

MICHIGAN LABOR HISTORY SOCIETY

Walter P. Reuther Library • Wayne State University
5401 Cass Avenue • Detroit MI 48202

NONPROFIT ORG.

U.S. Postage

PAID

Detroit, MI

Permit No. 3844

GET READY FOR **LABOR DAY!**

MLHS 2011 Labor Day MOBILIZATION LUNCHEON

Wed., Aug. 24 • 11:30 a.m.

UAW Region 1 in Warren

"For the Future of Our Children"

SPEAKERS:

**U.S. Sen. Debbie Stabenow and
UAW President Bob King**

Read more on page 2

Monday, September 5

LABOR DAY PARADES

in Detroit and elsewhere

For Detroit information, contact

Metro Detroit AFL-CIO, 313-961-0800

Virtual Tour in the Works For Southwest Detroit

By the end of next year, it's likely that residents of Michigan and throughout the world will be able to go to their computers and take a virtual web-based tour of Southwest Detroit, "the neighborhood that built the car." It was in this neighborhood that auto companies like General Motors, Studebaker, and parts suppliers opened early plants and where labor-related struggles like the sit-down strike at Kelsey-Hayes took place.

This Southwest Detroit Auto Heritage Virtual Tour, funded in part by the Motor Cities National Heritage Area with support from Southeastern Michigan Jobs with Justice and the Michigan Labor History Society, will provide website visitors with a history of firms and unions as well as commercial and residential development associated with a century of auto history.

Meanwhile, volunteers are needed to help research documents, stories, and photos related to labor history for the virtual tour. Once completed, the virtual tour could lead to similar projects that would cover auto and labor history throughout the entire Detroit metropolitan area.

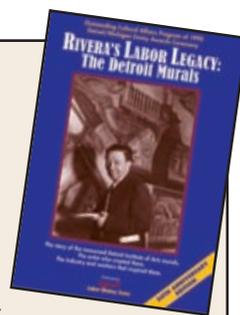
Volunteers who would like to learn research skills and participate in the project can get a copy of the project summary and sign up to help by contacting project coordinator Ron Alpern at 804-320-0440 or at ronalp@aol.com.

New Resources *Continued from page 9*

industry in the 1930s. The frescoes portray a dynamic vision of mass production that has become a Detroit icon, and includes much information on the conditions of work at the Ford Rouge Plant in Dearborn, which Rivera used as the basis for his frescoes.

"Certainly we've had our fair share of Diego Rivera films...but this one's different," wrote *Detroit Free Press* art critic Marsha Miro. "It weaves the history and philosophy of the 'Detroit Industry Frescoes' murals by the Mexican muralist with that of Michigan's labor movement...that twist amplifies the meaning of the art, contrasting Rivera's dreams of a united, dominant working class with the realities as they have changed from the 1930s to the present. It is a serious program, intelligent and fast-moving."

The video is \$14.98 and can be ordered by telephone at 1-800-379-3935.



'TRANSCENDING' POSTCARDS

If you want to send a message to an out-of-town friend, why not use one of the new postcards showing Detroit's Labor Legacy Landmark, "Transcending," in full color. The cards are available at Inside Detroit, the visitor center at 1261 Woodward in downtown Detroit.

Help Make Labor History

Join the Michigan Labor History Society for just \$10 and make sure that you're a part of Michigan's continuing labor history. You'll receive our newsletter, have access to documents and research materials on our website, and get notifications of coming labor-history events.

Fill out the following coupon and return it to Michigan Labor History Society at Walter P. Reuther Library, 5401 Cass Avenue, Detroit MI 48202

YES! Sign me up as a member of MLHS today.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ ZIP _____

E-mail _____

Union or organization _____



Looking Back Moving Forward

SUMMER 2011

A NEWSLETTER OF THE MICHIGAN LABOR HISTORY SOCIETY

<http://mlhs.wayne.edu>

Take a Walk Down Woodward

Last fall, labor historian Ron Alpern led a group of Detroiters on a one-hour walk along Woodward Avenue in downtown Detroit. He pointed out several sites where labor events have played an important role, provided some interesting anecdotes, and fielded several questions.

As a result of that walk, "Looking Back, Moving Forward" has compiled a brief do-it-yourself walking tour along Woodward from Grand Circus Park to the Detroit River. If you have an hour or so for a pleasant stroll, take this guide with you, stop at the six sites shown and think back to the important labor events that have taken place in our town.

The best place to start a walk through labor history may be Grand Circus Park at Woodward just south of Adams. For decades, this semi-circular park has been the scene of mass demonstrations and protests. It was a gathering place for the Unemployed Councils of the early 1930s, a staging point for buses taking people to demonstrations in Washington, D.C. during the 1960s, and has been the site of recent demonstrations including a tent encampment, and a UAW jobs rally. There are two important sites to visit:



SEAN DOERR/BUILDINGSOFDETROIT.COM

The statue of the "people's mayor" Hazen Pingree and the plaque honoring him at the base of the statue.

staff before he was found fatally wounded at the Ford Rouge plant in 1936.

One of the largest labor gatherings here occurred in March 1932 when thousands joined a funeral march on Woodward Ave. for four workers who had been shot and killed at the Ford Hunger March a few days earlier. At that event, jobless workers had walked from several Detroit-area locations to the Ford Rouge plant on Miller Road in Dearborn to demand jobs and relief during some of

1 CENTRAL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH: 'CONSCIENCE OF THE CITY'

Located on the northeast corner of Woodward and East Adams, this is the home of Michigan's oldest Protestant congregation, frequently referred to as

the "conscience of the city" for its support of workers and for its social vision.

As far back as 1830, church members reportedly cut a prisoner free from a scaffold where he was about to be hanged, and the local sheriff, a member of the church, resigned his post rather than make preparations for hangings. As a result, Michigan has never had capital punishment laws.

Labor leaders Walter and Victor Reuther attended services here and Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. preached from the pulpit. Rev. Lewis Bradford, a labor pastor whose story is told in the labor jazz opera "Forgotten," was on the

darkest days of the Great Depression. Ford security officers opened fire on the marchers, killing four men—Joe York, Joe Bussell, Kahlman Leny, and Joe DiBlasio—and fatally wounding a fifth, Curtis Williams.

If the church is open, you may want to go inside to view the stained glass Great Western Window facing Woodward. Installed in 1956, its images depict the effects of the atom bomb, a lynching, and racism, but also show positive messages like people of different races working together.

2 HAZEN PINGREE: 'IDOL OF THE PEOPLE'

Now, walk across Woodward where it meets West Adams and stop to look at the imposing statue of Hazen Pingree,

Continued on page 6



DAVE ELSHA



WALTER P. REUTHER LIBRARY, WVSU

Central United Methodist Church as it looks today just north of Grand Circus Park. In 1932, tens of thousands of marchers joined a funeral procession for the victims of violence in the Ford Hunger March. The march started at Woodward and Ferry, and ended in Grand Circus Park near the church.



MOBILIZING FOR LABOR DAY: Luncheon and Parade

United States Senator Debbie Stabenow and UAW President Bob King will be the keynote speakers at the annual Labor Day Mobilization Luncheon on Wednesday, August 24, sponsored by the Michigan Labor History Society.

As Labor Day 2011 rolls around, plans are being worked on for the traditional parade in Detroit, one of the nation's largest Labor Day events. Most unions and allied organizations will march down Woodward Avenue south toward Hart Plaza. They will be joined by building trades, Teamsters, and other workers marching east on Michigan Ave.



INTERNATIONAL UNION, UAW

Local unions are already building floats, preparing vehicles and signs, and recruiting bands for the event, which usually attracts tens of thousands. Given the current economic challenges faced by labor, turnout this year will be large, organizers say, with a focus on jobs and a secure future for our children.

A key event to mobilize workers for the parade will be the Michigan Labor History Society's annual Labor Day Mobilization Luncheon, which Stabenow and King will address.

This year's event with the theme "For the Future of Our Children," will be held at UAW Region 1, 27800 George Merrelli Drive, Warren, starting at 11:30 a.m. on August 24. The hall is off Tank Drive, north of E. 11 Mile Rd., and west of Van Dyke, and ample, free parking is available.

Tickets for the luncheon are \$40 and include a one-year membership in the Michigan Labor History Society. To order tickets, please contact the MLHS office, 5401 Cass, Detroit MI 48202 (313-577-4003); the Metro Detroit AFL-CIO, 600 W. Lafayette, Detroit MI 48226 (313-963-0800); UAW Region 1, 27800 George Merrelli Drive, Warren MI 48092 (586-427-9200) or UAW Region 1A, 9650 S. Telegraph Road, Taylor MI 48180 (313-291-2750).

The Detroit Labor Day parade was restored in 1981, following a 13-year absence, and has been one of the largest solidarity-building events in the Motor City.



BARBARA BAREFIELD

UAW President Bob King (at podium above) and Senator Debbie Stabenow (left) will keynote the 2011 Labor Day Mobilization Luncheon on Wednesday, August 24, at UAW Region 1 in Warren.

In 2008, Barack Obama spoke to a crowd in Hart Plaza following the parade, and other prominent labor and political leaders have often been speakers.

While most of the world celebrates Labor Day on May 1 (see page 8), the U.S. holiday goes back to Sept 5, 1882, when 20,000 workers marched up Broadway in New York City with signs that read, "Labor Creates All Wealth" and "Eight Hours for Work, Eight Hours for Rest, Eight Hours for Recreation."

In 1894, Congress declared the first Monday of September as a federal holiday, as opposed to May 1, which had been celebrated since 1886 in Chicago and other cities.



LOOKING BACK MOVING FORWARD

Summer 2011

Published by the
Michigan Labor History Society

c/o Walter P. Reuther Library
5401 Cass, Detroit MI 48202

Telephone: 313-577-4003

<http://mlhs.wayne.edu>

Co-Chairs:

Rory Gamble, *Director, UAW Region 1A*

Chuck Hall, *Director, UAW Region 1*

Sandra Williams, *President,
Metro Detroit AFL-CIO*

Secretary: Alberta Asmar

Treasurer: David Elsila

Board members: John Dick, David Ivers,
Mike Kerwin, Ruby Newbold

Editor: David Elsila
*National Writers Union,
UAW Local 1981, member*

Design: Barbara Barefield
Barefield Design Works

Annual MLHS Meeting Honors Bernie Firestone, Elects Officers, Plans Future Events



Gordon Patton, Lynn Marie Smith, and Skip Turner, cast members of the jazz opera "Forgotten," sing a special tribute to Firestone's memory, "We Remember You."

More than 75 members and friends attended the annual meeting of the Michigan Labor History Society on Wednesday, May 11, 2011, where they paid tribute to the late Bernie Firestone, elected new officers, and made plans for future projects.

Firestone, who died in 1989, was a leader of the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers, predecessor union of UNITE! HERE, and was actively involved in countless labor and community campaigns, both in his own union and others, including the Machinists' strike against Eastern Airlines, and the Transit Workers' strike at Greyhound. Indeed, there was hardly a strike, a negotiations campaign, or a community action in which he wasn't involved as a participant or supporter.

AFT Michigan President David Hecker, a close friend and colleague of Firestone, spoke of the vision that Firestone inspired—"looking out for each other, acting as one union although we are many."

"Bernie taught us what being a trade-unionist is all about," he said. It was "to stand fast in good times or bad, to be on call for whatever task is needed, to live by a code—largely unspoken and not to be violated—of concern for the lives of men



Above: Members and friends of the Michigan Labor History Society gather for the group's annual meeting. The MLHS photo exhibit of Detroit labor history is in the background.

and women."

Given the current attacks on labor, Hecker warned union members that if we fail to renew "our commitment to solidarity, our looking out for each other, our acting as one union" then we won't succeed in our mission of building a better world. "The labor movement," Hecker said, "is about being the most important part of the progressive movement and working with others to transform society." (Hecker's complete remarks are posted on the MLHS website at <http://mlhs.wayne.edu>.)

Several MLHS members—Dave Ivers, Skip Turner, Dan O'Rourke, Stella Reinstein, Mike Kerwin, Alice Audie-Figueroa, Phil Schloop, Ann Kerwin, Steve Babson, Mike Kerwin, and others—recalled events in Firestone's life and shared anecdotes of activities in which they had participated.

The MLHS meeting was held in Firestone's old ACTWU union hall at 1550

At the MLHS annual meeting speakers' table are program chair Mike Kerwin; AFT Michigan President David Hecker, the keynote speaker; Leigh Kegerreis, representing UAW Region 1A Director Rory Gamble; and Brian Johnson, representing UAW Region 1 Director Chuck Hall. Bottom, MLHS Co-chair Sandra Williams, president of the Metro Detroit AFL-CIO, welcomes the crowd.

PHOTOS: BARBARA INGALLS



Carl Reinstein, left, was one of several speakers from the floor to remember incidents and anecdotes from Firestone's life.

Howard St. in Detroit, now home to Operating Engineers Local 374 Detroit Training Center.

Lynn Marie Smith, Skip Turner, and Gordon Patton sang a special arrangement of "We Remember You" from the labor jazz opera, "Forgotten," with a verse composed by Smith to honor Firestone. The IWW's Wobbly Kitchen prepared food and beverages.

In other business, members elected Metro Detroit AFL-CIO President Sandra Williams, UAW Region 1 Director Chuck Hall, and UAW Region 1A Director Rory Gamble as co-chairs of the Society; Alberta Asmar as secretary; David Elsila as treasurer, and Mike Kerwin, John Dick, Dave Ivers, and Ruby Newbold as executive board members.



By Mike Kerwin

Bernard J. Firestone was “Bernie” to the labor movement in Detroit and Michigan in the 1970s and ’80s. He represented the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union (ACTWU), but he was also the symbol of united labor of all unions—and for workers not yet organized.

It would be no exaggeration to say that Bernie represented the soul of organized labor.

His official title was Secretary-Treasurer of the Chicago and Central States ACTWU Joint Board. Next, perhaps, was his place as officer and board member of the Metro Detroit AFL-CIO, under the successive presidencies of Tom Turner and Ed Scribner.

In a tribute to Bernie after his death in September, 1989, Jack Scheinkman, national officer of the ACTWU, said: “Bernie Firestone plucked the thistles of life and planted in their place the flowerbeds of an idealism that he nourished with love, with friendship, with devotion. ...To him the members were not his servants, but he theirs. ...He envisioned a better world for all of us.”

The clothing and textile workers of the Central States were well served. As Bernie’s close friend David Hecker put it, Bernie was known for his ideas of how to deal with labor problems: ideas of what to do, when to do it, how to do it, and especially who will do it. But, as Dave said, “Ideas alone were not what organized members in ACTWU, and are not what

produced good contracts. Leaflet-

We Remember BERNIE

ing, home visits, late night meetings are what organized. Solid research, all night bargaining sessions produced contracts.” This was Bernie.

Sounds like a job that would keep one human being busy from “break of morn’ ’til end of day.” But not for Bernie. If a trade unionist or a local union, any local union, was in trouble, Bernie was there.

Solidarity: How Can We Help?

Bernie co-chaired the Labor Crisis Support Committee of the Metro Detroit AFL-CIO. Locally or nationally, if there was a contract impasse, an organizing drive, an unfair labor practice, a strike, or a lock-out, Bernie’s first question was: “What can we do to help you?” And it was always: “You tell us. What do you need?” And Bernie would be off to the races.

An example of the scope of Bernie’s concern: at the Labor Crisis Support Committee meeting of August 29, 1989, the last one Bernie would chair, the following crisis situations were on the agenda:

- IAM-Eastern Airlines (national)
- United Mine Workers-Pittston Coal Co. (Virginia)
- AFSCME-Detroit Recorders Court
- NABET- Channel 2
- ACTWU-Samson and Delila (clothing)
- United Farm Workers-grape boycott
- Utility Workers-Consumers Power
- UAW-Detroit Hoist and Crane
- UAW- Colt Industries (Connecticut)
- UFCW-Warehouse Club
- SEIU-Advance Nursing Home
- CWA-Michigan Bell Telephone
- and a half dozen others.

United labor had a support operation going on in each struggle, and Bernie’s fingerprints were on every effort.

Yet with all of this, for Bernie, family was always first—his wife, Charlene, and

his daughters, and his home in northwest Detroit. Bernie made time to serve on the board of the neighborhood group, the University District Community Association.

His outlook was global. He always had projects going: Histadrut in Israel, persecuted unions in Central America, the anti-apartheid cause in South Africa. He gave leadership to “Freedom Tours,” the summer trips for Detroit-area high school students to follow the Civil Rights route from Detroit to Selma, Alabama.

Music, Culture and Labor

Bernie was a great one for music, particularly labor songs. When he planned a meeting, if any stretch of the imagination allowed it, there was at least one great labor song—and local singer—on the agenda. In 1986 the national AFL-CIO put on the first regional labor sing-along in Chicago. Bernie went, he saw, he conquered: “If Chicago can have this, so can Detroit,” and, sure enough, in 1987 we had the Great Midwest Labor Song Exchange in Detroit—at IBEW Local 58 and at UAW Region 1A. He later was a prime mover in the labor drama group, “Workers’ Lives, Workers’ Stories.”

There was no stronger labor advocate for the connection between the bargaining table and the ballot box. As part of the Metro Detroit AFL-CIO in the 1980s, he set up the Good Government Committee—aimed at two things: promoting labor’s political agenda and getting union members involved in the processes of government. He was also a board member of the First Congressional District Democratic Party, working closely with U.S. Representative John Conyers.

In Bernie’s view the chief vehicle for labor’s political and community activities was the Metro Detroit AFL-CIO. He worked closely there with President Tom Turner, and later, with President Ed Scribner. Or, maybe, they worked closely with him.

Bernie put a high priority on Detroit’s Labor Day Parade. Sadly, the parade was

When the poet wrote 'Love is a many splendored thing,' he surely must have had Bernie Firestone in mind.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF WALTER P. REUTHER LIBRARY, WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY

Bernie Firestone seemed to be everywhere at demonstrations for labor, civil rights, and peace. He marched in support of a Service Employees strike (below), a Farmworkers grape boycott (opposite page), and against the Vietnam war (above).

discontinued in 1967 after the racial uprising in Detroit, and no parade was held for fourteen years. Along with the Michigan Labor History Society, Bernie was a major force behind the parade's revival in 1981. He served proudly as Parade Grand Marshal in the 1989 parade, marking the 75th anniversary of the Amalgamated. The ACTWU marching unit—all workers, no vehicles—that year taught us a new labor chant, which we have since all learned:

Everywhere we go—oh—(echo)—People want to know—oh—(echo) Who we a—are—(echo)—So we tell them—(echo) We are the union—(echo)—Mighty, mighty union—(echo)

A Many Splendored Life

Tragically, two days later, September 6, 1989, Bernie was shot and killed in the offices of the Amalgamated by a distraught member who was convinced, with no reason, that he was being denied his pension.

The labor movement was aghast.

Perhaps Tom Turner spoke for all of labor as he said: "When the poet wrote that 'Love is a many splendored thing,' he surely must have had Bernie Firestone in mind, for Bernie lived a many splendored life, full of love, compassion, dedication, and concern for humanity. ...I was blessed to have Bernie carry the ball on so many programs, to establish a presence in so many areas, and to touch so many people. ...At a time when some of our membership have forgotten the bonds that make us a union, Bernie preached brotherhood and sisterhood and brought us back to labor's basic theme: An injury to one is an injury to all."

Some months later, when Bernie's killer was found guilty of first degree murder and possession of a firearm during the commission of a felony, Bernie's daughter, Nita Firestone, said the fami-

ly hoped the conviction would rekindle debate about handgun control legislation, echoing her father's long-held position.

At the special memorial gathering on September 24, 1989, to honor Bernie's legacy, there were many eloquent testimonials. Perhaps the one that came closest to what Bernie meant to workers was a letter from a rank-and-file member of Detroit Air Transport Local Lodge 141, International Association of Machinists. The IAM had been in a long and bitter fight against the labor depredations of Eastern Airlines. Local Lodge 141 at Detroit Metro Airport was the Detroit focus of this struggle. Needless to say, Bernie had effectively led the effort to bring them the full support of Detroit labor.

The letter said: "When I first met Bernie Firestone... The second time I saw Bernie... The third time I saw Bernie... I know that Bernie Firestone will always be in our hearts and minds, for the Eastern 37 are grateful to him for caring... My name is David Frank Elster. I am one of the Eastern family. Thank you for reading this letter."

Mike Kerwin is a board member and chair of the program committee of the Michigan Labor History Society. Bernie Firestone was remembered during a special program as part of the MLHS annual meeting May 11.





Walk Down Woodward

Continued from page 1



WALTER P. REUTHER LIBRARY, WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY

Woolworths workers take a break at the soda fountain during their 1937 sitdown strike. The site as it looks today on Woodward Ave.



DAVE ELSILA

the “peoples’ mayor” from 1889-1896. The plaque at the base of the statue notes that Pingree was “the first to warn the people of the great danger threatened by powerful private corporations. And the first to awake to the great inequalities in taxation and to initiate steps for reform. The idol of the people.”

Pingree helped turn vacant land into vegetable gardens during the tough economic times of 1893—a precursor of today’s urban gardens movement in Detroit. When Detroiters complained about having to ride horse-drawn streetcars while other cities were using electric trolleys and having to pay high fares, Pingree intervened. He sided with streetcar employees who were paid 18 cents an hour (women got 9 cents) and who won their strike for higher wages. Pingree’s proposal for city ownership of the streetcar lines passed by an 80-percent majority. Shortly afterwards, he was able to announce that some 87 miles of publicly-owned streetcar lines were ready to run. He oversaw electrification and cut fares by 40 percent.

Among Pingree’s other accomplishments were a public-works program that provided jobs for unemployed workers by beautifying Belle Isle and other parks and improving streets. He took on private utilities and established Detroit’s public lighting commission and put

streetlights under city ownership. As the book “Working Detroit” points out, Pingree was “one of the first big-city mayors to publicly ally himself with the working class and challenge big business.” Mayors in other cities followed in his footsteps.

3 WOOLWORTHS: THE WOMEN SIT DOWN

Continue walking toward the River along the west side of the street, and you’ll come to 1261 Woodward. Now partly a “Detroit Welcome Center,” this was where Woolworths, one of downtown Detroit’s two major dime stores, did business. In 1937, shoppers could buy everything from hairpins and clothing to shoes here. A lunch counter along the south wall served sandwiches and beverages. Woolworths

was the largest retailer in the U.S. with 2,000 stores, 40 of them in metro Detroit; some historians call it the “WalMart of its time.”

For workers, most of whom were women, some as young as 17, the store was a low-wage sweatshop (F.W. Woolworth, the chain’s founder, made his money by using cheap labor to sell cheap goods.) Women received between 25 and 28 cents an hour and worked a 52-hour workweek.

On Saturday, February 27, 1937, 23-year-old Mira Komaroff (later to become prominent hotel and restaurant workers leader Myra Wolfgang) blew a whistle in the center of the store and yelled “Strike.” The women stopped work and, after ushering customers out, sat down. For the next eight days, 108 of them occupied the store, refusing to leave until management met their demands. They rolled mattresses onto the floor to sleep, served food to each other at the lunch counter, sang songs and took turns curling each other’s hair at the beauty counter.

The media, which had just covered the auto sitdowns in Flint, gave favorable coverage to the Woolworths women, helping lead to much public support.

During the strike, the nearby compet-

ing S. S. Kresge dime store raised its workers’ wages. Finally, confronted with the workers’ continuing militancy, Woolworths management gave in, recognizing the Waiters and Waitresses’ union, agreeing to a 48-hour workweek, and raising wages by \$5 a week.

Today, Wolfgang is memorialized in a stone at Detroit’s riverfront Labor Legacy Landmark with her quotation: “Women were in labor before men were born.”

4 CADILLAC SQUARE: DECADES OF DEMONSTRATIONS

Walking two blocks farther south and crossing Woodward to the east side brings you to Cadillac Square, the heart of downtown and home to labor rallies and demonstrations for many decades.

It was here in 1927 that some 60,000 Detroiters gathered to protest the executions of Boston anarchists Sacco and Vanzetti, who had been sentenced to death after being made scapegoats in a murder trial. Speakers mounted eight flatbed trucks scattered around the square to condemn the executions.

Ten years later, in 1937, an estimated



An estimated 100,000 workers crowd Cadillac Square during a 1937 demonstration in solidarity with striking Chrysler workers. Today the square includes a park and skating rink.



100,000 persons gathered in Cadillac Square to support workers engaged in a multitude of sitdown strikes at auto plants, hotels and restaurants, cigar factories, and other workplaces—so many strikes that the Detroit News carried a front-page box score of businesses closed by the sitdowns.

And in 1941, thousands of Ford workers gathered on the eve of a representation election to hear union leaders and singer Paul Robeson urge them to vote for the UAW.

In later years, Cadillac Square became a gathering place for Labor Day rallies, with Walter Reuther and others speaking from the steps of the old City Hall, which stood across Woodward. Detroit's first Laborfest was held here in 1997. Today, much of the square has been transformed into a park, with an ice-skating rink in the winter and concerts during the summer months. To the south stands the "Soldiers and Sailors Monument," which includes a statue of a woman, labeled "Emancipation," which some have said was inspired by the life of Sojourner Truth, the African-American abolitionist and women's rights leader.

5 HART PLAZA: LABOR'S 'TRANSCENDING' LEGACY

Your walk down Woodward to the Detroit River takes you to Jefferson Avenue and Hart Plaza. It's here that you will see the 63-foot-high work of public art, "Transcending," which honors the working women and men who built Detroit.

Made of stainless steel with several tons of concrete inside its hollow core, Detroit's labor movement commissioned this work of art in 2001, the 300th anniversary of the founding of Detroit by French explorers. It was dedicated in 2003 at ceremonies that included a fanfare especially composed by the union musicians of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra.

Surrounding "Transcending" along a spiral walkway are bronze reliefs depicting Detroit's early workers, events in labor and social history, and images of today's workers. David Barr, who conceived the arch, and Sergio DeGiusti, who designed the bronze reliefs, are both local artists with a strong commitment to labor. Barr said that the idea of a circle came to him because the labor movement has always been a rebel movement, and that he

WALTER P. REUTHER LIBRARY WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY

DAVE ELSHA

wanted to contrast it to the rectangular buildings nearby that represented the corporate world. He left the top open to signify labor's undone work. The *Metro Times* awarded "Transcending" the distinction of being the best new work of art in downtown Detroit, encouraging viewers to stand with their back to the river and look through the "ring that Labor built" at the symbols of capitalism behind.

On the east side of the nearby wall of donors is a map of the spiral walkway with brief descriptions of each of the bronze reliefs. More information is available at the Michigan Labor History Society website (<http://mlhs.wayne.edu>).

6 UNDERGROUND RAILROAD MONUMENT: FERRY TO FREEDOM

Detroit is also the home of an impressive monument inspired by the Underground Railroad, which helped ferry escaped slaves during the pre-Civil War period to freedom across the river into Canada.

This work of art, just a short stroll across Hart Plaza from "Transcending," sits at the edge of the Detroit River. Sculpted by Ed Dwight, the monument depicts nine slaves and a "conductor" pointing toward freedom on the opposite shore. Maps at the base of the monument show

the routes of the Underground Railroad leading to the Detroit terminus, and the "safe houses" in downtown Detroit where escaped slaves could hide from bounty-hunters. There are also representations of the symbols placed on flags in abolitionists' windows to warn escapees of potential danger or to tell them that the coast



BARBARA BAREFIELD

At the edge of the Detroit River, this monument commemorates the terminus of the Underground Railroad in Detroit.

was clear.

A companion monument in Windsor features a woman Underground Railroad "operative" welcoming the slaves to safety in Canada.

More information is available at www.EdDwight.com, the artist's website.

Woodward Avenue was the site of a March for Freedom on June 22, 1963, when labor leaders joined Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., to Cobo Hall, where King delivered his "I Have a Dream" speech some two months before giving it at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. One of the sculptures at "Transcending" commemorates that event. Since the dedication of "Transcending," many labor groups have held demonstrations here.

There are many more labor history sites in the Detroit area. Consult the book "Working Detroit" for other places to visit, or visit the website of the Michigan Labor History Society, <http://mlhs.wayne.edu>.

Monroe County Labor Museum Sets Rededication Ceremony Sept. 2

The Monroe County Labor History Museum will re-dedicate the historic Philip Murray Building in Monroe, home to the museum, on Saturday, Sept. 3, 2011, at 2 p.m.

UAW President Bob King will keynote the ceremony, and guests will have the chance to see the museum's new permanent exhibit. The museum is located at 41 W. Front St. in Monroe where it seeks to carry out a mission of "preservation and display of local, regional and national labor history for present and future generations to view."



Wisconsin on the Seine

What is this, I wondered. Here I am, marching on May Day with 100,000 workers along Avenue Voltaire in Paris. Why don't Americans celebrate May Day like this—with marching bands, floats, balloons, and such an overwhelming spirit of solidarity.

After all, May Day originated in the U.S. over a century ago, didn't it?

Indeed, it was the U.S. Federation of Organized Trade and Labor Union that had declared that on May 1, 1886 workers would go on a general strike to force company owners to recognize the eight-hour day. And 350,000 workers actually walked out on that day.

As the strike continued in Chicago, police fired on unarmed workers at the McCormick Reaper complex, killing six. Workers protested in Haymarket Square and following a bomb explosion, police arrested eight anarchists for "inciting riot." Four were executed.

I thought about all that while in Paris on a family vacation when I saw placards and flyers announcing the May Day parade. So I decided to show a little U.S. solidarity by joining up. I rode two Metro trains, and finally emerging at the Place Republique, I was blown away.

Here was a huge, festive body of workers who, facing pension cuts and other austerity measures from the conservative Sarkozy government, were getting ready to march. They exuded a spirit of self-confidence and pride that, I thought, the Sarkozy regime had better watch out for.

There were comedians and singers poking fun at right-wing politicians, members of France's two major labor federations marching with huge colorful balloons, ethnic groups calling attention to liberation struggles in various parts of the world, and dancing in the streets.

It was class solidarity at its finest. And while people were raising serious issues, they were also having fun. It reminded me of what Emma Goldman reportedly said: "If I can't dance I don't want to be part of your revolution."

I continued to think about the early May Day observances in the U.S.



PHOTOS: DAVE ELSILA



Music and militancy: marchers in Paris, France keep the spirit of May Day alive, nearly 120 years after Chicago workers inaugurated the labor holiday in 1881. May 1 is Labor Day in most of the world.

where had joined forces to celebrate the original workers' holiday.

The Associated Press reported that in Milwaukee, AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka spoke to a lakefront May 1 rally following a two-mile march through the city that brought together labor and immigrant-rights supporters.

"The burning issues at rallies around the world were the same: more jobs, better working conditions, higher wages, and decent health care," the AP reported.

For months now, workers in Wisconsin, Ohio, and here in Michigan, have been recapturing the spirit of those early labor activists. Huge crowds in Madison, Lansing, and elsewhere are showing that the labor movement is on the rise.

They're keeping labor's spirit alive whether they march on May 1, on the last Monday in September or whenever they turn out.

I'll see you at the parade.

Dave Elsila

and how business and government leaders, worried about growing militancy among the working class, had voted to set the first Monday in September as an "official" Labor Day holiday.

While most of the rest of the world honors the tradition set by the 1886 U.S. strike and Haymarket, we in the U.S. have our own separate Labor Day. Another example of "American exceptionalism," I guess. Another way to suppress international solidarity.

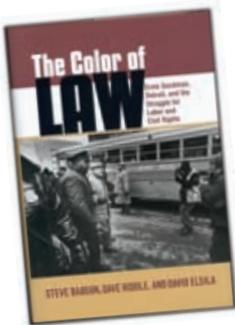
When I returned to the U.S. five days later, though, I was happily surprised. The papers were reporting that thousands of workers in Chicago and else-

PAST FORWARD

Labor History News Around Michigan

New Resources For Labor History

Just in time for summer reading, viewing, or sending a postcard off to a friend, these three labor history resources are now available.



THE COLOR OF LAW

Reviewers are calling it a “riveting story” and an “engrossing account.” *The Color of Law* is an extensive, exciting narrative biography of Detroit attorney Ernest Goodman, whose life spanned every

decade of the 20th Century and whose work on behalf of labor, civil-rights, and peace earned him a national reputation as a people’s lawyer.

Goodman defended the free-speech rights of leafleters at the Ford Rouge Plant during the UAW’s organizing drives in the 1930s, he won a Supreme Court case overturning a Texas law requiring union organizers to be licensed in the 1940s, he defended political activists and immigrants during the Red Scare of the 1950s, and he organized legal defense programs for civil rights workers in the South in the 1960s. He took up the cause of the Attica Prison rebels in the 1970s in upstate New York. And in the 1990s, shortly before his death at age 90, he was arrested for picketing on behalf of striking newspaper workers in Detroit.

“There are few lawyers in America who have put everything on the line to advance the cause of civil rights, civil liberties, workers rights, and peace,” writes former Detroit NAACP director Arthur Johnson. “Ernie Goodman was one of them.”

Now in its second printing by Wayne State University Press, *The Color of Law* is available at bookstores or on line at www.erniegoodman.com, a website that also includes photos, excerpts, reviews, and other information.

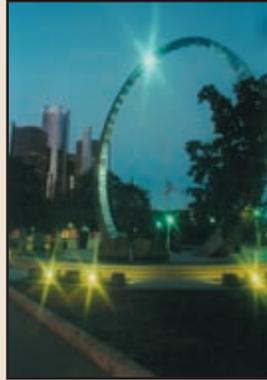
RIVERA’S LABOR LEGACY

A 20th anniversary DVD edition of the Emmy-award-winning documentary film *Rivera’s Labor Legacy* is now available. The show, broadcast on public television, contrasts the vision that informed Mexican muralist Diego Rivera’s Detroit Institute of Arts frescoes with the reality of the auto

Continued on back cover

New Signage will Help Identity ‘Transcending’

When drivers and pedestrians along West Jefferson Ave. near Griswold in downtown Detroit pass the imposing Labor Legacy Landmark, “Transcending,” they will soon see new signage describing the monument. New signs are being developed for both the street side and the Hart Plaza side that will



DON NICHOLSON

clearly and boldly identify the monument as a tribute to the men and women workers who have built and will build Detroit.

“Transcending” was dedicated in 2003 and has been the focus of numerous media stories locally, nationally, and internationally, and thousands of visitors have traveled the spiral walkway to look at the bas-relief sculptures depicting labor and social history as well as different occupations. Dozens of quotations from labor leaders and others are etched into a dais at the site. David Barr and Sergio De Giusti, local artists with international reputations, collaborated on the massive project.

Tours: MLHS can arrange for tours of “Transcending” for union locals, students, community groups, and others. A self-guided tour booklet is also available for distribution to visitors and convention delegates. Please contact the Society at its offices at the Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, 5401 Cass Ave., Detroit MI 48202, telephone 313-577-4003.

Two New Members Inducted into Labor’s Hall of Fame

Victor Reuther, one of the architects of the sit-down strikes at General Motors in Flint and at the Kelsey-Hayes plant in Detroit, and Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, an organizer for the Industrial Workers of the World and the “Rebel Girl” in Joe Hill’s song of the same name, were inducted into Labor’s International Hall of Fame May 11.

Teamsters President James P. Hoffa called the two “giants” of the labor movement at the induction ceremonies at Teamster headquarters in Washington, D.C. Speaking in front of blown-up photos of the two, Hoffa hailed their efforts on behalf of workers in the 20th Century and warned of the challenges faced by workers today including the “tsunami of anti-labor legislation” in Wisconsin, Ohio and other states.

Reuther, whose brother former UAW President Walter Reuther, is also in Labor’s International Hall of Fame, served as head of the union’s education department, where he was a strong advocate of rank-and-file education and worked to recruit women, minorities, and youth into leadership positions. He later directed the UAW’s international solidarity efforts. In 1949, he lost an eye but survived a shotgun assassination attempt at his home. Arriving at the hospital, he famously told the surgeon, “Take my eye or my arm or leg, but spare my tongue. I’ve got a living to make.”

Flynn became a full-time organizer for the Wobblies in 1907 and organized garment workers, miners, restaurant workers, and textile workers as far afield as Montana, and Washington State. She was arrested 10 times during protests but was never convicted. Among her ways of protesting was chaining herself to a lamppost during a free-speech demonstration. She later moved to Oregon, where she supported the West Coast longshoremen’s strike, and in 1936, in New York, she became a columnist for the *Daily Worker* and later was the first woman to chair the U.S. Communist Party.

Documents about Reuther, Flynn, and other Labor’s International Hall of Fame inductees including Mother Jones, Philip Murray, Cesar Chavez, William “Big Bill” Haywood, Eugene V. Debs, Olga Madar, John L. Lewis and others are housed at the Walter P. Reuther Library at Wayne State University in Detroit. The Hall of Fame was established in 1973.



SHAWN D. ELLIS



Early Days of the Union: The Kelsey-Hayes Sit-Down Strike

By Jim Ward

The year was 1935. On the streets of Detroit a bedraggled army of unemployed men and women marched from plant gate to plant gate in desperate search for work. In a scene that would be repeated a half century later, grown men were standing on street corners holding handmade signs begging for work. Those lucky enough to have jobs were forced to work under conditions designed to break their spirit. Wages were very low and constantly falling lower.

In the fall a toolmaker named Walter Reuther, who had been fired from Ford Motor Co. because management disliked his radical politics, returned to Detroit from a prolonged tour of Europe and Russia. Reuther and his younger brother Victor stepped into this labor tinderbox with the expressed purpose of turning the tiny United Auto Workers union into a force that could not be ignored by the auto industry titans

LOCAL 174 VS. KELSEY-HAYES

Realizing that there was strength in numbers, the Reuther brothers and other organizers urged the individual weak unions on Detroit's west side to pool their resources. In September 1936 their organizing effort led to the formation of UAW Local 174. Walter Reuther, then all of 29 years old, became their first president. The small local was comprised of only 78 members,

Their first target was Kelsey-Hayes Wheel which produced wheels and brake drums, mostly for Ford Motor Company. Kelsey was chosen for two reasons. It had a core of staunch union activists, and it had a relatively small work force—roughly 5,000 employees. The fledgling local stood a better chance of organizing Kelsey-Hayes than the massive Ford Rouge complex.

The organizers decided to concentrate on Department 49 at the McGraw Ave. plant. Department 49 had the highest number of signed up unionist. It also housed the hub and brake drum



WALTER P. REUTHER LIBRARY, WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY

section, a cauldron of workers discontent. The foreman enjoyed riding roughshod over poorly paid workers who were hired in at only 37.5 cents an hour. Women were paid only 22.5 cents an hour for the same job. The site was ripe for organizing.

Victor Reuther, Merlin Bishop and George Edwards (who later became a federal judge) secured jobs in Department 49. With union organizers in place, all they needed was an incident to spark a strike. They found it when they learned that a young woman had fainted earlier in the year from demands of production line speed-up. As luck would have it, the woman was a union supporter and readily agreed to help.

THE STRIKE... 'WE'VE HAD ENOUGH'

With details nailed down, the organizers set the strike for December 10, 1936. Since they planned a sit-in, they set up picket shifts and formed committee to feed the strikers and their families. Aware that company spies infiltrated most union gatherings, the organizers kept the date and time of the

protest a closely guarded secret. At the agreed upon moment—twenty minutes before the end of the first shift—the young woman agreed to seem to faint again. But this time, when she fell to the floor she launched the beginning of the UAW as we know it.

In his book, *The Brothers Reuther*, Victor Reuther recalled what happened next. "I ran and pulled the main switch and shouted, 'Strike. We've had enough of this speed-up.' The call for strike action spread through our whole department and soon we had an enormous gathering around us."

Upon seeing the determination of the workers, plant manager canceled the second shift and agreed to hold a formal negotiating session the next morning with union representatives from the plant on McGraw and another on Military. Jubilant over their success, the strikers went home to await new developments. That day alone Local 174 signed up hundreds of new members who were awed by the union's ability to confront management. In typical form, the Kelsey-Hayes manage-



WALTER P. REUTHER LIBRARY, WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY

Kelsey-Hayes strikers and supporters keep warm by dancing in the plant's compound during their sit-down strike. Others stay warm around a burn barrel (opposite page).

ment team began to stall. For days supervisors tried to cripple the organizing drive by bribing worker to support the company union, rather than Local 174.

SIT-DOWN STRIKE BEGINS

On Monday, December 14, 1936, the union called a general sit-down strike in both plants to protest Kelsey-Hayes' refusal to bargain fairly. Some 500 men and women remained inside the plants while workers from all across Detroit rallied outside and blocked the entrances. The pickets and protesters thwarted Kelsey-Hayes' attempt to move the equipment out of the plant, and more than 1,000 workers rushed to join the bold little Local. Whenever it was rumored that the company was readying an assault on the strikers, union brothers and sisters converged on the site to protect them.

Five days into the sit-down strike, Kelsey-Hayes slipped dozen of professional strikebreakers into the McGraw plant. Several thousand union members quickly surrounded the plant and began yelling "Throw the scabs out." Shortly after the angry chants filled the air the scabs left the building.

The sit-down strikers also benefited from the refusal of local politicians and police agencies to evict them. Officials took the position that the protesters had entered the building legally as employ-

ees and had the right to remain there.

As the days wore on, Kelsey-Hayes came under increasing pressure from its major customer, the Ford Motor Co. Ford was running low on parts. Executives from both companies held an emergency meeting in Ford headquarters. Harry Bennett, the notorious hatchet man for Henry Ford, warned that if the strike was not settled, Ford would go elsewhere for supplies. That ultimatum forced Kelsey-Hayes to enter serious bargaining with Local 174.

VICTORY

On Christmas Eve, Local 174 reached a settlement. It called for a wage of 75 cents an hour, a shop steward system, a shop committee elected by UAW members, and a seniority system that governed the order of future layoffs and recall. The union negotiators secured a 20-percent reduction in the speed of the production line.

The sit-down strikers marched to the cheers of thousands who gathered to congratulate them on their victory. Victor Reuther wrote, "Everyone sensed that a new era had begun for auto workers." Within 10 short days Local 174 increased its members from 78 to 3,000.

After the Kelsey-Hayes Wheel triumph, the phone at the west side Local was ringing every hour of the day and night: "Send us some soup and sand-

It was the successful 10-day Kelsey-Hayes sit-down that paved the way for success in Flint.

wiches; we're sitting down on strike."

Hours after the settlement, Victor Reuther and Merlin Bishop left for Flint where they played key roles in the GM sit-down strike. The 44-day protest which lasted from December 30, 1936 to February 11, 1937 thrust the UAW into the national spotlight. But it was the successful 10-day Kelsey-Hayes sit-down that paved the way for success in Flint.

Local 174 grew at a rapid pace. Sit-down fever spread through dozen of small plants and several large ones. By Christmas 1937, membership at the tiny Local that dared to take on giants of industry stood at 35,000. The Kelsey-Hayes Wheel Company had become the place where workers ushered in the birth of the UAW.

I have been trying for a couple years to get a Historical Marker on the site of the old Kelsey-Hayes Plant at McGraw and Livernois In honor of the early sit-down strikers, I didn't know how difficult it would be. I have contacted the President of the Detroit City Council, the Detroit Historical Society, a labor historian in Virginia and the list goes on. I will continue my efforts so that what those men did in 1936 is not buried in the rubble of Kelsey-Hayes as they tear it down.

Jim Ward is a retired member of UAW Local 78. He has been involved in the campaign to place a Historical Marker at the site of the Kelsey-Hayes plant on the west side of Detroit.

If you have labor history stories to share, e-mail them to Davelsi@aol.com for possible posting on our Michigan Labor History Society website and/or inclusion in our publication.