

**Radicals, Revivalists and Reformers:
The Heritage of Labor and Religion in the United States**

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In the spring of 1894 workers at the Pullman Palace Car Company went on strike. The workers were awash with white ribbons symbolizing their discontent with George Pullman who owned the company and nearly everything in the town. As the conflict began two sermons were preached from two different pulpits with two very different interpretations of the man at the center of the controversy. Rev. E. Christian Oggel, pastor of the Green Stone Church, extolled the virtues of George Pullman as a man who “has the noblest ideas and the highest aspirations.” On the other side of town the Methodist pastor William Carwardine lambasted Rev. Oggel’s praise. He referred to the company as “a sham, an institution girdled with red tape and as a solution to the labor problem most unsatisfactory¹.”

Carwardine was a thorn in Pullman’s flesh as he organized support for the workers. At first, none of the other ministers, except Rev. Morris Wickman of the Swedish Methodist congregation, supported him. Carwardine investigated the workers complaints and publicized his findings which led to a Congressional hearing.

Oggel and Carwardine represent the two extremes of religion’s response to labor. Throughout the history of the American labor movement there have been religious influences that contributed and opposed labor’s goals. This essay explores the influence of individual Christian leaders as well as ecumenical efforts and how their social locations and theological perspectives interact to influence how they responded to organized labor.

1800-1865: Producer Ethics and the Churches

Throughout the 1820s and 1830s the economy in the United States was undergoing a dramatic shift and along with it came profound changes in what people believed about work and society. A process of modernization had started to occur that slowly changed the forms of production from small shops of artisans to what would eventually become factories. These changes were the result not only of technological advances but also changes in the power dynamics between workers and owners. The way workers understood time began to change. Before, artisans controlled the pace of work and payment was not based on an hourly rate, but over time what came to be known as wage-labor became dominate. The old system of guilds was replaced with workers associations or no organization for workers to express their common concerns.

These changes created two different ways of thinking about the new economy. First, there were workers and some owners who held on to the values of the old system.

¹ Almont Lindsey, *The Pullman Strike*, Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1942, p. 102-103.

Historians have called this viewpoint “producerism” because it emphasized the rights and obligations of the one who produced the goods and services. The producerist ethic emphasized the obligation of the owner to the artisan and the responsibility of the artisans to the good of the community. They were generally opposed to the hourly wage system and the loss of control over the shop floor that was created by the development of “manufactories.” They saw these developments as an attack on the values of freedom that the new republic had won after the Revolutionary War. Second, there were owners who embraced the changes in the economy. They emphasized maximization of profits and the increasing individualism that went along with those economic pursuits.

Leading the struggle for workers rights in Baltimore were Methodist Protestants. The Methodist Protestants had broken away from the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1830 over attempts to make the denomination’s decision making process more democratic. Methodist Protestants such as journeyman hatter John H.W. Hawkins led the hatters strike in 1833. Methodist churches such as the Howard Street Chapel were formed by prominent labor leaders who supported the cordwainers strike and advocated the ten-hour day. In New York City another break away group of Methodists were known as the Stilwellites combined their evangelical faith with their support for workers rights². Their leader, William Stilwell, helped form the New York Society for Promoting Communities in the 1820s. The Society issued an “anticapitalist manifesto” of scriptural interpretation of workers’ rights based on Leviticus 25.

In Boston, Congregationalists such as Albert Wright, Herman Holmes and George W. Light were active trade union leaders during this period. Quaker artisans in Wilmington, Delaware gave leadership to the Association of Working People³. In contrast, the Quakers of Philadelphia were silent on labor issues because “the prosperity and remoteness of the members made sympathy with a labor movement a distant possibility⁴.”

Contrary to most church historians, religious leaders did not discover labor issues after the Civil War. Labor and religion had been cooperating on a local level for several decades prior to the age of industrialization. As the early labor movement waned in the 1840s, working class religious leaders shifted their attention to other social concerns such as temperance and abolition.

1865-1900: From the Christian Labor Union to the Social Gospel

Most church leaders were caught by surprise when the country experienced a depression in 1873. The following year nearly half of the iron works ceased production and by 1876 over half of the railroad’s had defaulted on their bonds. Brought on by over speculation in the railroad industry, the depression made churches aware of the industrialization of the nation and the emerging class conflict associated with it. In 1875 coal miners were defeated after a long strike in Pennsylvania, and in New York City over a quarter of the work force was unemployed.

² William R. Sutton, *Journeyman for Jesus: Evangelical Artisans Confront Capitalism in Jacksonian Baltimore*, University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998.

³ Jama Lazerow, *Religion and the Working Class in Antebellum America*, p. 71, 87-89, 100.

⁴ Ken Fones-Wolf, *Trade Union Gospel: Christianity and Labor in Industrial Philadelphia, 1865-1915*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989, p. 105.

Yet, throughout the 1870s and 1880s most church leaders and editors of church newspapers held onto their faith in free market capitalism. It was not until after the mid 1880s that established church leaders become more sympathetic to the cause of labor. The turning point came with the Haymarket Affair. At first, most religious leaders blamed labor agitators for the tragedy, but over time they came to see labor's complaints as legitimate problems in need of a solution.

By 1890 four major religious expressions had developed in response to the persistent problems of the industrial revolution.

First, a worker's expression of Christianity influenced the beginnings of the modern American labor movement. According to labor historian Herbert Gutman, "the Christian perfectionism of pre-Civil War evangelical and reform movements lingered on among many discontented...workers⁵." Prior to the Civil War evangelists, such as Charles G. Finney, combined spiritual renewal with social reform such as the abolition of slavery and suffrage for women. Along with these reform movements, evangelicalism also influenced the vision and passion of many of the early labor leaders.

These labor activists saw their union activity as an expression of faith and a part of a larger movement of doing God's will. A cigar roller in Louisville proclaimed in 1894 that "the toilers are coming out of darkness into light and...have dared to organize, to come in closer touch with our Lord's will and the teachings of Jesus Christ...The time is not far distant when the wage earners shall stand on the rock of independence and sing, 'Nearer, My God, to Thee.' We need not fire and sword, but [to] organize, unionize⁶." The creation of the Knights of Labor in 1869 marked the first successful working class organization in American history to reach across boundaries of craft, ethnicity, and occupation. One of its founders, Uriah Stephens, had studied for the Baptist ministry.

At the center of their faith was Jesus, the carpenter, who expressed God's solidarity with the poor and subversive example of justice for workers. A writer for *Railway Times* asserted that Jesus was "an agitator such as the world has never seen before nor since....despised and finally murdered to appease the wrath of the ruling class of His name⁷."

Jesus represented "true religion" that emphasized God's special concern for the material as well as the spiritual needs of workers. Michael McGovern, also known as the "Puddler Poet," expressed the ideal congregation in his song "The Socialist Church:"

*"My church accepts the teachings of
The Nazarene of old
It places social truths above
Men's lusts and greed for gold
With heaven's glory beaming round
It's one great earthly pew
Where God's theologies abound
I grasp its truths anew⁸"*

⁵ "Protestantism and the American Labor Movement: The Christian Spirit in the Gilded Age," *Work, Culture and Society*, New York: Vintage, 1977, p. 85.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 93, 94.

⁷ *Ibid.* p. 95-6.

⁸ Clark Halker, *For Democracy, Workers, and God: Labor Song-Poems and Labor Protest, 1865-1895*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, p. 175.

The worker's evangelical faith criticized established religion for not living up to the teachings and example of Christ. Many of these charges of hypocrisy were expressed in song-poems and poetry which borrowed the hymn tunes of popular gospel songs. These song-poets saw themselves as prophets within Christianity, not outsiders or skeptics. They were warning the church of its pending judgment if it did not repent of the greed and materialism that they saw was controlling the church.

Explaining the alienation of workers from established religion, William Camack of Jellico, Tennessee challenged the churches to live up to the "true religion" of Jesus:

*"Well, Parson Jones, I'll answer you
in language plain and fair
the church is not what it ought to be*

and I cannot visit there

they follow not the laws of Christ

that lowly Nazarene

the Bible on the shelf is laid

and gold is king supreme

you've got a church without a Christ

like a ship without a tiller

and wreck you will upon the shores of sin

with your load of gold and silver⁹

The strongest expression of the worker's faith was the Christian Labor Union. Founded in Boston in 1872, the Christian Labor Union was the first religion and labor coalition in the United States. While established churches were still defending the free market economy and questioning the right of unions to exist, the Christian Labor Union won the respect of labor with its assertion that the Bible is the "chief Labor Reform book in the world." They advocated for the eight hour day long before any denomination extended its support, and criticized the YMCA for supplying young men as scabs during a longshoreman's strike in 1875.

Among their leadership was a Congregational minister, Rev. Jesse H. Jones, who was active in the Boston Eight-Hour League. Along with Jones was Methodist lay preacher and ship carpenter Edward H. Rogers. The chief financial backer was T. Wharton Collens who was a Catholic layman and a judge in New Orleans¹⁰. Unlike the Social Gospel

⁹ Ibid., p. 145

¹⁰ Robert H. Craig, *Religion and Radical Politics: An Alternative Christian Tradition in the United States*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992, p. 17-28.

Movement that came later, they were not influenced by liberal trends in theology but rather by the same spirituality as the labor poets.

The second major religious response to the industrial crisis was the Social Gospel Movement. The Social Gospel was an attempt to make Christianity relevant to the major ethical issues (often called “the Social Question”) of the day by moving American Protestantism away from its individualistic and overly spiritualist approach to social problems. It was a movement of and for middle-class clergy and academic scholars who believed in the elimination of child labor, urban renewal, and prison reform. Guided by the principle of “the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of Man,” they sought to “Christianize” society through the gradual implementation of biblical teachings of social justice. The Social Gospel was distinct from the worker’s Christianity of “true religion” and there was very little interaction between the two viewpoints.

Not all Social Gospel thinkers agreed on the solutions to labor issues or on the theological ideas that should guide their movement. On the one hand, there were more conservative leaders, such as Congregationalist pastor Washington Gladden, who denounced socialism but advocated for basic labor reforms. Moderate Social Gospelers, like Baptist Walter Rauschenbusch, embraced a mild form of socialism but still held on the hope of social harmony that could ultimately be worked out through legislation. The left wing of the movement were Christian Socialists, such as Episcopalian W.H.D. Bliss and Methodist Harry Ward, who saw the Kingdom of God as the complete overhauling of society. There were some, like Rauschenbusch, who based their support for labor rights on the new liberal trends in biblical scholarship. But there were others who combined personal evangelism with a sense of social justice, such as evangelist B. Fay Mills or Presbyterian Charles Stelzle¹¹.”

Mills was the exception among his fellow evangelists who represent the third major response to the labor movement. The majority of professional evangelists were enthusiastic supporters of big business and condemned the poor for creating their own poverty through laziness and immorality. These evangelists were financed by wealthy business owners such as the McCormicks and Wanamakers, and the majority of their audiences were middle and upper-middle class.

The most famous evangelist of the period was D.L. Moody who was thoroughly pessimistic about social reform movements. His only solution to poverty was the conversion of individuals, “I don’t believe a man would have lazy hair on his head if he was converted to the Lord Jesus Christ.” In a fundraising letter from 1889 he wrote, “There can be no better investment for the capitalists of Chicago than to put the saving salt of the Gospel into these dark homes and desperate centers¹².”

Moody and other evangelists criticized labor organizers as nothing more than hypocrites who were motivated by liquor more than compassion. Evangelist Sam Jones criticized labor demonstrators who were waving flags inscribed, “Our Children Cry for Bread.” Quoted in the *Chicago Tribune*, Jones told an audience, “But an old devil walking around and toting a flag and saying his children cry for bread—why if you were

¹¹ William G. McLoughlin, *Modern Revivalism: Charles Grandison Finney to Billy Graham*, New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1959, p. 338.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 253, 255

to stick a knife in his belly four gallons of beer would run out.” The audience broke out into laughter and applause¹³.

In the early part of the twentieth century evangelist Billy Sunday was used by business leaders to divert attention and energy away from the cause of workers rights. In 1914 striking miners and their families were massacred by the National Guard in Ludlow, Colorado. Soon after, Billy Sunday was invited by business leaders to the state to conduct a revival. Sunday was a supporter of prohibition, as were other evangelists who saw liquor as the only credible social issue of the day. In the wake of his revival a governor was elected on a prohibitionist campaign but once in office issued special legislation to indict labor leaders and appoint judges who were anti-union¹⁴.

Conservative evangelists were not the only ones to oppose labor unions. The fourth response to industrialization came from liberal elite pastors who embraced the new biblical interpretations that questioned the authority of scripture, but unlike the Social Gospelers they did not sympathize with labor. The most famous of these liberal, anti-labor ministers was Henry Ward Beecher who was known for showing off his wealth and prestige. Like Moody, he believed that poverty was the worker’s fault, “The general truth will stand, that no man in this land suffers from poverty unless it be more than his fault—unless it be his *sin* ¹⁵.” Unlike Moody, he embraced the social application of Darwinism and the “great law of subordination” among social classes¹⁶.

As the nineteenth century drew to a close church leaders could not be more optimistic and labor could not have been in worse shape. The clergy saw 1900 as the dawning of a “Christian Century” promising social harmony and economic justice. Yet, the 1890s were marked by a depression, the collapse of the Knights of Labor, the still struggling efforts of the AFL, and political and police repression of union activists.

1900-1929: Wobblies, the Federal Council of Churches and the 1919 Steel Strike Report

The worker’s religion that was expressed in songs and poems and was the motivating principle for the early labor leaders diminished after the turn of the century. The merging of labor union philosophy and Christianity would never be as widespread as it had been for a variety of reasons. First, the philosophy of the American Federation of Labor was far too narrow to accommodate the broader social vision of the earlier labor leaders.. Second, society as a whole was becoming more secular that would have made it less important for labor leaders to frame their work in religious terms. Third, American culture was becoming more commercialized which diminished the influence and popularity of labor song-poems written by workers¹⁷.

In 1905 a new voice in the labor movement emerged that had an antagonistic perspective on religion—the International Workers of the World. The IWW was a broad-based union of unskilled workers, in contrast to the craft unionism of the AFL. The “Wobblies” were famous for their songs, which were collected in the “Little Red Song Book.” Many of these songs borrowed tunes from Gospel songs, such as “Onward

¹³ Ibid., p. 311.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 441.

¹⁵ Henry F. May, *Protestant Churches and Industrial America*, New York: Harper and Brothers, 1949, p. 69.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 71.

¹⁷ See Halker, p. 193-211; and Michael Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion*, New York: Basic Books, p. 3.

Christian Soldiers” and “Throw Out the Life Line,” and they parodied the words and ideas of the evangelists and the revivals. “What a Friend We Have in Jesus” became “Dump the Bosses Off Your Back” and “There is Power in the Blood” was transformed into “There is Power in a Union.”

According to Donald Winters, there are four aspects of the Wobblies view of religion¹⁸. One, ultimately religion for the Wobblies was a private matter that should have nothing to do with economic affairs. Two, they criticized the churches for hypocrisy for it’s allegiance to capitalism. Unlike earlier labor song-poets who saw themselves as Christian reformers, the IWW song-poets were critics who self-consciously stood outside of the churches. The most famous IWW song writer was Joe Hill who critiqued the church to the tune of “The Sweet Bye and Bye” in “The Preacher and the Slave:”

*“Long haired preachers come out every night
try to tell you what’s wrong and what’s right.
But when asked about something to eat
They will answer with voices so sweet:
You will eat bye and bye
In that glorious land in the sky
Work and pray, live on hay
You’ll get pie in the sky when you die—that’s a lie!*

Three, like earlier labor organizers, the IWW revered Jesus as the friend of the worker. Jesus was portrayed as a hobo, a rebel, and a worker who died at the hands of the greedy elite. Four, they drew parallels between the IWW and the church. The IWW was the new “religion” of the workers. Like the earlier labor leaders it was a millenarian vision of a coming reign of peace and justice, but it was a thoroughly secular vision. IWW organizer Arturo Giovannitti, former candidate for the Presbyterian ministry, expressed his new-found faith to a crowd of striking textile workers in Lawrence, Massachusetts in 1912 with his “Sermon on the Commons.” A take off of the Beatitudes, he spoke these words to workers from 25 different nationalities: “Blessed are the strong in freedom’s spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of earth....Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after equality; for they shall eat the fruit of their labor¹⁹.”

Ironically, as the IWW moved farther away from Christianity church leaders were moving toward an enthusiastic embrace of the cause of labor. A number of Protestant denominations followed the example of the Federal Council of Churches and adopted “Social Creeds” which expressed the main tenets of the Social Gospel’s stances on child labor, women’s rights, the right to strike and the elimination of poverty. With Pope Leo XIII’s letter *Rerum Novarum* on labor issues, Catholic leaders actively tried to support and influence the AFL. Official church endorsement of labor’s cause was becoming a reality.

Throughout the United States in 1911-12 the Federal Council of Churches sponsored the Men and Religion Forward movement. Led by Social Gospel preachers such as Charles Stelzle and Harry Ward, the Men and Forward movement combined Social Gospel teaching with revivalism. The message encouraged a personal commitment to Christ and education about social ills that was based on the Social Creed. The movement

¹⁸ *The Soul of the Wobblies: The IWW, Religion and American Culture in the Progressive Era, 1905-1917*. Greenwood Press: Westport, Conn., 1985, p. 62.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

was so successful in Minneapolis that six months later a committee of more than 200 unionists launched their own two-week long labor revival, known as Labor Forward. Soon after, the AFL copied the idea and spread it around the country as a secular version to revitalize local unions²⁰.

In 1919, amidst a series of other strikes around the nation, steelworkers throughout Western Pennsylvania went on strike protesting long hours (the average was 68.7 hours a week), low wages, and exploitative conditions. The definitive analysis of the strike was conducted by the Interchurch World Movement. Under the leadership of Methodist Bishop Francis McConnell the commission reported that the owners had fostered the conflict through the use of the “boss system” and pitted various ethnic groups (primarily newly arrived Eastern European immigrants) against each other. They also dispelled rumors that the union fostered violence.

The report found that most clergy had relied solely on management or pro-business newspapers for their source of information and had refused to support labor. Instead, most pastors offered vague statements of sympathy for the plight of workers. The significance of the report was that it gave legitimacy to the demands of the workers, over against the biased reporting of the newspapers, and it provoked governmental action that would have a positive effect in future years.

The years following World War One marked the end of the Social Gospel movement. Its optimism stumbled under the weight of the horrors of war and the Red Scare that followed in American politics that persecuted many leftists and demolished the IWW. The vision of the Social Gospel would live on in denominational stances on a variety of social issues and, indirectly, through the public policies that would become the New Deal in the 1930s.

1930s-1950s: PIAR and NRLF

Three years after the stock market crash of 1929 industrial production and national income had decreased by more than one half and 15 million Americans were out of work. As a part of FDR’s New Deal policies, the National Recovery Act was enacted in 1933. Section 7A of the Act gave for the first time legal protection for unions to organize and bargain collectively. Two years later Congress passed the Wagner Act which formally recognized collective bargaining as the standard practice for resolving labor disputes and established the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB). By the end of the decade a new form of unionism emerged. The Congress of Industrial Organizations was founded in 1935 based on “industrial unionism” which supported organizing workers on an industry-wide scale, rather than the more narrowly defined skilled craft unionism of the AFL.

During this period several denominations developed their most progressive statements on labor. For the first time, the Southern Baptist Convention issued a resolution on labor relations, and the Methodist Episcopal Church included collective bargaining as a right in their Social Creed, after a number of regional bodies passed resolutions condemning capitalism. The Catholic Church saw a flurry of pro-labor activities from its official National Catholic Welfare Conference to the unofficial Catholic Worker Movement.

²⁰ Ken Fones-Wolf, *Trade Union Gospel: Christianity and Labor in Industrial Philadelphia, 1865-1915*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989, p. 172-3

One of the most innovative labor-religion initiatives of this era was the People's Institute of Applied Religion (PIAR). Started by Cumberland Presbyterian minister Claude Williams in 1936, the purpose of the institute was to teach biblical principles that would empower rank and file union members to organize across racial lines. The "institute" was a series of training sessions conducted by Williams and others that worked, at first, with black and white sharecroppers connected with the Southern Tenant Farmers Union (STFU). The training combined the emotional appeal of a revival meeting with the information of an organizing strategy session. Other Institute leaders included Don West from the Highlander Folk School, Winifred Chappell of the Methodist Federation for Social Action, and Willard Uphaus of the National Religion and Labor Foundation. In 1942 Williams moved his operations to Detroit and did training among auto workers until the Institute came to an end in 1948.

At the same time PIAR was operating another school was established with indirect ties to the religious community. The Highlander Folk School was started in Monteagle, Tennessee to train grassroots organizers and promote the cultural heritage of the South. The school was started by former seminary students such as Myles Horton, who had attended Union Theological Seminary in New York, and Don West, who had been at Vanderbilt. In the 1930s a number of CIO organizers met at the school and in the 1950s and 60s it was a gathering place for civil rights workers.

The religious dimensions of the labor movement that Highlander and PIAR promoted were expressed in the music of Woodie Guthrie. Echoing the faith of early labor song poets, Guthrie expressed admiration for Jesus as well as criticism for the establishment in his 1940 song "Jesus Christ": "When Jesus come to town the working folks believed what he did say, the bankers and the preachers they nailed him on a cross and they laid Jesus Christ in his grave."²¹

While Guthrie sang about Jesus, labor unions made great gains during the 1940s that would last for another 25 years. In 1947 conservative forces in Congress were able to curb the gains made by labor with the Taft-Hartley Act which banned mass picketing, secondary boycotts, and closed shops. Communists and leftists were also purged from the labor's ranks at this time. The dye was cast for a new era in labor relations with unions as a junior partner with corporations in the post-war economic boom. Throughout the 1950s union member reached its peak and it became socially acceptable to be a union.

The major organization that followed these trends from the 1930s through the 1950s was the National Religion and Labor Foundation. Founded in 1932 as a coalition of labor and religious leaders. Its goals were to

- ✓ *"Define the social teachings of our religious faith and apply them to our economic and industrial life...."*
- ✓ *"Help the religious and labor movements interpret their aims and programs to one another...."*
- ✓ *"Encourage and support the organization of the unorganized, and to defend the trade union movement attacked by forces that would destroy it;*
- ✓ *Resist totalitarianism whether expressed in its fascistic, communistic, or monopoly capitalistic forms."*

One of the main activities of the Religion and Labor Foundation was education with seminary students. It sponsored inter-seminary conferences in conjunction with the

²¹ The Asch Recordings, vol. 1, April 1944, *This Land is Your Land*, Smithsonian Folkways, 1997.

national conventions of the AFL and the CIO. Future clergypersons attended these educational sessions from seminaries as diverse as Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville to Yale Divinity School. Methodist Bishop Jesse Dewitt recalls the work of the Foundation in helping to establish local committees on seminary campuses. As a student at Garrett Theological Seminary in Chicago, Dewitt and other students formed a committee in 1945. "President Smith was not pleased with it," recalled Dewitt but they were supported by faculty members Dr. Lieffer and Dr. Bab, who had been involved with the NLRB. The committee met for prayer and discussion with labor leaders, walked picket lines and participated in soup kitchen for Montgomery Ward workers.

Local Religion and Labor Fellowships were established throughout the United States bringing together clergy who were sympathetic to labor's cause. By the 1950s these groups were largely educational, usually featuring a luncheon speaker who addressed such topics as "The Church and the Guaranteed Annual Wage" and "The Ethical and Religious Significance of the AFL-CIO Merger"²².

Most of the energy and inspiration in the 1930s and 40s came from Willard Uphaus. A pacifist, former missionary to China and Methodist lay preacher, Uphaus served as executive director for nearly twenty years. He was ousted in 1951 due to anti-communist hysteria because he had attended the Warsaw World Peace Conference the previous year. The Foundation nearly collapsed after this rift, and throughout the early 1950s had lost its tax-exempt status.

It regained its footing under the direction of Dr. D. "Doc" Witherspoon Dodge. A former southern Presbyterian minister, Dodge had been a CIO representative on the War Production Board in the Southeast before becoming the executive director of the Foundation. After Doc's retirement his assistant, Methodist pastor Dr. Claire Cook, led the Foundation. By the early 60s the Foundation had run out of steam and was reduced to a one page weekly letter.

It was also during the 1950s that religious leaders established industrial missions in cities across the country. The industrial missions combined education and pastoral care to both labor and management based on the examples from England and the work of people like Horst Symanowski in West Germany. Their focus in the United States was not on organizing or activism as much as it was on bringing the witness of the mainstream Protestant churches into secular society through conversation and study.

The most successful of these projects was the Detroit Industrial Mission (DIM). Episcopal priest Hugh White established the Mission in 1956 among four parishes in the North and West suburbs of the city. It became an ecumenical venture with United Church of Christ and Presbyterian pastors joining the staff in the early sixties. White and staff member Scott Paradise had been influenced by the British industrial missions of the Church of England. The work of DIM revolved around workers forums in their homes and study groups for personnel and plant managers²³. As one person put it, it was "salvation through study groups." By the late 1960s their work had evolved into consulting work on social issues, organizing and personnel management.

²² Religion and Labor Fellowship groups were active in Columbus and Cincinnati, Ohio, Phoenix, Radford, Virginia, Atlanta, New York, Houston, Detroit, Fargo, North Dakota, Washington, D.C., Minneapolis, and Decatur, Indiana.

²³ see Scott I. Paradise, *Detroit Industrial Mission: A Personal Narrative*, Harper and Row, 1968.

1960s-1980s: From Grape Boycotts to Steel Mills

Unions made impressive gains throughout the fifties and into the sixties. Hourly wages in manufacturing—the base of unionized jobs—rose by 81 percent from 1950 to 1965; in steel it jumped 102 percent²⁴. For the first time in American history major sections of the working class were permanently moving out of poverty and into the middle class.

Seeking to extend the benefits of labor unions to people of color during this period was the United Farm Workers (UFW). Under the leadership of Cesar Chavez, the inspiration and organization of the UFW came from the Catholic Church in the Hispanic communities of California. Like many nineteenth century labor leaders, Chavez saw his work as a divine mission and urged the Church to join them:

“What do we want the Church to do? We don’t ask for cathedrals. We don’t ask for bigger churches or fine gifts. We ask for its presence with us, beside us, Christ among us. We ask for the Church to sacrifice with the people for social change, for justice, and for love of brother. We don’t ask for words; we ask for deeds. We don’t ask for paternalism; we ask for servanthood²⁵.”

Inspired by the Civil Rights Movement, Chavez went on a 25 day spiritual fast in 1968 to rededicate the union to biblical principles of non-violence. UFW marches almost always included the Eucharist and were often led by someone carrying a picture of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

Chavez gained the support of many religious bodies for a grape boycott. As early as 1965 the Committee of Religious Concern was organized by Catholic, Protestant and Jewish leaders to support striking grape pickers. In the early seventies UFW gained support from the religious community for a lettuce boycott. Even though the campaigns were complicated by rival organizing on the part of Teamsters, religious bodies played a significant role in the success of the United Farm Workers gaining recognition and contracts. Out of these endeavors came the interreligious National Farm Worker Ministry coalition.

During the 1970s textile workers in the South received support from the religious community. A 1972 strike against clothing manufacturer Farah and in the late 1970s a boycott against J.P. Stevens, the second largest textile company in the world, brought labor and religion together in limited ways.

In the North a series of plant closings beginning in the late seventies and throughout the eighties compelled religious organizations to form coalitions with community groups and labor unions. At times, the relationship between the unions and the community organizations could be antagonistic as labor resigned itself to the closing and the community lacked understanding or resources to combat the changing power dynamics deindustrialization. By the late 1980s the Midwest Center for Labor Research had created the Federation of Industrial Retention and Renewal.

The best (and most tragic) expression of religious-based community organizing against plant closings happened in Youngstown, Ohio. In 1977 Youngstown Steel and

²⁴ Kim Moody, *An Injury to All*, New York:Verso, 1988, p. 65.

²⁵ Patrick J. Sullivan, *Blue Collar—Roman Collar—White Collar: U.S. Catholic Involvement in Labor Management Controversies, 1960-1980*, Lanham, MA: University Press of America, 1987, p. 116.

Tube announced their decision to all but close down its Campbell Works. They had been taken over by the Lykes Corporation which gutted the assets and went into debt in the process. The net effect would be a loss of 18,000 jobs and \$146 million in retail business.

In September Catholic Bishop Malone and Episcopal Bishop John Burt called a meeting of religious leaders to explore ways to respond. Out of this meeting came the Youngstown Interfaith Coalition. Chaired by Bishop Malone, the executive committee was an ecumenical partnership of United Church of Christ leader Rev. William Laurie, regional Presbyterian head Rev. John Sharick, United Methodist Bishop James Thomas, Rabbi Sidney Berkowitz, and Bishop Burt.

The Coalition did three things. First, they issued a pastoral letter which, unlike previous letters, talked in specific terms about the faults of the industry and unions as well as the course of action to take. Second, they conducted an extensive feasibility study to determine whether the plant could become economically viable, and concluded that they had only nine months to form a corporation, secure management, and raise over a half million dollars in order to receive a Federal grant. Third, they attempted to buy the plant. Calling it the “Save Our Valley Campaign,” the Coalition persuaded residents and denominations to invest thousands of dollars and they formed a partnership with the United Steel Workers.

In the end it did not work. In spite of their promises, the Carter Administration had no intentions of awarding them a grant. The owners of the mill were never a willing partner in the sale of the property.

On the whole, Youngstown was the exception rather than the rule for church-labor relations in the seventies and eighties. The differences began with the Vietnam War, but became even sharper over foreign policy in Central American in the 1980s. Most mainline Protestant denominations actively opposed Reagan’s (and later Bush’s) policies in Nicaragua and El Salvador, but the AFL-CIO was controlled by Cold War fears of communism that had dominated labor since the purging of leftists during the McCarthy Era.

1989—Present: A New Era and A Common Legacy

When the United Mine Workers of America went on strike against the Pittston Coal Group a new phase in church-labor developed. In January 1988 Pittston had unilaterally cut off health benefits to disabled and retired miners and their families after they had cut ranks with industry-wide contract bargaining. The union went on strike, but the leadership developed a new approach. Union leaders and organizers studied Taylor Branch’s *Parting the Waters* about Martin Luther King, Jr. According to Jim Sessions of the Commission on Religion in Appalachia (CORA), “It was the Bible that everyone was carrying around.” Influenced by the tactics of the Civil Rights Movement, they developed a strategy of non-violent civil disobedience and developed broad-based coalitions with community organizations, anti-apartheid groups and other allies.

Among those groups were religious leaders. CORA, a long time supporter of labor, mobilized clergy in Appalachia as the UMWA was preparing to mount the strike. In Greenwich, Connecticut, where the company had their corporate headquarters, solidarity trips to the coal fields were organized for clergy and community leaders. Public

statements of support were issued by CORA in which clergy in the region called on religious leaders in Greenwich to support the coal miners.

By the mid nineties labor and religion were poised to deepen their relationship. New leadership at the AFL-CIO had ousted staff members who had broken down relationships with Protestants in the eighties, and President John Sweeney began redirecting the Federation into organizing that would include a greater receptivity to partnerships with religious organizations. At the same time, the issue of sweat shops gained publicity and concern among religious groups and campus activists. The issue of sweat shops and the rise of multinational corporations coincided with the concern over Central America and South Africa among mainline Protestants in the eighties. Responding to these changes, a number of groups started up, including the People of Faith Network in 1994. In the absence of Cold War politics, the new global economy created a common ground between them and labor leaders that had not existed in fifty years. It also created a resurgence of interest and energy among grassroots Catholics in labor issues. For the first time since the Depression the stage was set for labor and religion to develop new partnerships.

This partnership found its most active expression in the creation of the National Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice in 1996. Inspired by her work on the Pittston strike, Kim Bobo organized the Chicago Interfaith Committee on Worker Issues with Monsignor Jack Egan, Rabbi Robert Marx and Bishop Jesse Dewitt in 1991. By 1996 they had evolved into the National Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice

The National Interfaith Committee represents the continuation of a heritage of labor and religion dating back to the Christian Labor Union. Unlike the National Religion and Labor Foundation whose leadership was both labor and religious leaders, the leadership of the National Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice is exclusively religious whose mission is to provide support for workers' rights through the religious community. To date, there are nearly seventy local interfaith and labor-religion groups, whose primary focus (unlike the Religion and Labor Fellowships) is organizing and activism. Like the Foundation, the National Interfaith Committee has developed a program of exposing seminarians to the labor movement through summer internships with labor unions.