



“Labor History – With a Bite!”

**The Do-It-Yourself Handbook of
A Successful Labor History
Program Series**

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Introduction

In the Spring of 2001, the Education Committee of the South Central Federation of Labor, the central labor body located in Madison, Wisconsin, initiated a three-part labor history lecture series, “Labor History With a Bite.”

An important goal of the series was to reach out to educate younger workers with the lessons of labor history and contribute to the creation of the next generation of local labor leaders.

The series proved popular, regularly drawing forty to sixty people at each gathering. Another series of three programs was scheduled that Fall, again in the Spring of 2002, and is expected to continue indefinitely.

On April 27, 2002, the Wisconsin Labor History Society presented a Special Commendation Award to the SCFL Education Committee “for its outstanding efforts to raise awareness of labor history.” The Society also endorsed the program as an easily-reproducible model for central labor bodies elsewhere.

With the help of Laurie Wermter of the Wisconsin Labor History Society, the SCFL Education Committee has produced this do-it-yourself handbook to help others interested in promoting the development of young union activists through labor history education.

Establishing Goals and Building an Audience

Although the South Central Federation of Labor (SCFL) had several motives in offering a series of labor history programs beginning in Spring 2001, our primary goal was to teach the lessons of history to the next generation of labor leaders. It had been years since SCFL had sponsored any labor history events, and our delegates had expressed an interest in reviving labor history programs. That seemed like a good way to expose younger people to the labor movement, grow the next generation of leadership, and supplement our organizing activities. We scheduled the programs immediately before the monthly meeting of the central labor body, both to draw in more of our delegates and to expose young unionists to the delegates' meeting; that plan then obligated us to feed people, which we hoped would be another draw.

By purposefully scheduling our labor history programs prior to the monthly delegates' meeting of the labor council, those delegates could come early for the meeting, eat, and be inspired with some labor history. This contributed a ready-made audience and allowed delegates to participate without having to give up another evening.

The strategy of pursuing approval of credit for attendance by the apprentices in the construction trades and of continuing education units for attendance by the area's school teachers was integral to ensuring a good audience for each event and that the messages of labor history would reach younger people.

It is important to emphasize that our program did not set out to just teach labor history or even the history of the labor movement. We wanted to use labor history to

teach the lessons of history to the next generation of labor leaders. This is a vital distinction and to achieve this goal you need to ensure that each of your labor history program topics has a connection to a current struggle facing today's labor movement. For example, at our program on the historic struggle for the Eight-Hour Day, we made sure to bring into the discussion the recent struggle faced by a local union in the area over the length of the work day; this allowed the younger workers present, who are more likely to be attracted to a work week schedule made up of four ten-hour days, to get exposed to several of the lessons of history suggested by the issue and to get them thinking along those lines. (Be sure to also see the explanations provided for the series in the *Union Labor News* articles in the last appendix at the end of this handbook.)

Get a Committee Together

Go to your area's central labor body and talk to their education committee or executive board about creating a "Labor History – With a Bite!" program for your area. You'll need up-front money to pay for advertising, hall rental and any shortfall in food contributions, so you'll need executive board willingness and enthusiasm to spend perhaps a couple of hundred dollars.

Finding Some Speakers

Ask for suggestions of topics from labor council delegates, activists with the area's Labor History Society, and attendees at events. Be sure to check the appendixes at the end of this handbook, where you will find a list of some suggested labor history topics, as well as a list of some informational web resources on labor history.

You may also have local experts among your labor council delegates or simply

someone in the area who is knowledgeable about a labor-related topic. There will be many folks in your area who would be willing to travel an hour or so in order to speak on a favorite topic before an interested audience. Most university campuses will have one or two professors who can speak on pertinent topics and they usually relish the thought of speaking before interested adults.

Keep in mind, also, that two people might want to team up to present a program.

Program Design

Our desire to sandwich the programs between the end of the work day and the 7:00 p.m. monthly delegates' meeting made for a very tight schedule, but this actually worked well.

Aim to have the forty-five minute meal portion first from 4:30 to 5:15 and then the ninety-minute lecture portion (including the question-and-answer period after) from 5:15 to 6:45. The forty-five-minute time frame for dinner allowed most people to arrive whenever they got off work and to get their food without interrupting the speaker, although a relatively few may arrive after the lecture starts promptly at 5:15. Promptness is required given our need to conclude by 6:45 to allow fifteen minutes to get ready for the monthly delegates' meeting starting at 7:00 in the same room.

During the lecture, time seems to go quickly, especially if the speaker uses audio-visual resources (which is a good idea as a straight lecture format can quickly get boring). Handouts and bibliographies are also nice to have on the topic. We offered speakers monetary support (\$10-20)

and duplicating services to produce these, but found most speakers just went ahead and did it themselves.

Apprentice and Continuing Education Training Credits

Arrange with the area's apprentice training programs to grant credit to any apprentices who attend the programs. This takes a dedicated delegate to go through an elaborate process that involves both union and employer representatives. Once the first trade has broken the ice with their approval, it is easier to get other trades to do so.

At the registration table, there will need to be a sign-up sheet for each apprenticeship program as each program will prefer that the sign-up sheet for their apprentices be designed in a certain way or that attendance of their apprentices be recorded in a particular way.

Arrange with the teachers' unions in the area and the local school boards to grant credit to any teachers who attend the programs. That's an elaborate process, too, best done by a volunteer from among those benefitting.

Advertising the Series

You'll want to prepare some attractive flyers to advertise the programs. In addition to providing one flyer describing all the events of the series as a whole, make up an individual flyer for each of the sessions in the series – that way you will be able to begin the advertising to the media, your delegates, etc., with the series flyer, and then, closer to each up-coming event, remind everybody by distributing the flyer designed solely for that specific session.

Be sure to get the word out thoroughly by:

- Posting the flyers on the web site of the area's central labor body;
- Sending the flyers to the area's media, weekly newspapers, etc.
- Sending the flyers out to labor council delegates, Street Heat lists and to unions with a request to post in workplaces and publish in newsletters;
- Sending the flyers out to places where it should be posted, such as public libraries, local stores, neighborhood centers, etc.;
- Don't forget to also write up a press release version of the flyer, so the information can be posted on Internet listserves or be read on community radio and television stations.

Make sure that your publicity mentions that the programs are especially geared toward younger union members.

Book Table

Ask a local bookstore if they are interested in selling books at the events, as well as other items like buttons and bumperstickers. Besides the obvious topics of unions, popular economics and labor history, additional topics that sold well at our programs included current events, the anti-globalization movement, migrant workers, race and class, and women's issues. We just had to provide a couple of tables for display of the books.

The central labor body informally solicited unions to make contributions of \$100-\$200 and used the money to provide coupons worth \$5 toward book purchases from the book table. The \$5 coupons were

only good for use during the program that night and couldn't be cashed in anywhere else. Since the coupons are the equivalent of money, you'll need someone to issue them to attendees (no more than the available money donation would cover) and to redeem them from the bookseller for cash at the end of the event.

Room and Meal Reservations

Remember to reserve the meeting room early.

You will need a head count in advance to order the food, so ask those intending to come to the events to register for each event beforehand. Always add a fudge factor – at least ten people will come without making a reservation.

Organizing the Food

Simple catered food (e.g., lasagna, salad and garlic bread with a selection of beverages) works best, unless there are volunteers and facilities to do food preparation.

Registration Table

Everyone should sign in as they arrive and be encouraged to notice the large, conspicuously-signed bucket at hand for donations towards the cost of the meal.

There will probably need to be separate sign-in sheets for the apprentices from the different trades and for the teachers who will be getting credit for the evening's program.

This table is also a good place to put any handouts brought by the speaker. Always have the flyers for the related up-coming labor history events available also.

Recouping Expenses

Put a big, conspicuously-signed donations bucket at the beginning of the food line—salt it with a few five-dollar bills. A \$5 suggested donation will often come close to covering the costs, but consider asking for more, if additional funds are not available to cover some of the food costs and the speaker's expenses or honorarium.

Have someone designated to announce loudly (more than once during the evening, if possible), in words of no more than one syllable, that each person is asked to make a donation to help cover the expenses of the food and that \$5 (or whatever sum you feel is needed) is a fair donation. It worked best to say explicitly that \$5 is needed, otherwise people just came back and contributed only a dollar or two.

Since we are gearing our program to younger union members, we always make a point of saying that younger folks (often left undefined) are not expected to make a donation.

Meeting Logistics

Most labor federations are pretty good at holding meetings that involve food or monetary donations, so these meetings won't be anything new. You can make do with two or three staff members or volunteers, but the more the better.

Specifically, on the night of the program, you'll need:

- People to help set up/arrange the room for the program;
- Someone to meet the caterer and help set up the food;

- Someone to set up the (previously-arranged) audio-visual equipment to the presenter's satisfaction and to be available during the presentation, in case of unforeseen technical problems;

- Someone to supervise the registration table, including encouragement of donations to cover the meal costs and issuing the book purchase coupons;

- Someone to be the spokesperson for the meeting: calling the meeting to order; making announcements (especially about the need for donations to cover costs); inviting people to attend the delegates' meeting later following the labor history program; introducing the speaker; extending thank-you's; and, closing the meeting on time.

- People to quickly break down the room set-up after the program, to clean up, and to dispose of left-over food, etc.

Appendix A: Web Resources

Wisconsin Labor History Society,
www.wisconsinlaborhistory.org
Check this web site for information about activities of the Wisconsin Labor History Society and for information about events in Wisconsin labor history, including their extensive web bibliography (see next item).

Wisconsin Labor History Bibliography,
www.wisconsinlaborhistory.org/ref.html
At this web page you will find an extensive annotated web bibliography which identifies over two hundred book, article, video, and music resources for the study of workers and unions and work in Wisconsin, arranged by author, geographic location, or by topic.

Illinois Labor History Society,
www.kentlaw.edu/ilhs
Through this web page you can order over the web a nice selection of interesting books about U.S. labor history. Another very useful feature part of their site is their web page called "A Curriculum of United States Labor History for Teachers" suggesting many possible program ideas.

Czarnecki's Labor Education Links,
<http://users.erols.com/czarlab>
This is a meta site, a web page designed to link to all the best web sites on a particular topic (in this case, labor education); the core part of the site is arranged by the major subjects taught in the field of labor education. There are also sections provided to links of labor resources and to links of education resources.

Appendix B: Topic Suggestions

These suggestions were collected from just one delegates' meeting of the local central labor body:

Landrum-Griffin Act, (Labor Management Reporting and Disclosure Act), 1959--origins, consequences

Cesar Chavez' organizing activities

National Labor Relations Act (NLRA), 1935

Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA), 1970

Davis-Bacon Act ("prevailing wage law")--then and now

Civil Rights Act and its effects at work today

"Right to work" law--how it would affect us

Social impacts of classism, racism, gender--how to counter

Women and their role in the labor movement

Contributions of American communism to the labor movement

Eight-Hour Day movement

Labor's role in establishing public schools

Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA), including Garcia decision

History of the area's central labor body

Women leaders in the labor movement

Taft-Hartley Act, 1947

Role of the Ku Klux Klan in attacking union organizing

Organizing migrant farm workers in Wis.

History of trade legislation and its supporters

History of particular unions in the area

Appendix C: Calendar of “Labor History – With a Bite” presentations

February 2001 – “How the 8-hour Day was Won (and Lost)”

March 2001 – “1934! The Turning Point for the American Labor Movement”

April 2001 – “Home Town, Union Town, the often surprising history of the labor movement right here in Madison”

September 2001 – “Organized Labor and Community Services”

October 2001 – “Labor on the Move: The Early CIO”

November 2001 – “The Taming of the CIO”

February 2002 – “An Incomplete History of Labor Cartoons”

March 2002 – “Rebel Girls: Women, Work and the U.S. Labor Movement”

April 2002 – “One Big Union: the Story of the International Workers of the World”

Appendix D: Samples follow

Program Flyer for “How the 8-hour Day Was Won...And Lost”

Article about the series from *Union Labor News* (Madison, Wisconsin) – “SCFL Offers ‘Labor History with a Bite’” (January 2001)



Union Labor News, January 2001

SCFL Offers “Labor History With a Bite”

The South Central Federation of Labor (SCFL) is kicking off a class series, Labor History – With a Bite, in February, with stories your boss doesn’t want you to know.

People who are in charge want you to believe that they gave you that living wage, the 8-hour day, health insurance and a measure of job security. They don’t want you to know how those things were won, in great battles with contending armies facing off at dawn. They don’t want you to know about the martyrs, the traitors, and the power of 100,000 workers when they simply lay down their tools.

And they don’t want you to know the most subversive part, that the heroes of our movement were common working people just like you and me, maybe your grandmother or grandfather, people who stepped out individually and collectively to do what was necessary when it had to be done.

They don’t want you to know that because it means it can happen again; that, just like before, we have “a power greater than their hoarded gold;” that we can organize and make our own future, better than the past.

You won’t learn these stories in school or by watching TV. The labor movement must teach its own history to its next generation of leaders.

So far, three sessions are planned.

On February 19 the title is How the 8-hour Day was Won (and Lost), the story of a great 100-year long struggle that began right here in Wisconsin and continues to this day in Madison.

Then, on March 19 the topic is 1934!, probably the single most dramatic and important year for the American labor movement, the turning point, when working people started fighting back, and winning more often than they lost.

Finally, on April 16, the subject is Home Town, Union Town, the often surprising history of the labor movement right here in Madison.

SCFL will provide dinner for class participants from 4:30 to 5:15, and class sessions will run from 5:15 to 6:45.

All classes will be at the Labor Temple, 1602 S. Park Street in Madison, just before the SCFL’s regular monthly delegates meet-

ing. People attending the class can stay around and attend the SCFL meeting as guests, and perhaps see some labor history in the making.

Series organizers are encouraging locals to recruit young union activists – the next generation of leaders – to attend the class series.

Register now for Labor History – With a Bite

Since we need to order food and prepare hand-outs, we are asking people who plan to attend the first Labor History – With a Bite class to register by February 16. Just call the SCFL office at (608) 256-5111 and leave a message with the names of people who plan to attend and a phone number where you can be reached.

Clip and Save

Labor History – With a Bite

Call 256-5111 one week in advance for reservations.

February 19 – “How the 8-hour Day was Won (and Lost)”

March 19 – “1934!” probably the single most dramatic and important year for the American labor movement, the turning point ...

April 16 – “Home Town, Union Town,” the often surprising history of the labor movement right here in Madison.

Labor History – With a Bite

~ February 19 ~

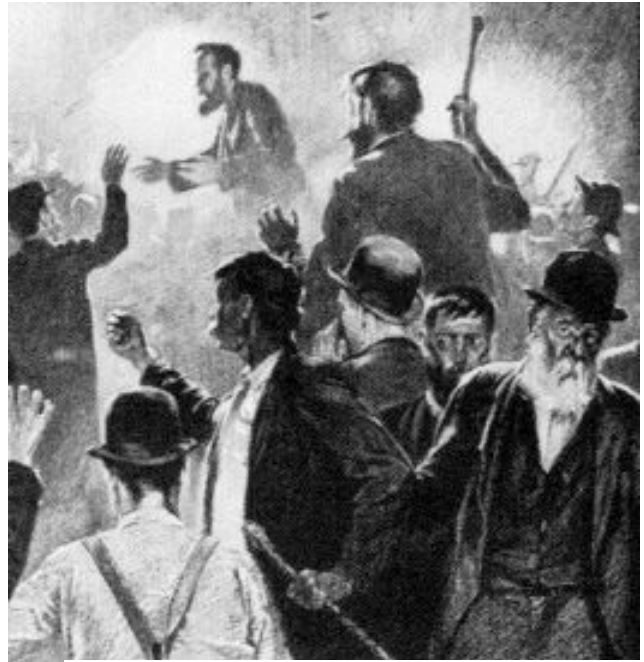
How the 8-Hour Day Was Won (and Lost)

the story of a great 100-year long struggle that began right here in Wisconsin and continues to this day in Madison.

Presenter: Ken Germanson,

President of the Wisconsin Labor History Society

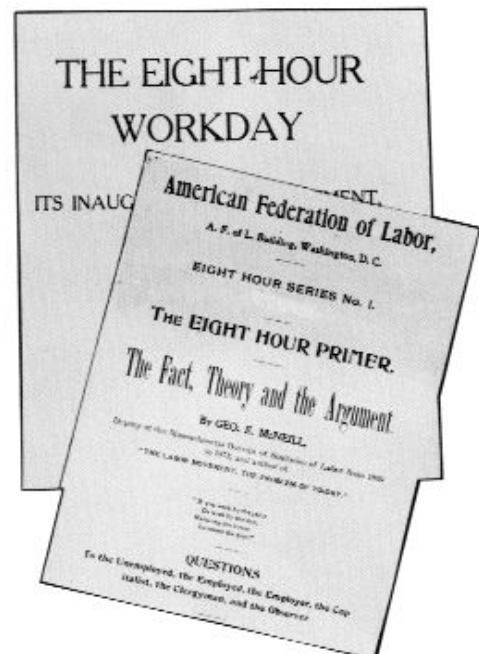
with John Vellardita, Pres. of PACE Local 1202 on current trends in working hours.



Labor History – With a Bite is a series of classes geared toward younger union members sponsored by the South Central Federation of Labor.

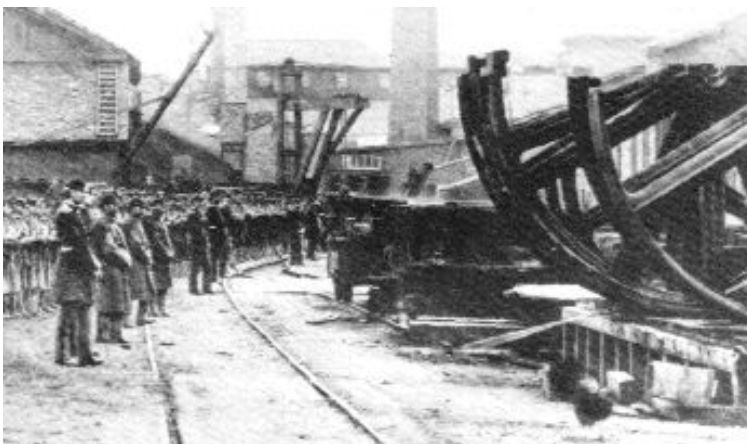
SCFL will provide dinner for class participants from 4:30 to 5:15, and class sessions will run from 5:15 to 6:45.

Location: Madison Labor Temple, 1602 S. Park Street



Series organizers are encouraging locals to recruit young union activists – the next generation of leaders – to attend.

Please register one week in advance by calling 256-5111 with the names of people who plan on attending.



National Guard troops marshalled at the Allis Reliance Works in Milwaukee during the 8-hour-day movement strikes in May, 1886.