Working for Peace and Justice
Memoirs of an Activist Intellectual

Lawrence S. Wittner

Working for Peace and Justice provides a lively, colorful account of some of the major social struggles of the modern world, as seen through the memoirs of Lawrence Wittner — an award-winning U.S. educator and scholar who has participated in the peace, racial equality, and labor movements from the early 1960s to the present.

Beginning amid the bloody, anti-Semitic pogroms of late nineteenth century Eastern Europe, the book recounts Wittner’s Brooklyn boyhood, the cross-fertilization of ideas and activism during his student days at Columbia College, the federal government’s spying upon him, his political purge and blacklisting as a young faculty member, and his subsequent work as an activist intellectual. Important portions of this story relate to his antinuclear activism, as well as to his leadership role in the Conference on Peace Research in History (renamed the Peace History Society) and in America’s largest peace organization, Peace Action.

Along the way, there are fascinating encounters with prominent individuals, such as Norman Thomas, William Appleman Williams, Michael Harrington, Cesar Chavez, the Unabomber, Robert J. Lifton, Randy Forsberg, Helen Caldicott, Zbigniew Brzezinski, and David Horowitz. There are also vivid descriptions of picketing the Kennedy White House against nuclear testing, working as a civil rights volunteer in Louisiana and Mississippi, teaching at an African American college and at the socially élite Vassar College, organizing democratic socialist activism on the community level, coordinating solidarity work for America’s largest higher education union, being arrested as part of the Free South Africa movement, collaborating with peace-oriented intellectuals in Gorbachev’s Soviet Union, and leading the annual march of thousands of antinuclear demonstrators through the streets of Hiroshima.

Larry Wittner’s life and work are inspiring on their own, but he recounts them in such a frank, open manner that he has crafted a real page-turner. Working for Peace and Justice takes you along on a joyful ride of discovery through the life of a model citizen/scholar/activist.”

— Kevin Martin, Executive Director, Peace Action

“Scholar, activist, and troubadour Larry Wittner has gifted us with his bold life’s journey for world betterment. Vividly written and deeply moving, this timely, splendid book will inform and hearten everyone concerned about peace and freedom, justice, democracy, and human rights.”

— Blanche Wiesen Cook, author Eleanor Roosevelt and Distinguished Professor of History and Women’s Studies, John Jay College & Graduate Center, CUNY

“Working for Peace and Justice provides a readable narrative of what it takes and the price one pays when the choice is made both to live a life of thought and contemplation and to act on a genuine commitment to make the world a safer and better place. Whether he was formulating ideas for world peace or walking a picket line, Larry Wittner was there and his impact was felt. We can all learn lessons from this wonderful memoir.”

— Bill Scheuerman, former President, United University Professions (1993-2007); retired President, National Labor College

“The season has come for memoirs of the children of the 1960s who became academics and changed the academy, and this memoir is a jewel of the genre: wonderfully lucid, evocative, honest, unpretentious, precise, and interesting. Larry Wittner’s splendid account reflects his deep good-spiritedness and describes his many years of activist struggle for peace and social justice.”

— Gary Dorrien, Reinhold Niebuhr Professor of Social Ethics, Union Theological Seminary; Professor of Religion, Columbia University

“It is fascinating to peer into the personal life of Lawrence Wittner -- the great chronicler of the antinuclear movement -- in this quite amazing autobiography. He has lived an exemplary life, one that we all should try and emulate in our own individual ways.”

— Helen Caldicott, Founding President, Physicians for Social Responsibility
Larry Wittner has been -- and remains -- a great union activist. Read this book and you'll learn what Solidarity really means!

— Bill Ritchie, President, Albany County Central Federation of Labor, AFL-CIO

Larry Wittner's engaging and important memoir reminds me of why his work, his scholarship, and his activism have made me proud to be an American historian. It is a record of democratic social struggle, as well as a gift to those in the next generation who will have the courage and ambition to follow his example of working for a better world.

— Martin J. Sherwin, winner of the 2006 Pulitzer Prize for biography

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