

# Library Service to Labor Unions

By Miriam E. McNally \*

DENVER Public Library's work with labor unions was started on an organized basis in 1944, when the library's field representative, Ola Burgesser, was assigned to this as a special responsibility. An educational service has been carried on continuously with both CIO and AFL, in the following ways.

## CIO

The central council and members of all locals were visited by the field representative, who distributed brief booklists from the science and engineering department and talked to officers and members about the possibilities of library service for their unions. Special interest was shown by the largest local, United Rubber Workers of America, CIO, Local 154, which has a membership of 2,700 at the Gates Rubber Company.

Working with the field representative, union officials of Local 154 worked out an educational program using as a springboard a public forum on "The Joint Responsibility of Labor and Management in Bringing About Full Employment." This was presented jointly by the URWA and the library in the spring of 1945, and was attended by more than 200 people representing a complete cross section of labor and management groups in Denver, as well as educational and civic organizations.

Following this the library arranged for a book station to be installed at union headquarters and to be serviced by the library. Titles chosen by the union included books on the American labor movement and its history, some fiction dealing with labor themes, and a number of titles on general personnel management.

Union officials asked the assistance of the library's field representative in arranging for the extension department of the University of Denver to present an evening class on labor and labor history.

From time to time, at the request of the union's executive board, the field representative has attended union meetings with spe-

cial collections of books and given talks on subjects such as inflation and price control and the history of the labor movement in America.

## AFL

Following the same procedure used with the CIO locals, the field representative talked with officials of every AFL local in town regarding the possibilities of library services, asking for their suggestions, and distributing registration cards for the union members. At the request of two locals, special subject talks were given on the problems of inter-cultural education, and sample booklists on various trades were distributed at union meetings. The field representative conferred with the editor of the official AFL publication, the *Colorado Labor Advocate*, on titles of books available at the library for inclusion in their book column. The book editor of the *ADVOCATE* suggested a number of titles for purchase by the library.

The library has supplied book exhibits and books for circulation at the state workers education conference sponsored annually by the state AFL.

In 1946 the library's field representative helped plan the programs for a series of six panel discussions, "Labor's Town Meeting," presented by the state AFL, and took part on one of the panels. Books from the library were checked out at each of these meetings to members of the group. The entire series was open to the public and was held at Denver's famed Opportunity School.

The very friendly cooperation established with local unions as a result of the effective work of the library's field representative has been evidenced in practical ways which are of benefit to the library and so to the community at large. For example, the library's campaign for a \$2,500,000 bond issue for a new main library building was supported by both AFL and CIO locals without exception.

Such support is just one evidence of the growing awareness of organized labor that the public library is their library and that they have a real stake in it. Increasingly they

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