
Introduction

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THE HISTORY OF LIBRARY SERVICE to labor unions is a long-standing one. It is thus somewhat surprising that, up to now, this has also been a largely undocumented history.

This issue is the brainchild of a committee with an unusual membership: six librarians and six representatives of organized labor. The American Federation of Labor/Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO)/American Library Association (ALA) Joint Committee on Library Service to Labor Groups, which celebrated its fiftieth anniversary in 2001, is committed to the current charge to “initiate, develop, and foster ways and means of effecting closer cooperation between the librarian and labor organizations and the large constituency represented by the labor organizations” (*ALA Handbook of Organizations, 2000–2001*, pp. 21–22). The work of the joint committee, discussed in detail in this volume, is but one manifestation of library-labor cooperation. For example, ALA also presents annually the John Sessions Memorial Award, in recognition of outstanding library service to labor unions such as special programming, subject-specific collection development, outreach training, and publications. Two other professional organizations of librarians—the Labor Issues Caucus of the Special Library Association (SLA) and the Committee of Industrial Relations Librarians (CIRL)—also address the provision of library services to organized labor, either on an in-house or outreach basis.

While serving as cochair of the joint committee, and as a reference librarian in Cornell University’s School of Industrial and Labor Relations Library, I noticed that the subject of library services to American labor unions received scant attention. This dearth of discussion is remarkable,

not only because of the long history of library-labor interaction, but also because of the scale (or potential scale) of such interaction. There are over 16 million labor union members in the United States (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2002) and approximately 100 industrial and labor relations programs in universities throughout the United States and Canada.¹

The nine articles in this issue reflect the diversity of the joint committee membership and the collaboration between librarians and labor union members. These articles draw upon the experiences and perspectives of academic, public, and special libraries, as well as labor unions' education and research departments. Authors include librarians, archivists, labor educators, and a professor in labor relations. Contributions include those of current and past joint committee members. The submissions discuss the history of library-labor interaction, as well as the ways in which libraries are currently working with union groups to provide research assistance and to facilitate the use of evolving technologies.

A trio of articles in this issue provides the historical context of the role of libraries providing service to labor groups. The relationship between labor unions and public libraries is an especially strong one, as evidenced in both Elizabeth Ann Hubbard's and Ann Sparanese's articles. Hubbard, senior assistant in the higher education department of the American Federation of Teachers, traces the history and evolution of public library services to labor unions from the mid-nineteenth century to the modern day, while Sparanese, a reference librarian at the Englewood (New Jersey) Public Library and chair of the John Sessions Memorial Award Committee, focuses on unique services and programming provided to unions by public libraries, highlighting some past Sessions Award winners. The AFL-CIO/ALA Joint Committee on Library Service to Labor Groups was initially founded to address the services of labor provided by public libraries. Over the years, the focus of the Joint Committee broadened. Art Meyers, director of the Russell Library (Middletown, Connecticut), and for many years an active participant on the joint committee, acts here as the committee historian, providing an overview of the creation, development, and workings of the joint committee from its earliest days to present.

An evaluation of library services to labor groups should include an assessment of the various needs of this community. Margaret Chaplan (library director) and Edward Hertenstein (assistant professor) at the Institute of Labor and Industrial Relations, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, describe the findings of their survey designed to assess the information needs of union officials throughout the Midwest. In addition, Chaplan and Hertenstein discuss the ways in which labor officials set about fulfilling these needs and the impact that library training has on how effectively union members find information.

The information and research services of one particular union is outlined in Howard Nelson and Bernadette Bailey's article describing servic-

es provided at the American Federation of Teachers (AFT). Nelson, senior associate director of Research and Information Services at AFT, and Bailey, a librarian at AFT, examine the changing roles of information services and research in the AFT, describing the effects of technology and financial considerations on these services.

Rounding out the emphasis on the research needs of labor, Gaye Williams, assistant to the president for communication and technology of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) describes the way in which her union utilized the Internet to facilitate communications and the dissemination of information following the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. She also discusses SEIU's network of Web sites, "Locals Online," and offers practical suggestions, from a union point of view, as to the ways in which libraries and labor can work together to oversee the information and technology needs of unionists.

The remaining articles in this issue provide the perspective of academic libraries. The role of documentation and archiving in academic institutions is provided by two articles that describe the ways in which university-based labor archives both preserve and make public an historical record of American labor. Thomas Connors, curator of the National Public Broadcasting Archives at the University of Maryland, describes the Labor Archives Project (LAP). In 1995, LAP brought together ten archivists to examine and discuss the ways in which organizational changes within labor unions have impacted both the record collection and documentation of unions, as well how these changes affected the relationship between these unions and the repositories of their collections. The team's survey methods, findings, and recommendations are discussed.

Dan Golodner, American Federation of Teachers Archivist and Webmaster at the Walter P. Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs at Wayne State University, describes the use of the Internet as a means of presenting labor history, in large part by revisiting the creation of Wayne State University's online exhibit, "La Causa—A United Farm Workers (UFW) Exhibition." This exhibit focuses on the formation and rise of the UFW; the life of its leader, Cesar Chavez; and various other aspects of the UFW. The theory and practical design elements involved in creating such an exhibit are discussed.

My own article is an outgrowth of nearly five years of experience as Outreach Services Librarian at Catherwood Library, School of Industrial and Labor Relations, Cornell University. In that capacity, I headed up the Labor Outreach Program, a curriculum focused exclusively on Internet training programs for labor unions throughout New York State and elsewhere. In addition to describing the creation and implementation of this program, I discuss the findings of my informal e-mail survey of fifty-three libraries and the findings of more in-depth phone interviews with academic librarians providing outreach services to labor unions.

The conclusions of my findings seem to match others in this issue; the long history of library-labor interaction notwithstanding, libraries could do much more to provide services to nontraditional patron groups such as labor unions. It is my hope that the articles in this issue will help further that goal.

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NOTE

- 1 This figure was the result of information gathered from *Peterson's Graduate Programs in the Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences* 35th ed., 2001, and *Peterson's 4 Year Colleges* 31st edition, 2001.

REFERENCES

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