

San Francisco Labor History Conference

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“San Francisco Labor, 130 Years of Tradition and Change” was the title of a day-long conference held at the Plumbers’ and Pipefitters’ Hall in San Francisco on December 5, 1981. Some 270 union members, community activists, educators, and writers attended the conference. The San Francisco Labor Council, A.F.L.-C.I.O., the Joint Council of Teamsters Number 7, and the Northern California District Council I.L.W.U. sponsored the event, along with the History Department, the Labor Studies Department, and the American Studies Department of San Francisco State University. The conference developed out of discussions in the Bay Area Labor History Workshop, a network of local labor historians drawn from rank and file, free lance, and academic writers in the San Francisco Bay Area.

John F. Crowley, Secretary-Treasurer of the San Francisco Labor Council, and Chuck Mack, Secretary-Treasurer of the Joint Council of Teamsters, welcomed the audience, and John Henning, Executive Secretary-Treasurer of the California Labor Federation, AFL-CIO, gave the keynote address. Stan Jensen, International Vice-President of the International Association of Machinist and Aerospace Workers, and a former officer of Machinists’ Lodge 68 in San Francisco, also gave a short talk.

The first panel of the day, chaired by Chuck Mack, Joint Council of Teamsters, focused on “San Francisco Labor at the Turn of the Century.” After a slide show with taped narration on “Workers and Unions in San Francisco from the Gold Rush to 1900,” presented by Professor Robert W. Cherny of San Francisco State, Professor Jules Tygiel, also from San Francisco State, gave a paper on “The Teamster and Waterfront Strikes of 1901.” Micheal Kazin, lecturer in history at San Francisco State and Stanford University, analyzed the San Francisco Building Trades Council during the 1896-1924 period in his talk on “San Francisco: Labor’s City.”

Professor David Brody, of the University of California at Davis, chaired the second panel on San Francisco Labor in the 1930s. Topics covered included the Open Shop movement, the 1934 General Strike, the rise of the CIO, the impact of

New Deal labor legislation, and the results of the organizing drives of the 1930s. Panelists were Harry Bridges, retired president, ILWU; Claude Jinkerson, retired president of Retail Clerks local 648 and former president of the San Francisco Labor Council; Joe O'Sullivan, retired secretary of Carpenters Local 22; Wendell Phillips, retired president of the Bakery Wagon Drivers Union, and Jackie Walsh, retired officer of Waitresses local 48.

The third panel of the day covered "Contemporary Issues Facing San Francisco Labor." Sue Cobble, director of Labor Studies at San Francisco Community College, chaired the session. Richard Liebes, retired research director of the Joint Council of Service Employees No. 2, talked on the structural changes in the Bay Area economy that have affected San Francisco labor, and Vince Courtney, former executive-secretary of Civil Service Association, local 400 SEIU, looked at public employees' strikes of the 1970s for their significance to the labor movement today. George Davis, secretary-treasurer of Office and Professional employees Union, local 3, discussed the situation facing organizers of white collar workers.

Labor historian David F. Selvin, editor of *Northern California Labor*, made the concluding remarks and addressed several provocative questions about the future prospects of the San Francisco labor movement to the participants and audience.