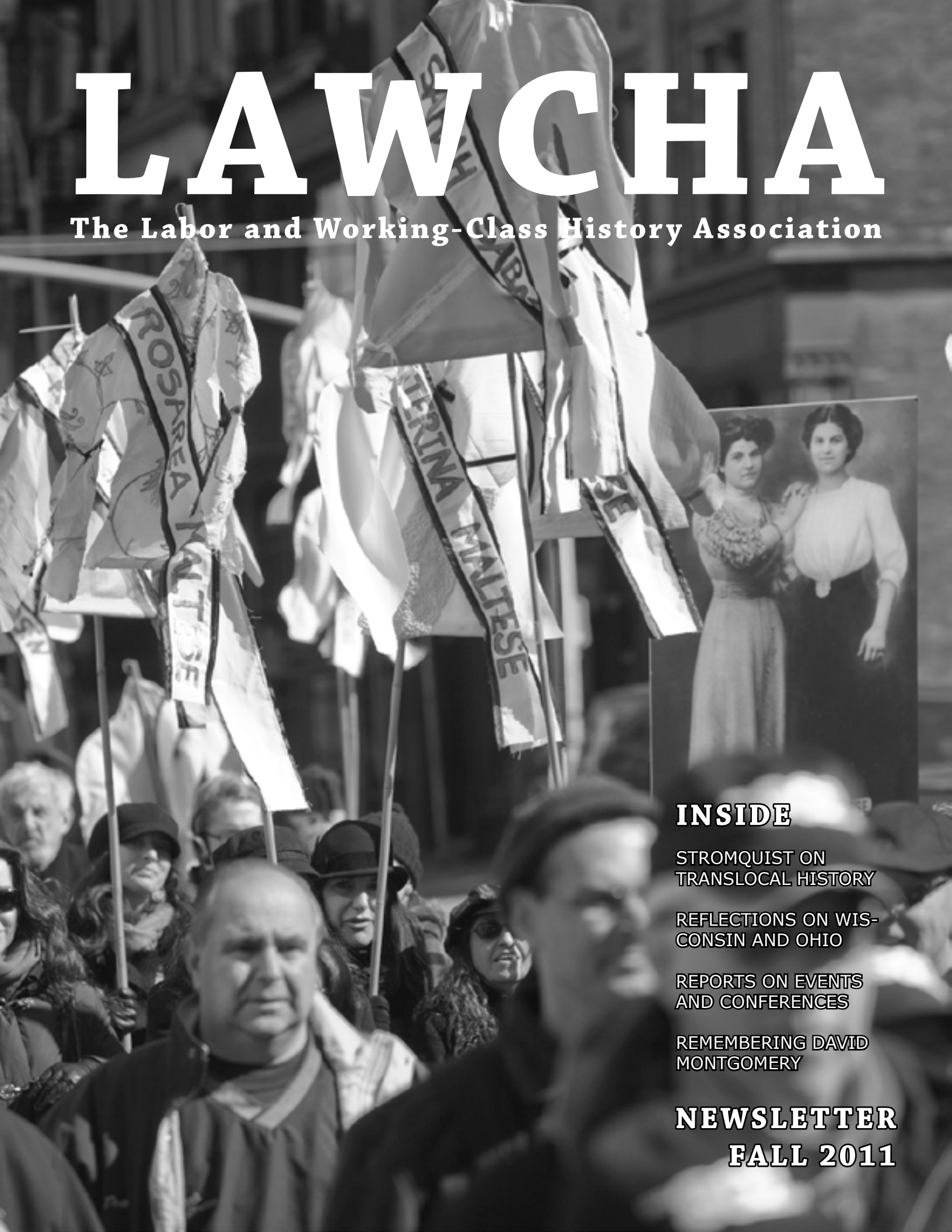


LAWCHA

The Labor and Working-Class History Association



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NEWSLETTER
FALL 2011

2011 Philip Taft Labor History Award Winner

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

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

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

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

2011 Herbert Gutman Award Winner

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

Jacob Remes, "Cities of Comrades: Urban Disasters and the Formation of the North American Progressive State"
Duke University, 2010. Advisor, Gunther Peck.

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

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From the Cover

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



LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

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

Kim Phillips, LAWCHA President

It has been another year of mass struggle for working-class people around the world and the year to come looks to see more activism. From Wisconsin to Greece, workers and their allies have taken to the streets, plazas and capitals to protest the widening gap between the wealthy and the poor. These protests have alerted those in power to the widespread and collective discontent, but the gains in wages, job protection, safety and dignity have been few. Some Americans have found manufacturing and service jobs at much lower wages, regardless of a union's protection. Others remain unemployed or underemployed. The decades long de-industrialization of the US and Europe, along with the industrialization of the global South, have resulted in what economists now call a "globally competitive wage." Ironically, while some state legislatures in the US have eliminated public union jobs and benefits, Americans continue to subsidize the ballooning bonuses paid to Wall Street, manufacturing and bank executives.

LAWCHA members have witnessed and documented these current struggles. The articles in this newsletter attest to the urgency of our work. While these new protests are historic, as historians and activists, we also need to provide a larger context to the current struggles. For examples, I draw your attention to our revamped website. I thank Ryan Poe, our brilliant graduate assistant and Shel Stromquist for their attention to the new website. Visit the site <<http://www.lawcha.org>> where you will find op-ed articles, action alerts, a blog and much more. We'll soon have a regularly updated list of publications.

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

In solidarity,
Kim Phillips, President



LAWCHA President Kim Phillips
Credit: Tom Klug

LAWCHA at the OAH, April 18-22, 2012

LAWCHA's annual conference for 2012 will be in conjunction with the OAH/NCPH conference. The theme, **Frontiers of Capitalism and Democracy** fits well with the conference location, in the battleground city of Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Please see the LAWCHA website for more information about the panels relating to labor history.

Labor Activism and Memory

Rosemary Feurer, Northern Illinois University

The past year has brought to consciousness the dynamic of class structures in the United States. The battles across the United States, responding to the class warfare grounded in political struggles, have made the work of labor historians more critical than ever. This issue highlights that theme, of the relevance of labor historians work, both on the ground in these movements, and as an analytical framework for those engaged in struggle.

We begin with excerpts from Shelton Stromquist's address at the Working Class Worlds conference in July. Stromquist asks us to reconsider old frameworks for understanding the connections between our work and the current crisis, using the frame of "translocal history" in a reflection both on the field of labor history, his experiences, and an historical appreciation of the role of the local in building communities of

collective action. Wisconsin and OCCUPY activists grew strength from the protesters in Egypt and anti-austerity activists across the globe, but each of these protests drew from the local communities of solidarity. Our newsletter then turns to reflections on events in Wisconsin and Ohio this year, in a way that reinforces Stromquist's insights. As Jerry Tucker and Ed Sadlowski make clear in that section, relying on national labor organizations leadership has been less satisfying than the self-activity of workers at the local base of the movement.

We mourn the passing of David Montgomery, but hope you will be inspired not only to mourn, but to organize. David's words and deeds inspired a generation of historians and activists, and we use his own words and the memories of others to highlight this influence.



Commemorating the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire
Credit: RJ Michels

Labor History and the Current Crisis

Revisiting Class and Community as Translocal Spaces

Skeleton Stromquist, University of Iowa

The following is excerpted from the full address was given as a keynote of the Working-Class Worlds: Local and Global Perspectives on Labor History Conference on July 9, 2011, in Iowa City, Iowa (see conferences section, p. 18). An earlier version of this address will be published in Dan Katz and Rich Greenwald, eds., "This is What Democracy Looks Like," (New Press).

I want to talk a bit about the some of the influences that have shaped our field, something of my own encounters with class and community, and finally how our current crisis and the transnational trends in labor history invite us to consider the value of what I've come to call the "translocal" basis for collective action past and in the present...

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

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

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

"Class" as a category of analysis has had its ups and downs to say the least, not unrelated to the success and influence of the labor movement itself. But even "success" has at times contributed to the marginalization of class. The New Deal framework of government-regulated collective bargaining brought real and substantial benefits, always contingent, however, on labor's political success. But those benefits, conjoined labor with a liberal establishment determined to transcend "class conflict," a project going back to the Progressive Era (as I tried to show in *Reinventing "the People"*) and produced the fiction of a broad, inclusive middle class that has only served to obfus-

cate the real, underlying and material class divisions that persist. If anyone doubted the relevance of class analysis, recent events, including a resurgent corporate-financed and orchestrated right wing attack on the fundamental right to collective bargaining in Wisconsin, Ohio, New Jersey, Iowa and a host of other states—are an object lesson of the first order. The erosion of worker rights and living standards under the battering ram of successive corporate-conservative administrations—dating at least from Nixon and Reagan—continues unabated and makes the idea of "class war" once again salient...

The twin of class analysis in my own work—perhaps better termed the method I've followed for understanding and complicating the meaning of class—has been serious engagement with the untidiness of "the local." In the context of historical communities, we can observe and document with some complexity the lives of workers, the patterns of their association and activity, the trials and triumphs that mark their efforts at mutual aid, and the structures of power and inequality with which they have had to contend as a daily fact of life...

Despite all the changes in the world of labor in our own time—the economic ups and downs, the global restructuring of manufacturing, the job losses in rustbelt communities, the attacks on the very right of collective bargaining, the crisis of social democracy and rightward drift of national politics, and the steep decline in private sector union density—we still face some of the same challenges that working people have always faced. How do we build and sustain a vital movement for social justice and equality capable of contesting for power and remodeling our workplaces, our communities and indeed our countries into the humane and just world to which we aspire? The challenge is clearly transnational to a degree it has never been before. Our organizing, our political engagement, and the history we write must ultimately rise to that challenge. But, it all starts locally—or, I would suggest, *translocally*...

My own scholarship and my political experience have been in perpetual dialogue with the "local" as the primary arena in which the networks of solidarity, that give fiber and strength to any meaningful social movement, must be built. As my academic work gravitated to the study of the Knights of Labor and the American Railway Union, I was struck by the vitality of local mixed assemblies as entry points for workers irrespective of skill or trade or industry, even race or gender, to a degree. These local chains of solidarity built on workers' organic community ties and became the basis for collective action in strikes, boycotts and ultimately politics in places like Hornellsville, New York, Creston, Iowa, and Cleveland, Ohio.

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Experience: Local Movement Building

Like many of you in this room whose activism has been intertwined with their academic work, the study of “the local” took on special meaning for me in part because I had witnessed and participated in such movement building from below, in my case during 1964 and 1965 in Vicksburg, Mississippi and Selma, Alabama... With courage and deepest conviction, people like Eddie Thomas (a barber), Pink Taylor (a retired sleeping car porter), and Bessie Brown (a domestic worker and the mother of six young children) risked everything to claim the right to vote, to hold meetings in churches in the face of Klan beatings and intimidation, and to build from the grassroots a new political party—the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP). They would be the local architects of a new, powerful social movement. In Selma, the audacity of young kids by the hundreds, like Ola Mae Waller and her friends, built their own youthful ties of social solidarity... They strengthened the backbones of their elders and we erstwhile recruits and inspired a movement that enabled their parents to claim voting rights and to walk to Montgomery to register those claims... But, by 1966, I also recognized that whatever useful, limited role whites had played in the movement to that point had now largely passed. I welcomed and applauded the turn to “black power” and moved on to other *localities* and their quest to build a new society.

In Tanzania, East Africa, I encountered a remarkable social transformation underway in 1966... Ann and I witnessed men and women committing their energies and their social vision to the arduous work of clearing new land, planting and harvesting jointly-owned crops, cooperatively constructing improved dwellings with local materials, and meeting to consider their next steps in this grassroots social movement. An older generation of farmers, like Hasani Kombo and Mzee Saidi, keepers of the oral tradition of communalism in a Handeni village called Mnkonde, joined members of a younger, politically-inspired generation, like Mwinjuma Thabiti, to give tangible meaning to a national campaign for Ujamaa (roughly translated from Swahili as the quality of familiness or socialism). The politics of implementing African socialism in post-colonial Africa proved challenging, however. The lingering debris of colonialism and the intrusive Cold War and neo-colonial policies of former and would-be colonizers created profound political barriers to social experimentation and successful development, limiting or even undermining the spread of locally-based socialism.

Back in the U.S. in 1968, I reencountered, now at high tide, a broad-based and inspiring social movement against the war in Vietnam. Settling in Milwaukee, Ann and I gravitated to a unique urban Catholic Worker community that combined militant action against the war and the draft with community-based organizing for fair housing, commu-

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

Education: Class and Community

Coming back to formal education after some years of community work, I found in the “new labor history” (to which I was first introduced by Mel Dubofsky at UWM) and in the emerging networks of labor historians, people who took up precisely the intellectual (and political) challenges these questions raised.

What this new work suggested, among other things, was a more diverse working class and a wider spectrum of working-class collective action than that represented in earlier scholarship. Even as it exposed the deep cultural roots of racism and patriarchy, so did the new work also find spaces in which workers constructed from the organic solidarities of the workplace and neighborhood new forms of resistance...

Scholarship: Trans-Local Working-Class Politics

In my own recent studies, I have become intrigued by the local, simultaneous political initiatives workers around the world undertook to address such concerns at the turn-of-the-century. The crises of urban life and the hardships imposed by the ongoing industrial revolution led workers in many and diverse settings to invent a new politics that directly addressed those hardships, bypassing existing liberal and conservative parties. The depression of the 1890s and the mass strike waves that swept through transportation, mining, and manufacturing sectors of the world’s industrializing countries provided the catalyst for political experiments at the grassroots that soon produced independent electoral challenges by laborites and socialists to the customary hegemony enjoyed by propertied elites in city councils, school boards, poor relief agencies and other local elected bodies. Although frequently marginalized at national party congresses and hamstrung by franchise restrictions, municipal activists nonetheless crafted platforms, established communication with comrades in other cities across national boundaries, and mounted campaigns for local office. In the early years (1894-1905) they won scattered victories but rarely governing control. Nonetheless, the tenor of municipal politics took a laborist and more democratic turn as they disrupted traditional elite forms of local governance.

In subtle but often significant ways improvements

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came to workers’ lives through their own self-activity. In many cities the scope of the local state expanded through municipalization of water, gas and electricity. Cities undertook municipally financed public housing and instituted public baths and city-owned markets. City employment expanded at the expense of private contract labor with municipal wages and working conditions that set new standards locally for employment. [Do we wonder today why public employee unions and the standards of employment they have won are such an object of intense attack by corporate America?] Activists in the past also engaged the battle for municipal ownership of streetcars. And workers won access to public space for their celebrations and public protests... This grassroots activism focused on the city as an arena of struggle and political mobilization. It also posed a challenge to the future course of social democratic politics, even as parliamentary-oriented party elites asserted their claims to leadership. As I have argued elsewhere, social democracy (of the Second International variety) came of age with the high tide of late nineteenth-century nationalism, and aspiring social democratic politicians and theoreticians inevitably framed their project in national terms, however much they still may have gestured toward internationalist principles. Drawn as they were to the quintessentially “modern” project of the bourgeois nationalists by their own positional struggles against socialist and anarchist locals (commune-itarians), they readily adopted the trappings of cosmopolitan moderns...

Stefan Berger has shown how liberal nationalism had a significant impact on social democrats in their formative stages. As he put it, “a certain ‘great state’ nationalism lurked behind the internationalist rhetoric” to which social democrats were reflexively committed. They conceived “civic nationalism” as a basis for internationalism and an antidote to ethnic parochialism, as well as a “vehicle for democratic emancipation.” Reinforcing this naturalization of the national has been an increasingly dense historiography of social democracy that defines the national arena as the only political arena worth the serious investment of organizational and ideological energy. While focusing on class and in varying degrees class struggle, historians have nationalized class. Berger notes, “their class narratives were alternative national narratives including different visions of national identity rather than an attempt to overcome national identity.” The parliamentary labor or socialist party became inevitably the story; its history the narrative spine. Localist and internationalist arenas became, in this retelling, marginal stories that existed only in relation to the master national political narrative. Municipi-

pal socialism, therefore, had little value in itself, except as a “training ground” for talented future parliamentarians.

The twentieth century is littered with national social democratic movements that may have shared or even won power, at least temporarily but in the long run abandoned their social democratic agendas. The renewal, periodically, of grassroots municipal politics has been an impressive counter-current. Never entirely secure and frequently operating from a minority position, those political initiatives, because they connected with real, day-to-day grievances of working-class people, provided a wellspring of political vitality.

Recent scholarship documenting the transatlantic and transglobal flow of social reform ideas and programs in the late 19th and early 20th centuries reminds us how interconnected these histories were. Nowhere was this flow more evident than in the realm of urban working-class politics. The political ideas and the transnational experience of political organizers cross-fertilized local movements...

What made such circulation feasible was that these political itinerants entered worlds that were undergoing

remarkably similar social and political changes; they spoke a common *political* language, read each other’s tracts, and understood the common problems they confronted. The observant labor and socialist local press in each country reported developments in the others. The global dimensions of this movement have been at times neglected or underestimated by historians and contemporary activists. Not only did such politics appear in widely dispersed local settings across the industrializing world, c. 1890-1920, the movements were also tightly and self-consciously linked through these transnational contacts, exchanges of information, and

traveling activist-organizers. Delegates to international socialist gatherings brought back colorful reports of the successes comrades had achieved elsewhere. Common threads defined these local struggles transnationally.

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

Workers today face a grim world in which capital mobility, media concentration, and the complicity of governments have circumscribed their ability and that of their unions and communities to assert control over the conditions they face. The prospects for national legislation that might at least re-level the playing field seem more remote than ever, as the effective abandonment of the struggle for the Employee Free Choice Act revealed. Immigration

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reform legislation seems hamstrung with little prospect of an opening for undocumented workers to claim their rights as workers or citizens. In the short-term Tea Party governors in Wisconsin, Ohio, New Jersey and other states at the bidding of their corporate masters have succeeded in dismantling the right of public workers to collective bargaining, even in the face of unprecedented mass mobilization. The capacity of big corporations and the Chamber of Commerce to reshape political debate by dumping millions of dollars into political campaigns, enabled now by the Supreme Court's "Citizens United" decision, has so skewed national and state politics to the right, at least for the time being, that little prospect of building an effective national challenge seems in the cards. The Obama administration, elected on a wave of hopefulness, is beleaguered and hamstrung by its own half-hearted and ill-conceived efforts to build a shaky bipartisanship with a newly energized, corporate financed rightwing Republicanism.

But, as some might say, we have them right where we want them! We might take a page from the past and re-imagine how new forms of working class solidarity, reminiscent of the Knights of Labor or the flying squadrons that linked networks of early CIO organizing committees in

Iowa towns, might be constructed and acted upon politically. Indeed, below the radar, local community activism, already well underway, again points the direction for the rebirth of a new popular politics capable of challenging for power, before the power structure fully realizes the scope of what's happening. At least, in my view, that's where our new "hope" lies.

The new local politics takes many forms—living wage campaigns, stricter local enforcement of environmental regulations, expansion of municipally-owned enterprises, support for local union organizing, the building and strengthening co-ops, defending the rights of undocumented workers, and building state and local workers' centers—like those in Vermont and Mississippi—that can serve as new centers of popular mobilization. Like earlier generations of activists, the challenge today is to "think globally and act locally"—among other things, to campaign for representation on city councils, school boards, local zoning and housing commissions, and police review panels. As in the past this may mean bypassing the existing channels of national power and influence in which our demands and interests get redirected, diluted and diminished, and building new structures of power and solidarity from below.



LAWCHA Vice President Shelton Stromquist Speaks to an Attentive Crowd
Credit: Anna Fure-Slocum

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The disappointments of the Obama presidency provide a powerful object lesson for those who seek a genuine progressive, democratic alternative.

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

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

In the U.S. grassroots progressive politics has acquired a new lease on life in the last decade, with vigorous local movements such as Progressive Maryland and living wage campaigns in Baltimore and its surrounding counties, and recently at the University of Georgia, the College of William and Mary, and other universities. A coalition of cities, calling itself "Cities for Progress," passed strong resolutions against the war in Iraq and has moved on to living wage campaigns and struggles against Wal-Mart. Even the U.S. Conference of Mayors has recently called for redirecting the resources squandered in wars in Iraq and Afghanistan to address the real human needs in cities at home. [Empower DC and "Nobody Leaves" in Boston.] In Madison, Wisconsin, "Progressive Dane" has crafted a local platform and run candidates for local office with some success, and in Iowa City, Iowa, FAIR! has worked on open, low-cost housing, municipalization of the electric utility, and endorsement of local progressive candidates.

We need a new "translocal" political vocabulary that affirms the common struggle to make grassroots democracy a living reality in communities and workplaces around the globe, not filtered through the leadership of national or international figureheads. We need good historical models for how the integrity of such local mobilization can be sustained and nurtured. What is clear is that social movements must remain linked to their own grassroots, must practice "participatory democracy" (to use the old SDS term), and must actively and self-consciously resist

We need a new "translocal" political vocabulary that affirms the common struggle to make grassroots democracy a living reality in communities and workplaces around the globe

the "oligarchical" tendencies that Robert Michels more than a century ago identified as a virus to which popular movements are themselves susceptible. New national and international structures of solidarity may emerge from local activism. World and regional social forums are an important point of contact and means to build translocal ties and coordinate international actions. New forms of struggle are being invented, or redeployed in new ways, through the direct sharing trans-locally of organizing experience among workers, as recently occurred between New York City's Chinatown

and Shanghai garment workers; through locally-organized, international boycotts of the products of abusive firms like Koch Industries', BP, and Hyatt Hotels; and through anti-corporate sit-ins such as those across Britain directed at tax-cheating businesses, like international cell phone giant Vodafone, facilitated through social media contacts that mobilized activists in London, Leeds, and some of the country's smallest and most conservative hamlets.

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

Reflections on Wisconsin and Ohio

We present here perspectives on the events in Wisconsin and Ohio. The first is by Wisconsin resident and retired history professor Paul Buhle, who together with Mari Jo Buhle, has just published an edited collection of accounts and reflections on the mobilization, *It Started in Wisconsin*. (Verso, 2012). It is followed by labor educator Michael Yates, with an excerpt from the introduction to his new edited anthology, *Uprising: Labor Fights Back* (Monthly Review, March 2012). In July, I interviewed two veterans of labor protest from the Midwest, Jerry Tucker and Ed Sadowski, and excerpts of that interview are presented next. We end the section with a reflection by labor historian Caroline Merithew on the recent landmark win in Ohio against SB5.

“It Started in Wisconsin” - but WHY?

Paul Buhle

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

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

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

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

Labor historians (among others) taking part—Wis-

consinites or visitors—seemed to follow two lines of logic. In one version, the mobilization against the Republican drive to eliminate state workers’ unions, setting off months of mass meetings in major cities and other events across the state, was leading toward a General Strike but was betrayed by Democrats, union leaders, etc. In the other, hazier version, “General Strike” was a great metaphor but never more than that. The mobilization triggered by the flight of fourteen Democratic Senators from the State inevitably came back to the political process, and for that matter, state workers were compelled to claim the high moral ground by staying at their jobs, after a short break, showing that their ability to make public services available was the key issue, not their own standard of living, however reduced or endangered.

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

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

Here’s one final note along the same lines: the role of firefighters, not only showing themselves in uniform (with bagpipes blaring, and kilts on show), but bringing along police into sympathy, is a labor phenomenon not yet grasped, even by our wisest heads (many them of gazing these pages) of labor lore.

Think about it as these two books and a collection of John Nichols’ essays, due later in Spring 2012, appear. There are no simple answers, nor should there be. The way we look at labor history will be shaped along with our look at the present.

Uprising: Labor Fights Back

Michael Yates

The U.S. economy and the economies of nearly every other country are under the firm control of financiers rich beyond comprehension, and these individuals and the firms they direct want a pliable and insecure worldwide labor force that will do their bidding. They stand ready to exert their enormous power to get their way, whether by shutting down plants, moving offshore, outsourcing jobs, disseminating propaganda through their media, or flooding politicians with money. They have no loyalty to any country, only to the expansion of their capital. If a nation tries to put in place policies that benefit working people, finance capital stands ready to attack its currency and move

Reflections on Wisconsin and Ohio

its resources elsewhere. Governments disobey their monied masters at their peril.

What all of this means is that the trajectory of working-class life is at best stagnant and at worst continuously downward, ever more pinched and insecure. The rich will get richer, and the rest of us will serve them in one way or another. It will not matter who is president or prime minister or what promises any aspiring politician makes. Whatever could be done to alleviate human misery will not be done. In the United States, there will be no “New Deal,” no universal health care, no concern for the poor, the aged, the infirm. There will be nothing but a deepening assault on the living standards of the working class.

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

Unless, that is, we do something about it. At the end of *The Communist Manifesto*, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels said, “The workers have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. Workers of all countries, unite!” These words might sound like quaint, antiquated slogans of a bygone era. But they are as relevant as ever. One proof of this is that the enemies of the workers, the finance capitalists with all the power, have taken them to heart for a long time. As Warren Buffett famously said, “There’s class warfare, all right, but it’s my class, the rich class, that’s making war, and we’re winning.” Perhaps it is the time for us to wage class war in return. If much of what we had has already been taken, and what we still possess is under assault, we really don’t have much more to lose but our chains.

Just last year, I would have said that the working class was not doing much to break its chains. But the rule of capital is fraught with contradictions, and rebellions can break loose at any time and be triggered by any number of events. We can never tell which spark will start a fire. Today, it seems that something is in the air. Perhaps the rattling of the chains. Perhaps the smell of smoke. For many months now, millions of people around the world have been rising up in protest against dictatorships that have not only denied their citizens basic democratic rights but have implemented the neoliberal agenda of attacks on workers. In Tunisia and Egypt, the masses said “enough is enough,” took to the streets, and overthrew their governments. In Bahrain and Yemen, they bravely faced bullets to demand freedom. Civil war erupted in Libya, and protests spread to Syria. Chinese workers have been organizing, as have those in India and South Africa. Iran may soon once again see its streets full of anti-government demonstrators.

What my friend and contributor to this book, Elly Leary, said about the top leadership of most U.S. labor unions applies in spades to the world’s autocrats, “Everyone can and should be replaced.”

Uprisings have also struck the rich countries, most dramatically in Greece, but also in Spain, Ireland, and Great Britain. In England, poor neighborhoods, frustrated by years of public neglect and police brutality, exploded in demonstrations and riots. There is no doubt that such events will happen again as capital and its government handmaidens continue to tighten the screws.

In the United States, the first notable uprising, and the subject of this book, took place last February and March, with the remarkable actions of public employees in Madison, Wisconsin. The massive protests initiated by public employees in response to the attack upon them

engineered by Governor Scott Walker electrified the nation... Working persons around the country have taken heart from this. Protests have erupted in other states, and ongoing struggles, in both the public and the private sector, have been given a boost by the Madison example. As living standards continue to deteriorate, what happened and continues to happen in Wisconsin will give others the courage to rebel. As this book goes to press, tens of thousands of workers, students, veterans, retirees, and others have joined the great Occupy Wall Street occupations and protests. Look for these to grow and deepen. “The story of coal is always the same.”

Reflections from Two Labor Activist Veterans

In July, at a commemoration of the 1877 general strike in St. Louis, I met with 2 veteran activists from the labor movement of the 1970s. Ed Sadowski is former director of Chicago-based United Steelworkers District 31 and was insurgent candidate for the United Steel Workers Union in the 1970s. Jerry Tucker is a St. Louis activist and leader of the UAW New Directions movement in the 1980s and 1990s. Tucker had just come back from a meeting with Wisconsin activists. Sadowski’s son, Ed Sadowski, Jr., who works for American State Municipal and State Employees, is directly involved in the movement in Wisconsin. Both expressed how connected they felt to the new movement. As two figures who reflect what Shelton Stromquist labelled translocal historical traditions, as well as the traditions of shop floor mobilizations as explored by David Montgomery, they connect with a number of the pieces in this issue. Here are a few excerpts from an interview with them that I conducted on that day, prompted by asking them what they thought about the Andy Stern interview in the Spring issue of Labor.

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

Ed Sadowski (ES): Wisconsin is the most important thing that has happened, equal to the inceptions of the CIO. If Wisconsin falls, it's like pins in a bowling alley. If you rally to a movement, you will get the ball rolling. Why we've only made that limited progress, is the real question at hand. And that question and hurdle has been in front of us for the last 200 odd years alone, not just yesterday or in Wisconsin. The labor movement has never been capable of adapting, in that sense of a long policy, of having people feel that they belong, belong to something that is right, belong to something that is fair, belong to something that creates a way to eliminate injustices, and provides a better life for their heirs to come. We've failed miserably in that sense, in as much as we've tried, it hasn't been too much of a try, we have to learn to structure something that people can relate to, that people can be proud of being a part of ... those emotional things. Just because someone pays dues doesn't make them union. That's what's going on in Wisconsin, trying to collect dues on the job. There might be some good come out of that, to have a staff rep go on the site, to sign somebody up. That remains to be seen... We haven't passed that knowledge on, the union as an institution, that's our failings. To correct those failings we have to educate, agitate, organize. A lot of people have been shut out...

Jerry Tucker (JT): This is a long span of history, from the cordwainers first efforts, and we have failed to place the struggle that workers have against capital in perspective, and create an ongoing concept of struggle. The exploitation is built into the system, and it's an automatic aspect of the system. Capital will exploit, it will exploit itself, they'll eat each other, if there is no one else to devour. But workers have of course, been the main course at this point all these years. The labor movement, in its various incarnations, some have been better than others. The Knights had certain attributes and the CIO had certain attributes that we could look at that were considerably better. In all cases we have failed as a labor movement, to see ourselves in this relatively eternal conflict, that by its nature exists between capital and labor, and to adapt our ability to deal with it. The recent industrial relations system was a product of struggle where workers had penetrated to the core, so they call in the safe minds of the labor movement, we'll create an industrial relations model. From our side, it needed complacent, vertically aligned leaders. It did not need what the mass movements represented, which was horizontal, that's where workers were engaging in self-activity, where they were lifting their own sails and flying into the face of an enemy that they could know. So capital comes along, and is a little more concerned about it. The politicians were bending toward creating the accommodation, the Roosevelt and Truman administrations. The labor leaders didn't go to sleep. They offered workers a version of détente or peace,

and said, we've got a system now. They did it to industrial, to the public sector and the service sector which was beginning to emerge during this period into unionism, but it was the industrial sector that set the stage. The Reuther administration played a significant role in moving to co-opt the energy that was there. Out of it, the ascendancy of America as a superpower, they saw the way to make tangible gains, with improvement of job security, working conditions. And so a lot of leaders, they grew into this. When I would say in the auto plants, "Why don't we fight that," they'd say, "that's just an incidental grievance. We have hundreds of them."

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

JT: This is the great "chilldown" that had already been the mode of operation. We left struggle by the wayside. And we really failed to be honest with the rank and file members, that this is an eternal struggle. It became unacceptable to talk about it, tricks like red-baiting to divide us into compartmentalized groups... At this point, we're at a point where the opportunity to educate and to organize, does exist, unlike what was going on in the 1970s

RF: So you actually feel this is more opportune than then?

JS: Oh, yeah.

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

JT: 120,000 people showed up at the state capital. When the challenge became so direct, so brutish, did it take a call from on high to respond? No, the calls were in the closet. Here's an old saying we used to use in the plant, "You can't lead from the rear." Were they anywhere near the front of the parade when the things began? Not from what I can tell.

RF: What do you see as the potential, given your experiences?

ES: Make more pals.

JT: Get a bigger gang.

ES: Emma Goldman, advised young workers: She said, When in Milwaukee learn how to polka. That's the frailty of the labor movement, they need to learn to polka in Milwaukee. Without the labor movement, we're dead. We've got to revitalize it.

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

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

sector is different.

ES: The public service worker has had that instilled in him, that he or she's not a working stiff. They look at that negatively, it's like a Bob Cratchit mentality, into those guys and gals. The issue is how do we turn that around?

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

ES: To rebuild what you've got there you can't surrender to the Democratic Party, letting Democratic Party have part of the strategy, is what is the problem.

JT: They have a choice... What we're trying to do in Wisconsin is speak truth to power. What they want is the energy of the working class but they want the money of the capitalist class, to keep them afloat. We've faced these issues historically. Carter broke every promise, Clinton broke his promises, Obama is on the same track that has presented historically. If workers are reorganized to sense their own power and to begin to exert it where it really counts... Jim Cavanaugh my old friend in Wisconsin has introduced general strike concept. You don't talk about a general strike, as much as, how do coordinated job actions move the ball forward and down the field. I wouldn't use the term general strike, that's a mythical thing... But the idea of worker power as a concept, even in public unions, and how you get that power, is the critical issue.

RF: Were there missed opportunities to create that power in the past?

JT: I think there were opportunities in the 1970s that did exist, and it was awfully hard to get around the leadership and the legacy of red-baiting. Lane Kirkland called the Humphries Hawkins Full employment law, "Oh that's that planning shit." We had this much-touted labor law reform act similar to the recent EFCA, on the public policy side, in the Carter administration. What did we do? First thing we did, was send this much touted team of lawyers, including the never-lamented Steve Slossberg, among others, in to meet with John Dunlap, and modi-

The problem today comes from the idea that you don't need struggle. You make progress through accommodation, but how can that be? Only if you have equal power can you accommodate. Capital doesn't sleep and its got the whole globe as its playground.

- Jerry Tucker

fied the bill before it was introduced, to meet the potential objections of the corporate community. As soon as it was introduced, the corporations reiterated a whole new set of objections, which of course then we had to work backwards from. But we had this organizing moment. And we rallied people all over the country. And then when we didn't get it, we said, "oh, ok" (laughter) We didn't do grassroots. The labor movement did not do grassroots.

RF: But they would say, we had busses to Washington, it was grassroots.

ES: But that's not grassroots, that's sending people to Washington. You got off the bus and then you went home.

JT: On Solidarity Day in 1981 and 1982, you went both times when nobody was in session. Craziest thing. These decisions were made by those who wanted to avoid conflict, people like Lane Kirkland.

ES: These were issues that if they had been rallied around, like in the 1930s, or like their doing in Wisconsin today, we would not be in the situation we are in today.

JT: The problem today comes from the idea that you don't need struggle. You make progress through accommodation, but how can that be? Only if you have equal power can you accommodate. Capital doesn't sleep and its got the whole globe as its playground. In order to wage war on a global basis like they are doing, we have to link up; a global sense of an injury to one is an injury to all.

RF: But Andy Stern would say that the only way to work this out to advantage to workers, and some workers might say, how can we really fight on a global scale where capital has such advantage?

JT: That's the fault of leaders who didn't describe it in more practical terms.

ES: We have to start thinking out of the box, on the issue of time, workday. We have to regear ourselves. The first resolution in the CIO was for a 6 hour day. That was 1937. Today they're working 12 hours a day in steel plants. I scream this out to Wisconsin. This is not an issue oriented campaign that needs to be waged, but a movement-oriented campaign.

JT: The issue is that we're in a class struggle. Our job is to say a worker is a worker is a worker. It's going to require rank and file to be caught up. When workers are engaged in struggle, their ears are open. We can connect their experiences with workers in Bangladesh. We have the capacity to talk about what's going on across the globe as part of capital's history.

ES: To be the driving force.

JT: Then some of the leaders will get out of the way. One of them, has already quit, Andy Stern.

ES: I got worse words than collaboration, for de-

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scribing him.... But we have to not focus on those types, but instead concentrate on all the people at the base who have so much unrealized potential. I look for a better tomorrow, I really do.

We Are All Ohio

Caroline Merithew, University of Dayton

One February back in the late twentieth century, my husband and I received a holiday card from my good-hearted and generous coastal in-laws. The card wasn't for Valentine's Day but rather a belated Christmas-Hanukkah-New Year's greeting that had arrived to us via Indiana (the state on the address label). Though I am Midwestern by origin and culture, I have never lived in the Hoosier state (and neither has my California-born husband). To my in-laws (and to many others, I suspect), the large swath of land hugged by the Mississippi and the Ohio Rivers and by all the Great Lakes minus Ontario are "fly-overs" which may become interesting (and perhaps even exotic) every four years when bogus presidential politicking is especially egregious. Things changed in 2011. That's when we all became Ohio.¹

The We Are Ohio (WAO) campaign started in late February 2011, a few weeks after John Kasich attempted to make taking the oath of the highest public office in the state a private midnight affair in his home. Senate Bill 5 (SB5) was passed by a Republican controlled legislature and, if made law, would have overturned Ohio's 1983 collective bargaining law and denied the 350,000 public workers the freedom required for collective bargaining. Thousands of teachers, prison guards, fire fighters, police officers, nurses, and their supporters rallied at the statehouse in Columbus to protest the SB5. On February 22, before the doors were ordered locked, one thousand people entered the chambers to witness and voice their opinions at the quick "public" hearings being held. State permits allow for triple that number but the thousands more waiting outside in the cold were not allowed into the statehouse. No one who had listened to Governor Kasich (through his work as a US congressman, as a commentator on Fox, and in his 2010 campaign to lead the state) could've been all that surprised that he signed SB5 into law. And his preference for secrecy, exhibited in his hope for a private oath, foreshadowed his signing of the bill after the statehouse was closed for the night on the evening of March 31st.

What surprised most (as reflected by the behavior of the coastal relatives who were now calling our house and emailing us with condolence messages), is what Ohioans did over the spring and summer. Within a week, We Are

Ohio collected 3000 signatures which launched the petition drive for the referendum and by late June, the group submitted to the Secretary of State petitions with 1.3 million signatures (four times the number needed to get the referendum, which became Issue 2, on the November ballot). Mary Lou Guizza, an Ohio native and one of the 17,000 WOA volunteers collected 500 signatures for the first referendum:

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

From the southeastern Ohio perspective where I live which, before We Are Ohio, matched some of the stereotypes my in-laws highlighted in their riffs against "Republicana" Midwestern dreg lands, the region's different and more exuberant attributes were being highlighted. "No On Issue 2" signs in their multiple forms appeared everywhere -- on city lots, well-kempt suburban lawns, edges of corn fields, and highways.

This is what made the movement -- this is the only way to make a movement. For example, the teach-in we held at the University of Dayton was packed with Republican, Democrats, and independents, intellectuals and activists, Religious studies scholars and labor historians. The rallies here, and across the state, included policemen and firefighters and the university students and teachers who would (by late November) become the Occupy movement's frontline. "It was hard to demonize those groups who people knew were like them." said Vincent Miller who holds the Gudorf Chair in Catholic Theology and Culture at the University of Dayton (UD). As Shawn Cassiman, UD Assistant Professor of Social Work put it:

The legislative attack upon public sector workers in states with newly elected Republican governors was well orchestrated. Perhaps such manipulation of the legislative process contributed to the mobilization of unions and union supporters here. Perhaps the language used to disparage public sector workers revealed how they were the next logical target in a long list of targets. Perhaps the Occupy Wall Street (OWS) movement contributed to the critical consciousness of folks that had not previously examined workers' rights. But, I believe it was nexus of all

1. Not even good progressive *Mother Jones Magazine* seems to understand the issue. Wisconsin, a cooler Midwestern state because of Madison sometimes fits into a different paradigm. Andy Kroll hinted the point in "Four Reasons Why Ohio Isn't Wisconsin," November 7, 2011, <<http://motherjones.com/politics/2011/11/ohio-kasich-wisconsin-scott-walker-union>>. The magazine's Mac McClelland lumped Florida in with the bunch in her "Ohio's War on the Middle Class," November/December 2011.

Reflections on Wisconsin and Ohio

of these that brought folks out in large numbers to defeat Senate Bill 5.

The capstone of the anti-SB5 movement has become OWS now. As Cassiman said, together both movements "closed the divisions that had been erected between union worker and non-union worker, worker and the unemployed, "them" and "us." As Thomas Suddes pointed out in his November 12, 2011 *Plain Dealer* article, only two counties (the old Goldwater stronghold and one in the Amish heartland) said yes to Issue 2. So, it is more difficult to find the "them" in "us" now or, at least, to see no "us" in "them." Miller, who lives across the street from a police officer who drives a Suburban with bumper stickers that

read "All my heroes are cowboys" with images of Ronald Reagan, have rarely spoke in unison. They did so against Issue 2 this year (and maybe will do so again in 2012).

The defeat of SB5 was about more than economics and thus parallels most working people's victories in history.

That is why We Are All Ohio! Welcome.



Crowd at one of the first organizing meetings on SB5 in Dayton, (Courthouse Square)

Credit: Shawn Cassiman

Events and Conferences Report

LAWCHA and the Commemoration of Triangle, 2011

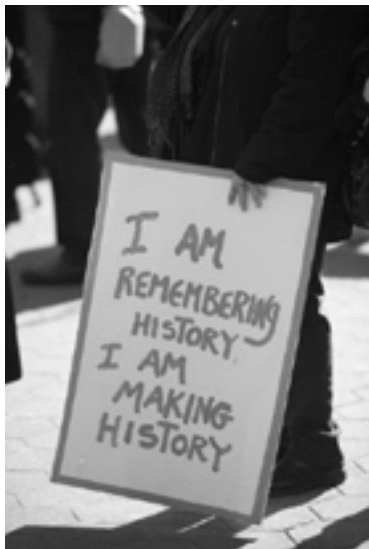
Rosemary Feurer, Northern Illinois University

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

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

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

In March 2011, a series of extraordinary commemorative activities, including participatory performance

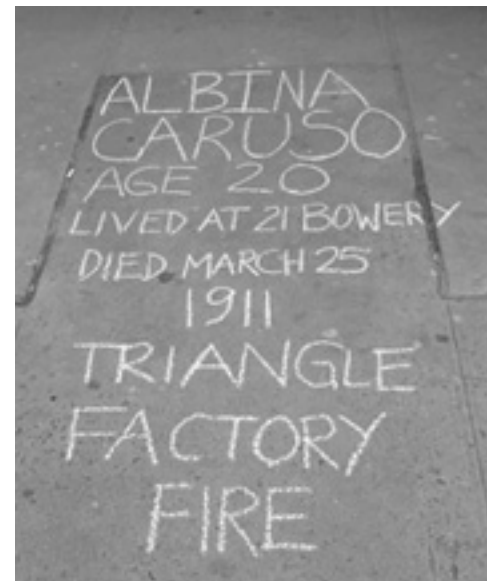


Credit: R.J. Michels

events, took place in New York and around the country. LAWCHA sponsored a day-long conference at CUNY Grad Center. On March 25, a stunning march was led by family members of the victims, and included 146 handmade shirtwaists and sashes carrying victim's names attached to bamboo poles, held aloft by participants. One participant blew a shofar, and others sang Italian songs from the period. Union members who carry on the struggle for a safe workplace, as well as teachers, historians,

labor activists participated in these and other events.

Historian Annalise Orleck, who was part of the Triangle Program Committee, remarked, "The Triangle Centennial events in NYC marked an amazing coming together of scholars, artists, family members of victims, youth activists and an international array of today's labor organizers. Coal miners, catfish workers, garment workers, taxi drivers from as nearby as New York City and as far away as Ban-



Credit: RJ Michels

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

LAWCHA members also participated in events in Chicago, Iowa City, Minneapolis-St. Paul and Bay Area as well. Since March, the coalition has continued its work. Updates and new events can be found at the website, where you can also donate to this cause, and find resources about the Triangle event in past and present. <<http://rememberthetrianglefire.org/>>.

Events and Conferences

LAWCHA at the SLSA Meeting

Chad Pearson, Collins College

Over a hundred attendees gathered in Atlanta for the 2011 Southern Labor Studies Association conference, "Memory vs. Forgetting: Labor History and the Archive," which was designated as 2011 LAWCHA conference. The three-day conference included stimulating panels on periods ranging from the Reconstruction Era to the present. Presenters covered some of today's most cutting-edge topics, including the different ways in which working class culture has found expression, labor union activism in confrontation with anti-union ideas and movements, non-industrial workers, the tensions between free and un-free labor, and the ways in which gender and race have intersected with class. This conference was more than a normal academic event. Angered by the attack on public sector unions throughout the Midwest, and inspired by the spirited fight-back in Madison, Wisconsin, several panelists suggested ways that labor historians can help educate the public about today's powerful conservative forces. Indeed, the most passionate labor historians are often socially active in their communities.

The links between activism and scholarship were spelled-out clearly in Robert Korstad's thought-provoking speech, "Searching for a Usable Past: Fifty Years of Writing Southern Labor History." Noting the close connections between Civil Rights activists and the writing of labor history, Korstad confirmed that some of most influential scholarship emerged at a time when scholar-activists grappled with finding ways to confront white supremacy, conservative politicians, and union-busting employers. Korstad's

talk has been posted at the Southern Labor Studies site at <<http://southernlaborstudies.org/category/scholarly-talks/>>.

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

Stetson Kennedy, a pivotal historical figure, was featured as part of the conference. Kennedy, a folklorist who gained fame as "America's Number 1 Klanbuster" in the late 1940s for his exposure of the workings of the Ku Klux Klan relied in part on the work of a union member. Andrea Kalin's new film, *Dissident at Large: Stetson Kennedy Unmasked*, was followed by a panel discussion in which Kennedy presented reflections on his long record of



Chad Pearson
Credit: Tom Klug



LAWCHA Travel Grant recipient A. Lane Windham with SLSA keynote speaker Bob Korstad.
Credit: Tom Klug



LAWCHA Member Paul Ortiz with Sandra Parks, wife of Stetson Kennedy, and Stetson Kennedy, right.
Credit: Tom Klug

activism.

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

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

Conference attendees in private conversations and in public forums pledged to reignite the fighting spirit of labor historians, and then concluded Saturday night with

a dance. A good time was had by all, though this writer recommends that labor historians should not quit their day jobs! We are all thankful to the organizers and the sponsors, and look forward to future conferences.



LAWCHA Board Member Clarence Lang and Nancy MacLean
Credit: Tom Klug

LAWCHA Labor Outreach Committee Report

David Zonderman, NC State University

The Labor Outreach Committee of the Southern Labor Studies Association (SLSA) and the Labor Activism Committee of LAWCHA sponsored two outreach panels at the SLSA/LAWCHA conference in Atlanta, April 7-10, 2011.

The first panel featured colleagues from across the South and Midwest speaking about labor activism on their campuses and in their communities. Given the recent assault on public workers' collective bargaining rights sweeping out of the heartland like a reactionary prairie fire, many in attendance spoke about the vital need for building strong bridges between public university workers (faculty, graduate assistants, and staff) and other public sector employees throughout state and local government. Those assembled agreed that faculty need to have their own strong organizations and then link those efforts to campus-wide labor groups as well as to broader community alliances on issues such as living wage campaigns and defending the public sector from reactionary political forces.

The second panel brought together students, staff, and community activists from campuses across Georgia

to talk about their specific campaigns for campus workers' rights and students' access to affordable higher education. Representatives from Agnes Scott College, Emory University, Georgia State University, and University of Georgia all spoke passionately and eloquently about the connections between low wage workers' struggles for a decent income and working-class students' recent realization that drastic budget cuts may force many of them to give up their dreams for a college education. These students, workers, and community organizers are building strong coalitions at campuses across the state, and are constantly in dialogue with each other using the latest in social media technology. As proof of their commitment to a shared struggle, several campus groups launched protests—including sit-ins in various administration buildings—shortly after the conference; and then continued to mobilize to support each other in the face of university threats to arrest and potentially expel the student protesters.

Midwest Labor and Working Class History Graduate Student Conference

Matt Mettler, University of Iowa

The Midwest Labor and Working-Class History colloquium (MLWCH) was held at the University of Iowa on April 15th and 16th, 2011, and it was a smashing success. Staughton and Alice Lynd joined graduate students in labor history from around the Midwest for the event. On Friday evening, Staughton Lynd gave a rousing keynote speech on guerrilla history to a group of approximately 80 people. In it, he recounted his and Alice's lifelong dedication to social justice and used their experiences to demonstrate how we can practice guerrilla history. He also reminded his audience that thought without action has plagued academia in the United States for many years. To address this conundrum, he called on those who practice history to also develop other professional skills in order to engage in struggles for social justice. The Lynd's personal history of activism on behalf of workers, prisoners, draftees and others is an example of how that can be done.

The Lynds encouraged graduate students who participated in MLWCH to learn to let the voice of historical participants speak by viewing themselves as equal to their subjects. In doing so, historians must reconsider their own intellectual boundaries that often prevent them from capturing history from the perspective of the actor. Many graduate students and other participants were inspired by the community building that the MLWCH colloquium generated. This feeling of camaraderie was epitomized in the closing moments of the



Alice Lynd, left and Staughton Lynd, seated, dialog with graduate students at the annual MLWCh conference.
Credit: Janine Giordano

conference, in which Staughton Lynd led the participants in singing "One Man's Hands" and "Solidarity Forever." The next conference will be at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee in March 2012. See the website for more registration details.

Working-Class Worlds: Local and Global Perspectives on Labor History at the University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa

Matt Mettler, University of Iowa

Over the weekend of July 8-9, 2011 students, colleagues, friends, and family of labor historian Shelton Stromquist gathered in Iowa City to partake in a conference in his honor. As Shel made abundantly clear over the weekend, the conference was neither a retirement party nor his idea. Rather, the conference was the brainchild of a number of Shel's former and current graduate students, who for years had been discussing the idea of formally celebrating Shel's life, scholarship, and mentorship. With former students Eric Fure-Slocum and Dennis Deslippe spearheading the effort, Shel's students finally put the idea – jokingly called "Shelfest" into action. Shel came on board only after he was assured that the conference would focus less on him than on the areas of labor and working-class history that he

had helped to build. Thus, "Shelfest" became *Working-Class Worlds: Local and Global Perspectives on Labor History*.

The conference included three panels of scholarly presentations that emphasized Shel's interest in local and global history; the intersection of these seemingly contradictory approaches are the subject of his forthcoming study, which will provide a comparative history of municipal socialism around the globe. Many of presentations came from Shel's students, which provided a glimpse into how Shel's approach to history has influenced those around him. The presentations were also decidedly international in nature, as several of colleagues that he met on his international research trips made the journey to Iowa. Two roundtable sessions provided a forum for the roomful of approximately

Events and Conferences

60 participants to discuss the topics relating to the teaching of working class history, as well as the state of the labor movement and the field of working class studies. The recent mass protests in Wisconsin over collective bargaining rights served as a backdrop to the thought-provoking discussions among the many labor historians and activists in the crowd.

The lively roundtable discussions were just the formal part of a larger conversation that continued through-

out a weekend of socializing, fellowship, and music. In addition to Shel's moving speech to end of the conference, a high point for many was the opportunity to hear from Shel's mentor, the late David Montgomery. Montgomery's speech, "Creative Research and Social Action: Shel and His Generation," [ed: see page 20] was a fascinating history of a social movement among scholars, the values of which Montgomery helped pioneer and pass on to Shel, who in turn passed them onto his graduate students.

"Pennsylvania Labor History Workshop Welcomes Paper Proposals"

Dennis Deslippe, Franklin and Marshall College

One of the many signs of labor history's strength is the creation of new local and regional labor history organizations. Since mid-2010 scholars, educators and activists in Pennsylvania have gathered every few months to discuss fellow members' research and enjoy a meal together. The most recent meeting, in December 2011, featured essays by John Eneyart (Bucknell University) on "American Anti-Fascism, Louis Adamic, and Progressive Liberalism, 1920-1951" and Andrew Arnold (Kutztown University) on "Stalemate: Coal Operators, Coal Miners, and Railroad Managers, 1883-1886." Future meetings will include works-in-progress by Rachel Batch, Anthony DeStefanis, Sharon Sidorick, and James Wolfinger.

The workshop is interested in projects that con-

cern Pennsylvania labor history, but it is also a venue for labor historians based in the state whose current research in focused on other locales. Interested individuals can contact David Witwer at <dxw44@psu.edu>.

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Remembering

David Montgomery

1927-2011

David Montgomery's influence on the field of labor history is without parallel. His death on December 2 is mourned by LAWCHA members. The author of many books, his approach to labor history was connected to the left wing of the last major labor upheaval, the 1930s. He worked for 10 years as a machinist in New York and in the Twin Cities. He was a member of the Communist Party for a time, and an enthusiastic member of the United Electrical Workers, which retained its focus on community-based organizing. It was the union whose occupation at Republic Window and Door in 2008 connects current and past uprisings. Here we present reflections on his life, starting and ending this segment with his own words. In July, he recounted the way that a generation of historians inspired him and the meaning of those generations to the current struggles. We continue with memories from those inspired by him, and then conclude with an excerpt from 2009 UE convention speech.

Creative Research and Social Action: Shel and His Generation

David Montgomery
July 8, 2011

This is an edited excerpt, transcribed by Rosemary Feuerer. The video is available at <<http://www.laborhistory-links.niu.edu/>>. Thanks to Dennis Deslippe for providing the video from which this transcript was made.

(Shel) came to Pittsburgh at a time when an absolutely marvelous group of people gathered. And it wasn't only in Pittsburgh. In Pittsburgh, in Binghamton, in Berkeley, in New York, there were new clusters of people wanting to study the history of workers. And they were coming about for two reasons.

Many of those discontented students were very suspicious of the labor movement of the time. They saw it as an essentially conservative force standing in our way... Until, from my personal experience, I would say, the great earth shaking event was the post office workers strike of New York in 1970. Suddenly here was something that swelled up from the grassroots, went right through the law, forgot all the existing rules and regulations that had been created, and took many students who had been very skeptical of the labor movement and of the working class out on the picket lines for the first time... Quite a few people who came to Pitt had been through that experience.

So when I came back from two years working in England here waiting for me was one of the greatest

bunches of students anybody could hope to come across. Shel was one of them, Peter (Rachleff) was one of them, Cecelia (Bucki) was one of them. They are all over the place here, Jim (Barrett)! They all came to gather around certain basic principles. The first was the time had come to concentrate our historical work on ordinary working people, auto workers, white, black, yellow, whatever nationality wherever they might be at that time, to see the crucial importance of community. Two books came out of that. One was Shel's book on railroad workers which looked at those workers in the communities where they lived and in that jobs where they lived-- in the character of those jobs. Another was a book I have to mention because only half of it ever got published. This is Peter Rachleff on Richmond which showed how a city in the south became a union stronghold after the Civil War, where two parallel union movements got established, one among the white workers and one among the black workers, but actually associating with each other.... And studying what kind of struggles they engaged, what kind of goals they set for themselves.

... It was EP Thompson's book (*Making of the English Working Class*) that was very influential on us... Here was a study in which the initiative, the role, the thinking of working men and women themselves played the central role, and class was not just a statistical category. What was Thompson's classic phrase? Class was the friction when some people in society rub up against others day by day. A sense of who is in what class comes out of that daily encounter on the job in the home.

This sense then really invigorated many of the students at Pitt ... and led to several important beliefs. One is that history is a collective project. This is not the place that we want to see who is the great shining star. Oh, how the academy liked the shiny stars! But we saw this as a place for all of us to work, gather around and single out tasks to underscore and build on with each other. So each student quickly counted on the collective help, the assistance of others.

And it was a sense that we had to study working men and women themselves. These were working men and women coming from the four corners of the earth, this massive movement of immigrants. The one study everyone had to read in every class of mine was Frank Thistlewaite's study on migration from Europe to the Americas. (*Migration from Europe Overseas in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries, 1960*) to recognize this as a movement of the peoples to make a new kind of working class life, here within the United States itself. The great struggle that took place to form themselves together, from the Civil War and

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Reconstruction, onwards, the different ways in which different nationalities and races of workers formed themselves together to make their contributions to working class movement.

And finally in teaching and writing history it was crucial to become active in today's labor movement. There was a sense in all of that Pittsburgh group, to surround itself and become active in the great struggle then developing. Since that time look what happened... Here is an entire new generation and yet another generation, carrying on the work...

But also new problems and new circumstances have arisen, coinciding with the great U-turn of the 1970s. Corporations realized that the ... living standards of working people in England, in the US, were creeping upwards. What to do, what to do? Richard Nixon used the power of the state more vigorously and more heavily in his attempts to control this, but soon it was clear that that was not enough. I invite you to read a book that I suspect many of you never have: William Simon Secretary of the Treasury under Nixon (wrote) *A Time for Truth*, on why, when New York City overspent its budget and went bankrupt, why the treasury refused to come up with money. The headlines read "Simon to New York: Go to Hell!" Here was the first signal of this new policy that has gripped us: Excessive spending is our problem, and we have to revitalize the private sector of the economy (in response to the public workers). This goal of privatization, of cutting down the budgets, cutting down taxes on the rich (which have gone down steadily ever since the 1970s in this country) became and the crucial theme. Together with the theme that Goldwater first announced, which in recent days has become almost a gospel: the theme that the only person that really matters in this world is me. Huhnph! That the beauty of life is to be a hog!!! With both feet in the trough if at all possible... The more we have to get rid of all this wasteful expenditure. All of it being a waste that is, except this massive military budget, as it becomes our self-assigned project to control the entire world in these times. And this reversal has had the profound effect of one industry after another shutting down til the country becomes ghost towns. Then, along with that setting factories up in other parts of the world and getting



David Montgomery speaking to picnickers.
Credit: Anna Fure-Slocum

into the business of buying up each other. With this result, a recent UN study came up with this figure not long ago: 78% of the world's manufacturing workers are outside of the old domain of the industrial sector. As firms were moving, they're undertaking all around the globe itself, that migration has come back on a scale that even Thistlewaite could not imagine. The latest figure is that there are 210,000,000 immigrants in the world today coming mostly not to the United States, mostly not to Europe, but to the Arab world is a major center for this attraction, along with Southeast Asia, this new migration.

So we've got to take a lot of these cold subjects and think of them in brand new ways, in new categories. What worked in the 1970s will not work today. But what we're trying to do still does cover and interpret and teach what it is that working people have contributed to this society and are contributing elsewhere around the world today. To revitalize and redefine that whole sense of internationalism... And to do so in a way that keeps us committed to our neighbors to our fellow working people and to others around the world in working

class struggles. These become the legacy of that sixties generation that we must now translate into new terms, translating, as the old song went, "carry it on!"

Remembering David Montgomery: Pittsburgh

Jim Barrett, University of Illinois

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

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on one side of the high-level bridge and US Steel's historic Homestead mill on the other.

But the mills and the hills were not the draw for students of the working class. They were there because the city was the home of David Montgomery, the machinist and union militant turned history professor, the guy who seemed to be transforming the field of working class history. Some came to Pittsburgh via Warwick University where David had helped E.P. Thompson to establish the Center for the Study of Social History as the first of many visiting American professors at the Coventry campus. Others came directly from work in the factories and a series of left wing organizations still thriving at the time.

Montgomery's lectures have become legendary. It was quite remarkable to watch this nerdy looking guy in the plaid sports coat (always a coat and tie when lecturing) rivet large classes of undergraduates, and often admiring graduate students, to their seats. With an energy we envied, he invested the everyday work and community lives, the strikes and unions of our parents and grandparents with a drama we found intoxicating. But no matter how much he loved to talk about these events, David usually saved time for student discussion. He based these on raw documents – court transcripts, work rules, wage rates which he carefully collected and reproduced on mimeographed sheets. (One semester, after I had graded this large lecture course, he asked me if I could see anything he might improve. At the time, it seemed like the Pope was asking for pointers on how to say the Mass. I screwed up my courage and mentioned that when he asked students questions, he often did not give them time to answer. This, he explained, came from his time at the base radio station

in Los Alamos: No dead time allowed on air.

David's graduate seminars were highly-charged affairs, the reading lists a mixture of original documents and the latest works in labor history and related fields. The group of students was extremely cohesive, but it would be dishonest to ignore the competition for David's attention; this was natural, given our admiration for him. It was remarkable, however, that he never betrayed a greater respect (or critical eye) for one student's work than another's.

Notwithstanding conventional wisdom about David's approach to labor history, his seminars often took us beyond the walls of the factory and union hall. Readings on women's and family history were very much a part of these discussions. The highlight my first year was a seminar on race and class developed by David with the help of his students. There was no "race problem" in Montgomery's approach that I could discern; the historical problem of racism among white workers and the efforts to overcome this barrier and create interracial workers' movements was the central issue we discussed.

We sometimes worked on papers collectively and shared them with the group and we looked forward to discussions of David's own work in progress. The students all appeared very brilliant to me, but most of them preferred to listen to Montgomery who seemed to wring every ounce of significance out of these readings and to spontaneously place them firmly in the broadest possible contexts. (Recall his remarkable ability to do this with diverse papers at conferences over the years.) The semester always ended with a dinner and discussion at David and Marty's home where we came to know much better this rather shy man



Montgomery speaking on July 8 at the Working Class Worlds Conference.
Credit: Anna Fure-Slocum

Remembering David Montgomery

and Marty, a fellow Chicagoan, who was always extremely warm and welcoming to us. Over the years, many of us returned to visit them, sometimes with kids in tow, in New Haven where they were wonderful hosts to an endless stream of visitors.

Through David's efforts and our own, we connected with others from our generation of young scholars. A weekend retreat/conference outside Brockport, New York was particularly memorable for the presence of Bruce Laurie, Alan Dawley, John Cumbler, and others just ahead of us in the field and also for a labor play. This featured Pitt's Joe White as Daniel De Leon (strictly type casting), Andrea Graziosi as Terence Powderly (with heavy Italian accent), and David as a surprisingly convincing Sam Gompers.

Long before the term became fashionable, Pitt was transnational in several respects. Our preliminary exam list contained at least as many European and other works as American, and the British Marxist books were central. We found opportunities to meet with our Canadian colleagues who were recovering their own nation's working class story in the same generation and, of course, David maintained his connections with *Labour/Le Travail* and a number of Canadian institutions over the years. The summer my wife Jenny and I arrived in Pittsburgh after working for a year in industry, we found Julian Beck and the House Theater in residence in an old mattress factory on the north side and E. P. and Dorothy Thompson offering seminars on England in the Age of the French Revolution and the Chartist movement. David's international and labor movement connections produced a steady stream of overseas luminaries and a range of labor activists, despite the fact that Pitt never seemed to have any money. He brought his colleagues from the Social History Roundtable to Pittsburgh -- Joan Scott, Michelle Perot, Patrick Fridenson, Marianne Debouzy, and others. Due to David's sojourns there (good taste), our Italian connections were particularly strong so that Andrea Graziosi (from one wing of the Italian left) and Betty Marconi (from quite another) joined our Reds softball team. (Betty was pretty good, as I recall; Andrea, terrible.) Later Nando Fasce joined this Italian connection, though during the Yale years.

I can recall no boundary at all between the scholarship and the politics. This effect was partly the work of the students who represented a wide array of left wing organizations ranging from the Communist Party and the Socialist Workers' Party to the New American Movement, the International Socialists, and at least one Maoist group. History became the core of the movement to organize graduate employees at Pitt. But the mixture of history and politics was also a product of Montgomery's own activities. He almost never spoke about his political commitments or past experience, but we saw him at demonstrations and picket lines. We never hesitated to ask him for help with our own endeavors and we never failed to get it.

We are fortunate that those who have benefited

so much from David's intellect and generous spirit found ways to acknowledge this while he was still alive. I recall with great fondness the birthday celebration Mark McColloch and others organized at Greensburg, Pennsylvania, the place loaded with kids and basketball games as well as serious discussion and greetings from all around the world. The Yale celebration of David's work there, organized by Glenda Gilmore, Cele Bucki, and others in New Haven, was a more elegant affair but every bit as enjoyable. David's career achievement award from LAWCHA signaled his contributions to people throughout the field and the labor movement.

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

Thanks to David's mentoring, many people in my generation emerged as leaders on their own campuses and in the profession, supporting the unionization of graduate employees and strikes and organizing in their communities, helping to build LAWCHA and regional labor history groups, and, in the process, reinventing working class history once again -- as David, Mel Dubofsky, David Brody, Herb Gutman and others did in that earlier generation. Most importantly perhaps, the Pittsburgh group has mentored a new generation of scholars in venues ranging from large lecture courses and seminars to graduate programs in US and comparative working class history.

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

David Montgomery and Transnationalism

Cecelia Bucki, Fairfield University, Fairfield, CT

I would like to elaborate on what Jim Barrett mentioned in his remembrance, the contribution that David made to internationalism, or what is now called transnationalism. David always presented an expansive view of the New Labor History to include connections among the emerging working classes of many countries since the rise of capitalism. Moreover, he directly facilitated the connections among labor (or labour, to accommodate the British and Canadian) historians through his expansion of the International Labor and Working Class History Newslet-

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ter after the unexpected death of its founder Robert F. Wheeler in 1977. Wheeler, a historian of modern Germany and the Independent Social Democratic Party (USPD), had received his PhD from the University of Pittsburgh in 1970, where his principal adviser was Richard N. Hunt; he apparently never worked with David. However, Wheeler had imbibed the spirit of the USPD and the New Labor History in his years of working in many European archives and he knew everybody who was working in the same archives. Thus he established the International Labor and Working Class History Newsletter to promote this new approach to political and labor history, and to connect all who were working on similar topics. When Wheeler died at age thirty-seven, it was unclear whether his newsletter would continue. David Montgomery agreed to take over as editor and expand it into the journal we know today as *ILWCH*. I was its first assistant editor in 1978-79. David brought together Edward and Dorothy Thompson and others in England, the new labor historians in France around the journal *Le Mouvement social*, those in the Netherlands around Amsterdam's International Institute of Social History, the Canadians around *Labour/Le Travailleur* (as it was titled then), some German historians, with American historians to create a dialogue that firmly established the New Labor History as a formidable field. The first few issues of *ILWCH* were filled with reports from labor history conferences in five countries, review essays on contentious concepts in this new field, and book reviews. It is difficult to imagine what our field would have been like if not for the pioneering networking that David accomplished in those years. The fact that he was able to bring *ILWCH* to Yale when he moved there is clear proof of the Yale History Department's sagacity in embracing David and the New Labor History in 1980.

In sum, David contributed a shop-floor perspective to the new labor and social history of the early 1970s, along with an internationalist perspective that reached far beyond the shop-floor.

Reflections on David Montgomery as Teacher and Mentor

Julie Greene, University of Maryland

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

Early in that decade I became fascinated by labor history when, taking a degree at Cambridge University, I wrote a thesis on Welsh miners and Communism during the 1920s and 1930s. At that time I was a student of European and British history. For a variety of reasons I decided to make a shift to U.S. history when choosing a

PhD program, but I wanted to continue my focus on labor and the working-class. When I asked faculty at Cambridge whom they thought I should work with, David Montgomery's name immediately came up.

I applied to Yale and got admitted. I knew nothing about the Department, except that this guy Montgomery was there and I was going to work with him. When I arrived on campus and stepped into the History Department, the staff handed me a piece of paper that said Nancy Cott would be my advisor. I had never studied women's history nor (stupidly) had I ever felt interested in it. I suppose Yale's History Department thought since I was female I was destined to be Nancy's student. I went and met with Nancy, and she was impressive as could be, but dang it, I was there to work with Montgomery. The next day I showed up at his office, introduced myself, and informed him that he was going to be my advisor and that, furthermore, I'd appreciate his doing an independent study with me so that we could launch into our work together. David looked up at me for a second or two, said, "Well, hello," laughed, and then added "...Okay, let's get to work!" He signed me up for an independent study and for the next year we sat talking very week or two, often for two hours or more at a time. We would dissect the nature of workers' control, or the impact of war on working people, or the relationship between radicals and the AFL. We spent way too much time on the period he most loved then and that I still most love today: the turn of the twentieth century, roughly 1877 to the 1920s. I learned more about history and how to think in those years than ever before or since. He possessed an encyclopedic knowledge of history, and his interests ranged well beyond US labor history. In the seminars I took with him, his choice of readings were eclectic and, sometimes, surprising. The first week of my first graduate seminar in U.S. labor history with David, for example, he had us read Carlo Ginzburg's *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a 16th Century Miller*. We were bewildered by this selection, but it was a good kind of bewildered. A year ago, visiting David and Marty at their home in Pennsylvania, I asked David what made him choose that book. "I wanted to read it and it was my show!" he said, "Plus I wanted you all to think big, in unexpected ways, about unexpected issues." Certainly he achieved that.

Over the next years I continued to study with David, worked with him as assistant editor of *International Labor and Working-Class History*, the journal he edited, prepared for comprehensive exams with him, and then researched and wrote a dissertation on the AFL and politics. My years of 'apprenticeship' under David's tutelage involved many things that have stayed with me. One was the sense of community that David created. Working at Yale with David meant, very importantly, also working with the likes of Dana Frank, Tera Hunter, Cecelia Bucki, Dan Letwin, Eric Arnesen, Priscilla Murolo, Karin Shapiro, and many more. And then David would broaden the com-

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munity further, encouraging me to contact his ex-student Shelton Stromquist or his friend Melvyn Dubofsky when I was trying to put together my very first conference proposal. Another striking thing was the way David built a concern for social justice and labor activism into his work as a teacher and a historian. The first picket line I ever walked, I walked with David. In his nonchalant way, as a matter of course, he opened his grad students to the idea that workers on strike—electrical workers, in this case—needed our support as they worked to build a better life for themselves. And then of course there were bigger battles, like that waged by clerical workers in the mid-1980s, when David helped organize faculty and students in support of the strikers. I was his TA that semester and watched him counsel graduate and undergraduate students as they faced pressure to stop supporting the strikers, or encourage other faculty to move their courses off campus as he had done. Working for him as a TA was consistently informative, for that matter, because he so loved lecturing and became so animated and theatrical. One memorable time he performed part of Paul Robeson’s “Ballad for Americans,” with his TAs doing some of the call and response bits of the song from the audience. It was my—and surely most all of the undergraduates’—introduction to the great Robeson.

Others have mentioned David’s brilliance and his leadership on a wide range of labor and political issues, but I would also like to note his egalitarianism, humility, and humanity. He took care to treat everyone, including his students, fairly, respectfully, and equitably. I never was made to feel that it mattered that I was female, for example, or that because I was female I should be studying women and leave the history of male workers to others. It might seem like a simple thing, but I realize now what a gift it was, coming from a man of his generation. He treated his students and others he mentored as fellow craftspeople. We had a job to do, a craft to learn, and he was there to help us learn it. Arrogance would simply interfere with the more important work so there was no place for it, from him or from us. He tried not to praise his students much for fear it would make them get too full of themselves and become lazy and uncreative. And the funny thing about this is that even though he refrained from excessive praise, he somehow made us feel more than able—indeed, empowered—to take on bigger and bigger challenges. How he did all that is a mystery to me, and certainly one of his great gifts.

I’ll conclude with a passage from the tribute to David I wrote for *Dissent Magazine* about some of the ways I see his impact, which is clearly a major and lasting one, and the ways his ideas are being continued by those he taught and mentored (see the full essay at <http://dissentmagazine.org/atw.php?id=638>):

The lessons we all learned from Montgomery are too numerous to name. But here is my idiosyncratic

list of points he made repeatedly and that continue to resonate through my own work: Being actively engaged in the struggle for social justice is not only essential for its own sake, it makes for better scholarship and teaching in unimaginable ways. It is possible to be hopeful about the future without being naïve or intellectually or politically unsophisticated. Strive to think globally without ignoring local struggles, and vice versa. Interrogating broadly the diversity of the working class, and the interconnections between race, ethnicity, class, and gender, makes for better history. Building an inclusive community—creating broad solidarities, as he would say in his lectures—is important wherever you go, whether you’re visiting the OAH convention or supporting clerical workers’ struggles.

Montgomery always loved the phrase a friend of his coined in the 1950s: “Stick close to the working-class, even when they’re throwing you out the shop window.” And so Montgomery did. Without romanticizing working men and women as all-powerful causal agents or writing them off as victims, he sought to illuminate our understanding of history by showing that working people—white, black, immigrant or native born, male or female—played a central role. By making this a central theme in his work and that of the many scholars he influenced, Montgomery reshaped the discipline of history.

Connecting the Past to the Present

Robin Clark-Bennett, University of Iowa Labor Center

I can still hear David Montgomery’s lectures. I remember his booming description of the words of a Polish steelworker testifying in favor of an eight hour day:

Mr. Chairman – just like a horse and wagon, work all day. Take horse out of wagon – put in stable. Take horse out of stable, put in wagon. Same way like mills. Work all day. Come home – go sleep. Get up – go work in mills – come home. Wife say, “John, children sick, You help with children.” You say, “Oh, go to hell” – go sleep. Wife say, “John, you go town.” You say, “No” – go sleep. No know what the hell you do. For why this war? For why we buy Liberty bonds? For the mills? No, for freedom and America – for everybody. No more horse and wagon. For eight-hour day.

I remember him demonstrating a verse of the Wobbly song “Pie in the Sky.” But I most clearly remember his unwavering attention to, and respect for, the subtle and creative ways in which working class people throughout

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our history have asserted their dignity in spite of the dehumanizing forces they often confronted.

David Montgomery inspired generations of students, historians, and labor activists, and I am honored to count myself among the people whose lives he changed.

I arrived at Yale University in 1990 from small-town Iowa, the daughter of a postal clerk/union activist father and a stay-at-home/part-time journalist mother. In order to send their kids to music and ballet classes, my parents had made very difficult economic sacrifices, and I was determined to “make good” on their investment. I was thrilled to attend Yale, but it was often a confusing place for a working class girl from Iowa.

For example, I remember a lunch conversation with a college dean and a handful of students. After asking the other students where they were from, the dean turned to me. I offered what I thought was a positive description of my background, and his well-intended reply was something like, “Thank goodness you were able to escape that place. That’s why it’s important that we offer financial aid, to save people like you.” I nodded, but remember thinking that the faces of the aristocratic Yale alums whose pictures lined the walls looked particularly unwelcoming that day. Had I intended to escape? Would I ever fit in here? I knew I wasn’t nearly as prepared for college as the kids from prep schools, and I had to work hard to find my voice and my bearings.

It may be obvious, then, that David Montgomery’s labor history classes meant more to me than other compelling lectures. His approach of looking beyond institutions and leaders, at the ways in which working people struggled to shape their society was incredibly affirming, as well as fascinating. Rather than “escaping” my heritage, I chose to embrace it. I changed my major from microbiology to history, and took every labor-related history course I could find. Professor Montgomery agreed to serve as my senior advisor, and loaned me his collection of materials about women streetcar conductors during the World War I for my senior essay. Outside the classroom, Professor Montgomery had a humble, kind personality. When my parents came to the campus to visit, he joined our family for pizza. On local picket lines, he seemed genuinely excited to see some of his students joining the protest.

After graduation, I became a union organizer, and have spent the past 18 years in various positions within the labor movement. Among my undergraduate friends who attended Professor Montgomery’s classes, at least five others became union organizers. I crossed paths with David Montgomery several times in conferences over the years, and was always struck by how little he had changed. His presentations were just as powerful and insightful as I remembered, and his personality just as thoughtful.

Professor Montgomery’s influence taught me to approach organizing campaigns by recognizing that, before the organizers and before the interest in unionization, the

folks in that workplace already had a culture of connections and leadership, and already had developed their own ways of interpreting their experience and experimenting with methods of resistance. The more I was able to understand that culture, the more effective I was at helping them recognize and overcome organizing obstacles, build their committees, and tell the story of their struggle in ways that their co-workers would understand.

Many people knew David Montgomery better than I, but I will always be grateful for his impact on my life – as a scholar, an activist, and a remarkable human being who inspired me and so many others to celebrate the working class heroes in our history and join in the struggle for a more just society. Thank you, Professor Montgomery.

Montgomery as Activist Historian

Alan Hart, United Electrical Workers *UENews* editor

My first encounter with Dave Montgomery was in the 1970s when he came to speak at a UE Local 506 Stewards’ Council meeting. He talked about the history of labor parties in the U.S. A few years later I was honored when, through the UE national office, he asked for an article I’d written for the 506 newspaper on the 1918 Erie GE strike. Montgomery wrote about that strike in his biggest and most important book, *The Fall of the House of Labor*, (1989) and my little article earned a footnote.

But my favorite David Montgomery memory is from the long first-contract struggle at Circuit-Wise. When in 1989 (a year after we won the Labor Board election, but before we launched the 18-month Circuit-Wise strike) we learned that both CW Pres. Jack Mettler and VP Dave Schumacher were members of the Yale Class of 1964, and their 25th class reunion was coming up, we knew we had to seize the opportunity. We put

together a demonstration in front of the hall at Yale where the 1964 Yalies were enjoying cocktails -- the demonstrators were UE members, HERE members from Yale, and other allies. We parked a flatbed truck in front of the building, which served as the stage for a guerrilla theater skit, with a friendly state rep in the role of Jack Mettler, and David Montgomery impersonating Dave Schumacher. Many of Mettler and Schumacher’s classmates watched from the balcony above; the next day the *New Haven Register*



Montgomery in guerilla theatre performance, 1989.
Credit: UE News

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quoted one of the classmates saying he'd be embarrassed to show his face if he was them.

Address to the UE Convention September, 2009

David Montgomery

In 2009, in his fourth appearance at a UE convention (a record according to Hart) Montgomery's keynote presentation was a riveting performance. The convention was held in New Haven, not only home to Yale, but a launching point and stronghold of the UE. Montgomery drew connections between the early union history at places like Sargent, and the union that UE became. After the speech Hart asked UE Local 243 President Ray Pompano what he thought. Ray, president of the local for 25 years, replied "It gave me goose bumps." Here is an excerpt of that speech, courtesy of Alan Hart and the UE. Other speeches, equally notable, are posted at laborhistorylinks.niu.edu, accessible from the LAWCHA website

We have a long legacy of working people struggles here in New Haven. When I think of them together with those that created the UE and that you are carrying on today there are some common lessons... Time and again in the history of this country the American workers movement has received a new shot of strength, energy and ideas from recent immigrants. Immigrants poured into the United States, including into New Haven there in the early years of the 20th century. There were two places that were especially important for the immigrants from Italy. One was a candy company and the other was Sargent.

At Sargent these two forces came together in 1902 in ways that showed the possibilities for the future but also showed the limits of the way workers were then going about it. In Sargent both the machinists and the molders had signed up in national union contracts by 1902. But the other 90% of the employees had nothing. They were supported by the metal polishers though. The metal polishers had a little local almost of all Irishmen. Then they formed a new local and on the slide, despite the fact that it was a craft union, would let anybody in. It quickly became the general union of the Italians. These new im-



Credit: Ron Flowers, UE

migrants poured in to this second local here at the Sargent Company. Soon the shop steward got fired. Then they all walked out on strike and took the company completely by surprise. The company then rehired the shop steward and the union started growing like mad. They had a big convention out in Schuetzen Park with a picnic combined with drawing up the names to back into the company asserting their demands for an eight hour day for union representation for everybody. When they were denied, out they went on strike. This strike was a real awakening of the Italian political community in New Haven. It drew everybody together. If you read through the main Italian language newspaper you would see the attention week by week to this strike and what it was doing to bring together the support of atheist, churches, the Italian Socialist Club, the Italian Republican Club, everybody came out in support of the strike at Sargent in those years. But here is where the craft unions proved to be the Achilles Heel because the machinists and the molders had contracts and their national leaders ordered them to go back to work. Then they went out and hired everybody but Italians to come in and do the less skilled work in that plant. Over the course of four or five weeks the strike gradually fell apart. It left behind very long memories. I was told by the former organizer in that area, the great Harry Kaplan, that in 1951 when they went out on strike in Sargent there were workers there that said, I am making up for 1902. (Laughter) There was a legacy then that carried on but with it came important lessons about what it would take to make use of this power that modern industry and the immigrants bringing in to that industry represented to reshape American industrial life...

In the struggles that followed one can get a sense of the UE long before it was actually born. (*Discussion about the struggles of WWI at Westinghouse and GE - ed.*)

... (But) in the shrunken movement of the 1920s when the American labor movement really ran out of steam, shrank into its shell and represented just a tiny minority of the workers in the country until the great depression came. The Great Depression hit ferociously all around the land. Here in New Haven, by the way, the city was bankrupt and run by a committee of bankers for twelve years as a result of the depression. All expenditures had to be cleared by the bankers committee of New Haven. But it was here also that the new

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union movement began to take shape. New Haven, you would not recognize it today. New Haven had about one hundred and eighty manufacturing establishments in those days. They are almost all gone today. Sargent, Circuit Wise, and so forth. This was a center of relatively small manufacturing concerns. With the garment industry especially important because the garment workers as you all know had one control over the labor market in New York City in the period around World War I. So company after company in New York farmed their work out and farmed it out to New Haven increasingly. Here they hired basically young women, 13, 14, 15 years old to do the jobs.

We know this because we had a New Haven Labor History Society that used to bring together retirees from the garment shops. They all knew each other since they were kids.... They became the driving force in organizing the garment industry both the Amalgamated Clothing Workers and the Ladies Garment Workers of New Haven and really started opening up this scene and opening it up with a very particular sense about it. New Haven also learned out of those struggles the importance of unions standing beside each other. When the American Labor Federation threw out the new industrial unions in 1938 and demanded the central labor councils through them out in New Haven they wouldn't do it. New Haven they formed instead a joint political committee that had AFL unions, CIO unions and railroad brotherhoods. All coordinated because of the fact that the two biggest unions that were growing were all brothers, sisters and cousins of each other. One was in the AFL and the other in the CIO. The last thing they were going to do is declare them as enemies in those years.

But the radio, electrical, equipment machine workers merged into UE in 1936... Boy there was every variety of politics in the early UE. You name it and you could find it here because these were the local activists that brought together this union. The key plant here became Sargent, once again, drawing on those lessons of 1902, a long, long time before. At Sargent the UE chartered a local in 1938. It carried on its campaign until finally it was able hold an NLRB election that won 4-1 in favor of UE recognition. Very quickly after that the UE started organizing all sorts of other smaller factories around the New Haven area. It was out of these struggles in the 1930s and the tremendous growth of unionism during the war itself and at the great highpoint, in my estimation, of American working class struggles and unity was reached in 1946 when you find major unions all across the country all going out for the same thing over the course of that year. These were the famous strikes that led to the 18½ cents settlements. This was the magic number... Who got the biggest benefit was the lowest paid workers... The UE took a penny off the 18½ cents and said that should go just to labor grades below common labor. Guess who was in labor grades below common labor? It was all women. They were all classified

as less than the common labor rate. Over the course of the 1946 strikes workers that were forming unions for the first time and those were where employers were trying to take back what they had established during the war, especially in workplace power. Representation on the shop floor over grievances. Those strikes were increasingly supported by general wide strikes around the country. In 1946 in Rochester, New York, Stamford, Connecticut, it is hard to believe that now, find me a factory in Stamford. But Stamford was a factory town in those days. And Stamford where the Yale & Towne, machinists were out, the UE played a major role in mobilizing everybody to come to the support of those machinists and Yale & Towne and gradually made a victory there possible.

General strikes were repeated in Pittsburgh, in support of municipal workers again, not private employees but those working for the government and in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, and did I say Rochester (NY)? That was the first one. All you Californians know that the biggest and baddest of all the general strikes was Oakland, California. They shut down everything for a week and just took over the city, the streets, the city, everything was run by the working people of Oakland, California, for a week, until they finally won recognition for the new unions of that city. This kind of unity was quickly faced with a ferocious counter attack by American employers. A counter attack first of all proclaiming management's goal was the right to manage. No more interference from people who did the job with the way the job should be done...

Here in New Haven, for the most part, since so many of these manufacturers were very small they were simply driven out of business. They shut down. There is not so much as moving to other parts of the country except the big garment companies began to take their production away from New Haven and ship it elsewhere...

Here was the new world of the post war years. A world in which moving jobs increasingly around the country and then around the world breaking up industry wide patterns. This was the setting for continuous grinding down of unionism in the manufacturing sector in America. UE still held up there though.

... As the labor movement was hammered down in manufacturing we begin to see it coming up in those other sectors. Most notably, many of you will remember, teachers in the 1960. Everywhere around the country. Pennsylvania had one county that recognized unions among its teachers in 1960. By 1970 there was only one that didn't recognize unions. Here were all kinds of strikes in violation of the law. Ninety teachers got sent to jail for breaking the law here in New Haven during that strike until finally the labor movement in New Haven threatened to call a general strike to support the teachers. The mayor persuaded the head of the Board of Education to close the schools over the weekend. So there is no more term. That way if there is no school term there is no strike. Therefore all of

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the people who are in jail could be let out because they are no longer breaking the injunction against the strike. They were let out. They negotiated a contract fast as all hell over the weekend and by Monday, boom, they had something to represent and the union had come out on top. But this was the epic of the breakthrough of new unions and of course here New Haven we all know of the crucial importance of the clerical and technical workers at Yale in pulling off their great strike in 1984-1985.

Here then were new kinds of workers coming into the labor movement. Clearly needing something new in their unions. You could not duplicate what was done in the factory with public service workers. Here learning to listen and carry on those lessons of solidarity at the same time learn to function in new ways suitable to their needs. UE's support of independent unions around the country has opened up a major new avenue, I think, in that direction.

Right after the election, of course, the workers at Republic inspired the whole country to think that we weren't beaten down and hopeless after all. It showed that they had learned these lessons.

First of all that a union is only as strong as the activity of its rank-and-file members and the work that goes on in the workplace is the heart of that organization. Secondly, that all unions must be brought together for common action. Get rid of this mutual union busting that so many of our organizations do engage in. Engage in

building forms of solidarity among unions. Third, to recognize that today that solidarity must be not just inside the United States but must be international. The ways in which we form alliances with working people in other countries is crucial. North American Free Trade Agreement really brought that home to us. What goes on in Canada and Mexico decisively influences everything that happens here in the United States and we must be involved in it. Fourth,

the never ending importance of political action. It was after the election of 1934 that what we associate with the New Deal really turned on. These were bitterly fought elections and then it was that the way was opened up in Congress and in state legislatures to a new outlook that could open the way to working people's needs. All these things are worth thinking about because that heritage of New Haven and certainly the heritage of UE. We need to guide deliberate action that we are taking

today as we face these new challenges in the 21st century. Think about it. Hang in there with it and carry it on.

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

2010 Bibliography

We post a selection of books from 2010. Next issue we will post those from 2011, as well as a selection of labor history videos. Thanks to Ilene Devault for sharing the book list from the 2010 TAFT committee, which provided part of the basis of this list. If you want to be sure a book is listed here in the future, send the title to me at <rfeurer@niu.edu>. In addition, if you have a bibliography of works related to a specific topic and are willing to share it, please send it along, and I will post it, with credits to <<http://www.laborhistorylinks.niu.edu>>, accessible from the LAWCHA website.

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