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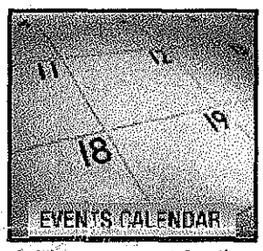

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UW-Madison Doles Out Dubious Degrees

by Charlie Van Hise *8:00am Thu May 16 '02* (Modified on 9:34pm Wed Aug 21 '02)
phone: 262-9036

UW-Madison's 2002 graduation ceremony includes two rather dubious honorary degree awards to apologists for university privatization and corporate globalization.

While many students, friends, and relatives should be justifiably proud of the diplomas they will be lining up to receive this coming graduation weekend, there are a few more dubious degrees being doled out by UW-Madison, as well.

Many may recall that last year's ceremony was marred by the keynote speech of Charlene Barshefsky, former U.S. Trade Representative under Pres. Clinton and chief apologist for such undemocratic free trade regimes as the World Trade Organization (WTO). Even as she gave another tired university-sanctioned plea for everyone to just jump on the corporate globalization bandwagon, UW graduates were facing a harsh economic future with unprecedented downsizing, slashed benefit packages and blatant union busting statewide. Thanks to NAFTA alone, Wisconsin has lost over 19,000 jobs since 1994 as companies shut down and relocated elsewhere in this race to the bottom.

This year UW-Madison has once again found it fit to honor not one – but two - technocratic architects of university privatization and corporate globalization. Among those receiving special honorary degrees on Fri. May 17th at 5:30 pm in the Kohl Center are Norman J. Latker and David S. Ruder.

Mr. Latker is probably most infamous for his role in crafting the Bayh-Dohl Act. Passed in 1980, this federal legislation allows universities to patent and then sell-off the results of public research to private interests. UW-Madison now ranks among the top ten in terms of royalty income, exceeding $20+ million per year. UW has also become rather fond of boasting about its numerous spin-off corporations – such as Middleton-based Gala Designs where genetically engineered dairy cows are being forced to crank out pharmaceutical products in their milk. A recent survey of U.S. industrial patents found that over 73% were largely

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The Whitebreads
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derived from work done at taxpayer expense at institutions like UW-Madison. Corporations get their own federal tax breaks – to the tune of $2+ billion per year - for giving kick-backs in the form of research "donations" to the same universities from which they later leverage lucrative results. One sure hopes Mr.Latker has gotten his fair share of the cream off the top of all this public largesse over the years.

As for Mr. Ruder, he's working diligently to tweak the legal standards in favor of U.S. corporations in the era of cutthroat global competition. He was chair of the Security and Exchange Commission under Reagan/Bush from 1987-1989 when the SEC ran interference on behalf of U.S. corporations facing domestic pressure for propping up the South African apartheid regime and other heinous dictatorships. Ruder has since moved on to become a law prof. at Northwestern and president of the Corporate Counsel Center. In case any budding profiteers want to capture pearls of wisdom straight from his lips, they should ante up $850 each to attend the 40th Annual Corporate Counsel Institute. The two day session includes several workshops addressing such vexing corporate issues as: "Mergers and Acquisitions," "Intellectual Property," and "What to do when the Press Calls." When not greasing the skids for private interests in the global capital markets, Mr. Ruder is greasing palms for the UW Law School, having raised $6.6 million for the newly remodeled "aircraft hanger" on Bascom Hall.

Mr. Latker and Mr. Ruder definitely deserve some sort of recognition for enabling such amazingly irresponsible mercenary behavior - maybe a delicious pie in the face?

add your own comments

Can Van Hise bake pies as well as facts?
by Richard Latker *9:34pm Wed Aug 21 '02*
address: Lot 1, DD228, Fei Ngo Shan, Hong Kong pristine@asia.com

Dear Indymedia:

I've only now come across your May 16, 2002 article "UW-Madison Doles Out Dubious Degrees." I know it's rather late for a reply. Still, the writer did have it wrong, and I'd appreciate the chance to set the record straight.

Thanks & regards,
Richard Latker

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I share Charlie Van Hise's suspicion of the 1980 Bayh-Dole Act, of which my father, Norman Latker, was a key architect (UW-Madison Doles Out Dubious Degrees, May 16, 2002). It was a

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fundamental rightward shift in intellectual property policy that, while perhaps bringing new drugs to market more quickly, has ultimately served to bolster corporate control over academia and erode research independence at state universities. The issue has prompted spirited disagreements between my father and I for many years.

Accusing my father of "amazingly irresponsible mercenary behavior" is quite ridiculous, however. And assuming that he has "gotten his fair share of the cream off the top", would be just plain wrong. What he did get was *fired*. His boss at the time--Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW) Joseph Califano—was a bitter opponent of the bill. Mr. Califano wasted no time in terminating my father's employment once it became clear that the latter was the intellectual force behind the legislation. While he became something of a Republican cause celebre, it was quite some time before my father was once again gainfully employed. Our family lived on government severance pay and, when that ran out, my mother's modest salary as government biological scientist.

Just before the bill came to a vote in 1980, Califano himself was fired by President Jimmy Carter, and my father reinstated for a time. But he was never employed or compensated by the giant agro-chem and pharmaceutical corporations that so vastly benefited from his efforts. While my father has received a handsome collection of awards and certificates over the years for his efforts on Bayh-Dole, he has never shared in the corporate spoils. No kickbacks, no stock options and no briefcases full of cash.

What had motivated my father, then a civil-servant patent attorney in HEW, to assist Senators Birch Bayh (D) and Robert Dole (R) in redrafting the country's patent legislation was not a desire to empower Monsanto or Genentech. It was a libertarian-inspired frustration that medical advances developed in universities were not finding their way to market, due to federal government lethargy in disseminating the intellectual property it controlled. HEW was sitting on a mound of unutilised advances in drugs and medical technology that it "owned" by virtue of the fact that federal funds had supported a portion of the initial research. Senator Bayh, one of the country's more liberal legislators at the time, had personal reasons to move the bill through congress: his wife was dying of cancer. He stated publicly that the sluggish pharmaceutical development pipeline had reduced treatment options for her.

Both Senator Bayh and my father believed that they were empowering universities—not corporations—by giving them

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commercial control over the innovations they developed. An obvious majority of research scholars at the time supported the bill, too. Few envisioned how corporations would use the new legislation to leverage control over academic research in public institutions. Nor did they really appreciate the deleterious effect the bill would have on American agriculture.

My father, who voted for Nader in 2000, nowadays spends his time picking hopeless fights with nasty suburban property developers. He might even enjoy the pie in the face you prescribe for him, if it tasted good and was delivered in a spirit of democratic debate. He takes attacks on his political legacy in good cheer. But to demonize him as a greed-driven "mercenary" when you are not acquainted with the facts is mean-spirited, and undermines the credibility of your argument.

Richard Latker
(former state secretary of the Wisconsin Labor-Farm Party, a convenor of the UW-Greens in 1987, and occassional all-night production editor at the Madison Insurgent)

ps: an aside --- (One of the few politicians at the time who did understand the ramifications of the Bayh-Dole legislation was Wisconsin congressional representative Robert Kastenmeier, who alienated core academic supporters at UW-Madison with his opposition to the bill. His arguments were spot on. Unfortunately, rather than speak out against the very corporate influence he had predicted would emerge, Kastenmeier began pandering to university corporate donors in the mid-1980s at the expense of his Dane family farm/Madison Left constituency. His muddled stance contributed to his defeat in 1990.)

pss: note spelling of Robert Dole (not "Dohl").