LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

LAWCHA and the Battle for Labor Justice in the Twenty-First Century

Kim Phillips, LAWCHA President

Last year we co-sponsored two successful conferences—the 100th Commemoration of the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire in New York City and the LAWCHA/Southern Labor History Studies conference in Atlanta. This year, we will have our annual conference in conjunction with the OAH in Milwaukee (April 18-21, 2012). LAWCHA members have been key to organizing the OAH conference, while Shel Stromquist has taken charge of the LAWCHA events. We are beginning to plan the 2013 conference, which will most likely take place in New York City. Stay tuned for more details about both conferences.

In solidarity,
Kim Phillips, President

From the Cover
Commemoration of the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire, March, 2011.
Credit: R.J. Michels

2011 Philip Taft Labor History Award Winner

The Cornell University ILR School, in cooperation with LAWCHA, announced the winner of the 2011 Philip Taft History Award for the best book in American labor and working-class history published in 2010. The winner is

James D. Schmidt, Industrial Violence and the Legal Origins of Child Labor
Cambridge University Press

The members of the 2011 Prize committee were:
Edward Baptist, Ileen DeVault (chair), Gilbert Gonzalez, Moon-Ho Jung, and Susan Levine.

For information on nominations for the 2012 Prize, please visit the Taft Award website. <www.ilr.cornell.edu/taftaward/>

2011 Herbert Gutman Award Winner

LAWCHA announced its fifth annual Dissertation Prize earlier in the year. The prize is named in honor of the late Herbert G. Gutman, a pioneering labor historian in the U.S. and a founder of the University of Illinois Press’s “Working Class in American History” Series. This year the winner is


The committee was composed of Nelson Lichtenstein, UC-Santa Barbara, Chair; Michael Pierce, University of Arkansas; and Heather Thompson, Temple University.

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LAWCHA at the OAH, April 18-22, 2012

LAWCHA’s annual conference for 2012 will be in conjunction with the OAH/NCPH conference. The theme, Frontiers of Capitalism and Democracy fits well with the conference location, in the battleground city of Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Please see the LAWCHA website for more information about the panels relating to labor history.
The past year has brought to consciousness the dyna-
namic of class structures in the United States. The battles across the United States, responding to the class warfare grounded in political struggles, have made the work of labor historians more critical than ever. This is-
sue highlights that theme, of the relevance of labor histo-
rans work, both on the ground in these movements, and as an analytical framework for those engaged in struggle.

We begin with excerpts from Shelton Stromquist’s address at the Working Class Worlds conference in July. Stromquist asks us to reconsider old frameworks for understanding the connections be-
tween our work and the current crisis, using the frame-
work that brings to life the protest actions of the Knights of Labor and the American Railway Union, I must be built. As my academic work gravitated to the study of the labor movement itself. But even “success” downs to say the least, not unrelated to the success and the trials and the transnational trends in labor history invite us to consider the value of what I’ve come to call the “translocal” for collective action past and in the present...

In Pittsburgh—some years back—a cadre of gradu-
ate students working with David Montgomery carried their academic work into the community through strike support activity, oral history, and community living. We examined the social conflicts and solidarities of the shop floor, the alternative structures of power and cross-class alliances that working-class community bred, the forms of collec-
tive action that workingmen and women devised, and the new kinds of politics they practiced. We saw that history brought to life in our own work and that of others by ex-
cavating the fabric of workers’ daily lives historically. That unique community of scholars would have been unimagi-
able without the mentorship and inspiration that Dave Montgomery gave to it...

But it is in the work of this latest generation’s students and scholars that the on-going vitality of the field is best in evidence. In my own case, I’ve drawn inspiration from their work in ways that have expanded and reshaped my own understandings of class and community.

Twin defining interests have shaped my scholar-
ship: first, class has been for me an analytical category of the first order, and, second, I have pretty consistently chosen to focus on “the local” as a prism through which to see and understand the struggles of working people—what Dave Montgomery has called “the frictions of daily life”—and the ways in which they acted to improve their lives.

“Class” as a category of analysis has had its ups and downs to say the least, not unrelated to the success and influence of the labor movement itself. But even “success” has at times contributed to the marginalization of class. The twin of class analysis in my own work—per-
haps better termed the method I’ve followed for under-
standing and complicating the meaning of class—has been serious engagement with the untidiness of “the local.” In the context of historical communities, we can observe and document with some complexity the lives of workers, the patterns of their association and activity, the trials and triumphs that mark their efforts at mutual aid, and the structures of power and inequality with which they have had to contend as a daily fact of life...

Despite all the changes in the world of labor in our own time—the economic ups and downs, the global restructuring of manufacturing, the job losses in rustbelt communities, the attacks on the very right of collective bar-
gaining, the crisis of social democracy and rightward drift of national politics, and the steep decline in private sector union density—we still face some of the same challenges that working people have always faced. How do we build and sustain a vital movement for social justice and equality capable of contesting for power and remodeling our work-
places, our communities and indeed our countries into the humane and just world to which we aspire? The challenge is clearly transnational to a degree it has never been before. Our organizing, our political engagement, and the history we write must ultimately rise to that challenge. But, it all starts locally—or, I would suggest, translocally... My own scholarship and my political experience have been in perpetual dialogue with the “local” as the primary arenas in which the networks of solidarity, that give life and strength to any meaningful social movement, must be built. As my academic work gravitated to the study of the Knights of Labor and the American Railway Union, I was struck by the vitality of local mixed assemblies as entry points for workers irrespective of skill or trade or indus-
try, even race or gender, to a degree. These local chains of solidarity built on workers’ organic community ties and be-
came the basis for collective action in strikes, boycotts and ultimately politics in places like Hornellsville, New York, Creston, Iowa, and Cleveland, Ohio.
that combined militant action against the war and the draft. Back in the U.S. in 1968, I reencountered, now at an earlier juncture, the radical potential of local communities and the unions that supported them. The militancy that combined militant action against the war and the draft, community-based organizing for fair housing, commu-

nity-controlled schools, and the direct action of poor communities and the homeless to force local power structures to address their needs and priorities. Such “communities of resistance... carried forward the legacy of the early civil rights movement by using non-violent action to build community, organize direct human services, and “speak truth to power,” whether it was manifested in draft boards, city councils, school boards, or powerful corporations.

Education: Class and Community

Coming back to formal education after some years of community work, I found in the “new labor history” (to which I was first introduced by Mel Dubovsky at UWS) and in the emerging African American and African diasporic history (MFDP) that they would be the local architects of a new, powerful social movement. In Selma, the audacity of young kids by the hundreds, like Ola Mae Waller and her friends, built their own youthful ties of social solidarity. They strengthened the backbones of their elders and we erstwhile activists and inspired a movement that enabled their parents to claim voting rights and to walk to Montgomery to register those claims. But, by 1966, I also recognized that whatever use limited, role whites had played in the movement to that point had now largely passed. I welcomed and applauded the turn to “black power” and moved on to other localities and their quest to build a new society.

In Tanzania, East Africa, I encountered a remarkable social transformation underway in 1966... And I witnessed men and women committing their energies and their social vision to the arduous work of clearing new land, planting and harvesting jointly-owned crops, cooperatively constructing their homes and local materials, and meeting to consider their next steps in this grassroots social movement. An older generation of farmers, like Hasani Kombo and Mze Saidi, keepers of the oral tradition of communalism, and the Mandala (the Handeni cooperative movement) that joined members of a younger, politically-inspired generation, like Mwinjuina Thabitil, to give tangible meaning to a national campaign for Ujamaa (roughly translated from Swahili as communalism in a Handeni village called Mnkonde, joined by saidi and Mzee. But, as the movement took the form of socialist urban neighborhood projects, in which transformed the landscape of the factories, and workers’ control of the workplace, the socialist party became inevitably the story; its history the story, and its leadership a narrative of resistance. But the question remains: do we wonder today why public employee unions and the standards of employment they have won are such an object of intense attack by corporate America?) Activists in the past also played the battle for municipal ownership of streetcars. And workers won access to public space for their celebrations and public protests... This grassroots activism focused on the city as an arena for struggle in the mobilization. It also posed a challenge to the future course of social democratic politics, even as parliamentary-oriented party elites asserted their claims to leadership. As I have argued elsewhere, social democracy (of the Second International variety) came of age with the high tide of late nineteenth-century nationalism, and aspiring social democratic politicians and theoreticians inevitably turned their project to national terms, however much they still may have gestured toward internationalist principles. Drawn as they were to the turn to “black power,” the project the bourgeoisie nationalists by their own positional struggles against socialist and anarchist locals (commune-instituents), they readily adopted the trappings of cosmopolitan moderns.

Stefan Berger has shown how liberal nationalism, a political pact on social democrats in their forma-

tive stages. As he put it, “a certain ‘great state’ nationalism lurked behind the internationalist rhetoric to which social democrats were reflexively committed. They conceived “civic nationalism” as a basis for interna-

tionalism and an antidote to ethnic parochialism, as well as a “vehicle for democratic emancipation.” Reinforcing this naturalization of the national has been an increasingly dense hierarchy of social democracy that defines the national arena as the only political arena worth the serious investment of organizational and ideological energy. While focusing on class and in varying degrees class struggle, historians have nationalized class. Berger notes, “their class nationalism... national boundary categories including different visions of national identity rather than an attempt to overcome national identity.” The parliamentary labor or socialist party became the story, its history the narrative of a national democratic project that they disrupted traditional elite forms of local governance. In subtle but often significant ways improvements came to workers’ lives through their own self-activity. In many cities the scope of the local state expanded through municipalization of water, gas and electricity. Cities under- took sweeping public works projects and instituted public baths and city-owned markets. City employment expanded at the expense of private contract labor with municipal wages and working conditions that set new standards for the kind of oppositional labor movement to that already engaged in collective action in the streets and the factories. And the battle for municipal ownership of streetcars. And workers won access to public space for their celebrations and public protests... This grassroots activism focused on the city as an arena for struggle in the mobilization. It also posed a challenge to the future course of social democratic politics, even as parliamentary-oriented party elites asserted their claims to leadership. As I have argued elsewhere, social democracy (of the Second International variety) came of age with the high tide of late nineteenth-century nationalism, and aspiring social democratic politicians and theoreticians inevitably turned their project to national terms, however much they still may have gestured toward internationalist principles. Drawn as they were to the turn to “black power,” the project the bourgeoisie nationalists by their own positional struggles against socialist and anarchist locals (commune-instituents), they readily adopted the trappings of cosmopolitan moderns.

Below the radar, local community activism, already well underway, again points the direction for the rebirth of a new popular politics capable of challenging for power, before the power structure fully realizes the scope of what’s happening. At least, in my mind, what’s where our new “hope” lies.

Workers today face a grim world in which capital...

What is the Relevance of this History to the Current Crisis: What is to Be Done?

Workers today face a grim world in which capital...
The disappointments of the Obama presidency provide a powerful object lesson for those who seek a genuine progressive, democratic alternative.

New local progressive alliances, with labor at their core, will need to set clear priorities. First, many believe the struggle for “home rule” by revising city charters to enable cities to better control their destinies economically; second, to mount new campaigns to extend the public sector through municipalization of city services that now rest in private hands and to defeat privatization at every turn by winning, for instance, municipal franchises for cable television, recycling, and other basic services; to declare cities as sanctuaries for undocumented immigrants who seek to build a life for themselves as good citizens and effective workers; to strengthen co-ops as the base for an alternative economy; to establish a “living wage” and a trade union-based “prevailing wage” environment for local business and on college campuses; to create green municipal energy parks with cheap energy for all; and to host of other initiatives, many of which are already under way in different localities.

Again, taking a lesson from the past, such local initiatives can run from the outset establish translocal linkages with cities and community organizations internationally that share ideas and resources, build support networks, and even mount parallel campaigns, much in the manner of municipal activists of a century ago. Living wage campaigns in U.S. cities and some states find their counterparts in the UK and Australia. Labor solidarity efforts link workers in the U.S., Mexico and other parts of Latin America. Local activists fighting to limit child labor have undertaken transnational action in India, Southeast Asia, Brazil, and elsewhere.

In the U.S. grassroots progressive politics has acquired a new lease on life in the last decade, with vigorous local movements such as Progressive Maryland and living wage campaigns in Baltimore and its surrounding counties, and recently at the University of Georgia, the College of William and Mary, and other universities. A coalition of cities, calling itself “Cities for Progress,” passed strong resolutions against the war in Iraq and has moved on to living wage campaigns and struggles against Wal-Mart. Even the U.S. Conference of Mayors has recently called for redirecting the resources squandered in wars in Iraq and Afghanistan to address the real human needs in cities at home. [Empower DC and “Nobody Leaves” in Boston.]

In Madison, Wisconsin, “Progressive Dane” has crafted a local platform and run candidates for local office with some success, and in Iowa City, Iowa, FAIR! has worked on open, low-cost housing, municipalization of the electric utility, and endorsement of local progressive candidates.

We need a new “translocal” political vocabulary that affirms the common struggle to make grassroots democracy a living reality in communities and workplaces around the globe. World and regional social forums are an important point of contact and means to build translocal ties and coordinate international actions. New forms of struggle are being invented, or redeployed in new ways, through the direct-sharing trans-local organizing experience among workers, as recently occurred between New York City’s Chinatown and Shanghai garment workers; through locally-organized, international boycotts of the products of abusive firms like Koch Industries’, BP, and Hyatt Hotels; and through anti-corporate sit-ins such as those across Britain directed at tax-avoiding businesses, like international cell phone giant Vodafone, facilitated through social media contacts that mobilized activists in London, Leeds, and some of the country’s smallest and most conservative hamlets.

Across the U.S. and around the globe, local trade unionists and community activists are reinvesting their political energies locally, building workers’ centers and inter-union alliances, creating new methods of struggle, and in the process renewing their communities from below. In doing so, they are taking a page from previous generations of local activists and union-builders, and in the bargain reaffirming the old adage that “every generation’s got to do it again.” They deserve a history that is honest, well crafted and relevant to their needs, and, like their activism, that begins locally, at the grassroots.

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Reflections on Wisconsin and Ohio

We present here perspectives on the events in Wisconsin and Ohio. The first is by Wisconsin resident and retired labor historian Michael B. Wall. The second is by labor (and Ohio resident) Stuart Rothenberg. Wall has just published an edited collection of articles and reflections on the mobilization, It Started in Wisconsin. (Verso, 2012). It is followed by labor educators Michael Yates and Paul Buhle, who together with Mari Jo Buhle, have written an introduction to their new edited anthology, Uprising: Labor Fights Back (Monthly Review, March 2012). In July, I interviewed two veterans of the Wisconsin protests, Jerry Tucker and Ed Sadlowski, and excerpts of that interview are presented next. We end the section with a reflection by labor historian Caroline Merithew on the recent landmark win in Ohio against STRP.

“It Started in Wisconsin” - but WHY? Paul Buhle

The title given to the anthology signals a claim that might easily be disputed. The events in the Middle East as well as movements of (mostly) young people in Europe against austerity policies signal the power of far-sighted Wisconsin activists to prepare themselves for something. None of us anticipated what really did happen.

At this writing, an intense mobilization gathering signatures for the recall campaign is certain to go over the top. My own sense, as an old time labor historian, is that not since the early days of CIO-FAC in the 1940s (and before the postwar Red Scare) has such a campaign combined labor backing, bold progressive politics, and truly widespread appeal across demographics and geography of a pretty diverse state.

Here’s the problem for labor historians. As one of the essays in our book puts it succinctly: “The pervasive sense of ‘solidarity’ expressed in high moments of mobilization during the recent Wisconsin past fits poorly into most older categories of labor activity in the state, including strikes, boycotts, and hardly fits better with the history of left-leaning political mobilizations. Long-ago campaigns to elect the LaFollettes (especially the original) or the Milwaukeew success spanning four generations to elect ‘socialists’ to local office have some similarities and actual connections with the present, as do the Madison-centered antiwar movement of the 1960s-70s, and in some respects even the Wisconsin Obama campaign of 2008 (especially the nomination process). But not much more than that. And yet a curiously familiar laborist quality of the new movement, visible at all times from iconography to chants and song-alongs, has been unmistakeable. Something important from the past near and far managed to survive and has been given new vigor.”

In other words, an incredibly exciting series of events, ongoing, fits badly into our own sense of labor history and our political categories of expectations, good or bad. It’s a daunting thought.

Labor historians (among others) taking part—Wisconsin and Ohio—seemed to follow two lines of logic. In one version, the mobilization against the Republican governor and the efforts of mass meetings in major cities and other events across the state, was leading toward a General Strike but was betrayed by Democrats, union leaders, etc. In the other, labor version, “Geeks, with an ‘S’,” was a refrain from the introduction to his new edited anthology, Uprising: Labor Fights Back (Monthly Review, March 2012). In July, I interviewed two veterans of the Wisconsin protests, Jerry Tucker and Ed Sadlowski, and excerpts of that interview are presented next. We end the section with a reflection by labor historian Caroline Merithew on the recent landmark win in Ohio against STRP.

The contrast between the two positions is lessened, to a degree, by a shared sense that unions have done (and continue to do) too little to organize or bring them out, beyond what email messages and a few phone calls might do.

But there are other issues off the usual charts. The number of labor RETIREES from the demonstrations to local efforts—most notable in the Recall campaign of the moment—is stunning. Survivors of plant shutdown can be found across the state, and help to account for a group, surprising development: small towns and rural areas bringing in petitions loaded with names. Go to a rally in Kenosha (while the good weather lasted) and you see who is most seriously motivated.

Here’s one final note along the same lines: the role of firefighters, not only showing themselves in uniform (while the good weather lasted) and you see who is most seriously motivated.

The hope for a better future has been deeply ingrained in the American psyche. And this hope had some basis in reality, even if the “rags to riches” saga was more myth than truth. “There is a pipe dream for most. Our best days are behind us. We have good reason to be anxious and depressed; the future looks bleak because it will be.”

Unless, that is, we do something about it. At the end of The Communist Manifesto, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels said, “The workers have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. Workers of all countries, unite!” Perhaps it is the time for us to wage class war in return. If much of what we have already been taken, and what we still possess under assault, we really don’t have much more to lose but our chains.

Just last year, I would have said that the working-class was not doing much to break its chains. But the role of capital is fraught with contradictions, and rebellions can break loose at any time and be triggered by any number of events.

In July, at a commemoration of the 1877 general strike in St. Louis, I met with 2 veteran activists from the labor movement of the 1970s, Ed Sadlowski is former director of Chicago’s Amalgamated Meatcutters, and was insurgent candidate for the United Steel Workers Union in the 1979s. Jerry Tucker is a St. Louis activist and leader of the UAW’s New Directions movement in the 1990s an 1990s. Tucker had just come back from a meeting with Wisconsin activists. Sadlowski’s son, Ed Sadlowski, Jr., who works for American State Municipal and State Employees, is directly involved in the Wisconsin movement. Both expressed how connected they felt to the new movement. As two figures who reflect what Elon Stoumpst tuned labelled translocal historical traditions, as well as the traditions of shop floor mobilizations as exploited by David Montgomerry, they connect with a number of the pieces in this issue. Here are a few excerpts from an interview with them that I conducted on that day, prompted by asking them what they thought about the Andy Stern interview in the Spring Issue of Labor.
Reflections on Wisconsin and Ohio

Rosemary Feurer (RF): What do your experiences, in the past, tell you about the present moment, about what is happening in Wisconsin?

Ed Sadlowski (ES): Wisconsin is the most important thing that has happened, equal to the inceptions of the CIO, if We're going to be a middle-class society. If you rally to a movement, you will get the ball rolling. Why we've only made that limited progress, is the real question at hand. And that question and hurdle has been in front of us for the Wi in 2007, and not just yesterday or in Wisconsin. The labor movement has never been capable of adapting, in that sense of a long policy, of having people feel that they belong, belong to something that is right, belong to something that is fair, belong to something that creates a way to eliminate injustices, and provides a better life for their heirs to come. We've failed miserably in that sense, in all of our efforts. But it hasn't been much of a try, we have to learn to structure something that people can relate to, that people can be proud of being a part of, to those emotional things. Just because someone pays dues doesn't make them union. That's what's gone on in Wisconsin, trying to collect dues on the job. There might be some good come out of that, to have a staff reg on the site, to sign somebody. That remains to be seen...

Jerry Tucker (JT): This is a long span of history, from the cordwainers first efforts, and we have failed to place the struggle that workers have against capital in perspective, and create an ongoing concept of struggle. The exploitation is built into the system, and it's an automatic aspect of the system. Capital will exploit, it will exploit itself, and they'll eat each other out of house and home. But workers have of course, been the main course at this point all these years. The labor movement, in its various incarnations, some have been better than others. The Knights had certain attributes that the CIO and other attributes that we could look at that were considerably better. In all cases we have failed as a labor movement, to see ourselves in this relatively eternal conflict, that by its nature exists between capital and labor, and to adapt our ability to deal with it. The recent industrial relations system was a product of struggle where workers had penetrated to the core, so they call in the safe minds of the labor movement, we'll create an industrial relations model. From our side, it needed to be some good come out of that, to have a staff reg on the site, to sign somebody. That remains to be seen...

The problem today comes from the idea that you don't need struggle. You make progress through accommodation, but how can that be? Only if you have equal power can you accommodate. Capital doesn't sleep and its collective bargaining will not be part of the issue of running for these 6 recall elections that are going on in Wisconsin right now. I respond, along with other critics, with saying, The labor movement has got to demonstrate its determination to offer leadership in these kinds of struggles, not collaboration... No one in this dynamic situation should step back and let sell-out politicians who have no concepts, who have compromised the dilemma in the first place, all the way up to the top of the Democratic Party in Washington. Then want to step in? I'd smack the shit out of them. That's what's happening on the ground right now...

ES: To rebuild what you've got there you can't surrender to the Democratic Party, letting Democratic Party have part of the struggle, that capital doesn't sleep and it...

JT: They have a choice... What we're trying to do in Wisconsin is speak truth to power. What they want is the energy of the working class but they want the money of the capitalist class... We're facing that in more practical terms. Carter broke every promise, Clinton broke his promises, Obama is on the same track that has preserved historically. If workers are reorganized to sense their own power and begin to exert it where it really counts, we've had this much-touted labor movement, it's been a mode of operation. We left struggle by the way-the union as an institution, to sign somebody up. That remains to be seen...

ES: That's the most important thing in his life! JT: This is the great "childhood" that had already been the mode of operation. We left struggle by the way-side. And we really failed to be honest with the rank and file membership, that struggle is the real thing. It doesn't matter if it's an eternal struggle. It became unacceptable to talk about it, tricks like red-baiting to divide us into compartmentalized groups... At this point, we're at a point where the opportunity to educate and to organize, does exist, unlike what was going on in the 1970s.

ES: But you actually feel this is more opportune than then? JT: Oh, yeah.

ES: Yeah, I think it's the most opportune time of my lifetime if we take advantage of it. A movement created, not an issue, issues you'll get your head heat in.

JT: 120,000 people showed up at the state capital.

ES: When the challenge became so direct, so brutal, did it take a call from on high to respond? No, the calls were in the closet. Here's an old saying we used to use in the plant, "You can't lead from the rear." Were they anywhere near the front of the parade when the things began? Not from what I can tell.

ES: What do you see as the cultural, given your experiences?

JT: We've got to revitalize it.

JT: Unless struggle is in front of you, you won't get from A to B. Struggle creates the new wealth of experience. People have to believe they are the leaders they've been looking for, and in Wisconsin, we were the people who were getting paid the big bucks, they kept trying to test the winds. They were trying to figure out what compromises they could offer before negotiations begin. Except as we all know, that never works. We had rank-and-file workers who stepped forward, who took initiatives. It was students like the teaching assistant unions.. Finally the leaders said oh, good, now we'll order pickers.

RF: But the argument is that the times are different, that production doesn't matter, that service and public sector is different.

ES: The public service worker has had the burden of the public sector, and she's not working a things. They look at that negatively, it's like a Bob Cratchit mentality, into those guys and gals. The issue is how do we create the new wealth of experience.

JT: We need to produce impetus for more new labor leaders, create new ones, there ought to be struggle oriented leadership, not to create our own sense of direction. A state leader in the Democratic Party of Wisconsin recently declared that collective bargaining will not be part of the issue of running for these 6 recall elections that are going on in Wisconsin right now. I respond, along with other critics, with saying, The labor movement has got to demonstrate its determination to offer leadership in these kinds of struggles, not collaboration... No one in this dynamic situation should step back and let sell-out politicians who have no concepts, who have compromised the dilemma in the first place, all the way up to the top of the Democratic Party in Washington. Then want to step in? I'd smack the shit out of them. That's what's happening on the ground right now...

ES: To rebuild what you've got there you can't surrender to the Democratic Party, letting Democratic Party have part of the struggle, that capital doesn't sleep and it...

JT: They have a choice... What we're trying to do in Wisconsin is speak truth to power. What they want is the energy of the working class but they want the money of the capitalist class... We've faced that in more practical terms. Carter broke every promise, Clinton broke his promises, Obama is on the same track that has preserved historically. If workers are reorganized to sense their own power and begin to exert it where it really counts, we've had this much-touted labor movement, it's been a mode of operation. We left struggle by the way-the union as an institution, to sign somebody up. That remains to be seen...

JT: But that's the most important thing in his life!

ES: In just two weeks through accommodation, but how can that be? Only if you have equal power can you accommodate. Capital doesn't sleep and its got the whole globe as its playground. But that's the most important thing in his life!...
Ohio collected 3000 signatures which launched the petition drive for the referendum and by late June, the group submitted to the Secretary of State petitions with 1.3 million signatures (four times the number needed to get the referendum, which became Issue 2, on the November ballot). Mary Lou Guizza, an Ohio native and one of the 17,000 WOA volunteers collected 300 signatures for the first referendum.

The reactions I encountered ran the gamut from people who were extremely grateful for the work I was doing to those who yelled at me how wrong and misinformed I was. I did have a door slammed in my face and I was followed home from one library once by the opposition. But overall it was an uplifting experience to see so many people come together behind a worthwhile cause to make such a difference.

From the southeastern Ohio perspective where I live which, before We Are Ohio, matched some of the egregious, Things changed in 2011. That’s when we all became Ohio.

The We Are Ohio (WAO) campaign started in late February 2011, a few weeks after John Kasich attempted to make taking the oath of the highest public office in the state a private midnight affair in his home, Senate Bill 5 (SB5) was passed by a Republican controlled legislature and, if made law, would have overturned Ohio’s 1983 collective bargaining law and denied the 350,000 public workers the freedom required for collective bargaining. Thousands of teachers, prison guards, fire fighters, police officers, nurses, and their supporters rallied at the statehouse in Columbus to protest the SB5. On February 22, before the doors were ordered locked, one thousand people entered the chambers to witness and voice their opinions at the quick vote. The SB5 was passed by a Republican controlled legislature and, if made law, would have overturned Ohio’s 1983 collective bargaining law and denied the 350,000 public workers the freedom required for collective bargaining. Thousands of teachers, prison guards, fire fighters, police officers, nurses, and their supporters rallied at the statehouse in Columbus to protest the SB5.

The rallies here, and across the state, included policemen and firefighters and the university students and teachers who would (by late November) become the Occupy movement’s frontline. “It was hard to demonize those groups who people knew were like them.” said Vincent Miller who lives across the street from a police officer who drives a Suburban with bumper stickers that read “All my heroes are cowboys” with images of Ronald Reagan, have rarely spoke in unison. They did so against Issue 2 this year (and maybe will do so again in 2012). The defeat of SB5 was about more than economics and thus parallels most working people’s victories in history.

That is why We Are All Ohio! Welcome.
March 2011 marked the 100th anniversary of the tragic Triangle Factory Fire. Across the country, labor historians and educators joined in activities to build awareness about the event and to discuss the relevance of this event in our collective history and current struggles. LAWCHA members became a formal part of the Remember the Triangle Fire Coalition, which focuses on linking the past and the present, and reflecting on the meaning of the event.

The Triangle Factory Fire was a pivotal event in U.S. labor history. The struggle of ordinary workers to fight for a living wage, safe working conditions was ignited by the tragic deaths of 146 mostly young Jewish and Italian immigrants.

For years, performance artists and volunteers have reminded New Yorkers of the events by inscribing in chalk the names and ages of the victims in front of their former residences. They post fliers with information about the history and how it ignited the fight for social justice and better conditions.

In March 2011, a series of extraordinary commemorative activities, including participatory performance events, took place in New York and around the country. LAWCHA sponsored a day-long conference at CUNY Grad Center. On March 25, a stunning march was led by family members of the victims, and included 146 handmade shirtwaists and sashes carrying victim’s names attached to bamboo poles, held aloft by participants. One participant blew a shofar, and others sang Italian songs from the period. Updates and new events can be found at the website, where you can also donate to this cause, and find resources about the Triangle event in past and present. [http://rememberthetrianglefire.org/].

glades spoke powerfully about those who labor now under conditions as dangerous as those that claimed the lives of the 146 young women and men who died at Triangle 100 years ago. It was moving, exciting and inspiring – so much more than simply a reflection on events a century gone by.”

LAWCHA members also participated in events in Chicago, Iowa City, Minneapolis-St. Paul and Bay Area as well. Since March, the coalition has continued its work.

Korstad’s thought-provoking speech, “Searching for a Usable Past: Fifty Years of Writing Southern Labor History,” noting the close connections between Civil Rights activists and the writing of labor history, Korstad confirmed that some of the most influential scholars emerged at a time when scholars-activists grappled with finding ways to confront white supremacy, conservative politicians, and union-busting employers. Korstad’s talk has been posted at the Southern Labor Studies site at [http://southernlaborstudies.org/category/scholarly-talks/].

Panelists demonstrated a variety of important work. In a session entitled “Labor, Race, and Unrest: Contested Memory, Contested Accounts,” John McKerley and Ruth Needleman discussed black labor in the Reconstruction period and the immediate post-WWII period respectively. Complicating our understanding of black urbanization in the upper south, McKerley pointed out that African Americans flocked to places like St. Louis and Kansas City decades before the great migration. Seeking to challenge the simplistic, and often inaccurate, assumption that black workers were merely strikebreakers during the great 1919 steel strike in Gary, Indiana, Needleman outlined a more complicated picture by noting that many blacks were staunch union supporters and opposed scabbing.

Stetson Kennedy, a pivotal historical figure, was featured as part of the conference. Kennedy, a folklorist who gained fame as “America’s Number 1 Klansbust” in the late 1940s for his exposure of the workings of the Ku Klux Klan relied in part on the work of a union member. Andrea Kalin’s new film, Dissident at Large: Stetson Kennedy, was followed by a panel discussion featuring a variety of important work. In a session entitled “Labor, Race, and Unrest: Contested Memory, Contested Accounts,” John McKerley and Ruth Needleman discussed black labor in the Reconstruction period and the immediate post-WWII period respectively. Complicating our understanding of black urbanization in the upper south, McKerley pointed out that African Americans flocked to places like St. Louis and Kansas City decades before the great migration. Seeking to challenge the simplistic, and often inaccurate, assumption that black workers were merely strikebreakers during the great 1919 steel strike in Gary, Indiana, Needleman outlined a more complicated picture by noting that many blacks were staunch union supporters and opposed scabbing.

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activism. A roundtable on the Freedmen and Southern Society Project after 35 years was another high point of the conference. Here the panelist demonstrated the richness of using the Maryland–based archives to better understand labor in the Reconstruction period. Leslie Rowland, the head of the project, kicked off the discussion by outlining the context surrounding the creation of the project and the challenges of selecting material to publish. Exploring the historiography of Reconstruction, Brian Kelly emphasized the importance of Du Bois’s often overlooked Marxist classic, Black Reconstruction. Alex Lichtenstein, one of the conference organizers, suggested the Freedmen and Southern Society Project may want to consider non-traditional ways of publishing, including uploading material on the internet.

Conference organizers deserve credit for organizing a number of films during the three-day event. Pioneering oral historian Alessandro Portelli and labor editor Leon Feld led a fruitful discussion about the documentary Morristown: In the Air and Sun, which explores capital flight, Mexican immigration, and economic development in the eastern Tennessee town of Morristown. Anne Lewis, the filmmaker, responded to several spirited questions and comments from the commentators and from the audience.

Conference attendees in private conversations and in public forums pledged to reignite the fighting spirit of labor historians, and then concluded Saturday night with a dance. A good time was had by all, though this writer recommends that labor historians should not quit their day jobs! We are all thankful to the organizers and the sponsors, and look forward to future conferences.

LAWCHA Labor Outreach Committee Report

David Zonderman, NC State University

to talk about their specific campaigns for campus workers’ rights and students’ access to affordable higher education. Representatives from Agnes Scott College, Emory University, Georgia State University, and University of Georgia all spoke passionately and eloquently about the connections between low-wage workers’ struggles for a decent income and working-class students’ recent realization that drastic budget cuts may force many of them to give up their dreams for a college education. These students, workers, and community organizers are building strong coalitions at campuses across the state, and are constantly in dialogue with each other using the latest in social media technology. As proof of their commitment to a shared struggle, several campus groups launched protests—including sit-ins in various administration buildings—shortly after the conference; and then continued to mobilize to support each other in the face of university threats to arrest and potentially expel the student protesters.
The workshop is interested in projects that concern Pennsylvania labor history, but it is also a venue for labor historians based in the state whose current research in Pennsylvania have gathered every few months to discuss fellow members' research and enjoy a meal together. The most recent meeting, in December 2011, featured essays by John Enyeart (Bucknell University) on “American Anti-Fascism, 1920-1951” and Andrew Arnold (Kutztown University) on “Stalemate: Coal Operators, Coal Miners, and Railroad Managers, 1883-1886.” Future meetings will include works-in-progress by operators, auto workers, white, black, yellow, whatever nationality wherever they might be at that time, to see the crucial importance of community. Two books came out of that. One was Shel’s book on railroad workers which looked at those workers in the communities where they lived and in that jobs where they lived—in the character of those jobs. Another was a book I have to mention because only half of it ever got published. This is Peter Rachleff on Richmond which showed how a city in the south became a union stronghold after the Civil War, where two parallel union movements got established, one among the white workers and one among the black workers, but actually associating with each other…. And studying what kind of strategies they engaged, what kind of goals they set for themselves. …"Love, Labor and Picket Lines (The Making of the English Working Class)” that was very influential on us… Here was a study in which the initiative, the role, the thinking of working men and women themselves played the central role, and class was not just a statistical category. What was Thompson’s classic phrase? Class was the friction when some people in society rub up against others day by day. A sense of who is in what class comes out of that daily encounter on the job in the home. This sense then really invigorated many of the students at Pitt … and led to several important beliefs. One is that history is a collective project. This is not the place that we want to see who is the great shining star. Oh, how the academy liked the shiny stars?? But we saw this as a place for all of us to work, gather around and single out tasks to underscore and build on with each other. So each student quickly counted on the collective help, the assistance of others. And it was a sense that we had to study working men and women themselves. These were working men and women coming from the four corners of the earth, this massive movement of immigrants. The one study everyone had to read in every class of mine was Frank Thistlewaite’s massive movement of immigrants. The one study everyone had to read in every class of mine was Frank Thistlewaite’s study on migration from Europe to the Americas. (Migration from Europe Overseas in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries, 1960) to recognize this as a movement of the peoples to make a new kind of working class life, here within the United States itself. The great struggle that took place to form themselves together, from the Civil War and the Reconstruction to the Progressive era, is a fascinating history of a social movement among scholars, the values of which Montgomery helped pioneer and pass on to Shel, who in turn passed them onto his graduate students.

One of the many signs of labor history’s strength is the creation of new local and regional labor history organizations. Since mid-2010 scholars, educators and activists in Pennsylvania have gathered every few months to discuss fellow members’ research and enjoy a meal together. The most recent meeting, in December 2011, featured essays by John Enyeart (Bucknell University) on “American Anti-Fascism, 1920-1951” and Andrew Arnold (Kutztown University) on “Stalemate: Coal Operators, Coal Miners, and Railroad Managers, 1883-1886.” Future meetings will include works-in-progress by operators, auto workers, white, black, yellow, whatever nationality wherever they might be at that time, to see the crucial importance of community. Two books came out of that. One was Shel’s book on railroad workers which looked at those workers in the communities where they lived and in that jobs where they lived—in the character of those jobs. Another was a book I have to mention because only half of it ever got published. This is Peter Rachleff on Richmond which showed how a city in the south became a union stronghold after the Civil War, where two parallel union movements got established, one among the white workers and one among the black workers, but actually associating with each other…. And studying what kind of strategies they engaged, what kind of goals they set for themselves. …"Love, Labor and Picket Lines (The Making of the English Working Class)” that was very influential on us… Here was a study in which the initiative, the role, the thinking of working men and women themselves played the central role, and class was not just a statistical category. What was Thompson’s classic phrase? Class was the friction when some people in society rub up against others day by day. A sense of who is in what class comes out of that daily encounter on the job in the home. This sense then really invigorated many of the students at Pitt … and led to several important beliefs. One is that history is a collective project. This is not the place that we want to see who is the great shining star. Oh, how the academy liked the shiny stars?? But we saw this as a place for all of us to work, gather around and single out tasks to underscore and build on with each other. So each student quickly counted on the collective help, the assistance of others. And it was a sense that we had to study working men and women themselves. These were working men and women coming from the four corners of the earth, this massive movement of immigrants. The one study everyone had to read in every class of mine was Frank Thistlewaite’s study on migration from Europe to the Americas. (Migration from Europe Overseas in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries, 1960) to recognize this as a movement of the peoples to make a new kind of working class life, here within the United States itself. The great struggle that took place to form themselves together, from the Civil War and
Reconstruction, onwards, the different ways in which different nationalities and races of workers formed themselves together to make their contributions to working class movement. And finally in teaching and writing history we can see how Social Justice became active in today’s labor movement. There was a sense in all of that Pittsburgh group, to surround itself and become active in the great struggle then developing. Since that time look what happened... Here is an entire new generation and yet another generation, carrying on the work... But also new problems and new circumstances have arisen, coinciding with the great U-turn of the 1970s. Corporations realized that the... living standards of workers in England, in the US, were creeping upwards. What to do, what to do? Richard Nixon used the power of the state more vigorously and more heavily in his attempts to control this, but soon it was clear that that was not enough. I invite you to read a book that I suspect that that was not enough. I invite you to read a book that I suspect... William Simon Secretary of the Treasury under Nixon (wrote) A Time for Truth, on why, when New York City overspent its budget and went bankrupt, why the treasury refused to come up with money. The headlines read “Simon to New York: Go to Hell!” Here was the first signal of this new policy. And then the 1970s in this country became the crucial theme. Together with the theme that Goldwater first announced, the strikes and unions of our parents and grandparents... So we’ve got to take a lot of these cold subjects and think of them in brand new ways, in new categories. What worked in the 1970s will not work today. But what we’re trying to do still does cover and interpret and translate, as the old song went, “carry it on!”

Remembering David Montgomery: Pittsburgh
Jim Barrett, University of Illinois
If you were interested in working class history in the seventies, Pittsburgh was the place to be. It was still possible to climb a hill near the Pitt campus at night and watch the entire steel production process unfold before your eyes – coke and bituminous coal arriving on barges along the Monongahela River, flames rising from the mill stacks, and a welter of activity in the yards where finished steel departed on flatted railroad cars from the Jones and Laughlin mill on the city’s south side. The giant Westinghouse house works still hummed in East Pittsburgh and at Bradford dock you could see molten steel in cars running on a high level bridge from the furnace on one side of the river to hot mills on the other side. From the patio of Chido’s Bar in Homestead, near the Steelworkers Organizing Committee memorial, you could see the giant Mesta Machine Works on one side of the high-level bridge and US Steel’s historic Homestead mill on the other.

But the mills and the hills were not the draw for students of the working class. They were there because the city was the home of David Montgomery, the machinist and union militant turned history professor, the guy who seemed to be transforming the field of working class history. Some came to Pittsburgh via Warwick University where David had helped E.P. Thompson to establish the Center for the Study of Social History as the first of many visiting American professors at the Coventry campus. Others came directly from work in the factories and a series of left wing organizations still thriving at the time. Montgomery’s lectures have become legendary. It was quite remarkable to watch this nerdy looking guy in the plaid sports coat (always a coat and tie when lecturing) rivet large classes of undergraduates, and often admiring graduate students, to their seats. With an energy we envied, he invested the everyday work and community lives, the strikes and unions of our parents and grandparents with a drama we found intoxicating. But no matter how much he loved to talk about these events, David usually saved time for student discussion. He based these on raw documents – court transcripts, work rules, wage rates which he carefully collected and reproduced on mimeographed sheets. (One semester, after I had graded this large lecture course, he asked me if I could see anything he might improve. At the time, it seemed like the Pope was asking for pointers on how to say the Mass. I screwed up my courage and mentioned that when he asked students questions, he often did not give them time to answer. This, he explained, came from his time at the base radio station in Los Alamos: No dead time allowed on air. David’s graduate seminars were highly-charged affairs, the reading lists a mixture of original documents and the latest works in labor history and related fields. The group of students was extremely cohesive, but it would be dishonest to ignore the competition for David’s attention; this was natural, given our admiration for him. It was remarkable, however, that he never betrayed a greater respect (or critical eye) for one student’s work than another’s. Notwithstanding conventional wisdom about David’s approach to labor history, his seminars often took us beyond the walls of the factory and union hall. Readings on women’s and family history were very much a part of these discussions. The highlight my first year was a seminar on race and class developed by David with the help of his students. There was no “race problem” in Montgomery’s approach to that I could discern; the historical problem of racism among white workers and the efforts to overcome this barrier and create interracial workers’ movements was the central issue we discussed.

We sometimes worked on papers collectively and shared them with the group and we looked forward to discussions of David’s own work in progress. The students all appeared very brilliant to me, but most of them preferred to listen to Montgomery who seemed to wring every ounce of significance out of these readings and to spontaneously place them firmly in the broadest possible contexts. (Recall his remarkable ability to do this with diverse papers at conferences over the years.) The semester always ended with a dinner and discussion at David and Marty’s home where we came to know much better this rather shy man...
and Marty, a fellow Chicagoan, who was always extremely warm and welcoming to us. Over the years, many of us visited them, sometimes with kids in tow, in New Haven where they were wonderful hosts to an endless stream of visitors.

Through David’s efforts and our own, we connect- ed with others from our generation of young scholars. A weekend retreat in Brooklyn, New York, was particularly memorable for the presence of Bruce Lau- rie, Alan Dawley, John Cumbler, and others just ahead of us in the field and also for a labor play. This featured Pitt’s Joe White and a White Russian who played basketball games as well as serious discussion and greetings from all around the world. The Yale celebration of David’s work there, organized by Glenda Gilmore, Celi Bucki, and others in New Haven, was a more elegant affair but every bit as enjoyable. David’s career achievement award from LAWCHA signaled his contributions to people throughout the field and the labor movement.

It is difficult to convey in shorthand the enormous influence David had on this Pittsburgh generation of his students. Most of us have simply looked up to him as— from documents in graduate seminars and undergraduate lecture courses, to comparative seminars and prelim lists, down to those meticulously numbered comments in the margins of papers and dissertation chapters. As we had assembled with students from other labor history centers around the country, so our own graduate students have continued that tradition through the student-organized Mitte Labor and Working Class History conference and other regional gatherings.

Thanks to David’s mentoring, many people in my generation emerged as leaders on their own campuses and in the profession, inspiring me to make the perennial employee and striking and organizing in their communi- ties, helping to build LAWCHA and regional labor history groups, and, in the process, reinventing working class history once again—as David, Mel Dubofsky, David Brody, Herb Gutman and others did in that earlier generation. Most importantly perhaps, the Pittsburgh group has mem- Bernard Siegel, Steven Watson, and Nancy Cott. As large course lectures and seminars to graduate programs in US and comparative working class history.

It has become fashionable to dismiss working class history as somewhat passé, but we have only to look around us to realize that the spirit David Montgomery displayed is needed more now than ever. We can best honor his memory by carrying it on.

David Montgomery and Transnationalism
Cecelia Bucki, Fairfield University, Fairfield, CT

I would like to elaborate on what Jim Barrett men- tioned in his contribution, the reminder that David made to internationalism, or what is now called transnationa- lism, and I would like to use a perceptive view of the New Labor History to include connections among the emerging working classes of many countries since the rise of capitalism. Moreover, he directly facilitated the connect- ion at the New Labor History to include connections among the emerging working classes of many countries since the rise of capitalism. Moreover, he directly facilitated the connect- ion at the New Labor History to include connections among the

Remembering David Montgomery

Reflections on David Montgomery as Teacher and Mentor
Julie Greene, University of Maryland

David Montgomery was a terrific intellectual and political force in the lives of so many people. Here I will tell the story of how I found my way to working with David, what it was like to work with him, and some of what I learned. I hope it will provide a sense of David’s talents and contributions.

Early in that decade I became fascinated by labor history when, taking a degree at Cambridge University, I wrote a thesis on Welsh miners and Communism dur- ing the 1920s and 1930s. At that time there was a study of European and British history. For a reason of interests I decided to make a shift to U.S. history when choosing a PhD program, but I wanted to continue my focus on labor and the working-class. When I asked faculty at Cambridge whom they thought I should work with, David Montgom- ery’s name immediately came up. I visited Yale and was astounded. I knew nothing about the Department, except that this guy Montgomery was there and I was going to work with him. When I ar- rived on campus and stepped into the History Department, the first person I met was a colleague who said Nancy Cott would be my advisor. I had never studied women’s his- tory nor (stupidly) had I ever felt interested in it. I suppose Yale’s Department of Women’s Studies was destined to be Nancy’s student. I went and met with Nancy, and she was impressive as could be, but dang it, I was there to work with Montgomery. The next day I showed up at his office and emailed him, and I found out today as ILWCH. I was her first assistant editor in 1978-79. David brought together Edward and Dorothy Thompson and oth- ers in England, the new labor historians in France in the journal Le Mouvement Social, those in the Nether- lands around Amsterdam’s International Institute of Social His- tory, the Canadians around Labour/Le Travailleur (as it was then titled), and later joined the American historians to create a dialogue that firmly established the New Labor History as a formidable field. The first few is- sues of ILWCH were filled with reports from labor history conferences, reporting on the period he most loved then and that I still love today: the turn of the twentieth century, roughly 1870 to the 1920s. I learned more about history and how to think in those years than ever before or since. He pos- sessed an encyclopedic knowledge of history, and his inter- ests ranged well beyond US labor history. In the seminars I took, him, his choices of readings were eclectic and, sometimes, surprising. The first week of my first graduate year we sat talking very week or two, often for two hours. More, I’d appreciate his doing an independent study with me so that we could launch into our work together. I did laugh at one of his stories about the time he was going to be my advisor and that, further- more, I’d appreciate his doing an independent study with me so that we could launch into our work together. I did laugh at one of his stories about the time he was going to be my advisor and that, further- more, I’d appreciate his doing an independent study with me so that we could launch into our work together. I did laugh at one of his stories about the time he was going to be my advisor and that, further-
munity further, encouraging me to contact his ex-student Shelton Stromquist or his friend Melyn Dubofsky when I was trying to put together my very first conference proposal. Another striking thing was the way David built a culture for social justice and labor activism into his work as a teacher and a historian. The first picket line I ever walked, I walked with David. In his nonchalant way, as a matter of course, he opened his grad students to the idea that workers on strike were valuable, that these workers in this case needed our support as they worked to build a better life for themselves. And then of course there were bigger battles, like the strike Montgomery’s students helped to negotiate in the mid-1980s, when David helped organize faculty and students in support of the strikers. I was his TA that semester and watched him counsel graduate and undergraduate students as they faced pressure to stop supporting the strikers. I was his TA that semester and watched him counsel graduate and undergraduate students as they faced pressure to stop supporting the strikers.

Montgomery always loved the phrase a friend of his coined in the 1960s: “walk close to working-class, even when they’re showing you out the shop window.” And so Montgomery did. Without romanticizing working men and women as all-powerful, unfazed or wise beyond the ages, as victims, he sought to illuminate our understanding of history by showing that working people—white, black, immigrant or native born, male or female—played a central role. I would make this part of my teaching and my work and that of the many scholars he influenced, Montgomery reshaped the discipline of history.

Connecting the Past to the Present
Robin Clark-Bennett, University of Iowa Labor Center

I can still hear David Montgomery’s lectures. I remember his booming description of the words of a Polish steelworker testifying in favor of an eight-hour day: Mr. Chairman—just like a horse and wagon, work all day. Take horse out of wagon—put in stable. Take horse out of stable, put in wagon. Same way for mills. Work all day. Take horse—go stable. Get up—go work in mills—come home. Wife say, “John, children sick, You help with children.” You say, “Oh, go hell!”—go sleep. Wife say, “John, you go town.” You say, “No” —go sleep. No know what the hell you do. For why this war? For why we buy Liberty bonds? For the mills? No, for freedom and America—for every one. No more horse and wagon. For eight-hour day.

I remember him demonstrating a verse of the Wobbly song “Pie in the Sky.” I can still hear him demonstrating his unwavering attention to, and respect for, the subtle and creative ways in which working class people thought of their history, our history, and our activities to change it. Being actively engaged in the struggle for social justice is not only essential for its own sake, it makes for better scholarship and teaching in unimaginable ways. It is possible to be hopeful about the future without being naïve or intellectually or politically unsophisticated. Strive to think globally without ignoring local struggles, and vice versa. Interrogating broad diversity of the working class, and the intercon- nections between race, ethnicity, class, and gender, makes for better history. Building an inclusive community—creating broad solidarities, as he would say in his lectures—is important wherever you go, whether you’re visiting the OAH convention or supporting clerical workers’ struggles.

Our history has asserted their dignity in spite of the dehumanizing forces they often confronted. David Montgomery inspired generations of students, historians, and labor activists, and I am honored to come to stand before this audience today. I arrived at Yale University in 1990 from small-town Iowa, the daughter of a postal union activist father, a professor, and a part-time journalist mother. In order to send their kids to music and ballet classes, my parents had made very difficult economic sacrifices, and I was determined to “make good” on my investment. I was thrilled to attend Yale, but it was often a confusing place for a working class girl from Iowa.

For example, I remember a lunch conversation with a college dean and a handful of students. After asking the other students where they were from, the dean asked me where I was from. I offered what I thought was a positive description of my background, and his well-intended reply was something like, “Thank goodness you were able to escape that place. That’s why it’s important that we offer financial aid, to save people like you.” I nodded, but I had noticed that the faces of the aristocratic Yale alums whose pictures lined the walls had more money and property than I did. Had I intended to escape? Would I ever fit in here? I knew I wasn’t nearly as prepared for college as the kids from prep schools, and I had to work hard to find my voice and my bearings. It may be obvious, then, that David Montgomery’s labor history classes meant more to me than other compelling lecture. His approach of looking beyond institutions and leaders, at the ways in which working people struggled and that of the many scholars he influenced, Montgomery reshaped the discipline of history.

David Montgomery inspired me and so many others to celebrate the working class, to embrace the labor movement. Among my undergraduate friends, the UE members, HERE members from Yale, and after graduation, I became a union organizer, and loaned me his collection of materials about women and leave the history of male workers to others. It might seem like a simple thing, but I realize now what a gift it was, coming from a man of his generation.

When David Montgomery was in his mid-sixties, he invited my classmates and I to the 1964 class reunion to visit, he joined our family for pizza. It was my—and surely most all of my classmates’—introduction to the great Robeson. He performed part of Paul Robeson’s “Ballad for Americans,” with his TAs doing some of the call and response bits of the song from the audience. It was my—and surely most all of us—I first learned that there are not only certain people who are great; that anyone who stands up for what is right and just is a great person. Here was a man of a generation who had the courage to organize and to be active in that struggle for a better society. When this battle was won, and we won the right to organize as a public union, that culture, the more effective I was at helping them recognize and organize, some of the most important book, The Fall of the House of Labor (1989) and my little article earned a footnote.

The most important book, The Fall of the House of Labor

In 1972, when he came to speak at a UA Local 506 Stewards’ Council meeting, he talked about the history of labor parties in the U.S. A few years later I was honored when, through the UE national office, I was asked for an article I’d written for the 50th anniversary of the 1918 Erie GE strike. Following a lead from that book, Maury McIntyre and I wrote an article on the UE movement of the 1960s, and our 25th class reunion was coming up, we knew we had to seize the opportunity. We put together a demonstration in front of the hall at Yale where the 1961 Yaleans were enjoying cocktails — the demonstrators were UE members, HERE members from Yale, and as the stage for a guerrilla theater skit, with a friendly state rep in the role of Jack Mettler, and David Montgomery impersonating Dave Schumacher. Many of Mettler and Schumacher’s classmates watched from the balcony above; the next day the New Haven Register...
In 2009, in his fourth appearance at a UE convention (a record according to Hart) Montgomery’s keynote presentation was riveting and moving. The convention was held in New Haven, not only to honor Yale, but a launching point and stronghold of the UE. Montgomery drew connections between the early union history at places like Sargent, and the union that UE became. After the speech Hart asked UE Local 243 President Ray Pompano what he thought. Ray, president of the local for 25 years, replied “It gave me goose bumps.” Here is an excerpt of that speech, courtesy of Alan Hart and the UE. Other speeches, equally notable, are posted at laborhistorylinks.niu.edu, accessible from the LAWCHA website.

We have a long legacy of working people struggles here in New Haven. When I think of them together with those that created the UE and that you are carrying on today there are some common lessons... Time and again in the history of this country the American workers movement has received a new shot of strength, energy and ideas from recent immigrants. Immigrants poured into the United States, including into New Haven there in the early years of the 20th century. There were two places that were especially important for the immigrants and their national leaders organized them to go back to work. Then they went out and hired everybody but Italians to come in and do the less skilled work in that plant. Over the course of four or five weeks the strike gradually fell and left behind very long memories. I was told by the former organizer in that area, the great Harry Kaplan, that in 1935 when they went out in strike on Sargent there were workers there that said, I am making up to 1900 for two, (Language) two brothers, they worked there... Then that carried on but with it came important lessons about what it would take to make use of this power that modern industry and the immigrants bringing into that industry represented to reshape American industrial life... In the struggles that followed one can get a sense of the UE long ago it was actually born. (Discussion about the struggles of WWII at Woolworth’s, then LaBarge in the ’40s.)

...In the shrinking movement of the 1920s when the American labor movement really ran out of steam, shrank into its shell and represented just a tiny minority of the workers in the country until the great depression came. The Great Depression hit factories, hit all over the country. Here in New Haven, because the city was basically run by a committee of bankers for twelve years as a result of the depression. All expenditures were cut by the bankers committee of New Haven. But it was here also that the new union movement began to take shape. New Haven, you would not recognize it today. New Haven had about one hundred and eighty manufacturing establishments in those days. They are almost all gone today. Sargent, Circuit Wise, and Sargent. This was center of relatively vital unionizing and organizing outside the great depression. But with the Great Depression it came to a stop. (Putting) the troops in the streets. All over the country the depression. All over the country the depression. was here also that the new organization started... People merged into UE in 1936... Boy there was every variety of那 there was no school term... The thing that is important about the UE is that it carried on but with it came important lessons that we would not recognize it today. New Haven also learned out of those struggles the importance of unions standing beside each other. When the American Labor Federation threw out the new industrial unions in 1938 and demanded the central labor councils through them to show their face if they were going to do the job. We know this because we had a New Haven Labor History Society that used to bring together retirees from the garment shops. They knew all each other since they were all the picketers. They formed a driving force in organizing the garment industry both the Amalgamated Clothing Workers and the Ladies Garment Workers of New Haven and really started opening up this scene and opening it up with a very particular sense about it. New Haven also learned out of those struggles the importance of unions standing beside each other. When the American Labor Federation threw out the new industrial unions in 1938 and demanded the central labor councils through them to show their face if they were going to do the job. We know this because we had a New Haven Labor History Society that used to bring together retirees from the garment shops. They knew all each other since they were all the picketers. They formed a driving force in organizing the garment industry both the Amalgamated Clothing Workers and the Ladies Garment Workers of New Haven and really started opening up this scene and opening it up with a very particular sense about it. New Haven also learned out of those struggles the importance of unions standing beside each other. When the American Labor Federation threw out the new industrial unions in 1938 and demanded the central labor councils through them to show their face if they were going to do the job. We know this because we had a New Haven Labor History Society that used to bring together retirees from the garment shops. They knew all each other since they were all the picketers. They formed a driving force in organizing the garment industry both the Amalgamated Clothing Workers and the Ladies Garment Workers of New Haven and really started opening up this scene and opening it up with a very particular sense about it. New Haven also learned out of those struggles the importance of unions standing beside each other. When the American Labor Federation threw out the new industrial unions in 1938 and demanded the central labor councils through them to show their face if they were going to do the job.

In those years. But the radio, electrical, equipment machine workers moved out, and by unionizing the electrical workers there was every variety of politics in the early UE. You name it and you could find it here because these were the local activists that brought together this union. The key plant here became Sargent, once again, drawing on those lessons of 1962, a long, long time before. At Sargent the UE chartered a local in 1938. It carried on its campaign until finally it was able hold an NLRB election that won 4-1 in favor of UE recognition. Very quickly after that the UE started organizing all sorts of other smaller factories around the New Haven area. It was out of these struggles in the 1930s and the tremendous growth of unionism in the United States. This led to the great highpoint, in my estimation, of American working class struggles and unity was reached in 1946 when you find major unions all across the country all going out for the one thing being graduated out of that year. These were the famous strikes that led to the 18½ cents settlements. This was the magic number... Who got the biggest benefit was the lowest paid workers. But the UE took a penny off the 18½ cents and said that should just go to labor grades below common labor. Guess who was in labor grades below common labor? It was all women. They were all classified as less than the common labor rate. Over the course of the 1946 strikes workers that were forming unions for the first time and those where were employers were trying to take back what they had established during the war, especially in workplaces. Representation on the shop floor over grievances. Those strikes were increasingly supported by general wide strikes around the country. In 1946 in Rochester, New York, Stamford, Connecticut, it is hard to believe that now, find me a factory in Stamford. But Stamford was a factory town in those days. And Stamford where the Yale & Towne, machinists were out, the UE played a major role in mobilizing everybody to come to the support of those machinists and Yale & Towne and gradually made a victory there possible. General strikes were repeated in Pittsburgh, in support of municipal workers again, not private employees but those working for the government and in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, and did I say Rochester (NY)? That was the first one. All you Californians know that the biggest and biggest of all the general strikes was Oakland, California. They shut down everything for a week and just took over the city, the streets, the city, everything was run by the working people of Oakland, California. And did I say Rochester (NY)? That was the first one.
the people who are in jail could be let out because they are no longer breaking the injunction against the strike. They were let out. They negotiated a contract fast as all hell over the weekend and by Monday, boom, they had something to represent and the union had come out on top. But this was the epic of the breakthrough of new unions and of course here New Haven we all know of the crucial importance of the clerical and white-collar workers at Yale in pulling off their great strike in 1984-1985.

Here then were new kinds of public service workers. Here learning goes on in the workplace is the heart of that organization of its rank-and-file members and the work that they do. Here we saw the ways in which the new kinds of solidarity at the same time learn to function in new ways suitable to their needs. UE’s support of independent unions around the country has opened up a major new avenue, I think, in that direction.

Right after the election, of course, the workers at Republican inspired the whole country to think that we weren’t beaten down and hopeless after all. It showed that they had just been lucky.

First of all that a union is only as strong as the activity of its rank-and-file members and the work that we are taking deliberate action that we are taking today as we face these new challenges in the 21st century. Think about it. Hang in there with it and carry it on.

We need to guide deliberate action that we are taking today as we face these new challenges in the 21st century. Think about it. Hang in there with it and carry it on.

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