

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

Nothing to Lose But Their Chains

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Mass Communication

by

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## ABSTRACT

### NOTHING TO LOSE BUT THEIR CHAINS

by

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Master of Arts in Mass Communication

Mainstream press coverage of labor unions is grossly distorted. It emphasizes conflict, obscures context, privileges the management perspective, addresses the audience as consumers rather than as citizens, and even includes outright falsehoods. This presents grave challenges to movements for workplace justice in the US. This study examines media performance on labor issues through the lens of political economy of the mass media. In seeking to understand the obscured linkage between labor unions and social justice, research also explores the relationship between unionization and income inequality. This exploration centers on a comparison of conditions in the US, a highly unequal nation, and those in Sweden, which is among the world's most equal countries.

Unionization reduces income inequality, which has a host of benefits for most citizens' quality of life. As literature on Sweden demonstrates – and interviews with Swedish labor figures confirm – unionization also relates positively to participation in democracy. While historical and present conditions in the two nations differ markedly, there may be Swedish examples worth emulating here; at present, US labor figures leave some dominant ideological frames unchallenged, thereby ceding the field to competing corporate interests.

## Chapter One – Introduction

### **The Shape of Things to Come**

This thesis is organized in the following manner: The balance of the first chapter is an essay providing the author's background experience which gave rise to the present inquiry. The second chapter is a review of literature on the subject areas encompassed in the project – history of the American labor movement, media representations of unions, the rise and contributions of Swedish labor to their nation's welfare state, and challenges shared by the two nations which threaten their worker-oriented institutions. The third chapter sets forth the methodology for the original research portion of the project; it describes the design, planning, and significance of the work. The fourth chapter features transcription of the documentary film, and the fifth chapter is a reflection on discoveries made throughout the process.

### **Background Discussion**

Since 2009, I have been walking picket lines all over Los Angeles as part of a labor-related web series I produce in between my studies and work as a substitute teacher and children's performer. I've met some remarkable people – hotelworkers protesting their absurdly high rate of workplace injuries, while all they ask to reduce their suffering on the job are long-handled brushes and fitted sheets; longtime restaurant workers whose bosses shut down the banquet hall for "renovations" but are now seeking to reopen as a non-union shop; SkyChefs workers, all of them immigrants – many probably illegal – who made deep concessions to the company to save it from bankruptcy in 2006, and who now want their pay-rates restored, since SkyChefs has returned to profitability. Again and again, I heard workers

call for the same things: Access to healthcare for their families. Dignity in their work. Respect from their employers. These seem like things everyone could believe in – universal values.

Yet at every strike, every march, every picket I attended, beneath the chants and the songs and the speeches, the situation was invariably grim. The bosses weren't even coming to the table, and the union didn't have the leverage to force them.

*How had it come to this?* Hadn't there once been something called Big Labor, that struck fear into the bosses, that secured decent middle-class lives for workers and their families, that steadied the ladder for many a climb toward the American Dream? Whatever happened to those mighty unions of yore? It was time for me to learn about the labor movement. Simply *belonging* to a union wasn't enough (I'm a member of United Teachers Los Angeles, and the Screen Actors Guild). Just *marching* with one wasn't enough. I needed to make a study of them, to follow the questions as far as they led, to do what I came to Hollywood to do: *I needed to make a movie.*

The immigrant restaurant workers, huddled in the December rain, facing an unseen boss who seemed to be ignoring them, gave me my first inkling that unions might be about more than just wages and benefits. Larger social forces appeared to be at work: solidarity, demands for justice, fighting spirit – dare I say it, the things of which *revolutions* have been made. Or was this just magical thinking; instead, was I witnessing nothing more than frustrated menial laborers venting impotent rage against a *piñata* shaped like their company truck? Would the chocolate coins wrapped in gold foil that spilled from the broken *papier-mâché* be the only coins these workers ever shook loose from anyone? I wondered, despite the weakened state of labor that I witnessed – or perhaps because of it, since this

enfeeblement served *someone's* interest – if labor unions were strong enough, might they give rise to a significant shift in the social order?

Essential to any alteration of the present social and economic arrangements would be changes in the prevailing ideology, as people can only accomplish those goals which they can imagine. Dominant frameworks present in the media and wider culture set boundaries for what is discussed, and therefore limit the possibilities which come into public consciousness.

These issues coalesced in the research question behind this study:

**How – if it all – does the US labor movement challenge dominant ideological frameworks?**

## Chapter Two – Literature Review

What follows is a review of literature on the following subjects: the history of American labor; background on the labor press; mainstream US media representations of unions; the relationship of unions to income inequality, and social effects of inequality. As a basis for comparison, there is a historical sketch of the Swedish labor movement and its contribution to that nation's famed welfare state; US corporate media portrayals of European social spending; the impact of recent immigration on Sweden's welfare state; finally, the historic legacy of racism on the interlocking development of US social policy and the American labor movement.

### **History of the US Labor Movement**

This overview of the vibrant history of labor in the United States touches upon each stage in labor's development – from contentious beginnings, through a long, embattled rise, to its brief period as a major institutional force, then its rapid decline.

The story begins by describing workers' position in the colonial period, then moves forward through the Revolutionary War and early years of the Republic, continuing through the Industrial Revolution as unions formed in the new factories, to the Civil War, Reconstruction, and the Great Railroad Strike of 1877. After this, the narrative takes in the Gilded Age and the Haymarket Square bombing, followed by a look at the Progressive Era. Labor's place in the uneven prosperity of the 1920s is examined next, along with workers' dramatically expanded rights during the Great Depression of the 1930s, culminating in the zenith of labor's power during the Second World War and subsequent Cold War period. Labor's position during the Vietnam War era follows, then the tale turns to the troubled

Reagan years and their aftermath, finishing with a look at labor's diminished position and grim prospects in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### *Labor and Colonial America*

Murolo & Chitty explore the dynamic between labor and capital in the pre-Revolutionary period in their 2001 book, *From the Folks Who Brought You the Weekend*. They describe European arrivals to the New World, who had crossed the Atlantic to enrich themselves with their newly acquired land. In order to be effective, these colonizers needed a labor force they could control. There were several mechanisms for this, including slavery, indentured servitude, and prison labor. There was also a minority of ostensibly free wage workers. All these workers were united by "subordination... the central fact of life" (Murolo & Chitty, 2001, p. 3).

Howard Zinn, in his *People's History of the United States* (1997), asserts that these early laborers, stretching back before the time of the first permanent colonies, showed resistance to the hardships of their working conditions. Murolo & Chitty (2001) describe numerous slave rebellions and uprisings of indentured servants explicitly as labor conflict, such as Bacon's Rebellion in 1676, which saw black and white indentured servants fighting side by side, prompting elites to turn more toward slavery.

Free labor, for its part, held strikes only rarely – according to Murolo & Chitty (2001), the only organized strikes of the colonial era were a fisherman's strike in Maine in 1636, and one mounted by tailors in New York City in 1768. They claim sailors were the most zealous among the wage earning classes, adding that thousands of them became pirates with the explicit aim of robbing the rich. Even the term *strike* originated among sailors: "they

would 'strike' – that is, lower – a ship's sails when they were no longer willing to work" (Murolo & Chitty, 2001, p. 22). The overwhelming majority – over ninety percent – of colonial residents were impoverished, owned no property, and could not vote or hold office. Because of these conditions, the rumblings of an American labor movement began well before even the *concept* of America had coalesced.

### *The Revolutionary Period*

According to Murolo & Chitty (2001), the American Revolution "followed more than a decade of anti-British protests by common people," particularly among the working classes (p. 25). The early protests of this period, against the Stamp Act of 1765 and Revenue Act of 1767, were often focused against the wealthy as much as the British. The Boston Massacre of 1770 grew out of workingmen's skirmishes with British soldiers, who were competing with the locals for scarce waterfront jobs.

It was only after the Boston Tea Party of 1773 – a "carefully planned direct-action protest" to break British laws – that wealthy Virginia planters joined with poor whites against the British (Murolo & Chitty, 2001, p. 28). Howard Zinn (1997) describes how tensions between the poor and the wealthy were often exploited by these revolutionary elites to agitate the lower classes against England, in exchange for which the poor were granted some small benefits, while the lion's share of the freedoms were reserved solely for the wealthy.

Even during the Revolution, the laboring classes organized to address their grievances (Murolo & Chitty, 2001). All states north of Maryland were forced by protests to install price controls on food items. Crowds of women ransacked stores when they suspected merchants of price gouging or hoarding goods. As the cost of living increased, sailors and tradesmen

went on strike, demanding higher pay. At the same time, slaves escaped in record numbers and flocked to the Continental Army. They often served in fully integrated units. Degraded conditions on the front led to outbreaks of unrest among these soldiers. Zinn (1997) describes how Congress voted to extend a portion of officers' pay for life, if they battled to the end of the war, while no such provision was made for the common soldiers. Decisions like this led to several mutinies.

Victory in the Revolution, formally ended in 1783 with the Treaty of Paris, brought mixed results to the coalition of poor and minority soldiers (Murolo & Chitty, 2001). Native Americans who'd fought alongside the Americans found their lands stolen by new settlers, whose thefts were then legalized by Congress. While slavery disappeared gradually in the North, partially due to the contributions of thousands of black soldiers, the slave trade actually *increased* in the South (Murolo & Chitty, 2001). Capital and labor found their disputes being adjudicated by the young nation's government very early on, and the results, even at the outset, largely favored elites and squeezed the workingman.

### *Towards a New Constitution*

Zinn (1997) asserts that in the post-Revolutionary period, powerful economic interests pressed for a strong central government, and feared an uprising among disgruntled farmers. Murolo & Chitty (2001) describe how farm-product oversupply led to depression following the war, which caused a drop in agricultural prices. Farmers took on loans to stay afloat. When merchants called in their debts, the farmers in many states turned to government for relief, and found none forthcoming. In Massachusetts, as many as a thousand farmers took up arms in 1786, capturing several courthouses. When they marched on Boston under

the command of Revolutionary veteran Daniel Shays, the merchants financed a militia to turn them back. Murolo & Chitty (2001) describe suppressions of rural uprisings in *seven* other states.

It was in this environment of worker uprisings that the "wealthy classes moved to consolidate their political power" with the "closed-door convention in Philadelphia" that soon emerged with the Constitution (Murolo & Chitty, 2001, p. 37). It was a business-friendly document that forbade states from taking measures that would have aided the farmers, while granting concessions like the three-fifths clause to slaveholders in the South, which gave the slaveholders much greater representation in the new Congress than they would have had otherwise (Murolo & Chitty, 2001).

The first labor unions in America formally appeared in 1792, among Philadelphia shoemakers. Early unionization was met with resistance in the legal system, which the finance-friendly Federalists had modeled after the British system, to use criminal conspiracy statutes to fight union organizing efforts. Despite such setbacks, labor unrest runs through the historical record of this period (Murolo & Chitty, 2001).

### *The Rise of the Factory Floor*

According to Philip Dray, in his 2010 volume, *There is Power in a Union*, the earliest American experience with mass manufacturing took place at Lowell, Massachusetts, in textile mills built in 1814. The mills hired heavily among women and children. Early workingwomen labored for less than two cents an hour – roughly half of what male workers at Lowell were making – in workweeks of seventy-two hours. Even this condition constituted an advance over women's previous earning power (Dray, 2010).

What is often considered the nation's first "labor confrontation" took place in 1827, when Philadelphia carpenters struck, seeking a ten-hour workday. The strike was not successful, though the defeated carpenters forged alliances with other tradesmen in 1828 to found America's earliest labor federation, the Mechanics' Union of Trade Associations (Dray, 2010).

The first labor action at Lowell, in 1834 over management's announcement of a fifteen percent pay reduction, included one-sixth of the city's entire workforce (Yates, 2009). The strike lasted only a few days, and ended with most women accepting the cut and returning to work (Dray, 2010). Two years later, though, the women struck again, this time over a proposed 25-cent hike in their room and board deductions. This time, the mill owners gave in, and restored the original pay structure. It had become clear, according to Dray, "[t]hat the tactics of organized labor resistance could be learned (2010, p. 32).

The "Ten-Hour movement," launched by carpenter Seth Luther in 1835, galvanized workers; this movement eventually led to legislative hearings in Massachusetts in 1845 – "the first legislative hearings ever conducted in America to examine the conditions of labor" (Dray, 2010, p. 54) – which failed to rule on the fundamental question of working hours. Several states adopted ten-hour laws during the 1850s, and Massachusetts followed suit in 1874 (Dray, 2010).

Contemporaneous with the ten-hour struggle, labor did have a victory with lasting implications: Union organizing, which had been treated legally as equivalent to conspiracy, finally became legitimized in 1842, in *Commonwealth v. Hunt*, a court case involving Boston boot-makers. On appeal to the Massachusetts Supreme Court, it was decided that the

bootmakers union was not a conspiracy, and so was ruled a legal organization. Similar rulings followed in other states; the ground was laid for the rise of unions (Dray, 2010).

Dray (2010) contends a recession in the late 1850s and waves of arriving immigrant labor both contributed to a change in the dynamic which had been famous as "the Lowell Miracle." The new immigrant workers, according to Dray, "became an anonymous, interchangeable labor force," and the workers and mill owners came to have a more contentious relationship that Dray argues was emblematic of US labor relations in the decades which followed (2010, p. 60).

#### *Fault Lines Within a Strengthening Movement*

Murolo & Chitty (2001) describe a contradiction which plagued the rise of labor unions during the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century; a wide variety of crafts and trades became newly organized, while simultaneously excluding women, immigrants, and racial minorities. The National Trades Union did not allow women as members, and even when they did urge assistance of women's organizing efforts, it was only with the ultimate goal of driving women out of the workplace. There was a similar divide between native-born workers and immigrants. The racial division, however, is the one Murolo and Chitty (2001) describe as the "most persistent and pernicious," as they point out none of the labor federations were integrated (p. 72). Sometimes, employers would play a white union off against a black union, as was done in Baltimore's ship-caulking trade throughout the 1850s.

#### *The Civil War & Reconstruction*

When the Civil War began in 1861, the North undertook an accelerated campaign of industrialization in order to supply war materiel. In the decade starting 1860, the number of factory workers in the United States passed the number of farmworkers. As manufacturing spread, so did labor organizing, even crossing into Canada (Murolo & Chitty, 2001).

After the war, Southern states were forced to make a number of concessions on the rights of former slaves, in order to be readmitted to the Union. However, the Johnson and Grant presidencies brought reversals to the early Reconstruction gains, and Republican governments in Southern states were soon "replaced with regimes that legally subordinated African Americans and controlled their labor" (Murolo & Chitty, 2001, p. 96). Sharecropping and convict labor spread across the region, and there was an exodus of black families. Murolo & Chitty (2001) claim this wave of repression gave economic elites greater leverage in the political system.

Someone who saw the interests of black and white workers linked was William Sylvis, who founded the National Labor Union in 1866; it was the first nationwide labor federation in the US (Dray, 2010). The NLU was dedicated, as Dray writes, "not to any specific trade but to all, to the cause of labor itself, to both skilled and unskilled workers, as well as to farmers, women and African Americans" (Dray, 2010, p. 76). The eight-hour crusade was also vital to Sylvis, who established the first labor lobby in Washington, and used it to exert leverage on President Grant in 1869. Dray (2010) claims this initiated the process by which all government workers eventually won eight-hour workdays. Ultimately, Sylvis could not integrate the unions in his NLU, and it fell apart within a few years of Sylvis's death in 1869; Dray notes he was "the first national labor leader around whom there grew a cult of personality" (Dray, 2010, p. 85).

### *The Great Railroad Strike*

After the Panic of 1873, union membership plummeted from its 1870 level of 300,000 to less than 50,000 only seven years later (Murolo & Chitty, 2001). By the same year, railroad workers had taken wage cuts adding up to over sixty percent since the Panic began. When the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad moved to make another ten percent cut, it touched off events that stretched across the nation's railroad network (Yates, 2009). A spontaneous worker uprising engulfed many large cities in enormous protests that were met with severe repression – in Pittsburgh, soldiers opened fire into a crowd, killing twenty and wounding women and children (Dray, 2010). Two square miles in the heart of Chicago were left a smouldering ruin. Martial law was declared in St. Louis, following a general strike. Federal troops squashed the uprisings after twelve days. According to Murolo & Chitty (2001), to this day this remains the largest strike in U.S. history. Dray (2010) describes the railroad strike as a loss for labor, while Zinn (1997) notes that the railroad strike of 1877 coincided with the end of Reconstruction; blacks and workers both failed to improve their position against combined government and business power.

### *The Gilded Age & Haymarket Square*

The Panic of 1873, among its other effects, also initiated "the Gilded Age, a quarter century of glittering riches for American capitalists, and leaden poverty for masses of working people" (Murolo & Chitty, 2001, p. 110). Capital consolidated, as national markets emerged amidst large-scale industrial mechanization, which relied on unskilled labor. This, coupled with a labor force bursting from continued waves of immigration, encouraged

employers to slash wages (Wheeler, 2002). The Noble and Holy Order of the Knights of Labor arose in response. It began as a Philadelphia tailors' union in 1869, but would grow under the leadership of Terence Powderly to a peak strength of 750,000 by 1886 (Murolo & Chitty, 2001). The K of L was progressive in its policy of inclusion, admitting women and blacks, even in some cases having integrated assemblies in the South. However, the Knights of Labor's record was marred by anti-Chinese rhetoric and action. There was a renewed drive for an eight-hour workday, and it was a demonstration in support of the eight-hour cause that gave rise to the creation of Labor Day, in 1882 (Dray, 2010).

This momentum of the eight-hour movement was derailed, however, by the Haymarket Square bombing in Chicago, on May 4, 1886. Several thousand workers and radical anarchists were rallying in Haymarket Square to protest police savagely beating workers and shooting four of them dead, the day before at a nearby factory (Dray, 2010). Police appeared as the rally was ending, and moments later there was an explosion. Police began firing into the crowd – accidentally shooting each other, in many instances – as workers returned fire. Ultimately, seven policemen and four workers died, with over a hundred people wounded. Police rounded up the speakers from the rally, other radicals, and their allies. While no physical evidence linked the eight men arrested to the bombing, they were convicted of murder after a trial which gripped the nation (Murolo & Chitty, 2001). Five of the eight men were sentenced to die by hanging. In essence, they were executed for their political opinions. Six years after the hanging, a subsequent governor of Illinois issued full pardons for the three remaining prisoners (Dray, 2010).

The bombing and subsequent trial undercut the eight-hour movement, and through taking a series of conciliatory stands, Powderly's Knights of Labor lost influence – and

membership – precipitously (Wheeler, 2002). In the same year as Haymarket, a new national labor organization, the American Federation of Labor, was formed, with Sam Gompers at the head (Yates, 2009). Rather than focusing on broad agendas of social reform, as earlier national organizations had, the AFL emphasized wages and hours and working conditions (Murolo & Chitty, 2001). The AFL met a string of early successes by accepting the economic system as it was, rather than seeking to overturn it (Dray, 2010). However, the AFL explicitly excluded workers of Asian extraction, and the federation locals were segregated (Murolo & Chitty, 2001).

One union which did not discriminate based on whether workers were skilled or unskilled, but which still maintained a color line, was the American Railway Union, formed in 1893 with president Eugene Debs, "one of America's most admired labor leaders" (Dray, 2010, p. 197). The ARU's more open policy led to fast recruiting, especially after the union won a strike against the Great Northern Railroad in April, 1894. Within two months, it was the largest union in the United States, with 150,000 members (Murolo & Chitty, 2001). The ARU struck the Pullman Palace Car Company that same year, fighting a wage reduction. When federal troops were sent by President Cleveland to put down the strike in Chicago, riots erupted. Civilian deaths numbered at least twenty-five. Debs spent six months in jail for violating a federal anti-union injunction. The ARU collapsed, nearly vanishing within three years (Murolo & Chitty, 134).

### *The Progressive Era*

Lichtenstein (2002) describes the Progressive reformers at the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as the first to realize that inequality was *inherent in the design of capitalism*. These

reformers set aside utopian visions to press for pragmatic improvements in workers' lives. According to Murolo & Chitty (2001), labor during this time principally organized around three groups, the AFL, the Socialist Party of America – which ran Eugene Debs for president several times – and the IWW, the Industrial Workers of the World, run by "Big" Bill Haywood. The SP and IWW were home to the "activists ignored or frustrated" by AFL conservatism, which also was riven by internal divisions and the appearance of corrupt union officers (Murolo & Chitty, 2001, p. 145). In addition, the AFL continued to exclude minorities, immigrants, and women. It flourished under these practices; its ranks stood in 1904 at over 1.6 million (Murolo & Chitty, 2001).

Years of inventive labor agitation from AFL affiliate, the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union of New York City, won higher wages and better hours for workers, but no say over safety issues, the last of these proving a fatal loss when fire broke out at the Triangle Shirtwaist Company on March 25, 1911. The blaze claimed the lives of 146 mostly immigrant women, many of whom leapt to their deaths from nine stories up, when they found fire exits locked, and lower-floor windows nailed shut (Orleck, 2011). While the factory owners were acquitted of wrongdoing, Dray (2010) asserts the Triangle Fire also ignited the activist career of Frances Perkins, and led to an effective nationwide campaign for workplace safety laws.

The AFL endorsed Woodrow Wilson for president in 1912, and after he assumed office, he advanced some of their agenda, creating the Department of Labor and later signing workman's compensation rights into law (Dray, 2010). However, the Wilson years also saw the Ludlow Massacre of April 20, 1914, which climaxed a months-long strike against Rockefeller's Colorado Fuel & Iron. Murolo & Chitty (2001) describe how twenty-one

people – including eleven children – were shot or burned to death by the National Guard on that day, and by the end of the next month, sixty-six miners or their family members were dead.

In the months after the Massacre, President Wilson signed into the law the Clayton Act, which ended the use of anti-trust laws against unions, and put a stop to the injunctions which had hobbled many strikes and sent Eugene Debs to his first prison sentence.

Radicals made many gains during this time. IWW labor actions were marked by audacity and inventiveness, and they met early success in a 1909 strike against US Steel, and in the famous "Bread and Roses" strike of 1912, in Lawrence, Massachusetts. However, industry opposition to the IWW was ferocious, and in numerous strikes, members were clubbed, arrested, and killed. IWW leader Joe Hill was convicted of murder and executed by firing squad in 1915, despite flimsy evidence (Murolo & Chitty, 2001). Despite continuing repression, the ranks of the IWW swelled past the 100,000 mark by 1918. By now, however, the tide was turning.

The Great War was on. Zinn (1997) argues that Wilson pushed for US involvement in the war partially to take national attention away from class struggle at home. Both Wobblies and Socialists were singled out for government repression because of anti-war views (Dray, 2010). Wobblies in Bisbee, Arizona were rounded up by the thousands and deported from the state, stranded on a train in the New Mexico desert without food or water. (Dray, 2010). Over a hundred Wobblies were tried under the 1917 Espionage Act, and convicted en masse, including IWW leader Bill Haywood. He was given twenty years in prison, but fled to Russia (Zinn, 1997). The Socialist Party had their publications banned in the mails, saw hundreds of members arrested for draft resistance, and twenty-seven leaders tried under the Espionage

Act. Eugene Debs was sentenced to ten years in prison for giving an anti-war speech in Ohio (Murolo & Chitty, 2001).

The AFL saw their fortunes rise during the Great War, as Gompers allied his federation with pro-war policies, positioning the AFL to reap the benefits of increased wartime production and lucrative government contracts with employers. The AFL became more open to less-skilled workers, and their ranks swelled. Women and immigrants were welcomed in larger numbers, also, though racial minorities remained excluded. AFL workers were involved in the massacre of black residents of East St. Louis in 1917 which left thirty-nine dead (Murolo & Chitty, 2001).

When the war ended, as Lichtenstein (2002) writes, a massive wave of strikes rose in 1917 and '18, only to be crushed by police repression. Meanwhile, government persecution of radicals worsened. Ten thousand were arrested in the Palmer Raids of 1920. Italian anarchists Sacco and Vanzetti were convicted in 1921 of a double murder, despite "sturdy alibis," and executed in 1927 (Murolo & Chitty, 2001, p. 168). Debs ran for president from prison in 1920 – gaining nearly a million votes. He was pardoned in 1921, but could not reverse the waning fortunes of the Socialist Party, which had nearly disappeared by 1928 (Murolo & Chitty, 2001). The IWW splintered in 1924, and only a tiny sliver remains today (Yates, 2009). Even the AFL membership declined during this period, as Republican rule and a sudden depression in 1921 shifted the tide against labor (Murolo & Chitty, 2001).

The crushing of the IWW, with its radical, democratic vision of labor as key to creating a more just society, cleared the path for the conservative view, held by the AFL – accepting capitalism as "inevitable, if not desirable" – to dominate labor relations (Eisenscher, 2002, p. 96).

The nation's three giants of labor all died around this time – the insider Gompers in 1924, the outsider Debs in 1926, and the radical Haywood in 1928. Murolo & Chitty (2001) assert, "The government turned on them all" (p. 173).

### *The "Roaring" Twenties*

Following World War I, the US experienced an economic boom, which saw some workers' wages increase modestly (Murolo & Chitty, 2001). However, Zinn (1997) asserts the benefits of the boom were largely for the wealthy. So-called "open shop" rules in many companies pushed back against organizing efforts, and corporate perks began to appear, which seemed to obviate the need for union representation (Murolo and Chitty, 2001, p. 176). Injunctions reappeared, and "yellow dog contracts" – which prohibited workers from joining unions or striking – bound over a million workers by decade's end (Dray, 2010). Factories in better-organized cities like New York began to move operations to "foreign zones" in New Jersey and Pennsylvania, a harbinger of outsourcing (Carty, 2006). The Supreme Court struck down minimum wage laws as unconstitutional. Murolo & Chitty (2001) describe this decade, for the labor movement, as one of "defeat, retreat, and division," adding that AFL and railroad union leaders most often *cooperated* with employers, rather than *opposing* them (p. 183).

### *The Great Depression*

Murolo & Chitty (2001) describe a U.S. economy already in trouble *before* the stock market crash of October, 1929 brought on a crushing depression. President Hoover's half-measures were not up to the task of righting the economy, while he and Congress did throw a

bone to labor in the Norris-LaGuardia Act, which ended injunctions against unions (again), and put an end to the yellow dog contract (Murolo & Chitty, 2001). Even so, unemployment kept rising, and participation in the labor movement kept falling (Eisenscher, 2002). In the Bonus March of 1932, out-of-work World War I veterans gathered on the National Mall and set up tent cities, demanding Congress pay early the \$50-100 bonus they would be owed in 1945. In late July of '32, General MacArthur's troops, including then-Colonel Dwight Eisenhower, tear-gassed the veterans, burned down their tent camps, and drove them out of the capital (Murolo & Chitty, 2001). That fall, voters denied Hoover re-election, in favor of Democrat Franklin Roosevelt.

In early 1933 when Roosevelt took office, unemployment had stranded between one-third and one-half of all American workers without jobs (Dray, 2010). Roosevelt's administration responded with a series of reforms which came to be known as the New Deal. Zinn (1997) describes one of the New Deal's aims as preventing the rumblings of rebellion among the lower classes from growing into revolution. One of the New Deal's key reforms, the National Industrial Recovery Act, codified for the first time, in Section 7(a), the right of workers to "organize and bargain collectively," though there was no enforcement mechanism, and employers routinely flouted the law (Murolo & Chitty, 2001, p. 193). Roosevelt's National Labor Relations Board, established in 1934, often ruled in favor of workers, but could not make its rulings stick. Still, the labor movement responded to the deteriorating economic conditions with vigor, and unions proliferated (Murolo & Chitty, 2001).

Bitter and violent clashes typified many strikes. Unions scored some important victories, like the Teamsters' Minneapolis strike in 1934 (Yates, 2009). Still, they lost other

fights, like the United Textile Workers strike that same summer – one of the largest strikes in US history, stretching from Alabama to Maine (Murolo & Chitty, 2001).

Divisions within the labor movement became more sharply defined and acrimonious. Murolo & Chitty (2001) describe how conservative AFL officials submarined the attempt of autoworkers to get union recognition in 1934. This conflict boiled over in 1935, when John L. Lewis, president of the United Mine Workers – the nation's largest union – punched out the Carpenters' union president, at the AFL convention. Lewis convened the heads of eight industrial unions, to form the dissident Committee for Industrial Organization, (CIO) which later broke away entirely from the AFL, and by 1937 had even (briefly) eclipsed the AFL in size. According to Dray (2010), Lewis "emerged as perhaps America's best-known labor leader" (p. 444).

Also during 1935, the Supreme Court declared the NIRA – and its section 7(a) – unconstitutional in the *Schechter* case. Congress and Roosevelt responded with the National Labor Relations Act, also called the Wagner Act. This provided the toothless NLRB with enforcement powers, and protected most sectors of workers in their right to organize without interference from employers. Murolo & Chitty (2001) describe how the National Association of Manufacturers unsuccessfully "fought its passage with the biggest campaign in the history of corporate lobbying" (p. 202). The Wagner Act joined the earlier Works Progress Administration – which employed over 3.4 million workers in 1936 – and the Social Security Act as signal achievements of the New Deal era.

Autoworkers gained the union recognition they desired, after the Flint sit-down strike of 1937, when seventeen plants and a majority of GM workers went on strike (Murolo & Chitty, 2001). General Motors gave in, and Chrysler soon followed. The ranks of the United

Auto Workers swelled to 400,000 by year's end. The sit-down tactic was widely copied – throughout 1937, there were 477 sit-down strikes, involving 300,000 workers (Murolo & Chitty, 2001).

Roosevelt cut federal spending in 1937, after a year of modest recovery, leading to a redoubling of the Depression, as rumors of war in Europe were rising. One last major reform did pass through Congress during this time, however – the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, which mandated a minimum wage for the first time, as well as a 44-hour workweek, which dropped to forty hours in 1940. After many decades of struggle, labor finally had their long-sought forty hours – though the AFL, bizarrely, opposed the legislation; it had always been against minimum wage laws (Murolo & Chitty, 2001). Other than the forty-hour victory, however, there was not much for labor to celebrate in this period. The CIO, sniped at by the AFL, lost ground in membership, as well as in a difficult strike against several steel companies. Ultraconservative legislators made in-roads in 1938, bringing the New Deal to a close, and starting anti-Communist witchhunts against labor and labor-friendly politicians (Murolo & Chitty, 2001).

Military procurement picked up, first to arm Britain, and then later for the US war effort against the Axis powers; the Depression began to lift. While the CIO made new gains, growing to over four million members by 1941, this was not enough to derail the split between John L. Lewis and Roosevelt. Lewis opposed the war and had chosen to back Republican Wendell Wilkie in the election of 1940. When workers contributed to Roosevelt's victory, Lewis resigned as head of the CIO. Labor, to Lewis's dismay, was wedded to one party's fortunes (Dray, 2010).

## *World War II*

The rise in war-related manufacturing brought gains to the labor movement. Unemployment plummeted from eight million in December 1940, to only one million three years later (Dray, 2010). Corporate profits soared because of government contracts. Barriers to female and minority workers dropped, as all hands were required for the war effort (Murolo & Chitty, 2001). During the war years, unions represented some 15 million workers (Lichtenstein, 2002). Despite unions nationwide taking a pledge not to strike, John L. Lewis's United Mine Workers engaged in numerous wildcat strikes (Eisenscher, 2002). Roosevelt ordered the mines seized by the government, and workers sent back on the job (Dray, 2010). Anti-labor sentiment among business found expression in the War Labor Disputes Act, known as Smith-Connolly, which passed in June 1943 despite Roosevelt's veto. It limited a union's ability to strike, or to get involved in politics. With the threat of striking removed, unions were forced to ally themselves ever more closely to politicians. Roosevelt's death, in April 1945, was the end of a presidency which showed "fundamental understanding of workers' value to society" (Dray, 2010, p. 492).

## *The Cold War Begins*

After the war ended, there was an enormous outbreak of labor unrest. Over 4,600 strikes swept the nation in a year (Murolo & Chitty, 2001). The CIO argued that higher wages for workers would stimulate demand and maintain economic prosperity. Conservative forces in Congress achieved a veto-proof majority in the elections of 1946, which they soon exercised in overriding a Truman veto to make the Labor Management Relations Act – known as Taft-Hartley – into law in June of 1947 (Dray, 2010). This legislation contained

sweeping rollbacks of union power, among other things enabling states to opt out of earlier Wagner Act protections for collective bargaining rights (Murolo & Chitty, 2001). In addition, pervasive anti-communist hysteria gripped the nation in the postwar period (Zinn, 1997). The AFL red-baited the CIO to gain advantage over its rival; the CIO drove out Communists within their own ranks (Yates, 2009). This, despite the fact that Communists had been among the most effective organizers, and the most committed to diversity and equality (Dray, 2010). John L. Lewis proposed in 1947 that unions refuse to sign the noncommunist affidavits required under Taft-Hartley, but when this was rejected at the AFL convention, he split his United Mine Workers out of the federation (Murolo & Chitty, 2001). By the time the House Un-American Activities Committee hearings began in 1953, accusations of communistic influence had led to 10,000 people losing their jobs (Murolo & Chitty, 2001). In this climate, the left-leaning CIO began to decline, while the conservative AFL rose in strength. The two federations raided one another's ranks mercilessly, though the rise of a new generation of leaders in the early 1950s allowed for the eventual merger of the two organizations into the AFL-CIO in 1955 (Dray, 2010). The merger nearly coincided with the high-water mark of US unionization in 1956, when 17.5 million workers – a third of the non-farm workforce – belonged to unions (Dray, 2010). Still, they belonged to a movement that had turned away from its broad social agenda of the past, and a narrow focus on "insular" concerns may have prepared the ground for its coming decline (Eisenscher, 2002).

At home, unions overall were able to hammer out favorable agreements – like the "Treaty of 1950" in Detroit – which meant increases in wages and benefits to American workers, while abroad the labor movement often partnered with the US government (Dray, 2010). Operatives from American labor helped to crush worker uprisings in Honduras and

Puerto Rico, while both AFL and CIO supported Puerto Rico's exemption from the federal minimum wage. Over time, American-led international labor federations became stacked with CIA operatives, helping to overturn the democratically elected Socialist government of British Guiana in 1962 (Dray, 2010).

Labor racketeering had been a visible feature of unions since at least the 1930s. During the 1950s it became more widespread, as strike funds and dues pools became enormous, "opening new avenues for corruption" (Murolo & Chitty, 2001, p. 242). In 1956 the McClellan Committee indicted Teamsters boss Dave Beck for grand larceny and tax evasion (Dray, 534). He was replaced by Jimmy Hoffa, who was also "implicated in sweetheart contracts and welfare-fund fraud," though he resisted indictments and clung to his position, while the Teamsters grew in strength (Murolo & Chitty, 2001, p. 243). The labor movement, however, had been tarnished by all the television coverage, and the image of union corruption and gangsterism lingered long after the McClellan hearings were over. Looking to minimize the damage, the AFL-CIO expelled the Teamsters, as well as laundry and bakery unions linked with corruption, but this did not stop the passage of the Landrum-Griffin Labor-Management Reporting and Disclosure Act of 1959, tightening oversight of union funds and elections (Murolo & Chitty, 2001). It also strengthened Taft-Hartley, encroaching further on labor's earlier gains (Dray, 2010). In the broader economy this was duplicated by corporations moving their operations to countries with lower labor costs. This flight of capital decimated cities like Camden, New Jersey, which had been emptied of jobs and filled with "an omnipresent stench of social collapse" (Murolo & Chitty, 2001, p. 245).

*Labor in the 1960s and 1970s*

During these years, which Zinn (1997) describes as the most concentrated series of protest movements in American history, traditional outsiders like African-Americans, women, gays and lesbians fought for, and in many cases won, greater access to the mainstream of American society through mass actions ranging from the Montgomery Bus Boycott of 1955 to the Stonewall Inn riot of 1969. Labor unions and federations were often supportive of these activities, even acting as sponsors for events like the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. Protests against the Vietnam War also had a strong labor component; Students for a Democratic Society grew with early support from the United Auto Workers and other unions (Dray, 2010).

A massive wave of strikes surged in the late 1960s, and conservative labor leaders found themselves "facing increasingly militant dissent from below" (Murolo & Chitty, 2001, p. 259). African-American workers, Puerto Ricans, and women battled for a greater voice in auto manufacturing, domestic work, the airlines, and other sectors. The AFL-CIO finally elected its first woman, Joyce Miller, to its board of directors in 1980. Farmworkers – who were not guaranteed the right to unionize under the Wagner Act – came together to form the United Farm Workers under Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta, who led a boycott against grape growers in order to win its first contract in 1970 (Murolo & Chitty, 2001).

During this period, unionism made its strongest gains in the public sector. In 1962, President Kennedy signed an executive order which gave collective bargaining rights to federal employees (Lichtenstein, 2002). Public sector unionism expanded quickly, and within a decade, a majority of public sector workers nationwide were union members. Strikes among public workers were common, though prohibited by law. Throughout most of the 1970s, strikes in all sectors numbered over five thousand annually. However, these strikes

were set against the backdrop of a rollback in public services and decaying urban infrastructures, while the black and Latino protest movements lost momentum (Murolo & Chitty, 2001). When the economy went into recession in 1974, the federal government cut spending, rather than stimulating the economy, leading to skyrocketing unemployment.

Meanwhile, the labor movement was riven with internal conflict (Murolo & Chitty, 2001). Most AFL-CIO leaders were in support of the Vietnam War, while Walter Reuther, the influential head of the UAW, took his union out of the federation in 1968 in protest. Labor no longer solely supported Democratic candidates, as several unions lined up behind Nixon, and even more later endorsed Reagan. Overall, assert Murolo & Chitty (2001), the conservative AFL-CIO approach ruled the decade for labor.

One area where unions maintained harmony was in their Cold War activities, whereby the AFL-CIO helped to destabilize Chile and prepare the ground for the Pinochet dictatorship (Yates, 2009). They also formed a trade group in Europe, to oppose socialist and communist labor organizations in Spain and Portugal (Murolo & Chitty, 2001).

The Chrysler bailout of 1979, which the UAW chief Douglas Fraser lobbied for, left the unionized Chrysler workforce slashed in half – down to 57,000 – as wages froze and factories closed (Murolo & Chitty, 2001). Unions, through ever-closer cooperation with management, were finding themselves complicit in the downsizing of their own membership.

### *The Rocky Shallows of Reaganomics*

Greenhouse (2009) refers to the combination of stressors pressing against working people in the early 1980s – deregulation, economic recession, increasing imports, and a union-busting offensive – as a "witching hour for American workers" (p. 79). President

Reagan set the tenor of his administration's relationship to labor early in his presidency when he fired the 15,000 air traffic controllers in PATCO – according to Levy & Temin (2007), this was one of the few unions to have *supported* Reagan's campaign. The air traffic controllers had gone on strike over inadequate staffing and equipment in August of 1981 (Lichtenstein, 2002). In reply, the AFL-CIO held a massive march and rally, but in the end their biggest response was increased – and ineffectual – political lobbying. Membership shrank dramatically and wages declined precipitously, as corporate America undertook wave after wave of mergers, plant closures and expanded foreign operations (Murolo & Chitty, 2001). This dynamic gave rise to an unchecked race to the bottom, devastating the industrial base of the US, as multinationals chased ever-lower labor costs. Between 1978 and 1982 alone, nearly seven million jobs were lost to factory closures in the US. Unions were helpless in the face of threats to outsource jobs, and concessions became the order of the day. Membership slid, as 2.7 million members dropped out between 1980 and 1984 (Murolo & Chitty, 2001).

Unionized workers in consolidated corporations were unable to use the lever of a strike in order to force employers to bargain. Enormous corporations could absorb strike losses, and technological changes made formerly-indispensible workers less necessary (Janis, 2001).

Unions had a spotty record on racial issues, and a dismal record on gender equity in their own leadership ranks. They were outstanding, however, when it came to supporting US foreign policy; the AFL-CIO set up a labor federation in support of the Haitian dictator Duvalier in 1984, paid off labor leaders in El Salvador to join the pro-government labor federation, and ran international conferences which condemned the leftist government of

Nicaragua (Murolo & Chitty, 2001). The AFL also subverted labor activists in Mexico in favor of captive, government-run unions, and bungled their relationships with auto workers in Canada so badly that Canadians broke out of the UAW to form their own union in 1985 (Murolo & Chitty, 2001).

Back home, the AFL-CIO misspent organizing drives on white-collar workers, while growth areas of the economy were in low-paid service jobs. When the AFL-CIO opposed President Clinton's North American Free Trade Agreement in 1993, and it passed anyway, labor leaders made no move to unseat the Democrats who had voted in favor. This made no difference, as Republicans swept to power in both houses of Congress in 1994. Forces within the ever-shrinking AFL-CIO finally rose up against their own leadership; reform candidate John Sweeney captured the federation's top post in 1995, in a rare contested election (Clawson & Clawson, 1999). The change proved more "palace coup than revolution from below," as Sweeney's modest reform agenda proved incapable of stopping labor's continuing slide (Eisenscher, 2002, p. 101).

### *Darkest Before the Dawn?*

NAFTA facilitated a massive capital outflow from the US, while having no substantial provisions to protect workers (Carty, 2006). In the first five years of the new trade agreement, 200,000 American jobs disappeared to our lower-cost trading partners. By 1998, the *maquiladora* zones in Mexico held over 3,000 factories. CEO pay exploded – Jack Welch of General Electric made "about 15,000 times more than his average Mexican employee" (Murolo & Chitty, 2001, p. 310). Unionization in 1995 fell to a level not seen since 1930. While convictions for labor racketeering continued, union officials on the whole

perceived the need for a different way of doing business, if their organizations were to survive. There was a wave of union mergers, bringing the AFL-CIO to sixty-six affiliated unions as of the year 2000, less than half the number of 1955. Women were in charge of three of the AFL-CIO's nineteen departments in 1995, but only three years later, they headed up *ten of twenty-one* (Murolo & Chitty, 2001). These cultural changes, while promising, have been thus far insufficient to meet the challenge of globalized capital, which has grown enormously powerful, while labor's own international efforts have been halting and ineffective (Clawson & Clawson, 1999).

Even in an atmosphere hostile to labor, notable successes have occurred. In response to the targeting of undocumented members by Immigration and Naturalization Service raids during many organizing drives, the AFL-CIO in 2000 made a historic call for illegal immigrants to be given amnesty (Murolo & Chitty, 2001). Also, the campaign against the selling of sweatshop-made apparel on college campuses was one of labor's biggest successes of the late 1990s, joining students and workers in a "social movement unionism" that offers some prospects for future advances (Carty, 2006, p. 240). Sweeney and his New Voices slate at the AFL-CIO launched the "Union Summer" campus organizing campaign in 1996, which contributed to an upsurge in graduate student unionization across the country (Dixon, Tope, and Van Dyke, 2008). A renewed emphasis on social justice brought unions into partnerships with clergy and other civil society groups. The unionization of 74,000 home health workers in Los Angeles who joined SEIU in 1999 was labor's largest successful organizing drive in sixty-two years. Also in 1999, Puerto Rican government workers were finally permitted to organize, and 150,000 employees were organized by five unions (Murolo & Chitty, 2001). Workers played a large role in the Seattle protests against the World Trade Organization in

1999 (Wheeler, 2002). Successful strikes were also carried out at UPS, General Motors, Boeing, and other firms (Murolo & Chitty, 2001).

Still, setbacks, strike losses, concessions, and plant closings continued. Internal struggles within the AFL-CIO led to a coalition of eight member unions – spearheaded by the SEIU under Andy Stern – breaking away in 2005, calling themselves Change To Win (Yates, 2009). However, within five years, three of the unions had returned to the AFL, and merger talks had begun for the rest of the CTW coalition, leaving observers to wonder what the split had accomplished (Leedham, 2009). On the legislative front, labor continued to back Democrats, despite the disaster of Clinton's NAFTA (Yates, 2009). Unions spent heavily for Democrats in 2006 and 2008 with expectation that their major legislative goal, the Employee Free Choice Act – which simplifies workplace organizing drives – would see passage. Instead, it has languished in Congress, calling into question the strength of labor's alliances (Greenhouse, 2011).

Unionization of the private sector workforce fell to 6.9 percent in 2010, the lowest in over a century. Public sector unionization was also in decline, but remained relatively robust at 36.2 percent (Greenhouse, 2011a). In 2011, Republican legislatures in fourteen states have taken up a raft of anti-union bills, designed to eliminate collective bargaining rights for public sector workers (Wisniewski, 2011). Wisconsin labor responded by occupying the capitol building in Madison for three weeks, turning out crowds in excess of 100,000 for numerous rallies (Kroll, 2011). Whether these protests, echoed in solidarity rallies across the country, are merely the death rattle of the labor movement as the last unions with any real clout are destroyed, or the beginning of a new uprising of working people, remains to be seen.

## **Media Representations of Labor**

This section describes noteworthy elements from the history of the American labor press. It also identifies major themes in mainstream media representations of labor.

### *The Labor Press*

Up until the 1830s, most American newspapers were nakedly partisan political organs, financed by local parties (Martin, 2004). This meant the bias in each paper was clear; it also meant issues of political, economic, and social importance received an airing from multiple perspectives. These newsheets were often priced at six cents, and ripe to be picked off by the "penny press" which arose in the 1830s, their far lower prices subsidized by advertising for the rising tide of consumer goods produced by nascent industry (Martin, 2004). There was a sudden shift in news content, away from raucous political debate, toward advertising and everyday human interest writing. Consumerist "lifestyle" content like cooking and fashion sections were common by the 1880s (Martin, 2004). At the same time, labor's escalating contention with capital brought a backlash from the business-friendly press; antilabor news accounts reached a fever pitch during the Haymarket Square trials of 1886.

Labor responded by telling its own story; by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, there were "hundreds of labor newspapers in dozens of languages" (Martin, 2004, p. 57). For example, when local press portrayed striking miners in Northern Minnesota in 1916 as "bloodthirsty savages" (Ronning, 2003, p. 367), miners responded by publishing *Striker's News* (Ross, 1994). America's most successful weekly newspaper just prior to World War I was a Socialist paper, *Appeal to Reason*. Some issues sold four million copies (Kumar, 2007).

During the Great Depression, the Communist Party USA's *Daily Worker* sold 100,000 copies a day (Pizzigati & Solowey, 1992).

Government repression of radicals, intensifying during World War I, led to the decline of such publications. Labor unions were among the early community-based broadcasters regulated off the airwaves by the FCC's pro-corporate decisions in the 1920s and 1930s (McChesney, 2000). After the Second World War, as corporate power organized against the workers' gains of the New Deal, a labor voice arose in 1952 with *Labor's Daily*.

This paper was funded by the International Typographical Union originally as a strike paper, to be circulated wherever the ITU had labor disputes, but it grew to nationwide daily circulation, featuring coverage of national and international issues from a labor perspective (Fones-Wolf & Fones-Wolf, 1995). *Labor's Daily* was progressive on social issues, and even critical of unions and labor leadership. This editorial independence was also likely the cause of its downfall. When the ITU could no longer shoulder the costs of production, other unions would not step in to save the paper. It closed in 1956, and nothing equivalent ever rose in its place (Fones-Wolf & Fones-Wolf, 1995). With the triumph of consumer culture and television in the post-World War II period, the labor press faded to near-nonexistence. The majority of contemporary materials aimed specifically at workers are union publications, which Martin (2004) points out are usually "formal, undemocratic mouthpieces for union leadership" (p. 61).

### *Labor in the Corporate Press*

In his 1919 study of American journalism, *The Brass Check*, Upton Sinclair asserts that "whenever it comes to a 'show-down' between labor and capital, the press is openly or

secretly for capital" (p. 346). Sinclair describes this as a process of excluding facts which favor workers, while taking care not to offend advertisers. Sinclair (1919) asserts this service to capital can include printing flat-out fabrications. He describes newspaper accounts of an I.W.W. strike of New York hotelworkers, which claimed the Wobbly organizer had told the strikers to poison the soup in the hotel restaurant. When a labor story is "so sensational that the newspapers could not suppress it," Sinclair writes, they will "ridicule and betray it" (1919, p. 351). He details an instance in which newspapers wildly exaggerated the wages of railroad workers, undermining worker efforts to get a living wage.

Sinclair (1919) draws a connection between public opinion and the outcome of strikes: it is known public opinion turns against strikes which are violent, therefore it is in employers' interests to portray strikers as violent. By refusing to cover peaceful labor disputes, most news accounts will necessarily be about violent ones, which Sinclair points out plays into the employers' purposes. This situation is exacerbated by the Associated Press's relationships with local papers, a source for AP news copy even eight decades later (Farhi, 2009). Many of these newspapers, as Sinclair (1919) details, were owned by industrial magnates with a direct interest in seeing that striking workers were portrayed negatively. He excerpts an interview with the AP representative of a Colorado paper owned by a mining company. When asked about the facts of a miners' strike, the AP man replied, "There's no use coming to me for the truth. A man in my position naturally gets only one side, the operators' side" (Sinclair, 1919, p. 357).

Lippmann (1965/1922) argues that journalists report strikes through the lens of the consumer. The simplest approach to a story about a strike is "to describe the event as the story of interference with the reader's life" (p. 221). Lippman (1965/1922) goes on to say that

in newspaper portrayals of strikes, the reasons behind the dispute are "rarely in the headlines, barely in the leading paragraphs, and sometimes not even mentioned anywhere" (p. 221). He ascribes this to the constraining effects of news routines, which favor stereotypical portrayals. If by some chance a journalist is able to describe a different perspective, it will often be excluded due to space limitations or fear of losing reader interest. Editors, Lippman says, favor "the indisputable fact and the easy interest," which are "the strike itself and the reader's inconvenience" (p. 221). In the present social arrangements, Lippman (1965/1922) says, the news will disadvantage those without access to official sources of power.

The Glasgow University Media Group published two large studies of British media performance, *Bad News* (1976) and *More Bad News* (1980). In their first volume, they find that British television news coverage of strikes privilege the interpretation of striking workers as constantly discontented, despite high wages. Coverage also exaggerates the size of strikes in certain sectors – communications, transportation, and government. This distortion favors the interpretation of strikes as an inconvenience to consumers. News accounts focus on possible effects of a strike, while omitting discussion of causes. In addition, the researchers find news reports repeatedly adopt management's point of view (Glasgow University Media Group, 1976).

In their second volume, the Glasgow team asserts the vocabulary used in television news broadcasts to describe industrial disputes "amounts to a preferred view... which corresponds all too easily with... managerial ideology" (Glasgow University Media Group, 1980, p. 166). Responsibility for labor disputes is ascribed, by the language of news, to the workers; management culpability is excluded. The Glasgow team finds that, according to the news, factories are shut down due to labor unrest, rather than mismanagement. Workers are

portrayed as having "suspect motives"; they "precipitate unnecessary action" against employers (Glasgow University Media Group, 1980, p. 178).

Rollings (1983) describes a shift in "interest in and dependency by" workers, away from unions and the relationships they foster, toward privatized entertainment like television, which he argues has a corrosive effect on bonds of worker solidarity (p. 133). He uses data compiled by the Machinists Union Media Monitoring Project – union workers conducted their own content analysis of television programming to identify persistent images of the working class – to conclude: "The television industry [is] one, if not the chief, culprit in the decline of American trade unions and workers' self-esteem" (Rollings, 1983, p. 135). Unions are rarely seen on television, and when they do appear, they are portrayed usually as "violent, degrading, and obstructive" (p. 135). Workers' viewpoints on major economic issues are rarely expressed, while corporate perspectives are offered nearly all the time, in all stories. Context is absent from strike-related coverage, which instead emphasizes conflict. The second study round finds negative distortions and erasure of working people worsening. Similarities across all television networks' coverage is sufficient to be found "more than coincidental" (Rollings, 1983, p. 145). Corporate press coverage of international issues is so free of context and information, Rollings likens it to reporting from nations with a government-run press system.

In the *Columbia Journalism Review*, Hoyt (1984) interviews reporters who describe the fallen state of both labor reporting and the labor movement. Raskin from the *New York Times* calls labor "much less significant" than it once was, going on to add, "People are bored with the labor movement" (Hoyt, 1984, p. 36). As labor declines, Hoyt points out, one thing left unexplored is the power arising in its place. Hoyt also offers examples of reportage so

mistaken as to present the exact opposite of the facts. A wage cut from Greyhound appears in the *Chicago Tribune* as the workers demanding a raise. Lastly, talk of management/labor collaboratives masks the truth that these two parties "do not have the same interests and priorities" (p. 40).

Jonathan Tasini (FAIR, 1990) situates the decline of labor reporting against the rise of consolidated corporate media. He finds that in 1989, only two percent of all network news broadcast airtime was given to labor-related issues, with just over one percent given to unions themselves. Unions and workers, Tasini asserts, are marginalized in the corporate press. When they do appear, coverage is distorted. When the media covered the 1989 strike at Eastern Airlines, reporting centered on the owner, Frank Lorenzo. This portrayal is in keeping with the news media practice of glorifying corporate executives. Union leadership is not given the same treatment, as almost all coverage of the Teamsters that year focused on criminal ties amongst the leadership. Focus on criminal allegations in the union also served to erase the 1.7 million members of the union itself, who were seldom seen in reports.

Tasini's FAIR study (1990) also finds striking workers in an enemy state are given far more – and more sympathetic – attention than American workers in a similar situation, as the US media align themselves with government foreign policy goals. An eight-day coal strike in the USSR received over fifty percent more coverage on national television news than the *nine-month-long* Pittson coal strike. Reporting of workers' issues is inaccurate or shorn of vital context; unemployment numbers are constantly under-reported, though more accurate numbers are readily available, while stories about raising the minimum wage emphasize elites in Washington, omitting discussion of the poverty endemic to minimum-wage work (FAIR, 1990).

William Puette, in his 1992 volume, *Through Jaundiced Eyes: How the Media View Organized Labor*, analyzes newspaper coverage of a three-year legal dispute involving the Carpenters' Union and a construction contractor in 1980s Hawaii. He identifies a pattern of uncritical press acceptance of statements from the business owner, paired with rejection and derision of all claims from the labor leader. Puette also examines television and newspaper coverage of the Pittston coal strike of 1989-'90. He finds the lack of a dedicated labor reporting staff led to uninformed coverage. He also locates a consistent "class prejudice" against blue-collar workers (Puette, 1992, p. 135).

Puette (1992, p. 155) identifies "eight lenses" which "operate as underlying values" for the conceptualization of labor put forth in the mainstream press: {1} Unions protect lazy and unproductive workers. {2} Unions hobble our national competitiveness through distorting wages. {3} Victimized workers – especially women or immigrants – might need unions, but the large international labor organizations are ineffective at providing protections. {4} Because of their underprivileged backgrounds, union leaders are especially susceptible to being corrupted. {5} Union activity should be volunteer activity; there should be no staff paid by worker dues. {6} Unions may have been necessary in the distant past, but today's employers are no longer exploitative; workers are sufficiently protected by current regulations. {7} Unions, by their nature, create conflict. {8} All unions are equivalent. The corruption of one therefore applies to all others. Puette claims these presuppositions have a powerful impact on mainstream press coverage. He calls for labor to engage with mass media, to make their own messages, and to combat what he sees as stereotypes "largely formed by ignorance" (Puette, 1992, p. 155).

Serrin (1992) shares an insider's view on the strained relationship between labor and the press. When invited to become labor reporter for *The New York Times*, he "figured that the offer meant I was somehow regarded as a second-stringer" (Serrin, 1992, p. 9). He recounts colleagues' similar comments disdaining this specialty. Serrin accepted the position, and found himself "hopelessly overcommitted," covering too much territory for too many editors; the paper would not assign more reporters to his beat (Serrin, 1992, p. 11). By comparison, the business section had around four dozen reporters. Stories Serrin reported were often buried in the paper, and he found that most editors "saw the labor movement as passé, even dead" (Serrin, 1992, p. 13). This decline in institutional esteem for labor is echoed by Erickson & Mitchell (1996) in their interviews with *NY Times* reporters. For his part, Serrin (1992) offers criticism to the unions, as well, calling them "weak," "lacking in ideas," too passive, and often coopted by employers (p. 13). Still, he goes on to say the labor movement can provide some of the "best stories in the nation," despite ever-shrinking space given to it, in print and on television (p. 17).

Parenti (1993) asserts that labor is largely absent from the corporate press; when it does appear, it is typically presented unfavorably. Labor disputes are treated as aberrations, both unjustified and free from connection to overall economic conditions. Unions are portrayed as recalcitrant and irrational; the reasons for strikes are rarely explored. When strikes are discussed, it is with respect to public inconvenience and economic cost. Corporate profits and executive compensation are deemphasized. Institutions of authority like the government and police are portrayed as "neutral guardians of the peace and defenders of the public interest," when most often they serve the interests of corporate owners (Parenti, 1993, p. 93). Solidarity among workers and across unions is excluded from coverage, which further

denies the class element in the struggle, and falsely portrays strikers as isolated. Like Rollings (1983), Parenti identifies media distortions as a major contributor to low public esteem for labor. He adds that workers themselves are demobilized by these pervasive negative images.

Rousmaniere (1999) points out how coverage of teachers' unions emphasizes the impacts of strikes on children and families, while omitting explanations of the causes. In these portrayals, unions are irrational and chaotic organizations, while school board positions are seen as rational and respectable. Striking teachers make "demands," for example, while management responds with "offers" (Rousmaniere, 1999). Distorted coverage springs from the assumption that the present economic arrangements are inevitable and correct; this fosters the characterization of workers' collective attempts to change these arrangements as aberrant (Rousmaniere, 1999).

Martin (2004) examines coverage of five major labor stories throughout the 1990s: The GM shutdown of the Willow Run Assembly Plant in Michigan from 1991 to 1994, the American Airlines strike of 1993, the Major League Baseball strike of 1994 and 1995, the UPS strike of 1997, and the protests against the World Trade Organization in Seattle in 1999. He locates five "dominant frames," concluding that coverage is "often severely critical of labor" while at the same time "enthusiastically supportive of capital" (Martin, 2004, p. 11).

Martin's (2004) five recurring conceptual frameworks: {1} *The consumer is king*. Media address viewers foremost as consumers, rather than as citizens. {2} *The process of production is none of the public's business*. The consumer sphere should be limited to product purchases, excluding knowledge about the workers and processes behind those products. {3} *The economy is driven by great business leaders and entrepreneurs*. With

workers rendered invisible, economic stories center on dynamic business leaders. Mainstream journalism celebrates wealth and the wealthy. Martin finds this frame persists even during economic downturns, when it might seem appropriate to criticize executive misjudgments and excess. {4} *The workplace is a meritocracy*. Another unspoken assumption holds that those who work hard will succeed, and those who don't advance must not be working hard enough. This viewpoint, Martin (2004) argues, springs from individualism, and mitigates strongly against positive views of collective action. This suggests the final theme: {5} *Collective economic action is bad*. When workers band together, the result is inconvenience to the consumer, and a disruption of US economic activity. The only acceptable form of action is individual – quitting a distasteful job, or making private consumer decisions.

Tracy (2006) studied US newsmagazine coverage of the International Typographical Union Local 6 strike against several New York newspapers, which began in 1962. He finds organized labor consistently framed as "malevolent, self-serving, and dishonest" (Tracy, 2006, p. 546). Labor is portrayed as deviating from the public interest, and the public is shown as victim of the union action. Coverage personalizes the role of the union local president, Bertram Powers, which has the effect of hiding the collective nature of the struggle. The motivations of the publishers are obscured, as is the fact that several of the papers *locked out* their employees; this is conflated with the strike, and blame ascribed to the workers. Also, violent imagery and language is employed to cast the union as thuggish. Tracy argues these misrepresentations combine with elite political ideology, rising automation and corporate consolidation to undermine the autonomy of the workers.

Kumar (2007) sees press misrepresentations as part of an overall structure utilized by the dominant elites to "manufacture consent for their policies" (p. xiv). Kumar points out that mainstream outlets uniformly have space for explicit discussion of business issues from a business perspective; no such outlet exists for labor. Kumar describes media performance as following a "dominance/resistance model" (Kumar, 2007, p. 56). At times of great social upheaval, dissenting viewpoints have a greater chance to find expression in the corporate press. In analyzing coverage of the 1997 Teamsters strike against UPS, Kumar locates a dominant frame of nationalism. The company and the press both made appeals to a national family to portray the workers as straying children, while the Teamsters successfully mobilized national and familial rhetoric of their own (Kumar, 2007).

Kumar (2007) finds strike coverage proceeding through distinct phases. First, the mainstream press downplayed the importance of the strike and emphasized the inconveniencing of consumers. However, as the strike progressed, press outlets found themselves acknowledging issues of wealth inequality and class. When the Teamsters won the strike, amidst strong public support as measured by opinion polling, news media were forced to recognize that globalization – contrary to dominant assertions – disadvantaged a great many workers. Kumar (2007) finds that, as conflict receded, dissenting voices once more disappeared from the press. He argues that true media reform is only possible within the context of a radical reordering of society.

Bruno (2009) tests organized labor's assertion that it receives unfair treatment in the press, and finds it confirmed; his analysis of a decade of *Chicago Tribune* stories on labor issues shows union activity severely under-reported; when coverage does appear, the majority is negative. In addition, the *Tribune* emphasizes conflict, while omitting

contributions unions make to improving health and safety standards on the job. In addition, negative stories about unions are clustered around a handful of themes, which suggests to readers these traits are institutionalized, while more diffuse positive coverage implies those qualities are uncharacteristic (Bruno, 2009). Bruno notes the trend toward increasing sports coverage amidst decreasing editorial space for hard news. The *Tribune's* portrayal of labor issues in sports stories is overwhelmingly negative, and the Tribune Company's ownership of the Chicago Cubs incentivizes unsympathetic newspaper coverage of the athletes' bargaining positions (Bruno, 2009). Bruno identifies the Sports section as "the principal vehicle for educating the public about organized labor and industrial relations" (2009, p. 397).

Harmon & Lee (2010) examine television news reports about strikes between 1968 and 2008, confirming a consistent frame for strike coverage is *impact on consumers*. Moreover, even in disputes where the impact on consumers is comparable, news outlets provide more in-depth coverage of strikes which impact middle and upper-class consumers, such as airline pilot strikes, while deemphasizing bus driver strikes which primarily affect low-income consumers. For Harmon & Lee (2010), this demonstrates corporate media's focus on the audience most desirable to advertisers. In addition, they find coverage focuses increasingly on celebrity and entertainment-driven labor disputes, such as professional athletes, Hollywood writers, and Broadway stagehands. This corresponds with the shift toward entertainment-driven content, as news organizations move deeper into a profit-centered market model.

## **Unions and the Social Contract**

The following section reviews connections between union density and income inequality, and the wide-ranging effects of that inequality, as seen in cross-national comparisons.

### *Unionization and Income Equality*

Scholars point to a link between the overall rate of unionization in a given nation's labor force, and the level of income inequality in that country (Gross, 2007). This relationship has a variety of salient features, including macroeconomic, interethnic, and even intraunion aspects. After touching on these, ramifications of the overall trend are illuminated by two examples – one domestic, the other international.

As part of a complex of interlocking forces, such as corporate compensation practices, and governmental tax and wage policies, it has been demonstrated that *as unionization rises, inequality shrinks, and as unions decline in power, income inequality grows* (Levy & Temin, 2007; Mosher, 2007). Pontusson (2005) cites Mishel, Bernstein, and Boushey, who show that one-fifth of the increase in US wage inequality in the 1970s and 1980s was attributable solely to falling unionization.

The trend toward inequality continued throughout the industrialized world between 1980 and 2000, while US wage inequality rose markedly faster than elsewhere; Pontusson (2005) argues this was due to the extremely weak position of American unions. This is confirmed by Pestieau (2006), who finds that as union density rises, "earnings dispersion tends to fall" (p. 136). Finally, Weeks (2005) studied changes in inequality across seventeen OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries during the

1980s and 1990s. He concludes that declining union membership is the *single most significant factor* contributing to rising inequality.

US union membership is found to reduce wealth inequality across all racial groups, but the effect is particularly dramatic among blacks and Hispanics, as unionization reduces the racial disparity in wages, relative to non-unionized members of the same communities (Agnone, 2008).

In addition, Pontusson (2005) finds that the more democratic nature of unions vis-à-vis the marketplace fosters egalitarianism within an individual worksite, through *wage compression*. There is both an upward pressure on the lowest wages – the lowest-paid workers being the primary targets of union organizing, as they are the ones most likely to benefit from unionization – along with a downward pressure on the highest wages within the same workplace.

A shorthand measure often used to describe income inequality is the gap between the compensation of a corporate CEO and that of a manufacturing worker. In the US in 1970, the average CEO was paid 30 times more than the average production worker (Hall & Murphy, 2003). By 2010, the gap had widened such that the CEO was paid 325 times more than the worker (Anderson, Collins, Klinger & Pizzigati, 2011). During this same period, private sector union density fell from a 1970 level of 29.1% (Working Life, 2004), to a 2010 level of 6.9% (Greenhouse, 2011a).

The most highly unionized country in the world is Sweden, where 65% of private sector workers belonged to unions as of 2009 (Fulton, 2011). A Swedish CEO makes only 34 times as much as the average manufacturing worker (Hirschler & Barber, 2011). This comparison is broadly indicative: Sweden is among the most equal nations on the planet

(CIA, 2011; OECD, 2011; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009), while among industrialized nations, the United States is ranked next-to-last (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009).

### *Why Income Equality Matters*

As British epidemiologists Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett demonstrate in their 2009 volume, *The Spirit Level*, societies which are highly unequal have significantly worse outcomes than more equal societies across a host of metrics; these include mental illness, alcoholism and drug addiction, life expectancy, infant mortality, obesity, children's educational performance, teen pregnancy, murder, incarceration rates, social mobility, and the level of trust people have for one another. The highly unequal United States performs dramatically worse across all these categories – oft-times, the *very* worst among all industrialized nations – when compared to highly equal nations like Sweden (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009). Improvements due to increased equality are not limited to the lower income strata; better outcomes also occur for the rich.

### **Sweden: The World's Most Powerful Labor Movement**

As aforementioned, Sweden is the world's most heavily unionized nation. Fulcher (1995) adds to the superlatives, describing Swedish labor as probably "the strongest and most unified socialist movement in the world," and going on to call their largest union organization, LO, "the world's most powerful union federation" (p. 7). In 2010, Sweden's overall union density – including both public and private sector workers – stood at 71%. While first among nations, this is still down considerably from a 1995 peak of 86% (Fulton, 2011). The trend in recent years was slow decline, until 2006, when a coalition of

conservative parties took control of government and made changes to labor law, resulting in a more rapid drop in membership (Fulton, 2011). What follows is a sketch of the twinned development – and partial decline – of Sweden's labor movement and labor politics.

### *History of Swedish Labor & the Welfare State*

Swedish unionism emerged comparatively late, in the 1880s, in response to the nation's late industrialization the decade before (Fulcher, 1995). The tension seen in the US between craft unions and trade unions was largely avoided in Sweden due to socialists, who innovated with work-material unionism, organizing entire sectors at once (Fulcher, 1995). Sweden's first union federation, LO, emerged in 1898 (Swedish Institute, 2011). It was established by the socialist party, known as the SAP, which itself had formed nine years earlier (Milner, 1989). Fulcher (1995) argues this relationship is key to understanding the success of Swedish labor.

Other unusual factors fostered labor's growth. Sweden was also late to democratization; it wasn't until 1909 that income and property restrictions on voting were removed (Fulcher, 1995). Even then, Sweden's voting system heavily favored the wealthy; in the election of 1909, the poorest citizen cast one vote, while someone in the richest income category was permitted to cast *forty* votes. Faced with this obstacle, many poor voters did not bother to turn out (Boix, 2010). The new labor movement, therefore, built its initial power base outside of electoral politics, inside the factories; from this position of mass support, workers used the general strike to push for more electoral reform (Fulcher, 1995). This came in 1911, in response to a general strike. Electoral reform culminated in 1921 with the introduction of universal suffrage and proportional representation, and the end of plural

voting (Greaves & Mayhew, 1937). The concentrated organizing work done outside the electoral system had placed unions and their allied socialist party in a prime position to take advantage of the new rules (Fulcher, 1995).

In quick succession, the previously marginal SAP – known in English as the Social Democrats – made stunning electoral gains (Boix, 2010). No longer constrained by a two-party system into making compromised alliances with the Liberal Party, workers had newfound power. The Great Depression led to the SAP emerging in 1932 as the dominant electoral force in Sweden (Clement, 2004). The early 20<sup>th</sup> century had seen a proliferation of strikes and lockouts, though generally labor was met with little state repression, even before the SAP took power (Fulcher, 1995). The government responded to the unrest of the Depression by enacting public works projects, unemployment insurance, maternity benefits, paid holidays, and old-age pensions (Milner, 1989). These policies would later become the blueprint for the postwar welfare state (Andersson, 2006). Fulcher (1995) points out these programs did not so much integrate labor into capitalism, as insulate it from the worst shocks of the market system. Leaders of the union and the party both still held out genuine socialism, won by peaceful means, as their end goal.

The labor crisis of the 1930s led the labor federation LO to come together with its opposite number, the employers' confederation known as SAF – which had arisen after the 1902 general strike, to counter labor's power with such weapons as the "general lockout" (Fulcher, 1995). The two sides hammered out the Saltsjöbaden Accord of 1938, setting forward an overall centralized bargaining agreement, and established terms for minimizing labor disputes and the involvement of the state (Clement, 2004).

Following the end of the Second World War, social programs in Sweden grew significantly. Public acceptance rested on the programs' universality; most benefits were shared among all citizens, rather than means-tested (Bergh, 2004). Universal benefits find political support among a larger portion of the electorate, and are easier to enact (Hill, 2010). As a result, from the early 1950s until the early 1970s, Sweden could be characterized as a "slum-free, affluent, egalitarian full employment welfare state, with a strong commitment to work for all and women's equality" (Ginsburg & Rosenthal, 2006, n.p.). As an indication of the close relationship between trade unions and the government, the macroeconomic principles which guided policy throughout this time – known as the Rehn-Meidner model – were devised by two economists from the trade union federation LO (Erixon, 2010).

Labor's influence extended deeply into culture, as well – into the 1980s, the labor press accounted for twenty percent of all newspaper readership (Fulcher, 1995). Workers' educational circles, sports associations, and a wide array of cooperative movements all arose, linked to labor and often drawing a large amount of support from state subsidy (Fulcher, 1995).

The Swedish welfare state has, since the 1970s, met more than one period of crisis. Benefits were cut back following the global recession of 1975 (Milner, 1989). The uneasy truce between Swedish labor and capital – which was the bedrock of their economic success – unraveled in the mid-1970s, when the SAP began to institute *genuine* socialism, in which ownership of industry would be moved gradually to the workers. The employers balked, and white-collar voters – who were also unionized – defected at the polls; the SAP was voted out of power for the next six years (Fulcher, 1995). Globalization rendered Swedish products expensive and uncompetitive; capital outflows hobbled investment (Fulcher, 1995). The

Swedish model was under serious threat, and the recession of 1990 led to further deregulation and privatization (Ginsburg & Rosenthal, 2006). The contemporary Swedish model, however, is marked by flexibility, and social benefits are maintained through a 25% sales tax and a top income tax rate of 55% (Feng, 2008). While it is true to say income inequality has risen in Sweden since 1980, this is indicative of overall trends worldwide (Ginsburg & Rosenthal, 2006).

The provision of healthcare is one of the pillars of the welfare state, and even after the long march of neoliberalism, the Swedish health system is still held in high esteem by all strata of citizens (Wendt, et al, 2010), showing a major portion of the welfare state could still "live up to the promise of treating all members of the society equally" (p. 177). The welfare state's universality translates – in times of crisis – into an effective bias toward the middle class, who have sudden need of increased services (Bergh, 2004).

In sum, regardless of recessions and crises and shifts in the ideological wind, Sweden remains the country which "spends the greatest percentage of its GDP in social expenditure" (Eger, 2010). The signal accomplishments of modern Sweden arose from the link between the dominant socialist party SAP, and the trade unions they had helped to organize, a century before.

### *The Swedish Welfare State in the US Corporate Press*

Corporate press outlets in the United States grossly misrepresent the nature of both the Swedish and broader European welfare states, falsely portraying European social programs as bedeviled by crisis, ever in the midst of wholesale dismantlement, and doomed by outrageous cost to certain destruction (Gornick & Meyers, 2001). Such portrayals provide

US policy elites with justification to maintain low levels of domestic social spending. Additionally, widespread ignorance of the strength and success of workers' movements overseas serves to keep Americans from imagining greater possibilities for homegrown labor.

### **The US & Sweden: Dangerous Parallels, Sad Divergences**

Despite its malleability in meeting the contemporary economic challenge of globalized capital, Sweden faces an ongoing change to its social conditions which bears special attention, when considering the future of what Fulcher (1995) calls "the world's most advanced welfare state" (p. 25). The present section identifies parallels between Sweden's current struggle over immigration and the challenges, both historical and contemporary, which racism has presented to the American welfare state. The role of racism is also discussed, in the historic failure of the US labor movement to secure wider benefits for American working people.

#### *Immigration: Existential Threat to Sweden's Redistributive Policies?*

Rising immigration has been a pressing political issue across Western Europe in recent decades. Writing of neighboring Denmark – which has a similar, universalistic welfare state – conservative scholar Peter Nannestad (2004) asserts that immigrants represent a drain on national resources, and the failure of integration is a signal of the irreconcilability of "unchecked immigration and a redistributive welfare state" (p. 755). Hjerm (2005) examines the question of immigration from a standpoint of *equality of outcomes* rather than resource drain, but similarly concludes that Sweden has not successfully integrated new arrivals into

either the labor force or the welfare state – though he adds immigrants will be key to maintaining social benefits, due to declining birthrates among native-born Swedes.

In a study of public opinion, Mau & Burkhardt (2009) find that Swedes – and Nordic citizens as a group – are open-minded toward foreigners, and generally feel their welfare state is not threatened by immigrants. However, Eger (2010) points out public discussion of immigration is considered politically incorrect in Sweden; respondents may not answer opinion surveys honestly. Instead, she notes support for social spending is in decline, and the areas of steepest decline are the ones with the most immigration. She argues that as heterogeneity increases, in-group solidarity declines; in 2006, despite robust economic growth, the long-ruling Social Democrats were voted out of power, and the new centre-right coalition quickly cut spending on social programs, both universal and means-tested (Eger, 2010). She sees this as a way to discourage future immigration, and to take away benefits from immigrants already there.

In other public opinion research, van Oorschot (2006) asserts that elsewhere across Europe – where respondents may lack Nordic reticence – immigrants are considered the group least deserving of inclusion in the welfare state. The Netherlands, a nation with generous social benefits, openly wrestles with integration; van der Waal, et al (2010) identify anti-immigrant "welfare chauvinism" among the native-born poor. Hargreaves & Leamon (1995) assert racism against immigrants and asylum-seekers is visible throughout the politics of Western Europe.

*The Challenge of Race to the American Welfare State*

Several scholars conclude that racism has been a feature – some say the defining feature – of the US welfare state, since it began with mothers' pensions, established in many states in 1911 (Neubeck & Cazeneve, 2001; Ward, 2005). The pensions were administered in a racially lopsided fashion; punitive measures often targeted African-American families for exclusion, a problem which continued when the Social Security Act of 1935 replaced these pensions with Aid to Dependent Children (Gordon, 1998, Neubeck & Cazeneve, 2001). Racial exclusion was a product of these federal programs being administered unequally by the states, but this condition had been deemed necessary for passage of the legislation (Neubeck & Cazeneve, 2001).

Conditions of equal access improved during the 1960s, likely in response to race riots which swept the nation; the program was renamed Aid to Families with Dependent Children, and minority participation in the welfare state swelled (Neubeck & Cazeneve, 2001). A political backlash followed, while public figures mobilized racialized rhetoric to undermine support for the program, culminating in its dismantling under President Clinton in 1996, in favor of Temporary Aid to Needy Families, which several scholars argue has elements of racism built into its design (Limbert & Bullock, 2005; Ward, 2005). In tracking public opinion about welfare programs, Gilens (1999) finds the single most powerful predictor of white opposition is "the perception that blacks are lazy" (p. 77).

It is important to point out the means-tested programs outlined above represent a small portion of overall American welfare state spending (Gilens, 1999). That said, Lieberman (1995) asserts that racial exclusion also played a role in the establishment of Old Age Insurance as part of the Social Security Act of 1935; the insurance did not extend to agricultural workers, for example, who were disproportionately African-American. Davies &

Derthick (1997) admit race was likely a factor, though they argue other elements were more crucial, and in any case, old age insurance became universal in 1950. While the extent of racial exclusion in the American welfare state is debatable, several pertinent facts remain: the US ranks next-to-last among industrialized nations in the proportion of GDP allocated to social spending (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009), the US ranks dead last in the percentage of poverty reduced by social spending (Gilens, 1999), and minorities are disproportionately represented among the poor (National Poverty Center, 2009). Whether or not racism was part of the design, it can be seen in the results. Even if the overlap of race and class was merely coincidental, the outcome is the same – as Lieberman (2005) writes: "a society in which race is a central axis of inequality" (p. 146).

### *Labor Wrestles with Racism, Capital Wins*

As described earlier, the racial history of the American labor movement is deeply troubled. While some unions and federations were racially inclusive, with a broad view of solidarity in the struggle of labor against capital, most organizations practiced exclusion, and sought to undermine minority unions in a number of ways – including, at times, the use of violence to repress minority workers.

These fractures appear largely to have healed in the most recent generation – Teamsters, who attacked members of the United Farm Workers during the 1973 grape strike with physical violence and racist rhetoric (Tejada-Flores, 2004; Elinson, 2008), appeared on the same stage together with them in downtown Los Angeles in March, 2011. Just over a month later, AFL-CIO president Richard Trumka spoke in Milwaukee at a combined May Day rally for immigrants and workers' rights (Pabst, 2011). The contemporary labor

movement has grasped the need for unity across multiple fronts. Still, the vital damage to the movement's effectiveness was accomplished long ago, during its periods of initial rise and greatest strength.

As the examples of both the US and Sweden demonstrate, for the greater part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, labor unions were *the* major force in civil society pushing for more redistributive policies. However, the US labor movement sidelined numerous potential allies for generations, thereby limiting their own organizational strength. Lipset & Marks (2000) argue that American socialism failed to catch fire partly because of deep-seated racism, and the attendant failure of many unions, especially among the AFL, to organize black and immigrant workers.

By contrast, in Sweden the link between socialists and labor unions was strong from the outset, in some measure due to racial homogeneity. Swedish labor participated more deeply in articulating a broadly-shared public policy vision, which reached its fullest flower after the Second World War: Sweden became, as seen across numerous metrics, the world's most egalitarian and even *most democratic* nation (Eger, 2010).

American efforts, severely hampered as they were by prejudice, produced predictable outcomes. According to Alesina, Glaeser, and Sacerdote (2001), racial animosity is a key factor in explaining the relative smallness of the US welfare state; the dismal ranking of the US across numerous indices of societal health and well-being has already been discussed.

## Chapter Three – Methodology

The research portion of this project will take the form of a documentary film. What follows is a brief exploration of the history and distinctive features of the form. After this comes a description of the project design, the equipment used, rights acquisition for music and stock footage, the sources of financing, my qualifications for this work, and its possible significance.

### **History of Documentary**

In his 2009 volume, *Directing the Documentary*, Michael Rabiger claims the term *documentary* grew out of a conversation in the mid-1920s between Scottish social scientist John Grierson and American filmmaker Robert Flaherty, considered the first master of the form. Grierson referred to one of Flaherty's films as "documentary" in its nature, and the label stuck. Grierson, a filmmaker himself, later defined the form as the "creative treatment of actuality" (Rabiger, 2009, p. 11). Rabiger adds to this definition, calling documentary "a corner of actuality seen through a temperament" (p. 25). Erik Barnouw, in his 1993 text, *Documentary*, offers an alternate explanation for the origins of the term. Barnouw asserts that the first wave of films, produced between 1895 and 1907, were known by a variety of names, including *documentaires*, *actualités*, *interest films*, *educationals*, *expedition films*, and *travel films* (p. 19).

Inspired by Edison's Kinetoscope – which projected moving images inside a box – French brothers Auguste and Louis Lumière added the innovation in 1895 of projecting the images on a screen for public viewing (Rabiger, 2009). Their first films were 50-second scenes of daily life, such as *Workers Leaving the Factory*, *Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat*,

and *Feeding the Baby*, produced between 1895 and 1897. Lumière cameramen circled the globe and produced hundreds of films, seeding national film industries as they went (Barnouw, 1993). During the first dozen years of cinema, documentaries outnumbered fiction films in most countries (Barnouw, 1993, p. 21). Even during these earliest years of documentary, the tension between reality and artistry was present. The Lumières posed elements of their films, contrived situations, and shot take after take, while other early documentarians staged recreations, used miniatures, and employed other forms of fakery (Barnouw, 1993).

While audiences during the first generation of cinema saw plenty of news footage, including scenes of the First World War, it wasn't until 1922, and Robert Flaherty's *Nanook of the North*, that the documentary form first came to maturity. Flaherty utilized the language of fiction filmmaking to convey scenes of dramatic impact and involve the audience emotionally in the story of the protagonists (Barnouw, 1993, p.39). Flaherty's film shows an Inuit family surviving harsh Arctic conditions, but several of the elements of the film were staged – Nanook (not his real name) hunted with his grandfather's spear, whereas in everyday life he used a rifle. Flaherty was seeking to document a way of life which had already passed. The film is widely acknowledged as a masterpiece, while the ethics of Flaherty's manipulations are debated to this day (Rabiger, 2009).

An early Soviet documentary, *Man with the Movie Camera* – made in 1929 by Dziga Vertov – demonstrates virtuosic understanding of the power of editing and trick photography. Rabiger (2009) writes that its closest contemporary analogue would be the music video.

The coming of sound brought an early example of satiric documentary in *Land Without Bread*, Luis Buñuel's dark 1932 film about the starving and disease-ridden poor in

rural Spain. While most of the elements are believed to be factual, at one point a crewmember shoots a goat to make it fall; the boundary between actuality and artifice remained fluid (Rabiger, 2009).

Leni Riefenstahl's 1935 *Triumph of the Will* and 1938 *Olympia* showcase the sense of majesty which can be lent to a subject through narrationless documentary. In addition, they demonstrate the political power of the form, which is also prominent in Frank Capra's series of films made between 1942 and 1945 to explain US involvement in the Second World War, entitled *Why We Fight* (Nichols, 1991). The Capra war films were dominated by words, featuring heavy narration which constrained space for audience interpretation (Barnouw, 1993).

According to Rabiger (2009), color was a late innovation to the documentary genre, and is integrated with black-and-white scenes in *Night and Fog*, a 1955 film by Alain Resnais, which narrates the camera's journey through the empty Auschwitz death camp.

Advances in sound recording technology in the 1950s and 1960s – first magnetic tape, then crystal-sync which allowed for the sound and camera equipment to function unconnected – allowed documentary filmmakers to travel more freely with their subjects. Filmmaker control over events was surrendered, in return for following the spontaneous flow of events (Nichols, 2001, p. 110).

The 1960s saw the rise of two opposing schools of documentary filmmaking: direct cinema (now called *observational cinema*) and *cinéma vérité* (which has come to be known as *participatory cinema*). Direct cinema is embodied in films like *Salesman* – the story of a Bible salesman who cannot bring himself to fleece his customers – from 1969 by the Maysles

brothers, Albert and David. (Rabiger, 2009, p. 84). The filmmakers attempt to make themselves disappear from the telling of the story, while foregrounding their subjects.

The *vérité* approach is embodied in French ethnographer Jean Rouch's 1961 film, *Chronicle of a Summer*. The filmmakers recognize that, in the making of a film, off-camera relationships develop; they make an effort to capture these in the film, by allowing themselves to appear on camera. This viewpoint emphasizes documentary as a collaborative process, allowing the filmmaker to provoke events, rather than waiting for them to unfold (Rabiger, 2009). These provocations were intended to reveal hidden truth, which might not have come out, had the filmmakers simply waited for it to emerge, as the observational school did (Barnouw, 1993). The *vérité* style also privileges interview, which had been shunned by documentarians up to that point (Barnouw, 1993, p. 261).

Editing was the site of the next round of innovation, as editors were forced to sift through the enormous amount of footage generated by observational and participatory directors. Editors focused on methods of *ellipsis* – alluding and abbreviating – and experimented with cutting techniques (Rabiger, 2009). The appearance of video technology in the 1970s eliminated film developing from the process, though video took some time to mature; the 1990s brought nonlinear editing, which spelled the end of earlier, linear systems requiring a cascade of changes each time an editor made an alteration.

Powerful computer software has advanced the art – and lowered the financial barriers to entry – to the point where even student filmmakers have finely-tuned control over their finished product, with results tending to be "more subjective and impressionistic" (Rabiger, 2009, p. 90). Meanwhile, the documentary form – with its inherently unstable relationship between fact and fiction– has found renewed popular expression in the so-called *reality*

*television* genre, with its coached participants and artificially heightened conflicts (Chapman, 2009).

### **Distinctive Features of the Documentary Form**

The central question of the documentary form arises from the tension between portraying an objective reality, and manipulating filmed situations to heighten dramatic impact. Rabiger (2009) calls objectivity impossible; subjective choices are involved in camera placement, when to begin rolling film, when to cut, and how to compress the footage into a story that is "brief, focused, and meaningful" (p. 17). He points out that while film often appears as transparent, unmediated reality, the presence of a filmmaker – like the presence of any observer – will "produce some change in those under scrutiny" (Rabiger, 2009, p. 86).

The critical element in making a credible film is showing that one's subjective choices are trustworthy; this involves having a broad grasp of the facts of one's subject, a cohesive logic to one's argument, and insightful interpretation of the material. Fairness, Rabiger (2009) asserts, is a more useful and realistic goal than objectivity. With respect to balance in documentary film, Aufderheide (2007) quotes Edward R. Murrow: "Anyone who believes that every individual film must represent a 'balanced' picture knows nothing about either balance or pictures" (p. 2).

Bill Nichols's *Introduction to Documentary* (2001) lists six principle modes of documentary film, which emerged in roughly chronological order. As filmmakers innovated, the new modes did not entirely drive out the old; rather, more tools were added to the kit, so that late films often employ elements from several modes, even if one predominates.

The *Poetic* mode has much in common with avant-garde filmmaking. It eschews continuity editing, often has no discernible narrative, and is more concerned with elements of rhythm, space, texture, patterns, and loose associations. As Nichols points out, viewers of Joris Ivens's 1929 film *Rain* will come away with no knowledge of the people they saw in the film, but will be left with an impression of what an Amsterdam summer shower is like (2001, p. 102).

The *Expository* mode emphasizes the historical world, arranging pieces together to form an explicit argument, and is often connected by an authoritative, "voice-of-God" narrator (Nichols, 2001, p. 105). Expository films often take the shape of an illustrated lecture. Capra's *Why We Fight* series (1941) is one example of this mode; *America's Most Wanted* on television is another. This mode continues to be used in theatrical documentaries, but is almost completely dominant in television news.

*Observational* cinema, as noted above, emerged around 1960 due to technological changes in sound recording. Filmmakers in an observational mode turned away from contrivances and reenactments. They also avoided soundtrack music and visual effects, in an attempt – as much philosophical as technical – to make their films as representative of lived experience as possible. Characters in the films ignored the filmmakers, and appear to go about their lives naturally, though underneath there remains the question of whether – and to what extent – the mere presence of a camera and film personnel affects the behavior of those in the film (Nichols, 2001).

In the *Participatory* mode, the filmmaker is located within the film in some way, and plays a catalyzing, instigating, interrogating role in the action. Whereas the observational mode seeks to show the truth as it would be were the camera not there at all, participatory

films show the truth as it can only be revealed by the *presence* of the camera. In one example, *Not a Love Story* (1981), the filmmaker poses for a nude photograph and then describes on camera how the experience made her feel. Participatory films often feature a collaboration between the filmmaker and the subject (Nichols, 2001, p. 118).

Films in the *Reflexive* mode are concerned with issues of representation, often toying with concepts of truth and subverting audience expectation. Movies like *David Holzman's Diary* (1968) or *No Lies* (1973) represent themselves at first to be reality as lived by their participants, who turn out to be actors (Nichols, 2001, p. 127). Concepts of proof and evidence come under scrutiny, and boundaries between fact and "truth" are fluid. *Exit Through the Gift Shop* (2010) would appear to be a late example of this mode, as the film freely mixes historical reality and contrived scenarios to explore questions of art and commerce.

Lastly, documentaries in the *Performative* mode emphasize subjectivity and lived experience as the pathways to revealed truth, rather than historical reality or fact. Nichols considers *Night and Fog* (1955) to be performative in nature, as its subject matter is a Nazi death camp, but its focus is the affective nature of memory, rather than a retelling of history (Nichols, 2001, p. 134). Many performative films are first-person, and this has often been the mode of choice for underrepresented communities, seeking to tell their own stories – like Marlon Riggs's *Tongues Untied* (1989), which offers the perspective of a gay black man with AIDS. Performative films tend to emphasize personal, emotional reality in a poetic fashion (Nichols, 2001, p. 132).

## **The Project Design**

The documentary which I produced consists of four major components, beginning at a personal level, expanding out to the level of an individual labor union fighting two of its major campaigns in Los Angeles, then moving further out to offer analyses of labor issues from both a national and international perspective.

I open the film with a background sketch of myself, as the filmmaker, and how I came to make this film. I am a member of three trade unions – the Screen Actors Guild, United Teachers Los Angeles, and United Auto Workers. I share the first stirrings of my own labor consciousness, after my work prospects as a commercial actor were decimated by the commercials strike of 2000. Then I touch on my studies in Journalism at California State Northridge as the means by which I came in contact with the hospitality workers union, Unite Here. This is intended to provide the film with an element of personal involvement.

While the film introduces many characters in interviews and observations, I could not get close enough with any of the subjects to present a glimpse of their psychological reality and explore any personal transformations they might have undergone during the twenty-six months of the film's production. Considering this a vital element for audience identification, I chose to touch on my own story of dawning consciousness regarding the struggles of others, and movement toward concern for things greater than myself. I appear on-camera at selected points in the beginning, again at the middle, and once more at the end of the film, while the voiceover I recorded provides a continuous thread of one person's journey through the various events of the story. This element, however, is relatively minor, when compared with the rest of the film's contents.

The bulk of the film consists of three interlocking parts: First is the struggle of the low-wage, mostly immigrant hotelworkers of Unite Here Local 11, as they wage two

campaigns for new contracts, at Disneyland in Anaheim, CA and Hyatt hotels in the Los Angeles area. Their struggles are linked with the student movement against state budget cuts, and Occupy Los Angeles, in which labor became a prominent player in Fall 2011. This portion of the film is based on sixteen labor-related actions I attended between January, 2010 and February, 2012, where I recorded the content of the events (marches, pickets, speeches, hunger strikes, street theater) and conducted dozens of interviews with participants, in both English and Spanish.

The second major element is made from in-depth interviews I conducted with labor leader John Wilhelm, international president of Unite Here; journalists Harold Meyerson and Charles Bowden; and academician Kent Wong of the UCLA Labor Center. These four figures offer analysis of American labor in historical terms, as well as in the present moment with respect to politics, culture, shifting national demographics, and intersections with social movements like Occupy Wall Street. Excerpts from these in-depth interviews bracket the individual labor actions, setting them in context, and providing a big-picture view to complement the ground-level struggles of the Hyatt and Disneyland hotelworkers.

The third and final significant component of the documentary comes in the form of a journey to Sweden. I traveled there in July, 2011 to attend Politicians Week in the medieval city of Visby, where I met labor leaders like Wanja Lundby-Wedin (the world's most powerful labor leader), Håkan Juholt (then the head of Sweden's largest political party), and Jesse Jackson, among numerous labor officials, party officers, workers, and students. Together, the many interviews I conducted at Politicians Week paint a picture of the considerable social benefits that flow from the world's strongest labor movement, while

acknowledging the daunting challenges posed by immigration, the rise of conservative ideology, and a fragmenting culture.

Following this, the focus of the film's closing section is back in Los Angeles, where Occupy LA has arisen, and joined with the hotelworkers in the Hyatt struggle. In the end, the Disneyland campaign comes to a positive conclusion; the workers win a contract which allays their major concerns of affordable healthcare and a full-time workweek. Meanwhile, as of April 2012, the Hyatt workers must fight on, as their unfinished campaign turns toward the court system.

### **Equipment**

Footage from the sixteen labor actions was recorded with a variety of cameras, including a FlipVideo HD camcorder (720p), an iPhone 4 with HD video (720p), and a Panasonic HDC-TM90 camcorder (1080p). The in-depth interviews in Los Angeles, and all of the Swedish materials, were recorded with the Panasonic camcorder, which had superior resolution, audio capabilities, optical zoom, and image stabilization. Editing was begun with iMovie '11 software on a MacBook Pro laptop computer (2009 release). However, late in the project, iMovie ceased to function properly – I was informed by Apple employees that the software was never intended to edit feature-length works – so I purchased Final Cut Pro X professional editing software, on which the project was completed. Despite initial difficulties with the new software, it proved vastly superior in terms of features and flexibility.

### **Rights for Music and Stock Footage**

The film features music and sound effects from several sources. One is Apple's iLife music and effects library, which came bundled with iMovie '11 software. These materials are free to end users to employ as they see fit; no rights or royalties are involved.

The film also prominently features a live performance of "Fight On," a rap composed and performed by grocery worker Phillip Meza; this same song plays underneath the documentary's ending credits. I contacted Mr. Meza through the United Food and Commercial Workers, and he gave permission to use his song as I saw fit. He sent me a cleanly-recorded edition on compact disc, and in that same envelope, he included a letter which assigns me the rights to use his work in my film, free of charge.

The bulk of the music in the film is composed by Kevin MacLeod, who maintains a royalty-free online library of thousands of his own compositions. There is no cost associated with the use of this music, so long as Mr. MacLeod receives credit. He does request a voluntary five-dollar donation for each song utilized, which I provided. This arrangement, as laid out on MacLeod's website, incompetech.com, releases me from any further obligation for use of his music in my project.

I consulted with an entertainment attorney regarding the accidental background recording of copyrighted music at live events. I was advised that, so long as the music does not play for an extended period, and it is not the central subject of the scene, then its inclusion in the film constitutes *fair use*.

Finally, I purchased two shots for the film (the aerial view of the Los Angeles cityscape and the aerial view of the Hollywood sign) from an online stock footage library, GotFootageHD.com. Each shot cost \$200, and with that came the right to use those shots in

the manner of my choosing, with no further obligation, so long as I credited the source in my film, which I have done.

### **Financing**

In May of 2011, I received the Association of Retired Faculty Memorial Award of \$1500, which paid for my airfare to Sweden and my youth hostel accommodations in Stockholm. In Fall 2011, I was also awarded a \$1000 Thesis Support Grant from the university, which paid for software, stock footage, and other incidentals as the project came to its conclusion. The \$2000 MacBook Pro laptop computer on which I did the editing was a gift from an exceptionally generous friend. The other costs associated with making the film – principally, the camera and the time needed to shoot and edit things together – was supported by student loans.

### **Qualifications**

Besides my interest in the subject and experience as a worker and trade unionist, I have an undergraduate degree in Theater, and a Master's degree in Screenwriting; one provides insight into the performative nature of storytelling, and the other an understanding of film structure. In addition, I have written, directed, and co-produced an hour-long narrative film, *Waycross* (2005), as well as a forty-minute documentary, *Survive the Night* (2010).

During the course of my Journalism studies, I established a YouTube channel, *Political Muscle*, where I posted news analysis videos which I produced with a small team. Over time, the nature of the series changed, into direct-participation activism videos. I

recorded or took part in strikes, pickets, and other events with Unite Here, the hotelworkers' union. This gave me new perspectives on the labor movement; I have also participated in and recorded several AFL-CIO events throughout Los Angeles. Finished videos typically feature a blend of action and interview, speeches and spectacle, ranging in length from four to twenty minutes. I produced nearly two hundred short subjects for YouTube between 2009 and 2011, which has been excellent preparation to tackle this larger project, in terms of developing technical proficiency with videography, interview, and editing – as well as coming into consciousness of where I fit into the overall economic system, and where my sympathies are.

### **Significance of the project**

As has been demonstrated, the corporate press consistently presents a grossly distorted image of the labor movement, promoting a view which overwhelmingly favors the interests of capital. This project aims to provide a modest corrective, exploring the history and social role of unions from a worker's perspective.

The film, by the nature of its subject matter, should be of interest to labor union members and possibly their political allies, both in the US and possibly in Sweden. If the work is effective, it may also be of wider interest to a general audience, who may not be highly conscious of worker issues. I hope to explore the reach of the film's audience by submitting it to festivals – those with a labor or social justice bent, and otherwise – both domestically and abroad.

## Chapter Four – Transcription

*00:00:02*

When I look at the gleaming towers of downtown LA, I sometimes think of the immense, almost unimaginable wealth and power wielded by the handful who own these properties and populate their upper floors.

The rise of these tower-dwelling titans represents both the overwhelming triumph of capitalism, and – through the influence their wealth buys – the near-total defeat of democracy. Can any force oppose their power? I never used to think about these things.

*00:00:31*

I was concerned only with the rise of my own star. Like so many others, I came from a small town to make it in Tinseltown, as an actor. I got an agent, I got a few very small roles, and I joined the Screen Actors Guild – the actors union.

*00:00:45*

I was auditioning frequently, and prospects were promising, until the commercials strike of 2000, when my non-union acting classmates suddenly got a lot of work. I knew enough not to cross a picket line, but throughout the six-month strike, I never went and marched on one. When the strike was over, my half-dozen auditions a week had turned into a single audition every two or three weeks.

I needed a new plan. Eventually, I came here, to Cal State Northridge, to study journalism. Still, I hadn't given up my dreams of being a star, so I created a show for myself to star in – a political talk show for the web, which I set at the gym.

*00:01:57*

It was a lot more work than I'd imagined, but it was fun to do, it was a creative challenge, and I even got some academic credit for it.

00:02:03

I guess I was feeling pretty self-satisfied when I attended a talk here at the CSUN library given by award-winning journalist and author Charles Bowden. He had come to discuss his excellent book about the Mexican drug war, *Murder City*, and at one point he was asked about what drives him to do his often-dangerous work.

00:02:41

Bowden was right. It's not all about me, about surrounding myself with cute girls who only talk about what I want to talk about. It's not about showing off my biceps or proving how smart I am.

I needed to do something else. I said goodbye to the cute actresses – sigh! – and looked for another direction to aim my camera. I didn't have to wait for long.

00:03:05

Though auditions had completely dried up by this point, I still paid my union dues – unwilling, perhaps, to let go that last shred of my original ambition – and I joined a union-related email list. One day in January 2010, I got an invitation to attend a protest at the Hyatt Century Plaza hotel in super-wealthy Century City.

Housekeepers, bellmen, and foodservice workers at the hotel belong to the hospitality workers' union, Unite Here, which has 275,000 members in the US and Canada. This was the first I'd ever heard of them. Their contract with Hyatt had expired two months before, in November 2009, and the workers were going to raise some Cain about it.

It sounded like a story with possibilities, and a chance – ten years late – to find out what a picket line looks like, up close.

*00:03:51*

450 of the workers at the luxury hotel, including food and beverage, housekeeping, and dishwashers, were part of Unite Here Local 11. When I walked amongst the picketing workers and their allies, I felt an unmistakable energy in the air. To learn more about the reason for the protest, I spoke with hotelworker Ignacio Ruiz, who set the table by telling me about his job.

*00:04:59*

Ruiz was emphatic about the vital role union membership plays in his working life.

*00:05:13*

The protest continued as day turned to night. I bumped into Maria Elena Durazo, head of the LA County Federation of Labor, and one of the highest profile labor leaders in the country. The first thing she said really surprised me.

*00:06:18*

Before I could ask what she meant about the right to organize, workers were gathered for an address by AFL-CIO president, Richard Trumka.

*00:06:53*

Though a union member myself, the rally at the Hyatt Century Plaza revealed to me how little I knew about this thing I belonged to. I sought out Kent Wong, director of the UCLA Labor Center, to fill in the gaps. He started with the basics.

*00:07:35*

I put myself on the mailing list for Unite Here local 11, so I would be alerted to future actions. A couple weeks later, in February 2010, I got word of the union's other major campaign, in nearby Anaheim. It seemed Disneyland might not be the happiest place on earth, at least if you're a hotelworker.

*00:07:48*

In front of Disneyland's Grand Californian Hotel, eight hotel employees were camped on the sidewalk and going without food for a week, to draw attention to their two-year struggle for a new contract. Before I spoke with hunger strikers, I noticed a shrine just at the end of the row of chairs.

*00:09:09*

He doesn't even work there, yet he's going without food for a week, in order to help them. This was something I had never seen before.

*00:09:20*

At a closing rally, the hunger strikers were celebrated by members of civil society, and then by their union's international president.

*00:11:04*

As workers and allies thanked the hunger strikers for their sacrifice, I considered the story told by John Wilhelm – this alternative vision of history, and its whole new set of heroes. People make sense of the world through the stories we tell ourselves, and Wilhelm's narrative was intriguing.

*00:11:22*

I caught up with him at the Beverly Hilton Hotel. He wasted no time in describing what he saw as the main relationships in this American drama.

*00:12:00*

Zooming in the local picture, I asked President Wilhelm for his sketch of the Disney workers' situation.

*00:12:37*

And the standing up continued in July of 2010, when Disneyland hotelworkers and their allies planned a mass action in the streets outside the resort.

*00:13:04*

As the workers began marching, I noticed several of them dressed in Disney costumes, appropriating the power of myth, as if symbolizing the question of who is hero, and who is villain, in this struggle.

*00:13:29*

Outside Anaheim Convention Center, Aramark workers joined with Disney workers in an immense river of mostly-immigrant, low-wage labor.

*00:14:10*

The union asserted that Disney's tactics had given a black eye to Anaheim, but the cardboard masks handed out to workers suggested they were willing to do the same, in return.

*00:14:20*

At the closing rally, the crowd was addressed by fellow hotelworker, Lucy Arevalo.

*00:14:44*

As at the hunger strike, the symbolic power of religion was mobilized, this time by Pastor Wilfredo Benitez of St. Anselm Episcopal Church in Anaheim.

*00:15:05*

I left the thousands of workers, and wondered how billion-dollar companies like Disney and Hyatt could squeeze these people so hard. Journalist Harold Meyerson offers an explanation.

*00:16:25*

In July, 2010, I received an invitation from Unite Here Local 11 to attend a "red-carpet event" on Sunset Boulevard, at the luxurious Hyatt Andaz Hotel.

*00:17:05*

At the appointed time, dozens of volunteers – Hyatt housekeepers and their civil society allies – stream off the sidewalk and into the middle of a blocked-off Sunset Boulevard at rush hour. They take their positions on a red carpet in the street – once again, people who live far outside the limelight are given the starring role.

And what would a red carpet gala be without celebrity interviews?

*00:19:09*

Among those arrested is Maria Elena Durazo, head of the LA County Federation of Labor.

*00:19:16*

The last one arrested, fittingly, was a hotel housekeeper. Next to the giant sheriff's deputy she looks tiny, but as she is escorted away, she carries herself with an enormous dignity.

*00:19:35*

In all, sixty-three people are arrested in front of the Hyatt Andaz that day.

*00:20:17*

But if you stage a creative action, and the media doesn't cover it, does it even happen at all? In January of 2010, I was the only journalist present for this inventive action by Disney workers in Hollywood.

*00:22:42*

I wondered if the lack of media covering this event might indicate something about the place of labor reporting in our nation's media landscape?

*00:23:33*

On one hand, a long struggle would seem to offer a challenge to a union, which has to present new, fresh angles on a labor conflict in order to maintain public attention. On the other hand, when a corporation is abusive enough, ideas keep suggesting themselves.

February, 2011 finds me back in Century City at the Hyatt Century Plaza, as the battle shifts into new territory.

*00:24:41*

Next we hear from Hyatt housekeeper Margarita Ramos.

*00:25:30*

Unite Here was demonstrating flexibility, determination, and impressively broad array of coalition partners. Could some unseen factor be holding them back?

*00:26:07*

One such law, passed in Wisconsin by Governor Scott Walker, brought unions out in force in downtown LA, in March, 2011.

*00:26:23*

Workers marched from the LA Convention Center toward Pershing Square, pausing along the way to highlight local labor struggles. The first stop was at the Luxe Hotel where Unite Here International President John Wilhelm put that contract fight in context.

00:26:58

Up to now, the biggest labor action I had seen was the black-eyed Mickey march at Disneyland, and this dwarfed that, with an estimated 20,000 workers filling the streets. Wisconsin had lit the match, but there were anti-worker laws pending in over a dozen states at that very moment, and workers were rising up.

00:27:18

United Food and Commercial Workers were in a tense contract negotiation at the time, and grocery worker Phillip Meza expressed himself through art.

00:27:54

The workers mass in Pershing Square, where they hear speeches from various labor figures, including Maria Elena Durazo, who speaks about freedom in a very different way than one hears from the American Right.

00:28:35

What brought people into the streets is a political problem, and Teamsters General President James Hoffa proposes a political solution.

00:29:13

The rally was called "We Are One," and when I saw several people I recognized from Unite Here labor actions, I considered the meaning of that title. A sense of belonging comes from being part of something larger than oneself, and that feeling was evident here in abundance. This was an aspect of *solidarity* I had not understood, until I experienced it.

*00:29:32*

On April 4, 2011, I attended a rally at the First AME Church in South Central Los Angeles, connecting the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King to the struggle of Wisconsin workers. Outside, I bumped into Disney hotelworker Jorge Iniestra.

*00:30:14*

Someone else I came face-to-face with is LA City Councilman Paul Koretz.

*00:30:29*

I'm just an average voter, I couldn't get a city councilman to show up at my barbeque. But gather a whole bunch of voters together, say in a union, and suddenly, there he is.

*00:30:39*

Inside the church, a packed house is addressed by numerous speakers, including Maria Elena Durazo, who points out Martin Luther King was a leader on labor issues, as well as civil rights.

*00:31:19*

While Dr. King has achieved a mythic status, and invoking his name can carry great power, Reverend James Lawson – living legend of the civil rights movement – reaches further back in the American story, to tap the power at the root of our national mythology.

*00:32:01*

In our interview, Unite Here International President John Wilhelm referenced another key moment in American history to illuminate the present day.

*00:33:07*

Another check against corporate power might be a citizenry educated enough to know when it's being manipulated, and which can vote in its own interest. Students from CSUN are

shown here at an April, 2011 rally to restore the CSU system, whose pro-democracy, anti-poverty mission has collapsed, as fees have risen 313% in the past ten years, and 4,000 faculty members have been cut in the past five years. Charles Bowden elaborates.

*00:34:26*

Although the California education crisis deepens each year, attendance at the rallies has rapidly declined. In March 2010, thousands of students turned out, but the 2011 rally shown here was a fraction that size, while a March 2012 rally at Cal State Northridge was canceled due to lack of student interest.

*00:34:46*

Does the hospitality workers union fare any better, under the fatigue of a long campaign? In July of 2011, a year after the red-carpet arrests, I was back at the Hyatt Andaz in West Hollywood, as part of a nationwide day of protest in ten cities, pressing Hyatt to address the abusive conditions faced by hotel housekeepers.

Here's Hyatt housekeeper Linda Lopez.

*00:36:42*

When the signal is given, workers and their allies pour once again into Sunset Boulevard. Instead of a red-carpet gala event with an actress playing a billionaire Hyatt owner, this year the housekeepers themselves take center stage.

*00:38:20*

The players enacted their now customary roles – workers and allies putting their bodies in the street, police hauling them away for blocking traffic – but this drama has three actors: the workers, the government, and the employers. It was impossible to guess what

management was thinking, as they watched the spectacle unfold from behind their mirrored glass.

*00:38:40*

While the number of arrests this year was down to twenty-four, the crowd stayed on later, yelling and chanting and demanding to be noticed. If the strain of a long fight was getting to them, it wasn't obvious.

*00:38:54*

Still, I asked President Wilhelm, was it distaste for drawn-out conflicts like the Hyatt and Disney campaigns that keeps 93% of private sector workers from joining unions?

*00:39:34*

Another group undergoing enormous struggle is undocumented students. At the 2011 Labor Day Picnic in Wilmington, CA, I encountered a large group of young people calling themselves "The Dreamers," who had just completed summer internships with social justice organizations.

*00:41:30*

In September 2011, Unite Here staged a week-long, round-the-clock strike, at the Hyatt Andaz. Nerves were on the jagged edge.

*00:42:55*

Some hotel guests saw things quite differently.

*00:43:35*

I went inside the hotel, where management issued me the following statement.

*00:45:05*

16.5% of workers in Los Angeles are unionized, well above the national figure. I wondered how the grit of these low-wage immigrant workers is translating into labor power in a broad sense?

*00:46:03*

Later that month, I heard from the Disney workers again, at an event they held at St. Anselm Episcopal Church in Santa Ana.

*00:46:41*

Maria Navarro, a Disneyland hotel housekeeper for seven years, was one of the hunger strikers I'd met eighteen months before, at my first Disney action. She was injured on the job a year ago, and has suffered much since then.

*00:48:15*

I heard weariness in the voices that night, even despair. How much longer could Unite Here hold out? And did unions everywhere face this choice between capitulation and endless conflict?

*00:49:38*

The US, Europe, globalization, union density, income inequality, politics, labor law, social welfare policy – there was a dizzying array of factors in play. I spent a considerable amount of time at the library. Here are the books and journal articles I combed through, to nail down some facts and unearth some connections.

*00:49:56*

As unionization rises, inequality shrinks, and as unions decline in power, income inequality grows. Private sector unionization in the US is at its lowest rate in over a century, and among the world's advanced economies, the US is ranked number two in income

*inequality*. If this relationship holds, then the most unionized country would probably be among the most equal countries. As it happens, the most unionized nation on earth is also the most equal nation on earth. They call this place Sweden.

*00:50:33*

I asked John Wilhelm and Harold Meyerson what they could tell me about this Shangri-La of union strength, this El Dorado of equality.

*00:51:35*

I think that's a great idea, and if nobody else is doing it, I guess it's up to me. My goal was to meet as many people as I could, and come back with a better understanding of how unions fit into the big picture.

*00:51:49*

I traveled from Los Angeles to Gotland, an island in the Black Sea, off the coast of Sweden.

*00:51:54*

There, in the medieval town of Visby, I attended Politicians Week, an annual gathering of elected officials, labor leaders, workers, students, and civil society figures from across the political spectrum.

*00:52:05*

Each of Sweden's eight political parties had its day in the sun, and tens of thousands of people attended over 1500 seminars where people from far left to extreme right discussed politics in a cordial, respectful way. I'd never seen anything like it.

*00:52:20*

This is Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt giving the keynote address when it was the Moderate Party's day in the spotlight.

*00:53:01*

After being schooled by the professor on yet another definition of freedom, I sat down with Mikael Nilsson, a national officer of the world's strongest labor organization.

*00:54:00*

For more on labor fundamentals, I talked with Mats Essemyl, a research officer for TCO, the white-collar union confederation, which Mats introduced as:

*00:54:42*

To understand the importance of these collective agreements, some historical context is required. The crucial moment came in 1938, with the signing of the Saltsjöbaden Accord. Johan Sundquist explains.

*00:56:27*

But so much has changed since World War II. How does Swedish labor adapt to the transformations of the globalized economy? Mats Essemyl of TCO explains two crucial factors.

*00:57:46*

Welfare systems are established by law, another example of the role politics has in shaping workers' lives. Just how central is politics to Sweden's strongest unions?

*00:58:11*

It was clear I needed to understand who the political players are, but Sweden's political parties are named in a way that is anything but clear.

*00:58:48*

In other words, there's a much larger space on the political Left in Sweden than in the US.

00:58:53

I caught up with Wanja Lundby-Wedin, the world's most powerful labor leader. She also spoke about the vital role of the political process, the goals it can be used to reach – she used terms almost unheard of in American discourse – and finally, she named what she sees as the crucial alliance for reaching those goals in Sweden.

1:00:00

For more on the accomplishments of this alliance, and who opposes it, I spoke with Ulla Lindquist, LO vice-president.

1:01:37

Social Democracy? That sounds suspiciously like *Socialism* – which the American Right tells me to fear and despise. I asked Andreas Johansson, a baker and member of the Food Workers Union, how he could choose to be something so horrible as a *socialist*.

1:02:36

That didn't sound so terrible. I attended the keynote address by Håkan Juholt, then head of the Social Democratic Party. It's the largest single party in Sweden, though it's presently out of power. Juholt spoke of renationalizing the railroads, renationalizing the pharmacies, and he said every person has a right – not just to a job, but to a *part-time* job – so they can spend more time with their families. Johan Sundquist explains.

1:03:24

I never heard political talk like this in the States – but then, Swedes do a lot of things differently, as was demonstrated by two college students I met.

*1:03:46*

I asked Andreas just how deeply rooted is this connection, between the blue-collar unions and the Social Democrats.

*1:04:13*

This happened in 1889. Forty years later, after the coming of democracy, the Social Democrats swept to power in 1932.

*1:05:17*

However, the Social Democrats have been out of power since 2006. I asked union officials and workers how this change in government affected them.

*1:08:07*

For a dramatically different interpretation of the unions' recent turn for the worse, I spoke with Li Jansson, an economist for the Confederation of Swedish Enterprise, the major business organization in Sweden.

*1:09:20*

At night, I slept a half-hour's walk outside the city walls, on the floor of a high school classroom. Down the hall were students from the Green Party Youth organization, and this seemed an appropriate time to inquire into Sweden's education system.

*1:09:55*

For clarification, I sought out the Swedish students' union – yes, they also have a union, 100,000 strong. It's part of SACO, the third major labor federation.

*1:10:50*

Mats Essemyl of TCO links the education system to the other pillars of Swedish society.

*1:11:42*

Alongside the formal education system for the last hundred years, this has been a network of seminars, study circles, and other events sponsored by trade unions through their Workers Education Association, or ABF, which – as ABF President Karl-Petter Thorwaldsson explains – has been empowering workers since before the arrival of democracy, with astonishing results.

*1:13:08*

But are today's students turning out to vote? To discuss turnout for the last national election in 2010, here's Johan Sundquist.

*1:13:47*

Back at the high school, an even more startling difference between the Swedish and American political systems was revealed, when I asked Green Youth member Lovisa Sagnell how Swedes register to vote.

*1:14:49*

One of the most pressing concerns for Swedish unions is declining membership among young workers. Mats Essemyl from the white-collar union confederation suggests some reasons for the decline.

*1:17:05*

Both Left and Right agreed there was an amnesia eroding public knowledge of Swedish labor's achievements. A nation's media system both records the national memory, and sets the agenda for public debate. Inside a noisy restaurant, I spoke with Eric Sundström, a leading journalist of the Left, about the role of Sweden's media in shaping public consciousness.

*1:18:57*

Anders of the Green Youth describes the effect when only one side can breathe fire in a political debate.

*1:19:29*

Could a pervasive, one-sided media culture even shape the understanding of those who *do* know how modern Sweden came about?

*1:19:58*

As I pondered this generational divide, I couldn't help but notice the tension between what I'd heard about the crushing burden of Sweden's extremely high taxes, and what I was seeing around me.

*1:21:06*

The man of the Left was a little low, and the woman of the Right was a little high. According to the Heritage Foundation, Sweden's top tax rate in 2012 is 57%, compared to a top US rate of 35%.

*1:21:32*

I'd never heard anything like that before!

*1:21:48*

I'm not sure sure it's fair to count her "double." However, I do think it's fair to compare taxes on unearned investment income, which is how rich people make most of their money. It's taxed in the US at 15%, while in Sweden it's subject to 30% tax. The more I looked at it, the more I began to see that a nation's tax structure is a reflection of its values.

I asked Andreas Johansson the baker about something I often heard said in the US.

*1:23:35*

How do workers in Sweden deal with some of the very same issues facing hotelworkers in Los Angeles? Sandra Viktor, the LO Youth Secretary, begins by explaining, while hotelworkers are still far more unionized than American workers overall, that sector is among the least-unionized in Sweden.

*1:24:00*

Next I described to her the hunger strike I'd witnessed at Disneyland.

*1:24:53*

Next I asked Sandra Viktor if Swedish hotels would consider using fitted sheets, which is such a contentious issue for US hotel chains like Hyatt.

*1:25:08*

While US business could learn from that Swedish example, there's a deeply distressing way Swedish business has begun following the American lead.

*1:25:44*

This, also, is no accident. As Ella Niia points out, it was a political decision.

*1:27:00*

When I spoke with Håkan Juholt, then the head of the Social Democratic Party, he drew together several strands of the discussion into one unified way forward for labor and its political allies.

*1:27:50*

Unsurprisingly, the Confederation of Swedish Enterprise takes a different view. Here, economist Li Jansson asserts that weak unions and low wages are *good* for immigrants!

*1:28:23*

It seemed an opportune time to ask an immigrant to Sweden for his perspective. Meet Johan Fricke, a left-wing journalist and Social Democratic Party activist.

*1:29:56*

I couldn't help but to think of the US, where many researchers claim long-standing racism determined the stinginess of our own welfare state. I put to Johan a question, which I had earlier asked of Andreas and Peter.

*1:31:06*

It seemed only fair I seek out someone from the ultranationalist party to hear that side of the story. I spoke with Markus Wiechel of the far-right Sweden Democrats.

*1:32:00*

For one worker's final thoughts on the immigration question in Sweden, I turn to Andreas Johansson, the baker and member of the Food Workers Union.

*1:32:26*

Suddenly, at an outdoor tee-vee taping, I chanced to see the Reverend Jesse Jackson! When his taping was finished, I asked for his thoughts on how US labor could make some of the same strides the Swedes had taken so long before us.

*1:33:13*

Politicians Week was ending. I finished my stay in Visby by considering the comments I'd heard from several people about how Swedish unions fit in the contemporary moment.

*1:35:39*

Before I left the island, I found two voices who neatly encapsulated the two grand visions locked in competition since the dawn of civilization. Elin Melander, the Left Party Student president, and Li Jansson of the Confederation of Swedish Enterprise.

*1:36:05*

I left Visby for the mainland, where I had two final Swedes to meet. In Stockholm, I ran into Troels Moller, who handles corporate bankruptcies at a finance company. He's also a union member!

*1:37:10*

Before leaving the country, I spoke with Amanda Lundquist, a barista and union member who has also attended college in the US.

*1:37:42*

I asked Amanda about the single thing I'd heard most often from hotel and restaurant employees in Los Angeles.

*1:37:53*

With that, all my questions were answered. Looking around, it was obvious the Socialist revolution wasn't coming anytime soon. Sweden, like the US, is dominated by consolidated corporate capital. The crucial difference between the two countries is a matter of degree. As I walked, I recalled the words of Mats Jönsson, of LO.

*1:38:48*

I flew home, where I found a surprising new force had arisen, seeking to realign American politics.

*1:39:19*

On October 1, 2011, Occupy Los Angeles sprang into being on the south lawn of City Hall.

*1:39:46*

I had long been wondering where is the uprising from the Left – could this be it?

*1:39:57*

It was joyful, it was talented. It was pithy and memorable. It was anarchic and colorful. But the fizzling student protest at CSUN made me wonder – would it have staying power? Also, how might Occupy LA make common cause with working people?

*1:40:48*

Two weeks later, on October 15, 2011, the AFL-CIO mobilized thousands of union members and others for a massive march and rally at Occupy LA.

*1:41:19*

The protestors took the street and marched on three major downtown banks. Everywhere I turned, people were articulating critiques of corporate capitalism.

*1:41:43*

In the two weeks since it began, the encampment had grown considerably. At a rally beside City Hall, Maria Elena Durazo blended the voice of labor into the chorus of Occupy LA.

*1:42:20*

That same week, sixty Occupy LA protestors joined Unite Here at a picket in front of the Hotel Bel-Air. At City Hall, I wondered how far this movement might go, in opposing greed and the corporate control of government.

*1:43:01*

Since Occupy LA was driven out of City Hall park by police in November 2011, it has multiplied and is now popping up all over. Here at the Hyatt Andaz, the Occupy-inspired "Out and Occupy" gay and lesbian organization joined with Unite Here Local 11 in February 2012, to give Hyatt the Valentine's Day gift of protest.

*1:43:37*

Still, the Hyatt campaign had taken a turn, toward the legal system.

*1:45:40*

The Hyatt housekeepers will have to be back. As of April 2012, their dispute still has not been settled. However, at this same Hyatt protest, I received important news about the Disneyland struggle.

*1:47:37*

The Hyatt workers struggle on, in picket lines and now court appearances, and the outcome of that campaign remains far from certain. The success of the Disneyland campaign, though, has tangible benefits for 2,100 workers and their families, many of whom I met over the past two years.

*1:47:51*

Jorge's daughter can get glasses. Eddie's son can get his broken arm fixed. Little Julissa can have her cavities filled, after eating all that sugar. But is there more?

*1:48:51*

With the new contract, 2,100 families are more economically secure, and more healthy. The community around Disneyland just became a little more equal.

*1:48:59*

Societies that are more equal have lower infant mortality, less teen pregnancy, less mental illness, less alcoholism and drug addiction, less murder, less incarceration.

*1:49:11*

They also have higher educational achievement for children, higher social mobility, greater trust among people, and longer life expectancy.

*1:49:20*

In Sweden, which performs *dramatically* better than the US across all the categories I just named, the improvements don't just go to low-income people. Even the rich have better outcomes when society is more equal.

*1:49:35*

I had spent two years following working people, and their intersections with social movements like Occupy Los Angeles, and with like-minded legislators.

As I saw in Sweden, only a massive movement from the outside, and progressive lawmakers on the inside, can ever hope to oppose total corporate supremacy.

*1:49:58*

In standing up to corporate power, these Los Angeles hotelworkers aren't just fighting for themselves, or even just for their non-union comrades, who suffer much worse treatment for even less pay.

These low-wage, mostly immigrant workers are fighting, through their labor union, to create a society that is more equal, more fair, more just, for all of us. Unions foster a better world for everyone.

## Chapter Five – Conclusions

Throughout the twenty-six months of filming, and several additional months of post-production work on this project, I encountered many confirmations of concepts in the labor scholarship I consulted, particularly in the areas of dominant frameworks for understanding labor struggles, declining mainstream coverage of unions, and on the question of class prejudice. At the same time, I also met with several unexpected revelations, including the difficulties people have in moving beyond their own interests, and the overarching ideas mobilized by labor to situate themselves in the world. These narrative frameworks are circumscribed to some extent in the US by dominant ideology, though labor still offers a vision of American life which competes with that found in mainstream corporate sources.

Many researchers found that strikes are covered through the lens of *inconvenience to the consumer* (Lippman, 1922; Martin, 2004; Tracy, 2006; Kumar, 2007). My own observations clarified one reason for this. At the weeklong Hyatt strike of September 8-15, 2011, I saw several guests of the hotel who were clearly upset by the round-the-clock ruckus raised by the union on the sidewalk in front of the Hyatt Andaz Hotel in West Hollywood. An Englishwoman was in tears that her vacation had been ruined; a German man angrily cursed at the picketers; an Australian couple complained vociferously to one of the organizers. At one point, in an exchange not captured on camera, I entered into dialogue with an area resident out walking his dog, who had approached to express – in hostile terms – his great displeasure at the constant noise. It is unmistakable: a strike *does* inconvenience consumers.

What goes underappreciated by some in the press, as well as by the angry guests and locals I witnessed or engaged, is the *reason behind the conflict*. To an observer who has no

context for the situation, the union is the one making the noise; therefore, the union appears to be the source of the inconvenience. This is in keeping with Rollings (1983), who found strike-related coverage lacks background, emphasizing instead the element of conflict. From a reporter's standpoint, the angry, cursing customers and locals are attention-getting. Focusing on them may simply be easier than digging to understand the nature of the dispute. Historical information can often seem dry, and difficult to visualize, especially for television – beet-red faces and forceful pointing and yelling are emotionally compelling and easy to capture.

My own conversation with the angry West Hollywood resident brought this out for me. I attempted to explain that the workers had a legitimate dispute with the employers, over unsafe working conditions, and that polite requests to management were insufficient to remedy their problems. He would have none of it, and focused instead on how the noise was keeping him awake at night. I suggested he complain to management, then, rather than to the suffering workers, with whom we should stand in solidarity. He was caught up in his anger, however, and reasonable conversation was not possible.

I walked away without raising what seemed to me the most obvious connection – this middle-aged West Hollywood man was the clear beneficiary of a successful gay rights movement, which had its defining moment in the 1969 Stonewall Riot, a noisy confrontation that had undoubtedly kept area residents awake. The importance of solidarity among the disenfranchised, and the need for impolite behavior in order to achieve change, would seem to be self-evident to a member of his community; alas, they were not.

While I experienced up close just how a strike inconveniences consumers, stopping the analysis at that point is woefully insufficient, and contributes to the corporate press

framework, as found by Martin (2004), that "the consumer is king." As Leigh Shelton, the Communications Director for Unite Here Local 11 explained, "People in this country have lost the cultural understanding of what it means to go on strike" (personal communication, September 11, 2011). She added:

Housekeepers work very hard to give excellent service to the guests, but Hyatt doesn't treat them well, in return. So this hotel is under strike, and guests should check out.

When people don't listen, we don't want to make their stay pleasant.

The operative principle seems to be that the housekeepers are *inconvenienced* by work-related injuries, they are *inconvenienced* by excessive workloads, and if they have to spread some discomfort around in order to improve their condition, so be it. In short, *to achieve anything worth having, some inconvenience is necessary.*

There were other occasions when passersby would ask me about what was happening, and I would sketch in for them why the union was on the march, or I would lend a hand to workers or elected officials as they struggled to get on and off the sound truck where I was filming their speeches. At times like these, I wondered if I was becoming too direct a participant in the action – was I *going native*? When I became aware that I was perhaps uncritically accepting the workers' side of the story, I increased my efforts to get the management perspective. Most of these attempts do not appear in the finished film, as during the editing process I made the choice to focus on Hyatt and Disney, and cut the other workplace actions I attended. Nevertheless, as contributions to my educational process, a few bear mention: At the Luxe Hotel and Angels Stadium, management flatly refused to speak with me. At the Wilshire Hotel, the general manager at first pretended not to be management, but the workers were all chanting, "General! General!" as they marched past him. At Pomona

College, I got a sit-down interview with management. Their perspective appeared reasonable, and even cast doubt upon the workers' version of events, until I did further research into management's claims, and found them to have been at least carefully framed, and at most misleading.

During the Hyatt strike which does appear in the film, I was issued a printed statement from management, which I used to question Communications Director Shelton. Management pointed out that the struggle was not about wages and benefits, which Shelton readily conceded. This surprised me, as I had heard many speeches from the sound truck, and complaints from the workers, about low wages. The heart of the dispute, Shelton explained, was in getting the right for Hyatt workers to picket, strike, or boycott on behalf of non-union Hyatt employees elsewhere. I wondered if the workers walking the line understood this was why they were striking; I had interviewed many of them, and *not a single one* had spoken about this. I even wondered if the union had been candid with its membership about the true nature of the struggle.

However, as I reviewed the footage from several Hyatt actions, I saw that leadership had spoken on the record with me, and on the sound truck to everyone, about the suffering of non-union Hyatt workers, as a reason for the labor actions they were undertaking. Ultimately, I think what the management statement highlighted did not rise to the level of dishonesty or lack of transparency on the part of the union; even so, rank-and-file members seemed less aware than they should have been, of the central role played in the drama by their non-union counterparts.

That factor would not have been so clearly delineated for me, had I not sought out the management perspective. Tasini (1990) found the union point of view marginalized in

corporate coverage; if I committed the same sin on the other side, by deemphasizing management's voice in my own work, I was comfortable with that. Neutrality had never been my goal. I couldn't *go* native; I was *already* native, though I had not understood this so well at the start. I came to do a story about the workers, though the management perspective, when I could get it, proved valuable in ways I had not anticipated.

At several events, I saw other journalists from a variety of outlets – *The Los Angeles Times*, *OC Weekly*, English and Spanish-language television stations, and at one event there was a radio reporter. I saw that labor unions could draw media attention, though there were times – in the deleted scene at Pomona College, and at one particularly colorful Disney action in Hollywood which remains in the film – where I was the only member of the press in attendance. Hoyt (1984) and Serrin (1992) both link the decline in labor reporting with the decline of the labor movement as a whole, which was echoed in my interviews with journalists Harold Meyerson and Charles Bowden. Shelton of Unite Here Local 11 spoke to me off-camera about the challenge she and others in the union faced, in generating attention-getting "hooks" for lengthy labor disputes, to keep the press interested (personal communication, February 15, 2011). The suffering of low-wage workers is clearly not enough, by itself. This unrelenting need for novelty was echoed by Mats Essemyl, research officer for Sweden's white-collar trade confederation, who spoke of pressure to be "funny and entertaining," in order to draw public attention (personal communication, July 3, 2011).

Puette (1992) describes "class prejudice" against blue-collar workers as a factor in explaining the under-reporting of labor stories. One of my interviewees, journalist Harold Meyerson, indicated the same thing when he pointed to "a gap in American elite consciousness, on the *existence* of workers. They aren't a subject; it's as if they simply aren't

there" (personal communication, November 26, 2011). Journalist Charles Bowden suggested this class bias has infected the wider culture, when he said, "Nobody considers themselves working-class. Everyone thinks of themselves as middle class, as if there are no upper or lower classes" (personal communication, November 8, 2011).

It is interesting to note that even labor officials adopted the language of class prejudice, to some extent. At the Disney Community Forum in September, 2011, Maria Elena Durazo was in the midst of offering a trenchant critique of how corporate greed "crushes the least among us," when she added, "and those of us accustomed to a middle-class standard of living," as if not to offend the Disney workers by pointing out their poverty (2011). Unite Here director Francis Engler did much the same at that identical event, when calling the positions at Disney "middle-class jobs," while in the next breath pointing out that housekeepers have a starting wage of nine dollars per hour (2011). There seems to be a hesitance to recognize the Disney and Hyatt housekeepers as working-class, as if it is an undignified term. For their part, none of the workers I spoke with ever described themselves with class labels at all.

As these incidents of false consciousness about membership in the middle class suggest, public figures in American labor use language in a constrained fashion, especially when compared with their Swedish counterparts. Interviewees in Sweden, like Social Democratic Party leader Håkan Juholt and LO trainer Patrik Arman, freely used the term "working poor" (personal communication, July 5, 2011). In the States, Unite Here officials spoke about "poverty wages," but did so in reference to the conditions they hoped to *avoid*, rather than the conditions their members *currently experience*.

While US journalist Bowden asserted no one in the States considers himself a worker anymore, Mikael Bögsjö of the Social Democratic Party was upfront about his party's mission of "defending the interests of the workers" (personal communication, July 6, 2011). Frequent reference was made by many Swedish interviewees to LO being the *blue-collar* labor confederation, another term I *never* encountered in twenty-six months of following US labor.

The intersection between labor and politics is also expressed in starkly different terms in the two nations. Mikael Nilsson, a national officer of LO, plainly asserted, "I think there will always be a conflict between capital and labor," (personal communication, July 5, 2011) while Mats Jönsson, IT Director for LO spoke about the centrality of "ideology" to the Swedish labor movement. These remarks have no analogues in my interviews with or recordings of US labor figures. In another example, the link between the Swedish LO confederation and Social Democrats is spoken of by many as the principal alliance which built modern Sweden. However, here in the US – in both interviews and public statements – Maria Elena Durazo often turned to the theme of generalized dissatisfaction over US labor's political alliance with the Democrats. Unite Here president John Wilhelm referred to it as "the lesser of two evils" (personal communication, December 10, 2011). Lastly, Swedish Food Workers Union member Andreas Johansson talked easily about the positive tenets of socialism (personal communication, July 3, 2011), whereas when I kidded Maria Elena Durazo about a "share the wealth" comment she made, she quickly – though jovially – denied any socialist impulse (personal communication, January 10, 2010).

The broader space for left and socialist framing in Sweden translates into articulations of more ambitious movement goals. LO President Wanja Lundby-Wedin spoke openly about

"building the welfare society" and "full employment" and "equality," ideas which almost never entered the discourse of American officials I met (personal communication, July 5, 2011). Maria Elena Durazo, at her public appearances, called for legislation such as the Dream Act, which had originally been proposed by Republicans, and for ending the occupation of Afghanistan. She also spoke of workers enjoying a greater share of wealth generated by increases in productivity, as had been the case "in the fifties, the sixties, and partially in the seventies" (personal communication, January 10, 2010). These are admirable goals; they just seem so modest, compared with those outlined by Swedish labor figures. As a group, these comparisons suggest that labor in the US has fallen victim to adopting "dominant frames" found by Martin (2004) in the corporate press and mobilized widely in the culture.

That said, US labor figures do employ language in alternative ways, distinct from the free-market ideology which Rousmaniere (2009) finds propagated in the corporate press. Durazo in Los Angeles and Lundby-Wedin in Sweden both spoke of *freedom* in a manner that situates it as springing from collective action – Durazo: "The freedom to organize, the freedom to have good wages and secure benefits, the freedom to collectively bargain," Wedin: "Trade unions give our members freedom," – rather than relating freedom only to *isolated individuals making personal choices*, which Martin (2004) locates as a dominant framework in corporate coverage. John Wilhelm, international president of Unite Here, explicitly refuted another of Martin's frames – about the economy being driven by great business leaders – when he spoke to Disneyland hunger strikers, saying,

When we go to school in this country, we don't learn history the way it really happens. In school we learn about famous people, important people, rich people. But

history is made by *ordinary* people, in our country and in our world. When Disney is finally persuaded or forced to do the right thing, we'll write the history the way it should have been written. We'll put your names up front, because you will make Disney do the right thing, for you and your families, for your community, and for this country (2010).

Wilhelm lays out an alternate vision of American history. Durazo reconceptualizes *freedom*. At a labor event in April of 2011 connecting the legacy of Martin Luther King to present-day worker struggles, Reverend James Lawson (2011) mobilized America's founding document, quoting from the Declaration of Independence on *life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness*, to advance his pro-labor argument in highly patriotic terms.

Proscribed though it may be in some respects by prevailing ideology, the rhetoric of the labor movement – whether in US or Sweden – describes a worldview in which individuals gain better lives through collective action. Given the research on the relationship between unionization and income inequality (Weeks, 2005; Pestieau, 2006; Mosher, 2007), this worldview corresponds with observable reality.

In future reporting on labor issues, reporters and editors should make a number of adjustments to remedy the present condition, described by Charles Bowden, in which "everybody works, and nobody covers it. Nobody reports on what they do, or how they're treated" (personal communication, November 8, 2011). At the micro level of the individual story, reporters must delve beneath the surface to relate background facts on a labor struggle, rather than focusing on superficial elements of spectacle or inconvenience to the consumer. At the macro level, Harold Meyerson's prescription is fitting: "American journalism needs to be comparing conditions here and abroad," which he asserts *The LA Times* did between the

1960s and 1980s, with a long-form, "twelve-part series on Swedish unions and social democracy" (personal communication, November 26, 2011). The US audience needs to know that possibilities for other social arrangements exist, especially when those arrangements foster improved outcomes for the great mass of society. The consolidated corporate nature of mainstream press outlets suggests this has a low probability of coming to pass; nevertheless, it is worth pursuing. It probably seemed unlikely that Sweden – a country which gave a wealthy man forty votes to a workingman's one vote – would some day become the world's most democratic nation, but it happened.

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