

To Our Readers

The Institute of Collective Bargaining is beginning a collaborative relationship with ILR's Institute for Workplace Studies (IWS). IWS serves as a bridge between the university and labor, business, and government. It promotes research and sponsors events that focus on the workplace, labor-management relations, the labor movement, and public policy. IWS is based in New York City and is directed by Prof. Samuel Bacharach, the Jean McKelvey-Alice Grant Professor of Organizational Behavior at ILR.

The Institute of Collective Bargaining will continue to publish *ICB briefing* and will periodically co-sponsor programs with IWS.

Upcoming Events

The need for organizational flexibility has changed the terms of employment for workers around the globe. As companies restructure and adopt new technologies, workers must adapt by changing jobs and acquiring different skills. The result is a new weave of expectations and commitments between employers and employees and unions and their members. A small group of academics, union and business leaders, and policy makers will meet in Israel in June to discuss current research on this "New Social Contract at Work." The conference is sponsored jointly by the IWS and Ben-Gurion University of the Negev.

The subject of human rights in the United States often goes unexplored. It will receive some long overdue attention next October when the IWS presents a conference entitled "Human Rights in the American Workplace: Assessing U.S. Labor Law & Policy." The conference will link academics, policy makers, and national and international practitioners in discussion of topics such as workers' rights as human rights and non-governmental organizations as agents of change. Contact iwsconferences@cornell.edu or call 212 340-2896 for more information.

Work Practices Diverge and Converge in U.S. and Abroad

New trends are emerging and old models disappearing in many facets of the global economy. The realm of labor relations and work practices is likewise undergoing a transformation as long-standing arrangements built around multi-employer contracts and pattern bargaining give way to a wider assortment of styles and strategies.

This evolution began in the United States and has recently become apparent in other industrialized countries as well. Harry Katz, Jack Sheinkman Professor of Collective Bargaining at ILR, calls the phenomenon "converging divergences." In other words, there is growing diversity in bargaining relationships and employment systems within countries although the nature of that variation shows striking similarities from country to country. Prof. Katz shared his insights with participants at a colloquium series that is sponsored by ILR's Institute for Workplace Studies and is held in New York City.

For many years after World War II, bargaining was said to be highly centralized: the tone and the details were determined by corporate executives and national union leaders. But by the 1980s, in the U.S. at least, the process and outcomes of collective bargaining were looking less and less the same. Employers in industries such as autos, telecommunications, steel, and trucking were rebuffing the pattern and negotiating deals that suited their particular circumstances. They also began demanding and winning localized arrangements for individual plants and work sites. Bargaining became decentralized, with more decisions made at lower levels of the company and union hierarchies.

Prof. Katz and his colleague Owen Darbishire, University Lecturer at the Said Business School and a fellow at Pembroke College, University of Oxford, spent several years studying the auto and telecommunications industries in the U.S., United Kingdom, Australia, Germany, Japan, Sweden, and Italy. They focused on these sectors because autos are a classic "old industry" and telecommunications an emerging "new industry." In addition, both are heavily unionized but experiencing growth in nonunion competition.

The researchers found four patterns of employment practices (see chart

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Women In the Trades

The intent was admirable: open the construction trades to women. Indeed, a 1978 executive order raised the issues of access and training and laid out guidelines for female representation in apprenticeships and on the job. But the 20% target was never reached and women today constitute just 2.5% of the industry's skilled trades workers. This number has not changed since the early 1980s.

The reason is not because the work is hard and dirty, said Susan Eisenberg, a master electrician, poet, writer, and teacher who spoke to students, faculty, and staff during ILR's Union Days. Rather, she said, the industry and the unions never embraced the policy. Eisenberg faulted a work climate that has in the past and continues today to tolerate harassment and discrimination and fails to provide the support and mentoring women need to succeed.

The industry insists that construction is men's work, Eisenberg explained, and that the gender divide is a natural reflection of ability and interest. Arguing against this assertion, she said women are drawn to the work for the same reasons as men: satisfaction, pride, usefulness, permanence, and an opportunity to use intelligence and creativity every day. When given the right training, mentoring, and support, she added, women perform as well as men.

But workplace barriers and industry culture prevent women from taking and holding onto skilled jobs. Eisenberg talked about threats and acts of violence against women and noted that purposefully inadequate training makes accidents

Source Links

In her book *We'll Call You If We Need You: Experiences of Women Working Construction* (Ithaca, NY: ILR Press, 1998), Eisenberg tells the stories of 30 women pioneers in the construction industry.

For a report on the health and safety issues specific to female construction workers, check this Web address: <http://www.osha-slc.gov/doc/accsh/haswicformal.html>

seem as though women are not capable. She also cited failings by other seeming allies. Eisenberg said

the women's movement has ignored access to traditional blue collar jobs; workers of color have not demanded the inclusion of women in project labor agreements (a pre-hire agreement covering terms of employment that is negotiated between a local construction trades council and a project's general contractor); and organized labor has ducked accountability on diversity and discrimination.

Despite the discouraging history, Eisenberg held out hope. "Women still maintain a toehold," she said. "The blueprint is there for how to do it. The issue is power, not merit." ♦

Using Coalitions to Build Community

The American labor movement long ago learned the value of solidarity. But as the workforce becomes more diverse, the practical meaning of that unity is tested daily. Unions have been slow to reach out to people of color, to immigrants, and to women. Workers, meanwhile, are searching for allies to assist in their struggle for social and economic justice.

But three panelists who met with ILR students and faculty during the school's third annual Union Days celebration said movement towards a new solidarity is underway. In cities as diverse as Greensboro, NC, Solvay, NY, and Los Angeles, CA, leaders and activists from across the racial, gender, ethnic, and religious divides are building coalitions and joining with local and national unions to improve conditions for thousands of unorganized workers. Within the union movement itself, the voices of Asian-American, African-American, Hispanic, immigrant, and women

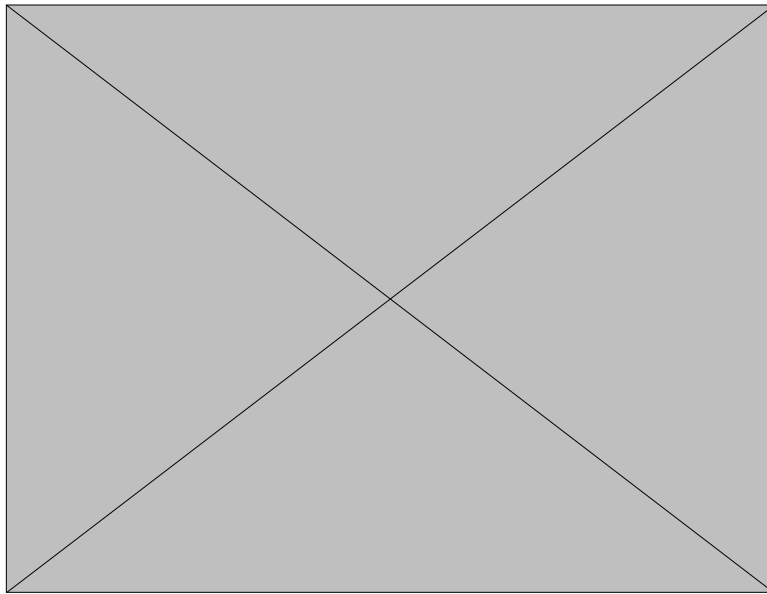
workers are increasingly being heard. The AFL-CIO Executive Council recently reversed its opposition to amnesty for undocumented workers and it now includes more minority and female representatives than ever before.

Disenfranchised workers, immigrants' rights advocates, community activists, and religious leaders are finding power in cohesion. Together they are pushing organized labor and other socio-economic institutions for inclusiveness, dignity, and fair play. These coalitions are helping to transform the attitude of organized labor towards immigrant and minority workers and breaking down the resistance of business and political leaders. "We need to coalesce our allies around an agenda of change," said Kent Wong, director of the UCLA Center for Labor Research and Education, the first president of the Asian Pacific American Labor
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(Diverge and Converge...continued from page 1)

below) that were more or less apparent in each country despite different socio-economic conditions. The **low wage strategy** is most often seen in nonunion companies and is characterized by insecure employment and autocratic interactions between workers and supervisors. The **human resources management** approach, pioneered in the U.S. by IBM, Kodak, and Polaroid, calls for a strong corporate culture, sophisticated communications, individualized compensation, and career development. The **Japanese-oriented** pattern relies on teams with forceful supervisors and minimal employee input. The **joint team** pattern, first seen at Xerox, Saturn, and the steel companies, involves joint decision making, semi-autonomous work groups, and pay-for-knowledge.

Growing Patterns of Workplace Practices



Source: Katz, Harry C. and Owen Darbishire. *Converging Divergences*. (Ithaca, NY: ILR Press, an imprint of Cornell University Press, 2000) page 10.

“We’re not seeing uncontrolled random increases in variation,” Prof. Katz explained. “There is commonality in the patterns.”

Prof. Katz noted another phenomenon that may be related: growing income inequality. Whereas the gap between the have’s and have not’s has been steadily widening in the U.S. for nearly 20 years, this is a relatively recent development in Europe. Classical economists explain the income gap as a product of “skill-bias technological change” (i.e., people with an education do well in a technologically-propelled economy and people without sufficient schooling fall behind). But Prof. Katz suggested decentralized bargaining as another, and often overlooked, explanatory factor. He noted that countries with the greatest variation in work practices are also showing the widest income divide. “The inequality is not just a reflection of individual skill,” he said. “The strategies firms take in how they pay people contribute to the inequality.”

The benefits and disadvantages of growing variation in labor relations and work practices are not yet clear. Some societies, such as Germany, were surprised by it. But greater diversity serves business needs, Prof. Katz noted,

and was therefore inevitable. He quickly added that this may not be bad for labor if workers and/or their representatives help decide how the variation should occur. Where crude employment conditions, low wages, and involuntary contingent work grow uncontrollably, however, government should play a role in limiting and dampening these divisive practices. Said Prof. Katz: “It’s a moral, political, and social challenge.” ♦

Sources in Print

Freeman, Richard B. and Joel Rogers. ***What Workers Want***. (Ithaca, NY: ILR Press, 1999) 224 pages. \$39.95/\$17.95. An extensive workplace study by the authors shows that union and nonunion workers want their say. Their ideal organization would be jointly run by workers and supervisors; supervisors, however, would limit workers’ participation to advisory committees.

Denenberg, Richard V. and Mark Braverman. ***The Violence-Prone Workplace: A New Approach to Dealing with Hostile, Threatening, and Uncivil Behavior***. (Ithaca, NY: ILR Press, 1999) 288 pages. \$32.50. The authors point to dysfunctional workplaces as the source of work-related violence and offer specific techniques for reducing the risk.

Rogers, Jackie Krasas. ***Temps: The Many Faces of the Changing Workplace***. (Ithaca, NY: ILR Press, May 2000) 208 pages. \$39.95/\$15.95. Rogers explores the world of temporary work as experienced by workers, agencies, and clients and discusses issues of race, gender, power, and identity. ♦

(Coalitions...continued from page 2)

Alliance, and this year's Alice B. Grant Labor Leader in Residence at ILR.

The way workers' struggles are defined affects their ability to attract outside support. "If you frame it as a dispute between the company and its employees," said Reverend Nelson Johnson, a civil rights and religious activist from Greensboro, "that's part of the culture of fragmentation. If you're not for the company or for labor, you can't hold on to it."

The Reverend's experience with workers at a local Kmart distribution center is illustrative. Once he and several colleagues helped the workers reinterpret their grievances as a matter of justice and right treatment, they became active proponents of the workers' cause. In time, this stance won the workers greater acceptance within Greensboro and laid the foundation for a broader coalition that is now focusing on civil rights and community issues.

Workers at Landis Plastics, Inc. in upstate New York also sought outside support in their fight against high stress, frequent injuries, and illegal firings. They built a coalition of labor, religious, and women's organizations that helped attract media coverage and provided moral support as they pressed safety and health charges against Landis. Said Kathy Saumier, a production worker and activist at Landis during the height of the conflict: "You've got to stick together and help each other out." ♦

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e-Briefs on the Net

HRWire, published by West Group, recently reported that a rash of employment related lawsuits is prompting start-up companies to finally think seriously about human resources management.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, nonunion wages increased faster than union wages between December, 1982 and March, 1999; pay rates for union members are still greater than for nonunion workers. Check <http://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/tedhome.htm> for more details.

An AFL-CIO poll of working women found that 87% of those surveyed identified equal pay as the most important policy issue. Quality, affordable health care, paid family leave, and pensions and Social Security are also top concerns. Go to <http://www.aflcio.org/women/survey1.htm> for survey results. ♦

ICB briefing

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