

GREATER NEW HAVEN  
**LABOR**  
**HISTORY**  
ASSOCIATION

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## **GNHLHA LAUNCHES LABOR HISTORY IN THE SCHOOLS LEGISLATIVE INITIATIVE**

This fall marks the beginning of a campaign by the Greater New Haven Labor History Association to get legislation passed to set standards for the teaching of labor history in Connecticut's public schools. The first meeting of the task force to work on this initiative will be held on Wednesday, October 5<sup>th</sup> from 4 to 5:30 p.m. at 267 Chapel Street in New Haven.

A similar initiative was successfully passed after years of effort in Wisconsin.



**Read the full statement on page 2.**

### **FAMILY WORK HISTORY PROJECT CONTINUES**

**By Paula Panzarella, Project Coordinator**

Last Spring, the Greater New Haven Labor History Association Outreach Coordinator Christine Saari initiated a wonderfully successful labor history program with students from Worthington Hooker and Katherine Brennan schools. Almost one hundred sixth and eighth-grade social studies students learned how to conduct

interviews with their parents and elders about work and wrote essays based on the interviews. The essays were used to create a composite performance piece with music and song by Mike Kachuba, which was performed by the students on the New Haven Green on May 1.

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# JOIN IN THE EFFORT TO PASS LEGISLATION IMPLEMENTING THE TEACHING OF LABOR HISTORY IN CONNECTICUT PUBLIC SCHOOLS

**By Steve Kass, GNHLHA Board Member**

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

*Hubert H. Humphrey, Vice President of the United States, 1965-69*

Following the lead of the Wisconsin Labor History Society that organized the passing of the historic Wisconsin legislation in 2009, mandating the teaching of labor history in the public schools (first in the nation), the Greater New Haven Labor History Association (GNHLHA) is introducing the same legislation in Connecticut.

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

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

Academic standards and curriculum resources such as textbooks have historically ignored or been deficient in their treatment of workers and the labor movement. Significantly, many teachers want to cover this history in their classrooms, but there are few written curriculum standards by local and state educational institutions to encourage the teaching this material.

Therefore, the GNHLHA proposes legislation that sets standards to teach labor history in the public schools of Connecticut.

The first meeting of the task force to work on getting this legislation passed in Connecticut will be held on Wednesday, October 5<sup>th</sup> from 4 to 5:30 p.m. at the Council/ Teachers Building, 267 Chapel Street, New Haven.

To get involved, contact Steve Kass, Task Force Committee Chair: [steve@laborhistory.org](mailto:steve@laborhistory.org), or call the Labor History office and leave a message for Steve, (203) 777-2756 ext. 2

## **FAMILY WORK HISTORY PROJECT**

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The Greater New Haven Labor History Association will be building off the success of last year's program, and has revised the Family Work History Project in order to reach a greater number of teachers and students. As the project coordinator, I will meet with fifteen social studies teachers in Connecticut to introduce them to the Family Work History Project and provide them with material so they can create a Family Work History Project with their own students.

I will have one meeting with their students to conduct a condensed workshop about the importance of our history at work, how to conduct an interview and how to write and present essays based on an oral history interview. Students will have the opportunity to practice interviewing a retired or active worker who will accompany me. Volunteer interviewees will be chosen from a variety of industries and occupations in the greater New Haven area.

For teachers who decide to incorporate the five-class curriculum, I will be available to assist in planning and publicizing their classes' "grand finale" performance.

I look forward to helping the students discover their "inner journalist" as they gain an understanding and appreciation of labor history. Please send me an e-mail at [paulapanzarella@gmail.com](mailto:paulapanzarella@gmail.com) or call (203) 562-2798 with any questions or suggestions. Thank you.

### **Questions about School Reform**

**By Mary Johnson and Lula White**

The term "school reform" is not new. Since the mid-1950s, when competition with the Soviet Union dominated political thought, some education critics began warning everyone that our schools were not up to par. It has now reached fever pitch with talk of "teacher bashing," "teaching to the test," tying tenure and salary increases to test scores and closing "failing" schools. There is no evidence, however, that any serious analysis of what is right and what is wrong with our schools has been done.

Here are just a few questions that should be addressed:

1. What is "school reform?"
2. Are "school reforms" working?
3. How are "school reforms" measured?
4. Do charter schools have to admit students who have troubled school histories of learning problems and/or disruptive behavior?
5. How does class size in charter schools compare with that in public schools?
6. Do charter schools have auxiliary staff (social workers, guidance counselors, psychologists and teacher aides)?
7. How do charter schools deal with chronic, disruptive behavior?
8. Do charter school students have computers they can bring home after school?
9. Does "teaching to the test" outweigh time devoted to teaching art, music, science and social studies?
10. Does "teaching to the test" destroy or inhibit critical and creative thinking?
11. Does "teaching to the test" encourage and/or lead to cheating by teachers and/ or administrators?
12. Tenure is under attack on the grounds that it protects "incompetent" teachers. In reality, administrators have always been able to get rid of any and all experienced teachers they did not like or favor, by harassment, class assignment, bogus evaluations and failure to support

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## **QUESTIONS ABOUT SCHOOL REFORM** *(continued from p.3)*

teachers on discipline decisions. Should eliminating tenure be used as a budget cutting tool (getting rid of higher paid teachers in favor of hiring teachers at the lower end of the salary scale)?

13. What are the standards for making decisions about who “deserves” merit pay?

14. What does merit pay do for teacher morale?

15. How does one factor in the evaluator’s personal feelings and relationships with staff members?

16. Should teachers evaluate administrators?

There are just a few of the questions which need to be addressed. Obviously, there are many more. We need facts, figures and insights. Otherwise, we will never know what works and what does not.

*Editor’s note: Mary Johnson is the Vice President of the Greater New Haven Labor History Association and Lula White is a long time Board member and former Recording Secretary. Both are members of the New Haven Federation of Teachers Local 933 Retirees Chapter.*

## **WISCONSIN UNIONS FIGHTING BACK**

**By Kenneth Germanson**

**President Emeritus of Wisconsin Labor History Society**

Public employee unions in Wisconsin are showing no signs of surrendering in the face of legislation that literally wipes out their right to represent their members.

In a few short months during this history-making year, Wisconsin public employees went from working under one of the nation’s first and most liberal collective bargaining laws to a new law that has reduced their right to bargain to wages (and nothing else) and imposed union-busting rules that took away dues checkoff and required yearly certification elections.

Most of the nation watched – and many cheered – as Wisconsin unionists were joined during the cold of February and March for record-setting marches around the State Capitol in Madison as well as rallies inside the Capitol. They protested the proposal of new Republican Gov. Scott Walker for the law that effectively ended collective bargaining for public employees.

By slick maneuvering, the Republican-controlled legislature pushed through the new law in spite of the absence of a quorum as the 14 Democratic state senators had fled to Illinois. Temporarily, the law was placed on hold by a judge, who agreed the passage of the law had been without appropriate notice, an action that made its passage illegal.

The matter was appealed to the State Supreme Court, which was in the midst of an election for the seat held by Justice David Prosser, a onetime Republican legislator and party leader. Everyone felt the election was critical since the Republicans held a 4-3 margin and the Court was ideologically divided. The election was a tight one, finally won by the incumbent over a labor-endorsed judge by a mere 7,000 votes out of more than a half million cast. Again, in unprecedented quickness, its GOP-majority in control, the Court ruled the collective bargaining law was legal, and it was put into effect on July 1.

Even though this law undoubtedly weakens the labor movement, there appears to be no loss of commitment to fight back among unionists and their many supporters in the State. What the labor movement may lose in resources (there will be a membership loss and it will affect the entire movement in Wisconsin), it has made been made up by

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## WISCONSIN UNIONS FIGHT BACK

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almost legendary volunteerism and dedication.



A banner showing the state of Wisconsin in the shape of a fist for union solidarity is seen July 28, 2011 during a protest against the debt ceiling debate on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC. (KAREN BLEIER/AFP/Getty Images)

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<http://www.inthesetimes.com/working/P24>

The public employee unions are meeting the practical effects of the law in several ways; some have already announced they will not seek to be certified since the limited bargaining rights they retain aren't worth the efforts required in facing once-a-year recertification elections; rather they will represent their members by other strategies, likely through political efforts, use of community support and the staging of rallies, marches and other activities. All of them have campaigns to get their members to agree to direct withdrawals from their bank accounts to pay dues, with several teachers' union locals reporting 80% success.

Meanwhile, all of Wisconsin's union members – including nonpublic unionists and a considerable portion of the public – were directly involved in summer's recall elections, in which Democrats unseated two of six GOP Senators coming within one seat of winning control of the Senate. The Republicans like to claim the Democrats “failed” in the recalls, but the fact is that Democrats won a larger percentage of the vote in those traditionally Republican districts than they did in previous elections, thus emboldening them for a possible recall of the governor in January 2012, when his recall becomes legally possible.

The recall will require the gaining of more than 500,000 legal signatures, and they must be gathered in a 60-day period beginning in early November. It will be a Herculean task, but unionists are committed to succeed. If they get to an election, the prospects look good, since Walker's approval ratings have plummeted into the 30 percent range.

History tells us one fact: Labor loses many battles, but is never defeated. That is being demonstrated in Wisconsin in 2011.

### CONGRATULATIONS!!!

**The Greater New Haven Labor History Association congratulates Christine Saari and David Leonard on the birth of their son, Nico Alexander Leonard, on July 18, 2011 at 3:45 a.m.: 7 pounds 13 ounces.**

**We welcome our newest member to the world with open arms.**

## **RHEA HIRSHMAN: Workplace sex discrimination still a reality**

*Editor's note: This article was originally published on Tuesday, July 5, 2011 as a forum piece in the editorial section of the New Haven REGISTER. It is reprinted here in its entirety with the author's permission.*

SOMETIMES, there's nothing like a short trip down memory lane to perk up a class discussion. A piece of recent history that my younger students of all political persuasions always find particularly mind-boggling is the fact that newspaper help-wanted ads used to be segregated into "male" and "female" — a fact I attest to from my own experience as a young college graduate perusing those very ads.

Even if you weren't around at the time, you can easily imagine what jobs were listed in which categories. If, as occasionally happened, the same jobs were posted under both the "male" and "female" headings, they came with different salaries, different qualifications and different opportunities for advancement.

Not until the 1973 U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Pittsburgh Press Co. v. Pittsburgh Commission on Human Relations* — a decision upholding regulations passed by the federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission — was sex-designated job advertising, except in very narrow circumstances, declared to be illegal sex discrimination.

Of course, this decision came in the days when the Supreme Court was capable of distinguishing between corporations and actual people. The current court majority, on the other hand, seems so besotted by corporations and so committed to the idea of "corporate personhood," that I'm wondering when they will grant corporations the right to run for political office.

The latest example of the "corporations are just like the rest of us, only bigger" view is evident in the recent *Wal-Mart v. Dukes* decision. The court reversed a lower court ruling that would have permitted a class action suit to be brought against Wal-Mart, contending ongoing and systemic discrimination against its 1.5 million female employees. By denying the women employees certification as a class, the court said that while individual female employees, or perhaps small groups at single stores, could sue Wal-Mart, workers could not band together to fight corporate policies.

Worth noting is the fact that many class-action lawsuits against corporations have been brought in the 45 years since Congress approved criteria for class actions, including a racial discrimination case in the mid-1990s against Shoney's restaurant chain, and a suit against Microsoft for misclassification of temporary and freelance workers.

By raising the threshold for bringing class actions "the court has said...with Wal-Mart we have too big to sue," notes Ken Jacobs, the chairman of the Labor Center at University of California-Berkeley.

Driving home the point, John Coffee, a professor at Columbia University Law School, says: "We're talking about access to the courts: Very few individual people other than the super rich can afford the costs of (lengthy) litigation."

This decision is not only about these employees. By "blunting the weapon (of the class action suit), the court has left millions of American workers without recourse,"

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## **GENDER DISCRIMINATION IN THE WORK PLACE**

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says Nelson Lichtenstein, a labor historian at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

Wal-Mart v. Dukes decision comes when women's wages overall as compared to men's are still 77 cents on the dollar for full-time workers, translating into \$10,622 less per year in median earnings, with even greater disparities for non-white women. The gap varies somewhat by state. In 2009, in Connecticut, the figure was 74 cents.

While that 77 cents is a marked improvement over the 59 cents to the dollar that women were earning at the time of the 1973 Pittsburgh Press decision, it's a figure that has been stubbornly resistant to change over the past several years. Meanwhile, Republicans in the U.S. Senate have been blocking a vote on the Paycheck Fairness Act, which would update and strengthen the 1963 Equal Pay Act.

The factors contributing to this gap are numerous and too complex to detail here, but they include the fact that so many traditional women's jobs — clerical workers, child-care workers, home health care workers — pay much less than traditional men's jobs. In addition, a recent study published by the American Association of University Women indicates that "... employers are less likely to hire mothers compared with childless women, and when employers do make offers to mothers, they offer them lower salaries than they do other women. Fathers, in contrast, do not suffer a penalty compared with other men."

My students can rightfully chuckle over those sex-segregated want ads, but they're still facing some serious gender equity issues in the workplace.

*Rhea Hirshman of New Haven is a freelance writer and adjunct professor at the Stamford branch of the University of Connecticut. Readers may write to her in care of the Register, 40 Sargent Drive, New Haven 06511. Her e-mail address is [rheahirshman@gmail.com](mailto:rheahirshman@gmail.com).*

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**THE LATEST NEWS FROM THE GREATER NEW HAVEN  
LABOR HISTORY ASSOCIATION  
By Joan Cavanagh, Archivist/ Director**

