

Illinois Labor History Society
430 South Michigan Ave.
Room AUD 1361
Chicago, IL 60605

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ILLINOIS LABOR HISTORY SOCIETY

REPORTER

April 2015



Read more
about the May
Day Commemoration
and the Annual
Membership Meeting inside!

All Members Invited to Attend
Illinois Labor History Society
Annual Meeting
May 1 2015
5:00 PM: Light Buffet &
Beverages
6:00 PM: Meeting convenes
Chicago Federation of Musicians
656 W. Randolph St., Chicago,
Haymarket Square

ILHS Trustees will be nominated and
elected at this meeting
ilhs@prodigy.net 312-341-2247
illinoislaborhistory.org

Dear ILHS Members,

It is time for the Illinois Labor History Annual Membership Meeting. It is our opportunity to share with our loyal members what we have accomplished during the past year, and our plans for the weeks and months to come. It is also an important time for us to say “Thank You.” We could not continue to provide labor history programs and education, protect labor history landmarks, and tell the stories of working people without your support.

This year we will hold our annual meeting on May Day. It will be a full day of commemoration, music, and solidarity. This year’s May Day will be made even more special--as we join together to celebrate and remember the life of a leader of the labor movement, Joe Hill, a Swedish immigrant and organizer for the International Workers of the World. 2015 marks the 100th anniversary of when Joe Hill was framed for murder and executed. Special guests from the Swedish and German labor movements will join us in Chicago to remember Joe Hill, commemorate May Day, and stand up for international labor solidarity. We hope you can join us for what will surely be a memorable May Day.

This February marked an important day in Illinois Labor history, as President Obama designated Pullman an National Monument. ILHS has been a long advocate for this project, and I was asked to write my thoughts on its realization:

President Obama’s historic action in authorizing National Park status for the Pullman District comes at a time when honoring the struggles of all working people to keep a vibrant middle class is needed more than ever. The history of the Pullman Porters, the workers who built the Pullman Palace cars and the courageous actions taken to improve their working conditions for themselves, their families and their community will now be honored as a national heritage.

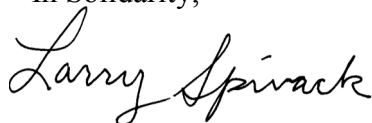
National Park Status for the Pullman District will create vitality in an area that so desperately needs it. Additionally, and just as important, is the role National Parks play in telling the story of America. The Chicago area is the richest in the nation with respect to the diversity of race, immigration, and workers’ struggles to win decent working conditions, and the relationship to the industries in which they worked. In telling this story we can teach current and future generations how we became such a great city and such a great nation. With National Park status the Pullman community will be history’s greatest teacher in an urban environment.

The Illinois Labor History Society has been telling the worker's story since 1969. We are proud to be partners in the coalition that helped bring Pullman to the fore of America's consciousness.

In cooperation with the City of Chicago, this summer ILHS will be dedicating a park bench at the Union Stockyard gate in honor of Les Orear for his tireless commitment to the preservation of the history of workers and this historic national landmark. Keep an eye out for more information, we will be inviting you to this dedication.

It has been an exciting year already for the ILHS and we look forward of continuing the important work of telling labor’s stories, together.

In Solidarity,



ILHS President



President Obama signs the Pullman declaration, photo courtesy of ILHS Vice President Mike Matejka

May Day Schedule

Noon - 1: 30 pm

May Day Celebration

Haymarket Memorial, Corner of DesPlaines & Randolph

May Day is known by workers around the world as International Labor Day, to commemorate the martyrs of Haymarket. On this May Day we come together to show our solidarity in celebration and protest. Let's stop fast track, let's stop Right to Work and let the voices of workers be heard!

Join the Chicago Federation of Labor, Chicago Jobs with Justice, and the Illinois Labor History Society in welcoming delegates from the Swedish and German labor movements as we join together in international solidarity.



5 - 7 pm

Annual Membership Meeting

Chicago Federation of Musicians

656 Randolph Street, Haymarket Square



At 5 pm we welcome you to a light buffet and beverages, and then our annual membership meeting will convene at 6 pm. The ILHS Annual Meeting will include an update on our past activities and plans for future projects and events. Nominations and election of ILHS trustees will be conducted at this meeting. We will be joined by our labor and musical guests from Sweden, who will be part of the program. We would like to thank the Chicago Federation of Musicians for donating the space for our meeting.

9 pm

Joe Hill Roadshow

Hideout, 1354 West Wabansia Avenue, Chicago

Cover Charge: \$10

Doors open at 9 pm and show starts at 9:30. Musical performers include Bucky Halker, Anne Feeney, JP Wright, Lil Rev, and special guest Jan Hammarlund from Sweden. Paul Durica will emcee and do readings, while Alexis Buss will briefly discuss her new Joe Hill memorial songbook. The Joe Hill Roadshow will feature songs and writings by Joe Hill (1879-1915), highlighting his contribution to American protest songwriting and his continued relevance in the world of modern labor.

May Day: International Workers' Day

By Tom Suhrbur, Illinois Labor History Society

Today, the events leading up to the Chicago Haymarket Affair of May 1886 are commemorated internationally as Labor Day. Every May Day, millions of workers march in cities around the world but, in the United States, until recently it received very little attention. Visitors from around the world passing through Chicago regularly stop by the Illinois Labor History Society (ILHS) office to inquire about Haymarket sites. I always wondered why May Day is celebrated around the world but widely ignored in the U.S.

A major reason Haymarket Affair is so important internationally is that, at the time, the U.S. had one of the largest and most powerful union movements in the world. The Knight of Labor had more than 700,000 members. The newly organized American Federation of Labor was growing rapidly and Chicago was a hotbed of radical unionism. The fight for the Eight Hour Day was an international struggle in industrial nations. When the Knights of Labor and the American Federation of Labor joined together in support of a nation-wide general strike for the Eight Hour Day, it captured world attention. On May 1st 1886, 350,000 workers across the U.S. went out; the strike reached a violent crescendo on May 4th at Haymarket Square in Chicago. Following the bloodshed at Haymarket, Chicago labor leaders were rounded up and indicted for murder. The show trial was a blatant miscarriage of justice. It resulted in the convictions of eight men, four of them were executed and a fifth died under mysterious circumstances in prison awaiting execution. In 1893, Illinois Governor Peter Altgeld pardoned the three remaining prisoners. The trial caused international outrage. In 1889, the Second International declared May Day as International Workers' Day.

The importance of the event internationally was clearly illustrated to me at a May Day celebration six years ago where I met Bill Oscar Neebe. Neebe was (he died in 2010) the grandson of one of the eight men convicted for the bloody events around the Haymarket Tragedy of 1886. In my conversation with Neebe, I was surprised to learn that he knew very little about his grandfather's Haymarket convictions until he was a teenager.

His parents did not talk about it but, when his family took a trip to Mexico City, they were greeted as working class heroes upon arrival. I was amazed! If Neebe's grandson did not know much about Haymarket, how could we expect the average American to know anything about it?

Another major reason that it is not widely observed in the U.S. is conservative efforts to demonize the event. I can remember growing up in the 1950's that May Day was dubbed Law Day in the U.S. News programs made a point of showing military parades in Moscow every May Day. The message was clear; May Day was a radical, "un-American", communist celebration. May Day parades in Germany, France, Sweden and other Western democracies received very little coverage. It was hardly mentioned in the high school history textbooks. Moreover, American labor leaders generally became increasingly more conservative than their European counterparts in the 20th Century. In Europe, unions were closely tied to socialist, communist and other left-wing parties whereas the mainstream of the U.S. labor movement was more conservative in its approach to politics. In the U.S., Labor Day is celebrated in September.

With the collapse of the Cold War, there is a growing movement in the U.S. to honor the Haymarket martyrs on May Day. The Monument first dedicated in 1893 is a National Historic Landmark. ILHS is the owner of the Monument and plot of land in Forest Home Cemetery in Forest Park, Illinois. Recently, the ILHS had the Monument restored. After 118 years, the Monument was in terrible shape. It needed repair, cleaning and preservation. Thieves had vandalized it. They removed the original bronze floral arrangement at the base of the monument and the bronze plaque naming the Haymarket Martyrs. On May Day 2011, over two thousand people attended the unveiling of the restored Monument. ILHS is committed to reviving May Day as a day to celebrate the accomplishments of the union movement in making the U.S. as a more just society.

From the ILHS Archives

In 1979, as the 75 anniversary of the birth of Joe Hill approached, the ILHS joined an effort to gain a pardon for the slain labor leader. Glen Plummer, a staff representative of the Amalgamated Meat Cutters Union from Buffalo Grove, had decided that it was time to try and win justice for Joe Hill. He began circulating a petition to be delivered to the governor of Utah, asking for a pardon. Plummer collected 2,500 signatures.

Inspired, ILHS leadership launched a nation-wide petition drive. This was the before the days of Change.org petitions and email campaigns. They had to painstakingly collect each signature in person and through the mail. To take on the massive task, the ILHS printed 10,000 copies of the petition signature page. First, the ILHS sent out a call to 13 other labor history societies throughout the country, asking for their help. The Illinois AFL-CIO joined the cause, and circulated petitions at the Illinois State Fair. Word continued to spread. The Ohio AFL-CIO reprinted the petition on the back page of their newsletter, and labor leaders from Philadelphia asked for 1,500 copies. United Steel Workers carried another 2,000 petitions to their national conference in Washington D.C. The mainstream press even began to pick up on the story. Media outlets in Chicago, along with the *Philadelphia Inquirer* and the *Detroit News* reported on the effort. That August, the *New York Times* wrote a long story about the drive, describing the “inch thick” stack of signed petitions on the desk of ILHS co-founder Les Orear. Trade union papers in Germany in Sweden carried the story as well. In all, the ILHS collected nearly 20,000 signatures.

In the end the Governor of Utah did not grant the pardon. Yet, as the 1979 ILHS President’s Report explained, the effort to exonerate Joe Hill served as a “powerful stimulus to interest in labor history.”



Joe Hill

Joe Hill was a Swedish-American labor activist, songwriter, and member of the Industrial Workers of the World (also known as the Wobblies). Hill traveled widely, organizing workers under the IWW banner, writing political songs and satirical poems, and making speeches. His songs often borrowed familiar melodies from songs of his time. He wrote one of his songs, “Rebel Girl” in honor of fellow IWW member Elizabeth Gurley Flynn. Hill was convicted and executed by firing squad for murder in Utah, but later evidence proved that Hill was framed. In tribute, Alfred Hayes and Earl Robinson wrote the “Ballad of Joe Hill.” Artists from Pete Seger, to Joan Baez, to Paul Robeson have covered the haunting song. Before his death Hill sent a telegram to “Big Bill” Haywood, another member of the IWW. In it he declared, “Don’t waste any time in mourning. Organize.” This charge from Joe Hill has become a rallying cry for the Labor Movement.



Want to help keep the legacy of Joe Hill and the spirit of labor music alive?

Donate to the ILHS Woody Guthrie Fund. **The fund was started in 2015 by a \$5,000 dollar donation from the Woody Guthrie Foundation.** All donations will be used for labor music history and programs. To contribute, make your check out to ILHS and write “Woody Guthrie Fund” on the memo line, send to:

ILHS, 430 S. Michigan Avenue, Room AUD 1361, Chicago, IL, 60605

January - March, 2015

The ILHS did not let the frigid temperatures of the Illinois winter keep us from our efforts to let the voice of the people be heard.

We provided a “Labor History on the Road” workshop, co-taught by Vice President Mike Matejka and Director Stephanie Seawell, for high school teachers, as part of the 2015 History Symposium at Illinois State University.

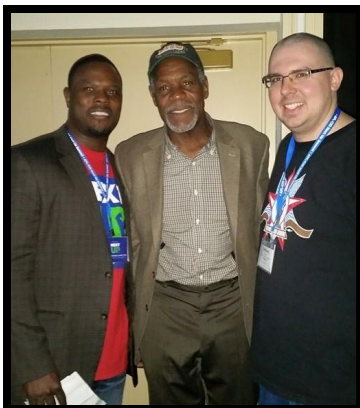
Vice President Mike Matejka, Treasurer Nick Christen, Trustees Keith Richardson and Alma Washington, and Director Stephanie Seawell attended the ceremonial Presidential Signing for Pullman to become a National Monument.

Vice President Tom Suhbur and Director Stephanie Seawell led a labor history work shop as part of the Chicago Roofers Apprentice Training.

President Larry Spivack gave a short address at the annual “wreath throwing” ceremony to honor labor advocate Clarence Darrow, hosted by the Clarence Darrow Commemorative Committee.



Crowd gathers for Clarence Darrow “Wreath Throwing” ceremony.



Trustees Keith Richardson and Anthony Scorzo with keynote speaker Danny Glover at the Next Up Summit

The ILHS had a tremendous presence at the AFL-CIO Next Up Young Workers Summit . Trustees Anthony Scorzo, Keith Richardson and Caleen Carter-Patton attended the Summit. Anthony and Keith addressed the entire crowd of more than 1,000 attendees, representing the Chicago Young Workers. Director Stephanie Seawell provided a workshop entitled “Standing on the Shoulders of Giants: Making History So We Don’t Become History.” President Larry Spivack led a bus tour of Chicago labor history sites, with assistance from volunteer Mark Rogovin. ILHS also had a book table for three days at the summit.

Secretary Debby Pope, Trustee Alma Washington and Director Stephanie Seawell attended the annual Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW) awards dinner. Congratulations to Trustee Katie Jordan for her hard work in hosting this annual event.

The ILHS was a co-sponsor of the “Salute to the Most Dangerous Woman in America” fundraiser hosted by the Working Women’s History Project, held at the Irish American Heritage Center. Secretary Debby Pope, Trustees Erik Gellman, Katie Jordan, Alma Washington, and Director Stephanie Seawell attended the event. The ILHS also donated five books about Mother Jones to the library at the Irish American Heritage Center.

President Larry Spivack and Stephanie Seawell co-presented on AFSCME history and Chicago Labor History at a well-attended membership meeting for AFSCME Local 2086.



Follow the ILHS at www.facebook.com/ILLaborHistory

illinoislaborhistory.org

ILHS Members are Invited

Thursday, April 16, 6 pm

Wabash Building, Room 418

Enter Building at 430 S. Michigan or 425 S. Wabash



Roosevelt University's St. Clair Drake Center, Department of History and Philosophy, Chicago Working Class Studies, and the Illinois Labor History Society Present:

Venise Wagner

Associate Professor of Journalism, San Francisco State University

Living in the Red: Black Steelworkers During the 1959 Strike.

Wagner will analyze how workplace and residential segregation hindered black steelworkers' ability to accrue wealth for their families despite a union that publicly and actively advocated for equality and civil rights in the larger community. *Free and open to the public*



Uri-Eichen Gallery has been organizing visual art, music performances, and discussions about Joe Hill since January of 2014 in its Joe Hill 100 Years series. Part 4 of Joe Hill 100 Years opens on April 10th from 6-10 pm. Uri-Eichen will host paintings from James Wechsler about FBI repression in his Freedom of Information series and comics, paintings and the writing of Jorge Franklin Cardenas, imprisoned and sentenced to death after the Spanish Civil War for "making fun of Franco"

The opening night, April 10th Uri-Eichen will host a panel discussion moderated by Pocket Guide to Hell's Paul Durica including Rick Perlstein, Gary Huck, and Jerry Boyle about using satire to make a political point. Often this was a tool of Joe Hill 100 Years ago. At 9 pm Mark Dvorak will play some Joe Hill tunes.

Join us as we celebrate the life of Joe Hill with art, music and discussion that keeps his spirit alive! Uri-Eichen Gallery 2101 S Halsted, Chicago. Questions? email Kathy at gabbyfish@hotmail.com or call 312-852-7717.

ILHS would like to thank . . .

Joanna Misnik for her past work keeping the ILHS office going

IBEW 134 and AFSCME 2858 for sponsoring the labor history tour Next Up Summit

Champaign County Labor Council for donating to K-12 labor education outreach



Illinois Labor History Society

Membership Form

Renew your membership in the Illinois Labor History Society. Membership dues are \$30 per year for individuals and \$200 for unions (\$100 for those with less than 200 members). To join as an individual or to affiliate your local union, complete this form and send it with a check to our office, or renew online at www.illinoislaborhistory.org.

For the first time, **you can also become a recurring member**. **To become a recurring member you MUST sign and return this form.** Once you become a recurring member, we will automatically renew your membership each year by charging the credit card provided. This means we will not have to ask you to update your membership.

To support ILHS, I want to:

_____ Become a member (\$30 annually)

_____ Affiliate my union (\$200 annually, or \$100 for locals under 200 members)

_____ Become a recurring member. (\$30, billed annually. Cancel any time)

Your Name _____ Name of Union Local _____

Address: _____ City _____ State ____ Zip _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Payment (please check one):

- Check is enclosed
- Credit Card (we will call you for credit card information)

Yes! I want to become a recurring member of ILHS

Signature: _____

Please contact me with more information about

- Scheduling a Labor History program for my union/organization
- Scheduling a Labor History Tour
- Volunteering with ILHS
- Becoming a "Top Shelf" ILHS Sponsor

Return this Form To:

430 South Michigan Ave. Room AUD 1361, Chicago, IL 60605
or renew your membership at illinoislaborhistory.org