

Bob Julian Interviews ILR Dean Harry Katz July 2005

Harry Katz, the Jack Sheinkman Professor of Collective Bargaining and Director of the Institute of Collective Bargaining at the School of Industrial and Labor Relations began his five-year term as Dean of the ILR School on July 1.

BJ: Harry, how do you feel about being appointed as the new dean of the ILR School?

Katz: Well, it's both a great challenge, and at the same time, a great honor. The ILR School is an important institution not only within Cornell but also in the wider field of labor and workplace studies. We are the pre-eminent institution of its sort in the country and in the world, and it's a great responsibility to make sure this institution stays in the leadership role it has played in the past.

BJ: Why did you seek the position?

Katz: A lot of people asked me whether or not I lost my marbles ... giving up the freedom and flexibility that you have as a tenured professor for all of the administrative responsibility you have as a dean. And I sought the position because of the commitment I have both to the ILR School and to Cornell University and because of the key role we play in leading study, research, teaching and outreach activities in the world of work. And so, I think it was just important for one of the internal faculty to be available for the role and I made myself available.

BJ: What do you see as being the things you will devote your attention to early in your administration?

Katz: One of the key issues is, there are enormous changes occurring in the nature of work because of pressures due to globalization, because of changes in technology. Work now isn't the same as work was when the school was founded. I think the key challenge is making changes in all aspects of the school that keep us in the forefront of the changes occurring in work and the changes occurring at the workplace. So, that will involve changes in the undergraduate curriculum, changes in the nature of extension and outreach activities. And at the core, I think the key challenge is, how are the activities that the school carries out, whether it be teaching, research or outreach, how are those activities responding to the many changes occurring in peoples' work lives? (Changes occurring in the location of peoples' work, just as an example.) We read every day about the importance of outsourcing and globalization and I think the key question is, is ILR well positioned to prepare our students and to conduct our research in

ways that respond to the changes occurring in terms of globalization and all? So, I think that's the number one thing I want to address.

BJ: Are these some of the same issues that came up during the search for the dean?

Katz: I was talking about these issues in the speech I gave to the faculty as part of the dean's search and I've been talking about those issues to faculty, to alumni, to students throughout the dean's search process. I've also been trying to prepare myself for the possibility that I was going to be chosen to be dean, so I've been doing a lot of homework trying to understand the issues and also get lots of peoples' views about what should be done to address those issues.

BJ: Do you prepare a list? Are any of these issues more important than others?

Katz: Clearly, globalization is as important as anything. It's changing where work is, how people work. It's creating additional economic pressures. So there is nothing more important than for us to respond to globalization. The other area where I think there is a really key challenge in the school is with regard to our outreach mission. We've had an Extension Division that has played a very important role as one of the central elements of ILR and I think extension and outreach are particularly under pressure because of these changes — whether they're changes in globalization or changes in markets and changes in where and how people work. So, another aspect of one of the key issues or areas where I'm going to focus initially in my administration is making sure our outreach and extension activities really meet the challenges of the day.

BJ: Do you have any ideas on how you can do that, in terms of outreach — new media, new audiences?

Katz: Well, one of the keys is, we have to make sure both the resident and extension faculty work together. We've had a traditional, at times somewhat awkward and artificial, divide in ILR between resident and extension faculty and I think that divide doesn't make as much sense any more. There still will be certain things that resident faculty do that extension faculty won't do and vice versa. But it seems to me that the key is to make sure that the outreach activities take advantage of all the current research that is going on in the school and that requires more coordination between resident and extension faculty. In terms of use of technology, clearly we have to use the web more actively to market our programs, to deliver our programs, and also to learn things through distance learning and other opportunities that one gets through the web. So, using the technology as well as changing the way we, ourselves, work as an institution are two key changes that are needed.

BJ: What's interesting about the ILR School is that the original mission as established in 1945 has been industrial and labor relations but the issues change and you have an opportunity here as the new dean of the school — and there is also the intent of that original mission of the school as formulated by Irving Ives, our first dean, and William Groat and our first faculty members, Jean McKelvey and Maurice Newfeld. How do you balance those two separate areas of responsibility?

Katz: Well, I think at the core we stay true to our mission. As I interpret the mission and as I have spoken about it during the dean search process, the core mission is to carry out teaching, research and outreach and the core mission is to work on labor, employment and workplace issues. I think those core aspects of our mission stay the same. What changes is how we go about doing it or what the current definition of work, employment and the workplace is. So, I think we can stay true to the mission but modify the sort of substantive content. So, work is clearly changing because of globalization but our focus on work and employment is not changing. So, we're going to use distance learning and other technologies to change the way we teach but teaching is still going to remain a core part of our mission. And also, another part of our mission as you pointed out, is our statutory mission. We have to pay special attention to the needs of New York State, its citizens, its organizations, its businesses, its unions, its workplaces. And we're going to stay true to that at the same time that we become ever more global in our outreach and in our learnings. So, I think you can do both but it does require a new energy and maybe a refocusing of some of our particular structures. But we can do that, and at the same time, stay true to the mission.

BJ: Those are awesome responsibilities. That's a lot to have on your plate but it's kind of an exciting opportunity.

Katz: I'm quite excited. As I've been starting the transition into the dean's job I'm struck by the fact that there are two things sort of hitting me. One is that every day, I draw heavily on the 20 years I've spent in ILR. I couldn't imagine doing this job without drawing on all the knowledge, all the networks, all the contacts, all the people I know because I've been there for 20 years. And at the same time, what I draw on is the research and teaching that I've done about organizational change. I've been spending a lot of time thinking about how to adapt ILR just as I have studied in the past changes occurring in the auto industry or the telecommunications industry. So, I'm drawing on both aspects of myself. I'm drawing on the history of being at ILR but I'm also thinking about how to change the organization in light of what I learned through my own research and teaching.

BJ: Can I ask you a pop question? You mention the auto industry. Talk about an industry that has gone through dramatic change over the entire history since the early days of the Ford car and with all of the current pressures on GM and Ford today. That's certainly been an interesting area to be examining.

Katz: Yes. I started studying the auto industry in 1980 and I've been studying it ever since because as you say, it's an amazing industry. It's amazing in terms of the importance it plays in the economy. I always like to remind people that 1-2% of all employees in the United States worked, in one form or another, connected to the auto industry, either directly producing cars or servicing cars or building roads. In 1980, what we were all worried about was whether the auto industry was going to leave the United States. I, along with many others, was quite pessimistic about the ability to sustain sizable domestic auto production in the United States. So, the good news is, here it is, 2005, and we have a very large auto industry in the U.S. The problem in the auto industry is not that the industry has left the United States. The problem is that there is a lot of organizational restructuring. The so-called Big Three — Ford, Chrysler, GM — have been losing substantial market share to the Japanese and other foreign producers. But interestingly, a lot of the foreign production is now not foreign production in the sense that it occurs in other countries. It's auto plants and auto production that occur in the United States but in factories owned by companies that are based in other countries, at least based financially in other countries. So, the good news is that there is a lot of auto production and auto activity in the United States. The difficult issue is, which companies are going to own that activity? What's going to happen to the employees who used to work in the Big Three as employment and production has been shifting to the so-called transplants, to the companies owned by the foreign-based producers? That's a massive issue in the country and we're in the middle of deep questions about the viability of the pension plans and the health care plans at the Big Three as production and activity is shifted to foreign-owned companies. Again, there is good news to the story that production has stayed in the United States and there is the difficult part of the news which is that there are transitions occurring in who has the work and what's going to happen to the employees as organizations restructure.

BJ: Just one follow-up comment on that. You mentioned about the restructuring but you look at General Motors — the large gap between the number of active workers today and the retirees. Just one statistic: from what I was reading, it costs General Motors \$1,500 for each car they sell just for health care benefits for the retirees.

Katz: Exactly. Those numbers are consistent with what I've learned too, and that's a very difficult problem. It's a difficult problem not just for General Motors financially. It's a difficult public policy

question. What do we do with organizations when you shift the composition of the workforce to where you are at that sort of point, where the ratio of the retirees to active has grown enormously? General Motors is wrestling with that and eventually, I suspect that it's going to hit the public policy arena. Congress is going to have to face up to the question and the auto industry is just beginning to face up to it, as the airline industry is now. *[And the question is,]* what do we do with these substantial pension funds and health care obligations? You can't just walk away from those funds. At the same time, they pose very difficult financial questions, not only for the companies, but I would say also for the country, as to what happens to the funding and what happens to the employees.

BJ: And this speaks directly to one of the key issues you mentioned just a few minutes ago.

Katz: Exactly. The good news for ILR is we're in the news every day. You read the newspaper. You don't have to look hard for a story that relates to work, employment, workplace issues. The issues are there. And the question for us is, how are we going to meet those issues? How are we going to address them? How are we going to stay in a leadership role with those issues? But the good news is the issues we address as a school are the issues that face the country and face the world. There's an enormous opportunity given the pressing nature of those issues.

BJ: The ILR School has a long history of attracting a very diverse and a very talented group of students who come here to enroll in our undergraduate and graduate programs. Why are we so successful in doing that?

Katz: First off, we're very proud of the fact that we have the most diverse student population of any school on the Cornell campus. We work hard to recruit those students and we work hard to provide an academic community, an intellectual environment that meets the needs of a diverse student body. The challenge is making sure we provide not only financial resources but an educational and social and community experience that meets the needs of a diverse student body. Once we provide that environment, the students will come. That's what's happened to us. We've gone out through recruitment efforts to recruit diverse students. We've provided a learning environment that, to our satisfaction and to their satisfaction, meets their needs and that leads to other students coming from similar communities and similar schools. It produces a virtuous cycle, as we like to say, and our challenge is to make sure we continue in a virtuous cycle mode. And you've got to stay in touch with the students. I have those diverse students in my classes regularly when I teach and you've got to learn from them. Just as a community we have to learn to adapt, we have to learn to adapt as individual educators. And as an individual, I've worked hard to try and do that and as a dean, I'll work hard to make sure our faculty continue to do that. We have a wonderful legacy to build on.

BJ: During our 60-year history, we have a large group of alumni, dedicated and talented people out there who are very interested in the school. Do you have a special message for our alumni?

Katz: Well, one of the messages is, I think, that one of the unique things about ILR is the degree to which the alumni stay active in the school. They're there not only helping us in terms of financial resources — they're strong contributors to the school financially — but in addition, they're contributors intellectually. It's through our alumni that we can generate so many of our student internship opportunities. The alumni often come as guest speakers. The alumni are often there at events providing opportunities for students to network with practitioners. And as you know, we have a very diverse alumni in a wide range of fields. Some alumni stay connected to law (labor issues) or HR issues (human resource issues). Others go into entrepreneurial lines that aren't directly connected to labor and employment; they're all connected to labor and employment in that everyone works. But in many ways, we have alumni who span all fields of interest and activity and again, the challenge is maintaining and continuing the wonderful networks that we have. So, if an alum is working as an entrepreneur in China, we can draw on that alum to help us get access to China both in terms of educational programs and in terms of internship opportunities for students. Or if we have an alum working in the hi-tech industry on the west coast in California, we can draw on that alum because some of our students, even though they go through ILR, they want to go become hi-tech entrepreneurs or work in computer sciences and we've got to maintain all those opportunities. At the same time, we maintain opportunities for the students who want to stay in the more narrow field of labor and employment and human resources.

BJ: One final comment. In one of my interviews with a graduating senior this year, he mentioned that one of the real strengths and what he really liked about this school was the close-knit, small, tight-knit community. *"I have access to my professors. I can talk to them in class, after class. I can see the professors in the hallway. I see the dean in the hallway. I can go up and talk to him."* That certainly left an impression.

Katz: Absolutely. One of the very, very nice things about ILR is we're a small school in a wonderful large university — and you want to take advantage of both of those traits. You want to have students have a sense of community both with other students at ILR and between the students of ILR and the faculty and staff of ILR. At the same time, you want our ILR students to take advantage of the wonderful things you get at Cornell. I just met with a group of incoming ILR freshmen-to-be. Down in our New York City offices, we had an event to meet those students and one thing I told them was to make sure they get outside the ILR School. They should go take advantage of the philosophy department or the arts courses or the literature courses or the language courses, the history courses or the cosmology courses or

whatever it is, whatever they're interested in. Cornell is a distinctive university with a wide range of course offerings and activities. And if you don't take advantage of those things at Cornell, you've missed an opportunity. It's a once-in-a-lifetime chance to be on a campus like Cornell and all of our students should take advantage of it. And I'm going to continue to work as a dean to make sure, again, that our students both get the advantage of a small college but the opportunity of a large university.

BJ: Thank you very much.

Katz: Thank you.