

### 1980 SOUTHERN LABOR HISTORY CONFERENCE

The Southern Labor Studies Association held its third Conference April 24-26, 1980 in Atlanta. Sessions scheduled covered a broad range and included the following: LABOR IN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE; PHILIP TAFT'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE AMERICAN LABOR MOVEMENT; STRUGGLES AGAINST RIGHT TO WORK: AN EXAMINATION OF THE LOUISIANA AND MISSOURI CASES; WORKERS IN THE RURAL SOUTH; WORKING WOMEN IN THE SOUTH: A WORKSHOP; WORKERS IN THE URBAN SOUTH; and THE CHANGING IMAGE OF LABOR IN THE SOUTH. Participants in the Conference reflected the Association's ever-widening circle of supporters from the academic and trade union communities who seek to stimulate a better understanding of labor in the South.

The SLSA was formed in 1978 as the outgrowth of interest by scholars who organized the Association of Southern Labor Historians nearly fifteen years ago. Membership and participation in Association activities are welcomed. Address all inquiries to: Dr. Les Hough, Secretary-Treasurer SLSA; c/o Southern Labor Archives; Georgia State University, Urban Life 1028; Atlanta, GA 30303.

**Dale Newman**

*University of Pittsburgh*

### BROCKPORT CONFERENCE ON WORKING CLASS HISTORY

The third Annual Conference on Working Class History was held March 14-15 in the Rustic Conference Center on the Fancher Campus of the State University of New York at Brockport. As in the past it was co-sponsored by the Network on Workers and Industrialization and the Brockport Department of History. Some fifty to sixty persons attended. The conference opened Friday afternoon with an informative discussion of sources for research and teaching in the social history of women's work, ably led by Ellen DuBois and Maurine Greenwald.

Regular sessions at the Conference are organized around sets of common readings rather than around presentations of formal papers. Each panel member offers remarks of some fifteen to twenty minutes, followed by audience participation. The aim is to create a community of participants rather than the normal dichotomy of "Speakers and Listeners," and in each session at the Conference this aim was highly successful. The first panel, Friday evening, addressed David Montgomery's *Workers' Control in America*. The discussants (Melvyn Dubofsky, Walter Licht, Peter Friedlander, and Robert Asher) offered general praise of the book, with the most common reservation a desire for Montgomery to have considered more thoroughly the broader context of industrial and of working class life. Still, Montgomery offers in the final part of the book one of the best analyses of

the contemporary struggle, and insists not only upon recognition of the continuation of that struggle but also upon recognition of its source in the working class itself. A long discussion ensued, hinging upon the question of consciousness, thus laying down what would become the essential focus of discussion throughout the weekend. The session finally gave way to a more informal exchange aided by potables and the traditional group singing of radical and labor songs from the "Little Red Songbook" led once again by Charles Leinenweber.

Reflection upon enjoyment of these festivities delayed the start of the next morning's business, but soon enough session two gathered itself together to discuss James Cronin's *Industrial Conflict in Modern Britain*. The panel (James Epstein, Robert Wechsler, and Joseph White) again responded positively to the book, and concentrated in large part, as did the lively discussion following (aided by the author's presence and participation), upon Cronin's interpretation of much of traditional labor activity—from strikes to the Labour Party—as consciously aggressive and often radical statements rather than as the defensive actions of a "coopted" class.

The final panel, concluding the Conference on Saturday afternoon, was organized to discuss Charles van Onselen's account of forced labor, *Chibaro: African Mine Labour in Southern Rhodesia, 1900-1933*. Panel members (John Higginson, Martin Murray, and Earl Smith) presented penetrating commentary on labor in the third world, and offered many of those present their first sustained insights into the contours of third world working-class history. As with the other panels, the audience's discussion was animated, and began to center upon van Onselen's treatment of workers' class actions undertaken in the absence of a formalized class consciousness.

This could well be cited as the theme which developed from the conference. On the one hand each author insisted in his work upon the vital and vibrant nature of working class resistance to the capitalist initiative in the contemporary struggle; on the other, questions of class and class consciousness both as analytical and as operational concepts arose in each session and it became clear, and remains clear, that they are concepts which capture the imaginations of social historians (and perhaps captivate them), with which we still are struggling, and upon which we need to develop some consensus, or at least to refine a common vocabulary.

With this task before them, reinvigorated intellectually and by the fellowship of the weekend, and physically drained, participants headed back to their own campuses with promises to meet once again next year at Fancher, for which planning is now underway.

**Charles Stephenson**  
SUNY—Brockport