

CENTER FOR GLOBAL WORKERS' RIGHTS

FALL SEMESTER 2016

In the midst of turbulent political changes in the US and beyond, the Center's agenda of promoting decent work for vulnerable workers in the global economy could not be more urgent. In Brazil, as the Center's invited speaker Professor Biavaschi explained, the impeachment of the Workers Party president has already produced adverse reforms for workers' rights and the poor (page 1). And in India, as observed by the Center's new Postdoctoral Scholar Dr. Madhumita Dutta, a conservative prime minister is pursuing anti-labor reforms, which provoked a general strike by labor unionists (page 2). Yet, in the midst of this difficult period, efforts to improve labor activism, education, and outreach are growing. Ellen Friedman, the Center's first speaker of the year, emphasized how union revitalization is linked to inclusive and democratic unionism (page 3). At Penn State, approximately 3,500 graduate student workers have stated their desire for a union election for graduate students (page 3). The Center's efforts to improve workers' rights continue to include educational outreach (page 4), participation in global conferences (page 5), and new research and publications (pages 4 & 6). To continue its efforts to improve workers' rights in the global economy, the Center is launching its first fall fund drive (page 2). Please consider contributing!

Brazilian Professor Discusses Implications of Impeachment

by Adriana Guimarães and Rairis Martins, LGWR Students

On November 10, the Center for Global Workers' Rights hosted an evening with Professor Magda Barros Biavaschi. Professor Biavaschi is a retired judge from a Brazilian Regional Labor Court and a Master of Law and Public Institutions at the UFSC. She is a researcher at the CESIT/IE/UNICAMP and an assistant professor at IFCH and IE/Unicamp where she teaches for the Global Labour University program in Brazil. During her visit, Professor Biavaschi discussed the cultural, political and economic factors that led to the impeachment of Brazil's first woman president and member of the Workers' Party, Dilma Rousseff. She highlighted historical factors and the adoption by the Workers' Party of some neoliberal policies. The legacy of slavery in Brazil fostered a highly stratified society as political and economic elites opposed the inclusionary social policies promoted by the Workers' Party. Neoliberal economic policy adopted by the government sought to keep inflation low and to increase government surpluses, with both of those policies designed to meet the needs of the business sector, financial markets, and foreign investors. At the same time, many important social reforms, such as Bolsa Família (a cash transfer program for poor families), the new minimum wage policy, affirmative action programs, and the interruption of the privatization process resulted in disfavor among elites. And certain economic policies hurt public finances, as did the dramatic decline in commodity prices in recent years. During her second term, Dilma challenged the financial system, which infuriated economic elites, who then began plotting her removal from office. Based on objectionable allegations of budgetary irregularities, Dilma was impeached on August 31. Her successor has signaled labor reforms and austerity measures that will jeopardize the social advances obtained during the last decade.



Professor Biavaschi (center) with Center and Labor and Global Workers' Rights students and faculty. Books shown in the photo were given to the Center by Professor Biavaschi.

Historical General Strike in India

By Madhumita Dutta, Post-Doctoral Scholar, Center for Global Workers' Rights

On September 2, 2016, the central trade unions of India conducted their 17th national general strike since India embarked upon its neoliberal policies in 1991. Around 120 to 180 million workers struck work on that day. The unions had 12 demands focusing on minimum wages and price rises, improving social security for all workers, employment generation, stopping labor reforms, implementation of labor laws, and stopping privatization of public sector units (<http://citucentre.org/index.>). State-based trade unions and independent unions amended these broad base demands to call for sectoral and state specific measures. The demands placed by the state unions had high resonance amongst the working people locally. A minimum wage of at least \$268 per month became a core demand for the working class people most impacted by the continuing price rises. The other issues that featured among the striking workers were increasing short-term contracts for public sector employees, lack of employment, and anti-worker amendments to the road transport and motor vehicles legislation.

The key challenge facing the unions now is how to build support and mobilize workers in the unorganized sector and female workforce, who were largely conspicuous by their absence in the strike. Given that more than 93% of India's working population is in the informal economy, and with the increasing informalization of the workforce through new labor reforms and investments policies, trade unions have not been able to adequately challenge or represent the interests of the people engaged in informal work.

As the trade unions work out strategies to follow up on their general strike demands, the Prime Minister of India made a surprise announcement in November on national television declaring de-monitization of Rs 500 (\$7) and Rs 1000 (\$14) currency notes, which form 85% of all currency in circulation in India. Purportedly the move is to control the "black economy" or unaccounted for money in circulation in India. While the government claimed that this move will target rich people who have amassed large amounts of "black" money, in reality, it is the poor, the working people and small businesses who are most impacted by the decision. It is they who get paid in cash and are dependent on daily cash transactions for basic survival needs. Media reports from across India show that workers in the informal economy, such as construction workers, daily wagers, and farm workers, who form the bulk of the working population in India, are most hit by the sudden withdrawal of the notes.

Even production in the formal sector, such as in apparel sector, which has multiple linkages with the informal work arrangements, is impacted by the move as daily payments to procure raw material or make cash payments to workers have become hard due to the non-availability of cash. Trade unions in the knitwear capital of India, Tirupur, affiliated to left parties and Congress Party, have called for a strike in opposition to the demonitisation as thousands of garment workers and their families are severely impacted by the government's decision.

Fall Fund Drive!!

By Mark Anner, Center Director

The Center for Global Workers' Rights, in coordination with the MPS program in Labor and Global Workers' Rights, has launched its fall fund drive. The goal of the fund drive is to support worker rights internships and Center events. Every year students come from countries as diverse as Liberia, Jamaica, Tanzania, Indonesia, Bangladesh and Brazil. Most summer internships are unpaid, putting a considerable financial burden on students as they attempt to complete the program.

Please help us promote workers' rights by contributing today. Checks should be payable to Penn State University. "CGWR Fund Drive" should be added to the memo line. Send to:

CGWR Fall Fund Drive, Attn: Patricia Everhart
506 Keller Building
University Park, PA 16802



IN SOLIDARITY
NATIONWIDE WORKERS' STRIKE
SEPTEMBER 2, 2016

Illustration by Madhusree Basu,
TN Labor Blog: tnlabour.in



2016-2017 MPS Students and Faculty

“Labour movement should be inclusive and democratic”: Ellen Friedman

By Samwel Ndaga, LGWR Student

It is rare to find someone with such rich experiences working with labor movements in a market oriented economic power-house and with unionists and activists in a rigid political regime. Ellen David Friedman has worked with labor in both the United States and China. She has remarkable insights on how centralized unionism functions in a socialist state with neoliberal market policies. She illustrated how Chinese unionism has evolved in the context of such a complex state-market nexus.

Speaking at a sharing meeting with Global Labour University (GLU) students at Penn State University, Friedman, one of the Policy Committee members of the magazine Labor Notes, emphasized the importance of being pragmatic in addressing worker rights issues, the challenges

of shop-floor unionism, and the need to find ways to link shop-floor issues with the greater social issues. She reminded the students that the labor movement is for the workers and emphasized that labor union revitalization is linked to bottom-up, democratic, inclusive unionism that turns to direct action and membership mobilization.



Ellen Friedman (far left) in Hong Kong with activists.
Photo: Left 21.

University graduate employees mobilize to unionize

By Kristen Schumacher, LGWR Student

Almost 3,500 graduate student workers at Penn State are in the midst of a drive to collect thousands of signed authorization cards calling for a unionization election. Once a majority of active graduate students have signed cards, the group plans to file for an election in the coming spring semester. The group driving the effort, the Coalition of Graduate Employees (CGE), is comprised of Graduate Assistants, Teaching Assistants, and Research Assistants across all departments on campus united around a shared goal of forming a union to bargain for more equitable treatment of graduate workers on campus. CGE is affiliated with the Pennsylvania State Education Association, which represents 180,000 educators across the state.

As of early November, more than 1,600 student workers have signed cards calling for an election and the drive has picked up momentum after the National Labor Relation Board ruling earlier this year, which officially recognized the right of graduate student workers at private academic institutions to form unions. While graduate student workers cite a diverse array of issues that they would like to see addressed on campus—including wages, hours, and benefits—many students are united by their desire to have a more equitable voice with the administration. Interested graduate students can fill out contract surveys at: <http://cge-psu.com/cge-update-what-do-you-want-in-a-contract-who-is-cge-and-why-unionize/>



GLU students join CGE in its efforts to unionize graduate student employees at Penn State.
Photo : Doug Kulchar, CGE Member.

Center Director Presents Apparel Research Findings in Dhaka

By Muyid Abdullah, LGWR Student

In late September, Center Director Mark Anner took a break from teaching to travel to Bangladesh at the invitation of the Dutch government in order to present his research findings on how sourcing dynamics in apparel global supply chains affect workers' rights. To an audience of hundreds of academics, industry, government, labor, and NGO representatives, he explained how U.S. and European apparel manufacturers and retailers have systematically paid lower and lower prices to the factories that make the clothing we wear, with deleterious effects on workers' rights. At the conference, he explained that, as prices go down, wages stay low, buildings become unsafe, profits get squeezed, and government revenue declines.



Bangladeshi garment worker
Photo: Mark Anner

Working together with LGWR graduate student Muyid Abdullah, they found that in the main export category of Bangladesh to Europe (knit t-shirts) from June 2015 to June 2016, even though total volume of exports increased, the real price went down and, in specific cases, even the nominal price for goods has seen decline since the beginning of 2016. The real dollar price paid to produce Bangladesh's main export to the United States, cotton trousers, has declined by 46% since 2010. At the same time, the time given to factories to make products for the US and European market has declined from 94 days to 86 days, resulting in forced overtime and increased outsourcing. The Center will continue this research on pricing and other sourcing dynamics in the coming year by looking to expand its research to cover the apparel sector in India and the electronics sector. In the electronics sector, it will look at the production of mobile phones by Samsung, Apple, and Huawei.

"MOOCs" Reaching Labor Activists around the World

by Paul Whitehead, Professor of Practice, School of Labor and Employment Relations

Imagine a course with more than 3,000 students who span six continents. That's the kind of teaching that Professors affiliated with the Center have been doing since last March. That's when Professor of Practice Paul Whitehead led a seven-week course on Global Workers' Rights as a MOOC (a "Massive, Open, Online Course"). Offered through a web-based platform known as Iversity.org, the Global Workers' Rights course was free of charge to internet users anywhere in the world. Enrollees included unionists at all levels of labor groups around the world, joined by a good mix of staff from non-governmental organizations, lawyers, government employees, and corporate officials responsible for social responsibility or sustainability initiatives. Student reaction was enthusiastic. As one evaluation put it, "This is just the kind of information I've been waiting for and looking for. Finally, I've found it. Thank you!"

The course was successful enough to be translated into French, Spanish, and Portuguese versions, and a Russian version is under development. But the Global Workers' Rights presentation is by no means the only MOOC that PSU Professors are offering. As this newsletter goes to press, Center Director and Penn State Associate Professor Mark Anner is getting ready to serve as lead instructor on a MOOC on Decent Work in Global Supply Chains, a topic on which he is a widely recognized scholar. And School of LER lecturer and labor educator Mary Bellman is at work helping to develop still another MOOC on the need for living wages and wage equality to promote decent work. Our three PSU professors are by no means alone in their efforts: they join with guest lecturers from the International Labor Organization's Bureau of Workers' Activities as well as professors, activists, and practitioners from the GLU network of universities and national and international labor federations. If you want to take a look at a MOOC that gives the flavor of these courses, simply go to Iversity.org, search for a new "short course" called "International Labor Standards: How To Use Them" and consider enrolling in the upcoming MOOC on Decent Work in Global Supply Chains.



Course starts on January 12, 2017

Enroll for free on: <https://iversity.org/en/courses/decent-work-in-global-supply-chains>

Global Labour University Conference and Summer School in South Africa

By Elaine Hui, Assistant Professor of Labor & Employment Relations

The 11th Global Labour University (GLU) Conference successfully took place in Johannesburg, South Africa on September 28-30, 2016. Every year the GLU Conference is held in one of the five countries involved in the GLU program. This year it was hosted by the University of the Witwatersrand in South Africa.



Participants at the GLU Alumni Summer School

The theme of this year's GLU Conference was: "The Just Transition and the Role of Labour: Our Ecological, Social, and Economic Future." It focused on the negative impact of the current global economic and political system on the working class, communities and environments around the world. And it sought to discuss strategies that trade unions and civil society actors should adopt to cope with various challenges facing working people and the environment.

More than 100 academic scholars, trade unionists and civil society activists from Africa, North and Latin America, Europe and Asia participated in the conference. In the three-day conference, participants joined panels and plenary sessions to discuss topics including the challenges facing the South African labor movement, trade union revitalization, minimum wages, just transition and democratic eco-socialist alternatives, precarious labor, economic policies and labor markets, and different forms of collective actions. The GLU Conference was followed by the annual GLU Alumni Summer School where thirty-six alumni and several GLU professors spent one week discussing global supply chains, strategic corporate research, trade union renewal, energy democracy, media outreach and a range of other topics. The next GLU Conference and Summer School will be hosted by the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) in New Delhi, India.

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Spotlight Shines on Madhumita Dutta

Post-Doctoral Scholar, Center for Global Workers' Rights

By Marina Christina, LGWR Student

"For me, it is important to situate and understand the everyday struggles and resistances of working people through their own voices and experiences. The everyday actions of labor may not often seem very political, but in the larger context of the social relations that they have to negotiate, especially social relations of caste, gender, class, inequality, poverty, access to resources etc., their small everyday responses can be quite radical. Therefore, we need to move beyond the homogenous idea of labor and class action and look at labor as 'social beings' with all their complexities," says Madhumita Dutta.

Madhumita completed her PhD in Geography from the University of Durham, UK. Her research focused on the everyday lived experiences of young women workers in a Special Economic Zone in Tamil Nadu, India. Her research points to the significance of linking different spaces occupied by women as workers, both formal and informal and waged and unwaged, to understand the grounded agency of labor in a patriarchal-capitalist society.

Currently a Post-Doctoral Teaching Fellow at the Center for Global Workers' Rights, Madhumita came into academia recently after having worked for many years as a labor and environmental justice activist in India. She believes that for a meaningful production of knowledge, there is a need for a deeper engagement, dialogue and collaboration between the academic and non-academic world.



Dr. Madhumita Dutta

Recent Publications by Center Team Members

Elaine Sio-ieng Hui. 2016. "Putting the Chinese State in Its Place: A March from Passive Revolution to Hegemony", *Journal of Contemporary Asia* (online version).

Elaine Sio-ieng Hui. 2016. "The Labour Law System, Capitalist Hegemony and Class Politics in China", *China Quarterly* 226: 431-455.

Elaine Sio-ieng Hui and Chris King-chi Chan. 2016. "The Influence of Overseas Business Associations on Law-making in China: A Case Study". *China Quarterly* 225:145-168.

Lois Gray, Paul Clark, and Paul Whitehead. 2016. Evolution of Administrative Practices in American Unions: Results from a 20-year Study. *Monthly Labor Review*. U.S. Bureau of Labor Studies, U.S. Department of Labor.

Madhumita Dutta. 2016. Place of life stories in labour geography: why does it matter? *Geoforum*, Vol. 77, 1-4.

Madhumita Dutta. Forthcoming. Economy of Disappearances: Tale of Nokia SEZ. *Economic and Political Weekly*. (Reviewed and accepted)

Mark Anner. Forthcoming. "Monitoring Workers' Rights: The Limits of Voluntary Social Compliance Initiatives in Labor Repressive Regimes." *Global Policy*.

Post-doctoral and Visiting Scholars Positions, Student Funding

The CGWR provides opportunities for scholars engaged in research on workers' rights by supporting a yearly post-doctoral teaching scholar and 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, go to: <http://lser.la.psu.edu/gwr/> or write to the Center Director at msa10@psu.edu.

MPS Program in Labor and Global Workers' Rights

The Center, through the School of Labor and Employment Relations and in coordination with the Global Labour University, offers a twelve-month MPS program in Labor and Global Workers' Rights. The program is designed for mid-career US and international labor practitioners. For more information, see: <http://lser.la.psu.edu/gwr/mps-in-labor-and-global-workers-rights>

CGWR Labour Rights Indicators (LRI) Dataset

The CGWR "Labour Rights Indicators" webpage provides comprehensive numerical and textual information on country-level compliance with freedom of association and collective bargaining rights that is comparable between countries and overtime. See: <http://labour-rights-indicators.la.psu.edu/>

Global Labor Journal

Don't forget to check out the latest issue of GLJ, an open access, online journal co-hosted by the CGWR. See: <https://escarpmentpress.org/globallabour>

GLU Massive Open Online course on "Decent work in global supply chains"

<https://iversity.org/en/courses/decent-work-in-global-supply-chains>. Watch the course trailer here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uq_uCqHomM0. For more information about the course, send an email to online@global-labour-university.org.



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