation in the climate talks scheduled for December in Copenhagen, Denmark,” said GLI Director Sean Sweeney.

Cornell ILR’s Global Labor Institute (GLI) is preparing to travel to Copenhagen with a United States labor delegation for the United Nations’ Conference on Climate Change. The GLI is organizing workshops in Copenhagen with two global union federations representing workers in the transport, food and agriculture sectors. GLI staff Jill Kubit and Lara Skinner will provide technical support for the events. LIUNA, SEIU, TWU, AFT, AFSCME, Utility Workers and IBEW, all of which attended the September 21 rally, are sending representatives to Copenhagen along with the AFL-CIO, Communications Workers of America (CWA), United Mineworkers, Boilermakers, United Steelworkers and the Amalgamated Transit Union. “The US labor unions will be joining a global labor delegation that will be pushing hard for green investments and transition assistance in the new climate treaty,” Sweeney said.
Union Leaders Grapple with Big Changes for the Labor Movement at the NYS AFL-CIO/Cornell Union Leadership Institute

With a global financial meltdown and a divided labor movement, are unions facing the same challenges in 2009 that they faced in the Great Depression? Can today's leaders turn those challenges into opportunities, as labor did in the huge upsurge of organizing in the 1930s?

Fifty-seven leaders from 17 different unions and community organizations tackled these and other big questions on Cornell's Ithaca campus in July, as they gathered for the annual week-long Union Leadership Institute summer seminar.

Since its beginning in 2001 as a partnership between the New York State AFL-CIO and Cornell ILR, the institute's summer seminar has launched each new class into the intensive year-long program. At the end of the week the outgoing senior class graduates.

Jeff Grabelsky, Director of ILR Extension's Construction Industry Program, set the tone for the week with an opening plenary discussion on "The Promise of Change: Union Leadership in the Age of Obama."

The theme continued throughout the week with presentations by Heen Devault, an ILR professor; BF Fletcher, American Federation of Government Employees' director of field services and education; and Sarita Gupta, executive director of national Jobs with Justice. Sean Sweeney and Jill Kubat, both of Cornell ILR's Global Labor Institute, focused discussion on climate change and labor's role in building a green economy.

Participants spent each morning in joint plenary sessions, after which the new class and senior class broke into individual workshop sessions. Outdoor events and group activities encouraged networking and building ties between unions and sectors, and an element of the institute that sets it apart from single-union leader training. The beauty of the Finger Lakes Region in the summer provided a memorable backdrop and a stimulating break from the routine overload most union leaders live with every day.

In a poignant moment at the Class of 2009 graduation ceremony, class members announced the establishment of the "Wayne Baker Scholarship Fund," presenting ILR Dean Harry Katz with a check for $5,000 raised in honor of Wayne Baker, an outstanding leader from UFCW Local 1776 and member of the Class of 2009. Wayne lost a battle with cancer during his time at the institute. The funds will be used to support future participants in the program whose unions would otherwise be unable to sponsor a leader due to financial reasons.

The graduation also marked the hand over of the institute to a new faculty team. Director Fred Kotler and Assistant Director Lee Adler both retired from Cornell. Sally Alvarez and Gene Carroll took the reins.

The institute is embarking on its tenth year. A 10th anniversary event will take place on April 8, 2010 and a commemorative book will be developed with input from each class. During the past 10 years, more than 270 labor union officers and staff from more than 30 labor organizations have participated in the institute. There is much to celebrate.

For details about the institute or information on the 10th anniversary celebration, see our website at www.ilr.cornell.edu/unistu, or contact program coordinator, Anne Sieverding, at 607-255-4462 or acs5@cornell.edu.

Cornell’s Linda Donahue Selected as Chair of the Hotel Wage Board

Linda Donahue, Rochester-based director of Cornell ILR's on-line labor extension programs, was chosen as chairperson of the 2009 Restaurant and Hotel Industry Wage Board. New York State Labor Commissioner Patricia Smith appointed the board to review existing minimum wage orders governing the restaurant and hotel industries and to issue a report.

The board consists of two nominees from business, two from labor and two public members. The labor representatives serving with Donahue are Neil Kwatra, director of political strategy at UFCW New York & Metro Trades Council, and Peter Ward, international vice president and business manager, UNITE HERE Local 6.

Since her appointment in March, Donahue—a 25-year ILR alumna—has chaired public hearings in Buffalo, Albany and New York City, and received testimony from employers, restaurant and hotel employees, and worker advocacy organizations. Evidence presented made it clear that guidance concerning wage orders was both desired and lacking. "A lot of the guidelines are written too broadly, such as stating that worker—employer—employee that they’re unenforceable to the average citizen, leaving people unclear about their rights and responsibilities," said Donahue. "Restaurant workers who testified that they were working 12-hour shifts, and 16-hour days, spoke of the long hours, low pay and difficult working conditions endured by many employees."

A new wage order on establishments that surfaced in the hearings were:

• Some workers are not paid time and half for overtime when they work more than 40 hours/week (sometimes as many as 100 hours/month);
• Some employers offer employees’ tips with managers, which is prohibited;
• Shifts can be excessively long and 12 and 14-hour days are not unusual for some workers, especially those working in kitchens and as delivery persons;
• Immigrant workers being subjected to exploitation because they have poor English-language skills;
• Restaurant owners, managers, and workers, are not aware of workers’ rights and employees’ responsibilities.

With this public input in mind, the board has drafted language that streamlines the provisions of the recommended Hospitality Wage Order, A combination of the hotel and restaurant wage orders. The board has recommended that the New York State Department of Labor (DOL) website add a new section on the hospitality industry where workers and employers can easily locate and understand the regulations affecting their daily work lives.

The board submitted its report and recommendations to Commissioner Smith in September. Her response is expected before the end of the year. The hearings are posted as DOL webcasts, with closed captioning, at http://www.labor.state.ny.us/agency/hrw/vbageardb.htm.

Black Trade Union Leadership Academy Begins January 30, 2010

The second session of the Black Trade Union Leadership Academy, a non-credit program designed to help emerging black trade unionists become successful union leaders, begins Saturday, January 30, 2010 at Cornell University's New York City conference center. The curriculum—developed at the request of and with the participation of a number of black union leaders and labor educators—will include topics that range from "Blacks and the Labor Movement Today," to leadership, goal setting and strategic planning and implementation skills.

The Academy consists of four sessions that run 9:30 AM - 3:30 PM on alternate Saturdays over six weeks this coming winter: January 30, February 6, February 20, and March 6. Attendance at all four sessions is required to receive a certificate.

Please register early because space in the Academy is very limited. To register, or for more information about the program, contact Steven King at 212-340-2812 or sk955@cornell.edu.

Cornell ILR and CUNY’s Murphy Labor Institute Launch New Partnership

Building on the 35-year history of the Cornell ILR School’s Labor and Employment Studies Program and CUNY’s Murphy Labor Institute, a new partnership in the study of college-level labor relations was launched in September between ILR and the Murphy Labor Institute of the City University of New York (CUNY).

This new collaboration between two educational institutions that have long-served working people and their unions is the largest expanded research and teaching program in the metropolitan area, including innovative course offerings and financial aid opportunities, access to CUNY’s library system and a seminar both to undergraduates and graduate students. Students who complete the certificate in labor relations can go on to earn a bachelor’s degree, either through Cornell or at the National Labor College in Silver Spring, Maryland.

The fall semester opened the first week of September with courses in Labor and Employment Law; Labor History, Unions and Related Policies; Work, Culture and Politics in New York City; and Collective Bargaining.

“Sometimes a good academic program can be had almost for free—just by walking down the hall and signing up for courses at the Murphy Labor Institute,” said Sally Alvarez, Director of Cornell ILR’s Labor Programs. “At the same time, CUNY brings many institutional resources and shares their deep commitment to and labor education. This was the best of both worlds. It is about expanding our offerings for our students.”

Steve Barracato, a member of Teamsters Local 812 said about the new partnership, “I was very impressed with the program and the commitment to help working people. The program has really hit the mark with me and I am sure will find a lot of success with other union members and leaders from all across the county.”

Counseling and financial aid are available at CUNY, and students often find that their union offers substantial in-furtherance in their education. CUNY also offers a new master’s degree in Labor Studies, for information, see www.workermgr.org.

The 2010 spring term (see back page of this newsletter) begins January 28 with courses in Arbitration, Contract Administration, Current Labor Issues, Labor History, History of Public Sector Workers, Unions and Leadership, Workplace Health & Safety and Union Education. The classes continue to be held in the evening — 6 – 9:15 PM — at the Cornell ILR School’s 34th Street conference center one night each week from April through June.

To register and for more information, contact Pam Whitefield at ps390@cornell.edu or 212-340-2847. The website is http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/laborstud.html.
Women building Domestic Workers United (DWU) is seeking to win passage of a Domestic Workers’ Bill of Rights in New York State. The DWU campaign was one of the initiatives studied by a team of faculty and students in Cornell ILR’s Labor Studies Certificate Program.

What’s Gender Got to Do with Organizing?

Research tells us that women are easier to organize into unions than men. Why? Is there something unique about women-centered organizing campaigns?

This question was explored by Cornell ILR Labor Programs’ faculty, staff and students this spring and summer when they studied several recent examples of women-centered organizing campaigns. The purpose was to learn effective strategies from the actual lived experiences of women who were organizing, which could in turn lead to greater organizing success among labor and community activists.

The research was supported by a grant from the Berger-Marks Foundation. Berger-Marks’ important 2004 study, “Women Organizing: How Do We Rock the Boat without Getting Thrown Overboard?”, was used as a basis for Cornell’s study. Fourteen students from Cornell’s college-credit Labor Studies Program were part of a course entitled, Women, Work, and Organizing. Taught in the spring trimester of 2009 by Cornell Extension Faculty member Pam Whitefield. The class required the students to work in small teams to develop four roundtables and analyze the data they generated. Each roundtable was open to the public and focused on a unique union campaign in the New York City area. The campaigns were the UFT/ACORN home-based childcare workers campaign, UFCW’s Yellow Rat Bastard retail campaign, the 1199SEIU homecare aides campaign and the Domestic Workers United campaign for a Domestic Workers’ Bill of Rights. Yasmin Emrani, a Cornell senior from Rochester, NY, and an ILR Summer Research Fellow, helped compile the data and co-wrote the final report over the summer.

What did the research find unique about these campaigns?

First, successful woman-centered campaigns address priorities of women that are broader than wages, benefits and work conditions. Examples or participants are immigrants rights, public school education, healthcare reform and respect for personal care work. Second, the campaigns recognize that age, culture and class can affect women’s decision-making and their view of unions. By partnering with religious congregations, ethnic organizations and political organizations and in one instance, actually creating a new organization for young workers, the campaigns overcome some of the fear and mistrust communities sometimes have toward unions. Third, the campaigns did not rely on traditional union structures and locations, they accommodated busy schedules and fragmented workforces by meeting with workers on an individual basis at different times and locations. Fourth, woman-centered campaigns build personal investment in the union through developing organic leaders from among the workers; they prioritize training rank and file members to lead, and recognize and celebrate their contribution.

Green jobs can be good jobs, helping the climate, strengthening labor and building strong communities at the same time. That’s the not-so-radical idea behind the Emerald Cities initiative, a project led by a diverse national coalition working closely with the Obama administration. The initiative unites building trades unions along with other unions, community organizations, social justice activists, environmentalists, business leaders, research and technical assistance providers, and public officials to help plan, launch and coordinate comprehensive projects to retrofit American buildings. Emerald Cities focuses on these vital and interwoven goals: greening our cities, building our communities and strengthening our democracy.

In early 2009, the AFL-CIO’s Center for Green Jobs and the Building and Construction Trades Department contacted Jeff Grabelsky from Cornell’s Construction Industry Program to facilitate a national planning process for the Emerald Cities Initiative. The process has involved 12 unions representing over two million members and has produced a Road Map to Emerald Cities that will guide the participation of building trades councils in up to 10 targeted cities and the metropolitan regions they anchor. The initiative has identified these cities as potential sites for the first pilot projects: Atlanta, Cleveland, Los Angeles, Milwaukee, New York City, Oakland, Portland, Providence, San Francisco, and Seattle.

According to Grabelsky, Emerald Cities partners focus on a high-road path to revitalizing the American economy with good jobs and lifetime careers. They are committed to the idea that fights for social equity, economic justice, racial equality, environmental sustainability, and workers rights are interwoven. “We are still in the planning stages, but this is an ambitious and unprecedented partnership that could yield huge benefits for the labor movement, climate protection, and the communities that decide to join,” commented Bob Drziga, chief of staff at the national Building Trades Department (AFL-CIO).

Local coalitions, consisting of labor, business, environmentalists and community social justice groups will implement comprehensive local plans to:

• achieve significant and measurable reductions in energy consumption and the carbon footprint that can lead to increased energy savings and efficiencies.
• generate good jobs and lifetime construction careers, create new high-road, community-based enterprises, reduce urban poverty and chronic unemployment in communities of color, raise living standards, and lower energy costs for working families.
• increase labor-community input in urban political decision-making, promote pro-working family economic development strategies, and build lasting democratic capacity to shape the urban economy.

For more information contact Jeff Grabelsky, jmg30@cornell.edu.
Three researchers from Cornell ILR joined a delegation of 20 United States union women who traveled to London in June.

Sponsored by the British-based Women and Trade Union Leadership Network (WTUL), the group of leaders and researchers participated in an international exchange exploring the strategic, policy and practical issues related to expanding leadership roles for women in unions.

Cornell ILR was represented on the United States research team by Legna Cabrera, New York City-based ILR labor extension staff; Cornell adjunct instructor, Deborah King ’94, who directs the 1199SEIU Training & Upgrading Fund; and Ithaca-based ILR Professor Risa Lieberwitz.

The WTUL is a two-year comparative research initiative involving United States and United Kingdom researchers and labor leaders sponsored by the Centre for Research in Equality and Diversity (CRED) School of Business and Management at Queen Mary College, University of London. In addition to Cornell ILR, other project partners are the Rutgers Center for Women and Work; NYS AFL-CIO; Cornell Union Leadership Institute; New Jersey State AFL-CIO; and the Southern and Eastern Regional Council of the British Trades Union Congress (SETRUC).

United Kingdom scholars and activists visited the United States in March. Researchers interviewed several top women union leaders, including Jillian Roberts (DCTU/AFSCME), Mary Landolfi (AFM Local 802) and Roberta Reardon (AFTRA).

During the London visit, participants attended a woman’s school held at CRED, and joined activities sponsored by several trade unions, including a private visit to the prime minister’s house. ILR’s Deborah King was a guest speaker at an event for women trade unionists attended by more than 60 United Kingdom women activists. Focus groups, networking sessions and individual leader interviews are being conducted in both countries to generate data for the study.

For more information about this program, visit http://photos.bsd.buffalo.edu/women leaders/index.html.

Summer 2009 ILR Extension Labor Research Fellows Program

Connecting Ithaca campus students with ILR Extension labor educators, researchers and practitioners in New York City, the summer 2009 Extension Labor Research Fellows Program sponsored or hosted thirteen undergraduate and graduate students. The students and their projects were:

- Colleen Brisport (ILR ’10) — Diversity and Inclusion in Labor Organizations
- Grace E. Chung (ILR ’10) — Global Labor Institute
- Michael Cohen (ILR ’11) — Title VII Consent Decree Repository Project
- Matthew Dillouros (ILR ’10) — Massachusetts Construction Industry
- Sarah Edelson (ILR ’10) — Global Labor Institute
- Yasmin Emran (ILR ’10) — Women Labor Union Leaders
- Kylen Fitzpatrick (ILR ’10) — Webinar Series on Workplace Disability Discrimination Law
- Marlena Fontes (Arts & Sciences ’10) — Young Workers, Intergenerational Issues and Labor Unions
- Nicole Goodkind (ILR ’11) — The Impact of the Recession on New York Film Production
- Thomas Van Haaren (Milk ’11) — Economic Downturn in NY (Mary Van Andale Internship Program)
- Raymond Hedaya (ILR ’10) — Race, Criminal Records and Employment
- Art Ron (ILR ’09) — The Healthcare Transformation Project
- Claudine Uyan (ILR ’10) — Title VII Consent Decree Repository Project

On-Line Labor Studies Brings the Classroom to Union Students

The Cornell ILR On-Line Labor Studies Certificate Program is in its third year of bringing college credit courses to union activists anywhere in the world.

The on-line format is surprisingly interactive, providing considerable opportunity for students to discuss with one another their experiences and perspectives. Since all of the learning is web-based, students can enter the course site at their convenience – day or night, from their home or workplace, from Alaska, Iowa, or Florida.

Courses being offered on-line this coming winter include:

Labor Relations in the Public Sector (LS238)

This course is designed to acquaint labor relations professionals, union members, stewards, local office leaders, and other union activists with a basic understanding of public sector labor relations.

Labor History (LS255)

Labor History can be understood from the perspectives of both trade union history and the social, cultural, and political life of workers. To gain insights into labor’s past, it is useful to explore not only union organizing, collective bargaining, and labor legislation, but also what workers think, how they work and live, and the impact of workers on the larger society. This course will use both of these approaches in order to examine the major themes in American labor history from the 19th century to the present day.

For more information, visit our website at http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/laborPrograms/leadership/laborStudies/index.html.

On-Line Course Program Participant Reactions

Alphonsa Cyrus

"Taking classes online with Cornell ILR has given me the flexibility needed to further my education despite my unpredictable work schedule. The instructors are well educated in the field of labor studies."

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ILR Researchers Compare Women Union Leaders in the U.S. and U.K.

The Centre for Research in Equality and Diversity (CRED) School of Business and Management at Queen Mary College, University of London. In addition to Cornell ILR, other project partners are the Rutgers Center for Women and Work; NYS AFL-CIO; Cornell Union Leadership Institute; New Jersey State AFL-CIO; and the Southern and Eastern Regional Council of the British Trades Union Congress (SETRUC).

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Cornell ILR NYC Classroom-Based Programs

Fall 2009 NYC Union Leadership Workshops (Non-Credit)

To register, or for more information, contact Jennie Pramualphol at jp424@cornell.edu or refer to the website indicated below.

In the spring of 2010 we are planning to run the workshops indicated below. Contact us for more information or to indicate your interest in being informed when dates are determined. This list is subject to change, and additions, based on input from participating unions.

- Assertive Grievance Handling
- Conducting Strategic Contract Campaigns
- Organizing and the Law

Workshops are held weekdays 9:00 - 4:30 PM.

Cornell/CUNY-Murphy Institute Certificate in Labor Relations

Winter – Spring 2010 Course Offerings (College Credit)

The Winter-Spring 2010 term begins on Thursday, January 28 and runs to Thursday, May 20. All courses are 15 weeks in length and earn four college credits.

- Mondays
  - first class is Feb. 1
  - Contemporary Labor Issues
    - Leadership within Unions
  - Tuesdays
    - first class is Feb. 2
    - Health and Safety in the Workplace
    - Issues in Labor Organizing
  - Wednesdays
    - first class is Feb. 3
    - History of Public Sector Workers in America
    - Contract Administration
  - Thursdays
    - first class is Jan. 28
    - Understanding Arbitration
    - Labor History

To register, or for more information, contact Jennie Pramualphol at jp424@cornell.edu or refer to the website indicated below.

Each course is held one evening a week from 6:00 - 9:15 PM.