



# Center for Global Workers' Rights

## CGWR, SPRING SEMESTER 2014

For the Chinese, 2014 is the year of the horse, and the **Center for Global Workers' Rights (CGWR)** is off to a galloping start. It secured its first major external grant, funded by the International Labour Organization, to establish a dataset on global workers' rights. The MPS program in Labor and Global Workers' Rights is on track to begin in the fall of 2014 (see article below). The Center is working with a group of scholars and practitioners to celebrate the 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the ILO Philadelphia Declaration (see page 3). Center members also continue to publish high quality research related to workers' rights (page 6). Students associated with the Center have participated in conferences and promoted workers' rights on campus (pages 4 and 5). The Center also organized a productive workshop on strikes in Vietnam and China, and it has once again sponsored an exciting speaker series, with guests arriving from China, Bangladesh, and Canada (pages 2 and 4).



**Garment Worker in Vietnam;**  
**photo by Mark Anner**

Write us if you have any thoughts or questions about the CGWR's work : [cgwr@psu.edu](mailto:cgwr@psu.edu) or visit the website: <http://lser.la.psu.edu/gwr/>

**You can also find us on Facebook: "The Penn State Center for Global Workers' Rights"**



## CGWR ACTIVITIES

### MPS in Labor and Global Workers' Rights set to start in Fall 2014



**Global Labour Union (GLU)**

In August 2014, the Center for Global Workers' Rights and the School of Labor and Employment Relations will welcome its first group of students to its new MPS in Labor and Global Workers' Rights. The application deadline for the program is April 15, 2015, and already there has been interest from labor activists in Africa, Asia, South America, the Caribbean, Europe, and the United States. As part of the fall 2014 semester, students will study workers' rights in residence and through online exchanges with Global Labour University students in Germany, India, South Africa, and Brazil in a new hybrid course that will be taught by Professor Paul Whitehead. The MPS program has passed almost all levels of the approval process at Penn State University, and it is now pending presentation of the program to the Board of Trustees.

## CGWR Speaking Event: Gaochao He, Sun Yat-Sen University, China

By Renwei Liu

*Renwei Liu is a visiting scholar with the CGWR.*

Based on field research and in-depth interview, Gaochao He, professor in the department of political science at Sun Yat-Sen University in Guangzhou (China), demonstrates multiple facets of the operation of the Chinese trade union. Gaochao He modifies the view that the All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU) is unable to protect workers' rights effectively because it depends on the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party. A new prospect has emerged for the understanding of the nature of the Chinese trade union, especially in economically developed areas. Gaochao He's research has provided a favorable template for the exploration of union reform in this country.



**Professor Gaochao He**

In accordance with He's research, the modes of operation of the trade union can be divided into Guangdong model, Shanghai model, Zhejiang model, and so on. The formation and development of these models are of respectively various features, with specific economic, political, and social backgrounds influencing each. These models, the products of the rapid economic development and of an emerging rights consciousness among workers, have thrived best in areas with relatively advanced economies.

On the basis of the guidance of He's research, one can explore what beneficial modes are in existence in Chinese inland cities with lower levels of economic development. Further research might explore what trade union practices may develop given the context of the current system of trade union laws.

## CGWR Speaking Event: Jeffery Hilgert and the global choice between "hazard or hardship"



**Professor Jeffery Hilgert**

Jeffery Hilgert visited the CGWR on February 27 to speak about his recent book, *Hazard or Hardship: Crafting Global Norms on the Right to Refuse Unsafe Work* (Cornell University Press, 2013). Hilgert is assistant professor in the School of Industrial Relations at the University of Montreal. His book assesses the rights of workers to refuse unsafe work. Posing a global policy question, Hilgert asks: Is it acceptable to expect workers to choose between their physical health and safety and their economic livelihood and basic subsistence? A rights-based approach to health and safety, also reinforced by commitment to freedom of association, is possible, he argues. Internationally, what is needed is greater attention to human rights norms as an important part of international labor standards.

Hilgert spent several years as a labor rights and anti-poverty activist in Minnesota and has been the recipient of human rights awards, a Fulbright, and an Archibald Bush Foundation fellowship for his efforts. He holds a Ph.D. in industrial and labor relations from Cornell University.

## Center for Global Workers' Rights Team

**Mark Anner** is the Director of the Center for Global Workers' Rights (CGWR) and Associate Professor of Labor and Employment Relations and Political Science at Penn State. He holds a Ph.D. in Government from Cornell University and a Master's Degree in Latin American Studies from Stanford University. He is the author of *Solidarity Transformed: Labor Responses to Globalization and Crisis in Latin America*.

**Jill Jensen** is the Assistant Director of the CGWR and a Visiting Assistant Professor. She holds a Ph.D. in History from the University of California, Santa Barbara. Her research examines the function of the International Labour Organization (ILO), a specialized agency of the United Nations. Her published work analyzes ILO policies on social security, fair pay, and women's employment opportunities, along with questions centered on human rights, trade, and development.

**Lisa Pierson** is Administrative Assistant to the CGWR. She joined Penn State in 2008 working for Labor and Employment Relations. In her dual capacity she offers support for both the Center and the School, overseeing promotion and tenure, travel, event planning, and budgets. Lisa's assistance is vital for all aspects of the Center, ranging from long-term preparation for events to everyday operations.

**Jakir Hossain** is Post-Doctoral Scholar for the CGWR. He received his Ph.D. from the School of International Studies, University of Trento, Italy. Dr. Hossain is currently on leave from the University of Rajshahi where he is an associate professor. He had been a visiting fellow at the School of Industrial and Labor Relations, Cornell University. He has written articles, policy papers, and briefs on labor rights, decent work, social dialogue, multilateral trading regime, and skill formation and learning.

**Renwei Liu** is a visiting scholar at the CGWR, and was awarded funding by the China Scholarship Council to pursue study at Penn State as a joint degree. She is a Ph.D. candidate of civil law from Southwest University of Finance and Economics, Sichuan, China, researching Chinese labor law, comparative labor law, industrial injury compensation, and industrial injury insurance.

**Joyce Sinakhone** is a graduate student assistant working with the CGWR on the Global Labour University (GLU) Master Program initiative and grants and projects. A second year master's candidate in Human Resources and Employment Relations, she studied at the GLU in Berlin in May and June 2013. Her master's research focuses on alternative models of union organizing.

### CGWR to Co-sponsor Philadelphia Event: The Global Spirit Philadelphia, May 10, 2014



**Franklin Roosevelt—meeting with ILO representatives in May, 1944; photo courtesy of the FDR Library**

Center Assistant Director Jill Jensen is co-host of the event, The Global Spirit of Philadelphia, which commemorates the May 10, 1944 adoption of the International Labour Organization's (ILO) "Declaration of Philadelphia." She will present a paper on key actors in the ILO who supported labor rights as an essential form of international justice. The Declaration, announced in Philadelphia in the spirit of freedom and liberty, insisted on the rights of working men and women around the world to economic security and a political voice. It charted programs to achieve full employment, raising standards of living, and workers' rights to freedom of expression, association, and collective bargaining. The event explores the intellectual origins of the declaration, continuing efforts to secure labor rights and opportunity for workers around the world, and the history and current prospects of the Philadelphia labor movement in the context of the ILO's Declaration.

The International Labour Organization's Kari Tapiola, Special Adviser to the Director-General, will open the event and a plenary address will be offered by Ai-jen Poo, Director of the National Domestic Workers Alliance (NDWA).

For a full event schedule, see <http://lser.la.psu.edu/gwr/events.shtml>



## New Bangladesh's Garment Workers' Resistance Research

By **Jakir Hossain**

*CGWR Post-Doctoral Scholar Jakir Hossain conducted field study in December 2013 in Bangladesh for research on garment workers' resistance against rights violations in Bangladesh.*

The industrial and labor relations in Bangladesh's garment sector have hardly been harmonious. But the conflicting nature is most pronounced in the recent years; on an average, there were over three workers' protests each week. To chart this change, I am developing a nine-year (2005-2013) dataset of garment workers' agitation from media reports and through focus group and key informant interviews with garment workers and their representatives, and employers and government officials. This is to not only understand the current state of movement, but also to find out the factors to prevent more violent forms of activity. Preliminary research findings on workers' agitation show that demands were broadly work and workplace related, and that these were in response to specific violations of rights such as non-payment or delay in the payment of wages and overtime. Lack of representative trade unions at the plant level, through which to express workers' grievances or aspirations, caused these to pile up, ultimately causing disputes to escalate.

When conditions become too oppressive, workers either simply leave the job in a silent protest, or channel demands through formal or informal interest groups with the hope of forcing employers to heed these demands, and government to intervene. Yet authorities' keen interests to press for punishment of protest leaders and participants, including offering penalties rather than help in resolving disputes, create the conditions for other disputes to emerge and escalate into severe forms of protests and agitations.



**Center Team with Speakers from Bangladesh: From left to right, Renwei Liu, Joyce Sinakhone, Reba Sikder, Kalpona Akter, Mark Anner, and Jakir Hossain**

## Bangladesh Worker Tour at Penn State

By **Ronnie Mixon**

*Ronnie Mixon is a junior at Penn State and a member of United Students Against Sweatshops. He serves as this year's Alta Gracia intern. Sponsored by the CGWR, the internship offers a chance for students to promote Alta Gracia, a company that produces union-made, living-wage apparel for Penn State and other universities.*

On Tuesday, February 18, United Students Against Sweatshops (USAS), with support from the CGWR, sponsored the Bangladesh Worker Tour. Penn State was chosen along with other major universities to serve as host to Bangladeshi labor organizer Kalpona Akter and garment worker Reba Sikder. The women shared stories about the Rana Plaza disaster of April 2013. The tragic collapse, which could have been prevented with heightened safety measures, killed over 1,000 garment workers. Many of them produced collegiate apparel for the U.S. market, including for major universities like Penn State. Reba Sikder, a survivor of this tragedy, shared a chilling story about her struggle after being trapped in the factory and Kalpona Akter gave a motivational speech about the steps she took to become an organizer, including risking her own life. Akter also described the campaign for the Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh, a legally binding agreement that holds brands responsible. Penn State showed its support for the Accord, requiring that by March 31 any company producing Penn State logo goods in Bangladesh must sign on to this, and failure to do so will lead to termination or nonrenewal of the license agreement. Overall, the event was a success in that it opened up the eyes of many students in attendance and informed students about the steps they can take to make a difference.

## Center Director Researching Wildcat Strikes in Vietnam

Center Director, Mark Anner, is spending the months of March and April 2014 researching the wildcat strike wave in Vietnam's apparel export sector. Vietnam is the second largest exporter of apparel to the United States, after China. Since 2006, workers in the apparel export sector have organized a wave of short strikes to demand better wages and improved working conditions. And they are winning. Preliminary research findings show that in 95% of the cases in which workers organized work stoppages, they achieved at least one of their demands. The strikes have also resulted in important state reforms; the government of Vietnam—in coordination with labor and employers—is now in the process of implementing a revised labor code that requires greater social dialogue in the workplace.

## The Principles of Union Organizing: The AFL-CIO's Organizing Institute

By Joyce Sinakhone

*Joyce Sinakhone is writing her Master's paper on alternative models of union organizing, and she is assisting the Center in launching its new Master's in Labor and Global Workers' Rights program.*

Within the School of Labor and Employment relations, there are extracurricular groups such as United Students Against Sweatshops (USAS) and Student Works at Penn State (SWAPS) that connect individuals interested in the labor movement with opportunities. These include internship positions as well as training options that enhance leadership or organizing skills. Along with two other SWAPS members, I participated in one such training through the AFL-CIO's Organizing Institute (OI)—a program that for over 25 years has been “identifying, training and developing organizers from our membership, staff, community and college campuses across the country.” \*



**Participants at the AFL-CIO's Organizing Institute in Pittsburgh**

Unlike most sessions where participants never encounter top leaders of the host organization, Leo Gerard, International President of the United Steelworkers (USW), and Jack Shea, President of the Allegheny County Labor Council, together led the opening remarks for this event. Approximately 45 participants gathered at the USW headquarters in Pittsburgh for the intensive 3-day training program.

This type of program not only helps build skills that are important for organizing but also provides a direct career path into unions. Students approaching graduation who display skill sets during the training important to unions are often considered for a 3-month paid apprenticeship—which may lead to a full-time position with that union. As a student who has long aspired to joining the labor movement, I was offered an apprenticeship with the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW). Thus, I am most grateful for having the opportunity to meet, befriend, and train alongside people within the labor movement at OI.

To read the full article, go to <http://lser.la.psu.edu/gwr/index.shtml>.

\* AFL-CIO. Organizing Institute. Retrieved on March 18, 2014 from <http://www.aflcio.org/Get-Involved/Become-a-Union-Organizer/Organizing-Institute>

## Research and Publications on Workers' Rights

Mark Anner recently published with Jennifer Bair and Jeremy Blasi an article titled, "Towards Joint Liability in Global Supply Chains: Addressing the Root Causes of Labor Violations in International Subcontracting Networks." *Comparative Labor Law and Policy Journal* Fall 2013, 35(1): 1-43.

Mark Anner and Jakir Hossain collaborated on a project titled, "Multinational Corporations and Economic Inequality in the Global South: Causes, Consequences, and Countermeasures," which will be published as part of a book for the Global Labour University "Combating Inequality" Project.

Jill Jensen contributed a chapter on democratic accountability within the International Labour Organization in Giovanni Finizio, Lucio Levi and Nicola Vallinoto (eds.), *The Democratization of International Organizations: First International Democracy Report* (Routledge, 2013).

Jill Jensen, along with labor historian Nelson Lichtenstein, will have a co-edited volume available later this year. *West Meets East: The ILO from Geneva to the Pacific Rim* (forthcoming, Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), investigates the complexity of ILO action on labor standards and development projects throughout the Pacific Rim region. For a more detailed description of the book, go to the CGWR website: <http://lser.la.psu.edu/gwr/>.

## Opportunities for Student Funding

The CGWR offers funds in support of individual or collaborative undergraduate and graduate student research on themes related to the protection of workers' rights in the global economy. If you are a student interested in research on a topic related to global workers' rights, please email us at: [cgwr@psu.edu](mailto:cgwr@psu.edu).

## Post-doctoral and Visiting Scholars Positions

The CGWR provides opportunities for scholars engaged in research matching the Center's agenda by supporting a yearly post-doctoral scholar fellowship and visiting scholars. Visit the CGWR's website for more information.

## Student Activism: United Students Against Sweatshops, Penn State chapter

Working closely the CGWR is USAS, a student organization that is committed, through direct action and educational activities, to holding the University and the brands that produce University logo apparel responsible for ethical business practices. Write Lili Hadsell for more information: [lqh5089@psu.edu](mailto:lqh5089@psu.edu).



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