

A Better Day For Brother Randolph

THOMAS R. BROOKS

FOR MANY YEARS a regular feature of every gathering of the hierarchs of labor has been the voice of A. Philip Randolph demanding justice for the Negro worker. On November 18 the seventy-four-year-old president of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters spoke out again before the AFL-CIO convention in New York, but this time he was anything but a lonely figure, having been solemnly invited by President George Meany himself to lead off the federation's discussion on civil rights. As Randolph concluded, the delegates gave him a standing ovation. In this, as in most things, they took their cue from Meany.

Meany and Randolph came along widely divergent paths to stand together on "the strongest civil rights resolution" ever put before an AFL-CIO convention. Meany may have arrived at this point somewhat reluctantly. He remained defensive to the end. "I can't understand," he said to the delegates, "the idea that the way to get these things is to abuse your friends." Yet Meany and the delegates were obviously relieved to be able to deal with at least one very clear-cut issue at their convention. To the consensus that something must be done about civil rights was added the chance to endorse an instrument to start the job—the Special Task Force on Civil Rights set up last summer by the AFL-CIO executive council. The key provision of the omnibus civil rights resolution was the convention's endorsement of the Task Force.

The one other issue at the convention that moved the delegates was, of course, automation, but on this issue Meany could do little more than utter a curse from the heart. On civil rights the delegates could make definite pronouncements, with the satisfaction of knowing that they were all on the side of virtue. At his own pace, Meany is now moving against discrimination within and without the unions. The Special

Task Force is headed by Meany and includes Randolph, Walter P. Reuther, C. J. Haggerty of the Building and Construction Trades Department, and AFL-CIO Secretary-Treasurer William F. Schnitzler. It is not a perfect instrument, but it has the full support of Meany's prestige.

Though the Task Force has not rushed into the Deep South, it has accomplished a number of things within the space of a few months. And it promises more for the future in its program of attacking "discrimi-



nation in all aspects of community life" through community drives and committees against discrimination. This approach enables the federation's anti-discrimination staff to outflank local unions in order to undermine their bias. Through the Task Force, units have been engaged in civil-rights work in Boston, Cincinnati, Washington, San Francisco, and other cities.

Making the Best of It

How much of this progress is merely a reiteration of good intentions? One indication of the way the winds of change are blowing through union halls is the disappearance of segregated locals by the process of merging. One railroad union, for example, has merged twenty-two locals in

the last year. Some nineteen international unions still have Jim Crow locals, but the total has dropped to 172 out of the fifty-five thousand local unions in the AFL-CIO.

One of the best indications of how things stand now is the fact that Randolph has now toned down his customary demands for direct sanctions against unions that practice discrimination. He did, however, propose that Meany, Reuther, and other union leaders go to such places as Birmingham; that an AFL-CIO committee be appointed to meet periodically with the leaders of six national civil-rights organizations; and that a representative committee of Negro trade-unionists and AFL-CIO officers be established to evolve techniques for combating discrimination at the local union level. Discussion among the delegates skirted debate on these proposals. Everyone was for the omnibus resolution on civil rights, but only one delegate moved that Randolph's specific suggestions be adopted as an amendment. Meany pledged that "Brother Randolph's" proposals would "certainly" be given serious consideration by the AFL-CIO executive council, and this seemed to satisfy the delegates. And even Bayard Rustin, the grand tactician of the March on Washington, termed the convention's actions "very satisfactory indeed."

At the 1959 AFL-CIO convention in San Francisco, Meany shouted at Randolph, "Who the hell nominated you the guardian of all the Negroes in America?" A lot has happened in the last four years, and Meany's present attitude toward Randolph may be one of the clearest measures of how those changes have affected the labor movement.

For Randolph, one of the high points of the convention must have come when a Plumbers Union delegate from Texas, a member of the conservative wing of Texas labor, cried out: "We will take our stand with the Negro, with the Latin American, or ten years hence we'll not stand at all in our state, I don't know about yours . . ."

The applause that followed these remarks was spontaneous and must have sounded quite pleasant to A. Philip Randolph after all the rebuffs and even insults he has received over the years.



White-Collar Automation

THOMAS O'TOOLE

AMID ALL the talk about the effects of automation on factory workers, surprisingly little has been said about the revolution automation is bringing about in white-collar ranks. The U.S. Labor Department, which keeps copious records on a multitude of things, has no clear statistics on how machines have begun to take over jobs that until recently have been considered the special province of human judgment and decision.

Perhaps the Department feels little compulsion to gather statistics that would be a paradox in light of other figures: while factory workers have declined because of automation, the white-collar multitude has grown to where it now numbers over thirty million in a work force of nearly seventy-five million. With figures such as these to cite, the blue-collar unions can sound righteously indignant when they ask: "What office automation? It's the factory man who's been hurt by machines, not the office worker."

And yet more than one economist has figured that the number of white-collar workers "dislocated" by computers every year has grown from almost nothing less than a

decade ago to about 100,000, or one-third the present automation toll. What is more, these men voice concern over management's changing attitude toward the white-collar worker. Until recently, the office hand was looked on almost as a child of management, immune to layoffs of any kind. But the last two recessions produced more white-collar furloughs than factory layoffs in many companies. U.S. Steel and Chrysler, to name just two, have let go more than five thousand office workers apiece in the last two years, and Big Steel says it will lay off still more. Not long ago, the *Wall Street Journal* quoted George Spatta, "blunt-speaking president of Clark Equipment Co." of Buchanan, Michigan: "You'd be amazed at how many useless white-collar workers there are. We're going to get rid of them." What may harm the office worker even more is his total lack of defenses against automation, if it comes. He has no really strong union behind him to fight it, he is difficult to retrain (retrain for what?), and because automation is so new to him, he may suffer more in morale than the factory hand who has spent

his working life on assembly lines.

A recent move by Union Carbide illustrates just how far the machines have come. The company decided to build a new warehouse next to its big chemical works in South Charleston, West Virginia. But how big a warehouse? Stocked with what chemicals? And how much of each? Instead of asking trained executives for the answers, Carbide posed the questions to a computer, in a new technique known in the computer trade as "Monte Carlo Simulation."

Over and over, the machine calculated the movement of chemicals in and out of imaginary warehouses, each time with a different set of customers, each time with different rates, shipping methods, and inventory levels. When it had done this, the computer considered hundreds of ways to warehouse different chemicals (which should be kept in drums? which in tanks?) before pinpointing the best way to store each chemical. Then, and only then, Carbide went ahead and built the warehouse the computer told it to build. Almost at once service improved, sales increased, costs were cut. Even more important, what would have taken men months to do, if indeed it could have been done by men at all, was done by the computer in minutes.

IT is in case histories like this that automation experts profess to see a new pattern emerging in our business fabric. Computers are taking over tasks that used to be the sole prerogative of management, tasks that had more than once been ruled outside the capability of machines. Moreover, it is being argued, this movement is accelerating as more businessmen grow aware of the managerial skills of computers.

When Martin-Marietta lands a new space contract, it is not experienced personnel men but a computer that selects the scientists and engineers who are to work on the job. A computer will soon link General Electric and the whole massive U.S. economy, in that it will try to predict the effects on G.E.'s business of such irresistible economic forces as a change in basic steel prices or a nationwide railroad strike.

Geologists assessing data for oil explorers, like engineers figuring the