

Newsletter

Wisconsin Labor History Society

(Affiliated with the Wisconsin Historical Society)

For more information, visit <http://wisconsinlaborhistory.org>

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USE OUR WEBSITE FOR INFORMATION ON CONTESTS:

- **FRANK P. ZEIDLER SCHOLARSHIPS FOR GRADS AND UNDERGRADS IN COLLEGE**
- **LABOR HISTORY ESSAY FOR HIGH SCHOOLERS**

<http://wisconsinlaborhistory.org>

WLHS LOOKS TO FUTURE IN PLANNING

Members of the board of the Wisconsin Labor History Society met in September to chart a future course for the Society.

The Society is now 27 years old, and has developed its programs largely through the use of volunteers. It has no paid staff. The board considered many ideas, and sought to set priorities.

The four-hour session was led by Corliss Olson of the University of Wisconsin School for Workers.

Many factors were discussed, including the basic question of how valuable the WLHS activities were to the Wisconsin labor movement.

The Society's activities rely on income raised from dues from members, including organi-



Under the leadership of Corliss Olson of the UW School for Workers, members of the WLHS Board (from left), Bob Agen, David Newby and Jack Jentz, review strategies.

zations within the Wisconsin labor movement, and upon some donations and grants.

Ken Germanson, president of the Society, said that the Society has been pleased to have strong participation from the 17 members of the Board, as well as other members.

The Board will consider the results of the strategic planning session in December.

BOARD MEMBERS HEARD FAR AND WIDE

Two members of the Board of the Wisconsin Labor History Society have been on the national stage making comments in publications or on television shows. Will Jones, associate professor of history at the University of Wisconsin—Madison, provided a post-election comment on President-elect Obama and the connection between organized labor and the civil rights movement in

the Dec. 1st issue of *Nation*. See it at: <http://www.thenation.com/doc/20081201/jones>

Harvey Kaye, of University of Wisconsin—Green Bay, appeared on the Thom Hartmann "Air America" program Nov. 13.

You can hear it at

<http://airamerica.com/thomhartmannpage/>

PRESIDENT'S COMMENTS

On the 50th Anniversary of State AFL-CIO



**Ken Germanson
President, WLHS**

"It's no time to yearn for 'good old days,' but it is time to tell workers, the public how unions were needed to build our decent standard of living."

The Wisconsin State AFL-CIO is celebrating its 50th Anniversary. In August of 1958, the Wisconsin State Federation of Labor and the Wisconsin State AFL-CIO merged into becoming the current Wisconsin State AFL-CIO. I was there, and it was shocking to realize that when this 50th Anniversary Convention was convened Monday, Sept. 22, I could find only one other person who also was there: former State AFL-CIO President John Schmitt.

I was there not as a member of Local 51 of the Milwaukee Newspaper Guild (my union then), but rather as a reporter for the old Milwaukee Sentinel, still not a part of the Journal company but a paper owned by the giant Hearst Corporation.

Two quick observations:

First, the Wisconsin Labor Movement in 1958 was BIG news. Both the Milwaukee Sentinel and the Milwaukee Journal had fulltime labor reporters, and I was there as a fill-in labor reporter to cover the AFL group; the regular labor reporter, Jerry Cahill, covered the CIO group, which was larger. Today, there is only one daily paper and NO labor reporter.

The second observation is even more troubling, sadly. The full floor of the old Auditorium (now converted into the Milwaukee Theater) was needed to house all of the AFL delegates and the larger Arena was needed for the CIO group. After both groups voted to approve the merger agreement (and there was lots of debate), they convened jointly in the Arena. In contrast, the 50th AFL-CIO convention was held in the grand ballroom of the Wyndham Hotel (at the airport), a

room easily large enough to house the reduced size of the delegates. In comparison, I think that 50 years ago the delegation from a single international union could have filled the space.

This is a sad reflection, but it does symbolize the state of today's labor movement. In 1958, more than 30% of the workforce carried union cards; today it is under 10%.

We must not, however, yearn for the "good old days," since that is pointless. We do need though to use the history of those days to tell workers and the public that it was only through union organization and worker solidarity that we were able to build a strong middle class in this country.

The union movement has been weakened for many reasons, not the least of which has been the erosion of labor laws that protect the right to organize and bargain collectively.

It wasn't until the passage of the Wagner Act of 1935 that law finally recognized the right of workers to organize and bargain collectively. Prior to that, workers were routinely fired for even talking about forming a union. Unions then boomed, as did the standard of living of all workers. That ended in 1981, when the Reagan firing of air traffic controllers set the tone giving employers encouragement to violate worker rights.

That's why the 2008 election was vital. We now need to draw attention of those elected of the need to pass the Employee Free Choice Act in the coming Congress. It's the beginning of restoring labor to greatness.

EARLY LABOR HISTORY IN WISCONSIN

1847: Masons strike in Milwaukee for increase in daily rate from \$1.50 to \$1.75 (This was one year before Wisconsin became a state)

1853: Milwaukee Typographical Union Local 23 formed, oldest in state.

1886: Bay View Tragedy. Seven killed by militia in 8-hour-day march.

1893: Wisconsin Federation of Labor Founded.

**PROUD UAW LOCAL 95
FACES CRISIS**

UAW Local 95 is continuing to fight to reverse the General Motors plan to close its Janesville plant.

Working with Governor Doyle and others in the community, the local plans to outline to GM that it would be good business to keep the plant running.

The plant was the oldest in the

GM system, having operated on the site since the early 1920s. It played a major role in one of the most significant events in U.S. labor history: the famous sit-down strikes of the Winter of 1937.

The members at Local 95 played a major role in one of the most significant events in U. S. labor history: the famous sitdown



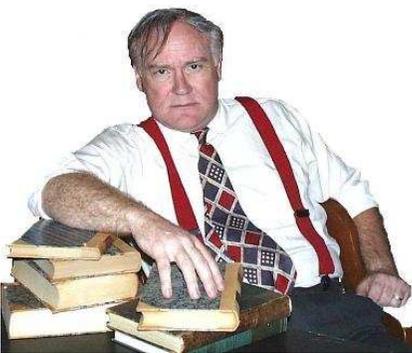
A 1939 photo of UAW Local 95 members at work in huge General Motors plant in Janesville

For a full account of the sitdown strikes of that era and the involvement of Local 95 members, go to <http://www.wisconsinstories.org/janesville/strike/>

**RECALLING FAMOUS LABOR
LEGAL BATTLES**

Clarence Darrow, defender of unions, unpopular causes and the forgotten, came alive in the Grand Ballroom of the Wyndham Airport Hotel in Milwaukee recently.

Though Darrow has been gone for 70 years (he lived from 1857 to 1938), his



Actor Gary Anderson, as famous lawyer, Clarence Darrow

eloquent words for working people echoed before an audience at an evening performance by his impersonator, Actor Gary Anderson, during the Wisconsin State AFL-CIO Convention.

The one hour and 40 minute performance enthralled the audience, as

Anderson relived Darrow's eloquent defense of the leaders of the Great Oshkosh Woodworkers Strike of 1898. The strike brought more than 1500 workers from millwork plants out on the streets during the summer of 1898. After the strike, Thomas Kidd, a Carpenters Union representative, and the local union president were charged with conspiracy for leading the strike. Darrow's defense and his two-day long summation helped a jury find the two not guilty.

In that era, employers often tried to use conspiracy charges against union organizing efforts or strikes, claiming such efforts were aimed at "robbing" employers of their property, thus constituting a conspiracy.

Anderson also reconstructed Darrow's famous defense of Big Bill Haywood of the Western Federation of Miners of a murder charge. The recitations helped to dramatize important incidents of labor history. Anderson is a union member and has performed impersonations of other champions of social justice, including William Jennings Bryan.

Essay Contest Announced

The Wisconsin Labor History Society is pleased to announce its High School Essay Contest for the 2008-2009 School Year for Wisconsin high school students (grades 9-12). **Great cash prizes, awarded in May 2009:**

- \$500 First Place**
- \$300 Second Place**
- \$200 Third Place**

\$100 Honorable Mention (Up to 5)

Rules: Essays should be approximately 750 words in length. They will be judged on understanding, evidence of original research, writing style and significance. Essays must be typed, double-spaced, on white paper. Two copies must be submitted (One may be a photocopy.) Please be sure to provide the following information on the cover sheet: Your name, address, home telephone number, your grade in school, name and address of your school, and, if you were encouraged or assisted by a teacher, the teacher's name. (Also, list your family's union membership, if applicable.) If you have any questions, contact: Harvey J. Kaye (920-465-2355 or kayeh@uwgb.edu).

Send completed essays to: Prof. Harvey J. Kaye, Center for History and Social Change, University of Wisconsin-Green Bay, Green Bay WI 54311. Submissions must be postmarked Feb. 13, 2009 or before. Full details at <http://wisconsinlaborhistory.org>

MARY JO AVERY WINS WLHS ANNUAL LIFETIME AWARD

The winner of the Wisconsin Labor History Society's 2008 Lifetime Achievement Award was Mary Jo Avery, a retired member and longtime President of Communications Workers of America Local 4600 in Milwaukee.

In presenting the award, Sheila Cochran, secretary-treasurer of the Milwaukee Area Labor Council, highlighted Sister Avery's career. She said: "Mary Jo Avery is one of those women in the labor movement who I still consider to be a 'trade unionist,'" indicating she felt that was the highest possible tribute.

Avery was one of few women who were president of a local labor union at the time in the 1970s. Cochran said: "She



looked forward to see what was best for the members."

Avery has been hailed by her own International Union, the CWA, having been named a lifetime member of her union, Cochran said. Mary Jo was also a community leader, including being a leader of the A. Philip Randolph Institute Local Chapter.

In accepting the honor, Avery said it was a "great honor." She cited the support she got from other labor union members "whose shoulders I stood on."

She said that "we are seeing history in the election for President of the United States, something I never thought I'd get a chance to see – a woman and an African-American. No matter how the outcome of this race, such history is being made."

PULLMAN PORTERS FEATURED AT RR MUSEUM; LABOR'S STORY IS HIGHLIGHTED



The National Railroad Museum in Green Bay has one of the nation's most revealing exhibits celebrating labor history.

Called "Pullman Porters from Service to Civil Rights," the exhibit traces the life of a Pullman porter, which offered jobs to African-Americans. Their work, however, called for them to be subservient and they were paid one-half the rate of their white counterparts. Thus, they sought to organize into a union.

In 1925, A. Philip Randolph, a young black activist, formed the Sleeping Car Porters Union, which despite stiff opposition, signed its first contract with the Pullman Company in 1937.

This story is shown in this exhibit. The Mu-

seum also has a Pullman car on exhibit, the Lake Mitchell. Located inside the car are four televisions, each depicting a computer generated depiction of Emanuel Hurst, a Pullman porter and union activist. He retired in 1968.

Visitors will learn about Hurst's life experience and the daily routine of Pullman porters.

Among the supporters of this project are the Wisconsin State AFL-CIO, the Greater Green Bay Labor Council, IBEW Local 158 and the Wisconsin Labor History Society.

The museum is open all year except major holidays, Monday through Saturday: 9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. and on Sunday: 11:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. It is located at 2285 S. Broadway, Green Bay.

Peter Gottlieb to head archivists' group

Peter Gottlieb, director of the Library-Archives Division at the Wisconsin State Historical Society and the State Archivist of Wisconsin, has been elected as Vice President/President-Elect of the Society of American Archivists. Peter, who is a former member of the Board of the Wisconsin

Labor History Society, assumed the vice president office in late August.

The Society is North America's oldest and largest archival professional association.

DAVID NEWBY:
STOPPING THE RIGHT WING ASSAULT

Following are excerpts from the address of David Newby, president of the Wisconsin State AFL-CIO, delivered at the 50th Anniversary of the Wisconsin AFL-CIO, made on September 22, 2008 at the Wyndham Airport Hotel in Milwaukee.



The second crisis we face is the future - the very existence - of the American labor movement. . . Yet the fact is that belonging to a union still brings our members advantages

We face two severe crises. . .

The first is the crisis of our economy. We absolutely must redirect the energies and resources of government. Our government, funded with our tax money, has been hijacked by the rich and powerful. For too long now, government has worked to structure our economic system to assure that obscene wealth flows to the rich, including the immense profits resulting from unnecessary and unwise and brutal wars.

As we now see so clearly, government has totally failed to control the excesses of capitalism through reasonable regulation. So, now, we see people are losing their jobs, their homes, their savings and their pensions at a rate unprecedented since the Great Depression nearly 80 years ago.

But government could serve the interests of us all. We need to restore strong and effective regulation of our increasingly chaotic and dysfunctional private business operations and we need massive investment in both our physical and social infrastructure. . .

The second crisis we face is the future – the very existence – of the American labor movement. Twelve percent of American workers are members of unions today – lowest since the passage of the National Labor Relations Act in 1935. Compare that with membership of 35% of the workforce in the 1950s.

Our actual numbers haven't changed over these past 50 years; but as the workforce has grown, we haven't so that our members are a declining percentage of the workforce.

Yet the fact is that belonging to a union still brings our members advantages in higher wages, better health insurance and sounder pensions than those workers doing the same jobs but without a union. And, most important, union workers

have a voice at work.

That can't last, unless our unions grow as a percentage of the workforce in order to build unchallenged power to ensure that union standards set the mark for all workers.

The two crises we face today are linked; they're two sides of the same coin. To understand why, we have to go back to at least the 1960s. When Barry Goldwater was defeated in 1964, the right wing began its methodical, strategic and well-financed campaign to gain power, not with policies of the less radical, more mainstream country-club Republican ideology, but with a new ideology, a far more radical ideology:

"Get government off our backs;" i.e., get rid of government controls, deregulate all industries, let "the market" cure all our ills; let the "invisible hand" of market principles order our society without the intervention of social policies imposed by government that would try to promote equality and strengthen the social and economic "safety net."

The argument is simple: Markets are self-regulating, and need no controls. That's the so-called "invisible hand" invoked by Adam Smith in the 18th Century.

The fact is: Someone is always in control. The question is: Is it the rich and powerful, or is it us?"

... This "new right" triumphed with the Reagan Presidency. We saw the beginning of the implementation of this ideology carefully promoted in the media, through well-financed new institutions called "think tanks" – and the advent of right wing "talk radio," Rush Limbaugh and his ilk.

That movement has intensified ever since. We've seen the effects:

- Reduced funding for every program that aids the middle class and working class;
- Open attacks on unions (The firing of the air traffic controllers gave a "green light" from Reagan to hire so-called "permanent replacements" for strikers);

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ZEIDLER AWARD WINNING ESSAY DISCUSSES FINNISH SOLIDARITY

“When the colossal strike on the Mesabi Iron Range erupted in 1907, Finns were on the forefront—fighting America-as-capitalism because they were victims of both, but crucially also fighting for a Finnishness which did not and could not exist in Finland before 1917. In response to a memory of colonial domination, in response to Americans’ racialized hostility to Finns, and in response to their first experiences with industrial exploitation, Finnish peasants displaced to the Upper Midwest struck in 1907, in 1913, in 1916, in 1919. They fought for higher wages and better working conditions; they also fought to give Finnishness institutional form in the United States.

“This is to say, Finns turned to socialism—or rather, built their American communities on a new and previously unimaginable conception of Finnishness: Finnishness-as-socialism.”

--excerpted from “Red (White and Blue): Communism, Finnishness, and America in the Upper Midwest, 1907-1940” by Joel Feingold

Joel Feingold, 2008 WLHS undergraduate Frank Zeidler research paper award winner, wrote in this original research paper about a socialist tradition among nearly 40% of all Finnish immigrants to Lake Superior’s shores, from southeastern Minnesota, Northern Wisconsin, to Michigan’s Upper Peninsula. The socialist tradition was not transplanted—it was new, but it grew into a socialist-nationalist culture so seamless and varied that its members could live completely within it and it was socially accepted and permeable to outsiders. This Finnish-American subculture flourished roughly between 1915 and 1935. It was a marriage of American social democracy — and then Communism — producing the most developed ethnic-socialist culture and institutions in the U.S., Feingold concluded.

Finns had arrived in the Midwestern Northland before that time and made their mark. Finnish miners, a workforce majority, led the first Mesabi Range strike in 1907. A smaller number of

Finns worked at the mines when workers struck a second time, but Finns ranked heavily among militant leadership. The Western Federation of Miners was too weak to assist the miners again, while the AFL endorsed but did not help. Finnish socialist halls and social organization filled the need to host many strike meetings and activities. Although the IWW sent their best organizers to help the striking miners, the miners ultimately lost.

Feingold said by the early 1920s, nearly half of the membership of the Workers Party of America — the public face of the Communist Party — were American Finns, heavily concentrated in the Upper Midwest. Among the red Finns’ many cultural activities were plays dramatizing class conflict, uprisings, and the valiance of people united against oppression and tyranny. Finnish Sunday schools taught Marxism to the children, while their Superior, Wisconsin-based cooperatives manufactured products under “Red Star” labels, complete with the Soviet hammer and sickle until 1929.

Feingold disclosed, “An intense battle between the CP and its Finnish cultural organs erupted in 1925, when the Comintern ... ordered Communist parties all over the world ... to exert central control over organizations affiliated with the party,” resulting in the expropriation of the Finnish social organizations, cooperatives, and control of the Finnish socialist community infrastructure. He summarized, “Bolshevization undercut Finnish-American sovereignty over an identity the community itself had crafted *before* Communism existed, and many red Finns were understandably upset.”

He argued the marriage of Finnish-American nationalism to socialism turned sour largely because of the CP-USA’s indifference to and exclusion of the rural Midwestern Finns from mainstream involvement, despite their numbers and cultural sophistication. The CP’s



Joel Feingold, of Janesville, was awarded a \$500 Frank P. Zeidler scholarship award for his undergraduate essay. He attended the University of Wisconsin — Madison,

Finns in Upper Midwest created “most developed ethnic-socialist culture in US,” Feingold paper says

Continued on Next Page

FINNISHNESS . . .

Continued from previous page

heavy-handedness eventually destroyed the bulk of the Finnish-American subculture — national in form and socialist in content. With the Winter War of 1940, when the Soviet Union invaded Finland with express Nazi permission, the Finnish-American attachment to Communism was largely severed.

However, radicalism remained a feature of Finnish-American life: the coops lasted decades longer, as did the CP's Finnish-language newspapers — and a Finnish-language IWW paper called

Cooperatives an example of Finish communal societies

Industrialisti was published until the 1980s. Feingold concluded, “The completeness of this culture leads us to one inexorable conclusion: Finnish-American Communism was the most fully realized ethnic-radical enclave in American history.”

The Zeidler Awards: The Wisconsin Labor History Society conducts an annual competition for the best original research papers about Wisconsin labor and working-class history. The awards honor Milwaukee Mayor Frank P. Zeidler, (1948-1960). There is a \$500 prize for a paper by an undergraduate student enrolled in any college or university and a \$1,000 prize for a paper by a graduate student. Full information on website: <http://wisconsinlaborhistory.org>.

LABOR’S FUTURE FACE CRITICAL PERIOD

Continued from Page Five

- Putting the National Labor Relations Board in service of the corporations, undermining the rights of workers and unions by an agency that was originally established to protect us;
- International trade policies written by and for multinational corporations;
- Gutting of health and safety protections for workers through dismantling of OSHA;
- Putting polluters in control of the EPA;
- Further deregulating of our financial infrastructure so that we have a savings and loan crisis 15 years ago and

now a housing bubble and mortgage crisis and credit collapse.
 ... Let's return for a moment to our other crisis: the future of the labor movement.
 ... See what President Bush has been able to do even when Democrats controlled Congress since 2006. The President still controls the Departments that run the government: OSHA, the Department of Labor, EPA, the NLRB – all government agencies still working against us and the interests of the working class.
 Read about what Bush has accomplished through the NLRB to undermine our rights and protections. For example there is a rule being drafted by the Department

of Labor to forbid any company that has a government contract to enter into a “card check” organizing agreement with a union.

... A truly democratic government cannot survive without a strong progressive labor movement.

... It is we (the labor movement) who make history, if we choose to. The question is: Do we have the commitment, the determination, the energy and the vision to do what needs to be done?

As Paul Wellstone said: “Politics is what we create by what we do, what we hope for and what we dare to imagine.”

Will our next 50 years be better than our last 50 years? It's up to us. Solidarity!

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>)

**TEXAS STUDENTS HIGHLIGHT
WISCONSIN WC LAW**

Wisconsin was one of the first states to initiate workers compensation, which became effective in 1911. That story is told on a video produced by students at Chester W. Nimitz High School in Houston TX. The project was done as an entry for National History Day and ended up as qualified for the national competition in Washington. The video tells the story of workers compensation in a compelling and interesting manner.

Plans are being made to place it on WLHS website in near future. Teachers for the for the three 11th graders and a 9th grader were Barbi Petty and Linda Kleeman.

WE'RE ON THE WEB: [HTTP://
WISCONSINLABORHISTORY.ORG](http://WISCONSINLABORHISTORY.ORG)



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

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The Wisconsin Labor History Society News-
letter is published quarterly
(ISSN 0731-3373). Articles and comments
for the Newsletter are welcome. Contact Ken
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NEWSLETTER
**For Members
And Friends**

**Time to Renew
2009 WLHS Dues**

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