

*Workers and Unions in Wisconsin: A Labor History Anthology*, by Darryl Holter. Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1999. v, 284 pp. Illustrations, tables, notes, index. \$45.00 cloth, \$24.95 paper.

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The library and archives of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin house the nation's foremost collection of labor materials. When University of Wisconsin economist John R. Commons and his associates began collecting information on the American working class nearly a hundred years ago, it marked the origin of labor history as a field of study. Thus the historical society's facility contains a remarkable assortment of documents that chronicle worker and radical movements. Because the collection records labor activities nationwide, moreover, those interested in Iowa labor history can usually benefit from a trip to Madison.

Given the reputation of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, it comes as no surprise that the Society published Darryl Holter's anthology, *Workers and Unions in Wisconsin*. Holter, who now teaches history at UCLA, came to the task well prepared with a Ph.D. in history and experience as educational director for the Wisconsin State AFL-CIO and editor of *Wisconsin Labor News*. His experiences addressing unions, students, and groups of the general public led Holter to decide to compile published and unpublished materials into a single volume for both professional historians and the general public.

The book comes in an 8½" x 11" double-column format. Unfortunately, it suffers from certain editing problems. The pagination used in the contents section creates confusion about article extracts and sidebars. Occasionally, the extracts themselves suffer from inadequate context. The sidebars, moreover, create a distraction when, as sometimes happens, the information presented deviates from the article. The same problem occurs with some visuals not referenced to the text. On the other hand, the numerous black-and-white photographs capture an interesting assortment of union leaders and rank-and-file workers in portraits, at worksites, and participating in strikes and picket lines, parades and rallies, conventions and meetings. Finally, short profiles of the authors would have been a useful addition.

The anthology covers a time frame from the 1850s to the 1980s, providing an arresting array of observations from union activists and labor historians. Holter offers nearly 80 interesting selections from books, articles, labor papers, and participant reflections. Occupational settings range from paper mills and battery plants to offices and

schools. Strikes and left-wing political action receive attention as well as internecine union conflict over leadership, gender, and race issues. Readers will find accounts of such well-known events as the two long and bitter strikes at Kohler in the 1930s and 1950s as well as the relationships between unions and Milwaukee's famous socialists—Victor Berger, Dan Hoan, and Frank Zeidler—and the struggles of the city's African American workers to overcome racial barriers.

The book also reveals some special contributions of the Wisconsin labor movement. Many of the state's unions and labor officials took the lead in pushing for industry-wide rather than craft-centered unionism. During the 1930s and 1940s organizing across craft lines resulted in significant union growth. By lobbying Republicans and Democrats and making alliances with Socialists and Progressives, Wisconsin unionists helped to pass ameliorative state legislation, including "child labor laws, unemployment insurance and worker's compensation, limits on employers' use of injunctions during labor disputes, prohibitions against labor spies to disrupt unions, and collective bargaining rights for public employees" (3). When a group of state employees gathered in Madison in 1932, they founded the organization that eventually became one of the nation's largest unions, the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME).

*Workers and Unions in Wisconsin* gives us an expansive survey of Wisconsin's rich labor history. The book concentrates on the central role of workers and unions in the state's economic development rather than the usual accounts of bold entrepreneurs, fascinating technology, or innovative products. Holter concludes that workers' "sweat and toil, combined with their courage and willingness to engage in collective action, . . . made Wisconsin both a great economic power and a pioneer in social reform" (9). His labor history selections draw from both the older institutional approach and the newer social approach. The former focuses on organizational activities, strikes, and labor leaders while the latter emphasizes gender, race, ethnicity, skill, community, and culture as interpretive dimensions. Since the traditional selections predominate, demographic factors receive scant attention. Nonetheless Darryl Holter's anthology illuminates Wisconsin's labor history by compiling an impressive array of materials. He gives us, in short, a good state model for probing labor history.

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