



LAWCHA

The Labor and Working-Class History Association

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NEWSLETTER
SPRING 2011

2010 Philip Taft Labor History Award Winner

The Cornell University ILR School, in collaboration with LAWCHA, is pleased to announce the co-winners of the 2010 Philip Taft Labor History Award for the best book in American labor and working-class history published in 2008

Seth Rockman,
Scraping By: Wage Labor, Slavery, and Survival in Early Baltimore
(Johns Hopkins University Press)

The Taft Prize comes with a cash award of \$1,500. It is named in honor of Professor Philip Taft, an eminent labor historian and economist, who made outstanding contributions to the field of labor and working-class history during his lengthy career. The prize competition is administered by the ILR School at Cornell University and has been held annually since 1978. For more information, visit:

<http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/taftaward>

Jefferson Cowie Wins 2011 OAH Merle Curti Award

Jefferson Cowie, Cornell University, has been selected by the Organization of American Historians (OAH) to receive the 2011 Merle Curti Award for his book *Stayin' Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (The New Press, 2010). The Curti Award is given annually by the OAH for the best book published in American social or American intellectual history in the previous year. For more information see:

<http://www.oah.org/awards/awards.curti.index.html>



From the Cover

Left: Women's Auxiliary of the Progressive Miners of America protest the assault on civil liberties in the coal fields – Springfield, IL – January, 1933. Credit: Greg Boozell Collection, <http://www.minwar.org/>

Right: Public workers and their allies protest at Madison, Wisconsin, February, 2011. Credit: Rosemary Feurer



2010 Herbert Gutman Award Winner

Named in honor of pioneering labor historian Herbert G. Gutman, the award comes with a cash prize of \$500 from LAWCHA and a publishing contract with the University of Illinois Press. The prize is contingent upon the author's acceptance of the contract with the University of Illinois Press.

Jessie B. Ramey,
"A Childcare Crisis: Poor Black and White Families and Orphanages in Pittsburgh, 1878-1929,"
(Carnegie-Mellon University, 2009,
Advisor: Tera Hunter)

For information about applying for this year's Gutman Prize, please see:

<http://www.lawcha.org/gutman.php>

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

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

Kim Phillips, LAWCHA President

As I write this short note, LAWCHA members have been very busy with the efforts to support public union workers and workers' collective bargaining rights in Wisconsin. Our members have also organized in support of workers in Iowa, Nebraska, North Carolina, Ohio, Virginia, and California. Governors and state legislatures in New York and elsewhere plan to go after public employees. Everywhere, LAWCHA members are participating in living-wage campaigns on their campuses and in their communities. Urgent in 2008, these struggles have become more so in 2011. Six months ago, the dominant explanation for the most devastating recession since the 1930s was the unregulated and egregious policies of banks and Wall Street. After the mid-term election, the well-funded media has changed the story, and it's the "greedy public workers" and unions more generally who caused the economic crisis. Of course this new explanation does not include how the men and women who teach, put out fires, take care of refuse, plow the roads, and serve in law enforcement have gone without raises—in some instance for half-a-decade.

LAWCHA members have used the power of the pen, airwaves, and the internet to tell the story of workers and unions. You will find links to all of these articles and radio interviews on the LAWCHA website. Please take the time to read these articles. If you write or speak, please forward the links to me: klphil@wm.edu. As important, please let others know about the LAWCHA site (www.lawcha.org).

Two events are immediately on the calendar. First, LAWCHA is one of the many co-sponsors of the 100th Anniversary of the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire in New York City, March 24-26, 2011. The panels and events on the weekend's schedule commemorate a horrific and unnecessary tragedy that hap-

pened to workers and their families in 1911, but the 100th commemoration also includes numerous talks and events that address the dangers and inequities that workers face in the twenty-first century. The LAWCHA events will be held throughout the three days, beginning with panels on March 24th at the Murphy Center. LAWCHA will participate in the evening commemorations on the 24th and 25th. Finally, the all-day LAWCHA conference at the Fashion Institute of Technology on Saturday brings together historians, labor activists, and workers. The events are too numerous to list here and I urge you to see the full schedule on the LAWCHA website. The Triangle Program Committee included me, Annelise Orleck, Eileen Boris, Jennifer Guglielmo, Franca Iacovetta, Laura Lovett, Dan Bender, Dan Katz, Laurie Green, Rich Greenwald, and Jim Green. Second, LAWCHA's annual conference will take place in Atlanta, April 7-10, 2011. This conference is a co-sponsor with the Southern Labor Studies Association (SLSA).

Finally, this newsletter is now under the stewardship of Rosemary Feurer and Steve Early. Over the past three years, Joe McCartin and Bob Bussel did an outstanding job of designing and editing the newsletter. I thank them for all of their hard work. Now, Rose and Steve have enthusiastically and ably assumed these duties. Their efforts will take a new form as we plan to go digital and create new features, including a wiki.

Peace and solidarity,

Kim Phillips
LAWCHA President

Save the Date!

LAWCHA Annual Meeting, 2012:
April 19-22, Milwaukee, Wisconsin
Co-sponsored by the Organization of American Historians

Labor Activism and Memory

Rosemary Feurer, Northern Illinois University

The last LAWCHA newsletter highlighted the political and economic threat to public sector unionism. After the November 2010 elections, emboldened right-wing forces unleashed an attack that exploited a purported fiscal crisis to challenge workers' rights and public goods. Part of a worldwide austerity campaign, the right's agenda is far reaching. In Wisconsin, for example, the legislation is wide-ranging: to not only to end collective bargaining but to deny provision of care to the poor and medically needy, to privatize the state owned power companies, and many other items. Behind this legislation is the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), funded by corporate sponsors and right-wing foundations such as the Koch Brothers and the Bradley Foundation. ALEC is the same organization that wrote the Arizona "breathing while brown" anti-immigration bill, with the Corrections Corporation of America, which conveniently profits from its implementation. Thus while the media has focused on the costs of public sector pensions and the elimination of collective bargaining rights in the public sector, this campaign is more a general assault on the very notion of a public sector. Indeed in the now-famous call that Governor Walker had with the gonzo journalist pretending to be David Koch, Walker suggested a vision of a new world that he might inaugurate to match that associated with Reagan's firing of air traffic controllers. It remains to be seen whether a reformulated labor movement and their allies will respond

more successfully against this existential threat than they did to the 1981 crisis.

The touchstone of that battle for labor renewal centers on Madison, Wisconsin, where workers and their allies were stirred by the immediate threats to collective bargaining, and the global inspiration of the Egyptian protests. In Madison community solidarities had been better nurtured in the labor council than in many other areas. Spurred by the bold actions of students and teaching assistants union activists, Madison's Capitol provided the space for engagement and demonstration, the kind of space denied to many private sector battles of recent years (the only equivalent being the Chicago UE/Republic Window and Door occupation of 2008). The Capitol protests' contestation and revisioning has inspired everyone who has witnessed it. For example, walking through the Capitol in late February, I encountered a gentleman in his fifties from Rockford, Illinois carrying a poster he had made from the Egyptian worker expression of solidarity with Madison "One World, One Pain". I asked him if he was in one of the unions, and he replied he had "never even thought about unions before." Now, he said, he wished he belonged to a union and he felt that that "maybe a new world was possible."

Can this movement transcend the divisions that are dominating the public discourse of the moment? Will the fight be effective if it focuses on the rights of collective bargaining for one set of workers, but leaves another without them? Unions have been engaged in a rearguard action for years. Moments like these, however, provide an opportunity for redefining goals and thinking of the limits to collective bargaining in respect to making the labor movement a force for social transformation. The right's attack has shown how critically private sector union decline matters for public sector unions, in the effort to whipsaw one set of workers against another. Moreover, it shows how critically ideas are connected to action. The right-wing think tanks have deployed a continual barrage of talking points, some of which essentially categorize public workers as indentured servants without title to wages or benefits, existing only at the favor of "taxpayers."

Certainly labor historians have a role to play in building an understanding of how we got to this point, and a long-range perspective that might inform these current struggles. LAWCHA members have been busy submitting historical perspectives to major journals, newspapers, and participating themselves in the actions in support of workers' rights. In Wisconsin, a number of LAWCHA members have been involved in bringing an appreciation of labor history to labor



Credit: Rosemary Feurer

Labor Activism and Memory



Solidarity cows show support. Credit: Rosemary Feurer

union members and the public. The Wisconsin Labor History Society (WLHS) has cultivated an on-the-ground interaction between trade union activists and historians since the 1980s, one that has built understanding of the past to inform the present. A few years ago, I attended their annual meeting, where shop stewards, local officials, students and activists engaged in genuine dialogue about the meaning of the past. James Lorence, one of these historians, noted that the WLHS "provided a way for academics to help to redefine the movement to include a broader spectrum of people, including historians," and emphasizes that labor historians have a "role to play in the process" of building an engaged labor movement.

This issue of the newsletter offers fuel for thought about the relationship of historians to the labor movement and to activism around preserving memories for future generations, and for more direct public engagement with labor's past. This engagement can be tender, and its roots need to be firmly planted. A long excerpt from Steve Early's book relates the intrigue surrounding the controversial attempt of LAWCHA members to intervene in current union governance issues and the ensuing debate over the proper role of academics in relationship to the union movement. Greg Boozell considers the relationship of mass protests at the Wisconsin Capitol to a similar appeal for a new labor movement in the 1930s. Thomas Klug tells us of the LAWCHA tour at the American Historical Association meeting, where participants learned of what Jim Green called his most important public history project. We also profile the effort to save Blair Mountain, the contested site of memory and forgetting of a miners uprising in the early 20th century, now threatened with obliteration. Jim Green issues an invitation to LAWCHA members to participate in the June events that will be taking place around the effort to remember and preserve this space. Alex Lichtenstein's call to the Southern Labor History Associa-



Credit: Rosemary Feurer

tion (co-sponsored by LAWCHA) elaborates on the themes of memory and forgetting and the public role of labor historians as we confront the global assault on working people, and Matt Mettler profiles the graduate student conference taking place in Iowa with activist historian Staughton Lynd as keynote speaker. Finally, Paul Lawrie profiles a University of Toronto conference where participants debated definitions and methodology of global labor studies, and pondered the relationship of local to global.

Rosemary Feurer
Northern Illinois University
Co-Editor, LAWCHA Newsletter

“Dare You Fail Us Now?”

Thinking about the Wisconsin Events from the Perspective of Another Historical Moment

Greg Boozell

The current protests in Madison, Wisconsin echo another mass demonstration in Springfield, Illinois held almost eighty years ago. On January 26, 1933, 10,000 members of the Women’s Auxiliary of the Progressive Miners of America assembled at the Illinois state capitol to protest the wanton violence in the coal fields and to demand the restoration of civil liberties. In the March 1, 1933 edition of *The Nation*, Women’s Auxiliary President, Agnes Burns Wieck recounted:

“We...have come to the seat of government in our State to seek redress from the oppressive and intolerable conditions in the coal fields of Illinois. Thousands of working-class housewives have marched to the State Capitol...It is well for the State that we have come while we still have faith in government, for that faith has been terrifically shaken during the past year.

When it was no longer possible for our men to have a voice in determining the condition under which they have worked, because of the usurping of this right by the officials of the old union, they broke away from that organization, to which they had given long years of service and devotion, and established a new union that is responsive to the wishes of the rank and file.

A reign of terror resulted...in which officials of the old union, the coal corporation, county and municipal authorities, and even the State joined-clubbing, tear-gas-

sing, shooting, killing our people, bombing our homes, making it impossible for us to assemble or to enjoy any of the rights to which the Constitution of this nation entitled its citizens...

Therefore, in the face of these intolerable conditions, we respectfully petition you, the Governor, and members of the Legislature of the State of Illinois: first for immediate and full restoration of civil liberties in the coal fields of Christian and Franklin counties...Not only is our welfare at stake, but our faith in the ability and willingness of government to protect and serve us is menaced. Dare you fail us now?”

For Illinois Governor Horner’s part, he largely ignored their demands and only cautioned them to continue to support the government:

“Faith in our government has been badly shattered. I am not a prayerful man, but I am praying that you will keep that faith. For without that faith in government the government cannot endure. When government goes all is lost.” (*Progressive Miner* – February 3, 1933)

Faith in government? To me, a lack of faith in government seemed pretty reasonable. The state militia had forcibly broken picket lines and were probably responsible for

Credit: <http://minewar.info>



“Dare You Fail Us Now?”

Thinking about Wisconsin through Another Historical Moment

several murders. Local sheriffs in Christian County and Franklin County routinely brutalized strikers and their families.

Over the past weeks, workers staged mass demonstrations in Madison, Wisconsin to turn back Governor Walker’s assault on labor rights. While there are some parallels between the two periods (mobilization of the national guard and exemplary grass-roots organizing to name two), one big difference is that in 1933, the labor movement hadn’t yet fully conjoined with the Democratic Party. That was still a few years off.

While we may marvel at the actions of the “Fab 14,” the Democratic Senators who left the state to prevent passage of the bill, there is little doubt that without a mass movement they would have compromised with Walker. Today a number of Democratic leaders are seizing this opportunity to grandstand before throngs of workers while doing little else. I wish those crowds would confront these opportunists and ask why the Employee Free Choice Act was deliberately ignored when Democrats could have passed the bill. (Prior to the Tea Party ascension to power, the Democrats held the Congress and the White House.) Or ask them to explain the onerous budget proposals of Cuomo in New York or Brown in California; both Democratic governors. Is the Democratic Party’s plan of a death by a thousand cuts really preferable to the full-on reactionary assault by Walker in Wisconsin? Are those the only two choices?

Both demonstrations were and are largely symbolic but the 1933 action was part of a larger strategy to halt production in the coal fields. And that is an important point. At the outset, the Progressive Miners understood that in order to prevail, they needed to stop production. No business as usual.

To that end, I think it’s promising that the South Central Labor Council voted to “immediately begin educating affiliates and members on the organization and function of a general strike.” (The wording is important since sympathy strikes are illegal under U.S. labor law.) Time will tell in Wisconsin, but I doubt that a purely symbolic gesture will be adequate for workers to win the day.

Greg Boozell is working on a documentary film on the Illinois mine war. The web site for the project is <http://minewar.info>.



Scenes from the Progressive Miners of America sit-down strike, May, 1937, Wilsonville, Illinois. Credit: Rosemary Feurer collection



Save Blair Mountain

Historic Blair Mountain Site Threatened with Destruction

Rosemary Feurer, Northern Illinois University

“The story of coal is always the same. It is a dark story,” wrote labor activist Mother Jones in her autobiography. Activists are working vigorously at the moment to prevent another dark chapter in that history from being written—the obliteration of Blair Mountain, the West Virginia site of one of the most memorable uprisings of miners in American history. In 2009, after years of effort led by third generation miner Kevin Kenney, Blair Mountain was finally placed on the National Register of Historic Places, which means that it cannot be destroyed. One of the crucial reasons for this victory was the work of historic preservationist Barbara Rasmussen in writing the formal proposal, and the work of Harvard Ayers, an archeologist whose team established that the site could yield remarkable amounts of evidence that will change the accounts of what happened there. Ayers noted that “coal companies had been spinning a myth that there wasn’t much left there, because of timbering [and] mining.”

Despite Ayers certainty that the evidence confirmed that “the entire battlefield should be a National Monument,” the political power of the coal industry led to its de-listing within nine months of its designation. Ayers explained, “the coal industry owns the West Virginia government and Massey Coal’s influence and money seems determined to use mountaintop removal to destroy the mountain.” Massey Energy attorneys claimed that a majority of property owners opposed the listing, which can be grounds for denying site status. But with much effort, Ayers’ team proved the list was “bogus” because of the existence of dead or illegitimate title owners on it; the actual property

owners approved the listing. Rasmussen called the de-listing a “terrible act of social act of social violence” and “desecration of a sacred memory.” If we erase the evidence of this tremendous effort on the part of organized labor by blowing up that mountain, all of American history suffers.

In September 2010, LAWCHA member Brian Kelly urged historians to join the effort, organized as the group Friends of Blair Mountain. Kelly initiated a letter from scholars and artists to the U.S. National Park Service and West Virginia State Historic Preservation Office expressing “strong opposition” to the de-listing of Blair Mountain. The letter noted that already in 1993, labor historians had listed Blair Mountain as one of the “Most Endangered Historic Places,” and noted the travesty of rejecting the designation of National Register of Historic Places “in the face of pressure from coal companies.” This letter and the support of professional historians and artists is a significant way for national attention to be trained on the site. But even now, Ayers noted that each time he goes to the site, he sees more evidence of the coal companies destruction of the integrity of the site. Action is urgently needed, he stated. Brian Kelly added, “The campaign to hold on to this landmark in our history has been sustained over many years by a few dozen committed labor and environmental activists—mostly local people. They deserve our gratitude and respect for having managed to hold off the power of big coal, but in this lopsided war of attrition, they need allies, and it’s important that LAWCHA and its members ‘walk the walk’ by lending whatever support we can to building the national campaign to save Blair Mountain.”



Workers give up their arms after the Battle of Blair Mountain. Credit: <http://www.pawv.org/>

Appeal to Support Blair Mountain Activists

The Historic Miners’ March of 1921 will be re-enacted in June as a Protest for the Earth and Labor History’s Place on the National Landscape

Jim Green, University of Massachusetts -Boston

As LAWCHA members know, Blair Mountain in southern West Virginia was the site of huge three-day battle in 1921 between two forces: an army of at least 7,000 union miners marching across the state to liberate imprisoned comrades in Mingo County, and their enemies—a body of several thousand sheriffs, state police and vigilantes defending coal company territory in Logan County. I am writing a book about the mine wars now for Pantheon. Of course, the battle looms large in my account, and so I have been closely following attempts to save this historic labor history site from destruction.

For more than thirty years, historically-conscious West Virginians and their allies have campaigned for a National Landmark to be placed at Blair Mountain—a crusade made more urgent by the plans made by Massey Energy to use mountaintop removal methods to mine it.

If the relentless drive toward mountaintop removal succeeds against the determined resistance of a brave band of citizens, the visual symbol of the key event in the mine wars will be destroyed; a place that is sacred ground for many Appalachians will be desecrated; and even more weight will be added to the forces that have blocked the West Virginia mine wars out the nation’s historical memory.

A recent EPA action pulling approval for the huge Spruce 1 mine near Blair Mountain has no direct effect on the battle site, but it bodes well for all concerned with stopping mountaintop removal.

I encourage you to make a tax-deductible contribution to the Friends of Blair Mountain for preserving the Blair Mountain Battlesite, to help support their efforts at recording oral histories, conducting field archeology, and researching and encouraging historo-tourism, and working toward obtaining National Landmark status for the battlefield, the goal of LAWCHA’s successful effort to landmark the site of the Ludlow Massacre. The activists who have been working night and day for years to save Blair Mountain are now on a roll. I attended their community meeting in Logan, WV, in January, and it was charged with energy. To dramatize the struggle, the group has planned a timely event: a re-enactment of the 1921 miners march to Blair Mountain.

You can help this way: To make a donation to the cause, you need to register for the march at <http://www.friendsofblairmountain.org>, whether or not you actually intend to participate. Then you will see how to make donation on PayPal. If you have other questions, please email Harvard Ayres at Harvard@boone.net

The march will begin on Monday, June 6 in Marmet, WV, the place where the 1921 miners gathered at the mouth of Lens Creek for their march, and it will end on Friday, June 10 in Blair, WV, at the base of the historic mountain where a major rally will be held on June 11. Elaborate plans for marching and camping are being made; the details of the march logistics will be posted on the website. The event’s mission statement reads, “We march to demand sustainable job creation in all Appalachian communities, abolish mountaintop removal, strengthen labor rights, and preserve Blair Mountain.”

I plan to be there, and I hope we can organize a LAWCHA contingent to be there as well. Check the LAWCHA website for more details and for contact information.

The valleys, streams and hollows of southern Appalachia are gorgeous in the spring, but if the coal industry giants have their way many of them will soon be filled with over-burden from the tops of mountains like Blair.



Artifacts uncovered by archeological team at Blair Mountain. Credit: <http://www.battleofblairmountain.org/>

The Progressive Quandry

Steve Early

EDITOR'S NOTES: LAWCHA member and newsletter co-editor Steve Early, a retired national staff member of the Communications Workers of America, has published a detailed account of the inter- and intra-union conflicts that became so costly and disruptive within the progressive wing of labor between 2008 and 2010. Early's new book, The Civil Wars in U.S. Labor, includes a chapter entitled, "The Progressive Quandry," which recounts how concerned students and professors were drawn into the fray, often reluctantly. The excerpt below from that chapter highlights the efforts by some LAWCHA members to respond to the bitter dispute that erupted between the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) and the UNITE HERE, when the six-year old merger between the garment workers and hotel employees began to unravel. The book, which ponders large questions of union leadership and democratic governance in unions, is available for order from Haymarket Books at www.civilwarsinlabor.org. We welcome feedback and reflection on this excerpt.

"Academics should refrain from inserting themselves in disputes among unionists. If they choose to do so, they should at least make sure that they act in a fair manner, on the basis of full information."

Joshua Freeman, labor historian, City University of New York

By late Spring, 2009, it was "déjà vu all over again" for labor-oriented academics and other progressives. SEIU's messy internal dispute with its regional California-wide United Healthcare Workers (UHW) was followed by the UNITE-HERE divorce, a disconcerting rift within Change To Win (the union federation that split from the AFL-CIO in 2005) that turned one-time "organizing union" friends into bitter enemies. Once again, college professors, public officials, community leaders, and members of the clergy throughout the country were being asked to choose sides as well. Cornell University researcher Kate Bronfenbrenner lamented that this new clash was occurring between "two groups of people who actually share so much," noting that "at least 200" of the combatants were her own former students. Just twelve months after 100 intellectuals beseeched Andy Stern to spare UHW from trusteeship—and some, like Bronfenbrenner, were then pressured by SEIU to disavow that appeal—a group of professors gathered in Chicago to consider writing to SEIU again.

Their discussion took place around a long table, at an Italian restaurant near Roosevelt University, during the annual conference of the Labor and Working Class History Association (LAWCHA). Nancy MacLean, a historian from Northwestern University, welcomed the dinner crowd of forty by expressing her personal anguish about the "division and crisis" within Change To Win. "We always thought of these unions as our friends and allies," she said. Now it was "very scary to all of us committed to a progressive labor movement" to see SEIU raiding UNITE HERE locals and disrupting their activities. Enormous resources—needed for health care reform and Employee Free Choice Act campaigning, plus union organizing and contract fights—were clearly being squandered.

Many of those present, like Jennifer Klein from Yale, were past supporters of SEIU—when the union seemed to be ad-

vancing the interests of oppressed workers. In her introductory remarks, Klein recounted her own positive interaction, the year before, with the "women, immigrants, and people of color" who belonged to UHW in California. She expressed dismay over their subsequent fate because, according to Klein, Andy Stern's trusteeship "reflected total disrespect for the 'social world' they had created"—a local union with a "strong shop steward system" and a "vision that was not merely local." Klein described a recent visit to Yale by Anna Burger, who boasted to undergraduates about all the management consultants used by SEIU. Nevertheless, Klein was not impressed with the results of SEIU restructuring based on "the corporate model." That model is "a disaster in politics and economics," she argued, "so why should we embrace it in labor?"

After Klein finished, three speakers from UNITE HERE provided an update on its current troubles. Andrea van den Heever, a former Yale clerical worker, led off with an urgent plea for help. Born in South Africa, van den Heever came to the U.S. to escape apartheid. In the early 1980s, she helped create HERE Local 34 in New Haven through organizing and strikes that she described as "radicalizing and transforming." Now, in her old bargaining unit, hundreds of members were being bombarded with "robo calls," mailings, and leaflets urging them to leave the union they had built, through many years of struggle, with HERE's John Wilhelm's help. These anti-HERE messages were funded by the millions in UNITE HERE dues money diverted by Bruce Raynor to his supporters before they defected to SEIU under the banner of "Workers United." As van den Heever noted, Yale was just one front in a nationwide assault on her union. In the hotel industry and other HERE jurisdictions, "SEIU is going in and becoming a company union, making sweetheart deals. Whether UNITE HERE survives is up in the air." A former student of MacLean's, now working as a hotel worker organizer, and an

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African-American shop steward from Chicago sadly corroborated Andrea's account of life on the front lines of labor civil warfare. As the litany of SEIU sins grew longer, the expressions of many listeners became pained. Others looked down at their plates of spaghetti. A few squirmed in their seats.

The question before the body, when the presentations were over, was what to do about this troubling information? Attending as a LAWCHA conference participant, I tried, briefly, to remind everyone about some unfinished business from the year before, involving solidarity with UHW members. In California, at that very moment, SEIU was using management-style tactics to block or delay National Labor Relations Board elections involving thousands of healthcare workers. Since many in the room had already taken a strong public stand in favor of "employee free choice," why not support the elections sought by NUHW and a cessation of hostilities against UNITE HERE? My friendly amendment was not well received. The organizers wanted to stay focused on SEIU's latest mis-adventures and they were right. Overcoming the reluctance of some of their colleagues—to speak out again—was a big enough challenge for the evening.

One signer of the May, 2008 letter to Stern,¹ LAWCHA president Mike Honey, quickly reminded the group that "we got all kinds of calls from SEIU" after UHW, unbeknownst to the signers, ran the letter as an ad in The New York Times. (As mad as she was at SEIU, even MacLean was still upset about that incident, informing me later that republication of the letter in "a boss paper" left her feeling "violated and betrayed.") SEIU's message to academics the year before was: "You don't know what you're talking about." Honey predicted that anyone signing another letter would be hearing that mantra again because this new controversy was even more complicated and LAWCHA, of course, could take no official position on it.

Seated next to me was Leon Fink, a University of Illinois professor, and editor of the LAWCHA journal, *Labor*, who seemed to agree with Honey. Also a May Day letter signer, Fink cautioned his fellow historians about inserting themselves, this time, in the crossfire between "serious strategic concepts." Joe Berry, a longtime labor educator (since

retired), argued that was "plenty of blame to go around" for the over-lapping SEIU-related disputes. All the top union officials involved are "democracy-challenged," he contended, and none should be "romanticized."

Another labor educator and author from Chicago, whose spouse works as an SEIU consultant, agreed that the union's behavior at Labor Notes and "what SEIU is doing now with HERE" was "repugnant." But, he said, "what I'm hearing tonight is that SEIU is the devil incarnate—worse than the Carpenters or Machinists?" He could not accept those characterizations. He urged everyone to remember that "Justice for

"We always thought of these unions as our friends and allies, . . . Now it was "very scary to all of us committed to a progressive labor movement" to see SEIU raiding UNITE HERE locals and disrupting their activities."

Janitors is one of the greatest movements we've had in the last twenty years. The strike of janitors at the University of Miami was brilliant and Stephen Lerner is one of the most brilliant organizers in the country." Reminded of the Miami campaign, another LAWCHA member defended UHW co-trustee Eliseo Medina as "an honest militant," who deserved respect because of his heroic role in the UFW forty years ago.

The conversation around the table was not going well, from the standpoint of follow-up action. The drift of it seemed

to be that SEIU should not be criticized in the present, because of what the union accomplished in the past. Whatever its errors lately, SEIU still stood head and shoulders above the rest of the union pack. Individual SEIU organizers were worthy of admiration. Blame for progressive union misbehavior must be shared equally by all sides. Nobody has clean hands.

A Letter of Concern

Eileen Boris, from the Feminist Studies Department at UC-Santa Barbara, was among those who favored acting but tried to identify with the mixed feelings in room that might prove paralyzing. And so it went, back and forth, until Klein and MacLean finally read their draft "letter of concern." It stated in part:

"SEIU's concerted efforts to undermine UNITE HERE belie the progressive ideals that SEIU has upheld for decades....The attempts to discredit UNITE HERE leaders, to lure workers out of UNITE HERE and into SEIU, and to

1. Editors note: on May 1, 2008 one-hundred labor-oriented intellectuals had sent Stern an unusual public letter which urged respect for "legitimate and principled dissent." They warned that putting UHW under "trusteeship" would show that "internal democracy is not valued or tolerated within SEIU."

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interfere in the constitutional process of UNITE HERE will not help the cause of democratic unionism and progressive reform. On the contrary, we are concerned that these actions are undermining the principle of union democracy and dividing the progressive movement at a critical moment in history.”

Recalling her own experience at Yale with professors prone to splitting hairs over the wording of faculty resolutions, van den Heever urged everyone present to endorse the Klein-MacLean draft, as written. There just wasn't time for a lot of tinkering, she said. Perhaps a third of the diners volunteered their signatures before leaving the restaurant. Thanks to the follow-up efforts of MacLean and Klein, joined by Nelson Lichtenstein and UNITE HERE itself, the list of endorsers eventually reached 300 in all. This growing network of SEIU critics came from colleges and universities throughout the U.S., Canada, and the U.K.

Despite the organizers' careful efforts to avoid procedural, if not substantive, controversy of the type that occurred the year before, objections were registered anyway. Joshua Freeman, a labor historian from City University of New York who didn't attend the dinner, professed to be “startled” that anyone could be asking “LAWCHA members to sign a letter criticizing SEIU for its actions.” He immediately contacted 80 other academics with a last-minute appeal not to endorse this “partisan attack.” Freeman likened it to “throwing oil on a fire,” arguing that:

Over the past fifteen years, there has been enormous progress in deepening the relationship between organized labor and progressives in the academic world. The moral presumptuousness and factional purpose of this letter can only harm that relationship.”

Freeman's intervention seemed to have little deterrent effect. In a strong riposte, Dan Clawson from the University of Massachusetts questioned whether the CUNY professor, who is close to Bruce Raynor, was really being “neutral” himself. Said Clawson:

“I don't dispute your right to be partisan, nor your right to choose not to be involved, but in this case I think you ARE actively involved, and are making a partisan appeal to oppose the side supported by the letter writers, and support the SEIU analysis, argument, etc. ...[A]lthough we may have been told, as scholars, to stay out of internal labor disputes...the world at that time also involved unions not leading raids on each other, trusteeing locals for disagreeing with the national leadership, and so on.”

Why No Debate on Campus?

One would think that a good place to have an open, honest debate about such competing positions would be right on campus, with all sides represented. The free exchange of “full information,” opinions, and ideas supposed to be a hallmark of intellectual life among students and professors, even in university-based labor studies centers. During labor's civil wars of 2008 to 2010, SEIU spokespeople, like IEB member Stephen Lerner, repeatedly claimed to be in favor of airing different points of view on the same platform. Yet, when offered such opportunities on numerous occasions, SEIU refused to participate in any public forum with internal or external critics, whether from UNITE HERE, UHW, the California Nurses Association, FMPR (the Puerto Rican teachers union), or, after the UHW trusteeship, the new National Union of Healthcare Workers (NUHW).

No one was more hesitant to take sides in disputes involving these parties than the staff of university-based labor education centers. Labor studies specialists depend on labor lobbying to keep their embattled programs afloat, particularly in the face of growing attacks from university budget cutters and conservative legislators. As U-Mass Amherst Labor Center director Eve Weinbaum points out, programs like hers “are often asked to weigh in on intra-union or inter-union conflicts and usually decline.” If they don't remain neutral, labor program staff—even ones with more secure academic appointments—can easily find themselves deprived of union support for their teaching, writing, and research. Offending a key player like SEIU can result in loss of access to unionized workplaces, fewer consulting opportunities, and not as many union members signing up for classes and seminars.

Weinbaum and the handful of other labor educators who bravely endorsed the May, 2008 letter to Andy Stern were quickly reminded of those risks when it appeared in *The New York Times*. Under pressure from SEIU, twenty-five endorsers of the original missive sent a follow-up letter-to-the-editor of *The Times* that was never published. The second letter said: “We signed [the letter to Stern] as part of an internal debate within the labor movement about strategies, tactics, and our vision of the future. We did not intend to choose sides, only to express ideas and concerns...” As Weinbaum explained later, this mea culpa “was instigated by Labor Center people, who felt that they were in a different situation from other academics who study labor but aren't directly involved with workers/unions.”

Sadly, the “we-can't-choose-sides” excuse extended even

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to hosting a debate or participating in a discussion with both sides represented and no institutional endorsement of either position. In the fall of 2008, for example, sixty left-wing intellectuals and activists from throughout California met in McCone Hall on the UC-Berkeley campus. There, they hoped to hear from health care workers in UHW and officials of SEIU about their disagreements. Although UHW provided some funding for travel expenses, the group assembled was not a partisan one; it even included local labor educators like Karin Hart, Vivian Price, and Bill Shields, who had no desire to alienate SEIU. The meeting organizer, Cal Winslow, tried unsuccessfully to get UCB's Center for Labor Research and Education (CLRE) to participate, because of its past research focus on home care and health care issues. Its director, Ken Jacobs, indicated that he and his 14-member staff were too busy to attend. So the Geography Department had to arrange space for the meeting instead. No one from CLRE came. SEIU was invited but, per usual, failed to appear.

While ducking such public forums, SEIU opted for a more personalized approach. Nelson Lichtenstein, a participant in the McCone Hall discussion, was among the Stern letter signers who started getting SEIU-related phone calls from Jo-Ann Mort in New York. A former union editor who still serves on the Dissent editorial board, Mort runs a PR firm called ChangeCommunications. Its impressive roster of clients includes the Ford Foundation, the Carnegie Corporation, the AFL-CIO, and the Open Society Institute funded by George Soros. In 2007-9, the firm was paid \$700,000 by SEIU for consulting work that included having its founder and CEO invite intellectuals to lunch so she could explain the union's controversial actions to them.

Mort's outreach shifted into high gear when SEIU took-over UHW. In early 2009, there was a real danger that progressives might sympathize with NUHW, the new union created by ousted UHW leaders and disgruntled members. To provide detailed guidance in this area, Mort sent all her campus contacts a press release in early February, 2009, that denounced the new union as a “Rogue Organization” whose attempt to “De-stabilize UHW” was “Both Reckless and Feckless.”ⁱⁱ In her accompanying email, Mort reported that she and SEIU leaders were going to put together “an on-going mechanism for dialogue between the academic community and SEIU to

make certain that we combine the best of intellect and activism to take advantage of the Obama presidency.” “I'm sure that you are as anxious as we all are to move past the UHW trusteeship situation,” she said.

Moving Forward “in a serious fashion”

Moving on, during the rest of 2009, wasn't so easy--thanks to the new “situation” that Andy Stern had just created with UNITE HERE, his CTW partner. As noted above, SEIU's costly conflict with Wilhelm's union ignited another round of “academic/lefty” controversy (as one SEIU internal email described it). So Mort, SEIU media relations director Michelle Ringuette, and SEIU board member Javier Morillo from Minnesota began brainstorming together, on line, about how to respond to the letter initiated by MacLean, Klein, and others in Chicago. The Yale-educated Morillo abandoned his own college teaching career to become a rising star within SEIU instead. In an email to Mort and Ringuette, he argued for giving his former academic colleagues a dose of tough love. The professors who signed the latest “letter of concern” should get a response from SEIU that “shames them just a little bit for signing onto something without knowing all the facts....Nothing guilt trips an academic more than reminding them how isolated they are from the world of policy, politics, and activism.” Morillo took it upon himself to contact Nancy MacLean directly. While looking forward to “opening a dialogue” that might avert future “misunderstandings,” Morillo made it clear that he was “saddened” and “disappointed” by her letter about SEIU. He upbraided MacLean and her fellow professors for failing to do the kind of “research and fact-checking you require, when producing work in your own fields.”

“If they don't remain neutral, labor program staff—even ones with more secure academic appointments—can easily find themselves deprived of union support for their teaching, writing, and research.”

Prior to his response, Mort encouraged Morillo to engage other campus leftists “about moving forward in a serious fashion.” She recommended targeting a few of the notables on the UNITE HERE letter signers list, for special attention. As for the rest, “most of these academics really are not worth it,” she asserted. “I just went through that list on the most recent letter and most of them are Labor Notes-types.” Ringuette then joined this private exchange, with a report on discussions at SEIU headquarters about “setting a few workers loose” on MacLean and her colleagues. “I know these aren't high value targets,” she told Mort and Morillo. “But I firmly believe

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people should not be permitted to do 'drive bys.' They are all getting a letter [from Andy Stern] this AM and they all bought a spot on our spam list."

Before anyone could send out any "general info spam," as Morillo called it, he forgot to delete these attached emails when he sent his condescending message to MacLean. Needless to say, when the other professors learned from MacLean that they were going to be shamed, spammed, or treated as low-value targets (aka "Labor Notes-types"), some were pretty miffed. MacLean certainly did not regard their appeal to Stern as the literary equivalent of a drive-by shooting. So she sent a blistering reply to SEIU that rejected any further dialogue with Mort and Ringuette because of their "contemptuous" comments. And she reminded Morillo that the letter signers were "not as clueless and unconnected as your email exchanges imagine."

"However SEIU's Executive Board chooses to label us, the truth is that the faculty who organized and signed this letter have long been your supporters and allies, and have used every occasion possible--until recent events--to hold up SEIU (along with UNITE HERE) as the best hope for the labor movement...We have done this in our scholarship, in our public lectures to community as well as academic audiences, in our relations with foundations and public officials, and in our teaching and mentoring of students, which has brought you many a staff member and student ally."

Within three days, Andy Stern was on the phone himself, personally apologizing to MacLean (as Ringuette did also, via email). MacLean reported that the prospects were now good for a "meeting with Stern and Bruce Raynor to discuss our concerns about their conduct and the broader issues at stake." Based on Stern's assurances, MacLean was also more optimistic than before that "our voices mattered to SEIU's leadership."

A few months later, Lichtenstein and Klein did have a short discussion in New York with Bruce Raynor, a session also attended by Raynor's friend, Josh Freeman from CUNY. Little was accomplished in the exchange. By the time Stern suddenly retired from SEIU in May, 2010, he had managed to avoid his own promised meeting with MacLean and other academics who defended UNITE HERE.

Several months later, the UNITE HERE divorce case finally got settled. In his cease-fire announcement, John Wilhelm declared simply, "We have won our union back." The consensus of opinion was that SEIU paid a pretty high price for settling a war that it started. Workers United/SEIU got to

keep the Amalgamated Bank, a key marital asset in dispute. UNITE HERE received a 28-story building in Manhattan worth \$85 million and \$75 million more in cash and other assets that had been frozen for the duration of the now-ended litigation. The two unions agreed not to compete with each other in hotels and gaming for the next 24 years. In food service, UNITE HERE also got the lion's share of the turf; workers in public school, college, and university cafeterias would still have a choice between SEIU and Wilhelm's union. SEIU was given jurisdiction over hospital food service operations (where NUHW was nipping at its heels in California).

In his public statement, Wilhelm graciously credited Stern's successor, Mary Kay Henry, "for personally devoting her energy to making this agreement." For the sake of workers and the labor movement, I hope that this is the first step in making SEIU the great union it can be under her leadership," he said. In a memo addressed to "The UNITE HERE Family"—a document clearly not intended for internal distribution alone—Wilhelm's tone was a lot more unforgiving. He recounted how merger problems morphed into a new front in labor's civil wars, with UNITE HERE as a target and the "labor visionary' Andy Stern directing the attack in order to get our jurisdiction." "On the ground every day for nearly two years, the organized power of our members, leaders, staff, and attorneys wrestled our union back in the face of local union office lockouts, physical intimidation, smear tactics, private investigators, a PR blitz by labor's biggest PR machine, and employers delighted to cozy up with our opponents." The end result: "SEIU has withdrawn from the field; Bruce Raynor is no longer a union president; and Andy Stern resigned." The UNITE HERE president thanked a long list of allies and supporters, who "rallied to our cause." Among them were the 300 professors who backed the "letter of concern" to SEIU that emerged from an after-dinner discussion at an Italian restaurant in Chicago during LAWCHA's 2009 national conference.

We are also interested in posting notes on pedagogical tools for the classroom. How do you use a particular movie, document, song, etc. in your classroom? Feel free to provide us with the title of your source and a short description of how you use it.

Randi Storch, SUNY-Cortland
Chair, LAWCHA Teaching Resources Committee

Syllabus Exchange

An Appeal from LAWCHA's Teaching Resources Committee

LAWCHA's Teaching Resources committee would like to launch a syllabi exchange. Do you teach a course on labor and working-class history or on a related topic? If so, please send your syllabus as an attachment to rfeurer@niu.edu.

Once we collect enough syllabi, we will build a module on Rosemary Feurer's Labor History webography that is currently linked through LAWCHA's homepage.

LAWCHA Tour at the AHA, Boston



Thomas Klug
LAWCHA Secretary-Treasurer
Associate Professor of History
Director of the Institute for Detroit Studies
Marygrove College, Detroit, Michigan

Tour participants view one of six porcelain panels at Back Bay station. Green called the panels the “most important public history project of my career.”
Credit: Tom Klug

In early January, on a cold and dreary Saturday afternoon in Boston, a dozen members and friends of LAWCHA in town for the annual conference of the American Historical Association huddled together for a labor history tour offered by former LAWCHA president, Jim Green (U Mass, Boston). Unlike the tour he gave when the AHA met in Boston eleven years ago, this one focused on just one site: the memorial to civil rights and labor history at the Back Bay station.

Among those who gathered at our starting point at the Westin Hotel (where LAWCHA vice president Shel Stromquist greeted us and introduced our tour guide) was our Australian colleague, Verity Burgmann, of the University of Melbourne. Jim briefly reviewed his work in developing a driving tour of twenty-two labor history sites in downtown Boston for the 2001 conference of the United Association of Labor Education. Each of us received from him a copy of one of the handful of remaining copies of *A Working People's Heritage Trail: Guide to a Driving Tour of Labor History Sites in Boston*, which was published by the Massachusetts AFL-CIO.

After introductions and a little background history, we walked across Dartmouth Street to site #1 on the

standard tour: the A. Philip Randolph Statue and the African-American Railway Worker Memorial at the Back Bay train station. During the 1980s, State Representative Byron Rushing took the lead in pushing for a monument to Randolph, whom he admired as a socialist and labor leader, as well as a fighter for civil rights. Tina Allen's bronze statue of the contemplative leader was dedicated in 1987 in the station's main waiting area.

In 1991, Representative Rushing received funding from the city's Transit Authority to memorialize the porters and other African-American railroad workers who once labored in the railway yards before the redevelopment of this section of downtown Boston. Jim Green teamed up with Robert Hayden, a historian and African-American community leader whose grandfather was a Pullman for 50 years. Hayden conducted oral histories with retired workers, and through his contacts a collection of family-held photographs emerged. Jim worked with these materials, wrote concise historical narratives to provide context for these workers lives and struggles, and also served as the principal designer. The result in 1993 was the dedication of six porcelain panels that are mounted on the interior walls of the main corridor of Back Bay

LAWCHA at the AHA

station. Jim still calls the panels the “most important public history project of my career.”

The panels examine the development of Boston's African American community, the racism and segregation experienced by African American railway workers, the pride they exhibited in their work, their struggles and union formation. Passing by, the traveling public observes photographs of rank-and-file workers and union officials, documents and newspaper articles, and large-scale quotations at the top of the panels. Some of these quotations come from A. Philip Randolph: “The essence of trade unionism is social uplift. The labor movement has traditionally been the haven for the dispossessed, the despised, the downtrodden, the poor,” and “Let the nation know the meaning of our numbers. We are not a pressure group, we are not an organization...we are not a mob. We

are the advance guard of a massive moral revolution for jobs and freedom.” But the voices of the porters, like Theron Brown, are given significant space as well: “Being a porter was educational because of the traveling. And it was a clean job. You had your nice uniform, white shirt, and black tie. And, well, you felt like an executive. I served famous people, the Rockefeller family, the old man Rockefeller. And I had Jackie Robinson on my train.” Jim emphasized that the visibility of working-class people in the displays is unique, as workers seldom appear in other sites of public memory in Boston.

After touring the site and standing for photographs next to Randolph's statue, we moved on to a nearby tavern for a round of drinks and good conversation. As we broke up and headed outside into the falling snow, we dreamed of brighter days to come.



Tina Allen's bronze statue of A. Phillip Randolph draws attention to the panels. Credit: Tom Klug

The 15th Bi-Annual Southern Labor Studies Conference, April 7-10, 2011

“Memory and Forgetting: Labor History and the Archive”

Alex Lichtenstein, Co-Chair, SLSA Conference Committee

Those of us who care about keeping the history of labor and the working class alive in the U.S. currently face at least four interrelated crises. First, there is a crisis of memory, as labor’s heroic past in building democracy faces obliteration from the nation’s popular and public culture. In some instances, this is a physical process, as the struggle to preserve West Virginia’s Blair Mountain as a National Historical Landmark in the face of coal companies seeking to strip mine near this historic site of labor struggle attests.¹ The threat to sites of memory and to the public history of labor mirrors the shrinking place for working-class history in college and high school classrooms, part of a more general devaluing of the humanities facing educators and students in the U.S.

Of course, these twinned crises of public and classroom pedagogy pale before the daunting terrain faced by American working people themselves. As Michael Kazin notes in the latest issue of *Dissent* magazine, with the precipitous decline of unions, workers are now virtually bereft of the only institution dedicated to voicing and representing their collective interests within the polity.² An all-out assault on public-sector unions appears to be poised to follow the deliberate gutting of their private sector counterparts that characterized the last three decades of labor history.³ Finally, most workers in the U.S. and the rest of the industrialized or “developed” world face a very real crisis of work itself: fewer and fewer people can count on productive, meaningful, secure, and remunerative labor, not to mention some kind of social wage to go with it. The conditions of those millions of workers, from China to Lesotho to Honduras, who produce the goods consumed in the developed economies are even worse, resembling nothing so much as those faced by American workers a century ago. That, if nothing else, should impel us to preserve U.S. labor’s history.

With the challenge of these quadruple crises foremost in mind, the 2011 Southern Labor Studies Conference is dedicated to exploring the themes of memory and forgetting in labor history. Convening in Atlanta April 7-10, at the Sheraton Hotel, the Conference coincides with the 40th anniversary of the Southern Labor Archives at Georgia State Univer-

sity. The selection and arrangement of panels and events seek to promote common dialogue among labor historians, the archivists they depend on to locate, construct, and organize the “archive” of working class history (especially in the U.S. South), filmmakers injecting labor stories into public culture, and the activists who keep alive a flame for labor’s future. How, we want to ask collectively, can preserving, interrogating, and making visible labor’s past help contribute to its potential future?

To this end, the conference promises an exciting array of events. Thursday night’s (April 7) keynote address will be given by Robert Korstad (Duke University), longtime practitioner of southern labor and oral history, and author of *Civil Rights Unionism: Tobacco Workers and the Struggle for Democracy in the Mid-Twentieth Century South*. Bob’s talk is entitled “Searching for a Usable Past: Fifty Years of Writing Southern Labor History.” Friday’s (April 8) lunchtime keynote features Alessandro Portelli, of the University of Rome (La Sapienza), probably the single most important practitioner of working-class oral history working today. Sandro’s address, “Thirty years of field work in Harlan County,” coincides with the recent release of his book, *They Say in Harlan County: An Oral History*. The conference itself consists of twenty-two panels, running the gamut from an examination of the holdings of the Texas Labor Archives to a retrospective look at the Freedmen and Southern Society’s monumental documentary editing project on emancipation. A pair of panels will consist of screenings of documentary films (“Morristown: In Air and Sun” and “Wildcat at Mead”), followed by panel discussions. In addition, on Friday night at the Atlanta University Center’s new Robert Woodruff library, there will be a pre-screening of portions of Andrea Kalin’s new film, “Dissident at Large: Stetson Kennedy Unmasked,” followed by a panel discussion including the filmmaker, and, if we are lucky, Stetson himself. Also on the program (Saturday, April 9) are two workshops sponsored by SLSA’s Labor Outreach Committee and LAWCHA’s Labor Activism Committee, focused on campus labor activism.

The conference will conclude with a walking tour and plenary

1. See the Open Letter to the U.S. National Park Service, Oct. 5, 2010, prepared by Brian Kelly and signed by many LAWCHA and SLSA members; <<<http://hnn.us/roundup/entries/132195.html>>>, accessed Jan. 17, 2011.

2. Michael Kazin, “Learning from the Debacle: It’s the Institutions, Stupid,” *Dissent* 58(Winter 2011):5-6.

3. Steven Greenhouse, “Strained States Turning to Laws to Curb Labor Unions,” *New York Times*, Jan. 4, 2011, p. A1.

Southern Labor Studies Conference

session held on Saturday afternoon (3:30-6:30) at the King Center for Non-Violent Social Change, at the Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historic Site. Convened by Michael Honey, author of *Going Down Jericho Road: The Memphis Strike, Martin Luther King’s Last Campaign*, this capstone event is organized around King’s dictum that “All Labor Has Dignity,” also the title of a new collection of King’s speeches on labor edited by Honey. We have invited longtime civil rights and labor activist and contemporary of King’s, the Reverend C.T. Vivian, to offer concluding remarks at this event.

We should be under no illusion that a mere academic conference of archivists and historians can, by itself, do much to combat the multiple threats facing working people today.

18th annual Midwest Labor and Working-Class History Colloquium (MLWCH) this April 15-16.

Matthew M. Mettler, Ph.D. Candidate, University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa

The University of Iowa graduate students will sponsor the 18th annual Midwest Labor and Working-Class History Colloquium (MLWCH) this April 15-16. Since 1994, graduate students at The University of Iowa, The University of Illinois at Chicago, and The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign have taken turns in organizing and sustaining this unique opportunity for graduate students to share their research and exchange thoughts about labor and working class history. MLWCH began as an effort to connect the strong labor history programs at these universities and continue a tradition of graduate student exchange begun decades earlier between students of David Montgomery and Herbert Gutman. Past conferences have included participants from Purdue, Northern Illinois, University of Minnesota, University of Wisconsin–Madison and UW-Milwaukee.

The colloquium is designed to facilitate a relaxed and informal forum to present research, receive feedback, and discuss current trends in the field. While the foundation of the colloquium has been labor and working class historians at these three universities, MLWCH welcomes interested graduate students from any institution pursuing a broad range of social history. Unlike at more formal academic conferences, participants pre-circulate papers so as to maximize time for thoughtful discussion and constructive feedback. Moreover, students at the host institution create a cordial atmosphere

Still, we hope that the conference will serve as a reminder of the simultaneous necessity of preserving and explaining—actively remembering—labor’s past in order to help secure its future. Lest we forget, Dr. King himself spoke to the importance of labor’s past, noting that “History is a great teacher. Now everyone knows that the labor movement did not diminish the strength of the nation but enlarged it... Those who attack labor forget these simple truths, but history remembers them.”⁴

Please see the program and register for the conference and accompanying events at:

<http://www.southernlaborstudies.org>

by organizing social events and arranging for home-stays for those coming to town.

The theme of this year’s Colloquium is “The Rank and File in Action,” and will focus on grassroots struggles for economic and social justice. Speaking to this theme will be noted scholar and social activist Staughton Lynd, whose keynote address is titled “Guerrilla History.” Along with his wife Alice Lynd, Staughton Lynd has been a leading voice of American radicalism in championing causes of civil rights, democratic socialism, world peace, and labor rights, among others. Lynd has balanced his activism with a distinguished academic career. During the course of a career that began in the late 1950s, Lynd has inspired generations of students with his lectures and his distinguished scholarly work, notably: *Intellectual Origins of American Radicalism* (1968) and *Rank and File* (1981). In pursuing a research agenda that aligned with his politics, Staughton Lynd has continued the tradition of his parents, sociologists Robert and Helen Lynd, in opening the academy to dissenting and critical voices that would reflect a more democratic history of the American experience.

Please submit inquiries to Audrey Coleman, MLWCH Colloquium Coordinator, e-mail:

mlwch2011@gmail.com.

4. Martin Luther King, Jr., “If the Negro Wins, Labor Wins,” at the AFL-CIO Fourth Constitutional Convention, Miami, Dec. 11, 1961, in Michael K. Honey, ed., *All Labor Has Dignity: Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s Speeches on Labor* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2011), pp. 36-37.

Transnational Labor, Transnational Methods

Toronto Summer Labor Institute 2008

Paul Lawrie, Ph.D. Candidate, University of Toronto

In the summer of 2008, an eclectic group of scholars and activists gathered at New College, University of Toronto to discuss the current state of global labor studies. The week long workshop “Transnational Labour, Transnational Methods” brought together approximately sixty junior and senior faculty, graduate students, and labor activists from five continents to reconsider the politics and practice of transnational history. This unique gathering was sponsored by New College in collaboration with the Toronto Area Council of the United Steel Workers, the International Institute of Social History (Amsterdam, Netherlands), and the Center for Asia Pacific Social Transformation Studies (CAPSTRANS), and Social and Equity Studies at the University of Toronto. The Toronto workshop was the third meeting convened by a group of transnational labor historians, the first being in Hyderabad, India (July – August 2005), and the second in Campinas, Brazil (June 2006). Toronto was the culmination of ongoing efforts by a group of labor historians to devise a workable, transportable, and equitable model of transnational labor history.

This trio of workshops grew out of growing concerns by a cadre of scholars regarding the increasingly fragmented nature of contemporary labor scholarship, and the analytical limitations of ahistorical models of ‘globalization.’ Organizers and participants sought to reconcile transnational history’s drive for global comprehension with local and regional imperatives. However, efforts to merge theory with practice revealed the politics within the praxis of transnational labor history. Structural and economic inequalities between the global north and south have produced unequal flows of knowledge which often unwittingly perpetuate imperialist ideologies. Within the context of global capitalism transnational methodologies

too often take on an extractive character whereby the North simply accumulates and appropriates Southern intellectual capital. To militate against this process, organizers challenged participants to conceive of history as a politics of operation as opposed to a set of outcomes.

The Toronto Summer Labor Institute was ambitious in scope. The organizing committee headed by Rick Halpern, former Principal of New College and current Dean of University of Toronto, Scarborough, and Daniel Bender, a Canada Research Chair in Cultural History and Analysis, University of Toronto at Scarborough, designed a far reaching, comprehensive workshop. Attendees were divided into one of four large home groups headed by a facilitator (often a senior faculty member) who moderated discussion around a set of readings based on the day’s plenary sessions. Participants were also placed in four working groups- “Migration and Diaspora,” “Globalizing Production,” “Laboring Culture,” and “Labour and Empire” -and charged with producing an editable wiki which identified key themes, secondary sources, and archival materials for future projects.

Drawing together a diverse mix of academics and activists across cultural, linguistic, and regional lines meant that the workshops were not without their problems. Many of the primary challenges in both the home and working groups coalesced around issues of vocabulary, methodology, and sustainability. Forging a common vocabulary required not only overcoming linguistic barriers, but also required those from the global north to forego their reflexive reliance on proscriptive rhetoric in favor of a language of mutuality. How we talk inevitably informs what we talk about and why. A trans-local methodology was proposed as an effective remedy for overcoming the bias towards the nation-state as

Transnational Labor, Transnational Methods



Credit: Rosemary Feurer

an explanatory model while not eviscerating the role of local politics in global labor studies. Such an approach also proved useful for complicating the often false dichotomy erected between free and unfree labor in analyses of both the global North and South. Finally, participants struggled with ways to sustain the workshop beyond Toronto. The working groups digitized and editable wikis were an uneven but vital first step to facilitating this process of intellectual solidarity.

Labor historians’ focus on the ebb and flow of working peoples, laboring communities, and regimes of production makes them uniquely positioned to interrogate the praxis of transnational histories. Just as the nation-state was naturalized via explicitly political means, any attempt to decenter and transcend the nation as an object

of study must also be attuned to the politics of its practice. The diverse array of participants at Toronto spoke to the fundamental utility of labor history which resides not only in its connection to working class politics or issues of social justice but in its methodological imperative to account for ‘informed action’ on the part of the powerful and the powerless. Foregrounding transnational labor history as an end in and of itself provides scholars with the analytical tools to historicize the dynamic interconnections of globalization and navigate the ever shifting, many headed hydra that is global capitalism. Labor historians at the University of Toronto look forward to further developing and deploying these tools as part of an ongoing investigation into global labor studies.

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