NYLHA's Youth Advisory Board

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ince January, NYLHA’s Youth Advisory Board (Front row, l-t: Courtney Francis, Joe Lopez, Prudence Katze, Darrah Sipe. Kimberly Schiller, Back Row, l-r: Art Fleischner, NYLHA Board Member and Membership Committee—and William Lehman) has been meeting on a monthly basis. Their mission is to connect younger generations to labor history. “Learning labor history to change the world” is their motto.

On May 13, the YAB’s Film Committee—Will Lehman, Kimberly Schiller, Prudence Katze and Joe Lopez—organized a successful evening featuring nine short films and discussion with two of the filmmakers as part of the Workers Unite Film Festival. Courtney Francis introduced the program and the films, all of which focused on current organizing struggles. “The Hand That Feeds,” about organizing efforts of employees at Hot and Crusty, was the hit of the evening and led to a lively exchange with the filmmaker.

Currently, the YAB is producing a poster, which will soon be available for distribution so that young people can connect to the group.

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NYLHA’s Youth Advisory Board

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Labor History Connections

SUNDAY, SEPT. 22 – SUNDAY, OCT. 20, 2013

On Equal Terms
Clemente Soto Velez Center (csvcenter.org)
On New York City’s Lower East Side
Come and bring your classes.
Second floor gallery (accessible only by stairs)
Open daily from 3:30-7 p.m.

THURSDAY, SEPT. 26, 6-8 P.M.
Opening Reception honoring New York City tradeswomen
On Equal Terms: An exhibit about an unfinished piece of civil rights history—in a nutshell: Had federal affirmative action guidelines issued in 1978 been enforced, women would now hold 25 percent of skilled trades jobs in construction. Instead, their percentage has been held at 2.5 percent since the early ‘80s. That discrepancy drives the work of journalist/author/poet and journeymen - woman electrician Susan Eisenberg (Resident Artist/Scholar, Women’s Studies Research Center, Brandeis University).

MINER’S MUSEUM - CAPE BRETON ISLAND
Situated on one of the most picturesque coasts of Cape Breton Island, on a 15-acre site filled with wild roses and grasses, the Museum pays tribute to the region’s long and rich history of coal mining. It is home to profound stories of miners and their families, and the resource that helped build a nation. The Museum is also home to the famous choir of miners – The Men of the Deeps.
http://www.minersmuseum.com
Submitted by NYLHA member Professor Tami J. Friedman, Brock University, Ontario Canada.

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Work History News

Henry Foner’s Book Bash a Smash: Bound Volume Unearths Hidden Treasures

NYLHA President Irwin Yellowstone welcomed a full house to Henry Foner’s Book Party at the Tamiment Library, NYU. The event, co-sponsored by Tamiment, the NYLHA, and LaborArts, took place on February 27, just a month shy of Foner’s 94th birthday. Longevity has its privileges, and the author’s decades of activism unfolded throughout the program in verse and song. A life-long habit of penning poems and songs was finally collected between covers. The book, Songs and Poems—(For Better or Verse)—dedicated to “The next generation of activists,” was made possible by LaborArts with support from Rachel Bernstein, Evelyn Jones Rich, Esther Cohen, and Donald Rubin.

Foner, a prominent, radical labor leader, served from 1961 to 1988 as president of the Joint Board of Fur, Leather and Machine Workers Unions. But, as Pete Seeger wrote, “He is one of the best organizers I ever knew—but I didn’t know till now what a good verse writer he was.” As an activist at City College, Foner collaborated with fellow students in the American Student Union, and mounted annual shows that took aim at ivory-tower intellectuals. A duet, “Confidentially, We Think,” (1939) sung by the author and Sonia Bernhardt Bloom, captured the flavor of these original shows, such as “Pens and Pencils.”

Foner penned lines to describe his experiences in the U.S. Army, and recited his “Thoughts on a Division Headquarters Clean-Up Detail” (1943).

“I envisioned battles raging / With myself in them engaging – / half a hundred Nazis caging / Caging Nazis by the score. / But instead, I cornered dust heaps – / Dirty dust heaps by the score. / Only this and nothing more.”

Evie Rich, with her own stories of activism—fighting against American-style apartheid and for social justice—noted that Foner regaled the LaborArts audience with stories of yesteryear. “He has, through his life of activism, become a legend,” she said. Richard called on the audience to share their own stories of activism, and brought forth anecdotes about the Free Speech Movement at Ohio State; military recruiters foiled at Manhattan College, and Robert Moses foiled at Cooper Square; (Continued on page 10)
Film Festival Celebrates Workers

By Rachel Bernstein

The second annual Workers Unite! Film Festival brought together an amazing collection of student and professional films from around the world, with panels of activists and filmmakers enlivening most of the 25 programs held over the course of the week-long event.

Many months of searching out great new worker/labor films and going through the archives of historical labor films went into the selection of the films, which cover many of the themes that affect working people today—such as they struggle to make ends meet, or to find a new job, during this very difficult economy.

There were films on being fifty and out of work, and films about immigrants seeking to find a decent job in their new home—anxious to make a contribution to their new communities. Films from nearby—NYC—focussed Cafe Wha? and Judith: Portrait of a Street Vendor, and films from afar—Iron Slave, about the men who tear apart de-commissioned oil tankers with their hands and simple tools in the deserts of Pakistan.

International spotlight

There was a film about the African American men who fought for dignity on the job and in their union as steelworkers—one of the most dangerous jobs in America. Another film shines the light on mothers in Bangladesh who must put their children with their own parents due to 15 hour days in the sewing factories of high fashion sweatshops. These are the same women who are still fighting the exact same deaths at the Triangle Shirtwaist factory in NYC and we are still fighting the same issues—health and safety—for labor rights and the motivation to get out and allow jobs to continue to dwindle as profits continue to soar.

This screening featured co-director Harry Gantz, Working Families Party director Dan Cantor, and director of the Coalition for the Homeless NYC Mary Brownsan, speaking about how to channel the outrage generated by the film. The new LaborArts exhibit Defending the Social Safety Net is featured on the festival website www.laborarts.org as an accompanying presentation.

This year the global reach of the festival was beyond programming, as it joined with twenty other worker/labor film festivals around the world—known as The Global Labor Film and Video Festival—on May 16th—to screen films on labor issues in China, Pakistan, Mexico, Slovakia and from all over the U.S.

Action-oriented festival

Many of the speakers during the week are currently engaged in worker struggles—as documentarians, and also as activists. The combination of the filmmakers (many of them fully engaged activists themselves) and the activists on the panels provided a terrific context for the audience, which could emerge from the theater with both a better understanding of our places in the global fight for labor rights and the motivation to get out there and participate in whatever actions are possible to make these rights a reality.

The Workers Unite! Film Festival took place at the esteemed venue for independent films, Cinema Village, on East 12th Street off University Place, May 10 – May 16, and at the Brecht Forum on May 17th.

Festival founder and director Andrew Tilton did a tremendous job, and was particularly enthusiastic about the cooperation provided by the NYLHA.

The challenge for this incredible festival is to help bring important labor films to an even larger group of viewers.

Triangle Commemoration

On June 3, an explosion and fire swept through parts of a poultry processing plant in northeast China, killing at least 120 people—one of the country’s worst factory disasters in years.

Many of the workers who died had been hindered from leaving the factory, according to news reports, because the exits had been blocked or inadequate.

This tragedy followed that of the Bangladesh factory collapse on April 24—the world’s deadliest garment-industry accident—that killed 1,127 people. Since 2005, at least 1,800 Bangladesh garment-industry workers have been killed in fires or building collapses—in the same industry that pays workers as little as $38 a month.

News stories such as these have their particular resonance for the students of Kimberly Schiller, who teaches eighth grade English in the Huntington (Long Island) schools, and incorporates the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire as an important component of her curriculum. “Even though the Triangle Fire happened 102 years ago, it is unfortunately still a reality for many within our country and around the world,” she said. “My students are both horrified and fascinated by the fire, its causes, and the reforms that are still being fought for today.”

Hidden history

Schiller first learned about the Triangle Fire as a junior at Adelphi University, in a class on women’s history. “I didn’t understand why I hadn’t learned about this tragedy earlier, and I felt compelled to learn more,” she said. She decided to teach about the tragedy in her classroom because she didn’t want it to go by unnoticed. “I incorporated the Triangle Fire into my English curriculum through the novel Ashes of Roses, by Mary Jane Aach, and primary sources from the ILR Cornell website.”

“Teaching about the Triangle Fire is very important to me,” she said. “I feel a connection to the women and men who perished in the fire and want to spread their stories. I hope that by making others aware of this tragedy, it will help to prevent other tragedies from happening in the future.” Ms. Schiller leads field trips each year to the Tenement Museum on New York City’s Lower East Side, and also takes a contingent of students to each year’s memorial commemoration ceremony for the Triangle Fire. Her students take part in the National History Day competitive events by submitting special projects, such as creating replicas of the building which housed the Triangle Shirtwaist Company on Greene Street, and preparing for this by doing copious amounts of research.

This year, twenty students accompanied Ms. Schiller to the memorial ceremony on March 20 and shared their thoughts about the meaning of the Triangle Fire. “I loved the opportunity to write about something that Ms. Schiller made so interesting,” said Emmanuel Anastos. “I was happy to be chosen to go and experience something that is real and meaningful for labor in New York City.”

Emma Pipolo noted that, “reading the book, Ashes of Roses, and learning about all of the horrible things that these factory girls had to go through, made me realize that if people long ago hadn’t been inspired to work on this issue, then the horrible working conditions would have continued. This holds great significance for me because I feel it is a shame that innocent people had to suffer and be exploited in order for change to occur.”

Anna Ardell recently moved back from Sweden and relates to the experiences of the immigrant garment workers. “I know what it’s like to be new,” she said. “I was inspired to work on this because many people lost their lives. They weren’t warned and didn’t have a chance to survive.”

Tragedy resonates

Kaya Ryan was inspired to work on her project for two reasons—amazement that she had never learned about it before; and after learning about it, wanting to teach other people about it. “The fire connects with the world we live in today. Because the Triangle factory owners didn’t want pieces of fabric to be stolen, they disregarded the safety hazards and so many innocent young people lost their lives.”

“It is extremely important to me that we never forget what happened to those girls,” said Delaney English, “and also, that we stop these kinds of things from happening again today.”

While learning about the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire, we also learned about places such as Bangladesh, where a fire happened not too long ago, and a building collapsed a couple of weeks after we visited the site of the Triangle Fire. If we don’t start taking responsibility for these terrible working conditions, nothing is going to change.

Visit the Huntington students’ website at http://36870672.nhd.weebly.com/.

To be continued...
NYLHA’s Night at the Movies

By Bette Craig

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aynard Seider’s Farewell to Factory Towns!, using North Adams, Massachusetts as an example of the deindustrialization plaguing our country, was the centerpiece of a film program co-sponsored by the New York Labor History Association on May 14th as part of the Workers Unite Film Festival. The festival, an annual event organized by Andrew Tilson, sold more than 650 tickets for a wealth of programs running from May 10 through May 17 at Cinema Village at 12th Street and University in Manhattan. Farewell to Factory Towns!, which details the development of Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (MassMoca) within the same buildings that housed the long-closed Sprague Electric—and before that water-powered textile mills—argues that art alone cannot provide enough economic development to provide salvation for our withering towns and cities.

First-time filmmakers Maynard Seider is a sociologist recently retired from teaching at Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts in North Adams and has been immersed for many years in studying the social history of North Adams and its wider implications. Three short films completed the May 14th program:

World’s Largest Unemployment Line by Phil Hopper about that 14 minutes on

March 6, 2012, when thousands of New Yorkers lined up on Broadway in a show of solidarity with the legions of unemployed; Never Got a Dime by Shelby Hadden about Lily Ledbetter’s role in fighting for pay equality; and Tax the Rich: An Animated Fairy Tale by Mike Kominack about how we arrived at this time of widening economic inequality.

Captivating topics

Historian Richard Greenwald, co-editor of the recently published Labor Rising: the Past and Future of Working People in America, presented a keynote address based on his current research, to be completed in the fall, on the rapid transformation of American workers into independent contractors, who will compete with one another as small businesses or find approaches to solidarity. His remarks stimulated a lively, and often impassioned, discussion, which was only brought to a close because it was time to begin the workshops. The morning sessions included one on the tragic Triangle Fire of 1911 presented by education professor Rob Linne and textile artist Pamela Koechler of Adelphi University, and classroom teachers Kimberly Schiller from the Huntington Schools and Caroline Russell-Gruss from PS 229Q in New York City. The presentations focused on how to use material about the Fire in the classroom. The second workshop was on the Bread and Roses Strike of 1912 and was conducted by Robert Forrant of the University of Massachusetts at Lowell, who captivated his audience with his detailed understanding of the strike, passionate presentation, and fascinating historic photographs, and who generously offered to share educational materials with his audience.

Participants enjoyed a light buffet and then joined in with George Altomare of the UFT, and the Vice President of the New York Labor History Association, in a set of labor songs. George has sung at many labor events, and as was true here his aim is to involve the audience. Once again he succeeded.

Rich resources

There were a second set of workshops in the afternoon. The first was on Low Wage Workers in New York: Maggie Gray, a political scientist at Adelphi University, and Irv Miljoner, Director of the U.S. Dept. of Labor on Long Island, which is responsible for enforcing wage and hour laws, presented a harrowing picture of the exploitation of agricultural and restaurant workers in New York State. The second was conducted by Paul Cooke, Executive Director of the American Labor Studies Center. He led participants through the rich resources of this Internet site, which offers teachers many opportunities for integrating labor studies into the curriculum. The site is also a rich one for any person interested in labor history.

The conference concluded with a plenary session led by the co-coordinators of the event: George Altomare, the UFT’s Director of Worker Education, and Leigh Benin, who taught social studies in NYC high schools and education at Adelphi University, and is also a member of the Executive Board of the New York Labor History Association.

The aim of the concluding session was to encourage participants to continue supporting the integration of labor studies into K-12 classrooms. The conference was an exciting first step toward advancing this goal. Participants exchanged ideas and contact information.

Our thanks go to George and Leigh who worked as co-coordinators to turn ideas into reality. We also thank the other members of the planning committee: Joe Doyle, Rob Linne and Abbe Nosof.

Priests of Our Democracy

(Continued from page 8)

the question and answer session, Heins and Schrecker both cautioned that the prognosis for academic freedom is guarded, especially with the rise of more sweeping national security measures following 9/11.

Henry Foner

(Continued from page 1)

to Columbia University, where NYLHA member Ted Caselman “fell under the sway of Eric Foner’s brother Tom, who made me the radical I am today.” Michael Zweig described the SDS—linked campaign against the draft from the campus at the University of Michigan.

Foner resumed the program with his ever-popular “Song of the Pennies” (1946), and concluded with his heartfelt tribute to Keri Amanda Myers—his personal archivist and loyal friend, reciting “The Ode That’s Owed to Keri” (2004). As Henry prepared to inscribe his books, all present felt part of the indispensible fact that Foner devoted his life to making a better life for everyone.

Irwin Yellowitz

On May 18, the New York Labor History Association and the Association of Teachers of Social Studies/United Federation of Teachers sponsored a day-long conference on Labor Studies in the Classroom. The event, co-sponsored by the Frances Perkins Forum, the Jewish Labor Committee, Educators Chapter, the Italian American Heritage Committee/UFT and the Women’s Rights Committee/UFT, was held at the UFT headquarters in downtown Manhattan. The many classroom teachers who attended received a certificate that they could submit to their schools for professional development credit.

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Frances Perkins Day

NYLHA member Donn Mitchell (left) delivered the address at the Frances Perkins Day mass May 13 at the Episcopal parish where she worshipped during her years as U.S. Secretary of Labor. He is shown here with the Rev. Charles Hafthauser of the Church of St. Monica & St. James, Capitol Hill, who celebrated the mass, and Carl A. Fillchio, Senior Advisor to the U.S. Secretary of Labor, who brought greetings from the Labor Department. Also present was Perkins’ biographer Kirsten Downey (not shown). The Episcopal Church has added Perkins to its calendar of saints and holy men and women. A lay associate of All Saints’ Sisters of the Poor, Perkins lifted millions of Americans out of poverty by bringing the Social Security system to fruition. Prayers at the mass included a series of petitions which ended with the phrase “Gracious God, help us build a gracious society.” Donn’s spiritual phrase: “Gracious God, help us build a gracious society.”
Activists in the activism gallery – “I’ve Got Something to Say”

Clara Lemlich awards honorees, April 3, 2013.

Molly Klopot (93) arrived at the museum directly from a protest across town against drones. She talked about her days in Detroit where, as a teen during the depression she joined mass demonstrations for food and jobs, and later became the first woman to be a union rep in an assembly plant. Her efforts on behalf of unmarried pregnant teens are only a small part of her decades of advocacy for the vulnerable in New York City’s public school system, and her work in the peace movement.

Natalie Gordon was part of the team which created the first Naturally Occurring Retirement Community (NORC) program at the ILGWU’s Penn South in the early 1960s, pioneering a model that brings together a social worker, housing management, and resident senior citizens to produce a wide array of programs and support services for those over 60. One legacy—thirty four NORC programs in NYC today help the elderly remain in their homes. A self described “old lefty,” she was active in Women’s Strike for Peace and a host of other progressive activities.

Lois Spier Gray, one of the first women field examiners for the newly created NLRB, and director of the first extension office of Cornell’s School of Industrial and Labor Relations, is a pioneer labor activist, labor educator and labor scholar. She has improved training for industry and union teachers, established the Institute for Women and Work, the Latino Leadership Center, international worker exchange, off-campus credit and certificate courses, and programs for employment and workplace systems as part of her leadership of the Cornell extension program, and published important work on labor market trends, women and minorities in the labor market, labor management relations and the governance of unions.

Glendora Folsum Buell has advocated for the rights of the community to use the community television promised by public access TV for many decades, in court and in neighborhoods. She has created many thousands of hours of her own community show, and inspired her community of neighbors and viewers to find the power within themselves to tell their own stories, on her program or on their own, and to fight against injustice.

Julia Rosario Jorge has been a labor activist for nearly half a century, first with SEIU Local 1199, and beginning in 1969 with the Social Service Employees Union Local 371, DC 37 AFSCME. She served on the NY State Workers’ Compensation Board 1989-1999, the first (and to date the only) member of Latin descent to serve on the 15 member board. Active in the DC 37 Retiree Association, she represents the group in many city and state organizations, including the Labor Council for Latin American Advancement, the Alliance of Retired Americans, the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists, and works tirelessly on many fronts to defend the rights of working people.

Marian Thom is an early Chinatown union activist, a bilingual paraprofessional who worked on reading and other programs in NYC public schools in Chinatown for 36 years, and helped organize the para into the United Federation of Teachers. Her influence in her community, in the schools and in the labor movement is widely felt; she helped found the Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance, was active in the Coalition of Labor Union Women, worked closely with families of her middle school charges, served the local Boy Scout troop for 41 years, and was on the board of directors of Confucius Plaza housing for 15 years. Presentations of awards were made by Rita Margules, daughter of Clara Lemlich; actor and writer Vinie Burrows, garment worker organizer Kathy Andrade, immigrant rights activist May Chen, filmmaker Victoria Kerezi and Rubin Museum founder Donald Rubin. The program was enhanced by comments from Perry and Gladys Rosenstein (founders of the Puffin Foundation), a song from NYLHAs own Henry Foner, and the display of the Triangle Memorial Quilt created by Robin Berson.

The Lemlich Awards were organized by Evelyn Jones Rich, Sherry Kane, Rose Imperato, Henry Foner, Esther Cohen and Rachel Bernstein, of LaborArts and the Remember the Triangle Coalition. The organizers welcome nominations for 2014 honorees—contact us at info@laborarts.org or 212 998-2657.

Find video and more about these and previous Lemlich honorees at LaborArts.org.
**Labor History Matters: LAWCHA Comes to New York City**

- **Sarah Henry, Curating Activism: Museums and Labor History**
  
  Sarah Henry began her talk by commenting on labor history in museums across the country. Some few are specifically focused on labor subjects, such as the Botto House in Paterson, NJ, or the Eugene V. Debs house and museum in Terre Haute, Indiana. However, many other museums display labor history material as part of a larger format. These institutions are museums that concentrate on a company or an industry. The relative importance and quality of labor exhibits varies widely in these settings. General purpose museums, such as the Museum of the City of New York, also have occasional labor history exhibits.

  Dr. Henry then discussed the Activist New York exhibit at the Museum. It is unusual in that it will be long term. The exhibit covers several areas of activism, including anti-slavery, women’s suffrage and civil rights, but it has a significant component on labor history. Dr. Henry then led the group through the exhibit explaining how content and form have to be harmonized to create a product that provides accurate information, but also can attract a public whose knowledge of the subject is limited.

  Balancing content and form

  Although the exhibit took advantage of modern methods of presentation, including interactive displays, it had to maintain accuracy as the major criterion. Attractiveness is important, but had to support the content. Although this would be true of any exhibit, it is particularly challenging in preparing a labor history exhibit. Creating this balance of content and form is the responsibility of the curator.

  The exhibit will not be static, and Dr. Henry asked the group to suggest new movements that should be included, and to send information that might be of interest. These activities would like to contact Sarah Henry, you may do so at sheney@mcny.org, or by phone at 212-534-1672, ext. 5319.

  Several participants were so impressed with the exhibit that they arranged to return for a more leisurely look following the workshop—hopefully on a sunny day. The exhibit is available on a long term basis during regular museum hours.

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- **Sarah Henry's talk continued on page 3**

- **Irwin Wittliff**

  In addition, the conference brought an outstanding array of world-class historians to New York City. For more information, see the conference website at: lawcha.org/annualconference.
Priests of Our Democracy, Marjorie Heins Book Talk at the Tamiment Library, February 12, 2013

By Stephen Lebstein

The NY Labor History Association together with the Tamiment Library/ Robert F. Wagner Labor History Archives sponsored a book talk by Marjorie Heins, whose study of academic freedom and Constitutional law, Prices of Our Democracy: the Supreme Court, Academic Freedom, and the anti-Communist Purge had just been published.

Introductions by historian Ellen Schrecker, author of In New York T owns among others, the February 12th event drew an overflow audience. Among those were former teachers who lost their jobs here in NYC in the 1940s and ’50s, as well as scholars researching related topics at the Tamiment’s Frederick Ewen Center on Academic Freedom.

A constitutional lawyer, Schrecker bunched much of her well researched and cogently argued study on anti-Communist Purges that took place here in New York. In introducing her book, she placed the purges in national historical context, noting that events in New York played an outsized role in developing the techniques for silencing left-wing teachers at all levels everywhere.

Cold War in classrooms

One of the most effective of these attacks was that of the infamous Rapl Coudert Committee, a New York State Legislative investigating body. Authorized by the State Legislature in 1940, the committee was originally created to investigate school financing and administration. But a sub-committee to investigate subversion in New York City schools was added later, chaired by State Senator Frederick Coudert, Jr. The Coudert committee began by subpoenaing the membership lists of the New York Teachers Union Local 5 and the New York College Teachers Union, Local 537.

The investigators started with Brooklyn and City Colleges, summoning activists in the union who had been identified as members of the Communist Party. By the end of 1941, over 50 City College teachers and staff members had lost their jobs in the series of raids. The Nationalization of the Soviet Union that June put an end to the Committee’s purge.

But its impact lived on, for it had invented some of the techniques and trained some of the personnel who carried on the attack on teachers in the Cold War era. In particular, the Committee forced the Board of Higher Education to adopt a series of policy resolutions forcing its employees to testify before legislative committees on penalty of dismissal, and ultimately prescribing members of the party from employment. The four colleges of the height of the Cold War purges in 1949, the state adopted the Feinberg Law, requiring an anti-Communist such as a condition for employment. That, and a provision of the NYC Charter (§903) dating from an earlier corruption investigation, allowed educational authorities to summarily dismiss any teacher who refused to sign the oath or to testify. In the Cold War period, an additional 67 teachers at the four municipal colleges lost their jobs, as well as over 300 city schoolteachers. Other states adopted similar laws, but few created as many victims as New York did.

Due process violated

Heins explained how the Supreme Court dealt with cases arising out of the anti-Communist purges. Until Earl Warren’s appointment as Chief Justice, the Court’s rulings offered little protection for victims of the purges. In 1952, for example, the Court upheld the dismissal of science teacher Irving Adler under the Feinberg Law. In many cases, the Court held that public employers had the right to set conditions for employment, echoing an 1892 ruling by Oliver Wendel Holmes that a public employee “may have a constitutional right to talk, but politics, for example, or the anti-Semitism of New York”. Academic freedom, he explained, was a constitutional right to be a policeman.

Not until 1956 did the Court change course, she explained, when it ruled in the case of Brooklyn College professor Harry Stochover that his summary dismissal under the City Charter §903 violated due process protections. Although academic freedom figured as a “concern” of the Court in that and other rulings, it never acquired the specific protection of the First Amendment.

The turning point came in 1967, when the Court finally struck down the Feinberg Law, overturning the earlier Adler decision. The administration of SUNY Buffalo offered an anti-Communist oath as a condition for employment. Harry Keyserlin, a young English professor who as a student had witnessed some of his teachers at Queens College fired, refused to sign.

A lively discussion followed, with questions about the eight-wing teachers who had cooperated with investigators, for example, or the anti-Semitism of New York. Heins explained, was a constitutional right to be a policeman.

A Power Among Them


This is a book that, at first glance, is easy to dismiss. Given the overflow of articles and books on gender and working-class feminism, a biography of a female labor leader—and seemingly secondary one at that—seems, at best, like a tasty addendum to the literature. Karen Pastorello’s biography of Bessie Abramowitz Hillman, however, is well worth historians’ attention. In this finely textured study of Hillman’s life, Pastorello succeeds in bringing her subject under the shadow of her husband, prominent labor leader Sidney Hillman. It places Bessie Hillman at the center of the history of industrial unionism beginning with the Progressive Era and extending to the emergence of second wave feminism. While not breaking any new conceptual ground, this story of Hillman’s long and productive life offers a window through which to view the significance of gender on the changing shape and character of the labor movement over much of the last century.

Pastorello traces the source of Hillman’s devotion to workplace justice to her Russian Jewish childhood in the late nineteenth century. She was especially effective at winning over reluctant African American workers. Although passed over for among the vice presidents of the American Federation of Labor—Congress of Working Women’s twenty-two vice presidents. They never imagined she would take the active role she did in running the union. Besides travelling extensively overseas to represent the ACWA (Pastorello notes that union leaders did this as a way to get her away from the headquarters) Hillman renewed her professional and personal friendships with a wide array of women union leaders and other liberal activists. Together they helped establish union women’s place in second-wave feminism in such areas as equal pay and pregnancy leave. Hillman served on John Kennedy’s Presidential Commission on the Status of Women and other important panels.

She undertook a transformation of sorts in these years as she reversed her opposition to separate organizations for women within the labor movement. Hillman did so on the grounds that male union hostility to women’s rights was more intractable than she then thought, and she remained opposed to the ERA until her death in 1970. This occurred four years before the founding of the Coalition of Labor Union Women, an organization she inspired in its small measure. This is a carefully researched and engaging biography that makes vivid the many changes affecting union women in the twentieth century. Pastorello stumbling, however, in explaining the grounds on which union feminists continued to back protectionism through much of the 1960s even as laws such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 were making them invalid. She informs us that they did not, unlike their middle-class reformist counterparts, do so in defense of materialism, or in the belief that women’s frailty marked them as deserving of special treatment. In a careful middle passage Pastorello explains that union women acted “on the basis of this new view of women’s entitlement… They sought empowerment as citizens rather than charity refugees” (60-61). Union women may have understood these protective measures as a win-win, but this intriguing suggestion that they served as an underpinning to citizenship claims deserves considerable more explanation than it receives in this otherwise compelling book.

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