



2012 Midwest School for Women Workers – Report to UALE Women’s Caucus

The 2012 Midwest School was held in Iowa City, Iowa and hosted by the University of Iowa Labor Center in cooperation with the Iowa Federation of Labor, AFL-CIO.

The school included leadership and skills course tracks as well as daily plenary sessions focused



on subjects like political economy, labor history, women’s rights, and the future of the labor movement (see attached agenda). Jennifer Sherer and Robin Clark-Bennett coordinated the school, in collaboration with a 10-person committee of Iowa women union leaders. Labor Center secretary Sarah Clark deftly handled all logistics and arrangements for the school.

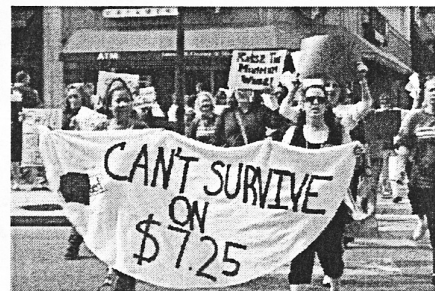
Fifty women from six states (IA, IL, MI, MN, MO, WI) attended the school from the following unions: CWA (10), USW (9), APWU (6), IBEW (5), UE (4), UFCW (3), UAW (2), IATSE (2), IBT (2), AFGE (2), OPEIU (1), AFSCME (1), ATU (1), SEIU (1), BCTGM (1). Twelve women attended the school with scholarship support. Six were funded by UALE, four by Berger-Marks Foundation scholarships for young women, and two by the AFGE Char Rains Memorial Fund.

Many talented instructors contributed to the program:

- UALE President and AFSCME Education Director Elissa McBride attended a portion of the school and taught a workshop on “Getting Members Involved in the Union.”
- APWU Local 44 leader Robin Arnold led a discussion group on “Finding Your Place in Your Local.”
- Eight instructors from university-based labor education programs taught classes at the school: Judy Ancel (U of MO-KC), Monica Bielski-Boris (U of IL-Champaign-Urbana), Gayle Hamilton (Wayne State), Michelle Kaminski (MI State), Barb Kucera (U of MN), Corliss Olson (U of WI), and Jen Sherer / Robin Clark-Bennett (U of IA).

Special events during the school included:

- planning and participation in a local minimum wage rally
- performance of the play “Bread, Roses, and Buttons” about the life of labor activist Pearl McGill



- screening of *Mother Jones: America's Most Dangerous Woman* and discussion with director/labor historian Rosemary Feurer
- labor trivia night led by Iowa Federation of Labor WIN Organizer Tracy Leone

As it does each year, the 2012 Midwest School made a difference in union women's lives, and many participants described it as a life-changing experience. Participant feedback included comments like these:

- *"The impact it has had on me is a landmark in my life. And there will be more landmarks!! I hope to remember this experience as something I need to make sure happens for others."*
- *"I learned a lot about union history, women's history in the unions, current hot topics going on in our country, and how we can be an effective leader in today's world."*
- *"I have learned so much this week, and my eyes have been opened to things that I didn't know existed."*
- *"I had the best time meeting such strong, inspiring women."*
- *"I am excited to bring new knowledge and information to other members."*
- *I will encourage and mentor more women to get involved in the union."*
- *"Communication skills class really boosted my confidence with my sisters near and far, and reminded me that even though we are all so different . . . we are so much the same. I believe I will be able to help and inspire leadership in others."*

Many thanks to UALE and the Women's Caucus for their role in supporting and sustaining the Women's Schools.

In sisterhood and solidarity,
Jennifer Sherer & Robin Clark-Bennett

