

The New Labor History: A Challenge for American Historians



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THIS article describes the American Federation of Labor Archives, indicates some of the possibilities for new departures through labor manuscript research, and calls on American historians to research and write a New Labor History.¹ Important works in the field of 20th century trade union history will be discussed and the conclusion reached that trade union manuscripts have scarcely been touched by scholars.² Some reasons for the general reliance on printed materials will be advanced. And suggestions will be offered on how to go about bringing labor history into the main stream of American historiography.

The archival and library facilities of the American Federation of Labor, as they have existed in recent years, may be divided generally into four parts. These are the A. F. of L. Library, the Samuel Gompers Room, the Central File Room,

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² This conclusion is based on a close analysis of the introductions, bibliographies, and footnotes in all of the books listed under the words "Trade Unions, United States, History of" and "American Federation of Labor, History of" or their equivalents, in the libraries of the University of California, Berkeley, and Stanford University, and on a complete shelf check of the labor history sections of the former and of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin Library.

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and the active office files. The first three are of deep interest to historians.

The A. F. of L. Library, formerly located on an upper floor of the traditional headquarters building, 901 Massachusetts Avenue, N. W., Washington, D. C., is in temporary quarters at 1625 Eye Street, N. W., but will move in 1956 to the new Federation headquarters, now under construction near the White House. The Library is a well-organized collection of books and pamphlets on matters of interest to union leaders. It is not a manuscript depository.³ The library collection does not equal the holdings of printed labor materials at the Department of Labor Library in Washington, D. C., or the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, the nation's two great labor libraries. In labor newspaper files and especially in labor pamphlets the A. F. of L. Library is no match for the Madison library, whose collections are well known.⁴

The Samuel Gompers Room in the old headquarters building was visited on occasion by a few close students of American labor history. The heart of the Samuel Gompers Collection was the bound "Copybooks of Samuel Gompers and William Green," which in recent years rested in a closet of the room. They appeared to number 317 volumes in all. Their contents, flimsy tissue, letterpress blue duplicates of outgoing letters typed over the names of the first two presidents of the Federation, were bound in strictly chronological order and have now

³ George Gilmary Higgins, for example, did his doctoral research in Washington, D. C., and thanked the staff of the A. F. of L. Library; yet he cited and seems to have used no manuscripts for his *Voluntarism in Organized Labor in the United States, 1930-1940* (Wash., D. C., 1944).

⁴ In addition to its regular lists of manuscripts, see *Collections on Labor and Socialism in the Wisconsin State Historical Library* (Bulletin of Information No. 77, Nov., 1912). The library has in recent years been microfilming journals of every state federation and many labor periodicals as well. Some 75 official union journals and 125 local labor newspapers are filmed regularly. "Labor Papers on Microfilm," July 1, 1954, mimeographed. The Department of Labor Library is strong on newspapers and documents. See Helen M. Steele, "The Library of the United States Department of Labor, Washington, D. C.," *Special Libraries*, XLI (March, 1950), 93-97.

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been microfilmed. Valuable as these are, the use of outgoing letters without any knowledge of incoming letters is always a frustrating experience. The Gompers Room also contained engagement books and scrapbooks, created largely from professional clipping service material. These records have in some instances been examined by students of labor history,⁵ but their use has been fragmentary.⁶

The book by Rowland Hill Harvey, *Samuel Gompers, Champion of the Toiling Masses*,⁷ is still the only Gompers biography of note. The author wrote that it had been possible "to utilize the very complete records of Gompers and the Federation preserved in the Federation archives." Yet there is room for a new biography of greater length which will incor-

⁵ Paul Lewinson, "The Archives of Labor," *American Archivist*, XVII (Jan., 1954), 22, mentions these. Louis S. Reed, *The Labor Philosophy of Samuel Gompers* (New York, 1930) tried to show the "origin" of Gompers' "ideas and policies" and "to account for them . . . [tracing] their development and the reasons therefor." (p. 8) Yet no manuscripts or scrapbooks were cited or used.

More recently, Robert K. Murray offered a revaluation of "Communism and the Great Steel Strike of 1919," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, XXXVIII (Dec., 1951), 445-466, without citing manuscripts. He writes that there was only an "alleged connection between communism" and the strike (p. 465). Frequently citing the not entirely unbiased Interchurch World Movement report, *Public Opinion and the Steel Strike* (New York, 1921), he does not mention the subsidized and partisan, yet telling and detailed *Analysis of the Interchurch World Movement Report on the Steel Strike* (New York, 1923) by Marshall Olds. William Z. Foster's denial that radicalism was involved in the strike goes unchallenged (p. 455), and any radical responsibility for violence is discounted (p. 456). Gompers is a figure dimly seen, whose objective of keeping the A. F. of L. out of radical hands in 1919 receives little comment. The Steel Strike can be revalued after further study in such collections as the Gompers manuscripts.

Delber L. McKee worked in the Gompers materials in 1954 to strengthen a completed Stanford dissertation, reading a paper on its theme, "The A. F. L. and American Foreign Policy, 1886-1912," before the American Historical Association, Dec. 30, 1954. Sidney Fine and several other historians have used Gompers Copybooks.

⁶ Secretary-Treasurer William F. Schnitzler has stated, "Naturally we are very interested in the field of labor history and want to make our records as accessible to historians as we can within the practical limits of A. F. of L. policy." Thus, "Any individual wishing to be given permission to utilize A. F. of L. records should write directly to Mr. George Meany, President." Letter of March 25, 1955, to writer.

⁷ (Stanford, 1935).

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porate far more archival material covering the story revealed in the giant-sized autobiography, *Seventy Years of Life and Labor*.⁸ Later researchers may not agree with Dr. Harvey's judgments of 1934-35, that Gompers should have built a labor party on "liberal" lines, that he was "old and broken" by 1920 — a lesson in futility — and that the A. F. of L. in general was built on a "narrow materialism" which "failed to arouse enthusiasm in its own ranks" and did not induce respect from enemies.

The Gompers Copybooks, scrapbooks, and volumes of clippings are undoubtedly important, but they are by no means the full archives of the American Federation of Labor. The correspondence files of incoming and outgoing letters from the 1880's to the recent past, and similar intimate records, are far more important.⁹

The Central File Room of the American Federation of Labor was in recent years located one floor below the ground, adjacent to the freight elevator. An irregularly shaped space of roughly 6,000 cubic feet with bars on the windows, it contained a soft coal-burning furnace. Several hundred standard four-drawer metal filing cabinets crowded every spare inch of space. Although the physical conditions there left much to be desired, the worker in that unpainted and crowded place felt surrounded by the story of the growth of the American labor movement from obscurity and weakness to a position of shared responsibility for the balanced health of the American economic system.

In recent years the Federation has been increasingly concerned over the growing quantity of files on its hands. In the

⁸ (2 vols., New York, 1925). Dr. Harvey wrote from a familiarity with manuscripts. It will be noted, however, that only 43 outgoing and 13 incoming examples of Gompers correspondence were cited, largely from the years before 1900 and from 1916-17.

⁹ The present writer was permitted in the spring of 1952 to have access to the Archives of the Federation without supervision or restrictions.

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spring of 1952 the writer prepared for Federation officials a rough inventory of archival correspondence in accordance with the file groups existing at that time. That grouping has been partially superseded by the natural upheaval accompanying the institution of a broad microfilming program. It is stated, "We have carried through a microfilming program which has meant that most of the valuable material is now on microfilm and certain other material which is of no value either to us or for historical purposes, has been discarded."¹⁰ The correspondence files fall into certain natural groupings, however, and it is to be presumed that most of them have been or will be microfilmed.

The unit of measurement adopted by the writer, the "cabinet drawer," will be used here, since it is more descriptive than a listing in terms of reels or feet of microfilm, and the latter process is incomplete in any case. All of these were letter size, 28 inch deep drawers, crammed full.

The correspondence files of the American Federation of Labor reflect quite well the fact that labor in America has been organized for over half a century into federal systems strongly influenced by the governmental structure of the United States. The Executive Council of the A. F. of L., for example, guides the actions of the President, the Secretary-Treasurer, and the administrative staff of headquarters and is in turn subject to the decisions of delegates from international unions, state federations, and city centrals at annual conventions. Between headquarters and these units (and local unions) flows the bulk of the correspondence of the American Federation of Labor. Letters to and from organizers, and to persons and groups of interest to union leaders also find their way into the permanent files.

Many files of the Federation shed light on the career of Samuel Gompers. Particularly to be noted are the files of in-

¹⁰ Secretary-Treasurer William F. Schnitzler to writer, March 25, 1955.

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coming and outgoing letters, going back at least to 1892, which totaled 276 "transfer" type vertical files and 31 file drawers. Probably most of the Gompers letters are duplicated in the letter-books. Six additional cabinet drawers of American Alliance for Labor and Democracy papers convey the story of A. F. of L. efforts, under the leadership of Samuel Gompers, to assist the Wilson Administration during World War I. They were not used, of course, by Gordon S. Watkins for his almost contemporary *Labor Problems and Labor Administration in the United States During the World War*,¹¹ still the standard treatment. A new account would be rooted in these manuscripts, the Gompers chronological and subject files, the Labor Department files now available in the National Archives,¹² the Wilson papers, Socialist files in various New York, North Carolina, and Wisconsin repositories, the massive material on the war in the Hoover Library, and research in newspapers and labor journals.

The files contain one drawer of correspondence relating to the famous trip which Gompers took to Europe in 1909. It was on his return, it will be recalled, that he wrote the provocative words, "The Old World is not our world. Its social problems, its economic philosophies, its current political questions are not linked up with America."¹³ Ahead for America lay involvement in World War I, and shortly thereafter would come the Bolshevik Revolution. Four drawers deal in large part with the role Gompers played in negotiations leading to the creation of the International Labor Organization in 1919.

While the Federation has at least 18 large scrapbooks, it must be noted that there are 28 Gompers Scrapbooks in the New York Public Library. These contain articles and speeches, for the most part, and treat the years 1902 to 1924. "This col-

¹¹ (Urbana, Ill., 1920).

¹² Labor Department files and other manuscript materials are not cited by Francis E. Rourke, "The Department of Labor and Trade Unions," *Western Political Quarterly*, VII (Dec., 1954), 656-672.

¹³ Samuel Gompers, *Labor in Europe and America* (New York, 1910), 286.

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lection has misled many people into thinking we have his correspondence," reports a Library official.¹⁴

The personal papers of most Executive Council members are not to be found in the A. F. of L. Archives, although 11 cabinet drawers of Frank Morrison papers are on hand. Morrison was a hard-working Secretary-Treasurer for the Federation from 1897 to 1939 and participated in innumerable policy discussions. The papers of John P. Frey have been given to the Library of Congress, in part because of a conversation the writer had with him in 1952. Some material on William Green's early years in Ohio may be located in the Archives.

The Executive Council is the top governing body of the A. F. of L. Its decisions are policy-determining between the annual conventions. The Executive Council Minutes in the archives are stenographic accounts of the private council sessions in which men said what was on their minds. Their contents do not appear to have been quoted by labor historians up to this time. Miami Beach and Atlantic City have been the usual meeting places for the Executive Council, each session lasting a week or more. Better organized files of these minutes are kept in headquarters offices for the use of Federation officials. A. F. of L. history will never be fully understood until the Executive Council Minutes, spelling out the steps in the decision process, have been quoted and paraphrased in proper context by the conscientious authors of dozens of serious, scholarly monographs.

Another avenue of Federation self-government, the annual conventions, have been productive of many hundreds of resolutions. These have been printed in the well known *Proceedings* series. Background material relating to these resolutions can often be found in the archives. Among the subjects they touch upon are foreign affairs, domestic politics and eco-

¹⁴ Robert W. Hill, Keeper of Manuscripts, N. Y. P. L., to writer, Jan. 30, 1952. No book author since Philip R. V. Curoe in his *Educational Attitudes and Policies of Organized Labor in the United States* (New York, 1926) seems to have mentioned indebtedness to these scrapbooks.

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nomics, inter-union and intra-union relationships and passing events and issues of American social history.

The sheer volume of correspondence necessary to bring some semblance of unified action to an organization like the American Federation of Labor staggers the researcher at first acquaintance. Letters to and from international and national unions from 1900 to the present filled over 125 cabinet drawers before microfilming. More than 134 drawers contained correspondence with city centrals, state federations, and special organizers for the more recent decades. Correspondence with local unions has been divided for filing purposes into two series: that with local unions which failed to survive ("Dead Locals") and that with the "Live Locals." The former totaled 69 cabinet drawers; the latter 82 drawers.

Both groups contain letters relating to the founding and subsequent struggles of local A. F. of L. unions from coast to coast. The story they tell might be supplemented by research in files at international union headquarters and perhaps in appropriate state federation and city central files. Serious articles about the role of local unions in American communities, based on manuscripts, could lend additional significance to state and county historical journals, most of which are wholly silent on 20th century industrial America.

It is difficult to see how any historian of rounded city, county, or state social or economic history will be able to consider his job "exhaustive" until he has consulted the often tragic stories told in the files of dead local unions, stories of energies expended and of frustrated organizational hopes. The editing of tiny sections of this material for our state journals would be real contributions to state history. Most if not all of the volumes of business history written in heavily documented detail in recent years should have contained material from these files, but none of them did, so far as has been determined. Another file category, Organizers' Reports, shows the odds faced by labor in its fight to build the union move-

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ment. In a 1928 report, for example, Alfred Hoffman, special representative of the Textile Workers in North Carolina, reported that union organizers in the South faced "tremendous odds." After working all day for a living at his trade, "He is followed wherever he goes; his hotel room is ransacked for papers; and if there is but one hotel in the town, the organizer will soon find that there is no longer room for him in the establishment."¹⁵

Special files in the A. F. of L. Archives relate to the subject of Strikes, many of the folders in one section of more than 92 cabinet drawers going back to the turn of the century.

American political history has been written for years without consultation of American Federation of Labor "legislative files." One bloc of 55 cabinet drawers covers most of the period 1900 to 1933. On the whole, little writing of modern labor history has been done by persons trained in history seminar rooms. Much of the story of labor in politics has been told by political scientists and political economists unused to manuscript research of the type common among colonial and civil war historians.¹⁶ In the legislative files is the story of Congressional bills Federation leaders supported and opposed and many of their motives in so doing. To the present writer, the A. F. of L. appeared in these records in the role of a pressure group, operating legitimately — sometimes effectively and sometimes not — within the constitutional and legal

¹⁵ A copy of this letter was sent by A. F. of L. headquarters to the presidents of 24 international unions. AFL Circular Letter, May 7, 1928, in Circular Letter Book 6, A. F. of L. Papers. George Sinclair Mitchell, *Textile Unionism and the South* (Chapel Hill, 1931), Chapter III, tells of Hoffman's movements at the time, unfortunately without having seen the organizer's reports.

¹⁶ A comparative study of two "unofficial governments," the A. F. of L. and the U. S. Chamber of Commerce, by workmanlike Harwood Lawrence Childs, *Labor and Capital in National Politics* (Columbus, Ohio, 1930) used no manuscripts. Citing four newspapers frequently, the author commented, "It is surprising how much information can be gleaned from these sources." (p. 273). Mollie Ray Carroll, *Labor and Politics* (New York, 1923), a study of "the attitude of the American Federation of Labor toward legislation and politics," written by a person well informed on labor activities, gives no indication of manuscript research.

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framework of American society, eschewing a variety of radical solutions which could have destroyed the trade union movement.

The American Federation of Labor has in its files a good many photographs of labor leaders, many of the pictures decades old, with full identifications on their backs. At this writing no book of labor history deserving the words "well-illustrated" comes to mind.

Other materials in the Archives are bookkeeper's files (at least 36 cabinet drawers treated one recent period of years), many files of letters and pamphlets received from pressure and propaganda groups, and other miscellaneous materials. In general, the Federation in the past has been careful to keep material sent to it by special interest groups, although limited space has been a problem which microfilming will help to solve.

Intelligent use of such archives as those of the A. F. of L., the C. I. O., and the Railroad Brotherhoods can only be made in conjunction with a familiarity with great manuscript, pamphlet, and periodical holdings of libraries outside the labor movement. The State Historical Society of Wisconsin, centrally located in the heartland of the continent, has assumed responsibility for the gathering of much printed material on trade union developments in every state and has obtained many manuscript collections from Wisconsin unions. Duke University has plans for eventually gathering material on state labor history to serve the Southern region, while Cornell University's New York School of Industrial and Labor Relations may become a center for the Northeastern region.

The University of California has the best collection of labor journals on the Coast, now housed in one convenient room. The Hopkins Transportation Library of Stanford University has complete sets of all Railroad Brotherhood journals and many English and European journals as well.

The listings in the Johns Hopkins sponsored set, *Trade*

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Union Publications (cited below) are not all to be found at that university's library, since "the authors made extensive use of the interlibrary loan system."¹⁷ The valuable Labadie Collection with its supplemental material at the University of Michigan does not as yet comprise a fully rounded collection for general 20th century labor research, although it is strong on radical movements.¹⁸ The John Crerar Library has liquidated its labor holdings.

The University of Washington has important periodical files, the University of Illinois and Princeton University have expended much effort on labor bibliography, and industrial and labor relations institutes at universities like Minnesota, Chicago, and Stanford have built files which are strong on the years since the Wagner Act. Universities offering superior doctorates in economics, such as Harvard, Yale, and Columbia, have periodicals and manuscript collections touching the labor theme at many points. Some public libraries, like those of New York City, Detroit, and Chicago are strong in printed labor materials.¹⁹

American labor historians and economists temporarily turned historian have produced some excellent books of labor history. They have contributed works of analysis and transmitted a factual framework of real importance. These works must now be examined to ascertain whether the limitations of their research method have not left a whole new research and writing task for a new generation of writers.

¹⁷ Homer Halverson, Johns Hopkins librarian, to writer, Feb. 18, 1952.

¹⁸ See R. C. Stewart, "The Labadie Labor Collection," a reprint issued by the Michigan library.

¹⁹ Libraries desiring to build substantial collections of secondary works in the labor history field may begin by checking their holdings against the 1,024 entries in Ralph E. McCoy, *History of Labor and Unionism in the United States (A Selected Bibliography)* (Champaign, Ill., Institute of Industrial and Labor Relations, Univ. of Ill., 1953) and *A Trade Union Library* (Princeton University, Industrial Relations Section, 1949). See also Phillips Bradley, "Special Libraries and Research in Labor and Industrial Relations," *Special Libraries*, XXXIX (March, 1948), 82-86, and Harold L. Wilensky, *Syllabus of Industrial Relations; A Guide to Reading and Research* (Chicago, 1954).

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The late John R. Commons of the University of Wisconsin,²⁰ his student Selig Perlman,²¹ Columbia University's Robert F. Hoxie,²² and in recent years Leo Wolman²³ and Lewis L. Lorwin²⁴ have written volumes of labor history to which all students of their field are indebted. Pioneer works of history and interpretation have been produced by Harry A. Millis and Royal E. Montgomery,²⁵ Paul F. Brissenden,²⁶ and George E. Barnett and Jacob H. Hollander²⁷ during the first five and a half decades of this century. While none of these scholars cite manuscripts in the books listed, or habitually researched in manuscript correspondence, several writers on 18th and 19th century labor history did so,²⁸ and younger writers are following in their footsteps.

Such popular syntheses as the facile and superficial, yet interesting Foster Rhea Dulles' book, *Labor in America: A History*,²⁹ and a similar effort in earlier years,³⁰ rest in large

²⁰ Chief editor of *A Documentary History of American Industrial Society* (10 vols., Cleveland, 1910-1911) and the four volume *History of Labor in the United States, 1896-1932* (New York, 1921-1935) series, for which he wrote, in part, the first two volumes.

²¹ *A History of Trade Unions in the United States* (New York, 1922) and other works. See below.

²² *Trade Unionism in the United States* (New York, London, 1917).

²³ *Ebb and Flow in Trade Unionism* (New York, 1936).

²⁴ See below.

²⁵ *The Economics of Labor* (3 vols., New York, 1938-45), especially volume III, *Organized Labor* (New York, 1945).

²⁶ *The I. W. W., A Study of American Syndicalism* (New York, 1920).

²⁷ Co-editors of *Studies in American Trade Unionism* (New York, 1906). See also *A Trial Bibliography of American Trade Union Publications* (Baltimore, 1904 and 1907).

²⁸ Almont Lindsey used about a dozen manuscript collections while writing *The Pullman Strike* (Chicago, 1942); see also Henry David, *The History of the Haymarket Affair* (New York, 1936) and Richard B. Morris, *Government and Labor in Early America* (New York, 1946).

²⁹ (New York, 1949).

³⁰ Mary R. Beard, *A Short History of the American Labor Movement* (New York, 1920 and other editions) was based largely on the work of the Commons group and on secondary works and was infinitely superior to Anthony Bimba, *The History of the American Working Class* (New York, International Publishers, 1927) which ended, "The proletarian revolution is inevitable in America." (p. 356).

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part on the heavy research of those mentioned above. Pioneering legal analyses of great merit were produced by Edwin E. Witte in *The Government in Labor Disputes*³¹ and Charles O. Gregory in *Labor and the Law*,³² neither determined to change the course of legislative events in the manner of the authors of *The Labor Injunction*.³³

Labor historians are grateful for works of substance in labor economics and industrial relations by such men as Clark Kerr, Dale Yoder, Neil W. Chamberlain, Sumner H. Slichter, John Troxell, Joseph Shister, and E. Wight Bakke, and for superior books of varying techniques and purposes by authorities like Joel Seidman, Florence Peterson, Wilbert E. Moore, Frank Tannenbaum, Domenico Gagliardo, Arthur M. Ross, William M. Leiserson, Herbert R. Northrup, and Robert R. Brooks. The doctoral work of John Herman Randall, Jr.³⁴ has special virtues despite a reliance on printed materials which is typical of the work of all the scholars just mentioned.³⁵

Detailed monographic studies, the fruit of doctoral work and usually heavy in manuscript citations, have in the field of 20th century labor history rooted their narratives in printed labor journals and proceedings, government documents, newspapers, and related printed sources. Brailsford R. Brazeal,³⁶ Morton Robert Godine,³⁷ Lorin Stuckey,³⁸ George Kozmet-

³¹ (New York, 1932). Dr. Witte wrote, "Correspondence and interviews with employers, labor leaders, and their attorneys can be made to yield much data not otherwise obtainable . . ." (p. 113 n.). He also obtained copies of a file of A. F. of L. correspondence in the matter of the Coronado Coal Co. Case (p. 117 n.).

³² (New York, 1946).

³³ Felix Frankfurter and Nathan Greene, (New York, 1930).

³⁴ *The Problem of Group Responsibility to Society: An Interpretation of the History of American Labor* (New York, 1922).

³⁵ This conclusion was reached by the process indicated in footnote number 2, page 1, above.

³⁶ *The Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, Its Origin and Development* (New York, 1946).

³⁷ *The Labor Problem in the Public Service* (Cambridge, 1951).

³⁸ *The Iowa State Federation of Labor* (Iowa City, 1915).

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sky,³⁹ William J. Walsh,⁴⁰ and others, at varying times and places, prepared their monographs without citing in footnotes or bibliographies manuscript materials. The list could be expanded at great length.⁴¹

The entire series of monographs from the famous economics seminar of Jacob H. Hollander and George E. Barnett at The Johns Hopkins University, published by its Press from about 1906 to 1932, gives no more than a bare indication of manuscript research. Most of these works are nearly identical in format, wording of preface, length, ratio of footnotes to text, bibliographical technique, and especially, research method. Students analyzed union constitutions and bylaws, convention proceedings, and printed journals. From these they created their doctoral essays, adding a few quotes from replies to their letters of inquiry and from comments made by union leaders in the course of interviews, most of which took place in the Baltimore area or vicinity.⁴²

One of the most important, and pioneering, volumes ever written on any phase of modern American history, the Selig Perlman and Philip Taft *Labor Movements*, which is Volume IV⁴³ of the *History of Labor in the United States, 1896-1932* series, has 45 chapters, a 22-page bibliography, and 3,125 footnotes. The effort which went into this great book evokes awe and admiration. Yet the footnotes include but one manuscript letter — a communication to the authors. The excellent bibli-

³⁹ *Financial Reports of Labor Unions* (Boston, 1950).

⁴⁰ *The United Mine Workers of America as an Economic and Social Force in the Anthracite Territory* (Washington, D. C., 1931).

⁴¹ A few, like Wilfred Carsel, *A History of the Chicago Ladies' Garment Workers' Union* (Chicago, 1940), have used manuscript minutes of local board and/or council meetings to good advantage, and others have interviewed varying numbers of labor leaders.

⁴² The printed dissertations of A. M. Sokolski (1906), James M. Motley (1907), F. E. Wolfe (1912), David A. McCabe (1912), Theodore W. Glocker (1913), Nathaniel R. Whitney (1914), Leo Wolman (1916), William O. Weyforth (1917), D. P. Smelser (1919), Vertrees J. Wyckoff (1926), David M. Schneider (1928), and Joel I. Seidman (1932) have a startling similarity of research method and intention.

⁴³ (New York, 1935).

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ography, helpful to scholars over the years, is divided into Public Documents, Cases Cited, Trade Union and Employer Proceedings, Labor and Employer Pamphlets and Leaflets, General Newspapers and Periodicals, Labor and Employer Papers and Periodicals, Books, and Magazine Articles. These are roughly typical of materials used by the best labor economist-historians to date. Yet in this pioneer book the correspondence — the manuscript letters — of labor leaders, local unions, city centrals, state federations, international unions, A. F. of L. departments, and Federation Headquarters itself are neither used, nor their absence noted.

The time has now come when the 20th century labor source materials which these men and others used must be broadened. It would seem that historians should try to improve on the printed materials research technique which for so many years has satisfied scholars who were economists first — and historians only second. Fortunately, a small start has been made, but not, on the whole, in a manner likely to be fully satisfying to specialists in American history.⁴⁴

Matthew Josephson recently relied heavily on ample Hillman correspondence, after being selected as the official biog-

⁴⁴ Mary Harrita Fox wrote her warm *Peter E. Dietz, Labor Priest* (South Bend, Ind., 1953) almost exclusively from a diary and seven files of manuscript letters, with the unfortunate result that all labor history seems to focus on her hero. Vernon H. Jensen cites a few dozen letters which passed between trade unionists to strengthen the final 100 pages of his fascinating *Heritage of Conflict: Labor Relations in the Non-ferrous Metals Industry Up to 1930* (Ithaca, N. Y., 1959). David Ziskind, in *One Thousand Strikes of Government Employees* (New York, 1940), used many documentary manuscripts, although almost exclusively to establish the bare fact that strikes had been called and won or lost. John Lombardi's history of the Department of Labor to 1921, *Labor's Voice in the Cabinet* (New York, 1942), came from extensive research, and five per cent of its citations are from governmental correspondence and unpublished minutes of meetings. No Gompers or A. F. of L. letters from collections described here were used. An unpublished dissertation by James Earl Wood, "History of Labor in the Broad Silk Industry of Patterson, New Jersey, 1872-1940" (Univ. of Calif., 1941), rests on a diversity of documentary and manuscript material (but not many letters) gathered by a WPA project of earlier years, and doubtless there are other unpublished doctoral manuscripts which used correspondence files.

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rapher of the man he has chosen to crown "Statesman of American Labor."⁴⁵ It cannot be said that Saul Alinsky did the same in his biography of the leader of the United Mine Workers. Both writers, lacking any inside view of the careers of other labor leaders through manuscript research by themselves or others in A. F. of L., C. I. O., or Brotherhood files, could only guess at the true caliber of the labor leaders who so often fought and distrusted their heroes both on ideological and practical grounds.

Several books give some indication of having some slight foundation in A. F. of L. archival material.⁴⁶ Lewis L. Lorwin has written that Chapter Five of his Brookings study, *Labor and Internationalism*,⁴⁷ was based "largely on the private correspondence between Gompers and European labor leaders which is in the files of the American Federation of Labor." (p. 630) The 16-page chapter mentions or quotes a handful of incoming letters and shows in so doing a maturity of viewpoint. A few years later, in his classic *The American Federation of Labor: History, Policies, and Prospects*,⁴⁸ Mr. Lorwin indicated that he had permission to use "the records in the archives of the American Federation of Labor, the personal correspondence of Samuel Gompers, the minutes of the meetings of the Executive Council, and other unpublished materials." (p. xi) He had, moreover, "drawn upon documents and unpublished records of the American Federation of Labor. . . ." (p. 548) Yet the Lorwin text does not contain any quotations from manuscript Council minutes, and only two

⁴⁵ Sidney Hillman: *Statesman of American Labor* (Garden City, 1952). Many will quarrel with this and other Josephson evaluations of men and events.

⁴⁶ Albert T. Helbring, *The Departments of the American Federation of Labor* (Baltimore, 1931), states, "An official of the American Federation of Labor was kind enough to place some material from the Federation's files at the author's disposal." Only one statement of fact in the book came from these data, so far as can be determined, the footnote reading, "Copies of Letters in Files at the A. F. of L. Building."

⁴⁷ (New York, 1929).

⁴⁸ (Washington, D. C., 1933).

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quotations from correspondence⁴⁹ appear. This is not the use historians usually make of manuscript materials.⁵⁰

The heavily propagandistic study of Philip S. Foner, *The Fur and Leather Workers Union: A Story of Dramatic Struggles and Achievements*,⁵¹ would not normally receive much attention in a survey of important books of labor history. But there is some indication that Mr. Foner used A. F. of L. letters on deposit in the Federation headquarters. In a section of the book called "Sources" are listed, by chapters but without footnote numbers, some letters attributed to "A. F. of L. Archives," with correspondents' names and dates. There is no indication as to the location of these letters in the files. Nor can one tell what statements rest on them.⁵² In the pages of this book by Mr. Foner, lecturer at the Jefferson School of Social Science,⁵³ the long fight of the A. F. of L. to break the Communist hold on the Fur Workers is documented solely to discredit the A. F. of L. "bureaucrats" and "misleaders of labor."⁵⁴

⁴⁹ Pp. 40 n, 138.

⁵⁰ The author's research method was little changed in his useful new draft of his 1929 work, *The International Labor Movement: History, Policies, Outlook* (New York, 1953) despite the passage of two decades.

⁵¹ (Newark, N. J., Nordan Press, 1950).

⁵² Very carefully selected sentences and paragraphs of A. F. of L. outgoing letters are reproduced now and then in facsimile, with emotional captions like "One of the most damning documents in American labor history." In many of the reproductions the letterhead, text, and signature are separated by white space, and the author's judgments may not be verified.

⁵³ On the Jefferson School of Social Science, see the *Fourth Annual Report of the Subversive Activities Control Board* (Washington, D. C., 1954) and the text of a forthcoming ruling. See also the *New York Times Index* for recent years and the *New York Times* for May 7, 1953.

⁵⁴ *The Fur and Leather Workers Union*, pp. 370, 449, *et passim*; p. 685. There has been a "shameless betrayal of the American workers by C. I. O. leaders" since the majority abandoned the C. I. O.'s alleged "progressive policies" by expelling Communist-dominated unions in 1949. When the "left wing" Fur Workers were expelled, C. I. O. leaders resorted to "red-baiting tirades," "witch hunting," an "orgy of red-baiting," and "the most unbridled red-baiting" (pp. 680, 681, 682, 676). The Fur Workers union, endorsers of the Wallace ticket in 1948, opponents of the Marshall Plan and the Truman Doctrine, led by the notorious Ben Gold — the book's hero, admittedly a former Communist who was indicted in 1953 for falsely swearing earlier that he had

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Why have labor manuscripts been so neglected? There may be four major reasons. First, those trained primarily in departments of history have been overawed by the needless complexity of the articles and books issued by their colleagues in economics. Potential students of labor history who venture into economics department seminars struggle valiantly with the literature of labor theory and labor economics. They often find that other students in the room are interested only in the contemporary collective bargaining process. Anything predating Taft-Hartley is thought to be ancient history; those interested in the past are antiquarians. Too many economists still would agree with the judgment of Robert F. Hoxie, almost four decades ago, that historical narrative in the labor field is a "fad," as he called it, useless because it contributed nothing to a general theory of economics. "The main trouble with those who indulge in historical narrative," Hoxie charged, "is that they seem to think that academic reconstruction of the past can contribute to the ends of the practical interest of the present. In this they are for the most part mistaken."⁵⁵

In the second place, if the history graduate student persists in writing on a 20th century labor theme, he may find that, with rare exceptions, no one, either in the economics department or his own, really wants to know or hear about his chosen area of specialization. Work in a vacuum can be discouraging, and a high proportion of the labor topics which appear in dissertations-in-progress lists fall by the wayside; higher, this writer believes, than is normal.

Third, in few areas of research is the periodical literature so immense and the gold one seeks so scattered. The Reynolds and Killingsworth set,⁵⁶ the impressive index and guide to

not been a Communist — is termed in conclusion "a beacon light for the American working class" (p. 684). On Mr. Gold, see *New York Times*, Aug. 29, 1950, for his resignation without recantation, and the issue of Aug. 30, 1953, for his indictment.

⁵⁵ *Trade Unionism in the United States*, p. 381.

⁵⁶ Lloyd G. Reynolds and Charles C. Killingsworth, *Trade Union Publica-*

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many labor journals, encourages students to begin research, but weeks and months in the wordy labor convention proceedings, and in the periodicals written, in actuality, by subordinate employees hired from outside the labor movement, brings discouragement, or worse, a false sense of accomplishment.

Those engaging in "opinion studies" in the labor field should be made to realize that periodicals are not usually as good as primary sources for their purposes. A challenging statement in a labor journal of some years ago shows this full well:

Brother members, you realize that our Magazine becomes public property and that it gets into the hands of employers and that there are very few educational institutions in our country but what are receiving not only our monthly Journal, but all other labor publications. You can then readily understand the necessity of exercising extreme care and carefully guarding and preparing the matter which appears in the columns of this publication.⁵⁷

That the situation still exists is obvious, and the anonymous confession of a labor editor more recently provides a similar warning:

As a labor union editor I must plead guilty to the charge of printing news that is biased, news that is deliberately intended to favor the union movement. Even the headlines in my paper are slanted with great care.⁵⁸

Finally, the student sends a letter to a state federation president or to a famous controversial figure in the labor movement, often without a prior introduction from someone of stature, and sometimes without full identification of himself,

tions: *The Official Journals, Convention Proceedings, and Constitutions of International Unions and Federations, 1850-1941* (3 vols., Baltimore, 1944-46).

⁵⁷ President Daniel J. Tobin in *Teamsters Magazine*, XVII (Nov., 1920), 12.

⁵⁸ Harold Stevens (pseudonym), "How Unions are Run," *Personnel Journal*, XXVIII (Jan., 1950), 279.

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his abilities, or his purposes. The inevitable refusal of permission to use personal and official papers surprises and dismays the student. Yet the negative answer often is no more than a letter prepared "in the usual form" by the busy man's assistant or secretary. An appeal in person, accompanied by a detailed outline or statement of intentions, might even yet save the day. With time running short and money running low, however, the student brings his unexpectedly dull and unrewarding research to a conclusion. With or without his doctorate, it is too often his last venture into labor history.

Nothing can be done quickly about the wall which separates the collective bargaining group, the labor economists and theorists, and the history men from each other. Nor can enthusiasm be expected from historians until they have read a few of the new biographies and histories which will be born of manuscript research. Yet the stupefying mass of labor periodicals can be partially by-passed if manuscript research is in prospect.

There remains the problem of the suspicious or disinterested labor leaders and/or their staffs, who wholly misunderstand the function of the historian and often refuse to aid him in his search for truth. Unsupervised examination of unexpurgated labor manuscripts in Washington, D. C., New York, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and elsewhere has persuaded the writer that senior A. F. of L. executives still living, and the descendants of others, have little to fear from allowing professional historians and their doctoral candidates to have free use of their papers. Many an unjustified slur and slander, fostered by radicals or reactionaries in earlier years, will probably disappear from circulation as the full story of cause and effect shows up in historical literature.

How long will it be before research in labor's manuscripts becomes a routine matter of notifying an official of one's imminent arrival for a month of digging in correspondence files in connection with a research project? The historical profes-

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sion itself can hasten the day. Labor history must be made to seem attractive to graduate students of diverse political and social persuasions and of various sectional origins. While it is to be expected that radicals will continue to try to "strike a blow" by writing damaging books and articles for socialist and communist audiences, such persons have always been in a tiny minority in other areas of American historiography. Only in the labor field has there appeared a noticeable percentage of writings dedicated, not to telling the story, but to discrediting leaders, movements, organizations, our balanced two-party system, and an economy based on the profit motive.⁵⁹ Labor leaders have the right to expect that their conduct will be evaluated and judged, if it is to be judged, on the basis of accepted ethical standards, not on the extent to which it thwarted the ambitions of many petty politicians of radical movements or irritated some leaders of industry or finance.

Labor leaders have been men of action. There is some danger that the younger graduate students may not understand the mores of the plain, middle class men whose personal letters they seek to quote verbatim. Many whose letters rest in modern labor archives are still with us—and so are their relatives, associates, friends, and enemies. The advice of Herman Kahn,

⁵⁹ For example, see Bruce Minton and John Stuart, *Men Who Lead Labor* (New York, Modern Age Books, 1937), in whose pages William Green was the friend of the National Association of Manufacturers and the betrayer of American labor (p. 29), Matthew Woll the "sovereign of the reactionaries" (p. 25), but Harry Bridges the "voice of the rank and file" with sense enough to advocate political action. The C. I. O. would be (ca. 1937) the beginning of "an American People's Front" (p. 245). America has been a land of "classes whose interests were fundamentally conflicting" (p. 12). Books like this, and those of Jack Hardy (1935), John Steuben (1940), and William Standard (1947), all issued by International Publishers, have nothing in common with productions by indoctrinated scholars who seek the truth as an entity of value in itself.

Two books which engage in character defamation heavily, much in the vein of cheap periodical literature, are Edward Levinson, *Labor on the March* (New York, 1938) and Charles A. Madison, *American Labor Leaders* (New York, 1950).

Books which try to reach scientific judgments on labor leaders are Eli Ginzberg, *The Labor Leader* (New York, 1948) and C. Wright Mills, *The New Men of Power* (New York, 1948).

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given in another connection, will bear repeating in this context:

It is not enough merely to press for free access to all archives and records, wherever they exist, as soon as they have come into existence. New policies and new standards in connection with the use of such archives and records are needed, or historians will inevitably encounter a growing resistance and hostility that can in the long run only be harmful to the cause of historical research.⁶⁰

Thus trained historians will try to use labor manuscripts with common sense, decency, and restraint. They know full well that their job is to focus their cameras on central themes of vast import. In the words of Edgar Eugene Robinson, ". . . we must dismiss, as of little importance, masses of gossip and speculation, innuendo, and denunciation."⁶¹ Historians cannot overlook grave errors or major scandals. Yet they will not stress minor faults at the expense of major accomplishments.

The new business histories, heavily documented from the correspondence of executives on the management side, are helping to carve out new attitudes toward American business men.⁶² These books are being written with only the barest use of trade union manuscripts. In the A. F. of L. files in Washington, D. C., and in other files of labor manuscripts lies, virtually untouched, the raw material for the story of the industrial growth of the United States as it appeared from the other side of the paymaster's window. This is an unhealthy situation. *It*

⁶⁰ Herman Kahn, "World War II and Its Background: Research Materials at the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library and Policies Covering Their Use," *American Archivist*, XVII (April, 1954), 162.

⁶¹ Mr. Robinson continued, writing in *The Roosevelt Leadership, 1933-1945* (Phila., 1955), 412, "Neither Mr. Roosevelt nor the American people whom he represented were motivated by selfishness, small outlook, greed, and brutal purpose. Such individuals did exist. Mr. Roosevelt had to deal with that fact. But he never lost sight of the great, dominant purpose, the idealistic outlook, and the deep faith of the men and women who had built America." The eating and drinking habits of labor leaders are not primary facts for their character sketches, and they are of little consequence in ascertaining their roles in history.

⁶² See the writer's "Those 'Robber Barons,'" *Western Political Quarterly*, VI (June, 1953), 342-346.

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is one which union statesmen will want to bear in mind as they begin to decide how much money to spend in calendaring, arranging, and housing their manuscripts for the full scale use of the scholars of the nation.

There must be no misunderstanding on one point: Use of labor manuscripts will not in itself guarantee excellence.⁶³ Nor, despite what has been said in these pages, does lack of manuscript research necessarily indicate mediocrity of results or a certain laziness in the researcher. Yet all will incline to agree that objective archival research would almost inevitably have strengthened most of the books listed here. And many books of labor history, it is now clear, will have to be done over when scholars come to realize the extent of the factual story that has heretofore been ignored.

What, to be specific, are the *archives of labor*? They are the manuscript correspondence files of the 109 international unions, 50 state and territorial federations, and 821 city central organizations of the American Federation of Labor; the 33 member unions of the Congress of Industrial Organizations, their 40 state industrial union councils, and their 247 city and county councils; the 73 railroad brotherhood and other independent unions; and the 75,000 "locals" of the entire trade union movement.⁶⁴ How extensive is the descriptive

⁶³ Bernard Mandel is writing extensively on Gompers from the critical standpoint of one who believes that American historiography should come "out of the clouds of Congressional debates and Constitutional arguments" and study the social basis of "political struggles." "Calhoun, Lincoln and Labor," *Science and Society*, XVII (Summer, 1954), 235. Gompers is coming out second best as Dr. Mandel deplores the Gompers fight against the Marxists and judges his race policies (ca. 30 years after Reconstruction) according to N. A. A. C. P. aspirations of the 1950's. See *Cigar Makers Journal*, 78 (Oct., 1954) and *Journal of Negro History*, XL (Jan., 1955). Gompers, one of the great figures of American history, is to this revisionist no more than "a conservative, stand-pat bureaucrat." *Ibid.*, 34.

⁶⁴ For guides to related manuscripts, see Ray Allen Billington, "Guides to American History Manuscript Collections in Libraries of the United States," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, XXXVIII (Dec., 1951), 467-496. Unfortunately, it will be no simple matter to persuade labor leaders to open even a significant portion of their golden store to researchers immediately. Such narrowness of viewpoint among labor leaders will have to be overcome by persistent

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and narrative task which lies ahead! How insufficiently buttressed are so many of the conclusions in our final chapters, our final paragraphs, and our textbooks! For no writer of trade union history has seen more than a few of these immense labor files, and, judging from the tenor of book reviews in journals of economics and political science in particular, there is little awareness that they exist.

The New Labor History will emerge eventually. It will be in large part the result of work in official and personal correspondence files of union leaders. Yet other changes in approach are desirable. A new emphasis on biography and on narration and description is needed. Union successes and failures must be placed within the framework of general history. Neither an excessive devotion to economic determinism nor a limited geographical focus should be permitted to restrict labor history to parochial or indoctrinated interpretation.

A whole field of research and writing awaits historians. Here is an area of investigation which, far from being over-written, has hardly been touched. And it is central to the history of the development of industrial America. If the challenge of these labor archives is accepted, and union leaders co-operate in facilitating research, scholars are going to rewrite and revalue the history of American trade unionism — and with it the history of the United States.

effort. Historians will want to rally to their cause prominent community, state, and national public figures.