
Library Service to Unions: A Historical Overview

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ABSTRACT

AMERICAN PUBLIC LIBRARIES and labor unions began their institutional development during the nineteenth century as communities developed and prospered across the nation. Both institutions had strong democratic ideals and a firm commitment to free, quality education for all Americans, and so the historical roots of these institutions intertwined. Public libraries strive to serve the special needs of specific populations within their communities by providing the materials and resources they need. In areas of densely populated organized labor communities, special services could include historical and biographical works on the labor movement; literacy materials; and industrial, economic, and political studies. However, according to a national public libraries research study, libraries since the late 1960s have shifted from providing organized labor with special services to treating them as a group of patrons without special needs.

This article briefly reviews the evolution of public libraries, the origins of today's union movement, and the role of the AFL-CIO/ALA Joint Committee on Library Service to Labor Groups. The article further defines a number of misunderstandings and lack of trust between libraries and organized labor. A statement developed by the joint committee is recommended as a guide to future steps for library and organized labor: "There must be continuing effort, inspired by the conviction on both sides that this enterprise can and will benefit both the labor movement and the public library" (*Guide for Developing a Public Library Service to Labor Groups*, 1973, [unpaginated]).

INTRODUCTION

American libraries and labor groups have a recorded history of working in collaboration toward common goals and participating in mutually beneficial activities. Libraries and labor unions in particular have intertwining historical roots. The organized labor movement considers itself a strong advocate for the free public library and has provided a consistent record of support and testimony for library funding critical to providing services and materials to the nation's citizens. Labor's concern and support for the community public library parallels its "ongoing struggle to achieve free, quality public education for all Americans" (Shields, 1979, p. 1).

As communities developed and prospered in the nineteenth century, public libraries were created to advance towns' social, cultural, or economic goals. Public library development was dependent upon either the economic viability of individual communities or upon the existence of interested wealthy individuals. Libraries, then, evolved from private philanthropic initiative, not from public governmental action. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, libraries and communities across the nation benefited from the proliferation of private philanthropy. Private philanthropy predated tax support by many years because it was simple, direct, and dependent only upon the accumulation of wealth by a generous donor (U.S. Bureau of Education, 1876, p. 477). The first tax-supported libraries drew much of their strength from the donations of wealthy men because towns were unable to adequately support the institution without them.

From these beginnings, organized labor envisioned the continuing educational opportunities for all its members and their families through the resources of the public library. Historically, unions have championed support for a strong public education system, have advocated the right of all children to receive a quality education, and have promoted opportunities for continuing education. Labor's commitment to the public library system extends to both individual and institutional needs. Union members collectively have a stake in public libraries as workers, taxpayers, parents, and citizens.

Many types of libraries are available to serve labor union members' needs: Academic libraries at universities with a labor studies center and major public library research facilities may serve local unions, central labor councils, or state labor federations. State libraries, law libraries at public universities, and national libraries such as the National Library of Medicine and the Library of Congress have specialized materials to answer complex requests. Also, labor union libraries can be found in cities housing national or international union headquarters.

In 1926, the American Federation of Labor (AFL) called attention to the need for librarians to assist unions in their educational work, especially in the area of adult education. The AFL recommended that "unions everywhere seek the friendly aid of librarians and that the American Library

Association (ALA) be kept advised of our needs and plans" (Shields, 1979, p. 1). A more formal and direct relationship between labor and libraries was recognized by the AFL recommendation, but it was not until 1945 that the ALA formed the AFL-CIO/ALA Joint Committee on Library Service to Labor Groups, one of the longest-lasting collaborations in ALA's strong partnership history. Meyers (1999) states that the partnership has served both the philosophical aims of libraries and the educational goals of labor (p. 52). But the history of library services to labor groups is not without conflict. The conflict between unionization of library staff and the goals of libraries to serve unionized patrons that was disclosed in a 1949 library study on the social contributions of the institution showed a need to educate library management on the difference between these two areas.

The scope and purpose of this report is to provide a brief historical overview of the evolution of the partnership between libraries and organized labor from their first documented collaborations in the early 1800s through the last decades of the twentieth century. Studies and reports of library service to labor are scarce in library literature, but two major works provide thorough overviews.

One major work was published in 1963, *Library Service to Labor*, a collection of articles compiled by Dorothy Kuhn Oko and Bernard F. Downey. The AFL-CIO/ALA Joint Committee had been in existence for eighteen years when the Oko and Downey book was published, and the book presents articles from various publications during the years 1940 through 1960. According to Humphrey (1963), a contributor to the collection whose original article was published in a 1953 *Newsletter*, there was a "great barrier preventing adequate library-labor cooperation," due to a "lack of knowledge on the one hand of available services and on the other, of actual needs" (p. 37). More than thirty-five years have passed since Humphrey's assessment, and a review of surveys, articles, and reports written since her statement will help determine more recent activities and views of library-labor collaboration.

Another rich resource is Soltow's 1984 overview of public libraries' service to organized labor. It details fifty years of library service to labor and examines factors that have influenced the services offered. Soltow includes the role of the AFL-CIO/ALA Joint Committee on Library Services to Labor Groups and provides suggestions for future directions.

According to Pfeffer and Salancik (1978), productive assessments of services to groups should create mutually acceptable outcomes and actions, reflecting both an assessment of the usefulness of what is being done and of the resources being consumed (p. 11). The expectation for library-labor collaborations is one in which the merger of labor's communicated needs and the library's ability to provide and support specific needs will result in useful and successful outcomes and will strengthen the partnership.

At the start of the new millennium, an analysis of the evolution of library services to labor and a record of perceived successes and failures are

needed to identify the types of services that could provide constructive strategies toward serving today's unions, while pointing toward future mutually beneficial collaborations. This historical review of the relationship between unions and libraries is intended to demonstrate the past connection and to initiate a future one.

THE EMERGENCE OF LIBRARIES AND TRADE UNIONS

The association between trade unions and the public library began as early as 1824 when the workers of Philadelphia, through one of the first central trade councils in America, organized a Mechanics Free Library as an educational center. At the Mechanics Free Library, workers assembled books to help them learn about new work systems in the first Industrial Revolution (Meany, 1960, p. 13). Merchants' and tradesmen's libraries in many cities formed the nuclei for libraries to be used by the general public. To the advantage of both, tax-supported libraries and tradesmen's libraries developed concurrently from 1825 through 1850 (Curti, 1943, p. 364).

Library reports document that the founders of the public library expressed deep concern for workers. But Ditzion (1947), in *Arsenals of a Democratic Culture*, states, "For library interests humanitarianism was too often a tactical approach to the sympathies of persons of influence. It was. . . psychologically sound to appeal to human and social values shared by Americans in all walks of life" (p.109).

The single most important benefactor of public libraries during the nineteenth century was the philanthropist Andrew Carnegie (Jeavons, 1994, p. 19). Between 1881 and 1917 he gave over \$56 million for the construction of 1,681 public library buildings throughout the United States, an unprecedented gift with profound effects. In each recipient community, Carnegie insisted that the communities commit themselves to the library's continued support. Carnegie's first philanthropic gift of a library was given to his birthplace, Dunfermline, Scotland, in 1881. Shortly afterwards, Carnegie wrote a letter to the mayor of Pittsburgh offering funds to build a free public library if the city would accept it and would agree to appropriate \$15,000 a year for its maintenance. Many years passed before Carnegie's gift to Pittsburgh was accepted and the building was completed. In 1895, as preparations were being made for the library dedication, Carnegie stated, "The list and number of tickets are to be published in the newspaper so that the workers may see they are not forgotten. We must carry the working masses with us or the Institution is a failure" (Carnegie to William Frey, 1 July 1895).

However, there was one large group of Pittsburgh citizens who were very vocal in their anger with Carnegie's gift. Trade unions publicly urged the rejection of Carnegie's library. A mass meeting under the authorization of the American Flint Glass Workers' Union was held on the South Side, 10 September 1892, to take action regarding Carnegie's gift. The well-attended meeting resulted from recent strikes at the Carnegie Iron Works. The

chairman of the meeting said that Pittsburgh was not impoverished and the Carnegie Library would be of no use to the workers of the city, especially in the selected location of Schenley Park (Ditzion, 1947, p. 161). He stated that the library would be a constant source of taxation and the people never had a chance to vote on whether they wanted such taxation. Unions accused Carnegie of building libraries and then reducing the wages of workers to pay for them. A union leader cried out that he “would sooner enter a building built with the dirty silver of Judas Iscariot got for betraying Jesus Christ than enter the Carnegie Library” (Ditzion, 1947, p. 161). The meeting closed with workers unanimously adopting the following: “Resolved, that this meeting declares that councils of the city of Pittsburgh shall revoke their previous action in accepting a donation from Andrew Carnegie to build a library for the city, and return the money to the donor” (*Pittsburgh Dispatch*, 1892, p. 3).

Carnegie, in a personal correspondence to Mr. Herbert Spencer dated 5 January 1897, explained why he continued his plans to build a library, hall, and museum for the working masses of Pittsburgh when they had publicly requested City Council reject his gifts: “they knew not what they did, and so rendered only more steadfast, if possible, in my determination to give them precious gifts. Never, have halls, Libraries, Museums and Art Galleries roused the masses of a city to such enthusiasm.” (Carnegie to Herbert Spencer, 5 January 1897).

Samuel Gompers, founder of the American Federation of Labor, stated: “Yes, accept his library, organize the workers, secure better conditions and, particularly, reduction in hours of labor, and then the workers will have the chance and leisure in which to read books” (Ditzion, 1947, p. 162).

During the early years of public library growth across the nation, a report from the Boston Public Library in 1898 stated that laborers were a very low percentage of their registered library users—only 702 card holders were identified as laborers out of 72,000 total patrons (Sullivan, 1954, p. 63). Sullivan points out that the level of education in the late 1800s was low and that large numbers of immigrants from many cultures created booming populations in cities such as Boston. The statistics did not allow for the number of laborers who used the library without being registered cardholders.

Two studies that brought fiscal and political issues to the attention of librarians are considered landmark studies and the first significant analyses of libraries in the political process. In the first of these studies, Joeckel (1935) argued that the organizational pattern of libraries and their funding provided the country with inadequate service. In *The Government of the American Public Library*, Joeckel described, analyzed, and evaluated the position of the public library in the structure of government in the United States.

The second of these studies, Garceau (1949), became one of the library field’s most cited works of a political nature and included a warning to librarians: “It is the conclusion of our research that it is of paramount im-

portance to librarians, to library service, and to the citizen that public librarians understand and appreciate more clearly the political world of the public library" (p. 239). Service to labor was included in this two-year study. The study encompassed fifty municipal libraries, ten county library systems, and twenty-two state library agencies and was designed to use interdisciplinary methods of research to investigate nine topics including history, budget, and governing authority. The study had two objectives: an appraisal, in sociological, cultural, and human terms, of the extent to which librarians are achieving their objectives and an assessment of the public library's actual and potential contribution to American society. One of the findings had a direct connection to library service to labor:

In a majority of our sample, librarians have not themselves seriously considered direct service to labor unions, though actively searching for direct links to organized groups. One large city library has allowed experiments with service to factories and unions to become confused institutionally and ideologically with the unionization of its own staff; and library board and chief librarian maintain a hands-off coolness to the project. (Garceau, 1949, p. 122)

Sullivan's and Cohen's contributions in *Library Services to Labor* provide a general historical background of the concurrent rise of the labor movement and the recognition by librarians that outreach services to various constituent groups would be mutually beneficial. However, Cohen (1963) states that an examination of certain attitudes toward service to labor reveals that librarians have, for the most part, felt no particular obligation to labor unions and their members (p. 54). Kemsley (1963) reminds us that "it is a correct assumption that very few union leaders and for that matter, few union education directors fully realize the services that are available from their public library" (p. 13). Oko and Downey's publication provides a wide range of topics for library services to labor, including: the needs of labor, how to establish a labor service within the library, collection suggestions, types of materials, union educational programs, publicizing labor services, and case studies of five large public libraries that developed labor services in the 1940s. The publication is useful as a primer for establishing services to labor and for providing the historical context for previous work in this area.

LIBRARY SERVICES FROM A LABOR UNION PERSPECTIVE

Union requests for library service mirror workers' interest in the community, employment issues, personal and family issues, historical materials for reference and information, literacy concerns, referral resources, and reading materials for enjoyment. Central to organized labor requests are materials and books that support ongoing adult education programs for members, standard reference tools and trade union periodicals, indexes and services in the labor field, and general labor literature.

Godfrey (1963) states that labor's first need is for librarians who are interested in their problems (p. 100). Surveying unions about their library needs, Godfrey found that unions desired to hire or train library staff who specialize in economic and trade union materials; to purchase more titles dealing with labor problems from the workers' and union's viewpoint; to collect biographical and historical works on the labor movement, as well as industrial, economic, and political studies; to provide subscriptions to more labor papers and magazines and information about legislative issues. Additional labor requests focused on timely and up-to-date statistical information including, but not limited to, employment, commerce, finances, business cycle barometers, job classifications, cost of living indices, workmen's compensation problems, legal decisions, and pension plans.

To provide a context for library services from labor's perspective, the following selected labor milestones will serve as background information about the union movement in American history. The events have been extracted from the work of James Green (2001) in his book, *Democracy at Work: The Union Movement in U.S. History*, and can be viewed on the AFL-CIO Web site (<http://www.aflcio.org>). Green begins his timeline from the 1600s, but this report will cite only the labor events beginning with the first recorded association between trade unions and the public library (1824) through the close of the twentieth century.

- Labor's struggles for freedom—1800 through 1865. During this time, mill girls in Lowell, Massachusetts, protested wage cuts, and in other cities, strikes were organized to promote a ten-hour work day. New Hampshire enacted the first state ten-hour day, while shoemakers went on strike in New England.
- Origins of the modern labor movement—1866 through 1898. The National Labor Union, the Noble and Holy Order of the Knights of Labor, Colored National Labor Union, the American Federation of Labor, and the Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions were all formed at this time. The Carpenters Union strike won an eight-hour day for some 28,000 members. Many strikes took place: the Iron and Steel Workers were defeated in a lockout, an integrated general strike in New Orleans succeeded, and a boycott of Pullman sleeping cars led to a general strike on the railroad.
- The Progressive Era—1899 through 1919. During this time, there were many strikes and many advances of organized labor, and the U.S. Industrial Commission declared trade unions good for democracy. During this era more unions, including the Women's Trade Union League and the Industrial Workers of the World, were founded. One of every five workers walked out in a great wave of strikes, including the "Uprising of 20,000" female shirtwaist makers in New York, who protested the sweatshop conditions that had led to the Triangle factory fire that killed 150

workers; the strike of unorganized immigrant steel workers in McKees Rocks, Pennsylvania; and the “Bread and Roses” strike of Lawrence, Massachusetts, which resulted in 23,000 men, women, and children going on strike. At this time, the government passed a bill creating the Department of Labor.

- The Recession and the Depression—1920 through 1933. The Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters was created. The Railway Labor Act set up procedures to settle railway labor disputes and forbade discrimination against union members. President Franklin Roosevelt proposed the New Deal program to Congress.
- Democratizing America—1934 through 1945. During this decade, there was an upsurge in strikes, including a national textile strike, and the auto workers won a sit-down strike against General Motors. The Fair Labor Standards Act established the first minimum wage and a forty-hour work week. The Committee for Industrial Organization (CIO) formed first within AFL and then as an independent federation. A National War Labor Board, created with union members and the CIO, formed the first political action committee to get out the union vote for President Roosevelt.
- The fight for economic and social justice—1946 through 1968. The largest strike wave in U.S. history occurred during this period—and the Taft-Hartley Act restricted union members’ activities. The AFL and the CIO merged. The Labor Management Reporting and Disclosure Act, the Equal Pay Act, and the Civil Rights Act passed. There was a march on Washington for Jobs and Justice. An AFL-CIO United Farm Workers Organizing Committee was formed by Caesar Chavez. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was assassinated in Memphis during a Sanitation Workers’ strike.
- Progress and New Challenges—1970 through 2000. The Occupational Safety and Health Act was passed. Many new groups were formed including the Labor Council for Latin American Advancement, the Coalition of Labor Union Women, the Organizing Institute, the Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance within the AFL, and the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists. Pride At Work was established. AFL-CIO rallies 400,000 in Washington, D.C. on Solidarity Day and defeats legislation giving the president the ability to fast-track trade legislation without assured protection of workers’ rights and the environment. AFL-CIO membership shows renewed growth: more than 75,000 human service workers are unionized in Los Angeles county, 5,000 North Carolina textile workers gain a union after a twenty-five-year struggle, 65,000 Puerto Rico public sector workers join unions, and the union movement organizes its biggest program of grassroots electoral politics ever.

Today the diversity of American unions and the working families they represent demands that libraries be more relevant and accessible to active

and retired union members. Meyers (1999) states, "The gateway that libraries open for individuals and groups to information, personal fulfillment, and building better communities also holds much potential for work with unions" (p. 52). The AFL-CIO is the voluntary federation of sixty-four of America's unions, representing more than 16.3 million union members in America in 2000 with a cross section of people—women and men of all ages, races, and ethnic groups. They work in hospitals and nursing homes, schools, auto assembly plants and on construction sites, trains, buses, and airplanes. They include teachers, librarians, musicians, electricians, postal workers, and janitors. In addition, union families and millions of union retirees should also be included in this population of potential library users. In the AFL-CIO, workers and unions find the opportunity to combine strength and to work together to improve the lives of America's working families, bring fairness and dignity to the workplace, and to secure social and economic equity in the nation.

LIBRARY SERVICE TO LABOR UNIONS AND THEIR PARTNERSHIP

In July 1945, the ALA proposed the appointment of a joint committee representing the American Federation of Labor, the Congress of Industrial Organizations, the Grand Lodge Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen, and the ALA. The overall objective was to discover ways of encouraging and assisting public libraries to develop specialized library services useful to labor. In October 1945, the ALA Executive Board authorized its president to appoint such a committee, named the AFL-CIO/ALA Joint Committee on Library Service to Labor Groups. Representative members were appointed from each organization and, in July 1950, the joint committee was made an ALA standing committee. Objectives included the provision of adequate source materials in research collections on various phases of the labor movement; the operation of a joint educational program for local librarians and local labor leaders; library provision of objective and timely materials to support public understanding of labor problems; adequate provision of library materials for the use of labor organizations; and the encouragement of greater library use by working people in general. Later, its purpose was expanded to promote outreach going both ways—to encourage unions to make better use of the services that many libraries offer.

In addition to partnership meetings and labor programs presented at the ALA conferences, the joint committee provided and promoted services to labor through the publication of newsletters and bibliographies. The committee issued a quarterly *Library Service to Labor Newsletter (Newsletter)* that printed contributions by librarians and labor that promoted, guided, and advised ways to develop the partnership. The *Newsletter* was not only an important resource and guide, but also served to provide the history of library services to labor and to assess their successes and failures.

Unfortunately, in 1970, due to severe budgetary cutbacks at ALA, the association moved to discontinue funding of the joint committee's *Newsletter* and other ALA committee publications and projects. The withdrawal of ALA funding was a severe setback to the joint committee and the labor members held a special meeting to determine their future participation. The conclusion of the *Guide for Developing a Public Library Service to Labor Groups* in its successive years of publication states: "Both parties must realize that, as in all partnerships, there is no easy and final adjustment. There must be continuing effort, inspired by the conviction on both sides that this enterprise can and will benefit both the labor movement and the library" (*Guide for Developing a Public Library Service to Labor Groups*, 1973, p. 5). The partnership survived and continues its struggles not only to survive but also to thrive as libraries and labor change with the times.

The Guide for Developing a Public Library Service to Labor Groups, first published in 1958, was meant to stimulate interest in the area, to give a basic understanding of some of the problems involved, and to furnish practical suggestions for librarians wanting to develop services to unions in the community. Included is a bibliography of basic materials for a public library collection. The guide answers the question, "Why library service to trade unions?" and describes how to make contact with unions, discusses types of services, and includes a list of selected materials and resources.

Since the late 1960s, according to Imhoff and Brandwein (1976), there was a shift in many libraries from an emphasis in treating labor as a special group and providing them with special services, to treating labor as a group of patrons with no special needs (p. 2). They stated that the shift away from labor brought the service emphasis to economically and culturally disadvantaged and bilingual patrons. A survey was mailed to 950 public libraries in 1967 to query them about available services. There were 384 surveys returned, a 40.4 percent response rate. The results were useful as a benchmark for another survey administered in 1976.

In 1975, the joint committee focused its efforts on the preparation of a new questionnaire on service to labor. A pretest questionnaire was sent to ten public libraries prior to the survey administration. In the spring of 1976, the questionnaire was sent to public libraries in communities over 10,000 with a central labor council. Seven hundred and twenty-three surveys were mailed and returned with a response rate of 53.2 percent. Kathleen Imhoff and Larry Brandwein were responsible for the survey development. Its purpose was to ascertain the status of existing labor collections and services throughout the United States, to learn of future plans for service to labor groups, to determine what help the library would like to have from unions if the library planned to develop a service plan for labor, and to obtain information to be used for the AFL-CIO/ALA joint committee's publication program. Imhoff and Brandwein concluded from an analysis of the results:

(1) Since 1967, the number of special labor collections . . . the number of staff with labor-related job assignments, the number of libraries working with labor organizations, and the amount of interest in providing service to labor organizations and/or their membership has steadily declined. (2) There was a surprising amount of mistrust and lack of understanding of anything connected with unions shown by the librarians answering the questionnaire. (3) Of the librarians that did say they wanted to provide service to labor groups, many stated that they had received no cooperation from the union. (Imhoff & Brandwein, 1977, p. 156)

Imhoff's follow-up to the questionnaire analysis of results, "Library Service to Labor Groups 1977—Dead or Alive?," revealed the answer to be that the service to labor groups is more dead than alive. She stated that librarians taking the survey assumed either that labor unions were well established or that local unions have large amounts of money to spend and should pay for special services. She found that librarians' mistrust of unions ran rampant in the responses. The joint committee was to use the information collected to develop materials to help the libraries that would like to improve, to expand, to organize special materials, or to plan labor programs. The committee's charge was also to determine whether to accept the status quo or to create new services (Imhoff, 1977).

The results of the 1976 survey were included in the testimony of Dorothy Shields, Assistant Director of Education, AFL-CIO, to the White House Conference on Libraries, 15–19 November 1979. Her testimony focused on library services to labor and what the AFL-CIO determined to be significant shortcomings in this area. Shield's statement reaffirmed AFL-CIO support for the adequate funding of public libraries and called for sharply increased collections and programs that speak to the role of the labor movement in American history, its economy, the world of work for young people, and labor's role in the arts and humanities.

Shields spoke to the misconceptions and lack of information that librarians have had about union members and emphasized labor's hope that the public library would be the repository of resource material on labor for the nation, especially for school children to research and learn. Specifically, libraries should collect materials that reflect the contribution of the laboring worker to the development of democracy, to music and literature, and to the progressive social legislation for the safety, health, and welfare of the workers and their families.

Her statement included the findings of the 1976 public library survey that the joint committee found disturbing: that librarians mistrusted unions and dismissed them as valid consumer groups; that many librarians assumed that union members had reading problems and ignored the reality of union members' educational level; and that some librarians indicated that basic information about union organizing should be excluded from public libraries. As a spokesman for the AFL-CIO, Shields suggested that librarians need-

ed assistance, education, and in-service training in order to recognize labor's contribution to society. The AFL-CIO local unions would be helpful to public librarians in this regard.

It was recommended that labor should be represented on library trustee boards; libraries should provide balanced labor collections; libraries should maintain the necessary technical information and economic data to provide help to unions in their collective bargaining research efforts; librarians should be impartial in their labor-management judgments when selecting materials; librarians should work with union members and their families; and labor should encourage members to continue their advocacy for public library support. As a follow-up and confirmation of organized labor's commitment, the December 1979 *AFL-CIO News* confirmed union aid to libraries for their source materials on labor.

The reality for public libraries to maintain and build their materials and resources for special services was not good: over the last several decades public libraries across the nation experienced serious financial difficulties due to a poor national economy and to state and local cutbacks in their funding. As a result, libraries have been forced to cut their staffing and hours and have attempted to serve the public with deteriorating collections and services. The ongoing fiscal crisis in public libraries across the country has recently led to closures estimated at approximately one library per week. Following these events there have been news reports, editorials, and citizens calling attention to a nationwide library crisis that affects the educational, cultural, and economic potential of all citizens as their access to the resources of the library are diminished or extinguished (Hubbard, 1996, p.1).

The public library crisis remained in effect as new computer technology, the Internet, and the World Wide Web were introduced as part of the information age. Libraries needed the resources to adapt to the changing world in which technology made an impact on the way people worked and learned. Labor was adapting to the new technology to benefit their organizing efforts, to support their collective bargaining research, and to gather information to counter management efforts against strikes and to break union organizing efforts, as they were also adapting to a new world of work in a global economy. Labor's needs as a special service group have expanded in recent decades. Workers have required training to use the new technology and have needed libraries to provide the computers, software, electronic databases, and Internet connections they lacked.

Public librarians have ready-made partners in organized labor to advocate for the adequate local funding to invest in computer technology and Internet connections for all citizens. Labor union members must reach out to library resources in their own neighborhoods and communities to strengthen a partnership that needs renewal.

CONCLUSIONS AND FURTHER STUDY

American public libraries and labor unions developed as institutions during the nineteenth century with their historical roots intertwined. Both had strong democratic ideals and a firm commitment to free, quality education for all Americans. From these beginnings, partnerships between libraries and labor would grow to the mutual benefit of each. As libraries and organized labor became more established and grew in various ways to remain relevant to their constituents and members, their services and needs grew.

For libraries, their services, materials, and collections for special groups changed to reflect the demographics of the nation. Since the late 1960s, there was a shift in many libraries from an emphasis in treating organized labor as a special group and providing them with special services, to treating labor as a group with no special needs. The shift moved toward service to economically and culturally disadvantaged and bilingual patrons. During this period, unions were fighting for economic and social justice—resulting in the largest strike wave in U.S. history, laws restricting union member activities, marches on Washington for jobs and justice, and the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., during a Sanitation Workers' strike. Labor was fighting for occupational safety and health issues, AFL-CIO membership was beginning to show renewed growth, and new coalitions were being formed within the national labor federation. Organized labor's needs were increasing for collective bargaining research information, demographic information, legislative issues, cost of living indices, pension plans, legal decisions on labor court cases, and related issues.

Research shows that, while organized labor had an increased need for library services and information to help with complex issues, librarians were distrustful of unions, had lowered opinions of union members' educational status, and did not consider unions to be a viable consumer group. Research also shows that unions in general did not reach out to libraries to ask for assistance.

New steps toward more effective interaction between labor and libraries include initiatives between AFL-CIO state and central labor councils and public library systems to educate each about opportunities for stronger collaboration. Public libraries that offer computer training for citizens should reach out to groups in their community, including labor groups. Research skills and database training can focus on the economic, financial, legal, and government information that union members seek. Also, job search skills and employment placement opportunities offered by some urban area libraries is a feature to be pursued for union and nonunion workers. The vast infrastructure of libraries in every community provides a ready-made physical resource for union organizing, education, training, and research for informed citizens to improve their society and to seek economic and social justice in the new globalized world.

Unions and libraries are both at a critical crossroad of their development. Both could develop their future relevance to America's working families with a renewal of mutual outreach that strengthens the bonds of a democratic society. Globalization and the Internet's impact on libraries and working Americans makes it imperative that efforts are made to develop new connections between leaders of libraries and unions.

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