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# ON THE ROAD TO THE SPLIT OF THE AMERICAN LABOR MOVEMENT: CRITICISM OF THE AMERICAN FEDERATION OF LABOR IN COMMITTEE FOR INDUSTRIAL ORGANIZATIONS PAMPHLETS (1935–1936)

**Abstract:** The US labor movement gained momentum after the passage of the NIRA (1933) and especially the Wagner Act (1935). The new law guaranteed employees the right to organise and bargain collectively through representatives of their own choosing. The dynamic growth in union membership was accompanied by a heated debate over whether unions should be organised to cover all workers in an industry or on an occupational or craft basis. This piece covers Committee of Industrial Organizations (CIO) pamphlets published between 1935 and 1936, a critical period in the rivalry between the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and the CIO. Most took the form of journalistic commentary on current events in the union environment. The pamphlet, as a form of communication, by definition, presents a one-sided description of reality. Nevertheless, the CIO pamphlets are a valuable source of knowledge about the division in the American labour movement in the 1930s. In this piece, I examine the axes of contention and arguments. They cover various issues, such as an assessment of the US trade union movement's achievements, jurisdictional claims, industrial charters, and dues. I trace the evolution of radicalism in the views of the CIO leadership, from reforming the Committee in the spirit of "unionising unorganised mass production under the banner of the AFL" to massive criticism of the Federation that ultimately made further coexistence impossible. The latter resulted in the AFL suspending the CIO in September 1936.

**Keywords**: Labor movement, trade unions, AFL, CIO, Lewis

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## INTRODUCTION

The labor market and industrial relations were key areas of the New Deal (Zieger, 1995: 13). Section 7(a) of the National Industrial Recovery Act of 1933 (NIRA) reaffirmed the right of workers to choose their representatives and to bargain collectively (Barkin, 1936: 169). After the NIRA was repealed in 1935, industrial relations were governed by the National Labor Relations Act of 1935 (the Wagner Act), which banned company unions and provided a mechanism for the federal government to enforce workers' right to organise (Millis and Brown, 1950: 88). Unlike the NIRA, this act was upheld by the Supreme Court in ruling NLRB v. Jones & Laughlin Steel Corp. (Harper, Estreicher and Griffith, 2015: 52) setting the stage for years of anticipation of the Franklin Delano Roosevelt administration's direction in labor-management relations. The legislative solutions adopted led to an increased interest in trade union participation, which translated (albeit unselfishly) into increased bargaining power for workers in collective bargaining. This process naturally anticipated the role of the US's most prominent national trade union federation: the American Federation of Labor (AFL). Founded in 1886, it focused on organising skilled workers and remained the central unifying body of the American labor movement until the mid-1930s. According to the eminent labor historian Selig Perlman, "the overshadowing problem of the American labor movement has always been the problem of staying organised" (Perlman, 1928: 162). After the passage of the Wagner Act, it seemed that his fears had finally been proved unfounded and that the American labor movement was in for decades of unity, growth and development. But the opposite happened.

The American labor movement changed between 1935 and 1936, when industrial unionists formed the Committee for Industrial Organisation (CIO). The CIO was initially set up as an offshoot of the AFL to promote mass-organising. By 1936, however, it had become a separate entity. Despite the CIO's assurances of its willingness to coexist within the AFL and its assurances, at least verbal, that there was no need for a rival union, the AFL suspended the CIO unions in 1936, which then formed a permanent structure called the Congress of Industrial Organisations after 1938. The split was formally sealed, sanctioning the disintegration of the US labor movement until the AFL--CIO merger in 1955.

Many authors have examined the reasons for the US trade union movement split. These included the technological development of the US economy, which led to the growth of a mass labor force, the fears of the unions of losing their existing influence, and the political ambitions of the leaders of the new unions (Bernstein, 2010: 42, 89; Tomlins, 1992: 142; Zieger and Gall, 2002: 94). The pamphlets published by the AFL and CIO are a rich field of study for the rationale of the above processes. While these sources offer valuable insights into the US labor movement, it is important to note that they primarily represent the perspective of top leadership and may not accurately reflect the thoughts and views of the hundreds of thousands of workers who participated in organizing efforts during the 1930s. In this article, I analyse the axes of contention and arguments presented by CIO leaders in the pages of the organisation's newsletters. The study covers pamphlets published between 1935 and 1936, a critical period in the rivalry between the AFL and the CIO. Most took the form of journalistic commentary on current events in the union environment. In some cases they were reprints of radio or rally speeches by the CIO leadership. The length of the pamphlets varied from 2 to 47 pages. What they had in common was a lively, colloquial language intended to be understood by the audience for this type of text, i.e. the American worker (skilled and unskilled).

## IN THE SHADOW OF AFL CONVENTIONS

A dominant figure in the American labor movement during this turbulent period was John L. Lewis, a leader of the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) and vice-president of the AFL. He was also behind the formation of the CIO (November 11, 1935), along with the leaders of nine other major industrial unions and the UMWA. On November 23 1935, Lewis resigned as vice-president of the AFL. He set out the reasons for this decision in a speech broadcast by the Columbia Broadcasting System. Its contents were later reprinted in the pamphlet *The Future of Organised Labor* (GMMA, Box 35, F2, 1935).

The starting point for consideration was the assertion that the CIO structures should continue working with the AFL, not against it (a caveat repeated twice). Lewis also referred to the changing economic land-

scape in the US. He spoke of industry's growing role in the US economy: in 1930, 20% of Americans were employed in agriculture, while manufacturing, mining, trade and transportation employed as many as 60%. Lewis also drew attention to the industrial revolution, the peak of which, he argued, occurred between 1923 and 1928 and was characterised by the integration of workplaces that had previously been scattered across the states. Thanks to their financial clout, the new corporations were able to exert influence on the bankers and tax agents of the East.

He argued that the downgrading of craft unions and skilled trade organisations primarily resulted from that technological change. Automating processes and mass production led to the erosion of the role of trained craftsmen. Their role was taken over by machine operators who could acquire the necessary skills through short courses rather than years of arduous apprenticeship. In Lewis's view, the AFL had not done enough to protect the rights of this section of the workforce. It failed during the period of great industrial activity up to 1920, nor the prosperity of 1923–1929. The AFL was to fail even after the NIRA (1933) passage, which guaranteed workers the right to collective bargaining. While there was a flurry of new unions in the aftermath of the Act, the AFL did not take sufficient care to consolidate them. Left to their own devices, without legal support and inexperienced, they often lost out to anti-union management in the industry. One example of effective employer action was to encourage the formation of company unions limited to one workplace. Isolated from more universal structures, the workers were less effective in bargaining with the employer. The result was a gulf between the relative prosperity of a relatively small group of well-organised skilled workers, who could count on high wages and standard of living to which they aspired, and the millions of unskilled and semi-skilled workers who could not count on the above benefits.

These plans questioned whether the CIO and the AFL could coexist within a single structure on the agenda. Lewis, on the one hand, promised that "we have no objection to craft unions that are established and functioning well", only a moment later to express an expectation of the craft unions that they would not "interfere, by paper jurisdictional claims or otherwise, with the organisation of the great majority of American wage earners in our basic manufacturing and mining industries" (GMMA, Box 35, F2, 1935: 8). The pamphlet pointed out that jurisdictional claims were a relatively recent phenomenon in the AFL. Until the early 20th cen-

tury, the Federation chartered almost any union that applied. Moreover, the charters were very vague in describing the jurisdiction granted. This allowed the simultaneous operation of, for instance, two different carpenters' unions. Only when new industrial methods reshuffled jobs, did the AFL adopt the policy of "one craft, union".

In the final section, Lewis outlined the aims of industrial unionism. These included, first and foremost, wage increases "to secure a fair share of industrial output". He described the wage question as the "lifeblood of industry". Here, Lewis allowed himself to make a confrontational remark about decent wages "for all and not profits for the privileged few" (GMMA, Box 35, F2, 1935: 9). Alongside this, the aim of the new trade union movement was shorter working hours and "the re-employment of the unemployed". The way to achieve this was through mass membership in the trade union movement.

The brochure *Industrial Unionism* of November 21, 1935, illustrated the tensions in the trade union movement following the AFL convention in Atlantic City (October 7–19, 1935; GMMA, Box 25, F1, 1935). The pamphlet contained a transcript of statements by the CIO secretary and International Typographical Union president, Charles P. Howard and president Lewis. The introduction to the pamphlet raised an objection to the AFL's practice of interfering in the operation of new unions formed in the wake of NIRA. In particular, craft unions objected to granting some charters to new unions and expected new members to pay dues to craft organisations. Craft union obstruction of new forms of organisation was at the heart of Howard and Lewis' minority report to the AFL convention. The tense situation in Atlantic City and the real fragmentation of the labor movement was demonstrated by the fact that the Majority Report of the Resolutions Committee was only adopted by eight votes to seven in the Committee.

The Minority Report, backed by Lewis, highlighted the anachronistic nature of the AFL's operation, demonstrated by its failure to include the broad mass of workers in craft union statutes. The report cited the AFL's membership of 3.5 million, compared with the 39 million workers who could be organised, as evidence of this failure. Restricting the trade union movement to the craft union formula weakened workers' bargaining power. It happened when workers in a company were separated, and their economic power was destroyed by "requiring various groups to transfer to National and International Unions organized upon craft lines", the document mentioned. The report's signatories called on

the AFL Executive Council not only to issue unrestricted charters to industrial companies but also to launch an "aggressive organization campaign in those industries in which the great mass of workers are not now organized" (GMMA, Box 25, F1, 1935: 8).

Lewis's speech in Atlantic City was much more bellicose and aimed at personal confrontation. Pointing to AFL president William Green, Lewis asked: "Where are those twenty-five million that in a moment of exuberance, we were going to organize?". In a meticulous calculation, the UMWA president pointed out that the number of state unions in the AFL had fallen by 314 in 1934, while the AFL itself faced the dilemma of serving "a paltry three or four out of five million of the forty-odd million wage workers of this country who, after all, want to be union men". He devoted a great deal of space to the previous AFL convention in San Francisco in October 1934. The conclusion was very bitter: "At San Francisco, they seduced me with fair words (…) At San Francisco, as I say, I was younger and more gullible (…)" (GMMA, Box 25, F1, 1935: 23).

Indeed, in San Francisco, it may have seemed that the AFL had found a solution to the problem of organising workers in large factories. A committee report provided for granting charters in mass production industries, which meant that unions would gain jurisdiction over workers in that industry. The convention adopted the report, giving the AFL Executive Council a mandate to issue such charters. These demands won the support of some craft organisations, such as the Typographical Union and the Printing Pressmen, which supported the modernisation of the AFL's organising policy in the mass production industries. Three months later, however, doubts were being raised about the interpretation of the resolution on the nature and scope of the charters and jurisdictions to be granted to the industries. This was illustrated by the example of the statute in the car industry, which limited the membership of the newly formed union to only one division (the assembly process of the factory operations). Lewis said this was "a breach of faith and a travesty upon good conscience". He felt betrayed and "ready to rend my seducers limb from limb (…)" (GMMA, Box 25, F1, 1935: 23).

The UMWA president did not confine himself to domestic issues. He also addressed the international aspect. He spoke of an American society that was "frightened and disturbed and depressed and discouraged", and thus threatened by "false prophets: the philosophy of the Communists and the philosophy of the Nazis". Lewis did not under-

estimate these threats, stating that they posed a "deadly threat to the future". In the UMWA leader's view, the American labor movement showed no inclination towards Nazi or Communist philosophy. Instead, he believed that a strong trade union movement would promote national security and "(…) will protect our form of government against the *isms* and the philosophies of foreign lands that now seem to be rampant in high and low places throughout the country" (GMMA, Box 25, F1, 1935: 28). Despite these unequivocal statements about the anti-communist stance of the CIO, the organisation was fed by socialists and communists in the years that followed. Lewis kept that he was able to control them (Cochran, 1977: 97).

In his concluding remarks, Lewis expressed the hope that the AFL would heed the demands of the Atlantic City minority report, which he described as "a policy designed to meet modern requirements under modern conditions in this industrial nation of ours" (GMMA, Box 25, F1, 1935: 30). The possible negative consequences of inaction were to mortgage the AFL. Another consequence of abandoning the spirit of the minority report would be the inevitable triumph of "the enemies of labor". Although Lewis repeatedly insisted that it was not his aim to harm or create competition for the AFL, his speech left few illusions about his criticism of the leadership of the largest US union.

## THE CASE FOR INDUSTRIAL ORGANIZATION

The UMWA leader's speech touched briefly on many issues and, typical of rally speeches (as well as Lewis's speaking style), was clothed in numerous rhetorical figures. In contrast, the relatively long (47 pages) 1936 pamphlet *The Case for Industrial Organisation* (GMMA, Box 35, F4, 1936) was much more structured. Maintaining a communicative language coloured by evocative illustrations, this publication answered the main challenges facing the trade union movement. Obviously, keeping the perspective of the CIO.

The starting point for the analysis presented in this anonymous pamphlet was the recognition of an imbalance of power between employers and workers. The former, represented by the United States Chamber of Commerce, the National Association of Manufacturers and

the American Liberty League, had more influence on those in power than the AFL. The division into organised and unorganised allowed employers to draw dividing lines and antagonise groups of workers. The unorganised, with less bargaining power, earned less, and as a result, the wages of unionised workers were driven down by competition from those who would work for less to keep their jobs. The better position of unionised workers, who could enjoy the benefits of collective bargaining, was also under threat. As pointed out, changes in methods and materials were "undermining old ways of doing things" (GMMA, Box 35, F4, 1936: 5). It meant that even skilled workers could feel threatened by being swept away by new inventions. For these reasons, it was argued that drawing the unorganised masses of workers into AFL structures would be rational.

However, how new union members would be looked after remained contentious. The AFL leadership stuck to its position of forcing newcomers into craft structures. The AFL had very limited success in this area. Craft unions had very few members in workplaces where workers moved from one type of work to another. These workers tended to push the formula of forming industrial unions, which included all wage earners in a factory and industry. The pamphlet clearly explained the difference between craft unions and industrial unions. The former, characteristic of the AFL's modus operandi, meant that the machinists' union, for example, claimed machinists regardless of whether they worked in car factories, naval shipyards or railway shops. It meant that a dozen craft internationals would operate in one auto or rubber plant. The larger the factory, the greater the fragmentation along craft lines. It atomised the labor movement and nullified the legislative impetus and trade union upsurge provided by the Wagner Act.

Noteworthy, the pamphlet highlighted the perspectives and concerns of craft union members. They were seen as very valuable and desirable in industrial unions because of their experience and expertise in union struggles. In particular, they had bargaining power because they were more burdensome for the employer to replace. One factor that may have influenced their move to mass unionism was, on the other hand, the decline in the number of skilled workers (and therefore the prospect of less power) and the realisation of a scenario in which "(…) tomorrow a new machine may make their skills useless" (GMMA, Box 35, F4, 1936: 5). In its publication, the CIO sought to soften the opposition and fears of craft union members by pointing out

that wage differentials based on skills would be maintained. At the same time, skilled workers could choose their representatives to deal with grievances. In addition, the CIO did not propose any changes in sectors where the craft trades have demonstrated successful organisational patterns. This was particularly true in the construction, publishing and railway industries.

This general criticism was accompanied by more detailed descriptions of the AFL's mistakes in organising mass production industries. In the case of the car industry, the process began in 1932, when some two hundred local unions were formed. Some of these received federal union charters from the AFL. These unions sought a national auto workers' union to deal with the national auto companies. The AFL agreed to form a national council with few powers, which remained under the control of officials with a craft background. The union's constitution was promulgated in 1935. However, it did not meet the expectations of the autoworkers. For example, it excluded tool and die makers who were supposed to be assigned to the crafts. The AFL also reserved the right to appoint the officers of the new International Union of United Auto Workers. At the AFL convention in Atlantic City, an appeal by representatives of the auto locals for the right of self-government was ignored (*Report of Proceedings…*, 1935: 729–750).

Another negative example of the AFL's failure to organise the labor movement was the radio factories. Although radio workers tried to form unions, the AFL's position was that they were less skilled and too low-paid to be able to pay high initiation fees and dues. Despite the Federation's reluctance, radio workers organised themselves. In some cases, they were able to negotiate very good terms with their employers. For example, radio workers in Philadelphia won the right to a closed shop, a thirty-six-hour week and a significant increase in hourly wages (69–159%). It has increased interest from the crafts that put in their claims.

The question of granting a federal charter to radio workers was discussed at the 1935 AFL convention (*Report of Proceedings…*, 1935: 752–758). Two unions, the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers and the International Association of Machinists, were interested in admitting radio workers. However, their proposed conditions meant inferior membership for newly admitted members. Therefore, the radio workers decided against becoming a part of any established craft international in that set-up of the AFL. The radio workers expected to form

their own national union, on an industrial basis, within the AFL but under their own control. The AFL's offer to join the Electrical Workers on weak terms (with one vote to a local in national conventions compared to one vote per member for regular locals) fell far short of the radio workers' expectations. The bitter words of the radio workers' resolution of December 1935 could therefore come as no surprise:

> The present officers of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers claim that before the radio and electrical appliances were invented and before most of us were born, it was decided that we should become their subjects (…) This unprecedented policy suggested by the Executive Council would transform the American Federation of Labor itself into a feudal domain in which a craft minority would cast votes for their Class B subjects in a rotten borough system which would overrule the desires of the majority (…) (*The Case for Industrial Organisation*, 1936: 15).

The CIO's criticism of the AFL was still accompanied by the ritual caveat of operating under the banner of the Federation to avoid accusations of fomenting disunity in the labor movement. Nevertheless, as early as in January 1936, the AFL Executive Council issued a statement calling on the CIO to cease its activities (Galenson, 1960: 10). The CIO responded that "continuance of the Committee is not only fully justified but essential to the future growth of the American Federation of Labor" (GMMA, Box 35, F4, 1936: 23). The Committee argued that it had taken no action that violated the Federation's constitution. It countered accusations of creating dualism in the labor movement by saying that it was the withdrawal of millions of mass production workers from the AFL that manifested the roots of dualism. Going on the offensive, the CIO addressed a letter to president Green in February 1936, urging him to raise funds to carry out the AFL convention's order to organise the steel industry.

In the final section, the author(s) of the pamphlet responded to the objections and arguments of the opponents of industrial unionism. The first of these objections concerned the difficulty of deciding where one industry begins and another ends. It sometimes took the ridiculous form of suggesting that since there were more than 6,000 industries, so 6,000 unions should exist. The CIO insisted that this plea was exaggerated and that "the employers have successfully solved this problem, and the workers can too" (GMMA, Box 35, F4, 1936: 23). Industrial unionism was flexible, they argued, unlike the rigid craft system, which did not follow modern production methods.

The second argument raised was concern about the lack of privileges for skilled workers in mass production industries. It involved specific health and safety legislation, higher wages and all the other privileges. The response stressed that the CIO was not interested in building industrial unions in many sectors where craft unions were already established (railroads, printing trades, building trades). Moreover, there were few craft unions in the mass production industries. Given the presence of skilled workers in these industries, industrial unions would protect skilled workers and improve their position. Craftsmen moving from one industry to another (e.g. metal polishers, blacksmiths) were to be given an interchangeable trade union card. Existing wage differentials were to be maintained. The CIO argued that the growth of industrial unions and the resulting increase in workers' power would benefit skilled workers by giving them a stronger bargaining position in discussions on social security, unemployment, pensions and sick pay.

The third issue concerned the achievements of industrial unions. The section included references to Department of Labor bulletins that credibly confirmed the development of industrial unionism. According to these figures, mining unions covered 86,6% of the workers. The figure for wearing apparel was 55%. Among craft unions, metal unions were reported to cover 47% of workers in the railway industry and 35% in shipbuilding. In mechanical engineering, the average union coverage was 7%. However, in the radio, television and communication equipment sub-sector of mechanical engineering, where industrial unions were strong, union density was as high as 47%. The dynamics of the industrial unions was even more evident in aggregate data on membership growth between 1920 and 1935. During this period, craft unions lost a third of their members (GMMA, Box 35, F4, 1936: 35; 'Types of Employer…', 1935: 1446).

Table 1. Change in Number of Members, 1920–1935

| | |
|---|---|
| Industrial unions | -6% |
| Craft unions | -32% |
| Semi-industrial unions voting for industrial unionism in 1935 | +5% |
| Semi-industrial unions that did not vote for industrial unionism in 1935 | -60% |
| Unions of miscellaneous type | -32% |

Source: GMMA, Box 35, F4, 1935: 36.

The fourth charge against the CIO referred indirectly to the history of the labor movement, equating the Committee to earlier fronts in the past. According to this approach, the situation of the CIO would die a similar death. The Committee was contrasted with the Knights of Labor, the American Railway Union, the Social Trades and Labor Alliance, the Industrial Workers of the World, the One Big Union and others. The responses pointed out that these organisations were formed in different socio-historical circumstances (e.g. revolt against the factory system after the Civil War), had different aims (e.g. promoting sectarian designs) and used other tools (turning to political action rather than trying to build effective collective bargaining organisations). Some did not seek to build industrial unions and had no plan to build a permanent organisation. Unlike the CIO, none of these movements had the support of long-established, successful unions representing a large part of the membership of the AFL.

A seemingly trivial but significant issue was the levying of dues on trade union members. The craft unions advocated high dues, arguing they were necessary for success. At the same time, this was a barrier to the low-paid worker (earning about three dollars a day as opposed to the ten-dollar-a-day aristocrats), which meant driving many such workers out. In this way, the craft unions "(…) bought their own high wages by agreeing to leave the majority to the mercies of individual bargaining" (GMMA, Box 35, F4, 1936: 39). This unfair division was perpetuated by a system of a monopoly of skills, apprenticeship laws and high recruitment fees. In the CIO's view, unions were not business enterprises. Dues were to go into strike funds, paid officials, social activities, club rooms, etc., to "increase their loyalty to the organisation".

The concluding paragraph acknowledged that the craft unions had won some gains for their members and the working class as a whole. However, in the face of "(…) unheard unemployment, rapid changes in industrial methods, the craft unions should not stand in the way of progress". Their actions were described as a "do-nothing policy", leading to "the stagnation and death for the AFL". According to the CIO, non-unionised workers should be allowed to join labor's ranks "on the only basis that meets their needs – industrial unionism", not by feeding into unions "which are now strong and scorn those less fortunate (…)" (GMMA, Box 35, F4, 1936: 47).

## RUBBER AND STEEL

Two 1936 pamphlets were devoted to characterising the trade union movement on a sectoral basis. The first dealt with the Akron rubber strike (1936), which ended in union victory and was a baptism of fire for the CIO. The pamphlet analysed the tactics used by the protesters and formulated "Lessons from the Akron Strike". At several points in the account, the contrast was drawn with the AFL, which "did little to assist the strikers". It was stressed that the AFL had squandered the sentiment for unionism that had spread in the mass production industries after 1932. Thus, when the strike broke out in February 1936, only a fraction of the fourteen thousand workers in the Goodyear plants were organised. At the same time, "the CIO stood ready with organisers and other active help" (GMMA, Box 1, F1, 1936: 14).

Most of those who walked out in mass protest against wage cuts and insecurity were not union members. However, they were immediately supported by a local branch of the UMWA, which successfully pressured the governor not to send troops to enforce the court order. A key weapon in the hands of organised labor in Akron was the sit-down strike (Tully, 2011: 174). Its implementation required considerable organisational efficiency, achieved through the cooperation of many groups in the labor movement. Care was taken to run a strike kitchen, liaise with the local press and keep strikers in readiness. The public was persuaded that "The two agitators in this strike were Goodyear hours and wages. They were native products. They were not imported from Moscow" (GMMA, Box 1, F1, 1936: 7). Sympathy was also gained by publicizing the income of the company authorities and comparing it with that of the workers. But the solidarity of the strikers and other Akron residents was crucial.

Much more difficult was the task of unionising the steel industry. This was the subject of a radio address by J. Lewis on July 6, 1936, printed in full in the CIO's third bulletin that year. The point of reference for the CIO chairman was the newspaper advertisement published by the American Iron and Steel Institute. In Lewis's opinion, it was "a declaration of industrial and civil war". The Institute recommended that steel companies adopt a single policy towards their workers. As Lewis added, this was a policy "(…) against the right of its workers to engage in self-organization or modern collective bargaining" (GMMA, Box 35, F6,

1936: 5). A strength of Lewis's speech was his frequent reference to data. He drew attention to the sheer cost of advertising in 375 newspapers (half a million dollars). The Institute accounted for 95% of the country's steel production and employed some 500,000 men. Workers in the sector could expect to earn 65 cents an hour, compared with 83 cents in anthracite mining. Lewis contrasted this with "dividends on fictitious shares" and expenditure on the machines that replaced human labor.

The contrast between the big factory owners and the workers was highlighted by reference to F.D. Roosevelt's acceptance speech after being re-nominated for a second term. Roosevelt's words: "The hours men and women worked, the wages they received, the conditions of their labor – these had passed beyond the control of the people, and were imposed by this new industrial dictatorship" (*Congressional Record…*, 1936: 10832) were somewhat distorted by Lewis, who referred to "industrial dictatorship" rather than "economic dictatorship which must be eliminated". Referring again to Roosevelt's words (this time from his inaugural address of March 4 1933), Lewis declared that "the money-changers must be driven from the temple" (*Congressional Record…*, 1933: 4261). In light of the above, it can be concluded that Lewis understood the proposals of the American Iron and Steel Institute as "(…) efforts upon retaining the old system of finance-capitalism which was in operation before the depression and thus preventing the attainment of political and industrial democracy by the people" (GMMA, Box 35, F6, 1936:14).

In the following paragraph of the pamphlet, the CIO promised to fight hard for workers' rights and a decent life. It included a living wage sufficient "for the support of the worker and his family in health and modest comfort". Preempting objections from the craft unions, the UMWA president pointed out that wages should be based on "(…) skill, training, hazard and responsibility". At stake in the success of the struggle against big business was the ability to determine their own destiny, for the alternative was "to serve as indentured servants to a financial and economic dictatorship which would shamelessly exploit our natural resources (…)". Accordingly, Lewis called on workers to "throw off their shackles of servitude and join the union of their industry" (GMMA, Box 35, F6, 1936:15).

## THE CIO SUSPENSION

A significant point on the road to a split in the American labor movement was Green's letter to the heads of the international unions that made up the CIO (November 23, 1935). In it, the AFL president expressed his unequivocal opposition to and disappointment with the creation of the Committee itself. He accused its founders of creating dualism in the trade union movement and competition for the AFL. He warned of unspecified consequences: "No one can accurately prophesy or predict where such a movement will lead" (GMMA, Box 35, F3, 1936: 11). He did not doubt that "bitterness and strife would inevitably follow".

Green's unequivocal stance was met with a response from the CIO in its 4th bulletin of 1936. It included excerpts from 6 letters from the presidents of the constituent unions responding to Green's concerns. Charles Howard, president of the International Typographical Union, criticised Green for ignoring the voices of millions of members of national and international unions and for having a narrow understanding of democracy, interpreted as a majority of the votes of officers and convention delegates. In contrast, Max Zaritsky, president of the United Hats, Cap and Millinery Workers International Union, pointed out that the formation of the CIO posed no threat to the AFL, adding that similar initiatives (e.g. the formation of the Conference of Progressive Political Action) had taken place in the Federation before (Green, 1998: 127).

A reminder of another statement by Green in 1918 preceded the polemic. It was an interesting rhetorical device, showing the change in the AFL president's views that had taken place over the years. In *The Case for Industrial Unionism* (Trachtenberg, 1918: 98), he argued for the advantages of the industrial model of trade unionism, using arguments taken almost verbatim from CIO speeches and bulletins of the 1930s. For example: "When men are organized by industry they can concentrate their economic power more advantageously than when organized by craft unions" (GMMA, Box 35, F3, 1936: 9). Elsewhere, he argued that the organisation of men by industry should promote "a more perfect organization, closer cooperation and tends to the develop the highest form of organization". Green pointed to the UMWA, which brought together skilled and unskilled workers, as an example

of a well-functioning industrial organisation. He claimed that the unskilled workers, in particular, would benefit from this model, as collective bargaining would continue "until the schedules applying to all class of labor employed in and around the mines are agreed to" (GMMA, Box 35, F3, 1936: 9). Finally, Green summed up the advantages of industrial organisation: reduction of opportunities for jurisdictional disputes, concentration of economic strength, and protection of interests of the weakest.

The CIO positioned the AFL president as firstly wavering in his views, as evidenced by the juxtaposition of two speeches, and secondly wrong on issues fundamental to the labor movement, as evidenced by letters from prominent CIO activists. In the final controversial voice in the pamphlet, Lewis encouraged Green to give up his seat as AFL president and join the CIO, asking: "Why not go back to father's house?" The offer was to become chairman of the committee, retaining his existing salary, with the promise that "the position would be as permanent as the one you occupy" (GMMA, Box 35, F3, 1936: 23). This was not a sincere offer; on the contrary, it was a mocking one that struck at the authority of the head of America's largest trade union organisation.

However, the tone of the CIO's last pamphlet of 1936 was very serious. It contained a letter to president Green in which Lewis, on behalf of the Committee, explained why the CIO had refused to attend an Executive Council hearing in August 1936. According to the allegations, the CIO had been threatened with suspension or expulsion. Lewis pointed out that this was inconsistent with the AFL constitution, which allowed such a sanction only at a regular AFL convention and by a two-thirds roll-call vote of the delegates. For this reason, the CIO refused to submit to the jurisdiction of the Executive Council. The letter also referred to the charges against the CIO. The committee was accused of "dualism, rebellion and fomenting insurrection". Lewis believed this resulted from craft union bosses competing with industrial union leaders. The CIO found itself "assaulted from the rear, denounced as to its motives, branded with charges of communism, solemnly warned of failure, and finally threatened by what is intended to be a ham-stringing expulsion from the Federation" (GMMA, Box 35, F7, 1936: 1). The Executive Council's actions were described as defeatist and obstructionist. Lewis maintained, as he had in earlier pamphlets, that there was a place for both forms of trade un-

ions in a "militant and progressive" labor movement. However, he was clear that the jurisdictional claims of craft unions in mass production industries were "at best but theoretical, and have never been, and cannot be, realized". This meant a further polarisation of the labor movement, as the very title of the pamphlet – *Why the Committee for Industrial Organisation Will Carry On* – foreshadowed.

## CONCLUSION

American union membership increased by 45% between 1933 and 1936 (*HSUS* 1976: 177). The largest increases were recorded in the automobile, rubber, and aluminium industries organised on an industrial basis. But it was the craft unions that set the tone in the AFL. As late as 1934 (the San Francisco convention), it appeared that an internal struggle over whether unions should organise all workers in an industry or on a craft basis could be resolved by an agreement of affiliated organisations within the AFL. The Executive Council of the AFL was then instructed to issue charters to unions in several mass production industries. To satisfy the craft unions, it was assumed that the jurisdictional rights of existing unions would be recognised. Although the AFL granted charters in a few areas (automobile and rubber industries), a subsequent convention (Atlantic City in 1935) showed that the dispute between industrial and craft organisations would not be quickly and easily resolved. The Minority Report, supported by some AFL affiliates, and the long, heated debate that accompanied it were harbingers of the split in the labor movement.

Reading the CIO pamphlets from this turbulent period leads to several conclusions. The key figure of the front within the AFL was J. Lewis. His style of speech, his colloquial arguments, his matter-of--factness and his appeal to numbers may have attracted readers and, consequently, supporters and members of the CIO. Of the committee's eight publications (1935–1936), two contained only Lewis's statements, and two others quoted him extensively. This was in keeping with the UMWA president's political role.

Another feature of the CIO pamphlets was the radicalisation of message and rhetoric. Up to the point of *Industrial Unions Mean Unity*, which

contained a reply to Lewis's letter from Green of November 23, 1935, the CIO pamphlets explicitly emphasised the possibility of reforming the Federation in the spirit of "unionising unorganised mass production under the banner of the AFL". The sneering tone of Lewis's letter to the AFL president, encouraging Green to join the CIO while retaining his salary, made constructive debate impossible. Significantly, however, the growing rhetorical radicalism did not translate into demands to radically transform society as a whole. The CIO explicitly avoided association with the IWW or the Knights of Labor, which proclaimed the challenge of capitalism through workplace control.

The CIO pamphlets are an exhaustive catalogue of the primary differences between the two perspectives on trade unionism. These can be boiled down to the dilemma between an elite and a mass movement and whether a decent wage should be the right of only a skilled worker or every worker. These issues were the subject of the CIO's most influential publication of the period: *The Case for Industrial Organisation*. While giving some credit to the AFL, it concluded by stressing that labor was in crisis and that craft unions should not stand in the way of progress. Thus, The CIO saw itself as the vanguard of the labor movement, which ruled out subservience to the AFL in the long run.

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