

inequalities, how this in turn reinforced and transformed gender ideologies, and how diverse kinds of oppositional activity were informed by gender.

United Mine Workers of America: Centennial Conference

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The coal fields have been the setting for some of the most legendary traditions of class conflict in American labor history. Dishonest and irregular pay, child and convict labor, mine disasters and black lung, repression of unions and the suffocating paternalism of the company towns—these have been among the more potent symbols of labor exploitation in industrial America. Relatedly, the mining regions have yielded an unmatched legacy of labor militancy and solidarity, embodied most enduringly in the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA). The recent, hard-fought Pittston strike illustrates how alive and immediate this history remains in the coal fields today. On October 18–20, 1990, approximately one hundred people, primarily labor historians and UMWA officials, gathered at Penn State University to mark the union's centenary and to evaluate its history and current prospects.

UMWA President Richard Trumka set the tone with his keynote address, "A World to Win: A New Unionism for the '90s." In order to remain vital, he argued, the labor movement needs to redefine the meaning of unionism, to expand beyond the workplace to confront the community needs—social, financial, legal, etc.—of its members as well. But in doing so, he added, the unions must not shed their traditional commitments to workplace issues and social justice and become mere purveyors of credit cards and travel services. It is both a moral and a strategic imperative that the unions reconcile their roles at the workplace and in the community, for working people pursue empowerment in both realms. Trumka turned next to the "new proletariat of service workers" in offices, hospitals, and the like. He called on the labor movement to reject the assumption that these workers cannot be organized, likening such thinking to that of the American Federation of Labor leaders regarding industrial workers during the 1930s. Finally, Trumka noted the response of white working people in Louisiana to the racist populism of U.S. Senate candidate David Duke. Liberals, he observed, tend to denounce the racism and move on; the challenge of the labor movement is to address the economic distress and political disaffection that make struggling white workers susceptible to Duke's demagoguery. "Labor is the only entity in America capable of challenging American racism at its roots," Trumka concluded.

Papers delivered over the next two days covered many aspects of the UMWA's history. The early years received ample attention. Stephen Brier examined the relationships among ethnicity, mobility, and class militancy in the coal fields of southern Colorado during the first years of the twentieth century. Joe William Trotter, Jr., explored how black miners in southern West Virginia turned to the union during the World War I era and the 1920s as a way of advancing their racial as well as class interests. John Laslett presented his findings on the influences of British miners on the early character of the UMWA, and on the respective approaches that developed within miners' organizations in Great Britain and the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. David Frank, Joseph Gowaskie, and Perry Blatz recounted turn-of-the-century efforts to establish lasting miners' organization in Nova Scotia (Frank) and the anthracite district of Pennsylvania (Gowaskie, Blatz). Their papers raised such issues as the distinctive agendas of the local miners and the national UMWA leadership, the relationship between the union and the state, and the comparative structures of the anthracite and bituminous coal industries as settings for labor organization.

Other papers addressed more recent history. David Brody linked the early and the recent with an overview of relations between the UMWA and the operators as they evolved from the origins of the union into the postwar era. Robert Zieger traced John L. Lewis's hardening opposition to federal intervention in the coal industry amid the rise of the "national-security state" and Lewis's declining influence over the direction of the labor movement during the 1940s and 1950s. Alan Derickson, Barbara Smith, and James Weeks detailed the UMWA's persistent efforts over the past century to achieve government recognition of black lung disease (Derickson) and miners' struggles during the 1960s and 1970s for a humane public health policy (Smith, Weeks). Smith and Weeks each stressed that protective regulation by the federal government was an unreliable resource if not coupled with union power. Richard Mulcahy discussed the turbulent history of the UMWA's postwar Welfare and Retirement Fund.

The conference closed with a session on the "Historical Development and Future of the UMW." James Green, a historian and labor educator who began working with the union during the recent Pittston strike, suggested that the UMWA's tradition of solidarity and community mobilization has not been a timeless trait, but rather an active project, recharging itself creatively as new struggles arise. As an illustration, he discussed how the union drew upon the example of the civil rights movement during the Pittston strike. (He mentioned that Taylor Branch's *Parting the Waters*, a biography of Martin Luther King, was required reading for strike organizers.) Anthony Mazzocchi of the Oil, Chemical, and Atomic Workers International Union argued that energy unions such as his and the UMWA needed to inject themselves more forcefully into current debates over environmental policy. He also emphasized the need for a labor party and the importance of union democracy and internationalism. Finally, there was an improbable talk by H. Charles Spring, acting deputy undersecretary for labor-

management affairs at the U.S. Department of Labor, whose call for greater cooperation and mutual understanding between the miners and the operators resonated about as deeply here as the talks by Green and Mazzocchi might have done at a meeting of Department of Labor bureaucrats.

Discussions following the papers were lively, often charged, indicating the high relevance of historical issues to the current situation of coalfield unionism. A remarkable feature of these discussions was the regular participation of union people, particularly President Trumka, who along with members of the UMWA executive committee remained for the duration of the conference. At times Trumka took the floor to “set the record straight,” but more often to ask incisive questions. The dialogue between labor historians and the labor movement was gratifying, although one could not help but feel wistful that the experience was such an unusual one.

In addition to the conference sessions, participants were shown *Out of Darkness: The Mine Workers' Story*, a new documentary by Barbara Koppel (who directed *Harlan County U.S.A.*). The film nicely intersperses miners' struggles during the early twentieth century with the Pittston strike of 1989–90. Those in attendance were also treated to a rousing performance of coal miners' songs by Tom Juravich and by Hazel Dickens and her band.

Social Science History Association

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The Fifteenth Annual Meeting of the Social Science History Association was held in Minneapolis in October 1990. As usual, it provided a particularly rich opportunity for the discussion of labor history. Of the ninety-nine sessions, eighteen were specifically sponsored by the Labor History Network; many sessions sponsored by other networks also touched on labor history topics. With such a variety of activities, this observer chose to sample rather than attempt complete coverage. Any authoritative summary of the proceeding is thus risky. My report is based on a crude content analysis of session and paper titles, attendance at some sessions, and limited unscientific polling of people who attended other sessions. These “data” lead me to conclude that scholars have moved away from the topics of “traditional labor history” — the history of male blue-collar workers and their unions — and are focusing on a much broader definition of “labor” issues, including: white-collar workers, convict labor, feminist critiques of working-class history, “recentering” African-American history and the Southern political economy, the family wage — from the perspective of female headed households, the “representation” of labor