



Asa Cristina Laurell honored with a doctorate from University of Buenos Aires



Dr. Asa Cristina Laurell, a member of our Editorial Advisory Board received an honorary degree from the University of Buenos Aires on September 2, 2009. The editors of Social Medicine would like to congratulate her on this honor which recognizes her academic contributions, her daily labor to promote social medicine, her commitment to social justice, and her untiring political commitment to promote health as a human right. We present here a brief summary of her life and work.

Training & Early Life

Dr. Laurell was born in Uppsala, Sweden. She studied medicine at the University of Lund from which she graduated as physician/surgeon in 1971.

She joined Amnesty International as a student and participated actively in opposition to the war in Vietnam. In 1967 she received a scholarship to study public health at the University of California-Berkeley (USA) where she graduated with a Masters in Public Health, specializing in epidemiology. During her stay in Berkeley she participated as an activist in mobilizations against the Vietnam War and

supported the African-American community in its fight against discrimination and racism and for the recognition of its civil rights.

She emigrated to Mexico in 1971 and became a nationalized citizen the same year.

Academic & Scholarly Work.

During 1971 Dr. Laurell co-founded *Mujeres en Acción Solidaria* (MAS, Women's Movement of Solidarity). In 1972 she participated in the creation of the journal *Punto Crítico* (*Critical Point*). During her time at *Punto Crítico* she wrote about union matters, the rights of women, and diverse other national political topics. She was elected to the governing body of the journal in 1977 and was re-elected until 1989 when the journal ceased publication.

From 1927 to 1976 she worked as Professor at the Mexican National Autonomous University (UNAM), investigating socio-medical topics. In 1976 she was invited to participate in the Social Medicine Masters Program at the Autonomous University of Xochimilco (UAM-X). This innovative project was set up by PAHO/WHO as a Latin

American center for post-graduate training and research. The Masters Program sought to incorporate the social sciences into health research. Latin American Social Medicine or Collective Health (LASM/CH) developed as a current of critical reflection within traditional public health. LASM/CH has had an important influence in both theoretical and methodological developments as well as on Latin American health policy. Indeed, LASM/CH has grown into a political movement which plays an important role in the defense of the right to health, the formulation of national health policies, and the rejection of neoliberal health reforms.

Asa Cristina Laurell has played an active, indeed critical, role in the development of this current of thought in Latin America. She has been an educa-

tional advisor on health matters to universities and health ministries in the majority of Latin American countries. She has served as occasional consultant to PAHO/WHO, international organizations and universities, and social organizations in Europe and Africa.

She was a researcher and teacher at UAM-Xochimilco until 2000, coordinated the Social Medicine Masters Program from 1979 to 1981 and served on the Board of Directors of UAM from 1990-1997. During her tenure at UAM-X she worked on several lines of investigation: "Health-disease as a social process"; "The process of work and health", and (from 1989 on) "Social Policy, Health Policy, and Social Security." The results of these investigations have been published in ten books and some 50 articles in specialized scientific magazines. Her most important books are: *Consuming the Worker* (1983), *Health in the Factory* (1989), *Social Policy in Crisis: An Alternative for the Health Sector* (1991), *State and Social Policy under Neoliberalism* (1992), *Occupational Health Research* (1993), and *The Counter-Reform in Health and Social Security* (1997).

In 1987 she received a doctorate in Sociology from the School of Political and Social Sciences, UNAM. She became a member of the Mexican National System of Researchers in 1988

She sits on the Editorial Boards of multiple scientific journals among which the most important include the International Journal of Health Services, Social Science & Medicine, the International Journal of Social Welfare,

Cadernos de Saúde Pública, Cuadernos Políticos, and, as of this issue, the journal you are reading. She was General Coordinator of the International Association of Health Policy (IAHP) from 1983 to 1987 and was vice-president of the Sociology of Health Research Committee of the International Sociological Association (1990-94).

Political Activities

In 1987 she worked in the Presidential campaign of the Frente Democrático Nacional (National Democratic Front) and participated in the founding of the Partido de la Revolución Democrática (Party of the Democratic Revolution) in 1989. She was director of the magazine *Conjuncture* from 1991-1994 and coordinated of social policy at the Research Institute of the Democratic Revolution, (1995-1996). She advised the congressional delegation of the Partido de la Revolución Democrática on matters of health and social security. She was Secretary of Research for the National Executive Committee from August of 1996 to March of 1999.

Dr. Laurell was active in the successful campaign of Manuel Lopez Obrador to become Mayor of Mexico City. This led to her appointment as Mexico City's Secretary of Health in December of 2000. During her tenure as Secretary she created a "food pension" that was enacted into law in 2003, thus creating a new social right in the capital city. In order fulfill the constitutionally mandated right to health protection, she instituted a program of Free Health Care and Medicines for all Mexico City residents not

covered by the (employment-based) social security system. By 2006 this program covered 95 percent of non-insured families In May of the same year the Legislative Assembly made the Free Health Care and Medicine program a right for all non-insured residents, thus assuring that the Mexico City government will have to fulfill its Constitutional mandate. Under her management major improvements were made to Mexico City's health infrastructure. Actual provision of services increased dramatically - a 30 percent increase in hospitalizations, 35 percent in ER visits and 85 percent in surgeries. She resigned in May of 2006 to work on the presidential campaign of the Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, who appointed her Secretary of Health of the Legitimate Government of Mexico, in November of the same year.

She has been member of ALAMES (the Latin American Social Medicine Association) since its foundation in 1984.