Labor Scholarship and/as Labor Activism

Michael McCann

Do public engagement and political activism enhance or compromise the research enterprise of social scientists? I offer a personal reflection on the benefits and challenges of grounding scholarship about labor and workers' political struggles in praxical engagement with labor activists, including with actual subjects of research. While scholars engage non-academic publics in many different ways, I underline how ongoing direct collaboration with labor activists can be facilitated by participation in campus organizations whose mission is labor-oriented research and education. My own involvement with the Harry Bridges Center for Labor Studies at the University of Washington provides one example of how this linkage between labor scholarship and labor activism can be sustained in routine, mostly complementary, and productive ways.

> Why should I write about labor unions and their struggle? Because a writer is also a worker . . . Then again, a writer is also a citizen; and as citizen he must safeguard his civil rights and liberties. Life is a collective work and also a social reality. Therefore the writer must participate with his fellow man in the struggle to protect, to brighten, to fulfill life. Otherwise he has no meaning—a nothing.
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> Carlos Bulosan, letter dated January 17, 1955[1]

> It's a dangerous business, Frodo, going out your door. . . . You step into the Road, and if you don't keep your feet, there's no knowing where you might be swept off to.
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> Bilbo Baggins, in *The Lord of the Rings,* J.R.R. Tolkien[2]

The concept of "praxis" refers to the process by which theories, insights, ideas, or ideals are enacted, practiced, or realized in sensuous life activity.[3] For Aristotle, praxis is guided by a moral disposition to act truly and rightly, by a commitment to putting learned knowledge and ethical principles to work in social practice so as to further human well-being and the good life. In the contemporary academy, the term has been appropriated primarily (but not exclusively) by scholar activists on the Left committed to egalitarian social justice, and its lineage is often associated with Marx, Gramsci, Freire, and Hooks, among others. For social scientists, the promise of praxis is the prospect of advancing communication of ideas and insights beyond academic audiences and institutional boundaries, and specifically working to close the gap between the unjust, hierarchical institutional order of the larger world around us and the visions, ideals, and commitments that inform our teaching and research endeavors.

The general aspirations associated with praxis seem familiar and simple enough. But the endeavor of praxis, of active engagement with and in the public world beyond academic life, is complicated and rife with challenges. Public engagement often requires a fundamental shift from the largely contemplative, insular, pacific world of the college campus to the unruly, contentious, unpredictable world of social movement activists, interest group advocates, public officials, journalists and media interpreters, and even armed adversaries. Much publicly-engaged praxis requires performing in new forums and formats, in language and substance that are quite different from and even alien to intellectual discourse. In particular, engagement in public life often demands a level of instrumental thinking that clashes with more open ended, reflexive modes of intellectual inquiry focused on understandings that yield no clear answer or easy solution. And

Michael McCann is Gordon Hirabayashi Professor for the Advancement of Citizenship at the University of Washington (mwmccann@u.washington.edu). His research focuses on the politics of rights and rights-based struggles for social justice, with an emphasis on challenges to race, gender, and class hierarchies. He currently serves as Director of the Harry Bridges Center for Labor Studies at UW, a center of publicly-engaged intellectuals addressing issues of working people around the world. *He would like to thank his colleagues in the Harry Bridges Center for Labor Studies for all of their inspiration and support. Special thanks are due to his colleague and co-author, political scientist George Lovell, who has provided great friendship, motivation, and leadership by example in recent years. This essay covers much terrain that echoes George's experiences as well as expresses their shared ideas on a wide range of matters. Finally, he would also like to thank editor Jeffrey Isaac for encouraging him to write this essay and for developing this special theme issue of* Perspectives on Politics *that treats labor issues.*

doi:10.1017/S1537592716000116
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https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592716000116 Published online by Cambridge University Press

public engagement often brings a host of perils unfamiliar to conventional academic activity. Speaking out and acting up on public matters can render us vulnerable to uncivil verbal attacks, harassment, and erosion of professional standing, including demands for public release of e-mail and other records for media or judicial scrutiny; for many people, especially in the Global South, public engagement entails risks of physical harm, incarceration, even death.[4]

This contrast between conventional scholarly activity and praxis beyond the relatively secure campus environment has led Colombian sociologist Cesar Rodriguez-Garavito to theorize that publicly-engaged scholarship—conventionally labeled "public sociology" in his discipline—is an inherently "amphibious" activity.[5] It requires, he outlines in a brilliant essay, the committed scholar to "lead a double life." Just as the amphibian must master both aquatic swimming and terrestrial maneuvering, breathing both under water and in open air, the engaged public intellectual must develop sensibilities and skills to engage with very different groups of others in very different institutional settings. Such amphibious multi-tasking offers promise as well as costs for the engaged scholar. The promise includes the potential not just for "making a difference" beyond academic boundaries, but for improving scholarship itself in various ways, including by expanding standpoints for viewing the world, which increases empathy with others and imparts greater "empirical thickness and accuracy" to empirical study; by addressing issues defined by actors and audiences who are the object of study rather than solely by academics; by increasing access to the actors and sites under study, resulting in more collaborative relationships between researcher and research subjects; and by stimulating the exhilaration that follows from partnership in the midst of politically contentious and socially consequential relationships. As such, praxis can work to challenge and reduce the closeted insularity, circularity, and overly-deterministic tendencies that can plague cloistered academic pursuits. At the same time, Rodriguez-Garavito importantly identifies real costs to public engagement, including role confusion and resource dispersion; capture by the projects and world views of one's research subjects; loss of analytic distance and space for making sense of events and relationships under study; and "burnout," as sustained public engagement can consume the researcher, reducing the capacity to produce scholarship.

Rodriguez-Garavito ends his account on a positive note, but I would add other challenges to his list. The most important are the professional pressures of the academic discipline that prioritize commitments that devalue or divert from engagement with non-academic publics. The development of professional knowledge generation, Michael Burawoy has written, has institutionalized a "battery of disciplinary techniques" and careerist norms[6] that routinely trump scholars' commitments to advancing social justice, inclusion, equality, and human rights, both within and beyond the campus community. Moreover, the competitive merit system of academic life arguably induces acquiescence to hierarchy, as the spaces of academic interaction increasingly are structured by the market-based forces of alienated competition and political compliance.[7] Finally, the powerful professional commitment to objectivity, impartiality, and rigor in research often is collapsed into a demand for ethical or political neutrality, which in turn discourages active, committed engagement—at least engagement directly joined to the research enterprise.

These constraints on public engagement are pressing and ever-present; many of us feel them all the time. But I, like Rodriguez-Garavito, believe that they can be overcome or side-stepped to a large degree. After all, as scholars we are already used to framing arguments for, and communicating ideas to, quite different audiences—undergraduates, graduate students, colleagues, administrators, alumni, parents, campus media. Indeed, the contemporary scholar must master multi-tasking, performing in multiple modalities and playing many different roles. It is hardly surprising that the primary forms of public engagement for many scholars are via phone, Skype, or direct interviews with media representatives along with writing op-eds, essays, and blogs for media dissemination, as these can be generated from the campus office and require the least transformation and translation of ordinary faculty activity to fit the public format.[8] Other types of public engagement modestly expand the range of performance and often elevate the challenges at stake, but depth of commitment to causes and people can provide the motivation necessary to step forward.

In the remainder of this essay, I will discuss one familiar route toward creating space, incentives, and support for engagement by scholars with non-academic publics. In short, many of us join or construct institutional collectives —programs, centers, working groups, etc.—on campus that connect in more routinized, ongoing ways our scholarship and teaching to public engagement with non-academic audiences. My discussion focuses in particular on one such institutional pathway that has been critical to my praxis: the Harry Bridges Center for Labor Studies at the University of Washington (UW). I begin with a short history of my own individual praxis combining scholarship and public engagement, and then relate how I became involved in building a variety of centers and programs that facilitated ongoing merger of scholarship, teaching, and local community political engagement, culminating in my current role as director of the Bridges Center.

Some Personal Intellectual, Professional, and Political History

In standard disciplinary terms, I am a political scientist who studies the "politics of rights"—the interplay of lawyers, judges, and litigants with rights-based social

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592716000116 Published online by Cambridge University Press

movements. My primary disciplinary affiliation is with the Law and Courts section of APSA. Substantively, much of my research has focused specifically on activism by workers and for workers' rights, especially the workplace rights of women and people of color, as well as on the relationships between labor unions and other organized groups or political struggles. These interests grew in part out of my early experiences as a construction worker in south Florida, which connected me with efforts to challenge racial segregation in the building trades and to mobilize worker opposition to the Vietnam War. Such experiences exposed to me as a young person to the many ways that the American legal system constrains political organizing by employees in workplaces and upholds the near exclusive sovereignty of property-owning business interests over workers.

As an undergraduate, I became fascinated with modern political theory[9] and began thinking comparatively about the different trajectories of state/capital/labor relations in Europe and the United States. This led to my early interest in the study of law and how legal systems shape economic development, focusing on questions about differences between centralized statist administrative law traditions in Europe and the more decentralized common law system of judicially structured capitalist and slave-based economic orders in the United States. I initially went to graduate school in political science with a vague commitment to exploring these topics, and those early interests have continued to inform in various ways most of my work as a professional scholar. Even when I am not addressing directly workers or labor issues, I usually formulate research questions that are grounded in a workers'-rights or labor-oriented "standpoint."[10] For example, one enduring theme of my writings on civil rights, civil liberties, and activist lawyers has been the shift over the course of the twentieth century in the United States from a focus on citizens and citizen interests as producers, and especially as *workers,* to identities as *consumers*.[11] These general interests in activism by, for, or in collaboration with workers have quite naturally invited, even demanded, my continued political engagement as a scholar with non-academic publics struggling for social change. My work as a scholar and my scholarship about work and workers together have constituted my subjectivity as an engaged scholarly laborer.

These interests did not fit comfortably within the mainstream discipline of political science, however, or so it seemed in the early years of my academic career. Fortunately, I cultivated early on a strong connection between my intellectual interests and the interdisciplinary social science tradition of Law and Society studies.[12] The Law and Society Association included a large group of scholars interested in labor law and workers' rights, and many prominent sociolegal scholars (including some first-rate political scientists) conducted fascinating, theoretically-sophisticated research concerning the many intersections of law, rights, and social movement activism. The interpretive turn toward studying "legal consciousness" of ordinary people influenced me greatly in the late 1980s, and it nurtured my own transformation from studying broad ideological currents of elite legal reformers in my first book[13] to focus on discursive praxis by workers and community activists "on the ground" in local contexts.

My second and probably most influential book, *Rights at Work: Pay Equity Reform and the Politics of Legal Mobilization*,[14] grew in large part out of this intellectual engagement with sociolegal studies. But the research was also grounded in my own activism in the movement for gender wage equity and related low wage worker issues, first on the UW campus and eventually around the nation, where I became an informed source of communication among activists in many local sites of the decentralized movement. For the first time, my scholarly research and activist engagement beyond academic confines merged quite seamlessly. Indeed, it is clear that the book would not have been nearly as compelling empirically and analytically, and may not have developed at all, without my direct engagement among the variously related activist publics.

The intellectual merger with law and society scholarship led me to develop a cutting edge program in comparative sociolegal studies (Law, Societies, and Justice, or LSJ) at the University of Washington and to devote a number of years researching and publishing about the political backlash against civil litigation in the United States.[15] But I continued my political engagement on and beyond campus—organizing a large multi-day conference on the corporatization of the modern university, participating in World Trade Organization protests, joining an ongoing organization of lawyers pressing for "access to justice" reforms, and much more. I also became more involved with service in the Law and Society Association. This included an appointment to lead a task force charged with developing a policy dealing with labor tensions in conference hotels and then election as LSA president in 2011, which increased my engagement in writing briefs for appellate court cases affecting workers and promoting more avenues for scholarly engagement in the Association, especially on issues of LGBT rights and immigrant rights. In this period, though, most of my activism emanated from national professional leadership roles, and thus was ad hoc, largely policy oriented, and only indirectly related to my scholarship. I was honored to play these many roles, but they were not the type of activism that was most familiar and gratifying for me.

The Harry Bridges Center for Labor Studies

The strongest and most sustained institutional connection between my substantive research interests and local community activism has been facilitated by my

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592716000116 Published online by Cambridge University Press

involvement in the Harry Bridges Center for Labor Studies. This connection to the Bridges Center was forged in the late stages of my activism and research on gender-based pay equity, grew throughout the 1990s, relaxed for a decade after 2000, and has in recent years again become my primary focus. My present role as Center director solidifies, formalizes, and intensifies my engaged scholar activist role in local politics.

The Center was founded by a collaboration of labor leaders and UW faculty members. Not surprisingly, the key inspiration was Harry Bridges, the Australian-born, longtime socialist, widely-admired labor leader and influential president of International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) from 1935 until his retirement in 1977. When Bridges' health began to deteriorate severely in 1990, ILWU members started to discuss how to memorialize him. Among the key leaders was Robert Duggan, a former Seattle dock worker who became a lawyer for the ILWU, as well as president of the University of Washington Alumni Association. Duggan posed the key question: If a host of corporate millionaires could be recognized by endowed professorships at the university, why not Harry as well? After all, Harry Bridges had delivered one of his most quoted speeches on the UW campus in 1937. Duggan and a host of other influential, diligent labor leaders quickly raised $1 million almost entirely from local workers[16] and convinced UW president (and political scientist) William Gerberding to champion the cause, against much local resistance. In 1992, the Bridges Chair and the Center for Labor Studies were born.

At present, the Bridges Chair endowment exceeds $3 million, and a host of separate endowed funds earmarked for student and faculty research support adds up to another $1.5 million, all the product of contributions from well over 1,000 donors, mostly workers and their unions. Center resources have supported research for over 30 books and a great many articles, M.A. theses, and Ph.D. dissertations over the years. The UW College of Arts and Sciences contributes a modest amount of support for annual course offerings and limited staff curricular and research-related administration. For over twenty years, the Center staff was located in a small, windowless, and marginal room resembling a storage closet; recently, the Center staff has expanded and moved into a larger, nicer, windowed, and accessible two-office suite on campus. The fact that the Center is funded almost exclusively by private donations ensures a great deal of independent internal control over its agenda of activities. Curiously, though, the Center remains very committed to its basic mission of "supporting research, teaching, and community outreach." "The Center focuses on labor's contribution to society. The Center promotes the study of labor in all of its facets—locally, nationally, and worldwide. Our mission is to develop labor studies, broadly conceived to include working men and women everywhere, as a central concern in higher education."[17] This mission self-consciously eschews both the overt issue advocacy and the training of labor organizers that some other labor centers embrace. Individual Bridges faculty, staff, and leadership routinely engage in overt advocacy—writings, speeches, event planning, marching, protests—but everyone consciously strives to draw a line between Center-sponsored and individual action. At the same time, we recognize that research and public education are in fact important forms of *indirect* advocacy, in that they aim to redirect public attention to concern about workers, their interests, their rights, and their struggles. Indeed, the Center works hard to elevate labor issues on the agenda and in the purview of many publics—students, faculty colleagues, journalists, politicians, policy makers, ordinary citizens. In this regard, our endeavor aims to disrupt and challenge dominant business-centric narratives, issue frames, and story lines on and especially beyond our campus by introducing accounts regarding workers and work relations.

The Bridges Center is by design very interdisciplinary, although most faculty are in the social sciences, and official administration and leadership have been shared by the departments of Political Science and History, along with dedicated independent program staff. The Center lists over forty faculty associates from across the three UW campuses, along with several university associates representing professional, classified, and janitorial staff. Finally, the Center is supported by a large Visiting Committee that includes local labor leaders, community activists, retired faculty, and elected political officials. While the Center focuses its research, teaching, and outreach in Washington State, it has, reflecting the ILWU legacy, long expressed a commitment to addressing global dimensions of worker-related issues and connecting with labor groups and centers around the world.

Generally, Bridges chairs have served as Center directors and been the public face of the Center, responsible for: reaching out to the community, responding to and engaging the media, offering expert testimony, writing op-eds, and coordinating with the local labor and progressive community on educational events and advocacy projects, among other tasks. Seven UW faculty members preceded me as Bridges Chair and Center Director. This group included historians Charles Bergquist and James Gregory from the Seattle campus along with historian Michael Honey from UW Tacoma and economist Daniel Jacoby from UW Bothell. Three political scientists from the Seattle campus—David J. Olson (1992–1994), Margaret Levi (1996–2000), and George Lovell (2012–2014)—also served notable terms as Chair and Center Director. Each left a distinctive mark, and together they generated a robust tradition of direct collaboration with local labor unions and progressive community activists on organizing conferences, speaker colloquia series, publicity projects, educational campaigns, and protest activity.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592716000116 Published online by Cambridge University Press

My Work as Director

Once I stepped out of other leadership roles in 2014, I took on the position that I always expected to assume: Director of the Bridges Center.[18] As noted already, I had been involved with the center in varying degrees since its inception. My activism in the gender-based pay equity movement and research for *Rights at Work* connected me to many local public sector workers' groups affiliated with the Center. I joined colleagues David Olson and Margaret Levi in working on plans for a living-wage campaign at Sea-Tac airport (anticipating the later minimum wage campaigns) in the late 1990s, and I remained involved in a host of events and issues related to low-wage workers in the United States and abroad.

Embracing the Bridges leadership role relatively late in my career thus has seemed very natural, a bit like returning home, although many challenges and awkward moments awaited. It helps that it has been a very exciting time for the progressive working class movement in Seattle, fresh off the successful, highly influential $15 minimum wage campaigns and a host of other initiatives by or for low-wage workers building on the Occupy legacy. In particular, the local labor movement for the most part had embraced both recent LGBT activism and immigrant-rights activism and is actively struggling to address issues at the heart of Black Lives Matter. College students also seem more interested and involved in labor activism than during the years before the recession of 2008.

So what has this role required and enabled Center directors to do? In some ways, activity as director is very similar to other institutional leadership roles on campus. Much of my time is devoted to meetings with staff and standing committees, event and colloquia planning, financial decision making, fund raising, coordinating with other program leaders and with our deans, and the like. To be honest, there are many moments when the director role leaves me feeling much more like a hamstrung bureaucrat than a publicly-engaged activist. I am frequently called on to talk with journalists in conventional mass media (radio, TV, print news) about a host of issues, including the history of Labor Day, current negotiations by local unions, planned and actual strikes, pending policy issues like the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade agreement and minimum wage legislation, or Supreme Court cases such as the pending *Friedrichs v. California Teachers Association* and other litigation. This is hardly new as activity, although it requires me to stay attuned to what is going on locally. But I must admit that, however important and necessary, this is still the least gratifying dimension of my engagement, largely because the focus is on addressing substantive policy matters for abstract, unknown audiences. Strategizing and interacting *with* activists on advocacy politics is more exciting for me than commenting impersonally *about* issues and activism to media reporters and their mass consumers.

That said, speaking out publicly on issues matters because it is rooted in, and directly affects, ongoing collaboration with workers and their struggles for social justice. Indeed, nearly all of those people with whom I, as director, interact and collaborate are similarly committed to interrelated activities of research, education, and advocacy on issues of work, workers, and the labor movement. For example, the Center gives out over $100,000 in fellowships and research grants to graduate and undergraduate students each year. Some of this funding is earmarked for first-generation college students from low-wage working class (often minority farm worker) families, some is targeted to support education for students working toward labor-related or social justice-oriented careers, and some goes to support research or engagement directly on worker and social-justice issues. As such, the funding plays an important role in channeling young people toward activism. One of the exciting developments this past year was the formation of a new Labor Studies Student Association, spearheaded by an activist group within the UW graduate student union (UAW Local 4121), undergraduates in the United Students Against Sweatshops, and others who have experience or interests in worker-oriented advocacy. As such, my faculty mentoring role directly bonds me with a constituency of student activists on campus who are deeply involved in community politics beyond campus scholarly pursuits.

The biggest difference between Bridges Center activity and previous modes of engagement thus is my regular direct contact with members of the local community—union leaders, rank and file union members, progressive community group leaders, immigrant rights activists, activist lawyers, elected politicians and (mostly) their staff, policy analysts, and progressive business-community leaders—in forums and at sites off of the university campus. I underline that we do a lot of outreach to these groups, but we have established a sufficiently strong working relationship and reputation that they also routinely reach out to us for support. Again, the Bridges Center, unlike some other labor centers, neither trains labor activists nor engages in direct advocacy of issues. But we as Center members facilitate lots of activity, help to coordinate among many actors, and provide resources for dialogue, strategizing, consciousness raising, publicity, and the like. These aspects of my activity are closer to what sociologist Michael Burawoy calls "organic" public engagement. Organic public sociology, he has argued, is a form of engagement in which the scholar "works in close connection with a visible, thick, active, local and often counter-public" such as "a labor movement, neighborhood associations, communities of faith, immigrant rights groups, and human rights organizations."[19] This type of

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activity is redemptive because of the solidarity that is forged over time through struggle among known groups of committed people.

This engagement takes me[20] off of campus and into union halls, community organizing offices, politicians' offices, and sites of protest and picketing in the streets, workplaces, airports, hotels, and the like. I regularly find myself engaging with a wide range of local activists in intimate dialogue as well as in large group performances such as speeches and rallying appeals; in the past year I have found myself marching in protests for UW janitors, Seattle teachers, underpaid farm workers, fast food and Wal-Mart workers, airport workers, Black Lives Matter, and more.[21] I communicate with the mass media still, but often in sites far from campus, which usually moves me to shift the form, style, and content of my communications to a less academic and more politically-engaged mode. In all of this activity, I, as a representative of the Labor Center or independently engaged intellectual, am continuing the long, sustained tradition of "building bridges" among campus scholars and students, labor leaders, rank and file workers, civil rights and immigrant rights advocates, and other community activists. Several examples of such activity fusing academic and activist engagement provide good illustrations.

The Labor Archives of Washington (LAW)

One obligation that I inherited as Bridges director was finding a way to sustain our impressive and growing Labor Archives of Washington (LAW). The UW Special Collections long had amassed a substantial library of labor, workers, and civil rights records, but increasing volumes of material exceeded processing capacity and coordination. Previous Bridges Chair Jim Gregory in 2009 worked with labor historians and leaders to attract funding from the labor community to hire a dedicated Labor Archivist. Several hundred thousand dollars was quickly generated, and a search committee was appointed that included me with Gregory, several labor leaders, and library administrators. We ended up hiring an extremely well-qualified and dynamic young archivist, Conor Casey, from the Bay Area. Casey bolted into action, and in a short time revolutionized the labor archives—reducing the backlog of unprocessed records, reaching out and generating a host of new collections, undertaking campaigns to teach union and activist group staff how to collect materials, and digitizing all the collections for dramatically greater campus and public access. Many regional unions were thrilled with this attention and the increased exposure of their organizational legacies, so that eventually Conor's three years were extended, and around $600,000 was raised from unions, workers, faculty, and the Bridges Center.

But the futures of LAW and its archivist were uncertain. I thus immediately worked to win from the deans of Arts and Sciences $50,000 of annual funding to supplement our privately-raised funds, along with a pledge to fund the Archivist's entire salary when those donated funds were depleted. This was a huge boost to solidifying already strong relations between the Center and the activist labor community. But this was just prelude to a bigger development: the Washington state legislature and governor responded to a strategy initiated by the Bridges Center and the Washington State Labor Council to provide permanent funding for the Labor Archivist, an archival assistant, and more. Working to reorganize LAW with this new funding has absorbed much of my time over the last nine months. This again has involved lots of on-campus bureaucratic coordination and financial maneuvering, but it also has taken us out into the community to work with the labor community, which in turn continually enlists us in direct collaboration and support for ongoing campaigns for workers' rights, civil rights, immigrants, and the like. LAW is a dynamic center of outreach, collaboration, mutual education, and community building with progressives around our state.

The SeaTac-Seattle Minimum Wage Campaign History Project

One good example of the dynamic linkages between archival history and current local activism over the last year has been the SeaTac-Seattle Minimum Wage Campaign History Project. This project has aimed to construct a digital web archive documenting the history of the influential local campaigns for a $15 minimum wage in 2013–2014 and their ongoing catalytic effects throughout the state and the nation. We have assembled about sixty interviews and oral histories (45-120 minutes each) with key participants—union leaders, rank and file workers, civil rights and community groups, faith leaders, business supporters and opponents, politicians—along with news articles, pictures, videos, and material artifacts from the path-breaking struggles.[22] Following the examples of previous digital web projects on worker history pioneered by Bridges colleague James Gregory, I initially envisioned the minimum wage project, generated funding from several sources, enlisted our Labor Archivist as co-director, and recruited a group of committed activist graduate and undergraduate students (most already associated with the Bridges Center) to work on the project. From the start, this project married classic scholarly activity to engagement with community activists on an important public issue. We trained the students in the protocols and technology of recorded interviews as well as news article processing and web archive construction. They conducted nearly all the interviews,[23] almost all of which were off campus at the sites chosen by interviewees, all around the region and in distant cities like Chicago, Los Angeles, and Washington, DC. The students also did the bulk of transcribing, editing, and polishing the interview

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592716000116 Published online by Cambridge University Press

digital files and transcripts. The result will be the most comprehensive and accurate empirical record of the struggles for a $15 minimum wage; the web archive will be available to scholars, students, journalists, and activists for many decades to come.

It is an understatement to say that this has been a new endeavor for me, one that required thinking and acting much more like a historian than a political scientist, and as much like an activist as a scholar. The project has, moreover, expanded greatly my connections with labor activists throughout the region. I had known some of the key actors and participated in previous ventures with some of them, and I had met many of them in earlier conferences that the Bridges Center sponsored related to initial phases of the minimum wage campaigns. But this project not only has built new bridges and fortified connections in providing a public platform for a history of the activism; it also facilitated communications and collaboration among local activists and with us in the Bridges Center related to a host of ongoing campaigns around workers' issues and social justice. Specific activities have included joining events demanding effective implementation of the minimum wage policies; working to form a Workers' Rights Center that will help enforce the minimum wage, sick leave, and other laws; leading demands to adopt the $15 minimum wage policy on the UW campus, including for undergraduate workers, and at the state level; planning a series of events to honor and reenact the famous 1919 Seattle General Strike; and more.

Political Campaigns for Faculty Unionization

Another area of activism that we in the Bridges Center have taken up involves political campaigns for faculty unionization, both on and beyond our campus. While this has entailed activity by us faculty in campus sites, the unionizing struggle has entailed engagement with colleagues, union leaders, community allies, and administrators in a decidedly non-scholarly mode. Consistent with our mission and tradition, the Bridges Center and its associates have not taken a direct advocacy role in the unionization campaign. However, we have worked with supporters of the campaign to plan public forums on the issues, to bring in speakers with expertise in faculty union experiences around the nation, to generate data on faculty unions and about the historical role of unions, and to elevate the general debate. I have had to walk a challenging, sometimes frustrating, line between overt advocacy as an engaged faculty member and merely facilitating dialogue, teaching, research, and consciousness-raising among colleagues as the Bridges Director. In the process, this activity has further connected us to the broader labor community in the state, including to union activists at other universities as well as K–12 teachers in the Washington Education Association. One directly related event was a forum that our LSSA group organized around the much publicized and successful teachers' strikes in Seattle and Pasco during the fall of 2015, the former of which had motivated many of us to join pickets periodically in the streets around Seattle schools the previous fall. Involvement in the faculty unionization campaign also has built on earlier Bridges Center engagement variously with janitors, classified staff, graduate students, and other unionized workers on our campus.

Advisory Committee on Trademarks and Licensing

A third form of engagement again connects campus activism to workers around the world, including factory workers in the Global South. I had periodically been involved in limited ways with the campaigns to challenge and change the work conditions of college apparel production in Central America and Asia, including working with our dynamic local United Students Against Sweatshops chapter. My role as Bridges director and previous engagement has recently led to appointment as faculty representative to the UW President's Advisory Committee on Trademarks and Licensing.[24] This again is to some degree a bureaucratic committee role, but it is also highly political and contentious in character, as we deal with a host of issues that directly challenge corporate power routinely subjecting workers in the Global South to brutal conditions and poor wages. The committee officially works with the Worker Rights Consortium and the Fair Labor Association, but its activities go far beyond this relationship. My role as Bridges Director and my past activism again provide the motivation for both my appointment and my willingness to escalate involvement around these issues.

Public Engagement and My Scholarship

Finally, it is worth returning to my initial reflections on how public engagement has continued to inform as well as be informed by my scholarship. After devoting the better part of 2000–2010 to projects on civil disputing and reactionary media constructions of rights litigation in the United States, I have returned to scholarship that connects workers, rights mobilization, and law. This includes several historical essays on how progressive-cause lawyers in the NAACP and ACLU shifted from a socialist politics focusing on workers' issues to consumer-oriented rights strategies over the twentieth century, as well as a long essay on the radical rights praxis of Black union leader A. Philip Randolph, both highlighting the class dimensions of the current neoliberal and allegedly post-racial era politics.[25] But the closest connection between my Bridges Center role, local labor activism, and scholarship is an ambitious book project on Filipino salmon cannery workers that I am co-authoring with former Bridges Director and present Bridges Chair George Lovell. I first imagined the project in the mid-1990s through involvement with the Bridges Center, where I met a host

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592716000116 Published online by Cambridge University Press

of activists in or related to ILWU Local 37. I learned of the murders of two young activists, which a civil trial eventually exposed as orchestrated by a corrupt union boss and U.S.-supported President Ferdinand Marcos of the Philippines, as well as the alternately triumphant and tragic experiences of workers mobilizing around civil rights lawsuits in the 1970s; the most dramatic lawsuit produced the infamous *Wards Cove v. Atonio* ruling, in which the U.S. Supreme Court substantially narrowed actionable claims of employer discrimination against workers. This led me to interview about twenty activists and plan a book, although other scholarly projects and institutional roles (chair of Political Science, founding of LSJ) pushed the book aside.

In 2010, as I began to reconnect with the Bridges Center, I asked Lovell to join me in resuming research and writing the book, with the help of a large National Science Foundation research grant. The Bridges Center connected me to this project in a host of ways—by early engagement with the extraordinary African American civil rights and worker activist Tyree Scott, as well as with Teri Mast and other activists in the Alaskan Cannery Workers Association; by exposure to the Seattle Civil Rights and Labor History digital archive that contained extensive records and research about the ACWA and Filipino workers, all linked to the much larger original collection in the UW libraries; and by the Center's continuous organizational and financial support for our research. Our up-close, bottom-up, semi-ethnographic social history of Filipino migrant workers simply would not have been possible without our connection to the Bridges Center, both of which in turn continue to connect us to contemporary as well as past workers' group activism in countless ways.[26] Our growing expertise on this history and its implications for past workers' rights struggles has increased our role as a resource for many contemporary campaigns. This book project is a great example of how scholarship and activism, on-campus intellectual pursuits, and public engagement well beyond campus can be routinely fused in continuous ways.

Conclusion: General Implications and Reflections

My general aim here has been to show how campus-based programs and centers like the Harry Bridges Center for Labor Studies can facilitate, support, and promote ongoing engagement by scholars with publics beyond campus and traditional academic endeavors. In a host of ways that I have touched on briefly, the Bridges Center enables scholars to fuse teaching, research, and advocacy in engaged public praxis, especially in our local community. Involvement in the Center greatly reduces the need for faculty initiative and many transaction costs of activism, as engagement is a routine part of everyday activity and responsibilities in the Center. Again, while we regularly reach out to the activist community, local labor, civil rights, immigrant rights, and other activists reach out to us just as often and invite our engagement and support. And it has become quite obligatory for me and my colleagues to respond as best we can to such regular entreaties and opportunities for collective praxis. Unlike much policy-oriented advocacy though mass media, which is an important part of my Center role and longstanding commitment as a public intellectual, organic local involvement builds and thrives on solidarity, on collaborating with, rather than speaking for, an ever expanding community of known others who share common causes.

Another of my themes has regarded how this public engagement can greatly enhance research. My praxis has exposed me, a privileged white male university professor, to intriguing people, topics, and events that might have remained largely invisible and silent without the Bridges Center connection. Virtually all of my research has reflected in some ways and degrees a labor-oriented standpoint of analysis, and several of my books have been researched while active in a local workers' struggle or in regular interaction with activists whose past struggles are my primary topic. As Rodriguez-Garavito has argued, such close engagement with the activists whom I study has expanded my understanding of what they do, my empathy for their aspirations, and my access to knowledge about the strategies and contextual contingencies of their struggles that simply would not otherwise be available. At the same time, regular engagement with activist communities has pushed and helped me to share my knowledge as a research scholar more effectively with non-academic but sophisticated publics.

I am quite aware that such mixing of activism and scholarship makes some professional colleagues uncomfortable. It is worth noting that I, when a young scholar, often dodged acknowledgement of my activism in my publications, even when it was directly related to my research. The reason was that I wanted the publications to be taken seriously for their analytical and empirical rigor, and I was concerned that candor about my activism may be viewed as compromising my impartiality or objectivity as a professional scholar. That concern diminished when my scholarship won attention, respect, and awards. But my initial concerns themselves were, I now think, ungrounded. My scholarship is highly informed by my activism, by my access to and collaboration with workers' rights activists. But my scholarship almost always has self-consciously aimed to analyze the *politics* of workers' struggles, to understand and amplify what they are trying to do, how they view the world, how they develop their political agendas and strategies, and how those struggles fare amidst the complexities of institutional and ideological power in (not so) liberal capitalist political contexts. Much like the official standpoint of the Bridges

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Center, I rarely advocate for specific policies or issue positions in my academic work; rather, I seek to conduct rigorous research into the character of class, gender, and racial hierarchies and how subaltern groups labor to struggle for egalitarian change. For example, my book *Rights at Work* did not advocate for comparable-worth policy approaches to advancing gender equity; it instead analyzed the complex dimensions of relational power involved in those policy clashes, and most generally how rights do or do not "work" in movement politics. My standpoint is always from "the bottom up," from the perspective of low-wage workers, but that is because an analyst must stand somewhere—there is no groundless Archimedean standpoint—and I try to be reflective and honest about that. I surely hope that my research helps to make variously situated workers, their interests, their aspirations, and their actions more visible and salient to others, including scholars, students, and the general public. But I, as a (privileged white male) scholar tend to leave the direct issue and ideological advocacy to the subjects of my research, who best can define their own interests and aspirations. As an activist and scholar alike, I am much more often accused of introducing too much political complexity, than of simplistic partisan advocacy of issue positions or policy change.

At the same time, ongoing engagement has involved challenges, costs, and risks. I must admit, for example, that I still remain relatively unskilled and frustrated by engagement with journalists in conventional mass media, even though I have written award-winning scholarly publications about the dynamics and effects of media reporting. I also am regularly conflicted about how to shift among uncertain roles and mindsets as researcher, educator, center director, movement collaborator, and advocate in particular moments. I feel like a clumsy, adolescent, or amateur amphibian, too often uncertain whether to swim or walk in different contexts. The obligation to keep the Bridges Center itself focused on research and education rather than advocacy in particular entails risks that regularly must be considered and negotiated, not least because we have reactionary foes watching closely and ready to pounce in potentially damaging ways on alleged improper activity.

But by far the most important challenge has been in the high volume of time and energy that such engagement demands, thus—when added to the demands of student teaching and mentoring that I take very seriously—reducing substantially my capacity for scholarly research (reading!) and writing. There can be no doubt that I have published less since I took over as director of the Bridges Center, as that role has been more draining than previous institutional leadership positions that involved at least some degree of public engagement. I have heard similar assessments by previous Bridges Chairs/directors. But none of my predecessors shrank from the challenge or considered the commitment in time and energy to be a net loss in efficiency. Indeed, I follow all of them in drawing broadly on the experiences of engagement to inform my research, teaching, and overall practice as a scholar. I consider myself to be fortunate to undertake this challenging but redemptive combination of activities as a publicly-engaged scholar.

Notes

1 Bulosan, quoted in San Juan, 1995, 143.
2 Tolkien 1994, 74.
3 The reference to "sensuous" activity invokes Marx 1845.
4 Several Turkish political science graduate students who work with me recently (late 2015–2016) found themselves endangered by their acts of signing protests against Turkish state violence.
5 This entire paragraph borrows amply from Rodriguez-Garavito's 2014 essay.
6 Buroway 2005, 5 7.
7 Ibid, 7.
8 See Skocpol 2014 on the Scholars Strategy Network regarding this type of policy advocacy through mass and social media.
9 By "modern political theory," I refer to the liberal social contract tradition and, especially, critical social theory that included Tocqueville, Marx, Weber, Nietzsche, Arendt, and varieties of post-World War II left theorizing.
10 On "standpoint" theory, see Hartsock 1983.
11 McCann 1986, 2014.
12 I attended my first Law and Society Association meeting in 1984, and that began a long, deep connection.
13 McCann 1986.
14 McCann 1994.
15 Haltom and McCann 2004.
16 A significant contribution from an executive at the corporate Pacific Maritime Association capped the original fundraising, largely to demonstrate respect that management had developed for the feisty Bridges and ILWU that he led.
17 From the Bridges Center website, http://depts.washington.edu/pcls/about.html#legacy.
18 The chronology is more complex than this account suggests. I was asked to start as Bridges Chair immediately on return from sabbatical in 2012, but at the time I was President of the Law & Society Association and joining the Faculty Council of the College of Arts and Sciences, which left me little time. I thus recommended that my younger colleague George Lovell take over as Bridges Chair and Director, which he did for two years. He then was drafted to become department chair in Political Science, vacating the Bridges role for me. If this switch in roles was not

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complex enough, I was deemed the Director of the Bridges Center but Lovell remained Bridges Chair, because I already held the much coveted Gordon Hirabayashi Professor for the Advancement of Citizenship on our campus.

19 Burawoy 2005, 8–9. Burawoy's list parallels almost exactly the range of groups that the Bridges Center engages.

20 I undertake most such activity as an individual scholar-citizen rather than as Center director, but my connections to the progressive labor movement through the Center often put me in position to engage in direct advocacy.

21 At my advanced age and extremely busy stage of professional life, I admit that I am less keen on availing myself to arrest by police than many others who join in marches and protests.

22 http://content.lib.washington.edu/projects/sea15/index.html. The initial rollout for the website was March 3 2016. A big event was held at the Washington State Labor Council and featured a press conference as well as celebration of activist groups and workers.

23 I participated in all of the initial interview sessions but left the students on their own increasingly as the project progressed; I ended up attending about one-third or more of the sessions, and I conducted a few on my own.

24 http://usas.org/.

25 McCann 2014, and forthcoming.

26 McCann and Lovell, in progress.

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