

Fourth Annual North American Labor History Conference

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The Fourth Annual North American Labor History Conference, sponsored by the History Department and the Walter P. Reuther Library for Labor and Urban Affairs at Wayne State University, was held October 14-16, 1982, in Detroit, Michigan. The conference was attended by approximately 140 scholars, workers, students, and trade unionists; but it was increased participation by women historians and union members which highlighted this year's program. Joyce Miller, Vice-President of the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers and President of the Coalition of Labor Union Women gave the keynote address on "Women in the Work Force: Past and Present," while three other sessions featured women panelists, a significant improvement over previous years' programming. In addition to Miller, unionists on the program included Irving Bluestone, Vice-President of the United Automobile Workers (retired), Gerald Lazarowitz of the UAW Research Department, and Norman Kopmeyer, President of the Wayne State University Chapter of the American Association of University Professors.

The theme of this year's conference was "Twentieth Century Labor History in Perspective." Several sessions dealt with American union history and the problems of organizing, with papers on UMW radical Powers Hapgood by Eugene Tobin (Hamilton College), The Miners for Democracy and Worker Insurgency in the UMW by George W. Hopkins (College of Charleston), the implementation of collective bargaining in the post office by Vern Baxter (Univ. of Wisconsin), and the successful unionization drive by female clerical workers at the Wisconsin Education Association Insurance Trust by Cynthia Costello (Univ. of Wisconsin). Other sessions addressed public policy questions. Jack Barbash (Univ. of Wisconsin), past president of the Industrial Relations Research Association, considered whether a new era had dawned in the field of industrial relations, while Helen Elkiss (Univ. of Illinois) compared the autoworkers' experience during the Great Depression and the current recession. Later, in a heavily attended luncheon session, the archival acquisition and use of union legal records was discussed by George Tselos of the Walter P. Reuther Library (Wayne State University). Finally, still another session addressed questions of a more theoretical nature, as Margo Conk (Univ. of Wisconsin-Milwaukee) probed the language of class in twentieth-century America by examining the entries in the *Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature*. Commentators for this

session were Robert Berkhofer (Univ. of Michigan) and Herbert Gutman (Graduate School, CUNY).

All of the foregoing panels elicited lively audience participation, but what proved to be perhaps the most provocative session featured two papers on the Canadian working-class experience in the twentieth century. Ian Radforth (York University) outlined the problems in organizing Northern Ontario lumber workers between the early 1900's and the famous Boise-Cascade strike of 1978. In contrast, Jeanne Williams (Simon Fraser University) cited forces underlying working-class cohesion in British Columbia's Fraser Lumber Mills in 1931.

As in past years, academic professionals dominated attendance at the Conference, but, according to surveys filled out by about half of those present, the audience included about half a dozen union representatives and persons engaged in an assortment of blue- and white-collar occupations, a few retirees, several unemployed persons, and a large number of students.

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