



LAWCHA

The Labor and Working-Class History Association

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CHICAGO CONFERENCE

FORUM ON AFL-CIO

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FALL 2009

Pictures from LAWCHA's 2009 Conference in Chicago



Erik Gellman, Liesl Orenic and Lisa Phillips, conference organizers.

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LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Retrieving Labor History and Struggling for Justice in the Era of Obama

Mike Honey, LAWCHA President, with Kimberly Phillips, Vice President

Labor historians Erik Gellman, Liesl Orenic, and Lisa Phillips, and labor and other community activists organized a spectacular conference on May 28-30, 2009 at Roosevelt University in Chicago that demonstrated LAWCHA's ability to bring together unionists and labor historians, students, and community folks. This and our other conferences in recent years have been significant efforts to retrieve our history in a way that makes it relevant to the present. (See article inside.)

The importance of that seems obvious today. As the gaps of racial and economic inequality become wider and deeper everywhere in an unfolding economic calamity for working-class people, we must pay attention to the moment we are in. It is a good time to recall the relief, recovery and reform efforts of the New Deal, or Martin Luther King's demand for a "moral revolution" to "shift from a 'thing-oriented' society to a 'person-oriented' society." King told workers in Memphis in 1968, "It is a crime for people to live in this rich nation and receive starvation wages," and it is still true. Ongoing dispossessions, foreclosures, and mass unemployment while Wall Street profits from the misery it created are equally criminal.

President Barack Obama offers us an opening for progressive engagement, but also the illusory goal of "bi-partisanship" with enemies of progress. As special interests pour funds into the pockets of Democrats, they can water down Obama's most important initiatives. Obama needs the pressure of a mass movement at his back, but advocates for progressive change are too quiet. Finance and health care reform, consumer protection, climate change, the war in Afghanistan, immigration, and labor rights, all are on the table. Academics continue to write the informed op-ed pieces that we are good at, in hopes of countering the hysteria created by the right-wing and business to quash debate, but it is not enough. It would be good to see labor and justice advocates taking to the streets as immigrants and their supporters did in 2006.

LAWCHA took some steps toward critical engagement with the past and present at our annual board meeting in Chicago. We started a LAWCHA Faith and Labor Committee aimed at working with people like Kim Bobo of the Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice. Several years ago, black ministers and unionists met in Memphis to engage churches in support of union organizing and such efforts would be welcome today. Our board also established a Labor Activism Committee, for those who would like to craft specific ways to help union organizers. To join either effort, write Nancy MacLean (nkm050@northwestern.edu).

We have a new committee to create a webpage to make labor history teaching resources more readily available. To help, contact Randi Storch (randi.storch@courtland.edu). We are also following up our success in restoring the Ludlow, Colorado, labor martyrs site

into a protected National Parks Monument by encouraging other labor history and memory projects. We do not have the resources to launch great national projects, but we can support local people who want to memorialize and educate about labor history as we did in Ludlow. Contact Tom Klug (tklug@marygrove.edu).

We are in the beginning stages of collaboration with organizations in New York City to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire in 2011. To offer suggestions or support, contact Annelise Orleck (Annelise.Orleck@Dartmouth.edu) or Kim Phillips (klphil@wm.edu). It is possible that LAWCHA will jointly sponsor a commemorative conference in April 2011.

We are not a legislative or lobbying organization, but we continue to educate about the need to reform national labor law: to make it easier for workers to organize unions and harder for employers to violate worker civil rights. To contribute to this effort, contact Joseph Hower (jeh67@georgetown.edu) and see <http://www.lawcha.org/tls.php>. Various labor historians have also expressed concern about the lack of unity within the union movement at this perilous time (see <http://seiuchangecourse.org/>).

We are working with the Southern Labor Studies Association and the University of Maryland to organize the 2010 LAWCHA conference, which will be held concurrently with the OAH in Washington, D. C., April 8-10. In addition to the concurrent sessions, we will have an off-site Saturday session (April 10th) at the William and Mary Office in DuPont Circle. This one-day session will focus on U.S. Labor and the Global South. Plenary sessions, panels, and lunch will be organized. If you have any panels you'd like to propose on this topic, please contact Kim Phillips.

All of us individually and collectively continue to build LAWCHA. We encourage faculty to get others to join, and to give a reduced-rate LAWCHA membership to graduate students at a cost of \$30 (<http://www.dukeupress.edu/lawcha/>). To otherwise promote LAWCHA membership, contact Shel Stromquist (sheltonstromquist@uiowa.edu).

As an organization, LAWCHA relies almost totally on member initiatives. Sometimes the results are spectacular, as in Chicago and Ludlow. Please participate in whatever way you can, and urge others to join LAWCHA. It is a good time for visible, vocal efforts to retrieve the past and restore our prospects for a decent future. To let us know what you are doing, please contact our executive assistant Mike Stauch at Duke University (LAWCHA@duke.edu).

Evaluating “New Voice” and John Sweeney’s Presidency of the AFL-CIO

Bob Bussel and Joe McCartin

When John Sweeney was elected president of the AFL-CIO in 1995 on a platform that promised a “New Voice for American Workers,” there was a palpable mood of hope and expectation in many sectors of the union movement and among outside observers sympathetic to labor’s cause. Although many of afflictions that ailed labor (ongoing losses of manufacturing jobs, a hostile political climate climaxed by the Republican takeover of Congress in 1994, implacable employer resistance to union efforts to organize) were largely beyond control of the AFL-CIO’s leadership, the administration of Lane Kirkland, who had succeeded George Meany as the federation’s president in 1981, seemed unable to mount an effective response to the multiple threats facing labor or provide direction for a movement that appeared increasingly marginalized and adrift.

In a rare contested election for the top post in American labor, Sweeney defeated incumbent AFL-CIO secretary-treasurer, Thomas Donahue, and vowed to dramatically increase lagging union membership, re-establish labor’s political relevance, and restore its moral authority. Now, as Sweeney prepares to retire nearly fifteen years later, it is a propitious time to evaluate his tenure as AFL-CIO president and assess the achievements of the New Voice movement. We have asked two leading labor educators and analysts, Richard Hurd and Robert Bruno, to offer their assessments of the Sweeney years. We are also fortunate that two veterans of one of the Sweeney administration’s most important programs, (its field mobilization department), Marilyn Sneiderman, the former director of the department and Enid Eckstein, who served as her assistant in that work, have teamed up to offer their reflections on the lessons of the Sweeney years.

As labor historians, we offer a few brief observations to provide some additional context. As a federation based on the principle of union autonomy, the AFL and later the AFL-CIO have historically faced formidable structural obstacles in persuading their affiliates to embrace national policy, whether it was Samuel Gompers urging unions to relax their racial exclusiveness, Walter Reuther insisting that more resources be devoted to organizing, or the federation’s persistent post-merger calls for its affiliates to mobilize in support of its political program. Like his predecessors,

John Sweeney would face similar difficulties in gaining support for some of his most prized initiatives, especially regarding organizing, and impatience with his inability to fully implement key elements of his agenda led in part to the secession of seven key unions and the formation of the Change to Win federation.

Any assessment of Sweeney’s administration should also recognize that certain events beyond his control helped to undermine New Voice’s early momentum. The Teamsters Union’s successful strike against United Parcel Service in 1997, the most successful national strike in a generation, inspired hope that “labor’s ultimate weapon” might again be effectively used. However, when Teamster president Ron Carey’s bid for re-election was torpedoed by improprieties during his campaign, the prospects for capitalizing on the UPS victory quickly dissipated, and fresh questions were raised about union legitimacy. Subsequently, after labor had worked tirelessly to elect Al Gore in 2000, the Democrat candidate’s controversial “defeat” at the hands of George W. Bush dashed hopes for labor law reform, sidetracking the federation’s most important political initiative. And, following the AFL-CIO’s reversal of its traditional restrictionist position on immigration and the prospect of an agreement with the business community that might have ushered in comprehensive immigration reform and enhanced opportunities for organizing immigrant workers, the events of September 11, 2001 derailed this possibility and had a chilling effect on union activity in its immediate aftermath.

Each of these events was a body blow to New Voice’s gradual but unmistakable momentum. The remainder of Sweeney’s presidency was in no small part a response to circumstances that were not entirely of his making, a stark reminder that the fate of the union movement has often been powerfully shaped by external events that influence and circumscribe its options. This view is not offered as a blanket defense of Sweeney’s leadership but instead as a contextual observation that should be considered in a fair assessment of his efforts to remake the AFL-CIO and create a “New Voice for American Workers.”

John Sweeney and the Next American Labor Movement

Robert Bruno

Evaluating the record of the Sweeney administration begs the question, compared to what? Is it appropriate to judge the past fifteen years according to the metrics of the corresponding preceding years? How appropriate is it for an historical accounting to pivot, as Fernando Gapasin and Bill Fletcher imply, on a “could’a, would’a, should’a” basis? Or is it best to calibrate performance against an agreed upon objective standard, assuming there is one? Evaluations of the “remaking” and “rebuilding” of the labor movement under John Sweeney’s direction tend to be effusive and while undoubtedly well intended, are typically products of the assessor’s hubris, a hubris that comes from believing that from the learned vantage point of the academy, we can really know labor’s record. So what do we think we know?

Currently, domestic manufacturing contributes less to the nation’s GDP than the financial sector, trade policy is really a corporate investment strategy aided and abetted by the same Democratic Party, union membership has fallen frighteningly near the tipping point, and the movement is splintered with different factions apparently ready to wage war against each other. After an initial investment of resources and enthusiasm, federation projects undertaken to build institutional capacity and to educate the membership were either starved for attention or fatefully ignored. In what may prove to be a final Sweeney-era misstep, despite public anger at everything corporate and the presence of “friendly” political majorities from one end of Pennsylvania Avenue to the other, labor inexplicably chose not to create the “street heat” necessary to counter business assaults on the Employee Free Choice Act. If we stop right here, the New Voice record reads as a straightforward disappointment. But frankly, I think it’s a more complicated assessment. Establishing a baseline might be helpful.

When John Sweeney and the New Voice Slate were elected to govern the AFL-CIO in 1999, the United States had a centrist Democratic adherent to neo-liberalism in the White House, a reactionary Republican majority controlling Congress and a unitary national labor organization. Washington had just passed a middle-class, job-killing trade pact and the labor movement was conducting triage to arrest a declining unionization rate. Expanding labor’s ranks was further handicapped by obstructionist National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) machinery that by the end of the 1980s took on average three years to complete the appeals process for just one of an estimated 10,000 illegally fired workers every year. In effect, many unions just quit trying to organize; from 1975-1990 the number of NLRB union elections fell from 7,700 to 3,600.

Working class families had been pillaged by over two decades of unrestrained free market capitalism, union manufacturing jobs were disappearing at an accelerating clip, and the transition to a non-union retail, service and information processing economy continued unabated. Where unionized firms once had set the pay

and working standards in many regulated labor markets now low wage, nonunion competitors emerged to exploit an increasingly unregulated environment. Solidarity wages had succumbed to two-tier payment plans and defined retirement accounts were being replaced by 401k games of chance. Workplaces that had once been partly governed by collective bargaining agreements were now subjected more and more often to the unilateral dictates of human resource professionals. During the Kirkland years the countervailing power theory of unionism seemed to accommodate to a rising tide of quality circles and labor-management teams that blurred the distinction between profits and wage shares.

Politics were a mess. After George Wallace and more effectively Richard Nixon introduced “backlash politics” to the white working class, the federation’s political influence fractured along racial, gender, ideological and foreign policy fault lines. A political low point arrived with the election of Ronald Reagan who promptly sledge-hammered striking air traffic controllers into unemployment and declared open season on union busting, while the Lane Kirkland-led AFL-CIO remained motionless. For all the failed strikes, falling union density, union avoidance, right-wing politics, and trickledown economics, it was this inability to respond that finally brought a sense of crisis to the center of organized labor.

Critiques of the Kirkland years pointed to the federation’s slumbering response to corporate and political assaults on the New Deal framework as “exhibit A” of a decayed House of Labor, and this profound frustration prompted a unique challenge to the leadership of the AFL-CIO. “Here’s the truth,” John Sweeney self-reflectively declared after his victorious election, “the weakness of labor encouraged employers to take the low road.” Approximately fifteen years later as the Sweeney administration exits the historical stage and a new leadership headed by Richard Trumka picks up labor’s cause, Sweeney’s introspective call to raise up the union movement is precisely how his performance should be measured. While there are numerous vantage points from which to assess the Sweeney record I will limit my critique to efforts made to strengthen three areas of acknowledged “weakness”: (1) organizing capacity (2), political action and (3) the structure and role of the AFL-CIO.

Sweeney entered office with a high profile commitment to increasing union membership and immediately tasked the federation to assist affiliates in organizing new members. He called for unions to boost their organizing expenditures to 30 percent of their budgets. While prior to 1995 no reliable baseline of organizing budgets existed, common wisdom held that most unions were not spending more than 5 percent on recruiting new members. But according to a study by Jack Fiorito and Paul Jarley (Labor and Employment Relations Association Series Proceedings, 2008), in 2004 average organizing budgets had increased substantially to about 14.5 percent of total union

spending. This was nowhere near the goal Sweeney set, but a substantial improvement. Sweeney further declared “We’ll organize now without the law” and many of the affiliates heard the call. As president of SEIU Sweeney had approved creative public demonstrations and community pressure tactics to win organizing campaigns and he encouraged the AFL-CIO to adopt similar practices.

In the Sweeney era the average annual number of elections per union dropped to less than 130 from approximately 260 during the Kirkland regime. NLRB certification elections dropped sharply from over 6,000 elections annually in the early 1980s to 1,931 elections in 2008 (NLRB 73rd Annual Report, 2009). But a 2007 study by American Rights at Work revealed that over 200,000 private and public sector workers had joined a union through a majority sign up petition process. Organizing through elections still represented approximately 85 percent of all organizing activity, but during the Sweeney term some unions had successfully managed to circumvent the NLRB. The results may have triggered an unexpected increase in the efficacy of using board certified elections; the average win rate during the Kirkland era was 51 percent, compared to 61 percent for the Sweeney administration. While overall membership shrunk from 16.7 million in 1990 to 16.1 million in 2008, membership declined during the Kirkland years by 5.3 percent but increased approximately 2.7 percent during the Sweeney years. In 2007 and 2008, according to the United States Department of Labor’s Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) union membership in the country actually increased for the first time since the BLS began collecting annual union membership information 25 years ago. The gain, at first attributable to statistical aberration, was tiny but looking back from 1980 the decline in union density seems to have been arrested.

The Sweeney-led federation underscored the importance of a renewed commitment to organizing by strengthening the standing of the effective but often maligned Organizing Institute (OI). The New Voice leader restructured the OI within a newly created independent Organizing Department, increased its training budget, and allocated funds to subsidize strategic organizing campaigns. Sweeney determined that there was a need for a coordinated space and centralized entity that could assist member unions in doing what they seemed unable (or unwilling) to do by themselves. But the activities of the OI never comfortably rested within the often byzantine world of union politics and there was considerable opposition from some affiliates. On balance however, the OI’s increased profile, budget and effort to educate union leaders about the need to ramp up organizing activity was unquestionably the right message and policy.

The message was further enhanced through the creation of the “Common Sense Economics” curriculum. Designed in 1997 by the Education Department as a tool to educate rank-and-file members on the reasons for organizing and political activity, the curriculum was largely ignored by affiliates. Still Sweeney encouraged a vibrant if at times unnecessarily sectarian debate over the most effective model of organizing and unionism. Still,

some unions made changes, even if too many remained resistant. Organizing strategies may have been faulty and promises unfulfilled, but the temper of the times did encourage critical reflection, prompted creative initiatives, and produced some important changes. Sweeney deserves credit for influencing not only the organizing discussion but also for helping change the way certain unions approached the challenge of attempting to recruit new members.

In 1972 George Meany pronounced that the federation was the single most effective “political organization” in this country. Unfortunately, by decade’s end labor’s political machine had begun to badly sputter. The dissipation of labor’s “bloc-like” voting behavior occurred at the presidential level. Democrat Jimmy Carter attracted only 48 percent of organized labor votes in 1980 and four years later Walter Mondale won barely a majority (53 percent) of union votes. But it was the 1994 Republican congressional victories that made a mockery of Meany’s once proud boast. Motivated by the anti-union House Republican leadership and freshmen class, as well as the ascension of centrist Democrats, organized labor undertook a political education program unprecedented in its history.

Under Sweeney’s direction political mobilization became a priority and the AFL-CIO moved to increase organized labor’s presence in local, state and national politics. In the 1996 election cycle labor spent \$119 million on federal political activity, while the AFL-CIO contributed a combined \$37.2 million on issue advocacy and campaign donations. In 1998 the federation spent 27 percent of its total political action budget to defeat state referenda designed to restrict the ability of unions to spend funds for political purposes. Cumulatively, between 2000 and 2008 organized labor contributed roughly \$388.7 million to federal election campaigns.

The increased spending was not strictly for friendly candidates. In 2000 for example, unions registered 2.3 million new union voters, made eight million phone calls and handed out more than fourteen million flyers and leaflets. The AFL-CIO alone mailed out more than twelve million pieces of direct mail. Labor unions also joined with other progressive interest groups to fund “527” organizations which spent money on issue advocacy and get-out-the-vote efforts. It is estimated that for the 2008 election cycle the AFL-CIO alone spent \$35-40 million to help educate voters, mobilize membership and help elect, with few exceptions, Democratic candidates. The outreach effort had an impact. In 1992, 19 percent of all voters were union members, but in 1996 approximately one out of four voters held a union card.

The increase in labor’s electoral activity between the mid-1990s and 2008 also correlated with higher success rates in electing pro-union Democrats to the House and Senate. Although a resurgence of the union effect on voting in presidential elections was evident from 1976 through 1988 the Sweeney era produced a discernible return of the “labor bloc” vote. In the 1996, 2000, 2004 and 2008 presidential elections no fewer than 60 percent of AFL-CIO union members voted for the Democratic candidate. Most impressively,

according to a 2008 election-night survey conducted for the AFL-CIO by Peter D. Hart Research Associates, in battleground states union members supported Obama by a 68 percent to 30 percent margin.

Organizing energy and political influence aside, the AFL-CIO has fewer affiliates, represents fewer members and has fewer financial resources today as Sweeney leaves office than it did when he entered. Schism to some, alternative visions to others, the division of labor's house raised legitimate concerns about the role and structure of the federation. Prior to Sweeney's election affiliates complained that the national body had not been politically active enough, while others asked for more organizing assistance. Still others preferred that the federation limit its activity to largely symbolic gestures. The SEIU inspired Change to Win unions demanded a more centralized federation with the power to compel affiliates to organize around core jurisdictions. Manufacturing based unions wanted the federation to pay more attention to the growing problem of globalization and trade. At the intra-institutional level antagonisms flared over how Sweeney's restructured Field Mobilization Department was interacting with affiliates.

Each point of contention reflects the unsettled role of the AFL-CIO. Is the federation merely a resource for affiliates? Is it a loose coalition of international unions with a central administrator? Should it have any authority to set an agenda for the affiliates and more problematically, to call to account those member unions that choose not to act consistently with federation philosophy? In the space permitted here it's not possible to address every tension over role and structure, but as an assessment of past performance the Sweeney administration has, on balance, certainly enhanced the value of the AFL-CIO to the affiliates.

Unlike the Kirkland years, the New Voice federation worked to strengthen the badly atrophied relationship between affiliates

and central labor councils. In addition, affiliates have relied substantially on the AFL-CIO's Organizing Institute and Union Summer program for training organizers. The national body has also contributed to the affiliates' capacity to undertake sector or core industry strategic campaigns. While much of the relationship is still under-developed, affiliates now have a more willing and vibrant partner than they had previously. During Sweeney's tenure affiliates were offered the opportunity to participate in creating an agenda for the labor movement. Unfortunately, what proved strong enough to bind labor in 1994 could not prevent a break-up in 2004. Perhaps Sweeney should have done more to engage the real issues agitating the dissenters. But the split notwithstanding, Sweeney's AFL-CIO attempted to build a relationship with and among affiliates that went beyond self-serving political calibration. Sweeney, unlike his predecessors, was no heir apparent. His was a challenge to the incumbent leadership predicated on a promise of change. That too little changed was only partly Sweeney's doing.

There may very well not be a unified answer to what the labor movement wants from the AFL-CIO. Expectations are high that the Trumka era will usher in an increased commitment to fashioning the AFL-CIO as a champion of the working class (even if the leadership doesn't use the term). But expectations are often full of promise. An anonymous commentator on the union movement's accomplishments once offered this insightful bit of advice to its future leadership: "an appreciation of the historical circumstances limiting labor's options is a prerequisite for those seeking to surmount them." President Trumka could do no better upon his first day in office than to welcome a serious debate about what prevents the labor movement from becoming in Wendell Phillip's words "the last noble protest of the American people against the power of incorporated wealth." However it turns out, I am certain that when someone writes Trumka's record, the brief will be complicated and not purely of his own making.



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“New Voice” Forum Continued

“Sweeney’s Legacy: Tempered Ideals”

Richard Hurd

John Sweeney’s retirement as AFL-CIO President invites reflection on his accomplishments, but it is hard to look back over the past fifteen years without first registering a deep sense of disappointment. It all started so well...

In 1995 the New Voice slate of candidates promised to “...reinvigorate the labor movement at every level,...organize at an unprecedented pace and scale,...[and] build a progressive new political movement.” Once Sweeney’s victory was secured at the AFL-CIO convention, the whole tone of organized labor seemed to shift. The new officers criss-crossed the country, reaching out to members and promoting the organizing priority. They also took the initiative to enter our world of academia, inviting input and cultivating support. At headquarters in Washington, D.C., the excitement was palpable as a cadre of new staff set about to redefine the role of the federation.

Replicating his style as president of SEIU, Sweeney appointed relatively young and very progressive independent thinkers to key posts. The outspoken Richard Bensinger was named the federation’s first director of organizing, and soon was exhorting national union presidents to embrace the Changing to Organize program. Marilyn Sneiderman injected life into the somniferous field operation, renamed it Field Mobilization and unveiled the Union Cities initiative to reinvigorate the movement at the grassroots. Also, there was Steve Rosenthal leading political action, Ron Blackwell molding a new corporate affairs department, plus Bill Fletcher, Karen Nussbaum and several dozen others committed to New Voice ideals who were playing key roles. Add the exciting Union Summer experiment that gave many of our students an opportunity to connect with labor activism, and it is no wonder we actually believed that labor indeed could be transformed.

But the Sweeney AFL- CIO encountered obstacles almost from the beginning. There was no housecleaning of professional staff, blocked by a union contract and a sense of fair play. Instead, a new layer of managers was created to make space for the broader New Voice team, with a full quarter of the federation’s 500+ employees holding titles of director or assistant director. In 1998 I interviewed department directors, surveyed the entire managerial staff, and met with the executive boards of the AFL-CIO’s staff unions. The survey data and discussions made clear that three years into Sweeney’s tenure, there was still widespread distrust between New Voice appointees and the larger groups of holdovers from the Kirkland era.

But the internal dissension, however counterproductive, was far less of an obstacle than the pushback from affiliated unions as Sweeney and other key figures in the administration attempted to sell the new agenda. The unions that had originally opposed the change in leadership were wary from the start, privately deriding as pompous the “AFL-SEIU.” But even unions in the

Sweeney camp resisted efforts by the federation to expand its strategic role. When I participated in discussions with two dozen union presidents at a Spring 1997 meeting of the AFL-CIO Executive Council’s Committee 2000, it was clear that there was shared skepticism from almost all unions regarding suggestions from Sweeney’s lieutenants that it might be appropriate for the federation to prompt specific mergers and influence national unions’ jurisdiction.

The first public sign of difficulty came in the summer of 1998. Richard Bensinger had been charged with redefining the AFL-CIO’s role in organizing, a daunting assignment because there was no tradition of leadership from the center in this arena. His commitment to this task was never questioned, but his frank criticism of national union leaders who did not demonstrate sufficient enthusiasm for the Changing to Organize agenda won few friends, and there was pressure from some key members of the Executive Council to rein him in. Also there were rumblings about antagonism between the organizing director and Sweeney’s inner circle of top aides. In spite of the warning signs, we were all stunned when Bensinger was asked to step down. Even Fortune ran an article with the lengthy title, “Labor’s Lost Chance: AFL-CIO President John Sweeney had Big Labor on the move for the first time in a generation. Then he fired his top organizer. Oops.”

The depth of the problem with affiliated unions became clear to me at a September 1998 AFL-CIO managers’ retreat. In a half-day discussion of challenges and opportunities, the participants shared a clear consensus that the major obstacle to moving forward was a lack of trust and buy-in from affiliates – “too few affiliates are committed to change.” Following the retreat, a work group was appointed to address the challenge. Its subsequent internal report “Managing our Relationships with National Union Affiliates” expanded on this: “...There are perceptual differences between AFL-CIO departments and many affiliates with regard to the role of the AFL-CIO...The affiliates are not necessarily on board with our prioritization of work.”

In retrospect, this was the critical juncture in John Sweeney’s presidency. Would the AFL-CIO find a way to redefine its role, or would it back away and allow the individual national unions to continue their control of strategic decisions? Modifications in the organizing program illustrate the course that was followed.

Originally, the Changing to Organize program challenged national unions to transform their internal structure and culture, to shift resources and to mobilize members in support of organizing. Faced with a rhetorical buy-in but institutional resistance, Bensinger had persuaded Sweeney that the best way to propel organizational change was to set a target for national unions to devote 30 percent of their resources to organizing. Although the 30 percent target nominally survived Bensinger’s departure, in his absence the federation did not push it aggressively. By 2000,

the target had been replaced with a numerical goal of organizing 1,000,000 workers each year, but this objective was never taken seriously.

A year later, the organizing department had retreated to a modest role not that different from the AFL-CIO's stance prior to Sweeney's election. Federation staff offered advice to national unions committed to investing more resources in organizing, provided assistance to organizing campaigns when invited, and planned the longer term Voice at Work effort to amend labor law. Priorities had morphed from mobilization and organizational transformation into the more comfortable arena of government policy.

A similar scenario played out across the AFL-CIO. The work of Committee 2000 that started with consideration of a greater role for the AFL-CIO in prompting mergers and influencing union jurisdiction culminated with a 1999 proposal to restructure Central Labor Councils via the New Alliance program. Field Mobilization, originally committed to inducing change from the bottom up by building activism at the grassroots, became the vehicle to implement New Alliance. The objective? Improve the ability of Central Labor Councils and state federations to coordinate political ground operations in key precincts and Congressional districts.

When the idealism of the New Voice team waned in the face of resistance from affiliates, the promise of union revitalization faded as well. Over the first half of John Sweeney's presidency, the rate of decline in private sector union density continued at roughly the same rate as toward the end of the Lane Kirkland era. Frustration began to grow among those unions actually committed to the organizing priority. Although some of them were content with the AFL-CIO's subdued role, others began to voice criticism. SEIU's Andy Stern made a final push to get the federation to assign organizing jurisdiction (i.e. healthcare for SEIU) at the winter 2001 Executive Council meeting in Los Angeles and was rebuffed. Later that year, the Carpenters (UBC) left the AFL-CIO arguing that fees for membership would be better devoted to organizing. Debate within the labor movement's organizing community about what had gone awry continued to simmer. Before long SEIU, UNITE, and HERE were urging Sweeney to create a forum for candid strategic discussions among the AFL-CIO's top affiliates, but to no avail. Then in the summer of 2003, these three unions joined with UBC and the Laborers in a strategic alliance as the New Unity Partnership. The seeds of the federation's eventual rupture had been sown.

The public feud in 2005 between the Change to Win unions and those committed to the AFL-CIO, culminating in the August split, was the low point of Sweeney's reign. The subsequent inability of Change to Win to gel as a clear strategic alternative, or to build any momentum of its own, was cold comfort. When Sweeney backed off in 1998 and 1999 from the New Voice promise of leading a rebirth of the labor movement based on mobilization and organizing, he did so because of his commitment to the AFL-CIO as an institution. He adopted the role of conciliator, doing his best to respond to the conflicting demands of key national

union presidents. But as a high level staff member of a major union pointed out to one of my classes last year: "The most important job of the president of the AFL-CIO is to keep these guys together...[Sweeney's] biggest failure was his inability to do that."

Should we blame Sweeney for the labor movement's continued decline and internal factionalism? Should he be criticized because he dared to believe that national union presidents would set aside narrow institutional interests and personal ambitions for the good of the labor movement? Perhaps his biggest mistake was assuming that enough other union leaders agreed with the New Voice priorities to make it possible for the AFL-CIO to exercise strategic leadership in organizing, grassroots mobilization and confronting major corporations. Unfortunately, even union presidents that were part of the New Voice coalition that propelled Sweeney to leadership jealously guarded their right to act in what they perceived to be the best interest of their own organizations, whether or not these actions were consistent with the AFL-CIO's efforts to revitalize the movement.

Yes it is disappointing that John Sweeney ultimately stepped back from the promise that New Voice originally offered. Realistically, there may not have been another option. In fairness, he did introduce some important changes. Public relations and outreach to media and progressive academics improved dramatically. International policy was no longer dominated by anti-communist fervor and instead concentrated on building alliances with other labor movements. Labor's position on immigration did an about face in 2001 with an endorsement of amnesty and workplace rights for undocumented immigrants. And in the one arena where the AFL-CIO traditionally had been accorded a lead role by affiliates, the political action program attained a higher level of professionalism and effectiveness. The New Alliance restructuring and grassroots mobilization in targeted states and Congressional districts helped strengthen labor's political influence even as union density continued to decline.

What does the future hold as Rich Trumka assumes the mantle of leadership? His charisma and public speaking skills will serve the movement well. If the Employee Free Choice Act can survive in some form so that there is real labor law reform, perhaps we will see some union growth in the private sector. And once the dust settles at Change to Win, re-unification is not out of the question. The labor movement will amble along and continue to be an important institutional force in the political arena. But John Sweeney's retirement serves to remind us of the potential for radical transformation and a vibrant movement of working people, and of the hopes we once shared that began to fade away nearly a decade ago.

Looking Back, and Looking Ahead

Marilyn Sneiderman and Enid Eckstein

John Sweeney's election and the victory of the New Voices Slate in 1995 represented hope and promise that the labor movement could rebuild itself as part of a larger progressive movement. It was exhilarating to imagine the possibilities of what a new labor movement could accomplish. An exciting urgency began to take hold in local communities around the country that mirrored a new sense of mission and hope at the national AFL-CIO.

It is in the spirit of recognizing both the progress of the last fifteen years, and the seemingly rudderless state many unions and our movement are currently mired in, that we offer a sober assessment of why the dreams of 1995 haven't been realized and raise some thoughts about underlying issues that need to be addressed. The question of "movement building": where and how movements are built and how they relate to, support and interact with each other, national unions and community organizations, is at the center of analyzing why, despite our many successes, we didn't succeed in transforming local labor councils into vehicles for revitalizing the broader labor movement. By looking at some of our successes and the roadblocks we were unable to overcome, we can sharpen the issues we believe unions need to confront in order to meet the threat and seize the opportunity afforded by the current economic crisis.

We began with a simple theory: to build a successful progressive movement, we needed to mobilize and build organization and capacity in local communities that, when combined with other cities, could link up with, support and help build national movements. The goal was to create a sense of urgency about organizing, to build real coalitions, to change local politics and to inspire and motivate workers by starting to win again. And to do this, the focus had to be with members, local unions and local labor movements in cities big and small across the country. The nuts and bolts work of organizing; activating and uniting union members around common fights in their own community, and applying "street heat", were the building blocks of the Union Cities Campaign.

We developed a strategy based on combining the best, most creative and innovative organizing elements from different cities into the "Union Cities" strategy with the goal of maximizing their impact by implementing them in multiple cities at the same time. The exciting examples of member mobilization, local political victories and renewed activism in Milwaukee, South Bay, Seattle, and Atlanta offered the framework of what could work, and led cities like Cleveland, San Diego, Cincinnati, Houston, Miami, Minneapolis, Syracuse, and St Paul to begin to mobilize and activate union members and allies in their communities. In Los Angeles, San Francisco, and San Mateo, councils used politics to leverage organizing agreements at airports. In San Jose and around the country, hotels and convention centers that received public benefits won organizing agreements. In Denver and other cities, labor showed a new ability to run grass roots political campaigns. In city after city, labor councils won living wage

ordinances by aligning with community allies. We argued for and built a campaign around the idea that for unions to organize and grow, in both numbers and strength, we needed strong vibrant local labor movements with an ongoing capacity to mobilize and activate workers that was not dependent on or needed rebuilding each time an election occurred or a new organizing campaign was launched.

And there were some great actions and campaigns and extraordinary moments--The Battle in Seattle, The Immigrant Workers Freedom Ride, and Street Heat actions with thousands marching to support local labor struggles where labor united with both traditional and new allies demonstrated what our movement could be. The tragedy is that these moments, while incredible, powerful, and important, were seen as exceptions instead of as models of what was possible and what we could build. There never was and still isn't consensus, nor a clear commitment to the importance of building local labor movements among international unions.

Despite excitement on the ground, many international union leaders and staff never came to see central labor councils and local labor movements as a critical building block. They viewed them through a prism of their national union political and specific short term campaign needs, but rarely embraced or accepted the idea that investing financial, political and institutional resources in Union Cities was core to the success of individual unions or even the labor movement as a whole. And in many ways this is totally understandable, especially for those unions with resources and industry organizing plans. For them the multi union work at the local level often seemed like a cumbersome distraction and waste of limited resources.

This was demonstrated by the unwillingness of international unions to change the "right to work" system of local union affiliation to their local labor movements. It was mandatory to pay per capita to international unions but voluntary to pay to labor councils. Allowing local affiliates to drop out at any time limited council leaders' willingness to take risks, because any major local affiliate could veto change by threatening to pull out. International unions complained about ineffective state and local labor councils but often stood in the way of concrete changes that could make them more effective.

The roadblock of a lack of political and financial commitment to building local labor movements was compounded by the fact that only a few unions "changed to organize" and launched national organizing programs. After all the smoke and rhetoric cleared, very few unions actually put significant resources into organizing or had strategic plans to organize. Core to the Union Cities / Field Mobilization strategy was building to support organizing campaigns to grow both the local and international labor movement. But absent many international unions changing to organize, local labor movements found themselves building

"New Voice" Forum Continued

capacity to support too few or, in many cases, non-existent organizing campaigns. In some cases unions with significant national organizing programs felt their resources were being used to support unions who wouldn't make the same commitment to organizing they had, leading some of the most effective organizing unions to adopt a "go it alone strategy" geared to their specific industry plan. The Union Cities Field Mobilization program had a vision of building regional labor power in a defined number of cities that were strategic to organizing. Absent an increase in organizing, hamstrung by a right to work dues system, we then further limited ourselves by accepting the operational premise that moving forward locally was contingent on reaching consensus nationally. With the best of intentions, we slipped into creating a numbing bureaucracy of overlapping meetings and committees aimed at more strategically connecting the work in the field with the international unions. We were caught between consensus and a hard place.

So what does all this mean for "movement building" locally and nationally and to the future of the labor movement? This brings home the dilemma we currently face. There are no simple answers, or easy villains to point to. Neither unions, their locals nor labor councils are monolithic. Local labor movements have suffered as a result of labor's infighting and lack of support. And while some unions may be growing, and may have effective organizing programs, the labor movement as a whole and individual workers in particular are weaker than anytime in recent history. There is no evidence that the best work of national unions even when combined, is sufficient to confront and beat the concentrated corporate power that increasingly dominates the national economy and local communities. Now more than ever, it is impossible to imagine a revitalized labor movement if we do not commit ourselves again to building locally based labor movements with deep roots that combine to provide the building blocks for a progressive movement that can truly challenge the global power of capital.

As the labor movement debates its future, how unions are organized at the local level to maximize building industry power and movement building is critical. One union alone cannot build a local labor movement, no matter how strong it may be. So long as unions view community organizing, coalition building and geographic member mobilization as episodic work that is started anew for each campaign, we consign labor to being an increasingly marginal player in the communities we need to win. In looking to the future, the strategic importance of local labor movements will need to be addressed. To not do so will limit the power of labor to make fundamental and lasting social change.

FORUM CONTRIBUTORS

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Marilyn Sneiderman served as Director of Field Mobilization for the National AFL-CIO from 1996-2005. Enid Eckstein was a former Assistant Director of Field Mobilization for Strategic Campaigns and is currently a Vice President at Large of 1199 SEIU United Healthcare Workers East in Massachusetts.

Georgetown University Announces a New Labor Initiative

On November 10, Georgetown University will formally launch the Kalmanovitz Initiative for Labor and the Working Poor, with the goal of creating a new labor center in Washington, D.C. Funded by a five-year gift from the Kalmanovitz Charitable Foundation, the initiative will marshal historically informed research to aid in the development of new strategies and innovative public policy that can improve workers' lives and strengthen their efforts to organize in a rapidly changing economy. The initiative seeks to foster collaboration among university faculty, students and student organizations, unions, policymakers, and high-road employers. LAWCHA members Joe McCartin (director) and Jennifer Luff (research director) will help guide the initiative. For more information, see to soon-to-be activated website: <http://lwp.georgetown.edu>

LAWCHA in the City of Big Shoulders

Leisl Orenic, Dominican University
Lisa Phillips, Indiana State University
Erik S. Gellman, Roosevelt University



In May 2009 over 360 scholars and activists convened at Roosevelt University in Chicago for a conference on “Labor and the City: Crises Old and New.” Held jointly with the Labor Fund for History and Culture (Laborlore), the annual LAWCHA conference included panels and workshops on the state of urban labor history, community structures, environmental justice, working-class culture, women in the trades, migration, itinerant workers, and the history of the Gilded Age.

Historian Lynn Weiner, Dean of Arts and Sciences at Roosevelt University, welcomed conference attendees to the university at the opening night plenary. Founded after the Second World War, Roosevelt University educated returning GIs and other workers who faced racial and religious discrimination in higher education. Its founders named the university’s library after William Green and Philip Murray of the AFL and CIO; early faculty members included St. Clair Drake, Betty Balanoff, August Meier and Charles V. Hamilton. This site on South Michigan Avenue, many attendees remarked, was an ideal venue for the conference.

The opening plenary session featured Joe Trotter, Zaragosa Vargas and James Grossman in conversation with Kim Philips and Mike Honey; these panelists encouraged the audience to think carefully about race, labor, agency and deunionization in the late twentieth century. Fittingly, numerous panels throughout the conference reflected these concerns, including a panel on the labor struggles in central Illinois in the 1990s and their ties to British deindustrialization, a panel on the second great migration to Chicago, and another on the politics of waste management and its impact on the environment. There were too many great panels to list here but a copy of the program is still available at the conference website: (<http://chi-lawcha09.indstate.edu>; and for great pictures go to <http://www.flickr.com/photos/lawcha/sets>).

The “Crises Old and New” theme inspired several panels that dealt with contemporary problems, their historical context, and strategies for change. Heather Thompson, Anne-Marie Cusac, Robert Chase and Alex Lichtenstein discussed mass incarceration in relation to civil rights struggles, privatization, changing

LAWCHA in the City of Big Shoulders



Opening plenary "Race, Labor and the Urban Crisis"

technology and criminalization of public behavior. The panel on Big Box stores offered both historical and activist perspectives. Historians Nelson Lichtenstein and Bethany Moreton, who have recently published outstanding books on the topic of Wal-Mart, were joined by United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) staffers Moises Zavala (from the local) and Bill Dempsey (from the international) and community organizer Elce Redmond in a robust discussion of corporate strategy, race, community and faith.

This year's LAWCHA conference, especially because of the participation of our Laborlore allies, included a special focus on music. In both the plenary session and a Friday night performance, LAWCHA president Michael Honey played guitar behind Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Freedom Singer Bettie Mae Fikes's gospel vocals on a series of labor and freedom songs. Friday night's concert featured a performance by folksinger/musicologist Bucky Halker, who hosted a series of guests including Janet Bean of Freakwater and Eleventh Dream Day, and Jon

Langford of the Mekons and Waco Brothers. Other music presentations discussed the significance of country, folk, jazz, and blues music to working-class society. One highlight that bridged performance and scholarship was the paper sung by country music scholar. Bill Malone. that weaved more than eighty years of country and blues songs through changes in the economic history of the United States in a fifteen-minute a cappella recital.



Friday panels

LAWCHA in the City of Big Shoulders



Rev. Addie Wyatt and her family and friends at the LAWCHA awards luncheon



Betty Mae Fikes and Mike Honey at Ganz Hall Friday night.

The LAWCHA annual meeting and luncheon was standing room only. The awards ceremony honored the Reverend Addie Wyatt of the packinghouse workers (UFCW) with the LAWCHA Distinguished Service to Labor and Working Class History Award. Alice Kessler-Harris reflected on Rev. Wyatt's remarkable career as a labor activist, religious leader and women's rights activist, and oral historians Timuel Black and Leslie Orear joined in the tribute by offering their own reflections on Rev. Wyatt's contributions to Chicago's African American and labor communities. This year's Taft and Gutman awards went to three outstanding candidates. Thavolia Glymph's *Out of the House of Bondage: The Transformation of the Plantation Household* (Cambridge University Press) and Jana K. Lipman's, *Guantánamo: A Working-Class History between Empire and Revolution* (University of California Press) shared this year's Taft Prize. And

Michael Rosenow won this year's Herbert Gutman prize for the best dissertation in labor history for "Injuries to All: The Rituals of Dying and the Politics of Death among United States Workers, 1877-1910."

Workshops on writing labor history, doing oral history and activism of faculty closed the panel sessions on Saturday afternoon. Jim Green, Julie Greene, Mike Honey and Kevin Boyle led a fruitful discussion on writing labor history for a broader audience. Jim Wolfinger, Kerry Taylor, Erin McCarthy, Al Stein and Joe Lambert joined Timuel Black for a conversation about doing oral history in working-class communities.

The audience had the opportunity to hear about applying oral history to college courses and also about the multigenerational project that Timuel Black has worked on for over thirty years that has documented the rich experiences of African Americans in Chicago. And in a workshop concerning faulty activism, Nancy MacLean, Eileen Boris, Juan Mora Torres and Martha Biondi led a dynamic discussion on the challenges and rewards of working on social justice issues in the labor movement, particularly during our present moment of both political opportunity and internal fracturing.

Absent from the conference were luminaries who passed away after the initial schedule was posted, including Laborlore founder Archie Green, surrealist poet Franklin Rosemont, and oral history legend Studs Terkel. Participants remembered and celebrated their lives and accomplishments in several panels, including in a short documentary, Alex Johnston's "Learning to Bend Steel," on Archie Green.



Eileen Devault and Thavolia Glymph, winner of the Philip Taft Labor History Award for her book *Out of the House of Bondage: The Transformation of the Plantation Household* (Cambridge University Press)

LAWCHA in the City of Big Shoulders



James Thindwa, Jobs with Justice, the first speaker on Saturday night.

The conference concluded with a dinner and discussion of the theme of “Labor in the 21st Century” with James Thindwa (Jobs with Justice), Jorge Ramirez (Chicago Federation of Labor) and Tom Balanoff (SEIU Local 1) in a local union hall.

And for those who remained on Sunday, Jeff Helgeson led a tour based on the Chicago Labor Trail Map that highlighted Chicago’s rich legacy of working-class history, covering the Haymarket site, the packinghouse district, and the South Side Bronzeville neighborhood.



Some guests Saturday night.

Participants left with an impression that labor history in the twenty-first century is a vibrant and diverse field, boding well for future meetings of LAWCHA, and for further explorations of class and culture past and present.

By all accounts the conference was a wonderful success! Special thanks to the student workers and volunteers at Roosevelt and to all the sponsors: the Chicago Center for Working Class Studies, UNITE-HERE, Chicago Jobs with Justice, the Association for the Study of African American Life and History-Chicago Branch, Dominican University, Northwestern University, and our host, Roosevelt University.



Participants in the Sunday bus tour on the steps of the South Side Community Arts Center. Photograph by Maria Francisca.

Interfaith Worker Justice Reaches Out to Campuses—and LAWCHA's New Faith and Labor Committee Reaches Back

Nancy MacLean and Rev. April McGlothlin-Eller

Founded in 1996, Interfaith Worker Justice mobilizes the religious community in the United States around issues of economic justice, especially issues affecting low-wage workers. At the core of IWJ's mission is the belief that the faith leaders must engage their congregations and the larger society on the rights and workplace conditions of families in low-wage jobs. The organization's work is unique; while there are other organizations committed to social and economic justice work, IWJ is the only one with the ability to call upon the religious community to act on its values and use its moral authority to support worker justice issues. It provides ethical voice and power workers sorely need during these uncertain economic times by calling religious congregations back to their social justice traditions.

Since 2000, IWJ has been engaging young leaders in seminaries, rabbinical schools, Muslim training programs, and undergraduate institutions through its summer internship programs and school-year internships. IWJ also reaches out to faculty from seminaries, rabbinical schools, and labor and religious studies departments to connect students to worker struggles through internships and field placements, coursework, and readings that equip them to address worker justice issues in their future careers. By developing models for clear ethical reflection and social analysis, the program seeks to embolden and prepare student and faculty leadership to be stronger advocates for worker justice.

There are a number of ways in which members of LAWCHA and its new Faith and Labor Committee can help to advance the work of IWJ. They can assist students on their campuses to organize a Seminars or Students for Worker Justice group to address issues that face workers on their campus or in their community. IWJ is releasing a Worker Justice Immersion toolkit this fall to guide interested parties in developing Alternative Spring Breaks for students

that address faith and worker justice issues. LAWCHA members can work with students and Campus Ministry offices to implement this program on their campus. Members can also guide justice-minded students to work-study or internship positions with local IWJ affiliates (see list on website) to address issues that face workers today.

LAWCHA members can teach a course or a section of a course on contemporary economic justice and include materials from IWJ, including executive director Kim Bobo's book *Wage Theft in America*, an expose of a crisis that affects millions of workers each year. They can also share their syllabi with other faculty who might be interested in developing a course on economic justice. Kim is available to speak on campuses about the crisis of Wage Theft, which would also provide an opportunity to introduce faith-based student groups and Campus Ministry staff to worker justice activism. This fall IWJ will be lobbying Congress to pass the Wage Theft Protection Act, which was introduced in the House in July. LAWCHA members can assist in setting up delegations to members of Congress to encourage their support of the Wage Theft bill, organizing campus and community forums on the issue, and writing letters to the editor to expose this issue to their community. Members can also distribute IWJ's Wage Theft Survey to students and support a National Day of Action on Wage Theft on November 19, 2009.

For more information or to get involved contact: Nancy MacLean, LAWCHA Faith and Labor Committee, at nkm050@northwestern.edu or 847.491-3154 and/or Rev. April McGlothlin-Eller, Student Programs Coordinator for IWJ, at aeller@iwj.org or 773.728.8400, ext. 21.

For further information about IWJ and listings of its affiliates and worker centers in your area, visit its website at <http://www.iwj.org>.

LAWCHA Forms Teaching Resources Committee

Randi Storch, SUNY-Cortland

LAWCHA's newly formed teaching resources committee invites you all to take a look at our first initiative. Rosemary Feurer has been working overtime to develop a webography that will be especially useful to our members. In the upcoming months we plan to add a link to the LAWCHA website that will bring browsers to Rosemary's materials. Before we do, we'd like you all to take a look at her site (<http://www.laborhistorylinks.niu.edu>) and see if your favorite places are included. If not, please don't hesitate to get in touch with Rosemary who will be updating and maintaining the site. This project is a work in progress and Rosemary is open to your suggestions. Eventually the site will have drop down menus and will be searchable. Any of your ideas that Rosemary incorporates will be credited to you on the site. Please send any suggestions, including important books on the book page-- maybe your own-- to Rosemary at: rfeurer@niu.edu. Any other suggestions for the committee? Send them directly to me: randi.storch@cortland.edu.

Thanks.

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Lecture for LAWCHA!

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Special thanks to Cecelia Bucki for her honorarium donation in 2008-09.

Teaching Labor History

Theater, Embodiment, and Transformation

Peter Rachleff, Macalester College

A few months back when I attended the premiere concert of the newly organized Twin Cities Labor Chorus, I noticed that the young man conducting it looked familiar. I approached him after the performance and he reminded me that he had played the quintessential villain, Harry Bennett, the head of Ford Motor Company's private security force, in the Macalester College production of the labor opera "Forgotten: Murder at the Ford Rouge Plant" five years ago! "I had never thought about the labor movement before participating in that show," he said to me, "And now I am Campaign Communications Coordinator for SEIU's Minnesota State Council and the musical director of the Twin Cities Labor Chorus." He smiled, shook my hand, and gave me a business card.

This charming experience (hey, this Labor Chorus was actually good, when for years we had had a singing group that could turn the most dramatic tune into a dirge) reminded me of the greatest value of teaching. Under the right circumstances, we can actually foster the transformation of the young women and men who take our courses.

I teach at a private liberal arts college in a major metropolitan area. I am able to shape my own curriculum, and, for the most part, to find colleagues willing to collaborate on various teaching projects. Our students are bright and highly motivated. While few come from working-class or union families, the Twin Cities has a rich labor history and has had a lively labor movement, at least until the last 10-15 years. Having taught at Macalester since 1982, I have built a set of relationships with local organizations and activists that I can mobilize as a resource for my teaching.

I want to discuss two courses/ projects which I consider the most exciting and satisfying work I have done at the college. In both cases I sought out an intellectual partner in the arts. Together we constructed a learning experience that asked students to immerse themselves in an historical experience and embody historical characters. We were very interested in connecting the past with the present, in making them coexist in provocative ways. We also reached beyond the campus to connect with working men and women, and with unions, in ways that both informed the students and enriched the workers' universes. And we shared the outcomes of our work with the college and wider communities, at least those who were interested in it. Performers, contributors, and audiences were all moved to different degrees and some, I know, were transformed.

In the fall of 1997, I collaborated with Beth Cleary, associate professor of Dramatic Arts and Dance, around her staging of Clifford Odets' 1930s play, "Waiting for Lefty." Determined not to present this play as an historical artifact, Beth placed "Lefty" in the present, cast women and actors of color in historically white male roles, and contextualized it with three short pieces from

the 1930s which broadened its racial and gender terrain: Langston Hughes' "Limitations of Life," a satirical critique of the film "Imitation of Life"; James Edwards' "A Day in a Harlem Unemployment Office"; and a movement piece based on Meridel LeSueur's "Women on the Breadlines". After these intellectual hors d'oeuvres, "Lefty" opened with Harry Fat, the corrupt union boss, delivering his self-serving opening monologue. But he was interrupted by waves of characters who swept over the 45 degree raked stage, carrying signs protesting not only the taxi drivers' union's timidity but also the dominance of white, male characters in the original play. A new cast was negotiated on the spot, and then the play proceeded. Audiences paid rapt attention as the story unfolded, and many were shocked in its penultimate scene, when actors leapt from seats in the audience to harangue Harry Fat, bemoan Lefty's death, and urge a wildcat strike. At its end, a "Mother Jones" character emerged to distribute "Solidarity Forever" song sheets to the audience, who were encouraged to stand and sing along with the cast.

In preparation for the play, Beth exposed her cast to the labor activism of the past and the present. She brought Manny Fried from Buffalo for a residency. A playwright, actor, and union activist (mostly in the UE), Manny had acted in that original New York City production of "Lefty". Although he was in his 80s in 1997, he was still going strong (he is, by the way, still going strong today, in his 90s!), and he not only told stories but he also pushed student actors through intensive vocal and physical exercises. Manny brought the thirties to life for the students. They would be connected to the activism of the present, too. In the summer of 1997, UPS workers waged a dramatic strike to turn part-time jobs into full-time jobs, and the media largely represented them as a youthful workforce, the labor militants of the future. I introduced Beth to local UPS strikers, and they held a series of discussions with the cast, communicating their passion and energy to the actors. When the play went up, it was often UPS strikers who were the first audience members to rise for "Solidarity Forever."

That fall, in tandem with the preparation of the play, I offered a new course, "The US in the 1930s: The Great Depression and New Deal." A dozen of the "Lefty" actors and stage hands took it, and they were joined by another dozen or so students attracted to the topic. The actors brought their issues of embodiment into our classroom, and their enhanced knowledge of the 1930s into rehearsals, where they shared them with other cast members. After providing an overview of the period, the course dug deeply into social and cultural history. Our most important readings were Liz Cohen's *Making a New Deal*, Robin Kelley's *Hammer and Hoe*, Barbara Melosh's *Engendering Culture*, and Michael Denning's *The Cultural Front*. Our attention ranged from long-term changes in class, racial, gender, and ethnic formations and identities in the first three decades of the twentieth century and the particular challenges that the Great Depression posed to them, to the ways

Teaching Labor History, Continued

that activists engaged them in their efforts to mount responses to the Depression and the ways that artists and cultural workers constructed and employed art in the 1930s. We got out of the classroom to tour St. Paul's City Hall, which was completed in the early 1930s and is brimming with the aesthetics of that era. We of course read "Waiting for Lefty" and other plays, looked at New Deal visual art, and listened to popular music, from Aaron Copeland to Billie Holiday. Most valuable in our class discussions were the reports about "Lefty" rehearsals and cast conversations reported by the actors and stage hands in our midst. Class discussions frequently explored parallels and connections between "then" (the 1930s) and "now" (the late 1990s), as well as the ways that cultural work can be organized around political goals. All the students in the class attended the college production of the play, which came at the very end of the semester, and many of them participated in the post-show discussions which followed each performance and brought students together with the union activists and working people who also attended.

Six years later, when a friend returned from the Great Labor Arts Exchange insisting that I look at a video showing a working performance of a newly written labor musical/jazz opera, I reflected on how well the "Lefty" experience had gone. I loved everything about this new piece, "Forgotten: Murder in the Ford Rouge Plant," written by Steve Jones, and I began to think about how I might use it as a learning tool in my Labor History work at Macalester. "Forgotten" is set in 1937, when Lewis Bradford, a Methodist minister turned union organizer and radio host (his "The Forgotten Man's Hour" ran against Father Coughlin's anti-communist "Hour of Power" on Detroit area radio stations) died mysteriously in the Ford Rouge plant, the largest factory in the world. Bradford had run afoul of Harry Bennett, Ford's henchman, and he was found in a remote area of the plant on November 30, 1937, his skull fractured. Although the company doctor termed his death an accident, union activists and his own family always suspected foul play. Steve Jones (who was Bradford's great-nephew) used this mystery as the basis for a story of workers' struggles to organize in the Great Depression, told as an opera in song.

I turned to a colleague, Music Professor and Choral Director Bob Peterson, and asked him if he would be interested in directing this musical and helping me teach a new course called "Telling Labor's Story Through Music." Bob was not only willing, but as we got deeper and deeper into the project, he soon forgot our agreed upon goal of a "concertized production" (no sets, lights, or costumes) and set his – and our – sights on a fully-staged production. We were all having too much fun.

The course was open to students with no prior knowledge of labor history or experience in musical performance. While we required every student in the course to participate in some way-- in the ultimate staging of the musical, producing publicity, taking tickets, or working back stage if not in the cast itself- Bob insisted on auditioning performers for the lead roles with the goal of putting something of quality on stage. In the course itself I sought to give students an overview of American labor history, an introduc-

tion to the place of music and song within working-class culture and the labor movement, while Bob exposed them to different musical genres and styles, placed within historical contexts. We listened to a lot of music in class. We paid particular attention to the 1930s given the play's setting, although we began with slave work songs and the blues and ended with hip hop, our readings ranging from Leroi Jones' *Blues People* to Tricia Rose's *Black Noise*, with other gems like Ruth Glasser's *My Music is My Flag* and Robbie Leiber's *My Song Is My Weapon* also providing great material. Our most valuable reading proved to be Benjamin Filene's *Romancing the Folk: Public Memory and American Roots Music*, as his argument about the impossibility of the quest for "authenticity" in folk music became a framing device for the students' exploration of their own abilities to cross class lines and play blue collar workers on stage. It also informed our appreciation of Steve Jones' eclectic musical score for "Forgotten" rather than expecting it to sound like a 1930s period piece.

Bob and I secured additional support from the college, which enriched our work. We were able to travel to Detroit to see a professional, unionized production of "Forgotten," which inspired us. We were able to pay honoraria to guest presenters. Benjamin Filene was Director of the Museum and Exhibits Division of the Minnesota Historical Society (just down the street), and he made some guest presentations to the class and became a part of our project's extended family. We were able to bring composer Steve Jones to St. Paul twice, once to work in rehearsals with the cast and, of course, to talk to the class, and a second time to see our end product (which made not only the students nervous, but Bob and me, too). We also brought Illinois public intellectual and folksinger extraordinaire Bucky Halker (who happens to have a Ph.D. in American Studies from the University of Minnesota), to provide an in-class presentation on how he approaches working-class music as a living legacy meant to be revised by each performer. Bucky also performed a rocking campus-wide concert which illustrated his ideas and raised interest in our project.

Most importantly we were able to form a partnership with UAW Local 879 at the St. Paul Ford truck assembly plant. I thought it was vital that students have a sense of the work performed in an auto plant and also that they get to know some of the workers.. The plant had been closed to tours since 9/11, but the union shop chairman was able to get us access and to lead our tour himself. We also attended a union meeting and had several focus group discussions with workers at the union hall. While it was obvious – and unsurprising – that these experiences had a big impact on the students, it became clear that the conversations meant a lot to the autoworkers, too. They felt seen and heard, their work appreciated. They were also genuinely interested in the students. Some connections persisted well after the play was staged.

And the play was staged twice, one night in the college's concert hall and a second at the union hall. On both occasions, we played to a full house. Some students went to the union hall and some union members came to the college. The audiences were enthusiastic and the student performers were moved – and inspired to quite terrific performances. Composer Steve Jones was knocked

Teaching Labor History, Continued

out by what had started out to be a “concertized” production by young people at music stands. It rocked. And it moved. And it was followed by lively discussions with audiences – and among cast and course members.

The “Lefty” and “Forgotten” courses and projects stick with me because so many students were engaged, moved, and, even, transformed. Today, twelve years and five years later, not only are some of those young people union members, organizers and

staffers, but others of them are community organizers, teachers, actors and directors, writers, arts instructors, arts administrators, and more, all with a sense of understanding labor history at its best, from the inside. “When the union’s inspiration through the workers’ blood shall run,” are not just lyrics on a page to them.

“There can be no power greater anywhere beneath the sun.”

Indeed.

CALL FOR PAPERS, WORKSHOPS, AND PRESENTATIONS

Pacific Northwest Labor History
Association Annual Conference

Portland, Oregon
June 11-13, 2010

“The Union Makes Us Strong”: Inspiration, Guidance, and Hope During Hard Times

The Pacific Northwest has been seriously affected by the current economic crisis, the worst since the Great Depression. This crisis has inflicted extreme hardship on workers, families, and communities throughout the region.

Although the Pacific Northwest has had many historical encounters with economic downturns and hard times, the region also has a rich tradition of unionism, community organizing, and independent political action. It is this context that shapes the theme of the 2010 PNLHA conference. In hard times we can draw on this history for inspiration, guidance, and hope in developing strategies that promote working-class needs and interests.

We invite proposals for papers, panels, workshops, and presentations related to this theme. We welcome a range of methods that contribute to historical understanding, including oral history, the arts, and more formal scholarly presentations. Proposals dealing with Canadian themes are strongly encouraged.

WE ESPECIALLY ENCOURAGE PROPOSALS THAT ADDRESS THE FOLLOWING ISSUES:

Analysis of economic crises, both previous and current

The struggles of immigrant workers and Native Americans

The struggle for racial and gender equity in the Northwest

Organizing the unemployed

Alternative institutions and worker organizations

The growth, development, and current struggles of public sector unionism

Efforts to provide workers with affordable, quality health care

Independent political action and labor-community alliances

Proposals for workshops and panels should include a 1-2 page summary, a list of presenters and/or papers to be delivered, and a short biography or vitae for each participant. Individual paper proposals are also welcome.

The deadline for proposals is February 15, 2010. Submitters will be notified on the status of their proposals by March 15, 2010.

Please send proposals to: Bob Bussel, Labor Education and Research Center
1289 University of Oregon
Eugene, OR 97403

For further information, contact Bob Bussel at (541) 346-2784 or bussel@uoregon.edu.

Stormy Weather

Labor Education Programs Under Fire Amid Economic Crisis

Bob Bussel, Labor Education and Research Center, University of Oregon

With many states having to close huge budget deficits as a result of the current economic crisis, it has been a difficult season for university-based labor education and labor studies programs.

These programs, located at approximately fifty college and university campuses across the country, provide an array of vital services to unions, including education and leadership development training, applied research, and consultation on important work and employment issues. Labor education and labor studies programs have always existed uneasily within the university, facing persistent questions about their legitimacy as an academic discipline and allegations that they are politically partisan and fail to exercise scholarly objectivity. Such charges, however, are rarely leveled against university programs that serve business, agricultural, or other industrial or corporate interests, underscoring the political animus that often underlies these criticisms. Even in good times, labor education struggles to retain its funding and independence, with programs frequently encountering pressure to merge with other academic departments whose missions are more traditional or oriented toward management concerns.

Although land grant universities and other state-sponsored institutions typically have community and public service obligations attached to their missions, they tend to give priority to protecting traditional academic programs when resources shrink. Labor education becomes particularly vulnerable under these kinds of circumstances, which are now pervasive with many states facing extreme budget shortfalls.

In some instances political animus has clearly motivated budget cuts. California governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, goaded by conservative legislators and corporate interests, has repeatedly sought to eliminate funding for labor education programs at the UCLA and UC Berkeley campuses. These programs have done important outreach work to immigrant workers, strongly supported union organizing initiatives, and conducted research on public policy issues that has angered employers and their political supporters. Schwarzenegger has yet again proposed eliminating the UCLA program, apparently hoping that under the pretext of budgetary duress, he will have better luck in achieving what has been a consistent objective. At this writing the status of labor education at UCLA is still uncertain, with the program and its supporters yet again waging a spirited campaign to ensure its continuation.

Elsewhere, cuts to labor education and labor studies programs have reflected a more complex set of motives. The program housed at the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) was able to avert its proposed closure through intervention by the Alabama AFL-CIO, while a small business development center at

UAB lacking comparable support was unable to prevent its elimination. Nonetheless, the UAB labor education program has been compelled to find a new affiliation with a community college. Evergreen State College's budget was cut in half, while Indiana University of Pennsylvania experienced a substantial reduction and faces possible merger with a management program. Programs at the University of Massachusetts have suffered losses of faculty positions and are fighting to retain state funding for research on the "future of work" in Massachusetts that they have enjoyed for a number of years.

Some labor education programs, such as Rutgers and the Joseph Murphy Institute at the City University of New York, have been able to add positions during this difficult time, so the picture for labor education is not entirely gloomy. Moreover, labor education programs have continued to play an important role in helping unions respond to contemporary challenges, including climate change and the possibilities of creating green jobs, developing more effective outreach to immigrant workers, and introducing internal initiatives that will make their organizations more vibrant and effective. Indeed, labor education programs provide a safe space where all unions--AFL-CIO, Change to Win, or independent-- can come together and engage in candid, thoughtful discussion about how best to deal with labor's adversity and capitalize on opportunities for growth and expansion.

A final challenge to labor education programs has been launched in recent months by the Landmark Legal Foundation, a conservative advocacy group. Landmark has filed information requests with nearly a dozen universities, attempting to demonstrate that the work of their labor education programs misuses public funds in violation of their official purpose or statutory obligations. The United Association of Labor Educators is closely monitoring these efforts and working to develop a coordinated strategy to help labor education programs resist these politically inspired attacks on their legitimacy.

As a vital resource for workers and unions, university-based labor education is well worth protecting. Experience clearly shows that strong labor, political, and community support are indispensable elements in ensuring that labor education programs can continue their proud record of service to working people and the union movement.

Messages from the Grassroots



WISCONSIN

Andrew E. Kersten, University of Wisconsin-Green Bay
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In 2008, Wisconsin's working-class voters pushed hard to elect Barack H. Obama, giving him one of the largest victories in the Midwest. In particular, the state AFL-CIO labored tirelessly to put him in office, hoping that he would stem the tide against the Great Recession, help restore and create jobs, promote immigrant rights and immigration reform, deliver health insurance reform, and sign the Employee Free Choice bill.

It is too soon to judge whether President Obama is the leader that Wisconsinites desired. But, the federal stimulus money has made a difference. The Obama administration has pledged \$3.8 billion. The state's Democratic leaders have spent the bulk of the money on education, health care, and public work projects, especially highway and road construction. Unemployment, however, remains at a twenty-five year high. Although the rate—9.5 percent—mirrors the national average and has dipped slightly, voters are skeptical about the recovery. Despite the availability of jobs in highway construction, the rest of the state's economy remains weak. For example, the volume at the airport in Green Bay—which despite its reputation as a football town is still a major transportation hub—is down nearly 25 percent over a year ago. Further, shipments of dry goods through the city's port are down by roughly 40 percent. This is no surprise since the recession has devastated all Great Lakes shipping, particularly iron ore and limestone. Elsewhere in the state, employers have downsized. In Fond du Lac, for instance, Mercury Marine managers are conducting negotiations with the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers, the union representing the 900 shop floor workers who make boat motors and accessories. Company officials would like to consolidate operations in much-less-union-friendly Stillwater, Oklahoma. Likely, the best the IAM workers can hope for are wage and benefit concessions.

The Wisconsin AFL-CIO and its affiliated unions keep pressuring state leaders to invest in the economy so that decent jobs remain in the state. They are also fighting to counter the right-wing attack campaigns on health reform, immigration reform, and the Employee Free Choice bill. They have won some battles. In spring 2009, owing to the long-standing campaign of the American Federation of Teachers, Wisconsin's university professors finally earned the right to

form unions and bargain collectively. But as for the larger, national campaigns for worker rights and health insurance reform, the Democratic message is beginning to get lost. And, progressive politicians are worried. State Democrats have witnessed a steady loss of approval among the public. Right-wing groups like the Tea Party Protestors are gaining strength. They regularly appear at town hall meetings and have strong followings on college campuses. Current Democratic Governor Jim Doyle, who only has an approval rate of 40 percent has announced he will not seek a third term next year. The door is open to conservatives, like the NRA-backed attorney general J. B. Van Hollen, who seek to capitalize on the unease among Wisconsinites of all socio-economic status.



SAN FRANCISCO

Don Watson, Bay Area Labor History Workshop
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Archie Green of LaborLore fame had a well attended memorial in May at San Francisco State University honoring his many years of work in behalf of labor history and mountain music.

The 2009 Labor Fest honored the 75th Anniversary of the San Francisco waterfront and general strikes. Featured was a march along the Embarcadero, followed by a month of films, poetry, plays and music.

The San Francisco Public Library in August displayed a large exhibit on the 1934 Pacific Coast Waterfront strike and held a session on "Solidarity Stories, an Oral History of the ILWU." led by Harvey Schwartz, author of the new book recently published by University of Washington Press.

Meanwhile the San Francisco Bay Area Labor History Workshop has a full schedule for the 2009-10 season. Plans for this Fall-Winter include talks by Katherine Marinino on the 1980s Watsonville Cannery Strike, Benjamin Balthaser on "Images of Labor and Violence," Molly Martin and Gail Sansbury on San Francisco Bernal Heights labor and radical history, and Carol Cuenod on ILWU involvement with community housing in the Western Addition. These events are mainly in held in homes. For more information, contact Don Watson.

Finally, a new BALHW directory of members will be coming out this season.

Messages from the Grassroots



CENTRAL FLORIDA

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The North Central Florida Central Labor Council, headquartered in Gainesville, has been active in rallying support for organized labor's two key legislative goals, to wit: passage of the Employee Free Choice Act and adoption of meaningful health insurance reform. Regarding the former, Council members participated in a rally in Jacksonville early in June staged to protest a meeting of corporate anti-EFCA strategists; and on June 20, Council members picketed a local branch of the Bank of America, a major opponent of labor law reform. With reference to health insurance, on August 10, the Council sponsored a forum on health care legislation and then adopted a resolution favoring the "single payer" option but insisting that a public provision option be included in whatever legislation is passed. The Council's Labor Day breakfast is scheduled for Saturday, September 5. Over a hundred North Central Florida labor, women's, civil rights, environmental, and personal rights activists are expected to attend this annual event.



DETROIT

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Labor Day in Detroit: September 7, 2009. Thousands of rank-and-file union members marched down Woodward Avenue to affirm the statement of Mike Hayes, a vice president of UAW, Local 412 (representing workers at Chrysler Group): "The union, well, we live to fight another day." Many – perhaps most – marched with renewed determination and grit this year, displaying their solidarity with the union cause. With official unemployment at 20 percent for Wayne County (where Detroit is located), the base of support for the Labor Day parade expanded. Several professors from Oakland University marched in the Labor Day parade after walking out of their classrooms when the negotiating deadline produced no new contract. City unions joined the march protesting possible layoffs and wage concessions under the new Dave Bing administration, which faces a \$300 million deficit. Mayor Bing

warns that if municipal workers do not take deep wage cuts the city could run out of money soon. Michigan Public Radio quoted Kae Halonen, a retired Ford employee, who noted that the present is "closer to some of the same feelings that may have been in the 1930s, when there wasn't a lot of choice." For that reason, Halonen said the feeling today is "you better stick together or you're gonna really, really be undercut."



ALBERTA

Alvin Finkel, Athabasca University
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The Alberta Labour History Institute (ALHI) is continuing its work for the centennial of the Alberta Federation of Labour in 2012. This includes a multi-authored book on the history of working people in Alberta, a DVD on the same subject, four pamphlets highlighting major working-class struggles in Alberta, and a variety of posters celebrating working-class struggles. Our first pamphlet, commemorating the struggles of the coal miners of Alberta's Crow's Nest Pass, appeared in April 2009 in time for this year's Alberta Federation of Labour convention in Edmonton. The second pamphlet, outlining the proud history of organizing in the province's meatpacking industry and the destruction of this industry as a result of capitalist reorganization in the period of "globalization," will be produced later this year.

On October 22, there will be a celebration of union achievements in another industry that capitalist reorganization has taken out of our province, whose fate government has largely left to the whims of multi-national energy companies: the clothing industry. GWG (Great Western Garments), whose jeans are well known worldwide, was for almost a century the main employer of immigrant women in Edmonton. The plant was established in 1911 and closed its doors in 2004 when GWG moved its former Edmonton operation to Haiti. ALHI worked with Catherine C. Cole, who has spearheaded a major oral history project regarding GWG, as well as a multi-media project that features both film of the GWG workers and a stage performance of songs written by Alberta's amazing singer-songwriter Maria Dunn, to get federal recognition of the organization in 1911 of Local 120, United Garment Workers of America, the province's first female-dominated union. The Historic Sites and Monuments Board has designated that event an event of national significance and a plaque marking the event will be placed on the building that was the long-time home to GWG on October 22 as part of the commemoration of this important working-class milestone in Alberta.

Getting on Rachel Maddow

A Tale of History and Media

Trevor Griffey, University of Washington
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Archival research can be so isolating that we can forget the value our work might have to a wider audience. Smoking guns are rare. And the amount of time between research, writing, and eventual publication can discourage us from believing that the records we work with might be of value to others.

But there are ways to use our archival research to make timely interventions in our political culture. Just a few months ago, some of my research ended up being used by Rachael Maddow on her television show as part of the debate over judge Sonia Sotomayor's appointment to the U.S. Supreme Court.

I offer the story of how my otherwise obscure research made its way onto TV to reflect on ways that we as historians can develop mutually beneficial relationships with journalists and news producers. I propose that LAWCHA members in general, and its outreach committee in particular, consider developing new ways to feed progressive journalists story ideas.

IN THE ARCHIVE

I went to the Richard Nixon archives in Yorba Linda, California in October 2008 to search for materials about the history of affirmative action and Nixon's outreach to conservative labor leaders.

In Yorba Linda, I had the pleasure of sifting through boxes of memos of "contested files"—recently released documents whose only commonality is that the Nixon White House blocked their release for nearly three decades. It's an illuminating experience to see "eyes only" memos that didn't end up in the archives of the federal bureaucracy for a reason. Even the most mundane government paperwork takes on new meaning when one tries to ascertain who wanted to keep the document confidential and why.

Speculative memos, think pieces, and strategy proposals pepper the contested files that the Nixon White House sought to keep out of public view. They are a gold mine to political historians, and are often overlooked by public historians and journalists looking for evidence of "dirty tricks" that Nixon contemplated against his "enemies."

It was while digging through these contested files that I

came across a political strategy proposal by Pat Buchanan, then a Nixon speechwriter, for courting the so-called "Catholic vote" as part of Nixon's 1972 reelection campaign. Buchanan was trying to influence the Nixon administration's plan to create a new majority for the Republican Party by appealing to northern "white ethnics," Catholics, and conservative union members. He advocated the appointment of Catholics to prominent positions, the embrace of public subsidies for private schools, and a host of other overt and covert means to supposedly appeal to conservative Catholics. Interested mainly in the intersection between Buchanan's policy proposals and the Nixon administration's outreach to organized labor, I photocopied the memo and didn't think much more about it.

IN THE MEDIA

Then one day, eight months later, I clicked on a link to an op-ed a friend of mine posted on Facebook, and I was confronted by Pat Buchanan's overtly racist screeds against Judge Sonia Sotomayor. Buchanan wrote in June that Judge Sotomayor was "Miss Affirmative Action, 2009," (<http://www.humanevents.com/article.php?id=32264>) an "affirmative action baby" who relied upon a reverse discrimination so hypocritical that "one prefers the old bigotry" for its supposed honesty.

Immediately, I recalled that Buchanan memo from 1971 I had photocopied. Nixon's administration was the first to impose affirmative action goals and timetables upon government and private hiring. Affirmative action for Nixon and his advisers wasn't reverse discrimination, but a means to dole out political patronage. He denounced the quotas that he himself had imposed, but privately used them at different times in different ways to cultivate the support of various constituents he treated as interest groups.

It was in this context that Buchanan's 1971 memo (<http://students.washington.edu/trevorg/pdfs/Nixon/Buchanan.pdf>) to the President's advisers frankly called for Nixon to appoint a Supreme Court justice not based on merit, but based on race, gender, and religion. He wrote that:

"instead of sending the orders out to all our other agencies-- hire blacks and women-- the order should go out-- hire ethnic Catholics preferable [sic] women, for visible posts. One example: Italian Americans, unlike blacks, have never had

Getting on Rachel Maddow, continued

a Supreme Court member-- they are deeply concerned with their "criminal" image; they do not dislike the President. Give those fellows the "Jewish seat" or the "black seat" on the Court when it becomes available."

The memo exposed Buchanan as a hypocrite for criticizing Sotomayor as "Miss Affirmative Action." But I had no idea how to get my memo into the public sphere. All the journalists I knew covered local politics, not national politics.

As an historian, I had no network, no connections, or easy media access through which to get my memo into the hands of people who would understand its significance and use it effectively. And it is this kind of network that I think LAWCHA and other groups of like-minded historians should consider developing as part of their media outreach.

In the absence of such a network, and busy with my own research and writing, I lazily put my faith in the digital ether to provide me with some kind of assistance. I created a blog that I called Nixon's Ghosts (<http://nixonghosts.blogspot.com/>) for the sole purpose of daylighting the Buchanan memo, and added a couple other random documents I found in the archives (including one that provides an explanation into why Nixon pardoned Jimmy Hoffa). I used my own name and title so people could verify my research rather than presume I was engaged in some kind of anonymous hit piece. I then posted a link to the blog on my Facebook page. And then, predictably, nothing happened.

Plan B: I began to reach out to people I had never met via email. I emailed a link to my blog to Patricia Williams at the Nation. No response. To David Corn at Mother Jones, who I had interned with a decade prior while he worked at the Nation in Washington DC. No response. I sent it out to a few other prominent journalists and progressive columnists, but received no replies.

Except from one. I had seen Rick Perlstein, the author of Nixonland, at a couple different LAWCHA-sponsored events and decided to email him the link to my blog. To my surprise, he was enthusiastic. And he was extremely generous with his time and media contacts he had developed as part of the publicity he received from his book tours and political advocacy.

Perlstein sent the word out about my find. But when the Washington Independent picked up the story (<http://washingtonindependent.com/47327/pat-buchanan-1971-give-the-scotus-black-seat-or-jewish-seat-to-a-catholic>), it got it completely backwards. It wrote that "It's striking how little Buchanan has changed in 38 years," but missed the

hypocrisy of his attacking affirmative action as discrimination while advocating whites-only hiring. After that, I gave up.

So it came as a surprise to me when, over a month later, I got an email from Perlstein saying that Rachael Maddow had used my document as part of her devastating refutation of Pat Buchanan's opposition to Judge Sotomayor's nomination to the Supreme Court. She didn't need the memo to roast Buchanan, but it was gratifying nonetheless to know that archival sources I had unearthed played a tiny part in defending Judge Sotomayor in the debates that led up to her confirmation.

Maddow cited Perlstein as the source of the memo, since he had been the one to bring it to her producer's attention. But it hardly mattered. A once-confidential document had gone from complete obscurity to being fodder for ongoing political debates over race in U.S. history— thanks to the work of archivists in the Nixon papers, to the personal media network of an engaged scholar, and the open-mindedness of progressive media.

IN THE FUTURE

It's worth thinking about how archival sources can themselves be news instead of focusing exclusively on the writing of op-eds for newspapers. The power of the internet has allowed us greater ability to transmit archival materials that can insert historical questions and insights into contemporary political debates.

When I published online a collection of historic photographs from the Ku Klux Klan in Washington State (http://depts.washington.edu/civilr/kkk_intro.htm) in the 1920s, for instance, an Associated Press story about this history circulated through regional papers throughout Washington and Oregon, and touched nerves and prompted debates that I think went beyond what a single op-ed would have produced.

The question I'm left with after this is experience is: What kind of organization or networks can we as historians develop to keep track of the news, to strategize the kinds of archival sources that might make critical interventions in public discourse, and to develop relationships with progressive print, internet, radio, and TV journalists who might use our research effectively?

Jim Green Receives Sol Stetin Award

In the past several years, numerous prestigious awards have gone to LAWCHA members for their fine scholarship. Special congratulations this year go to James Green of the University of Massachusetts Boston, and former LAWCHA president, who received the Sol Stetin Award for Labor History from the Sidney Hillman Foundation for his life's work dedicated to writing and teaching the history of working people, often to workers and union members. Jim was cited by the Hillman

Foundation for "the clear, persuasive analysis and careful research that have characterized his books, articles, classes, films, and other public presentations have made him an outstanding teacher in classrooms, union halls, and historical organizations in America and abroad." LAWCHA member David Montgomery did the honors, and a video of the event is available online at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uh9J8Joh6XI>



Richard Schneirov and Jim Green at dinner and discussion of "Labor in the 21st Century" Saturday night.

2009 Philip Taft Labor History Award Winners

The Cornell University ILR School, in collaboration with LAWCHA, is pleased to announce the co-winners of the 2009 Philip Taft Labor History Award for the best book in American labor and working-class history published in 2008

Thavolia Glymph,
*Out of the House of Bondage:
The Transformation of the Plantation
Household* (Cambridge University Press)

&

Jana K. Lipman,
*Guantánamo: A Working-Class History
between Empire and Revolution*
(University of California Press)

For information on nominations for the 2010 Prize, due by December 15, 2009, please visit the Taft Award website:
<http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/taftaward/>

2009 Herbert Gutman Award Winner

The Labor and Working Class History Association (LAWCHA) announces the winner of the 2009 Herbert Gutman Prize for Outstanding Dissertation in Labor and Working-Class History

Michael Rosenow,
“Injuries to All: The Rituals of Dying and the Politics of Death among United States Workers, 1877-1910” (University of Illinois, Advisor: James R. Barrett)

For information on the 2010 Prize competition, due by November 30, 2009, please visit the Gutman Prize website:
<http://www.lawcha.org/gutman.php/>

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*.

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