

1765: The first society of working women, the Daughters of Liberty, is organized.

1824: Women workers strike for the first time, in Pawtucket, R.I. 102 women workers strike in support of brother weavers protesting a reduction in wages and extension of the workday.

1839: Susan B. Anthony starts her teaching career in New York, first in New Rochelle, and then at the Canajoharie Academy in 1846. She fought for wages equivalent to those of male teachers, since men earned roughly four times more than women for the same duties.

1845: The Female Labor Reform Association is formed in Lowell, Mass., by Sarah Bagley and other women cotton mill workers to reduce the workday from 12 or 13 hours a day to 10, and to improve sanitation and safety.

1863: Women in Troy, N.Y., organize the Collar Laundry Union. They went on strike and won an increase in wages. The leader of the laundryworkers' union, Kate Mullaney, became assistant secretary of the National Labor Union.

1869: Women shoemakers form the Daughters of St. Crispin, the first national union of women workers.



1872: Congress passes a law giving women federal employees equal pay for equal work.

1881: 3,000 black women laundry workers in Atlanta stage one of the largest strikes in the history of the South.

1892: Mary Kenney O'Sullivan of the Bindery Workers is appointed the AFL's first female national organizer.

1903: Mary Harris "Mother" Jones leads a protest of mill children. Many were victims of industrial accidents.



1909: "Uprising of the 20,000" female shirt-waist workers in New York strike against sweatshop conditions.

1914: A small army of goons hired from the Baldwin-Felts agency lay down a barrage of machine gun fire on a strikers' tent village at Ludlow, Colo., killing men, women and children.

1919: Fannie Sellins of United Mine Workers is shot to death by coal company guards in Brackenridge, Pa.

1931: Clara Holden, National Textile Workers Union organizer is abducted and beaten by vigilantes in Greenville, S.C.

1933: Francis Perkins, the first woman in a presidential cabinet, serves as Secretary of Labor throughout the Roosevelt administration, 1933-45.



Labor coalition stakes claim for women's rights



CLUW members have long supported social justice issues, such as ending apartheid in South Africa and protesting human rights violations in China.

By Liza Frenette
New York Teacher

They began during the rise of the women's movement, meeting in airports after flying in from different parts of the country.

Clustered together in molded plastic lounge chairs, they talked about how they wanted a voice as both laborers and feminists; they felt a women's group was needed for working women.

"Don't forget, when we started CLUW, all (business) letters were signed 'fraternally,'" said Joyce Miller, CLUW past president and member of UNITE HERE, the union representing textile, hotel and restaurant workers.

By 1974 they were ready: They held their first convention as the Coalition of Labor Union Women in Chicago.

Organizers "tried to get extended credit with the hotels because we had no money," recalled Gloria Johnson, CLUW past president and member of the Communications Workers of America.

Today, they are still the only national women's organization within the labor movement, now representing 56 national and international labor unions.

Staking a claim for women in the workplace remains Job One. Carol Rosenblatt, CLUW executive director, said in the last census women earned 77 cents for every dollar a man earns. She invites a comparison of a social worker to a construction worker, saying the

pay gap shows how the former "is not valued in the way it should be."

The benefits to being unionized include better wages, health benefits, a stronger voice and pensions.

Problems that too often end up in working women's corners — leave time pay, day care — are really family issues and should be a part of collective bargaining, Rosenblatt said.

Today, CLUW President Marsha Zakowski of United Steelworkers is busy advocating for the organization's full agenda, including promoting passage of the Employee Free Choice Act.

"It will help more women come into the union movement," Zakowski said. Other priorities include pay equity, leadership training, cervical cancer education, and developing the Center for Educational Research.

CLUW has created health and wellness committees and regularly sponsors conferences on health issues. The organization's Web site, www.cluw.org, shows its



CLUW President Marsha Zakowski

ongoing charge for a health campaign. Calls are frequently sent out on the site for legislative action. With headquarters in Washington, D.C., CLUW is at the ready to move on issues.

"CLUW helps women form a bond," said Zakowski. With chapters in most states, "We develop programs at grassroots levels that give women personal contact."

Women now realize "they don't have to fight alone," said Johnson. "Their unions have been sensitized to these issues."

CLUW has helped create recognition for women within the labor movement, Miller said, but more is needed. "You have women at higher levels, but there are still few women presidents."

CLUW provides training for women, filling their toolboxes with ways to become more involved in their unions and aspire to office.

"CLUW interpreted the goals of the labor movement to the feminist movement, and the goals of the feminist movement to the labor movement," Miller said.

The coalition, she said, was responsible for persuading labor to take a stand and support the Equal Rights Amendment.

NYSUT Vice President Maria Neira, a member of CLUW's executive board, says the coalition is "a strong voice for women."

"CLUW provides a national forum for the issues our members care about," she said, noting 65 percent of NYSUT members are women.

Contact Liza Frenette at lfrenett@nysutmail.org

CLUW's principles

- Encourage women to be active; to be leaders.
- Address affirmative action in the workplace
- Get involved politically; encourage women to run for office
- Organize unorganized women

For membership information, visit www.cluw.org/membership

A woman of principles

Supporting the union is as important for teachers now as it was more than 75 years ago. Throughout the economic struggles of the 1930s to the political turmoil of the 1950s and beyond, Helen Weinstein's career reminds us of the personal and professional sacrifices some teachers have made to support what is best for education. This is her story, told by her grandniece, Brandy Marshall of Glenmont. Marshall is a former member of the Guilderland Teachers Association.

It was 1932, the height of the Great Depression. School officials at PS 225 in Brighton Beach, Brooklyn, decided to put 50 students in a single first-grade class.

(Today, the average first-grade class at PS 225 is 18.3.)

Tammany Hall's "Uncle John" McCooey insisted the city had no money to build an addition to accommodate the growing student population. Helen Weinstein, in her first teaching job, launched a protest anyway.

With her colleague Ralph Fagin and the support of the principal, Weinstein organized the parents. She borrowed a mimeograph machine, distributed leaflets and took part in parades. Ultimately, the Board of Education was forced to build a wing onto the school. Mayor LaGuardia received the credit and Weinstein and Fagin were subsequently transferred by Superintendent William O'Shea "for the good of the service," according to a 1932 article in *The Nation*.

Education and civic organizations from the PTA and local Chamber of Commerce to the Teacher's Union and ACLU protested the transfers, but to no avail.

"They should not have gone parading through the street and arousing the ire of the people against their employers ... They should not help to instigate public uprising," O'Shea told a group of parents, according to minutes taken of the meeting.

In fact, O'Shea believed he had done the teachers a favor by transferring them instead of firing them.

Weinstein was sent to PS 16 in Staten Island. Her commute was a two-hour ordeal.

From 1932-37, Weinstein worked in several New York City schools, but the next school to test her principles was PS 23 in Brooklyn.

Before she even began her job there, Principal Jesse Seehof called her in for a meeting. After initial pleasantries, he asked:

"Are you in favor of unions?"

"Of course," she answered.

Seehof made it clear he would not tolerate union business in "his" school, according to letters written sometime later by both Weinstein and Seehof to

the Board of Superintendents.

Seehof assigned Weinstein to a classroom that did not have enough seats and then claimed her students were unruly.

When Weinstein asked to move her class to the vacant adjacent room that had enough seats, Seehof considered her uncooperative.

Seehof faulted Weinstein, who earned about \$7 per day, for failing to make personal donations to every school fundraiser. Seehof threatened to give unsatisfactory ratings to those teachers who did not participate in the "voluntary" fundraisers.

Teachers were required to conduct daily inspections of students to make sure the children complied with the school's cleanliness regulations. The inspections included small details, such as

whether shoes were polished. Weinstein did not focus much on that part of the inspection.

As she later explained to the Board of Superintendents, "I could not find it in my heart to be too exacting on the question of highly polished shoes. I know from my contact with these children that there are many who cannot afford the simple luxury of shoe polish."

In March 1938, Seehof wrote a letter to Assistant Superintendent Oswald Schlockow, informing him of his intent to give Weinstein an unsatisfactory rating because of a lack of detail in her February inspection report. The poor rating

would likely prevent her from getting her permanent teaching certification

In June, Seehof had sent the Board of Superintendents a 20-page letter justifying his assessment of Weinstein. Among his reasons was her "use of voice:"

"There are teachers in this school who no longer use the same streetcar line as does Miss Weinstein because they are ashamed at the tone of voice used by this agitator ... Miss Weinstein's strident voice is known to the citizens who frequent the same restaurant; some of them have changed their restaurant because of it."

He wrote that her lack of self-control is the same as what he had witnessed in "too many union fanatics."

"It is very seldom that a teacher's speech is able to annoy me, but when, on rare occasions, I force myself to discuss an official matter with Miss Weinstein, I find the rush of blood to my head beyond my control and I am rarely able to perform other school tasks efficiently for the rest of the day."

The Teacher's Union, at the time an affiliate of the American Federation of Teachers, filed dozens of grievances against Seehof's administration, and in support of Weinstein.



Helen Weinstein resigned her teaching position rather than label a colleague a Communist.

Photo circa 1945

1935: Mary McLeod Bethune organizes the National Council of Negro Women, a coalition of black women's groups that lobbies against job discrimination, racism and sexism.



1941: Almost 7 million women enter the workforce, including 2 million in heavy industry during WWII.



1963: The President's Commission on the Status of Women documents discrimination against women in the workplace and makes recommendations for fair hiring practices, paid maternity leave, and affordable child care.

1963: Congress passes the Equal Pay Act, making it illegal for employers to pay a woman less than what a man would receive for the same job.

1966: The National Organization for Women is founded by a group of feminists including Betty Friedan. The largest women's rights group in the U.S., NOW seeks to end sexual discrimination, especially in the workplace.



1969: Mary Moultrie organizes a strike of 550 black women hospital workers in Charleston, S.C.

1972: The Equal Rights Amendment is passed by Congress and sent to the states for ratification. The amendment died in 1982 when it failed to achieve state ratification.

1974: In *Corning Glass Works v. Brennan*, the U.S. Supreme Court rules that employers cannot justify paying women lower wages because that is what they traditionally received under the "going market rate."

1978: The Pregnancy Discrimination Act bans employment discrimination against pregnant women.

1986: Sandra Feldman succeeds Albert Shanker as president of the United Federation of Teachers, becoming the first woman to head the largest local union in New York state.



2007: Arlene Holt Baker is named executive vice president by the AFL-CIO Executive Council, becoming the first African-American to be elected to one of the federation's three highest offices and the highest-ranking African-American woman in the union movement.

2008: Randi Weingarten, Antonia Cortese and Loretta Johnson are elected to the top leadership positions in the American Federation of Teachers. It's the first time three women hold the top posts in AFT, whose membership is more than 70 percent female.

Continued on page 26

A woman of principles

Continued from page 25

At a June 21, 1938, hearing, an unusual decision was made. The Board did not support several of the weaknesses cited, including “use of voice.” However, it did uphold Weinstein’s unsatisfactory rating for the term. More importantly, Assistant Superintendent Schlockow granted her permanent certification and recommended a transfer to another school.

At PS 36 in Brooklyn (1938-44) and later PS 189 in Manhattan (1944-53), Weinstein earned tremendous professional success.

Long before it was fashionable in education, her students were involved in cooperative learning and elaborate interdisciplinary projects. They created a Mexican fiesta, held an assembly about China, organized international pen pals and wrote an original play about the life of George Washington Carver.

While Weinstein’s career was relatively smooth during those years, America had become increasingly preoccupied with the worldwide spread of Communism.

In 1949, the New York State Legislature passed the Feinberg Law, which essentially barred members of “subversive groups” from teaching. Every school board in the state had to investigate its teachers annually and report the results to the Board of Regents.

In New York City, that mission was embraced by Superintendent William Jansen. By May 1950, he had suspended eight teachers for refusing to tell him whether they were Communists.

In 1953, Weinstein volunteered to transfer to PS 112, a school that was opening in the Bronx.

She got along well with students, parents, colleagues and administrators, and volunteered to create and organize the school’s library, among other projects.

By this time Jansen had become a national figure, even appearing on the cover of *Time* magazine on Oct. 19, 1953.

Assistant Superintendent Joseph Loretan required the elementary and junior high schools in his

“The right question about a teacher is whether he [sic] is competent. We have been so busy being sophisticated anti-Communists... that we have failed to observe that our educational responsibility is to have a good educational system. We do not discharge that responsibility by invading civil liberties, reducing the number of qualified teachers available... and intimidating the teaching staff.”

— Education philosopher Robert Hutchins, *New York Teacher News*, 1955.

districts to create and present a patriotic program for the public. At PS 112, Weinstein volunteered to take on that challenge.

She wrote, produced and directed a patriotic musical extravaganza: “This is Our Country.” It covered American history from Columbus’ journey to America through the Eisenhower era and involved every grade, K-6, in a song, dance or skit praising America’s greatness.

During the planning of the production, Weinstein was summoned to Jansen’s office. He wanted her to name one Communist on the faculty.

Weinstein had no intention of lying or ruining a colleague’s career in order to save her own. She submitted her letter of resignation instead.

“This is Our Country” was per-



In 1953, Helen Weinstein, seated between two students, volunteered to set up the school library in the newly opened Public School 112 in the Bronx.

formed on June 2, 1955. At its completion, the district superintendent stood up to praise the school’s principal for the fine work.

Compliments were echoed in letters from all over the community.

Not long after the school year ended, Weinstein realized that districts throughout the state had her name on a list. Even Staten Island was out of the question.

After more than 20 years of teaching in New York City — in four different boroughs — Weinstein had been blacklisted from teaching in New York state.

A year later, Weinstein landed a job at Greens Farms School in the prestigious Westport, Conn., school system.

It was an unlikely spot for Weinstein. The district had no union, and she would be one of the first Jewish teachers on staff.

Weinstein’s students accomplished amazing projects. They performed in original plays about Abraham Lincoln, such as “Lonesome Train” and “When Lincoln Learns to Read.” They created an educational television show as part of a State Department of Education experiment.

When Weinstein was ready to retire in 1967, the problem of

her New York exit became more apparent. Although she had taught and contributed to her New York pension for more than 20 years, only \$10,000 of the money was allowed by the state to be transferred to the Connecticut pension system. After 35 years of teaching, she received a \$200 per month pension. But there was a catch.

By law, public school teachers had been prohibited from taking part in Social Security, and no deductions were ever taken from the payroll. Although a 1954 revision made Social Security available to teachers with pension plans, the final decision was left to each state. Connecticut opted not to permit pensioned public employees from becoming part of the Social Security system. Today it is one of 14 states that does not participate.

Anticipating her future needs, Weinstein chose to pay into Social

Security. That cost more than \$200 per month. So, after years of dedicated teaching, Weinstein had a deficit monthly income for the first several years of her retirement.

Had she given Superintendent Jansen the name of just one “Communist” colleague in 1955, her New York pension would have been comfortable.

Weinstein, however, chose to stand behind her principles, and paid for it.

Helen Weinstein — my Great-aunt Helen — has an ineradicable spirit. She is 101 years old and living in Florida, where she maintains a modest apartment, cooks for herself and takes daily walks and swims.

President Obama, in his inauguration speech, spoke of “risk-takers ... some celebrated, but more often men and women obscure in their labor” who sacrificed individual ambitions “so that we might live a better life.”

As teachers, we are engrossed in the dynamics of our classroom and the politics of education. We may forget the teachers long before us who paved the way for the freedom and benefits we have today.

Now, it’s their turn to be celebrated.



ONLY ON NYSUT.ORG

Name that tune

Telephone hold music at NYSUT headquarters in Latham went from “Muzak” to music in February, thanks to a new union initiative. Callers put on hold are now entertained by any one of sixteen original student performances. You can listen online to the best submissions from around New York state.

Still time to celebrate

Find a link to the Celebration of Teaching & Learning’s new Web site that offers professional development resources. There’s still time to register for the March 6-7 event online, too. NYSUT is a leading sponsor of this premier professional development conference for educators.

Certification information

You can find the latest information about National Board Certification and the steps it takes to achieve it. NBC, developed for teachers by teachers, represents professional acknowledgment of “accomplished” teaching practice meeting the highest standards.

Flu prevention

NYSUT has reproduced a series of informational posters to help reduce and prevent transmission of the flu virus.

The posters, originally developed by the state Department of Health, urge people young and old to wash their hands, cover their coughs and avoid crowds where germs can spread.

All three posters are available for download in a single PDF document.

Organizer for retirees

The NYSUT Retiree Personal Organizer is available for download.

The organizer is a convenient tool for keeping track of personal information including:

- Union, professional and personal contacts
- Financial information
- Insurance coverage
- Deeds, titles and credit
- Memorial arrangements
- Wills and personal effects