

Although each of the following eight articles concentrates on a particular facet of American unions, our contributors reveal that they have varied views on currents in organized labor. Such diversity is welcome in NEW POLITICS, especially if it stimulates (or provokes) readers to send in their own comments.—The Editor

# 1. The Alliance for Labor Action

George W. Brooks

ESTABLISHED ON MAY 26 by the United Automobile Workers and the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, the Alliance for Labor Action (ALA) was launched with anticipated fanfare. It met with the expected lack of response. Does it represent a lively possibility for a revitalized socially-conscious labor movement, or Walter Reuther's greatest blunder?

With so much publicity preceding formal organization, what happened on Opening Day was anti-climactic. Goals were restated in familiar phrases, having the quality of a laundry list or of "union demands" at the opening session or ritualistic bargaining. So much is announced that nothing comes through strongly, except perhaps the determination to organize the unorganized.

Whatever force is in the statement diminishes as the list of goals expands—urban renewal, community unions, guaranteed income for everyone, free university education for all children, an end to water and air pollution, among others—all to be accomplished in combination with farm groups, consumer groups, professional groups, the academic community and politicians. The United Automobile Workers and the Teamsters and such other labor organizations as can be persuaded to join will provide the "dynamic." The general reaction naturally is "you've got to be kidding!" Curiously, union democracy is absent, although it was emphasized in the UAW case against the AFL-CIO.

It is pointless to talk about the Alliance for Labor Action in terms of its own statement of objectives. Any evaluation of the degree of reality which is to be assigned to these goals will have to wait until some machinery is actually set in motion. It may indeed be, for example, that the Alliance for Labor Action can make common cause with the "liberal-intellectual and academic community and the youth of our nation," but the people who would most like to see this come about will be the least likely to bet that it will happen.

Their doubts will not be based upon lack of money. The Alliance will assess the members of its affiliates at the rate of 10¢ per month, which guarantees an income to start with of about \$4,000,000 per year. But generous funding by itself gives very little assurance that anything significant will happen. The declining value of mere money in achiev-

ing social progress is one of the most comforting facts of American life.

The most fundamental doubts relate to the effectiveness of the UAW and the Teamsters as instruments of reform. Beyond any question of doubt, the UAW is a great union, perhaps the greatest of all time judged by many tests. It is not only that it has achieved a phenomenal success in collective bargaining. Many American unions have been able to do so. But the UAW has brought to the process imagination, innovation, and determination. The UAW did not merely climb onto the gravy train. It helped make the train and determine its direction. And perhaps most impressively of all, it maintained an unprecedented degree of international democracy and local autonomy. It is a living refutation of many of the canards uttered in criticism of the labor movement.

The question is whether substantial success in organizing and collective bargaining makes a union an effective crusader for social change. There is no need to labor the theoretical analysis of the counter-revolutionary effects of successful trade unionism. Nor is it necessary to engage in polemics about the deleterious effects of "business unionism." The UAW speaks for itself. What the founders of the UAW did, with whatever intentions, was to create a private welfare state of breathtaking scope and conception. The commitment to unlimited technological change, with insistence upon the protection of workers who happen to be at the points of change, has made the UAW as valuable to industry and society as to its members. Thus, as long as American industry continues to thrive and grow, there is nothing in sight except additional improvement. Although many people are familiar with the UAW accomplishment, its full significance has not yet been generally realized.

For the staff of the UAW, the accomplishment is even more impressive. They have a private welfare state of their own. Nothing critical is implied by this statement. The UAW staff are less given to ostentatious display than most, but the forces at work here are irresistible. Those persons on the staff of the UAW who would be most likely to commit themselves to the asserted goals of the ALA are the generation who helped found the UAW. In the 30's, they were young men. Now they are roughly thirty years older, and they are marching abreast toward an imminent and comfortable retirement. It is not only the age which is different, but the way of life, and these stalwarts do not strike the objective observer as being made of the stuff which produces revolutions—or even major reforms. But they are still the best hope. It is no secret that the newer staff members of the UAW are quite different. Born into the welfare state, they take it for granted, without any personal experience of what went before.

The actual situation is in fact much worse than the platitudes above suggest. As far as one can tell from casual conversation, there is as yet no involvement of UAW staff or local activists in the Alliance for Labor

Action. Most of them know about it only from releases to the general public. The most friendly attitude is that of staff members who are willing to "wait and see" what is going to happen. Some of the other reactions are unprintable. Walter Reuther and Frank Fitzsimmons have announced that there will be effective action between UAW and Teamster staff and locals but thus far nothing seems to have happened. Nor does it seem likely to happen in the case of many Teamster locals.

The International Brotherhood of Teamsters is also a great union, in a different way. And the emphasis which Fitzsimmons gives to the ALA seems more realistic than the joint pronouncements made under the ALA banner. Teamster emphasis is upon organizing the unorganized, the provision of substantial financial support for beleaguered unions, and some special support for farm workers. Of all the things which the ALA talks about, this seems not only to be more realizable, but also to provide the most plausible reason for the alliance of these otherwise unlikely partners. But if these organizing goals are to be achieved, cooperation between the local organizations of the two partners is imperative. Simply to operate at the top, with whatever amount of money, would be even less likely than the IUD-type organizing campaigns to produce significant results.

But it is when one talks about local cooperation that the problems of the partnership seem difficult, and it is perhaps with an eye to the public reputation of the ALA that so little has been said within either organization about the details of this assumed local cooperation. There is in the IBT a great deal of local autonomy, exercised by different locals in different ways. One familiar way is to maintain close cooperation with AFL-CIO unions, especially in the building trades. Some City Central Councils still include Teamster representatives, and some meet in Teamster halls. Even if IBT headquarters wanted to enforce exclusive cooperation with UAW locals (which it assuredly does not), it would probably not be able to do so.

So what is in it for the Teamsters? Organizing the unorganized? This seems unlikely, since the IBT is already the best mechanism for organizing the unorganized which we have seen in our times, (except possibly the current cooperation between union officers and party leaders to produce dues payers among public employees). The IBT rate of growth, and its present size, are not accidents, but a result of hardnosed techniques and disciplines. No other large labor organization attaches to results as much prestige and other rewards as do the Teamsters. Indeed, this is an understatement; in many unions, especially the industrial unions, rewards are almost wholly dissociated for individual performance. It is difficult to imagine what contribution the Alliance could make to the organizing effectiveness of the Teamsters.

So what are the Teamsters doing with all this gossamer stuff in

"Article II Objectives" of the ALA Constitution? It has been suggested that the Teamsters are looking for respectability. But if they are suffering any serious disability as a result of their "tarnished" reputation, no one in the Teamsters seems to have heard about it. It is true that the leaflets circulated by the opposition during a raid by, or on, the Teamsters often dwell on Hoffa and the exposures of the McClellan Committee. Among some types of employees, they seem to carry weight. But they appear not to have diminished significantly the appeal of the Teamsters to unorganized workers or to workers dissatisfied with their representation. In any case, it is hard to see how the association with the UAW would remove the tarnish.

Furthermore, it is still widely believed inside the AFL-CIO that the return of the Teamsters to the fold waits only upon some assurance that Hoffa will remain in jail for a few more years. No one, and certainly not the UAW staff, believes that the ALA would act as a deterrent to that return.

TO SOME OBSERVERS AND SOME WORKERS, the most significant question about the ALA was whether or not it would bring about the recrudescence of rival unionism on a large scale. It is not disputed that the period of rivalry between the AFL and CIO not only produced the "dynamic" approach Walter Reuther talks about but also had the effect of dissolving what had seemed up to that point to be insurmountable barriers to organizing and bargaining flexibility. Caught up in that fight, unions set aside their long-standing prejudices against organizing women, Negroes and unskilled workers, against new forms of organization, and new kinds of collective bargaining demands. It is not likely that anything except the heat of rivalry would have produced this much versatility and imagination.

Perhaps, some people hoped, a new era of rivalry would produce a new flexibility and drive. But here the UAW is trapped by those dogmas of the labor movement in whose creation Walter Reuther and the UAW played so large a part. The litany of unity cannot easily be cast aside. In fact, the proposal for a no-raid agreement with the AFL-CIO came from the UAW and was turned down by the AFL-CIO, dealing from strength.

The AFL-CIO has not lost interest in no-raid pacts and "unity," but it is able to insist that the terms of unity include membership in, and commitment to, the AFL-CIO. The Federation is in the strongest possible moral position on this point.

In only one case that comes to mind has there been any overt rivalry between the UAW and the AFL-CIO. At the McDonnell Douglas plant in St. Louis, both the UAW and the Teamsters presented themselves as rivals to the International Association of Machinists. If the

results are indicative of the general situation, the ALA may turn out to be a less effectual rival than either of the two partners alone.

This is the same conclusion which must have been reached by some of the candidates for affiliation with the ALA. So far, in spite of some early indications to the contrary, all AFL-CIO affiliates have turned away from the invitation to associate, even though the ALA proclaims that it is not a "dual" movement, and that ALA affiliation is not inconsistent with AFL-CIO affiliation. The AFL-CIO has taken a firm position to the contrary and is making it stick. The one exception thus far is District 65, formerly affiliated with the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union, which has for other reasons been undergoing severe internal strain.

To all other affiliates, the advantages of affiliation are nebulous. Consider, for example, the position of Local 1199, Drug and Hospital Union, another affiliate of RWDSU. Local 1199, an organization of 36,000 members, competent in dealing with some of the problems with which ALA says it is concerned, has so far seen no advantage in an ALA association, in spite of the attractive overtures which have been made to it. This is not hard to understand. For example, Local 1199 has recently formed a National Organizing Committee for hospital workers in various sections of the United States. It is currently engaged in a difficult, expensive and risky strike at two hospitals in Charleston, South Carolina. The ALA, and Reuther personally, have come to the aid of the Local with both money and public appearances. But so also has the AFL-CIO and President Meany. The support from the AFL-CIO has been organizational as well as financial. How could 1199 possibly have it better? What possible gain could come from affiliation with ALA, at the risk of almost certain expulsion from RWDSU and the AFL-CIO? This must be the kind of question which is asked even by people who share a good deal of the ALA's views with respect to the deficiencies of the AFL-CIO.

EVEN THE WARMEST ADMIRERS OF THE UAW (among which the author includes himself) are obliged to acknowledge that thus far the AFL-CIO has had much the better of the argument with the UAW. The AFL-CIO recent "white paper," *To Clear the Record*, is a brilliant polemic. The inconsistencies in the UAW position are identified and dramatized. The document makes the most of the fact that Walter Reuther is attacking the very institutions which he helped to create, foster and defend. It is particularly effective in responding to Reuther's charges of a lack of democracy within the AFL-CIO Executive Council, and the effect of the response is greatly enhanced by the undemocratic character of the constitution of the ALA. Indeed, the handling of the whole issue of democracy is bringing dismay to some UAW supporters.

Although the UAW criticism of the AFL-CIO was detailed and persistent on this issue, it is that issue on which the *ALA Statement of Purposes and Objectives and Constitution* has little or nothing to say.

Another cause of dismay among UAW supporters is that the UAW's public reputation may be severely damaged by the ALA. This is not mainly because of the association with the Teamsters, but because the ALA is the worst possible battleground for developing the goals of the socially-conscious elements in the UAW. All the debate between the AFL-CIO and the UAW has been conducted in terms set by the AFL-CIO. It has revolved around the way the AFL-CIO works, what are its goals, the value of unity, etc., etc. This has been an argument by and for trade union hierarchs. Walter Reuther could never win this argument on these terms. Whether one likes it or not, George Meany is an effective and accurate spokesman for the full-time staff of American trade unions. Among the leaders of other AFL-CIO affiliates, Reuther has been losing ground since December, 1955.

It is now inescapable that the events of 1955 were not so much a "merger" of the AFL and the CIO as an absorption of the CIO by the AFL. This turned out to be surprisingly easy once the AFL had accepted industrial unionism. The last 13 years have seen an inexorable drift toward the strengthening of the position of union leadership in the frank pursuit of institutional security. It is now difficult to find, outside the UAW, a single dissent to the general acceptance of business unionism (in the non-pejorative sense).

But the exception is therefore all the more important. The UAW still tries to resist this trend. However hopeless the battle may seem to be, however diaphanous the statements from Solidarity House, this fact should not be forgotten.

The problem is that the fight is being waged up to this point on the wrong battleground. While it is probably true that George Meany also speaks more accurately for the members than Walter Reuther, it is not so certainly true at every single time and place as it is for the full-time staff of the unions. Reuther may be right, but certainly not within the AFL-CIO framework. He may be so committed to trade union dogma, and the staff may be so uninterested in risking their security, that the battle cannot be won anywhere. But the chances are certainly better among those workers who are unorganized, or organized into unions with which they are disaffected, and where they have lost their freedom of choice.

The odds against the success of the ALA are long. The times are against it. But it raises challenges. With luck, it may do more.

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## 2. Black Caucuses in the Unions

Charles Denby

THE WHOLE NEW STAGE OF BLACK REVOLT that has now moved directly into the factories has to be seen as part of the long, long history of black caucuses. To understand both today and tomorrow, you first have to know what the black caucuses were yesterday, when they sprang up spontaneously at the end of World War II.

I remember the first strike I ever led. It was over the discrimination against black women workers in our shop. It was during World War II, when I was at Briggs and I was so new in the shop that I didn't even know what a strike was. I was working in the dope room, where you put glue on the airplane wing. You had to paint on so many coats of glue and then it was baked and painted again. The room was sealed and ventilated through some kind of fans in the ceiling. The fumes and odor were so bad we had no appetite left by lunchtime.

When I was first hired, there were all white men in the room. But as they hired blacks, the whites were transferred to better jobs. One day they brought in the first black woman. By the end of that week they had brought in about five black women, and there were only one or two white men left. That's when we decided to get those girls out of there. The women had been talking about their husbands who were in the service in Germany—and here they couldn't even get a job in the sewing room next door. That was for white women only. These things just burned us up.

None of us knew anything about the union, but I finally got to talk to our white Chief Steward, who told me the reason there were only white women in the sewing room was because they had so much seniority, 10 or 15 years. We knew they were lying, because some of those girls were just out of high school. So we told the Steward that if he didn't do something about it we were all going to quit at the same time, on the same day. We didn't know it would be called a strike. All we knew was that every factory had "Help Wanted" signs up and if we quit and went together to some other factory, we'd be working the next day.

On the day we walked out, they locked the gates on us. (That was the first we knew that the huge fence around the shop wasn't so much to keep saboteurs out, as to keep us in.) By that time, other workers inside the factory were coming out with us. We didn't even know what they were coming out for. I thought maybe they just had a problem like we did. It wasn't until the company sent for me as the "strike leader" that I realized what we had actually done.

We learned a lot in that strike, including what to expect from the