

# The Contribution of UP SOLAIR to Labor Empowerment<sup>1</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the contribution of UP SOLAIR to labor empowerment through education. It focuses in the period 1982 until the elevation and expansion of the School to UP SOLAIR. More than two decades of the past history of the School illustrates the practice of institution-building within an academe. In its recent history, the institution reinvented itself with a graduate program in IR to expand its academic program aimed at labor empowerment, social justice and economic development. The author asserts that labor empowerment and social justice cannot be attained if the country remained un-industrialized. Industrialization and economic development are not tasked to the labor movement alone. It is a collective effort by labor, management, government and the civil society sectors.

## INTRODUCTION

The UP SOLAIR traces its roots in 1954 when it started as the Labor Education Center (LEC) and renamed as the Asian Labor Education Center (ALEC) in 1958, with the primary objective of

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educating Filipino workers and trade union leaders on their rights and responsibilities. This was in response to the new era of collective bargaining and economic unionism as an offshoot of the Industrial Peace Act (RA 875 or the Magna Carta of Labor) of 1953 which answered the labor movement's demand for less government and US intervention in trade union activities.

The Center was elevated in status as an autonomous unit of the University of the Philippines and renamed as the Institute of Industrial Relations (IIR) in 1982. It further evolved and renamed as the School of Labor and Industrial Relations (SOLAIR) upon approval by the Board of Regents on March 24, 1988. Henceforth, the vision was to focus on higher level of education, research and training. The institution reinvented itself with a graduate program in IR in order to expand its labor education aimed at labor empowerment, social justice and economic development to the other actors of the Philippine IR system.

## **THE TRANSITION TO THE INSTITUTE OF INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS**

Gatchalian (2004) observed that the "period of Martial Law from 1972 onwards provided an increasingly inhospitable climate for the Philippine labor movement to grow and develop. Workers' education activities coincidentally experienced a decline as labor and social movements took on a more radical orientation. Internally, within the Center, noticeable signs of organizational malaise were increasingly evident. Rapid staff turnover, absenteeism and low morale and other signs of dysfunction consequently affected organizational effectiveness and levels of faculty and staff performance. Diminishing requests for training assistance and consultancy from the trade unions were likewise evident. The Philippine Ministry of Labor, in the meantime, established an Institute of Labor and Manpower Studies (ILMAS) as its research and training arm, which simultaneously rivaled and duplicated the activities and functions of the ALEC in many areas."

In order to maintain its relevance to the University and a possible dissolution or diminution as an institution, the ALEC leadership (1970-1977) introduced in April 8, 1975 a graduate program in industrial relations as approved by the Board of Regents. It pioneered in Asia the teaching of the special discipline in labor studies and industrial relations. ALEC became a full-fledged member

of the UP academic community performing the tri-functions of teaching, research and extension, the 40<sup>th</sup> degree granting unit of the university system. It offered Master and Diploma degrees in Industrial Relations (MIR, MAIR and Dip. in IR) in the school year 1975-1976.

Because of the graduate program, ALEC's research and publication outputs were augmented to include occasional papers, research monographs and the *ALEC Report* which carried news briefs, articles and other current and relevant information on IR trends locally and abroad.

After the death of Atty. Cipriano Cid, noted labor leader and considered dean of the Philippine labor movement, the Cid family donated Atty. Cid's private collection of books to UP IIR. In gratitude, the IIR library was named Cipriano Cid Memorial library by the Board of Regents in December 1976. The library became a specialized section of the Institute in the implementation of the academic programs and other objectives of the unit. It has one of the most comprehensive collections of books and other materials on labor and IR in the country.

ALEC's labor education programs from the 1970 to 1980s passed through an uneasy and difficult phase, with the few remaining training specialists implementing a new "workers' education program" or WEP with limited funding support. Its main task was to realign its training program with the Labor Code of the Philippines and the new IR system based on tripartism and compulsory arbitration.

The Board of Regents elevated the ALEC into a full-fledged Institute because *"the present functions of the unit have broadened in scope and its clientele expanded to accommodate three important sectors in industrial relations—labor, management and government."*

Institution-building was the hallmark of this period in the history of UP SOLAIR. The development of people, particularly of the faculty and staff, was vigorously pursued and many were sent for master and doctoral studies from UP and educational institutions in Europe, the United States, Japan and Australia. The Graduate Program in IR, Workers Education Program (WEP) and Research and Publication Program (RPP) were the regular programs of the UP IIR.

An institutional tie-up was set up with the Institute of Social Studies (ISS) of The Hague in Netherlands. Many of the faculty and staff of the Institute pursued their graduate studies in the ISS. Others studied in University of Illinois in Urbana, Champaign, USA, Keio University of Japan, and the University of Sydney and University of New South Wales in Australia. The rest completed their graduate studies at the University of the Philippines, Diliman.

The graduate academic offering in IR became the lead program of UP IIR. Its objectives were as follows:

- To train qualified students and staff members of unions, management, government agencies, and educational institutions for a professional career in the administration of labor relations and human resources development programs in industry and government;
- To undertake research that will examine policies and/or serve as basis for policy formulation in labor and manpower programs;
- To provide consultancy services through a continuing forum for the discussion and dissemination of pertinent information in the various aspects of industrial relations and manpower research, and other extension activities.

Under the Research and Publications Program (RPP), UP IIR researches and publications supported workers' education and the graduate academic instruction programs. Researches were also conducted in labor policy formulation and review. The researches, monographs and occasional papers were published in the *Philippine Journal of Industrial Relations*.

The UP IIR Workers Education Program (WEP) training were geared towards:

1. *Organized or unionized workers* - Due to the increased capability of unions in conducting basic labor education, IIR focused on advanced and specialized residential 2-3 week training of unions in selected industries. Courses offered included collective

bargaining, trade union administration, grievance handling, job evaluation, wage and salary administration, trade union finance and accounting, etc.

2. *Non-traditional labor organizations* - Non-unionized workers, associations of peasants and farm workers, community and civil society organizations, cooperatives and non-government and peoples' organization representatives in the government (e.g., *sangguniang bayan, sangguniang panglalawigan*).
3. *Special Program* - The IIR explored the possibility of operationalizing the concepts of an open university for purposes of accrediting actual experiences and expertise developed through active community work or leadership in the trade union movement.

A year-long seminar series was instituted which tackled important IR issues such as: Regimentation of Labor—the Philippine Experience; Labor-Management Cooperation; Basic Issues in Asian Labor Relations; Labor Relations in the Public Enterprises; and New Dimensions in Philippine Industrial Relations. Another significant development in the Institute was the gradual shifting of the cost in conducting training programs by requiring participating and sponsoring organizations to shoulder fifty percent (50%) of the total cost.

After the EDSA 1 People Power uprising, the Institute conducted in August 1986 a "Workers' Education Program on the Air" at the government station DZRM of the Radyo ng Bayan (Peoples' Radio) in Bohol Avenue, Quezon City. It was a regular component of the award-winning public affairs radio program "Tinig ng Bayan" (Voice of the People)

To contribute to the search for more harmonious and productive work relations, the UP IIR introduced and promoted the concept of labor management cooperation (or councils-LMCs) nationwide. This strategy was pursued in active collaboration with the DOLE, DTI and other relevant government offices and agencies that dealt with labor organizations and non-government organizations (NGOs) such as the Businessmen-Bishops Conference (BBC). The campaign succeeded in substantially toning down industrial conflict.

## **ELEVATION TO UP SOLAIR**

On March 24, 1988, the institution was elevated to the School of Labor and Industrial Relations (SOLAIR) upon approval by the UP Board of Regents. During this phase, the vision was to bring back the School to its former position as the premier labor education center in the country, focused on higher level of education, research and training. The School's research and extension programs expanded with the emergence of new forms of labor utilization (informal sector labor, contingent workers, etc.) and organizing (workers cooperatives, NGO-assisted initiatives, etc.). SOLAIR's training programs multiplied to include cooperative management, social movement unionism, peasant-oriented seminars, social enterprise development and grassroots entrepreneurship. Thus, the WEP was transformed into the Labor Education and Extension Program (LEEP).

The SOLAIR Organic Act was approved by the UP Board of Regents on January 1, 1991. SOLAIR's Vision is to "maintain itself as the country's premier educational institution in the field of industrial relations and human resources development and to be at par with the best among similar institutions overseas by providing quality and timely IR/HR instruction, research and extension services that promote the general empowerment of the major Philippine IR actors in the over-all context of professionalization, democratization and humanization of work and work relations".

UP SOLAIR's Mission states: "Committed to the empowerment of labor; enlightened industrial relations, and social justice, [SOLAIR] shall for this purpose provide the highest quality of instruction, research and extension services. The School seeks the enlightenment of workers and the strengthening of their organizations, and the democratization and humanization of industrial relations as a profession".

The School's mandate or objectives are:

1. To provide instruction to qualified students in order to professionalize the practice of industrial relations.
2. To assist, through workers education and other related activities in the overall development of free and democratic trade unions, peasant organizations, cooperatives and other types of workers organizations.

3. To conduct research that will foster understanding of labor and industrial relations, provide a sound basis for the review and formulation of labor policies, and enlighten the various actors in the industrial relations system.
4. To provide extension services to labor and other sectors and serve as a forum for the dissemination of information in the field of labor and industrial relations (SOLAIR's Organic Act of 1991).

The 'Organic Act' fully recognized the School's three major programs: the Graduate Studies Program in Industrial Relations, the Research and Publications Program, and the Labor Education and Extension Program.

The School gave birth to two major labor initiatives in the University, the All-UP Workers Union and the UP Housing Cooperative, which have been articulating the most urgent welfare concerns of the UP faculty and staff. The School has also helped give practical orientation to the emergent workers' cooperatives which took over the huge pineapple, rubber, palm oil, and other plantations in Mindanao.

UP SOLAIR, in cooperation with the Friedrich-Ebert Stiftung (FES), conducted industry-wide conferences and published their proceedings. Among these conferences were on the transport industry in 1989<sup>2</sup> and the construction industry in 1990<sup>3</sup>. Research conferences on agrarian reform were also conducted and published in 1990 and 1991<sup>4</sup>.

In 1992, there was a proposal to transfer and integrate the School's graduate studies program to another UP unit. Its research and extension functions were recommended for transfer to the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE).

<sup>2</sup> Teodosio, V.A., PB Bandayrel, Jr. and GL Labastilla, (1989), *Labor and the Transport Industry in the Philippines*, Quezon City: UP SOLAIR

<sup>3</sup> Teodosio, V.A., MR Serrano and GL Labastilla (1990), *Labor and the Construction Industry in the Philippines*, Quezon City: UP SOLAIR

<sup>4</sup> Refer to Ofreneo, Rene and M. Serrano (eds) (1990), "Trade Unionism and Agrarian Reform", *Philippine Journal of Labor and Industrial Relations*, and Ofreneo, Rene and M. Serrano (1991), *Problems and Prospects of Agrarian Reform Implementation*.

To counter the threat, the School justified that its IR program is internationally recognized and linked with the world's academe with programs in IR through the International Industrial Relations Association (IIRA) based in Geneva, Switzerland and an affiliate of the International Labor Organization worldwide. In addition, the IR discipline is vital to national development and the demand for IR program was strong as shown by the increasing enrollment of the School.

During the same period, SOLAIR responded to the *Pahinungod* (volunteer) program of the University and launched the SOLAIR Free Labor Leadership Institute (SOFLLI). It gave free seminars on trade unionism, cooperativism and self-managed enterprises.

The School tied up with the DOLE's Workers Organizations and Development Program (WODP) to strengthen extension activities to labor organizations nationwide. This program was renewed in 1996. With the promotion of voluntary arbitration as a means of settling disputes, several senior faculty members of SOLAIR were accredited as voluntary arbitrators by the Philippine Association of Voluntary Arbitrators (PAVA).

In the field of research, the School conducted 6 major research projects in 1995. Among these were impact assessments of the Special Program for the Employment of Students (SPES) and the *Tulong Alalay sa Taong may Kapansanan* [Assistance to People with Disabilities] (Tulay 2000) of the government's Social Reform Agenda.

Furthermore, the administration initiated the implementation of training programs to enhance the capabilities of government employees through a MOA with the Civil Service Commission signed in 1995 and renewed in 1998.

## **EXPANSION OF THE INSTITUTION**

In line with the Vision-Mission of the School, the school launched the 3-pronged program of consolidation, expansion and modernization of the School's programs and facilities beginning November 1995. This resulted to the following:



1. The increase in student enrollment by more than 50% from 250 or more to 500 a semester.
2. The successful elevation of the IR graduate courses to the UP system program implemented in UP Cebu, Mindanao and Baguio in response to the demand from regions experiencing transformation.
3. The expansion of the School's research and extension programs into 3 centers- Center for Labor and Grassroots Initiatives (CLGI), Center for Industry Productivity and Competitiveness (CIPC) and Center for the Administration of Labor Justice (CaLJ).
4. The rehabilitation and modernization of the School buildings and facilities.
5. The various awards reaped by the School at the University and national levels.

Some faculty members, students and alumni participated and presented papers in the IIRA Congresses in Taipeh, Taiwan and in Bologna, Italy. In 1996, the School formalized a tie-up with the Employers' Confederation of the Philippines (ECOP). The Schools' HRD seminar series were extended to various member organizations of the ECOP. The SOLAIR-DOLE cooperative undertaking on the WODP program was likewise extended in 1996. It extended the cooperative undertaking with the Civil Service Commission (CSC) in 1998 for the capability building training of government employees.

The National Academy of Voluntary Arbitration (NAVA) at UP SOLAIR was established which was a joint undertaking with the National Conciliation and Mediation Board (NCMB), Tripartite Voluntary Arbitration Council and the Philippine Association of Voluntary Arbitration (PAVA). The aim was to promote voluntary arbitration as an alternative mode of settling industrial disputes to foster industrial harmony (Foz 1972).

Researches by faculty and staff were enhanced. The UP SOLAIR paper presenters in the 13<sup>th</sup> World Congress of IIRA in Berlin, Germany in 2003 were supported by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung foundation. In the Asian IIRA Congress in Seoul, Korea in 2004, it was the CLEARED Foundation that gave support.

UP SOLAIR has established academic linkages with the following international educational institutions such as Labor History and IR Center of the University of Wollongong, New South Wales, Australia; Industrial Relations Research Association (IRRA) of the US; International Institute of Social History of Amsterdam Osaka University (Economics and Law), Osaka, Japan; and Labor and Personnel College, Renmin University, Beijing, China.

Presently, UP SOLAIR is a regular member of the International Industrial Relations Association (IIRA) based in Geneva, Switzerland which was founded in the academic circles of the United States of America. The school has co-hosted with the Philippine Industrial Relations Society, Inc. (PIRS) the first and fourth Asian Regional Congresses of the IIRA. It has also hosted national and international conferences on labor movements, globalization, economic development, etc. Among these major conferences were: "Labor and the National Centennial" in 1996; "Sandaang Taon ng Kilusang Paggawa, 1902-2002" (100 Years of the Labor Movement 1902-2002), "The Industrial Debacle and the Economic Alternatives for the Philippines" co-sponsored with the Fair Trade Alliance<sup>5</sup> in 2002.

UP SOLAIR also formalized its links with local professional associations in IR and HR like the Personnel Management Association of the Philippines (PMAP), Philippine Society for Training and Development (PSTD), Philippine Association of Labor Management Councils (PALMCO) and Philippine Association of Labor-Management Council Professionals (Philamcop).

## THE GRADUATE STUDIES PROGRAM

Being the only school of labor studies and industrial relations in the country, the Graduate Studies Program (GSP) in IR has grown as one of the biggest graduate schools in the UP system. In the second semester of AY1999-2000, the UP SOLAIR had 385 graduate students in the home campus in UP Diliman, Quezon City. The IR graduate studies program was elevated in 1997. It was offered nationwide by the UP System in Davao City in UP Mindanao, in UP

<sup>5</sup> Ofreneo, Rene (ed) (2002), *Philippine Journal of Labor and Industrial Relations, Quezon City: UP SOLAIR*

<sup>6</sup> The Board of Regents in its 1104<sup>th</sup> meeting in December 20, 1996 approved the system wide offering of SOLAIR programs/courses.

College Cebu of the UP Visayas and in UP Baguio in Northern Luzon<sup>6</sup>.

The graduate program has a ladder type structure: a student enters first the Diploma of Industrial Relations (Dip. IR) program (21 units), after which he or she may pursue further studies to complete the whole Master of Industrial Relations (MIR) program. The graduate program has trained qualified students and staff members of unions, management and government agencies, as well as professionals in educational institutions and non-governmental organizations for careers in industrial relations and human resource development.

The School has 13 regular faculty members, 11 part time professorial lecturers. Eleven faculty members have doctoral degrees, and the rest have master's or law degrees with rich experiences in the practice of labor management relations and human resource development at the workplace, industry, and national policy levels.

The graduate studies program (GSP) in industrial relations is multidisciplinary. The program integrates various disciplines concerned with the problems of work and work relations, such as the social sciences (sociology, political economy, psychology), management, law, social work, industrial engineering and statistics. The curriculum provides the students various options to develop their competencies. Students are required to finish basic integrative (core) courses, while developing expertise in any of the four areas of specialization — labor management relations, human resource development, comparative industrial relations, and labor policy administration.

## **TRAINING, RESEARCH AND PUBLICATIONS**

In December 20, 1996, the Board of Regents created three centers in order to expand UP SOLAIR's labor education and extension programs- the Center for the Administration of Labor Justice (CaLJ), the Center for Industry Productivity and Competitiveness (CIPC) and the Center for Labor and Grassroots Initiatives (CLGI)<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> Minutes of the 1104<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Board of Regents, BOR room, Quezon Hall, UP Diliman, Quezon City, December 20, 1996.

The centers' research and extension activities are focused on the following: to promote grassroots entrepreneurial skills in labor based enterprises such as workers' cooperatives; the promotion of labor justice through specialized and advanced workers education and trade unionism, including collective bargaining, disputes settlement, arbitration and the like; and the enhancement of productivity and competitiveness of human resources through seminars and training especially to develop skills and competencies of those in the middle (supervisory) and managerial levels. The most popular training program of the School is the *Workers' Institute on Labor Laws (WILL)*.

More than 3,000 participants annually have participated in the School's short term 2-3 days certificate programs. Participants were mostly managers, government officials, labor leaders, and practitioners from the private, public and civil society sectors.

With a core faculty of researchers and practitioners and supportive linkages with its local and international network, the UP SOLAIR is in a situation to play a major role in developing programs in industrial relations which meet the challenges of globalization. The rich and varied experience of UP SOLAIR in the fields of industrial relations and human resource development is a unique advantage for the University, towards the promotion of labor empowerment, social justice and sound industrial relations in the wider context of total human development.

Researches undertaken at the School dealt with issues and problems in industrial relations, within the Philippine and Asian context. Studies undertaken include the following: compensation, wage policy, the best human resource practices, collective bargaining trends, productivity, labor flexibility, gender at the workplace, agrarian relations, cross country industrial relations, trade unionism, industrial restructuring, overseas labor migration, and the like.

The School has regularly organized symposia, conferences, and workshops on industrial relations wherein distinguished local and international scholars, trade union and business leaders, as well as government officials interact in a social dialogue over key issues affecting industrial relations.

Most of the scientific papers on Philippine IR and HRD presented and published locally and abroad mostly at the IIRA congresses were research outputs of UP SOLAIR faculty, alumni and students.

Even researches of students had been accepted for presentation in local and international fora.

UP SOLAIR has provided, and continues to provide labor education, research and extension work with trade unions, farmers associations, NGOs, management groups, and government agencies.

## **SUMMARY AND ASSESSMENT**

The past two decades of UP SOLAIR illustrates the practice of institution building within an academe. UP SOLAIR has grown into a reputable school of labor and industrial relations that has made significant contributions to Philippine labor empowerment and economic development.

Formerly UP LEC and ALEC, UP SOLAIR started as program implementer of US ICA and AID projects to educate trade union leaders in the Philippines and Asia. Its long-term goal as an institution, pursued through labor education and the strengthening of the trade union movement in the country and Asia, is labor empowerment since trade unionism and collective bargaining will assure labor, the impoverished majority in a developing economy, a fair share in the industrialization process. This will also guarantee democracy in an industrializing society since the trade union movement at the core of the labor movement will countervail the powerful capitalist elites and government bureaucrats who are prone to take advantage of a powerless unorganized mass of workers.

The Philippine development strategies from 1950 to 1970s however failed. The trade union movement which UP SOLAIR helped nurture was confined to a small segment in the modern sector of society. With a very limited base in a non-industrialized economy, the trade union movement suffered from intense rivalries among unions and federations competing for the limited trade union membership. It was the number of trade union leaders and federations that increased while the number of trade union members remained the same and now declining in the era of rapid globalization and intensified trade liberalization.

With a vast army of unemployed among the informal labor, collective bargaining through trade unionism became unfavorable to the

unionized workers in particular and the informal workers in general. The process became either militant or legalistic or both which at least increased the workers' salaries and benefits in the formal sector. With the trade union movement in disarray and groping for direction during the 1970s, the UP SOLAIR (then ALEC) was also fighting for its own survival as an institution within the University.

It was during this critical period that UP SOLAIR seriously rationalized its being. It launched an institution building program (organizational development) that re-defined its mandate, vision and strategies. Reaffirming its basic mandate as an institution for labor empowerment through labor education, UP SOLAIR rationalized that empowering labor cannot be done on a piecemeal basis, that of educating the trade union leaders alone. Labor empowerment involves not only the organized labor in the formal sector of the Philippine industrial relations system but also the other actors- management, government and most importantly, the civil society sector operating in the larger informal IR system.

Hence, the ALEC reinvented itself with a graduate program in IR in order to expand its labor education to the other actors of the Philippine IR system, aimed at empowerment, social justice and economic development. Labor empowerment and social justice after all cannot be attained if the country remained un-industrialized. Industrialization and economic development are not tasked to the labor movement alone. It is a joint and collective aspiration and undertaking of all the IR actors that will benefit from it - labor, management, government and the civil society sectors. Thus, the UP LEC, ALEC became the UP Institute of Industrial relations and now the UP School of Labor and Industrial Relations.

When President Carlos P. Garcia inaugurated the UP ALEC building (Bonifacio Hall) in January 6, 1960, the *Dedication Program* published the President's paper "New Deal for Philippine Labor" with a portion quoted below:

The next 50 years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century will see the Filipino people waging a relentless and determined war for economic emancipation. Already, the battle lines are drawn. The outcome of this struggle will determine whether the Filipinos are fit to live in a free world of free men.

In manifestation of our nationalist goals, my administration is dedicated to the creation of a balanced agro-industrial economy that will be capable of giving to all our people the blessings of a decent, full and active life.

I intend that labor shall play a major role in the realization of our aims" (Garcia, Carlos 1959).

It is now 45 years after President Garcia wrote these thoughts. Have we lost the relentless war for economic emancipation? It is UP SOLAIR's task to continue and help win this relentless struggle.

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