

*Chicago's Progressive Alliance
Labor and the Bid for Public Streetcars*

By Georg Leidenberger

(DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2006. Pp. viii, 202. Illustrations, maps, notes, select bibliography, index. \$35.00.)

This book joins a number of other works that have placed the “labor question” at the center of Progressive Era politics. Georg Leidenberger argues that the ability of labor unions to connect their interests to a civic or public interest explains how they became, in a “progressive moment,” the lightning rod for a movement for municipal ownership and control of the Chicago transit system.

Workplace and community-wide strategies that stretched the structural limits of the American Federation of Labor created a style of unionism capable of altering the landscape of power in Chicago. Unions of the teamsters and the teachers were the base for this transformation. Teamsters’ use of the sympathy strike—which included for example, the refusal to deliver goods to department stores when their women workers went on strike—was the vehicle for building a broadly based movement and for helping to make Chicago one of the most highly unionized cities in the country at the time. The teachers union recognized the need to engage in coalition-building and politics for their workplace demands, but also connected effectively with middle-class reformers.

These two unions, Leidenberger argues, brought to the fore an insurgent “metropolitan unionism” in the wake of the city’s 1903 streetcar

strike. Coalition building and articulation of the public interest in a safe, worker-controlled workplace helped to bring victory in that strike, which involved a significant amount of support for the strikers from the city’s middle-class residents. Unions came out of the strike with the ability to articulate a “public interest” agenda that centered on municipal ownership and management of the transit system. Mobilizing in the community and through their workplaces (teachers, for example, sent home petitions with school children), workers led the effort that brought reform mayor William Dunne to political leadership in the city.

Rather than seeing middle-class reformers at the center of the Progressive Era, Leidenberger insists that it was the working class that articulated the need for radical reforms. Middle-class allies were not as yet wedded to the notion of workers as pawns of graft and boss control, but rather viewed them as the potential base for a vibrant democratic agenda. The working- and middle-class coalition offered public control of commodities such as streetcar service as its carefully articulated solution to private greed— notions about functionalist politics and professional efficiency and distance were not as yet operative.

Leidenberger convincingly argues that these more familiar definitions came to define the Chicago school of progressivism only after a business coalition was able to defeat the base of labor power. This pro-business agenda was part of a national effort that sought to stanch the growth of labor power, one city at a time, through community networks. Spatial power, exemplified by the teamsters' control of the distribution network, had led to political power, and employers sought to reverse that advantage by eliminating the sympathy strike. In doing so, they also brought about a public relations campaign more sophisticated than the countersubversive one developed to squelch the eight-hour movement after the Haymarket riot fifteen years earlier. This campaign sought to label labor unions as antithetical to the public interest and began to break down the alliances between labor and middle-class reformers, although the full story of how this happened needs

more development than Leidenberg has given it. On the heels of the street-car strike, the municipal ownership campaign faltered and then failed. "Good government" functionalist views of regulation, led by middle-class reform organizations, ended the public transit campaign and superceded the labor-centered coalition.

Leidenberg's book is an important contribution to labor history as well as to the history of twentieth-century reform. His conclusion—that historians' definitions of Progressive Era reform do not consider the rise and defeat of alternative "progressive moments" shaped by labor insurgencies and counterinsurgencies—provokes a host of questions for future researchers.

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Daughters of the Union
Northern Women Fight the Civil War

By Nina Silber

(Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005. Pp. 332. Illustrations, notes, index. \$29.95).

There has been a recent flourishing of books on women's experiences in the U.S. Civil War. Nurses' letters have appeared, the work of female spies has been recounted, and historians have even recovered women's

experiences on the battlefield. As Nina Silber notes in *Daughters of the Union*, Confederate women's work has long been more famous than that of their Unionist counterparts, a bias that started during the war itself. But