

How Class Works – 2010 Conference  
SUNY Stony Brook June 3-5, 2010  
Report

Over 230 people from fourteen countries gathered to participate in the How Class Works – 2010 conference at the State University of New York at Stony Brook June 3-5, sponsored by the Center for Study of Working Class Life. This fifth in the series of bi-annual How Class Works conferences held at Stony Brook was the most international. Forty participants came from outside the United States, including nine people each from Canada, Turkey, and the UK. Others came from Australia, Brazil, France, Germany, Greece, New Zealand, Nigeria, Portugal, South Africa, and Sweden. Conference-goers included graduate students and senior academic scholars, community and union activists as well as top-level elected union officers, artists, and independent scholars.

Over fifty sessions across three days engaged participants in a wide range of issues involved in working class studies. The complete program is posted on the conference Website, as are papers that panelists have submitted for posting. For details, please go to <http://www.stonybrook.edu/workingclass/conference/2010/index.shtml>.

The opening conference plenary session, part of the Provost Lecture Series, featured Larry Cohen, international president of the Communications Workers of America (CWA – AFL-CIO), on the theme “Economic Crisis, Political Paralysis: What’s the Working Class to Do?” Cohen stressed the importance of independent worker organization in politics as well as at the work place, through both traditional unions and new forms of worker organization. Other plenary sessions focused on analyses of right-wing populism (with Bill Fletcher and William Tabb) and charter schools (with Leo Casey, Kamilah Jarvis, and Nancy Van Meter).

The Friday evening banquet provided the opportunity for the Center for Study of Working Class Life to present its Award for Lifetime Contributions to Social Justice for Working People to photographer Milton Rogovin (100 years old and still active) and social theorist and activist Frances Fox Piven. The Working Class Studies Association also presented awards, including the Studs Terkel Prize for Media and Journalism awarded to Trish Dalton, Mike Konopacki, and Michael Zweig for the DVD *Why Are We in Afghanistan?*, produced by the Center for Study of Working Class Life. We were honored to have Roger Clayman, executive director of the Long Island federation of Labor, present at the banquet with a delegation from the L.I. Fed.

Barbara Bowen, president of the Professional Staff Congress at the City University of New York (PSC-CUNY, American Federation of Teachers local 2334), was the Friday evening banquet speaker. She explored the increasing threat of corporate power and management practices in higher education, including greater use of adjuncts, lecturers, and other contingent labor, placing these trends in the larger context of assaults on the public sector. The conference offered other opportunities to explore the changing class dynamics of higher education, in sessions on Thursday and Saturday, and a Saturday morning presentation by Maria Maisto, president of New Faculty Majority.

Music, poetry, art, and creative non-fiction readings were part of the conference experience. Anne Feeney and Elise Bryant performed songs at every plenary, as well as the Friday night banquet and a later party. Poster art by Ralph Fasanella and Milton Rogovin were on display, and a lively event on the eve of the conference opening featured music and readings. The conference also hosted the annual meeting of the Working Class Studies Association.

The conference was able to extend considerably its tradition of financial aid. Thanks to generous institutional contributions by Bill Arens, Dean of International Academic Programs, Paul Edelson, Dean of the School of Professional Development, and SUNY Vice-Provost for Diversity Pedro Caban, we were able to offer much-needed scholarships to twenty-seven people. In a few cases, the assistance we could offer was not enough to overcome high airfares from abroad and cutbacks in travel funds at domestic colleges and universities, but it made a vital difference to many who otherwise would not have been able to attend.

Again this year, faculty and staff from twenty different departments and programs helped host the conference by chairing sessions in their areas of interest.\* Thanks to generous support from Lawrence Martin, Dean of Graduate Studies, the conference was able to hire thirteen graduate students to work as conference staff; they also had the opportunity to attend sessions. Additional support for the conference came from Provost Eric Kaler, Vice-President for Research John Marburger, Vice-President for Student Affairs Peter Baigent, and College of Arts and Sciences Dean Nancy Squires, as well as the department of economics. Special thanks go to Pam Wolfskill in political science, and to Ann Brody of the Office of Conferences and Special Events, who did an extraordinary job. We had welcome help from the labor movement as well – Phil Smith, president of United University Professions at SUNY (UUP – AFT local 2190); New York State United Teachers (NYSUT); and Artie Shertzer, president of the Stony Brook chapter of UUP.

We have already reserved space for the How Class Works – 2012 conference, scheduled for the Stony Brook campus June 7-9, 2012. A call for presentations will go out in spring 2011. We hope once again to host an international conference that will unite the campus and the community, academic inquiry and social engagement, across all the disciplines of working class studies, in a relaxed but intellectually challenging environment.

- Michael Zweig, Director, Center for Study of Working Class Life; June 2010

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\* art, biochemistry, economics, English, environmental health and safety, European studies, facilities engineering, health care policy and management, history, interdisciplinary social science, library, linguistics, Office of Student Affairs, parking services, philosophy, political science, School of Professional Development, Small Business Development Center, sociology, and technology and society