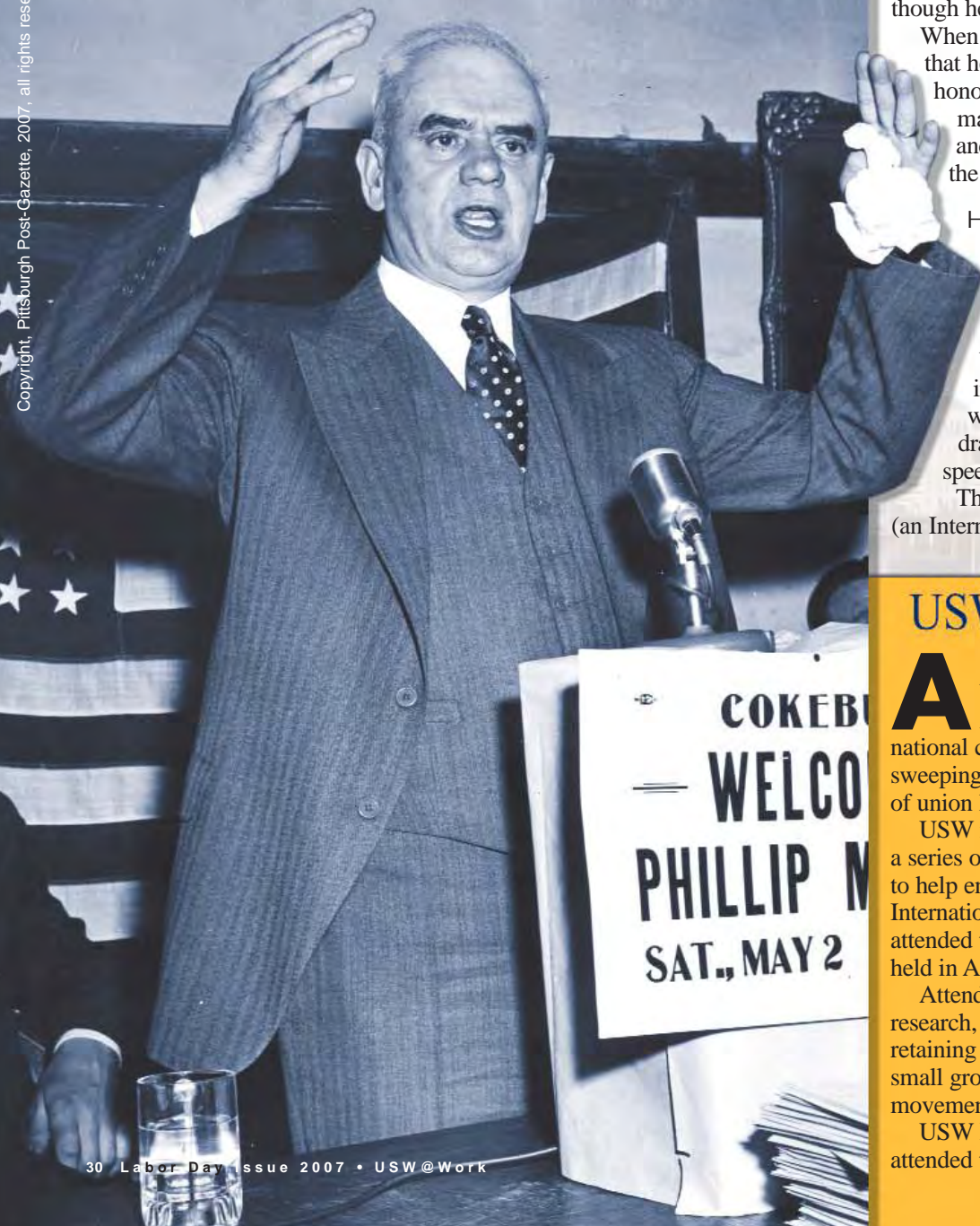


Phil Murray

USW Founder Changed Nation's Economics and Politics

By Russell W. Gibbons

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My first union card had the signature of Philip Murray at the bottom, and I carried it for many years after leaving the pig iron conveyor belts of the National Steel Co.'s Hanna Furnace in Lackawanna, N.Y.

Later I would come to the headquarters of the United Steelworkers of America in Pittsburgh, and found his picture was still on the walls even though he had been dead for 13 years.

When I sought out a dentist, I soon found out that he had been named Philip Murray, an honor his father had wished to bestow on the man who had effectively changed his life and allowed a son to enter college and not the mill.

Humble immigrant

And the "old timers" who formed the original Steel Workers Organizing Committee (SWOC) were still around in numbers. Many told stories of the humble immigrant from Scotland who went into the mines at Castle Shannon, Pa. when only 14 and who in time was able to draw thousands to hear his magnetic speeches.

The Allegheny County Council on May 1 (an International Day honoring working people in

most countries) acknowledged this pioneer of the modern labor movement by honoring him with a new designation for Pittsburgh's 10th Street Bridge, for decades the artery to the steelmaking South Side of the city. A 75-foot bell tower erected by the Steelworkers in the 1950s honors Murray in the Castle Shannon cemetery next to St. Ann's church.

Following final dedication on Labor Day, the Philip Murray Bridge will provide an appropriate companion to three sister spans that honor other greats in diverse fields who shared his Pittsburgh links.

The former 6th, 7th and 9th Street bridges are now known as the Roberto Clemente, the Rachel Carson and the Andy Warhol bridges. Each has a special connection to Pittsburgh and the forces that shaped 20th century America.

Special connections

One of the last true heroes of baseball, Clemente embodied the finest of Hispanic Americans, meeting his death in a humanitarian mission to Nicaragua.

Carson is commemorated as the spiritual founder of the modern environmental movement, initiating much of her work and the book "*Silent Spring*" in her Springfield, Pa. homestead, where she helped create an increased awareness of toxics and dangerous workplaces.

Andy Warhol brought attention to the rich cultural and artistic tradition of largely blue collar ethnic communities through his world-famous art and painting.

Ironically, the region's younger generation might recognize one or more of these bridge honorees, but it is unlikely that they would know of the man who lived in a modest suburban Pittsburgh home and who arguably changed the economics and politics of the second half of the last century.

If you entered the work force after 1950, you were affected by the dynamics of bargaining that were launched by Phil Murray and his concept of industrial democracy. His reach was immense — for 16 years he led the Steelworkers and for 12 he was president of the Committee — later Congress of Industrial Organizations, the CIO.

Shaped middle class

Consider wages, for that was a time when workers could shut down an entire national industry, which Murray and his Steelworkers did in 1946, in 1949 and in 1952, to gain what would be in time the fundamental building blocks for social policy achieved through collective bargaining.

Those strikes elicited outrage among the establishment and among many citizens, but they shaped the middle-class standard of living that included the non-union worker as well as the trade unionist. Now disappearing, pensions based upon years of service and health insurance for families became realities in America, with many employers emulating them.

Who was this Philip Murray, anyway? He made the cover of *Time* magazine and was a frequent guest at the White House of presidents Franklin D. Roosevelt and Harry Truman.

Historian Melvin Dubovsky said that Murray was different from his labor and industry peers: "He preferred to be among ordinary folk. In negotiations he persuaded, jollied and persevered ... Murray practiced a form of social democratic Catholicism."

Lessons to learn

One of Murray's confidants in his first decade leading the Steelworkers was Harold Ruttenberg, an economist who was the first research director of the USW. Murray told him, "was a man of the people, who had a touch of greatness, a Lincolnesque quality about him and who was essentially a working-class individual."

The Murray bridge will in a sense be a bridge to a past industrial century that represented both glory and power, proving the foundation for America's middle class, now itself in danger of eradication. As with all history, it offers lessons for those willing to learn.

Russell W. Gibbons was the last program director of the Philip Murray Institute of Labor Studies. He is a former editor and communications director of the USW.

USW Members Attend AFL-CIO Diversity Dialogues

A stronger union movement is the goal behind the AFL-CIO's Resolution No. 2. Adopted in 2005 at the federation's national convention, the resolution offers a sweeping plan that aims to increase the diversity of union leadership at all levels.

USW members and staff this summer attended a series of federation-sponsored workshops meant to help ensure the resolution becomes reality. International Vice President Fred Redmond attended the Detroit event. Other dialogues were held in Atlanta, San Francisco and Philadelphia.

Attendees heard from speakers, studied research, shared best practices for recruiting and retaining diverse union leaders and worked in small groups to come up with ideas on how the movement can do better from the local level.

USW Local 3657 member Marcia McGee attended the forum in Detroit and said she learned

much and brought a lot of information home that she spread to her union colleagues. "We now have Resolution No. 2, and it is time to make this resolution real," she said. "We must keep the diversity forums going and get progress from this."

In Philadelphia, AFL-CIO Executive Vice President Linda Chavez-Thompson said diversity is a vital issue for labor leaders. Almost half of union members are women and one in five is a person of color, she said.

"Often times because we're busy representing people or because we're busy negotiating contracts we lose sight of the fact that we're not doing enough to make sure that our leadership is diverse, that at all levels people can see themselves in

the leadership of their union," Chavez-Thompson told *USW@Work*.

"This is a very important dialogue for us. We're trying to make sure that we look like the labor movement that is out there today."

Welcome all

William Lucy, secretary-treasurer of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees and president of the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists, also attended the Philadelphia session. He said in order for labor to grow stronger — especially as it is under attack from multinational corporations and others — the movement has to welcome and develop all workers.

"The new work force is made up of young people, immigrants, African-Americans, women, gay and lesbian

workers, and the movement has a responsibility to represent their hopes and dreams and aspirations as a part of its basic work," Lucy said.

"Secondly, and equally as important, is to have those kinds of people at the table when policies and decisions are being made that relate to labor's mission — its economic mission, its political mission and certainly the issues that it will deal with on a social basis."

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You can hear more from the Philadelphia dialogue in POWERcast Episode 22. Download it on www.usw.org or from iTunes.