

Update: Dismantling Labor's Past in Maine

Posted on January 1, 2013 by Rosemary Feurer

Two years ago, Maine Governor Paul LePage's removed [Judy Taylor's labor history mural](#) located in the state's Department of Labor. On January 14th, it saw the light of day once again.

January 15, 2012

Two years ago, Governor LePage removed a labor history mural from the states' Department of Labor building. On Monday, January 14th, it was back on display after an agreement was reached to display the mural for three years at the Augusta Museum. For more information, see the below news stories:

- Mike Hall, "[Maine Labor History Mural Finally Sees Light of Day](#)," AFL-CIO NOW, January 14th, 2013.
- Clark Canfield, "[Labor mural removed by Maine gov. back on display](#)," *Salon*, January 14th, 2013.
- *Maine Sun Journal*, "[Maine labor mural goes back on display Monday in Augusta](#)," January 13th, 2012.

April 26, 2011

The clash over the recent removal of a mural depicting the labor history of Maine at that state's Department of Labor offices has entered the courts. On Friday, April 22, Justice John Woodcock, Jr., of the U.S. District Court in Bangor, denied a request by six Maine citizens for a temporary restraining order against Governor Paul LePage and the directors of the Maine Department of Labor and state museum. The plaintiffs argued that LePage's removal of the mural violated the First Amendment free speech rights of Maine citizens by denying them access to the mural. Judge Woodcock ruled in a lengthy 45-page decision that the mural is government speech and that the governor's administration has the legal right to

choose to display or remove art that is owned by the state in state buildings. The plaintiffs in the case, including Maine labor lawyers, union officials, and artists, had sought the restraining order to compel the return of the mural and the disclosure of its location and condition. Woodcock did not issue any ruling on the latter issue, and the plaintiffs still hope to force the LePage administration to disclose where and how the mural is being stored and to ensure its physical integrity.

Other legal remedies to the mural's removal are being explored. In early April, Guy Gilbert, a senior U.S. Department of Labor official, wrote a letter to the Maine Department of Labor ordering department officials to either reinstate the mural or repay the federal portion of the \$60,000 under the Reed Act that was used to pay for the mural. Some in the coalition established to defend the mural and demand its return note that Governor LePage did not consult the mural's creator, Judy Taylor, before removing her art, as the contract between her and the state requires, but Taylor has not taken any legal action. Others suggest that LePage's removal of the mural may have violated the Visual Artists Rights Act of 1990.

For the latest news and information on how you can support efforts to reinstall the mural, see the Maine Labor Mural coalition website and Facebook page:

<http://mainelabormural.blogspot.com/>
<http://www.facebook.com/mainelabormural>

- Justin Jackson

April 1, 2011

Over the weekend of March 26-27, 2011, Maine Governor Paul LePage removed a mural celebrating labor history from the Department of Labor offices. In ten panels painted by Maine artist Judy Taylor and installed in 2008, the mural depicts the working people who were central in the making of Maine's rich industrial history. The panels portray diverse groups of working-class Mainers, including colonial-era artisans; nineteenth-century loggers and child laborers; shoe workers on strike with the CIO in Auburn and Lewiston in 1937; and women workers riveting ships at Bath Iron Works during World War II. Together with the renaming of department conference rooms previously named after important figures in the nation's labor history, such as Frances Perkins, the first female secretary of labor, whose family has Maine roots, this act constitutes an attempt to erase the historical memory and heritage of Maine's working people.

For those interested, [Judy Taylor's website has detailed photographs of the mural.](#)

The Museum in Lewiston-Auburn and Portland City Hall are deliberating with state officials to take the mural off the state's hands. The Portland City Council is set to vote on **April 4** on accepting the mural. The state AFL-CIO and Union of Maine Visual Artists, which has coordinated protests on this, seems to be working to pressure Portland and the museum not to take the mural at this time, in hopes that it might be returned

LAWCHA Resolution

The following resolution has been adopted regarding the Governor Paul LePage's actions in Maine:

The Labor and Working-Class History Association, the largest organization of labor historians in the United States, supports efforts to preserve public art that represents the nation's labor history in local, state, and federal buildings. We deplore Maine Governor Paul LePage's removal of the labor history mural from Maine Department of Labor offices over the weekend of March 26-27, 2011. In eleven panels painted by Maine artist Judy Taylor and installed in 2008, this mural depicts the working people who were central in the making of Maine's rich industrial history. The panels portray diverse groups of working-class Mainers, including colonial-era artisans; nineteenth-century loggers and child laborers; shoe workers on strike with the CIO in Auburn and Lewiston in 1937; and women workers riveting ships at Bath Iron Works during World War II. Together with the renaming of department conference rooms previously named after important figures in the nation's labor history, such as Frances Perkins, the first female secretary of labor, whose family has Maine roots, this act constitutes an attempt to erase the historical memory and heritage of Maine's working people. LAWCHA urges Maine's elected officials to reinstall the mural in its original location and to return the names of distinguished labor activists to the rooms where they belong.

Labor and Working-Class History Association

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Brian Kelly, Queen's University
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More Information

- [Maine Labor Mural Blog](#) - the most recent news on the event.
- [Kevin Miller, *The \(Maine\) Times Record*, "Moved Mural Uproar Persists"](#) (March 29, 2011)
- [Amanda Terkel, *Huffington Post*, "Maine Department Of Labor Quietly Removes Mural Over The Weekend"](#) (March 28, 2011)
- [New York Times Editorial, "He Dreamed He Saw Kim Jong-Il"](#) (March 27, 2011)

How Can I Help?

Getting involved is as easy as writing a letter, making a phonecall, and voicing your opinion!
Make yourself heard by contacting:

Office of the Governor
1 State House Station
Augusta ME 04333-0001
Email governor @maine.gov
207 287-3531
Maine Arts Commission
Donna McNeil, Director
193 State Street
25 State House Station
Augusta ME 04333-0025
207 287-2724
fax 207 287-2725
donna.mcneil@maine.gov
Portland City Council
City of Portland
Mr. Nicholas Mavodones, Mayor
389 Congress St #211
Portland ME 04101
207 874-8683
nmm@portlandme.gov
Museum L/A
35 Canal Street
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Acting Commissioner Laura Boyett
54 State House Station
Augusta ME 04333-0054
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Maine State Museum
Joseph R. Phillips, Museum Director
83 State House Station
Augusta ME 04333-0083
207 287-6607
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Maine House of Representatives
House Republican Office
Room 332, State House
2 State House Station
Augusta ME 04333-0002
House Democratic Office
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