The Moral Urgency of Worker Justice

A Talk by Kim Bobo
Founder & Director, Interfaith Worker Justice

And panel discussion with Triangle-Area Faith and Labor Leaders:
Rev. Nelson N. Johnson, Beloved Community Center
Justin Flores, Farm Labor Organizing Committee
MaryBe McMillan, North Carolina AFL-CIO
Rabbi Eric Solomon, Beth Meyer Synagogue
Barbara Zelter, North Carolina State University, moderator

Please stay to join us for more informal conversation at the reception that follows the panel, beginning at 8:30
Speakers

Kim Bobo is the Executive Director and founder of Interfaith Worker Justice, the nation's largest network of people of faith engaging in local and national actions to improve wages, benefits and conditions for workers, especially those in the low-wage economy. Since 1996 she has been helping build interfaith groups and workers centers around the nation. She was named one of Utne Reader’s “50 Visionaries Who Are Changing Your World” in 2009. Kim is the author of Wage Theft in America: Why Millions of Working Americans Are Not Getting Paid – And What We Can Do About It, the first and only book to document the wage theft crisis in the nation and propose practical solutions for addressing it. The first edition came out in 2008 and the revised edition in 2011. The book and Kim’s extensive speaking on the subject helped coin the phrase “wage theft” and has helped get the issue of wage theft on the national radar. Prior to Interfaith Worker Justice, Kim was a trainer of organizers for the Midwest Academy, a leading national training institute for the progressive movement and social change, and Director of Organizing for Bread for the World, a multidenominational Christian organization to end hunger and poverty. She is co-author of Organizing for Social Change, the best-selling organizing manual in the country. Kim writes a column for the online magazine Religion Dispatches, and is the Choir Director at Good News Community Church, a multicultural congregation in the Rogers Park neighborhood of Chicago. Kim and her husband, Stephen Coats, have twin teenage sons, Eric and Benjamin.

Justin Flores was raised in both Long Island, New York and Ponce, Puerto Rico and moved to NC for college in 2002. Justin graduated from the University of North Carolina School Of Law in 2009, where he focused on labor and employment law. He decided to use his legal education towards assisting in the organizing efforts of Latino workers in North Carolina and joined the staff of the Farm Labor Organizing Committee, AFL-CIO (FLOC). Working with the only farmworker union operating in the South, Justin focused on contract administration, membership education, and community outreach around FLOC’s campaign to end human rights abuses in the supply chain of Winston-Salem based tobacco giant, Reynolds American. In 2011, Justin was named interim director of the Campaign for Migrant Worker Justice, where he continues to work with the membership and other contacts of FLOC, supporting education and organizing of the farmworker community.

Rev. Nelson N. Johnson has been active in the movement for social and economic justice since high school in the late 1950's. He served as a leader in the Student Government Association at A&T State University, in Greensboro, NC in 1970. Between high school and college Rev. Johnson served four years in the United States Air Force. He continues to work for social and economic justice in Greensboro as Pastor of Faith Community Church and Executive Director of The Beloved Community Center of Greensboro. Though involved in a myriad of initiatives, Rev. Johnson centers his efforts on facilitating a process of comprehensive community building, which include a convergence of racial and ethnic diversity, social and economic justice, and genuine participatory democracy. At the Beloved Community Center, he and his colleagues attempt to bring together the homeless, the imprisoned, impoverished neighborhoods, and other disenfranchised groups in the spirit of mutual support and community. Guided by his three-part emphasis of diversity, justice and democracy, Rev. Johnson is actively building relationships with and providing leadership within organized labor, faith groups and other public and private community organizations. He and other local ministers of the Greensboro Pulpit Forum led an active support effort in 1997 that resulted in a significant contract settlement for workers at the Greensboro K-Mart Distribution Center. As a result, he is frequently invited to share that success story at workshops and meetings, including those sponsored by the George Meany Labor Institute, the AFL-CIO of New York, and the Michigan AFL-CIO.

MaryBe McMillan is Secretary-Treasurer of the North Carolina State AFL-CIO, representing 120,000 union members throughout the state. With her election to this position in 2005, she became the first female officer in the history of the organization. In September 2009, she was elected by acclamation to a second-term. Prior to working for the AFL-CIO, she worked as Research Director for the Common Sense Foundation and as State Policy Analyst for the Rural School & Community Trust. MaryBe grew up in Hickory, North Carolina. She is a long-time social justice activist who became involved with union organizing as a student. MaryBe graduated with honors from Wake Forest University
with a Bachelor of Arts degree in sociology. She also holds a Master of Arts degree from UNC-Greensboro and a Ph.D. in sociology from NC State University. MaryBe is a member of the International Union of Operating Engineers (IUOE) Local 465 in Durham, North Carolina.

Rabbi Eric Solomon serves as the spiritual leader of Beth Meyer Synagogue in Raleigh and has rooted his rabbinate in a deep commitment to social justice. To that end, he currently serves on the Social Justice Commission of the Rabbinical Assembly (the international association of Conservative Rabbis) and on the rabbinical boards of Hazon (a Jewish environmental organization) and J Street (a Jewish organization committed to a peaceful, two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict). Locally, he serves as the President of the North Raleigh Interfaith Clergy Group, and as a board member of Uniting NC, a state-wide organization committed to making North Carolina a place that respects and values immigrants. In 2010, Rabbi Solomon was honored as a “Tarheel of the Week” by the Raleigh News&Observer for his interfaith efforts, and, in February 2012, Rabbi Solomon was named the inaugural Rabbis For Human Rights-North America “Rabbi-Of-The-Month” for his vocal support for social justice. In August 2012, Rabbi Solomon travelled to Ghana as part of a Young Rabbis’ Delegation sponsored by the American Jewish World Service to see first-hand the work that is being accomplished by AJWS-sponsored affiliates to end child slavery on the South Atlantic coast. Rabbi Solomon is married to Rabbi Jennifer Solomon and has three children.

Barbara Zelter is a Clinical Assistant Professor of Social Work at NC State University, with an emphasis on policy advocacy, community organizing, and human services administration. Her Masters degrees are in Social Work (UNC-Chapel Hill, 1991) and Theology (Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School, 2011). She has spent the past decades in statewide multi-issue activism in collaboration with a number of North Carolina nonprofits and grassroots efforts. Her major affiliation has been with the NC Council of Churches, educating and agitating for living wages, labor rights, peacemaking, and promoting the voice of those in the public welfare system. From 1997-2002 she served as founding Executive Director of JUBILEE, a project of the NC Council of Churches that built collaborations in 20 NC counties for economic human rights in the face of welfare reform. She has also been active with crisis counseling, refugee sponsorship, immigrant rights advocacy, undoing racism, death penalty abolition, mentoring young activists, and electoral reform.

Tonight’s panel is the inaugural event of the new CLASS Center at Duke

The Center for the Study of Class, Labor, and Social Sustainability is a collaborative effort among faculty and students from several area universities to promote teaching, research, and community engagement on labor and class-related issues, as these intersect with race, gender, citizenship status, and sexuality to shape our public life.

The concept of ecological sustainability has generated much public discussion and policy. The CLASS Center will explore the equally important question of social sustainability: how the quality of jobs and working people’s collective power—or lack thereof—affect individual well-being, social health, and democracy itself. In a nation that is becoming more unequal in wealth and power, the Center aims to raise awareness of how class inequality intersects with race, gender, citizenship status, and sexuality in ways which affect us all.

The CLASS Center will bring historical perspective to current issues such as the embattled human right to organize labor unions, the demise of living wage jobs with benefits, immigration and citizenship issues, the care crisis facing working families, and creative new forms of organizing that have emerged in recent decades such as immigrant worker centers and domestic workers alliances. As a center of engaged scholarship, CLASS will publicize research and courses that address class-related issues and seed campus-community partnerships to promote a fair and socially sustainable economy.

For more information, visit our website: http://sites.duke.edu/class/
With appreciation

The CLASS Center (Center for the Study of Class, Labor, and Social Sustainability) would like to offer grateful thanks to the many people and organizations that made this event possible:

The Duke Divinity School for generously providing this space

Duke Campus organizations which provided funding and/or sponsorship of the event:

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   Office of Black Church Studies, Duke Divinity School
   Sallie Bingham Center for Women’s History and Culture

Our community partners in arranging Kim Bobo’s visit:

   Durham Congregations in Action
   North Carolina AFL-CIO
   The North Carolina Council of Churches; NC Jobs with Justice
   The Workers Rights Project of the North Carolina Justice Center

The event organizing committee volunteers:

   Carol Brooke; Allison Cheyney De Marco; Mary Fulkerson; Ron Garcia-Fogarty; Amy Laura Hall; Sandy Irving; Robert Korstad; MaryBe McMillan; Gene Nichol; Adam Orlovich; Deborah Rosenstein; Nick Wood Ramon; Zepeda; David Zonderman

And the Executive Assistants of the CLASS Center and the Labor and Working Class History Association:

   Brad Wood and Ryan Poe

To join our mailing list please contact us at: CLASS-Center@duke.edu