

Start! A Labor Drama

Posted on January 27, 2026 by Leilah Danielson

Teaching Labor's Story is excited to add a labor drama to LAWCHA's labor history sourcebook: *START! A Play in Seven Scenes*. Written and produced by two garment worker-students at Brookwood Labor College in 1927, *Start!* tells the story of Sonia, a garment worker and ardent unionist, sent from New York to organize garment workers in New Jersey.



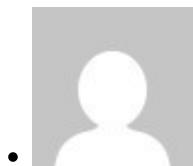
Eva Shafran and Beckie Friedman

This is a great example of the early 20th century workers education movement in action. Garment worker-playwrights Beckie Friedman and Eva Shafran used their understanding of the industry; of union solidarity; and the desires, foibles, and potential of fellow workers to craft educational entertainment.

The primary source for this TLS entry is an abridged excerpt of the first two scenes of this seven-scene drama. As the teaching guide essay explains, these scenes are entertaining, realistic, and pack in important insights into four major themes in labor history: tensions between first- and second-generation immigrant workers, tensions between craft- and industrial- unionists, the impact and threat posed by capital mobility, and the nature of labor feminism. These themes are threaded through all seven scenes; a citation to the full play is included.

This TLS is authored by Leilah Danielson, Professor of History at Northern Arizona University. Her published works examine the history of religion, race, and American social movements, including *American Gandhi: A.J. Muste and the History of Radicalism in the Twentieth Century* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014) and a co-edited anthology (with Doug Rossinow and Marian Mollin), *The Religious Left in Modern America: Doorkeepers of a Radical Faith* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018). Her current projects include research on the workers' education movement of the interwar years and the U.S.-Latin American solidarity movement of the 1970s and 1980s.

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