

Newsletter

(Affiliated with the Wisconsin Historical Society)

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FEATURED IN THIS ISSUE:

- **STEVE CUPERY OF WEAC ELECTED NEW WLHS PRESIDENT. SEE PAGE 2.**
- **AMY STEAR OF 9TO5 AT BAY VIEW TRAGEDY. READ HER SPEECH ON PAGE 3.**
- **FULL REPORT ON 28TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE BEGINS ON PAGE 5.**
- **WHAT STUDENTS SAY ABOUT ESSAY CONTEST ON PAGE 11.**

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ARE YOU A MEMBER?
IS YOUR LOCAL A MEMBER, OR YOUR COUNCIL?

SEE MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION ON PAGE 9

From 1930s come lessons for re-unionizing: 28th Annual Conference Highlights

The dramatic struggles in forming unions during the Great Depression — and the challenges and opportunities that followed — came alive at the 28th Annual Conference of the Wisconsin Labor History Society May 9 in Neenah.

The events of the 1930s were discussed at the conference held in the Neenah-Menasha Labor Temple as unions try to regroup and grow in the aftermath of several decades of anti-unionism that has weakened unions and lessened the standards of living of all workers.

The conference entitled, "Organizing in Hard Times: Problems and Opportunities," attracted 70 persons.

It began with the showing of "With Babies and Banners," a 1979 film of the role of women in the 1937 sitdown strikes at Flint, Michigan, that led to the first UAW contracts with GM. The conference covered the unemployed workers movement of the period

and other organizing. It moved then through the anti-unionism that covered the nation, before settling in on several current union efforts that offer promise for the future.

THE 1930s VICTORIES. Rosemary Feurer, assistant professor at Northern Illinois University, said workers of the 1930s felt powerless against the companies that hired them, just as workers do today as union protections weaken and joblessness increases. Yet, she said, the workers moved away from the traditions of the era in exchange "for ideas that were considered radical at the time."

Both Feurer and Jim Lorence, professor emeritus of history at University of Wisconsin – Marathon County, agreed that organizing succeeded at the time as whole communities got involved in the effort, including unemployed worker councils and the wives, sisters, mothers and daughters of workers. Since whole communities of people sup-

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STATE ASSEMBLY VOTES ON LABOR HISTORY BILL; SENATE NEXT



State Representative Christine Sinicki (D-Milwaukee), shown speaking at the annual Bay View Tragedy event, chaired the State Assembly Labor Committee and helped to steer the "Labor History in the Schools" bill through to passage by 61-38 vote in the Assembly. In July, the State Senate held hearings on the two bills under consideration. One bill would mandate all school districts to teach labor history in the schools and the second bill (as passed in the Assembly) would require the teaching of labor history to be part of state standards. **Read full report by President Steve Cupery on the Senate hearings on Page 10.**

Steve Cupery, a veteran unionist, has been elected President of the Wisconsin Labor History, succeeding Ken Germanson who chose not to run for re-election.

Cupery, Lakewood Uniserv Director for the Wisconsin Education Association Council (WEAC), was elected unanimously at the annual WLHS meeting in Neenah on May 9. He became active, being elected Secretary-Treasurer of his Allied Industrial Workers local union in Kalamazoo, Michigan at the age of 20. He later graduated from Cornell University's School of Industrial and Labor Relations with a

STEVE CUPERY NEW WLHS PRESIDENT

— LONGTIME LABOR
ACTIVIST TAKES
LEADERSHIP ROLE

major in economics. He has worked for Cornell's Labor Studies Program doing labor education, the UAW as an organizer and the Service Employees Union as a union representative in Wisconsin before joining WEAC.

His is married and has one daughter and lives in Shorewood.

Germanson, a retiree of the former Allied Industrial Workers Union (now part of Steelworkers Union), served as President from 1992 to the present. The WLHS Board voted to make him President Emeritus.

A TRIBUTE TO KEN GERMANSON

After 17 years of dedicated leadership, Ken Germanson has stepped down as president of the Wisconsin Labor History Society. We know that organizations are more than one individual, but Ken's passion for labor history and boundless energy enriched the Society in so many ways. His consistent good humor made all of our efforts over many years so much more enjoyable.

The WLHS Board Members wanted to do something special to show our deep appreciation, so we have contributed to have an oral history recorded of Ken's life and work. Michael Gordon, Associate Professor of History at UW-Milwaukee and one of the best oral historians in the country, will conduct the interview this summer.

Ken has spent a lifetime in support of the labor movement and other progressive causes. His involvement with labor began as a reporter with the Milwaukee Sentinel and as a leader in the 1962 Newspaper Guild strike, for which he was blacklisted. He went on to work for AFSCME and then the Allied Industrial Workers union. Ken also has an encyclope-

dic knowledge of the Wisconsin labor movement, and we want to capture all that so it can be shared with future generations.

Ken's shoes would be tough to fill for anyone, but the Labor History Society is so fortunate that Steve Cupery has agreed to take the reins. Steve is Lakewood Uniserve Director for the Wisconsin Education Association Council, located in Brookfield. Steve's activism with the labor movement began as local union leader in the Allied Industrial Workers where his commitment to labor and passion for its history was encouraged by both Ken and the late labor educator, George Daitsman. The Society will now benefit because these three paths crossed.

Ken has been given the status of President Emeritus. We hope that he will continue to share with us his basic optimism for the future and appreciation for the lessons of history. —On behalf of the Wisconsin Labor History Society Board, by Joanne Ricca



WLHS BOARD MEMBERS

Members of the WLHS Board of Directors posed (picture below) after 28th annual conference. Shown are (first row, from left) Joanne Ricca, Harvey Kaye, Candice Owley, Ken Germanson, Judy Gatlin, and Joanne Bruch; and (second row) Carmen Clark, Jim Lorence, Bob Agen, Paul Cigler, Laurie Wermter, David Nack, Steve Cupery and Jack Jentz. (Not shown are Will P. Jones, Stephen Meyer, David Newby, James Reiland)

NO TIME FOR COMPROMISE IN FIGHTING FOR RIGHTS

(From remarks of Amy Stear, Wisconsin director of 9to5, made at 123rd Anniversary Commemoration of the Bay View Tragedy, May 3, 2009, in Milwaukee.)

... I was raised in West Virginia and learned at an early age you had to understand which side you were on - you couldn't be on both. And the reason you couldn't, I was told, was because a time would come in your life where you would be faced with making the kind of choices that mattered, that were life altering or world changing. Even if I was just a hillbilly kid who may or may not ever get out of Appalachia, I had a role to play, a job to do, a difference to make. And that meant I had to be clear about a basic tenet of life - knowing the difference between right and wrong. The next step involved being willing to stand up for what was right in the face of forces who would do wrong.

In 1886, workers in Milwaukee arrived at exactly that same place my great-uncles told me about, that place where you have to swallow your fear and gain your heart to fight for what is right, for the side YOU have chosen to be on. We are here today to honor those workers, the fallen and those who lived to fight another day. Because of their courage we enjoy rights as workers that the bosses never wanted to cede us. The battle for the eight hour day that was the heart of the fight in Milwaukee, WI 123 years ago was not won nationally until 1938. But because workers in Milwaukee, along with other workers across the nation in other cities, were willing to step up and demand what was right, what was fair for the work force, we were able to gain one of the most signifi-



Amy Stear, of 9to5, links 1886 8-hour day marches to fight for paid sick leave in Milwaukee

cant labor standards in our country's history. It is a standard we must never take for granted, just as we should never forget how much it cost to win it.

Today, we honor that fight by continuing to work for justice in our workplace, identifying what we need, as workers, to make our lives better. It is 2009 and we now have more women in our workplaces than ever in the history of our nation. Almost 80% of women are working today, a far cry from my mother's workforce of the 1950's. Here in Milwaukee we have a record number of single women head of households - almost 50% - balancing the needs of their families while working to succeed in their jobs. And it isn't easy. 9to5 represents many of these women. Our membership is dominated by low wage women who are single mothers. They work in fast food restaurants, small retail shops, light manufacturing sites. Only one in four of these women statistically can be expected to have even one paid sick day. What happens to these women when their children fall ill? It

isn't as if they can call on their mothers, their sisters or a friend to come in and "save the day" so they can go off to work knowing their child is cared for by a trusted family member — the truth of the matter is, mom, sister and friend are most likely working themselves and therefore can't be counted on for emergency childcare. It is at this point our members find themselves faced with terrible choices that include loss of much-needed pay or even loss of their job. As people on the conservative side of the political spectrum lament the lack of initiative of poor people to rise out of poverty, we rail against the conditions imposed on these women that make it so much harder to provide for their families.

I am proud to have been part of the campaign last year in Milwaukee to fight for paid sick days for all workers in our city. And given the current public health crisis it feels like we were prescient. Milwaukee voters came together to ensure all people who work in our city would be able to care for our family's health while maintaining a stable income. Here in Milwaukee, we recognized that everyone gets sick and, with the evolution of our workforce that has resulted in a reduction of stay-at-home caretakers, we must take steps to ensure workers receive support at their jobs to deal with unexpected illness and preventative care. This new minimum standard of paid sick days for workers in our city is important to all of us but it is particularly significant for working women. We are excited to be a part of the movement to gain improvements in workers' lives and we know that our participation in the fight for workplace rights will increase the likelihood our movement will thrive and we will ultimately prevail.

... We are living in times of great economic turmoil, we are facing bosses who have been empowered by corruption at the highest levels. Here in Milwaukee we have seen what this kind of power does to the leaders of the business com-

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Scenes

From
123rd Annual
Commemoration:
Bay View
Tragedy of
May 5, 1886



Anita Zeidler, daughter of the late Mayor Frank Zeidler, read off the names of the seven killed in the 1886 tragedy. Mayor Zeidler headed Milwaukee from 1948 to 1960 as a Socialist. He was active in Bay View event until his death in 2006.



Stephen Hauser, author and historian, was master of ceremonies at event that attracted more than 200. Shown seated in front row are (from left) Ellen Tucker, Bay View resident whose great grandmother was Beulah Brinton, a prominent Bay View leader; Kathy Mulvey, president of the Bay View Historical Society, and Rose Daitsman, who introduced Amy Stear.

‘CHOOSE YOUR SIDE AND FIGHT . . .’ – STEAR

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community. When faced with the reality of an overwhelming vote in support of a basic worker right the MMAC (Metropolitan Milwaukee Association of Commerce) leadership said we don't care what you want or need, we don't have to respect your choice. Workers have watched this same arrogant attitude play out across the country for decades now as bosses defy our right to organize unions, insisting we don't know what's good for us.

Now, more than ever, we must stand up to the tyranny of that small fraction of our country that would deny us even the smallest slice of the pie. We must reach out to working people, we must recognize that every interaction we have is an opportunity to organize. We need to

talk to our neighbors, engage our coworkers, turn to that person standing in line behind us at the grocery store and start a conversation. We must demand accountability from our elected leaders and hold their feet to the fire. We have to own our power as a collective - we put them into office and we can take them out. We must not accept anything less than true representation of the best interest of the majority. We can not tolerate widespread misery while a small, select few enjoy the fruits of our labor.

Our movement is riddled with sacrifice as occurred here in Bay View 123 years ago. We best honor our history by increasing our efforts to build the movement. We can and we must. There's no "maybe" box on the ballot. Choose your side and fight for it.



Larry Penn, prominent folksinger, led audience in singing traditional "Ghosts of Bay View," while later everyone sang "Solidarity Forever."

SUMMARY OF PRESENTATIONS AT 28TH ANNUAL WLHS CONFERENCE

FILM OPENS PROGRAM. Opening the 28th Annual WLHS Conference, **David Nack**, WLHS Board Member, showed a portion of the film, "With Babies and Banners," the story of the Women's Auxiliary Brigade during the Flint Sitdown Strike of 1937. The film was produced in 1979 and is a classic labor film.

The film showed the major role that women played in the classic struggles of labor, particularly in the 1930s, he said.

SESSION ONE: Organizing in Hard Times.

Jim Lorence, emeritus professor of history at the University of Wisconsin – Marathon County, and author of "Organizing the Unemployed," discussed the Workers Alliance, an organization of unemployed workers that had been developed in the early 1930s. The Alliance collaborated with the union and its organizing efforts, with the unemployed and was active in picketlines and other events, Lorence said.

The Alliance worked with the union to ease the workers' access to relief, since the county authorities in Flint required applicants to go to their employers first to ask for help before they could apply for relief, he said.

A Welfare Committee was formed and it evolved into the UAW Welfare Department in 1938, which helped to bring about the principle that the union was also a "social institu-



Jim Lorence

tion," Lorence said. First of all, it provided for support for unemployed workers, and secondly, it worked on the principle that if the union assisted the unemployed it would build worker solidarity, he said. The department, in a sense, became a "school for unionism" and helped to lessen the impact of scabs and strikebreakers, he added. The union's actions in working with the unemployed emphasized that unionism went beyond wages and hours and that the unionism was extended to the community and the families.

CONFRONTING POWER. **Rosemary Feurer**, assistant professor of history at Northern Illinois University, said the film ("With Babies and Banners") corrects the myths on how the UAW and the CIO was born. The film, she said, showed that you do not need the great national CIO leaders to create a strong union."

"What you really see when you study the 1930s you see the dynamics of power and how they were addressed," she said.

As many feel powerless today as a result of corporate power, she said, workers of the 1930s also felt powerless. Many then lived in company towns and felt they "could not bite the hand that feeds them," a similar sentiment heard today, she said.

Feurer said the worker leaders of the 1930s were "throwing out ideas and traditions for ideas that were considered radical at

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ECONOMY HELPED BRING DE-UNIONIZATION; NOW SIGNS OF A REJUVENATION

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ported the workers' causes, the unions were able to become formed.

THE DOWNTURN. Reflecting on the decline in union membership that began in the 1980s, speakers Michael Gordon of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and Peter Rachleff of Macalester College in St. Paul cited numerous changes in the economy, plus a recharged anti-unionism from employers that gained steam through the support of Presidents and Congresses that were growingly conservative.

Both cited "deunionization" incidents, like the Hormel strike in Austin, Minnesota, in 1984 and the Patrick Cudahy strike in 1987-89 in which the use of strikebreakers helped to weaken union resolve and caused the strikes to end as mainly losses for the unions.

THE FUTURE. The prospect that unions may be headed for a comeback was dramatized by presentations in the third panel of the day, which began with a showing of a 20-minute video of the Republic Window revival in Chicago early in 2009. Carl Rosen, Midwest regional director of the United Electrical Workers Union, outlined how some 100 workers and union

members "took over" their plant when its closing was announced and eventually got the Bank of America to payoff wages they were due and for the plant to possibly reopen under new ownership.

Labor's future also depends upon organizing workers in some of the growing areas of employment, such as child care and home health aides. Efforts by the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees to organize Wisconsin child care workers were outlined by Silke O'Donnell. She noted the attempt requires approaching hundreds of small day care providers, who are both employers and employees.

Passage of the Employee Free Choice Act this year in Congress was offered as a step forward to help revitalize the union movement. Rachleff, however, said that the work of people who care about labor history also plays a major role. He said:

"We do what we're doing now. We keep the stories alive. . . That's really a great responsibility and it's great you are willing to take that on. . . We have to keep doing the research about the stories that need to be told. There's so much we need to know and learn. We need to pass those lessons on. It's so important to keep those stories alive."

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the time. The unemployed movement was for the six-hour day. Behind it were the vast numbers of people being organized one at a time. They learned how to organize against this dynamic of power and used the communities to build power."

She said the unemployed workers movement felt the union movement was a force to make change.

She said labor has a tradition of being involved with groups that might have been considered "radical," like the Socialists. She noted that the "other side" historically has accused the labor movement of being allied with "radicals," and being "un-American."

"We must think about the role of ideas with a connection to action," she said. "The idea is how to confront power."

She said the women in the film showed that the power of ideas made them "more than what they thought they could be."



Rosemary Feuer

SECOND SESSION: Struggling with De-unionization

Andrew Kersten, historian at UWGB and member of UAW Local 191, opened the second panel that dealt with labor's challenges of the late 20th Century, referring to the pending closing of the Kimberly-Clark mill. Kersten said his grandfather worked as a chemist in the Kimberly-Clark mill, while his father and uncle were Laborer Union members at the mill. "It pains me to see this happening there," he said.

With Wisconsin being a major papermaking state, working in the mill provided prosperity in the area, he said.

Michael Gordon, associate professor of history at the University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee, discussed the problems that workers and their unions faced in the 1970s and 80s.

There was a growing emphasis, he said, on the part of employers to "force strikes so that they could bring in permanent replacement workers." The role of the National Labor Relations Board helped to further these actions, particularly during the Reagan Administration of the 1980s.

The changes were influenced by 1) the political climate after the 1968 elections in which Richard Nixon won and destroyed the New Deal coalition forged by Democrats; 2) the grave economics problems, such as the end of the postwar boom; 3) the oil shortage which put pressure on business;

and 4) inflationary pressures in the 1970s that stilled economic growth.

There was also an increased pressure by unions in the period for increased safety and health protections and greater involvement of minorities into the workforce. He said the increase in union protections, and "this atmosphere caused all sorts of employers to seek to gain back the power they had lost, due to the increase of union strength."

He said some employers moved elsewhere; other employers went into short-term mergers and down-sizing, and still others launched an assault on unions through concessionary bargaining, forcing strikes and by using the NLRB.

Employers introduced the two-tier wage system that further weakened unions, followed by the firing of the air traffic controllers in 1981 that sent a signal to other employers that they need not hold any obligations to their workers, Gordon said in quoting a column by Harold Meyerson of the Washington Post. "And employers got that message loud and clear," stifling union organizing through the firing of workers and using replacement workers in strike situations.

The use of strikebreakers in the Phelps-Dodge Copper strike in 1983 was a prime example of what happened to unions in

Andrew Kersten, of UWGB, introduces Peter Rachleff (left) and Michael Gordon for second session.



that period, he said. The strike ended in 1986 after Reagan's NLRB ruled that the company did not violate federal laws in bringing in strikebreakers.

Professor Herbert Northrup of the Wharton School was instrumental in breaking the strike, Gordon said. In 1974, he added, Northrup helped found the so-called "Research Advisory Group to find ways for employers to defeat unions, and Phelps-Dodge was a founding member of the group. By 1982, the Group began publishing a "Strike Manual" for employers to use to beat unions, and it has been used widely since. Gordon said the manual was used by the Milwaukee law firm of Krukowski-Costello in the 1987-1989 Patrick Cudahy strike in Cudahy. It was used in many national

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strikes, too, such as at Greyhound, Maytag, Chicago Tribune, TWA, Hormel, Ravenswood Aluminum, etc.

During the 1980s, the NLRB issued far fewer rulings and a greater percentage favored employers, he said. He noted that during the 1970s, the number of unfair labor complaints grew from 33,000 a year to 57,000, but declined during the Reagan years, largely because unions felt they couldn't "trust" the NLRB, since it might make "bad law" from the workers' viewpoints.

The NLRB's anti-union rulings included giving employers more time to influence workers in union elections, and turning away cases of bad faith bargaining. For instance, he said, a union complaint in the Patrick Cudahy strike against the company was approved by the regional office of the NLRB, but turned over by the Board on appeal to Washington where Reagan appointees held control.

He cited a study that showed many workers were discouraged from joining a union because of a fear that they'd be replaced in a strike that might occur. This had an effect on stifling organizing attempts, he added.

Peter Rachleff, a professor of history at Macalester College of St. Paul, said the 1984 Hormel Strike in Austin, Minnesota, pro-



Part of the more than 70 persons who attended the 28th annual WLHS conference.

LABOR THEME TO RAILROAD MUSEUM

Andrew Kersten, historian at UWGB and member of UAW Local 191, referred to the exhibit at the National Railroad Museum in Green Bay that highlights the sleeping car porters and their union. He said the Museum had used some of the old Pullman Cars to fashion an exhibit that features the porters, and the Union, the Sleeping Car Porters Union.

He referred to Steve Taylor, who had played on the first basketball team of the new UWGB back in the 1950s. Taylor told about his grandfather, Manuel Hearst, who joined the union in the 1940s, and it had a "transformative effect" upon his family. Taylor produced photos and other material about his grandfather, and these were included into a talking exhibit, he said. Kersten said in the "talking exhibit" that Hearst will tell about his working life, the union and "what A. Philip Randolph meant to him."

He urged persons to attend the Museum, located in Green Bay.

vided employers with further inspirations to push back unions. He cited the links between labor unions in the adjacent states, which affected even the recent situation in Postville, Iowa.

He said the Hormel strike demonstrated how "hard times" had weakened unions, citing problems unions have in getting quorums at meetings, in taking the summer off for union meetings and in getting persons to run for union leadership.

In Hormel in 1984, the company expected the union might collapse when the company sought concessions, even though the company was profitable. The company wanted to end an historic pay system that provided stable pay for workers and to

call for a 23% wage cut. The company also wanted to change work procedures, including a plan to go to "machine-sharpening" of knives, which made their work more difficult, thus increasing impact of carpal

tunnel syndrome injuries.

In the Hormel strike, the union responded by organizing the organized, seeking to educate union members who paid dues but didn't understand the union. The union told the story of how it was formed in 1933 through a sitdown strike, a story that was an inspiration, with many workers.

The Hormel local organized many activities to involve members, he said. Most people, he said, are "more than their jobs," meaning they have untapped talents, and the union worked to bring those talents into the local in support of its strike. The local realized that whole families had to become involved in the struggle, as well as the community, Rachleff said. The union changed so that it would "stop being thought of as a bureaucracy, stop being seen as an insurance company, stop being seen as an interest group."

In spite of all the local union efforts, the strike was defeated, he said, in part because the International Union did not support the strike. Also, he said, the AFL-CIO in general supported the International Union, giving the company expectations that it could successfully outlast the workers. Permanent replacement workers replaced half of the work force, he said.

He said his perspective has changed a bit, and he uses the term "neo-liberalism" to describe the situation. Rachleff noted the term shows the emphasis that is now placed on the "marketplace" as the determinant of economic behavior. It in-

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volves, he said, globalization and free trade.

Rachleff said the fighting at the upper levels of the labor movement were damaging. He said there were high expectations with the election in the 1990s of John Sweeney to head the AFL-CIO, but that was followed by the break off of the Change to Win unions which offered hope for more progressive unionism. Soon came growing internal fights within that group, and now the internal disputes within the Service Employees Union and UNITE.

"What do we do in hard times," he asked?

"We do what we're doing now. We keep the stories alive. . . That's really a great responsibility and it's great you are willing to take that on. . . We have to keep doing the research about the stories that need to be told. There's so much we need to know and learn. We need to pass those lessons on. It's so important to keep those stories alive."

Rachleff, in answer to a question, said that there needs to be an effort done to reinforce the image of public employees, who have been demonized and become a "whipping boy" for politicians. "We need to tell stories about what public employees do to make our lives better," he said. He said there is a program in Minnesota to develop speakers program to tell the public about the important work public employees do.

SESSION THREE: "Re-unionization in Our Own Hard Times."

Professor Feuer returned to moderate the third panel which looked at two ways in which unions are finding revitalization: finding different groups of workers to organize and using more grassroots tactics.

Such reinvigoration is critical so that working people can retain some of the fruits of productivity gains that have been made in recent decades. She noted that during the 1970s there was an expectation that greater worker productivity would mean better wages, but since then

employers have come to believe in the philosophy that they can extract more out of workers so that the employers could win greater profits.

Silke O'Donnell, of Council 40 of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, discussed her work as both an organizer and as the operator of her own child care agency in Madison.

Currently, she said, there are about 5,800 child care providers in the state. The organizing effort has been going on since 2006, O'Donnell said, and it was a concept she didn't immediately respond to. "Self-employed people forming a union? How do you do that?" she asked.

She said she first realized that independent child care providers needed help when critical funding cuts were being planned and AFSCME stepped in to stop it. The union worked to get legislation that included such items as a child care providers "bill of rights," she said. The union made it possible for the union to meet regularly with the state, as well as to have a grievance procedure, O'Donnell said.

The child care union covers 71 counties of Wisconsin, she said, while AFSCME Council 48 covers providers in Milwaukee County. Currently, she said, there are 1,500 members in the state, and union dues deductions began in May.



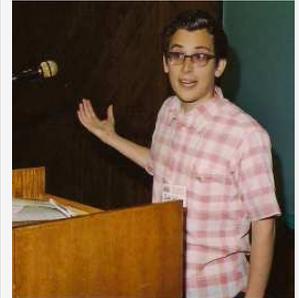
Silke O'Donnell

There are difficulties in organizing, since sites are spread throughout the state, O'Donnell said. Also, many providers are independent in thought and feel powerless, even feeling a union can't win against the state bureaucracy.

The union and its members are dedicated to preserving family child care, she said, as a viable service to families. Many child care providers are being paid below minimum wage, O'Donnell said. There's no health insurance,

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UWM STUDENT WINS ZEIDLER AWARD



Zachary Sell, a senior at University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee, won the Frank P. Zeidler Scholarship for his essay, "Good Homes Make Good Workers: Migration, Housing, and the Making of Black Beloit"

Sell commented it was an honor to receive an award named after Frank Zeidler, Milwaukee's last Socialist mayor. He said he had been impressed with Zeidler's knowledge of history when he met him shortly before Zeidler death in 2006. He noted that Zeidler said his major regret was that as mayor he had failed to address the needs of Milwaukee's black community.

Sell received \$500 for his undergraduated level study.

The funds for the awards are raised in the Zeidler 100 process, in which persons are asked to pledge \$15 a year. The Award was presented by Laurie Wermtter, WLHS Vice President.

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retirement benefits and no unemployment compensation benefits, she added.

Carl Rosen, Midwest director of the United Electrical Workers, described the situation of the Republic Windows and Doors takeover in December 2008 by the members of UE Local 1110.

He showed a 20-minute video of the event, entitled "Hasta la Victoria: Until Victory is Ours – The Worker Occupation of Republic Windows and Doors." (The dramatic video can be seen at http://www.ueunion.org/ue_republic.html.)

The Republic Window event involved a long-organized plant in Chicago, in which the workers were given three-day's notice of the plant's closing, largely due to the failure of a bank to approve a loan. The workers staged a sit-in, or takeover, which drew attention throughout the world and eventually resulted in the bank renewing its loan commitment and the eventual sale of the company to a new owner.



Carl Rosen

Rosen called the incident a "case study for the American people as to why we need unions." He said there were laws violated by the company, but that bankruptcy laws "trumped" the other laws that might protect workers.

"The only way the workers were going to be able to do anything was to organize resistance, to organize pressure," he said. "You do that by having organization. What is that organization for working people? It is a union."

With plants closing all around the country, most of them unorganized, the workers are left "high and dry," Rosen said. In cases of unionized plants, some workers have been able to protect their rights.

While most workers support unions as a general positive to society, they will respond to organizing more readily when they feel a direct need will be served. "The core reason we are here is that most employers want to screw workers," he said.

He cited four reasons why the Republic situation was important. First, it shows times may be changing, Rosen said. Worker struggles, such as at Republic and the Teamster UPS strike of 1989, gain national attention and give hope to working people that they can win some of these struggles.

Secondly, Rosen noted that the Republic workforce was heavily Hispanic and African-American, with generally low-income backgrounds. Most had little to lose by challenging the company, he said, and they felt they had the right to organize.

A third reason, he said, is that the union continued to organize the workers within Republic while they serviced the contract; it's a matter of "organizing the organized."

It had become necessary before the takeover to instill in the workers a true interest in the union because of a previous period of passive leadership. In the effort to move into the UE, the local had gone through many struggles, which may have helped workers develop a spirit in which they were ready to fight the plant closing.

Fourthly, the community support was critical to the effort, particularly that of Rep. Luis Guttierrez (D-II). The process involved having the workers speak for themselves, he said.

In discussion, Feurer noted many persons had a wrong impression that the Republic event was a spontaneous effort of the workers, and had nothing to do with the union.

Rosen noted that not all union members may be ready to do such a takeover, particularly those whose union wages and benefits have permitted them to develop a comfortable middle-class life, and would feel that they would have too much to lose. In the Republic case, the workers had been told they would not be receiving their next pay check and had lost their health insurance, so that they "really had nothing to lose in terms of their relationship with the employer and they had lots to win in challenging it," he said.

"Our strongest weapon is solidarity," Rosen said.

Time to Pay Membership Dues for 2009

Annual Dues for Individuals:

- \$20 for Individuals \$10 for Students, Retirees
- \$30 for Family Memberships \$50 for Sustaining Memberships
- \$100 for Solidarity Memberships

Dues for Organizations, Locals, Councils

- \$50 for locals under 500, councils \$100 for locals over 500 members

Make check out to Wisconsin Labor History Society and mail to: Wisconsin Labor History Society, 6333 W. Blue Mound Rd., Milwaukee WI 53213. (Full Details, at <http://wisconsinlaborhistory.org>)

LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD TO JIM REILAND

Joyce Reiland, wife of longtime WLHS Board member Jim Reiland, accepted the WLHS 2009 Lifetime Achievement Award, given each year to a union activist. Reiland was cited for his service to the Society, his work with the retirees and his longtime activism in his union, the Graphics Communications Workers.



**OUR PAST INFORMS OUR FUTURE :
LEGISLATURE CONSIDERS
' LABOR HISTORY IN THE SCHOOLS '**

By Steve Cupery, President, Wisconsin Labor History Society

A packed room formed the backdrop to a hearing held July 9 by the Senate Education Committee on bills AB 172 and SB 135 that would require teaching labor history and collective bargaining in our schools. All of those testifying were in favor of the bills.

Testimony opened with Education Committee member Senator Dave Hansen (D-Green Bay) noting that there had been about several previous attempts to pass the legislation dating back to 2001. He indicated that he had received the testimony of Ken Germanson, who could not be present at the hearing, but whose efforts to pass this bill had been instrumental.

Senator Hansen reminded committee members that the measure passed the Assembly last legislative session on a bipartisan 61-38 vote and this time he was optimistic the bills would pass both chambers. He went on to note that the greatest value to teaching the history of organized labor is that it teaches the history of ordinary citizens achieving extraordinary things, and that's the inspiration we must pass on to our young people.

Testimony from Senator Hansen was followed by that from the Department of Public Instruction which, as it has in the past, supported passage of the legislation. Testimony was also received from several representatives of Organized Labor. Opening this testimony was State AFL-CIO President and WLHS Board member David Newby.

President Newby's theme centered on the difficulty in planning for the future if we don't understand our past. After reviewing several accomplishments by Wisconsin workers, he asked the question why is it, we don't hear of these struggles and achievements? In answering the question he pointed out that two very influential right-leaning state school boards in Texas and California have kept labor history largely out of modern text books. He encouraged Wisconsin legislators to do what is right for our state, citizens and children in passing the bills before them.

WLHS Board member David Nack from the School for Workers pointed to the desperate need to correct what he observed was an abysmal lack of knowledge about labor history by graduating high school students.

Testimony ended with that of Steve Cupery, newly-elected President of the Wisconsin Labor History Society. Cupery pointed to the continued relevance of unions and collective bargaining and why it remains relevant to learn about organized labor's achievements in building a strong and viable

middle class. Citing the resurgence of significant disparities in income and wealth that correlate with the decline in union membership, Cupery argued that knowledge about one's rights to organize and the benefits of unions offer the promise of positive future change for the next generation.

WLHS President Emeritus Ken Germanson reflected that "in my mind, the most important reason to pass either SB135 or AB172 is that the teaching of labor history shows the triumph of ordinary citizens over the powers of society: only by organizing into labor unions could working people in Wisconsin eventually gain the living standards that many of us enjoy; it was only the strength and impetus of labor that brought about unemployment insurance and workers compensation, the end to child labor, the eight-hour-day, public education, our state university system and technical college system. Our sons and daughters deserve to know that the fruits of our labor were not handed down to us by those in power but rather won by the efforts of extraordinary people who sacrificed to produce a better life for all of us."

Chairman of the Education Committee, Senator John Lehman (D-Racine) commented that the committee had a great hearing and expects to move the Labor History bill to passage this session. He expressed his appreciation for the steadfast support for this legislation from organized Labor across the state, the Labor History Society and members and the for the great leadership of Senator Hansen.

Stay tuned for developments on this bill and we encourage all of our members to take time to write their Assembly and Senate representatives on these important measures.

DARRYL HOLTER AWARDED WOODY GUTHRIE FELLOWSHIP

Darryl Holter was named a recipient of the 4th annual Woody Guthrie Fellowship. The announcement was made on April 22, 2009 by Ralph N. Jackson, president of the BMI Foundation and Nora Guthrie, executive director of the Woody Guthrie Archives (WGA) and Foundation.

Holter, Adjunct Associate Professor of History at the University of Southern California, has authored several books and articles on labor history in the U.S. and France. His current project, "Woody Guthrie in Los Angeles, 1937-1941," offers insight into the importance of the Los Angeles years on the formation of Guthrie's music, politics, and links to the labor movement.

How can members serve the cause of Labor History?

Our scholarship, curriculum and education work is planned and carried out by committees of WLHS members headed by representatives from our Executive Board. The work done by these committees touches the lives of those we serve. These committee efforts include:

Judging high school history fairs as part of National History Day

Preparing high school labor history curriculum materials

Providing scholarships and grants related to labor history

Planning our annual conference

Contributing to our Website and Newsletters,

Promoting our organization at conferences and by organizing new members.

If you would like more information and are interested in participating in these rewarding efforts, we welcome your contributions and service. Please contact Steven Cupery, President of the Wisconsin Labor History Society and I will put you in touch with the Board members leading each of these efforts by either calling me at (262)789-6000 or writing me at cuperys@weac.org.

ON SALE:

'SONGS FOR FRANK ZEIDLER'

A specially-priced CD featuring Jym Mooney's eloquent "Frank Said" and Larry Penn's "In My Father's Mansion." These songs pay tribute to the life and work of the late Frank Zeidler, Milwaukee's last Socialist mayor and longtime community activist. "Frank Said" was recorded live at The Coffee House's 40th Anniversary Concert in 2007. Available exclusively at live performances by Jym Mooney, Larry Penn, and the Moxie Chicks. Contact Larry Penn at cookeman@execpc.com for information on purchasing this special CD.

'PERSPECTIVES ON MILWAUKEE'S PAST' ANTHOLOGY

Edited by Victor Greene and Margo Anderson, this anthology contains essays from a number of contributors discussing socialism and labor in Milwaukee's past. Greene is emeritus professor of history and UWM and Anderson is UWM professor of history and urban studies. Published by the University of Illinois Press, the book is available at <http://www.press.uillinois.edu/books/catalog/84eyb8kt9780252034152.html>



ESSAY WINNERS HONORED

Present at the annual WLHS conference to receive awards in the WLHS High School Essay contest were (from left) Rebecca Schleicher, 2nd place, and her mother, and Benjamin T. Plass, 1st place, and his father.

STUDENTS TELL HOW THEY VALUE CONTEST

Many of the students who submitted winning essays to the WLHS annual labor history essay awards have written letters of appreciation. Excerpts of several letters follow:

Benjamin T. Plass (1st Place) of Combined Locks: "I will be using the money towards tuition at Concordia University of Wisconsin. I was glad to see so many people at the conference who were truly motivated to making a difference for working class families; the only one I had seen prior to this opportunity that was that enthused was my father."

Adam Cooper (Honorable Mention) of Pardeeville: "As someone who has been so affected by a multitude of labor unions, someone who has known so many laborers, someone consistently pro-union/pro-labor, and someone who may one day be a member of a labor union, it is exciting to receive recognition for my writing."

"I was also pleased to see another student from my school, Erin Scharenbroch, receive the same award as myself. She and I actually share a class together. I only rarely speak to her, and I'd have never guessed that her history would have been affected by labor as well. It simply goes to show the vast number-and the variety of people that number represents-that are affected by labor as a social movement and a practical means of earning a wage."

Erin Scharenbroch (Honorable Mention) of Pardeeville: "I will be using [the prize money] to help finance my college education. I also want to thank you for helping keep the importance of unions alive!"

Melissa Ertl (Honorable Mention) of Park Falls: "I have learned a lot through this writing experience and have enjoyed it greatly."

STATE AFL-CIO DONATES TO FUND

The Wisconsin State AFL-CIO has donated \$200 to the "Labor in the Schools project of the Wisconsin Labor History Society. Funds are used to provide awards to students winners in the Labor History Essay Contest and in awards for labor projects in the National History Day competition.

WE'RE ON THE WEB: HTTP://
WISCONSINLABORHISTORY.ORG



Wisconsin Labor History Society
6333 W. Blue Mound Rd.
Milwaukee WI 53213

Phone: 414-771-0700 x20
Fax: 414-771-1715
E-mail:
info@wisconsinlaborhistory.org

**Dedicated to preserving the
history of Wisconsin workers
and their unions**

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Wisconsin State AFL-CIO, Milwaukee

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Germanson, President Emeritus, 313 E.
Plainfield Ave., Milwaukee WI 53207. (414)
483-1754. Email:
info@wisconsinlaborhistory.org

**Wisconsin Labor History Society
6333 W. Blue Mound Rd.
Milwaukee WI 53213**

**NEWSLETTER
For Members
And Friends**

**Full Report on
28th Annual
Conference**

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