

# Robert Emmett Doherty

*January 8, 1923 — February 19, 2005*

Robert Emmett Doherty, known to all as Bob, trained in history, was an early student of teachers' unions, taught and mediated in the wider field of public-sector collective bargaining, and deeply influenced the School of Industrial and Labor Relations as Associate Dean and Dean from 1977 until his retirement in 1988. He is fondly remembered as a colleague, steward and leader whose astonishingly deft sense of humor allowed him to speak plainly without offense, entertain while educating, and act in a principled way without appearing dogmatic or punctilious.

Born in 1923, Bob's early years were spent in Trout Lake, Washington. Growing up as the youngest child in a family of twelve, he experienced a rural childhood of church services held in local homes, playing in a high school football league with six-man teams, being entertained and educated via radio, and creating harmless, small-town mischief with his pals. In retirement, he wrote several short stories that recounted, with great wit and insight, experiences that happened (or could have happened) in this small, western hamlet; he published many in a book entitled, *The Ambiguity of Remorse*.

Bob's undergraduate education was interrupted by World War II, in which he served as a paratrooper in the Pacific. He graduated from Oregon State University in 1949 and received a Master's degree from Teachers College, Columbia University, in 1951—teaching high school in Oregon and New York both before and after obtaining his Master's degree. In 1959, he earned a doctorate from Columbia in history and began teaching American and labor history at the State University College at Oneonta, New York. In 1961, he was hired by the ILR School to teach labor history in its adult programs, and in 1967 he was made a full Professor in the School's Department of Collective Bargaining, Labor Law and Labor History. The 1960s were a time of historic change as the nation's public school teachers became unionized and the practice of collective bargaining took hold. Bob was prominent in analyzing such emerging public-sector issues as negotiation and mediation, contract structure, the right to strike, effects on educational quality, teacher job security, and emerging organizational issues for school districts.

At heart, Bob was a keen observer of the human condition who had a sharp eye for the ridiculous, a love of words and the English language, and a creative sense of humor. Under the pen name of Peter Pedant, he wrote several very funny, but salient, essays on academic pretensions, including the "epidemic misuse" among academics of such words as "parameter" (when "boundary" or perhaps "perimeter" is meant) and "impact" (when "effect" is meant,

not Webster's "collision"). He attributed the use of "impact," for example, to "literary impotence" among social scientists:

*Our contributions are of little consequence. They don't change things much, not even the views of fellow social scientists. That could be because we have been using the more gentle effect in describing complicated relationships. Effect is too tame, too amiable a word to catch anybody's attention. So we say "impact" instead since it conjures up thoughts of force and penetration.*

Bob believed strongly that those professors to whom the university had made a lifetime commitment had a reciprocal obligation of service. The ILR School came to count on the respect Bob had among faculty and staff for his honesty, conscientious attention to necessary tasks, willingness to make tough decisions, and unselfish loyalty to the School. He was Associate Dean from 1977-79, served as Acting Dean in 1979-80, as Associate Dean again from 1980-85, and was Dean from 1985-88.

Although Bob chose to serve as the ILR School Dean for only three years, they were three of the most critical years in the School's history. In 1985, when Bob assumed the deanship, the world of work was dramatically different from the world that existed when the School was founded in 1945. It was apparent that globalization, technological change, the growing regulation of the labor market, the changing composition of the workforce, and other factors had undermined several of the central premises on which the School had been founded. The School, however, had not fully come to grips with the implications of these historic changes for its curriculum, research, and outreach programs. Faculty, students, alumni, and other constituencies were all dissatisfied with the direction the School seemed to be taking, but did not necessarily agree on the strategies and programs that were most likely to succeed in addressing the School's problems. In some quarters, doubts were even expressed about the survival of the School. It is not an exaggeration to say that the School faced a crisis.

Bob confronted these challenges head on, dealing with them in a principled but pragmatic fashion. Under Bob's sponsorship, a distinguished panel of academics and practitioners conducted the first outside evaluation of the School. The outside evaluation was followed by an exhaustive internal assessment by a committee chaired by Professor Ronald Ehrenberg. These evaluations resulted in dozens of recommendations, most of which were implemented in the years that followed.

It was during Bob's deanship that the School launched the Center for Advanced Human Resource Studies (CAHRS), which brought together over fifty senior human resource management executives with ILR faculty in a partnership that continues to endure. During this period, the School also offered its first executive education programs. Simultaneously, Bob expanded and strengthened the programs the School offered to the labor movement. A score

of new extension programs were launched during the Doherty deanship. Planning new classroom, library, office, and conference center facilities accelerated during Bob's deanship, which ultimately resulted in over \$50 million of new and renovated facilities.

Perhaps most importantly, Bob, exercising superb qualities of leadership, repaired frayed relationships that had existed within the School and between the School and its external constituents. The mood in the School changed from one of pessimism to one of optimism. After three short years of Bob's stellar leadership, the School had restored its prominence in the field of employment relations and no one doubted its standing as the preeminent institution of higher education in that field.

Edward Lawler, who served as Dean of the School from 1997-2005, summarized Bob's contributions as follows:

*"Bob played a critical role in the School during some difficult periods. He was a straight shooter who didn't mince words and who had a special wit that many will remember fondly."*

Those who knew Bob will miss both his wit and his wisdom.

*Ronald Donovan, David Lipsky, Robert Smith*