



IN MEMORIAM

Irving Bernstein
Professor of Political Science, Emeritus
Los Angeles
1916 — 2001

Irving Bernstein's distinguished career as a labor historian, teacher, and arbitrator grew naturally out of his own early experience. The son of Lithuanian immigrants, he grew up in Rochester, New York, where he could see the plight of the American worker all around him during the Great Depression. "I became enormously interested in the development of the labor movement," he later told a reporter, "and I was tremendously impressed by Franklin Roosevelt and the New Deal."

Financing a higher education during the depression was no easy task, but Bernstein worked his way through the University of Rochester, earning his B.A. degree in 1937. He moved to Harvard for graduate study, where he was awarded the M.A. in 1938. Then he worked at the Brookings Institution, the Bureau of Labor Statistics, and the National War Labor Board, before serving as the Swedish language specialist for the OSS during World War II. Then it was back to Harvard for his Ph.D. in history in 1948, under the direction of Arthur Schlesinger, Sr. Immediately thereafter he came to UCLA, first as a member of the Institute of Industrial Relations, and then from 1960 until his retirement in 1987, on the faculty of the Department of Political Science.

In his years at UCLA Bernstein established a national reputation as a scholar. First, there was his magisterial three-volume study of the American labor movement: *The Lean Years* (1960), covering the 1920s and the economic collapse from 1929 to 1933; *Turbulent Years* (1970), describing the growth of unionism and collective bargaining between 1933 and 1941; and *A Caring Society* (1985), in which he argued that the New Deal was instrumental in preserving democracy and capitalism in America. Retirement did not slow his productivity as a scholar, for in 1991 came *Promises Kept: John F. Kennedy's New Frontier*, a positive assessment of Kennedy's domestic programs, and in 1996, *Guns or Butter: The Presidency of Lyndon Johnson*, an analysis contrasting brilliant accomplishments in domestic legislation with disaster in foreign policy.

Other scholars heaped praise on his work. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., wrote: "Irving Bernstein is pre-eminent among historians of American labor history." Clark Kerr considered him to be "...the leading historian of labor relations in the United States now active in the field." But his writings also reached many outside the academic world, for he wrote with a fluency and grace that made complex ideas accessible to a broad public.

This same skill in communication was evident in his teaching, for his courses on business, labor, and government were recognized three times by the "Professor of the Year" award of the Political Science Honor Society. When asked by his department chair for a statement on his "philosophy" of teaching, he answered: "The decisive element... is commitment. A good teacher must sincerely believe ... in the significance of the material he is expounding, in the intelligence, dignity, and integrity of his students. The absence of commitment is transparent; students recognize it at once. Commitment is demanding of time and energy." No one ever doubted Irving Bernstein's commitment as a teacher. And those who heard his lecture to the Emeriti Association on the Johnson presidency will have gleaned something of the lucidity and the learning that went into his skill as a teacher.

In addition to his writing, teaching, and participation in innumerable departmental and university committees, Bernstein served extensively as a labor arbitrator, traveling to cities throughout the United States to mediate labor- management disputes. He served as president of the National Industrial Relations Research Association and of its Southern California chapter, and was a member of the Federal Services Impasses Panel from 1979 to 1980.

He was devoted to UCLA, working in his office every weekday for years after his retirement, making extensive use of the research library, playing tennis enthusiastically, and vigorously exchanging ideas in a multidisciplinary emeriti luncheon group. His colleagues and many friends sadly miss his humor, his strong sense of social justice, and his wide- ranging intellect.

Bernstein is survived by his wife of 60 years, Frederika, his children Deborah Weir, Jonathan Bernstein, and Judith Bernstein, and his grandson, Alexander Shirwo.

Leonard Freedman