



Work and Class in Post-Katrina New Orleans

by Michael Mizell-Nelson

In the wake of several levee collapses -- New Orleans's manmade disaster following Hurricane Katrina -- the media focused its attention on the innumerable failures of local, state, and federal government. The impoverished nature of tens of thousands of New Orleanians left to be rescued by boat and helicopter quickly generated third world allusions. The Lower Ninth Ward quickly became a term meant to denote poor African-Americans.

In reality, the Lower Ninth Ward's status as a cohesive, working-class community and its heritage as one of the city's most integrated neighborhoods proved to be too difficult for most journalists to convey -- if they discovered it at all.

Few journalists chose to question how a neighborhood depicted as the city's nadir of poverty could boast majority home ownership in a city characterized by about one-third vacant housing stock, absentee landlords, and ill-preserved housing developments falling to gentrification. Almost 70% of Lower Ninth Ward residents owned and still own their homes -- a testament to the legacy of New Orleans' union dockworker past. With home ownership the treasured measure of success in the United States and integrated neighborhoods an elusive ideal, one would expect more interest in Ninth Ward history.

The tradition of earning meager incomes but enjoying the benefit of an inherited residence can certainly be found throughout the nation and among all sorts of classes; however, New Orleans's chronically depressed economy often made such conditions a crucial element

of survival for white and black working-class families (including some of my neighbors in my flooded-out neighborhood). The culture of getting by assisted hotels and restaurants in recent decades as they charged some of the highest room rates in the nation while paying some of the lowest wages.

Despite the international interest in the effects of Katrina and the "discovery" of entrenched poverty, scarcely any media paid attention to the role of international hotel chains and the convention and tourism industry as one of the main beneficiaries of oppressive conditions in the New Orleans labor market. For several decades the same chains that pay union wages in other major convention cities have successfully fought off attempts to unionize by frightening and firing individual workers while arguing that the city's lower cost (i.e., stan-

dard) of living renders unionization and higher wages unnecessary. For decades the Fairmont was the only unionized hotel until the Loews Hotel was recently built using union pension funds. The Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 100 experienced short-lived success organizing Hyatt workers in the late 1980s. The best funded and organized effort yet emerged in 1998 via the Hospitality, Hotels, and Restaurants Organizing Council (HOTROC) campaign. With funds from the AFL-CIO, a coalition of the SEIU, the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees, and the International Union of Operating Engineers attempted to organize the estimated 16,000 New Orleans workers toiling at the bottom of the convention and tourism industry, the fastest growing sector of the New Orleans economy. The city's dire economic (cont'd on page 11)

Venezuelan Labor -- An Update

by Kim Scipes

Visiting Venezuela this past summer on a short, 10-day trip, I got to interview people at both the Confederacion de Trabajadores Venezolanos (CTV) and the new Unión Nacional de Trabajadores (UNT). Together with a small but growing literature on the subject of labor in Venezuela, this trip gave me a sense of what is happening there.

The CTV is the long-established labor center in Venezuela. The CTV was established in 1936 not only for organized workers but also for popular sectors in general. It played a central role in two national oil strikes, the first, in 1936-

37, against the "imperialist" oil companies, and the second, in 1958, aimed at overthrowing the military government of Perez Jimenez. In the 1980s, it led the fight for "Workers Participation," and in 1989, led a general strike against President Carlos Andres Perez's neo-liberal economic program.

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Message from the LAWCHA Newsletter Committee

Michael Honey

Current editors Rick Halpern and Dan Letwin pioneered in creating and editing the newsletter for the last three years. At our spring board meeting, they proposed that editorship now rotate to two new editors at the end of this academic year and that we set up regular procedures to keep it going. Mike Honey chaired a committee of Letwin, Halpern and Cele Bucki to do that. We agreed that the newsletter is an important tool of outreach to build and connect our membership and to educate people about labor perspectives and issues. We agreed on a regular rotation of editors, with term lengths to be set by the Executive Board; that the newsletter should continue to be published twice a year; that a new "associate" membership category should be established to encourage non-scholars to subscribe to the newsletter and join LAWCHA; and that the newsletter editors should seek to connect LAWCHA more closely to unions.

Dan and Rick had written a memo explaining the need for increased funding and technical support, which was a major burden during the first two years (Rick's Centre for the Study of the United States at the University of Toronto and the yeoman work of Dan and Rick kept it afloat). Bob Korstad has alleviated much of that burden, making it possible to move layout, printing, and distribution to the LAWCHA offices at Duke University, leaving new editors free to concentrate on editing and circulation.

Mike Honey was designated to recruit two new editors, based on a list of possible candidates. The e-board has now gladly and heartily accepted his nomination of Joe McCartin, Associate Professor of History at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C., who has in turn selected Bob Bussel, Associate Professor and Director of the Labor Education and Research Center at the University of Oregon in Eugene, to join him as co-editor. With the following statement, they accepted the editorship for a two-year term (renewable for a third, subject to e-board approval) for academic years 2007-2008 and 2008-2009:

We believe that we will make an effective editorial team, given that one of us is on the East Coast, one on the West Coast, one of us teaches in a history department, while the other runs a labor education program in addition to being a labor historian. We would feel fortunate to follow in the footsteps of Dan and Rick, building on the high standards they have set for the newsletter. To build on what Dan and Rick have done, we hope to capitalize on Bob's long history as an organizer and his network of contacts in labor education as well as the labor history community and Joe's proximity to national union offices in a special effort to widen the circulation of the newsletter among labor movement people. We would like to devote our energy to making it even more of a forum for interchange between labor scholars and the labor movement in the spirit that has animated LAWCHA since the organization's founding.

The new editors plan to archive past newsletters on the LAWCHA website, to widen readership to non-academics, and to build closer ties with unions. In a subsequent phone conference, the Executive Board praised Rick and Dan for their hard work in making the newsletter an important vehicle for LAWCHA, and we accept-

ed the new editorship of McCartin and Bussel with great enthusiasm and optimism for the future.

The Executive Board urges members to use the newsletter to familiarize people with LAWCHA. Duke University Press is willing and eager to set up special mailings. If you would like to mail to lists you have to urge people to subscribe to the newsletter and join LAWCHA, please contact our director Max Krochmal (mk63@duke.edu). If you would like sample copies of the newsletter sent to particular people, along with a letter inviting them to subscribe, contact Donna Blagdan (Blagdan@Duke.edu), who works on newsletter distribution for Duke University publications.

Based on proposals made this spring by Nelson Lichtenstein and Nancy MacLean, we would like to see LAWCHA historians writing to a larger public in conjunction with union organizing and current issues. Lichtenstein, Bussel, McCartin and Honey are working on a proposal to do just that, which will be presented to the e-board at the spring board meeting in Durham. If you are interested in becoming involved in writing or speaking on labor issues, please send an email to Max Krochmal at mk63@duke.edu.

The LAWCHA Newsletter is published twice yearly and mailed to all paid-up members of the Labor and Working Class History Association. A PDF version (and eventually back issues) are available via the Association's website: www.lawcha.org

Copy for the Spring issue is due on 15 April 2006 and can be sent to one of the co-editors:

**Rick Halpern, University of Toronto,
rick.halpern@utoronto.ca**

**Dan Letwin, Penn State University,
letwin@psu.edu**

**The Labor and Working Class History Association and Southern Labor Studies present
Working Class Activism in the South and the Nation:
Contemporary Challenges in Historical Context**

May 17, 18, and 19, 2007 at the Terry Sanford Institute for Public Policy, Duke University

Join us for an innovative dialogue on current issues facing the working class and their allies. This conference will bring together scholars, students, social justice and union activists, policy makers and rank-and-file workers to explore the connections between contemporary challenges facing the working class and their historical context. This gathering aims to enhance personal and organizational ties between those engaged in ongoing workplace and community organizing efforts and students and scholars whose work documents the long history of activism in the United States.

The key thematic areas for the conference will be:

- * The New Working Class: Public Sector and Service Workers
- * Farm Labor & Immigration
- * Organizing Outside the Workplace
- * Environmental Justice
- * Intellectuals' Role in Labor Struggles

Five plenary sessions featuring round-table discussions among an academic, an activist, a policy maker and a rank-and-file worker, will each address one of the conference themes. Panels, documentary presentations, and cultural programs will further explore the issues raised in the plenary sessions.

The LAWCHA/Southern Labor Studies Program Committee invites submissions of paper and panel proposals broadly related to the conference theme and plenary topics. The Committee prefers proposals of complete panels, but will accept single paper proposals. LAWCHA encourages proposals that are interdisciplinary in nature, include public historians and activists as well as academics, take creative approaches, and that will speak meaningfully to those both inside and outside the academy.

Proposals for sessions should include: a one-page summary of the session as a whole; a one-page abstract of each paper; a brief curriculum vitae of each participant.

Please be sure to include contact information for each participant including name, title, institution or affiliation (please indicate if independent), mailing address, contact phone number and e-mail address. Submissions are due January 15th. Contact Information:

Please address proposals and papers to:
Max Krochmal, Executive Secretary
Labor and Working Class History Association
Box 90239
Sanford Institute of Public Policy
Duke University
Durham, NC 27708
(919) 613-7399
lawcha@duke.edu

Venezuela (cont'd from cover)

However, during the 1990s it became much more conservative, moderating its positions related to social benefits and economic transformation. By 1996, the CTV, following the leadership of the Acción Democrática (AD) political party, had accepted the neo-liberal economic policies of President Caldera.

Upon the election of Hugo Chavez to the presidency in 1998, the CTV came under attack by the Chavez regime for corruption, but the Chavista labor leaders could not come to a unified position in regard to the CTV: should they try to dissolve and reform as a new labor center, or should they try to take over control of the organization?

Ultimately, the traditional labor leaders, whose leadership had been threatened by the Chavista challenge, regained control of the labor center. In April 2002, these traditional leaders joined with the business confederation, FEDECAMARAS, to call a general strike against the state-owned oil company. The march on the oil company headquarters was transformed by these leaders into the opening moves in a coup that briefly removed Hugo Chavez from office, but was overturned by the mobilization of millions of people in Caracas who surrounded the presidential place and demanded Chavez's return, and by splits in the Venezuelan military.

The AFL-CIO's "Solidarity Center" was involved in bringing together the CTV and FEDECAMARAS leaders prior to the coup. CTV President Carlos Ortega played a key role in the coup, but was betrayed by fellow coup plotter Pedro Carmona, who became President after Chavez's removal. Only after Carmona excluded labor people from his cabinet, and then dissolved the National Assembly and suspended the Constitution, did Ortega condemn the coup attempt. The AFL-CIO claims the

CTV condemned the coup, but that happened only after the betrayal.

Following the failure of the coup attempt in December 2002, the right wing tried again. Managers in PDVSA, the state-owned oil company, combined with technicians in the oil workers union (the key member of the CTV), launched a lockout -- which they called a "general strike"--sabotaging the oil industry -- the sector so vital to Venezuela's economy social order. This continued for 63 days, into February 2003, ultimately causing the GNP to drop by an astounding 27 percent!

After the oil lockout, workers and their unions left the CVT in droves, ultimately reforming within the new UNT, in April 2003.

Lee Sustar describes the situation in considerable detail in his 2005 article, "Revolution and Counter-revolution in Venezuela: Assessing the Role of the AFL-CIO," at www.selvesandothers.org/article10406.html. In this article, Sustar tries to discredit the AFL-CIO's claims that the UNT was merely a creation of Chavez's administration and, in my opinion, he succeeds. Sustar concludes that, "[t]he UNT isn't a creation of the state, but the result of a break by some union leaders from the CTV after the oil lockout-strike, to form a bloc with pro-Chávez leftists and dissident social Christians in 2003."

Since the founding of the UNT, there has been considerable debate within the labor center over issues including union democracy, "co-management," and the rightful relationship between the labor center and President Chavez (should the UNT maintain a supportive, yet independent position, or should it ally itself with Chavez' MVR [Movement of the Fifth Republic]?) These issues do not seem yet settled, but the fact that the labor movement can have these debates

is a vast advance over the days of the CVT. Although their national convention in May 2006 was quite "lively," they ultimately decided to support the re-election of Chavez in December 2006. But it is clear that they will maintain a distance from the President and his political organization.

In fact, when I talked with Frolián Barrios, the UNT National Coordinator, in June 2006 in Caracas, he pointed out that they were trying to establish a "classist" trade unionism, focused on benefiting the working class. He suggested the new unionism has social, economic, cultural and political aspects: this gives the unions a chance to address the social inequality in the country; to help create a new model of economic production based on worker co-management (with an explicit rejection of neo-liberalism, state capitalism, or savage capitalism); to reclaim their traditional cultures, which means a recognition of diversity, and the long-neglected African part of the Venezuelan heritage; and, to establish direct democracy in the country, with power based on participation not political party.

How successful will they be? One doesn't know. But the new unionism under the UNT seems a far better alternative than that of the CVT, which has long subordinated workers' interests to the state and big business.

From The Grassroots

Mid-Atlantic

From New York *Gail Malmgreen*

New York Labor History Association: Our May Labor History Month conference this year was devoted to a timely discussion of union organizing in higher education, and featured speakers from the Graduate Student Organizing Committee at New York University as well as representatives of the City University of New York and University of Massachusetts faculty unions. After a quiet summer, the fall got off to a rousing start with our annual meeting, a celebration of a new biography of Carlo Tresca. The author, Professor Nunzio Pernicone of Drexel University, held the audience spellbound and deftly fielded a barrage of questions emanating from many political viewpoints. On October 18th a capacity crowd at the Center for Jewish History attended our screening of "Clara Lemlich: A Strike Leader's Diary," and heard a discussion of the film by Henry Foner, Daniel Katz, and writer/director Alex Szalat. On November 16th our annual Commerford Labor Education awards reception will honor Roger Toussaint, president of TWU Local 100, and labor historian Joshua Freeman

From Uniontown, PA *Gibb Prettyman*

During March 15-17, 2007, a conference entitled "Living Together, Working Together: African-American Miners and the Coal Culture of Southwestern Pennsylvania, 1870-1970," will be held at Penn State Fayette, the Eberly Campus, in Uniontown, Pennsylvania. Sponsored by Penn State Fayette's Coal and

Coke Heritage Center and the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, this conference will bring together interested scholars and citizens in an effort to explore the cultural history of African-American miners and their families in the bituminous coalfields of Southwestern Pennsylvania and surrounding regions. Cecil E. Roberts, president of United Mine Workers of America, will be the keynote speaker.

The conference will begin with a reception on the evening of March 15 to unveil a new Pennsylvania state historical marker commemorating the Connellsville Coke Region. Friday, March 16 will feature speakers and scholarly papers by researchers from a variety of disciplines. Registration is required for all participants and attendees; student registration is free. On Saturday, March 17, the conference will conclude with a Community History Fair; information about African-American genealogy and oral history will be presented and local historical groups will be on hand to discuss their activities. Admission to the Community History Fair is free and open to the public.

To register online or for more information, please visit our website at www.coalandcokepsu.org

Midwest

From Chicago *Liesl Miller Orenic*

On November 10th the Chicago Center for Working-Class Studies launched a new interactive online version of The Labor Trail: Chicago's History of Working-Class Life and Struggle. This new format, funded by a grant from the Illinois

Humanities Council, greatly expands the use and content of the Labor Trail. Take a look at the Labor Trail website at www.labortrail.org to see the changes.

Over the summer and early fall the CCWCS helped form the Hotel Workers Rising Faculty Support Committee to raise public awareness of and support for the hotel workers in their successful contract negotiations with Hilton, Hyatt and Starwood hotels. This spring we will hold our third "Getting Paid to Cause Trouble: Careers in Social Justice" workshop, which will bring together young community and union organizers and college students from the Chicago area.

Looking forward to 2008, the CCWCS has formed a series of subcommittees to organize a national conference on new forms of worker organization like worker centers, minority unions, and working partnerships.

From Milwaukee **Michael Gordon**

Working people and labor historians in Wisconsin recently mourned the death of former Milwaukee Socialist Mayor Frank P. Zeidler, who died on July 7 at age 93. Zeidler, who served as mayor from 1948 to 1960, followed other Socialist mayors, Emil Zeidel (1910-1912), and Daniel Webster Hoan (1916-1940). As mayor, Zeidler led an aggressive annexation campaign and expanded city services. He helped revitalize the Socialist Party of America, served as national chair for many years, and was the party candidate for president in 1976.

Shortly before his death, Zeidler appeared at two annual labor events. On May 7, he spoke at the 120th anniversary commemoration of the Bay View Massacre. The annual event was held along Lake Michigan at the site of the May 6, 1886, incident in which state guardsmen killed seven people during a strike of workers at the North Chicago Rolling Mills. Featured speaker was Christine Neumann-Ortiz, founder of *Voces de la Frontera* (Voices of the Border), a Milwaukee newspaper focusing on the plight of undocumented immigrants. Neumann-Ortiz was the organizer of the march last spring that brought thousands into city streets to protest proposals to punish undocumented workers.

On November 30, the South Central Federation of Labor unveiled a huge mural painted by stonemason and muralist, Marcus Nickel, depicting events in Madison labor history. Guests included AFL-CIO Executive Vice-President Linda Chavez Thompson.

From the Twin Cities **Peter Rachleff**

During June 14-17, 2007, the annual conference of the Working-Class Studies Association will be held at Macalester College. The conference will be focused around the theme, "Class Matters: Working-Class Culture and Counter-Culture." The conference will explore working-class culture in all its forms -- activism, pop culture, the arts, storytelling, and more. Working-class culture can be a source of unity as well as division, and it is constructed in the workplace as well as in the realms of "leisure" and popular culture. At this conference, we hope to explore the relationships between "cultural workers" and their audiences, control over the means of cultural production (publishers, music producers, universities, etc.), and the commodification of working-class culture, among other issues. We are eager to provide a venue in which scholars of working-class culture using Humanities and Social Science frames and lenses can come together with each other, and with creators of working-class culture.

How has working-class culture changed over time? Is there is a diasporic, transnational, and/or global working-class culture? How do working-class people use representations, organizations, and everyday life to resist the dominant culture? How does working-class culture reflect divisions among working-class people?

We invite proposals for presentations, panels, posters, roundtables, and performances. Submit 1-page abstracts with a brief biographical statement January 15, 2007 to:

Peter Rachleff
History Department
Macalester College
1600 Grand Avenue
St. Paul, Minnesota 55105
email: rachleff@macalester.edu
phone: 651-696-6371

Dormitory housing available.

From Wisconsin **Ken Germanson**

The Wisconsin Labor History Society continues to partner with the Wisconsin State AFL-CIO by offering projects and opportunities to help spread the word about the importance of labor history. Thanks to support from the Federation, many locals and labor councils, we have seen our membership and financial assets grow and become more stable in the last year. As unions seek to organize new workers and to mobilize present members, they have learned that most workers have very little knowledge about the history of unions and how important they were to creating good working conditions. The Labor History Society is dedicated to fulfilling that need.

The Society held its 25th anniversary conference on May 13, 2006, at Milwaukee's Turner Hall, and attracted some 80 persons. It was Frank Zeidler's last public appearance before his death at age 93 on July 7, 2006. Zeidler, who has long supported the Society and was Milwaukee's last Socialist mayor (1948-1960), honored us with nearly one and one-half hours of commentary and the answering of questions, in spite of his growing fragile health. Professor Harvey Kaye of UWGB was keynote speaker, discussing material from his book, "Thomas Paine and the Promise of America."

For several years now, the Frank P. Zeidler Academic Awards are offered to graduate or undergraduate students for commendable research in the field of Wisconsin Labor History. The 2005 Zeidler Academic Award in the undergraduate category for original research in the area of Wisconsin labor and working-class history was given to Cassandra Irwin, a graduating senior at the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh, for her paper, "The Kohler Strike of 1954: The Kohler Company's Resistance to 'Outside' Union Representation."

The Society sponsored and helped to make possible the purchase and presentation of a portrait of former Milwaukee Mayor Frank Zeidler, in a joint project with the Public Enterprise Committee of Milwaukee. Some \$3,400 was raised for the effort. The portrait was presented to city in a ceremony Nov. 1, 2005 at the Municipal Building before some 200 persons, including Mayor Zeidler, current Mayor Tom Barrett and other public officials. This idea was first presented to the Society by member Phil Blank at the 2005 conference, based upon a suggestion of his wife, Bea.

For further information on the Wisconsin Labor History Society, go to www.wisconsin-laborhistory.org

From Wisconsin Laurie Wermter

All last spring, many Wisconsin school kids were busy researching labor history for their National History Day (NHD) projects. Since the national theme for the 2005/06 competition year, "Taking a Stand in History -- People, Ideas, Events," was perfect for labor

topics, the Wisconsin Labor History Society (WLHS), an affiliate of the Wisconsin Historical Society, decided -- as a trial -- to offer awards for projects devoted to American labor history to the middle school and high school students participating in the National History Day in Wisconsin competition. Their program made available two \$50 awards for the best labor history entries, selected from across all competition categories, at each of Wisconsin's seven NHD regional events (one award at the junior age level for grades 6-8 and one award at the senior age level for grades 9-12) and two \$100 awards at the Wisconsin History Day state finals event. Through this new program, the society hoped to increase awareness of the role of working people in building a more just and equitable America.

In talking with the students competing for the labor prizes, many mentioned that they had gotten the idea for their labor topic while talking with a family member. Others said they had selected their labor topic precisely because they knew nothing about it and reported that, as they learned the labor story, they were excited to share the inspiring history they were finding with their classmates. At least a third of the labor-related projects were done on topics of Wisconsin labor history. Qualifying projects could focus on: 1) organizations, such as labor unions and political groups connected to the labor movement; 2) leaders of working people and their associations; or 3) the experiences of workers on the job or their organized struggles to improve their work and lives.

The Society has decided to continue with these prizes. "Triumph and Tragedy in History" will be the national NHD theme for the 2006/07

competition year. For more information, either go to www.wisconsinlaborhistory.org, or contact Laurie Wermter at lwermt@library.wisc.edu

South

From Florida Robert Zieger

In July of this year, a historical marker honoring A. Philip Randolph was installed in his natal town, Crescent City, Florida. The initiative came from a group of trade unionists, academics, and African-American leaders, notably State Senator Anthony Hill of nearby Jacksonville. The marker's placement is part of a program sponsored by the State of Florida to encourage local citizens to identify and bring to public attention episodes, institutions, and individuals of historical significance in Florida. The marker, which commemorates Randolph's contributions to labor and civil rights, is located outside a church at which Randolph's father, James William Randolph, was a minister. There is an account of the event and a picture gallery at <http://www.waymarking.com/waymarks/details.aspx?f=-1&WMGUID=98ac3c03-db29-408e-92ae-bee3c97867fa>]

From Memphis Michael Honey

"The problem of racism, the problem of economic exploitation and the problem of war, are all tied together." -- Martin Luther King, Jr.

In July, an interracial gathering of several hundred ministers, community activists, academic workers, and Change to Win and AFL-CIO union members from eight southern states met for

three days at the University of Memphis, in the first conference of the Southern Faith, Labor and Community Alliance. The conference was led by Reverends Nelson Johnson and J. Herbert Nelson, veterans of the K-Mart workers 1996 struggle in Greensboro, North Carolina, where ministers and black community members engaged in economic boycotts and went to jail to support union rights and higher wages for 500 low-wage workers. Martin Luther King gave his life in a similar struggle in Memphis in 1968.

Both strikes made the rights of workers a central issue for the black community and for civil rights movements. Memphis set off a decade of mostly-successful union campaigns among disproportionately black, female, and poor public employees; Greensboro helped to revive religious and labor coalitions in the era of downsizing, privatization, and destruction of unions. The Memphis conference sought to reinvigorate and reconnect the black church to the struggle of low-wage workers.

In a call to the conference, organizers wrote, "Much of Christendom is silent on the question of the poor" and "is increasingly becoming the faith of the empire, an empire that proclaims freedom and democracy on the one hand while enforcing economic tyranny within this country and abroad on the other," as "the world is plunged into a permanent war culture." Conference organizers critiqued the patriotic "empire theology," stressing individual material of the Christian megachurches and stressed instead the need to create a new alliance between black labor and the church.

Myself and Alice Bernstein, an advocate of Eli Siegel's system of Aesthetic Realism from New

York City, wrote up the conference in a number of southern African-American newspapers. She taped panel discussions on labor history, current and planned future organizing campaigns, post-Katrina New Orleans, and immigration issues. Vice-President Gerald "Gerry" Hudson of the Service Employees International Union, which represents 500,000 nursing home and home care workers, spoke about promoting community and global unionism. Conference participants also joined a mass protest at the Olive Branch, Mississippi plant of the second largest printer in the world, Quebecor (QW), which produces magazines like Sports Illustrated and People. Unions and the Mid-South Interfaith Network for Economic Justice led the effort.

Much like the Latino, African-American, and white workers at Smithfield Packing Company in North Carolina, Quebecor workers are fighting a viciously anti-union corporation in the heart of the "right to work" South, where low wages, unsafe conditions, firings, and harassment of union organizers dominate. Efforts to bring together academic, faith, civil rights, and labor communities in the South, from Memphis to New Orleans to North Carolina, have set the stage for the LAWCHA/Southern Labor Studies Conference on May 17-19, 2007 in Durham. Be there!

West

From the Bay Area *Don Watson*

This year the San Francisco Bay Area hosted another July "Labor Fest" in honor of the 1934 San Francisco General Strike. Daily events ensued, including the

annual labor history boat cruise, music, poetry, and theater. A small committee has been organizing this event for a number of years.

On December 6, the East Bay labor movement will be commemorating the 60th Anniversary of the 1946 Oakland General Strike. On that date in 1946 up to 100,000 workers struck in support of striking downtown women department store workers. A plaque will be unveiled at the site of the beginning of this strike.

Meanwhile the San Francisco Bay Area Labor History Workshop has moving ahead for its 16th year. Here's the schedule for 2006-07:

September 17: Cynthia Taylor on A. Phillip Randolph's Religious Journey;

October 15: John Holmes on Jewish Communism and Garment Unionism during the 1920s;

November 12: Bill Issel on Msgr. Joseph Munier's transnational Catholic labor activism;

January 14: Beth Slutsky on Charlotte Anita Whitney (1867-1955) and Kendra Alexander (1946-1993);

February 18: Lauren Coodley on "foregrounding" labor history in her new California history textbook;

March 18: Celeste MacLeod on labor history in her new book on "Multiethnic Australia";

April 23: Kathy Maggiora Rogers on creating the museum exhibit on East Bay Italian American workers (CON LE NOSTRE MANI, "With Our Hands");

May 20: Bill Shields and City

College Labor Studies Students on "Youth Speaks! S.F. City College Students' Labor History Projects."

Contact Bill Issel, bi@sfsu.edu, for information about the locations of these meetings.

From Los Angeles

Paul Krehbiel

Paul Krehbiel, long-time union member and activist, has written a four-part series of articles on building Stewards Councils that appeared in the monthly labor journal *Labor Notes* from July through October 2006. Based on his experiences in building Stewards Councils at LAC-USC Medical Center and Harbor-UCLA Medical Center, both major public hospitals operated by Los Angeles County, Krehbiel explained how building the Councils created a strong internal union structure that empowered workers to protect and advance their interests. He spelled out how to start the process from scratch, and described a historic campaign led by nurses to force Los Angeles County management to comply with a recently passed state law mandating reasonable nurse-to-patient ratios. To read these important articles, google *Labor Notes* and Paul Krehbiel.

Canada

From Toronto

Franca Iacovetta

In October, the Toronto Labour Studies Research Group -- a study group that has existed for more than thirty years and whose success might be measured by the different generations of labour, left, and feminist historians who have belonged to it over the years -- hosted an Australian guest and comrade, Diana Covell, from the University of Sydney,

Australia. Diana was in Canada on a research trip taken in connection with a comparative study she is completing of organized efforts by women in Canada (Hamilton -- Women Back Into STELCO) and Australia (Wollongong -- Jobs for Women in BHP/Al&S, Port Kembla) to get jobs in the steel industry in the late 1970s-early 1980s. Since several of the Toronto Labour Studies members are founding members of the Hamilton-based Ontario Workers Arts and Heritage Centre (which brought together some of the Women into Steel folks a few years back) we were delighted to have Diana share her research with us in Toronto and to put her in touch with contacts in Hamilton. Her oral history and archival research project to record the history of the Wollongong and Hamilton campaigns is being carried out with the support of former participants in both campaigns.

From Peterborough

Bryan Palmer

David Montgomery was the 2006-07 Ashley Fellow at Trent University, presenting a series of lectures on "Workers Movements and Imperialism, Old and New," between 26 September and 17 October 2006.

Joan Sangster, of Trent's History Department and Women's Studies Program, is the recipient of a distinguished Killam Fellowship, which she will use to do research for a major study of Canadian women and waged work in the post-World War II period.

In conjunction with York University's Mark Thomas, Steve Tufts of Trent's Geography Department has organized a workshop on New Voices in Labour Studies. Taking place 27-28 October 2006, the workshop will draw

younger scholars from across the country to discuss how they envision the field of labour studies and the changes it has gone through recently.

Canada Research Chair Bryan Palmer of the Canadian Studies Program has a book appearing with University of Illinois Press, due out in January 2007, entitled *James P. Cannon and the Origins of the American Revolutionary Left, 1890-1928*. Palmer continues to edit *Labour/Le Travail* and, along with Sangster, Jeff Taylor of Athabasca University, Mark Leier of Simon Fraser, Andree Levesque of McGill and others, is involved in a SSHRC sponsored Research Cluster Initiative on Work and Society in Canada.

* * * * *

RANDOM NOTES

**Building Bridges:
A Labour Studies Conference
University of Windsor,
Windsor, Ontario, Canada**

February 2nd and 3rd, 2007

How can we defend and create good jobs, protect the environment, challenge injustice and inequality, and create peace?

Register online at the web site www.uwindsor.ca/labour. You may alternatively use the printable registration form (in PDF format) on the website, and return it by regular mail to Labour Studies, University of Windsor, Windsor Ontario N9B 3P4. (Attn: Building Bridges Conference).

LAWCHA GRADUATE STUDENT AWARDS

LAWCHA is pleased to announce its annual competition for graduate student research and travel awards.

The prizes are aimed at facilitating participation in the North American Labor History Conference to be held at Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan, in October 2007.

Three categories of prizes will be awarded:

- Research Paper Prize (\$500)
- Three Travel Grants (\$250 each)
- Minority Student Travel Award (\$250)

For the research paper award, LAWCHA solicits direct submissions or faculty nominations of original research papers of approximately 35 pages in length (not MA theses or dissertation chapters) regardless of geographical or chronological field. The candidate for the award must be a graduate student at the time of the application or nomination. For the Minority Student and general travel grants, submit proposals to present at the NALHC including a 1-2 page abstract and brief vita.

Visit www.lawcha.org or e-mail lawcha@duke.edu for more details. Deadline: March 31, 2007

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Katrina (cont'd from cover)

conditions have many sources, but one of the major impediments to progressive change in area income and quality of life remains unexamined and unchecked.

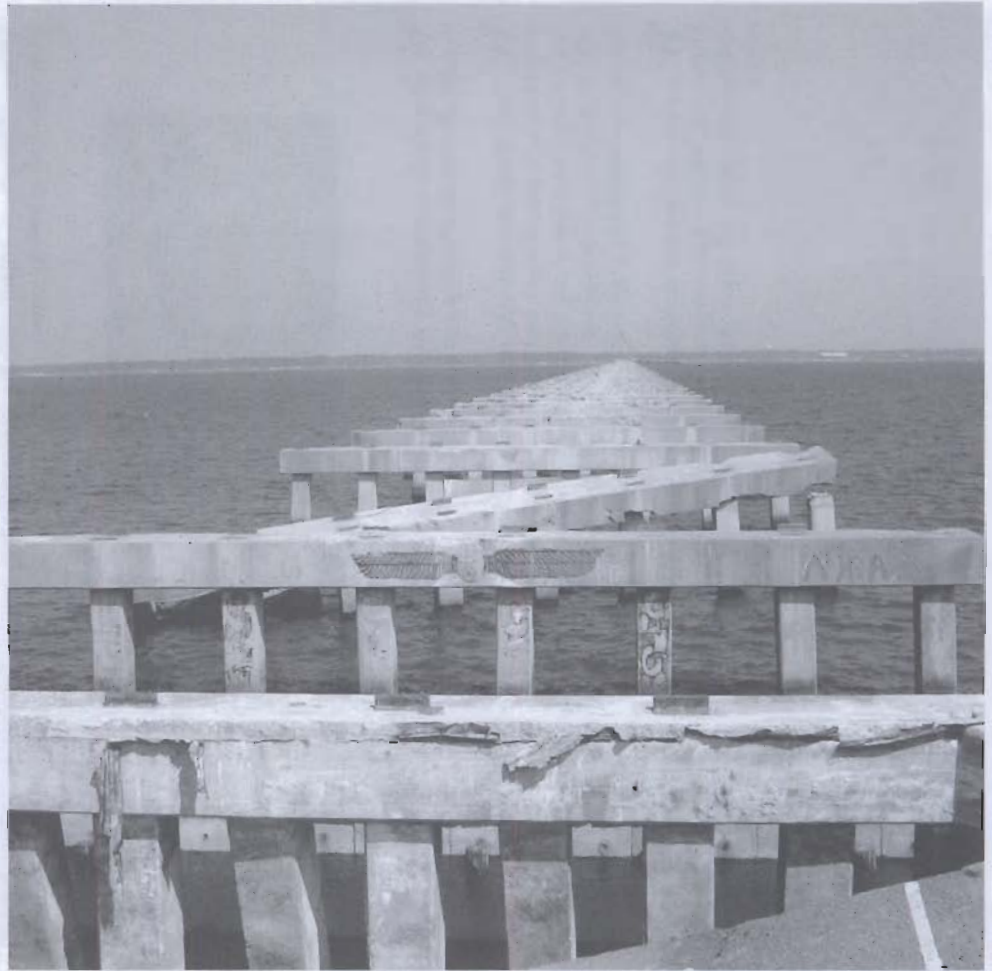
Media coverage of work in post-Katrina New Orleans centers upon the spike in service industry wages, the booming construction industry, and the influx of documented and undocumented workers while ignoring Katrina's effects on organized labor.

Two of the largest and most successful unions in pre-Katrina New Orleans served teachers and transit workers: the United Teachers of New Orleans, AFT (UTNO) and the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU), Local 1560. UTNO and the local ATU had both signed their first collective bargaining agreements in the mid-1970s. Hopefulness about the city's economic future when New Orleans still ranked among the Sun Belt cities characterized this brief period of interracial unionism. White membership in both unions dissipated in the following decades, but strong collective bargaining agreements characterized both unions. Now both are crippled.

1350 Regional Transit Authority employees included several hundred ATU members. The loss of entire transit lines and most of the riding public caused about 800 workers to lose their jobs. Skilled maintenance workers, organized with the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, have fared better.

The largest union in the city just before Katrina, UTNO had 4700 dues-paying members, and the union negotiated on behalf of 6300 of the 7500 school board employees. The union was disemboweled in November 2005 when the state legislature seized the opportunity to take control of all of the poorly performing schools in order to develop a Recovery District. This placed almost 90% of the systems schools under state control and

photo: remains of Interstate 90, north of New Orleans



destroyed the collective bargaining agreement. UTNO now represents about 300 workers. Middle class black and white parents whose children attended the several schools performing well according to state standards moved rapidly to develop charter schools -- many of which had been planned pre-Katrina. Teachers at these schools were required to agree to work under non-union conditions on an annual contract basis.

University and community college faculty in southeast Louisiana have been far more fortunate in the short term. However, administrative downsizing has forcibly removed some faculty from all institutions. The Louisiana Federation of Teachers has provided legal support for some of the several state faculty appealing their loss of positions. Other faculty have found positions elsewhere; some have simply relocated. The American Association of University

Professors is preparing a report regarding the status of tenured faculty at private universities who lost positions due to program cuts.

Not all news is terrible. In June 2006 the AFL-CIO announced its one billion dollar investment in rebuilding the Gulf Coast. The Gulf Coast Revitalization Program represents the first and largest infusion of private funds into the region since the hurricane. The program will create union jobs in order to construct affordable housing for working families. 250 million dollars will be used for mortgage and first-time home ownership programs. 100 million dollars of the funds will be used to develop commercial construction projects "focusing on hotels and other projects that create construction and service jobs." Given the still hostile attitude of the hotel chains towards worker organization, hospitality unionization in New Orleans may have to start from within.

Who We Are

ABOUT LAWCHA

▶ We are historians, labor educators and working class activists who seek to promote public and scholarly awareness of labor and working-class history through research, writing, and organizing.

▶ We are open to the widest possible variety of approaches to the subject of labor and working class history; through our organization we facilitate the free exchange of ideas and opinions.



▶ We have a demographically regionally, and internationally diverse membership and leadership.

▶ We have developed mutually supportive relationships with existing regional, state, and local labor studies and labor history societies in the US and other countries. We have developed equally important relationships with unions and community organizations.

▶ We promote labor and working-class history within the history and social studies curricula in public schools as well as community colleges, colleges, universities, and unions.

Join Now!

BENEFITS OF A MEMBERSHIP

▶ Connect with other labor historians, educators, and activists through our comprehensive website at www.lawcha.org. It provides a wide range of resources, a membership directory, current news about the labor movement and the labor history profession, and much more.



▶ Participate in LAWCHA sponsored panels at the AHA and OAH, and at labor history and labor studies conferences around the United States. We cosponsor LAWCHA panels, plenaries, and walking tours, and hold an annual members' meeting.

▶ Receive our informative and interesting newsletter twice per year that updates members on LAWCHA activities around the country.

▶ Grad student members are eligible for our Research Paper Award as well as annual travel grants to the North American Labor History Conference or to another co-sponsored LAWCHA conference.

▶ Receive reduced subscription rates to the labor history journal *ILWCH*.

▶ Receive a subscription to LAWCHA's official journal, *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas*.

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