Labor’s Untold Story

According to a poll by the independent Hart Research, 54 percent of adults said they know just a little or don’t know much about unions. They said their chief sources of knowledge were personal experience (37 percent), people in unions (26 percent) and the media (25 percent). Significantly, learning about unions in school was not even mentioned.

The implications of these numbers are clear. To a very large degree, Americans are uninformed or misinformed about the labor movement and the role that workers have played, and do play, in our nation’s economic, political and cultural life.

Academic standards and curriculum resources such as textbooks have historically ignored or been deficient in their treatment of workers and the labor movement. Significantly, there are a number of teachers who want to cover this history in their classrooms but there has been no one place for them to easily find materials.

Until now! The mission of the American Labor Studies Center is to inform teachers about the rich and varied curriculum resources available to integrate into lessons, primarily through its Web site (www.labor-studies.org) but also through workshops, seminars, presentations, exhibits and personal contact.

Help support this mission by promoting and supporting the ALSC today.

Kate Mullany
National Historic Site

A young Irish immigrant, Kate Mullany founded and led America’s first bona fide all-women’s union — the Troy Laundry Collar Union — and was the first woman to serve as an officer of a national union.

In 1864, she led her union on strike and won a 25 percent pay increase which helped her mother, Bridget, build a six-apartment building at 350 Eighth St. in Troy, N.Y., which they occupied in 1869.

Hillary Rodham Clinton dedicates Mullany House as a National Historic Landmark.

The Mullany House was declared a National Historic Landmark and dedicated by then First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton in 1998. It was designated a National Historic Site by Congress in May 2005.

Mullany was inducted into the National Women’s Hall of Fame in Seneca Falls in 2000. The house was included on New York state’s Women’s Heritage Trail in 2007.

A centerpiece of the RiverSpark Heritage Area, the Mullany House is home to the American Labor Studies Center and has an exhibit area on the first floor. The third-floor Mullany apartment is being restored and furnished to its 1869 configuration. Kate Mullany Park, honoring trade union women pioneers, is being developed on the adjacent property.

For additional information, visit the Mullany Web site at: www.katemullany.nbs.org.

The history of the American labor movement needs to be taught in every school in this land... America is a living testimonial to what free men and women organized into free democratic trade unions can do to make a better life... we ought to be proud of it.

Vice President
Hubert H. Humphrey

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Cultural Resources

The ALSC Web site is particularly rich in offering visitors access to labor music, film and art. A wide array of labor songs, in both lyrics and audio, can be downloaded; classic labor films such as If You Don’t Come in on Sunday, Don’t Come in on Monday are reviewed with links to purchase; NYU’s Labor Arts and the Labor Culture section of the Berkeley Labor Guides from UC Berkeley are highlighted as are resources available from the Labor Heritage Foundation. There are special sections on Women’s Labor History, Black Labor History and Religion and Labor.

Troy, N.Y., students simulate bargaining a contract.

Simulations

By going to the ALSC Web site, teachers can access classroom simulations on organizing a union and on collective bargaining developed by the Collective Bargaining Education Project of the Los Angeles Unified School District and the United Teachers of Los Angeles (UTLA).

The American Labor Merit Badge was established by the Boy Scouts in 1987 and the requirements for the badge are provided on the Web site.

Scouts who obtain the badge learn a great deal about the history and nature of the labor movement. A number of unions provide opportunities for scouts to earn the badge by sponsoring sessions with a Labor Merit Badge Counselor.

ALSC Mission

The American Labor Studies Center provides teachers with standards-based resources and strategies for integrating labor history and the economic, cultural, social and political contributions of the American labor movement into the K-12 curriculum.

Materials from the ALSC Web site (www.labor-studies.org) include, a bibliography, biographies, child labor, chronologies, documents, a filmography, a glossary, labor songs, labor quotes, photos, policy issues, primary sources, simulations on organizing and collective bargaining and more.

Complete course descriptions and lessons are available. Elementary, social studies, English, Career and Technical Education, music and art teachers will discover a wide variety of relevant curriculum materials.

In addition to teachers, these resources are also useful to apprenticeship and union education directors.

Original Materials

Among the resources for teachers is a joint project of the ALSC and the National Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown entitled Hardball and Handsbakes. This standards-based unit explores the history of the relationship between owners and players culminating in the creation of the Major League Baseball Players Association and the role collective bargaining plays in America’s National Pastime.

Union Histories

Also available are the histories of scores of national unions, an extensive chronology of labor history and a Policy section featuring a number of issues of contemporary significance to the labor movement.

The Board of Regents calls upon all members of the education community to recognize and include the contributions of the American labor movement as an integral part of the school curriculum.

— New York State Board of Regents

The ALSC annually sponsors a $1000 Gold Prize in the National History Day contest for an entry in the category American Labor History. The national prize goes to the student who enters the best documentary, exhibit, paper or performance. Each year, the contest has a different theme. The prize is awarded in June.

The American Labor Studies Center is a wonderful source for elementary and secondary teachers who are seeking high quality curriculum materials and resources for integrating labor history, and an understanding of the role the labor movement, into their classrooms. It deserves the strong support of all those who support the labor movement and the Center’s mission.

Randi Weingarten, President American Federation of Teachers

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