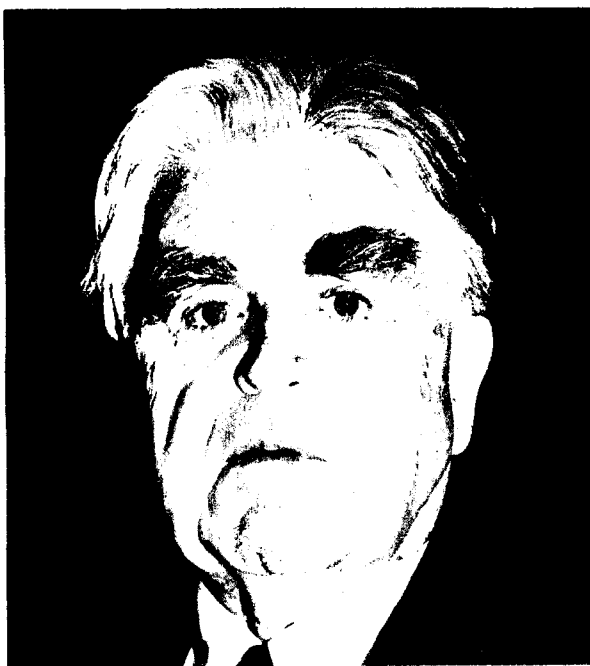


CIO president Philip Murray, whose recent serious illness prompted unification talk



Bill Green, 78, is president of AFL, which once included the CIO and may again



John L. Lewis, 71, keeps UMW independent just because he can't get along with anyone

The AFL Will Absorb

As soon as younger men succeed labor's aging leader

By EDWIN A. LAHEY

PHILIP MURRAY, president of the CIO, had a close brush with death a few months ago. It was touch and go with him for a couple of nights in a Pittsburgh hospital, and only his tough heart pulled him through. Among Murray's friends, who range from President Truman to the countless miners and steelworkers who call him by his first name, there was a two-sided apprehension.

They felt what everybody feels when death hovers at the door of a beloved citizen.

But beyond that they had the feeling that with Phil Murray gone, there would be no Congress of Industrial Organizations.

This latter feeling, of course, varied in intensity. To the payrollers of the CIO, it was the real thing. To students of social history, it was a reminder that the passing of a few men now in the evening of their lives almost certainly will bring revolutionary changes in the labor movement of this country.

During my associations of many years with many people in the CIO, I have heard it suggested that the organization would continue after Phil Murray, under the leadership of some universally revered union president like Jack Potofsky of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers.

Potofsky was an ardent follower of the late Sidney Hillman, and succeeded him as president of the ACW. They had fought together in the great clothing workers' strike in Chicago back in 1914, and had come up together to positions of great influence in the labor movement, especially as it got more and more into politics.

Nevertheless, the suggestion that Potofsky might take over from Murray belongs back in the days when there was real enmity between the American Federation of Labor and the CIO, the latter fighting with especial bitterness to survive and grow. That situation no longer exists.

Since the CIO fumigated its left wing in 1949 and 1950, it and the traditionally more conservative AFL have been much alike in their ways of thinking; certainly they see eye to eye on the menace of Communism, both foreign and domestic.

Leaders of the two organizations feel much more at ease with one another today, and the urgency for independent existence is not the fierce passion in the bosoms of the CIO union leaders that it once was.

As the glumness settled over the CIO building in Washington while Phil Murray was fighting for life against pretty heavy odds, one wise union official said to me:

"We may as well be realistic. If Phil goes, that's the end of the CIO. The Steelworkers and the Auto Workers each pay about \$100,000 a month to the CIO, and that's what keeps the CIO going. If the man who maintains the balance is lost, the Steelworkers and the Auto Workers couldn't live peaceably together as equals for six months."

Our best-known labor leaders today are Murray, aged sixty-five, William Green, president of the AFL, seventy-eight, and John L. Lewis, head of the United Mine Workers, seventy-one. Their unions claim, respectively, 6,000,000, 8,000,000, and 600,000 members. These claims may be a little high, but they do indicate the relative membership strengths of the organizations. Nonaffiliated unions have another million or two.

When Murray, Green and Lewis (all former coal miners) are gone, there will be a united labor movement in this country, at least 14,000,000 strong; the most formidable labor force in our history. Labor is now united at many points of contact, and the final act of organic unification will be a simple enough evolutionary step. "It's on the way," a keen insider confided to me, "and it will not be bad at all."

A united movement will not be a new thing for American labor, for both the CIO and UMW originally were part of the AFL. The Committee for Industrial Organization, as it was first called, consisted of eight AFL unions, including the miners; their purpose was to launch an organizing drive to unionize whole industries (like steel and automobiles) instead of just crafts (plumbers, carpenters and the like), as had been traditional AFL policy.



AFL carpenters' union, once militant, is now conservative under Big Bill Hutchison, 77



Elderly Dan Tobin, president of the potent AFL International Brotherhood of Teamsters

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he CIO When...

e way will be open for one big, powerful organization

It was this policy disagreement that resulted in the suspension, then expulsion, of the CIO affiliates from the AFL; three years later, in 1938, the CIO adopted its own constitution and the new name, Congress of Industrial Organizations.

With the CIO and UMW back in the fold, the united labor movement will embrace all but a few traditionally independent unions, such as the railroad engineers, firemen, conductors and trainmen, who for three quarters of a century have been going their own ways (and occasionally breaking one another's strikes).

Doubtless many CIO men will suffer emotional pains at the time of unification, but they certainly will not suffer humiliation. The CIO, in the brief span of years it has existed, has put more pep and drive in the union movement than ever was known before. It has been wonderfully successful in industry-wide organizations. It has given to all union men some concept of the political power of the workers, and how that power can be used.

Merger Would Help Labor Cause

These and other characteristics of the CIO will survive unification, to become characteristics of the entire union labor movement. About all the CIO will lose by merger will be its name. Labor as a whole will gain the advantages of assembled strength and drive—even as the split in labor in 1935 activated each rival faction, sometimes to the acute distress of employers and the National Labor Relations Board.

A united labor movement will certainly, in its first flush of new life, address itself to the jobs at which a divided movement has not been too successful. Labor's most glaring recent failures have been its relative political ineffectiveness (for example, in the 1950 Congressional campaign) and its poor showing in the drive to organize workers in the South. In these fields and in others, the reunion of labor's warring factions will mean a tremendous revitalization.

The groundwork for unification has been building for some time. On the lower levels, the rival groups have worked closely together in state and national political campaigns since 1944. I recall a united labor committee that boarded President Truman's campaign train in 1948 as it crossed the line into Utah. Here were rank-and-file members of unions working in friendly harmony, obviously pleased at showing how they could operate together for a common goal. The organizational frictions and bureaucratic jealousies that existed among some of their leaders had not infected or affected the membership at all. They simply did not care, for they felt strongly that workingmen are not divided into groups with widely differing interests.

In the international field the American Federation of Labor, the Congress of Industrial Organizations and the United Mine Workers have already joined in support of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, which is leading the successful global fight against the World Federation of Trade Unions, voice of the Russian Cominform. In the domestic field, the AFL and the CIO have worked as one in the successful fight to win positions of real influence in the current defense mobilization program.

The AFL and the CIO actually have committees in existence to discuss unification, and these committees have met at least twice. It is

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likely that they could be energized quickly, whenever the situation is right. Once these committees agree on a working plan, the mechanics of the unifying steps would not be too difficult. Ratification by the two top organizations might have to wait for the next annual conventions, but it seems more probable that special conventions would be called to consider this one subject.

The differing methods of union organization within the AFL and the CIO—craft versus industrial—present no great problem. Each of the constituent unions could go ahead as it has been doing, if that is what it wants to do. An Industrial Union Department could become a part of the unified movement, and into that department the CIO unions could continue with enough autonomy to preserve their present methods.

There would be jurisdictional and other problems in the electrical, maritime and transportation fields, which now have unions in both the CIO and the AFL. But with the basic relationship established, these problems could be adjusted.

The men you'll be reading about as the leaders and hearing from as the most articulate voices in this powerful labor movement are already on the scene, most of them well known, and some of them—like Walter Reuther of the CIO Auto Workers, and George Harrison of the AFL Railway Clerks—well-established leaders of mass organizations in their own right. Elsewhere in labor there are other men of proven ability, making up a reservoir of leadership that a unified organization could call on when the time came.

Thus, the final act of complete labor unity awaits only the retirement or passing of three onetime cronies, Green, Murray and Lewis, whose recriminations against one another have furnished so many choice news items since 1935, when the labor movement discovered that one way to grow is to have competitive civil war. With those three powerful men gone, great changes would be almost certain.

A Leader Who Can't Be Replaced

The CIO could not survive a year without Murray because he is the personification of the outfit in a sense that no other man can be. There is no one in sight to take his place; and anyone who knows his way around the corridors of union halls—as I think I know mine—is certain the Auto Workers would not stand still for a leader who came out of the Steelworkers, any more than the Steelworkers would accept one from the Auto organization.

These dominant, freight-paying unions of the CIO probably would not welcome an overall president from a smaller constituent outfit. Even if this compromise expedient were tried, it would be a weak and shaky alternative to immediate unification, and the titular head thus chosen could not keep peace in the family for long. The logic of facts and events would be against him. As one labor friend of mine puts it, "Nobody is really hot for a compromise, and in this labor-union work the man at the top needs hot support. It ain't enough just to have nobody against you."

The rival pressures of the two big union organizations would, in the opinion of those best qualified to know, pull the CIO apart in a matter of months. Purely as a protective measure, the CIO would probably merge with the AFL while it still had the appearance of unity, to give it bargaining power.

I think it almost (Continued on page 71)

Tomorrow's contenders



George Meany of AFL may head a unified organization



CIO Auto Workers' Walter Reuther would be influential



Highly regarded Dave Beck of AFL western teamsters



UMW's John Owens, rated as possible Lewis successor



Joe Keenan, the aggressive head of AFL political arm



Young Jim Carey, of CIO electrical workers' new union

CIO communications union is headed by Joseph Beirne



Dave McDonald, Murray's likely heir in Steelworkers





Don thought it foolish for the man to get cross, for he was playing as much of a game as Don was. He was playing that he wasn't a convict, and Don was playing that the man was getting away with it