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*The following exchange stems from an article by Herbert Hill—**Organized Labor and the Negro Wage Earner**—which appeared in our last issue (Winter 1962). Seymour Lipset teaches sociology at the University of California; William Gomberg is on the faculty of the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School of Finance and Commerce; Tom Kahn is a student at Howard University and author of *The Unfinished Revolution*; Herbert Hill is National Labor Secretary of the N.A.A.C.P. We hope to continue the discussion in coming issues.—The Editors*

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## AN EXCHANGE:

# Negroes and the Labor Movement

### Seymour Lipset:

There can be little doubt that Herbert Hill is correct when he points to various facts which indicate that large sections of organized labor are sustaining racially discriminatory practices, and that those segments which oppose such discrimination are not doing very much to bring their recalcitrant or prejudiced brethren into line. The facts are not at issue, but the causes and prospective solutions to the problem are.

In so far as Hill suggests a cause, it would seem to be the growth of bureaucratic conservatism, especially among the leaders of the old CIO unions who seemingly no longer strongly care about or support the liberal or radical **objectives of their** earlier days. The blame is placed on a change in the perspectives or situation of the leadership. I would question this interpretation.

All the available information gathered in diverse surveys indicate that on both economic (welfare state, government planning, social policy) and non-economic (civil rights, civil liberties, internationalism) issues, the *leaders of organized labor are more liberal or radical than are their members*. For example, when comparing the opinions of leaders and followers, the officials are less likely to be Republicans, more likely to favor the need for a labor party or systematic

labor political action, more disposed to support government medicine, government planning, public ownership of natural resources and utilities, support of trade unions abroad, and so forth. The leaders are also more prone than their members to favor civil liberties for unpopular minorities even Communists, and are more favorable to equal rights for minority groups, particularly Negroes. The greater liberalism of the leadership would seem to be derivative from aspects of the leadership position itself, the fact that it involves them in many activities which lead them to understand the relationship between the needs of organized labor and these political policies, as well as a certain degree of self-selection for union leadership posts of those who initially are more disposed to believe in the social movement values of the labor movement.

Although former CIO men are somewhat more liberal than former AFL men, the difference is not as large as it is between each group of leaders and their followers. Far from the image of conservative leaders restraining a progressive rank and file, the true picture more clearly resembles the opposite. This is not to deny that in many unions there is an active minority of rank and filers who are more liberal or radical than their officers. This more leftist minority is often disproportionately represented

among the union activists, those who attend meetings, and hence sometimes create an illusion of a more radical membership. And it is, of course, also true that some unions are led by men who can properly be described as reactionaries.

The fact that the members generally are more conservative or bigoted than their leaders ironically often means that the more democratic unions exhibit more prejudice. For example, if one compares the behavior of the two sailors' unions, there is no question that the former CIO affiliate, the National Maritime Union, has a much better record on Negro rights than do the units of the Seafarers International Union, which belonged to the AFL. But the origin of this difference lies in the fact that the NMU was dominated for many years by a powerful dictatorial Communist apparatus which instituted the practice of racially mixed crews without giving the membership the option of objecting.

The Sailors Union of the Pacific, the major founding unit of the SIU, on the other hand, was led by an old Wobbly, Harry Lundeberg, who believed in frequent consultation of the membership as well as in few paid officers, and low pay for them including Lundeberg, himself. The membership of the SUP refused to adopt policies requiring racially integrated ships. A major difference between the CIO and AFL unions rested in the fact that the former were largely industrial unions which bargained nationally, while the AFL unions were in large measure craft organizations with decentralized local bargaining and authority. Thus the very fact of a strong national administration with tremendous power over local unions meant that the leaders of the industrial unions could ignore membership sentiment as expressed in the locals or plants, while those organizations in which local unions retained a great deal of power more clearly reflected membership sentiments and prejudices.

It is a well known fact that union government is much more democratic in the local than in the national administration. There are many more contested elections and turnovers in office on the local than on the national level. The Carpenters' Union, one of those cited for an unsavory race relations record by Hill, is oligarchic and dictatorial nationally, but many of its affiliated locals are extremely democratic. The same is true for others of the generally prejudiced building trades unions. The International Typographical Union which is democratic on both the national and local level has very few Negro members. The paucity of Negro printers reflects the fact that admission to the union sector of the industry is largely in the hands of the union members, themselves. Men generally become apprentices through being brought into the shop by union members, and the white members of the union, whether consciously prejudiced or not, are not likely to bring Negroes into the trade.

The supporters of Negro rights must face up to the fact that unions remain one of the more discriminatory sectors of American life precisely because they are one of the more democratic sectors, particularly on the local level. Union leaders are relatively free to express their generally liberal personal sentiments in public policy resolutions at state and national federation meetings since such resolutions do not affect what goes on in the shop, or at the local union meeting. But those dependent on support in the shop or local feel inhibited about trying to force union members to change their behavior. An employer sometimes can be more liberal precisely because legally he is a dictator, he is not up for re-election in the local.

If the general tenor of my argument is correct, then it follows that any basic solution is not to be found within the structure of organized labor acting unilaterally. Unions and union members must be forced to accept job

rights for Negroes by public action, by legislation, by strong enforcement of Fair Employment Practices legislation. And here, of course, is the rub. For obvious reasons, unions generally oppose any legislation which gives government agencies power over union admission policies as well as other aspects of their internal affairs. In the past, liberal and radical intellectuals, generally favorable to unions as the largest single force sustaining the redistribution of privilege to the larger society, have supported the unions' resistance to government intervention. But the fact remains that as in the case of serious violations of union democracy, often little can be done to reform unions from within to make them effective instruments of integration.

It must be admitted that the suggestion that the struggle to modify union exclusion policies should be carried on primarily on the level of government action is not one which offers much hope for effective reform in the immediate future. The Democratic Party is today the primary partisan political instrument for improving the lot of the Negro. But the two largest groups within the Democratic Party are the trade unions and the Southerners. While differing on most issues of social policy, these two groups unite in opposing legislation which would force unions not to discriminate. And Democratic administrations in the North as well as in the Federal government are reluctant to get involved in direct fights with union leaders on whom they must rely for strong support on Election Day. The Republicans, although not loathe to embarrass unions and desirous of winning Negro votes, also find themselves incapable of taking action in this field. It would be difficult for them to strongly support the rights of Negroes to union membership without also favoring Fair Employment legislation, policies opposed by their businessmen supporters and Dixiecrat Congressional allies.

All this would seem to imply no

alternate except the traditional remedies of organized pressure tactics and public exposes. Democratic Party and trade union leaders alike must be subjected to a barrage of criticism for their failings on the supreme domestic moral issue of the mid-twentieth century. Leaders, whether union or political, react to pressures. And at the moment the pressures to which they are subjected, both within unions and in the general polity, make inaction on this issue seem most appropriate. The labor movement and the Kennedy administration are basically led by men of good will with respect to civil rights issues. To embarrass them into acting is the best thing which those who want more effective trade union action or political realignment can do to foster these objectives. Picket lines should be at least as effective outside union halls or Congressmen's offices as they have been outside of Woolworth's.

### William Gomberg:

MR. HILL'S ARTICLE leaves me with the question, what is he trying to achieve? I have no quarrel with his facts. I do with some of his implications and his implicit conclusion.

Articles on the Negro-White problem may be classified into two categories.

(1) Those that accelerate "gradualists" to move at a rate somewhat faster than that of a snail by offering counter shrillness to the fanatical racist.

(2) Those that advance a set of operational remedies that are workable.

Mr. Hill's article belongs to the former group. The querulous indignation of Hill's article does serve a useful purpose. Its shrill tones makes the trade unionist, who is indifferent to the problem, take a position. It is my own conviction that an indifferent, supine rank and file permits it-

self to be controlled too often in local situations by the fanatical racist. The racist is sick with his obsession and works at his hatred full time. He makes things so unpleasant for the rank and file that the racist's mores come to govern the group. The counter-querulousness of the Hill approach is necessary to make the man in the middle take a stand. George Meany, whose personal attitude on this question is above reproach is caught in between. When Philip Randolph pressed him, Randolph encountered a common psychological reaction. If you dare not get angry with the persecutor, then lash out at the persecuted for pricking your sense of frustration. Meany has more than made amends for this "bloopers." I do think it unfortunate that in a television appearance he expressed the opinion that a financially dishonest person presented more of a threat to the union movement's integrity than a racist. I don't know that he should expel the racist but he should recognize that the comparative threat to a movement's integrity is if anything the other way round. The financial depredations of an underworld crook are reversible. There is even a chance to get the money back.

A racist assault upon a minority leaves its victims much more deeply crippled and hurt than simple embezzlement or even simple assault. Unfortunately, expulsion from the movement has proven a remedy in neither case. It simply removes what little influence was previously exercised. That is the reason I thought the Teamsters expulsion was a mistake, and the reason I would oppose expelling the racist.

Mr. Hill's technique depends in large part on communicating facts, but not all of them. A distorted picture emerges that pseudo simplifies the problem at hand.

I have no quarrel with Mr. Hill's facts. There is no doubt that they are true. The implicit remedy is that

we must integrate all locals into single color-blind bodies. This means that in many cases a Negro bureaucracy must surrender its offices in a segregated local. It very often means that a fearful Negro rank and file is asked to integrate its job opportunities with the white local whom the Negroes don't trust, on a theoretical non-discriminatory basis. The Negro worker is for integration in the abstract, but in the concrete, he too often wants to maintain his own segregated local. He's all for integration for the other guy and his fears are quite understandable. The Chicago Negro musicians local is a case in point.

Some highly placed Negroes politically have humorously coined a new term, "worcmij" or Jim Crow spelled backwards, and tell you quite frankly that they would never occupy the posts that they do unless they were Negroes. The numerous clause is not without its morbid beneficence. The labor movement is not without its share of this perversion. Nevertheless, I think it significant that Hill continues to demand more of the labor movement than of any other organized group.

Much as he would deny it, he at least knows that he can embarrass them by playing upon their sense of guilt. What other organization has this implicit moral sense?

### Tom Kahn:

Alfred Baker Lewis' letter in the last issue criticizes my article ("The New Negro and the New Moderation,") on three counts, which I should like, belatedly, to take up now.

1) Mr. Lewis feels that my criticism of Herbert Hill "for not strengthening the Negro community's identification with the labor movement" is undeserved; he goes on to cite instances of Mr. Hill's support of labor's efforts for social reform. These instances are not quite relevant. There are many people who support labor-backed so-

cial reforms and even the right of collective bargaining, and yet have no sense of identification with the labor movement itself.

My article contrasted Mr. Hill's position with that of Mr. Lewis, who had written in *Crisis* that "we support organized labor in general." Mr. Lewis objects to the contrast. Yet, 164 pages in front of this objection Mr. Hill writes that:

*the militant Negro worker is confronted not with a trade union movement that is a force for social change but on the contrary, with a national labor organization that has become a very conservative and highly bureaucratized institution, closely allied in many cities and states to reactionary political forces and defending that status quo which is now directly attacked by the Negro in virtually every area of American life. (Italics are his own.)*

I think this more than substantiates my complaint that "we look in vain through his reports for any indication of a 'natural alliance,' for any sign that the labor movement is, in his eyes, something more than just another instrument to discriminate against Negroes." Mr. Lewis had contended that it was "unnecessary for Hill . . . to emphasize his stand [favoring the labor movement]" because his reports were not intended for "wholly uninformed people." What a vindication of the ignorant, who assumed that Mr. Hill meant only what he said and no more!

I do not wish here to argue the validity or invalidity of Mr. Hill's position (a mixture of the valuable and the destructive), only to defend my statement that his position is not what Mr. Lewis' position has been. In the November, 1960, *Crisis* Mr. Lewis wrote that "usually employers are the ones guilty of job discrimination. The union, if there is one in the plant, simply goes along with the employer's policy." But Mr. Hill's piece in *New Politics* tells us that

"trade union discrimination is the decisive factor in determining whether Negro workers in a given industry shall have an opportunity to earn a living for themselves and their families."

Elsewhere in his letter Mr. Lewis makes reference to "the alliance that ought to be strengthened between the NAACP and organized labor," a reference with which I wholly concur. I guess Mr. Lewis, like me, is one of those sophomoric 'experts' on race relations . . . [who] lament the 'disruption' of the so-called 'Negro-labor alliance.' "

Was it Voltaire who asked God to save him from his friends, for he could take care of his enemies himself?

2) Mr. Lewis is correct in reminding me of the NAACP Youth Council sit-ins of 1958 and 1959, but wrong in suggesting that they began the sit-in movement. Antecedents of Greensboro can be cited at length (e.g., CORE's successful Washington sit-ins during the 50's), but these did not spark mass action. Moreover, they took place in border cities, whereas what developed in 1960 was a Southern based phenomenon. No, neither the NAACP Youth Councils nor any other organized group fathered the sit-ins.

3) I think Mr. Lewis' contention that it was the NAACP's Supreme Court Case and not the Bus Boycott that desegregated Montgomery's buses is rather formalistic. It's a bit like saying that the Interstate Commerce Commission integrated the bus terminals, without discussing the Freedom Rides.

### Herbert Hill Comments:

I am generally in agreement with Professor Lipset's comments and it is to be hoped that he and other members of the academic community will continue to study the social characteristics of the American working class and their institutions. In

other articles I have indicated that I share Professor Lipset's concern with the authoritarian and the racist impulses of American workers.

I certainly agree with Professor Lipset that in fighting discriminatory racial practices within labor unions there is "no alternative except the traditional remedies of organized pressure tactics and public exposés . . . trade union leaders . . . must be subject to a barrage of criticism for their failings on the supreme domestic moral issue of the mid-Twentieth Century." And this is precisely what the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People is doing.

Lipset's final comment that "picket lines should be at least as effective outside union halls or Congressman's offices as they have been outside Woolworth's" is particularly interesting. It was precisely the threat of a picket line in front of the headquarters of the Waiters Union in Philadelphia, after more than a year of futile negotiation, that forced for the first time the dispatching of an integrated work force to the Sheraton Hotel during the 1961 NAACP Convention.

Mr. Gomberg's comment suggests that he is most uncomfortable with the material contained in my article. On one hand, Mr. Gomberg says "I have no quarrel with Mr. Hill's facts. There is no dispute that they are true," but in the previous sentence he accuses me of giving a "distorted picture." I have given the facts without distortion and it is most unfortunate that persons like Bill Gomberg, who have functioned for many years on trade union staffs, should feel uncomfortable by the material I present.

In referring to Meany's vicious attack on Randolph, Mr. Gomberg says that "Meany has more than made amends for this blooper." I should

like to know what "amends" he is referring to. Certainly Mr. Gomberg cannot be referring to the subsequent action of the AFL-CIO Executive Council in publicly censuring Randolph because of his effective attacks upon the discriminatory practices of many important affiliated unions. This action can only be described as an incredible piece of stupidity, including the charge that Mr. Randolph and his colleagues are discriminating against white workers who wish to become Pullman car porters.

Mr. Gomberg regards other examples of Meany's comments on Negro issues as "unfortunate," but the fact of the matter is that these "bloopers" and "unfortunate" remarks are simply expressions of the tragic lack of insight and understanding on the part of the trade union leadership of the Negro's struggle for full equality and dignity in American society. For Meany, Dubinsky, Harrison, and all the other "labor statesmen," civil rights is something they will dispense to the poor deserving Negro in their own time and in their own way on the basis of their own superior wisdom because they know what is good and just. It is this pathetic attitude that is today the heart of the question.

Negro workers, especially those who belong to trade unions, are not going to permit Meany or anybody else, to determine what their proper and just demands should be or how they will be achieved. The Negro is now directly intervening in trade unions as well as in all other institutions in American society to radically alter his status as a member of an inferior caste and this is precisely what Mr. Meany and his colleagues are incapable of understanding.

The Chicago Negro Musicians' local cited by Mr. Gomberg to prove that Negro trade unionists are not for integration is completely atypical, as some unusual conditions exist in the

American Federation of Musicians. However, for every such case one can cite a hundred others where Negro workers who are forced to belong to "Jim Crow" locals have protested for many long years but to no avail against their segregated status with its separate racial seniority lines and wage discrimination in the Brotherhood of Railroad and Steamship Clerks, the Railway Car-men of America, the Carpenters Union, the Pulp and Sulphite Workers Union, the Papermakers and Paperworkers Union as well as many others. The attempt to blame Negro trade unionists for the existence of segregated local organizations is unworthy of Mr. Gomberg.

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As for the comments made by Mr. Kahn, I can only say that the labor movement I deal with is the labor movement that exists in reality, not the labor movement that exists only in Mr. Kahn's fantasies. Although I must say that I, too, share the hope that someday there will be a trade union movement that will be an expression of democratic humanism and that it will use its power to secure social justice and dignity for all the workers of America.

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# Correspondence

## To the Editor:

I have read Mr. Bottone's essay "Cuba: Socialist or Totalitarian?" published in *New Politics*. Many ideas, difficult to express, come into my mind. Twenty five days ago, I was in Cuba believing, until the last moment, that "something ought to happen." My hope was useless; all possibilities were closed. Today I am a Cuban refugee.

I am a poet, and as a poet I fought against Batista in the "26th of July" (underground division). It was easy to choose then; Batista was, at that moment, the expression of all the evil of our history. The conditions were good to sweep the past away and to begin with a new future. But we did not have a good ideology to fill the utopian space of our ideals, even if we did know something for sure; that the Communists were no good for us. Why? Because they broke with Cuban revolutionary ideals for good when they supported Batista in 1935-1944, after he had ordered the killing of proletarians in the General Strike of 1935 and the assassination of the revolutionary leaders Guiteras and Aponte among other things. Then, when Batista took power in 1952, the Communist Party opposed any strikes against him as they opposed any radical solutions to the situation. In January 1959, everything changed in Cuba but the Communist Party; the same old Stalinists came to light with the same old songs. Not a single young man joined them.

The "26th of July" arose with the power in its hands and with new things to propose. At least that was what we thought. But Fidel had made up his mind. First he ordered Raul to boycott any intention of organizing a political party under the leadership of the "26th of July" which be-

gan to have some ideas of its own. For export purposes (in that time we didn't realize that) Fidel spoke about "Humanism." But he stopped soon without any intention of going further. His "Humanist doctrine" fulfilled his purpose; to make confusion in the ideological order and to deceive some of the foreign spectators. It was a good moment for the initial activities of the Communist Party. They freely began their indoctrination with the aid of Fidel, Raul, and Guevara. They wrote pages and pages—using the patterns of the Stalinist dialectical system—"demonstrating" how the revolution and the Communists "coincided" in their different points of view. Meanwhile the "26th of July" said nothing and was allowed to say nothing. In those conditions, many young intellectuals thought that the best thing to do was to become Communists and change the structure of the Party from inside. To this day they have failed. Take for example, the ideological magazine *Cuba Socialista* and you will see that Stalinism (I believe now that Stalinism is the natural form of Communism) is the only way of thinking these people have.

We know, now, that Fidel mistrusted the "26th of July" all the time. He was right in a way. We would never have supported his dictatorship. That's why the "26 of July" doesn't exist now and instead the "United Party of the Revolution" (read the Communist Party) rules the nation.

Did the "26th of July" have some totalitarian ideas? I am afraid we did; though we were clear in our hatred of one man rule we let Fidel lead us toward the denial of free elections. It is true that we had very bad opinions about elections in Cuba, so it is easy to understand our position. But the



fact is that we didn't realize Fidel's real intentions.

As you see, the situation was confused. Confusion is a good road for the Communist car and they know how to ride it. Fidel and his comrades began to work, without being disturbed, in this direction. The people didn't have time to react, because of the speed of events. The Communists, meanwhile, taking advantage, won all the strategic positions. It is the old story, the story of a country that really needs a revolution and that thinks, rightly, that nothing can be done without a socialist touch.

We are now in tragic spot. Everybody has run too far. There are, nevertheless, some facts that still remain from 1959. First, no matter what Fidel says, he is not a Communist. Castro doesn't understand a word about Marxism-Leninism but he does about Hitler. Take any of Castro's speeches and you will see how close they are to Hitler's soul. This fact leads us to another. There was and there will always be (in case anything happens) conflict between the Communists and Fidel Castro. At this moment, the question of power (the only thing Castro cares about) is leading his forces into a deep crisis. Ché Guevara, for example (the only man who dares to make some criticism over TV) is in disgrace, because he is not a Stalinist, although he is a convinced Marxist-Leninist. Fidel himself is being used to amuse the mob, which needs his voice (as Germany needed Hitler's) to go on with his "socialism."

Mr. Sam Bottone's splendid essay together with Robert Alexander's and Samuel Shapiro's made me write this letter. My English prevents me from going as deeply as I want.

Each day I am more convinced of the Communist defeat but the Communist use of humanity's needs causes a lot of harm. Cuba is one of its victims. Our job is to rescue her and

sustain, at the same time, the principles of progress, which your publication seems to represent.

I also want to reply to some things said by Mr. Cedric Belfrage in your symposium.

*Quotation from Mr. Belfrage:* "Since the revolution was officially declared socialist Fidel's popularity has not diminished but grown."

*Reply:* False. The increasing of "guerilla" groups among the peasants and continuous exodus of thousands of Cubans from the country (despite all the government obstacles) demonstrate that the people are becoming more conscious of the true situation. Besides, the government is using terror as a way to restrain public discontent. The majority of people that are being shot or jailed today are workers and peasants.

*Quotation:* "The people like to listen to him (Fidel) for hours because they feel that there is a great man who is theirs and who is telling their truth."

*Reply:* False. In a totalitarian country you can not prove that the people's feelings toward the government are sincere. The Communists force you to a continuous performance through fear and terror. When Fidel appears in public many go to see him because they are afraid to lose their jobs or something worse. As to Fidel Castro's truths he has contradicted himself on so many occasions that it isn't worth going over his speeches from the beginning of his rule to his final declaration of his Marxist-Leninist faith in December 1961.

*Quotation:* "The formation of Revolutionary Defense Committees in every community seems to be an intermediate step toward this" (the single revolutionary party).

*Reply:* The so-called "Defense Committees" are organizations the government uses to watch over every step the people make. The rules are clear about their main job. Besides, they are organized in factories, farmers co-