Larger Than Life: Remembering David

Michael Hanagan
Vassar College

David Montgomery was larger than life in his personal style and self-presentation as well as in his spirit. Both watching and listening to him in conversation were a treat. So absorbed would he become in explaining some little-known incident of labor militancy that his entire body would get involved, his hand gestures and physical movements growing broader, requiring his listener to stand back to get a fuller view. His intense interest in labor history and patient willingness to share his knowledge with younger scholars testified to his faith in labor far more effectively than any manifesto. He communicated a sense of labor history as a shared enterprise in which we were all fellow workers.

I first got to know David around 1974 when I interviewed at the University of Pittsburgh for a position in European labor history. I didn't get the job, but it was the beginning of a lifelong friendship that was supported by our participation on the editorial board of *ILWCH* and by our shared trips to a couple of foreign conferences.

There are some readings that stay with us; for me, in the mid-seventies, reading his brace of articles on "Machine Control of Production in the Nineteenth Century" and "The 'New Unionism' and the Transformation of Workers' Consciousness in America" were formative. While my own work at that time was on French skilled workers between 1870 and 1914, I was fascinated to discover the similarities in hope and purpose between battling French and rebellious American workers. Many a French revolutionary *syndicalist* would have felt right at home with David's puddlers, molders, and typographers. David, along with Joan Scott, was extremely helpful in getting my first book into the University of Illinois series on labor history and provided both invaluable and copious comments.

Paging through a copy of *Workers' Control in America*, I'm still struck by the scope and quality of his work and by the magnificent bibliographical essay at the end of the volume.[1] The bibliographical essay was a natural vehicle for David who knew so much about so many areas of labor history. The explosion of books on labor history in recent decades has been so rapid that I wonder whether any future scholar can duplicate David's mastery of as many different literatures.

What I most remember about David is not his thorough mastery of his trade but his sustaining vision. Both in France and the United States, though always partial and fragmented, "workers' control" was ever the grandest vision of the labor movement. The image of local-level democracy based on work captured the highest aspirations of labor and perhaps even of struggling humanity. No historian has had a more comprehensive and complete understanding of the battle

International Labor and Working-Class History
No. 82, Fall 2012, pp. 32–33
© International Labor and Working-Class History, Inc., 2013
doi:10.1017/S0147547912000312

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0147547912000312 Published online by Cambridge University Press

for workers' control than David Montgomery. We will miss him greatly while continuing to be inspired by his work.

NOTES

1. David Montgomery, *Workers' Control in America: Studies in the History of Work, Technology and Labor Struggles* (Cambridge, 1980).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0147547912000312 Published online by Cambridge University Press