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## A Fifty-Five Year Partnership: ALA and the AFL-CIO

ARTHUR S. MEYERS

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### ABSTRACT

IN 1946, THE AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION (ALA) established with the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) the Joint Committee on Library Service to Labor Groups. Since then, the committee has been a beacon for service to labor, and the link between the organizations has been integral to public learning and beneficial to both unions and libraries. In 1974, the charge became “to initiate, develop, and foster, through the organizational structures of the ALA and the AFL-CIO, ways and means of effecting closer cooperation between librarian and labor organizations.” It was also to serve as “a catalyst for libraries and other institutions to enable them more effectively to fulfill the expressed and unexpressed needs of the labor community” and to encourage wider use of libraries. Today, the committee is within the Reference and User Services Association (RUSA) and is comprised of nine librarians, appointed by RUSA, and nine representatives from the AFL-CIO, with a cochair from each group. Several aspects of the partnership suggest that it has played an important role in furthering the long tradition of public learning—union leaders speaking strongly about services targeted to labor’s needs, developing guidelines for service, establishing the John Sessions Memorial Award to recognize a library or library system for significant work with unions, forging an active publishing program including reading and viewing lists, and presenting and exhibiting material at conferences. The committee’s activities reflect a continuum of the value that committed librarians and union leaders have long placed on public learning for labor. The partnership has endured because a renewing group of librarians and union leaders has recognized its importance, and the joint committee is a model for ALA commitment and collaboration.

## INTRODUCTION

"If the public library is to play its part in society it must give to labor, as well as to all other groups, the means of comprehending events in our swiftly moving social scene" (Goshkin, 1941, p. 74). This 1941 plea foretells the founding of a remarkable partnership in American library history five years later. In 1946, the American Library Association (ALA) established with the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) the Joint Committee on Library Service to Labor Groups. The 1941 call also suggests a recurring question in the study of public organizations, and that is whether they respond on their own initiative to needs or must be prodded into providing services. In service to labor through the years, a number of public libraries developed special programs although most libraries have not done so. Importantly, over the past half-century, the joint committee has been a beacon for such service. In the longer history of the nation, the library-labor link has been integral to public learning and beneficial to both unions and libraries.<sup>1</sup>

## PUBLIC LEARNING, LABOR, AND LIBRARIES

Richard D. Brown (1996) has written that, in the mid-eighteenth century, a politically informed citizenry was seen as vital for the state and liberty. The American Revolution helped democratize the new nation, as intellectual life was considered a necessity for people. The nineteenth century saw books and discussions in Workingmen's and People's Institutes and Lyceum and Chautauqua lectures. By participating in this wide range of activities, Americans displayed their commitment to the ideal of an informed, knowledgeable citizenry. At the turn of the twentieth century, clubwomen studied social issues, universities developed extension courses, and social and cultural centers and congregations sponsored lectures, such as the Open Forum. Merle Curti (1951) has argued that the unique characteristic of American intellectual history is that the gulf between the learned and the common people has been less wide and deep than elsewhere.

In the nineteenth century, factory libraries, such as at Pacific Mills in Lawrence, Massachusetts, sought "to elevate and enlighten the minds of these operatives" (Ditzion, 1947, p. 111). With the founding of public libraries and the development of the organized labor movement at midcentury, wider efforts were made to reach working people. The phrase "workingman's university" (Ditzion, 1947, p. 113) is found in early library statements—for example, in Mount Holly, Pennsylvania. By the end of the nineteenth century, some libraries in industrial communities made a genuine contribution toward furthering the education of industrial workers. The library in New Brunswick, New Jersey, was visited almost entirely by factory workers, with the staff determining "by the odors which clung to a book" (Ditzion, 1947, p. 115) the factory where the borrower worked. In South Norwalk, Connecticut, the library was used "exclusively by factory

employees" (Ditzion, 1947, p. 115). Carnegie libraries, a widespread democratizing force in the early twentieth century, were dedicated with the hope "that the masses of workingmen and women . . . would remember that this is their library" (Ditzion, 1947, p. 114).

The other side of the library-labor relationship is that union leaders have long recognized that education and libraries are vital to working people. In 1839, the Philadelphia General Trades Union adopted the Mechanics' Library; other libraries were attached to workingmen's clubs and institutes. Towards the end of the Civil War, labor groups established libraries for their own members, such as railroad conductors in Montgomery, Alabama. At the first meeting of the National Labor Union in 1866, the organization recommended the establishment of free reading rooms. While the groups sought fairness in fundamental economic power and were thus sometimes negative toward tax-supported libraries, they were not oblivious to their value. Unions were early supporters of community libraries; for example, at the turn of the century, each member of the Hagerstown, Maryland, bricklayers' union pledged one free day of work in constructing a new library building.<sup>2</sup> In Buffalo and other cities, the central union council "agitated" for tax-supported libraries (Soltow, 1984, p. 164). Samuel Gompers, founder of the AFL, recognized that laboring people would gain awareness and education when the eight-hour workday provided leisure to enjoy the "people's university" (Ditzion, 1947, p. 126).

### 1920S AND 1930S

During the post-World War I period, some librarians came to realize that outreach to unions was part of their educational responsibility, similar to their service to immigrants. In 1921, six librarians were among the 200 persons present at the founding meeting of the Workers' Education Bureau of America, an information center and a publicity organization. The bureau recognized the important role of public libraries in out-of-school learning, identifying the need for governing boards that included "alert, intelligent and purposeful men and women of the laboring classes" (Sullivan, 1963, pp. 15–18). In the 1930s, with union strength growing and the Depression deepening, the unemployed began using libraries on a larger scale. While some library directors became concerned about the unionization of their own employees, others saw the organizations as powerful allies and set up collaborative programs (Sullivan, 1963, p. 13).

In 1939, ALA published profiles of exemplary adult education group work in libraries, beginning with proactive service to unions. Minneapolis assessed its work "unusually successful . . . with plain people of limited education" (Chancellor, 1939, p. 51). The city's labor movement was "coming into power" and the library had an "obligation to gain their confidence and be of service" (Chancellor, 1939, p. 51). Between 1936 and 1939, the staff contacted various workers' groups about books of interest. Special lists

were prepared, with the union printing shop “bug” on them, and displays brought a wide range of resources to workers’ attention. Milwaukee librarians, aware they had not met workers’ educational needs, began “extramural service,” reaching out to a wide range of labor groups. Library staff talked to the central labor council, attended meetings of every union local, placed book collections in some headquarters, and attended the Milwaukee Workers’ College to study labor problems. (Deposit collections in factories, however, were judged not as successful.) The Milwaukee library director concluded there must be “full confidence in the broadminded and impartial attitude of the library” and all sides of controversial issues must be equally available, since “Workers cannot advance themselves individually or advance the collective interest of the group without educational opportunities” (Chancellor, 1939, p. 62).

### EARLY 1940S

The services in Minneapolis and Milwaukee, even before the joint committee was established, were not unique. In 1941, five of twelve central labor groups in a survey judged libraries “very cooperative.” The Des Moines librarian “will go out of his way to cooperate with union labor.” Libraries, the study found, play “a much more important role” on workers’ education committees and labor schools. Three union locals responded in the study that “the public library cooperates to the fullest extent.” Eight of thirty-nine libraries reported “active” cooperative programs, while eleven others provided “some” services. The libraries recognized the correlation between positive attitudes and service. In an increasingly totalitarian world, the study concluded, libraries must help labor “participate with intelligence and understanding in the responsibilities [of the age.]” (Goshkin, 1941, pp. 66–74).

### ESTABLISHMENT OF THE JOINT COMMITTEE

In the early 1940s, with the changing socioeconomic climate and war mobilization, librarians saw in unions an ally for their own goals, and began establishing programs targeted to the needs of their members. As the services gained momentum, librarians who were active in the field pressed ALA to establish a steering group to coordinate programs at the national level. In October 1946, the ALA Council established the Joint Committee on Library Service to Labor Groups. The original purpose was to discover “ways of encouraging and assisting public libraries to develop specialized library services which will be useful to labor groups” (Imhoff & Brandwein, 1977, p. 149). In 1974, following an ALA reorganization, a responsibility statement was adopted, with the primary charge “to initiate, develop and foster, through the organizational structures of the ALA and the AFL-CIO, ways and means of effecting closer cooperation between librarian and labor organizations” (*ALA Handbook of Organization*, 1999–2000, pp. 20–21). It was also to serve as “a catalyst for libraries and other institutions to en-

able them more effectively to fulfill the expressed and unexpressed needs of the labor community" (*ALA Handbook of Organization*, 1999–2000, pp. 20–21) and to encourage wider use of libraries. Initially placed under ALA's National Relations Office, then the Adult Services Division and later the Reference and Adult Services Division, the committee today is within the Reference and User Services Association (RUSA). It is comprised of nine librarians, appointed by RUSA, and nine representatives from the AFL-CIO, with a cochair from each group. Placement of the committee within RUSA for administrative purposes aligns it with adult information services in different types of libraries and also with the mission of RUSA to stimulate and support reference and information services to all groups (Retrieved March 11, 2001, from <http://www.ala.org/rusa/2000plan>).

The committee's librarians and union representatives (the latter often labor educators) begin with the recognition of shared ideals and move on to organizational possibilities and realities. They know that in the autonomy of local libraries and unions the national collaboration can only serve as a beacon for service rather than a command to follow. From 1948 to 1970, the committee published the *Library Service to Labor Newsletter*, initially quarterly but later twice yearly. It focused on successful cooperative activities, labor problems with which librarians should be familiar, and committee activities. In the early years of the committee, the members presented programs at ALA conferences on such topics as new developments in labor, how librarians could make contacts with unions, the effective use of film, and the common denominator in service to business and labor.

In 1958, the committee published a *Guide for Developing a Public Library Service to Labor Groups*. The initial run of 2,500 copies was quickly exhausted and it was reprinted. In 1963, Dorothy Kuhn Oko and Bernard F. Downey brought together a number of articles from the newsletter, as well as other publications, in *Library Service to Labor*. The book captured the historical background of the service, labor's information needs, the composition of a good collection, how to publicize the service, and case studies of five libraries that provided strong programs. Three reading lists at the end were targeted separately to beginners in schools and unions, high school and more advanced union students, and college students and union leaders.<sup>3</sup>

The committee's 1967 publication, *Developing Library Service to Labor Groups*, provided a rationale for having a specialized focus, union contact information for librarians, and descriptions of the varied services that unions and workers might require. Samuel L. Simon, committee chairman, asked librarians to show persistence and understanding and asked union leaders to communicate their information needs. He wrote that both organizations must realize that a continuing effort is required for successful service, and the result of this effort would be beneficial to both partners. The extensive list of resources at the end of the booklet included general reference works, business and labor publications, a list of oth-

er organizations that provided information, labor history and problems, and audiovisual materials.<sup>4</sup>

### SERVICES TO LABOR

Despite these early activities of the committee and the exceptional efforts made by several libraries, the general aim of library service was not in this direction. A 1948 survey of twelve libraries in four states showed that only two had more than fifteen titles on labor relations published since 1941. Pamphlet and periodical holdings were judged “spotty,” not related to local labor concerns, and, “in most cases, filled with employer and anti-labor material” (Sullivan, 1963, p. 17). The same survey revealed that of 338 library board members in thirty-seven libraries, only ten of the trustees were union members. The large-scale “Public Library Inquiry” after World War II found “not more than a half dozen libraries have made serious efforts to make [union members] library users, and those that have are not encouraged by the results” (Garceau, 1949, p. 121). For the working person, the public library still looks and feels a little “like a rich man’s collection” (Garceau, 1949, p. 122). Despite the best intentions, the study noted, some librarians retained “a custodial attitude toward their books and preferred to have them go into homes where they would be respected and cared for” (Garceau, 1949, p. 122).

In addition to unions gaining strength during the war years, libraries advanced their role as builders of public morale in the wider community. The result was that, in the democratic feeling inspired by the crisis, “much of the hostility or coolness toward trade unions was discarded” (Sullivan, 1963, p. 19). In 1943, the *Reader’s Guide to Periodical Literature* established the subject heading “Libraries Work with Trade Unions.” In 1951, *Library Journal* began a special section of reviews of materials concerning labor, and *Booklist* soon followed suit by creating a similar section (Sullivan, 1963, p. 19). Libraries from Worcester, Massachusetts, to Kansas City, Missouri, provided specialized services to labor. The Akron (Ohio) Public Library was the first to have “Business and Labor” as a department (Sullivan, 1963, pp. 19–20). Dorothy Kuhn Oko, chairman of the joint committee from 1953–60, single-handedly built the outstanding Labor Education Service department in the New York Public Library, reaching a wide network of unions in the state and helping both labor education and libraries serve working people (Soltow, 1984, pp. 165–166). During the postwar period, Akron, Boston, Milwaukee, New York, and Newark became touchstones for other libraries with their targeted services (Soltow, 1984, p. 165). While their approaches varied, the common denominators were book collections in local union headquarters, reference service, collaborative programs, and visits by librarians to unions (Sullivan, 1963, p. 23). These libraries perceived service to unions as part of their mission to serve the total community. In several cities, labor leaders expressed appreciation for the good work be-

ing carried out, although they were skeptical of the largely conservative library boards (Garceau, 1949, p. 122).

### PROBLEMS AND ISSUES

But as in any collaboration, problems arose. One librarian, who kept in close touch with the committee from 1953 to 1960 and helped staff their booth at ALA conferences, recalls that "Nobody paid enough attention to them, and they probably included people with more Marxist orientations than there were in ALA as a whole—although all of this was around and after the McCarthy era" (anonymous respondent, personal communication, January 22, 2001). The members "always seemed to be having to prove how important and how unappreciated they were" (anonymous respondent, personal communication, January 22, 2001). Over the years, committee members from both labor and libraries were sometimes frustrated at the organizational structure of ALA, both in the lead times required for scheduling conference programs and the obstacles to gaining approval for service guidelines. A librarian member recalled that, after the committee thought an updating of the guidelines was completed, they learned that formalization required ALA Council approval, "a much . . . more tedious project" (anonymous respondent, personal communication, March 6, 2001). Some committee members perceived (correctly or not) that the problems were due more to antiunion attitudes within ALA than to the bureaucracy of the organization. One librarian representative on the committee was surprised that ALA wanted a collaboration considering attitudes within the organization (anonymous respondent, personal communication, March 27, 2001). On the other hand, several librarian committee members recalled the helpfulness of the RASD and RUSA staff in navigating within ALA and, very importantly, the value of working in a division of the association that served all adult groups (M. F. Hicks, personal communication, February 26, 2001).

In addition to association problems, some conflicts between the partners on the committee emerged over different value systems. In 1948, when the committee began to publish case studies of exemplary service to labor, the premise was that solid models would lead other libraries in the same direction. One model was the Jefferson School of Social Science in New York City, a worker education program that served unions. Unfortunately, the Jefferson School was on the government's list of subversive organizations, and the CIO had just been in a bitter fight with the Communist Party over control of its unions. While labor representatives on the committee did not want any link with the school, the librarian members saw the issue as one of intellectual freedom. After much internal debating within ALA, the case study was published in late 1950 but in a shortened version (Ring, 1985, pp. 287–301).

In later years, other issues arose—for example, responding to labor disputes in individual libraries and to the ALA holding programs in nonunion hotels. Another problem was whether the committee's annual programs

should focus on how libraries could better serve labor groups and workers or, instead, why librarians should join or form unions. The 2001 conference program balanced these concerns by reviewing past service to blue-collar workers and the different information needs of professional workers, including librarians, who are engaged in collective bargaining. Despite such potentially divisive issues, the partnership has endured. Librarian members on the committee remember early labor representatives John A. Sessions and Albert K. Herling were very helpful in resparking the committee after it had been “in the doldrums” for a period. Sessions in particular was judged by a librarian cochair of the committee as “key” in the process, wanting to put more “oomph” in the collaboration, and urging, “let’s do more.” The labor representatives on the committee paid for conference speakers, printed lists, and created the annual Sessions Award. In more recent years, James A. Auerbach and Anthony Sarmiento have carried out comparable leadership roles from the labor side.

### STUDYING LIBRARY SERVICE TO LABOR

The most active period of library outreach to labor was from the 1950s to the mid-1960s, as the committee pressed hard in urging special services. Since the late 1960s, library services to labor have generally declined. In the 1970s, many libraries that had been treating labor as a special group shifted their focus to more pressing needs, such as literacy issues, service for the economically disadvantaged, or ethnic services. In the 1980s, budgets for materials and special services were not adequate and, when budgets were restored in the 1990s, libraries focused on technological development.

In 1967, the joint committee surveyed public libraries with a book budget over \$10,000. Of 306 libraries reporting unions in their area, 156 had contact with these unions, most commonly providing reference service. The initiative for cooperation came from the union in forty-five instances. While many of the libraries working with unions were not familiar with the Joint committee, others who were aware of it did not necessarily have contact with labor (Rogin & Rachlin, 1968, pp. 201–206).

A 1976 committee survey went to public libraries in cities of 10,000 or more having a central labor council. The premise was that special services were more likely to be found in those cities because of a greater need. The responses showed that many libraries were unaware or uncertain about local unions or a central council, and many assumed unions either did not need services or could afford to pay for them. Of 385 libraries responding, only forty-six reported special collections for unions, although others had some materials, while seventeen libraries planned to develop collections. Outreach to unions was done by forty-five libraries, compared with 156 nine years earlier. The number of libraries with staff assigned to the work dropped from twenty-two to fourteen between the surveys, and only twenty-five libraries in 1976 used joint committee materials. But awareness of

unions was growing, as shown by the fact that most of the responding libraries expressed an interest in what labor could do for them, and 177 of the 385 asked for advice, cooperation, or suggestions. Unfortunately, the 1976 survey revealed that, despite twenty-eight years of work by the joint committee, librarians had a surprising amount of mistrust and lack of understanding of unions. While there are many reasons for the decline in service, a British librarian suggested one factor may be that American unions have not been "fully accepted as a necessary part of [the nation's] fabric" (Imhoff & Brandwein, 1977, pp. 149–158). In 1986, a survey of U.S. academic libraries and nontraditional labor studies participants showed a corollary inadequacy in service (Cash & Paar, 1987, pp. 112–126).

### ACCOMPLISHMENTS

In view of this general lack of commitment by libraries to serve labor, the key question is whether the special services that the joint committee promoted for the past half-century impacted unions or their members in terms of public learning. Several aspects of the partnership suggest that the committee has played an important role in furthering this long tradition in America.

First, union leaders from the beginning have spoken strongly about the positive, participatory results of library services targeted to labor's needs. Through the years, the learning became two-way, with the largely middle-class, intellectually rooted librarians gaining an awareness of workers' concerns, and union leaders in turn coming to see the possibilities of a strong partnership. In 1960, the AFL-CIO published *Your Library Can Serve Your Union*, a nineteen-page booklet targeted to local union leaders on how libraries can help them in carrying out their responsibilities. A similar booklet, *Your Library Can Help Your Union*, was published by the AFL-CIO in 1965. In 2001, Dorothy Shields, the retired AFL-CIO director of education, looked back at the long relationship and concluded that it was positive for both sides and very important for the work of the Education Department: "In many cases librarians really did not have substantive knowledge of the structure or mission of the labor movement. By working with us the libraries gave a credence to the legitimacy of the movement that otherwise was not accepted by librarians [earlier]"; for libraries, "labor was helpful in lobbying for funds . . . both locally and nationally" (D. Shields, personal communication, February 3, 2001). For example, labor representatives testified at the 1979 White House Conference on Libraries and Information Services, eloquently asking for increased cooperation and additional awareness of labor's information needs. Beginning in 1984 and continuing for several years, the AFL-CIO participated in the National Library Week focus as part of ALA's National Partnership program (*ALA Yearbook*, 1980, p. 181; 1985, p. 167). In 1998, the relationship was strengthened by collaboration with the advocacy group Libraries for the Future in promoting national aware-

ness of the need for and good examples of service to labor. At the 1999 ALA Conference, the AFL-CIO executive vice president focused on ALA's key action areas in a speech on "The AFL-CIO and the ALA: A National Partnership for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century."<sup>5</sup>

Secondly, the joint committee recognized early the practical importance of developing and disseminating guidelines for service to labor beyond meetings and programs at conferences. The implementation of ALA guidelines is up to libraries as individual local institutions, and the work of guideline implementation is never completed merely with publication of these guidelines. But national guideposts do spur a deeper understanding of unserved and underserved areas of library patronage, and guidelines provide concrete ways for planning and carrying out special services.

Drawing on its 1967 publication, *Developing Library Service to Labor Groups*, the joint committee issued *Library Service to Labor Groups: A Guide for Action* in 1975 and again in 1989, in a slightly revised format. The later statement continued the earlier call for librarians to understand the problems and attitudes of unions and urged them to reach out. It also asked labor organizations to become aware of their members' needs and to communicate how libraries can be helpful. As in all partnerships, the guidelines recognized that problems might arise but if both labor and libraries were convinced, they would benefit from the effort, and a rewarding and significant service could develop.

To deepen the impact and awareness of special services to labor, the joint committee developed the John Sessions Memorial Award in 1980. Named after the key labor representative on the committee, the award recognizes a library or library system for significant work with unions. Through the award, a handsome plaque given to the winning library, librarians have become more cognizant of the history and contributions of organized labor. Over the past two decades, the award has identified libraries across the country that have strengthened the library-labor collaboration and have increased awareness of workers' concerns. The public library winners in a cross section of communities have helped find career services for the unemployed and workers considering career changes. Award winners from academic libraries have made union archives more accessible, and special libraries have built a bridge between local union history and the community. The wide range of activities carried out by Sessions winners proves that no single approach characterizes "library service to labor," but that in fact examples of outstanding services can be verified or replicated in different settings. An early winner traces a direct line from a special project in a small library to an ongoing service in a large county system, where information and assistance are provided to a wide range of the employed and unemployed. The career counseling focus of the larger service, writes the librarian, is based on a principle that unions have always known: "There's more to life than work and it was the labor movement that first set the times and

terms of work/life balance, maybe ahead of their time" (M. E. Jaffe, personal communications, March 3 and 5, 2001).

Another important component of public learning has been the promulgation of an active publishing program to disseminate model services and helpful materials. Beginning with the first newsletter in 1948, the joint committee urged librarians to take services to labor groups (*Library Service to Labor Newsletter*, July 1, 1948, p. 2). In the last issue of the newsletter in 1970, the publications program was still strong, as shown in the extensive annotated bibliography on new careers for the disadvantaged. The last issue also noted that 6,000 copies of *A Step by Step Plan* had been printed but, "the number was inadequate for broad distribution" (*Library Service to Labor Newsletter*, Spring 1970, pp. 1–6). This pamphlet succinctly listed first steps for local union officers and librarians to take in seeking to improve service. It also listed several free publications from the committee, including *Labor in America: A Reading List for Young People*. This latter annotated list, aimed at junior and senior high school students, teachers, and librarians, had sections on labor heritage, unions in action, labor and today's issues, automation, biographies, and fiction. In the last issue of the committee's newsletter, in 1970, the revised edition of *Labor, A Reading List* was reported as ready for publication. However, with 10,000 copies of the old edition still available, the committee discussed how they could promote it better. The same issue of the newsletter noted that a *Labor Film List*, with 150 titles, was underway in 1970. These two lists may have been combined in an extensive annotated bibliography, *American Labor: Books, Films, Magazines*, that was published during the year. This booklet listed materials on American labor history, the theory and practice of unionism, industrial relations, labor and today's issues, biographies, and labor magazines and films. In 1979, the committee published a twenty-five-page bibliography, *Labor Today and Yesterday: Selected References, Books, Films and Magazines*. Materials lists—such as *Women Workers Today: Ideas for Change* (1982) and *Workplace Health and Safety* (1983)—were also developed and distributed at ALA conference exhibit booths and programs. Michele C. Russo, a librarian member of the joint committee in later years, assessed the publication activities as the most beneficial outcome of their work, with concrete ideas on why and how libraries could help in serving unions (personal communication, March 2, 2001). Through *RQ*, the journal of the Reference and Adult Services Division, the joint committee described in 1984 how libraries were responding to the information needs of job seekers, and in 1996, what reference resources were meeting the information needs of unions. In 1999 and 2000, the committee's publishing extended to a wider audience with articles in *American Libraries*, *School Library Journal*, and *Booklist*.

Yet another direction of the joint committee has been the development of programs and exhibit booths at ALA conferences, aimed at achieving the communication and practical implementation aspects of public learning.

In 1978 the committee prepared an exhibit of labor trade publications as part of its awareness goal, and in 1979 the conference program was on library-union programming in the humanities. The committee conducted a successful program in 1983 on workplace health and safety that drew 100 people. The program featured an industrial hygienist speaking on health hazards in libraries, and the exhibit booth highlighted union publications on health and safety. (In the fast-changing workplace, labor unions were educating librarians.) In recent years, attracting conference-goers to programs and exhibits, with meetings spread over long distances in a city, is a challenge for all ALA committees. As a consequence, attendance at joint committee programs has suffered, but the presentations have nevertheless been lively and stimulating, often drawing new people into the committee's work. The 1994 program, "Has Workplace Violence Become Part of Your Job?" proved a timely topic, attracting more than 200 persons. The librarian cochair on the committee said the AFL-CIO research in the area was fresh, the speaker offered ideas for further research, and many people came to the open microphone to voice their fears and concerns. The 1997 program on union-supported literacy programs in public libraries was judged a success. In 2000, a lively panel, audience discussion, and distribution of pertinent Web sites highlighted the program, "For Better Salaries and Service: Should ALA Follow the American Medical Association Toward Collective Bargaining?"

### LOOKING AHEAD

This overview of the AFL-CIO/ALA Joint Committee on Library Service to Labor Groups reflects a continuum of the value that committed librarians and union leaders and members have long placed on public learning for labor. The fifty-five-year national partnership has endured because a dedicated, renewing group of ALA leaders, librarians, union leaders, and educators have recognized its importance. While the national focus has not been translated into action programs by a large number of libraries on a continuing basis, the joint committee's work shows what can be developed when commitment and collaboration come together. It is a model for other national library partnerships. A new generation of librarians and union educators can ensure it continues.

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## NOTES

1. Initially, the two labor organizations were separate but they merged in 1955 (*Dictionary of American History*, 1976, I, pp. 102–103). Some academic, special, and school libraries have also acted strongly in this service area, as shown in the range of libraries which have won the John Sessions Memorial Award for significant service to labor. For a complete list, see [http://www.ala.org/rusa/awards/awd\\_sessions.html](http://www.ala.org/rusa/awards/awd_sessions.html) (retrieved March 11, 2001).
2. The contribution of the Hagerstown bricklayers was replicated in 1978 by 200 Teamsters who volunteered to move the Allentown, Pennsylvania, Public Library to its new building. The move, involving 210,000 books, was accomplished in four hours using nineteen tractor-trailers (*ALA Yearbook*, 1979, p. 149).
3. Dorothy Kuhn Oko and Bernard F. Downey, comp., *Library Service to Labor* (New York: Scarecrow Press, 1963).
4. *Developing Library Service to Labor Groups*, 1967, 1. The 1958 *Guide* was not found in the ALA Archives.
5. Valuable insight on the perspective of librarians that shape service to labor is found in Leigh Estabrook, "Labor and Librarians: The Divisiveness of Professionalism," *Library Journal* 106(2), January 15, 1981, p. 125–127.

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