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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.

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 Knoblach, 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 these 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 Irwin Devault, an ILR professor; Bill 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 Kubit, 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 session, 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, an element of the institute that sets it apart from single-union leadership 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 757, and member of the Class of 2009. Wayne lost a battle with cancer during his year 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 Kotter and Assistant Director Lee Adler 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 Institute 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 http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/thel insti tute, or contact program coordinator, Anne Siemens, at 607-255-4462 or acc@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 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 Kowata, director of political strategy at UFCW Local 1776 & Meat, Bread & Frozen Foods 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 employee—has chaired public hearings in Buffalo, Albany and New York City, and received testimony from employers, restaurant and hotel employees, and labor advisor organization representatives. A presentation made it clear that guidance concerning wage orders was both desired and lacking. “A lot of the guidelines are written in such a way that they’re unenforceable to the average citizen, leaving people unclear about their rights and responsibilities,” said Donahue. “Restaurant workers who testified are the kinds of workers who may speak on the long hours, low pay and difficult working conditions endured by many employees.”

Several key issues for which consensus that surfaced in the hearings were:

• Some workers are not paid time and half for overtime when they work more than 40 hours a week (sometimes as many as 160 hours/month);
• Some employers provide 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 personnel;
• Immigrant workers and the restaurant industry is a “port of entry” into the American workforce, are particularly exploited; and what they have poor English language skills;
• Restaurant owners, managers, and workers, struggle with “about 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 Wage Order 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/agencies/infols/wageboards.htm.

Black Trade Union Leadership Academy Begins January 30, 2010

The second session of the Black Trade Union Leadership Academy, a non-profit program designed to help emerging black trade unionists become successful union leaders, begins Saturday, January 30, 2010 at Cornell University’s New York City Center of Labor Education. 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 sk995@cornell.edu.

How to build a strong labor movement: Five students from Cornell ILR’s NYC Labor Studies Certificate program graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree from the National Labor College (NLC) in Silver Spring, Maryland. Hilda Solis, the new Secretary of Labor in President Obama’s administration, delivered the commencement address. The graduates were accompanied and cheered on by Teamsters Local 237 member Lainie Kitt, who has worked as the NLC liaison and helped guide the students through the rigorous requirements of the degree program. Kitt reported that “Secretary Solis vowed to make sure that the labor movement would be a force to be reckoned with.”

Are you interested in completing your bachelor’s degree at the National Labor College? For more information about the program, contact Steven King at 212-340-2812 or sk995@cornell.edu.
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 UFTIACORN home-based childcare worker campaign, UFCW’s Yellow Rat Bastard retail campaign, the 1199SEU 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 workplace demands and rights. Women respondents report working conditions, 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 the emergence of new leaders as true voices. While the study argues that there is not really a unique “women’s way” of organizing, women-centered campaigns can offer important insights into organizing all workers. As demographics shift and work becomes more informal and less geographically defined, women-centered campaigns have been particularly effective in developing new ways to reach out to all workers. The more important question is how to implement these strategies in unions’ organizing campaigns.

The full report is available on the Cornell ILR Labor Programs website at http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/laborprograms/.

New “Emerald Cities” Initiative Links Building Trades, Environmentalists, Business and Community Groups in Fight for Cleaner Climate and Good Jobs

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, researchers and technical assistance providers, and public officials to help plan, launch and coordinate comprehensive projects to retrofit Americas building stock. 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 Ozinga, 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 underemployment 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.
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 workspace, from Alaska, Iowa, or Florida.

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.

Ed Starr

• ILR’s online Labor Studies Program has enhanced my understanding of the labor movement and provided me with the skills necessary to be proactive in helping not only my union membership but organized labor as a whole.

Edward Cecatto

Executive Vice President | Niagara Falls Teachers Association

• The major advantage of the on-line courses is that the work can be done at your convenience. Like most of us active in labor a great deal of time and commitment is required of me. I’m an officer in my local and an activist in my state union, but I’m also a teacher with a family.

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 officers, 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/laborStudiesOnline. See additional registration information on the right.

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Cornell ILR NYC Classroom-Based Programs

Fall 2009 NYC Union Leadership Workshops (Non-Credit)

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<th>Nov. 9-10</th>
<th>Advanced Grievance Handling: Getting Settlements</th>
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<tr>
<td>Nov. 12-13</td>
<td>Managing and Supervising Union Staff w/ Labor's Values: Part I</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nov. 19-20</td>
<td>Habits and Skills of Successful Union Representatives</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dec. 3-4</td>
<td>Managing and Supervising Union Staff w/ Labor's Values: Part II</td>
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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
- Bargaining Tactics
- Strategic Research
- Managing Your Union's Finances

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

Cornell/CUNY-Murphy Institute Certificate in Labor Relations

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.