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**“She Was One of Us:
Eleanor Roosevelt and
the American Worker”**

The 2012 Jerry Wurf
Memorial Lecture



The Labor and Worklife Program
Harvard Law School

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The Jerry Wurf Memorial Fund was established in memory of Jerry Wurf, the late President of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME). Its income is used to initiate programs and activities that “reflect Jerry Wurf’s belief in the dignity of work, and his commitment to improving the quality of lives of working people, to free open thought and debate about public policy issues, to informed political action...and to reflect his interests in the quality of management in public service, especially as it assures the ability of workers to do their jobs with maximum effect and efficiency in environments sensitive to their needs and activities.”

Jerry Wurf Memorial Lecture

February 9, 2012

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Roosevelt and the American Worker”

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Elissa McBride
Director of Education and
Leadership Training, AFSCME



Elissa McBride

The other day, I learned that I would have the honor of introducing Brigid O’Farrell as the 2012 Wurf Memorial Lecturer. At the dinner table that night, I talked with my husband and my 14 year old son about what to say about Brigid O’Farrell and her new book about Eleanor Roosevelt and the labor movement.

Pretty soon, we were deep in conversation about Eleanor Roosevelt and her amazing life. What made Eleanor so tough, we wondered? Was it her economically privileged but personally traumatic childhood? After all, she lost both parents by the age of ten and lived among quite a few emotionally cold and mentally disturbed relatives. Was it the education she received from working with organizers like Rose Schneiderman in the tenements of the lower east side? Or was it the battle she waged with her mother-in-law to run her own household? That’s my theory. After she finally stood up to her mother-in-law, Sara Delano Roosevelt, no one posed a challenge. Not Herbert Hoover. Not George Meany. And definitely not Franklin.

You will learn more about the toughness of Eleanor Roosevelt when you dig into this splendid new book, *She Was One of Us*. In a few minutes, we’ll hear from Brigid herself. But before that, I want to say a word about this lecture series, and then say a little bit more about Brigid.

helpful, is in bringing back that tie, the idea that labor rights are human rights. Boy, she understood that. This is why the testimonial to her life is her role in the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

A. On a very practical level, in trying to organize immigrant workers and seeking to reach out, I realized the Declaration is available on the UN website in many languages. So I designed a t-shirt with Eleanor’s union card up front, and on the back I had the Declaration article 23, point 4, “Everyone has the right to form a union,” in six languages.

I think this is incredibly powerful. But the words and languages have to be used by all of you.

Thank You.

Brigid O’Farrell is an independent scholar affiliated with Mills College in California, and the Eleanor Roosevelt Papers Project at George Washington University. This lecture has been edited and is based on Brigid O’Farrell’s book: *She Was One of Us: Eleanor Roosevelt and the American Worker*, Cornell University Press, 2010. She coauthored *Rocking the Boat: Union Women’s Voices, 1915-1975* and coedited *Work and Family: Policies for a Changing Work Force*. For more information see: www.bofarrell.net.

and then you hit images, one of the first images that comes up is Eleanor Roosevelt holding it. If you go to the Arab Spring or anywhere, they hold up the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which says trade union rights are human rights. Whether it is Europe or even Canada, the rest of the world makes the link that labor rights, including the right to collectively bargain and form unions, is a human right. Why is it important to call it a human right? It is because human rights are indivisible. You cannot say, we will give you this right, but this one we are not so sure about. They go together as a package. And secondly, they are rights that belong to all of us. They are not given by legislatures, they are not given to us by governors. They are rights that belong to us. And governors and states are required to recognize them. Which is different than saying, the governor gave it to us, and now they took it away. One of the great failures in U.S. history is that in the post-Universal Declaration of Human Rights period, the anti-communism and the rise of Ike sort of buried that. The rest of the world embraced it. But we sort of lost it, including labor. Labor said let's not worry about human rights, and let's just keep it simple and stick to labor rights.

I believe we have to go back to embracing human rights. Nothing wrong there. But we have to make sure that labor rights are understood as part of those rights. The key human right is freedom of association and the right to engage in collective activity. By the way, there is no meaning to the right to engage in collective activity in the workplace unless it is to organize a union and to negotiate. That is why it all fits so well together.

Where we will see Eleanor Roosevelt coming back, and where your book is so very

Today's lecture is sponsored by the Jerry Wurf Memorial Fund. The Wurf Fund was created thirty years ago as a memorial to Jerry Wurf, who had served as the President of AFSCME for almost two decades. The fund recognizes Jerry Wurf's legacy by advancing his work in two areas: to advocate for public employee rights, and to "carry to the world at large the facts about the need for equity and justice in the public service." At the end of his life, President Wurf had begun a relationship with Harvard through the Kennedy School, and so the fund is housed here. It supports research, leadership development for union staff and members, and advocacy for public service trade unionism.

One of the great pleasures of my role as the Education Director of AFSCME is that I am the liaison to the Wurf Fund. That role has put me into partnership with two brilliant and formidable women: Elaine Bernard and Mildred Wurf. Elaine directs the Harvard Labor & Worklife Program, as you know, and she lavishes her considerable energy and intellect on you and many other union leaders on a daily basis. And Mildred is the second toughest woman I know, after Eleanor. She is a former AFSCME education director and was married to Jerry Wurf during all the years that he led AFSCME to become a powerful organizing and bargaining union. Elaine and Mildred, please stand so we can recognize you. Together, the three of us have led the Fund to achieve great things in the last ten years, including the revival of the Wurf lectures and the creation of a new scholarship program that connects young people of color with the labor movement.

Now, on to Brigid and Eleanor. I'm going to take the liberty of using their first names, because I know Brigid. And thanks to Brigid's book I feel like I know Eleanor. I am going to introduce Brigid by telling you three ways she resembles her subject.

First, and most obvious: Brigid and Eleanor are both tall, brainy and elegant. Look at the photos in the center of the book, and then look into Brigid's piercing blue eyes, and you will see what I mean.

Second, Brigid is - and Eleanor was - a tireless activist. Eleanor was active in local, national and international politics until the day she died. Brigid is a sociologist by training, a professor by trade, and she is also active in politics at every level. Brigid understands the need to connect knowledge of the past with engagement in the fights of our moment. When she had finished writing this book, she immediately looked for ways to connect with women union leaders who are working right now to organize and change the world. And when the governor of Ohio, her home state, attempted to deny public service workers the right to union representation, she was one of the first people to call me up and ask "how can I help?"

Finally, Brigid is - and Eleanor was - a powerful educator. As a labor educator, I was blown away by the questions that Eleanor used in the history and government classes she taught in a New York City high school for girls in the late 1920s:

List the ways in which the government touches your home.

What is the object today of inheritance,

"The Iron Lady" when I thought, "She now has got to play Eleanor Roosevelt." It is important to realize that Eleanor and Franklin were an amazing couple. There really was a synergy. They respected each other. There were lots of problems and lots of issues. But they were a very powerful team. She was stronger because of him. She greatly valued his political skills. And he greatly valued her ability to reach out and bring him ideas, her sense of what was important. She could rally support for her ideas and programs.

Sometimes when you focus on Eleanor, Franklin drops out, but he is very, very important. But her independent strength comes out more clearly once she leaves the White House. She says, that's the end, she is not going to do anything else. But then you see how strong she is.

The Right uses this quote when Wisconsin was happening that FDR opposed public sector unions. William Gould, the former head of the National Labor Relations Board, happened to ask what I thought of this.... I said I would have to look into this. I cannot tell you how many times I have heard that quotation repeated by people opposing public sector unions, and they say, "Even FDR opposed public sector unions." It was one sentence in one letter, taken out of context. I like to write materials to counteract that with the many sentences from Eleanor's letters. But I have to say they are much better at using the historical material.

Q. (Elaine Bernard) I am very happy that your international colleagues persuaded you to keep in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. To give you an example, if you go to Google and you put in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,

became the dominant foreign policy of the AFL-CIO, which was just anti-communism and no working with them whatsoever, and Eleanor who opposed this.

Q. (Simon Weller) I am from the UK. I am a trade unionist, and I have been a train driver as well. What I find very interesting, and quite uplifting, given that I have come to the U.S. for five weeks now, I have come with a very European and working-class view of the U.S. and its politics and the interesting direction it appears to be going.

And then I hear this. I now say there is some hope. You have a very powerful role model for young women and for young men. It is a powerful role model that the labor movement should be utilizing. How do we get this story, how do we get Eleanor Roosevelt from behind the shadow of FDR and the New Deal? We need to start saying what she actually achieved, perhaps particularly on the postwar stuff, the little-known stuff, the work on human rights. We are certainly hearing in the UK attacks on European human rights legislation. I would not be surprised if the U.S. is no different. There is this constant undermining not just labor rights but also human rights. It is important that we as a movement start using these kind of stories to push back. How do you think we can develop that, how can we communicate that?

A. I think that what I do, and others who work on Eleanor, try to make the information available in the simplest forms possible, easy to use. But you guys have to pick it up and use it. One of my favorite little side ideas is that I see Meryl Streep playing her. I was not ten minutes into

income and similar taxes?

How are Negroes excluded from voting in the south?

Why is there a struggle between capital and labor?

Don't you think Jerry Wurf would be proud of her agitational skills?

Brigid is an agitator too, and I certainly mean that as a compliment. She has traveled the nation all this past year, taking the lessons of Eleanor Roosevelt's life in the labor movement to women union leaders. Like Eleanor, she knows that we can make real change if we link education and action. I hope you will listen, learn, and leave committed to honor the legacy of Jerry Wurf and Eleanor Roosevelt by passing on the knowledge you gain here to others, so that together, we can restore the right to organize and bargain for all workers – public and private.

Keynote Address Brigid O'Farrell



Brigid O'Farrell

I am honored to be part of the Jerry Wurf Memorial Forum, recognizing the outstanding leadership of Jerry Wurf and his union, the American Federation of State County and Municipal Employees. I appreciate the opportunity to meet Mildred Wurf and acknowledge her efforts to further the labor movement's goals through labor education. It is a great pleasure to return to the Harvard Trade Union Program where many years ago I worked with then director Joe O'Donnell. More recently I also had the privilege of interviewing Professor John Dunlop, shortly before his death, a long time leader of the HTUP. Professor Dunlop set the record straight—as only John Dunlop could-- on some early Roosevelt history which was important to the accurate telling of today's story. I also want to acknowledge the Schlesinger Library. The superb archives and staff were an invaluable resource.

She Was One of Us: Eleanor Roosevelt and the American Worker emerged from an earlier book I wrote with Joyce Kornbluh called *Rocking the Boat*, which was based on oral histories with over 80 union women, including AFSCME's own Lillian Roberts. Though one of the youngest women interviewed, she already was a powerhouse in her union where she continues to serve today as executive director of DC 37 in New York City, a position also held by Jerry Wurf.

Many of these women had wonderful stories about meeting Eleanor Roosevelt, going to the White House and Hyde Park or joining her on

a communist yourself. And it is clearly a speech targeted at Eleanor's and Walter Reuther's positions because she is in the audience and she had gone to India. She had developed very close relations with Nehru's sister, Madame Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit. She felt it was perfectly reasonable for India to be talking with everyone. Meany was outraged at this.

But even the Eisenhower State Department was upset at Meany's position. Reuther had been invited to India, and he had not gotten around to the trip. Shortly after this episode, they quickly organize the trip. Reuther has this amazing trip to India, very much following the path Eleanor had pursued during her trip there in 1952. The core of this is that the Meany foreign policy was very much coming to the fore. She was very much arguing against it. It really began with the Truman Doctrine. She basically opposed the Truman Doctrine as well.

The debate had not reached its peak but she was very well aware of those tensions. She was very much on the side of keeping a dialogue going, trying to get workers to work together.

It was in 1959 that Khrushchev comes to the U.S. George Meany refuses to meet with him. Khrushchev is going all over the country saying, "Where are the workers, where are the workers? I want to meet with workers. The U.S. is hiding and repressing workers." So about seven union leaders meet at a convention in San Francisco. They work out a dinner, which Victor Reuther arranges. Victor Reuther's Russian is still pretty good. He meets Khrushchev and speaks to him in Russian. Eleanor Roosevelt had also met with him. Khrushchev also comes through Hyde Park and wants to pay his respects at FDR's grave.

There was this real tension between what

need to know more about that part of her life.

In the 1950s, it just closes down. Certainly labor's interest in it by the 1960s is not there, with all of the things going on with union density starting to be shaky and core international activities also slacken off. In part, by the 1970s Walter Reuther was gone, and he had been a strong supporter of international economic aid and the work of the United Nations. Except for a small conservative group at the top, the unions turned inward.

Q. One of your slides showed Eleanor Roosevelt in Paris functioning as a good will ambassador for labor. My question would relate to what you had to say about the intersection between domestic and foreign affairs. After World War II, there is a lot of outreach from the AFL-CIO in individual unions to build international unions in other countries that partly serve the progressive purpose of helping workers and advancing human rights but also had the un-progressive aim of combating communist influence in unions in other countries. You mention that Eleanor Roosevelt was not naïve when it came to the Soviet Union and Communists in the U.S. But what was her view of the un-progressive role of U.S. labor unions abroad?

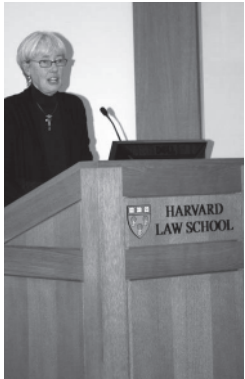
Maybe she was a little too early for her to have interactions with the American Institute for Free Labor Development (AIFLD)?

A. Yes, that was after her time. But she was clearly part of that discussion. After the AFL-CIO merger convention, two days later, there was a dinner honoring George Meany and Walter Reuther. George Meany gets up and gives a speech in which he is very angry at Nehru for inviting the Soviets to India. He lashes out that this is as good as being

the campaign trail. When I went to labor history, however, I could not find much information about her work with unions. The extensive Roosevelt literature barely mentions her support for worker issues; but two Roosevelt biographers, Blanche Cook and Allida Black, assured me there was a story. They just did not know what it might be and they were right.

In *She Was One of Us*, I explore—for the first time—how Eleanor Roosevelt, one of the most admired and most controversial women of the twentieth century, became committed to workers and their unions and how she translated that commitment into action. There are many things to talk about, but I will start by highlighting four areas. First, how Mrs. Roosevelt came to believe in unions as fundamental to democracy. Second, her work with unions in developing the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Third, her support for workers in the public sector and fourth, her opposition to the right-to-work laws. As you well know, unions are under fierce, though not unprecedented, attack today. My talk has changed in light of what is happening to unions in Wisconsin, Ohio, Indiana and other states. I received a call last spring from a young girl in middle school near Columbus, Ohio. She and a friend were writing a short play for a school competition and found my book on the internet. Their subject was Eleanor Roosevelt and human rights. They wanted their drama to address the workers in Ohio. The girl asked, “Eleanor Roosevelt went into a coal mine didn’t she?” “Do you think she would be supporting the workers today?”

“The extensive Roosevelt literature barely mentions [Eleanor’s] support for worker issues.”



My answer is a resounding yes and, in part inspired by these young women, I have taken Eleanor Roosevelt's labor story across the country: from the small southern union women's summer school in Parrish, Florida, to the over 900 strong AFSCME Women's Conference in Wisconsin, to the IBEW convention in Vancouver; from elementary schools to universities, from civic forums to political gatherings, from Washington DC to Hawaii. This is a time to reflect on our history and to learn from our past. But we can only do that if an accurate history has been written. I want to put Eleanor Roosevelt's commitment to unions and labor's contribution to securing workers' rights as human rights into the history books so we can learn from that history.

The road to labor rights as human rights....

Let me begin on a cold day in late December 1936, just one year after the National Labor Relations Act was signed into law by President Roosevelt--New Deal legislation guaranteeing employees a voice at work and the foundation of our labor relations system today. On that day, First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt celebrated the first anniversary of her syndicated newspaper column, "My Day," by joining the American Newspaper Guild, CIO. She told her January 5 press conference that while she could not go on strike or walk a picket line (although she would always refuse to cross a picket line) she believed in what the Guild was trying to do. Her membership was widely noted in the press and many of the women

good at reaching out and connecting with people. She listened to people, and people would tell her things. Her sympathy, her empathy comes from her very lonely and sad childhood. She did not have a lot of family support and reinforcement. So she found that she got a lot out of her meeting and talking with people one-on-one.

Q. I am keen to hear more about Eleanor and the Universal Declaration, and it being so much better known and appreciated around the globe than in the United States?

A. After Eisenhower becomes President, his Secretary of State within a couple of months announces that we will not be doing anything more on covenants. The U.S. foreign policy really just backs away. I did not look into this very much at all. But the formal government structure shuts down on the Universal Declaration around the UN. She is literally taking trains and planes, travelling to Idaho to meet with people. There is an American UN Association and she goes down after her resignation is accepted, and she volunteers to help them. But the official government structures shut down around this.

In fact, we did not pass the covenant on political rights till 1992. We are one of four countries that still have not ratified the covenant on economic and social rights. So there is just an insular attitude in the country. At one point, I was not going to do the Universal Declaration, I was going to drop it out, and a friend who does a great deal of travelling around the world said, "Don't you dare! You keep that in there." Because she realized that Eleanor was one of the few Americans who really championed human rights, and we

These Triangle years were those in which she was moving the family around, having the babies, and she was not really very engaged at that time.

Q. I suppose there are plenty of examples of people like her from privileged backgrounds who support labor rights or what might be called progressive causes. But what seems extraordinary about her is that she seemed to thrive upon getting in the coal mine or visiting the seamstresses. I am just wondering why you think this is? Was it just her personality, or were there experiences she had?

A. ER's connection with people is interesting because she was basically very shy. One of my favorite quotes is when she says, "you must do the thing that you think you cannot do." That came up when she was asked to go to the United Nations. At first, she said she was not qualified, she was not a diplomat, she was not an elected official. I think going out and meeting people starts with Marie Souvestre, the head mistress of the Allenswood school. She took her out to various places and to meet with people. When she comes home during the Progressive era she applies what she learned in England. There is a group of young debutantes who do not want to just do the parties, and they start working in the settlement houses. The Consumer League was very important to her, as she went with an older woman to visit the sweatshops and tenements and to talk with the women who were working in the retail stores. She says that she really did not know anything about that and was nervous. I think that started when she was young, and she saw it as something that she got a lot out of. For whatever reason, she was very

reporters present belonged to the same union. Others in the press and on Capitol Hill, however, wanted to know how the First Lady could join such a "Communist" organization. Extraordinary then and now! She was a member of the Guild for over 25 years and had her union card in her wallet when she died.

For others trying to join a union, however, the fight was bloody. It is hard to imagine today what it was like in 1936. Within days of the First Lady's announcement, Flint, Michigan became a battle ground. Members of the newly energized United Automobile Workers Union shut down Fisher Body, a key General Motors plant, and the famed sit-down strikes were underway. The Women's Emergency Brigade was met in the streets by the police and national guard. Across the country companies stockpiled weapons and hired paramilitary forces. Many workers were intimidated, brutally beaten, and some were killed. Workers fought back.

A month later, as the strikes and the violence escalated, ER, as she often signed her name, met with a group of young women in New York City who were out of work because of their union activities. She told her readers that "Many people do not believe in unions. Unquestionably unions and their leaders are not always wise and fair any more than any other human beings. There are only two ways to bring about protection of the workers, however, legislation and unionization." The Wagner Act combined these strategies.

The First Lady was a skilled political operative, effective government negotiator, seasoned diplomat, inspirational public speaker,

"[Eleanor Roosevelt] was a member of the [Newspaper] Guild for over 25 years and had her union card in her wallet when she died."



influential columnist, author—and a proud union member. She wrote 27 books, over 8,000 columns, over 50 articles a year, and answered thousands and thousands of letters. She gave an average of 50 speeches a year and attended an unending series of meetings. Her radio programs and television shows reached millions of people. Her “My Day” column, written from 1936-1962, six days a week, provides the clearest record of her support for labor. An average of two columns per month specifically mentioned unions, providing over 600 columns that form a central part of this story along with her speeches to union conventions. She loved new technology and I have no doubt that today she would be on Facebook, have a web page, and she would tweet and blog. For a new education tool, you can go to the Eleanor Roosevelt Papers web page and find all 8,000 of her columns on-line. You select a date, pull up her column and print it out: www.gwu.edu/~erpapers.

How did this happen? How did a woman from such wealth and privilege, wife of one President of the United States, the niece of another, become so committed to workers and their unions? As a young girl Eleanor Roosevelt went off to boarding school where her headmistress taught her the importance of giving back to society, not just with charity balls and turkeys at Thanksgiving, but by learning about the underlying social and economic problems. She first learned about working conditions when she returned from England as a young debutante volunteering in a settlement house on the lower east side of Manhattan. After she married the dashing young Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1905, she had six children in ten years.

to ask about her experience in New York City. You mentioned the Triangle Fire in 1911, and you know that Frances Perkins was really jolted by that. I was just wondering if Eleanor was there, if it had a similar impact on her, and if she had a relationship with Frances Perkins that early?

A. No, she did not. And I don't want to quite say she was not there. Near the time of the Triangle Fire, her third child, Franklin Jr., had died in late 1909, and she had her fourth child Elliott in late September 1910. There is no record that she was engaged or even aware of the fire. Except Franklin does go to Albany and, while it was not on the top of his list, he ends up supporting the reform legislation that comes out from the commission that was set up in response to the Triangle Fire.

She begins to work with Frances Perkins in the 1920s. She strongly encouraged FDR to appoint Perkins as the first woman industrial commissioner of New York State. There is a wonderful picture of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Triangle Fire, which is on the corner in New York. Dubinsky is there and several of the survivors. Rose Schneiderman is there. Frances Perkins and Eleanor Roosevelt, these very old ladies are looking at each other with such affection. That does not mean they did not have disagreements, and there were issues. She was not involved in the suffrage movement at all. When she started getting active during World War I, just helping with the events for the service people, she was not involved with this issue. Franklin only came belatedly to support suffrage. But then once the vote happens, and the Democratic Party comes to see all these people can vote, she gets really energized and helps organize women to vote.

support for the union, while not going along with some of what was going on with the Communists in New York whom she disagreed with.

The situation gets much trickier and more difficult in 1949 when the CIO expels the Communist unions. They did the most for organizing women and minorities. But there were a lot of other things combined in that. They had supported a third party. She finally comes to the conclusion that with the new IUE that was formed, that expelling the Communists was the right thing to do.

You can disagree with that. But she struggled with the issues. She pushed when she could. She strongly spoke out against McCarthy. The Communist Party was legitimate and legal. You should be able to express those beliefs. They should be taught in labor education programs. Trade unionists and workers needed to understand what are the positions of the Communists and their philosophy. The only way to defeat them was to understand their ideas. Again she was vilified, and she was under a lot of pressure as were the labor education programs at the time to not do any of that, to just totally ignore it.

Communism comes up again after the merger. George Meany, very anti-communist, and the others will have nothing to do with the WFTU and unions that have Communist trade unionists in them. She and Reuther both struggle with that and have an argument with Meany over that. So it's complicated.

Q. (Jim Green) On the last point, I suppose in a way she was trying to keep the Popular Front alive, even after so many liberals had thought it was over after the war. But maybe not. I wanted

During this time she encouraged FDR's work as a young legislator with the craft unions in Albany and when he became assistant secretary of the Navy. She learned much of her organizational skills managing the family and staff as they moved several times a year from Manhattan to Hyde Park, to the summer home in Campobello, then Albany and Washington, DC. This included negotiating with her formidable mother-in-law Sarah, as well as with the Oyster Bay Teddy Roosevelt family.

It was not until the 1920s, however, when she met Rose Schneiderman, a cap maker by trade and fiery union organizer by vocation, that she was introduced to the Women's Trade Union League. There she learned about the social unionism of the garment trades. She began to see progressive unions as a critical part of the solution not only to the problems of poor wages and dangerous working conditions, but also of housing, health care, financial assistance, and cultural life. She soon introduced her husband to these union women. A young Rose Schneiderman was organizing workers on the lower east side of Manhattan when Eleanor was teaching music and dance to children in the settlement. With Eleanor Roosevelt's help, the Women's Trade Union League celebrated their twenty-fifth anniversary at the Roosevelt estate in Hyde Park in 1929. Factory girls, state labor leaders, and politicians went by boat up the Hudson River to the Roosevelt home. *The New York Times* reported that there had never before been such a gathering, but it would not be the last.

“[Eleanor Roosevelt] began to see progressive unions as a critical part of the solution not only to the problems of poor wages and dangerous working conditions, but also of housing, health care, financial assistance, and cultural life.”

The White House years and beyond...

ER's experiences with unions broadened when she entered the White House to include miners, steel and electrical workers, porters, migrant farm workers, and teachers. By 1940 she came to see labor unions as exemplifying fundamental democracy. In 1922 she asked Rose Schneiderman "Why should women join unions?" but by 1941 she told striking members of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers that she believed that "everyone who was a worker should join a labor organization." And she practiced what she preached.

Early in the administration Eleanor Roosevelt attended the first hearing on a labor bill under the New Deal to hear Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins testify. Over 400 people crowded the hearing room, in no small part because the First Lady was there reinforcing the President's concern. In 1933 a cartoon in *The New Yorker* made fun of the idea of the First Lady going into a coal mine, but in 1935 she spent an hour and a half in the Willow Grove Mine near Bellaire, Ohio, with the local president of the United Mine Workers Union and the company president. The subject was mine safety. At the same time she never lost sight of the workers' families. That same year she encouraged mine workers' wives to resist the company stores in an article for the *United Mine Workers Journal*. She encouraged all workers to join unions at the IBEW picket line. Under the New Deal, organized labor grew from 3 million to 8 million members during the decade; an increase from 10 percent to 23 percent of the workforce.

"...she told striking members of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers that she believed that 'everyone who was a worker should join a labor organization.'"

leaders had to do it. You did not single out one group.

An interesting story about her membership in the Newspaper Guild.... Around 1940, there was this columnist, Westbrook Pegler, who was sort of the Rush Limbaugh of his day, an incredibly influential newspaper columnist and magazine writer. He was initially very supportive of the Roosevelts, and he then became very antagonistic, particularly toward Eleanor and the unions. He wrote in his column that she did not deserve to belong to a union because she was a dilettante, she was not really a trade unionist, and she hung out with union thugs who were Communists. She should resign from the union. So there was all this back-and-forth with the union. She believed if you were in a group, you should participate and try to change things.

She had tried to change the Daughters of the American Revolution when they refused to let Marian Anderson sing at the DAR Hall. And she resigned very publicly from that group because she thought their racist policies were wrong. With the Pegler attack she starts to go to union meetings, takes her card, and attends. She finds out that the New York local is dominated by Communists. They are very much against FDR having a third term. There is lots of maneuvering going on. She goes to meetings, votes on various issues on the losing side. And her colleagues are saying, "Don't resign. That is exactly what they want. They want you out of the union." So she resolves the issue by resigning from the New York local and taking her membership to the Washington D.C. local where she was living. She becomes active with the Washington D.C. local. She found a way to maintain her belief and

that Walter Reuther gets invited to the dinners. She makes sure that so-and-so is at that event. It was not just social. She had an agenda. She knew which people would help influence FDR.

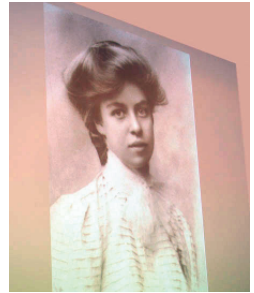
The clearest example of ER's influence on FDR was in the correspondence and reports with A. Philip Randolph leading up to FDR's Executive Order 8802, the Fair Employment Practices Committee, and prohibiting racial discrimination in government contracting during World War II.

Q. (James Williamson) To push a little further into the question that was touched upon when you discussed A. Philip Randolph, the CIO had a lot of people who thought of themselves as Communists or Socialists who helped build the organization. Of course, the Communist Party had a history during that period and would have been involved in some of the organizations that she was aligning herself with in some ways. Did she ever talk about that? How did she see that relationship? Moving into the later 1940s and early 1950s, with the rise of McCarthyism and Loyalty Oaths and all that, how did she respond to some of those attacks?

A. This period was absolutely the hardest part of the book to write, the late 1940s and early 1950s. I had sort of grown up with the understanding that there were Communists and anti-communists, and that was kind of good. But in fact that was not the case. There was a much larger group in the middle. She left some organizations where she felt the Communist influence had become too strong. But she wrote strongly against the provisions with labor leaders having to take loyalty oaths as part of Taft-Hartley. If labor leaders had to do it, then corporate

In the 1940s, ER joined forces with Walter Reuther, the visionary young leader of the UAW, to argue for a full employment policy at home and economic aid, rather than military containment, abroad. They took strength from each other. Reuther became her strongest ally in the labor movement. Walter Reuther, his wife May and their daughters visited Val-Kill often and were the last friends to see ER there before her death. After a speech to the CIO in 1944, Jim Carey, leader of the electrical workers, wrote to ER that she did not fully know “how much it meant to the workers to have someone of her position understand and defend them so strongly.”

Eleanor Roosevelt did understand what the unions gave to her. In contrast to the scene in Flint, Michigan in 1936, in 1940 she spoke at the ILGWU convention at the World's Fair in New York. Over 120,000 people crowded into the Court of Peace. Musicians from the Metropolitan Opera Company performed, along with the Eva Jessye Choir, the nation's foremost African American choir, along with the union symphony orchestra and chorus. She told the delegates that while union members had their own individual preferences and the freedom to say and do as they liked, they had to discipline themselves to achieve results for all of the members. “That is so in the labor movement as a whole,” she said, “and that is so in a democracy.” The next day, she told her readers “I get such a sense of power and solidarity from a meeting like yesterday's that I can face the uncertainty of the future with far more strength and courage.” Also in 1940, for the first time she went to Congress not to listen to someone else,



Young Eleanor
Roosevelt

but to testify herself before a committee. In this case she was testifying on behalf of migrant farm workers.

ER's influence continued to grow after FDR's death. In 1955, she was a keynote speaker at the historic merger convention of the AFL and the CIO. On my web site you can watch the video of ER giving this speech at the peak of labor's power. Unions represented 35 percent of the workforce. At the same time, she did not hesitate to criticize union leaders when she thought they were not assuming the new responsibilities that came with increased power and not living up to their ideals.

She became a harsh critic of John L. Lewis for his frequent strikes that often paralyzed the country, but she never lost her concern for the miners themselves. She called on labor to end corruption from within and she strongly defended A. Philip Randolph, president of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, and his call to end racial discrimination within unions. She continued to see unionization as the best route for women to improve their working lives, although, in retrospect, she clearly underestimated how long that was going to take. When many of her contemporaries were retiring, she continued to develop new alliances as she grew older. For example in 1959, when A. Philip Randolph asked her to join the National Farm Labor Advisory Committee, she agreed and was an active member.

Labor and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights...

I want to turn now to ER's proudest achievement at the United Nations. In 1945,

she took him with her. He was known to the kids as "her feller." She reports in her autobiography that they got to the street with the horses and the garbage and the smell and the noises, Franklin turned to her and said, "My God, I didn't know people lived like that." She credits that as Franklin's first awareness about what work might be like for other people. I use it as an example of her first influence on Franklin to introduce him to that world, as she did later with the Women's Trade Union League.

At one point during FDR's service as Governor of New York, there was an issue of old age pensions and someone said, why are you not doing anything on this? She said, "We have argued so long that we are no longer on speaking terms on that subject." He will not move. So it was that kind of activity.

One other quick story: it is the late 1930s, John L. Lewis is really unhappy with Roosevelt. Part of the split with John L. Lewis had to do with his endorsement of Wendell Willkie in 1940. At one point, one of John L. Lewis's aides came to the White House, and he reported that Eleanor called him aside to the sitting room to have tea and she said, We need to talk because you understand we both work with prima donnas, and we have to figure out how to control this.

So there are hints of that underlying influence. She very much pushed him on the fair employment practice issues in 1938. A lot of her most outspoken labor issues, however, come in the 1950s on right-to-work and the public sector unionism after she has left the White House. Especially during the war years, however, FDR veers and drops a lot of his labor issues. That's where she picks up with Reuther. She makes sure



Mildred Wurf and daughter Abigail

not an active part of that Democratic coalition like Walter Reuther, James B. Carey, and the others, this kept them somewhat more distant on a social level. There's no question they worked closely together and had a great deal of respect for one another. She was vilified in the press, particularly in the Southern press, though not exclusively, for her civil rights work. The Ku Klux Klan had a bounty on her head. A bomb exploded in a church in the 1950s right before she got there to speak. She refused to be intimidated. That group of civil rights leaders all knew of her support. She went on the board of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund.

I sometimes get frustrated that A. Philip Randolph is often remembered as a civil rights leader, but the fact that he was a labor leader often gets dropped out. It was a very important connection.

Q. (Barry Bluestone) I wonder if you could say a little bit about Eleanor's influence on FDR on labor issues?

A. She was very careful in the White House years. She really believed that you could get a lot done if you did not care who got credit. Sometimes it was really hard to trace her influence. But going to that hearing on the Black bill to listen to Frances Perkins' testimony, I do not believe it was Franklin's idea. I cannot actually prove this. Coming out of New York, she saw that she could make a difference. She could often push him much farther than he was originally willing to go.

But my first and most concrete example of her influencing him was in the tenements in 1904. She was visiting one of the children who was sick in her home. Franklin was visiting from Harvard so

after FDR's death, President Truman asked ER to become a delegate to the United Nations. Much has been written about her role in creating the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, including the fine work of Harvard Law School's Mary Ann Glendon, but little is known about labor's role with her. The AFL and CIO strongly supported including human rights in the UN charter. They agreed on little else in 1945. Only seven NGOs were then given consulting status with the Economic and Social Council to attend meetings, suggest agenda items, and present positions. They could do everything but vote. Three of them were labor groups: the AFL, the World Federation of Trade Unions, where the CIO played a leading role, and the European International Confederation of Christian Trade Unions.

As the widow of the President of the United States, but also as an advocate of international humanitarian causes, ER brought her considerable political and organizational skills to the task of defining human rights for the world, including workers, women and men, of all colors and nationalities. More than most seasoned diplomats and politicians, she understood how intertwined domestic and international policy had become. During the war she fought to preserve and strengthen the social and economic policies of the New Deal. In 1944, however, she also told delegates to the Amalgamated Clothing Workers convention they had to recognize that economic problems were global in scope and only international solutions would be effective. The most important lesson of recent history, she affirmed, was that the only way to prevent more

“The AFL and CIO strongly supported including human rights in the UN charter. They agreed on little else in 1945.”

destructive wars was “by giving people all over the world hope for better economic conditions.”

On January 1, 1946, the U.S. delegates embarked on the Queen Elizabeth for the trans-Atlantic voyage to the opening meeting of the UN General Assembly in London and a new role for ER. She worked very hard and was an experienced committee member. She facilitated helpful informal exchanges by inviting people to meetings in her apartment and her fluency in French enabled her to hold some discussions in a neutral language. At the same time, her “My Day” columns described the UN proceedings in detail, including the labor discussions.

The Economic and Social Council asked ER to join a small group to make recommendations for a permanent Human Rights Commission. Just as Goodwin describes how Lincoln orchestrated a team of political rivals, ER guided a complex international team of philosophers, lawyers, politicians, diplomats, and trade unionists. At an early hearing her old friend Rose Schneiderman was the only woman to testify. She sought to include rights for women, such as the right to work at profitable employment, equal pay, to vote, and to bargain collectively, and she supported a sub-commission on the Status of Women.

In August 1946, Jim Carey and his family arrived at Hyde Park for the weekend. Carey had just returned from a trip to Russia, Germany, Paris, and London. He brought greetings from Russian friends and sent her a copy of the CIO delegation’s report on the executive committee meetings of the WFTU in Moscow. ER was anxious “to hear all about your travels,” and no doubt included his

Q. (Chris Mackin) Could you speak about Eleanor Roosevelt’s relationship with A. Philip Randolph, and how important this was?

A. The relationship was very important. She actually addressed in 1940 the convention of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters in New York City. The stance she took on racial issues and how they overlapped and combined with labor issues were really important. She was First Lady, she goes to Harlem, and she addresses this group of not only trade unionists, but they are also African American trade unionists. A. Philip Randolph saw her as a real ally. There was one letter I came across after they got the fair employment practice law through to affect government contracting during the war. He said, Dear Mrs. Roosevelt, I am just writing to thank you for all that you do. You do not need to answer this. I just want you to know we appreciate you. She often lost these fights with the Congress and FDR. But she was an ally they could turn to.

One of the things I could not figure out was, why so many labor leaders ended up at the White House, but Randolph did not. I asked some other historians, and no one seemed to really know. I finally figured it was two things. One, A. Philip Randolph did not socialize a great deal with anyone, and not outside the African American community. Second, he was a Socialist. He did not vote for a Democratic President until Lyndon Johnson.

And still Eleanor Roosevelt worked closely with him. Randolph had a huge fight in 1961 with George Meany. Eleanor comes out strongly in the paper in support of Randolph and criticizing Meany. She rarely did that, she was very careful to stay neutral on all sides. But she was a Democrat to her core. Because Randolph was

and they have hundreds of writers who write for free. We thought that maybe there should be some sharing there. The picket line is now down.

Reaching the public is a real challenge for historians. It is a real challenge to do what Eleanor Roosevelt did. She wrote that column. Some of them were not very good, and they were all over the place. But she got those messages out. The radio interviews I have done are a very helpful way to reach the public. I get very frustrated at local political meetings these days, and they say, well, the New Deal got change through in one hundred days, what's wrong with the current Administration. I reply, everything FDR got through was overturned by the Supreme Court. It took the second term to really get those laws enacted and approved by the Supreme Court.

The other thing I try to do, by going to the unions, is reinforce that Eleanor Roosevelt tried really hard to get the unions to do more of their own educating of the public. We spend a huge amount of time talking to each other. One of the exercises I do in this workshop is to take International Human Rights Day and to ask the participants to come up with an event where they can reach out to the broader community and talk about democracy, voice at work, and not about whatever the current issue is with wages and working conditions. But we need to partner with these larger coalitions. They sometimes know more about the Universal Declaration of Human Rights than the labor people do. They don't always know about Eleanor Roosevelt's connections with labor and the declaration. It's a long answer. But I would say we have a long way to go.

ideas for the Human Rights Commission.

In January 1947, David Dubinsky, her friend, and Mathew Woll, a sometime adversary at the AF of L, came to see ER about the human rights bill they had presented to the commission. She told her readers, "It is natural, of course, that labor unions should be interested in human rights. And one of the things that I hope will evolve from any bill of this kind is the right of people to economic as well as political freedom." That same month, the AF of L hired Toni Sender as their full-time staff representative at the United Nations. Sender was a German journalist who had been active in social democratic politics and served in the Reichstag. She and Eleanor Roosevelt had much in common.

In 1947, as the debate continued, a sub-committee was established to gather all of the resolutions and amendments. The WFTU had only a part-time staff representative there, but ER was conscious of the divide within the U.S. labor movement, and Sender reported that ER "repeatedly insisted that if any mention of the WFTU was adopted the AF of L must be given the same place." The labor issues were the subject of discussion for the next year.

Mounting international tensions complicated the process of consensus-building for delegates to the commission. When General Charles de Gaulle of France proposed that trade unions be replaced by associations where employers and employees had equal rights, ER noted dryly that "trade unions were the first organizations to be dissolved" under Hitler. She saw the State Department's efforts to have the CIO withdraw



Question from
Simon Weller

from the WFTU as shortsighted. She believed it was important for American unionists to engage in dialogue with their counterparts in other countries and “find points of agreement on which to work together.”

The work on human rights moved forward. ER made a strong endorsement of the economic and social rights, as well as the political and civil rights. She stated that from the perspective of the United States, trade union rights were an essential element of freedom, the recent passage of the Taft-Hartley law notwithstanding. “While other associations had long enjoyed recognition,” she explained, “trade unions had met with much opposition and it was only recently that they had become an accepted form of association. The struggle was, in fact, still continuing, so her delegation thought, therefore, that trade unions should be specifically mentioned.”

The commission also took up the issues of the closed shop and the right to strike, but these were soon referred to the implementation process, where covenants would be developed that had legal implications. Other debates were held on equal pay, discrimination, remuneration, family allowances, rest and leisure. ER also continued to find time between her meetings with kings and queens, presidents, ambassadors, and diplomats to visit a training program for German refugees in the working class section of Paris, largely funded by unions in the United States.

When the UN General Assembly convened in Paris on September 21, 1948, the international situation was deteriorating rapidly. On the week of November 15, the committee took up discussion

anything about her labor work. That included a talk I gave at Sarah Lawrence College, where I was thrilled to be introduced by Franklin D. Roosevelt III. He is an economist there. I thought, uh, oh. I kind of quit interviewing Roosevelt family members because nobody ever seemed to know anything about ER’s work with unions. He said, I really thought I knew my grandmother very well. I remember meeting Walter Reuther at Hyde Park one time. I had no idea she had this level of commitment. So beginning with the Roosevelt family, it’s an education process. I have not actually found myself with very many groups that were not generally sympathetic. I spent a day at the California State Fair. They have a California authors’ corner. That is where I found the most people who asked, why should we care about ER or why should we care about unions? Those are, of course, the hardest people to reach.

Along these lines, the other thing I have been doing is giving talks at schools from elementary school to university. I gave talks to my grandsons’ first, third, and sixth grade classes. And I found there are no good children’s books on the labor movement – or very, very few. And Eleanor Roosevelt is a wonderful avenue. At universities, the audience of the undergraduates don’t know much about unions and frankly they did not care a lot. But I think they were intrigued. It is there I felt it was more important than ever to reach out.

I have written a lot of op-eds. I have written short blog pieces. I was very pleased that I got one in the Huffington Post. And then my union, the National Writers Union, UAW Local 1981, put up an electronic picket line around the Huffington Post. That was right after Arianna Huffington sold it to AOL for hundreds of millions of dollars,

“She stated that from the perspective of the United States, trade union rights were an essential element of freedom...”

Question and Answers

Q. (Susan Ware) I wanted to ask about some of your travels around the country and how people are responding to Eleanor Roosevelt. Obviously when you give your talk, you are reaching out to people who already know about Eleanor Roosevelt. As a historian, I worry that popular knowledge of anybody is just nil. And yet, Eleanor Roosevelt seems to be such a good vehicle and window for bringing an understanding of the twentieth century into contemporary life. I wonder if you could talk some more about the different groups you have spoken to around the country?

A. Over the past year I have spoken to a very wide-ranging group of people in part because of a travel grant from the Berger-Marks Foundation, which is a small foundation that only focuses on helping women organize into unions and develop leadership. Some colleagues who thought this book was wonderful said, “There are a whole lot of people around the country who are never going to read your book. How are you going to reach them with Eleanor’s message, to inspire and to improve their historical sense?” What’s come out of that is now on my webpage, a workshop guide. Now other people can take and use this material, download it into little sections or for a whole workshop and use her words to help inspire and get this historical message across. Mostly in the union talks I give there is a general interest in Eleanor Roosevelt. I give lots of political talks. People are there because they are friendly to begin with.

I have not found anyone who knew much of

on work related rights. The debates were long and contentious, and weary delegates grew irritated as they scrutinized the language of these fundamental principles again and again. As they took up the article on work in its original form, ER told her readers that it “gave everyone the right to work under favorable conditions and at fair wages with protection against unemployment.” Everyone had the right to equal pay for equal work and a decent standard of living. The article stated that “everyone is free to form and join trade and labor unions for protection of his rights and interests.” On Thanksgiving Day they addressed the related issues of workers’ family responsibilities and met until 11 pm. Between sessions, the Americans shared a holiday dinner. ER had managed to acquire two turkeys from the American Embassy.

With ER’s gentle, but firm guidance and close collaboration with the delegates from France, China, Lebanon, and many others, on December 10, 1948, just before midnight the Universal Declaration of Human Rights passed the General Assembly with 48 votes in favor and none against. The Soviets abstained. The President of the assembly ended the meeting with a special tribute to Eleanor Roosevelt, and the General Assembly responded with a standing ovation.

For labor, Mrs. Roosevelt had developed from someone who had access to powerful people to a political and diplomatic power in her own right. She was able to take their cause to the highest political levels and to the general public in ways that they were unable to do themselves. They also recognized the important way she connected with their members who were the critical base of their

“Everyone had the right to equal pay for equal work and a decent standard of living.”



own power. Now she had helped take their cause to the entire world through the United Nations. In 1949, Phil Murray showed the esteem in which they held her, by writing a letter to the Norwegian Parliament supporting her nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize.

ER took the message of human rights across the country and around the world, developing ever more allies and coalitions. In 1961, she shared the podium of the AFL-CIO convention with President John F. Kennedy, Secretary of Labor Arthur Goldberg, and the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King. That same year her life came full circle. She agreed to chair President Kennedy's first Presidential Commission on the Status of Women, where those around her included union women. The Declaration, however, was ER's proudest achievement. It remains the cornerstone of the powerful human rights movement around the world, but not so in the United States.

Public sector workers and right-to-work then and now...

Today, union membership has reached a level not seen since the Great Depression. Certainly improvements have been made since the days of the sweatshops and the Triangle Fire, which we honored this past year on the 100th anniversary of 146 mostly young immigrant women who died in the factory fire. Yet in December 2010, 24 women were killed in a garment factory fire in Bangladesh, the second of the year. Jobs have moved overseas and so have many of the worst working conditions and wages. In this country,

is narrow in concept, punitive and discriminatory against wage-earners, and is designed solely to benefit employers. I am opposed to it because its real aim is to destroy American labor."

Eleanor Roosevelt believed that workers rights are human rights. All unions and employers, public and private, need to maintain high standards of responsibility, accountability, and transparency. As ER argued, however, we need a system where "All interests shall be equally considered and concession shall never be expected from one side only." She firmly believed that democracy should include not only voting in government elections, but also having a voice in major decisions that affect our lives at work. When asking "Where, after all, do human rights begin?" she answered "In small places close to home... the neighborhood... the school...the factory, farm or office...unless they have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere."

ER's voice resonates today with the call for labor law reforms, not only to achieve economic gains, but also to restore a basic element of democracy to people who work for a living. She reinforces Jerry Wurf's beliefs "in the dignity of work, in improving the quality of lives of working people, in free open thought and debate about public policy issues, and to informed political action." And she told the delegates at a CIO convention, "We can't just talk. We have got to act. And we must see improvement for the masses of people, not for the little group on top."

Thank You.

"She firmly believed that democracy should include not only voting in government elections, but also having a voice in major decisions that affect our lives at work."

without paying for them. She wrote that “To protect collective bargaining and the interests of the workers are, in my view, the right thing to do and when state laws oppose this, I think the state laws are wrong.”

ER reported that a survey in Indiana found that only four percent of university students knew what a “right to work law” actually was. I wonder how different that figure is today. She devoted her 1958 Labor Day column to explaining the misnomer. She contended that right-to-work laws were a “political maneuver of employers” and were being deceptively presented as protecting workers rights. This misnomer was close to her heart as Article 23 of the UDHR began with the carefully crafted words “Everyone has the right to work.” She declared that the right to work laws were aimed at the destruction of human rights and did not concern themselves “one iota with human rights or the right-to-work.” Rather they were a “calculated and cunning smoke screen to beguile the innocent and unknowing.”

When the California ballot initiative used what she called “weasel words” and sought to give the impression that her husband had supported “the concept embodied in the so-called right to work laws,” she said that “the American public understands very well that Franklin Delano Roosevelt would never have supported such a reactionary doctrine.” The ballots were defeated in all the states but Kansas. She followed up with an article in the *American Federationist*, the AFL-CIO newspaper, with an article titled “Why I am Opposed to ‘Right to Work’ Laws.” She began with “I am opposed to this legislation because it

however, unemployment remains stubbornly high, wages have been stagnant for decades, and inequality is growing—one only needs to visit Wall Street or Oakland to see this dramatized. Just over 7 percent of the private sector workers belong to a union. Millions of workers are still not covered by the weakened National Labor Relations Act. While the reasons for union decline are complex, the well documented cases of workers routinely being harassed, intimidated, and fired for trying to join a union play a role. US unions have only recently begun to rediscover the UDHR. At the women’s trade union summer school in Florida this past August there was a young woman there from the AFL-CIO Solidarity Center in Cairo. She brought photographs of the uprising, and we did an evening program on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. She knew far much more about the document and its potential than our instructors or students.

The title of my book comes from the AFL-CIO and their tribute to Mrs. Roosevelt after her death. I think of the title often, “She Was One of Us,” when trying to answer some of today’s questions. As our teachers, police officers, nurses, fire fighters, the people who make our cities run and maintain our roads, come under attack. There are calls to not only lower their pay and pensions, but also take away their voice at work. Would ER support the workers? Both she and FDR worried that neither the industrial system nor the craft model would work smoothly in the public sector, and they looked for alternatives. They did not oppose unionization, as some would have you believe, but looked for adjustments and I suspect

“The Declaration ... was ER’s proudest achievement. It remains the cornerstone of the powerful human rights movement around the world, but not so in the United States.”

FDR's views would have developed in ways similar to those of his wife had he lived.

In the 1950s, public sector unions began to organize more forcefully under the leadership of Jerry Wurf and his colleagues. Eleanor Roosevelt struggled with the issues publicly in her column. She worried that public employee unions could usurp government power and she feared for the safety of children in schools and the sick in hospitals if the teachers and nurses could strike. She favored mediation and arbitration as ways to resolve disputes. But she also carefully considered the position of the workers. She was shocked when a city police commissioner refused to meet with a workers' grievance committee. She acknowledged budget problems, but asked if "any workers should be kept at starvation wages?"

By the late 1950s, she concluded that unionization in the public sector was necessary because employers in the public sector were little different from those in the private sector, refusing to listen to workers and treat them fairly. "Employees who are quite evidently not receiving a living wage and are dissatisfied with their conditions of work," she wrote, "would simply be slaves if they were obliged to work on without being able to reach their employers with their complaints and demand negotiation."

When teachers went on strike in New York City in 1962 shortly before she died, she wrote that there was no "method of complaint and adjustment that could take the place of collective bargaining with the ultimate possibility of a strike." She concluded that "Under the present set-up teachers have no other recourse but to strike to

draw attention to their legitimate complaints."

Indiana has just passed so-called right-to-work legislation. This same debate took a dramatic turn after the 1956 election. Ten years after the Taft-Hartley Act became law, 18 states had taken advantage of Section 14b and passed right to work laws. In 1958, six more states had right-to-work laws on the ballot: California, Colorado, Idaho, Kansas, Ohio, and Washington. On July 9, 1958, ER and former New York senator Herbert H. Lehman announced the formation of the National Council for Industrial Peace to oppose right-to-work legislation. They proclaimed that it was time for "all right-thinking citizens, from all walks of life," to protect the nation's economy and the worker's union security from "the predatory and misleading campaigns now being waged by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and National Association of Manufacturers." Seventy-five years old and in failing health, ER plunged into the fray of a hard-fought political campaign. Labor estimated that in Ohio alone, 4 million cups of coffee were poured at gatherings designed to "drown a proposed constitutional amendment in a sea of hostile votes."

ER was on familiar ground. This issue had been debated at the Human Rights Commission. A few years earlier she had told her readers that government should not force people to join unions, but when collective bargaining was in place, a majority of the workers should be able to decide on a requirement to join the union to protect their hard won status. There was no right to be a "free rider," to get the benefits of the union