

and inequality, but at least it's eradicating poverty! But it's just not true.

AL: In light of all of this, it's not surprising that the legitimacy of our present economic system is rapidly eroding. Think about it: 5 or 10 years ago we hardly ever heard about the problem of inequality in popular media. Now it's everywhere. Not only that, but people are beginning to question the very idea of capitalism. This used to be unthinkable—you would

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### **...the current economic order is producing climate change and inequality...**

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be shunned if you even suggested it.

And think about the surge of social movements that we're seeing all over the world: everything from Occupy Wall Street to the anti-austerity protests in Europe, from the student uprisings in Chile to street riots in Brazil. We can see this as social instability, but we can also see it as a harbinger of a new world to come: the birth pangs of a new order.

But it's not just protest. There are also alternatives arising everywhere. El Alto in Bolivia, the Za-

patistas in Mexico, the Transition Towns in the United Kingdom and elsewhere—people are opting out of the current system en masse. Our challenge now is to scale up these alternatives and to build new ones, replicating aspects that are true to the principles we hold dear. This isn't going to be easy. But as Albert Camus said, "Freedom is nothing else but a chance to be better, whereas enslavement is a certainty of the worst."

Some will call this anarchism, but all anarchism means is democratic self-organization. It's about autonomy and creativity and the belief that people should be able to build their own worlds without relying on arbitrary authorities. We've always been told we need them, whether it was the sun gods, the emperors, the feudal lords or the 1%. We've been told that the world will fall apart if we don't have the stability they create. It's time we challenge that fallacy head on.

As E. F. Schumacher reminds us, "The task of our generation is one of metaphysical reconstruction." The aim and hope is not to replicate the misery and apartheid of capitalism, but to create the more beautiful world our hearts know is possible.

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## **An Interview with Staughton Lynd**

by Andy Piascik and Staughton Lynd

For more than 50 years, Staughton Lynd has been a leading radical in the United States. He was an engaged supporter of the Black Liberation Movement in the Deep South in the early 1960s, most notably as coordinator of the Freedom Schools during Mississippi Summer in 1964. He was an active opponent of US aggression in Indochina, including as chairperson of the first national demonstration against the war in Vietnam in April 1965. [1] In recent decades, Lynd has been an attorney representing prisoners, particularly at the Ohio State Penitentiary in Youngstown, and has written a book, a play and numerous articles about the 1993 uprising at the Southern Ohio Correctional Facility in Lucasville. [2]

Since the late 1960s, Lynd has also been deeply involved in the labor movement as an activist, attorney and prolific writer. [3] Inspired by Marty Glaberman, Stan Weir and Ed Mann, [4] Lynd has been a passionate and prolific proponent of decentralized, rank-and-file driven unionism. In December 2014, Haymarket Books published a book by Lynd entitled *Doing History from the Bottom Up: On E.P. Thompson, Howard Zinn, and Rebuilding the Labor Movement from Below*. A new edition of his book *Solidarity Unionism: Rebuilding the Labor Movement from Below* will be published by PM Press in Spring 2015.

Piascik: What is your general view of the state of organized labor in the United States today?

Lynd: My general view, like that of everyone else, is that the labor movement is in catastrophic decline. My particular view is that the reason for this decline is not the Supreme Court or the McCarthy period or anything that might be remedied by chang-

ing the top leadership of unions, but the model of trade union organizing that has existed in all CIO unions since 1935. The critical elements of this model are: (1) exclusive representation of a bargaining unit by a single union; (2) the dues check-off, whereby the employer deducts dues for the union from the paycheck of every member of the bargaining unit; (3) a clause prohibiting strikes and slowdowns for the duration of the contract; and (4) a "management prerogatives" clause giving the employer the right to make investment decisions unilaterally.

In combination these clauses in the typical CIO contract give the employer the right to close the plant and prevent the workers from doing anything about it. So long as collective bargaining agreements conform to this template, the election of a Miller, a Sadlowski, a Carey, a Sweeney, or a Trumka will not bring about fundamental change.

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### **...the labor movement is in catastrophic decline.**

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*Piascik:* You have written extensively about the working class upheaval of the 1930s, both the early years of the decade and the formation of the CIO. [5] How and why was the CIO consolidated as a top-down organization?

*Lynd:* It tends to be forgotten that the CIO was created by John L. Lewis. There is now a significant body of scholarship to the effect that: (1) Lewis centralized the administration of the UMW so as to minimize the traditional influence of local unions and ran the national union in an altogether high-handed manner; (2) Lewis went out of his way to assure the business community that if they bargained with the CIO such phenomena as wildcat strikes would become a thing of the past; (3) many liberals and radicals such as Roger Baldwin of the ACLU opposed the Wagner Act, believing correctly that the result would be exactly what has occurred and that alternatives such as the Progressive Miners in southern Illinois would be steamrollered; (4) contrary to popular belief, the revival of unionism among miners began from below before the passage of the National Recovery Act with its Section 7 during the Spring of 1933, and the long-lasting miners' strike the following summer was created and persisted in by rank-and-file miners despite endless attempts by Lewis and his lieutenant Philip Murray to settle it from above.

*Piascik:* You consistently underscore the importance of local initiatives. What do such initiatives look like in practice and why might they be more fruitful than national reform campaigns?

*Lynd:* At first glance any imaginable agglomeration of local groups appears helpless in contrast to gigantic international corporations. Indeed, in my

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moment, the unions say they only want to help these workers win specific demands through direct action. Down the road, however, these same unions may seek to make local direct actions serve as stepping stones to their familiar objective: exclusive bargaining status, complete with dues check-off and no-strike clause.

I have come to feel that the sense of helplessness experienced by local groups may be exaggerated, even illusory. In a single workplace, workers in a particular strategic unit or department may be able to bring the entire enterprise to a halt. Vicki Starr a.k.a. Stella Nowicki describes how this was

true when the "beef kill" stopped work in the Chicago stockyards in the 1930s. [6]

Something like that occurred at the giant Walmart warehouse in Elwood, Illinois, near Chicago, two years ago. That particular warehouse handled most of the products flowing into the multitudinous

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## **Energy should go into building strong nuclei of self-activity on the workplace floor.**

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Walmart distribution points throughout the United States. So severe was the disruption caused when these particular workers walked out for a couple of weeks over local grievances that the company not only granted some of their demands but also welcomed them back to work and paid back pay for the time they were on strike! Thus even when confronted with the challenge of national coordination, inquiry circles back to the willingness of small groups of workers in particular critical segments of the production or distribution process to stop work.

Energy should go into building strong nuclei of self-activity on the workplace floor. Stan Weir called such entities "informal work groups." He was convinced that such groupings come into being wherever human beings work together and develop leadership of a sort from below, as needed.

Energy should not go into electing new top officials.

*Piascik:* Would you elaborate on the drawbacks of the "exclusive representation" stipulation in the NLRA?

*Lynd:* There are at least 3 or 4 drawbacks to the idea of exclusive representation.

1. The initial contact between a union organizer and a group of workers involves activities meaning-

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## **...clauses in the typical CIO contract give the employer the right to close the plant and prevent the workers from doing anything about it.**

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early struggles with this dilemma, I highlighted the absence in the steel industry in the 1930s of effective coordination between new local unions improvised by the rank and file in a variety of locations.

The same problem presents itself today as low-wage workers in a variety of communities are simultaneously assisted, but also managed by, existing national unions like the UFCW and SEIU. For the

less in themselves, such as collecting signatures on cards or petitions which are then forwarded to the NLRB. The obvious alternative is to build solidarity, what Stan Weir called creating a “family at work” by means of small direct actions.

2. Once a union is successful in winning a representation election pursuant to Section 9 of the NLRA (now LMRA), it becomes extremely difficult for a group of workers to “decertify,” that is, to choose another union to represent them. In contrast, in Nicaragua during the 1980s a union was selected only for the duration of a single contract, at the expiration of which there was a new election to choose a union to negotiate the next contract.

3. Self-evidently, the Section 9 process made it seem impossible for a minority of workers to do anything meaningful until it became a majority. As everyone knows, this need not be the case in a workplace or any other setting. The idea of “minority” or “members only” unionism has accordingly been gaining ground. Its leading exponent is Professor Charles Morris, who argues that under the NLRA as originally conceived the employer had a legal obligation to bargain with any group of workers, even if was not a majority. [7] Thus a group in a particular department that was strategic in the enterprise could successfully bargain for better terms for itself. If successful, other workers would be drawn to join the union.

The main problem with Professor Morris’ perspective is that he makes it quite clear that bargaining status for a minority union is only a stepping stone to becoming an exclusive representative. It is my understanding that in many European countries there can be many minority unions, each aligned with a different national political tendency. Such unions may join together for bargaining purposes.

4. I think the Right has a point when it says that existing law and practice strips away the dimension of voluntariness from union membership.

*Piascik:* How about automatic dues check-off? It’s taken almost as gospel among progressives and radicals, not just bureaucrats, that it’s essential to the survival of unions.

*Lynd:* When Alice and I did interviews for what became *Rank and File*, roughly in 1970, we asked: What do you think is the main reason for the failure of CIO unionism to fulfill its promise? The answer that received more support than any other was, the due

Sylvia Woods said that in her UAW local at Bendix during World War II they deliberately did not seek the check-off, because what happens when you have it is, everybody sits on their duffs and nobody does anything. [8] The argument for dues check-off is inseparable from the argument for ex-

clusive bargaining status. If you believe that a voluntary minority can accomplish more than an involuntary majority, the check-off recedes in importance.

Moreover, absent the check-off there is of necessity a greater tendency for activists to stay in the workplace rather than seeking a desk at “union headquarters” in a separate building.

*Piascik:* Given the severe constraints of no-strike and management prerogative clauses, why is there virtually no discussion even among

rank-and-file oriented unionists of the need to get rid of or even modify them?

*Lynd:* I have asked myself this question over the years.

I believe that the Wagner Act is Exhibit 1 for many radicals and liberals looking back on the successes and failures of the New Deal and of their own lives. I think of my own father, Robert S. Lynd. As a member of the governing board of the 20th Century Fund in the 1930s, he critiqued the Wagner Act for mistakenly presuming that the Act would equalize

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### In many European countries...many minority unions...may join together for bargaining purposes.

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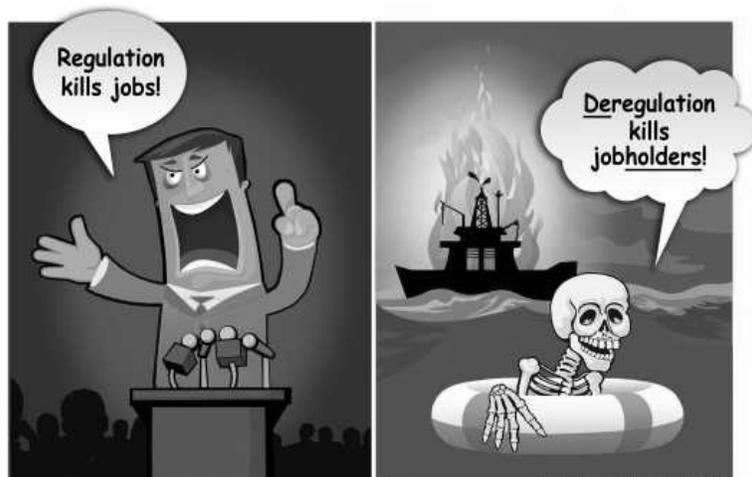
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### ...we live through the cycle of over-adulation of a leader, followed by disillusion...

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the bargaining power of management and labor. Yet at a UAW educational conference after World War II, my dad delivered a speech that was well received by the delegates and, according to Victor Reuther, reprinted as a pamphlet by the UAW because of insistent rank-and-file demand. Therein my father said that organized labor was the only force big enough to counter big business, and that the country would move toward socialism or fascism depending on the outcome of this confrontation.

Roger Baldwin of the ACLU, on the other hand, opposed the Wagner Act because he saw how



Lewis would use the mechanism of exclusive representation to squeeze the life out of the Progressive Miners in southern Illinois, the union actually preferred by the membership. See Cletus Daniels' book on the ACLU in the 1930s. [9]

It is always easier to blame someone for the failure of a cherished remedy to deliver a solution than it is to critique the remedy itself. It is especially puzzling that folk on the Left have been so insensitive to the dictatorial heavy hand that John L. Lewis laid on dissidents within his own union, and on nay-sayers within nascent CIO unions. When an initial convention of the UAW voted not to support Roosevelt in 1936 and to look toward a new labor party, Lewis prevailed through UAW president Homer Martin and CIO staff man Adolph Germer to have that vote reversed.

In truth, we live through the cycle of over-adulation of a leader, followed by disillusion with his or her performance, over and over. Labor histori-

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**...most single distressed companies that have attempted worker ownership have either failed or become capitalist enterprises again.**

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ans and union staffers sequentially idolize Lewis, Reuther and Murray, followed by Arnold Miller, Sadlowski, Sweeney, Carey, Trumka and others, only to recognize when the smoke clears that the structure of unionism in the United States has not changed—but to go looking for another maximum leader! As we sang in the 1960s, when will they ever learn?

*Piasek:* What experiences did you have with unions that led you to your present conclusions?

*Lynd:* Let me describe three experiences.

1. About 1969 or 1970, while still living in Chicago, I attended with some friends a Labor Against the War gathering at the hall of Harold Gibbons' Teamsters local in St. Louis. The occasion was sponsored and steered by top national officers such as the Foners, Emil Mazey, Jerry Wurf and, as it turned out, Harry Bridges. The labor movement was five years late in opposing the Vietnam War, leaders like Walter Reuther having supported the war, but the occasion was promising. I found myself attending a rank-and-file caucus. We offered a motion from the floor that there be a single day on which workers all over the country would protest the war in whatever manner suited their circumstances (extended lunch hours, leafleting, local union resolution, press conference, etc.). His voice dripping with sarcasm, Mazey invited delegates to vote on this crazy idea. The resolution passed by about 3 to 1. So the apparatchiks canvassed over lunch and brought on Harry Bridges in the afternoon to ask the delegates to withdraw their approval. They did.

2. In Youngstown, the International Steelworkers refused to support a campaign against the steel

mill shutdowns. Their advice was to be concerned about benefits, what Ed Mann and John Barbero derisively called "funeral arrangements." The national union red-baited Gar Alperovitz and myself. We were defended by the Catholic bishop of the Youngstown diocese, Father James Malone. After our spirited campaign but courtroom defeat in district court, the Steelworkers refused to file even a friend of the court brief in support of our appeal to the federal Sixth Circuit. Now the national union makes happy talk about worker buyouts, more than 30 years too late.

3. Packard Electric, now known as Delphi Packard, had about 12,000 employees when we moved to Youngstown in 1976. Along with or next to GM Lordstown, it was the largest employer in the Youngstown area. The local had originally been part of the UE and there was a clause in the local union constitution to the effect that any contract amendment had to be approved in a membership referendum. When the local violated this clause by agreeing to new language permitting 10 or 12 hour days without membership approval, we went to federal court and won. The company and union pushed through an approval process in a fog of misleading propaganda that we were unable to rebut. There are now less than 1,000 workers for Delphi in Youngstown and over 40,000 in Mexico.

The national leadership of these mainstream unions was simply endlessly behind the curve of membership sentiment.

*Piasek:* You mentioned the unsuccessful efforts by steelworkers to take over control of closed mills in Youngstown 35 years ago. In many places, perhaps most notably Argentina, as well as at Republic Windows and Doors in Chicago, such efforts have been quite successful. Is assuming control of shuttered workplaces something unions, together with communities and local officials, should be attempting to do more of and if so how might it most effectively be done?

*Lynd:* This is the problem that in Youngstown and Pittsburgh we called, "socialism in one steel mill." Historically, most single distressed companies that have attempted worker or worker-community ownership have either failed or over time become capitalist enterprises again. One runs into a variety of problems.

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**I think there is no substitute for public ownership of the "commanding heights" of the economy.**

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In Youngstown, we felt it would be a cruel temporary solution simply to buy any of the closed mills without modernizing them. Mere purchase might have cost \$20 million. Necessary modernization to replace antiquated open hearths would have cost an additional sum of about \$200 million, ten times as much. This was at a time when the guaranteed loan fund, created by the US government to

assist the industry throughout the country, was only \$100 million.

In arrangements for worker “ownership” as at Weirton Steel, the new start-up capital was often derived by cutting workers’ wages and substituting common stock of the company. Pension experts specifically warn against a pension portfolio overly emphasizing any one company. Note, too, that Weirton was advised by Lazard Freres, [10] and that while workers held a majority of the common stock they were not permitted to fill a majority of the seats on the board of directors of the “worker-owned” company.

In a worker-owned meatpacking plant, the union president became a member of the board of directors. Only in retrospect did it become clear that the arrangement created a conflict of interest.

Note, too, that it is not clear to me that Republic Windows and Doors has been successful. I believe it has passed through a number of ownership arrangements.

I think there is no substitute for public ownership of the “commanding heights” of the economy. In the midst of our Youngstown struggle, representatives of Swedish metalworkers visited us. It was like a fairy story! In Sweden, when a plant was sched-

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*Piascik:* You participated in Occupy Youngstown and have drawn parallels between the Occupy phenomenon and youth-led revolts in 1905 Russia and 1956 Hungary that were joined by workers and became general insurrections. How is this different from traditional views of revolutionary change and how might it apply to the United States specifically and the anti-austerity, anti-imperialist movements around the world in general?

*Lynd:* There are different groups and sub-groups in any imaginable rainbow coalition for fundamental change. After a good deal of thought, I believe that neither soldiers or prisoners can be the basic force for such change. The reason is that neither group is permanent. Prisoners are released one by one onto the street and usually go back to the old neighborhood. They struggle to survive and not to be again imprisoned. Soldiers, too, hopefully come home.

Students are a distinct group but they, too, are temporary. At Oberlin College, students concerned about criminal justice kept that concern alive for 2 or 3 student generations, but then it lapsed.

Thus one comes back in the end to workers. Here also there are divisions and sub-groups. Stan Weir used to emphasize how disruptive it was for the informal shop floor networks formed during the 1930s when conscription for World War II picked them off, one by one, and broke up the sub-groups. Adjunct professors represent a potential for change that has not yet organized itself, whereas tenured full professors are unlikely to be helpful, at least in significant numbers.

There is a potential for transformative change within the working class, and, I conclude, only there. Manny Ness says that most full-time workers are now in the Global South, and, as in India and South Africa, have been driven to open revolt, not only against employers but against do-nothing hierarchical unions.

Especially in an economy like that of the United States, stripped of manufacturing, “workers” need to be broadly defined. Moreover, it obviously will make a great deal of difference whether workers are encouraged to focus on individual material benefit or, in solidarity, on common interests.

As women come into the work force more fully and into positions of leadership I believe that solidarity will be nurtured.

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## There is a potential for transformative change within the working class...

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uled to close, printouts of available jobs were posted every day on the shop floor. Each worker received a year’s severance pay, and husband and wife were financed by the government to make a trip to a possible new job site. And public assistance went beyond “benefits.” Sweden had three separate steel mills: one in the far North, where iron was abundant; one inland, where the steel was poured; and one on the seacoast. Our visitors told us that the government insisted they be combined into a single company.

I worked more than 15 years for a public enterprise, Legal Services, that provided legal assistance to persons who could not afford a private attorney. It was a highly decentralized operation, and it worked.

I remain, as I have been for the last 70 years, a socialist.

*Piascik*: You've written extensively about Accompaniment as well as about your decision in the 1970s to "accompany" as an attorney, historian and writer rather than get a mill or factory job. Could you talk a bit about what Accompaniment means and what you would suggest to a recent college graduate or professional who wants to support the kind of working class movement we've been discussing?

*Lynd*: I continue to believe (see the Conclusion of my book *Accompanying* [11]) that persons with college degrees can make their best contribution not as manual workers but as the kind of professional they have been trained to become, in daily contact with, and support of, other kinds of workers. Instead of pursuing a professional career in an academic or upper-middle-income setting, a person who acquires credentials to practice as a useful sort of professional—teacher, doctor or nurse, lawyer, etc.—should consider locating and putting down roots at an address that gives poor and working people easy access to him or her. Perhaps I can best explain what I mean by describing my own experience.

After I got graduate degrees in history, my first teaching job was at Spelman College, a school for African American young women (who included future Pulitzer Prize winning novelist Alice Walker). We lived on campus, around the corner from Howard Zinn and his family. As a result I was able to hold an honors seminar in our living room. It would have been difficult, in the segregated Atlanta of the 1960s, to do so off-campus.

While I was in Mississippi as coordinator of the Freedom Schools in the summer of 1964, before starting to teach at Yale, Alice found an apartment for us in New Haven, in a moderate-income downtown neighborhood near a good public school. Members of the Yale faculty asked her, "Why would you want to live so close to the university that it will be easy for students to visit you?"

Of course Accompaniment is not just a question of where you live but of whom you serve. I was fired by the main union-side law firm in Youngstown for assisting individual workers who were at odds with the unions who were the firm's main clients. When *Labor Law for the Rank and Filer* was published, Alice and I debated whether to give a copy of the book to the boss. We decided to do so. I was fired at 10:00 the next morning.

Fortunately, I had already become a member of the board of directors of the local Legal Services office. I called the executive director, and within a week of my discharge I was practicing employment law as a Legal Services attorney. From time to time, local lawyers at private firms would ask me when I would be moving on to the "real" practice of law. I responded that I was happy as a pig in mud at Legal Services.

Since retirement, Alice and I have been volunteer attorneys for the ACLU of Ohio. From 1978 to the present moment, 36 years, I have been able to practice law for needy clients whom the Legal Services office or ACLU served without charge!

## Notes

1. On Lynd's many years as an activist, see *Living Inside Our Hope: A Steadfast Radical's Thoughts on Rebuilding the Movement* by Staughton Lynd (ILR Press, 1997); *Alice and Staughton Lynd's Stepping Stones: Memoir of a Life Together* (Lexington Books, 2009); *The Admirable Radical: Staughton Lynd and Cold War Dissent, 1945–1970* by Carl Mirra (Kent State University Press, 2010); and *Side by Side: Alice and Staughton Lynd, the Ohio Years* by Mark Weber and Stephen Paschen, forthcoming from Kent State University Press in October 2014.
2. *Lucasville: The Untold Story of a Prison Uprising* (Temple University Press, 2004). Layers of Injustice, a booklet by Lynd summarizing the Lucasville story and bringing it up to date, is available from him for \$5. Send an e-mail to [salynd@aol.com](mailto:salynd@aol.com).
3. Lynd has written articles on labor for *Radical America*, *Liberation*, *The Industrial Worker*, *Labor Notes* and many other publications. Among his labor books are *Rank and File: Personal Histories by Working-Class Organizers* (Beacon Press, 1973) and *The New Rank and File* (ILR Press, 2000), both edited with his wife Alice, as well as a new, expanded edition of *Rank and File* (Haymarket Books, 2011) in which eight interviews from *The New Rank and File* are added to all the oral histories in the original edition; *The Fight Against Shutdowns: Youngstown's Steel Mill Closings* (Singlejack Books, 1982); and *Labor Law for the Rank & Filer* (PM Press, 2008) with Daniel Gross.
4. Marty Glaberman (1918–2001) was an autoworker and labor historian who lived in Detroit, taught at Wayne State University and wrote extensively about the UAW. Lynd compiled a collection of his writings in *Punching Out & Other Writings* (Charles H. Kerr Publishing, 2002) for which he also wrote the Introduction. Stan Weir (1921–2001) was a rank and filer and writer, some of whose writings are collected in *Singlejack Solidarity* edited by George Lipsitz (University of Minnesota Press, 2004). Ed Mann (1928–1992) was a steelworker and long-time officer in the Youngstown local of the Steelworkers Union. Excerpts from Mann's autobiographical booklet appear as an appendix to the first and forthcoming editions of Lynd's *Solidarity Unionism*.
5. See, for example, *We Are All Leaders: The Alternative Unionism of the Early 1930's*, Staughton Lynd, editor (University of Illinois Press, 1996).
6. *Rank and File*, pp. 67–88.
7. See Charles K. Morris, *The Blue Eagle at Work: Reclaiming Democratic Rights in the Workplace* (ILR Press, 2005).
8. *Rank and File*, pp. 111–129.
9. Cletus Daniel, *The ACLU and the Wagner Act: An Inquiry Into the Depression-Era Crisis of American Liberalism* (ILR Press, 1980).
10. Lazard is a global financial and advisory firm headquartered in New York specializing in investment banking and asset management.
11. *Accompanying: Pathways to Social Change* by Staughton Lynd (PM Press, 2013)

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