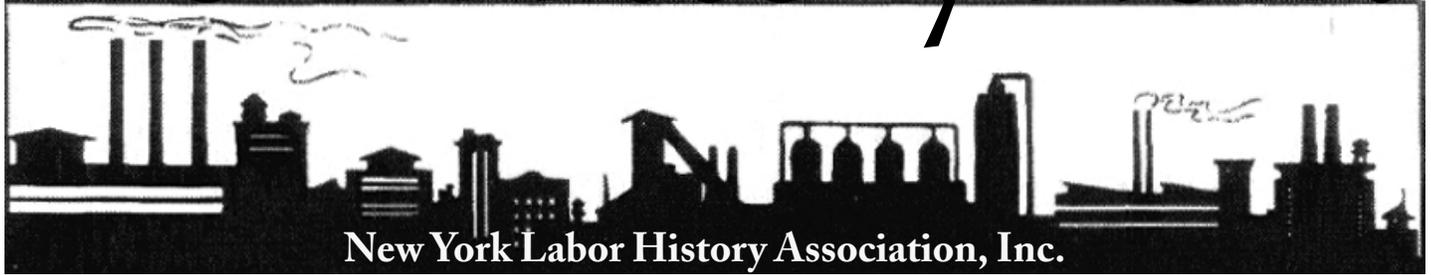


# Work History News



New York Labor History Association, Inc.

A Bridge Between Past and Present

Volume 34 No 2 Summer/Fall 2017

## I've got something to say

### Lifelong activists honored at Clara Lemlich Awards



Peter Odabashian

The 2017 Clara Lemlich honorees (from left): Lidia Correa, Vinie Burrows, Ingrid Frank, Mary Albritton Douglas, Lubow Wolynetz, and Aisha al-Adawiya

By Rachel Bernstein

“everything here  
seems to need us”

—Rilke

These words from poet Rainer Maria Rilke capture the essence of the historical moment and the spirit of the six amazing women honored at the Seventh Annual Clara Lemlich Awards on May Day at the Museum of the City of New York (MCNY). The award celebrates unsung heroines for their lifelong commitment to social activism, in the tradition of those who sparked so many reforms in the aftermath of

the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire over one hundred years ago.

#### The 2017 Lemlich Honorees

**Vinie Burrows** – actor, author and fighter against violence and racism – uses her artistry to advocate for social change. With few roles open to a woman of color, she developed her own one-woman shows, which she has performed more than 6,000 times worldwide. A stunningly energetic 92-year-old, Burrows fit the Lemlich event into her one night off from the SohoRep production of *Samara*. Queens-based rapper Kalie Kamara introduced Burrows with a rap written just for her.

**Aisha al-Adawiya** has been a force in interfaith-based activism in New York City and around the world for nearly four decades. She founded Women In Islam in 1992 in response to atrocities perpetrated against Muslim women in refugee camps in Bosnia. In her introduction, Sarah Sayeed, from the mayor's office, noted al-Adawiya's commitment to conflict resolution, cross-cultural understanding, and peace building, as well as her efforts on the Schomburg Library project documenting black religious heritage.

**Lidia Correa**, originally from Puerto Rico, dedicated herself to helping fellow New York City garment workers when she was a sample maker, and that dedication has never waned. Long since officially retired, Correa still works essentially full-time helping retirees. You'll also find her on picket lines and protests, while she remains active in community groups in her Bronx neighborhood. When garment union leader Edgar Romney introduced Correa, he remembered her tireless effort and enthusiasm.

**Mary Albritton Douglas**, originally from rural North Carolina, has been a volunteer nurse's assistant and mentor to other volunteers at St. Barnabas Hospital for more than 30 years. Her dedication, as Arlene Allende from St. Barnabas noted in her introduction, is extraordinary. When Douglas was in her 80s, she trained as a hospice worker, and she continues to

*Continued on page 4*



# Upcoming events

We hope you'll join us in the coming months. These are strange days, indeed. They're better spent together.

## Friday, September 22, 2017

### Women in Non-Traditional Skilled Trades Today

**Roundtable discussion** on programs that have helped women enter historically male-dominated skilled trades and the uniformed forces, in commemoration of the 35th anniversary of the hiring of the first women firefighters in New York City. Participants include women from IATSE, Local 3 IBEW, United Women Firefighters, and the nonprofit, Tools & Tiaras. Jane LaTour, author of *Sisters in the Brotherhoods: Working Women Organizing for Equality in New York City*, will moderate the discussion about mentoring, training, and what it took, and still takes, for women to work in the skilled trades.

NYU Tamiment Library,  
70 Washington Square South  
New York, NY 10012  
6:30 – 8 p.m.

RSVP to [tamiment.events@nyu.edu](mailto:tamiment.events@nyu.edu) or call 212-998-2635.

This event is sponsored by the Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives at NYU's Tamiment Library • New York Labor History Association • LaborArts

## Thursday, October 12, 2017

### 3rd Annual Bernhardt Labor Journalism Award and Forum on Labor Journalism

**Join us for a forum** on labor journalism and history – and the announcement and celebration of the winner of the third annual Debra E. Bernhardt Labor Journalism Prize.

NYU Tamiment Library, 70 Washington Square South  
New York, NY 10012  
6 – 8 p.m.

RSVP to [tamiment.events@nyu.edu](mailto:tamiment.events@nyu.edu) or call 212-998-2635.

The Bernhardt prize is sponsored by York Labor History Association • LaborArts • Metro New York Labor Communications Council • NYC Central Labor Council, AFL-CIO • Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives at NYU's Tamiment Library

#### Also in the works : Stay tuned for details

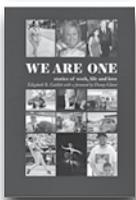
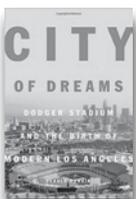
- The 31st Annual John Commerford Labor Education Awards
- Labor Relations in Baseball: Today and Tomorrow
- Labor and electoral politics: Where do we go from here?

## BOOK REVIEWS ONLINE

**CHECK OUT OUR** growing list of reviews of books related to labor and labor history on the New York Labor History Association website: [newyorklaborhistory.org](http://newyorklaborhistory.org).

Books reviewed in recent months include *Jews in the American Labor Movement: Past, Present & Future*; *We Are One: Stories of Work, Life and Love*; *Joelito's Big Decision/La Gran Decisión de Joelito*; *City of Dreams: Dodger Stadium and the Birth of Modern Los Angeles*; *White Trash: The 400-Year Untold History of Class in America*

If you'd like to write a review, please contact Keith Danish, our book review editor, at [keithdanish@yahoo.com](mailto:keithdanish@yahoo.com) with your suggestion.



## Work History News



*Work History News* is published twice per year to keep NYLHA members informed about our organization's work and labor history events in New York. For more information, visit us at [newyorklaborhistory.org](http://newyorklaborhistory.org).

President	Irwin Yellowitz
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Report on Blanche Wiesen Cook's book talk

# Eleanor Roosevelt's essential American life gets its due

*Eleanor Roosevelt: The War Years and After, 1939-1962* By Blanche Wiesen Cook, Viking, 2016

By Miriam Frank

**L**abor History month at Tamiment Library featured a book talk on May 9 with CUNY's Distinguished Professor of History, Blanche Wiesen Cook. The third and final volume of her massive biography of Eleanor Roosevelt came out in November last year and will be launched as a paperback this fall.

Cook's Volume I, *The Early Years* (1992), follows ER's childhood, youth, and marriage to Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1905, and concludes in 1933 when she was 49 years old and just entering the White House as First Lady. Volume II (2000) observes ER during *The Defining Years* (1933-38) – the transformative crisis of the Great Depression, the New Deal, and the rise of fascism prior to US entry into World War II. Cook now concludes the acclaimed series with Volume III (2016), *The War Years and After* (1939-1962).

Cook arrived for her talk at Tamiment in great spirits. She may have other projects in mind, but for now, she is thrilled to share the exhilaration of completing this thorough and necessary biography. Her years of shaping deep research into elegant narration have yielded fresh, powerful insights into ER's ideals and travails during the worst of times, and then her life after FDR's death during the post-war period.

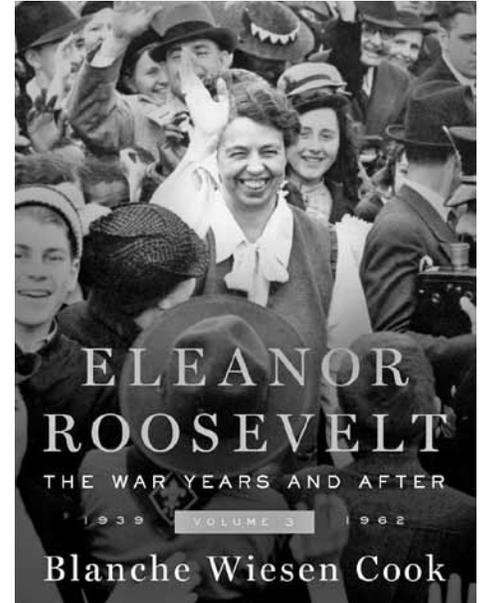
Cook's presentation prompted lively dialogue with the audience about the famously difficult presidential marriage and its discontents. The troubles that the two had with each other were sometimes emotional, sometimes political. On occasion they did agree, but nuances of strategy and balances of power were often tricky and the issues – racial justice, rescue of refugees – were urgent. "She never stopped pushing



Blanche Wiesen Cook

FDR into doing more," said Cook.

As First Lady, ER cast an independent and activist role that would involve her deeply in the vital movements of her time. From research in the public record and in ER's extensive and intimate correspondences, Cook details ER's maturing political skills and the evolution of her powerful public identity. ER flourished as a campaigner and as a popular newspaper columnist. Her daring ideals involved her in many projects and controversies; and her progressive positions often challenged government policies. She received plenty of criticism



for her radicalism, but persisted, whether or not her husband agreed.

Following FDR's death in 1945, ER was honored and admired for having come into her own through much adversity. She continued to campaign for her causes and lived to see many of her projects come to fruition. Hers was an essential American life, sweetened along the way with secret loves and nurturing friendships during war and peace, and made purposeful with the good fight for a better world.

*Miriam Frank is active in UAW Local 7902, the NYU adjuncts' union. Her book, Out in the Union: A Labor History of Queer America, was cited by the American Library Association as an "Outstanding Title" of 2015.*

***Cook's years of shaping deep research into elegant narration have yielded fresh, powerful insights into Eleanor Roosevelt's ideals and travails.***

# Let's put on a show! (Union-style)

By Keith Danish

**W**ith the passing last February, at age 102, of the actor/comedian "Professor" Irwin Corey, we may have lost the last human connection to the 1930s hit *Pins and Needles*, the ILGWU-sponsored satirical musical revue that gave us songs of "social significance", warned that "it's not cricket to picket", and advised that "if a radical idea gives you nervous diarrhea, call it Un-American!". The play started with a cast made up almost entirely of union members from the shop floor, who rehearsed for over a year to become stage-worthy performers.

The play's "command" performance at The White House in March 1938 resulted in the headline "...the Garment Workers Get the President in Stitches, or Sew It Seams".

As for Corey, he was one of the professional "ringers" who, he later confessed, joined the show by borrowing the union card of a friend's father. Gene Barry (born Eugene Klass), later to become TV's "Bat Masterson", was another professional actor who made an appearance in *Pins*, as did Hy Gardner (born Hyman Goldstein).



Irwin Corey in *The Unveiling of the General* from *Pins and Needles*, 1938

The show ran from 1937 to 1940, with a variety of casts and touring companies, losing its all-amateur status, becoming less "ethnic" and more mainstream, and



Corey, at nearly 100, panhandling for causes

maintaining its popularity. The Daughters of the American Revolution attacked it as "profane" and "Communistic", the American Communist Party condemned its anti-Stalinist bent, and columnist Heywood Broun wished "it had less entertainment value and more bite as propaganda." However, the show was aimed at a mass audience, and was never intended to be left-wing "agit prop", so it was an historic success for the ILGWU and (may we say?) first-rate propaganda for a union edging into the mainstream.

*Keith Danish's father, Max, created the Pins and Needles revue title while serving as editor of Justice, the newspaper of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union.*

## Clara Lemlich Awards

*Continued from page 1*

volunteer at the elementary school in the Bronx where she used to teach, she sings in her church choir, and serves as an Eucharistic minister at St. Anthony of Padua R.C. Church.

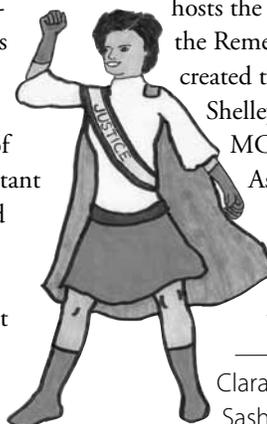
**Ingrid Frank** arrived in the U.S. at age 12, a Jewish refugee from Nazi Germany, and she soon awoke to America's racial injustice. Marching on a "Free the Scottsboro Boys" picket line at 14 was the start of a lifetime of civil rights activism. From Dr. King's Poor People's Campaign to the "Hip Hop Heals" campaign supporting Barack Obama, Frank has been a steadfast activist for racial justice. Twelve-year-old Sasha Matthews, cartoonist and budding activist, introduced Frank.

**Lubow Wolynetz** preserves cultural traditions of her native Ukraine at the Ukrainian Museum in Manhattan, fostering

appreciation of those traditions by teaching embroidery and other arts-and-crafts to New Yorkers of all ages and cultural backgrounds. "For Ukrainians," Lubow says, folk art "is the creativity of self-taught people...It is important because folk art, traditions, and language are what kept our identity and helped people preserve themselves as a distinct ethnic group."

The standing-room-only award ceremony included the New York City Labor Chorus at its finest, a song by 17-year-old singer-songwriter Anni DiRusso, a proclamation from Mayor De Blasio, and personal congratulations from Gale Brewer (Manhattan Borough President).

The Puffin Gallery for Social Activism



at the Museum of the City of New York hosts the Lemlich Awards. LaborArts and the Remember the Triangle Fire Coalition created the award with support from the Shelley and Donald Rubin Foundation, MCNY, the New York Labor History Association, and Jewish Currents. Go to [LaborArts.org/LemlichAwards2017](http://LaborArts.org/LemlichAwards2017) for video of the ceremony and interviews with present and past honorees.

Clara Lemlich, everyday superhero. By Sasha Matthews

*Rachel Bernstein, co-founder of LaborArts.org, is a public historian who taught in the graduate program in public history at NYU for decades, and author, with the late Debra E. Bernhardt, of Ordinary People, Extraordinary Lives: A Pictorial History of Working People in New York City.*

# Chalk

By Ruth Sergel

In these dark times –  
an offering.

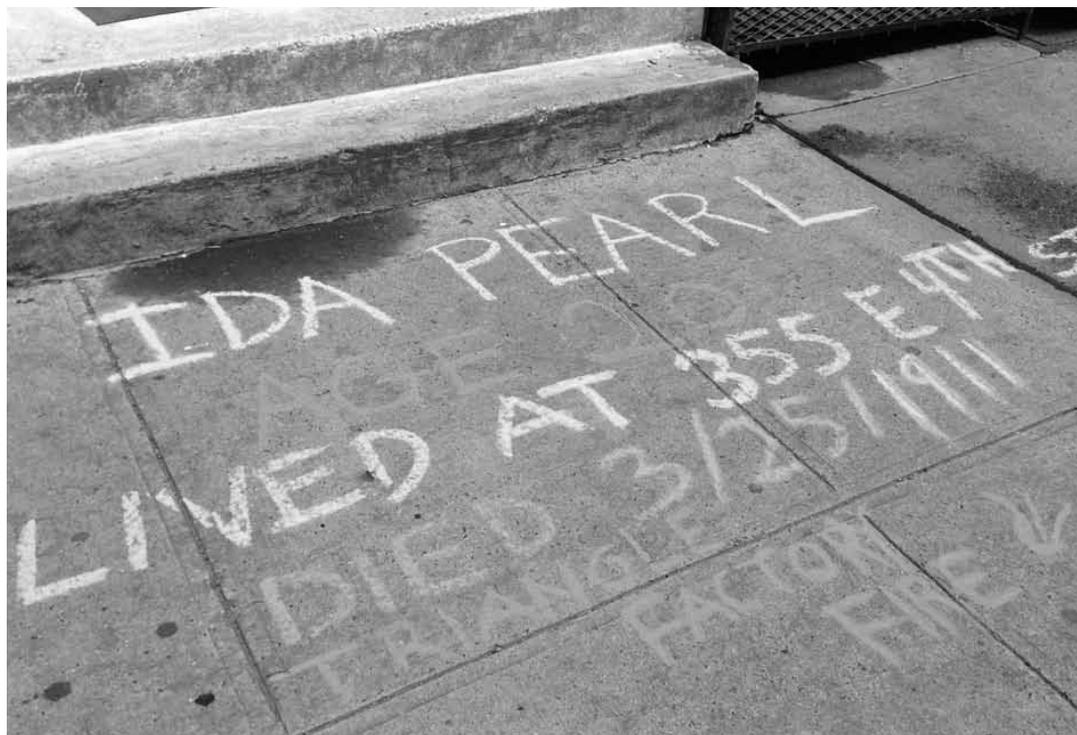
**O**n each March 25,  
someone steps out  
into the streets  
of New York.

Juggling chalk, fliers, tape, she  
seeks out an address. In 1911  
the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory  
fire took the lives of 146  
young workers, most of them  
immigrant women and girls.  
Each year on the anniversary of  
the infamous blaze, we radiate  
out across the city to their  
former homes to bend to the  
pavement and inscribe a name:

**Ida Pearl**  
**20 years old**  
**Lived here at**  
**355 East 4th Street**  
**Died March 25, 1911**  
**Triangle Shirtwaist**  
**Factory Fire**

A flier is posted nearby,  
describing the fire and the  
movement for social and  
economic justice it galvanized.  
Across the street, around  
the corner, more names are  
appearing. As we touch the  
pavement, we protest the  
injustice by locating the story not  
at the factory, the place of their  
death, but where they lived. The  
door they walked through each  
day, a window they might have  
looked out, perhaps a friend or  
a co-worker across the street.  
Tracing other forms of knowing,  
the sense memory we hold in  
bone and asphalt.

Chalk is an ephemeral  
memorial, predicated on a  
disruption of the public space.



It is an explicit rebuke to  
those who treated the Triangle  
workers as if their lives were  
of so little value they could  
turn to ash and their loss not  
be noted. Each year we return,  
not necessarily the same exact  
people, but the community we  
are perpetually re-creating. We  
come as we are – as workers, as  
women, as neighbors, as Jews,  
as Italian-Americans. Each one  
has agency to design their own  
memorial – simply or with  
decoration, perhaps the same  
name each year or a thread  
through a physical address.  
Although we have never met,  
the people who chalk are  
community. Together we ensure  
that each of the 146 Triangle  
dead are laid before the public.

Each name scrawled is a  
rehearsal, training us in the  
translation of our heartfelt

***There is a profound joy as we find  
ourselves strong, clear, and able to  
act swiftly in the moments when  
it matters most.***

inner world to public action.  
There can be a mesmerizing  
fear when we stand on the  
brink of visibility. But as we  
practice transgression, the  
spell is quickly broken. There  
is a profound joy as we find  
ourselves strong, clear, and able  
to act swiftly in the moments  
when it matters most.

We are not the resistance.  
We are the future.

There is great violence ahead  
of us. We will be called to risk  
more than we ever wanted.  
We will need every tool we

can muster as we face the hard  
choices that are upon us. But  
with a little practice, perhaps  
we will find –

– we were made for these  
times.

Looking forward to seeing  
you in the streets.

*Ruth Sergel is an artist +  
agitator. Her book, See You  
in the Streets: Art, Action +  
Remembering the Triangle  
Shirtwaist Factory Fire, is  
available from the University  
of Iowa Press. To participate in  
Chalk 2018, please see:  
www.streetpictures.org*

## Our annual labor history event

# When government was the solution

## The New Deal's forgotten legacy, then and now

By Abbe Nosoff

**W**ith the role of government taking on new meaning, our annual labor history event, “Celebrating New Deal New York City: We Did Great Things and Can Do them Again!” gave teachers, trade unionists, and academics the chance to come together to examine the past and imagine a brighter future.

The New York Labor History Association and the Association of Teachers of Social Studies/UFT co-sponsored the event, with support from PSC/CUNY, AFT, and the National Jobs for All Coalition. Steve Leberstein organized the event with assistance from Joe Doyle and teachers from the ATSS/UFT.

NYLHA President Irwin Yellowitz and Barbara Bowen, president of PSC/CUNY, welcomed us, and Franklin D. Roosevelt III, grandson of FDR and professor emeritus of economics at Sarah Lawrence College, gave the opening remarks.

### Learning from the past

Panel I focused on the New Deal as the solution to economic and social crises, then and now. With the New Deal, the government brought hope and relief to a besieged nation in the throes of the Great Depression. Gertrude Schaffner Goldberg, professor emeritus of social work and social policy, Adelphi University, discussed the



By Lily Furedi, 1934

historical context. Irwin Yellowitz examined the role of labor and the New Deal policies that changed the picture for union participation, particularly the government's shift from oppressing unions to neutrality. Philip Harvey, professor of law and economics, Rutgers School of Law, discussed how to promote an economic bill of rights, particularly the fundamental right to decent work, which had its origins in the New Deal. Sheila Collins, professor emeritus of political science, William Paterson University, discussed environmental issues and the essential role the New Deal played in promoting public health and tackling environmental problems.

Panel 2 centered on the New Deal's complex and sometimes contradictory role in enhancing quality

of life. Landscape architect and co-founder of Designing the WE, Braden Crooks, discussed structural racism in cities. The New Deal, for instance, encouraged home ownership through home loans and restrictive deeds, which led to the redlining of neighborhoods, and zoning of areas for racial segregation, which cut off investment in communities of color. Joseph Wilson, former director of Brooklyn College's Graduate Center for Worker Education, discussed the “raw deal”, which extended racism in America. Failures of the New Deal, he said, were rooted in the failures of Reconstruction and housing policies were designed to institutionalize segregation. Sheila Collins discussed the New Deal's role in theatre, the arts, and music projects. Kimberly Phillips-Fein, associate professor of

history, NYU, spoke about the reaction against the New Deal. Prior to the 1930s, the assumption was that the national government had no right, nor power, to regulate the economy. Conservative business groups attacked the New Deal, beginning in the 1930s and continuing into the 1970s, and even beyond. They saw “freedom” as coming from the individual, while the New Deal notion of freedom comes from solidarity.

After lunch, we took a short walk to the New York Custom House to view Reginald Marsh's WPA murals of shipping in the New York harbor.

Afternoon workshops on what a new New Deal could do for New York and the country looked at the environment, the social safety net, an economic bill of rights, and more. Steve Leberstein led a workshop on social disruption and social movements as catalysts for change.

We had lively Q&As after the sessions. With a long view of New Deal history, many participants voiced their views on current social and economic issues. Our thanks to Steve Leberstein, Trudy Goldberg, and Sheila Collins of the Living New Deal Project, the Association of Teachers of Social Studies/UFT, and others who made this outstanding event happen.

*Abbe Nosoff is a retired schoolteacher, member of the United Federation of Teachers, and member of the NYLHA board.*

# Remembering Henry Foner

By Steve Leberstein

**H**enry Foner was a much respected and loved activist in the labor left and other progressive circles, as well as a satirical song-writer, playwright, and erstwhile saxophonist. On April 4, more than 100 people came together to celebrate his life and contributions in a memorial co-sponsored by Jewish Currents, LaborArts, SEIU 1199, the New York Labor History Association, and others.

Henry was one of four Foner brothers – along with Jack, Moe, and Phil – and grew up in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. He graduated from City College and, along with all of his brothers, was active in bringing a union to the college, joining the Instructional Staff Association, which later became the New York College Teachers Union AFT Local 537. Henry, who graduated in 1939, was a student activist, elected president of the student council and organizing for the American Student Union and the Young Communist League.

## An early activist

In 1940, the New York Legislature formed a committee, headed by upstate Assembly member Herbert Rapp, to look into the administration and financing of the state's public schools. Soon after, a sub-committee, headed by State Senator Frederick Coudert, Jr., was added to investigate "subversion" in New York City's public schools.



Known as the Rapp-Coudert Committee, its investigation started with City College.

All four Foner brothers were hauled before the committee's investigators. Jack, Moe, and Phil were dismissed, but Henry, the youngest, had just graduated and didn't have a job yet. His interrogation by the committee cast a long shadow.

Before he was called up for active duty in 1942, Henry was a substitute stenography teacher and took the test for a permanent teacher's license. He was discharged from the Army in 1946 with honors. But when he applied for a permanent teachers license, he was turned down for not having a sufficiently "meritorious record."

When Phil Foner spoke at an event in 1981 commemorating City College faculty who fought in the Spanish Civil War and noted that the survivors would have been fired by the Rapp-Coudert committee when they returned,

the then acting president of City College, Alice Chandler, vowed to do what she could to make amends to those who were purged in 1941. She asked me to research the purge and seek a resolution of the college's Faculty Council, pledging to safeguard the college from possible future purges, not so unimaginable in the first year of Reagan's presidency. That quickly led me to Henry, who helped organize the campaign that persuaded the City University Board of Trustees to apologize to those unjustly fired or let go, and to safeguard the Constitutional rights of assembly and speech to current and future generations, which it did in October 1981.

Shortly after losing his substitute teachers position, Henry went to work for the Joint Board of the Fur Dressers and Dryers Union, later the Joint Board Fur, Leather, and Machine Workers, from which he retired as president 40 years

later, in 1988. With his leadership, Henry's union was among the first to support the civil rights movement and the movement to end the war in Vietnam. He was also active in local politics – with the Liberal Party when it was truly liberal, and as campaign manager when former longshoreman, State Assembly member and Chair of the Assembly's Labor Committee, Frank Barbaro, ran for a Congressional seat in 2004. Henry enlisted me, my wife, and many friends in Frank's campaign; who could ever forget his frantic race around the city streets, hoping that we would get to the next event in one piece! Fortunately we survived but, unfortunately, Frank lost.

## A man about town

Henry was also a board member and writer for the progressive monthly, *Jewish Currents*. He actively sought to keep knowledge of the labor movement alive. He wrote songs and, in 1947, the play, *Thursdays 'Till Nine*, for the department store workers' union. He taught at City College's Center for Worker Education and elsewhere. He was an active NYLHA board member and editor of this newsletter. He co-founded LaborArts.

Young and old alike miss Henry. He touched many lives, and made a difference.

*Steve Leberstein, a social historian, member of the PSC's Executive Council and chair of its Academic Freedom Committee, was friends with Henry Foner for more than 35 years.*

**NEW YORK LABOR HISTORY ASSOCIATION**

Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives  
70 Washington Square South, 10th Floor  
New York, NY 10012

*Inside*

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- ▶ A personal remembrance of Henry Foner
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## Work History News



### **The New York Labor History Association**

was founded in 1976 to bring together New Yorkers interested in the history of working people, their organizations, and their struggles for a better life and a more just society. Too often this history is left out of textbooks and

classroom education. We organize discussion panels and conferences, book talks and movie nights. We celebrate long-time activists and new labor journalists. **Learn more about us at [newyorklaborhistory.org](http://newyorklaborhistory.org) — and if you're not a member yet, please join us!**



Like us on Facebook / New York Labor History Association