

George H. Hildebrand

July 7, 1913 – May 18, 2007

George H. Hildebrand, the Maxwell M. Upson Professor of Economics and Industrial and Labor Relations, died in Walnut Creek, California, on May 18, 2007 at the age of 93. He is survived by his second wife, Florabelle Hildebrand, to whom he had been married for 24 years, and his three sons. His first wife, Margaret, died in 1982.

George received his B.A. degree in Economics from UC-Berkley in 1935, his M.A. degree in Economics from Harvard in 1941, and his Ph.D. degree in Economics from Cornell in 1942. After service in the military during World War II, he began his academic career as an Assistant Professor of Economics at UCLA in 1947 and rose through the ranks to full Professor in 1954. In 1960, he returned to Cornell as a Professor of Economics and Industrial Relations and in 1970, he was elected the Maxwell M. Upson Professor of Economics and Industrial and Labor Relations. In 1977, he was elected the founding director of Cornell's Center for the Study of the American Political Economy—a position that he held until his retirement in 1980. His retirement came after the then-mandatory retirement age of 65; his professional stature led the university to voluntarily agree to extend his tenured appointment beyond the mandatory retirement age.

Few scholars can match Hildebrand's academic and professional contributions. His academic writings were numerous and spanned a wide variety of areas in labor economics and collective bargaining, including the effects of tax policies on unemployment and inflation, industrial relations in European nations, bargaining structure and power, impasse resolution, wage differentials, and collective bargaining and antitrust law. Although trained as an institutional labor economist, Hildebrand understood the growing importance of econometrically-based empirical research in economics; in 1965, along with his colleague in the Economics Department, T.C. Liu, he authored an important book, Manufacturing Production Functions in the United States, 1957: An Interindustry and Interstate Comparison of Productivity.

George regularly applied his professional expertise to help solve real-world problems in his field. He was a noted arbitrator and mediator in both public and private sector labor relations disputes and had a special interest in labor relations issues in the mining industry throughout his career. He was a member of the prestigious National Academy of Arbitrators and a member of its arbitration panel and the arbitration

panels of the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Services and the New York State Public Employee Relations Board. From 1969-71, he served as Deputy Undersecretary of the U.S Department of Labor, and during this period, he was the U.S representative to the International Labor Organization. Given his academic accomplishments and these professional contributions, it is not surprising that he was elected President of the Industrial Relations Research Association when he returned to Cornell in 1971.

Those of us who were fortunate enough to know George learned many important lessons from him. His effectiveness as a mediator and arbitrator was at least partially due to his extraordinary ability to keep things told to him in complete confidence. The parties to labor disputes that he was helping to resolve knew that nothing that they told him would be divulged to the other party unless he received explicit permission from them to do so. His academic stature at Cornell and the widespread knowledge of his ability to keep confidences undoubtedly were important factors in his selection to be the first faculty member to be a member of a Presidential Search Committee at Cornell; in 1976-77, he served on the committee that recommended the appointment of Frank H.T. Rhodes to be Cornell's 9th President. Those of us on the committee writing this obituary tried to emulate George's discretion while we served as administrators at Cornell.

George also had an uncanny ability to see the positive in difficult situations—another attribute of a skilled mediator (at a more mundane level, he once told one of us that he loved it when it snowed in Ithaca because the snow was such a welcome contrast to Ithaca's predominant gray skies in winter). The importance of trying to make the best out of every circumstance set an important example for his younger colleagues, both as they coped with difficult administrative decisions and as they faced adversity in their personal lives.

Finally, two years before he was planning to retire, George came to one of us (who was then the chair of his department) and said that he no longer was going to vote on new appointment and tenure decisions. He said that this did not mean that he approved of the decisions that his younger colleagues were making; often he did not. But, he went on, we were the ones who would have to live with these decisions for decades, and so we should be the ones making the decisions. As a large number of his former colleagues in economics and industrial and labor relations are now nearing their own retirement ages, and the number of new faculty hiring and tenure decisions their departments must make is increasing, we wonder if those of us now nearing retirement will be able to be as magnanimous in ceding decisions to our younger colleagues as George was.

Ronald G. Ehrenberg, Chairperson; David Lipsky, Robert Stewart Smith