REPORTS AND CORRESPONDENCE

1998 Latin American Labor History Conference

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The fifteenth meeting of the Latin American Labor History Conference (LALHC), held April 17–18, 1998, at Duke University, began with a session on the early twentieth-century labor history of the Brazilian state of Rio Grande do Sul. In "Class, Ethnicity, and Gender: The Negotiation of Workers' Identities in Porto Alegre's 1906 'Strike of Twenty-One Days,'" Joan Bak (University of Richmond) used the surprisingly detailed contemporary press coverage to carefully reconstruct the discourses of class, ethnicity, and gender that marked one of the earliest generalized work stoppages in the capital city of Porto Alegre. The origin of the 1906 strike, she argued, grew out of three intersecting transitions: from an artisanal to an industrial mode of production; from largely hermetic ethnic communities to more heterogeneous ones with multiple ethnic groups cross-cut by an emerging class identity; and from an overwhelmingly male paid working force to one increasingly female. She demonstrated how the workers' experience as a class during the strike came to override other divisions at this critical juncture. To understand this process of class formation, she argued, one must study how appeals to ethnicity and gender interacted with this emerging class identity, and how each element served as a locus of contention and negotiation between workers and management.

In a paper entitled "From 'Solidarity' to *Assistência*: Organizational Strategies and Mutualism in the Labor Movement of Porto Alegre," Alexandre Fortes (Universidade Estadual de Campinas) began with a clear and striking paradox that has not yet been explored in the literature on Brazilian labor. There was, he notes, a remarkable continuity in the debate about mutualism within the Brazilian workers' movement over ninety years. This can be explained, he goes on, "because, despite doctrinal positions against its continuation, in fact the practice of such [mutualist or *assistencialista*] activities in the interior of the unions was rarely suppressed" even by those who opposed such measures (whether anarchists, communists, or members of today's Workers' Party [PT]).

Addressing a subject that has attracted increasing attention in recent years, Fortes criticized the view that such activities were simple deviations from or distortions of the union's "real" job. It is more fruitful, he suggested, to analyze how mechanisms of mutuality and assistance have served "as a means of creating associative links between workers" in their fight for health care, assistance against unemployment, and for death and funeral benefits. While recognizing the role

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of the labor laws after 1937 in tilting the balance towards union *assistencialismo*, Fortes argued that "state intervention to this end was mediated by preexisting practices and traditions" and was not "totally disconnected from what [working-class activists] defined as the functions" of a union. In this aspect, too, the state's project in many ways "comes from and impacts upon the tensions and unresolved internal problems of the workers' movement."

The second panel dealt with railroad and dock workers, two distinctive working-class groups whose struggles marked Argentine labor history in the first half of the twentieth century. In "Union Culture in Argentine National Railroads (1912–1922)," Silvana Palermo (State University of New York, Stony Brook) focused "on the development of union politics and culture at the local level" in pre-Peronist Argentina. The collective action and series of railroad strikes that challenged labor discipline and managerial authority ran parallel to the rise of a specific union culture on the railroads. Union successes in the 1910s and early 1920s, in particular the 1917 strike in Tafí Viejo, were related to the mutual understanding between the central union leadership and the local sections in railroad company towns. In this process, the Federación Obrera Ferrocarrilera both shaped and "embraced local initiatives as well as workers' own visions and values regarding their rights at the workplace." Moreover, these challenges to managerial hierarchies in the railroad workplace were part of a broad process of questioning authority and defining rights in the society at large.

In "Contentious Survivors to Aspiring Citizens: Argentine Dockworkers and Seamen in the Wake of Peronism," Geoffroy de LaForcade (Tufts University) offered an in-depth analysis of the contending forces that dominated labor activism in the port neighborhood of La Boca before and during the Perón Era. Focusing on La Boca's early twentieth-century anarchist and syndicalist heritage, de LaForcade argued that these traditions helped to make seamen's unions more resistant to employers' offensives and to state control. Drawing on recent theoretical debates, de LaForcade contended that syndicalism functioned as a "speech community . . . [that] provided a relatively unified discourse that transcended the differences between crafts, and built bridges within the fragmented, adversarial civic cultures of the fledgling industrial city." It would take the populist Peronist regime a decade to successfully dismantle the power of the maritime unions and to bring them into the state-friendly Confederación General del Trabajo—and this only occurred after the nationalization of one of the largest private fleets and the defeat of a major strike in the 1950s. Even then, however, there was still an important "continuity between syndicalist and Peronist labor traditions," which calls attention "to the continuous interaction of the practices of the labor movement with local community traditions, institutions, and public spaces."

The third panel dealt with the labor dimension of state/society relations in Bolivia and Chile during periods of intense political conflict. In "'We Are No Longer in the Time of Mr. Bellows': Revolutionary Culture and Politics in a Bolivian Mining Community, 1944–1964," Andrew Boeger (North Carolina A & T State University) analyzes the impact of the Bolivian Revolution of 1952 on the

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lives of the miners of Chojlla. He argued that not only was the revolution not confined to the level of the state, but that it was ultimately a cultural as well as a political process. In particular, he traces the relationship that existed between Chojlla workers (together with the Miners' Federation) and the governing MNR (Revolutionary Nationalist party). While this alliance was helpful to the miners of Chojlla in the 1940s, the MNR failed to provide long-term leadership in the battle against the International Mining Company and the increasingly harsh demands of the world market for tin and tungsten.

Using company records and interviews with miners, Boeger reconstructs life in Chojlla, paying close attention to fiestas and sports activities, in order to reveal the cultural implications of political changes. "Revolution redefined social relationships at Chojlla," he concluded, and this redefinition of roles was accompanied by increased control of the company store, more resources for cultural activities, and a growing importance of patriotic holidays through which miners participated in the national imagery of the revolution.

In "Domesticating Men: State-Building and Class Compromise in Popular-Front Chile," Karin Rosemblatt (Syracuse University) offered a broad analysis of the efforts of the Popular Front coalitions that dominated Chilean political life in the 1930s and 1940s to reform gender roles. In particular, she focused on the heated debates over male temperance and recreation. She analyzed how this drive intersected with "evolving norms of popular masculinity," which both converged and diverged from elite notions, thus illustrating the "complex connections between state policy and conflict and agreement within civil society."

Rosemblatt demonstrated that "state formation is a gendered historical process that traverses civil society and is patterned by popular sectors as well as political and economic elites." Just as the convergence of popular leaders and state officials helped to "rout a more rowdy and nomadic masculine identity," popular adherence to "more civilized forms of masculine identity also provided male workers with a sense of protagonism and fortified their sense of class belonging." In the end, Rosemblatt argues, it is attention to the "tensions and nuances of sharing and conflict . . . [that allows us to] gauge the degree of openness of state-building projects." If not, we face the danger of falling prey to "vague and demobilizing generalizations about the state."

The final conference paper by Leon Fink and Alvis Dunn (University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill) presented the first results of an unusual transnational project dealing with the role of immigrant Latino workers, especially Guatemalans (mostly Mayan), and their role in an ongoing unionization battle in Morganton, North Carolina. Beginning in 1991, the workers at the Case Farms poultry plant engaged in several work stoppages in response to employer abuses, waged a successful union election campaign in 1995, and are currently engaged in an ongoing fight over the company's refusal to negotiate with their now legally recognized union. This struggle, they argued, offers a wonderful opportunity to better understand "the potential resources and obstacles facing US organized labor in a changing political climate" while allowing analysts to question and explore, once again, the meaning of "working-class community."

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Having carried out research in both the US and Guatemala, Fink and Dunn use a wide variety of oral and written sources to examine the nature of the two quite different Guatemalan communities from which the workers have migrated. In posing the question of how to best understand the sources of their militancy, Fink and Dunn pay close attention to the pre-existing identities, social forms, and cultural patterns of these Mayan peoples and how these came to acquire new roles in the US context. At the same time, they resist the temptation to explain their actions as the result of these workers' commitments to a pre-industrial form of moral (communal) traditionalism.

The Second Wave: Southern Industrialization, 1940–1970

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Georgia Institute of Technology

In the prevailing narrative of twentieth-century American labor, the South has played an established role. The part reads something like this: Despite the sporadic efforts of Southern workers to unionize, the South remained a region of unorganized, low-wage, politically powerless workers, a region whose working people were divided by race, overwhelmed by managerial paternalism, and repressed by state and local government. Even during the heyday of Big Labor (circa 1935–1955), when industrial workers in the North and West built powerful unions, organized labor misfired in Dixie. The trend was not hard to explain. The South's repressive systems of politics and race relations, its chronically low-wage economy, and (some, excluding myself, would argue) its unusually individualistic workers—all of these created an inhospitable climate for labor unions in the New South.

But what about labor in the newest New South? What about the Sun Belt version of Dixie, which has an active two-party political system, is free from the burden of Jim Crow, and touts a diverse and booming economy? The South remains the least unionized region in the nation. Why? Many observers point to the power of tradition. Others add that the South has become the national norm, that the rest of America has become "Southernized." In this view, business leaders in the Rust Belt states, reeling from the loss of industry to the nonunion South, have embraced Dixie's antiunion model. Thus, unions in America continue their decline outside of the South because they remain weak within it—or so the story goes.

However, the story is more complicated than that, a point suggested by a

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conference held at the Georgia Institute of Technology, June 5–6, 1998, entitled "The Second Wave: Southern Industrialization, 1940–1970." Spearheaded by Philip Scranton (Georgia Tech) and held under the auspices of Georgia Tech's Center for the Study of Southern Industrialization, the Second Wave conference initiated a multidisciplinary investigation into the South's economic transformation. The program consisted of four panels, each with three presenters and a commentator. Participants came from all ranks in the profession (including graduate students), hailed from across the United States as well as Germany and Canada, and represented the disciplines of history, sociology, geography, historic preservation, engineering, and energy resources.

The result was two days of stimulating—and truly multidisciplinary—engagement. The focus was on economic change and development rather than labor. However, labor historians must begin to address ecomonic issues more systematically. Some of the papers which did not directly discuss workers were of obvious significance to labor scholars, including William Boyd's (University of California, Berkeley) brilliant investigation of the South's new pulp and paper industry. Naturally, labor issues arose almost immediately and demanded constant attention. What follows is not a summary of the various sessions but a discussion of some important labor-history issues that emerged from the conference. Those wishing to consult the conference papers on the web may do so at www.gatech.edu/hts/cssi/2ndwave. In addition, Scranton plans to edit a volume of essays from the Second Wave papers.

Taken together, the conference papers left no doubt that Sun Belt economic development and the story of Sun Belt labor have been complex. In other words, the current antiunion climate of the South owes itself to more than tradition. Moreover, the view that the South is now the seedbed for national antiunionism must be qualified by the fact that some Sun Belt industries—e.g., automobile and airframe—have actually facilitated Southern unionization.

The "selling of the South" model of regional growth generated much discussion at the conference, leading to some fruitful insights on Southern labor. As historian James Cobb and others have demonstrated, Southern leaders unabashedly "sold" their states and cities to Northern industrialists, promising cheap labor, free land, and generous tax breaks for firms willing to relocate in Dixie. Consequently, when an increasing number of Northern firms took advantage of the South's "favorable business climate," prounion Southerners were doomed again. There is much truth in this, but two papers in the conference suggest a more ironic view. First, not all second-wave industries were imports. Randall Patton (Kennesaw State University) offered an example of home-grown development in his study of the tufted carpet industry, which originated and remains centered in Dalton, Georgia. Carpet manufacturers had no need to tout the region's cheap nonunion labor as they developed their industry. Did workers therefore fare better in this industry? To some extent; in the early years of carpet development, a few workers became industrialists themselves, and the expansion of the carpet industry in the 1950s and 1960s created new jobs in the Dalton area (at the very time when old-line textile mills were shutting down).

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But in the end, Patton argues, carpet industrialists proved staunchly antiunion and rendered their workers powerless. The "selling" process, he suggests, was not a necessary ingredient to Sun Belt antiunionism.

But what about those firms from the North (as well as Japan and Europe) that were in fact "sold" on the South's friendly business climate? The evidence is contradictory. Some firms moved south to free themselves from union influence, but what are we to make of those Rust-Belt-to-Sun-Belt firms that came to Dixie without losing their unions? In a fascinating study of how the automobile industry migrated to the South, Karsten Hülsemann (Georg-August University, Göttingen) noted that some firms relocating to the South brought their union partners—sometimes even their non-Southern union workers—with them. Neither historians nor economists have yet to understand the meaning or long-term impact of such anomalies.

Most of the conference papers emphasized the importance of the federal government—particularly federal military investment—in transforming the economy and infrastructure of the South. World War Two, the Cold War, and the Vietnam War sent a flood of federal dollars into the underdeveloped, capital-hungry region. Exactly how Southern leaders captured that money and how (and when) it altered the Southern economy were matters of some debate throughout the conference. Once again, labor entered the discussion. What was the relationship between federal largesse and Southern unions? Did federal spending (and federal intervention) affect Southern race relations?

The first panel of the first day sparked these questions, which then became an important subtheme throughout the conference. That panel, "Aircraft Production and the Atlanta Region," emphasized the importance of federal military investment in the creation and development of Georgia's airframe industry. Thomas Scott (Kennesaw State University) highlighted the massive changes that occurred in Cobb County (northwest of Atlanta) as a result of the Army's decision to build a bomber plant there, and Richard Combes (Georgia Tech) analyzed the transformation of Bell Aircraft into the massive Lockheed Corporation during the Cold War era. Both Bell and Lockheed created tens of thousands of new, high-wage factory jobs in Georgia. But who would get those jobs?

Race, of course, played a role in the segregated South. Karen Ferguson (Simon Fraser University) dealt directly with the issue in her analysis of wartime civil rights and labor mobilization at Bell. The federal government placed some pressure on Bell to hire blacks not just in menial positions but also in skilled jobs. In a provocative paper, Ferguson argued that the Urban League (Atlanta's main civil rights organization at the time—and a decidedly middle-class one) gained the power to screen black applicants at Bell and, in doing so, intentionally privileged middle-class applicants over the "black masses," thereby creating a long-standing class fissure within the African-American community. Commentator Merl Reed (Georgia State University) questioned her thesis, countering that the Urban League's power was circumscribed at best and that the Urban League's efforts were not so much elitist as they were practical and realistic. Looking at

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the issue of race and employment in the postwar era, Combes noted that the federal government demanded that Lockheed desegregate its work force *before* the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (which finally banned racial discrimination in hiring); Lockheed complied, apparently without major incident. Clearly, we need to know more about the relationships among race, labor, and federal military–industrial policies in the South.

In the final panel of the conference, in which three interesting and significant papers pointed toward labor issues but never quite addressed them, commentator Bryant Simon (University of Georgia) asked: "Where are the workers?" That is a question economic historians must bear in mind. Those who write the history of Sun Belt industrialization must incorporate working-class culture, labor politics, and labor markets in their analyses. Equally necessary, labor historians must pay closer attention to the complexities of ecomonic development. The Second Wave conference demonstrated that scholars from a variety of disciplines are busily researching the wartime and postwar economy of the South. Rightly so, for the Sun Belt South has been at the center of what America is becoming. For those sympathetic to organized labor, that may not be heartening news. But those who read *ILWCH* would do well to keep up with the emerging literature on the Southern economy, for in it there is much to be learned about the changing worlds of power, influence, and work in the twentieth century.

Work, Difference, and Social Change: Two Decades After Braverman's *Labor and Monopoly Capital*

Rick Baldoz and Charles S. Koeber
State University of New York at Binghamton

On May 8–10, 1998, scholars and activists gathered at the "Work, Difference, and Social Change" conference hosted by the Sociology Department of the State University of New York (SUNY) at Binghamton. The conference marked the twentieth anniversary of the "New Directions in the Labor Process" conference. The focus in 1978 was on debates in labor process theory inspired by the publication of Harry Braverman's *Labor and Monopoly Capital.* This became not only one of the most important books in contemporary Marxist scholarship but also a respected alternative to mainstream social-scientific analyses of work and industry. Contrary to prevailing perspectives of that time, which reflected the imperatives and interests of management, Braverman argued that work is systematically degraded. Employers strive to control and standardize the production process in order to maximize profit and to reproduce unequal (class-based) work relations. The conference brought together staunch defenders of Braverman as

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well as those who sought to move beyond the theoretical and methodological approach offered in *Labor and Monopoly Capital.*

Twenty years later, the "Work, Difference, and Social Change" conference focused on two overlapping themes: (1) revisiting *Labor and Monopoly Capital* and the labor process debate and (2) critical analysis of contemporary work and workplace change. The event drew many of those present at the first conference, scholars who have since achieved prominence in their fields, including Edna Bonacich (University of California at Riverside), Michael Burawoy (University of California at Berkeley), Evelyn Nakano Glenn (University of California at Berkeley), David Noble (York University, Ontario), Bryan Palmer (Queens University, Ontario), and Erik Olin Wright (University of Wisconsin). These participants, alongside a strong contingent of a new generation of scholars and activists, provided the foundation for an exciting and often provocative conference.

Panelists representing Monthly Review Press opened the event with discussion of the legacy of *Labor and Monopoly Capital* twenty-five years after its publication. John Bellamy Foster (University of Oregon) criticized a recent book review by Michael Burawoy in which Burawoy concluded that, although a classic, the validity of Braverman's analysis must be limited to the labor process of its respective time. Expressing strong disagreement, Foster urged his audience to respect the book's contemporary relevance. The stage was set for those present to decide for themselves whether *Labor and Monopoly Capital* was a classic of its time or remains a classic applicable to the world of work a quarter of a century later.

While early labor process theory focused overwhelmingly on the male manual worker in manufacturing, many conference presentations addressed other types of industries, work, and workers, reflecting the shift over the past two decades to a service and information economy. One such contribution was the paper presented by Pei-Chia Lan (Northwestern University). Lan's "Bodily Labor" explored issues of control, examining different modes of discipline built into the cosmetics sector of the retail service industry. Lan attempted to connect structural analysis of political economy with an analysis of symbolic practices articulated within the dialectics of labor control and workers' agency. For example, cosmetics sales clerks must not only sell beauty products but must also use their bodies to display themselves in a way that sells an ideal-typical image of beauty. In this manner, control mechanisms are embodied in the discipline and performance of "bodily labor." To deviate from presentation of the ideal-typical image is to reduce one's ability to successfully sell the product.

Since the last conference, major technological advances have occurred within the context of more internationalized production relations. What impact has information technology had on work and how does one understand social conditions and relations for those who labor in the burgeoning computer industry? Several papers addressed these questions. For instance, Sean O'Riain (University of California at Berkeley) in "Networking for a Living" discussed work relations of a globalized software firm. O'Riain worked as a technical writer on a team of software developers in Dublin, Ireland; the team was managed from abroad in the Silicon Valley, California. Discussing the dynamics of globaliza-

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tion, O'Riain took issue with those who argue that transnational firms and new technologies diminish the significance of place and break down traditional organizational hierarchies.

According to O'Riain, one of the main structuring characteristics of production relations was the project deadline. In the absence of a manager in close proximity, the deadline unified the team and compelled team members to labor intensely while working long hours to complete a project on time. In effect, place became more salient as team members worked closely and developed complex interdependencies. While solidarity and work intensification characterized this predeadline phase of the project, team members—some of them contract workers—abandoned solidarity during the postdeadline phase as they jockeyed for position on forthcoming assignments. The frantic pace of work also burned some workers out. Thus, fragmentation, instability, and reorganization of the team in the postdeadline phase allowed the firm to reassert its hierarchical control.

Some have argued that the growth, development, and implementation of new technologies, along with flexible staffing, vertical disintegration, and labor-management cooperative programs have marked a transition to a new era of post-Fordist work relations. Papers by Sheila Cohen (*Labor Notes*), Elly Leary (United Auto Workers), and James Rinehart (University of Western Ontario) examine the gap between descriptions and realities of post-Fordism. All three authors relied on studies of the reorganization of the automobile industry over the last twenty years, wherein post-Fordism has been most widely embraced and developed. Do these changes represent a transcendence of Taylorism and its close cousin, Fordism?

Sheila Cohen critically evaluated lean production in automobile manufacturing. According to Cohen, while ostensibly a "win-win" situation, lean production actually constitutes a reparcelized and more intensified form of Taylorism. Along with increased automation, teams of workers use their tacit knowledge of the labor process to streamline and intensify their work. Teams then use peer pressure to police themselves, enforcing a production speedup, a form of "management by stress." According to Leary, while this type of reorganization has significantly increased productivity in the automobile industry, the work force has been substantially reduced and injury rates have skyrocketed. Rinehart emphasized that worker participation programs do not improve the quality of work life and do not create a worker-friendly environment—nor do they constitute harmonious labor–management relations.

Together, these three talks made a case that, like Braverman's description of Taylorism, post-Fordism manifests itself as a managerial strategy used to appropriate the knowledge of workers to increase corporate control and work standardization. With many conference papers painting a bleak picture of the workplace, the obvious question became, Can workers fight back, and if so, how? Several papers assessed the obstacles and opportunities. Edna Bonacich (University of California at Riverside), in "The Challenge of Organizing in a Globalized/Flexible Industry," discussed sweatshop workers in the Los Angeles apparel industry. According to Bonacich, the mobility and flexibility of production systems in the apparel industry effectively hinder trade union organizing.

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Through subcontracting, firms become decentralized to the extent that workers often do not know the identity of their employers. The apparel industry also disproportionately employs an immigrant work force predominantly made up of women marginalized within the structures of political and economic power in the United States. According to Bonacich, in spite of these and other barriers, organizers have achieved success by linking the interests of apparel workers with those of consumers concerning the abhorrent conditions under which clothing is manufactured. The results have been a series of successful campaigns organized by the Union of Needle Trades, Industrial and Textile Employees (UNITE) to reform and challenge apparel industry employers.

During the concluding plenary, Michael Burawoy brought the discussion full circle as he responded to criticisms levied by John Bellamy Foster. While acknowledging the significance of *Labor and Monopoly Capital*—mainly that it was a book that encouraged people to think critically about work—Burawoy defended his position. He argued that studies of the workplace have moved beyond Braverman and referred to various conference presentations to reinforce his position. We believe the views of Burawoy and Foster represent only two opposing opinions in what has become a broad field engaged in the critical study of work. In spite of important differences, there is certainly room for agreement. Perhaps the most significant contribution of the "Work, Difference, and Social Change" conference was that it brought together participants who tried to incorporate the lessons of *Labor and Monopoly Capital* while expanding the terrain of critical workplace studies. The conference displayed a consensus that the degradation of work in a broad sense remains central to the capitalist labor process. Shifting historical conditions warrant constant reconsideration of the specific form of degradation and its corresponding dynamics and relations. Is *Labor and Monopoly Capital* a classic of its time or for all times? While this question certainly made for interesting debate and provided the subplot for the conference proceedings, it was appropriately left unresolved. Perhaps another conference in another twenty years will put this issue to rest.

Southwest Labor Studies Association Conference

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The Southwest Labor Studies Association held its twenty-fourth annual conference April 24–26, 1998, on the campus of St. Edward's University in Austin,

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Texas. The meeting, coordinated by historian Kathleen A. Brown (St. Edward's University) and cosponsored by the Texas chapter of the American Federation of Labor–Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO), provided an opportunity for collaboration between union organizers, community activists, and labor scholars. Several general areas of interest emerged at the conference: Texas labor history; the documentation of workers' experiences in videotaped oral interviews; workers' engagement with environmental issues; various constructions of working people's identities; and the relevance of utopian visions to the future of the labor movement. In addition, local events in Austin infused the meeting with energy and a sense of immediacy.

During the weekend of the conference, the University Staff Association (USA) of the University of Texas at Austin held a rally and march which drew over one thousand people. The purpose of these events was to demonstrate support for the USA's fight to win an across-the-board pay raise from the university, whose employees earn seventeen percent less than the city's market rates according to Association leaders. In a presentation entitled "University Organizing from Within," USA representatives explained their personal transformation from observers to activists and assessed the results of their organizing. The struggle for fair pay did not take shape overnight; the USA originated as a social group, but when staff members became aware of their common problems, the organization provided a foundation for the pay-raise campaign. The ideal of the university as a community played a role in organizing staff as well as in appealing to administration officials and Austin citizens.

The Association's ultimate impact upon conditions of work and pay at the university remains uncertain. Its representatives, however, intimated that the whirlwind organizing experience had significantly altered their lives and perspectives. The USA activists created solid working relationships, developed concrete strategies for obtaining fairness in the workplace, and gained a clear sense of their position within the university community and Texas politics. The campaign also challenged its leaders to draw upon their individual talents and to learn new skills, such as writing press releases and orchestrating large meetings, in order to garner support and to attract media attention.

David Van Os, a labor lawyer in Austin, provided conference participants with a larger historical context for understanding Texas labor history. He argued that the state's courts have consistently favored the interests of employers rather than workers. Van Os outlined the 1888 case in which the Texas Supreme Court, refusing to grant compensation to a railroad worker who had been injured and then dismissed, advanced the concept of employment "at will." In 1998 the court continued to maintain that, without a written contract explicitly stating the length of employment, any worker's job may be terminated without cause. Unionization affords some protection against arbitrary dismissal, Van Os explained, because the National Labor Relations Act explicitly allows workers to engage in "concerted activity." He questioned, however, the efficacy of federal antidiscrimination laws due to the prohibitive cost of complex litigation.

Despite daunting legal and political obstacles, Texas has a long and rich history of labor organization and struggle. Glenn Scott (Austin Federation of

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Teachers) brought one period of this history to life by combining visual media with techniques of oral history. Scott displayed excerpts from her video "Talking Union," which records the memories of several women who worked in Texas during the Great Depression. Their personal accounts, juxtaposed with contemporary photographs, vividly illustrate patterns of labor exploitation in agricultural processing and the garment trades and convey the enthusiasm which working women brought to unionizing efforts.

Dana Cloud (University of Texas at Austin) used oral interviews to dramatize contending strategies within an established union organization. Cloud encouraged workers to speak for themselves in a series of interviews videotaped in the wake of the 1995 Boeing machinists' strike in Wichita, Kansas. She focused on leaders of a "dissident caucus" within the International Association of Machinists; the dissidents criticized plans for a union–management "partnership" and aroused the local rank and file in favor of "union democracy." According to Cloud, the caucus educated and mobilized Boeing workers more effectively than the union leadership.

Another panel compared the activism of unionized workers and working-class women in favor of environmental protection. Rob Gordon (Wayne State University) challenged the assumption that environmental activists and organized labor represent distinct constituencies and pursue conflicting interests. In Pittsburgh during the early 1970s, the "Group Against Smog and Pollution" (GASP) included community organizers and local members of the United Steel Workers who extended their concern for health and safety in the factory to the surrounding urban landscape. The GASP successfully campaigned for more stringent county and federal antipollution standards despite the "environmental blackmail" of US Steel, which insisted that compliance with regulations would result in layoffs and factory closures. Gordon concluded that alliances between unionized workers and environmentalists have been most effective when both groups share a wider commitment to social justice.

Ann Herda-Rapp (University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign) discussed the motivation of working-class women who joined "Citizens Against Ruining the Environment" (CARE) in order to oppose the placement of industrial incinerators in Chicago's poor communities. Their activism, she argued, did not depend upon their "structural availability" as homemakers but instead proceeded from their self-constructed identity as concerned mothers intent upon preserving their children's health. Herda-Rapp also observed that professional women in other environmental organizations referred to quite different concerns and identities; her study of women's motivations might well prove useful to labor organizers seeking recruits beyond the traditional base of male blue-collar workers.

Conference participants also sought to understand how attributions of ethnic and gender identity have affected workers. Tom Zaniello (University of Northern Kentucky) explored ethnic conflicts in film images of migratory labor. He presented segments of several documentary and feature films that depict nativist hostility toward migrant workers employed in various industries. One re-

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cent film, *Alamo Bay,* concerned the attacks made upon Vietnamese fishermen along the Texas Gulf Coast. White fishermen, many of whom were Vietnam veterans, blended nativism with anticommunism in their effort to drive the new fishermen away from the area.

In a preview of his book *Making Sense of the Molly Maguires* (New York, 1998), Kevin Kenny (University of Texas at Austin) reinterpreted the history of the Irish mine workers executed in Pennsylvania during the 1870s for conspiring to assassinate their supervisors. Kenny asserted that the Molly Maguires cannot be understood by consulting the rhetoric of their prosecutors, who relied upon nativist notions of Irish ethnicity and allegations of "seditious conspiracy." He referred, rather, to the social experience and cultural memory of the immigrant miners; elements of their rural traditions, Kenny suggested, were expressed in their violent response to conscription, blacklisting, and union-busting.

Citing her study of child labor in the late nineteenth-century American South, Shelley Sallee (University of Texas at Austin) argued that Samuel Gompers's gendered view of labor prevented him from understanding the needs and desires of Southern mill workers; his equation of independence with the male breadwinner conflicted with the life experiences and traditions of mill workers, who each contributed economically to the welfare of the family. Theresa Case (University of Texas at Austin) raised issues of race and gender in her presentation on the Congressional investigation of the Knights of Labor and the 1886 Southwest railway strike. She observed that the committee avoided linking the strike's violence to the Chicago Haymarket Riot of the same year and, despite the activism of African Americans and women in the strike, interviewed white men almost exclusively. This approach, according to Case, served to perpetuate a national fiction which associated the cause of "labor" with lawfulness, whiteness, masculinity, and moral rather than social reform.

Historians of European labor discussed the socialist initiatives proposed by organized workers in nineteenth-century Germany and France. Richard Skinner (St. Edward's University) showed that German printers rejected competitive free enterprise, engaged in cooperative production, and attempted to construct a national union during the revolutionary turmoil of 1848. Carolyn J. Eichner (University of South Florida) found a similar enthusiasm for producers' cooperatives in the "Union des femmes," which sought to improve women's access to labor and equal wages during the Paris Commune of 1871. Kolleen Guy (University of Texas at San Antonio) maintained that vine-growers for the French champagne industry likewise resisted market competition in 1911, although this resistance was based on regional identities rather than a class consciousness.

In her keynote address, Elizabeth Faue (Wayne State University) encouraged the audience to imagine alternative futures for the labor movement as it enters the twenty-first century. The current gospel of competitive and efficient work, Faue argued, precludes positive expectations among today's workers; its logic projects a society saturated by technology, in which the depopulation of the workplace continues to diminish the value of human labor.

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Recalling the late nineteenth-century utopian visions of Edward Bellamy and Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Faue suggested that both science fiction and labor history could contribute to a critique of technical and material progress and might help to restore an emphasis on social equality, cooperation, and solidarity as attainable goals. Faue's address raised questions concerning the practical utility of revisiting nineteenth-century utopian projects and prescriptions; comments from the audience confirmed the relevance of historical perspectives but noted that the language of labor historians remains inaccessible to most workers.

Pacific Northwest Labor History Association Conference Highlights Organizing Strategies, Past and Present

Marcus Widenor
University of Oregon

On May 15–17, 1998, over one hundred and fifty labor historians and union and student activists attended the thirtieth annual conference of the Pacific Northwest Labor History Association (PNLHA) at Portland State University. The conference was cosponsored by the University of Oregon's Labor Education and Research Center and over a dozen labor unions and other organizations.

The theme of this year's program was "Lost Traditions of Organizing and the Reinvention of Unionism," reinforced by the keynote speaker and Rutgers University historian Dorothy Sue Cobble, author of *Dishing It Out: Waitress Unionism in the Twentieth Century.* Cobble's plenary session set the stage for the rest of the conference by focusing on older models of organizing that continue to hold lessons for today's labor movement as it faces the challenges brought on by the global economy, the decline of American manufacturing, and the rise of service and high-tech industries. Professor Cobble emphasized that while we often view the Congress of Industrial Organization's (CIO) campaigns of the 1930s as the model for union organizing in this country, there are older, nonindustrial, craft and occupational models which may hold lessons for us today.

One example emphasized by Cobble was the American Federation of Labor's (AFL) flexible approach to an "occupational" form of unionism. Based on organizing the labor supply rather than focusing on particular employers, this form of unionism existed not only among the building trades but in many other industries as well. A national organizational structure that supported this approach was the AFL's chartering of independent unions unaffiliated with international unions (called Directly Affiliated Local Unions, or DALUs). These al-

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lowed workers to build organizations suited to their particular needs even when this did not include a contractual relationship with a particular employer. While DALUs have largely disappeared since the 1950s, Cobble argued that their flexible structure might provide a more conducive vehicle for organizing workers in today's high-tech and service industries. Today's contingent employment has made "employment security" in a particular labor market a more concrete organizing goal than "job security" within a single firm (the model represented by the CIO's industrial union contracts).

In examining different forms that today's unions might take, Cobble drew on examples from numerous female-dominated service industries, where emotional labor has now become dominant over physical or mental labor. Workers as diverse as waitresses, flight attendants, and sex workers have organized to control their relationships not just with their employer but with their individual customers as well. She views this effort of workers to control the customer encounter as a good example of how organizing issues have changed in our era. New forms of service labor will require not only different organizational forms for workers' representation but also a different view of who should be organized and what issues workers will rally behind. Professor Cobble concluded with a reminder that our labor force has always been diverse and that the history of organizing strategies and structures offers lessons on how to avoid a one-size-fits-all approach to organizing. Instead, we must develop a strategy "open to diverse means as well as diverse ends."

Panel presentations focused on a variety of events in Pacific Northwest labor history. A group of newspaper workers reflected on Oregon's longest labor struggle at the *Portland Oregonian and Journal* in the early 1960s. Not only was this a watershed event in Oregon labor history, but it contained the seeds for many of the newspaper strikes of the past fifteen years, such as those at the *Pittsburgh Press, New York Daily News,* and *Detroit Free Press.* Four strike participants discussed the dynamics of the struggle, including its origins in disputes over technological change, the use of striker replacements by the newspapers, and the development of an independent striker's newspaper designed to compete with the struck papers. As the panel demonstrated, the *Oregonian* strike was a harbinger of things to come in the 1980s and 1990s.

A panel on "Portland's Workers and Bosses in the 1934 Maritime Strike" examined a pivotal event in western American labor history. Although San Francisco was the focal point for the struggle (and for much subsequent scholarship), the strike spread throughout the West Coast and became a landmark in local Portland labor history as well. Tacoma historian Ottilie Markholt presented a narrative account of the role of the Portland Central Labor Council's support of the strikers and the escalation of tactics toward calls for a general strike just before the Waterfront Employers' Association settled with the International Longshoremen's Association.

Portland political scientist Michael Munk's paper on the employer's counteroffensive by the Chamber of Commerce's Citizen Emergency League (CEL) was drawn from diverse sources including the Portland Police Department's Red

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Squad files and the records of the Chamber of Commerce. Munk's paper revealed the CEL to be a conscious attempt by the city's business leaders to mobilize a private army of vigilantes against the strikers. He also argued that the precedent set by the CEL laid the groundwork for later antiradical efforts in Portland during the Cold War era.

This year's PNLHA featured two sessions examining the history of people of color in the region. A panel on "African-American Workers in Portland" focused on International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) Local 8 and its black members. To set the stage for this, Portland historian Elizabeth McLagan's paper traced the history of legal barriers to equal opportunity in Oregon between 1844 and 1980. Rudy Pearson's (American River College) paper then sketched out the story of Local 8's desegregation during the 1960s. In a session typical of PNLHA's tradition of bringing together scholars and participants in historical events, a number of audience members who were active ILWU members during the era commented on their own experiences in light of the panel presentations.

Two papers examined the experience of Mexican railroad workers in the West between the turn of the century and the end of World War Two. While much literature on Mexican workers in the West focuses on agricultural workers, Erasmo Gamboa (University of Washington) and Jeff Garcilazo (University of California at Irvine) emphasized the industrial roots of the Mexican-American working class. Garcilazo's paper examined the small but significant foothold of the International Workers of the World (IWW) in the southwestern Mexican-American labor movement through the life of Aurelio Vincente Azuara, a Spanish-born, Mexican-reared Wobbly who organized in the Los Angeles area during the pre–World War One years. Gamboa's paper concerned the World War Two era railroad *bracero* program, which brought over seventy-five thousand Mexicans to work on the railroad tracks of the western states. He discussed the nonagricultural communities of maintenance-of-way workers that were established throughout the Pacific Northwest between 1941 and 1946.

Other panels included "Labor and the Environment" and "Labor and the Community." In addition to the panel presentations, numerous smaller workshops demonstrated how labor history and culture can be used to build a stronger labor movement today. These included "Popularizing Labor History in the Local Union, Schools and Community," "Works Progress Administration Art of the Pacific Northwest," "Working-Class Literature of the Pacific Northwest," "Collecting Union Memorabilia," and "Young Workers and the New Economy."

Another component of the program was the presentation of the annual PNLHA "Person of the Year" award. This year's award went to William Perrin, a founding member and first president of the Association of Western Pulp and Paper Workers (AWPPW), the independent Pacific Northwest labor union (now affiliated with the Carpenters). The AWPPW was founded as a breakaway from two paper-workers' unions in 1963 over issues of internal union democracy. In many ways it continued the radical and independent spirit that has characterized the Pacific Northwest's labor movement throughout its history.

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The PNLHA is unique in its emphasis on bringing together historians and activists to celebrate the rich heritage of working-class culture and politics of the Pacific Northwest. The aim of the conferences has always been to foster further dialogue on the future of the labor movement as well as its past accomplishments in an environment that is intellectually stimulating yet accessible to nonhistorians. Perhaps the most exciting thing about the 1998 conference was the diverse audience; participants ranged in age from nineteen to eighty-five years old.

The 1999 PNLHA Conference will be held in Vancouver, British Columbia, May 28–30. The theme for the 1999 conference is "Labour and the New Millenium" and further information can be obtained by contacting the conference coordinator:

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For those interested in joining the PNLHA or receiving additional information, please write to PNLHA, P.O. Box 75048, Seattle, Washington 98125, USA.

Globalization From Below:

Contingency, Conflict, Contestation

Daniel Levinson Wilk
Duke University

In the past decade or so, "globalization" has become a firmly entrenched catchphrase in such diverse worlds as industry, academia, and popular culture. Businessmen and economists tend to laud the coming global era, while critics (including many labor historians) worry about its effects. However, both sides of the debate often share assumptions about the nature of globalization. They agree that it is a fairly new process which involves coordination of massive flows of capital, goods, and labor across national borders, the increasing impotence of national governments in regulating those flows, the increasing eradication of local cultures by a homogenous Westernized world culture, and the increasing powerlessness of local people in every corner of the world (or, depending on one's point of view, empowerment of local people through access to Western goods and ideas).

In recent years, though, a number of academics have challenged these as-

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sumptions. In this spirit, the Globalization from Below conference was organized by Paul Husbands, Vincent A. Brown, and Jon Beasley-Murray at Duke University on February 6–8, 1998. It drew together an international and interdisciplinary crowd of historians, anthropologists, political scientists, philosophers, sociologists, economists, geographers, and cultural theorists—both professors and graduate students—to reexamine globalization and begin to forge a more sophisticated description of the process, sensitive to variations across time and space. The topics of the forty-six papers and four keynote addresses varied widely, from Mary Louise Pratt's (Stanford University) address on "Peripheral Modernity and the Idea of the Global" to Dee Dee Tran Que Nguyen's (University of California, Los Angeles) paper on "Transnationalism and the Nike Boycott Among Vietnamese Americans," from Franco Barchiesi's (University of the Witwatersrand) paper on "Subjectivity and Class in Workers' Responses to Globalization: The Case of the South African Car Industry," to Vinay Bahl's (Penn College of Technology) address, "What Went Wrong with History from Below, Or, Why I Won't Commit Sati."

Despite this diversity, a number of themes appeared again and again, overturning received wisdom: Globalization is not new, globalization does not overwhelm local culture, globalization is often developed and harnessed by people who may on the surface seem powerless. This common approach led to many exciting and provocative exchanges—in both conference rooms and hallways—among participants who drew links between their disparate topics. More links remained latent, and will hopefully be drawn out by future comparative research and exchanges of ideas.

A refreshing aspect of the Globalization from Below conference was its emphasis on the long history of globalization. In his keynote address, Michel-Rolph Trouillot (Johns Hopkins University) argued that globalization began five centuries ago, when massive flows of people, goods, and disease began to cross the Atlantic. By many measures (capital flow, investment, etc.), globalization was as massive before World War One as it is now, and Trouillot argued that the "newness" of globalization is an illusion created by the editorial board of the *Wall Street Journal* and its compatriots. Trouillot did note one aspect of globalization which is new: People are now conscious of the sources of the global commodities which arrive on their doorsteps. The fact that residents of Evanston, Illinois, can buy sushi is not in itself novel, but the fact that they all know that sushi is of Japanese origin is novel. The significance of this fact is not, however, explicit: Further study is required to determine how the current experience of globalization differs from experiences in past eras.

A number of papers used historical topics to show how local people have experienced and modified global exchanges and migrations. In her study of the colonization of Kodiak Island, Alaska, by Russian fur traders in the eighteenth century, Gwenn Miller (Duke University) used material culture, religious ritual, and changing customs to describe marriages forged between Russian men and Alutiiq women. Men forced women to accommodate in countless subtle ways—for example, Russian men refused to enter iurts through a hole in the roof, so

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doors were cut out of the walls—but compromise occurred on both sides. More importantly, these negotiations happened between individuals, not on the level of nations. Torbjorn Engdahl (Upsalla University) described the cotton markets of Uganda in the first decades of the twentieth century, showing that the rules of the marketplace were not imposed by the colonial state, as has been previously argued. Rather, they were the result of struggle between local chiefs and traders, colonial agents, and global market institutions. Alexander Byrd (Duke University) revised the traditional historiography on the migration of black Londoners to Sierra Leone in the 1780s by arguing that migration was limited by local problems in black London's social networks, not by global issues. These and other papers emphasized that where academics see globalization, local people often saw the continuation and extension of familiar forms of negotiation and practice.

One recurring theme was the way local people have used global media to fight local battles. An excellent panel on Native Americans showed the many ways various groups have used the international press to their advantage. First, Ken Coates (University of Brunswick) gave a general history of battles for indigenous rights in the late twentieth century, noting the ways in which news of the American Indian Movement had a profound effect on the politicization of indigenous people in Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. Alanna Thain (Duke University) then gave a history of Cree protests against hydroelectric development in Quebec. These often theatrical protests played to the international media, and growing political pressure eventually led New York State to cancel an electricity contract with Hydro Quebec, effectively ending the construction of more dams and the flooding of Cree lands. Paige Raibmon (Duke University) described the journey of a group of Kwa'kwa ka'wawk from their home in western Canada to the World's Columbian Exhibition in Chicago in 1893. In order to undermine the assimilationist policy of Canadian officials back home, Kwa'kwa ka'wawk dancers staged a shocking, gory version of a ritual which had been banned by the Canadian government. The performance was widely publicized in newspapers around the world, demonstrating the Indians' determination to control their culture, and humiliating Canadian officials who claimed to have assimilated the natives. During the question and answer period, the presenters discussed the ways in which using the media is a double-edged sword: In order to appeal to a larger audience, indigenous people have often stressed their "authenticity," reifying the idea of a traditional, static Native American culture (which never actually existed) and committing Indians to that definition of their culture, at least in public.

Global media have also been used to build global movements. The keynote address of Harry Cleaver (University of Texas, Austin) examined the Zapatista movement in Mexico, whose supporters have built an international network of activists over the internet. This network has given rise to a large, international movement which identifies its enemies as the purveyors of "neoliberalism" and, more generally, capitalism. Cleaver applauded this growing movement's refusal to offer a formulaic plan for revolution and its insistence on preserving a model of decentralized organization and coalition building: a new, global way of engaging in politics.

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Even when papers were not explicitly historical, they resonated with the work of many historians. In a panel entitled "Women Workers of the World," Rosie Cox (Coventry University) and Yumna Siddiqi (University of North Carolina, Greensboro) both spoke on domestic workers. Karen Booth (University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill) discussed sexual politics and medical expertise in a Nairobi AIDS clinic. Discussant Nancy Hewitt (Duke University) drew connections between the papers presented and historical work done by herself, Elizabeth Clark-Lewis, George Sanchez, Tera Hunter, and Donna Guy. She pointed to four common themes spanning the last century and a half: the importance of the informal sector for migrant workers; class tensions between domestic workers and the wealthy women who hire them; attempts by local women to accept the goods and services proffered by "globalized experts" (such as nineteenth-century missionaries or twentieth-century AIDS workers) while retaining "their own culturally rooted faith and vision;" and the way medical epidemics, which have historically followed mass migrations, lead elites to link "medical expertise, domestic labor, and classed and racialized discourses of dominance."

Hopefully, the Globalization from Below conference will inspire scholars to search out more such connections across time and space, creating new general theories which take into account the experiences of local people without erasing their agency. Those who are interested in learning more about the conference or ordering papers can write to Robert Sikorski at the Center for International Studies, Box 90404, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina 27708–0404, USA. There is a charge of US $1 for each paper, plus postage. The conference website can also be visited at:
http://jefferson.village.virginia.edu/~spoons/global/

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