



PennState

# CENTER FOR GLOBAL WORKERS' RIGHTS

Fall Semester 2015

The Fall 2015 semester has gotten off to an exciting start. On August 15, we proudly watched our first group of Labor and Global Workers' Rights MPS students graduate. One week later, we welcomed our second group of LGWR students, with participants from India, Brazil, South Korea, and the United States. We also co-hosted, with the AFL-CIO, our first Global Labour University Conference (pages 1 & 3). And we welcomed to Penn State the annual GLU Alumni School with participants from 25 countries (page 3). This issue of our newsletter also covers news from a Turkish GLU student's perspective on developments in her country (page 2); CGWR member research on Bangladesh (page 2); CGWR exchanges with the ILO (page 4); an update on USAS activities (page 4); and the newest member of the Center team, Dr. Lane Windham (page 5). The Center also launched a global database on trade union rights, which provides quantitative and qualitative data on 108 indicators (page 5).

## The 10<sup>th</sup> Global Labour University Conference Co-hosted by the Penn State Center for Global Workers' Rights

by Rebecca Ruiz, LGWR student

On September 29th, the 10th Annual Global Labour University Conference (GLU) took place at the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organization (AFL-CIO)'s headquarters in downtown Washington, D.C. This year's conference was the first year the GLU convened in the United States, and Penn State Center for Global Workers' Rights (CGWR) students, faculty, and staff had the exciting opportunity to organize and host the event, welcoming workers' rights activists and organizers from all around the world.

The theme of this year's conference, "Sharing the Gains – Containing Corporate Power," focused on national and international corporate regulation, trade union campaigns, broader civil society mobilization, and research. For the three day conference, participants networked, strategized, and learned from each others' labor and social movement work.

In addition to the panels and presentations, conference participants had the opportunity to attend the presentation of the AFL-CIO's Human Rights Award given this year to trade union organizers from Swaziland for their ground-breaking work to support the human rights and dignity of workers under one of the most repressive anti-labor regimes.

Next year's Global Labour University Conference will be hosted by the University of the Witwatersrand in South Africa, and conference hosts have already put out a call for papers. The Center for Global Workers' Rights can't wait to see you there!



Global Labour University's Participants and Alumni at American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organization headquarters in Washington, D.C. Photo: Anjali Sinha, LGWR student.

## Global Labor University Student Bilge Çoban Talks about the Union Struggle for Democracy in Turkey

by Bilge Çoban, Turkish Trade Unionist and GLU student in Brazil

Turkey made headlines on October 10 when a peace demonstration was bombed. Not reported in the press was the fact that many trade unionists participated in the demonstration. Two participants in the GLU Alumni School at Penn State were still in the United States when the bombing occurred. Their colleagues were among the victims that day. The bombing was following by a parliamentary election in which the governing party expanded its power.

Bilge Çoban, one of the Turkish participants in the School, told the CGWR about the situation in her country: "In Turkey we have just experienced the parliamentary election, which was unfair and characterized by excessive violence and fear. Just before the election, two bombs exploded during a peace rally organized by Turkish trade unions, which took the lives of 102 people and wounded many more. The government mandated a curfew in some Kurdish cities in which dozens of civilians lost their lives while others have experienced long power, cell phone and landline outages. Despite the violence, the harassments, and the electoral fraud, the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), which enjoys the support of labor unions, won more than 5 million votes."



*Bilge Çoban is currently in the GLU program at Universidade Estadual de Campinas (UNICAMP), Brazil. She has served on the Executive Board of the Istanbul branch of Sosyal-İş, the Social Workers' Union, and she is a member of the Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions of Turkey (DISK) Women's Commission in Turkey.*

**From left: Ekin Aklar and Bilge Çoban, GLU students, at the GLU Alumni Summer School dinner. Photo: Mark Anner**

## Workers' Rights for Bangladesh Garment Workers

For over two decades, Bangladeshi garment workers have clothed much of the world, second only to China in apparel exports. At 33 cents an hour, they also have among the lowest wages. And they face some of the most dangerous conditions, as illustrated by the Rana Plaza building collapse of April 24, 2013, which killed 1,129 workers.

Center Director, Mark Anner, visited Bangladesh this summer with two colleagues to examine the causes for these conditions and to explore possible solutions. He found how the low price paid by major U.S. retailers and brands for apparel imported to the U.S., which has declined by over 40% in real dollar terms since 2000, has resulted in downward pressure on wages that in turn contributed to the use of unsafe buildings as producers looked to save money on the amount they paid for monthly rent. But Anner and his colleagues were also able to examine implementation of the Bangladesh Accord on Fire and Building Safety, which was signed by labor organizations and apparel firms following the Rana Plaza disaster. The Accord makes buyers partially responsible for safer factory conditions.

Anner, Jennifer Bair, and Jeremy Blasi have published an article on Bangladesh, "Toward Joint Liability in Global Supply Chains: Addressing the Root Causes of Labor Violations in International Subcontracting Networks." They are now working on a book project that will explore efforts to improve wages and working conditions for all garment workers through a model of triangular bargaining that includes workers, suppliers, and buyers.



**Around 80% of garment workers in Bangladesh are women.  
Photo: Mark Anner**



## The 9<sup>th</sup> GLU Alumni Summer School

by Anjali Sinha, LGWR student

The 9th GLU Alumni Summer School was hosted by Pennsylvania State University the first week of October.

The school brought together former and current GLU students from different parts of the globe. There were more than 40 participants from 25 countries including India, Brazil, Argentina, Zimbabwe, Korea, Cambodia, South Africa, China, Germany, Great Britain, the USA, the Philippines, Turkey, and many more. Besides students there were professors and trade unionists from the GLU Network.



GLU Summer School is a yearly event that is meant to strengthen the network links between former GLU students and to explore possibilities for future research collaboration. Unlike many graduate school programs that end when a degree is received, the GLU network aims to create lifelong educational opportunities. The annual Summer School gets GLU graduates working in solidarity with trade unionists. Throughout the Summer School, participants give detailed presentations on issues their communities

**GLU Alumni from around the world on the PSU University Park campus in front of Old Main.**

**Photo: Danna Jayne Seballos, LGWR student**

## GLU CONFERENCE: From a Future GLU Alum

by Danna Jayne Seballos, LGWR student

The Global Labour University's 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference held this October was a series of firsts. The first year for being held at the AFL-CIO headquarters in Washington D.C., the first year to be held in the United States/North America, and the first year for current GLU students to help host and collaborate on organizing efforts.

"I think it was good for us to bond with Professors and each other", said Denny Monteiro, GLU-Penn State student. "We had to think about the conference here [at Penn State] as a group first, and we bonded over a common goal."

There were a series of sleepless nights for both faculty and the students leading up to, and maybe even during the conference. However the experience of the Labour Movement was enlivened once we moved from reading academic articles in class to helping those same authors and emerging experts check-in at the registration table. *Knowing* what the GLU network means took new shape for each of us.

The conference was a response to the true power in global connections (for corporations). But for some of the current GLU students, the power and the potential of uniting trade unionists, scholars, activists, socialists, and on-the-ground workers was felt on a new level. Over 150 people from 50 countries gathered in Washington D.C. to explore critical thought about the power and potential that exists within all workers.



**Denny Monteiro, LGWR student**  
**Photo: Anjali Sinha, LGWR student**

## Center Connecting Closely with the ILO



**LGWR Professor of Practice, Paul Whitehead, during a visit to the ILO in Geneva. Photo: Tandiwe Gross**

Since its 2013 launch, the Center has seen its professors and students working closely with the International Labor Organization (ILO), the tripartite body headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland, and the world's preeminent body for promoting international worker rights.

In the summers of 2014 and 2015, CGWR's Professor of Practice Paul Whitehead attended the ILO's International Labor Conferences (ILCs), where he served as an observer to the U.S. worker delegation. Whitehead has followed closely the effort of world employer organizations to push a narrow interpretation of the ILO Convention on Freedom of Association so as to exclude any internationally recognized right of workers to strike.

Next summer's 2016 Conference will address the special challenges and policy demands posed by global supply chains. In that connection, Professor Mark Anner, Director of the PSU Center, will advise the Norwegian labor movement, a group he has worked with for years. In the fall of 2013, Anner devoted two months of his sabbatical to working at ILO headquarters to research, among other things, strike activity in Vietnamese factories.

Grad students in the GLU program spend a significant part of their first semester studying how the ILO, and other organizations around the world, give effect to international labor standards and thereby promote the rights of workers. All in all, Penn State has made solid connections with the leading advocate for worker rights worldwide.

## USAS Goes to Regional Bootcamp at Columbia University

by Katuscia Galhera, CGWR visiting faculty

United Students Against Sweatshops (USAS) is a student-driven organization that advocates for workers' rights in the garment industry. Mark Anner, CGWR Director, serves as USAS faculty adviser at PSU. One major victory of Penn State USAS Local 123 was to persuade the University to cut ties with Jansport and its parent company, VF Corporation, by eliminating them from the list of Penn State's clothing and backpack suppliers in March 2015. Now USAS is organizing to boost the sale of sweatshop-free goods at PSU's University Park campus.

PSU's students participated in an 8 hour Bootcamp at Columbia University in New York City on October 10th. USAS's yearly Bootcamp is an opportunity for information exchange, strategic thinking, and workshops, where USAS groups from throughout the U.S. to share experiences related to gender, race and multiculturalism.

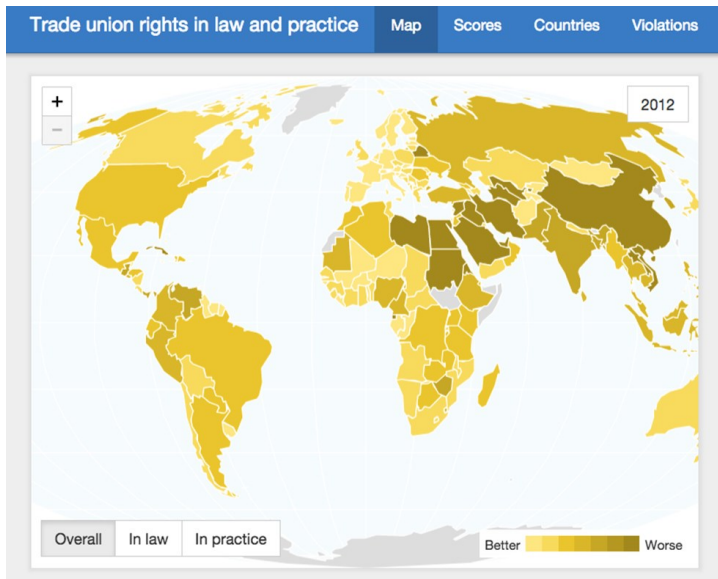
For more information on USAS, visit <http://usas.org/>



**United Students Against Sweatshops - Bootcamp at Columbia University in New York City. Photo: USAS Regional on FB**



## New database of worker rights' indicators



During the 10th Annual GLU Conference, the CGWR publicly launched a database that allows users to determine the extent to which countries of the world respect workers' rights to freedom of association and collective bargaining. To access this unique resource for scholars and practitioners, one need only go to <http://tur.la.psu.edu/>. There, the website greets the user with a map of the world, color-coded to show the degree to which each country honors workers' rights to freedom of association in law and practice. From this overall set of indicators on Trade Union Rights (TUR), the user can, with just one or two clicks, identify the precise sources supporting each country's coding, be it good, bad, or in-between by international comparison. The official sources for the coding trace to nine internationally authoritative sources. The user who wants to know "the details" can use the database to navigate directly to the relevant text of the supporting sources. The CGWR hopes to expand this database in the years ahead.

## Spotlight Shines on Lane Windham 2015-2016 Postdoctoral Scholar with the Center for Global Workers' Rights

by Denny Monteiro (LGWR student) and Katuscia Galhera, (CGWR visiting scholar)

Lane Windham's involvement with the labor movement dates back to her college years. Her interest in social justice stemmed from a summer she spent working and living in an impoverished African American community. After receiving her B.A. in History from Duke University, she worked organizing poultry and garment workers in Mississippi and North Carolina. Later in her career, she worked at the AFL-CIO for 12 years where she headed the Media Outreach Department. She was the media contact in important milestones of the institution such as the switch of its policy on immigration, the foundation of Working America, and the split of the Federation.

The desire to go back to graduate school came in 2009. Her interest was in understanding how the changing characteristics of capitalism, as it is moving out from its industrial stage, has impacted the structures that have sustained the labor movement in the 20th century. In order to do that, she enrolled in the doctoral program in History at the University of Maryland. Her research goes back to the past both to understand the weakening of the labor movement and to provide insights for the future. In her dissertation, soon to become a book, "Knocking on Labor's Door: Union Organizing and the Origins of the New Economic Divide," she challenges the misleading assumption that the unionization decline in the 1970s occurred due to lack of workers' efforts. "It is important for people who are building a movement going forward to know that people tried. They fought and lost. That's different from people didn't fight," she added.



**Dr. Lane Windham**

At Penn State, Dr. Windham began by teaching Labor and Employment Relations at the World Campus, and now she is the new post-doctoral scholar for the Center of Global Workers' Rights, where she teaches Research Methods in Labor. She tells the CGWR, "I was just so delighted when the Center chose me because I think [the Masters Program] is so unique. There's just nothing like this in the US labor movement. I think the GLU is very exciting." She believes that the program is important to educate new generations of labor activists. "Forms of work are changing, and the [labor] organizations are built to serve the old forms of work," she said. "The challenge is to recreate and rethink the way our organizations function."

## Labor and Global Workers' Rights (LGWR) Masters Program Invites Applicants Deadline: March 1, 2016

The 12-month program focuses on labor and global workers' rights and is designed for mid-career professionals. The program's new cohort will begin their studies in mid-August, 2016. The Masters program's core curriculum covers workers' rights, comparative employment relations with a strong focus on the Americas and Asia, gender and race relations at work, research and writing for labor practitioners, labor and globalization, and strategic corporate research and campaigns. Students participate in internships with U.S. labor unions or NGOs and write a capstone project. The Center for Global Workers' Rights at Penn State is the fifth worldwide campus to join the Global Labour University, a network of universities, trade unions and civil society organizations that works with the International Labor Organization (ILO) to provide labor-focused academic programs.

The deadline for admission to Penn State's GLU Masters program is March 1, 2016. More information is available at <http://lser.la.psu.edu/gwr> or by contacting [lgwr@psu.edu](mailto:lgwr@psu.edu).

## Recent Publications by Center Team Members

Anner, Mark, and Xiangmin Liu. (2015). "Harmonious Unions and Rebellious Workers: A Study of Wildcat Strikes in Vietnam." *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*. The article explores the causes for wildcat strikes in Vietnam, examining how workers have pushed unions to play a representative role in order to address workers' concerns.

Windham, Lane. "'A Sense of Possibility and a Belief in Collective Power': A Labor Strategy Talk with Karen Nussbaum." *LABOR: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas*, (Fall 2015). This article features an interview with Working America founder Karen Nussbaum, placing her current work and her work with 9to5, the women's clerical group, in the context of today's "alt-labor" organizations.

## PSU Professor To Offer MOOC in Spring, 2016

Come March, PSU-LER Professor Paul Whitehead will head a seven-week Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) on "Workers' Rights in a Global Economy." Developed by the GLU, the course features the vital role that international labor standards (ILSs) can play in a globalized economy. In its first offering last summer (2015), the MOOC attracted over 3,000 students, 15% of whom earned certificates of completion (a relatively high figure by MOOC standards). Course sponsors are determined to build on these numbers going forward. To see a short trailer for the course, go to: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8vu8dpMVfH0>

## Post-doctoral and Visiting Scholars Positions, and Student Funding

The CGWR provides opportunities for scholars engaged in research on workers' rights by supporting a yearly post-doctoral scholar and by hosting visiting scholars. It also 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.

For more information, visit: <http://lser.la.psu.edu/gwr/>



**PennState**  
College of  
the Liberal Arts

**Center for Global Workers' Rights  
School of Labor & Employment Relations  
501 G Keller, University Park, PA 16802**

**Phone: 814-865-0751 Fax: 814-867-4169**

**Email: [cgwr@psu.edu](mailto:cgwr@psu.edu)**

**Website: <http://lser.la.psu.edu/gwr/>**

