

On Behalf of the I.W.W.: Helen Keller's Involvement in the Labor Movement

Mary M. Fleming and William H. Ross, Ph.D.

Department of Management

University of Wisconsin--La Crosse

Abstract: The paper describes Helen Keller's role in the labor movement during the 1910s and 1920s as well as the factors that led to her deciding to cease her labor activism. The thesis of this paper is that Helen Keller was first interested in the causes of industrial blindness. Gradually, she came to believe that the greed that caused employers to balk at installing safety equipment (the cause of many blinding accidents) was inherent in the capitalist system. As she made sympathy speeches on behalf of factory workers, she became acquainted with the Industrial Workers of the World (I.W.W.) labor union. She eventually embraced the I.W.W.'s philosophy, and actively worked for its cause. Several factors appeared to influence her decision to leave the labor movement: (1) The arrest of hundreds of I.W.W. leaders during the early 1920s; (2) The reaction of the public that she was being "duped" by I.W.W. leaders; (3) The failure of LaFollette's Progressive Party to do well in the 1924 Presidential election; (4) Pressure from the American Foundation for the Blind out of fear that their chief spokesman would alienate potential donors, and (5) Pressure from motion picture producers who were seeking to make a film about her life and who did not want any adverse publicity. After this period, Helen concentrated on humanitarian work on behalf of the blind, and only rarely spoke or wrote about labor issues.

Key Words: Helen Keller, labor movement, American Foundation for the Blind

"The two most interesting characters of the nineteenth century are Napoleon and Helen Keller"---Mark Twain (1916).

Introduction

When many people hear the name Helen Keller, vivid images of her appear in their minds. They envision a young girl stumbling around furniture, eating food from her family member's plates, and saying her first word, "water." The play and movie, "The Miracle Worker" (Gibson, 1956), brought the remarkable story of this young Alabama girl to millions of people around the world.

However, few people know much of who Helen Keller grew up to be a college graduate and crusader for the blind. Even fewer are familiar with her political and labor activism. In the 1910s and 1920's Helen Keller became a socialist and spokesperson in support of the Industrial Workers of the World (I.W.W.) labor union. Despite pressure from friends and influential people to keep silent, she spoke adamantly on the behalf of the I.W.W. One purpose of this article is to explore the reasons for Helen Keller's involvement with the I.W.W.; a second purpose is to examine her reasons for ceasing to speak on behalf of organized labor.

An Interest in Causes of Industrial Blindness

As a young woman, Helen Keller began touring the country in hopes of helping others with blindness and educating the sighted so they would realize the capabilities of the blind and the disabled. In her travels, she discovered that often blindness among workers was traceable to on-the-job accidents, which resulted from poor industrial conditions. Helen attributed these poor conditions to "the selfishness and greed of employers" (Bindley, 1916, pg. 5). Many of the victims had lost their sight as children, working under harsh factory conditions. She stated in one of her many writings that "the real cause [of particular cases of blindness] is an employer's failure to safeguard his machines. Investigation shows that there are many clever safeguards for machinery which ought to be used in factories, but which are not adopted because their adoption would diminish the employer's profits. Labor reports indicate that we Americans have been ... dishonorably slow, in taking measures for the protection of our workmen" (Keller, quoted in Foner, 1966, pg. 29). She was saddened by those afflicted with blindness and disabilities caused by disease and malnutrition, but outraged by the fact that many times it was caused by "men of greed". With a heightened awareness of the industrial laborers of the country, Helen became a proponent for the working class. She gradually addressed broader issues than industrial accidents and became highly critical of the free enterprise system. Helen felt that "the means of employment, the land and the factories, that is, the tools of labor are in the hands of a minority of the people, and are used rather with a view to increasing the owner's profits than with a view to keeping all men busy and productive. Hence there are more men than jobs. This is the first and chief evil of the so-called capitalistic system of production" (Keller, quoted in Foner, 1966, pg. 35). Helen saw a parallel between her own struggles in life and the struggles of the workers. Helen's early years were indeed a struggle. Unable to see, hear, or speak, she was in a world of her own, but once she discovered sign language the outside world was open to her. She felt that "the struggle of the workers resembled her own in many ways and she wished them to be helped as generously as she had been" (Brooks, 1956, pg. 49). Factory workers were having trouble communicating their plight to the outside world and the wealthy business owner offered little relief.

Witnessing the hardships of these struggling workers, she publicized their concerns: "Surely the things workers demand are not unreasonable. It cannot be unreasonable to demand protection of women and little children and an honest wage for all who give their time and energy to industrial occupations" (Keller, quoted in Foner, 1979, pg. 446). In her mind, social justice could never be attained until the great masses of the people were filled with a sense of responsibility for each other's welfare. Helen wrote, "We may draw nearer and more near the age when no man shall live at ease while another suffers" (Keller, 1903). She spoke out in a newspaper article, "Their cause is my cause. If they are denied a living wage, I also am defamed. While they are industrial slaves, I cannot be free...I cannot enjoy the good things of life which come to me if they are hindered and neglected" (Keller, 1918, pg. 1).

Helen's general empathy for others' sufferings came together with her specific interest in social and industrial causes of blindness to create receptiveness to the Socialist ideas to which she was exposed after 1905 (Stineman & Loeb, 1979). Anne Sullivan, Helen's teacher and live-in companion, married John Macy and the three lived together. During the early years of the twentieth century there was much talk about the threesome concerning their views about Socialism: "Contrary to the general belief, Mrs. Macy

(Anne Sullivan) did not rush into this movement, pulling Helen in after her. The Wrentham [Massachusetts] household [of Helen, Anne, and John] went into Socialism... one by one, first Mr. Macy, then Helen, and two or three years later, Mrs. Macy" (Braddy, 1934, pg. 224). One historian commented, "For Helen, participation in the Socialist movement was another bridge to the external world, the 'not-me' world, as she had put it. It was an escape from the 'egocentric predicament' to which she in her deaf-blindness was more vulnerable than most. The struggle of the working class had the throb of life in it, a vividness and reality that her life usually lacked. She knew she was stirring up controversy; but that added to the movement's attractiveness, for controversy meant that the world was paying attention to her" (Lash, 1980, pg. 373). Such attention was welcomed by the Socialists. As the Socialist Party daily newspaper, "The Call", wrote on May 4, 1913, "If ever there was a superwoman that woman is Helen Keller. By her indomitable will she wrought a miracle, and when one ponders over her achievements, the brain is dazzled by the possibilities of the human mind. To us Socialist Helen Keller ought to be doubly precious, for she is our Comrade - let us glory in that" (quoted in the Helen Keller Reference Archive, 2000).

Embracing the I.W.W.

As Helen searched for organizations to help her publicize workers' concerns, she became acquainted with the Industrial Workers of the World (I.W.W.). Unlike the conservative American Federation of Labor (A.F.L.), whose leaders represented only those workers employed in the skilled trades, I.W.W. leaders sought immediate improvements in the wages and working conditions of unskilled factory workers. However, the I.W.W. also had broader goals. Its leaders were openly socialist and many were Marxist, repeatedly calling for a workers' revolution. This revolution would lead to the abolition of capitalism, the end of the wage system, and the creation of a worker-run society (Mills, 1989).

Once Helen embraced the I.W.W.'s general aims, she began to speak publicly on behalf of the organization. Did the leaders of this industrial trade union realize what a champion for their cause they had in Helen Keller? People listened to this woman; they were in awe of her courage and triumphs. She wasn't a crackpot on a soap box, but a revered and admired woman speaking out about the injustices of the times.

Helen not only voiced her concerns and feelings, but also contributed financially to alleviate the workers' plight. "While lecturing, instead of thriftily storing up the surplus, they [Anne Sullivan and Helen] were sending it in checks to the blind in Des Moines, to the deaf in Turkey, to strikers in New Jersey, and to the unemployed elsewhere" (Braddy, 1934, pg. 272). The early nineteenth hundreds marked a time when labor strikes were a common occurrence: "Helen sent a check for \$87.50 to Little Falls [New York] in support of the [1912] strike at the knitting mills, a sum that Helen had received for writing tender messages of Christmas goodwill to be used on Christmas cards" (Lash, 1980, pg. 386). Accompanying the check she enclosed a message: "Will you give it [the check] to the brave girls who are striking so courageously to bring about the emancipation of the workers of Little Falls?" her letter asked. She continued, "Until the spirit of love for our fellowmen, regardless of race, color or creed, should fill the world, making real in our lives and our deeds the actuality of human brotherhood----until

the great mass of the people shall be filled with the sense of responsibility for each other's welfare, social justice can never be attained" (Keller, quoted in Lash, 1980, pg. 386). In 1916, thirty thousand iron ore miners in the Mesabi Range in Minnesota went on strike under I.W.W. leadership (Betton, 1968). Helen sent them, "all I can share of my earnings." She appealed for public support, "Will citizens who believe in justice remain silent while [Carlo] Tresca and the other leaders of the Mesabi Range strikers are being tried for their lives on an utterly groundless charge of murder?" (Keller, quoted in Lash, 1980, 434).

Helen was appalled by what she saw as injustices dealt to the leaders and members of the Industrial Workers of the World by law enforcement officials in communities throughout the United States. Many members of the I.W.W. were arrested without warrants, thrown in jail without access to attorneys, denied bail, put on trial without jury, or even shot at (Anon., "The I.W.W. and the Socialist Party..." 1917; Adams, 1966). Masked men kidnapped Frank Little, an I.W.W. leader, from his bed at three o'clock the morning of August 1, 1917. They dragged him behind a car, and hanged him from a railroad trestle (Anon., "Crime at Butte, Montana," 1917; Gutfeld, 1969). That same summer, twelve hundred miners were deported from Bisbee, Arizona, because of I.W.W. organizing activity there; however, many deportees were not I.W.W. members or sympathizers. They were packed into freight cars and shipped out into the desert of New Mexico. If an outraged society had not protested they would have died of thirst and hunger (Byrkit, 1982). In a round up of officers, members, and sympathizers of the I.W.W., charges of conspiracy were levied against them (Miles, 1986). Helen was shocked and saddened by these horror stories, but more disturbed that newspapers around the country did not denounce such police actions as unlawful, cruel, and undemocratic acts. Most of the newspapers indirectly praised the perpetrators of these actions for their patriotic service (Keller, 1918, pg. 1).

In her travels, Helen happened to be in San Francisco when she heard of the barbarous treatment of the unemployed in San Francisco and Sacramento. Helen decried what she called the "mental blindness" all around her (Stineman & Loeb, 1979, pg. 437). She declared that she would speak on the I.W.W.'s behalf from the platform. Authorities warned Helen that if she carried out her promise, she would be "hailed down and carried from the city in a cart". She was not intimidated and was so incensed by the actions taken against the unemployed that she spoke out vehemently to reporters, "I think their treatment was outrageous. It is not a crime to protest for your fellows. It is not a crime to be without bread. They say that these men are I.W.W.'s and that means, 'I Won't Work'. I honor these men for their protest, and I am going to say that... tonight" (Keller, quoted in Foner, 1965, pg. 439). Helen felt so strongly for the I.W.W. cause that she risked the alienation of her public, as well as her personal safety, to publicize it.

Helen Keller's Message

Helen felt that individually, workers had no hope for reaching their goals--they would always be kept the underdogs by their employers. The opening sentence in her article, "In Behalf of the I.W.W.", from the *Liberator*, emphatically proclaimed this: "Down through the long, weary years the will of the ruling class has been to suppress either the man or his message when they antagonized its interests" (Keller, 1918, pg. 1).

Helen was deeply concerned with the wants and needs of the working class. She understood their desire to get up out of the wallow of poverty, to make a decent living, and to get ahead in the world. She stated, "I know those men are hungry for more life, more opportunity. They are tired of the hollow mockery of mere existence in a world of plenty" (Keller, 1917, pg. 18). Helen saw a society "divided into two great elements and organized around an industrial life which was selfish, combative, and acquisitive, with the result that man's better instincts are threatened, while his evil propensities are intensified and protected" (Keller, 1929, pg. 330-331).

According to Helen, it was not only industry that was exploiting the workers, but also the government. Apparently, Helen believed that government leaders viewed the working class as an inexhaustible resource for the military during World War I. She opposed the U.S. military buildup (in the name of "preparedness") just prior to the war, because it "means war, and war means that the class of people who are not responsible for the trouble will have to do the fighting. If congressmen, lawyers, and journalists did the fighting, I would not object so strenuously to preparedness" ("Joys of life are pictured," 1916, pg. 10). The belief that workers were about to die while the rich lived in luxury deeply disturbed Helen. She reported that the United States was facing a grave crisis stating, "The few who profit from the labor of the masses want to organize the workers into an army that will protect the interests of the capitalists" (Keller, 1917, pg. 18).

In contrast, Helen was impressed with the strides that Abraham Lincoln had made on the issue of slavery, impressed with the progress of education through past decades, and the ability of citizens to become more involved in governmental processes.

However, she felt these steps were not enough and more progress was needed. It would only be a matter of time, she believed, before the workers would become united and take possession of what was rightfully theirs--the means of production. In a 1916 speech in La Crosse, Wisconsin, Helen publicly announced that she was a socialist (Anon., "Miss Keller has wonderful story; audience pleased," 1916, pg. 8). In 1918, she wrote, "That long struggle in which they have successfully won freedom of body from slavery and serfdom, freedom of mind from ecclesiastical despotism, and more recently a voice in government, has arrived at a new stage. Workingmen everywhere are becoming aware that they are being exploited for the benefit of others, and that they cannot be truly free unless they own themselves and their labor. The achievement of such economic freedom stands in prospect – and at no distant date – as the revolutionary climax of the age" (Keller, 1918, pg. 1).

In speaking on the Industrial Workers of the World's behalf, Helen did not hold back her growing feelings about the union. She stated, "The I.W.W. was pitted against the whole profit-making system. It [the preamble to the I.W.W. constitution] insists that there can be no compromise so long as the majority of the working class live in want, while the master class lives in luxury. According to its statement by the I.W.W., 'there can be no peace until the workers organize as a class, take possession of the resources of the earth and the machinery of production and distribution, and abolish the wage system'. In other words, the workers in their collectivity must own and operate all the essential industrial institutions and secure to each laborer the full value of his produce. I think it is for this declaration of democratic purpose, and not for any wish to betray their country [in

opposing U.S. involvement in World War I], that the I.W.W. members were being persecuted, beaten, imprisoned, and murdered" (Keller, 1918, pg. 1).

Helen felt strongly about protecting the rights of the working class and the interests of the unemployed. In her article in the newspaper, *Liberator*, she stated, "Surely the demands of the I.W.W. are just. It is right that the creators of wealth [i.e. the workers] should own what they create. When shall we learn that we are related one to the other; that we are members of one body; that injury to one is injury to all?" (Keller, 1918, pg. 1).

The exploitation of the working class was not limited to the United States. It was a worldwide problem. Helen felt strongly that it was just a matter of time before workers all around the world would finally stand up and demand their rights – rights, she felt they deserved: "The mighty mass-movement of which they [workers] are a part is discernible all over the world. Under the fire of the great guns, the workers of all lands, becoming conscious of their class, are preparing to take possession of their own" (Keller, 1918, pg. 1). By writing this type of article, Helen sought to inform and reassure American workers that they were not alone in their struggle--as well as warn the wealthy of the impending revolution. Helen believed that the Industrial Workers of the World was the union that could organize the working class so that such a worldwide revolution was possible.

Helen not only spoke for the Industrial Workers of the World, she became a member. In taking this step she turned her words into action. It was dangerous to be known as an I.W.W. member. However, Helen only grew bolder. She began to speak out more, expressing her views and concerns and was even willing to go to jail if necessary, in order to uphold those views: "She became an I.W.W. member because nothing could be gained by political action within the system. She thought that the true test was to unite and organize all workers on an economic basis and it was the workers themselves who must secure freedom for themselves and the workers themselves who must grow strong" (Bindley, 1916, pg. 5). Helen summarized her feelings on revolution, "We have tried peace education for nineteen hundred years. Let us try revolution and see what it will do now. The revolution is bigger than any [political] party and will come..." (Keller, quoted in Bindley, 1916, pg. 5). She discovered that talk was getting the workers nowhere, and believed that revolution might be the only course of action.

Helen hoped that any workers' revolution might be peaceful. She advocated techniques such as the General Strike, which offered the possibility of a successful worker revolt without bloodshed. She said in an article in the *New York Tribune*, "I am for peace because I think workers can gain their ends by putting their hands in their pockets [i.e., by striking]. The world is theirs then. And with the world in their possession, wouldn't the people promptly proceed to build up institutions and situations almost identical with the ones you deplore? The world can be run no worse than it has been by its economic masters, at least the underdog would have a chance at the envied bone" (Keller, quoted in Bindley, 1916, pg. 5).

Although she did not favor sabotage and violence, she supported Big Bill Haywood, a member of the National Executive Committee of the Socialist Party, and his endorsement of violence to further the worker's cause and so wrote to *The Call*. She pleaded for "harmony" in the party. "It is with the deepest regret that I have read the attacks upon Comrade Haywood which have appeared in the *National Socialist*. It fills

me with amazement to see such a narrow spirit, and such an ignoble strife between two factions [the Eugene Debs faction and the Bill Haywood faction] which should be one, and that, too, at a most critical period in the struggle of the proletariat." She protested the moves against Haywood. "What? Are we to put differences of the party tactics before the desperate needs of the workers?" (Keller, quoted in Lash, 1980, pg. 387). How could the workers ever unite as one if there was so much dissension among the leadership? She deplored ideological factionalism within the working class. "Are we no better than the capitalist politicians who stand in the high places and harangue about petty matters, while millions of the people are underpaid, underfed, thrown out of work and dying? While countless women and children are breaking their hearts and ruining their bodies in long days of toil, we are fighting one another. Shame upon us! The enemy is at our very doors... while we leave the victims helpless, because we think more of our own theories--theories that have not even been tested! How can the workers, whom we urge to unite, look to us Socialists for guidance if we fail to unite? What is our chief bond of unity? The welfare of the working class and the abolition of capitalism" (Keller, 1913, pg. 606).

To summarize, Helen's views were as strong and undaunted as she was. She believed that either blindness from industrial accidents had to end or the machinery that caused the accidents must instead be shut down. She further believed that most problems facing workers were rooted in the economic system, and this too had to change. Wealthy capitalists should no longer enjoy the fruits of the poor workers' labor. Every person – whether rich or poor – deserved decent food, shelter, clothing, and an education for their children. If the I.W.W. members united as one, she thought, they could effect changes, even with a revolution if that was necessary. Her feelings and convictions were so strong that she became an I.W.W. member.

A Time to Speak and A Time to Be Silent

Helen seemed poised on the threshold of becoming a national spokesperson, a woman whose admiration from the public allowed her to influence both opinion and policy on behalf of the working class. Thus it is surprising to discover that, after 1918, Helen's labor and political activities faded from the limelight and eventually ceased altogether. Was it pressure from influential friends or colleagues? Was the reality setting in that change was slow in coming? Was there a change in objectives? Or was the cause a combination of all of these factors? There does not seem to be any concrete documentation pointing to a specific reason, but the evidence suggests that it was a combination of forces. Helen had discovered that when she spoke out about something, people listened. If it was unpopular or uncomfortable, it was usually the subject matter and those associated with it (e.g. I.W.W. leaders) that took the heat instead of Helen: "It took her a long time to learn, indeed, she has never quite learned it, that she cannot help an unpopular cause by endorsing it. She was never blamed, this was for her the worst of it, always someone else. When she announced that she was a Socialist, the Socialists were accused of using her to advertise themselves. When she marched in a suffrage parade the same charge was brought against the suffragists [sic]. When during the World War [World War I] she lifted her voice for peace she was called a supermegaphone for undesirable citizens" (Braddy, 1934, pg. 226). "In the eyes of the public if the topic she spoke out for was favorable she could do no wrong. She soon discovered while she was a

goddess and an archpriestess so long as she stood with the majority, she was an ignorant woman who did not know what she was talking about if she came out in opposition to them" (Braddy, 1934, pg. 227).

When she was criticized, the attacks were often personal. For example, Helen's disabilities as well as her political positions were mentioned in a critical *Brooklyn Eagle* newspaper editorial. Helen responded, "... Now that I have come out for socialism he [the editor] reminds me and the public that I am blind and deaf and especially liable to error..." She, in turn, criticized the paper and its editor, "The Eagle and I are at war. I hate the system which it represents... when it fights back, let it fight fair... It is not fair fighting or good argument to remind me and others that I cannot see or hear. I can read. I can read all the socialist books I have time for in English, German, and French. If the editor of the Brooklyn Eagle should read some of them, he might be a wiser man, and make a better newspaper. If I ever contribute to the Socialist movement the book that I sometimes dream of, I know what I shall name it: Industrial Blindness and Social Deafness" (W.C.O., 2000).

The making of the movie *Deliverance*, about the story of her life, may have been the event that led Helen to suppress her views. At first, she had been warned by friends and family but she then began to realize the consequences of her actions herself: "Before Dr. Miller had time to finish the first draft of the scenario, Helen precipitated a crisis by publicly deploring the persecutions of the I.W.W. Panic followed. Her teacher was told that if the picture was to succeed, Helen must for the time being, confine her appeals to their great humanitarian effort and let other great humanitarian efforts alone, especially such highly dubious ones as those sponsored by the I.W.W." (Braddy, 1934, pg. 274). In December, 1918, an article appeared in Upton Sinclair's entitled, "The Blind Who Will Not See", which reiterated the fact that Helen's actions were coming back to haunt her. Sinclair stated, "It was difficult to get this picture [Deliverance] financed, because the capitalist world has discovered that Helen is a Socialist, and is afraid of her; the newspapers no longer mention her, and many big picture people turned down the proposition. And the world is to be given a story of Helen Keller which omits all mention of the fact that she is a Socialist! It would be propaganda to mention that fact, I was told. Imagine! This girl, who is blind to the present, has seen all the future; in the history of her life that is the supreme, culminating fact, that is the great drama, the meaning and justification of all the rest – and it may not be mentioned! The boys and girls in the movie theaters will get a little slushy sentimentality – they will learn that Helen Keller loves humanity and weeps for the world's woe; but they must not be told that she has dedicated her life to the abolition of the profit system!" (Sinclair, 1918, pg. 16).

In 1924, Robert LaFollette of Wisconsin ran for President of the United States on the Progressive ticket. Helen agreed with his political platform and wrote a letter to him endorsing his campaign. In that letter she also confided her predicament, "So long as I confine my activities to social service and the blind, they compliment me extravagantly, calling me 'archpriestess,' 'wonder woman' and 'a modern miracle.' But when it comes to a discussion of poverty, and I maintain that it is the result of wrong economics---that the industrial system under which we live is at the root of the physical blindness in the world---that is a different matter!" LaFollette's loss marked the end of Helen's active

participation in party politics. She did not again endorse a candidate until she supported Franklin D. Roosevelt for a fourth term in 1944 (Lash, 1980, pg. 529).

Helen had begun work on behalf of the American Foundation for the Blind and, here too, she encountered pressure to silence her political convictions: "She soft-pedaled her politics, presumably at the request of the Foundation's trustees which were conservative businessmen, as were the men who would have to give the green light in various communities to the Foundation's fund raising effort. Independently of the political convictions of the trustees, there was a cogent case against Helen, the Foundation's chief fund raiser, proclaiming views that were likely to give offence to many potential donors" (Lash, 1980, pg. 529).

As Helen grew older and became more involved with the American Foundation for the Blind, the worker's revolution became less of a priority. Also, as America entered the 1920s, society was changing. Many of the United States leaders of the I.W.W. had been arrested and either imprisoned or deported during the "Red Scare" panic that followed the 1917 Russian revolution, rendering the union ineffective as a representative of the working class. This left Helen isolated from many of her former sources of Marxist propaganda (University of Colorado, "The Socialist Legacy of Helen Keller," 2000). The Socialist and Communist parties were divided and generally irrelevant, and the Progressive movement siphoned off some of their remaining public support. Even the conservative American Federation of Labor (A.F.L.) union organization declined (Rayback, 1966). Therefore, one explanation for Helen's silence is that she no longer had the time nor the inclination to devote her energy to causes whose success seemed ever more remote (Lash, 1980, pg. 527).

Some years later, in 1937, Helen read an article in *Reader's Digest*, entitled, "John L. Lewis, Labor's Looming Force". In response to the article Helen made one of her last public statements concerning her beliefs on the rights of the working class. She stated, "This is the first time since Eugene Debs' earlier years that I have had any lively hope of a labor movement in this country. Whether John Lewis is a genuine radical or not I am uncertain, but he appears to have courage, wisdom and the wide influence required to organize the majority of the American population. If he succeeds in mobilizing even a part of the laboring class to bargain collectively for wages, hours and better living conditions they will thus secure a voice in the government and make it more truly a democracy. His massive personality, amazing powers of persuasion and defiance of the lightning – corporate wealth mightier than any political empire earth ever witnessed – command my admiration..." (Keller, 1938, pg. 200).

Helen Keller was a woman of courage. Instead of seeking personal gain, she used her publicity and notoriety to help the working class: "Her vision enabled her to see into the future of mankind. She believed that the salvation of humanity would come through an intelligent application of socialism. She stated, 'if the greedy were able to think better, the needy would be able to live better'" (Keller, quoted in Thomas, 1948, pg. 419). Her determination helped lay the foundation for state and federal legislation addressing the concerns of workers and their families. But Helen faced a dilemma that all must consider: How should one best spend one's time and energy to help humanity?

For Helen, this first meant making speeches on behalf of the workers, and then – when those efforts became counterproductive – stopping those speeches and instead

concentrating on other causes that would benefit humanity. In choosing this path, Helen Keller truly showed her genius.

MARY FLEMING is a graduate of the University of Wisconsin at La Crosse. She is now employed as an analyst at Organic Valley food producers.

WILLIAM ROSS, Ph.D., (B.A. Auburn University, Ph.D., University of Illinois) is professor of Labor and Industrial Relations and Human Resources Management at the University of Wisconsin at La Crosse. He is interested in labor history and third-party dispute resolution procedures.

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