NYC WORKS
CELEBRATING LABOR IN THE BIG APPLE
Meet the Real Power of the Labor Movement; The Rank and File

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Michael Mulgrew is no stranger to being up front. He spent a decade in front of classrooms teaching English at William E. Grady High School in Brooklyn, but at 10 am on Saturday, Sept. 8, Mulgrew will be in front of a different, much larger gathering, as grand marshal of the 2018 New York City Labor Day Parade.

Since taking the helm of the 189,000-member United Federation of Teachers, the city’s teachers’ union, in 2009, the Staten Island native has used his leadership position to advocate for smaller class sizes, more city and state funding for public schools, increased parental involvement in their children’s education, and less reliance on standardized testing.

Under Mulgrew’s leadership, in 2014 the UFT won a teachers’ contract with the city that included an 18 percent pay raise.

He serves as a vice president of the American Federation of Teachers; an executive board member of New York State United Teachers, executive vice chairman of the city’s Municipal Labor Committee, and on the executive board of the New York City Central Labor Council. His UFT bio mentions that the veteran union leader “actively promotes issues that include economic fairness, immigration reform, equality and social justice.”

When the Central Labor Council tapped Mulgrew to lead this year’s parade, he joined such local labor union luminaries as Thomas VanArsdale of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, John J. Sweeney and Denis Hughes of the AFL-CIO, Peter Ward of the New York Hotel & Motel Trades Council, Lillian Roberts of DC 37, and Mulgrew’s predecessor as UFT president, Randi Weingarten, who have led New York’s signature labor union march.

“I’m proud and honored I was chosen this year to be the grand marshal of the parade,” the veteran union leader told Community News Group. “The Central Labor Council said to me, ‘your union is out front on labor issues, especially lately since unions have been under attack; we wanted you to be at the head of our march.’ But this is not just about spreading the message on the day of the parade; it’s also about the week leading up to the parade, spreading the message about workers’ rights. Having those rights is the only way we’re going to be able to fix the income disparities in this country.”

Mulgrew said he sensed “a new wave of energy inside the labor movement in New York,” and pointed to his own union as a prime example.

“The UFT is at the lowest number of people who are non-union, about 400 out of a union of nearly 200,000. That’s phenomenal,” he said proudly. “More than ever, workers are embracing the value of unions.”

He warned, however, that labor unions “should never, ever, stop moving forward at all times,” and continue to fight to protect workers’ rights to fair wages, adequate healthcare coverage, and retirement benefits against forces that would try to strip those away.

“If someone had said 15 years ago that Wisconsin would be the most unfriendly state in the country for labor unions, I would have said ‘no way in hell,’” Mulgrew said. “But now that’s the case.”

GRAND MARSHAL: Michael Mulgrew, president of the United Federation of Teachers, is this year’s grand marshal of the 2018 New York City Labor Day Parade and March. United Federation of Teachers
Once again, Fifth Avenue the place for the parade

BY PHOEBE VAN BUREN

Roughly 50,000 labor union members and supporters will take their fight down Manhattan’s storied Fifth Avenue for the annual New York City Labor Day Parade on Sept. 8. Since its inception in 1882, the parade has become a banner event for the labor movement not only in the city, but across America.

“It’s really viewed throughout the country, even outside the city, as the signature kind of event for the Labor Movement,” said Vincent Alvarez, who is the president of the New York City Labor Council, which puts on the parade. “Even though it’s a parade, it’s a march — it’s a march for rights.”

The architects of the parade, Matthew MacGuire, who was a machinist and secretary of the Central Labor Union, and Peter MacGuire, who was a carpenter, co-founder of the American Federation of Labor, had come up with an idea to introduce a labor holiday. On a Tuesday in 1882, they brought together 30,000 people in Union Square, meaning that workers had to forfeit the day’s wages to attend. The march was so popular that it was held again one year later, sparking a campaign for a Labor Day across the country.

Congress named the first Monday of September as Labor Day in 1894. Masses of union members and their supporters have marched across the city most years, barring periods that it didn’t happen due to several reasons, such as poor attendance as people began viewing the holiday as the final weekend of summer and leaving the city.

The parade has its own flair, however, differing from all of the other parades in the city because it is 100 percent participatory, meaning that anyone can join, Alvarez said.

“If you are part of the labor movement, a family member, neighbor, friend of the movement, we say march. If you’re a worker in the city whose industry is under attack, we say march,” he said.

In the 1800s, participants marched down Broadway, but that changed in 1959 when it moved to Fifth Avenue. A permit for the stretch is almost impossible to secure these days but an existing agreement between the Labor Council and the city allows it to continue on that route. This year, it will be led by Grand Marshal Michael Mulgrew, who is the president of United Federation of Teachers, AFT Local 2, while the chair is Lester Crockett, Regional President, CSEA-AFSCME Local 1000, Region 11.

And with each year comes different campaigns. In 2018, revelers can expect to see many “Count Me In” signs and banners from construction workers, referring to a campaign against including non-unionized construction workers in big developments across the city. Doing so puts workers at risk since not everyone has proper safety training, Alvarez said.

Since the parade is the Saturday before the primaries, the New York City Labor Council also puts resources into advocating for candidates it supports for office.

Beyond being a time-honored New York City tradition, the parade is a way for workers to come together and show the public just how many people are fighting for them.

“We show our strength and show our solidarity by marching together,” Alvarez said.
Change often comes after years and years of hard work. No one knows this better than low-wage workers. On Labor Day, they are taking a step back to look at their progress towards the ongoing fight still ahead of them.

Six years ago, Andrea Bundy was struggling to survive on just $7.25 an hour while working as a cabin cleaner for a subcontractor at the John F. Kennedy International Airport. She struggled to make ends meet and take care of her daughter. Many of Andrea’s co-workers talk about similar, everyday struggles.

Their stories are now well known. In 2012, subcontracted airport workers at LaGuardia Airport, Newark Liberty International Airport and the John F. Kennedy International Airport started organizing for a union, higher wages and benefits with 32BJ SEIU. The historic campaign has been wildly successful, as 9,000 low-wage workers organized themselves into 32BJ SEIU and nearly doubled the minimum wage at New York’s airports. But it didn’t come without a struggle.

In the airports campaign, the broad aim was not to organize workers at a few subcontracting companies here and there, but to organize the entire airport industry. 32BJ SEIU successfully organized thousands of workers in New York, New Jersey, Philadelphia and won a commitment from the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey Board of Commissioners to a $19 minimum wage for 40,000 employees at Newark, JFK and LaGuardia working for multiple employers.

This sectoral approach has helped 32BJ SEIU in the past 20 years organize nearly 100,000 new members up and down the East Coast in the airport, security, cleaning, residential building and food service industries, and 90% of those members are covered under industry-wide “master” contracts that multiple employers sign onto.

Organizing the majority of workers in an industry actually reduces the incentive for employers to fight unionization because companies are no longer competing against each other in a race to the bottom for the lowest labor costs. Unions can create a floor for wages and benefits in the market, which raises job standards throughout the industry, thereby reducing employee turnover and improving the quality of services.

It’s not easy but it can be done and in fact, it’s already making life better for thousands of workers. And another remarkable thing that has come out of these efforts is the realization that raising standards for wages and benefits is not only an antidote for poverty for these workers of color but an economic stimulus for the communities in which they live.

Unions remain the best vehicle workers have to fight for better wages, benefits and working conditions and by actively participating in our democratic process we can still speak to the aspirations, direct interests and core values of all working people. It’s been unions that are pushing a bold vision for issues beyond the workplace, including expanded social security, progressive taxation, affordable health care and prescription drugs, extended sick time and family leave, childcare benefits, pre-K for all children, no-cost college and reduction of student loan debt.

In 32BJ, We Win!

Airport workers won a wage increase to $19 an hour—one of the highest in the nation—because we came together in union with 32BJ to demand the good jobs we deserve. Thanks to our fight, the Port Authority has voted to increase wages over the next five years that will get all 40,000 airport service workers at JFK, LaGuardia and Newark airports to $19 an hour.

Find out more: www.seiu32bj.org/airports
Labor pains, and labor gains

BY PHOEBE VAN BUREN

Since the Labor Movement took hold of New York City in the 1800s, its workers have fought for fair wages, reasonable hours, and important benefits. With every new government comes new fights, and with new fights, come opportunities to improve workers’ lives, its leaders say.

Whether it be against developers behind some of the biggest building ventures in the city or media employees working for the chance to unionize, New York workers are now facing a myriad of issues. The larger movement is at a crossroads right now, as it will need to start using its money and members to keep members while coming to an agreement politically, according to one expert.

“It’s going to find itself spending resources to keep members they are already have,” said Ed Ott, who has spent 40 years in the Labor Movement and is a lecturer at the City University of New York’s Murphy Institute Worker Education and Labor Studies. “We have to find out how to keep what we have and what our political situation is at this point.”

Perhaps the biggest labor issue of the 2018 came when the United States Supreme Court ruled in Janus v. American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, that people who are represented by a public unions but aren’t members don’t have to pay fees. As a result, unions expect that they will lose 10 to 30 percent of their members and the money that comes with them.

To help unions suffering from the ruling, the New York City Central Labor Council has been working to stabilize unions and prepare them with the support they need to keep operating effectively, Vincent Alvarez, the president of the Council, said.

While it struggles to recover from the Supreme Court decision, the movement is also experiencing a political divide. “There are many workers split in the Labor Movement who supported and continue to support Trump. We have other unions who are adamantly opposed,” Ott said. Trump supporters can be found in the Bedford Union Armory building in Crown Heights in 2016, demanding the city reverse the RFP given to Slate Property Group to convert the armory building into 330 apartments.

STATE OF THE UNION: (Above) Union activists and supporters rally against the Supreme Court’s ruling in the Janus v. American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, case, in Foley Square in Lower Manhattan on June 27. In a 5-4 decision, the Court ruled that public employee unions cannot require nonmembers to pay fees. (Left) The New York State Nurses Association called for more staffing to better care for New Yorkers at 14 of the city’s private hospitals in 2015. (Below) Crown Heights Tenants Union tenants and activists protested outside the Bedford Union Armory building.

As workers across the country fight to keep their unions alive, New York workers, nearly a quarter of those who are unionized, have been involved in several campaigns for their rights this year. The “Count me in” campaign launched in response to the developer behind Hudson Yards on the city’s west side using a mix of union and non-union labor. This can create safety hazards, as the non-union workers may not be properly trained, Alvarez said. “It’s an issue that’s extraordinarily dangerous and a tremendous amount of danger that exists in construction.”

In July, workers at retail store H&M urged the company to negotiate with them for a fair contract that would include the elimination of making workers take back-to-back closing and opening shifts without at least 10.5 hours rest, ensuring a minimum number of hours per week, and the right to time off after five consecutive days worked. Members of the New York City Council got behind the workers and urged the company to come to the table.

And people working in digital media, an increasingly volatile industry, are battling to unionize and strike deals with their employers that would ensure job security, fair wages, and benefits. In August, workers at culture blog Thrillist went on strike after their company refused to reach an agreement with the union.

Graduate school unions have been hard at work too — Columbia University employees urged officials to meet their demands to put an end to issues with late paychecks, rent increases, and inadequate medical coverage they say interferes with their ability to provide the best education possible.

Even as they face these new challenges, the problems that come from the government are still the same, Alvarez said. “There’s always the broader attacks on working people from the government.”

In 2018 and beyond, workers will have to continue to come up with innovative ideas in order to effectively keep their unions and their livelihoods strong, according to Ott.

“Old forms may not work in new capitalism and new forms are gonna be have to be created,” he said.
Let's try an experiment.

It's Labor Day weekend, when we take a moment to appreciate the contributions made to America by its working men and women.

It's also a weekend when we barbecue. So while you're at one, ask a friend this question: Do you think New York's public projects, paid for with your tax dollars, should be spent on American-made goods whenever possible?

I bet you know the answer you'd get: “Of course!” That response is in line with state-wide and national polling that finds majorities of voters think American-made spending plans for public projects are a good idea.

And they are. By guaranteeing that domestic manufacturers are given the first shot when our government repairs a highway or builds a bridge, Buy America laws promote domestic economic growth. They create an incentive for companies to set up shop in America, and that means more jobs in New York. And more jobs in New York means an expanded tax base and a smaller burden on the social safety net.

And they don't soak taxpayers. Buy America laws always include waivers if domestic material is prohibitively expensive or only available in limited quantities.

Here's an example of domestic preferences applied: A few years ago, when the Metropolitan Transit Authority went looking for 15,000 tons of steel to replace the upper deck on the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge, it ended up buying it on the cheap from state-owned companies in China. That's a lot of business for government-subsidized steel-makers on the other side of the planet, which instead could have put American workers on the job.

By comparison, the recent Tappan Zee Bridge construction project was partially funded by federal money, and was therefore stuck to Buy America rules. And it just so happened that New York officials found it cost-competitive to purchase all the steel required for the new span from U.S. manufacturers.

The results? Making it in America saved more than $1.5 billion and years of construction time. It also nearly 8,000 American jobs in the production of its construction material.

While you're at that barbecue, ask your friend which deal made more sense.

New York last winter moved to bring its state-level procurement policies into line with federal ones. It now requires the use of American-made iron and domestically melted and poured steel for any and all work on road and bridge projects over $1 million. It also requires the use of domestic iron and domestically melted and poured steel for all contracts over $1 million awarded by the Dormitory Authority, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, the Bridge Authority or the Thruway Authority.

It would be good to see all New York agencies implement such rules in their procurement policies. But this is a good start, because when correctly applied, buying American supports American jobs. New York's tax dollars should remain in the state and national economy – and not be used to promote jobs overseas, especially when cost-competitive and quality goods are available here at home.

They're a good idea, and they're good for our economy. So, next time you find yourself using a piece of public infrastructure, ask yourself a question: Do I know where this bridge or road was this made, and by whom?

With strong Buy America rules, you'll know the answer.

American workers built our past.
American workers can build our future, too.

By Scott Paul

american manufacturing
www.americanmanufacturing.org
The New York City Labor Movement has spanned more than four centuries, dating back to the 1600s. Over time, the key players have changed but the problems remain very much the same. It would be nearly impossible to put together an exhaustive list of all of movement’s events in The City That Never Sleeps, but we’ve compiled a brief history showing how workers have fought for their rights time and time again:

1882
Approximately 30,000 Knights of Labor convene at City Hall for an unofficial march that would become the city’s first Labor Day Parade. The event was held on a Tuesday, meaning that workers had to give up a day of wages to attend. Matthew and Peter McGuire proposed the day be named Labor Day to celebrate workers. The parade was held the following year, inspiring a campaign for the holiday across the country.

1894
Congress names the first Monday of September Labor Day.

1909
Roughly 20,000 women, primarily Jewish, working in shirtwaist factories, walked out of the job in protest of unfair wages, working conditions, and hours, marking the first mass strike by women in United States history. The following year, the women’s demands were met.

1911
A fire broke out at the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory in Greenwich Village, killing 146 garment workers after they became trapped in the building due to locked exits and only one fire escape. The tragedy was one of the deadliest industrial disasters in American history.

1930s
Folk singer Woody Guthrie performs at Webster Hall in support of union workers.

1954-1968
One million black workers enter the Congress of Industrial Organizations, sparking a new campaign from black workers to use labor issues to win the fight for racial justice. During that time, tensions rise as some unions refuse to make any changes to their traditions.

1959
In a milestone event for the Labor Movement, the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations merged to create the AFL-CIO, the largest federation of unions in the country. That same year, the Labor Day Parade moves to Fifth Avenue, where 115,000 union workers and their supporters celebrated the day. Also in 1959, city firefighters decide to unionize in a bid to win a pay increase.

1960
Union leaders urge the city to set a minimum wage of $1.25 per hour, asking that the state or Congress raise the rate.

NYC WORKS CELEBRATING LABOR IN THE BIG APPLE
The Brotherhood Labor Party demands a $1.50 minimum wage, and six-hour, five day a week work schedule. In December, city labor leaders announce they will support a New Year’s Day strike for a 20-hour work week. The city labor commissioner jump-starts negotiations to avoid a strike that may affect streetlights.

City Council passes a bill that raises minimum wage to $1.50 an hour, boosting the paychecks of approximately 400,000 workers. In return, business owners sue, alleging that the pay raise is unconstitutional.

Governor Nelson Rockefeller vetoes the $1.50 an hour wage, arguing that the raise would force businesses owners to take their work elsewhere.

More than 6,000 handymen, elevator operators, porters, and custodians strike to protest building owners’ assertion that complying with union contracts would mean that they would have to raise rents. The strike affected 1,000 apartment buildings across the city.

Letter carriers in Brooklyn and Manhattan walk out on the job, beginning the first mass work stoppage in the history of the United States Post Office Department. The strike grew to 210,000 employees, causing President Richard Nixon to declare a state of emergency and deploy the military to New York City post offices.

Approximately 20,000 New York City police officers refuse to report for duty during the five-day NYPD work stoppage after a lawsuit that would have increased pay for police and firefighters is struck down. Officers said they would still respond to serious crimes, but would not participate in regular patrolling duties. As a result, the city was patrolled by as few as 200 officers at some times.

Roughly 14,000 workers from 45 hotels walk off the job to protest unfair wages in the first walk-out in the history of the Hotel and Motel Trade Council of the AFL-CIO.

Starting on Dec. 20, during the busiest shopping week of the year, New York City transit workers went on strike for two days, stopping most bus and subway service. This was a result of a breakdown in negotiations for a new contract over retirement, pension, and wage increases.

Supporters of the “Fight for $15” campaign win big when a plan to raise the minimum wage to $15 an hour is signed into law along with a 12-week paid family leave policy.
BY JAMES HARNEY

Some 150 unions and local organizations will participate in the 2018 Labor Day Parade and March on Saturday, Sept. 8. Here is a list of the line of march:

LEAD-OFF SECTOR: March time: 10 am
NYPD Color Guard

LEAD-OFF BAND: The Tottenville High School Marching Band

GRAND MARSHAL: Michael Mulgrew, president, United Federation of Teachers, AFT Local 2

PARADE CHAIR: Lester Crocket, regional president, CSEA-AFSCME Local 1000, Region 11

NYC Central Labor Council, AFL-CIO: Officers and executive board

New York State AFL-CIO
New York State Department Of Labor

Pride at Work
A. Philip Randolph Institute
Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance
Coalition Of Black Trade Unionists
Coalition Of Labor Union Women

Labor Council For Latin American Advancement

New York City Alliance Of Retired Americans
Union Veterans Council
Greater NY Labor-Religion Coalition

New York Branch NAACP
Jewish Labor Committee

New York Labor History Association
James Connelly Irish American Labor Coalition

Italian American Labor Council

New York Committee For Occupational Safety & Health

Mount Sinai Selikoff
Cornell Worker Institute

CUNY Murphy Institute
Empire State College-SUNY

New York City Labor Chorus
Actors’ Equity Association

American Federation Of Musicians Local 802

SAG-AFTRA
American Guild Of Musical Artists

Writers Guild Of America East

International Alliance Of Theatrical Stage Employees and local unions
New York Council Of Motion Picture

SECTOR 1
March time: 10:15 am
United Federation Of Teachers and AFT local unions
New York State United Teachers and local unions

United University Professions-Downstate Medical Center
Professional Staff Congress
Council Of Supervisors and Administrators

CSEA-AFSCME
AFSCME District Council 37 and local unions

AFSCME District Council 1707 & local unions

Uniformed Firefighters Association Local 94

Uniformed Fire Officers Association Local 654

Public Employees Federation

SECTOR 2
March time: 10:45 am

Communication Workers Of America and local unions

The Association Of Flight Attendants Amalgamated Transit Union & local unions

American Postal Workers Union
National Association Of Letter Carriers

New York State Nurses Association
Air Line Pilots Association

Office and Professional Employees International Union & local unions

Organization Of Staff Analysts

Civil Service Merit Council
American Federation Of Government Employees and local unions

SECTOR 3
March time: 11 am
Building and Construction Trades Council

BCTC officers and staff

Helmets To Hardhats

The Edward J. Malloy Initiative for Construction Skills

Non-Traditional Employment for Women

Plumbers Local 1

Steamfitters Local 638

Laborers’ Local 731, 147 and National Postal Mailhandlers Union Local 500

Cement & Concrete Workers DC 16, Locals 6A, 18A & 20

Pavers And Road Builders District Council, Local 1010

Cement Masons Local 780

Plasterers’ Local 262

Mason Tenders District Council & Locals 66, 78, 79, 108, 279 & 1261

SECTOR 4
March time: 11:30 am

Roofers And Waterproofers Local 8

Sheet metal Workers Locals 28 & 137

Ironworkers District Council and Locals 40, 46, 197, 361, 580

Heat and Frost Insulators Locals 12 & 12A

Boilermakers Local Lodge 5

International Union Of Painters & Allied Trades DC 9 & Locals

SECTOR 5
March time: 12 pm

New York City District Council Of Carpenters and local unions

Elevator Constructors Local 1

International Union Of Operating Engineers and local unions

Bricklayers and Allied Craftworkers Local 1

Tile, Marble And Terrazzo Local 7

SECTOR 6
March time: 12:15 pm

International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW)

IBEW Local 3

IBEW local unions

New York State Allied Printing Trades Council

Allied Printing Trades Council

Graphic Communications Conference

SECTOR 7
March time: 12:45 pm

United Auto Workers Region 9A & local unions

Utility Workers Union Of America Local 1–2

United Food & Commercial Workers Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union

UCFW-RWDSU Local unions

International Longshoremen Association and local unions 920, 1814

Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco & Grain Millers and local unions

SECTOR 8
March time: 1:15 pm

Teamsters Joint Council 16 and IBT local unions

SEIU Local 1199

SEIU Local 246

SEIU Local UNIONS

Workers United

Transport Workers Union Of America and local unions

Seafarers’ International Union Of North America

Marine Engineers Beneficial Association, District 1

New York Taxi Workers Alliance

NY Hotel & Motel Trades Council

Unite Here! Local unions

International Association Of Machinists & Aerospace Workers
New York City Brags About the Expansion of UPK, But…

New York City Must Provide Wage Parity for The City’s Public Center-Based Day Care and Head Start Employees

Employees working for public center-based early education centers are being cheated out of thousands of dollars of income over their careers by the City of New York. And the City is doing nothing about it.

For years these dedicated public day care and Head Start employees have made exceptional sacrifices to work in their profession. The City’s response has been to pay them tens of thousands of dollars less than their public school counterparts, even though they are mandated to hold the same education and state education credentials.

These employees have provided high quality early childhood education services to New York City’s children and toddlers for nearly two generations. The City has created a multi-tier wage disparity program with Early Learn, Head Start and UPK teachers and other staff earning disparate and lower wages, it seems, because the majority of employees are women and women of color – and many are heads of households. This not happening in Alabama or Mississippi. This is happening in progressive New York City.

In fact, a retention crisis has developed in many centers caused by the lack of wage parity. Early childhood education staff earn their credentials and often leave for the public schools. Across the city many centers experience inordinate turnover rates when staff leave the jobs they love for better paying jobs in public schools or other career opportunities.

It is the children who suffer because staff retention is necessary for young minds to flourish. The toll on staff and families in these communities-in-need is also particularly painful. It is discrimination at its lowest form. The City of New York cannot pretend to ignore it anymore.

New York City must act now to end this thoughtless crisis in child care by providing necessary funding for salary/benefit increases to the staff at the unionized nonprofit early childhood education centers across the city. The time for change is now!

Name (print): _____________________________________________________________________________
Address: ________________________________________________________________________________
Date: ____________________

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Lights! Camera! Unions!

BY JAMES HARNEY

Labor — who does it, for whom, and what, if any, is acceptable compensation for it — is a never-ending story. Through the decades, the employer-employee relationship has spawned its own vernacular: walkouts, work stoppages, slowdowns, demonstrations, layoffs, strikes, riots, unions. From time to time, clashes between labor unions and management — and sometimes, the individuals who have emerged at the forefront of those clashes — have drawn the attention of Hollywood's spotlight. Here are a few noteworthy movies that have crossed the silver screen in recent years:

‘Hoffa’

“Hoffa” was a 1992 film biography of the notorious union boss Jimmy Hoffa, chronicling 40 years of his life, his rise to the top spot in the rough-and-tumble International Brotherhood of Teamsters, to his leadership of a violent strike, to his sinister involvement with organized crime, to his well-publicized clashes with U.S. Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy during a federal investigation into Hoffa’s infamous mob dealings, to his equally young, equally strung-gling colleagues to go on strike after Joseph Pulitzer, publisher of the New York World, tries to one-up business rival William Randolph Hearst by raising the prices that the “newslies” have to pay to buy newspapers from Pulitzer’s distribution centers.

High points in “Newsies” include a confrontation between Jack, his compatriot Les Jacobs and Pulitzer in the publisher’s office, a refusal by Brooklyn-based newsies to join the Manhattan newsboys’ strike, and a climactic ambush of the distribution center and destruction of all its newspapers.

‘Norma Rae’

Starring Oscar-winner Sally Field, “Norma Rae” was based on the true story of Crystal Lee Sutton, a worker in a textile mill in a small North Carolina town where the pay is low and the hours long. Inspired by a rousing speech from a visiting labor activist — and after poor working conditions at the mill start becoming hazardous to workers’ health, including her own — Norma Rae is moved to rally her beleaguered colleagues to unionize. She encounters anger from a flancé jealous of her closeness with the labor activist, as well as fierce opposition from her employers. The movie climaxes with the workers voting to form a union. In addition to Field’s Best Actress Oscar win, the 1979 film also won an Oscar for Best Original Song for the theme song, “It Goes Like It Goes.” And in 2011, “Norma Rae” was chosen to be preserved in the National Film Registry of the Library of Congress, because it is “culturally, aesthetically or historically significant.”

‘On the Waterfront’

“On the Waterfront” was a 1954 movie directed by famed Hollywood director Elia Kazan that depicted union violence and corruption and racketeering on the Hoboken, N.J., waterfront. It featured a star-studded cast that included Marlon Brando, Lee J. Cobb, Karl Malden, Rod Steiger, Pat Henning and Eva Marie Saint, with a soundtrack composed by the legendary Leonard Bernstein. It told the story of the conflict between a cold-blooded union leader and a disenchanted dockworker. The dockworker had been a talented boxer on the rise until a powerful mob boss persuaded him to throw a fight. But when a longshoreman is murdered before he can testify in an investigation into the mob boss’s violent control of the waterfront, the dockworker courageously decides to testify himself.

‘Silkwood’

Released in 1983, “Silkwood” starred Meryl Streep in a role inspired by the life of Karen Silkwood, a whistle-blowing worker and labor union shop steward who died in a mysterious car accident while on her way to meet with a news reporter investigating alleged wrongdoing and serious safety defects at the Kerr-McGee plutonium plant where she worked. The movie suggests that the “accident” may have been murder, but the case has never been solved. In real life, Silkwood’s death gave rise to a 1979 lawsuit, Silkwood v. Kerr-McGee. The jury rendered a verdict of $10 million in damages to be paid to Silkwood’s estate, at the time the largest amount in damages ever awarded for that kind of case. Eventually, the estate settled for a $1.3 payout.

‘Harlan County, USA’

“Harlan County, USA” was a 1976 documentary about labor tension in the coal-mining industry, in which director and workers’ rights advocate Barbara Kopple filmed a 1972 strike by miners at the Brookside Mine in rural Kentucky. After the miners join a union, the mine’s owners refuse the labor contract. Once the miners walk off their jobs, the owners bring in “scabs” to replace them. The strike dragged on for nearly a year, and confrontations between strikers and scabs often became violent, with even Kopple and her cameraman beaten in one incident. Clashes were often punctuated by gunfire, and in one, a miner was killed. Kopple and her crew spent years with the families depicted in the film, documenting how they suffered while striking for decent wages and safer working conditions, and how some miners contracted Black Lung Disease. “Harlan County, USA” won Kopple an Oscar for Best Documentary.
Ratting out the scabs!

The story of Scabby the Rat, the inflatable star of many a picket line

BY JAMES HARNEY

It was early September, 2016. Labor Day had come and gone, and a new semester at the Downtown Brooklyn campus of Long Island University was supposed to have begun. But instead of standing at the front of their classrooms, faculty members — embroiled in a salary dispute with the university’s administration in which replacement educators had been brought in — were marching on the sidewalk outside the school’s main building on Flatbush Avenue, waving placards and chanting slogans.

And Scabby was there.

For more than 40 years at labor unions’ picket lines around New York, Scabby the Rat — an inflatable charcoal-gray rodent with a bubbly pink underbelly, pointed claws, red dish eyes and protruding buck teeth, has often loomed slyly nearby, a six, 15, 20, or even 25-foot-tall snarling symbol of protest against real or perceived mistreatment of employees by management.

“New York is still a labor union town,” says Senior Professor of Journalism Dr. Ralph Engelman, a former vice president of the LIU Faculty Federation. “Bringing out the rat to embarrass the university and call attention to its attack on labor was something we felt was very important.”

Workers who have crossed picket lines to replace union workers have historically been vilified as “scabs,” or “rats,” but “Scabby” didn’t begin appearing at picket lines, demonstrations, or marches until 1990, in Chicago. That’s when the Chicago branch of the Bricklayers and Allied Craftworkers union approached Big Sky Balloons and Searchlights, based in suburban Plainfield, Ill., and asked owners Mike and Peggy O’Connor to design and produce a larger inflatable vermin, ranging from 6-feet-tall models priced at nearly $2,600 to 25-footers that cost almost $10,000. The price includes a blower, with an extension cord, to inflate the balloon, and stakes to hold it in place on the ground.

O’Connor estimated the inflatable bedbug for a group protesting a New York hotel that had bedbugs, “greedy pig,” a cockroach, and a money bag in the other], a fat cat [a pompous-looking, feline wearing a suit and grabbing a construction worker by the neck in one hand, and a money bag in the other], a “corporate pig,” a cockroach, and a Border Patrol agent.

“We once even designed an inflatable rat that had bedbugs,” she said. “We’re in the balloon business; they asked for it, so we made it.”

In the past, victims of “Scabby the Rat” have challenged its legality — and lost. In 2011 that National Labor Relations Board ruled that the inflatable rodent was a symbolic form of free speech protected by the First Amendment. And in 2014, a Brooklyn federal judge upheld the right of a laborers’ union to use “Scabby” in its demonstration.

“In an era in which attacks on labor are taking place on multiple fronts, it’s particularly important for unions to fight back,” Engelman said.

“The use of the rat at our lockout was part of that fight.”

RATS: Union activists hoisted the giant, inflatable rat outside a residential development in Gowanus in 2015, alleging worker exploitation by the contracted construction company. File photo by Jason Speakman

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Gladly riding the Local

Four workers tell why they value union membership

BY JAMES HARNEY

There are more than one million unionized workers in the New York metropolitan area — policemen, firefighters, schoolteachers, letter carriers, longshoremen, hospital workers, construction laborers, electricians, and motel employees to name just a few — tolling for some 300 union locals, some with predictable names, like the American Postal Workers Union, or the New York State Nurses Association; others with such unique identities as Tile, Marble, and Terrazzo Local 7, or the Heat & Frost Insulators of Labor Day Parade and March on Saturday, Sept. 8, "to show that union presence.

**Barrington Anderson**

*Professional mover, Local 814, International Brotherhood of Teamsters*

Anderson has been a member of the Teamsters local representing professional movers in the city since 2005. The work takes him to jobs all over the city, and at times even as far as towns in New Jersey. The work can be tough at times, and he says he wouldn't even think of doing it without the wage and healthcare protections his union local provides.

"I live with my wife and six children in Yonkers," Anderson, 40, said one day last week during a break from a job at a large hotel in midtown Manhattan. "Being in this union helps me maintain a fair wage and get the coverages I need for my family."

Anderson is so convinced of the value of union membership that he spends some of his down time doing union outreach work.

"I represent the freelance movers who aren't affiliated with one company or another," he explained. "When they look for jobs and are looking for information within the union, I'm one of the guys to go to."

Anderson says the moving industry in New York is often infiltrated by non-union workers, a practice he thinks is a bad idea.

"There are some 'fake unions' out there that aren't really unions," he said. "Their members aren't certified, they can't OSHA [Occupational Safety and Health Administration] cards to do jobs on some of the newer developments being constructed these days. Unions are important because they protect us in the event of injuries on the job. Companies that try to get by with non union labor to save money and pay their workers less than the union rate put those workers at risk. In the end, it's those workers who suffer."

He thinks Saturday's parade "shows that unity brings strength, that we're the working class people who build and move everything around the city."

**Dave McIntosh**

*Journeyman, Plumbers Union Local 1*

McIntosh, a 13-year member of Plumbers Union Local 1, likes to stay busy.

"I wear a couple of hats for Local 1," McIntosh, 43, readily admits. "Out in the field, I'm a full-time plumber. I was recently elected for my second term on the Local 1 finance committee. And I also teach an orientation class — we call it the Heritage Class for new union members."

The class, which McIntosh teaches two nights a week at the Trade Education Center in Long Island City, is intended to give new members "an idea about unions, what they're about, and a taste of labor history."

He says the Heritage Class particularly resonates with him because of his own, sometimes rocky, path to union membership.

"I was working as a non-union plumber, and did some work as an apprentice, but it was a farce," McIntosh recalls. "I knew union members made higher rates of pay and had benefits, but this was before the Internet and smartphones, and I didn't know anything about how to get into a union. I figured you had to be a friend of a friend, I thought it was a closed situation."

That changed, he says, when a friend gave him the phone number to the local Plumbers Union hall. On a whim, he called it, left his phone number with a secretary and, to his surprise, got a return call asking for resume. The conversation led to McIntosh signing on with the union "at the absolute lowest entry level, plumbers helper."

In the years that followed, he worked his way up the union ladder from a helper in the service division, to a journeyman in the higher-paying new construction division, attending training classes at night to become more skilled at his trade. He excelled so well in those classes that he was eventually asked to teach them.

"I've been doing it now for about four years, working as a plumber by day and teaching incoming union members by night," McIntosh says. "I feel like it's me giving back to the organization that's provided such a great opportunity for me."

The married father of three, who lives with his family in Teaneck, N.J., says joining the Plumbers Union...
changed his life, and he’s a firm believer in its value.

“I’m convinced that labor unions are the only viable vehicle for upward mobility. We are the middle class. If an employer is not paying a decent rate of pay, how are workers supposed to get medical coverage for their families, and to have enough money to live on when they retire?”

Asked why the parade is important, McIntosh said: “I hate to sound jaded, but what are the two things that matter to politicians? Money, and votes. So by turning out in force for the Labor Day Parade, and putting our boots on the ground, so to speak, we’re showing what kind of a force we can be in the political arena.”

Evet Stephens
Construction engineer,
Local 14, Crane & Heavy Equipment Operators Union

When Stephens stood before a meeting of Local 14 of the Crane & Heavy Equipment Operators Union in Flushing, Queens in June, 1987, she broke the union’s glass ceiling, becoming the union’s first woman member.

The milestone didn’t surprise her; becoming a construction engineer for Local 14 — the union her father, Monroe, had belonged to as a laborer for many years — was a goal she had pursued for several years. What did surprise her was the applause.

“About 300 men at the meeting applauded me for finishing the training,” Stephens remembers. “It was overwhelming. Then I was told that I was officially in the local. A couple of days later, I went to work as a full-fledged unionized construction engineer.”

That moment was the culmination of a road that had begun when she was a young woman who was disenchanted with finance classes at Pace University, and with law enforcement courses at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, and decided she wanted nothing as much as a career as a construction engineer.

“My dad was old fashioned, he didn’t want his daughter working with men who used bad words all day, but when he saw I was undeterred, he relented and drove me to the Local 14 offices,” she said. After trips between union offices in Manhattan and Queens, Stephens completed and submitted the necessary paperwork.

“The man at the union hall looked at me and said, ‘Don’t waste my time. Are you sure you want to do this?’ I said yes, I’m sure.’ Somehow I convinced him,” she said.

She was accepted for training in November of 1982, and four years later was inducted into the union as its first woman member.

“I went through the same learning and training as any man would do,” Stephens recalls. “When I first started working on jobs, the men would look at me as if to say, ‘What are you doing here?’ It took some time for them to get used to it, but they finally realized that I was serious, and that I was going to show up to class every single time, they came around.”

After 31 years as a construction engineer at various job sites in the metropolitan area, Stephens says she is “as satisfied now as I was then,” and notes that now, there are “25 to 30” women members of Local 14.

“It is a long time coming,” she says of other women joining the union. “It didn’t happen for the first few years. It wasn’t like [women] were pushing in the door to [become construction engineers].”

But Stephens has never regretted her career choice, and insists that “unions are what made this country. You have job security when you’re with a union; you’re able to make a decent living and take care of your family. Hiring non-union workers is dangerous; they have no training whatsoever. We’re constantly doing training, doing refresher courses for everything we’ve learned, the industry is changing and we’re studying to change with it.”

The parade “shows solidarity for the working-class man and woman, and it shows that as union members they’re safer, more efficient, and qualified to get the job done.”

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