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The Congress of Industrial Organizations: Operation Dixie and a Legacy of Worker Activism

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Abstract

Trevor George Porter: The Congress of Industrial Organizations: Operation Dixie and a Legacy of Worker Activism (Under the Direction of Dr. Jarod Roll)

The passage of the National Labor Relations Act of 1935 overhauled United States labor law, and it shifted the balance of power in favor of organized labor. Seizing upon this monumental moment in history, the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) was founded with a mandate to "organize the unorganized". The labor federation made its primary focus the mass production workers of America, many of whom had not previously been afforded the opportunity to join a union. This was especially true in the southern United States, where a combination of one-party political hegemony, Jim Crow laws which mandated segregation, and the defiance of corporations went unmatched in opposition to unionism. Building on a tradition of radical, militant activism, the CIO brought mass unionism to the South. Refusing to stop with workers' rights, the federation went further by pushing for civil and political rights for African Americans in the South when few dared to challenge the established order which had remained in place since Reconstruction. The legacy of the CIO can be traced beyond its southern organizing forays to the present day, where the traditions of worker activism continue to make themselves known in the present day in fights for equal rights across not only the South but the entire United States of America.

Table of Contents

Introduction

George Holloway was born in Memphis in 1915. The years of his childhood comprised some of the worst of the Jim Crow Era for an African American boy.[1] George grew up in an era with segregated schools, restaurants, streetcars, and swimming pools. He learned from his father, a Pullman porter, about the importance and value of a union at an early age when he joined the Memphis chapter of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, but there were also harsh lessons to learn. George learned that even with a union the power of segregation remained unbroken since blacks were required to meet separately and had little power over their own affairs; he also learned that involving oneself in a union in Memphis was dangerous.[2] Edward Crump, the notorious political boss who de facto ruled Memphis for decades, was a staunch opponent of organized labor. When George was about twelve years old, he along with his father witnessed Crump using the power of the police to put labor and civil rights leader A. Philip Randolph on a train leaving Memphis before he could finish speaking to his audience.[3] Crump and the accompanying ruling elite used police power, segregation, threats of being run out of town, poll taxes, and even the church to maintain political hegemony over the city. This was the city that George Holloway grew up in; it was a city whose leaders were heavily devoted to stopping the spread of organized labor and civil rights especially to the majority African American population of Memphis. As George himself said, "Until people like me came back from college to take positions, that's just how it worked. I joined the union and all to help change these things."[4]

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[1] Michael K. Honey, *Black Workers Remember: An Oral History of Segregation, Unionism, and the Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley, Calif: University of California Press, 1999), 60-61.
[2] Ibid, 60-65.
[3] Ibid, 60-61.
[4] Ibid, 63-66.

George would go on to do exactly what he set out to do. The Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), a rival labor organization to the American Federation of Labor (AFL), set about to organize the Firestone plant in Memphis in 1940. George was one of the leaders of the organizing drive for the United Rubber Workers (URW) and the CIO. He led biracial marches around the plant prior to the beginning of the workday, assisted URW organizer George Bass, and ensured black support for the CIO.[5] During the organizing drive, Bass and his assistant were beaten by a group of men with clubs. Policemen stood by and some even joined in on the brutal assault. Holloway was prevented from coming to his friend's aid since the union men did not wish for the incident to become something which could be portrayed as a race riot. Holloway and Bass attributed the assault to the orders of Crump due to the lack of police assistance and the amount of money which was involved in the planning and execution of the attack.[6] George Bass continued to promote the CIO despite these attacks. As Holloway said of Bass, "George used to tell everyone that the CIO believed in justice for all, and the right to a job. That's what the CIO was built on. Blacks should have as much right to a good job as anyone else, and the company shouldn't be making color division."[7] Holloway was forced to quit his job at Firestone before the union vote as he was about to be fired for leading the march at the plant in support of the CIO. Adding to the misfortune was the fact that the CIO lost the union vote at Firestone to the AFL which was backed by a majority of white workers. Nevertheless, George Holloway would receive his long-awaited victory at Firestone. The CIO pursued another organizing drive at the plant in 1942. This time, George returned as a poll watcher for the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), and in his own words, "… I bet 99 percent voted CIO."[8]

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[5] Ibid, 69-70.
[6] Ibid, 70-71.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Ibid, 71-72.

The CIO brought its radical brand of unionism with it to the South even though the obstacles to unionization throughout the region were overwhelming. Their efforts would culminate in the CIO's Southern Organizing Drive, known popularly as Operation Dixie, which took place from 1946 to 1953. Operation Dixie and the Congress of Industrial Organizations have both been studied at length. Much of the existing historiography relating to Operation Dixie, however, has been limited in its scope. While focusing heavily on the textile industry where the CIO chose to make its strongest pushes for organization, the fate of many workers and unions outside of major textile producing regions is often ignored. Operation Dixie and the CIO more generally is also depicted as suffering constant defeats from its inception and being subjected to a steady decline which culminates in the dissolution of Operation Dixie and the 1955 merger of the CIO with the AFL.

There is much to be explored about this incredibly complex campaign and the CIO members behind its planning and execution. The most important element to remember when discussing Operation Dixie, one which has often been forgotten, is that the Southern Organizing Drive cannot be contained merely by the years of its formal activity. Rather, Operation Dixie should be seen as the culmination of a long-term CIO strategy to organize the South. At the annual CIO convention held in Detroit in 1941, the following resolution was unanimously passed in favor of southern activity:

> Whereas, it having been recognized by this convention that the organization of the workers in the South is the No. 1 task before the CIO . . . Resolved, That the officials of the CIO are urged immediately to formulate and put into effect plans in conjunction with all interested national and international unions designed to bring about the organization of all Southern workers into unions of the CIO.[9]

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[9] Michael Goldfield, *The Southern Key: Class, Race, and Radicalism in the 1930s and 1940s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), Oxford Scholarship Online, 2020, 294.

Even prior to this resolution, there was significant CIO activity in the South. CIO organizers across the region had years to sharpen their techniques, scout the potential challenges, and become familiar with the territory they were to organize. Workers in the South responded to the CIO and its ideals, and these workers often formed the basis of a grassroots organizing base in places such as Birmingham and Memphis. Long before Operation Dixie commenced, these types of grassroot movements became commonplace in CIO organizing throughout the South. These grassroots activities would become a crucial part of early CIO successes in the South, and the implications of this kind of organizing would continue to have a major effect on the CIO through Operation Dixie. For these reasons, Operation Dixie should be looked at as if it were the culmination of a CIO project spanning decades rather than a one-off push by the union.

The story of Operation Dixie is made up of much more than defeat and dejection. There are many unions that experienced tremendous successes as a result of the CIO's organizing drive such as the Food, Tobacco, Agricultural, and Allied Workers (FTA), United Steelworkers of America (USWA), and the United Auto Workers (UAW) among many others. The CIO leaders responsible for the drive saw promise in their efforts; they saw signs that encouraged them to continue in their grand campaign to organize the South. These men believed from the outset that Operation Dixie would bring success, and there were substantial victories throughout the drive which served to reinforce those beliefs. These victories came in many forms: negotiating new contracts, organizing new locals, and adding members to the existing unions across the region. These are not the only parts of the Southern Organizing Drive which have been largely overlooked within the current research. Throughout the CIO's existence, the organization remained committed to combatting injustices. In this capacity, the CIO exhibited wide-ranging support for black workers and civil rights unionism within its ranks. The CIO also stood behind

female workers and often employed women in roles for the organization including at some of the highest levels of the CIO. While these actions in and of themselves may not seem extraordinary, these were policies which were decidedly not mainstream during the CIO's existence. This is especially true in the American South, where Jim Crow laws provided a legal basis for the separation of the races and cultural norms often relegated women to a lesser role in both single and family life. These guiding principles of the CIO have been well established by writers such as Robert Korstad, but the radical nature of the CIO and its program of civil rights unionism alongside its grassroots organizing strategies had an outsize effect, both positive and negative, on CIO activity in the South for its entire existence, including the Southern Organizing Drive.

There is the question of why the CIO attempted such an ambitious project in the first place. Often ignored during this evaluation is the CIO's wide-ranging activity in the South prior to the beginning of Operation Dixie; the union was active for ten years in the region before the formal organizing drive. Its organizers and workers had ample time to learn lessons in organizing the South, but it is not clear that these lessons were applied to Operation Dixie proper. From its beginning, the CIO was founded and governed on the principles of civil rights unionism. As these were the organization's guiding tenets, the motivation to organize laborers in the South came not only from practical concerns but also from an ideological basis as the CIO strove to support women and African Americans. Much of the CIO's southern organizing activity was driven by this commitment to minorities and women. These ideals found a place in Operation Dixie, but ultimately, due to the immense difficulty with confronting the existing order in the South, they were expressed in a much different way than they had been by the earlier CIO activities in the region. Additionally, the reasons for the optimism of the CIO regarding the drive become much clearer when viewed in the context of the evolving labor movement in the United

States from 1935 onwards. Expanding the scope of research surrounding Operation Dixie and the

CIO strategies employed within allows for a much clearer picture of the motivations for the

undertaking, the drive to persevere, and the eventual end of the campaign to take shape.

Chapter I. New Deal Labor and the South

The activities of both the CIO and organized labor more generally did not occur in a

vacuum. When the CIO first came into being in 1935, the United States was in the middle of the

Great Depression. Unemployment during 1935 reached almost twenty percent while it was even

higher in the preceding years.[10] Organized labor, long demonized and brutalized by many

American politicians and businessmen in its ongoing struggle for attempting to bring the power

of unions to bear against industry, received a boon in 1933 in the form of the National Industrial

Recovery Act (NIRA) which was a part of President Roosevelt's "New Deal with the American

people." "Section 7(a) of the new law declared that workers had the right to bargain collectively

with their employers through representatives of their own choosing. The law implied that it was

illegitimate for employers to stifle unions, interfere with efforts to form unions, or refuse to enter

into bargaining relationships. The passage of this act spurred major union membership gains

among the UMW, ACWA, ILGWU, and others.[11] Though the NIRA was seen as a breakthrough

in federal policy towards labor, in reality it was deeply flawed. Section 7(a) lacked any sort of

enforcement mechanism against corporations who violated it. Nonetheless, its passage

encouraged workers to fight for their rights, and in 1934 there were more work stoppages since

the early 1920s. This culminated in September with the general textile strike of 1934 in which

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[10] "Labor Force, Employment, and Unemployment, 1929-39: Estimating Methods," (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1948), https://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/1948/article/pdf/labor-force-employment-and-unemployment-1929-39-estimating-methods.pdf.

[11] Robert H. Zieger and Gilbert J. Gall, *American Workers, American Unions: The Twentieth Century*, 3rd ed. (London; Baltimore, Md; Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 80-81.

some 400,000 textile workers walked off the job; it was the largest strike action in American history at that point.[12] Senator Robert Wagner, a Democrat from New York and a long-time friend of the labor movement, disagreed with the way in which Section 7(a) was carried out in practice. When in May of 1935 the Supreme Court declared the NIRA illegal, Wagner wasted no time introducing his own bill, the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA), popularly known as the Wagner Act.[13] As Graham Boone of the *Monthly Labor Review* noted, "The NLRA went beyond the NIRA by guaranteeing private-sector workers the right to unionize, allowing workers to engage in collective bargaining as a matter of national policy, providing for secret ballot elections as the means for choosing unions, and protecting workers from employer intimidation, coercion, and reprisal."[14] The Wagner Act also created a strong National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) to wield investigation and enforcement powers with regard to the provisions of the act. Despite the Wagner Act's sweeping protections for organized labor, there were crucial omissions to the law. Key among these omissions was the fact that the NLRA did not protect agricultural workers and their right to organize and bargain. In 1935, when the Act was proposed, agricultural workers made up nearly twenty-five percent of the US workforce meaning that almost a quarter of the country's workers were excluded from labor law protections.[15] Nevertheless, owing in part to the tremendous endorsement of support for the New Deal that came with the sweeping Democratic victories in the 1934 midterm election, the passage of the act was completed on July 5, 1935; most employers, however, resolved to openly flaunt the act

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[12] Ibid, 73-77.

[13] Ibid, 77-81.

[14] Graham Boone, "Labor law highlights, 1915–2015," *Monthly Labor Review,* (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, October 2015), https://doi.org/10.21916/mlr.2015.38.

[15] United States National Labor Relations Board, *Employee Rights Under the National Labor Relations Act*, 2011, https://www.nlrb.gov/sites/default/files/attachments/basic-page/node-3788/employeerightsposter-8-5x11.pdf.; "Labor Force, Employment, and Unemployment, 1929-39: Estimating Methods," 51.

since they believed it would be struck down by the Supreme Court in due time much like the NIRA.[16] The Supreme Court declared the Wagner Act constitutional in March of 1937 paving the way for the tremendous labor organizing victories around the country during 1937 and 1938.[17]

With respect to organized labor, the South can and should be considered as a mostly separate entity from the rest of the country. The region's history of slavery, continued enforcement of segregation through Jim Crow laws, its reliance on agriculture, and a unique political hegemony created very difficult conditions under which to organize workers. The southern United States has a long history of meager union activity. This was usually limited to AFL organization of craft trades, but there were occasional exceptions to this rule such as the cases of the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union (STFU) and the Sharecroppers' Union (SCU). While both the STFU and SCU were interracial organizations with black majorities often aided by communists and other radicals, the AFL, despite its nominal prohibition on discriminatory unions, comprised many unions which openly segregated black and white workers; some other AFL unions like the International Association of Machinists (IAM) barred black workers from joining entirely.[18] The STFU and SCU, due to their focus on the work of organizing agricultural workers, were excluded from the provisions of the NLRA. The SCU's newspaper chronicles the frustrations of these poor farmers through letters written to the paper. One, written from

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[16] Patrick Renshaw, *American Labor and Consensus Capitalism, 1935-1985*, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1991), 20.; Zieger, *American Workers, American Unions: The Twentieth Century*, 80-81.

[17] Zieger, *American Workers, American Unions: The Twentieth Century*, 80-81.

[18] F. Ray Marshall, *Labor in the South*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1967), 25-35.; Robin D. G. Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists During the Great Depression*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 38-40.

"Starvation County, Mississippi," criticized the governor's stance on outside industry in

Mississippi:

> Let us see what in short are the attractions for outside capital in Mississippi. 1. Cheap, unorganized labor. 2. 80 per cent are politically disfranchised. 3. More than half the population is jim crowed. 4. Unemployment is great and greatly augmented by taking 3,000,000 acres out of production due to the tax sales. 5. Living standard very low. 6. Illiteracy, counting both Negro and white, almost 45 per cent…There can be only one answer to Gov. White and his associates who present a reactionary front against the common people of our state – a strong farmer-labor party founded on a strongly organized farmer-labor population with the active support of small merchants, teachers, and other exploited classes in our state. – A Homeless Taxpayer in Starvation County Miss.[19]

The South's political structure made the region ever more hostile to union organizing.

Disfranchisement of the majority of the populations of many southern states, often due to

theories of racial superiority, allowed one-party political hegemony to flourish. The fact that

most southern politicians did not face serious challenges during elections allowed them to pursue

a course which was increasingly accommodating to business and capital while opposing labor

and unions.[20] Given political cover, corporations were often much more hostile and antagonistic

towards southern workers attempting to organize than their northern counterparts. Ed Crump's

political machine in Memphis coopted the support of early AFL unions to maintain control of the

city and its politics. At the same time, Crump and his allies brutally repressed any union

movement not aligned with the machine.[21] In Gadsden, Alabama, furious local officials went to

great lengths to prevent the organization of major industries such as steel and rubber; they passed

numerous ordinances designed to prevent the gathering of workers in places all over the city.

Pro-union workers were often terrorized by their anti-union counterparts, thugs supposedly on

corporate payrolls, and even the police.[22] The lack of allies in the region forced labor and its

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[19] "A Letter From a Taxpayer In Starvation County, Mississippi," *Southern Farm Leader*, August 1936. 6.
[20] Gerald Friedman, "The Political Economy of Early Southern Unionism: Race, Politics, and Labor in the South, 1880-1953," *The Journal of Economic History* 60, no. 2 (2000): 406-407.
[21] Roger Biles, "Ed Crump Versus the Unions: The Labor Movement in Memphis during the 1930s," *Labor History* 25, no. 4 (1984): 536-540.
[22] Charles H. Martin, "Southern Labor Relations in Transition: Gadsden, Alabama, 1930-1943," *The Journal of Southern History* 47, no. 4 (1981): 549-554.

representatives to settle when looking for political support. A key example of this is the 1936

Mississippi election for United States senator. Despite being acknowledged as a conservative,

labor, including the AFL and national railway unions, threw their support behind Pat Harrison.

The Chairman of the Mississippi State Legislative Board of the Brotherhood of Railroad

Trainmen wrote of Harrison: "He has not been radical or taken part in any radical legislation but

his thoughts and actions have been solid and constructive and we will be benefitted by his

service."[23] Nonetheless, the unions backed Harrison, and this turn towards conservatism would

continue to be apparent at various times in southern unionism over the next two decades.

Chapter II. The Beginnings of the CIO

The Committee for Industrial Organization, later renamed as the Congress of Industrial

Organizations (CIO), was formed by John L. Lewis, president of the United Mine Workers of

America (UMW), following the 1935 annual American Federation of Labor (AFL) convention.

During the convention, Lewis' ideals of industrial unionism in which mass production workers

are organized were rejected in favor of the AFL's brand of craft unionism which focused its

organizing efforts on skilled craftsmen.[24] The AFL's attempts to keep their craft unions of skilled

laborers powerful had the effect of alienating the vast majority of workers in mass production

industries. Additionally, many of these often-unskilled laborers were minority workers; by

keeping the AFL focus away from industrial unionism, the organization was by default excluding

a large portion of minority workers from their ranks; additionally, at least thirty-one AFL

affiliates expressly barred black members from joining. John Lewis recognized the opportunities

available in organizing this disparate group of workers and. attempted in vain to persuade the

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[23] Wayne Flynt, "A Vignette in Southern Labor Politics--The 1936 Mississippi Senatorial
Primary," *The Mississippi Quarterly* 26, no. 1 (1972): 96-98.
[24] Robert H Zieger, *The CIO, 1935-1955,* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 23-24.

AFL leadership to support his cause; when this proved unfruitful, Lewis allowed his passion for

his ideals to show when he assaulted a fellow union leader who disagreed with the principles of

industrial unionism.[25] Frustrated, John Lewis decided to rally support from other supporters of

mass production unions within the AFL. Lewis's own UMW along with other unions such as the

Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America (ACWA) and the International Ladies Garment

Workers Union (ILGWU) formed the initial backbone of the Committee, but the group as a

whole remained affiliated with the AFL.[26]

Initially after forming their organization, Lewis and his fellow members remained

committed to the AFL. They sought to advance the cause of industrial unionism among the many

staunch craft unionists within the AFL. In short order, whatever dreams the men had of

remaining allied with the AFL would be squashed. AFL leaders remained steadfastly opposed to

any and all CIO activity and asserted that the AFL was the organization which should speak for

organized labor.[27] Conversely, Lewis, as leader of the CIO, grew more antagonistic towards AFL

officials and policies. With tempers between the AFL and CIO flaring, the Committee's first

chance to make a large impact on labor came at the Goodyear plant in Akron, Ohio.[28] At the

plant, members of the United Rubber Workers struck against Goodyear. The workers showed a

large degree of militancy in their actions on the picket line and against anti-union workers; this

caused the AFL, who the URW was affiliated with at the time, to disapprove of the rubber

workers tactics. Meanwhile, the CIO jumped at such an opportunity to support a group of

industrial workers.[29] The CIO actively supported the strike by sending organizers to show

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[25] Ibid, 22-23.
[26] Ibid, 23-24.
[27] Ibid, 29-31.
[28] Ibid, 31-33.
[29] Zieger, *American Workers, American Unions: The Twentieth Century,* 84-86.

solidarity on the picket line, give speeches, and hand out pamphlets. For the URW, it was

decisive CIO show of commitment to organizing mass production workers. The union itself

decided to affiliate with the CIO in June of 1936.[30] During this same month, the CIO formed the

Steel Workers Organizing Committee (SWOC). The organizing of workers in the steel industry

would provide a large challenge to the CIO due to several factors as described by historian

Robert Zieger:

> Steel was the quintessential heavy industry, employing a half million workers in its various subdivisions. It was central to manufacturing and increasingly important in coal mining, and the steel industry was run by some of the most fervently antiunion businessmen in the country. The very fact that organized labor had suffered crushing defeats in 1892 and 1919–20 both complicated the task of winning the allegiance of steelworkers and made victory imperative.[31]

Backed by 500,000 dollars of Lewis' UMW money and aided by a partnership with the

Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers (AA), SWOC sidestepped the AFL and

other unions by declaring its intent to organize all steel workers irrespective of jurisdiction. This

act spurred the AFL to suspend all CIO member unions from their organization, and tensions

continued to grow especially among Lewis and AFL president William Green who often hurled

insults at each other publicly.[32] Led by future CIO president Philip Murray, SWOC forged ahead

with their plans to organize steel workers across the country. Despite having allocated two

hundred experienced organizers to the campaign, results came slow during the first several

months of SWOC organizing. Despite these initial uncertainties, Murray remained convinced

that with the proper tools and enough time the steelworkers could be organized.[33]

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[30] Ibid.
[31] Zieger, *The CIO, 1935-1955, 34-35.*
[32] Ibid, 35-38.
[33] Zieger, *The CIO: 1935-1955,* 38-39.

Chapter III. Major Industries, Major Victories

During the early months of the SWOC organizing drive, the CIO received another opportunity to make leaps of progress for industrial unionism. United Auto Workers Local 34 just outside of Atlanta struck at a General Motors (GM) plant in November of 1936. The workers employed a sit-down strike in which they would not leave the plant until an agreement was reached. This was to be the first in a chain of UAW strikes that would bring GM to its knees.[34] In Flint, Michigan, the heart of GM's auto production empire, spurred on by the CIO, the earlier success of the URW, and the earlier sit-down strikes at GM plants around the country, workers organized a sit-down strike which shut down two of GM's large, important manufacturing facilities on December 30, 1936.[35] While the CIO did little to manage the actual conduct of the strike at GM, John Lewis himself took up the cause of negotiating with state and federal officials to bring GM to the bargaining table with the UAW. Lewis remained opposed to demands that the workers vacate the plants before an agreement was signed. While the militant workers held onto the plants against police attempts to take them back, Lewis' efforts were eventually able to help bring GM to the bargaining table. [36] On February eleventh of 1937, GM agreed "to recognize the UAW as the only legitimate labor organization in the plants affected by the strike for a period of six months." The agreement won by the UAW in Flint provided an opportunity for the UAW to expand its membership both within and outside of GM. Additionally, "[t]he auto agreement was powerful vindication of the CIO course" of organizing mass production industrial facilities using militant tactics if necessary.[37]

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[34] *No More Moanin: Voices of Southern Struggle*, Vol. 1, no. 3/4. (Atlanta, Georgia: Institute for Southern Studies, 1974), 64-80.
[35] Zieger, *The CIO: 1935-1955,* 49-50.
[36] Ibid, 50-52.
[37] Zieger, *The CIO: 1935-1955,* 50-52.

The CIO was the benefactor of another resounding victory shortly after the major UAW victory in Flint. The SWOC had grown steadily since its inception, and it could claim in its membership 125,000 steelworkers by the start of 1937. SWOC organizers and members agitated at steel mills throughout the country in attempts to force steel companies such as U.S. Steel, the largest steel producer in the United States, to the bargaining table. Finally, after months of secretive negotiations, on March 2, 1937, an agreement between the SWOC and U.S. Steel was announced by John Lewis and Myron Taylor, chairman of U.S. Steel. The SWOC had managed to win recognition, wage increases, and shortened working hours from one of the most notoriously antiunion companies in the country.[38] Philip Murray, SWOC head, and other top leadership believed initially that the agreement with U.S. Steel would lead to agreements with other steel companies around the nation; these companies were known collectively as Little Steel. This was not to be, however, as Little Steel felt that U.S. Steel had betrayed their cause and remained opposed to union activity.[39] Though some hardline companies would hold out against the CIO for years, many other plants would be organized through the continued hard work of the SWOC and its organizers. The fervor ignited by the U.S. Steel agreement enabled SWOC to constitute a membership of 300,000 workers by June of 1937.[40] SWOC also made appreciable gains into the South where union membership was rare and often openly opposed by governments and corporations alike. As historian Ray Marshall noted, "When the SWOC started in the south, the only plant organized was the Kilby Car Manufacturing Company at Anniston, Alabama, but by the time of the 1937 wage and policy convention it had contracts with 18 steel mills, blast furnaces, foundries and fabricating plants, including Tennessee Coal and Iron, the

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[38] Zieger, *American Workers, American Unions: The Twentieth Century*, 89-90.
[39] Ibid, 90-91.
[40] Ibid.

major company in the region."[41] SWOC continued to grow despite challenges and it would find itself as one of the largest CIO unions by the end of 1937.

SWOC was the benefactor of a history of southern organizing activity especially in Alabama. In 1931, the Share Croppers' Union (SCU) was founded in Tallapoosa County as an all-black union with the support of white and black communists alike from Birmingham. Black women joined the union in large numbers and the movement encouraged the involvement of women in its affairs, and Al Murphy, secretary of the SCU, "…regarded the all-black movement as the very embodiment of black self-determination."[42] Though the SCU would not survive to unite with the CIO, the movement, which at one time claimed as many as 8000 members, helped to inspire many to join the communist party and agitate for labor gains in Alabama.[43] When the CIO was formed in 1935, communist and black workers in Alabama quickly aligned themselves with the CIO due to its radical policies on race and gender. John Lewis, with his own interests in organizing the mines and steel mills of the state, readily accepted communist assistance; similarly, the Communist Party (CP) and its leadership, seeing an opportunity to gain legitimacy through the CIO, subordinated the party and its idealistic goals to the labor movement.[44] These developments allowed the UMW to consistently make gains in Alabama's mines throughout the 1930s. The UMW also challenged the established racial order in the South by integrating union membership, meetings, and strikes. According to historians Edwin Brown and Colin Davis, "Blacks were elected as officers of locals and as members of mine committees, and they sometimes played a more prominent role than their titles suggested. For instance, … 'the President was a white man but he mostly put [Carlee] Thomas [a black man and vice president]

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[41] Marshall, *Labor in the South*, 186-187.
[42] Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists During the Great Depression*, 43-47.
[43] Ibid, 56-65.
[44] Ibid, 138-139.

up to speak'."[45] When SWOC arrived in Birmingham, it was able to use the experiences of

communists and black workers who had long been fighting the corporations in the region. As

black workers constituted almost fifty percent of Jefferson County steelworkers, SWOC required

the participation of black workers in order to be successful. Fortunately, black workers were

favorably disposed towards the CIO due to its promotion of civil rights unionism, and once the

white workers began to join SWOC in large numbers, the success of the organizing drive was

ensured.[46] Without the work of the early communist activists in Birmingham and the SCU, the

drive to organize workers in the mines and mills of Alabama would have undoubtedly proved a

much more difficult task than the CIO actually found it in the 1930s.

Chapter IV. A New Kind of Unionism

With the massive success of the UAW and SWOC, the CIO began to grow at an

astonishing rate. CIO national director John Brophy reported, "Hundreds of groups of all types

are clamoring for charters…We have had to turn down hundreds of requests."[47] The primary

targets of the CIO's industrial unionism – the UMW, SWOC, and the UAW – saw large numbers

join their ranks during 1937; there were approximately 600,000 mine workers, 400,000

automobile workers, and 375,000 steelworkers in CIO unions by the end of the year.[48] With

additional workers outside of these industries eager to join the organization, the CIO began to set

up an administrative structure which was ironically similar to that of the AFL. Regional and state

directors were appointed, dramatic expansions in staff size took place, and new local unions were

chartered across the country.[49] Often, these new locals were left without an international union to

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[45] Edwin L. Brown and Colin J. Davis, *It Is Union and Liberty: Alabama Coal Miners and the UMW*, (Tuscaloosa, Ala: University of Alabama Press, 1999), 77-81.

[46] Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists During the Great Depression*, 142-143.

[47] Zieger, *American Workers, American Unions: The Twentieth Century*, 91.

[48] Renshaw, *American Labor and Consensus Capitalism, 1935-1985*, 29.

[49] Zieger, *The CIO: 1935-1955,* 66-69.

manage or advise them, and their management was handled by the National CIO office directly.

To help accommodate many of these new locals, entire new international unions were chartered

by the CIO.[50] Unions such as the United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing, and Allied Workers of

America (UCAPAWA) and the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union (STFU) among many others

joined the CIO banner during this time of restructuring.[51] As the CIO sought to expand both its

regional influence and institutional size, it became clear that association with the AFL was no

longer possible. Despite proclaimed desires by Lewis to not become a rival labor union to the

AFL, the CIO was doing just that by expanding into areas and trades where the AFL had

previously dominated.[52]

It was during 1937 that the CIO leadership saw an opportunity to organize the mass

production workers within the textile industry. A Textile Workers' Organizing Committee

(TWOC) was established which was based on the earlier SWOC; TWOC was headed by

longtime CIO supporter and ACWA president Sidney Hillman. While Hillman and the drive's

other leadership greatly desired to organize southern textiles, they devoted the majority of their

efforts to the northern textile mills where the prospects for organization were much more

promising.[53] Nevertheless, organizers were sent into the South and prominent liberals were

recruited to help with the drive in the southern states. While the CIO could claim over 300,000

textile workers in its membership by the end of 1937, there was no southern breakthrough

despite the organizers' best efforts. Critics of TWOC blamed the failure on the CIO's lack of

confronting racial issues as part of TWOC.[54] In fact, Lewis and Hillman had chosen textiles to

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[50] Ibid.
[51] Donald H. Grubbs, *Cry from the Cotton: The Southern Tenant Farmers' Union and the New Deal*, (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2000), 167-169.
[52] Zieger, *The CIO: 1935-1955,* 69-72.
[53] Ibid, 74-76.
[54] Ibid, 76-80.

infiltrate the south specifically because there were not many black people employed in the industry. Thus, the men believed that the campaign would come easier with the advantage of being able to sidestep the racial issue which dominated organizing in the South. Despite their beliefs, some local unionization movements featuring large numbers of African Americans were successful even where TWOC had failed.[55]

UCAPAWA-CIO was founded in July of 1937 in Denver, Colorado. At the union's founding convention, President Donald Henderson issued a strong rebuke of the AFL: "The policies followed in the past by the American Federation of Labor have not helped us. They have been too narrow and have been based too much upon straight business unions. They had to be able to make money out of the unions in the past in order to interest their organizers and officials."[56] UCAPAWA, Henderson said, had been built by the efforts of the workers, and it was represented by groups from twenty-four states at the convention. These groups represented a wide range of activities from packing house and cannery workers to sharecroppers and field laborers.[57] Delegates at the convention were determined to make sure that discrimination had no place within their new union. As such, a "Resolution on Racial Discrimination" was passed during the convention which said, in part, "That we exert all our forces to fight for the rights of all minority peoples in extending any and all articles of legislation, Federal and State; and that this Convention commit itself to uphold the fundamental principle of NO DISCRIMINATION, toward the foreign-born and other minorities regardless of nationality, color, creed or political belief…" They also wanted to draw a clear line between CIO and AFL policy. This was accomplished by placing a rebuke of AFL policy in the very same resolution, "Resolved: That

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[55] Ibid.
[56] UCAPAWA First National Convention, (Denver: UCAPAWA, July 1937), Part 1, 16.
[57] Ibid. 20.

we assert our condemnation of the policies of many A. F. of L. leaders against nationalities as a blot on organized labor…"[58] The words were not hollow to the delegates at the convention; several telegrams were sent to officials from the convention as part of an effort to intervene on behalf of Mexican workers in Texas who were being deprived of their civil rights.[59] UCAPAWA did not wait long to follow through on its offerings of support. In November of 1937, Henderson himself issued a charter to the Texas Pecan Shelling Workers Union, known as UCAPAWA Local 172; this local was dominated by Mexican workers and claimed upwards of 10,000 members in 1937. Following announcement of a fifteen percent cut in wages, workers at the Southern Pecan Shelling Company along with several other plants in San Antonio went on strike on January 31, 1938.[60] There were early attempts to stop the strike by the city of San Antonio. According to the *CIO News*, "The strike was met with every kind of police and company violence, including tear gas, beatings and wholesale arrests and evictions."[61] At least one company union member was sentenced to a year in jail for a brutal assault on the president of Local 172 after his attempts at organizing a crew of strikebreaking workers failed.[62] According to a Department of Labor publication on agricultural unions, "Chief of Police Kilday consistently justified attempts to suppress the strike on the ground that it was organized and led by Communists. He said in later testimony: 'I did not interfere with a strike! I interfered with a revolution'." Despite widespread protests against the police treatment and a state commission concluding that "there was no evidence introduced before us that would justify police interference prohibiting picketing or the assembling of workers," the UCAPAWA was refused an

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[58] UCAPAWA First National Convention, (Denver: UCAPAWA, July 1937), Part 2, 59-60.
[59] Ibid, 64-65.
[60] Stuart Jamieson, "Bulletin No. 836 Labor Unionism in American Agriculture," Bureau of Labor Statistics, (Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1945), 279-280.
[61] "Pecan Sheller Gets No Exemption on Wage-Hour Law," *CIO News,* January 30, 1939, 2. Internet Archive Search: CIO News. (n.d.). Retrieved February 04, 2021, from https://archive.org/search.php?query=CIO+news.
[62] "Company Agent Gets Jail," *UCAPAWA News*, December 1939, 13.

injunction to keep the police from interfering.[63] By December, despite the best efforts of the city

of San Antonio, UCAPAWA had won 13 contracts which covered around 8000 workers in San

Antonio.[64] The strike had a strong effect of the Texas State CIO; due to the hostility experienced

by the workers in San Antonio and the major victory won by the UCAPAWA there, the state

CIO Council chose to hold its annual convention in the city in 1939.[65]

In the great fury of organizing in 1937 and 1938, as noted by Robert Zieger, "It [The

CIO] had welcomed, as the Federation [AFL] had never done, immigrants, blacks, and women

without regard to race, gender or nationality. Especially with regard to the issue of race, national

CIO leaders realized that strife between black and white workers "helped to confer unchallenged

power on employers…"[66] Due to the CIO position on civil rights, poll taxes, lynching, and many

other contested issues, the organization itself was seen as much more radical than the AFL. As

described by historian Michael Honey, "In places like Memphis, where blacks made up 80

percent of the unskilled factory labor force, they became the first to join and the last to leave the

CIO."[67] By contrast, the AFL often segregated their unions, and on some occasions, AFL unions

denied black workers the option to organize at all. Especially in the south, few women were also

afforded the opportunity to organize prior to the CIO's mass organizing drives.[68] Pressing on in

the face of the obvious challenge of bringing their radical ideas to organize the South, the CIO

did experience some successes in the region. A notable example is that of the International Union

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[63] Jamieson, "Bulletin No. 836 Labor Unionism in American Agriculture," 280-281.
[64] Ibid.
[65] "Texas CIO Meets In San Antonio," *CIO News,* April 3, 1939, 3.
[66] Robert H. Zieger, ed., *Organized Labor in the Twentieth Century South*, First ed, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991), 138.
[67] Michael Honey, "Anti-Racism, Black Workers, and Southern Labor Organizing: Historical Notes on a Continuing Struggle," *Labor Studies Journal* 25, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 10. doi:10.1177/0160449X0002500103.
[68] Ibid.

of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers (Mine Mill), founding member of the CIO, and its activities

around the Birmingham, Alabama mines and steel production facilities. Mine Mill was

dominated by black workers and also served as a haven for Communist Party activists. Due to its

make-up, the union was forced to constantly undergo scrutiny from racists and anti-communists

in addition to the always present opposition of corporations and, in the South especially,

politicians. Nevertheless, Mine Mill was able to win its first collective bargaining contract in

Alabama in October of 1938.[69] In support of their commitment to minorities espoused at the

national CIO level, Mine Mill along with the UMW "launched mass voter registration drives in

an effort to increase black and poor white political participation, and several Mine Mill locals

organized voter registration workshops that were intended to inform union members of their

legal and constitutional rights."[70] The experience of Mine Mill proved that organizing black

workers and even communist workers was possible even in the Deep South with all its inherent

challenges. As Robert Zieger wrote, "…CIO organizations, often establishing ties with black

civic organizations, civil rights leaders, and churches, continued to stress the recruitment of black

workers," and Philip Murray, SWOC head, acknowledged that black workers were a crucial part

of CIO success.[71]

The UAW was among the first of the major CIO unions alongside SWOC to attempt a

foray into organizing the American south. Despite the success of SWOC, the UAW found that

many in the South were not friendly to unionization. Early attempts to organize a Ford

production facility in Memphis ended with the primary UAW organizer nearly beaten to death by

paid thugs on two separate occasions.[72] At the time, Memphis was an extremely anti-union city

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[69] Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists During the Great Depression*, 144-147.
[70] Ibid, 147.
[71] Zieger, *American Workers, American Unions: The Twentieth Century*, 93-94.
[72] Zieger, ed., *Organized Labor in the Twentieth Century South*, 138.

led by Ed Crump, former Mayor and ultimate arbiter of power within the city. Crump was a strict

segregationist and despised unions, though AFL craft unions were usually welcome to organize

as long as they avoided mass production workers and followed Crump's wishes.[73] The

stranglehold on the city was finally loosened in early 1939 by a strike conducted by the Joint

Council of River Workers, a 4000 man-strong alliance of black workers in the AFL's

International Longshoreman's Association (ILA) and the CIO's Inland Boatmen's Division of

the National Maritime Union's (NMU) white riverboat men. Efforts by AFL's Memphis Labor

Council leader Lev Loring and city officials to break the strike and reopen traffic on the

Mississippi River were unsuccessful, and the workers were eventually recognized and given

collective bargaining rights along with an official union contract.[74] This constituted a major

victory for the CIO. As historian Michael Honey noted, "The victory allowed the National

Maritime Union to open the first CIO hall in Memphis, cracked the Crump machine's stone wall

of opposition to CIO interracial unions, and opened the way to more widespread union

organization."[75] Nevertheless, victory did not always ensure safety. Thomas Watkins, leader of

the ILA during the strike, was kidnapped along with his wife by uniformed Memphis police

officers after the conclusion of the strike. Though the officers had plans to kill them both,

Watkins was able to escape and his wife was thereafter left alive and arrested rather than killed.

Seeing as the officers would not confess to kidnapping or attempting to murder Watkins, he

received no justice under Jim Crow laws and was forced to leave Memphis. The heightened

danger of interracial unionism in the South and in Memphis more generally can be summed up

by Watkins' words at the end of his official affidavit describing the event, "At this point [the end

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[73] Ibid, 135-137.
[74] Ibid, 138-139.
[75] Honey, *Black Workers Remember: An Oral History of Segregation, Unionism, and the Freedom Struggle*, 40.

of the strike] Loring advised me that he would dig my grave and see me in it. To which I gave no

reply. He almost dug it with the aid of the Memphis police department."[76]

The CIO held its constitutional convention in November of 1938. At this meeting, the

break with the AFL was formalized even though the two groups had been nominally separate

since March of 1937.[77] Another major event that occurred with the drafting of the organization's

constitution was a change in name to the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) from the

Committee for Industrial Organization. This occasion marked a monumental moment in the

history of the organization, and there were high hopes for the CIO among its membership.

According to Robert Zieger, CIO leaders were confident that "…[T]he CIO would redefine the

role of the central labor federation. It would amass a great war chest, launch potent organizing

drives, and claim, in Lewis's words, 'increasing participation in the functions of government'."[78]

Lewis and his fellow leaders were not coy about their undertakings, but there would be

immediate challenges to overcome in order for them to see their dreams become reality. First, the

AFL had stepped up its organizing efforts; now that the two organizations were essentially rivals

for the same workers the CIO would have to compete directly with the AFL to organize workers

on many more occasions than they had previously. Second, internal strife was threatening the

effectiveness and the existence of some of the CIO's largest unions including the UAW.[79] Third,

the CIO was in financial difficulties due to an ongoing recession and a failure to adequately

collect dues from its members. John L. Lewis, whose UMW union subsidized a great deal of

CIO activity, observed, "The financial nightmares around this . . . organization have been serious

enough month after month and pay day after pay day, simply because somebody has been getting

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[76] Ibid, 29-37.
[77] Zieger, *The CIO: 1935-1955,* 88-90.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Zieger, *American Workers, American Unions: The Twentieth Century*, 98-100.

a free ride." Finally, the CIO received a great blow when David Dubinsky, president of the

ILGWU, announced that his union would not be joining the new CIO after the constitutional

convention.[80] These challenges would be faced against the backdrop of impending world war

after Germany opened the war in Europe on September 1st, 1939. The beginning of the war

would provide both unique challenges and opportunities for the CIO over the next six years.

Chapter V. Armaments, Organization, Tribulation

The United States began an enormous defense rearmament campaign in response to the

outbreak of war in Europe. The increased demand for defense industry workers played to labor's

strengths at the time; labor leaders saw opportunities to complete the organizing of the industrial

core of the economy while also continuing to make gains in conditions and wages for current

union members.[81] These opportunities were jumped at by CIO leader John Lewis who declared

repeatedly, "'If it is our mission to save Western Civilization, then let us begin by saving it right

here in our own country' through improving living standards, abolishing racial discrimination,

and democratizing the political process."[82] Before the CIO could turn its full attention to earning

the gains set in front of it by the onset of war, the organization would have to deal with a major

shakeup at the top of its chain of command. In 1940, President Roosevelt appointed a National

Defense Commission with Sidney Hillman, ACWA president and CIO vice-president, as the

chief representative of organized labor on the mobilization committee.[83] This appointment

inflamed the isolationist Lewis who had grown increasingly critical of Roosevelt. Hillman, on

the other hand, believed that labor had a crucial part to play in the war effort and that

associations with the federal government could be leveraged for labor gains in the future. Chief

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[80] Zieger, *The CIO: 1935-1955,* 94-101.
[81] Zieger, *American Workers, American Unions: The Twentieth Century*, 104-105.
[82] Zieger, *The CIO: 1935-1955,* 104.
[83] Renshaw, *American Labor and Consensus Capitalism, 1935-1985*, 50.

among the disagreements between the men were two points: the awarding of federal contracts to

corporations who violated labor laws and the reelection of Roosevelt as president. [84] While

Hillman was able to provide assurance that new federal contracts would not go to those

companies who violated labor laws, the gap between Lewis and Hillman on the issue of the

presidential election was too far to bridge. Lewis would, in turn, shock almost every member of

the House of Labor throughout the nation by supporting Republican Wendell Willkie for

president and promised to step down if CIO workers repudiated him with their votes.[85] As

Roosevelt won a resounding victory, it was clear that labor would remain supportive of him and

the Democratic Party. Shortly after the election, Lewis, true to his word, ended the monumental

power struggle at the top of the CIO by stepping down as president. Philip Murray, SWOC head,

replaced Lewis as president of the CIO on November 22, 1940.[86]

With the introduction of Murray as CIO president, he began to make changes to ensure

the long-term health of the organization. As historian Robert Zieger noted, "In 1941 under

Murray's leadership the CIO became a coherent, fully functioning, and self-financing union

entity as it never had been and likely could never have been under Lewis."[87] With the upturn in

industrial employment that came with the war, Murray sought to level pressure on some of the

largest corporations such as Ford and Goodyear which the CIO was unable to bring to the

bargaining table during previous organizing drives. As part of this strategy, labor lawyers

submitted numerous National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) complaints against these large

companies in hopes of coopting the support of the federal government to force these companies

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[84] Zieger, *The CIO: 1935-1955,* 104-108.
[85] Ibid, 107-110.; Zieger, *American Workers, American Unions: The Twentieth Century*, 112.
[86] Zieger, *The CIO: 1935-1955,* 107-110.
[87] Ibid, 111.

to negotiate.[88] The CIO won its first major victory against Ford by virtue of an NLRB election on

May 21, 1941. This hard-won victory came after over six months of organizing activity

conducted against the fiercely anti-labor practices of Ford. Crucial to the success of the UAW in

this drive were the approximately six thousand African American employees at the Ford Rouge

plant in Detroit. UAW organizers appealed to National Association for the Advancement of

Colored People (NAACP) leaders in Detroit to help bridge the gap between the union and the

black employees who viewed Ford favorably.[89] Despite not convincing all of the workers, the

partnership between UAW-CIO and the NAACP served to bring enough black workers over to

the union side to ensure a sweeping victory in the election which cleared the way for elections

and CIO victories in Ford plants around the country.[90] Local 600 at Ford in Detroit would go on

to provide nearly half of all black staffers hired by the UAW.[91] Around the same time, Murray's

SWOC sought to finalize the gains it had earlier made by completing the organization of the

Little Steel plants which had refused to follow U.S. Steel's lead. SWOC took its first actions

against Little Steel by striking at Bethlehem Steel on March 25, 1941.[92] Though the company

attempted to use threats and intimidation to stop the striking workers, enthusiasm for the union

proved too strong. The company allowed NLRB elections to be held in which the CIO won

handily. This only foreshadowed what was to come as the CIO consolidated its gains throughout

the rest of the antagonistic Little Steel plants.[93] Also in 1941, the CIO's URW launched a drive

to force Goodyear to the bargaining table.[94] By October of the same year, Goodyear signed

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[88] Ibid, 120-122.
[89] Ibid, 122-124.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Robert Korstad and Nelson Lichtenstein, "Opportunities Found and Lost: Labor, Radicals, and the Early Civil Rights Movement," *The Journal of American History* 75, no. 3 (1988): 796-798.
[92] Zieger, *American Workers, American Unions: The Twentieth Century*, 106-108.
[93] Ibid, 107.
[94] "CIO Rubber Union Launches Big Drive in Goodyear Plants," *CIO News,* January 13, 1941, 7.

contracts with URW locals at some of the biggest plants including those in Akron and Los Angeles.[95]

Though not directly associated with the prewar defense buildup as some of the other CIO unions, UCAPAWA also looked to make gains during this crucial organizing period. The union was especially active in Memphis, where it became the fastest growing local in the city during 1940. UCAPAWA in Memphis contained a number of members who were also members of the CP. The communists believed deeply in the principles of integration and civil rights for all.[96] The union grew so quickly because of a commitment by these leftists to organize anyone including black workers and black and white workers together. In Memphis, where the Crump machine maintained a firm grip on the city and supported staunch segregation, the integration of workers in a union meant more than just new union members. According to Zieger, "At a time when civil rights organizations remained almost nonexistent in Memphis and the Mississippi Delta, the CIO provided an equal-rights philosophy combined with a specific means to change social conditions." In addition to winning victories for workers in the cotton and food processing industries, the UCAPAWA also helped the International Woodworkers of America (IWA), a CIO member union, organize in woodworking factories and sawmills.[97] In other arenas, UCAPAWA dealt with a significant number of setbacks which hampered the organization. In California, UCAPAWA was effective at organizing workers as most of them were either African American or Hispanic and welcomed the union support. Due to the seasonal nature of the field industry, the UCAPAWA wished to take time to stabilize its union by recruiting year-round cannery and packaging workers before consolidating gains against labor. The locals, however

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[95] Charles H Martin, "Southern Labor Relations in Transition: Gadsden, Alabama, 1930-1943," 561.
[96] Zieger, ed., *Organized Labor in the Twentieth Century South*, 140-141.
[97] Ibid, 141.

mitigated by the International they might have been, continued to stage spontaneous strikes which often failed due to lack of planning.[98] Presiding over the spontaneous failed strikes, a much smaller national budget, and renewed AFL emphasis on organizing field workers eventually forced the UCAPAWA to turn its attention almost completely away from the organization of field workers. As the UCAPAWA turned away from field workers, groups of locals in California and Florida among other states disbanded.[99] When the UCAPAWA began to turn away from the organizing of field workers, the union looked to agricultural processing facilities often in metropolitan areas to make up gains. Despite this shift in priorities, data from the third national convention of UCAPAWA shows that in late 1940, the union had 158 contracts representing 20,000 workers with 223 different companies. The union also estimated total wage gains won over the previous year at just over one and a half million dollars. These numbers represent a marked increase over the gains made by UCAPAWA in the previous year.[100] The following report was issued by the UCAPAWA during 1941: "At the present time UCAPAWA is concentrating on four principle organizing industrial campaigns. a) Fruit and Vegetable Processing plants; b) Cigar and Tobacco plants; c) Grain processing and Cereal plants; d) Cotton Seed and Cotton Compressing plants."[101] While focusing their efforts on industry, the UCAPAWA was able to make considerable gains for its workers in the run up to WWII. The union added forty-four contracts for a total of 202 representing over 36,000 workers as of October 1941. In addition to the new contracts and workers, the union reported wage gains

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[98] Jamieson, "Bulletin No. 836 Labor Unionism in American Agriculture," 174-179.
[99] Ibid, 186-188, 312, 340.
[100] UCAPAWA Third National Convention, (Chicago: UCAPAWA, December 1940), Part 1, 2.
[101] "Summary Progress Report," National and International Unions, UCAPAWA: Oct-Nov 1941, 2, ACUA 001, Records of the Congress of Industrial Organizations, The Catholic University of America, The American Catholic History Research Center and University Archives, Washington, D.C., United States.

totaling twelve million between 1940 and 1941. On the eve of WWII, the UCAPAWA had

organizers active in twenty-two cities around the nation.[102]

Aside from the great successes of the CIO in the build up to American entry into the war,

the organization was also forced to deal with its own further share of controversy. Between

September and December of 1941, Lewis led miners in recurring strikes to gain a provision for a

union shop in captive mines, mines that are owned by a company, for example U.S. Steel, for the

purpose of producing its own coal. Despite feeling sympathetic to the cause, Murray and other

CIO leaders recognized that the constant strikes were stirring anti-union feelings among the

public, press, and Congress.[103] Failing to reach a consensus with Murray, Lewis grew more

antagonistic towards the CIO; indeed, he often used UMW resources in attempts to hamper the

CIO. Finally, in May of 1942, Lewis and his UMW left the CIO in what amounted to the natural

conclusion of the saga that proceeded it. The CIO and its member unions, for so long dependent

on Lewis and his UMW, now had the numerical and financial strength to survive and thrive

through the departure.[104]

Chapter VI. War Requires Cooperation

With the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December of 1941, the United States entered

World War II. Seeking to take advantage of industrial cooperation for the war effort, FDR

convened a meeting of labor and business leaders shortly after US entry into the war. As

described by historian Patrick Renshaw, "After some weeks discussion, representatives agreed to

a three-point program for industrial peace: no strikes or lockouts for the duration of hostilities;

peaceful settlement of all industrial disputes; and the creation of a tripartite board with labor,

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[102] Ibid, 2, Table 1.
[103] Zieger, *The CIO: 1935-1955,* 135-138.
[104] Ibid, 139-140.

management and the public each represented by four members to be called the National War

Labor Board" (NWLB).[105] The no-strike pledge, supported by the CIO, served to lower lost man

days from over twenty-three million in 1941 to just over four million in 1942.[106] It was

wholeheartedly supported by Murray and much of the CIO leadership as essential to secure the

CIO's place in the wartime industrial-military-government apparatus which rapidly developed.

Murray declared, ""Labor is determined to place itself in the forefront in the battle of achieving

maximum production."[107]

The beginning of the war brought immediate advantages to the CIO especially in terms of

membership gains. As production of war materiel increased dramatically, tens of thousands of

new workers began work in industries where the CIO already held significant footholds. As these

workers were brought into the union, there were challenges which had to be confronted.[108] Many

of these new workers during the war years were either women or black workers, both of whom

had long denied opportunities for industrial employment, due to a lack of white manpower given

the demands of the war. During the war, women made up a full thirty-six percent of the civilian

workforce while one million new black workers also entered the workforce during this period.[109]

The fact that these changes took place in such rapid manner only added to the already simmering

racist and discriminatory feelings in many parts of the country. To attempt to combat these

issues, President Roosevelt signed an executive order in June 1941 to allow for "full and

equitable participation of all workers in the defense industries without discrimination." This

mandate was enforced by the Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC), which was also

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[105] Renshaw, *American Labor and Consensus Capitalism, 1935-1985*, 56-57.
[106] "Strikes in 1941," "Strikes in 1942," Work Stoppages. (n.d.), Retrieved February 04, 2021, from https://www.bls.gov/wsp/
[107] Zieger, *The CIO: 1935-1955,* 141-143.
[108] Ibid, 143-147.
[109] Zieger, *American Workers, American Unions: The Twentieth Century,* 118-124.

created by the executive order. The job of the FEPC was to investigate discrimination complaints and recommend action on them.[110] Despite continually ruling in favor of black workers, the FEPC lacked a way to enforce its rulings; thus, many of them were ignored, especially in the South where racism ran most rampant. Though the inability to enforce its rulings handicapped the FEPC, it served as a beacon for black workers. The fact that the federal government was publicly endorsing a policy of non-discrimination and created an organization to oversee it meant a lot for those who before had few options to address the injustice they experienced.[111] The CIO, with its longstanding belief that discrimination had no place in its organization, supported the work of the FEPC; speaking at the CIO's Fifth National Convention, Philip Murray proclaimed, "CIO's traditional battle to eliminate discrimination against racial or national minority groups in American industry has been materially assisted by the work of the Fair Employment Practices Committee."[112] Reactions to increased black participation in the workforce angered groups of white workers around the country who felt that their own positions were threatened by this influx of new laborers. These intensified feelings produced hate strikes among white CIO workers to keep African Americans out of the workplace or to prevent the promotion of black workers. Some of the most notorious strikes in Detroit, a hotbed of racial tension, were brought to heel by the UAW and its staunch anti-discrimination stance. UAW President R.J. Thomas personally intervened to compel the local at the Packard aircraft engine facility to call off the strike and discharge workers who went against the UAW's official policy of nondiscrimination. By contrast, the AFL's closest rival to the UAW, the International Association of Machinists (IAM),

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[110] Timothy J. Minchin, *Fighting Against the Odds: A History of Southern Labor Since World War II*, (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2005), 17.
[111] Ibid, 22-25.
[112] "FEPC Anti-Bias Program Wins CIO Approval," *CIO News,* November 9, 1942, 2.

continued to bar African Americans as a whole from the organization through the war years.[113] As these hate strikes were erupting in places like Mobile and Detroit, the CIO gained Willard Townsend as its first black executive board member along with the union he led, the United Transport Service Employees (UTSE), which was predominately comprised of black members.[114] As part of further efforts to combat racism and discrimination among its workers, the CIO announced at its Fifth National Convention the "Formation of a CIO Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination." Describing its purpose, the *CIO News* declared, "This committee has a detailed plan…designed to carry on the fight against racial discrimination, and discrimination against Negroes in particular, on both an immediate and a long-time basis."[115] CARD, as this committee became known, set about to encourage racial understanding through conferences, letters, and pamphlets while also supporting nondiscriminatory practices of the federal government like the FEPC and promoting the inclusion of clauses prohibiting discriminatory hiring practices in union contracts. The organization also encouraged and aided the formation of anti-discrimination committees throughout affiliated CIO unions and organizations. By the end of the war, over one hundred of these councils had been established within the CIO network to advance the causes of racial equity.[116]

The introduction of the no-strike pledge did not mean that the CIO was resolved to wait out the conflict until attempting to secure a better deal for its members. Key among CIO activity during the war was the organization of the new workers entering key industries and the unionization of unconquered plants as well as the continued winning of improved conditions for its workers. Since the CIO had committed itself to the no-strike pledge, the main avenue for

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[113] Zieger, *American Workers, American Unions: The Twentieth Century,* 123-126.
[114] Zieger, *The CIO: 1935-1955,* 154-156.
[115] "Form CIO Group to Aid Minorities," *CIO News,* November 9, 1942, 2.
[116] Zieger, *The CIO: 1935-1955,* 156-158.

organizing and making contractual gains for workers was the NWLB. The NWLB, however,

served a dual purpose of ensuring that inflation remained controlled during the war.[117] Given this

dual purpose, it is natural that some NWLB decisions inflamed labor leaders who were mostly

concerned with winning better wages and conditions for their workers. A key decision early in

the war established the Little Steel formula which was used as a scale to determine wage

increases relative to cost-of-living increases.[118] The NWLB voted to give steelworkers,

represented by the United Steelworkers of America (USWA) as SWOC was now known, at

Little Steel plants a five and one-half cents increase per hour instead of the full dollar that labor

was requesting. This formula substantially hampered the CIO's bargaining abilities with regard

to wages, but in the same decision the NWLB sanctioned several points crucial to union security

which the CIO leaders were enthralled about. The board ordered a maintenance of membership

clause as well as the check-off of union dues among the Little Steel workers.[119] The maintenance

of membership provision required new workers to join the union within a fifteen-day period of

entering employment with a company under union contract. The check-off of dues ensured

automatic payments through the aid of employers themselves and greatly improved the overall

payment of dues in CIO unions.[120] These guarantees of union security swelled the ranks of the

CIO and its unions during the war, and the consistent payment of dues allowed the organization

to achieve solvency and surplus.[121] Though the tools of union security were thoroughly enjoyed

by the CIO, the loss of the strike as a bargaining tool with corporations had serious consequences

for the organization. Many of the largest CIO actions of the 1930s and early 1940s were built

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[117] Zieger, *American Workers, American Unions: The Twentieth Century*, 130-132.
[118] Ibid, 132-133.
[119] "USA-CIO Plea For $1 Raise Turned Down," *CIO News,* July 20, 1942, 3.
[120] Zieger, *American Workers, American Unions: The Twentieth Century*, 136-137.
[121] Ibid.; Zieger, *The CIO: 1935-1955,* 145-146.

around grassroots militancy and demonstrated techniques such as the sit-down strike to force employers to the bargaining table. The rank-and-file membership of the CIO grew restless and dejected by the lack of options they had to force collective bargaining on the part of the employer.[122] As NWLB directives grew more onerous to workers, strikes began to break out in greater numbers. Following the great reduction in strikes and idle days in 1942, strikes began to increase in frequency and scale during 1943 and 1944. Despite being more numerous and involving more workers, the average length of strikes was substantially shortened to less than six days from a previous low of nearly twelve days.[123] Faced with government pressure and threats to revoke maintenance of membership clauses, the CIO itself played a large role in ending many of these strikes. Murray commented in 1944, "a very substantial portion . . . of the monies collected by each of the international organizations [in dues payments] is now being used to enforce the directives of the National War Labor Board . . . which we do not believe in."[124] Ironically, the historically most militant group represented within the CIO, communists, were the staunchest supporters of the no-strike pledge. Despite disagreeing with many NWLB policies, many communist union leaders in such unions as UCAPAWA and Mine Mill remained committed to this policy throughout the war. Overall, the war had a decidedly strong effect in removing the union leadership from being closely involved with the membership of the unions; massive growth in membership and the increased collection of dues allowed the leadership to make this turn away from the rank-and-file membership while a desire to adhere to federal policies and a general desire to be seen as patriotic and supportive of the war effort more often drove their actions than the workers who they actually represented.

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[122] Zieger, *The CIO: 1935-1955,* 150-151.
[123] "Strikes in 1944," Work Stoppages. (n.d.), Retrieved February 04, 2021, from https://www.bls.gov/wsp/, 2.
[124] Zieger, *The CIO: 1935-1955,* 178.

Chapter VII. The CIO Marches South

While the CIO faced numerous tribulations in dealing with the war and the NWLB, the labor federation continued to make strides in the organizing of workers outside of maintenance of membership clauses. The CIO, remembering the 1941 convention pledge to organize the South, set about to make good on its vision. The industrial workforce in the South expanded dramatically due to the demands of the war; armed with the support of the federal government and the NWLB, the CIO made numerous incursions into hostile southern territory in the hopes of organizing workers. Buoyed by flush pockets and an extremely tight labor market, the CIO was able to make some significant strides across the South.[125] In Gadsden, Alabama, ferocious anti-union sentiment prior to WWII often led to violence and employers instilled fear in employees who wished to unionize. Softened by a desire to win war contracts, the town slowly softened its stance against organization during the war. The CIO did not waste the opportunity. First, the USWA won an NLRB election by nearly five-to-one odds with over 2000 votes in favor at a Little Steel plant in Gadsden.[126] The URW won a similarly emphatic victory less than a month later at the Goodyear plant which for so long had stood as a staunch opponent to unionism.[127] Similarly, the war and federal support for industrial-union relations forced the city of Memphis to soften its stance on unionism. Previously, the political machine of Ed Crump had served to keep unionism in the city at a minimum. Despite this, UCAPAWA and the National Maritime Union (NMU), both unions known for their support of integration, had been able to gain membership in the city and provide the CIO with a base of operations there.[128] The URW, which had been unsuccessful in organizing the large Firestone plant in 1940 despite the almost

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[125] Minchin, *Fighting Against the Odds,* 32-37.
[126] "Steel—Five to One!" *CIO News,* March 22, 1943, 3.
[127] "Rubber Wins at Gadsden," *CIO News,* April 12, 1943, 7.
[128] Zieger, ed., *Organized Labor in the Twentieth Century South*, 141-142.; "NMU Pamphlet Tells of Fight Against Bias," *CIO News,* April 12, 1943, 7.

unanimous support of black workers, returned to Memphis in 1943; white workers, now

disillusioned with the AFL, voted for the URW. By war's end, this plant would comprise 7000

CIO workers, a third of these women and a third of them black. CIO efforts in Memphis would

allow over half of the city's industrial workforce, 20,000 people, to be organized by 1943.[129]

Major southern gains were also experienced by the Oil Workers International Union (OWIU).

The union more than doubled its membership and number of contracts during the war; most of

these gains were realized in the South, specifically along the Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast. A

fledgling union at the start of the war, the OWIU emerged from the conflict with a strong

southern base of workers and the financial means to press organizing into other areas of the

country.[130] The Textile Workers' Union of America, formerly known as TWOC, also saw

dramatic growth during the war period. The union increased its overall membership by 133,000

workers during the war; this number included nearly 38,000 southern workers represented by 71

contracts.[131] The union's southern gains remained concentrated in the Piedmont region of

Georgia, the Carolinas, and Virginia, and arguably the most impressive organizing victory of the

entire war came at a southern mill. In July of 1942, the Riverside and Dan River Cotton Mills in

Danville, Virginia, largest in the world, were organized by the TWUA in the largest election in

the union's history. The victory also carried a symbolic element as the mills were the site of a

failed 4000 worker strong, four-month strike in 1930.[132] UCAPAWA was another of the CIO

unions which benefitted from the war and its effect on labor. As of the Fifth National Convention

in late 1944, UCAPAWA held 493 contracts representing 77,000 workers at seasonal peak. This

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[129] Zieger, ed., *Organized Labor in the Twentieth Century South*. 141-144.; "It Ain't the Same Old Memphis," *CIO News,* March 15, 1943, 2.
[130] Marshall, *Labor in the South*, 230-233.
[131] Ibid, 233-234.; Zieger, *The CIO: 1935-1955,* 145.
[132] "Textile Union Wins South's Biggest Pole," *CIO News*, July 6, 1942, 3.

was a drastic improvement over prewar numbers representing an almost 200 percent jump in contracts and workers.[133] The union continued to be active across the country and made further inroads into the food and agricultural processing and packaging industries of the South by organizing in places such as Memphis and Little Rock, Arkansas.[134] Nowhere did UCAPAWA experience such success as at the R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. The UCAPAWA attempt to organize the plants differed from two earlier AFL attempts in that UCAPAWA focused more on black workers, who made up over two-thirds of the 10,000 strong workforce. Organizers began their work at the plant in 1941, but it would not be until 1943 that their plans would pay off.[135] Theodosia Simpson, a worker at Reynolds Plant #65 and a UCAPAWA organizer, described the beginnings on June 17, 1943 of what would become a massive strike at R.J. Reynolds, "So at lunchtime we got together and decided, let's do it after lunch. So when they pulled the whistle for us to go to work, all that I had talked to just sat down on the little stool that was out from the machine, and turned their backs to the machine. Well, when some of the others saw what was happening, they didn't turn on their machines. They weren't members of the union, but they didn't." The initial group of strikers were nearly all women reflecting the fact that women made up a significant portion of the workers at Reynolds.[136] As the strike dragged on, more and more workers joined the movement. As Robert Black, who worked at Reynolds from the time he was six years old, put it, "The people realized something they had never thought of before: we hold the strength in our hands to stop this company. They had allowed that company to ride over them roughshod all those years, with their

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[133] UCAPAWA Fifth National Convention Officers' Report. (UCAPAWA: December 4, 1944), 3.

[134] National and International Unions, UCAPAWA, 1942, 30. Records of the Congress of Industrial Organizations, ACUA 001, The Catholic University of America, The American Catholic History Research Center and University Archives, Washington, D.C., United States.

[135] Marc Miller, *Working Lives: The Southern Exposure History of Labor in the South*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981), 184-186.

[136] Ibid, 186-190.

heads bowed."[137] UCAPAWA, wishing to honor the no-strike pledge of the CIO, worked to forge an agreement with Reynolds vice president John Whitaker which ended the strike, but the company continued to fight potential NLRB elections in the courts. Finally, in December the election was held, and the UCAPAWA-CIO emerged victorious by a margin of better than two to one.[138] At the Fifth UCAPAWA convention in late 1944, the union changed its name to the Food, Tobacco, Agricultural and Allied Workers Union of America (FTA). This change was done primarily to include "tobacco" in the name of the union; it experienced a 155 percent increase in tobacco workers under contract between 1942 and 1944, making it the second largest industry represented by the union after food processing and packaging.[139]

Though the CIO's major southern victories are some of the best documented, organizing activity was not limited to large concerns. In early 1942, the United Packinghouse Workers of America (UPWA) signed contracts with three prominent Louisiana sugar companies covering four thousand workers. The union quickly followed this up with victories in two Chattanooga, Tennessee packinghouses.[140] Around this same time, UCAPAWA continued its efforts across the South. Local 19 in Memphis was instrumental in winning contracts at four cotton compresses in the city early in the year; the union was quickly able to use its influence to force a pay raise for the workers covered under its contracts.[141] UCAPAWA secured its first contract in Arkansas in March of 1942 at the Arkansas Fertilizer Co. followed very shortly by another at Pierce Williams

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[137] Ibid, 190-199.
[138] Ibid.; "2 More Smashing Victories Chalked Up by CIO Union," *CIO News,* December 27, 1943, 8.
[139] "UCAPAWA Changed Its Name: We Are FTA-CIO Now!" *FTA News,* December 15, 1944, 1.
[140] "Organizing," *CIO News,* March 30, 1942, 12.; "Packing Union Takes Two Polls in the South," *CIO News*, August 24, 1942, 5.
[141] "11 to One for the CIO," *UCAPAWA News,* May 28, 1942, 7.; "Win Union Shop & Peak Memphis Compress Pay," *UCAPAWA News,* June 28, 1942, 7.

in Jonesboro.[142] The southern momentum was kept up as the UCAPAWA continued to make gains; in a three month span the union secured eight contracts in Memphis and Little Rock. Additionally, UCAPAWA was even able to charter a local in the company town of Truman, Arkansas despite staunch company resistance.[143] In late 1942, UCAPAWA organized tobacco plants in Richmond, Virginia and Charleston, South Carolina foreshadowing the Reynolds victory which was to come.[144] With the opening of 1943, UCAPAWA began a concerted organizing drive among the citrus workers in Florida with the ultimate goal of organizing 30,000 workers.[145]

As war production continued steadily into 1943, the early months of the year saw windfalls for the CIO across the South. The UAW secured the last division of the North American Aviation Plant, one of the largest manufacturing facilities in Texas, to complete CIO control of the plant.[146] The International Woodworkers of America (IWA) won key victories in Vicksburg and Memphis despite organizers being subjected to beatings.[147] In Fort Worth, the UPWA won a major victory at the large Armour plant which had been the site of organizing activity since 1938.[148] This fall of this large plant to the union would spur other Armour facilities in Memphis and Mt. Pleasant, Tennessee to organize by years end.[149] Through WLB decisions, UCAPAWA was able to win wage gains for the Florida citrus workers only four months into their organizing drive.[150] The union's success spurred the creation of a state CIO council in

[142] "Cannery Union Sweeps Poll in Arkansas," *CIO News,* March 9, 1942, 2.; "New Arkansas Pact Provides Union Security," *UCAPAWA News*, July 1, 1942, 6.
[143] "Desoto Oil Wins 8c; Eighth Pact in 3 Months,"; "Ark. Workers Deliver Landslide CIO Vote In (Former) Co. Town," *UCAPAWA News,* September 15, 1942, 8.
[144] "Drive Pushes South into Giant Plants," *UCAPAWA News,* October 1942, 8.
[145] "Florida Citrus Drive Moves Fast," *CIO News,* January 25, 1943, 3.
[146] "6 More Elections for CIO!" *CIO News,* March 8, 1943, 2.
[147] "Organizing," *CIO News,* April 19, 1943, 11.
[148] "Organizing," *CIO News,* March 22, 1943, 7.
[149] "Organizing," *CIO News,* July 26, 1943, 7.; December 20, 1943, 7.
[150] "Citrus Increases Up to 25% Okayed by RWLB," *UCAPAWA News,* April 15, 1943, 3.

Florida to better coordinate the current CIO union drives within the state.[151] Meanwhile, UCAPAWA continued to expand into tobacco production by organizing two more large tobacco plants in Winston Salem to go along with the massive Reynolds victory.[152]

CIO activity in the South did not slow down during 1944. If anything, the organizing of workers in rural areas sped up during the year. The organizing of workers in rural settings was driven by UCAPAWA and the IWA, but the CIO and its member unions continued to focus on crucial war industries in more metropolitan areas as well. The IWA began the year by securing NLRB election victories at plants in Bolton, Mississippi and Suffolk, Virginia as well as at plants in several rural Arkansas towns.[153] The union continued its momentum in Arkansas by organizing four plants in Helena by June. Several additional new plants in Arkansas and Memphis were added to IWA rolls before the end of the year. In December, the union gained ground in Mississippi when it organized the Port Gibson Veneer and Box Co. winning a large majority of the NLRB votes.[154] In Alabama, the USWA alongside Mine Mill continued to organize workers in Birmingham and in small surrounding towns such as Keystone. Alongside these unions, the Industrial Union of Marine and Shipbuilding Workers of America (IUMSWA) also worked to organize shipyards in Mobile which were critical to the war effort.[155] In early 1944, UCAPAWA claimed victory in the Virginia peanut belt comprising several facilities in Suffolk and Franklin.[156] The union also captured several packing sheds in Mercedes, Texas and Harvey, Louisiana through elections as well as claimed victory in four different Memphis

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[151] "Florida CIO Council Hits Hard at Disruptors," *UCAPAWA News,* May 15, 1943, 5.
[152] "Cannery Workers Go to Town," *CIO News,* September 6, 1943, 8.
[153] "Organizing," *CIO News,* January 10, 1944, 7.; January 17, 1944, 7.; March 20, 1944, 7.
[154] Ibid. June 26, 1944, 7.; July 10, 1944, 7.; December 4, 1944, 18.
[155] Ibid. May 29, 1944, 7.; December 25, 1944, 9.
[156] "How We Won Victory in The Virginia Peanut Belt," *UCAPAWA News*, January 27, 1944, 8.

plants.[157] UCAPAWA continued to actively pursue the organizing drive in Florida as evidenced by International President Henderson's early 1944 visit to Waverly to encourage workers in their efforts to secure an NLRB election.[158] Throughout the year, UCAPAWA continued to force the issue against companies by bringing cases before the War Labor Board. The persistence of the union won hard fought wage gains for their workers.[159] In late 1944, UCAPAWA continued to organize along the Mississippi River, winning elections in both Memphis and Port Gibson, Mississippi.[160] At the time of the union's Fifth National Convention in November of 1944, the Mississippi Delta region harbored the largest number of workers represented by UCAPAWA in the South after the tobacco producing areas of Virginia and the Carolinas.[161] UCAPAWA, now known as FTA, continued to push for organization in 1945. Throughout 1945, FTA exploited areas where it already had strength in order to further organize across the South. This resulted in victories in places such as Little Rock, Memphis, Charlotte, and Mercedes, Texas where the union maintained a very active presence.[162] The FTA continued to use WLB rulings to win wage gains and better conditions for their employees under contract. Coming off a renewed interest in southern organizing at the FTA convention in 1944 and in attempt to line up with stated CIO policy to organize the South, a regional committee was established to coordinate union activities in Florida, Georgia, and Alabama.[163] The IWA continued to be active in the South in the waning months of the war. Over ten plants in Little Rock, Memphis, and Vicksburg were organized by the union, but organizers did not stop at these centers of IWA activity. Plants in places such as

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[157] "Organizing," *CIO News*, April 17, 1944, 7.; June 5, 1944, 7.

[158] "Local 4 To Strike Back in Waverly Packinghouse," *UCAPAWA News,* February 15, 1944, 5.

[159] "Our War Labor Board Cases,"; "Win 50c Minimum by Hard Fought RWLB Case," *UCAPAWA News,* April 15, 1944, 1.

[160] "Organizing," *CIO News,* November 20, 1944, 11.

[161] UCAPAWA Fifth National Convention Officers' Report, (UCAPAWA: December 4, 1944), 6.

[162] "Organizing" *CIO News,* February 12, 1945, 9.; February 19, 1945, 9.; May 7, 1945, 9.; June 18, 1945, 8.

[163] "New Council Formed in Southeast," *FTA News*, March 15, 1944, 4.

Emporia, Virginia, Clennora and Alexandria, Louisiana, and Greenville, Alabama were also organized by the IWA.[164] The fact that organizing activity of the CIO and its member unions was assuredly not restricted to only large, metropolitan concerns shows that the CIO had a base of operations in the South. To be certain, the network of unions was nowhere near as strong as those in the northern states, but it is important to acknowledge that the CIO did not begin the postwar era without supporters and those who believed in the union across the South.

The war offered the CIO a wide range of challenges and opportunities, but the CIO seemed to emerge from the war with significant strength, both in numbers and in the financial realm. The CIO added 2.1 million members during the course of the war, and this figure includes the loss of John Lewis' UMW workers. The UAW emerged from the war with over one million members while the USWA claimed over 700,000 workers by the end of the conflict. The United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America (UE) expanded from under 50,000 workers to over 430,000.[165] TWUA, Mine Mill, and the Packinghouse Workers more than doubled their memberships during the war, and IUMSWA more than quadrupled its membership from 35,000 to over 200,000. The maintenance of membership and dues check-offs afforded by the NWLB substantially aided the CIO with its upswing in membership. Van Bittner, future director of Operation Dixie, asserted, "If it was not for the union security given to our unions by the National War Labor Board we wouldn't have 5,000,000 dues-paying members [sic] in the C.I.O."[166] Despite the NWLB's penchant for riling labor leaders, it proved encouraging that the federal government backed up favorable decisions for labor; in several instances, the army was

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[164] "Organizing," *CIO News,* January 22, 1945, 8.; February 12, 1945, 9.; February 26, 1945, 9.; March 5, 1945, 9.; November 19, 1945, 11.
[165] Zieger, *The CIO: 1935-1955,* 145.
[166] Ibid, 145-147.

called upon to seize plants in order to force compliance with orders.[167] As the war came to a

close, representatives of organized labor, both AFL and CIO officials, focused on keeping a firm

grasp on the gains that were made throughout the war years. Additionally, plans were made for

organizing in the postwar era bolstered by millions of new members and their financial

contributions. The CIO, ever conscious of its political identity, determined to head into this new

era with the promise of a better deal for all under the banner of industrial unionism. At the 1944

CIO convention Philip Murray said, "God help the Negro in America, and God help the minority

groups of America, were it not for the splendid work that is being done by this great institution

of yours and mine. We don't confine ourselves to the mere adoption of resolutions in meetings of

this kind; we make those resolution effective and workable."[168]

Chapter VIII. Winds of Change

World War II, as its name suggests, affected nearly the entire world. The United States,

being heavily involved in the conflict, underwent a great deal of change during the war years.

The ways in which the US was changing during the conflict held important implications for

organized labor as it looked toward the postwar era. The demand for labor spurred massive social

upheaval around the country as black workers and female workers took jobs previously held in

large part by white males. This reorganization of the labor force resulted in a large number of

African Americans, as many as three to five million, leaving the South in search of jobs in the

defense industry.[169] Aside from those black and white who left the South in search of work,

many others also moved around the South in attempts to find work in the ballooning defense

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[167] "U.S. Wants No Defiance by Big Corporations, WLB Tells Shipyard," *CIO News,* May 4, 1942, 6.; "Ward vs. U.S," *CIO News,* May 1, 1944, 4.

[168] Zieger, ed., *Southern Labor in Transition: 1940-1995*, First ed, (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1997), 113.

[169] Renshaw, *American Labor and Consensus Capitalism, 1935-1985*, 43-44.

industry. This mass migration was spurred by an incredibly sharp increase in the industrialization of the South necessitated by the war effort along with the effects of a continued decline in the agricultural economy that had been felt by many rural southerners for years.[170] Seemingly overnight, boomtowns popped up around defense industry sites. Many rural southerners flocked to cities and towns in search of the industrial employment which the war demanded.[171] This boom in southern industrial employment, an increase of 1.2 million jobs at its peak, provided the opportunity for the CIO to greatly increase its membership during the war.[172]

To reap the benefits of this new membership, however, organized labor had to cooperate closely with the federal government. It was recognized at an early stage in the war that conflicts between labor and management ran the risk of bringing strikes and subsequently bottlenecks and irregular prices to the whole country. With the war economy necessitating maximum production, labor-management conflicts seemed poised to derail the war effort. Recognizing that labor leaders would never agree to work with management unless they were on equal standing, FDR created the National War Labor Board with equal representatives of labor, management, and the public at large.[173] As a result, the majority of unions including the CIO entered into a pledge not to strike for the duration of the war. Philip Murray wrote about the policy:

> Because we realize the importance of maintaining continuity of operation and achieving all-out industrial production in this emergency we have agreed to a no-strike policy for the duration of the war. In order that labor's rights may not be infringed upon, however, we have opposed repressive anti-strike legislation and have insisted that the most effective way to prevent stoppages is through voluntary agreement on procedures for the peaceful adjustment of all disputes.[174]

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[170] Charles D. Chamberlain, Victory at Home: Manpower and Race in the American South During World War II, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2003), 15-18.
[171] Ibid, 18-20.
[172] Marshall, *Labor in the South,* 225.
[173] Renshaw, *American Labor and Consensus Capitalism, 1935-1985*, 53-57.
[174] "Pres Murray's Letter on War Labor Board," *CIO News,* January 19, 1942, 5.

As previously mentioned, the surrender of what was considered labor's most powerful weapon against management spawned discontent among workers who felt they were being taken advantage of by their employers. Despite the pledge drastically shrinking the number of strikes and the man-days lost to strikes, the CIO and its members actions were placed under extreme scrutiny as a result of the importance of the war and the previously agreed upon no-strike pledge.[175] The national unions attempted to ensure that their workers were not being taken advantage of by communicating openly with the War Labor Board, but WLB decisions continued to antagonize workers faced with increasing hours and production goals due to wartime needs.[176] Lacking their primary mechanism for forcing the hands of employers, the CIO continued to develop its reputation for activism. The federation threw itself wholeheartedly into supporting the war effort in attempts to swing public opinion behind labor, but that did not stop the CIO from acting on behalf of its workers.[177] A key example of this is longstanding support for abolition of the poll tax in the Southern states. The CIO branded itself as a champion of democracy in the South where voting rates were extremely low and the poor and minorities were almost always excluded from voting.[178] The attacks on the poll tax served a dual purpose as the CIO was also able to personally criticize southern politicians many of whom were some of the labor movement's staunchest opponents. The support of the CIO resonated with many southerners like Jesse Burton, sharecropper and secretary of UCAPAWA Local 285 at Camp Hill, Alabama, who said, "A new light is shining and we are all waking up and will sleep no more. That new light is the CIO." Similarly, a tire builder at the Firestone plant in Memphis said, "Experience has shown us that only through the CIO can we get the kind of pay and conditions

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[175] Zieger, *The CIO, 1935-1955,* 148-151.
[176] "Auto Union asks 'Equal Sacrifice'," *CIO News,* April 13, 1942, 5.
[177] Zieger, *The CIO, 1935-1955,* 177-180.
[178] "Millions Look to CIO For Delivery from Poll Tax Congressmen," *CIO News,* January 5, 1942, 7.

we Southern workers need… Thank God we are not falling so much for propaganda to divide us and keep us barely at a subsistence level. Thank God for the CIO that has helped us to understand these things."[179] Certainly, this support was nowhere close to unanimous and many people around the country detested the CIO and its activities. Disdain for the CIO was nothing new, but during the war years even small job actions brought heightened criticism especially if they were related to war production.

Unfortunately for the CIO, its large industrial membership meant that many of its workers were involved in war industries; thus, when work actions occurred in these industries, they were heavily publicized and strongly condemned.[180] A constituent of Senator James Eastland of Mississippi from Hattiesburg wrote to him declaring, "Our neutrality law should be repealed outright and these CIO strikes ended by force if necessary. If we are to defend our government we must stop all strikes in defense program work."[181] The CIO, however, was not responsible for these strikes; the organization refrained from authorizing strikes and often attempted to put an end to them whenever they popped up. CIO International Unions such as UCAPAWA, seeking to show support for the no-strike pledge, fined workers responsible for walkouts while also making sure to levy blame at the WLB.[182] Nevertheless, conservative Congressmen used the strike issue to condemn the CIO and the labor movement generally. In March of 1942, US Representative John Rankin made several speeches imploring his Senate colleagues to take up anti-labor legislation passed by the House. Rankin painted the struggle

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[179] "Rubber Union Takes Firestone Poll By 2-1," *CIO News,* May 4, 1942, 8.
[180] Zieger, *The CIO, 1935-1955,* 150-152.
[181] "Correspondence from NT Currie to Senator James Eastland," September 28, 1941, Box 114, Folder 20, James O. Eastland Collection, MUM00117, University of Mississippi Archives and Special Collections, Oxford, Mississippi, United States.
[182] "Labor's Pledge Kept," *CIO News,* February 22, 1943, 4.; "Local 19 Fines Leaders of Feed Mill Stoppage," *UCAPAWA News,* March 15, 1943, 6.

against labor as one of survival declaring, "We must not follow the course of France. She first capitulated to a few labor, financial and industrial racketeers, then sank into Communism and paid the supreme penalty of defeat, humiliation and disgrace. Her brave men fighting at the front were not supplied the weapons necessary for defense."[183] While marked by sensationalism, conservative appeals such as Rankin's found their mark by the time of the 1942 midterm elections. Republicans gained forty-four House seats along with nine Senate seats; these seats lost were held by true liberals and friends of labor as opposed to the overwhelmingly conservative southern Democrats. Speaking on the election, one CIO union leader lamented, ""When you come to examine the result of the recent election, you will find the entire element we cleaned out . . . in 1932 and 1936 are back stronger than ever."[184] In 1943, strikes increased from 1942 levels as continued worker unrest boiled over across the country; despite this, the CIO and its member unions remained committed to the no-strike pledge.

Ultimately, it would be John Lewis and his UMW who would bring about serious complications for the organization. Beginning on April 1, 1943 and continuing at intervals throughout the year, Lewis ordered some 400,000 miners out on strike to protest the lack of a wage adjustment by the WLB. The CIO issued a statement in support of the miners and their wage adjustment, but the Executive Board also made sure to criticize the strikes of the miners and the general actions of Lewis as being detrimental to the war effort.[185] The reaction of both the American public and Congress was swift and decidedly anti-labor. Those such as Senator

[183] "The Labor Situation: Statement by Representative Rankin of Mississippi," March 21, 1942, Box 7, Speeches 1942 – Labor Strikes, John Rankin Collection. University of Mississippi Archives and Special Collections, Oxford, Mississippi, United States.

[184] Zieger, *The CIO, 1935-1955,* 180-181.; "Bright Spots Found After Nov. 3 Storm," *CIO News*, November 9, 1942, 7.

[185] "CIO Urges WLB To Grant Miners Wage Adjustment," *CIO News,* May 17, 1943, 8.; "Strikes in 1943," Work Stoppages, (n.d.), Retrieved February 04, 2021, from https://www.bls.gov/wsp/

Eastland gave speeches which asserted that "[l]abor needs protection from the grasping, greedy racketeer. The cause of labor needs protection from the saboteur who parades in labor's noble robes." The senator also stated of the striking miners, "They sabotage the war effort and endanger the lives of our soldiers, increase casualties and sacrifices of our men. Because of strikes in this time of war, men can be killed, our nation destroyed, and our people enslaved."[186] Those writing to their Congressmen about the ongoing situation often reflected these antagonistic views; one Mississippi man asserted that "[i]n any other country than these USA, J.L.L [John Lewis] might get the firing squad or neuse [sic]."[187] A similarly outraged individual wrote of the situation, "…this is a responsibility that rests upon the shoulders of Congress and none other than Congress and it seems to me that any congressman or senator unwilling to join in the undertaking of the curbing of these outlaws should have a plane chartered to carry him across to Hitler's quarters."[188] With these attitudes toward labor bubbling up as a result of the strike, it is no wonder that substantial progress was made regarding anti-labor legislation in less than two months after the beginning of the strike. By mid-May, Murray and the other CIO Executive Board members were pleading with Congress not to pass the War Labor Disputes Act, or the Smith-Connally Act as it is more popularly known.[189] CIO leaders argued that the Act would unnecessarily punish millions of workers due to the antagonistic actions of only one man, Lewis. Both national CIO leaders and local labor supporters wrote to Congress in protest of the bill as

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[186] "Floor Speech of Senator James O. Eastland," May 10, 1943, Series 2, Subseries 5, Box 1, Folder 4, James O. Eastland Collection, MUM00117. University of Mississippi Archives and Special Collections, Oxford, Mississippi, United States.

[187] "Constituent Letter to James Eastland from E.H. Anderson," June 7, 1943, Series 3, Subseries 1, Box 114, Folder 25, James O. Eastland Collection, MUM00117. University of Mississippi Archives and Special Collections, Oxford, Mississippi, United States.

[188] "Constituent Letter to James Eastland from L.O. Crosby," May 15, 1943, Series 3, Subseries 1, Box 114, Folder 25, James O. Eastland Collection, MUM00117. University of Mississippi Archives and Special Collections, Oxford, Mississippi, United States.

[189] "Halt Smith-Connally Union Wrecking Bill, CIO Asks Congress," *CIO News,* May 17, 1943, 3.

undemocratic and unfair.[190] Their efforts went unheeded as the Act was passed by a greater than

two-to-one majority in order to override President Roosevelt's veto.[191] Described by historian

Robert Zieger, the Act, which itself was a combination of proposals introduced by Senator Tom

Connally of Texas and Rep. Howard Smith of Virginia, "…mandated a thirty-day waiting period

between the holding of a strike vote and a walkout, provided for government takeover of military

production plants threatened by labor disputes, barred strikes and strike advocacy in federally run

facilities, and limited political activities of labor unions."[192] Despite suffering a political setback

as a result of the bill, the CIO's Executive Board, led by Murray, remained committed to the no-

strike pledge for the purpose of winning the war.[193] Deprived of the option to strike without

alienating public opinion or receiving the ire of the federal government and sensing the winds of

political change moving across the country, the CIO resolved to further its efforts in the political

arena after Smith-Connally.

After the passage of the Smith-Connally Act, the CIO put into motion a plan which was

designed to "inject its ideological and programmatic agenda directly into the Democratic Party's

bloodstream."[194] In the summer of 1943, the organization created the CIO Political Action

Committee (PAC) to achieve this goal; it was the brainchild of and chaired by Sidney Hillman.

At its inaugural conference in Chicago, according to the *CIO News*, over 300 delegates "voted

unanimously to support the election of candidates in national, state and city-wide contests in

1943 and 1944 who have demonstrated their consistent support of President Roosevelt on all

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[190] "Smith-Connally Cripple-the-War Bill Nearly Law," *CIO News,* June 14, 1943, 3-4.; "Letter from Robert Reed, Gulfport Central Labor Union to James Eastland," May 30, 1943, Series 3, Subseries 1, Box 114, Folder 25, James O. Eastland Collection, MUM00117. University of Mississippi Archives and Special Collections, Oxford, Mississippi, United States.
[191] "Smith-Connally Bill Law; CIO Hits Passage But Renews War Pledge," *CIO News,* June 28, 1943, 3.
[192] Zieger, *The CIO, 1935-1955,* 180-181.
[193] "Smith-Connally Bill Law; CIO Hits Passage But Renews War Pledge," *CIO News,* June 28, 1943, 3.
[194] Zieger, *The CIO, 1935-1955,* 180-182.

major issues, domestic and foreign."[195] Following the lead of the CIO, many member unions

including UCAPAWA encouraged political action among their workers. The CIO PAC held a

conference in Birmingham only a few weeks after its convention in Chicago; the event was

highly regarded by the CIO at the time due to the difficulties with conducting political action of

any kind in the South.[196] A main focus of the CIO PAC was registration and ensuring sufficient

voter turnout; this crucial element was believed to be a key factor in the conservative gains in

1942. Over a year before the 1944 election, both the *CIO News* and the *UCAPAWA News* were

running pieces on voter registration in preparation for the upcoming battle.[197] Entering 1944, the

PAC had hosted conferences in several more large cities around the nation, and its treasury was

flush with over $700,000 from both the CIO and its member unions. Philip Murray reinforced

the organization's commitment to supporting the president and his pro-labor policies and allies

while refraining from taking on the role of a third party.[198] The organization placed a large

emphasis distributing literature encouraging people to become politically active; it also released

specialized writings and pamphlets targeted towards women and black workers and voters. All

told from the middle of 1943 through 1944, the CIO PAC distributed nearly 85 million pieces of

literature around the country.[199] The monumental efforts of Hillman and his PAC were supported

by the activities of member unions like UCAPAWA as they continued to emphasize the

importance of political action among their members. While the CIO succeeded in defeating

established politicians even in southern strongholds such as Gadsden, Alabama, the primary

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[195] "CIO Political Drive Shifts to High Gear," *CIO News,* August 2, 1943, 3.

[196] "Political Action Hits 'Deep South' in Birmingham Parley," *CIO News,* August 30, 1943, 3.

[197] "Here's What You Have To Do To Register To Vote In Vital '44!" *CIO News,* August 30, 1943, 5.; "Register-To-Vote Campaign," *UCAPAWA News,* September 1, 1943, 7.

[198] "CIO Political Parlay Slated for '44 – Murray," *CIO News,* January 3, 1944, 5.

[199] Zieger, *The CIO, 1935-1955,* 180-182.

concern of the PAC was the presidential election.[200] After election day, CIO officials hailed FDR's win and emphasized that the PAC played a crucial role in the proceedings; outside of holding the presidency the Democratic Party, most often associated with labor support, also held seats in the Senate while gaining twenty seats in the House. Importantly, the PAC was able to exert political influence even while being attacked by conservatives as being hopelessly infiltrated by communists. The failure of this strategy sits in stark contrast to the events which would befall the CIO before the end of the decade.[201]

While many portions of the CIO's political action program seemingly resonated with those around the country, an increased number of strikes in 1944 led to an intensified round of hostility against the CIO. This hostility manifested itself increasingly across the South where conservative Democrats sought to keep the labor movement away from their states. Beginning in 1943, a wide range of legislative challenges to unionism were launched by various states. These laws were often argued as necessary by conservatives as they were needed to prevent racketeering by union officials.[202] More often than not, the laws passed in these southern states were at odds with federal law and were thus declared unconstitutional after court challenges by various unions.[203] During the 1944 election, Arkansas, Florida, and California held referendums on right-to-work amendments to their respective constitutions. Though the CIO was able to fight off the challenge in California, smaller memberships in Florida and Arkansas were unable to defeat the amendment which effectively banned the union shop as they "provided that no person

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[200] "The Fight for the Soldier Vote," *UCAPAWA News,* January 15, 1944, 4.; "Organizing," *CIO News,* October 2, 1944, 9.

[201] Zieger, *The CIO, 1935-1955,* 186-188.; "State by State Story – How the CIO Helped to Win the Election," *CIO News*, November 13, 1944, 1-4.

[202] "CIO Membership Demanded of Discharged War Veterans: Speech by John Rankin, Series 4, Box 7, Speeches 1944 – Labor, June 7, 1944, John Rankin Collection. University of Mississippi Archives and Special Collections, Oxford, Mississippi, United States.

[203] Marshall, *Labor in the South*, 241-243.

could be refused employment because of affiliation or lack of affiliation with a labor union."[204]

As historian Ray Marshall noted, "These laws proved unenforceable but set precedent for the

state right-to-work laws when they were permitted by the Taft-Hartley Act in 1947."[205] The early

days of 1945 did not prove much different than the war years which had proceeded it. In only a

few short months, however, America would lose its president and claim victory over both

Germany and Japan. Through August, when the Japanese surrendered to officially end the war,

strike numbers had remained relatively low. Upon the end of the war, CIO priorities shifted now

that the union had more flexibility with regard to job actions. The CIO immediately sought wage

gains for its members, many of whose wages had been stagnated for years due to the WLB's

policy of preventing inflation. The CIO also issued a renewed commitment to collective

bargaining and made unemployment compensation a key priority for the federation. The rise in

wages accompanied by unemployment security for those newly unemployed after the war, the

CIO believed, would allow for a smooth reconversion of the postwar economy.[206] The smooth

reconversion was nowhere to be found initially. The UAW, USWA, UPWA, and UE, all unions

which had experienced tremendous growth and boasted large memberships, struck between

December of 1945 and March of 1946. All of these unions sought wage gains from corporations

such as GM and US Steel; these wages were kept low due to the threat of inflation during the

war, but fact-finding boards appointed by President Truman found that these corporations could

afford substantial wage increases despite their insistence otherwise.[207] The first two months of

1946 saw over 43 million man-days lost to strike activity with over a quarter of the CIO's

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[204] "Union Shop Ban Killed In California," *CIO News,* November 13, 1944, 1.
[205] Marshall, *Labor in the South*, 242.
[206] "Full Text of CIO Stand on Reconversion Policy," *CIO News,* August 20, 1945, 2.; "Work Stoppages Caused by Labor-Management Disputes in 1945," Work Stoppages, (n.d.). Retrieved February 04, 2021, from https://www.bls.gov/wsp/
[207] Renshaw, *American Labor and Consensus Capitalism, 1935-1985*, 80-84.

membership on strike as of February 1st. Collectively, these actions would be the largest

sustained strike action in US history by the time they were brought to a resolution by the raising

of wage rates.[208] The CIO's largest unions emerged from the war flush with members and

money. They were determined to use their strength to consolidate and win further gains from

management. The CIO was determined to weave the strength of its largest national unions

together with the hundreds of thousands of unorganized workers in the South in order to carve

out labor's role in postwar America. These desires would collide with the launching of Operation

Dixie in 1946 in an event which marked a new era for the CIO.

Chapter IX. Operation Dixie Begins

The CIO, fresh off securing wage gains for many of their members through large,

disruptive job actions, finally acted on its promise to organize the South during 1946. In March,

Philip Murray announced the creation of the Southern Organizing Committee (SOC) to affect

"the organization of low-paid, unorganized workers in the southern states." Speaking on the

drive, Murray said, "With wage rates set at the highest level in history, the southern drive has

become even more important. It will not only bring comparable benefits to the southern workers,

but will protect the northern, unionized workers from low-pay competition in open-shop

areas."[209] During the same announcement, Murray promised a one-million-dollar funding

contribution to the drive from the CIO and its member unions. He also named the members of

SOC to be headed by Van Bittner, Murray's long-time lieutenant at both the UMW and USWA,

as director and George Baldanzi, vice president of the TWUA, as assistant director.[210] The

campaign officially opened on May 3, 1946 in Atlanta, Georgia. This was the site of SOC

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[208] "Work Stoppages Caused by Labor-Management Disputes in 1946," Work Stoppages, (n.d.). Retrieved February 04, 2021, from https://www.bls.gov/wsp/ ; Zieger, *The CIO, 1935-1955,* 221-224.
[209] "CIO Wage Gains Spur Southern Organizing Drive," *CIO News,* March 18, 2021, 2.
[210] Ibid.

headquarters and the place from which Bittner coordinated much of the activity of Operation Dixie. SOC was active in twelve states: Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Florida, Georgia, Alabama, Tennessee, Kentucky, Arkansas, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas. Each state was assigned a state director who would be responsible for the regional directors serving under them. A stated minimum of no less than two hundred organizers was planned for the drive, and by November there would be more than two hundred and fifty organizers in the field.[211] A large portion of these organizers would be sent to textile mills across the South in which almost a third of southern manufacturing workers toiled. While the textile industry had steadily lost workers in the North, the South by 1946 had become the center of American textiles comprising about seventy-five percent of all textile workers. Sensing the weakness of unionism in an industry where almost an entire region of workers remained unorganized, CIO leaders jumped at the opportunity to organize these crucial concerns. Van Bittner himself said, "When you organize the textile industry of the South, you have not only the textile industry of America organized, but you have practically all industries in the South under the banner of the CIO. So, our main drive…has been in the textile industry."[212] From the beginning, opposition to the CIO was expected to be stiff. The politicians of the southern states shared many of the same vitriolic views of both the southern organizing drive and the CIO more generally. An example of these views can be found in a speech prepared by Senator Eastland of Mississippi:

> Mr. President, the Congress of Industrial Organizations has opened a drive to organize the Southern States for the admitted purpose of electing to the Congress men who will follow the CIO line to control the political affairs of the South, and to dominate the social and economic life of our people. During the past few years this organization has grown powerful throughout the nation. It is allied with and works hand in

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[211] "Time to Re-Tire," *CIO News,* May 13, 1946, 4.; Marshall, *Labor in the South*, 254-255.

[212] "500,000 Organizing Goal Set By Textile," *CIO News*, April 29, 1946, 7.; Minchin, *Fighting Against the Odds,* 38-41.

> glove with the minority groups of the industrial east, the negro organizations, and various classes of fellow travelers.[213]

This speech is just one example of the numerous attempts to paint the CIO and its organizers as outsiders, foreign to the land, and lacking real desire to help southern people. Alongside these charges, accusations of communist affiliation were readily thrown at the CIO, its leaders, and its member unions. Political criticism, especially the threats of being labeled communist, forced Bittner to tread carefully since the CIO did have significant communist influence in several of its member unions. First, Bittner drew approximately eighty-five percent of his staff from the South to push back against portrayals of CIO foreigners "invading" the South. Secondly, he emphasized that the CIO would not accept the help of outside organizations during its upcoming drive, and he also cautioned member unions contributing organizers to the drive not "to try to put organizers on our staff you wouldn't have on your own."[214] Additionally, at Bittner's urging, the CIO Executive Board decided that all state directors for SOC would resign any PAC jobs they held. The decision was made to subordinate political interests to organizing during the drive because, as Bittner noted, the CIO was "not going to make any political gains in the South until we organize the workers.[215] These actions had the effect of marginalizing some of the more radical and politically conscious elements among CIO organizers; ironically, these left-leaning radicals had been the driving force behind many of the CIO gains in the South prior to 1946. The CIO as well as Bittner's personal sensitivity to the communist issue and the subsequent decisions made by the Executive Board along with Bittner himself represented a major shift in CIO strategy which would have immediate ramifications on Operation Dixie.

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[213] "Speech prepared by James. O. Eastland," 1946, Series 2, Subseries 5, Box 1, Folder 17, James O. Eastland Collection, MUM00117. University of Mississippi Archives and Special Collections, Oxford, Mississippi, United States.
[214] "Organizing Drive All CIO – Bittner," *CIO News,* April 22, 1946, 10.; Marshall, *Labor in the South*, 254-256.
[215] Marshall, *Labor in the South*, 255-256.

Bittner was not similarly cautious about the issue of race, saying, "we made up our minds that…we are organizing men and women regardless of creed, color, or national origin, because they are God's human beings and are workers, and we are organizing all workers."[216] Despite these strong words which mirrored the egalitarian policy of the CIO, expectations of radical racial reordering in the South were tempered from the beginning of the drive. The *CIO News* described, "as Bittner has pointed out, CIO's sole objective in the south is to organize workers into unions 'for collective bargaining for higher wages and better working conditions.'"[217] It was clear that while black workers would not be excluded from the organizing campaign, the broader social issues intertwined with race in the south would not be touched by SOC. As reported by historian Robert Zieger, "continued agitation of racial questions, Bittner told FTA president Donald Henderson, 'is hurting our drive and I am not going to allow anything to interfere with the organization of the workers into CIO unions.'"[218] In the same way that decisions to marginalize the left within Operation Dixie would come to define the strategy of the entire drive, the explicit decision to avoid the issue of race whenever possible would shape organizing efforts in the South. Once again, Bittner and the SOC leaders chose a conservative path which served to limit the influence of some of its most militant, successful southern organizers and members during a watershed moment for southern organized labor.

Harboring a decidedly conservative strategy and leadership, SOC set about to organize its primary concern, textiles, during 1946. Operation Dixie's focus on textiles has been well researched by numerous historians over the years. From the efforts of these historians such as Robert Zieger, Michael Goldfield, and Barbara Griffith among others, it has been established that

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[216] Ibid.

[217] "Time to Re-Tire," *CIO News,* May 18, 1946, 4.

[218] Zieger, *The CIO, 1935-1955,* 233-234.

Operation Dixie with regard to organizing the crucial textile industry in places such as North and

South Carolina, Virginia, Georgia, and Alabama was a failure.[219] SOC strategy had dictated that

some of the largest textile chains in the South such as Cannon Mills in Kannapolis, North

Carolina, Bibb Mills in Georgia, and Avondale Mills in Alabama were among the first priorities

for CIO organizers. The CIO leaders hoped that by organizing these large concerns throughout

the South they could bring back the hope and optimism of 1937 and 1938 when the UAW,

URW, and SWOC won victories against some of the largest employers in their respective

industries.[220] SOC leaders believed that winning union representation in small plants would be

insignificant and not provide the desired boost to organizing workers when compared to potential

victories at the large chains; besides, the sheer number of small textile concerns in the South was

too great for the CIO to attempt to organize them in a timely, effective manner given their

relatively small number of organizers spread throughout the region. The decision to concentrate

on large textile chains would provide no shortage of challenges for CIO organizers. As Barbara

Griffith wrote of the strategy in her work on Operation Dixie:

> One of the most compelling arguments against it stemmed from the fact that bellwether plants were often
> the only industry in an area and had been built with their own mill towns around them. The level of control
> that owners of such plants exercised over the lives of their workers was much greater than that found in
> towns with more than one employer. The peculiar problems posed by the paternalism of textile mill villages
> added an altogether different dimension to the task of union organizing and more often than not made an
> organizer's job significantly more difficult.[221]

Despite the continued assertion from those involved with the southern organizing drive that

things were progressing well, and gains were being made in the textile industry, the results of

NLRB elections from the inception of the drive until the end of 1946 bears a much different

story. Of forty-seven elections conducted among nine different southern states, the TWUA won

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[219] Goldfield, *The Southern Key: Class, Race, and Radicalism in the 1930s and 1940s,* 301-303.
[220] Barbara S. Griffith, *The Crisis of American Labor: Operation Dixie and the Defeat of the CIO*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988), http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv941x0c, 24-26.
[221] Ibid, 46-48.

only twenty-one of these elections. Aggregate numbers show the union was outvoted by

approximately three thousand "no union" votes during this period, and the elections only covered

16,000 of the hundreds of thousands of textile workers spread across the South. Even more

telling was the fact that the CIO could simply not get enough workers to sign membership cards

at many of the large plants it wished to organize; as a result, workers at many of the large plants

mentioned above never even participated in an NLRB election.[222] William Smith, North Carolina

state director for SOC, wrote to Bittner after a disappointing run of election results:

> Frankly, I am worried and heartsick about the loss of these two textile elections this week as I realize only
> too well that unless we crack some of the major textile mills in the state, the rest will not mean too much. I
> never wanted to do anything more in my life than to do a real job in the textile industry. The lethargy and
> disinterest of the textile workers is enough to frustrate anyone and frankly, while I have some ideas, I do
> not know the answer to it all.[223]

The CIO struggles of late 1946 were not limited to Operation Dixie. In November,

Republicans won sweeping victories in the midterm elections gaining control of both the House

and the Senate for the first time since 1930. Conservative gains were driven by reactions to the

strike wave of 1945-1946, to Operation Dixie and its potential to affect change in the South, and

to charges that the CIO was run by communists.[224] The combination of these forces combined

with a continuing shift to the political right across the country set the CIO up for failure in these

elections. The *CIO News* labeled the day "Black Tuesday" for organized labor whilst describing

the wide assortment of anti-labor bills which were likely to be considered by the new

Congress.[225] Crushing defeat in these elections served to add insult to injury to the CIO who was

quietly racking up losses in Operation Dixie. The election was a blow to the organization's PAC

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[222] Ibid, 56-58.; Zieger, *The CIO, 1935-1955,* 235-238.

[223] Griffith, *The Crisis of American Labor: Operation Dixie and the Defeat of the CIO*, 38-40.

[224] Honey, "Anti-Racism, Black Workers, and Southern Labor Organizing: Historical Notes on a Continuing Struggle," *Labor Studies Journal* 25, 17-18.

[225] Zieger, *The CIO, 1935-1955,* 238-240.; "Liberal Forces Face Stiff Fight in Congress," *CIO News*, November 11, 1946, 2.

which had earlier in the year lost its leader, Sydney Hillman, in July of 1946. Even prior to

Hillman's death, the PAC was forced to fight a constant uphill battle to oppose anti-labor

legislation and attempt to help elect friends of labor to Congress. Labor suffered a string of

legislative defeats such as the scuttling of a bill which would create a permanent FEPC, the

failure to affect the passing of an effective full employment measure, and the dismantling of the

wartime price control apparatus within the federal government.[226] The CIO's poor legislative

performance culminated in June of 1947 when the Labor Management Relations Act of 1947,

popularly known as the Taft-Hartley Act, was passed over President Truman's veto. This law

overhauled the 1935 Wagner Act and had important implications for organized labor and the

CIO. The law contained a number of provisions making a number of activities illegal such as

jurisdictional and secondary strikes and union contributions to political campaigns of most any

nature.[227] Taft-Hartley also established a list of unfair union practices which complicated the

process of collective bargaining and expanded the power of the government and the president to

prevent or bring an end to strike activities. The CIO Executive Board and President Murray

issued many forceful rebukes of the law through the *CIO* News as well as wrote impassioned

pleas to those in Congress and the White House, but the conservative upswell emanating from

the 1946 election was simply too strong to keep the legislation from being passed.[228] A

congressional survey commissioned around the time of the passage of Taft-Hartley clearly shows

that a large majority of both houses of Congress as well as the voting public endorsed the

provisions of the Act. In many southern states, support for the Act was unanimous among the

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[226] Zieger, *The CIO, 1935-1955,* 243-245.
[227] Ibid, 246-248.
[228] "Not Time Enough to Uphold Veto,"; "Statement of CIO Executive Board," *CIO News*, June 30, 1947, 2-3.

congressional delegations.[229] Confined to these realities, the CIO for the immediate future would be forced to deal with the restrictions of Taft-Hartley. Two of the more onerous provisions of the Taft-Hartley Act were the section which provided states with the right to pass laws outlawing any form of union security measures such as the closed shop and the requirement that union officials wishing to deal with the NLRB had to sign non-communist affidavits. As a result of these actions, over half of the southern states passed right-to-work laws by the end of 1947.[230] The issue of communist influence within the CIO continued to simmer within the organization; this issue, fueled by the introduction of the affidavit requirement, would eventually force CIO leadership's hand later in the 1940s as part of a continued turn towards conservatism within the organization.

Operation Dixie was marred by issues from its very conception. The campaign struggled mightily to organize in its stated area of concentration, textiles, and the CIO-PAC suffered critical electoral as well as legislative defeats which hampered the overall program of labor organization within the southern United States. It would, however, be a disservice to the CIO and SOC to assert that it achieved no postwar victories in the South. Rather, the CIO and its member unions experienced considerable success throughout the region, and many of these victories provided proof of the very same organizing concepts which SOC and its leadership rejected in the textile campaign portion of Operation Dixie. Opposed by hostile politicians supported by a considerable amount of the populace in the South, CIO organizers nevertheless carried their mission to "organize the unorganized" across the southern states in hopes of improving the

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[229] "A Congressional View of the Closed Shop: More Facts and a Gauge of the Future," March 7, 1947; "Letter from Thomas Abernethy to Mr. V.L. Egger," May 19, 1947, Box 422, Labor Legislation H.R. 3020, Thomas G. Abernethy Collection, MUM00001, University of Mississippi Archives and Special Collections, Oxford, Mississippi, United States.
[230] Zieger, *The CIO, 1935-1955,* 246-249.; Minchin, *Fighting Against the Odds,* 44-47.

conditions of exploited southern workers. Beginning in 1946 and shortly after the launch of the

drive, it was clear that results were to be had in favor of the CIO. In July, the IWA won an

election at the Masonite Corp. in Laurel, Mississippi; this plant was the largest industrial facility

in the state at the time employing nearly 2200 employees.[231] By September, the IWA had added

three lumber mills to its Laurel local as well as a further two Natchez, Mississippi concerns. The

union also made forays into Arkansas where it organized woodworkers in West Helena and

Mountain Pine. Additionally, the IWA added two plants in Sondheimer, Louisiana to its rolls

while also recruiting bargaining units in Norfolk, Virginia and Century, Florida.[232] Through the

end of the year, the IWA continued to press its organizing throughout the South. The union

added to its rolls lumber mills in disparate places such as Diboll, Temple, and Waskom, Texas as

well as Troy, Evergreen, and Fulton, Alabama. The IWA continued to complement its previous

gains in Arkansas and Mississippi; new plants were signed up in Benton and Pine Bluff,

Arkansas while the union saw victory in several elections within the state capital, Jackson, while

continuing to add plants in both Natchez and Laurel. Additionally, the IWA was able to organize

a lumber mill in Knoxville, Tennessee, a feat never before completed, prompting Paul

Christopher, Tennessee state director for SOC, to report that this "opens the way for organization

of many more workers in this industry in Knoxville."[233] By the time of the one-year anniversary

of the beginning of Operation Dixie, the IWA could claim a further ten election victories in

North Carolina with several more yet to be held.[234]

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[231] "25 Southern Plants Go CIO," *CIO News,* July 8, 1946, 6.

[232] "Organizing," *CIO News,* September 2, 1946, 11.

[233] "Organizing," *CIO News,* October 7, 1946, 9.; December 9, 1946, 10.; December 16, 1946, 9.

[234] "Letter from William Smith to J.E. Fadling," June 11, 1947, Series 1-121, Reel 3, Katherine F. Martin and Congress of Industrial Organizations (U.S.). *Operation Dixie: The C.I.O. Organizing Committee Papers, 1946-1953*, (Sanford, N.C.: Microfilming Corp. of America, 1980), University of Mississippi Archives and Special Collections,
Oxford, Mississippi, United States.

The IWA was not the only CIO union to experience southern success after the launch of the southern organizing campaign. The FTA, formally UCAPAWA, had been active in the South since its creation in 1937. The union comprised some of the most radical elements of the CIO; this is borne out by the union's approach to building interracial unions across the Jim Crow South while remaining committed to combining the principles of industrial unionism with civil rights actions. In 1946, the FTA's reputation was well established. The *CIO News* reported on FTA political activity in Winston-Salem, where a strong union presence in the form of Local 22 was established during WWII, "mayor of Winston-Salem during the recent primary campaign, told a [sic] FTA delegation that they were responsible for the registration [to vote] of 15,000 Negroes. 'With all these labor people voting, you can never tell what will come next,' he said."[235] The FTA experienced tremendous success at the beginning of the drive. The union won representation elections at cotton compresses and other agricultural concerns across the South in Charleston, Jackson, Montgomery, and New Orleans during the early months of the drive. Much of the FTA effort during this early period was the organizing of tobacco concerns in Virginia and North Carolina. The FTA won NLRB elections in over fifteen North Carolina tobacco plants scattered across the state. These plants bolstered the FTA presence in tobacco which had existed ever since interracial Local 22 won bargaining rights at R.J. Reynolds during the war while inroads were made in Virginia with a winning election at two tobacco production facilities in South Boston.[236] Throughout their organizing efforts, the FTA continued to support political and civil rights activity throughout the South. Local 75 member Roger Adams became "…the first

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[235] "Labor Candidates Win in Two States," *CIO News,* July 1, 1946, 5.
[236] "Letter to Allan Haywood from C.W. Fowler," October 15, 1946, CIO, National and International Unions, Food, Tobacco, Agricultural, and Allied Workers of America, 1945-1946, Records of the Congress of Industrial Organizations, ACUA 001, The Catholic University of America.

Negro leader to appear on a Democratic primary ballot in Texas." The *FTA News* praised

Adams' accomplishment as well as the large number of Local 75 members who exercised their

right to vote.[237] The FTA, in the midst of its tobacco organizing drive, prepared to release a

pamphlet highlighting the issue of race and civil rights in attempts to advance tobacco

organization among black workers. William Smith, North Carolina state director for Operation

Dixie, immediately objected to the release of this communication. In his letter to FTA regional

director Frank Green, he says, "While the leaflet contains material that is truthful and can be

used to good advantage in some situations, I strenuously object to its use in the State of North

Carolina for the following reasons: 1. It raises a negro nationalistic approach which could easily

prove dangerous to us. 2. Our campaign in the Tobacco drive is such a huge success that we

should easily be able to bring it to a successful conclusion without the need of elaborating on the

racial issue…"[238] Smith's writing is emblematic of the majority view held by most of SOC

leadership with regard to confronting the racial issue in the South. It also reflects the ways in

which the conservative SOC attempted to keep its member unions from making direct challenges

to the racial order of the southern states.

FTA was not the only union which embodied more liberal beliefs about race compared to

the SOC. Mine Mill had from its inception welcomed black workers and communists freely into

their ranks. The union had insisted on forming integrated locals even in staunchly segregated

Birmingham. With the opening of the southern organizing campaign, Mine Mill took the

opportunity to further expand its membership in the South. The union acquired significant gains

by winning several elections in Charleston, South Carolina and Savannah, Georgia while also

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[237] "Local 75 Member First Negro on Texas Ballot," *FTA News,* September 1, 1946, 6.

[238] "Letter to Frank Green from William Smith," October 3, 1946, Series 1-48, Reel 2, Katherine F. Martin and Congress of Industrial Organizations (U.S.). *Operation Dixie: The C.I.O. Organizing Committee Papers, 1946-1953,*

winning NLRB victories in plants in Dublin, Georgia and El Paso.[239] The UPWA, its leaders

known to be of the more radical, left wing persuasion, won elections in Atlanta, Dallas,

Memphis, and Oklahoma City during the early months of the drive. The elections both served to

extend representation further into the large companies which the UPWA had already partially

unionized as well as helped the UPWA to establish a presence at smaller packinghouses.[240] The

United Furniture Workers of America (UFWA) maintained a small presence in the South prior to

Operation Dixie. Their membership was concentrated among the Carolinas as well as in

Arkansas and Memphis, Tennessee. The union set about to expand the reach of its membership

by committing itself to a southern drive at the UFWA convention in June 1946; at this same

convention resolutions were introduced encouraging cooperation with the Soviet Union as part of

the WWII "Big Three" and opposing minority discrimination.[241] While at odds with the ideals of

SOC leadership, the facts bear out that these resolutions did not slow down UFWA organizing in

the South. The union saw a number of gains during 1946 especially in Memphis where the union

won four elections in rapid succession after the onset of the drive. Across the border in Arkansas

the union found similar success in early NLRB election victories there.[242] Perhaps the greatest

single success for the CIO's southern campaign during 1946 came at a large atomic plant in Oak

Ridge, Tennessee. Following a run-off election between the CIO and the AFL, the CIO won the

right to represent nearly four thousand workers of the Carbon & Carbide Chemicals Corporation.

As the *CIO News* notes, victory was achieved "despite the frenzied efforts of the AFL to paint

the CIO red [as communists]."[243] The success of a number of unions in running organizing drives

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[239] "Organizing," *CIO News,* September 9, 1946, 9.; December 2, 1946, 9.
[240] "Organizing," *CIO News,* September 23, 1946, 9.; December 9, 1946, 10.
[241] "Going Places in The South," *CIO News,* June 17, 1946, 10.
[242] "Elections Won in the State of Tennessee," May 1, 1946 to March 31, 1948, Series 3-50, Reel 25, Katherine F. Martin and Congress of Industrial Organizations (U.S.). *Operation Dixie: The C.I.O. Organizing Committee Papers, 1946-1953*.; "Organizing," *CIO News,* October 21, 1946, 9.
[243] Ibid.; "CIO Wins Big Atom Plant," *CIO News,* September 16, 1946, 6.

across the South during the early stages of Operation Dixie stands in stark contrast to the failure

in organizing the crucial textile industry. Even more surprising is that many of the CIO unions

which showed the greatest degree of success across the southern states were those which

harbored left-wing leadership and radical ideas rapidly losing favor among top CIO brass. The

tensions between these conflicting ideals would continue to simmer over the next few years

while Operation Dixie clung to life in the South.

The FTA continued to enjoy considerable success in the South despite the struggles faced

by Operation Dixie more generally. It opened the year 1947 by winning elections by a greater

than two to one margin at a cotton oil plant in Greenwood, Mississippi and a tobacco production

facility in Greenville, Tennessee. During the Greenwood drive, black organizers were often

threatened by groups of whites in the town. The *FTA News* detailed the response of one

organizer faced with these threats:

> This young veteran, a Negro, told them simply that he had given three and a half years in service to
> eliminate fascism, to give people the right to organize into unions of their own choosing and that he was
> going to organize as long as he was alive, and if they wanted to dump him in the river to go right ahead
> because someone else would take his place. When this group saw that they could not scare him or the
> people like him, they were left alone.[244]

The FTA continued to organize workers in the face of much hostility. The focus on tobacco

remained evident as the union secured bargaining rights at seven tobacco production facilities in

Kentucky, this led to the formation of FTA Local 66, while also winning an election at a plant in

Nashville. The union also added two food processing plants in Suffolk, Virginia along with a

cotton compress in Greenwood, Miss. Adding to the FTA's impressive record, it successfully

fought off an AFL challenge at American Tobacco Co. in Charleston; once again, the victory

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[244] "FTA Wins 2 By 2 to 1," "FTA Vets Don't Scare – Even in Bilbo-Land," *FTA News,* January 15, 1947, 3.

was carried despite smear campaigns conducted by both the AFL and the company.[245] The FTA continued to carry on strong support for political action and subsequently the *FTA News* reflected this in nearly every issue by encouraging readers to become politically involved. The FTA further improved its hold on the tobacco industry by organizing another two plants in Farmville, Virginia, and it organized another cotton compress in Selma, Alabama.[246] By October of 1947, the FTA had signed up so many cotton oil and compress workers that a conference on the industry was held in Memphis with representatives from plants across the South as well as FTA President Henderson in attendance. The conference discussed the prospect of agitating for wage gains in the industry, the addition of overtime pay for the workers, and further organizing of these plants across the region.[247]

Like the FTA, the UPWA continued to shore up gains in the South while agitating for greater political action. Early in 1947, the UPWA won elections at facilities in Vernon and Mt. Pleasant, Texas. The union secured additional victories for workers in Albany, Georgia, Mayfield, Kentucky, Oklahoma City, and Memphis during the first half of the year.[248] During 1947, the UPWA went to great lengths to establish links between organized labor and farmers wherever possible for the purpose of political action. UPWA leadership believed that an effective partnership between the two groups could provide a united front against swelling tides of conservatism in the United States. The *CIO News* acknowledged that "these committees have a long row to furrow in reviving the traditional liberalism of the American. However, they have the keen advantage of a determined will to do the job.[249] Alongside the UPWA, the UFWA kept

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[245] "FTA Wins in 6 Elections," *FTA News,* February 15, 1947, 1.; "It Takes More Than AFL's Got to Win," *FTA News,* February 15, 1947, 8.
[246] "Organizing," *CIO News,* February 3, 1947, 7.
[247] "Hold First Cotton Oil Parley, Ask Wage Floor, Overtime Pay," *FTA News,* October 15, 1947, 3.
[248] "Organizing," *CIO News,* January 13, 1947, 6.; January 27, 1947, 16.; April 6, 1947, 8.; April 14, 1947, 13.
[249] "Pitching Hay Together," *CIO News,* June 23, 1947, 5.

at its organizing in the South. The union won NLRB victories early in the year at large plants in Port Smith, Arkansas, Sumter, South Carolina, and Rocky Mount, Virginia.[250] Later, the UFWA organized a plant in Knoxville, Tennessee before its organizing efforts were hampered by the actions of an AFL-affiliated union. This union, the UIU, continually attempted to raid UFWA southern locals which forced the UFWA to expend organizing resources to ensure that their locals remained intact. UFWA Director of Organization Ernest Marsh released a statement to union membership criticizing UIU leaders for claiming to have taken fifty or more shops from the union in the Carolinas and Tennessee when in reality the UIU held only three or four shops in the entire South. These AFL raiding efforts coupled with the passage of the Taft-Hartley Act prompted Marsh to release another statement to specifically southern UFWA locals and members. Marsh encouraged radical action to overcome the effects of Taft-Hartley and secure the organization of the southern furniture industry: "There will be no recognizing of the T-H law and we will fight with the old reliable methods used before F.D.R. gave us the Wagner Act. From now on we must build real strong, militant locals – we will strike if necessary to win recognition or demands or if forced to do so by bosses who are trying to break our Unions. This all means that greater solidarity must be built up in our own UFWA Locals and among the various CIO Unions."[251]

During 1947, the IWA continued to organize workers across the South in both cities and far-flung rural lumber concerns. In the east, the IWA secured election victories at several plants in Portsmouth, Virginia and Elizabethtown and Norman, North Carolina during the first half of the year. In rural Arkansas, the union won an election at a large plant in Warren. They followed

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[250] "Organizing," *CIO News,* February 17, 1947, 11.; March 17, 1947, 8.

[251] "Letter from Ernest Marsh to UFWA Membership," June 10, 1947; "Letter from Ernest Marsh to the Officers and Members of all Southern UFWA Locals," July 21, 1947, Series 3-677, Reel 47, Katherine F. Martin and Congress of Industrial Organizations (U.S.). *Operation Dixie: The C.I.O. Organizing Committee Papers, 1946-1953*.

this up by organizing and winning elections at lumber mills in Fayette and Yazoo City,

Mississippi as well as yet another victory at a large mill in Laurel.[252] As the year progressed, the

IWA was active in Louisiana, where they won elections at mills in Ponchatoula, Thibodaux, and

an especially large mill in Tallulah. The union continued to maintain a presence in the larger

cities by organizing mills in both Memphis and Dallas during the latter half of the year. The IWA

had a series of late year victories amid the flourishing timber industries in North Carolina and

Georgia; three mills were organized in Albany and Dawson, Georgia while a further two NLRB

victories were won in Fayetteville and Elizabeth City, North Carolina.[253] Along with its

organizing progress, the IWA encouraged political action among its members much like the

FTA. The *CIO News* ran a story on the significance of IWA political action in Dierks, Arkansas.

In 1945, IWA Vice President Bill Botkin visited the small, newly formed local at Dierks, which

was at the time a solid company town, and gave the union members small encouragement for

political action. As the story reads, "Recently, Botkin passed through Dierks again. He found that

they had elected the union president mayor and won every other post except one minor

office."[254] This is just one example of CIO political action bringing real, tangible change to the

lives of its working membership through the winning of political office. As noted, however,

many of the CIO's largest unions as well as the SOC committee neglected to encourage political

action in the South during Operation Dixie due to the conservative ideals of the leadership.

Mine Mill was another of the CIO member unions who insisted on encouraging political

action among workers. In 1947, however, the opposing factions of conservatives and liberals

within the union threatened to tear it apart. The January reelection of Reid Robinson, a known

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[252] "Organizing," *CIO News,* February 3, 1947, 7.; March 17, 1947, 8.; April 6, 1947, 8.; April 14, 1947, 13.; May 5, 1947, 11.

[253] Ibid, June 9, 1947, 8.; August 18, 1947, 6.; December 22, 1947, 10.

[254] "Workers Oust Company Rule," *CIO News,* July 14, 1947, 3.

left-wing radical, as Mine Mill president spurred a movement to secede among more conservative elements of the union.[255] Threats to union stability reached such a fever pitch that by March the CIO Executive Board was offering to mediate the situation. The Executive Board intervened to bring some 24,000 members back into the union, and they were also successful in getting Mine Mill to agree to a special election to resolve the internal dispute.[256] Despite the election of a new president, Mine Mill leadership remained overwhelmingly left-wing, the leadership refused to sign non-communist affidavits required by Taft-Hartley, and the competing tensions within the union would continue to simmer.[257] Even with internal strife threatening the union, leadership was able to create a Mine Mill PAC for the purposes of initiating a program for the 1948 elections. The PAC was to focus on energizing the rank-and-file membership of Mine Mill for political activity. Once again, this sort of activity ran counter to the wishes of the SOC, but it provided a political avenue to entice workers to join the union in addition to purely economic measures.[258] For Mine Mill, a union which had long been interested in political activism and militant unionism, the establishment of a PAC to invigorate its own membership seemed a natural evolution for the union.

1948 was a decisive year for the CIO and its unions. The federation was forced to reckon with the impact of Taft-Hartley among a growing swell of anti-communist ideals within the CIO. The government only fueled these tensions by its decidedly anti-communist attacks on CIO unions. The Senate Labor-Management Relations Committee released a report condemning the powerful FTA Local 22 in Winston-Salem for, among other things, "excessive political activity

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[255] Griffith, *The Crisis of American Labor: Operation Dixie and the Defeat of the CIO*, 149-150.

[256] "CIO Mine-Mill Decision," *CIO News*, May 19, 1947, 18.; "Mine-Mill Will Hold Election Referendum, *CIO News*, September 9, 1947, 9.

[257] "Two CIO Unions Hit T-H Law," *CIO News,* September 1, 1947, 10.; "Elect John Clark Mine, Mill Head," *CIO News*, December 8, 1947, 10.

[258] "Mine, Mill PAC," *CIO News,* October 6, 1947, 6.

which has nothing to do with employee interests or with collective bargaining," "soliciting and

collecting contributions for the CIO, PAC and for other organizations and movements known as

communist or subversive in their natures," and "promoting the political fortunes of a Negro

alderman." It should be noted that CIO President Murray came to the defense of the FTA by

asking the chairman of the committee, Republican Joseph Ball, to "repudiate" the report;

Murray's defense of the FTA in this instance would stand in stark contrast to many of his future

actions with regard to FTA and other left-leaning unions in the CIO.[259] Further difficulties came

for the FTA as a result of the affidavits required by Taft-Hartley. FTA leadership's refusal to

sign the affidavits meant that the union could not appear on NRLB ballots. As a result, AFL

unions seized on the opportunity to raid FTA membership from its locals. Thus, FTA resources

during 1948 were tied up in attempting to defend their membership from these raiding actions

and further organizing efforts were less effective.[260] The FTA clashed with the national CIO over

two crucial events during the year. First, the FTA wholeheartedly endorsed Henry Wallace's

third party bid for the presidency. Second, the union refused to endorse the Marshall Plan and

instead offered their own plan for aid to Europe. Both actions ran counter to explicit direction

from CIO leadership to deny support to third party candidates as well as to support the Marshall

Plan.[261] In their opposition to CIO policy, the FTA was joined by Harry Bridges, UE president

Albert Fitzgerald, the Fur and Leather Workers' Union, the UFWA, NMU and CIO general

counsel Lee Pressman among others. By March, Bridges had been relieved of his duties as CIO

regional director for California and Pressman resigned from the CIO to "be free to engage in

such activities as working for the election of Henry A. Wallace." SOC director Van Bittner,

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[259] "Murray Asks Ball to Veto FTA Report," *CIO News,* March 15, 1948, 12.
[260] "Organizationally Speaking," *CIO News,* June 21, 1948, 10.
[261] "Urge Locals Support Wallace," "A Real Plan for Europe," *FTA News,* January 15, 1948, 1-2.

speaking on the issue of support for Wallace, said, "…was really the first open fight between the trade unionists and the communists and in the end I am sure it will do the CIO a lot of good."[262] The UFWA joined FTA in supporting Wallace and denouncing the affidavit requirement of Taft-Hartley. As with the FTA, the failure to sign non-communist affidavits resulted in the raiding of union locals by AFL unions and even some CIO member unions. International President Morris Pizer sharply criticized this raiding activity within the labor movement and implored national CIO leadership to put a stop to the practice. Much like the FTA, organizing new locals in the South became much more difficult as resources were prioritized to defend established locals from raiding.[263] Following in the steps of the two aforementioned unions, Mine Mill endorsed Wallace's campaign for president and also refused to sign the non-communist affidavits. The policies of Mine Mill leadership once again brought factionalism within the union to a head. Locals released public statements disagreeing with Mine Mill Board policy, and a group of twenty-four locals comprising nearly 20,000 members bolted from the union with plans to affiliate with the UAW.[264] The events of 1948 were, unfortunately for these unions, only a precursor to further anti-communist attacks in 1949 and 1950.

In contrast to the three unions mentioned above and following the line of the majority of the CIO member unions, the UPWA and IWA complied with the signing of non-communist affidavits and adhered to CIO policies opposing political third policies. These unions, free to participate in NLRB elections, were far less susceptible to raiding from other AFL and CIO unions, and they were still able to make organizing gains during this period. The IWA was able to secure the union shop at one of its large plants in Laurel while at the same time winning

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[262] Zieger, *The CIO, 1935-1955,* 267-271.; "Pressman Quits Legal Posts," *CIO News,* February 9, 1948, 3.
[263] "Furniture Votes "No" on Affidavits," *CIO News,* June 14, 1948, 10.
[264] "N.Y. State, Ohio Hit 3rd Party," *CIO News,* March 8, 1948, 2.; "Councils Rally to CIO Policy," *CIO News,* March 29, 1948, 7.; "UAW Accepts Die Casters," *CIO News*, August 9, 1948, 9.

elections at new plants in Greenville, Hattiesburg, Yazoo City, and Meridian. The woodworkers once again entered Texas, Tennessee, and North Carolina to win elections at new concerns in Nacogdoches, Memphis, and Washington, respectively. In Alabama, the IWA added nearly five hundred workers to its rolls in Brewton by winning elections among all three divisions of a large lumber mill. NLRB victories at mills in Columbus and Buena Vista, Georgia followed by victories in two union shop elections covering nearly 1400 workers in Louisville, Kentucky rounded out the year for the IWA.[265] Whereas previously the IWA had maintained only a select number of locals in the South, the union could claim almost 12,000 members represented in the region by the end of 1948.[266] The UPWA followed the IWA's example of a turn towards conservatism and yielded to signing the Taft-Hartley affidavits; the union's leadership also repudiated support for Wallace and third party candidates generally.[267] Despite being preoccupied with a prolonged strike during the first half of the year, UPWA managed to secure a number of southern NLRB victories. The UPWA added three plants in Birmingham to its membership; an additional four victories were claimed in Fort Worth and Dallas with one election covering almost 1600 workers. Organizing was not limited to these larger cities, however, as the UPWA also won elections in Elk City, Oklahoma, Tifton, Georgia, and Chattanooga, Tennessee before the year was out.[268] 1948 was a year of poor fortunes for the CIO's most radical, leftist member unions, but the troubles would only intensify with the coming of the new year.

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[265] "Organizationally Speaking," *CIO News*, May 17, 1948, 10.; June 14, 1948, 10.; August 9, 1948, 8.; September 6, 1948, 12.; November 8, 1948, 10.; December 6, 1948, 8.

[266] Frank T. De Vyver, "The Present Status of Labor Unions in the South: 1948," *Southern Economic Journal* 16, no. 1 (1949), 4, doi:10.2307/1054621.

[267] "Packing Signs Affidavits," *CIO News,* June 14, 1948, 10.; UPWA O.K.'s Wage Plan; Hits 3d Party," July 5, 1948, 6.

[268] "Organizationally Speaking," *CIO News,* October 4, 1948, 12.; November 1, 1948, 10.; December 6, 1948, 8.; December 20, 1948, 8.

Chapter X. No More Communists

By 1949, reactionary forces had raised the communist alarm to its highest levels in the United States. Raiding of CIO unions by both AFL and other CIO member unions had been occurring since 1947 and was a serious problem for the left-leaning unions; in December of that year, Local 207 of the ILWU based in New Orleans, an interracial local with a decidedly communist leadership, lost its 1700 workers to the CIO United Gas, Coke, and Chemical Workers because of the refusal of the leadership to sign the non-communist affidavit.[269] As previously mentioned, UAW, led by Walter Reuther as president, had raided Mine Mill locals and summarily brought almost 20,000 new workers into the union during 1948. In 1949, the CIO Executive Board endorsed UAW raiding of the much smaller Farm Equipment Workers (FE) due to its leadership's refusal to sign the non-communist affidavit or accept a forced merger with the UAW.[270] Similarly, the FTA was tasked with defending itself from raids by other unions, both AFL and CIO, but the organization lacked an effective mechanism to defend itself since its leadership would not sign the affidavits required by Taft-Hartley. Appeals to stop union raiding were sent from the FTA convention in 1949 to both the AFL and CIO, but these appeals could not find listeners over the roar of anti-communism. Even the resignation of President Henderson, who was subsequently hired as administrative director to get around signed the non-communist affidavit, could not appease the CIO.[271] The UFWA also struggled against the spectre of anti-communism. UFWA Local 282 in Memphis organized a strike among seven hundred black women in the summer of 1949. The strike, according to Rebecca McKinley who worked at the plant, was over wages and working conditions at the Memphis Furniture Company. The strike

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[269] Bernard A. Cook and James R Watson, *Louisiana Labor: From Slavery to "Right-to-Work"*, (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, Inc., 1985), 237-239.

[270] Zieger, *The CIO, 1935-1955,* 279-280.

[271] "Ban Union Raiding, FTA Urges AFL, CIO," *FTA News,* February-March 1949, 5.; "Henderson Resigns as President; Appointed Administrative Director," *FTA News*, July 1949, 5.

was beaten through company use of scabs as well as the actions of CIO officials in Memphis.

The head CIO man in the city, William Copeland, was a staunch anti-communist and was also an

opponent of integration. Copeland helped to set up a committee to investigate communism

within Local 282 as well as FTA Local 19.[272] This committee ultimately purged Local 282 and

Local 19 of many of the most militant black workers as well as the most progressive white

members of the unions. As historian Michael Honey notes, "the removal of white leftists robbed

the Memphis CIO of interracial strike support, and strikes indeed began to fail. The loss of the

strike against the Memphis Furniture Company coupled with the loss of some of its most

effective organizers provided for the destruction of the UFWA's largest local before the end of

1949."[273] Mine Mill perhaps experienced the most dramatic union raiding of any of the left-wing

unions. Its integrated Birmingham locals, representing over 4000 workers, were a prime target of

USWA locals in the area. The USWA encouraged white Mine Mill members to revolt and leave

their unions since they were more likely to oppose the communist tilt of the union and its

egalitarian principles. The Ku Klux Klan intimidated black unionists during the build up to the

election, and attacks between Mine Mill leadership and Phil Murray grew increasingly personal

as violence escalated in and around Birmingham. In May 1949, the USWA emerged victorious in

an election and took control of the Mine Mill locals in the Birmingham area.[274] The loss of these

Mine Mill locals meant that one of the most radical, militant CIO unions had lost its foothold

even in an area where it had previously thrived, and this only provides further evidence as to the

radically conservative turn of the CIO in the late 1940s.

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[272] Zieger, ed., *Organized Labor in the Twentieth Century South*, 147-150.; Honey, *Black Workers Remember: An Oral History of Segregation, Unionism, and the Freedom Struggle*, 114-120.
[273] Zieger, ed., *Organized Labor in the Twentieth Century South*, 147-150.; Honey, *Black Workers Remember: An Oral History of Segregation, Unionism, and the Freedom Struggle*, 180-183.
[274] Zieger, *The CIO, 1935-1955,* 280-281.; "Mine, Mill Smear of Murray Carried Even to His Faith," *CIO News,* May 23, 1949, 6.

The FE and the UE had already severed ties with the CIO before the end of 1949 over the communist issue. Late in the year at the CIO convention resolutions were adopted which "authorized the Executive Board by a two-thirds majority to refuse to seat anyone 'who is a member of the Communist Party . . . or who consistently pursues policies and activities directed toward the achievement of the program or the purposes of the Communist Party.' Moreover, the delegates shouted through a companion resolution empowering the board to expel any affiliate it deemed to have been following policies 'consistently directed toward the achievement of the program or the purposes of the Communist Party.'"[275] In the early months of 1950, charges were brought against the American Communications Association, FTA, Fur and Leather Workers, Mine Mill, United Office and Professional Workers, United Public Workers, ILWU, Marine Cooks and Stewards, and the International Fisherman's Union based upon the above resolution. Trials were prepared, but they could not be expected to be impartial since all members of the trial committees were avowed anti-communists. Eventually, all of these unions would be expelled from the CIO in 1950 despite the defiance and best efforts of their leaders. In removing these unions from the CIO, the federation had voluntarily forfeited nearly a fifth of its total membership.[276] Meanwhile, the UFWA only escaped expulsion from the CIO by removing the communists from leadership positions within the union. While persecuting whole unions, the CIO also called on member unions to root out "traitorous elements of a foreign government." Jack O'Dell, WWII veteran, NMU member, and Operation Dixie volunteer organizer, fell victim to one such purge within his own union when he was expelled on June 26, 1950.[277] Discontent

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[275] Zieger, *The CIO, 1935-1955,* 285-287.

[276] Zieger, *The CIO, 1935-1955,* 289-291.; Renshaw, *American Labor and Consensus Capitalism, 1935-1985*, 119-120.

[277] Renshaw, *American Labor and Consensus Capitalism, 1935-1985*, 119-120.; "'They Teamed Up with The Police And The Klan: Jack O'Dell On Red Baiting in the National Maritime Union," May 8, 1993, http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/6924/, Interview courtesy of Sam Sills

with simply expelling the unions, CIO officials actively worked against the FTA after it left the CIO. Local 22 in Winston-Salem, the largest FTA local comprising some 10,000 white and black workers, was the primary target of the CIO. The first election, in March 1950, was forced into a runoff between Local 22 and "No Union" while the CIO and AFL members attempting to raid the local failed to reach this stage. At first, it appeared Local 22 had held up under pressure by a razor thin margin; however, the NLRB awarded 133 challenged votes to the "No Union" camp which caused Local 22 to lose the election. The loss of the massive local crushed the FTA and resulted in a merger with several other small unions to form the Distributive, Processing, and Office Workers of America (DPOW).[278]

Chapter XI. Final Days of Operation Dixie and the CIO

Operation Dixie took a backseat to the expulsion of communist dominated unions which occurred in 1949 and 1950. Van Bittner, director of the Southern Organizing Committee, died on July 19, 1949. He was succeeded as president briefly by George Baldanzi before John Riffe supplanted him in this position.[279] SOC had pulled out of Texas, Mississippi, and Louisiana by the end of 1948; Alabama would join these states as abandoned in 1949. Sporadic organizing would continue around the region from 1949 on, but the overall CIO commitment to the effort was marginal at best.[280] Baldanzi, a vice-president of TWUA, regularly clashed with President Emil Rieve after Baldanzi's brief stint as SOC director. The two men lobbed accusations relating to the poor performance of the TWUA in the South. A failed 1951 TWUA strike at the Dan River mills in Virginia which cost the union nearly 1.3 million dollars was the last straw for

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[278] "FTA 22 Blasts Taft-Hartley Ruling in R.J. Reynolds," *FTA News*, September 1950, 2.; Proposed Unity Agreement Ok'd by FTA Board," *FTA News,* September 1950, 3.

[279] Marshall, *Labor in the South*, 259.; "Telegram to William Smith" July 20, 1949, Series 1-23, Reel 1, Katherine F. Martin and Congress of Industrial Organizations (U.S.). *Operation Dixie: The C.I.O. Organizing Committee Papers, 1946-1953*.

[280] Griffith, *The Crisis of American Labor: Operation Dixie and the Defeat of the CIO*, 161-162.

Baldanzi and his supporters. He opposed Rieve at the 1952 TWUA convention, but Baldanzi and

his fellow supporters running for office were summarily defeated. Not two weeks later, Baldanzi

joined the United Textile Workers of America (UTWA), an AFL union, as director of

organization. Baldanzi himself holds that the TWUA lost around four hundred local officers and

nearly 50,000 members when his supporters joined him in the UTWA.[281] This split in the textile

industry only made further gains harder to come by in what had already been an uphill battle.

After the expulsion of its communist dominated unions, the CIO as a national concern

grew more and more interested in politics. Leadership saw the legislative and political areas as

useful places to advance the interests of their union membership. The federation also pushed for

an embrace of social Keynesian economics which would ensure continued economic growth for

the country. The CIO, especially after its support for Truman in the 1948 election, grew closer

and closer to the Democratic Party. Throughout the early 1950s, the CIO supported Democratic

senators and representatives with the hope of advancing portions of their legislative agenda such

as the repeal of Taft-Hartley.[282] Many CIO unions, formerly prone to wildcat strikes and

spontaneous actions by the rank-and-file membership, began to become more stable in the 1950s.

The establishment of strong bureaucratic structures coupled with effective leadership proved able

to slowly lessen the impact of these actions, actions which ironically had fueled the rise of the

CIO less than two decades earlier.[283] In November 1952, two actions occurred which had

massive implications on the CIO's future. First, Republican Dwight Eisenhower was elected

President of the United States. Second, on November 9, Philip Murray, who had been the CIO

president for over a decade, died. The election of a conservative president combined with the

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[281] Marshall, *Labor in the South*, 259-260.
[282] Zieger, *The CIO, 1935-1955,* 306-308, 310-314.
[283] Renshaw, *American Labor and Consensus Capitalism, 1935-1985*, 140-144.

death of its venerable leader put doubts on the CIO's ability to continue. Out of a closely

contested election, Walter Reuther, veteran UAW official and current president, ascended to the

CIO presidency. Shortly after his rise to the presidency, Reuther set up the Organizing Policy

Committee (OPC); the function of this committee was to discontinue any CIO directed

organizing projects. The OPC also closed forty-three of the CIO's fifty-six regional offices.

Among the causalities of the reordering was the Southern Organizing Committee; thus,

Operation Dixie came to a rather unceremonious end in early 1953 when compared to the fanfare

which kicked off the campaign in 1946.[284] Determining the final balance of Operation Dixie is

made rather difficult due to a lack of reliable statistics about union membership. For example,

SOC claimed in November 1948 that the drive had brought 450,000 new members into the

union, but NLRB elections, which the CIO almost always used to secure new membership,

tallies from 1946 to 1952 show only 276,969 votes for the CIO, making it incredibly difficult to

discern the exact numerical gains with accuracy. After the expulsion of the communist unions

from the CIO, raiding of their former locals became more commonplace than the organizing of

new concerns. Competition with the AFL also burdened CIO organizers throughout the region.

Many of the CIO's member unions added numbers to their rolls during Operation Dixie, but by

1953 the CIO had lost ground to the AFL in percentage of total southern membership. Thus,

while there were CIO gains during the drive, factionalism among the unions, competition from

the AFL, the difficulties organizing in the South, and initial difficulties left the drive drifting and

without a clear purpose in its latter years.[285] Ultimately, the CIO's grand project to remake the

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[284] Zieger, *The CIO, 1935-1955,* 336-341.
[285] Marshall, *Labor in the South*, 263-269.

South and the nation fell short, but the drive still constituted a major undertaking which had no precedent at the time of Operation Dixie's beginning.

After Reuther's election to the CIO presidency, factionalism once again reared its head within the federation. David McDonald, Murray's former lieutenant, claimed the USWA presidency after Murray's death. With the USWA and UAW being by far the CIO's two largest unions, McDonald was a natural rival to Reuther after the latter rose to the CIO presidency. McDonald engineered the placement of USWA official John Riffe, former head of SOC, as CIO executive vice president to ensure a level of control despite Reuther's place as president.[286] With institutional instability and Reuther's primary commitment to the UAW, much of the responsibility of organizing was dispersed among the individual CIO member unions during 1953 and 1954. With fervor for industrial unionism at a low point following the post-Korean war recession, Reuther began to look towards merger with the AFL as a serious and indeed, an inevitable conclusion. He was spurred on by McDonald who threatened to take the USWA out of the CIO unless a merger with the AFL could be had. Though unity discussions had occurred periodically between the AFL and CIO since 1937, the lack of CIO interest by Reuther, McDonald's insistence on merger, and the declining fortunes for the labor movement in the postwar era more generally combined to create a perfect storm in 1955. Joint unity committee discussions began in October of 1954. On February 9, 1955, Reuther and George Meany, AFL president who ascended to the office around the same time as Reuther, signed the basic agreement which would bring the labor federations together.[287] Negotiations on the specifics of the merger continued throughout the year, and by December everything was in place to complete

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[286] Zieger, *The CIO, 1935-1955,* 336-341.
[287] Zieger, *The CIO, 1935-1955,* 357-362.

the merger. The CIO held its final convention on December 1-2, 1955; when it came time to vote

on the merger, only Michael Quill and the Transport Workers Union of America (TWU) that he

headed opposed the action.[288] On December 5, 1955, the AFL and the CIO united and the

American Federation of Labor – Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) was founded

in New York City.[289] The grand project that was the CIO ceased to exist as an independent

organization, but the power afforded to the unified federation ensured that it would survive until

the present day, championing labor and the worker along the way.

Conclusion

Even though the CIO only existed as an independent entity for less than twenty years, the

body had an outsize effect on the American labor movement. The CIO, headed by John Lewis,

came onto the scene in 1935 with a mandate to "organize the unorganized" especially in the mass

production industries which were heretofore ignored by the AFL. Its early organizing successes

in the 1930s were fueled by revolutionary, militant tactics such as the sit-down strike. The CIO

espoused egalitarian ideals within its ranks and valued the rank-and-file membership during

these early days precisely for their radicalism and militant activities. In the South, the CIO was

one of the earliest large organizations to confront the specter of segregation head on. Through the

early days of the CIO, radical members who were willing to take action against management

were valued for their organizing skills and for their refusal to compromise their ideals. Often,

these radical progressives pushed hard for anti-discriminatory stances in official CIO policies

and many of the white workers among them strove to improve the stations of their black and

Hispanic peers. When World War II began, any prerogatives on the part of the radical members

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[288] Ibid, 368-371.
[289] "Texts of CIO Resolution Hailing Unity and Merger Implementation Agreement," *CIO News*, December 5, 1955, 8.

of the CIO were pushed aside in the name of national unity. Returning to a peaceful domain, the same radical, militant members of the CIO found themselves in a disadvantageous position. The marginalization of the left which occurred with the onset of the Cold War drove a wedge between the CIO as it was in the midst of Operation Dixie. National leadership, insistent upon a conservative course of action, sought to deemphasize the earlier values of shop floor militant unionism combined with a strong civil rights agenda. Disaster resulted for the CIO; many of its strongest southern locals collapsed without interracial support. Without radical organizing support, new workers were harder to sign up and the gains made in earlier years in many places erased as a result of the conservative onslaught. The CIO was forced into a merger with the AFL after its grand experiment in industrial and civil rights unionism came to an end in 1955.

Despite reintegrating with the AFL, the CIO maintains a separate legacy in its own right, especially with regard to southern organizing. When the CIO first made organizing forays into the South, the federation was often the first real, tangible opportunity for black workers to improve upon their conditions in many areas. One party political domination, Jim Crow laws, and the fiery racial attitudes of the southern United States made it incredibly difficult to organize black workers. The CIO and its member unions, with the benefit of a tradition of radicalism and militant action existing in areas across the South, spent years organizing black workers, encouraging them to become active politically, and fighting alongside them to win better rights. This legacy of civil rights unionism did not die with the AFL-CIO merger. In the years since the CIO ended its mission to organize Dixie, the spirit of those early activists, progressives, and militant union members has survived. In 1960, as historian Timothy Minchin notes, four African American students used a sit-in at a white-only lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina, "initiating the direct action phase of the southern civil rights movement…Within two months,

similar sit-ins had taken place in fifty-four cities in nine southern states."[290] According to George

Holloway, now a member of the UAW, as he reflected on his time in the unions, "The United

Auto Workers and two other labor unions were the ones that contributed the money and the

people to make the 1963 civil rights march in Washington, D.C., a success. Most people don't

know these things." He later added, "I'm a living example of UAW justice. I learned about

kindness and fairness in the labor movement. I learned about truthfulness and justice in contracts.

I have my UAW flag, and I saved it to be put on my casket, just like Walter [Reuther]'s was."[291]

These actions for civil rights culminated in the landmark 1964 Civil Rights Act which

among many other significant developments established the Equal Employment Opportunity

Commission (EEOC) to ensure compliance with non-discrimination. In February 1968, a

spontaneous strike of all black Memphis sanitation workers began in response to poor working

conditions, job hazards, and poor pay. They struck to secure union recognition, and they were

supported by a broad community coalition as well as legendary civil rights activist Martin Luther

King, Jr. King's last public address was to a crowd assembled in support of both the striking

workers and racial justice; he was assassinated in Memphis the next day. The tragedy of King's

death spurred ever more support for the sanitation workers, and they won the union recognition

they sought. Eventually, the sanitation local would grow to become the largest union local in the

city of Memphis, and its efforts would inspire public employees to unionize across the South.[292]

This success came in the same city where Edward "Boss" Crump had proudly proclaimed that he

would keep "nigger unionism" out of Memphis prior to the massive successes CIO experienced

organizing the city. Similarly, African American hospital workers struck in 1969 to protest

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[290] Minchin, *Fighting Against the Odds,* 93.
[291] Honey, *Black Workers Remember: An Oral History of Segregation, Unionism, and the Freedom Struggle*, 357-358.
[292] Minchin, *Fighting Against the Odds,* 109-111.

working conditions and low wages. The hospital administration and politicians of the state opposed the strike vigorously while the workers enlisted the help of the civil rights movement in their campaign.[293] Traditions of black worker activism were unleashed which could be traced all the way back to the FTA's own Charleston Local 15. In Laurel, Mississippi, where the CIO had established a strong presence during Operation Dixie, a 1979 strike at a Sanderson Farms poultry processing facility lasted for nearly six months. In preparation for an anticipated strike, the international union had sent young, black organizers in to replace the older, white representatives at the majority African American plant.[294]

Even today, the spirit of CIO organizing lives on in the South. In Bessemer, Alabama, just sixteen miles outside of Birmingham, a massive union drive is due to be decided by NLRB votes on March 29. The Retail, Wholesale, and Department Store Union (RWDSU), originally chartered by the CIO in 1937, is leading the effort to bring the union to an Amazon fulfillment center employing over 5000 workers. In Bessemer, where over a quarter of the population lives below the poverty line and seventy-one percent of those people are African American, it is easy to see why this facility would have been high on the CIO's list. A victory would be a watershed moment for the labor movement; it would be the first union to gain recognition at Amazon in the United States.[295] Much has changed since the CIO and its unions roamed the South looking to organize workers, but the basics of union organizing in the South have not. The hostile political structure, defiant management, and the issue of race remain. The legacy of CIO success in defeating these elements to improve life for workers can be seen in the union drive at Amazon and it will continue to inspire and motivate southern workers for years to come. As Amazon

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[293] Ibid, 112-113.
[294] Marc Miller, *Working Lives: The Southern Exposure History of Labor in the South*, 291-295.
[295] Kim Kelly, "An Unholy Union," March 22, 2021, https://www.vox.com/the-highlight/22320009/amazon-bessemer-union-rwdsu-alabama.

worker and union organizer Jennifer Bates says, "So many times we walked away when we could have helped somebody, and said, 'I'm gonna save myself and the rest of y'all can sink if you want to,' but this one right here was one of those where I said, 'You know what, I'm not running. I'm not running.' For years, I've seen people are being mistreated. I've seen people just get fired. When is it gonna stop?"[296]

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[296] Ibid.

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