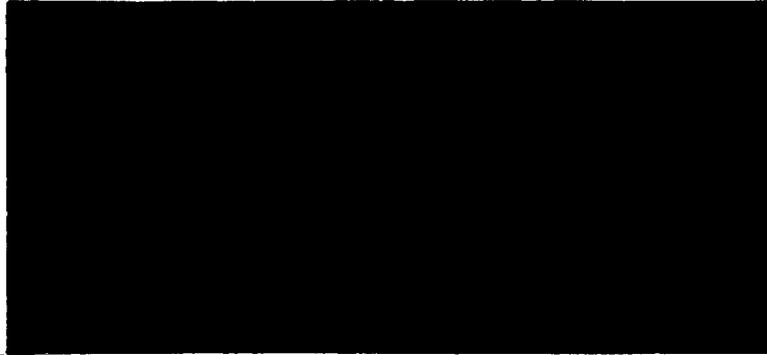




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"BRINGING UNIONS BACK IN
(OR, WHY WE NEED A NEW OLD LABOR HISTORY)"

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Bringing Unions Back In
(Or, Why We Need a New Old Labor History)*

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The field of labor history has undergone a stunning metamorphosis, as chronicled in the pages of this journal and others over the past three decades. Emerging from its drab economic cocoon in the 1960s, labor history has become a particularly lively and colorful creature of the humanities, at once deeply historical in method and sensitive theoretically to the variety of human experiences and understandings. The field has not merely evolved; it has been transformed -- a process so profound that even the term "labor history" itself has fallen into disfavor with some "new" historians who regard it as an anachronistic throwback to the "old" union-centered institutional paradigm.¹

This intellectual transformation has been the subject of several illuminating discussions.² In almost every case, the tone -- if not the explicit message -- has been celebratory, owing mainly to the demise of the old union-centered history. With the ascendance of the new history of the working class, it is argued, the field has finally come of age. While sharing much of the enthusiasm for the new history, I find little to celebrate in the growing marginalization of unions and other institutional forces in contemporary historiographical writing on the working class. I do not regard the demise of institutional approaches as a sign of the field's maturity so much as a means for avoiding the intellectual challenges posed by the old history. Continued progress, as I suggest below, is not likely to come from exchanging one historical method for another, but from utilizing the perspective of the new history to address the relevant concerns of the old.

The following comments, necessarily brief, are not intended as an exhaustive survey of modern labor history. My aims are rather more modest. Instead of offering a superficial overview of the field, I have chosen to focus more narrowly on the theme of worker consciousness, both because it is one of the most central, yet undertheorized, concepts that labor historians have to work with, and because it is one of the few common concerns that spans the old and new histories.

The study of worker consciousness sui generis really begins with Karl Kautsky, the leading theorist of communism in Germany around the turn of the century. Challenging the

reigning Marxian orthodoxy which reduced consciousness to the organization of production, Kautsky introduced a critical distinction between what he termed the objective "conditions for socialist production" and the "consciousness of its necessity." It was "the nature of the case," he explained, that "modern socialist consciousness" arose alongside but not exclusively out of the economic struggle between classes.³

Both strands of Kautsky's argument -- his insistence of the relative autonomy of ideology, and his rejection of economic reductionism -- were woven together by Lenin into a more formal theory of proletarian consciousness. Writing in 1902, the future Bolshevik leader turned against his more orthodox comrades within the Russian Social Democratic Party, who he denounced as "economists" for maintaining that socialist consciousness would arise spontaneously from the economic struggle against capital. Retreating still further from classical Marxism's belief in the self-emancipatory capacity of the working class, Lenin argued that bourgeoisie ideology, because of its strength and pervasiveness in capitalist society, rendered most workers incapable of generating revolutionary consciousness on their own. "The history of all countries shows," concluded Lenin, in one of his most celebrated passages, "that the working class, exclusively by its own efforts, is able to develop only trade union consciousness."⁴

Lenin, under attack from the prominent Russian Marxist George Plekhanov for "idealism," promptly recanted,⁵ but the general thrust of his argument regarding the role of consciousness in the revolutionary process was eventually borne out by events following World War I. In trying to explain the crushing defeat of working-class movements in Germany, Austria, Italy, Hungary and elsewhere, leading western european Marxists returned to Lenin's earlier emphasis on subjectivity, arguing that recent setbacks underscored the importance not of objective conditions, which they regarded as ripe across the continent, but of the masses' willingness to act. If, under presumably favorable conditions, most workers still refused to mount the barricades, it was because they had embraced the ideology of the dominant class as their own. The struggle in the streets, in short, was unwinnable without first winning the battle for workers' minds.⁶

Victory in the ideological contest depended on the presence of a tightly organized and disciplined party at the head of the workers' movement. This "party of a new type," as Lenin envisioned it, was to consist of small detachments of "professional revolutionaries" whose continuing immersion in political activity uniquely insulated them from the contaminating influence of the hegemonic ideology. As the organizational "embodiment" of proletarian consciousness, the party's principal task was to wash away any trace of bourgeois or "false" thinking, thereby transforming the working class into a collective tabula rasa on which to inscribe the ideology of socialism.⁷

The vanguard party, which Leninists saw as a cleansing and purifying agent, appeared to many non-Marxist scholars as the main source of ideological pollution within the working class. For the Wisconsin School of labor history, Marxism's chief rival, revolutionary intellectuals only served to confuse the rank and file, distracting them from their real interests.⁸ Selig Perlman, the most aggressive proponent of this view, made such anti-intellectualism the cornerstone of his theory, premising his entire analysis on the "clearly recognized...divergence which exists between the intellectual and the trade unionist." Unlike ordinary workers, who were guided to their immediate economic concerns by a "universal manualist psychology of scarcity," intellectuals were animated by an "overwhelming social mysticism...on behalf of the new social order." Standing Leninism on its head, Perlman concluded that "false consciousness" was the creation not of a hegemonic bourgeoisie, but of an insurgent intelligensia whose constant "meddling" sidetracked the labor movement from its true goals.⁹

That is where the debate about worker ideology stood for many years, with Marxists and their Wisconsin School critics holding diametrically opposed views regarding the "true," unspoiled character of proletarian consciousness. When workers articulated ideas at odds with their "true" beliefs, expressed feelings inconsistent with their "true" sentiments, or acted in ways that defied their "true" interests, any of several theoretical alibis were conveniently invoked. Just as Marxists explained away working-class conservatism by developing theories about the ideologically corrosive effects of imperialism, affluence, bureaucracy, segmentation, and

misleadership,¹⁰ the Wisconsin School dismissed labor radicalism as an epiphenomenal product of incompetent union leaders, irresponsible employers, or vanguard parties.¹¹ In neither case was the original theory modified to accommodate reality.

Such theoretical intransigence was possible because both Marxism and the Wisconsin School, despite reaching radically different conclusions, approached the study of worker consciousness in a similar way. Although Perlman claimed to have developed his theory from direct observation of union work rules and contracts, his argument was no more grounded in an empirical analysis of consciousness than was Lenin's. In fact, neither theorist ever examined what ordinary workers were actually thinking: Lenin simply deduced their thoughts from what Marx and Engels had written while Perlman did the same from what union officers and employers had written. In neither case was the rank and file -- the intended object of study -- consulted.¹²

Lacking an empirical foundation, both theories rested on a set of assumptions about the essential character of working-class interests. Lenin assumed that workers were naturally socialists. If bourgeois ideology could be suppressed or at least neutralized by the party, he argued, the workers' "proletarian instincts" would invariably take over, compelling them to embrace socialism. In contrast, Perlman assumed that workers were inherently economic conservatives who, in the absence of Leninist agitators, would just as naturally reject all manner of radical and socialist doctrines. The original assumptions may have been different in each case but the process of reasoning was the same. For both theorists, the starting point was some essential property of worker interests to which all other strivings were ultimately reducible.¹³

Sharing an "essentialist" conception of interests, Lenin and Perlman converged on an equally idealist image of consciousness. In both theories, the only categories of thought that existed were reform and revolution. Although perhaps defensible as ideal types, neither concept was deployed as a test of real world consciousness so much as a substitute for it. Depending on the formulation, workers were either socialist or economic, class or job conscious, but never a little of both. By setting up a neat dichotomy between reformist and revolutionary orientations,

Lenin and Perlman avoided the messy task of sorting out and understanding the full range of actually existing intermediate ideologies that fell between both poles.¹⁴

In this fictive world of polarized thought, the road from reform to revolution was obstructed by various ideological obstacles, making it virtually impassable to the average rank and filer. Lenin's proletarians were too stupified by bourgeois thinking to complete the journey, while Perlman's trade unionists were too pragmatic to even begin it. Mobilizing the falsely conscious and the cynical alike required the intervention of a party that was capable of shattering conventional patterns of working-class thought. In privileging the party, however, Perlman, the former Menshevik, joined Lenin's Bolsheviks in minimizing the role of the working class as an active agent in its own emancipation.¹⁵

This Lenin-Perlman consensus -- anchored in essentialism, dichotomous imagery, and vanguardism -- lay at the heart of the old labor history. Focusing at the institutional level of analysis, Marxists and Wisconsinites wrote their contending histories of American labor from a common vantage point high above the rank and file, looking over their heads to the impersonal laws of the marketplace as the mainspring of unionization. Whatever disagreements arose were rooted in differing conceptions of "the economic."¹⁶ Whereas orthodox Marxists such as Philip Foner traced the laws of the marketplace to the capitalist mode of production and therefore saw in every act of worker resistance, no matter how small, an incipient challenge to the system itself, mainstream labor historians such as Philip Taft, Perlman's prize student, viewed workplace demands, even the most far reaching, as rearguard actions aimed at protecting the diminished economic opportunities created by encroaching product and labor markets. However much they might have disagreed in their interpretations of labor movement dynamics, neither Foner nor Taft -- nor, for that matter, any of their modern-day disciples -- were ever led to seriously question the consensus position.¹⁷

The first real challenge to this consensus came from the "new" labor historians who, echoing the populist and radical sentiments of the 1960s, sought to restore a place in history for ordinary working people. Rejecting the elitist and institutionalist biases of the existing framework,

they found themselves on a collision course with the basic assumptions underlying the historiography of workers' movements.¹⁸ In the ensuing clash of paradigms, the new labor history came out on top. Essential interests, the ever reliable *deus ex machina* of the old school, were driven from the historical stage by flesh and blood actors whose lived experiences became the focus of the new history. With the recovery of popular culture came a growing appreciation of the diversity and complexity of working-class consciousness. Scrapping the old dichotomy between reform and revolution, the new labor historians advanced a more nuanced understanding of the workers' mental world, as inherently dualistic and at times self-contradictory. Such ideological impurity did not mean, however, that the rank and file was confused or that they were incapable of coherent action without the guidance of a party. Contrary to the vanguardist premises of the old school, the new labor historians depicted the workers' "organic consciousness" as a potentially rich storehouse of insurgent values and beliefs.¹⁹

As the old consensus unraveled, labor history broke out of its confining institutional straight-jacket and began exploring the full panorama of working-class life. Placing ordinary wage earners rather than unions at the center of their narratives, the new labor historians set about documenting the many and varied ways in which class has been experienced in America, not only on the picket line or at the union hall, but on the job and off, in homes, neighborhoods, bars, music halls, voting booths, churches, synagogues, fraternities, clubs and indeed wherever workers congregated. In countless case studies of local communities, workers' quotidian lives and innermost thoughts were laid bare, revealing the rich variety of experiences and multiple identities that went into making the American working class.²⁰

In aiming at ever more authentic expressions of proletarian experience, however, labor history has increasingly lost sight of its original target: the union, which, because of its institutional character, has come to be seen as a less genuine, even counterfeit, representation of the workers' world. Sprung from an institutional netherworld dominated by cold and impersonal organizations, the union seems out of place in the warm and intimate context of workers' everyday experiences.²¹

But if experiences and institutions belong to different analytical worlds, they nonetheless occupy a common empirical universe in which neither can be adequately understood apart from the other. Just as the old union-centered history lacked balance without an understanding of "the subject," the new culturalism has been no less one-sided in neglecting the institutional embeddedness of working-class experience. And so labor history has come full circle. Like the institutionalism of old, the new culturalism has proven incapable of generating more than a partial, if richly detailed, account of the workers' total universe.²²

Where the new historians err is in failing to distinguish their critique of institutionalism as a level of analysis from the study of institutional life itself. Without such a distinction, they have unthinkingly thrown unions out with the bathwater of institutional analysis. In so doing, many labor historians have begun turning away from the industrial arena altogether, abandoning economic institutions for the headier stuff of culture and experience. This has even been true of such neo-Marxists as David Montgomery who, while speaking in the vernacular of class and production, has considerably less to say about unions than about the shop floor experiences of workers.²³

In deflecting attention from unions, the new historians, culturalists and Marxists alike, have drawn the field of labor studies away from its original concern with the dynamics of capitalist society. For Lenin and Perlman, as for Marx and Commons before them, unions were not only economically-based interest groups but potential vehicles of social change, whose importance lay in providing the principal means through which wage earners, one of the two great classes created by the industrial revolution, constituted themselves as an organized force capable of influencing the direction of modern society.²⁴ Whether conceiving of unions as Lenin's "transmission belts" of revolutionary consciousness or as Perlman's engines of bourgeois self-interest, the study of labor organization has been driven by the larger prospect of understanding the class basis of societal change and stability. That American unions never represented more than a minority of all wage earners, that they have engaged in questionable, even unsavory, practices, and at times seem to have forgotten whose side they were on

-- none of these well-worn indictments served up by the new historians in any way alters the fact that organized labor, for all its faults, has provided one of the most enduring links between class and protest for the past century.²⁵

The study of organized labor as a social movement, which animated the old history, is being taken up anew by historically-minded industrial sociologists. Unlike their contemporary counterparts in the field of labor history for whom institutional realities have become an ever-fading blur, the "new" industrial sociologists are bringing processes of class organization, and unionism in particular, under a sharper focus. Combining traditional sociological approaches to class analysis with more recent theorizing on social movements, they are rediscovering unions as the locus classicus of industrial conflict, recognizing their centrality to working-class mobilization and social change.²⁶

But for all the light that has been cast on the organizational aspects of class formation, the workers' mental world remains shrouded in darkness. Like the experientialism of the new labor history, the organizational perspective of industrial sociology largely ignores the ideological nexus between workers and their unions, thus leaving the explanation of union loyalty and membership dynamics under the uncontested sway of the old consensus. The tenacity of Perlman's theory is a case in point: despite repeated attacks from every conceivable angle, his argument "remains," as one critic recently lamented, "by default, the only intelligent, overarching explanation for why American workers behave the way they did and do."²⁷

That Perlman's explanation remains viable says less about its "intelligence" than about the failure of most critics to engage the theory of job consciousness on its own turf. If the old consensus is ever to be effectively challenged it will mean returning unions to the center of labor studies, not in some mechanical fashion that merely reproduces the former institutionalism, but rather by viewing the relationship between unions and their members through the experiential lens of the new history.²⁸ The thought of analyzing unions from "the ground up" will no doubt offend the sensibilities of many labor historians, making both institutionalists and culturalists a bit uncomfortable. But there is no reason, apart from intellectual tradition, why the two approaches

should not be brought together as part of an emerging synthesis that reintegrates the union, as a critical component of the proletarian experience, into workers' everyday lives.²⁹

This synthetic project is now long overdue. A decade ago, in an influential review essay, David Brody argued that "the truncated state of the field -- rich in its findings, unclear as to larger meaning -- places the task of synthesis high on the agenda of American labor history." Addressing himself specifically to the new historians, Brody proposed a new synthesis which takes "as its starting point not culture but work and the job" as the "common ground applying to all American workers."³⁰ Searching for some such "common ground" -- whether it be "the job" or "working class culture" -- holds out the attraction of advancing beyond the narrow "male and pale" focus of the old union-centered history, but it does so while retreating from the larger questions of social transformation that drew earlier generations of labor historians to the study of unionism in the first place. To the extent that our historical sights remain fixed on the industrial sources of stability and change under capitalism, unions and other institutions of working-class organization remain central to our vision of labor history.

NOTES

¹ Many new labor historians choose to describe their research as "working-class history" or simply "social history."

² Robert H. Zieger, "Workers and Scholars: Recent Trends in American Labor Historiography," Labor History 13 (Spring 1972):245-266; David Brody, "Labor History in the 1970s: Toward a History of the American Worker," in The Past Before Us: Contemporary Historical Writing in the United States, ed. Michael Kammen (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1980):252-269; David Montgomery, "To Study the People: The American Working Class," Labor History 21 (Fall 1980):485-512; and Robert Ozanne, "Trends in American Labor History," Labor History 21 (Fall 1980):513-521.

³ Kautsky's "critical distinction" is quoted in V. I. Lenin, "What Is To Be Done?" in Essential Works of Lenin, ed. Henry M. Christman (New York: Bantam Books, 1966), p. 81. Kautsky on "modern socialist consciousness" is from his The Class Struggle, trans. William E. Bohn (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 1910), pp. 191-198.

⁴ Lenin, "What Is To Be Done?" p. 74. For a more extensive discussion of Lenin's views on trade unionism, see Thomas Taylor Hammond, Lenin on Trade Unions and Revolution, 1893-1917 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1957).

⁵ Lenin's auto-critique, in which he conceded that his attack on economism led him too far in the direction of voluntarism, must surely be regarded as one of the best kept secrets of Marxism; see Adolf Sturmthal, "Comments on Selig Perlman's A Theory of the Labor Movement," Industrial and Labor Relations Review 4 (July 1951):486. Despite Lenin's self-critical remarks, his original thesis -- still unmodified after all these years -- remains the definitive formulation on worker consciousness, not only for Marxists but for their "bourgeois" critics as well. Among non-Marxists, Lenin's theory of consciousness is embraced by Aileen S. Kraditor, The Radical Persuasion, 1890-1917: Aspects of the Intellectual History and the Historiography of Three American Radical Organizations (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981), p. 320; and Michael Mann, Consciousness and Action Among the Western Working Class (London: The Macmillan Press, 1973), p. 71.

⁶ The most prominent western Marxists to figure in this debate were Karl Korsch, Marxism and Philosophy, trans. Fred Halliday (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970); Georg Lukacs, History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971); Antonio Gramsci, Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci, ed. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (London: Laurence and Wishart, 1971); and Rosa Luxemburg, Selected Political Writings of Rosa Luxemburg, ed. Dick Howard (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971).

⁷ While western Marxists generally agreed on the importance of "the subjective factor" in revolutionary change, the role of the party was a more contentious issue, dividing the "vanguardist" Lenin and Lukacs from the more "workerist" Korsch and Luxemburg, leaving Gramsci somewhere in between. On the problematic relationship between party and class, see Rossana Rossanda, "Class and Party," in The Socialist Register 1970, ed. Ralph Miliband and John Saville (London: Merlin Press, 1970), pp. 217-231; Ralph Miliband, Marxism and Politics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), chap. 5; and Frank Parkin, Marxism and Class Theory: A Bourgeois Critique (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), part 3.

⁸ The Wisconsin School is most closely identified with the writings of John Commons and his associates; see John R. Commons, "American Shoemakers, 1648-1895: A Sketch of Industrial

Evolution," Quarterly Journal of Economics 24 (November 1909):39-84; Selig Perlman, A Theory of the Labor Movement (Philadelphia: Porcupine Press, 1979) (reprint of 1928 edition). The most penetrating critiques of this school, particularly Perlman's contribution, include Charles A. Gulick and Melvin K. Bers, "Insight and Illusion in Perlman's Theory of the Labor Movement," Industrial and Labor Relations Review 6 (July 1953):510-531; Andrew Dawson, "History and Ideology: Fifty Years of 'Job Consciousness'," Literature and History 8 (Autumn 1978):223-241; and Abraham J. Siegel, "The Extended Meaning and Diminished Relevance of 'Job Conscious' Unionism," Proceedings of the Eighteenth Annual Winter Meeting of the Industrial Relations Research Association, December 28-29, 1965 (Madison: Industrial Relations Research Association, 1966):166-182.

⁹ Perlman, A Theory, pp. 9, 281, 5. For a particularly penetrating critique of Perlman's vanguardism, see Sturmthal, "Comment."

¹⁰ The concept of a "theoretical alibi" is from Geoff Eley and Keith Nield, "Why Does Social History Ignore Politics?" Social History 5 (May 1980):258. For a sampling of such "alibis" from the Marxian camp, see William Foster, Misleaders of Labor (Chicago: Trade Union Educational League, 1927); Eric Hobsbawm, Labouring Men (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1964); Stanley Aronowitz, False Promises: The Shaping of American Working Class Consciousness (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1973), chap. 4; Dan Clawson, Bureaucracy and the Labor Process: The Transformation of U.S. Industry, 1860-1920 (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1980); and David M. Gordon, Richard Edwards, and Michael Reich, Segmented Work, Divided Workers: The Historical Transformation of Labor in the United States (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

¹¹ The "alibis" of the Wisconsin School appear in Perlman, A Theory, especially chap. 2; Philip Taft, "Attempts to 'Radicalize' the Labor Movement," Industrial and Labor Relations Review 1 (July 1948):580-592; Philip Taft, "A Rereading of Selig Perlman's 'A Theory of the Labor Movement'," Industrial and Labor Relations Review 4 (October 1950):70-77; and Walter Galenson, "Why the American Labor Movement is Not Socialist," Reprint No. 168, Institute of Industrial Relations (Berkeley: University of California, 1961).

¹² Perlman, in fact, argued that analyzing the decisions of union leaders was "the closest one can get to the experimental method in dealing with social movements"; see Selig Perlman, "The Basic Philosophy of the American Labor Movement," Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science 274 (March 1951):59. On the larger methodological problem of using texts prepared by working-class activists and leaders, see Jacques Ranciere, "The Myth of the Artisan: Critical Reflections on a Category of Social History," International Labor and Working-Class History 24 (Fall 1983):10-13.

¹³ On the assumptions guiding Lenin's theory, see H. Wolpe, "Some Problems Concerning Revolutionary Consciousness," in The Socialist Register 1970, ed. Ralph Miliband and John Saville (London: The Merlin Press, 1970), p. 269. On the role of assumptions in Perlman's theory, see David Brody, "Labor History in the 1970s," pp. 253-254. In the extreme, critics of such "essentialist" reasoning deny the possibility of pre-existing interests altogether; see Barry Hindess, Politics and Class Analysis (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), chap. 6, 7.

¹⁴ For criticisms of the "rebel or submit" dichotomy, see Eley and Nield, "Why Does Social History Ignore Politics?":260-261; Irving Howe, "Sweet and Sour Notes: On Workers and Intellectuals," Dissent 19 (1972):265; Ellen Meiksins Wood, "The Politics of Theory and the Concept of Class: E. P. Thompson and His Critics," Studies in Political Economy 9 (Fall 1982):69; David Montgomery, The Fall of the House of Labor: The Workplace, the State, and American Labor Activism, 1865-1925 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 288; and Iver Bernstein, "Expanding the Boundaries of the Political: Workers and Political Change in the

Nineteenth Century," International Labor and Working-Class History 32 (Fall 1987):59. Sociologists have long been aware of the inadequacy of simple dichotomous images of consciousness; see, for example, D. Lockwood, "Sources of Variation in Working Class Images of Society," Sociological Review 14 (November 1966):249-267; Frank Parkin, Class Inequality and Political Order: Social Stratification in Capitalist and Communist Societies (New York: Praeger, 1971), chap. 3; Gordon Marshall, "Some Remarks on the Study of Working-Class Consciousness," Politics & Society 12 (1983):263-301; and Rick Fantasia, Cultures of Solidarity: Consciousness, Action, and Contemporary American Workers (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

¹⁵ On the relationship between consciousness and organization, see David Montgomery, "Spontaneity and Organization: Some Comments," Radical America 7 (November-December 1973):70-80; and Jean Monds, "Workers' Control and the Historians: A New Economism," New Left Review 97 (May-June 1976):81-104.

¹⁶ John H. M. Laslett, "The American Tradition of Labor Theory and Its Relevance to the Contemporary Working Class," in The American Working Class: Prospects for the 1980s, ed. Irving Louis Horowitz, John C. Leggett, and Martin Oppenheimer (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Books, 1979), pp. 3-30.

¹⁷ This is not to argue that Foner and Taft, as leading practitioners of the Wisconsin School and Marxism, were indistinguishable. Clearly, there are differences in emphasis and of course interpretation. But beneath such obvious differences, which have been seized upon by most observers, lies a number of striking parallels in the way both men approach and understand the subject matter of labor history. On Taft's influence, see the special issue of Labor History 26 (Winter 1978). On Foner's influence, see Melvyn Dubofsky, "Give Us That Old Time Labor History: Philip S. Foner and the American Worker," Labor History 26 (Winter 1985):118-137.

¹⁸ The intellectual agenda of the new labor history is ably summarized in Zieger, "Workers and Scholars"; and Brody, "Labor History in the 1970s."

¹⁹ The influences acting on the new labor history are numerous and varied. Among the most important seminal contributions are those of E. P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class (New York: Vintage Books, 1963); Hobsbawm, Labouring Men; Herbert G. Gutman, Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America: Essays in American Working-Class and Social History (New York: Vintage, 1966); David Montgomery, Workers' Control in America: Studies in the History of Work, Technology, and Labor Struggles (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979); and George Rude, Ideology and Popular Protest (New York: Pantheon, 1980).

²⁰ See, for example, the work reviewed by Brody, "Labor History in the 1970s."

²¹ The anti-union reflexes of the new labor history have been identified by Michael Kazin, Barons of Labor: The San Francisco Building Trades and Union Power in the Progressive Era (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987), p. 6. In a parallel development outside of history, the traditional "job-centered" approach of sociology has come under attack for neglecting culture and experience; see Steven Peter Vallas and Cynthia Fuchs Epstein, "Consent and Control in the Labor Process: The Limits of Job-Centered Analysis," paper presented at the Annual Meetings of the American Sociological Association, August 23-28, 1988, Atlanta.

²² For somewhat related critiques of the new history, see Elizabeth Fox Genovese and Eugene O. Genovese, "The Political Crisis of Social History," Journal of Social History 10 (Winter 1976):205-221; Tony Judt, "A Clown in Regal Purple: Social History and the Historians," History Workshop Journal 7 (Spring 1979):66-94; Eley and Nield, "Why Does Social History Ignore Politics?"; and Lawrence T. McDonnell, "'You Are Too Sentimental': Problems and Suggestions for a New Labor History," Journal of Social History (Summer 1984):629-654.

²³ Montgomery, Workers' Control in America: Fall of the House of Labor. Culturalism has most recently surfaced within social history in the form of post-structural linguistics. It may be overstating the case to suggest, as Joan Scott does, that "attention to 'language' has become the order of the day...among labor historians"; see her "On Language, Gender, and Working-Class History," International Labor and Working-Class History 31 (Spring 1987):1. Still, discourse analysis -- and the study of language in particular -- has had a significant impact on American labor history; see, for example, Gary Gerstle, Working-Class Americanism: The Politics of Labor in a Textile City, 1914-1960 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); and Michael Kazin, "A People Not a Class: Rethinking the Political Language of the Modern U.S. Labor Movement," in Reshaping the U.S. Left: Popular Stuggles in the 1980s, ed. Mike Davis and Michael Sprinker (London: Verso, 1988):257-286.

²⁴ Commons's views on industrial conflict and social change are succinctly presented in his article, "Is Class Conflict in America Growing and Is It Inevitable?", American Journal of Sociology 13 (1908):756-766. Marx's views on trade unionism are presented in Marx and Engels on the Trade Unions, ed. Kenneth Lapides (New York: Praeger, 1987).

²⁵ On the relationship between unions and class-based politics in the United States and Western Europe, see John D. Stephens, The Transition from Capitalism to Socialism (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1979); and Gary Marks, Unions in Politics: Britain, Germany, and the United States in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).

²⁶ See, for example, Jerry Lembcke and William M. Tattam, One Union in Wood: A Political History of the International Woodworkers of America (New York and British Columbia: International Publishers and Harbour Publishing, 1984); Larry J. Griffin, Michael Wallace, and Beth A. Rubin, "Capitalist Resistance to the Organization of Labor Before the New Deal: Why? How? Success?," American Sociological Review 51 (April 1986):147-167; Jeffrey Haydu, Between Craft and Class: Skilled Workers and Factory Politics in the United States and Britain, 1890-1922 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); Howard Kimeldorf, Reds or Rackets? The Making of Radical and Conservative Unions on the Waterfront (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); and Judith Stepan-Norris and Maurice Zeitlin, "'Who Gets the Bird?' Or, How the Communists Won Power and Trust in America's Unions: The Relative Autonomy of Intra-class Political Struggles," American Sociological Review 54 (August 1989):503-523.

²⁷ The critic quoted is Michael Kazin, "Struggling With the Class Struggle: Marxism and the Search for a Synthesis of U.S. Labor History," Labor History 28 (Fall 1987):497. The hegemony of Perlman has also been questioned by Dawson, "History and Ideology":238; Brody, "Labor History in the 1970s":265; and Montgomery, "To Study the People," p. 500.

²⁸ Sociologist David Lockwood long ago observed that the study of class consciousness "should aim at an understanding of the relationship of the ... worker to the trade union movement, the main vehicle of working class consciousness." Lockwood is quoted in Ron Eyerman, "Some Recent Studies in Class Consciousness," Theory and Society 11 (July 1982):543.

²⁹ Such a synthesis, I would argue, is already taking shape, and can be seen in several recent monographs, including Kazin, Barons of Labor; Kimeldorf, Reds or Rackets?; Bruce Nelson, Workers on the Waterfront: Seamen, Longshoremen, and Unionism in the 1930s (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988); and Joshua Freeman, In Transit: The Transport Workers Union in New York City, 1933-1966 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

³⁰ Brody, "Labor History in the 1970s," pp. 269, 268.

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