
Service to the Labor Community: A Public Library Perspective

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ABSTRACT

SINCE THE EARLIEST DAYS OF THE NATION, American workers have been viewed as primary beneficiaries of the establishment of the free public library. They have been the focus of public library development, whether for the fortification of their education or for social control, as a counter force to the upheavals of workers in Europe. At various times in its history, the public library has concentrated on workers, specifically the organized labor movement, as both clientele to be served and as partners in cooperative educational work. Although their numbers have diminished in the last decade, unions in the year 2000 still represented 16.3 million U.S. workers—13.5 percent of all working people in the U.S. (“Union Membership,” 2002, p. 1)—arguably a greater number of individual members than any other American social justice or secular organization. If union retirees and union households are taken into consideration, a very high percentage of Americans are indeed included in the community of organized labor which potentially interacts with the public library. Historically, significant forms of outreach, programming, and cooperative services designed specifically for workers have been undertaken by public libraries across the country, many in cooperation with the labor movement. In addition, public libraries have endeavored to address the needs of the American workforce both as individuals and as labor union members. In order to make these endeavors more productive today, the needs of the labor community, both individually and collectively, must be considered. As the labor movement itself has changed and developed, in terms of membership demographics, size, and expressed goals, the public library’s service to this important sector must also grow and evolve.

THE LITERATURE OF LABOR AND LIBRARIES

Of the various types of libraries throughout the country, the public library undoubtedly has had the longest, deepest, most intimate, and yet most ambivalent relationship with the labor movement. Considering the size of the labor community and its own long history, there is a relatively small body of library literature addressing the relationship between these two institutions. Literature concerning public library service to the labor movement reached a high point during a time when the labor movement was at its strongest and ebbed with the movement's decline in membership and influence. The subject of library service to labor does receive a major visitation every decade or so; each time the amount and size of this literature appears directly proportional to the size and strength of the labor movement itself. As the labor movement has itself gradually decreased, literature dealing with library service to labor has also declined.

In the middle to late 1800s, articles in the literature focused on the task of reaching workers with the message of the democratizing effect and educational uplift provided by libraries. This included the preamble to the Massachusetts Library Law of 1847 (Ditzion, 1947, pp. 18–19). In the early 1900s, library literature was developed in support of the Workers' Education Movement, a group that strove to provide workers with a class-oriented view of the world and society as well as education in their fields (Dwyer, 1977, pp. 27–151). In the 1940s and 1950s, years which coincided with the greatest growth of union membership and strength in our society (in 1954, 35 percent of all private sector workers were union members), a number of dissertations (Goshin, 1941; Poll, 1953; Sullivan, 1953) were produced on the relationship between libraries and labor, culminating in 1963 with a full-length book, edited by Dorothy Kuhn Oko, a developer and leader in library service to labor at the New York Public Library, in collaboration with B.F. Downey. Published by the American Library Association (ALA), *Library Service to Labor* was a landmark contribution, pulling together many of the articles published in the newsletter *Library Service to Labor*, produced for many years by the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO)/ALA Joint Committee on Library Service to Labor Groups. This book, considered the "bible" of library services to labor unions, presented historical background, theory, practical ideas, and case studies on how public libraries could reach out to and serve organized labor. Though this work is now dated, it has no contemporary equivalent, particularly with the elimination in 1970 of the *Library Service to Labor* newsletter, the source of much of its material. Even with a forty-year gap and changes in information technology, many of the ideas presented in this book are as relevant today as they were in 1963. In 1976, the last survey of labor collections and services in public libraries was done by the joint committee. Of the 723 questionnaires sent out, 18 of 385 responding libraries reported that they had special labor collections, and 14 had a staff mem-

ber assigned to work with labor, down from 22 in the previous survey of 1967 (Imhoff & Brandwein, 1977, p. 151). Today, even the New York Public Library no longer has a staff member specifically devoted to work with labor.

While no monograph discussing public library service to labor has been published since the 1960s, several articles were published in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. The work of the joint committee was reported annually in the ALA Yearbooks until they, too, ceased in 1986. A significant contribution to this subject was D. W. Schneider's 1990 chapter "Library Service to Labor Groups," in ALA's *Adult Services: An Enduring Focus for Public Libraries*. At the time of Schneider's article, the labor movement was in decline, with union membership accounting for only 16 percent of the work force, much of this represented by workers in the public sector. By the time Art Meyers' short, "Building a Partnership: Library Service to Labor" article appeared in *American Libraries*, figures were even lower. Since this time union statistics have continued to drop, with membership in unions now hovering at around 13 percent of the workforce, much diminished from its peak membership of 32.3 percent in 1954. Union membership in the private, nonagricultural sector now stands at less than 10 percent, while the government sector unionization is almost 38 percent.

While the AFL-CIO's current president John Sweeney is dedicated to massive organizing campaigns, forces in the new global economy have continued to wreak havoc with labor organizations. Although federation affiliate international unions organized over 800,000 new members in 2000, the federation still registered a net loss of 219,000 members in that year. At a recent northeast regional conference of the AFL-CIO's Central Labor Councils (the grassroots, local extensions of the AFL-CIO affiliated unions), Richard Trumpka, Secretary-Treasurer, projected the need to organize 1 million workers per year in order to register any net gains in union membership and offset the loss of union jobs through globalization, downsizing, and the destruction of the U.S. industrial base. Clearly this is a goal of epic proportions, but it reveals a strong new direction for the AFL-CIO that is likely to result in organizing activity in local communities served by public libraries.

Despite the drop in current membership percentages of the work force, unionized workers, their households, and retirees still represent an exceedingly significant sector of the U.S. population; in actual numbers they are 1 million more than during the years in which their percentage in the labor force was higher (Labor Research Association, 2002). Furthermore, union membership is no longer limited to white males in skilled or unskilled trades. Unions now represent a wide cross section of the American social and political body, with women and people of color in greater numbers than ever before. As previously noted, 37.5 percent of all government workers are presently unionized, many of whom are women. Teachers and other professionals are joining unions, even as the traditional manufacturing workers are losing their jobs. The AFL-CIO has taken on the challenge of

organizing immigrants, regardless of their legal status, where they exist in the workforce. Therefore, despite the loss of percentage points in the overall population, unions still represent millions of U.S. workers. These numbers are evidence of a defined community, their ranks as numerous as any other traditional public library partner or constituency. The question and challenge for public libraries then is how to reach and adequately serve this ever evolving population. Any literature addressing library service to the labor community must take into account the current labor situation as well as the history that public libraries and the labor movement share.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND—LABOR AND LIBRARIES GROW UP TOGETHER AND APART

The relationship between the labor movement and the public library goes back to the days of the emergence of both institutions in the early to mid-nineteenth century. In 1820, special libraries were developed for the education of mechanics and apprentices in the trades, in order to help them to improve their skills and general education on a local and institutional level. Libraries of this type were established in cities throughout the eastern United States, including New York City, Boston, Portland, Salem, and Philadelphia. As manufacturing shifted from the small workshop to the factory, some employers established factory libraries for the practical education and personal enrichment of their employees. One such library was at the Pacific Mills in Lawrence, Massachusetts, which was established for the sole use of its employees, who were assessed one cent a week to maintain the library and its associated lecture hall. In some communities, these libraries were used by the public, such as the Cambria Library Association in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, which was supported by the Cambria Iron Corporation but open to the entire community.

The benefits to the working classes were part of the rationale for the movement toward larger, tax-supported institutions. Both the labor and public library movements grew rapidly between the 1850s and 1890s. At least one librarian writing about this parallel growth drew a cause and effect relationship between the shortening of working hours, and the subsequent acquisition of more leisure time by the worker, with the growth of and demand for libraries: "By and large the rapid multiplication of libraries between 1850 and 1890 was synchronous with the labor movement and the achievement of shorter working hours" (Borden, 1931, p. 282). According to Ditzion (1947), "By 1890, librarians . . . conceived it as their special mission to bring the library to the industrial employee" (p. 118), using methods such as distributing pamphlets and book lists among employees as they left the factories, sending circulars to manufacturers requesting them to encourage their workers to use the public libraries, and placing library borrowers' application forms at strategic locations in the mills (p. 119). At the first meeting of the National Labor Union in 1866, a resolution was passed, calling for the

establishment of “workmen’s lyceums and free reading rooms” (Ditzion, 1947, p. 121). Other labor organizations, including the Workingmen’s Union in New York and the National Labor Reform passed similar resolutions. The establishment of a public library in Chicago was preceded by a call from the *Workingman’s Advocate*, a labor newspaper of the day, to city employers to establish reading rooms and libraries for their own workers. While the labor movement was not in the forefront of the establishment of public libraries, it did play significant roles in cities such as Washington, D.C., and Buffalo in the 1890s. (Ditzion, 1947, pp. 120–123).

In the second half of the nineteenth century, a type of class warfare was ongoing in U.S. social institutions, reflected in the debate over what was considered suitable material for collection by public libraries:

The shape of [library] collections and the mission they identified reflect a struggle that never ceased to take place during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: the struggle of taste and the selection of works to be admitted into the realm of high culture. The motives for starting public libraries included a wish to collect and preserve important writings, a genuine commitment to educate people, and a desire to use books as a means of social control. (Cayton, 1993, p. 2482)

This element of social control involved not only the concept of high versus low culture, but the idea, prevalent among the intellectual founders of the public library such as George Ticknor, Francis Wayland, and Edward Everett, that libraries would provide an antidote to the revolutionary fervor present among the working classes in Europe. The library would not only have a democratizing effect, but literacy and reading would combat the political extremes that they believed were the result of illiteracy and ignorance. The “quiet, conservative mood of the library was hailed as a tempering agency for an unsettled era . . . Educated workers would have sober views on economic questions and consequently would not be led like cattle by radical leaders” (Ditzion, 1947, pp. 134–135). An article in *Library Journal* in 1898 decried the situation that “laboring men could not discriminate between their own real interest and such sham reforms as are brought before them by their so-called labor leaders” and argued that libraries would offer another side of the question than was fed to them by their trade unions (cited in Ditzion, 1947, p. 137).

The questions of which type of reading to promote was also a reflection of, and had an influence on, the class bias of the newly emerging public libraries. When librarians founded the ALA in 1876, they seemed to ally themselves with those wanting to protect higher culture from the influences of the newer, cheaper, dime novels and the pulp fiction appearing at the time. Cayton (1993) points out that, “Designed to ameliorate class friction during a period of high tensions by making ‘good’ reading materials democratically available, the style and values of the public libraries of the period often left members of the working classes cold” (p. 2440).

Between 1881 and 1917, steel industrialist Andrew Carnegie donated over \$41 million to finance the building of public libraries, with the stipulation that local communities agreed to tax citizens and allocate 10 percent of building costs for the annual upkeep of their libraries. These grants, the foundation of so many great public libraries, caused a significant rift between the working class and the public library. Although Andrew Carnegie may be remembered as a philanthropist today, at the turn of the century strong opposition to his gifts came from the labor movement. Carnegie was viewed by the movement as a low-wage advocate and the antagonist of the Homestead Mills Strike of 1892 in which over forty workers were killed in a battle with Pinkerton detectives, notorious at this time for working as strikebreakers. While Carnegie's speeches often centered on the benefits to workers of his library philanthropy, labor and its allies viewed his actions as a "shrewd policy. . .to expend a trifle of the gains which [were] made off the people in giving them public libraries. Why libraries? Because he who selects the libraries, as he who makes the songs, of a people may be expected to frame its laws" (Ditzion, 1947, pp. 136–137).

Eugene Debs, leader of the American Railway Union, denounced Carnegie's hypocritical philanthropy in no uncertain terms and urged workers to reject Carnegie's libraries. "We want libraries," Debs said, "and we will have them in glorious abundance when Capitalism is abolished and workingmen are no longer robbed by the philanthropic pirates of the Carnegie class . . . Then the library will be, as it should be, a noble temple dedicated to culture and symbolizing the virtues of the people" (cited in Ditzion, 1947, p. 163).

Samuel Gompers, head of the more pragmatic and conservative American Federation of Labor, had a different approach. "Yes," Gompers advised, "accept his [Carnegie's] 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" (cited in Ditzion, 1947, p. 162). Despite Debs's and others' resistance, Gompers's viewpoint prevailed, and libraries were built and accepted by most communities (with the notable exception of Homestead and Pittsburgh—where the bitterness of Carnegie's strikebreaking was most vivid). As a result, "many members of the working class saw [Carnegie's] beneficence as part of an elitist and paternalistic scheme of social control and resisted using the new facilities" (Cayton, 1993, p. 2440).

LABOR EDUCATION AND THE PUBLIC LIBRARY

The 1920s and 1930s saw the formation of schools for workers created by trade unions and socialist organizations in the United States. The goal of what became known as the Worker Education Movement was to promote understanding of the social and economic realities governing workers' lives. Although course titles were similar to those in more traditional classrooms, the content focused on the contributions of workers and their place in

history. Librarians and writers in the workers' education field produced short pieces in both the library and workers education press, illustrating ways in which public libraries could aid the workers' education movement. Eduard Lindeman, a writer and theorist in the field of adult education produced some of these pieces, including a pamphlet printed by the Workers' Education Bureau entitled "Workers' Education and the Public Libraries" (Lindeman, 1926). Similar articles appeared in the trade union press, including the *American Federationist*, *Library Journal*, and the *Wilson Library Bulletin*. Occasionally an article was printed in a library journal and then reprinted in the trade union journal. This body of work extended through the 1940s as librarians became increasingly conscious of serving a growing and dynamic labor movement which now had its own educational arm with which libraries could directly link.

THE PIVOTAL ROLE OF THE AFL-CIO/ALA JOINT COMMITTEE ON LIBRARY SERVICE TO LABOR GROUPS

In 1945, George Meany, the Secretary-Treasurer of the AFL, urged union members to become active on library boards. Meany believed that "Adequate libraries are an essential part of the educational and recreational opportunity which we provide for ourselves in America. They can help us to achieve a fuller life and to become better citizens and better trade unionists" (cited in Soltow, 1984, p.164). Both the CIO and the AFL became partners with the ALA when the Joint Committee on Library Service to Labor Groups was formed in 1945. The merged AFL-CIO supported the original Library Services Act, put before Congress in 1956, legislation that continues to provide the basis for direct federal aid for public libraries.

In 1945, the AFL-CIO/ALA Joint Committee on Library Service to Labor Groups was founded in order to "discover ways of encouraging and assisting public libraries to develop specialized library services which will be useful to labor groups" (McBride, as cited in Schneider, 1990, p. 298). The newsletter of the joint committee, *Library Service to Labor*, was published from 1948 to 1970 (when it was eliminated in a cost-cutting move by ALA) and documented efforts made by public libraries with case studies, bibliographies, and examples of successful programming to reach labor; in doing so the journal motivated libraries with new ideas. As has been noted in more than one article about libraries and labor:

One of the periods of most active service existed in the 1950s to the mid-1960s at a time when the American Library Association Joint Committee on Library Service to Labor Groups was most active in pressing for such services. Since that time, there has been a decline in services, particularly at the public library level, with the disappearance of special services for labor from such noted libraries as the New York Public Library and the Detroit Public Library. (Downey, as cited in Schneider, 1990, p. 299)

During the 1950s, 1960s, and into the early 1970s, several metropolitan library systems, notably New York, Boston, Milwaukee, Newark, and Akron established active labor outreach and collections programs. In a landmark book, *Library Service to Labor* (Oko and Downey, 1963), Dorothy Kuhn Oko wrote about the desirability of assigning a knowledgeable professional as labor librarian—a luxury that few public libraries would consider today—or even believe there was a need for!

The John A. Sessions Memorial Award, named for the long-standing AFL-CIO cochair of the joint committee and the assistant director of the AFL-CIO's Department of Education, was established in 1979 to recognize a library or library system that has created or carried out significant service to the labor community (ALA, 2001, p. 120). Throughout its history (see the Appendix) the winner was frequently a university or special library. But public libraries have continued to distinguish themselves by developing innovative labor programming, building collections in the area of labor, and providing outreach, some in remarkable ways. (This writer served as chair of the Sessions Award Committee in 2000 and 2001.) The recent increase in public library activity mirrors the rebirth of the labor movement itself, the visibility of its recent organizing drives, and the fresh inclusiveness of the new, forward-looking AFL-CIO leadership led by John Sweeney. Labor is shedding the narrow, conservative, and inward-looking focus it has held for the past several decades and is reinventing itself as a broad social justice movement. The continuing relationship between the public library and the labor movements may well depend on the ongoing evolution of the labor movement itself, as well as its visibility, expressed needs, and labor's own desire to establish community partnerships. The recent activities in public libraries reflect the new consciousness of the labor movement itself. While it may not be registering net gains, there is no doubt that a rejuvenation of the labor movement is afoot. Libraries could well play a significant educational role in this process.

MEETING THE NEEDS OF LABOR TODAY

In order for public libraries to provide adequate service to labor today, libraries must define the "labor community" and assess this community's information needs. As is pointed out in "Library Service to Labor Groups," the 1989 guideline produced by the Joint Committee on Library Service to Labor Groups, trade unionists "are concerned about the same things as everyone else in their communities. They are parents, consumers, taxpayers and concerned citizens" (AFL-CIO/ALA Joint Committee, 1989, [unpaginated]).

LIBRARIES AND EMPLOYMENT

Many public libraries have services that are aimed at workers both as union clientele and as individuals. These services include job information

centers, career materials, vocational exploration resources and, in some cases, job counseling. Several winners of the Sessions Memorial Award established exemplary services of this kind. The economic turmoil of the 1980s produced programs such as those initiated by the Jackson-George Regional Library System in Pascagoula, Mississippi, involving unions along with a wide spectrum of community organizations in addressing the many needs of the unemployed (Meyers, 1999, p. 53). This project included the production of an information kit for the unemployed, among whose ranks were 19–26 percent of the county workforce in 1983. Bibliographies were produced, bulletin boards were established for job posting, and bartering for goods and services took place. The Lorain (Ohio) Public Library, another Sessions winner, initiated an approach to the problem of unemployment in their area by developing a resource collection and career-planning advisory service, also with community support and input. Cuyahoga County's (Ohio) Public Library's InfoPlace is over twenty-five years old and has the services of three career counselors, a research librarian, and the facilities to videotape mock interviews. Among other community agencies, InfoPlace has a relationship with the local United Labor Agency, the community services arm of the Central Labor Council. This author's posts on various listservs to gather materials for this article often resulted in responses that had to do with this kind of employment-oriented service, though not necessarily in conjunction with organized labor. This is true for the Mid-Hudson Library (Poughkeepsie, New York) System's "Libraries & Labor: A Virtual Connection," an extensive use of the public library as a satellite location for the state's workforce development system. Although the libraries enhanced collaborative ties with the New York State Department of Labor and reached out to workers throughout the area, the project did not involve direct outreach to or involvement with organized labor.

THE PUBLIC LIBRARY AND THE UNION CITIES INITIATIVE— EXPLORING POTENTIAL INITIATIVES

The AFL-CIO now estimates that its member unions must organize at least 1 million people per year if the labor movement is to stay viable in this era of global capitalism, free trade, and U.S. industrial and manufacturing shrinkage. Part of the federation's strategy is to reactivate its role as the largest, most multiethnic, multiracial social justice organization in the United States, joining with others in the community to fight on varied issues and thereby to create a more favorable climate for successful union organizing.

The Union Cities program—the name given to this aggressive strategy—is first and foremost about organizing. An increase in organizing efforts will likely result in the increased need by organizers for the type of information public libraries are well suited to provide: analysis of community demographics, industry listings for a particular area, workers in these indus-

tries, and the ties, connections, and points of leverage for employees in the various industries (Cohen, 2001, interview).

While the national AFL-CIO maintains a research division, as do most international unions, the need for local information is paramount to people working in the community. Organizers in the public sector need information on local budgets, government structures, ordinances, etc. Organizers in both the public and private sector need maps for house calls and addresses of workers, information which is public but not necessarily easy to retrieve. They may also need meeting space in the local community, a service the public library provides routinely to many organizations.

In addition to organizing, trade unions engaged in contract bargaining need information to help them cost out their contracts, that is, to ascertain what the real costs of benefits are in the local market and what wage scales are in the local industries or in surrounding towns. They are trying to assess what is realistic in terms of pay and benefits; where the employer has a public face or has appeared in news sources; or where the employer might be responsive to the pressure of public persuasion. Political and legislative information, census information, laws relating to the right to work—all this “factual information becomes crucial” (Cohen, 2001, interview).

The AFL-CIO has also embarked on an ambitious campaign to rejuvenate its community roots by building its Central Labor Councils (CLCs). The CLCs are the local joint bodies of affiliated trade unions, which come together on a city or countywide basis. It is here that unions converge to discuss issues, make political endorsements, mobilize and support organizing. Delegates to the councils may be shop stewards, organizers, or business agents, but they are always local labor leaders. It is through the CLCs themselves that public libraries have the best opportunity to establish formal ties with the local labor movement. By partnering with the local CLC, librarians can provide valuable services to union members and their families, highlighting new resources, offering Internet training, and providing meeting space for educationally based union activities. Connecting with the Central Labor Councils is one of the key suggestions made by Dorothy Kuhn Oko in her 1963 anthology, a suggestion that remains as pertinent today as it was then.

Public libraries can provide a particularly useful service by maintaining a database or vertical file of collective bargaining contracts currently in force for businesses and public sector institutions in the area. It is often helpful for those negotiating a contract to read the contracts of others, though these contracts may be difficult to obtain. By partnering with a local CLC, librarians may be able to obtain contracts, thereby building useful and much needed databases, vertical files, and/or Web pages of information.

LIBRARIES AND THE UNION COUNSELOR PROGRAM

The Central Labor Councils have, for many years, carried out a program called Union Counselor Training (UCT). This worker education pro-

gram consists of a series of classes that educates union rank and file as well as business agents and organizers, about the various services in and about the community that are available to their members. Classes cover such topics as Social Security and Medicare, workers' compensation and other government programs, substance abuse programs, and other community services and resources. Currently, the public library is not part of the official Union Counselor Training. As the public library is the source of such a wealth of resources for the local community, librarians could suggest its inclusion in this curriculum by demonstrating the types of community, state, and national programs and services public libraries provide. In areas where the Central Labor Council lacks sufficient space for UCT classes, the public library could provide a meeting room.

One evening of the Union Counselor Training is a session called "Common Sense Economics," which is a short course in economics from a worker's point of view. The public library is well positioned to provide workers with the materials necessary to bolster their knowledge about the "new" economy, corporate globalism, the tax structure, and economic theory; in other words, material geared to support their self-education on these questions. Because the mission of the public library is to provide materials from a variety of viewpoints, it is well positioned to be an important resource for workers' continuing education.

Partnering with the CLC would almost certainly ensure the library a place on the UCT agenda. Librarians can easily approach the person responsible for the Union Counselor program at the CLC to see how the library can assist in the work he or she is doing. A presentation might be given by the librarian covering the services, facilities, and collections offered at the public library. Or, an actual meeting might be held at the library where participants can be given a tour of the facilities. A list of further reading on "Common Sense Economics" might be developed. Internet classes, featuring sites about labor, might be offered.

LABOR HISTORY MONTH

In 1999, Libraries for the Future, the library-advocacy organization, won the Sessions Award for its "Pump Up the Volume" campaign for Labor History Month. The month of May was first designated Labor History Month by President Bill Clinton in 1995, but it had been recognized in New York City for years prior to this proclamation. Historically, May has always been associated with labor, first and foremost with the May 1st workers' holiday, celebrated around the world, but with roots in the United States as a commemoration of the demonstrations in 1886 for the eight-hour work day. In 1995, Cynthia Lopez, the advocacy director for Libraries for the Future, the New York City-based organization that encourages the use and support of the public library, attended a meeting of the AFL-CIO/ALA Joint Committee on Service to Labor Groups in San Francisco. This meeting resulted in

a fruitful collaboration in which the production of materials and brochures on the importance of Labor History Month, along with suggested activities for public libraries and a bibliography entitled, "A Selected Bibliography for a Public Library Labor Studies Collection" (compiled by the author), were distributed to more than 100 public libraries. The Libraries for the Future project encouraged libraries across the United States to establish Labor History Month programming and activities. One group inspired by the project was the Friends of the St. Paul (Minnesota) Public Library, who established a Labor History Month series called "Untold Stories," which is profiled later in this paper.

ENGLEWOOD PUBLIC LIBRARY UNION OUTREACH PROGRAM

For librarians, being unionized themselves can be an incentive to serve the labor community. A case in point is the Englewood Public Library in Englewood, New Jersey. In 1997, the reference librarians, including this author, and members of the Retail, Wholesale, and Department Store Union, embarked on a project to involve the labor movement in the library and build its labor studies collection by applying for a collection development grant from the New Jersey State Library, which regularly awards grants for the development and evaluation of needed subject collections. A proposal for \$10,000 to build collections in employment and labor studies was submitted and subsequently awarded. With this money, a sizable collection of books on career development and labor history was built. Development of this collection was aided by a community advisory committee composed of trade unionists, community career counselors, staff representatives of the local Women's Rights Information Center, as well as two local labor history writers. As the collection grew, so did the project. In 1998, the library launched its first Labor History Month celebration. Events included a series of panel discussions on the labor movement, past, present, and future. In following years, programming consisted of a labor film series, a performance by the New York City Labor Chorus, major speakers from the trade union movement and, in 2001, the production of the labor play, *Marching to Union Square* by Dorothy Fennell, Director of Special Projects for Unions at the Cornell School of Industrial and Labor Relations in New York City. In order to produce this play, the library relied on grants and contributions from the ALA's Libraries Alive Grant program, the Bergen County Central Trades and Labor Council, and three local trade unions. Union label flyers are sent out to Central Labor Council affiliates with CLC mailings, and a list of local trade unions is now used to publicize events.

In order to serve labor, public libraries need to view the labor community in the same way as other communities are viewed. Creativity needs to be used to form partnerships and to win grants to serve organized labor and union members in the same way as relationships with other groups are developed.

LOCAL 17 “LABOR AND DEMOCRACY LIBRARY PROJECT”

Another take on the collaboration between libraries and labor unions was that of Local 17 International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers’ Library and Democracy Project, initiated in 1998. Local 17 did an analysis of the Seattle Public Library’s database as it reflected the library’s labor collection and found that union materials were very limited and outdated. At the time of their study, Local 17 found that entering “unions” as a subject heading retrieved 959 matches. However, by entering “finance” as a subject heading, that count jumped to 5,868 titles. The subject heading “business” resulted in 6,876 matches. Dismayed by this disparity, Local 17 sought to raise funds for collection development in the area of labor.

Local 17 focused on the Seattle Public Library (SPL) for two reasons: First, the library is one of the most used in the U.S. A recent poll reported 75 percent of area residents using the library at least once in the twelve months previous to the survey. In addition, the library’s reach extends to the entire population of King County, Washington (1,507,319 people). The second reason Local 17 chose SPL was in order to take advantage of a special matching fund that would allow them to double the money raised. The Seattle Public Library Foundation has a matching funds program funded by Microsoft magnate Paul Allen, in which every dollar raised for the library is matched by the foundation. Initially, the project raised about \$20,000 for books and videos for the labor collection. “It was a lot of work, but when Local 17 members and members of the labor community realized there wasn’t a labor collection, they gave generously to the cause” (Joe McGee, personal communication, March 7, 2001), Local 17 Executive Director Joe McGee said. “How far does a book reach? The Seattle Public Library estimates that each book is circulated 50 times during its life. Since each book will have a ‘Local 17 labor-donated’ bookplate affixed to it, we have the opportunity to reach people with the message that ‘labor is the community’” (International Federation, 2001, p. 1).

FRIENDS OF THE LIBRARY AND OF LABOR—“UNTOLD STORIES” AT THE ST. PAUL (MINNESOTA) PUBLIC LIBRARY

For the past three years, the Friends of the St. Paul (Minnesota) Public Library have produced an outstanding and inspirational program during May, “Labor History Month.” Over the years, their programming has grown from a film series to their 2001 series of programs, which included activities at a half dozen of the library’s thirteen branches as well as events at union halls and college campuses. Author visits during the 2001 celebration included a reading by Cheri Register from her book, *Packinghouse Daughter*, and by Bill Milliken from his book, *A Union Against Unions*, both recently published by the Minnesota Historical Society Press. Other programs included a performance of workers’ songs by Larry Long, a local

troubador, and a walking tour of working-class historical sites in downtown St. Paul. Though initiated by the Friends, other organizations joined in the work for the celebration, including the St. Paul *Union Advocate*; the electronic news journal, "Workday Minnesota;" the University of Minnesota's Labor Education Service; Macalester College's History Department; as well as a number of local unions. Financial support for programming has been provided by the National Endowment for the Humanities, the St. Paul Trades & Labor Assembly, the United Auto Workers, and various foundations. With these resources, the library has highlighted Minnesota labor history and generated local press coverage. Commenting on programming, labor historian Peter Rachleff wrote, "This is a terrific model of collaboration—and legitimization of labor history. We could still do more with outreach, particularly to the local labor movement at large and the public schools, but we're getting better at it" (Rachleff, 2001).

MORE LOCAL LABOR HISTORY—THE BRIDGEPORT (CONNECTICUT) LOCAL LIBRARY'S WEB SITE

The World Wide Web has introduced a whole constellation of new ways in which public libraries can relate to the labor movement and labor history. All history is local and all local history has a labor element, if only it is uncovered and made known. The Bridgeport Public Library developed a Web site with a collection of graphics and oral histories of the labor movement in the area, entitled "Bridgeport Working: Voices From the Twentieth Century" (<http://www.bridgeporthistory.org/>). The site is devoted to photographs and oral histories of the working people of Bridgeport and is curated by the head of the historical collections of the library, Mary K. Witkowski, and her staff. The site gives visitors a glimpse of what it was like to work and live in Bridgeport, Connecticut, during the past century: "Who else could tell us but people who worked on the line in the factories; sold goods behind the counter at a department store; taught children in the local schools; ran a travel agency, worked as a housewife, drove a truck, or ran one of the many other prosperous businesses that helped Bridgeport grow and develop" ("Bridgeport History," 2001, p. 1). The photo gallery is organized by decade, and thirty different oral histories from workers—many in audio format—are organized by name. A local labor history bibliography is included. Projects such as these organized by local public libraries are essential to uncovering the "untold stories" of labor.

LABOR, YOUTH, AND A LOCAL LABOR TRAGEDY: THE LODI MEMORIAL LIBRARY EXPERIENCE

The 2000 winner of the John Sessions Memorial Award was a creative and moving collaborative project undertaken by the Lodi (New Jersey) Public Library, renowned labor muralist Mike Alewitz, local trade unions led by the Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees, AFL-

CIO (UNITE), and high school students. On 21 April 1995, a violent explosion and fire at the Napp Technologies, Inc., plant in the working-class town of Lodi killed five workers, injured numerous others, and forced the evacuation of 300 residents and a school. An investigation revealed the accident was caused by a deadly combination of inadequate corporate practices and precautions along with the volatile chemicals, and the impact on the community was profound (Vial, 1997). "Workers' Memorial Day," celebrated nationally on 28 April of each year to bring attention to workers killed on the job (AFL-CIO, 2002) was the occasion for a project that focused on the creation of a memorial mural inside the Lodi Memorial Library. Public high school students studied the event at the library and in their classrooms. After their study, they worked with Mike Alewitz to paint a mural on the wall of the library, a permanent display to commemorate the deaths of the local workers and also to remind all who see it about the on-the-job deaths that occur each year. At the dedication ceremony, many trade union rank and file and leaders were in attendance.

CONCLUSION

The relationship between the public library and the labor movement has ebbed and flowed over the history of both institutions but is enjoying a renaissance in the current period. The activities of a number of public libraries demonstrate that there is service that can be rendered to and with the labor community that will enhance both institutions. Just as libraries have recognized their obligation to incorporate the interests and needs of the various social and ethnic communities they serve, as well as the needs of the businesses within their service area, they need to take into account the special interests and needs of unions and their members as they plan their libraries' work and outreach. As has been illustrated in this article, the partnership between labor and public libraries has been, and can continue to be, a mutually beneficial and rewarding one.

APPENDIX: WINNERS OF THE SESSIONS MEMORIAL AWARD FOR SERVICE TO LABOR

- 1981 Muncie (Indiana) Public Library
- 1982 Wagner Labor Archives, Bobst Library, New York University
- 1983 State Historical Society of Wisconsin Library
- 1984 Jackson-George Regional Library System, Pascagoula, Mississippi
- 1985 Birmingham (Alabama) Public Library
- 1986 Martin P. Catherwood Library, Cornell University
- 1987 Lorain (Ohio) Public Library
- 1988 Southern Labor Archives, Georgia State University
- 1989 Citizens Library (Peter G. Sullivan, Director), Washington, Pennsylvania
- 1990 Hennepin County Library, Minnetonka, Minnesota

- 1991 Department of Archives and Special Collections, Ohio University Libraries, Athens
- 1992 National Association of Letter Carriers, Information Center, Washington, D.C.
- 1993 Texas Labor Archives, University of Texas at Arlington
- 1994 Archives of Urban and Labor Affairs, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University
- 1995 Special Collections and University Archives, Rutgers University Libraries and Butte-Silver Bow Public Archives, Labor History Collection, Butte, Montana
- 1996 Metropolitan Detroit Professionals Library, UAW Local 2200
- 1997 Englewood (New Jersey) Public Library
- 1998 Institute for Industrial Relations Library
- 1999 Libraries for the Future
- 2000 Lodi Memorial Library of Lodi, New Jersey
- 2001 Duane G. Meyer Library, Southwest Missouri State University

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