

LAWCHA

The Labor and Working-Class History Association



INSIDE

REFLECTIONS ON
YABLONSKI'S 1969 UMW
CAMPAIGN

LABOR, THE UNIVERSITY,
AND THE FINANCIAL
CRISIS

NOTES FROM D.C.

NEWSLETTER
SPRING 2010

Hold These Dates!

MARCH 24-26, 2011

LAWCHA will co-sponsor the 100th Commemoration of the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire in New York City, March 24-26, 2011 (the call for papers will be on the LAWCHA website soon).

APRIL 7-10, 2011

LAWCHA will co-sponsor its annual conference with the Southern Labor Studies Association (SLSA) in Atlanta, April 7-10, 2011 (the call for papers is on the LAWCHA website now).

Announcement of UALE Book Awards

The winners of the Best Book of the Year Award of the United Association for Labor Education were announced at the April 2010 UALE conference in San Diego: Steven Ashby and C.J. Hawking's *Staley: The Fight for a New American Labor Movement* and Michael K. Honey's *Going Down Jericho Road: The Memphis Strike, Martin Luther King's Last Campaign*.

The LAWCHA
Newsletter Team

Co-editors: Bob Bussel (bussel@uoregon.edu)
Joseph McCartin (jam6@georgetown.edu)
Layout: Michael Stauch (lawcha@duke.edu)

For submission, email Joe or Bob
For additional copies, email Michael

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Notes from Washington, D.C.

Kimberly Phillips, LAWCHA President

As I write this short note, we have just finished our joint meeting with the OAH in Washington D.C. We had a full three days that included panels, discussions, an off-site day of panels, tributes, dissertation and book awards, and the LAWCHA Board meeting. And we managed to include a gathering of a committee planning the Triangle Fire Commemoration, which will be held next spring in New York City (more on this below). You will read more about the LAWCHA conference in Washington in our next newsletter (and we'll include pictures), but we had days of demonstrating what LAWCHA Board member Laurie Green describes as "engaged scholars." On Friday, we sponsored a joint discussion with Bill Samuel, Director of Government Affairs for the AFL-CIO, LAWCHA Board members Nancy McLean and Joe McCartin, and Kim Bobo, Executive Director and founder of Interfaith Workers Justice on how academics can be "troublesome allies" for workers and unions. Bill Samuels urged academics to continue writing op-ed pieces and remain active in labor's pursuit of state and national legislative efforts (especially EFCA). Nancy McLean suggested that as many campuses engage in wage campaigns, academics, students, and staff might find new pathways to support and participate in workers' right movements, on and off campus.

On behalf of LAWCHA and Historians Against the War (HAW), Staughton Lynd led a moving tribute to the life and work of Howard Zinn, who died January 27, 2010 at the age of 87. Staughton's tribute was, Mike Honey noted, "very historical and thoughtful and also very inspiring. People were almost in tears at the end, and yet we learned so much from his perspective on Howard." On Saturday, LAWCHA honored Staughton with its annual Distinguished Service to Labor and Labor History. This award was our third and we heard, again, a moving—even magical—example of an engaged scholar. As LAWCHA Vice President Shel Stromquist observed, Staughton's support for labor is "without peer." Raised by parents committed to non-violent social change, Staughton went on to fight for racial economic justice in the South and participatory democracy for all. He has published numerous books and articles on behalf of workers, peace, and social

change. In the incessant wars of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, he has tirelessly campaigned for peace. He observed on Saturday that wars would end once soldiers resisted and refused to fight. He sang a miner's song from the early twentieth century, at once demonstrating creative struggle for change and his long participation in workers' struggles. His remarks will soon be up on the LAWCHA website.

Staughton received his award in the midst of lively sessions held at the College of William and Mary offices in Washington, D.C. that focused on American labor and the Global South. John Russo, Rick Halpern, Sherri Linkon, Lisa Fine, Susan McGrath-Champ, and Andrew Herod held a panel on "Working Space: A Conversation Between Labor Historians and Labor Geographers." Susan joined us from the University of Sydney. Rick Halpern, Dan Bender, and Paul Lawrie gave a terrific account of the global labor/labour workshop that they have launched at the University of Toronto. For the workshop's manifesto, please see the LAWCHA website. Julie Greene delivered the keynote address for our annual membership meeting: "Ditch Diggers of the World: From Empire to Global Labor." Our gathering included two additional awards. Jessie Ramey, Carnegie Mellon University, received the 2010 Herbert G. Gutman Dissertation Prize for "A Childcare Crisis: Poor Black and White Families and Orphanages in Pittsburgh, 1878-1929." Seth Rockman received the 2010 Taft Prize for *Scraping By: Wage Labor, Slavery, and Survival in Early Baltimore* (2008).

Finally, please note that along with numerous labor organizations, civil rights, and universities, LAWCHA will co-sponsor the 100th Commemoration of the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire in New York City, March 24-26, 2011; and LAWCHA will co-sponsor its annual conference with the Southern Labor Studies Association (SLSA) in Atlanta, April 7-10, 2011 (the call for papers is on the LAWCHA website). The call for papers for the Triangle Commemoration will be posted very soon.

Peace and solidarity,

Kim Phillips

The Public Sector Under Pressure

Bob Bussel and Joe McCartin

A few months ago, the Bureau of Labor Statistics shared some news that many had expected but few have truly prepared for: figures now show that the majority of union members in the United States work for government at the local, state, or federal level. As private sector union membership rates eroded relentlessly, it has long been apparent that this moment would come. Yet the economic dislocations of the Great Recession have brought us to this point more quickly than even close observers anticipated.

The fact that most union members are now government workers raises some profound issues. One issue concerns scholarship. Labor scholars, and especially historians, have yet to devote sufficient attention to government workers. Thus the recent news serves to invite scholars to redouble their efforts to make government workers and their struggles more visible in the narrative of labor and working-class history.

A second issue concerns politics. Now that the majority of union members work for government, public sector unions are more vulnerable in many ways than they have ever been. As private sector workers experience chronic joblessness, see their benefits stripped, and watch their pensions shift from the defined benefit to defined contribution model, it has become easier for anti-unionists to characterize public sector unions as privileged elites that plunder the tax dollars of hard-working Americans while remaining immune from the sacrifices private sector workers are forced to make.

The recent economic crisis has only exacerbated this vulnerability. Already one hears calls for take-backs from government workers. Public workers have been hit hard by furloughs over the past year. The incipient recovery has hardly relieved the pressure on them. Government workers who traded potential wage increases for improved pensions now see those pensions and much else that they have won threatened.

We thought that this was an appropriate time to ask two historians of the public sector labor movement, Joseph Slater and Fran Ryan, and one its leading union strategists, Paul Booth, to share their thoughts with us on the state of the movement. Joseph Slater's book *Public Worker: Government Employee Unions, the Law, and the State, 1900-62* (Cornell 2005) is a standard reference for anyone who wants to know about the origins of public sector unionism. Fran Ryan's book, *AFSCME's Philadelphia Story: Municipal Workers and Urban Power in the Twentieth Century*, forthcoming from Temple University Press, promises to help illuminate the history of public sector unions in postwar Philadelphia. Paul Booth, a founding member of Students for a Democratic Society in the 1960s, and a longtime veteran of the public sector union movement currently serves as the executive assistant to Gerry McEntee, president of the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees. In the essays that follow, the three share their views on how the current economic crisis threatens the well-being of public sector workers and challenges the legitimacy of public sector unionism.

Public Sector Labor in 2010: View of a Legal Historian

Joseph Slater, Eugene N. Balk Professor of Law and Values

University of Toledo College of Law

JSlater@utnet.utoledo.edu

In 2009, public employees became, for the first time, a majority of unionized workers in the U.S. This reflects not only the continuing success of public sector unions (with union density close to 40 percent), but also the continued decline of labor in the private sector (with density under 8 percent). These trends have now lasted nearly a half-century, and they call into question the rise-and-fall periodization of much labor history, centered on the road to the New Deal and the subsequent erosion of union strength and influence.

Beyond this broad trend, the past decade has produced some important issues in the public sector, issues steeped in history. I will briefly sketch three (at least two reveal my interest in law): budget woes and blaming unions; the fight over collective bargaining rights in the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the Transportation Safety Administration (TSA); and a Missouri case which gave public workers in that state a constitutional right to bargain but failed to explain how such rights would work. Throughout, debates continue over what rights to collective bargaining public workers should have, with some opposing such rights entirely.

On April 5, 1971, the New York Times editorialized that it was “certain” that pension commitments for unions representing New York city workers “involve a ruinous charge on . . . taxpayers, now and forever,” and are “obstacles in the way of municipal survival.” On January 22, 2010, a Wall Street Journal article titled “Public Employee Unions are Sinking California” concluded that “public employee pensions would ‘bankrupt’ the state.” While in both cases, the financial situation was indeed grim (last year, a judge ruled that Vallejo, California could nullify its union contracts as part of its bankruptcy restructuring), often at least the subtext of such pieces questions the entire propriety of public sector unions.

Also, the economic crisis has hurt public workers. Throughout the country, public employers are freezing or cutting salaries, and imposing layoffs and privatization in search of short-term budget savings. In jurisdictions which use binding interest arbitration to settle bargaining impasses (a plurality of states), arbitrators have sympathized with the employer’s economic condition to the detriment of workers. An interest arbitration decision in Illinois last year refused to look at standard factors such as what comparable employees in other jurisdictions made because of the economic “free-fall.” An arbitration involving Baltimore workers explained that it would have accepted the union’s wage proposal, but for the city’s inability to maintain a statutorily required balanced budget. Such decisions are common across the country.

Furloughs are also in vogue as some academics have discovered. Unions in California and elsewhere have challenged furloughs. A case in Prince George’s County, Maryland (currently on appeal), held that furloughing public employees violated the Contracts Clause of the U.S. Constitution, but other challenges have been rejected.

Historians should note how these issues have revived long-standing arguments in the U.S. over the very legitimacy of public sector unions. Union rights for public workers came much later than for private sector workers. Most public sector labor laws were passed in the early 1960s to early 1980s, and a number of states still don’t grant collective bargaining rights to most or all of their public workers. I discussed the rhetoric behind opposition specifically to public sector unions in my book *Public Workers*: for example, fears that unions will necessarily grow too powerful within government and are unconstrained by market forces. These arguments are routinely repeated by mainstream Republican and conservative voices. For example, on March 6, 2010, the Cato Institute issued a report on public sector unions making those arguments and calling for a ban on any collective bargaining in the entire public sector.

Debates continue over what rights to collective bargaining public workers should have, with some opposing such rights entirely.

The debate over whether public workers should have bargaining rights was highlighted by the Bush administration’s stance on workers in the DHS and TSA. When the TSA was formed, the Bush administration determined that its workers would not have bargaining rights. Then when the DHS was created, the administration insisted that the authorizing statute allow the agency to create a more restrictive personnel system.

————— “Public Sector” Forum Continued —————

Democrats preserved a right to bargain collectively, which set the stage for litigation.

The DHS then set up a very restrictive system: among other things, it allowed the DHS to void unilaterally any provision of any union contract it had agreed to. A union sued, claiming this was not “collective bargaining” as the statute required. In *National Treasury Employees Union V. Chertoff*, 452 F.3d 839 (D.C. Cir. 2006), the court agreed with the union. “Collective bargaining” was a term of art, and it could not mean a system in which one side was not bound by collectively bargained contracts.

Beyond the courtroom, the rhetoric, especially following 9/11, has been extreme. “Do we really want some work rule negotiated prior to 9/11 to prevent us from finding somebody who is carrying a bomb on a plane with your momma?” Senator Phil Gramm (R-Tex.) asked in 2002. Even today, TSA workers still lack the right to collectively bargain, and Obama’s first nominee to head the TSA was sunk partly because he refused to oppose such rights. Questions about the fundamental legitimacy of unions in government employment are not going away.

My final topic involves a case from Missouri which also raises the question of whether historically, “collective bargaining” is a term of art. In 1945, Missouri added the following clause to its state Constitution: “employees shall have the right to organize and to bargain collectively through representatives of their own choosing.” In 1947, the Missouri Supreme Court held that this provision did not apply to public employees. Then in 2007, that court reversed itself and held it did cover public workers. *Independence-Nat. Educ. Ass’n v. Independence School Dist.*, 223 S.W.3d 131. This was significant, as many government employees in Missouri (notably public school teachers and police) still have no statutory right to bargain collectively.

Missouri has not passed a statute implementing this Constitutional guarantee or explaining how “collective bargaining” under the Constitution should work. Thus it is unclear what specific rights Missouri public employees have under their Constitution. The issue is hotly contested. Public school employers in Missouri have promulgated labor relations rules in response to *Independence* that are quite different from what has traditionally been considered “collective bargaining.”

Two lower courts have issued opinions in the past eight months on the meaning of “collective bargaining.” Full disclosure: I acted as an expert witness in both cases, testifying on behalf of NEA-affiliated teachers’ unions. My role was to describe the history and meaning of the term “collective bargaining” as used in statutes, agency interpretations, and in practice in the U.S. at least through 1945. It was an improbable dream job for a historian of labor law (e.g., testifying about decisions of the “old NLRA” under NIRA!). But since neither judge seemed to rely on my testimony, my ego was kept in check.

So, what does “collective bargaining” mean? In a case from Springfield, Missouri, the school board set up a system for union recognition that allowed teachers, in an initial ballot, to choose to be represented by one union, multiple unions, or no union. Under the multiple union option, more than one union would represent the same group of teachers, i.e., teachers in one bargaining unit could be simultaneously represented by more than one labor organization – even if they were hostile and competing unions. This contradicts the historically-established principle in U.S. labor law of exclusive representation. The judge ignored this principle and held this system did not violate the Missouri Constitution, because current dictionary of definitions of “collective bargaining” resolved the matter. Webster’s Third (1993) says “collective bargaining” is “negotiation for the settlement of the terms of a collective agreement between an employer or group of employers on one side and a union or number of unions on the other.” *Springfield Nat’l Educ. Ass’n v. Springfield Bd. of Educ.*, No. 0931-CV08322 (Cir.Ct. Greene Cty, MO, Sept. 10, 2009).

On the other hand, the union won a case in Bayless, Missouri. *Bayless Education Association v. Bayless School District*, No. 09SL-CC01481 (Cir.Ct. St. Louis, Feb. 10, 2010). In Bayless, the employer required employees in each school in the district to select two individual representatives and two alternates; these representatives, plus one representative a union designated, would bargain as a group with the employer. Bayless held this did not satisfy the constitutional right to bargain collectively. Bayless distinguished Springfield by noting that in Springfield, teachers at least had the option of choosing a traditional exclusive representative. Bayless then explained that the system in question “mandates collaborative bargaining, not collective bargaining through a union representative.”

It’s unclear where the judge got the term “collaborative bargaining” (it’s not a term of art in labor law), nor does the Constitution require a “union” representative. I would have preferred a holding that stressed that this system did not allow employees a “representative of their own choosing,” at least in the sense that term has been understood historically in labor relations.

In sum, this issue, the debates over bargaining in the TSA, and objections to public sector unions generally, especially in hard economic times, are not new. For historians of public workers – and there should be more of them – this is a fascinating time.

Public Sector Unions in the New Austerity Age: Reflections from Pennsylvania

Francis Ryan, Comey Institute of Industrial Relations

Saint Joseph's University, Pennsylvania

fpryan33@gmail.com

At the end of February 2010, news coverage of a one-day strike by Greek public sector unions, representing diverse groups such as air traffic controllers, college professors, garbage collectors, and public nurses demonstrated the type of broad, militant coalition that organized labor in that nation can bring together. Similar displays of strength routinely occur in European capitols where public sector organizations take firm stands against cuts in services, wages, and benefits. The street-level tactics of European trade unionists contrast sharply with those employed by their counterparts in the United States. At a recent debate in a labor history class at the Comey Institute of Industrial Relations in Philadelphia, I asked a rank-and-file group of public sector union members, "Why don't we do that here?"

"We are," said a member of AFSCME DC 47, which represents 5,000 white-collar city workers in the City of Brotherly Love. "We stopped Mayor Nutter from shutting down city libraries, we saved those jobs. A lot of people came out and supported us too." Indeed, in November 2008, over a thousand Philadelphia AFSCME members joined with other public workers represented by SEIU 32BJ and IAFF Local 22 outside City Hall to protest proposed service cutbacks that would impact basic services and cause layoffs. While such actions do not make the same kinds of international headlines as general strikes, local solidarity efforts address the same issues that face workers and citizens around the world in a new age of austerity. "We can't shut down the whole country like they do in France, but our problems are local," another member mentioned.

The discussions at the Comey Institute this past year should challenge labor historians to focus on how local responses by public sector unions to the current economic crisis reflect the paradoxical nature of the government sector in the United States. With most budget sources for local government services coming from state and municipal taxes, and with collective bargaining and recognition policies differing from state to state, the programs of the most powerful public sector units—particularly AFSCME, SEIU and the teachers' unions—seem to fragment across this vast range of political cultures. Several recent trends in Pennsylvania, one of the early centers in the historic rise of public sector unionization, give some background to understanding long-term developments that may emerge nationally among public sector unions in the coming decade.

At the beginning of the Obama presidency, public sector unions remain the powerhouses of the American labor movement.

Despite the continued growth of government service unions, their influence remains checked by a political culture that holds government action in contempt. As Joseph A. McCartin has shown, the rise of a powerful national conservative movement between 1975 and 1980 was directly related to local taxpayer rights activism that sought to curb the power of government sector unions. Although no formal study of the current Tea Party movement's attitude towards government sector organizations yet exists, it is clear that today's conservatives continue these earlier goals that ultimately seek the destruction of these unions. These efforts will surely continue in the coming decade.

Despite the continued growth of government service unions, their influence remains checked by a political culture that holds government action in contempt.

A pattern of aggressive calls for givebacks of benefits achieved over decades of collective bargaining, along with demands to reopen current contracts seems the norm in cities and townships across the nation. These efforts continue the strategies of conservative legislators since the last decade. Executive orders issued by the governors of Kentucky, Missouri and Indiana in 2004 and 2005 took away collective bargaining rights for public employees in those states. Florida gutted its civil service system, removing 16,000 positions from merit-based oversight in an obvious effort to weaken potential efforts to increase union membership. The political responses of many right-wing governors have indeed hardened even in the face of desperate need since the recession began. As Diane Stewart and Michael Lipsky noted recently, "in the midst of the worst state fiscal crisis in decades, some state governors even found it politically expedient to refuse emergency federal assistance funds in perverse appeals to anti-government sentiment."

These problems are evident in Pennsylvania as well. In February 2009, Governor Ed Rendell submitted a budget to the General

Assembly, calling for cutbacks that would curtail services across the commonwealth in order to address the state's 2.3 million dollar deficit. Political wrangling resulted in a stalemate and the July 1 budget approval deadline mandated by the state constitution was not met. While budget impasses had occurred in Harrisburg numerous times since the 1980s, an unexpected legal decision prior to the deadline ruled that the commonwealth had no authority to pay employees in the event that a budget agreement is not enacted. Faced with payless paydays, AFSCME, SEIU and several other public unions initiated legal procedures to challenge the ruling, eventually winning the case in December. Through July, however, public workers organized to place pressure on Rendell and state legislators. Some members called for a strike. Addressing these demands, AFSCME Council 13 Executive Director David R. Fillman cautioned members that a work stoppage while still under contract was illegal, as well as politically irresponsible. "A strike would play into the hands of the politicians as they would not pay you and they would keep you out to save money. As repulsive and unnecessary as this budget impasse is, you will get all your money back to July 1," he stated. With continued pressure, Rendell eventually signed a bridge loan to cover state workers pay until the budget was passed.

Fillman's position against a major walkout was grounded in the realities of current labor law and budgetary procedure in Pennsylvania. Still, the struggles faced last summer were important for many AFSCME members in their own political education and as an initiation to the principles of trade unionism. Casey Karns, a therapeutic activities aide at a mental health facility in Franklin, Pennsylvania and member of AFSCME Local 1050 (DC 85) sees last year's crisis as a turning point in her involvement in the union. Although she had previously attended union rallies with her mother, who is also an AFSCME member, last summer was the first time she assumed a leadership role, organizing a picket line to gain public support for the union cause. "A lot of younger people are just getting out after college and most have never been in a union before. They didn't have a sense of the history of the union or what a union even did. The budget impasse was a big deal. It sparked youth involvement, and I still see it."

Other shifts toward youth activism also emerged in AFSCME over the past year. In June 2009, AFSCME held its first national conference for youth members, bringing over five hundred activists to meet to discuss the future of the union. Acknowledging internal surveys that predict an over forty percent retirement rate among union leadership by 2020, AFSCME's Next Wave program hopes to cultivate new leaders under thirty-five years old. The conference established the priorities of younger workers, such as the importance of web-based technologies in union communications and a desire for labor history to give a sense of the union's origins. Since the conference, Next Wave chapters have been introduced across the country, and have increased youth participation in collective bargaining sessions and grievance handling cases, providing direct experience under direction of long-time union stewards.

True to its history, the current drive for youth involvement in public sector unions highlights the importance of political activism. Other unions are also implementing similar political directives. Pennsylvania's largest teachers union, the Pennsylvania State Education Association (PSEA), has built coalitions with community organizations and parents in Bethlehem and Reading. In summer 2008, with direct involvement of the PSEA, the Bethlehem Coalition for Quality Education (BCQE) was founded to speak out against proposed cutbacks that would impact school bussing services and programs for special needs students. Recognizing the importance of formal representation on the local school board, BCQE volunteers supported Aurea Ortiz in her bid for a seat on the board. With support especially from Bethlehem's Spanish speaking South Side, Ortiz was elected to the school board in November 2009, becoming the first Latina elected to office in the history of the Lehigh Valley. Ortiz's campaign signals an important moment in the political organizing of the diverse Spanish speaking community in this section of Pennsylvania, which PSEA activists plan to continue into the future.

True to its history, the current drive for youth involvement in public sector unions highlights the importance of political activism.

The rise of PSEA's community coalitions in Bethlehem and Reading is not so much a break from the state's traditions of public sector union activism, but an acknowledgement of the importance of old style politics. Political education remains central to what will continue through this decade. As Philip M. Dine notes in his recent book *State of the Unions*, "until labor sharpens its political act—pushes once again its issues, including labor law reform restoring the right to organize, onto the national agenda—it will continue to shrink in membership." For some labor leaders in Pennsylvania, putting forward an agenda for working people hinges on trade unionists seeking elected office themselves. Wendell Young III, who organized over 4,000 state liquor store clerks into the Retail Clerks Union (UFCW) in 1970 supports such a program and has been urging AFL-CIO president Rich Trumka to initiate it in Pennsylvania. "Who else can better represent the workers' needs than men and women who come out of the unions?" Young argues. "We need to groom members from our own ranks. We need to identify them and back them. If we can build on that, we'll have no problem getting our agenda on the table."

The Great Recession Hits Public Sector Labor - Hard

Paul Booth, AFSCME

pbooth@afscme.org

The government workforce, and its unions, are not exempt from the suffering this recession has brought. The financial blows they have sustained have been lesser and later than those visited upon the private sector. The political attacks that the recession has fostered, however, are directly aimed at the heart of the public sector.

Through calendar 2009, state and local public employment had fallen back by little more than 1 percent, or approximately 200,000 jobs, with an additional 46,000 lost in January and February 2010. The unemployment rate among government workers rose to 4 percent as of February 2010, considerably less than half the rate for the civilian labor force. But throughout 2009, millions of public workers had their pay cut, in most cases by furloughs, typically one or two unpaid days off per month.

Still, through 2009, public sector unions eked out membership gains, with successes in organizing exceeding losses through fiscal cutbacks. The AFL-CIO reported at its spring meeting that AFSCME grew by 43,000, AFT by 21,000, and AFGGE by 13,000. For the first time, the annual Bureau of Labor Statistics union membership survey reported more public employees in unions than private-sector employees.

The prospects for 2010 are bleak; budgets are shrinking as receipts fall from income, sales, and now property taxes, and layoffs are planned in anticipation of the end of the federal fiscal relief that was provided under the Recovery Act. Economist Mark Zandi projects 900,000 jobs will be lost due to the fiscal crisis at state and local levels, in the absence of additional federal assistance.

The Ideological Challenge to Government

The debate about such assistance is just one indicator of the political focus on the public sector workforce. There is a drumbeat of publicity about public employee pensions, and retiree health care, with a narrative about bankruptcy and forced tax increases. The anti-government theme has been featured in the opposition to health care reform and in the Tea Party movement.

Breaking the power of public employee unions has developed into a standing leading theme for Republican candidates for Governor; it's an explanation for fiscal problems, but it's also a strategic priority.

Government's role has long been at the center of political debate. President Obama's addressed it in his inaugural speech: "The question we ask today is not whether government is too big or too small, but whether it works," a nice contrast to Reagan's

"government is not the solution, government is the problem."

Thirty years of Reaganism has brought America to a crossroads: the Reaganites correctly saw the election of Barack Obama as threatening to reverse their successes, and have escalated their efforts in a desperate attempt to kill the Obama Opportunity before it takes hold. They thwarted the campaign for the Employee Free Choice Act, but they also need to strike against public employees and their unions.

If the Reaganite agenda of globalization, deregulation and privatization was incomplete, it was in the power of public worker unions and the resilience of public services that the incompleteness lay. Busting public sector labor was, and is, at the far reach of the Reaganite ambition. They did do a great deal of permanent harm to the very idea of governing for the public good, while they held the reins of power; they made the Katrina hurricane response the metaphor for government effectiveness.

To fully turn the page on the Reagan Era, we would have to prevail in three areas: Deeds, Words, and People. Deeds means notable examples of effective, successful governmental problem-solving; Words means changing the narrative, and People means re-staffing public agencies at all levels with a new generation of employees, committed to the ideals of public service. All of that depends on a strong public sector labor movement and its ability to win in the electoral arena.

The 2010 election will therefore be an historic test for the public sector unions. They will be challenged by the intensity of anti-government sentiment expressed in the Tea Party movement, and handicapped by the continuing split in organized labor, in which the Service Employees and Teamsters remain outside the AFL-CIO.

Furthermore, in the eyes of public workers, a simple partisan explanation for their difficulties isn't as credible as it was in 2008. With Democrats occupying the White House and serving as governors in many states, they have now become the "employers" who are carrying out the cuts caused by the revenue shortfalls of the recession.

The term "scarring" has been offered to draw attention to the impacts of the recession that will outlast the downturn itself, such as the reduced lifetime earnings for those who entered the labor force at its lowest ebb. If the recession contributes to the extinguishment of the political opportunity to revitalize public service, the quality of life for future generations, which a robust public sector provides, will be diminished. Those scars might not fade for many years.

“Public Sector” Forum Continued

The Professoriate and the Financial Crisis

Larry G. Gerber, Professor Emeritus of History

Auburn University

gerbelg@auburn.edu

The nearly 1.4 million higher education faculty in the United States have not been immune to the hard times that have come with the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression. Newspaper headlines have announced layoffs, furloughs, and hiring freezes at American colleges and universities across the country. Faculty have been affected not only at poorly funded state institutions, but also at wealthy private universities such as Harvard and Princeton.

While recognizing the very real economic pressures on American colleges and universities, faculty and others concerned about the quality of American higher education should not accept without question claims by college presidents and governing boards that academic program and instructional staff reductions are the only way to respond to current budgetary problems. Faculty, students, and concerned citizens need to insist that in deciding how to allocate available resources, college and university administrations give highest priority to carrying out their academic mission—teaching students and generating new knowledge—instead of continuing to spend on nonessential services and additional layers of administration.

Contingent faculty, who lack the protection of tenure, have typically been the first to suffer from the cutbacks that have been sweeping across the country. However, tenured faculty have also been affected. Florida State University recently laid off 21 tenured and 15 tenure-track faculty, and tenured faculty have also been terminated at Clark Atlanta University, Florida Atlantic University, and the University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston. Other schools have warned that similar layoffs may be necessary because of their budget shortfalls.

Furloughs that amount to pay cuts have already been imposed on faculties and staff at many colleges and universities, including the University of California,

the University of Illinois, and the University of Georgia. In some instances, mandatory furloughs have represented pay reductions of more than ten percent. The College and University Professional Association for Human Resources reports that overall, one-third of faculty in 2009 experienced pay cuts, with the median decrease being three percent. At most schools, hiring for new positions has either been halted altogether or reduced drastically, thus further eroding what was already a weak academic labor market. Entire colleges and schools have faced closure at some institutions, while on many campuses, programs and departments have been put on the chopping block.

College presidents and governing boards have argued that falling revenues resulting from the deep recession have necessitated the various measures they have implemented to reduce faculty personnel costs. Clearly, public institutions have witnessed substantial reductions in state funding, as state governments slash budgets in response to steep decreases in tax revenues. State funds for the California State University System were cut by 584 million dollars in the 2009-2010 budget. The State University of New York experienced cuts of 334 million dollars in state funding in 2008 and 2009. The State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO) organization reports that 13 states have cut their support for higher education over the last two years by more than 15 percent. Massachusetts tops the list with cuts of 37 percent. Federal stimulus monies have helped significantly in filling funding shortfalls, but such funding is temporary and has not been sufficient to compensate fully for shortfalls for many states.

Private institutions are generally not affected by cuts in state funding, but, like most public institutions, they also have been hurt by a drastic decline in earnings from endowments. The Chronicle of Higher Education reports that the “value of college endowments declined

by an average of 23 percent from 2008 to 2009.” Especially at the richest private and public schools with the largest endowments, the decrease in investment income has been accompanied by a substantial increase in debt as schools have maintained or even increased spending from endowment funds while seeing endowment income go down.

There is no denying that colleges and universities are facing serious funding problems. But too often administrations and governing boards have downplayed certain trends that are counterbalancing the decline in state funding and endowments. They often do so in order to use the current financial situation to justify restructuring efforts that would otherwise meet stiff opposition and that have little academic justification. Most people following recent news stories about program and staff cuts would probably be surprised to learn that for all public institutions in the country, the total amount of state and local support went up by seven percent between 2007 and 2008, and stayed roughly the same (actually increasing very slightly) between 2008 and 2009, though spending per student did decline by four percent in 2009 (CHEEO, State Higher Education Finance FY 2009). The situation, of course, varies from state to state, but the overall funding situation for public higher education is not nearly as bleak as it has often been portrayed.

Moreover, at many public institutions, state funds provide a relatively small percentage of total operating revenues. At both the University of Virginia and the University of Michigan, for example, state government contributes only eight percent of all institutional income. The percentage is considerably higher at institutions not focusing on research, but, in general, state funding as a percentage of revenues for most public institutions has declined significantly since the 1970s, as legislators have increasingly insisted on a more entrepreneurial approach to the management of public colleges and universities. Although double-digit state or local funding cuts can have a devastating impact on the budget of a community college or non-research oriented state university, it is important to realize that for many state institutions such cuts represent a much smaller percentage decline in total operating revenues than first appears.

Both public and private institutions have responded to current budget pressures by raising tuition to

help offset declines in other revenue sources. Public colleges and universities raised tuition rates in 2009 by 3.4 percent but realized a gain in total revenues from tuition of 7 percent, because the number of students going to college increased over the past year—not in spite of the recession, but probably because of it. Nationwide, tuition now provides over 44 billion dollars of income for public colleges and universities, as compared to the 88.8 billion dollars coming from state and local taxes, and federal relief funds. The National Association of Independent Colleges reports that even while private institutions this year held down tuition increases to their lowest levels in thirty years, they still raised tuition rates by an average of 4.3 percent.

The point of all these numbers is not to argue that every college and university is doing fine in the face of the recent recession, but rather to highlight the need for a careful investigation of an institution’s finances before accepting a claim that reduced revenues necessitate program and faculty cuts that could not be pushed through in “normal” times, and which might do long-term damage to the academic quality of the institution. Too many administrations see the current situation as presenting a “crisis” that they do not want to “waste” as they seek to restructure their institutions.

It is also important to look at how college and university administrations had already been redirecting their spending priorities, even before the current financial crisis arose. Data gathered by Ernst Benjamin shows that in 1975, more than two-thirds of all faculty members worked full-time, and that the overwhelming majority of these faculty were tenured or on the tenure-track. By 2007, less than one third of all faculty were tenured or on the tenure-track, and half of all faculty worked only part-time. During the last two decades, in contrast, the number of full-time support and administrative staff not directly involved in teaching or research increased nearly twice as fast as full-time instructional staff (Center for College Affordability and Productivity, Trends in the Higher Education Labor Force). A study by the Delta Project, Trends in College Spending, concludes that between 1995 and 2006:

Direct instruction expenses have consistently declined as a proportion of education and related spending, relative to increases in student services, academic support, administration and maintenance. The deepest reductions in spending for instruction occurred among the “teaching”

The Professoriate and the Financial Crisis

institutions in the public sector—e.g. public and private master's institutions, private bachelor's institutions, and community colleges.

The redirection of resources away from direct support for teaching and research has greatly exacerbated the impact of the recession on faculty and students. Thus, any response by colleges and universities to current economic pressures must include a reversal of the generation-long pattern of disinvestment in full-time faculty and concurrent explosion in administrative and auxiliary costs. To achieve this reorientation in higher education spending, faculty will have to establish a collective voice on their individual campuses to demand greater budget transparency and greater faculty involvement in the budgeting process.

The American Association of University Professors (AAUP) has long held that faculty should play a significant role in budgeting decisions. This basic principle of shared governance was articulated in the "Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities" that the AAUP jointly formulated in 1966 with the American Council on Education and the Association of Governing Boards. Now, more than ever, greater transparency and greater faculty involvement in budgeting can help reassure those who are footing the bill for higher education--students and taxpayers--that the core missions of our colleges and universities are the first spending priorities. If spending cuts are necessary, they should come first through the elimination of peripheral activities and excessive layers of administrative bureaucracy, rather than in the areas of teaching and research.

Full access to an institution's financial information is a key first step in fighting against unnecessary cuts affecting the academic mission of our colleges and universities. Faculty senates are certainly one vehicle for faculty to press for access to information and for a reorientation of institutional spending priorities. But the most effective means for faculty to have an impact on their institution's budgeting decisions is through collective bargaining. This may not be an option for many faculty, but one recent example of the power of collective bargaining for those faculty who can unionize is the University of Akron. The AAUP-affiliated union at Akron recently signed a two-year

contract that called for a two percent pay "bonus" for 2009 and a five percent increase to base pay for 2010. Last fall, the AAUP's Collective Bargaining Congress (CBC) adopted a resolution entitled "Turn it Around; Don't Give it Away," in which it argued that faculty should make use of all means at their disposal to bring institutional spending priorities in line with core mission responsibilities before agreeing to pay cuts or layoffs.

More broadly, as the AAUP's Collective Bargaining Congress argues, faculty across the country also need to engage in an organized campaign to convince the general public that adequate funding for higher education is essential for the nation's future, not only as a means of furnishing students with the skills necessary to be successful in a twenty-first century economy, but also in order to prepare students to become active and informed citizens. Adequate funding must include greater investment in full-time faculty, who are the human capital that is necessary for the long-term health of our system of higher education. In resisting cuts in salary and layoffs, faculty are not just defending their narrow self interest; they are trying to preserve a system of higher education that has been the envy of the rest of the world and a foundation stone to the well being of the nation.

Larry G. Gerber, Professor Emeritus of History at Auburn University, currently serves as the chair of the American Association of University Professors' Committee on College and University Government.

Activities of the Southern Labor Studies Association

Cindy Hahamovitch, President, SLSA

College of William & Mary

cxhaha@wm.edu

The Southern Labor Studies Association has been hard at work promoting the study, teaching, and preservation of southern labor history although our first order of business has been to promote the organization itself. Outgoing president Heather Thompson (Temple) organized a wonderful labor history bus tour and a luncheon at the Southern Historical Association meeting in Louisville, cosponsored by the Southern Industrialization Project. At the luncheon, Heather gave an eye-opening talk on the prison industrial complex, which has expanded with alarming speed and virtually no regulation in recent decades.

Since then, Beth English (Princeton) produced our first newsletter and Max Krochmal (Duke) has been collecting syllabi for our forthcoming syllabus exchange. The syllabi will be available to members after some revamping of our website (www.southernlaborstudies.org) this spring. If you have not already contributed your syllabi, please do! Feel free to contribute syllabi with relevant content, such as material on slavery or forced labor generally, the Global South, southern culture, etc. You decide. Please send them to max.krochmal@gmail.com.

At the fantastic Conference on Race, Labor and Citizenship in the Post-Emancipation South in Charleston, South Carolina, March 11-13, the SLSA hosted a roundtable titled "Forced Labor in the South after Slavery: the Longue Durée." Papers by Alex Lichtenstein (FIU), Talitha L. LeFlouria (FAU), Douglas Blackmon (Wall Street Journal), and Robert Chase (Case Western) were

followed by a lively discussion and a clip from Blackmon's forthcoming documentary "Slavery by another Name."

On Friday, April 8th the SLSA held its general meeting at the Organization of American Historians/LAWCHA meeting in Washington, D.C., which was followed by a panel discussion titled "Challenging Teachers and Teaching Challenges in Southern Labor History," featuring Bob Korstad (Duke), Brett Rushforth (William & Mary), and Cindy Hahamovitch (William & Mary). Joe McCartin (Georgetown) chaired. Jenny Brooks (the SLSA's VP and Program Committee Chair) was the mover and shaker behind these events.

Most importantly, the SLSA's conference subcommittee, chaired by Alex Lichtenstein (FIU) and Traci Drummond (Southern Labor Archives), has made great strides in organizing the next Southern Labor Studies Conference, which will also be LAWCHA's annual conference. The conference, which will be hosted by the Southern Labor Archives will take place in Atlanta, April 7-10, 2011. Appropriately, since the conference will celebrate the Southern Labor Archives' 40th anniversary, the conference theme will be "Memory and Forgetting: Labor History and the Archive." Keynote addresses will be given by Robert Korstad from Duke University and Alessandro Portelli from the University of Rome.

We look forward to seeing many of you there.

Lecture for LAWCHA!

Next Time you receive an honorarium, why not donate it to LAWCHA?

The Labor and Working Class History Association needs your financial support to continue our many and growing programs. By sending us your honorarium check (or any contribution, large or small), you'll be supporting our dissertation and book prizes; you'll be making sure that graduate students continue to receive travel grants to present their work at our conferences; and you'll help us reach new members. And it's tax-deductible.

Send your next honorarium check to LAWCHA treasurer Tom Klug, Marygrove College, 8425 W. McNichols, Detroit, MI 48221.

Messages from the Grassroots



WISCONSIN

Andrew E. Kersten, University of Wisconsin-Green Bay
kerstena@uwgb.edu

Wisconsin remains in the economic doldrums. Jobless numbers show that new claims rose in January 2010, increasing the overall unemployment rate to an estimated 8.7 percent. It's still lower than the national percentage, but that's little comfort. In my hometown, Green Bay, the rate held steady after the holiday season at 7.7 percent. Just over 13,000 workers in the city are still looking for jobs. Furthermore, if national trends hold true in Wisconsin, workers at the lowest income levels are bearing the brunt of the Great Recession. A mild winter might help some of them. Orange road construction barrels have already sprung up where snow banks have receded. Those who still have jobs are working harder and longer hours to prove their worth. Productivity continues to increase. Wages have remained stagnant, and state workers continue to labor under the temporary furlough system, which has cost them between 5 percent and 10 percent of their earnings.

The Wisconsin AFL-CIO continues to lead the charge to improve the lives of workers, both employed and unemployed. They have pressed local, state, and federal officials to establish pro-worker policies and programs. This includes initiatives such as health care reform as well as the extension of unemployment insurance and the creation of public works. For example, when Kentucky Republican Senator Jim Bunning blocked a bill that would have authorized funds for highway construction, unemployment benefits, and Medicare payments, the state Federation lobbied strenuously to get Bunning to change his mind, which he later did. The state AFL-CIO has made other advances, too. Last December, after more than a decade of political work, Governor Jim Doyle signed AB 172, which mandates public schools to teach the history of organized labor and collective bargaining. Wisconsin's law, which seems to be the first of its kind, has taken on new significance because of the battles being fought in Texas over its state educational standards. This Texas front in the cultural and educational wars has pitted progressives against conservatives on the State Board of Education, which has begun the vetting and rewriting of the state's history standards in order to remove all mention of progressive women and minorities, of labor leaders and working-class struggles, and of the civil rights movement. Should the conservatives win in Texas, which is likely, it will have an enormous impact across the nation as Texas state educational standards have an overwhelming influence upon

the nation's history and other textbooks. Nevertheless, the Wisconsin law may act as a bulwark against this, at least in this state.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that there is a new union movement afoot. The state's university faculty, who until last year were prevented by law from forming unions and bargaining collectively, are attempting to establish unions on several campuses. So far, two campuses, UW-Eau Claire and UW-Superior, seem close to organizing and affiliating with the AFT-Wisconsin. It makes one wonder what would happen generally in the state, and perhaps the nation, if the Employee Free Choice bill were to become law.



CENTRAL FLORIDA

Robert Zieger, University of Florida, emeritus
zieger@ufl.edu

The United Faculty of Florida (UFF), which is affiliated with the AFT and NEA, has, after protracted negotiations, reached and overwhelmingly ratified a new agreement with the University of Florida administration. UF faculty members have enjoyed the benefits of collective bargaining since 1976 but were forced into de facto recertification in 2002-2003 owing to changes in the governing structure of the Florida higher education system. During the five plus years when negotiations for a new contract were being conducted, many faculty believed that the UF administration was employing delaying tactics in hopes of undermining support for the union. The new contract, which must be approved by the UF Board of Trustees, contains important intellectual property rights protections, much improved sabbatical provisions, and a model academic freedom statement. The University of Florida is one of the few flagship state universities whose faculty have union representation.

Here is a link to the contract.

http://www.uffacultycontract.org/new/archive/2010-2013_HIGHLIGHTS_for_PROPOSED_CBA.pdf

Messages from the Grassroots



MASSACHUSETTS

Jim Green, U-Mass, Boston
james.green@umb.edu

Three newsworthy notes, two retrospective and another prospective.

First, the President of the Massachusetts AFL-CIO, Robert J. Haynes, a devotee of labor history and labor education, succeeded, after a ten year effort, in persuading the state to place a gorgeous bronze relief in the State House building ten steps from Governor Deval Patrick's office to honor the memory of former State Fed president Edward Cohen, killed by a deranged gunman in that office in 1901. The plaque, created by sculptor Meredith Bergmann, also highlights the contributions the union movement has made to Massachusetts history. It is a fine work of art and an outstanding example of what can be done to put labor history on the public landscape. It is worth a visit.

For a full description of the memorial, the history it captures and the ceremonies surrounding its dedication, see the link: <http://www.massafcio.org/edward-cohen-plaque>

I was pleased to be invited to the meetings to think about how to conceptualize and represent Mass. labor history in bronze. Second, for LAWCHA members in college and university positions, explore what local schools and school districts are doing with Teaching American History grants (Byrd grants). For the past two years I have been involved in the three of them and have given about a dozen lectures on labor and working class history to more than 100 social studies teachers from many different schools.

Third, the folks at the Lawrence History Center and Immigrant City Archives are planning a series of events to honor the 100th anniversary of the Bread and Roses strike. Barbara Brown, the superb director, is eager to have LAWCHA support and participation, which might be something the history and memory group could consider. See the Center's exciting website: <http://www.lawrencehistorycenter.org/history>

For information on the 2012 centennial events, contact: director@lawrencehistory.org

And plan to visit Lawrence in 2012; something will be happening there every month.



THE BAY AREA

Don Watson, Bay Area Labor History Workshop
dwlabor@earthlink.net

The Bay Area Labor History Workshop (BALHW) is continuing its spring program, mostly in homes. In January, Carol Cuenod opened with a talk on the successful housing project, St. Francis Square, created through ILWU pension funds. She was followed by Conor Casey, who gave a presentation in February on the two martyrs of "Bloody Thursday" who were shot by police in the 1934 San Francisco waterfront strike — Nick Bordoise and Howard Sperry. Their two coffins were carried up the length of Market Street and followed by thousands in the silent funeral march that triggered the 1934 San Francisco Bay Area General Strike. He is investigating the lives of these two men. He was followed in March by Elizabeth Lamoree of UC Santa Barbara. She is working on a study of the grape industry and its moves to quell the UFW grape boycott. In April Harvey Schwartz will talk about his new book, published by the University of Washington Press, *Solidarity Stories: An Oral History of the ILWU*. At the May meeting Bill Shields, Director of the San Francisco City College Labor and Community Studies Program, will present his annual program, "Youth Speaks: Students' Labor History Projects." Thanks to Catherine Powell for chairing the program committee.

The Annual BALHW dinner on June 1 at John's Grill will feature William Issel speaking on his new book: *For Both Cross and Flag: Catholic Action, Anti-Catholicism, and National Security Policies in World War II San Francisco*.

This June will be the thirtieth anniversary of the Workshop, born in June 1980. The continuing members of the Workshop through the years have been Carol Cuenod, Jean Pauline, Bob Cherny, Bill Issel, Harvey Schwartz, Anne Loftis and Don Watson. The Workshop has had the cooperation of the three Directors of the Labor Archives and Research Center, Lynn Bonfield, Susan Sherwood, and Catherine Powell.

Jock Yablonski's 1969 Campaign for the UMW Presidency: His Son Looks Back 40 Years After His Assassination

Joseph A. ("Chip") Yablonski

chip@yablonskilaw.com



Jock Yablonski talking with mine workers. Courtesy of the United Mine Workers of America

On May 29, 1969, my father, Joseph ("Jock") Yablonski, declared his candidacy for the Presidency of the United Mine Workers of America ("UMW" or "UMWA"). Seven months later, three assassins hired by the UMW hierarchy on orders of its President "Tony" Boyle, paid with embezzled union funds, murdered my Dad (age 59), my mother Margaret (age 57) and my sister Charlotte (age 25) as they slept in their home in Clarksville, Pennsylvania.

My brother Ken and I devoted the next six years assisting the law enforcement authorities in bringing their killers to justice and attempting to make our father's vision for UMW members a reality. After 40 years, the historical record is now settled and quite clear.

Jock Yablonski was a known commodity to coal miners in 1969, having defied the UMW leadership by successfully lobbying the Pennsylvania Legislature and Governor to enact the Nation's first law recognizing coal workers' pneumoconiosis ("black lung") as a compensable occupational disease and establishing a miners' clinic that still operates in Western Pennsylvania today and bears his name. Yablonski had served on the UMW Executive Board for 27 years and had just been named to head the UMW's Lobbying arm as Congress began to tackle coal mine health and safety issues in the wake of the Farmington (W.Va) disaster that had killed 78 miners in late 1968.

Yablonski laid out an ambitious agenda for the UMW in his declaration of candidacy: full autonomy for all of its 23 Districts, 19 of which had been held in trusteeships for decades, depriving members of the right to elect the officials principally responsible for handling their grievances; an end to the cozy relationship with the coal operators where contracts were negotiated secretly and implemented by fiat, providing an extra dollar or two a day and miserly benefits; enactment and enforcement of strong federal and state health and safety laws augmented by a UMW Safety Department with more than the single employee it then had; huge increases in pensions that then paid a flat rate \$115 a month to miners and provided no survivors' benefits to

Jock Yablonski was a known commodity to coal miners in 1969.

their widows; an invigorated, democratic union that would be engaged in improving schools, housing, government, and the environment throughout the coalfields. To accomplish this far-reaching agenda, Yablonski pledged "to obtain the brightest young minds from our universities... for staffing and leading our union to meeting the pressing problems of today and tomorrow."

Despite repeated requests by Yablonski for the U.S. Department of Labor ("DOL") oversight and three different federal court decisions finding Landrum-Griffin Act violations, the DOL refused to conduct any pre-election investigations. Without any government oversight, massive additional violations of union election law occurred on UMW election day, December 9, 1969, and Boyle was declared the winner. Within a month, Yablonski was dead, but the miners who joined his cause banded together as Miners for Democracy and pursued his complaints before the DOL. The Department of Labor finally swung into action and filed suit to overturn the election. The Miners for Democracy ("MFD") slate swept to victory in the December 1972 court-monitored re-run election, and, on December 22, 1972, Arnold Miller was inaugurated as President, Mike Trbovich as Vice President and Harry Patrick as the Union's Secretary-Treasurer.

By the end of 1974, virtually every plank in Yablonski's 1969 platform had come to fruition:

- With strong input from Yablonski and Congressman Ken Hechler, the Federal Coal Mine Health and Safety Act became law on December 30, 1969. It was, however, not until 1973 and 1974 that the UMW began to hire and deploy the staff necessary to enforce the Act, now known

as "MSHA."

- Autonomy was restored to all of the UMW Districts which held constitutional conventions and elections.

- Model by-laws, that were the embodiment of democracy, were written by union-democracy Law Professor Clyde Summers and implemented at every UMW Local.

- Within one year of the MFD victory, the UMW membership gathered at a convention held in Pittsburgh and completely re-wrote the UMW Constitution, which was immediately recognized as the most democratic charter in the American Labor Movement.

- The new Constitution established a framework for the conduct of collective bargaining that began with solicitation of the views of miners before bargaining began and concluded with highly transparent rank-and-file ratification (with local-by-local results posted in the UMW Journal).

- The Union launched organizing drives, winning NLRB elections at Duke Power's Brookside Mine in Harlan County and at the Peter Kiewit's Rosebud Mine in Hannah, Wyoming. Local Union 1974 was chartered and, following a protracted strike memorialized in the Oscar winning documentary "Harlan County, USA", Duke Power signed the National Coal Agreement, re-establishing a union beachhead in Eastern Kentucky for the first time in decades.

By the end of 1974, virtually every plank in Yablonski's 1969 platform had come to fruition.

- By December of 1974, the UMW bargaining team (nominally headed by Miller) had successfully negotiated and secured rank-and-file ratification of the National Bituminous Coal Wage Agreement of 1974. Undersecretary of Labor Bill Usery who mediated the talks opined that the 1974 NBCWA was the "richest industry-wide contract" in American Labor History. Miners represented by the UMW had achieved among other benefits:

- A wage package, with the first ever COLA, that could amount to increases of more than 37 per cent over a 3-year period.

- A wholly new pension plan (the first industry-wide plan

Jock Yablonski's 1969 UMW Campaign

negotiated under ERISA) of \$500 or more per month to miners who retired after 1976. (Increases of \$100 per month for currently retired miners).

- Guaranteed right to miners to walkout over safety issues.
- Guaranteed UMW jurisdiction over all coal-related work on company owned or leased coal lands with strict limits on sales of mining operations and sub-contracting.
- Expanded total paid days off to 30 from 20, including a week of paid sick leave each year, plus a sickness and accident benefit plan of \$100 a week.
- Helpers on face equipment in underground mines and on shovels and draglines.
- Company paid safety training for safety committeemen and company paid UMWA mine inspections.

By 1977, the 1974 NBCWA had resulted in 40,000 new UMW jobs.

•The Miners for Democracy campaign attracted a unique collection of truly brilliant and creative activists and professionals. Rick Bank, who served as Arnold Miller's Executive Assistant, was a Penn Law Graduate with extensive legal experience in the coalfields as a black lung activist. (Bank, who served as a principal UMW negotiator in 1974, was, for many years, the AFL-CIO Director of Collective Bargaining). Mike Trbovich's Executive Assistant was Edgar James, who left the UMW in 1975 to enroll at Harvard where he received simultaneous graduate degrees in

The Miners for Democracy campaign attracted a unique collection of truly brilliant and creative activists and professionals.

Law and Public Health and now is the lead partner in one of the Nation's preeminent labor law firms. Robert Haupman enlisted in the campaign to develop computerized mailings of targeted campaign literature. A computer whiz, Haupman served as an assistant to Harry Patrick before leaving the UMW to enroll at Stanford where he received an MBA after four years. Bernard Aronson, Miller's speechwriter, later became President Jimmy Carter's Deputy Assistant and

Executive speech writer and Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American affairs during the George H.W. Bush Administration. Don Stillman ran the UMW Journal until he left for the UAW, becoming Editor of its publications and Director of International Relations. J. Davitt McAteer, counsel to the Safety Department, became the Assistant Secretary for MSHA and was also the Solicitor of the U.S. Department of Labor during the Clinton Administration.

Tom Bethell, head of the UMW Research Department, hired Tom Woodruff an M.I.T. Ph.D. in Economics, and Don Pierce. Together, they prepared original, incisive economic research papers that were essential to the UMW's bargaining successes. A crop of bright, young, ambitious rank-and-file miners assumed key policy-implementation and administrative positions, including organizers Tom Pysell, Houston Elmore, John Cox, and James "Goat" Thomas, safety expert Richard Cooper and Miller assistant Eddie Burke. Many of these men were Vietnam veterans who were equally capable of functioning independently in the field or in office settings.

The UMW Legal Department was led by Chip Yablonski (a former Court of Appeals law clerk and NLRB appellate attorney) and included three former Supreme Court Law Clerks, Yablonski's law-firm partner for 30 years, Dan Edelman, and longtime Harvard Law Professor Lewis D. Sargentich. Three junior members on Yablonski's legal team were Thomas Geoghegan, who later became a nationally acclaimed author (*Which Side Are You On?*) and outspoken worker advocate; Ellen Chapnick, currently the Dean of the Social Justice Initiatives at Columbia; and Richard L. Trumka, currently the President of the AFL-CIO.

By the late 1970's, infighting among the UMW's officers, "red-baiting" by Boyle-loyalists (and by Mike Trbovich), and physical assaults and foolish restrictions on the staff (such as prohibiting them from working late or on weekends) led to a mass exodus of the "brightest young minds" from the UMW. (The author left the UMW in the Summer of 1975 before the most divisive turmoil began.) Without critical multi-disciplinary skills from the staff who created and understood the structure and importance of each step in the bargaining provisions of the Constitution and the complete bargaining history of the 1974 NBCWA concerning jurisdiction, sub-leasing and contracting-out provisions, the UMWA was out-maneuvered and outgunned by management during the 110 day strike in 1977-78 and again in 1981. Those successor agreements resulted in massive givebacks for UMW members and huge membership losses for the UMW itself.

Today, the UMW is a shell of itself in the 1970's. It represents a tiny fraction of the 160,000 active members that enjoyed the new benefits negotiated in 1974. All of its failings are not self-inflicted. The coal industry moved West, principally to the Powder River Basin in Wyoming, where more coal (sub-bituminous) is produced than in all of the coal states of the East and Mid-West combined and nearly all of that coal is non-union. The UMW was totally unprepared to meet the "pressing new problems" presented by this sea-change. Its efforts to organize miners in the West have been anemic, if not absent altogether. In the meantime, the multi-employer BCOA has fragmented, leaving the UMW with fewer and fewer companies with which to negotiate an overarching National Contract. Many companies in the heart of the Eastern coalfields are now operating non-union affiliates or subsidiaries that were prohibited under the terms of the 1974 NBCWA, but are impossible to organize after the givebacks in 1978 and 1981 (which have not been reversed).

The UMW has shrunk from 23 districts in 1969 to six today. Despite the gutting of MSHA by the second Bush Administration, there were 30 coal mine fatalities in 2008 as compared with 276 in 1968. The underground coal industry continues, however, to evade and avoid complying with the respirable dust standards mandated by MSHA. Consequently, instead of dying instantly, miners today – as they did in the 1960's and before – continue to die a slower, more agonizing death from black lung. There has not been much advancement on that issue other than the fact that underground coal mine employment is a small fraction of what it was in the mid-70's.

Nor have there been any significant improvements in the democratic arena in the UMW over the past quarter century. Arnold Miller won a three-way election in 1977, but without a talented and dedicated staff, he proved to be a hapless leader and an erratic administrator. Miller's mental and physical deterioration permitted Sam Church to succeed to the Presidency. Church governed the Union through fear and physical intimidation, and he ran roughshod over the members' rights. Church destroyed not only the headquarters' staff, but permitted the UMW's largest asset, The National Bank of Washington, to be plundered by cronies and political donors to his campaigns. Church was single handedly-responsible for the departure of many of the younger miners on the staff and nearly all of the professionals who had come to the UMW during Miller's first term.

Notably, Rich Trumka returned to the mines and accrued sufficient years-of-service to qualify for the UMW Presidency and he soundly defeated Church in 1982. The losses the UMW suffered during Miller's second term and

under Church proved, however, to be irreparable. In the seriously weakened UMW, there have been a succession of uncontested International elections since 1982, and the UMW Journal is once again dominated by photographs of the incumbents.

Many of the constitutional reforms enacted in 1974 remain in place, but the UMW has enacted an "outsider rule" prohibiting any candidate for union office from receiving funds or support from any non-member. Had such a rule been in place in 1972, Miller and his Miners for Democracy slate would never have succeeded.

On the bargaining front, the UMW has, following the disastrous strikes and givebacks in 1977-78 and 1981, treaded water. Its active membership has shrunk from nearly 160,000 in 1977 to less than 20,000 today. Only 19 percent of the coal mining workforce in the U.S. was unionized in 2005 according to the DOL's Bureau of Labor Statistics. The Union's organizing potential is severely limited by the crushing burden of the legacy costs that are required to maintain benefits for its retirees and their dependents. Today, there are more workers employed in the U.S. wind industry than in its coal mines.

The name "Yablonski" does not appear in UMW historical offerings.

The UMW has never recovered from the brain drain it suffered in the late 1970's, when key personnel on the staff were forced from their positions by a succession of hapless, inept and corruptible officers. When the professional staff formed a union to assure job security which was certified following an NLRB election, the delegates at the UMW Convention in 1976, at the urging of Sam Church, adopted a resolution prohibiting the officers signing a contract with the staff. According to one staffer who resigned in disgust, it was the "largest mass unfair labor practice ever committed."

Despite the turmoil the Union has experienced over the past 40 years, one would expect that an institution that proudly cites and invokes its history would have reserved a special place for Jock Yablonski to remind and inform newer members of the ultimate sacrifice he made for them. The members of the LAWCHA and readers of this Newsletter who have a profound interest in labor history will be surprised to learn that the name "Yablonski" does not appear in the historical offerings on the UMW Website and rarely, if ever, appears in UMW Journal. Perhaps it is just as well that this is so.

2009 Taft Award Nominations

In keeping with our recent tradition, we are attaching a list of books nominated for the Taft Prize in 2009. The list is below.

Ashby, Steven K. & C.J. Hawking. *Staley: The Fight for a New American Labor Movement*. University of Illinois Press.

Bauer, William J. Jr. *We Were All Like Migrant Workers Here: Work, Community, and Memory on California's Round Valley Reservation, 1850-1941*. University of NC Press.

Bender, Daniel E. *American Abyss: Savagery and Civilization in the Age of Industry*. Cornell University Press.

Brenner, Aaron, Benjamin Day, Immanuel Ness, eds. *The Encyclopedia of Strikes in American History*. M.E. Sharpe.

Bryan-Wilson, Julia. *Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam Era*. University of California Press.

Buss, Fran Leeper. *Moisture of the Earth: Mary Robinson, Civil Rights & Textile Union Activist*. University of Michigan Press.

Chen, Anthony S. *The Fifth Freedom: Jobs, Politics, and Civil Rights in the United States, 1941-1972*. Princeton University Press.

Collins, Gail. *When Everything Changed: The Amazing Journey of American Women from 1960 to the Present*. Little, Brown & Co.

Cope, Tony. *On the Swing Shift: Building Liberty Ships in Savannah*. U.S. Naval Institute Press.

Curl, John. *For All the People: Uncovering the Hidden History of Cooperation, Cooperation Movements & Communalism in America*. PM Press.

Cushing, Lincoln & Timothy W. Drescher. *Agitate! Educate! Organize! American Labor Posters*. ILR Press / Cornell University Press.

Delton, Jennifer. *Racial Integration in Corporate America, 1940-1990*. Cambridge University Press.

Dennis, Michael. *The New Economy and the Modern South*. University Press of Florida.

Drescher, Seymour. *A History of Slavery & Antislavery*. Cambridge University Press.

Egnal, Marc. *Clash of Extremes: The Economic Origins of the Civil War*. Hill and Wang (Farrar, Straus & Giroux).

Enyeart, John P. *The Quest for "Just and Pure Law": Rocky Mountain Workers and American Social Democracy, 1870-1924*. Stanford University Press.

Fink, Leon & Brian Greenberg. *Upheaval in the Quiet Zone: 1199/SEIU and the Politics of Health Care Unionism*. University of Illinois Press.

Flannery, James L. *The Glass House Boys of Pittsburgh: Law, Technology & Child Labor*. University of Pittsburgh Press.

Gage, Beverly. *The Day Wall Street Exploded: A Story of America in its First Age of Terror*. Oxford University Press.

Ganz, Marshall. *Why David Sometimes Wins: Leadership, Organization, and Strategy in the California Farm Worker Movement*. Oxford University Press.

Gordon, Linda. *Dorothea Lange: A Life Beyond Limits*. W.W. Norton.

Greenberg, Joshua R. *Advocating the Man: Masculinity, Organized Labor, and the Household in New York, 1800-1840*. Columbia University Press.

Greene, Julie. *The Canal Builders: Making America's Empire at the Panama Canal*. The Penguin Press.

Guttenplan, D.D. *American Radical: The Life and Times of I.F. Stone*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux.

Hill, Rebecca N. *Men, Mobs & Law: Anti-Lynching & Labor Defense in U.S. Radical History*. Duke University Press.

Johnson, Ann. *Hitting the Brakes: Engineering Design & the Production of Knowledge*. Duke University Press.

Juravich, Tom. *At the Alter of the Bottom Line*. University of Massachusetts Press.

Kaufman, Bruce E. *Hired Hands or Human Resources? Case Studies or HRM Programs and Practices in Early American Industry*. Cornell University Press.

Kraft, James P. *Vegas at Odds: Labor Conflict in a Leisure Economy, 1960-1985*. Johns Hopkins University Press.

Lang, Clarence. *Grassroots at the Gateway: Class Politics and Black Freedom Struggle in St. Louis, 1936-1975*. University of Michigan Press.

Levenstein, Lisa. *A Movement Without Marches: African American Women and the Politics of Poverty in Postwar Philadelphia*. University of NC Press.

Lorence, James J. *The Unemployed People's Movement: Leftists, Liberals, and Labor in Georgia, 1929-1941*. University of Georgia Press.

Magra, Christopher P. *The Fisherman's Cause: Atlantic Commerce & Maritime Dimensions of the American Revolution*. Cambridge University Press.

- Mapes, Kathleen. *Sweet Tyranny: Migrant Labor, Industrial Agriculture, and Imperial Politics*. University of Illinois Press.
- Martin, Philip. *Importing Poverty? Immigration and the Changing Face of Rural America*. Yale University Press.
- Mitchell, Steven T. *Nuggets to Neutrinos: The Homestake Story*. Xlibris.
- Moccio, Francine. *Live Wire: Women and Brotherhood in the Electrical Industry*. Temple University Press.
- Moreton, Bethany. *To Serve God and Wal-Mart: The Making of Christian Free Enterprise*. Harvard University Press.
- Norris, Jim. *North for the Harvest: Mexican Workers, Growers & the Sugar Beet Industry*. Minnesota Historical Society Press.
- Orenic, Liesl Miller. *On the Ground: Labor Struggle in the American Airline Industry*. University of Illinois Press.
- Orozco, Cynthia E. *No Mexicans, Women, or Dogs Allowed: The Rise of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement*. University of Texas Press.
- Parham, Claire Puccia. *The St. Lawrence Seaway & Power Project: An Oral History of the Greatest Construction Show on Earth*. Syracuse University Press.
- Phillips-Fein, Kim. *Invisible Hands: The Making of the Conservative Movement from the New Deal to Reagan*. W.W. Norton.
- Reyes, Barbara O. *Private Women, Public Lives: Gender and the Missions of the Californias*. University of Texas Press.
- Rockman, Seth. *Scraping By: Wage Labor, Slavery & Survival in Early Baltimore*. Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Rogers, Donald W. *Making Capitalism Safe: Work Safety and Health Regulation in America, 1880-1940*. University of Illinois Press.
- Rondinone, Troy. *The Great Industrial War: Framing Class Conflict in the Media, 1865-1950*. Rutgers University Press.
- Schwartz, Harvey. *Solidarity Stories: An Oral History of the ILWU*. University of Washington Press.
- Shackel, Paul A. *The Archaeology of American Labor and Working-Class Life*. University Press of Florida.
- Sidorick, Daniel. *Condensed Capitalism: Campbell Soup and the Pursuit of Cheap Production in the Twentieth Century*. Cornell University Press.
- Soule, Sarah A. *Contention and Corporate Social Responsibility*. Cambridge University Press.
- Srole, Carole. *Transcribing Class and Gender: Masculinity and Femininity in Nineteenth-Century Courts and Offices*. University of Michigan Press.
- Sundue, Sharon Braslaw. *Industrious in their Stations: Young People in Urban America, 1720-1810*. University of Virginia Press.
- Taillon, Paul Michael. *Good, Reliable, White Men: Railroad Brotherhoods, 1877-1917*. University of Illinois Press.
- Vapnek, Lara. *Breadwinners: Working Women & Economic Independence, 1865-1920*. University of Illinois Press.
- Weber, Lauren. *In Cheap We Trust: The Story of a Misunderstood American Virtue*. Little, Brown & Co.
- Witwer, David. *Shadow of the Racketeer: Scandal in Organized Labor*. University of Illinois Press.
- Zamora, Emilio. *Claiming Rights and Writing Wrongs in Texas: Mexican Workers and Job Politics during World War II*. Texas A&M University Press.
- Ziegler-McPherson, Christina A. *Americanization in the States: Immigrant Social Welfare Policy, Citizenship, and National Identity in the United States, 1908-1929*. University Press of Florida.

Oral History: Has It Been Useful to the Study of Working-Class History?

Alice M. Hoffman, Emerita Professor of Labor Studies and Industrial Relations
Penn State University

At the meeting of the Oral History Association held in Pittsburgh in 2008, I was asked to address the question: Has oral history made a contribution to the understanding of the labor movement and more particularly to the experience of the working class? I was perhaps well qualified to recount the story of the effort to make the rise of unionism more readily accessible to the community of professional historians. This was because I was hired in 1965 by the Department of Labor Studies at the Pennsylvania State University and given the task to gather and preserve at the University Archives the records of unions affiliated with the Pennsylvania AFL-CIO.

At that time several industrial unions recognized that educational institutions were not providing their students with any understanding of the importance or the contributions of organized labor to society. The United Auto Workers had established an archival program at Wayne State University in an attempt to meet that need. When I was hired to gather the records of Pennsylvania labor organizations, it was natural to approach the United Steelworkers Union of America (USWA), because the Department already had a well-established program of worker education in place with the USWA. Moreover, the national headquarters of the union was in Pittsburgh. When I made the request for the union's Pennsylvania records, the USWA Department of Education replied that they saw no good reason to break up their records state by state and therefore agreed to deposit all their records at Penn State. Thus in one stroke, the University unwittingly had become one of the few key archival repositories for the records of the labor movement due, of course, to the Steelworkers' importance in the rise of industrial unionism.

Even before the project was implemented, we had wondered why there was no biography of Philip Murray. He had been the first president of the union, succeeded John L Lewis as president of the CIO, and served as an advisor to Presidents Roosevelt, Truman, and Eisenhower. He was present at the creation of the industrial form of organization; thus the lack of a biography was surprising. But when we began to look for the records of his leadership, we understood. His records had been given to Catholic University and at least three historians had studied those records but found them too sparse to allow for a biographical treatment.

Moreover, as we began to collect records from local and district offices, we found ourselves increasingly disappointed in them. They did not offer insights into the origins of the organization, nor did they reflect process. Rather, they were the official records of resolutions and routine organizational decision-making. There were other problems, too. Contemporary journalism tended to be written either by advocates or by detractors. We hit upon

the notion that we might address this problem by utilizing tape-recorded interviews with those who had been actively involved in order to supplement the archival records. Thus, we had stumbled on to the newly developing field of oral history.

I attended the first national meeting of the Oral History Association in 1967.

From its beginnings the oral history movement began to cultivate two rather divergent schools of thought. There were projects that attempted to preserve the experience and views of important elites, the movers and shakers. The anthropologists and social historians asked the question: doesn't this technique enable us to interview and evaluate the experience of people at all levels of society and in so doing make it possible to study a more democratized form of history?

Therefore, a group of oral historians appreciated the opportunity to preserve the experience of those who through their participation in collective behavior could hope to influence the course of events. I became excited by these possibilities and felt bold enough to perceive that I could perhaps be engaged in what I called a new kind of history. I was further emboldened by the emergence of other projects with similar aspirations. Studs Terkel became popular with his use of oral interviews to write an analysis of "The Good War" from the point of view of those engaged in it from the trenches of both the war front and the industrial front. In 1971, as an officer of the Oral History Association, I was invited to address the Anthropology Section of the British Association for the Advancement of Science where my assigned topic was "The Relevance of Oral Tradition." The British seemed well ahead of us in their appreciation that oral history made possible the preservation of "the unorganized and unconscious events of the past as experienced by all the folk."

I became even more interested in the possibilities of oral history after meeting Sven Lindqvist, the Swedish author who came to speak at a meeting of the Pennsylvania Labor History Society. Lindqvist developed his theory in his book entitled "Dig Where You Stand; How To Research a Job." He argued that no area of modern history has been more distorted by one-sided treatment than the history of business. He interviewed workers at a cement factory in his hometown and discovered that factory history could be written from a fresh point of view, that is by workers investigating their own workplaces. He discovered that employers had denied these workers the known facts about exposure to cement dust and that management had prevented access to electrostatic dust collectors for 60 years while they continued to profit from failing to provide these life saving measures. He concluded that the failure to supply the workers with this information was deeply

imbedded in Swedish class society while the employers continued to profit from a cheaper form of production that did not utilize the known means to reduce dust exposure. He pointed out that the workers' research into the history of their own jobs was politically embarrassing to established business institutions in Sweden. "History is dangerous," Lindqvist proclaimed, and elsewhere he characterized "history as armed."

By this time my interviews began to provide further evidence for the possibilities of a new working-class history. For instance I interviewed Albert Atallah, who had been a rank-and-file member of the Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel and Tin Workers. He described how he went to John L. Lewis with a suggestion on how to overcome the resistance of the Amalgamated to accept Lewis' offer of money to organize the steelworkers. He told John L. that he should attend the convention of the Amalgamated meeting in Cannonsburg, Pennsylvania and offer the money directly to the delegates, explaining: "If President Mike Tighe doesn't want to accept the offer, the membership will want to know why." Thus we had a story of how rank-and-file pressure broke the deadlock created by the assertions of dual unionism made by the leadership of the old craft union. Perhaps President Sweeney's effort to enlist the affiliates of the AFL-CIO in changed and invigorated organizing efforts might have benefited from a similar appeal made directly to workers both in unions and in community based organizations.

It would be folly to ignore the value of oral history to the preservation of a story that emphasizes worker culture and attitudes beyond their organizations, and is a true movement-based appreciation reflective of a collective and collaborative consciousness.

In preparation for the talk I gave at the 2008 meeting of the Oral History Association, I returned to the Penn State University Archives to review how our interviews might look in the glare of the passage of time. There are, of course, many transcribed memories of Philip Murray as well as memories of John L. Lewis and his relationship with miners and organizers in a variety of CIO organizing efforts. However, these tapes have not been utilized very much by historians. Melvin Dubofsky presented the Bernie Kleiman lecture, a series of lectures honoring the USWA general counsel. His lecture was entitled "Phil Murray and John L. Lewis—Labor's Odd Couple." Dubofsky bemoaned the fact that there was no biography of Murray. When he and Warren Van Tine wrote their biography of John L. Lewis, they did visit the Archives at Penn State. But they did not have time to examine the oral interviews with Pat Fagan, who succeeded Murray as President of District 5 of the United Mine Workers. Those interviews are very revealing of that storied relationship between Lewis and Murray. Moreover, there is a biography of Philip Murray by Pat Angelo, Professor of English at Edinboro University of Pennsylvania that was published in 2003. Angelo came from a steelworker family and dedicated his book to those workers whom he had known. This book made extensive use of the interviews at the Penn State Archives, but it borders on hagiography, emphasizes Murray's

religious motivations, and does not meet the standards of academic analysis. It may be that the oral interviews themselves reflect workers' uncritical descriptions of Philip Murray.

The Society of American Archivists provides a directory of Labor Archives in which they describe the holdings of 46 archives, only 14 of which mention oral history as part of their repository. Moreover, Robert Zieger, in providing a bibliography and archival guide to the CIO in *Labor History* (1990), complains that "major depositories of CIO records are housed in a former Dominican priory in Silver Spring" (The George Meany Center, now called the National Labor College) "and in catacomb like vaults five miles away at the Catholic University of America. After spending a day examining Steelworkers' records, researchers can contemplate the cows and pigs on the sprawling campus of Penn State." Ouch! Zieger concluded that the task still remained of integrating these studies and the CIO itself, into the general history of twentieth-century America.

How do we account for this? 1) Historians became critical of institutionally funded programs. 2) They noted the frequent lack of material on the workers themselves, on minorities and women. Nelson Lichtenstein points out that unions have become bureaucratic institutions, -often undemocratic and functioning for the worker not unlike an insurance agency. Leon Fink remarked at a conference on the New Labor History held at Northern Illinois University in 1984 that popular insurgency had become organized bureaucratic reformism. Thus, it seems that a means to provide worker-inclusive material that is more accessible and better organized to help researchers find the material they need to create a new workers history may still be unfinished business.

At one point, sensing the need for workers themselves to be more fully engaged in this task, I wrote a pamphlet for local labor unions on how to preserve their records and conduct interviews with retirees and members. At this point it might be important to revisit that effort.

In his chapter on oral history in the *Handbook on Oral History* published by Altamira Press, Ron Grele, the former Director of the Oral History program at Columbia University, made the following summation. There are two themes in the progress of oral history. One viewed oral history as a source of data to fill a perceived vacuum in the existing record; the other theme saw oral history as the handmaiden of the new social history. The latter theme was carried out for the most part by New Left historians whose goal was to produce a more democratically conceived story of the past, a story that could continue to inspire and stimulate a new generation of activists. I am not sure that I would be willing to wholly abandon either theme. But it would be folly to ignore the value of oral history to the preservation of a story that is interdisciplinary in its methodology, emphasizes worker culture and attitudes beyond their organizations, and is a true movement based appreciation reflective of a collective and collaborative consciousness. These projects do exist. The oral history program at Youngstown University in Ohio is a good example. But how to organize these projects and make them more available both to scholars and to workers themselves is a task which requires further effort. As the song says, "us working folks got to get together or we ain't got a chance anymore."

Reading, Writing, and Union-Building

Steve Early

lsupport@aol.com

“It’s a well-established fact,” reports The New York Times Book Review, “that Americans are reading fewer books than they used to.” According to the National Endowment for the Arts, more than 50 percent of our fellow citizens surveyed haven’t cracked a book in the previous year. In labor circles, the percentage of recent readers may be even smaller. Eric Lee, the UK-based founder of “Labour Start”, recalls an encounter he had, a few years ago, at a union conference in Chicago. There, a “labor intellectual” was “bemoaning the fact that even the most intelligent and best-informed union leaders he knew simply did not read the books that they should be reading, if they read any books at all.”

As evidenced by an essay collection I published last year, with Monthly Review Press, I’ve long been an “optimist of the will” rather than a “pessimist of the intellect” on the subject of reading, writing, and union-building. Unions clearly need to do a better job connecting labor writers to potential readers within their own ranks. But, in my experience, that work has become a little easier in recent years. Within organized labor—an institution not always known in the past for the richness of its intellectual life—the marketplace for new ideas has grown even as union density has shrunk. Labor activists today are often desperate for any information, insight, or inspiration that can aid union renewal.

On my bookshelf alone, I can count more than a dozen titles, from academic, left, and trade presses, about how to “remake,” “reshape,” “revitalize,” “reorganize,” or “restructure” unions. But, unless they are national union presidents—with the ability to use dues money to promote their book and/or purchase it in bulk for internal distribution—labor-oriented authors must work quite hard for readership. One limitation many face is publishing with a university press. The marketing departments of academic publishers are not well equipped to attract the attention of working class readers or the general public. According to longtime Cornell ILR Press editor Fran Benson, her average book sells about 2,000 to 2,500 copies (in hard and soft cover). Thus, as labor educator Bruce Nissen observes, “Any labor book selling over 5,000 copies is a ‘best seller.’”

Overall “success” or “failure” depends on several factors. One is the book’s accessibility and appeal to non-academic readers. Benson reports that her labor books often do better than Cornell titles generally because union activists, not just other academics, will buy them if the material is topical and well written. The non-academic audience includes college-educated young people who’ve gravitated toward union work after being involved with campus labor solidarity activity

Some books get a sales boost in the form of bulk orders from unions whose work they describe (if they are pleased with the portrait).

But the usual key to greater visibility and sales is self-help by the author. This invariably takes the form of a well-designed website, combined with other forms of on-line networking and “social marketing” that can help publicize bookstore events, book-related speaking engagements, and favorable reviews.

Several independent labor education or media projects have become useful allies. The American Labor Education Center, run by Matt Witt, a former communications director for the Mine Workers, Teamsters, and Service Employees, publicizes “out of the mainstream” books (and films), which is to say those dealing with labor. Witt’s online reviews appear eight times a year at www.TheWorkSite.org and in New Labor Forum. David Prosten’s Union Communication Services (UCS) publishes a labor book catalogue once a year. Distributed to 70,000 potential readers, this 60-page brochure features volumes on labor history, economics, and bargaining, plus union-oriented books for children and young adults. (See www.unionist.com)

In an earlier era, some labor organizations like the United Auto Workers operated book clubs. In the larger left-liberal community today, that idea is making a comeback.

On Eric Lee’s cross-border labor campaign site, book reviews and author interviews are regularly posted (see www.labourstart.org/bookshop) Labour Start now lists almost 300 recommended titles in its “on-line bookstore.” At www.aboutus.org/PowellsUnion.com, one can find books favored by the ILWU Local 3 members who work at Powell’s Bookstore in Portland, Oregon. Even the AFL-CIO has made book buying easier via its own “on-line retail store,” although the federation offers a much smaller selection. The web page of the independent United Electrical Workers markets several widely-read labor books—*Them and Us* and *Labor’s Untold Story*. The UE News is also rare among union newspapers because it actually runs book reviews on a regular basis. Unfortunately, the websites of other unions offer little in the way of good reading and the book review sections of their publications are skimpy to non-existent.

For many years, I coordinated a leadership training program, for the Communications Workers of America, at the Cornell ILR School in Ithaca. I began organizing “book-and-author” events for the 100 or more CWA “students” in attendance each year. The authors were usually recruited locally and included faculty members like Lance Compa, Jeff Cowie, Kate Bronfenbrenner, and Bill Sonnenstuhl.

Either at breakfast or during a lunch break, speakers like these would talk about a recent book they had written, take questions about it, and sign copies for any buyers. CWA stewards and local officers were encouraged to make purchases from the large selection of other ILR Press books available so they could start building a library for themselves or their local union back home. For most CWA activists involved, this was the first “book-signing” they had ever attended. Some responded so enthusiastically that they returned home with stacks of ILR Press titles, catalogues, and order forms. To underline the importance of reading as part of what would hopefully be a career-long quest for personal self-improvement, I told first-time students one year that buying an ILR Press book and writing a review of it was a pre-requisite for returning to Cornell the following year.

Despite the local presence of the ILR Press, CWA is apparently the only union user of the ILR conference center that’s ever had such “book-and-author” events. If more labor organizations took similar initiatives, there could be far greater book-selling synergy with university presses (or any other cooperating labor book seller) whenever union activists are being trained.

In an earlier era, some labor organizations like the United Auto Workers even operated book clubs. In the larger left-liberal community today, that idea is making a comeback. Two years ago, the Progressive Book Club was launched. Among the PBC’s initial offerings are about ten labor-related titles. One of them is *A Country That Works* by PBC editorial board member Andy Stern. To its credit, SEIU is also the only union sponsor so far. Preoccupied as they may be with their own survival struggles, more unions should get involved with the PBC—or, better yet, start their own labor-oriented version of it. This could be done in conjunction with the handful of journals, which still regularly review or run excerpts from labor-related books, or by a group of cooperating labor studies centers. Either way, both trade unionists and friends of labor need to find new ways to encourage rank-and-file reading—or revive some of the old-fashioned ones.

(Steve Early is a LAWCHA member who worked for 27 years as a Boston-based organizer and international representative for the Communications Workers of America.)

For further reference, see the following:

Rachel Donadio, “You’re an Author? Me Too!” *The New York Times Book Review*, April 27, 2008, page. 27.

Eric Lee, “Educate, Agitate, Organize: Selling Labor Books On-Line,” *The Industrial Worker*, May 2005, page 4. (Available on line at www.labourstart.org/books.shtml)

See *Embedded With Organized Labor: Journalistic Reflections on The Class War at Home*, Monthly Review Press, 2009. Available at: www.monthlyreview.org. This article is an excerpt from the introduction and afterward of that book.

See, for example, Andy Stern’s *A Country That Works: Getting America Back on Track*, Free Press, 2006. Similarly benefiting from a “captive market” of union members was CWA President Morton Bahr’s *From Telegraph to the Internet*, a ghost-assisted memoir and public policy book, published in 1998.

For more information on the PBC works, see www.progressivebookclub.com.

LAWCHA's Success and Challenges

Michael Honey, outgoing LAWCHA president
University of Washington, Tacoma
mhoney@uw.edu

This spring I finished my two-and-a-half year stint as President of LAWCHA. I am very pleased to turn LAWCHA's leadership over to President Kimberley Phillips and Vice-President Shelton Stromquist; we could not ask for stronger leadership. They are both fine scholars and organizers and we can look forward to some innovative activities in the years ahead. Fortunately, Cele Bucki, our national secretary, and Tom Klug, our treasurer, have both been re-elected. They have served LAWCHA well almost since its beginning in 1998 and provide institutional memory as well as the skills needed for our continuing work. Alice Kessler-Harris deserves special praise for putting LAWCHA into such excellent shape during her Presidency and in chairing the Nominating Committee the past two years. Alice and our previous presidents Jim Green, Joe Trotter, and Jacquelyn Dowd Hall also deserve all our praise.

I want to extend thanks to Joe McCartin and Bob Bussel, the outgoing editors of the LAWCHA newsletter, who have made it an interesting and expansive enterprise that attracted many new members. As editor of *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas*, Leon Fink provides the bedrock upon which our history association rests. Our special thanks to Bob Korstad, one of the hardest-working folks in academia, for keeping our office going at Duke. These people, our editorial and board members and our volunteers working on programs of labor heritage and civic engagement, and in southern labor studies all make this a beautiful organization. We can report steadily growing and increasingly significant conferences (DC, Santa Barbara, Duke, Vancouver, Chicago, and DC again), a growing membership and a solid budget. We have created a strong and vibrant labor history organization, sponsored many panels and papers and provided a means for like-minded folks to channel our energies within the historical profession. We have also made some impact on the larger public perception of labor. I'd cite as examples the outreach to unions and students and the larger public at all our conferences and most notably in Chicago in May 2009, where Erik Gellman, Lisa Phillips, Liesl Orenic and others did such a fine job of organizing.

In addition, the AFL-CIO supported our civic engagement efforts by funding Joseph Hower, a graduate student at Georgetown University, as our liaison to labor organizations. With his help, we sent a statement in support of the Employee Free Choice Act to Congress, signed by 170 historians, published numerous op eds, and Prof. Martin Halpern organized (and we co-sponsored) a teach-in in Arkansas on labor law reform. Julie Greene and Mike Honey each guest lectured at the AFL-CIO and various LAWCHA members continue to develop relationships with labor and community organizations. The amazingly successful memorial to the martyrs of the Ludlow, Colorado, Massacre led by Betsy Jameson and Jim Green also demonstrated the great possibilities

for labor heritage and memory projects. We have taken steps toward labor and faith and labor action committees and set aside funds to bring more students, especially students of color, to our conferences and into studying labor history.

We also have major challenges facing us. Those involved in LAWCHA are most often extremely busy teachers and students who are also heavily engaged in scholarship. We all find it very difficult to take on additional volunteer work. And the political climate for labor has worsened rather than improved. We had high hopes that a new Obama Administration would launch a series of reforms through a Democratic Congress, and we have been sorely disappointed in the so-far meager results. Labor law reform that would restore the right to organize is crucial to union revival but seems to be nowhere on the political horizon.

We have created a strong and vibrant labor history organization, sponsored many panels and papers and provided a means for like-minded folks to channel our energies within the historical profession.

LAWCHA has many organizational challenges to meet and in my opinion we should broaden our civic engagement and find more ways that we as an organization of labor scholars and unionists can effect change. We only need to think of the people we have honored as lifetime supporters of labor history: David Montgomery, David Brody, Addie Wyatt, and this year, Staughton Lynd. Each of these people forged connections to various labor communities and reached larger publics while also doing tremendous scholarship. Under our LAWCHA umbrella, we could support a renewed labor heritage and history offensive. We need a higher profile for music events, teach-ins, films, published articles and books, speeches and all the things that we do to help people better understand the importance of organized labor to democracy and the well-being of people.

A recent poll suggests that public support for unions has dropped in the wake of the continuous propaganda against labor rights advanced by the Chamber of Commerce and employers. Just as Martin Luther King warned the AFL-CIO in 1961, today the

combined forces of ultra-right reactionaries and the business community threaten “everything decent and fair in American life.” We in LAWCHA have achieved some organizational cohesion and have moved beyond the model of a professional organization toward labor history activism and civic engagement but actually have rather few mechanisms and personnel by which to advance our cause. We should feel proud about what we have accomplished with few resources but also realize that there is so much more we could do. How we can advance labor history and memory and encourage progress toward a more democratic society will undoubtedly remain an overarching goal for LAWCHA officers, Board and membership. And the time for action is now.

At the OAH conference Nelson Lichtenstein and others on a labor history panel called on labor historians to counter the Chamber of Commerce image of unions as greedy and corrupt. Martin Luther King offered a moral framework for unions as “the first anti-poverty program” and called for a labor-civil rights alliance against racism, poverty and war in fifteen largely unknown speeches to unions in the 1960s. I have edited these speeches and Beacon Press will publish them as “All Labor Has Dignity,” by Martin Luther King, on the King birthday in January, 2011. The book includes audios of these speeches and we will have a DVD as well as speakers available. If you are interested in using these materials as part of a campaign to formulate a moral demand for union and worker rights, please contact me at mhoney@uw.edu, or 253-692-4454.

Not Yet a 2010 Member? Join LAWCHA Today!

Please enter my 2010 membership to LAWCHA, which includes a one-year subscription (four issues) to *Labor: Studies in Working Class History of the Americas*.

- Individual one-year membership, \$50
- Student one-year membership, \$30 (please enclose photocopy of valid ID)

*Canadian residents: Please add 7% GST and \$12 postage.
For orders outside the U.S. and Canada: Please add \$16 postage*

Payment options

- Enclosed is my check, made payable to Duke University Press
- Please charge my VISA Mastercard AmEx

Card Number _____ Expiration Date _____

Signature _____

Name

Affiliation

Address

City/State/Zip/Country

Email

Please mail this form to:
Duke University Press
Journals Fulfillment Department
Box 90660
Durham, NC 27708-0660

You may also order by phone at 888-651-0122 (in the U.S. or Canada) or 919-688-5134.

Join online at www.dukeupress.edu/lawcha

LAWCHA

c/o Sanford Institute of Public Policy

Duke University

Box 90239

Durham, NC 27708-0239

(919) 451-5467