



# Project for Global Workers' Rights

## PGWR NEWSLETTER, FALL SEMESTER 2012

The Project for Global Workers' Rights (PGWR), an initiative of the Penn State Department of Labor Studies and Employment Relations, is looking forward to an exciting second year with more speakers, a major international symposium, and a series of initiatives for students, faculty, and practitioners designed to promote global workers' rights, especially for the most vulnerable workers. This year's speaker series will include scholars offering teleconferenced lunch-time lectures, such as the October 18 event with Eddie Webster from South Africa. And with the goal of increasing the impact of our research, this year the PGWR will be partnering with other universities, labor unions, and NGOs to produce action-oriented research projects on workers' rights in Colombia and El Salvador. In this, our first newsletter, we provide an overview of our activities. Write us to let us know what you think and to join our listserv in order to stay on top of the latest events: <globalworkersrights@la.psu.edu>. And check out our website <http://lser.la.psu.edu/gwr/>.



Women in computer factory, India; by Anushya Badrinath



Tea pluckers, Bangladesh; by Arifur Rahman

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## Project for Global Workers' Rights (PGWR) Team

**Mark Anner** is the Director of the Project for Global Workers' Rights and an Associate Professor of Labor Studies 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 a Visiting Assistant Professor involved with the Project for Global Workers' Rights. She holds a Ph.D. in History from the University of California, Santa Barbara. She studies labor law and social policy development, and inter-governmental relations surrounding global labor markets and trade.

**Daniel Hawkins** is a Post-Doctoral Scholar with the PGWR. He holds a Ph.D. in Political Science from the University of Kassel, Germany. He studies work, trade unions, and the informal economy, with a particular focus on Latin America. Previous to arriving at Penn State, Daniel was a researcher at the National Trade Union School of Colombia (ENS).

**Lisa Pierson** is the Administrative Support Assistant to the project. A native of Indiana, Pennsylvania, she worked for twenty years at S&T Bank. She joined Penn State in 2008 where she has worked with the Department of Geosciences before re-joining the Department of Labor Studies and Employment Relations.

## ACTIVITIES OF THE PGWR, 2012-2013

**Speaker Series:** The PGWR will host a number of national and international scholars who have published extensively on a variety of topics related to workers in the global economy. All lectures will take place in Keller Building, room 502.

On the 18 October (12:30 p.m.), **Edward Webster**, Emeritus Professor of Sociology and founder and Director of the Society, Work & Development (SWOP) Institute, University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa, gave a lecture on Labor's responses to globalization.

On the 15 November (12:30 p.m.), **Frank Bardacke**, educator and long-time community activist, based in Watsonville, California, will be speaking on "Skilled Farm Labor and the Immigrants Who Do It." He is author of *Trampling Out the Vintage: Cesar Chavez and the Two Souls of the United Farm Workers*. (See a review on the next page.)

On the 7 February 2013 (12:00 noon), **Ruth Milkman**, Professor of Sociology at the CUNY Graduate Center New York and at the Joseph F. Murphy Institute for Worker Education and Labor Studies, will speak about low-wage immigrant workers in the USA.



**Cabbage harvesters, California;  
by Oscar Durand Galarza**

### The work of Frank Bardacke

"Behind every fruit and vegetable for sale in the supermarket lies an unknown world of toil and skill," wrote Frank Bardacke in *Trampling Out the Vintage: Cesar Chavez and the Two Souls of the United Farm Workers* (Verso, 2011). The imagery of two souls captures the nuance of Bardacke's narrative describing the passions behind two separate yet connected struggles—one taking place in the hearts and minds of agricultural workers and the other among Cesar Chavez, a cadre of United Farm Workers (UFW) officials, and their public advocates.

The UFW "movement" encompassed innumerable dramas and a mix of social, political, and moral ambitions. Although Chavez and others successfully mobilized millions to join the union and even more to support the surrounding boycott movement, divergence and lack of understanding meant the UFW failed to harness the true power, militancy, and allegiance of the workers in the fields. This remarkable book recounts the unknown world of toil along with the UFW's militant rank and file, as it describes how two forms of radicalism clashed, in the end determining the organization's fate.

## International Symposium: Global Workers' Rights, Patterns of Exclusion, Possibilities for Change (20–22 March 2013)

Following in the footsteps of the highly successful and well attended 2012 symposium organized by the members of the PGWR, in March 2013 we will be hosting another event. It will examine the growing trend towards worker precarity and discuss existing strategies and propose alternative ways to overcome it while clamoring for spaces that can help promote worker empowerment. The symposium will be inaugurated with the keynote address of Guy Standing, Professor of Economic Security at the University of Bath and a founding member and co-president of the Basic Income Earth Network (BIEN), and will include the participation of scholars, activists, and labor practitioners from various parts of the world.

### The work of Guy Standing

Guy Standing's recent book, *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class*, (Bloomsbury, 2011) has been an international scholarly sensation. In it, Standing defines and discusses the composition and characteristics of the precariat, which he contends is the most important post-globalization "class in-the-making." Standing then analyzes the implications of its emergence and growth in terms of the associated political and social crises and transformations of recent times. This book follows on from Standing's seminal 2009 book, *Work After Globalization*, which critiqued the labor and political regimes in the era of Industrial Citizenship, geared as they were to deepening the alienation of workers via their incorporation into a patriarchal model of worker subservience to the demands of mass production, controlled by big capital, and regulated by a monolithic state. Standing proposes the reconfiguration of markets, worker organizations, and states so that they prioritize a social model that enhances occupational security, worker autonomy, and control of the work process, augmenting flexible and creative forms of work.



**Professor Guy Standing,  
University of Bath**

### PGWR action-oriented research

One of the key objectives of the PGWR is to contribute to the monitoring and denouncement of attempts by firms or states to violate or make more difficult the fulfillment of workers' rights. The members of the Project will be taking part in research initiatives that examine developments on the ground associated with worker freedom and organization as well as general working conditions. Presently, the Project's team is involved in two research projects.

**Daniel Hawkins, Colombia:** Post-Doctoral scholar Daniel Hawkins is taking part in an international study which examines best practices of organizing and formalizing non-standard workers in five countries: South Africa, Vietnam, Cambodia, Colombia, and Tunisia. The project is being coordinated by scholars from the School of Management and Labor Studies at Rutgers University, New Jersey and is funded by the International Center for Labor Solidarity in Washington D.C. Daniel is undertaking the Colombian case study, which will discuss and evaluate the union campaign to affiliate and formalize the working situation of non-standard workers at the country's busiest sea port in Buenaventura, Valle del Cauca. (See box below.)



**Stevedores loading sugar sacks at the Buenaventura Port, Colombia**

**Report from the Field: Workers' Rights in Colombia:** PGWR postdoctoral scholar, Daniel Hawkins, recently returned from Colombia, where he met and interviewed numerous workers, unionists, officials from the Colombian Ministry of Labor, the Vice Minister for Labor Relations, and representatives from the US Embassy, as a means of detailing exactly what is taking place in Buenaventura and defining the nature of labor rights' violations there.

As South America's second most populous country, Colombia has a long history of violent anti-union practices, evidenced by the 2,944 unionists killed between 1979 and 2010. The nature of these practices contributed to a five-year freeze on the US-Colombian Free Trade Agreement (FTA) as it languished in the US Congress. The Labor Action Plan, negotiated and signed by the Obama and Santos administrations in April 2011, signaled a revitalization, calling for rigorous policy reforms aimed at protecting labor rights and union activity in Colombia. In exchange, the Obama government committed to seek Congressional approval of the FTA and offer presidential authorization. The Action Plan centered on the special monitoring of five key sectors, all plagued by hostile anti-union business practices: mining, African palm oil, ports, sugar, and cut flowers.

(Continued on page 5.)

In the port sector, after a mid-1990s push for privatization, union activity declined, working conditions deteriorated, and labor intermediation increased in the four busiest ports (Buenaventura, Cartagena, Santa Marta and Barranquilla). In 2009, activists created a new autonomous, national union, Unión Portuaria (UP). The union's primary goal was to organize port workers and pressure for the formalization of work contracts. With resource and lobbying support from the US union movement via the AFL-CIO's Solidarity Center in Bogotá, the UP gradually made inroads into the port working population. Particularly in Buenaventura, the union, driven by the momentum of the first port-workers strike in fifteen years, managed to pressure a main operating firm, TECSA S.A. to directly contract eighty machine operators. Since then, the Ministry of Labor has conducted hundreds of inspections and imposed hefty fines to firms illegally conducting labor intermediation. Nevertheless, anti-union practices continue, in defiance of the labor law and directly challenging Action Plan dictates.

**Mark Anner, El Salvador:** Dr. Mark Anner, the PGWR's Director, is presently involved in investigating patterns of violation of the Freedom of Association (ILO Convention 87) in the San Marcos free trade zone in El Salvador. Preliminary evidence suggests that factory owners are using coercive tactics to block legitimate attempts by workers to organize. This on-the-ground research is being done for various anti-sweatshop groups and labor organizations in the USA.



**Apparel EPZ workers, El Salvador;**  
photo by Mark Anner

### Post-Doctoral Scholarship

The PGWR provides opportunities for a new generation of scholars engaged in related research by supporting a yearly post-doctoral scholarship. Post-doctoral scholars help organize PGWR events and teach in the Department of Labor Studies and Employment Relations.

### **The Global Labour University**

In order to further encourage the study of global workers' rights, the PGWR has initiated contact with the Global Labour University (GLU). GLU is a network of universities that offer Master's degrees in labor and globalization. GLU students are mid-career labor unionists or practitioners. Through the program, students gain knowledge of international labor standards and trade unions, sustainable development, social justice, and global institutions. Currently, GLU is operating in four countries: Germany, South Africa, Brazil and India. In addition, every year GLU holds an annual conference and student workshop at one of its four campuses. This year's event was held in Brazil on September 26 – October 3, 2012, and PGWR's director, Mark Anner, was invited to make a presentation based on his book, *Solidarity Transformed*. Mark also met with the GLU steering committee to discuss how the PGWR could collaborate with GLU in the future. More information on GLU can be found at: <http://www.global-labour-university.org/>

### Opportunities for student funding

The PGWR encourages the development of student projects that examine themes related to the protection of workers' rights in the global economy. As part of this, the PGWR offers funds in support of individual or collaborative undergraduate and graduate student research on associated themes.

### "Alta Gracia" internship sponsored by the PGWR

This year's Alta Gracia intern, Lili Hadsell, is a Women's Studies and English Major with a minor in Media studies. She has been an activist in United Students Against Sweatshops (USAS) since 2011 and is currently the Penn State University chapter's leader. She is also the secretary for the Women's Studies Honors Society, TRIOTA. Lili serves on the Commission for Women and is also a Worker Rights Consortium Board Representative.



Lili Hadsell

### **STUDENT ACTIVISM: United Students Against Sweatshops: Penn State chapter**

The Penn State USAS chapter meets every Thursday at 5:30 p.m. in 218 Willard. This semester USAS is campaigning to pressure for the annulment of Penn State University's contract with Adidas. This stems from this global firm's continued refusal to pay approx. \$1.8 million in severance to roughly 2,800 workers in Pakistan, following the closure of a factory.

**The Project for Global Workers' Rights seeks to support research and activism on sweatshops, labor standards, and labor rights by creating a network of scholars working on these issues around the world.**

**For additional information:**

<http://lser.la.psu.edu/global.workers.rights.home.htm>

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