My name is Ken Zinn and I am the national political director of National Nurses United, the largest nurses’ union in the United States.

On behalf of NNU, the host of tonight’s showing, I want to say what an honor it is to be here tonight with John Sayles to introduce this showing of *Matewan* and to be part of presenting John the Tony Mazzochi Labor Arts Award.

First, I have been a fan of John Sayles since I saw *Return of the Secaucus 7* in 1980.

And, without a doubt, *Matewan* is one of the finest movies on the American labor movement ever made.

Thank you, John Sayles, for making such a masterpiece—a film I must have seen at least 30 times over the years.

This is also meaningful to me because I spent a dozen years as a staff member of the United Mine Workers of America in the 80s and 90s and lived and breathed the history of the union for those years and beyond.

The UMWA produced so many important leaders from Mother Jones to John L. Lewis, from John Mitchell to Bill Blizzard.

Bill Blizzard may not be as well known as the others but he commanded the miners’ army during the Battle of Blair Mountain, the largest labor uprising in American history, which took place in 1921 soon after the Matewan Massacre and the murder of Sid Hatfield on the steps of the McDowell County Courthouse in Welch.

Bill Blizzard also happened to be the great-uncle of Cecil Roberts, the UWMA’s current president.

I remember back when this movie came out in 1987—and I was at its DC premier that year because the UMWA hosted it-- that Fred Decker was able to get a small part in this movie, somewhat ironically as one of the Baldwin-Felts gun thugs.

Ironic because Fred was a coal miner and an organizer for the UMWA when I was there, a union man through and through.

And when we struck AT Massey in 1984, Pittston Coal in 1989 and Peabody Coal and Consolidation Coal in 1993, there really wasn’t a lot of difference between what the miners faced in the early 20s when this movie takes place and what they faced in the 1980s and 90s when I was there, and even still today.

The coal operators still had their gun thugs and their strikebreakers and would still treat the miners no better than a piece of machinery—something you use until it’s broken and then throw away.

As Fred said back then, ''The only difference between then and now is that they used to bring the scabs in on trains and now they use helicopters.”

But the message of this movie isn’t just relevant to coal miners.

Its message rings true for nurses, and factory workers and teachers—indeed, anyone who works for a living.

And that is that the only way working class people—the 99%— are going to advance our interests is by organizing, overcoming differences of race, ethnicity and gender, and standing together in struggle against the 1%.

That’s the message that Tony Mazzochi, the co-founder of this film festival, preached his entire career.

Tony holds a special place in my heart because it was a speech he gave at a St. Louis labor conference on occupational health and safety in 1979 that first inspired me to get into the labor movement.

I later had the pleasure of working with Tony when I was at the UMW and he was at the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers and when he was organizing the Labor Party.

I especially liked Tony because, even though he was an important labor leader in his own right—after all, there literally would not be an OSHA without him—he did not suffer fools gladly and had no use for those union officers and bureaucrats who so frequently got in bed with corporate bosses and politicians against the interests of the workers they were there to serve.

Tony believed passionately in the power of the working class to affect progressive change in this country.

As he used to say, “When you build a big movement from down below, regardless of who's in the White House, you can bring about change.”

That’s something our union, National Nurses United, believes to its core and we practice what we preach.

Which is why we are one of the main organizers of the People’s Summit that will occur in Chicago on June 9, 10 and 11 where 4,000 activists and leaders will convene to talk about working together to build that movement.

Those interested in attending should sign up this week on the website at thepeoplessummit.org.

It’s something you will not want to miss.

So in closing let me once again congratulate John for winning this award and for sharing your tremendous gifts with the world.

The movement thanks you.

Kenneth S. Zinn, Political Director

National Nurses United

8630 Fenton Street, Suite 1100

Silver Spring, MD 20910

USA