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POSTWAR RECONVERSION STRATEGIES OF AMERICAN AND WESTERN EUROPEAN CABOR

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## POSTWAR RECONVERSION STRATEGIES OF AMERICAN AND WESTERN EUROPEAN LABOR

A good deal of recent historiography on labor movements and trade union organizations during post World War II reconstruction has focused on the role played by the European Recovery Program and, more broadly, by American the reshaping of European labor. Several historians have policies, on importance of the Marshall Plan proposal in dividing the stressed the European trade union movements: it deeply affected their attitudes toward the political process in various nations, precipitating the collapse of that large unity across the political spectrum which was the common pattern of labor organizations in the immediate post war years (1). The influence of United States initiatives, together with the concomitant foreign activities of American trade union federations, has been more thoroughly studied and pointed out by those scholars who dealt with the international dimension of trade unions history. The Marshall Plan was undoubtedly the main issue around which the breaking up of the World Federation of Trade Unions revolved and the driving force which brought about its split and the subsequent realignment of international labor with the foundation of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (2). The quality and the extent of the European Recovery Program's influence has also been investigated in regard to several national labor movements, especially in the German case (3). The main reason for the cultural appeal and political success of the American proposal, especially in the labor field, lay in its promise of a widespread prosperity assured by steady economic growth (4). The best interpretative framework so far has been provided by Charles Maier's concept of "the politics of productivity". The American approach to the problems of Europe's postwar social stabilization - Maier argues - originated from the New Deal

and wartime experience of agreement on production and efficiency. The "stalemate" reached by Liberal and Conservative forces in 1945

"precluded any consistent social-democratic trend for the American political economy. Coupled with the impressive record of the domestic industrial plant as the 'arsenal for democracy', it made it easier for American leaders to fall back upon the supposedly apolitical politics of productivity."

Thus, American plans for organizing postwar Europe, as well as for Japan, focused on the effort "to ensure the primacy of economics over politics, to de-ideologize issues of political economy into questions of output and efficiency", in order to eventually achieve the ultimate goal of "superseding class conflict with economic growth" (5).

For labor movements, consensus on growth and productivity became the dividing line between "cooperative" and "destructive" organizations, between "free" and "apolitical" unions on the one hand and, on the other, "subversive" and "communist-dominated" organizations. As the major practical attempt to suggest and implement the politics of productivity, the European Recovery Program provided European non-communist unions with an institutional framework and an ideological prospect with which they could be part of the political community. Above all the ideology of productivity offered a set of modern values, a new conception of their function for those new organizations, like CISL in Italy and Force Ouvrière in France, who faced the competition of larger, long-established labor confederations of class orientation. In search of an alternative, innovative union identity, the non-communist organizations partially found it in the productivity promise of growth's future benefits.

Alan S. Milward has recently and most convincingly argued that the effectiveness of economic and political leverage given by the Marshall Plan to the United States over western Europe's pattern of reconstruction ought

to be evaluated in relation to specific issues rather than through sweeping generalizations (6). As far as labor's political realignment and economic strategies are concerned, the European Recovery Program did indeed strongly enhance the influence of American political values, precisely because such values coincided with the needs and aims of large and various groups of European unionists and politicians. If the concept of productivity had a far-reaching influence on ideological attitudes and political cultures, on the other hand its concrete ability to give life to new patterns of industrial relations and bargaining behaviors in participant countries seems to have been more limited. Although still at an initial stage, studies on the actual impact of the American model of industrial relations (and, more broadly, of the practical implications of the productivity concept) definitely suggest that national conditions and traditions largely prevailed over Marshall Aid ideologies (7).

A second aspect which so far has been much less studied is how American labor organizations were affected by the Marshall Plan, both in their international policies and in their internal situations. The issue does not concern so much the American Federation of Labor as the Congress of Industrial Organizations, since the Marshall Plan did not significantly change the A.F. of L.'s outlook. On the contrary, it reinforced the federation's attempt to bring about a radical division of European labor along anti-communist lines. It gave to the A.F. of L.'s proposals the strength and the feasibility that the federation's policies themselves did not have: a broad conception of a growth-oriented political economy and, secondly, a direct and large involvement of the United States government's agencies in bringing about the realignment of European labor (8). The real issue, however, is the C.I.O., where mass-production major industrial unions were

federated. Because it was the C.I.O.'s presence in the World Federation of Trade Unions which sanctioned, from an American point of view, the existence of world labor unity. And it was primarily the C.I.O. which had to be realigned, in the Truman Administration's intentions, if the Marshall Plan was to effectively have a deep political influence on European trade unions. The State Department was very well aware of such a problem and the presence of the Secretary of State Marshall at the C.I.O. Convention in 1947, where he asked for the most open and full support to the E.R.P., makes it clear. Moreover the State Department records show very well how carefully the American diplomacy kept an eye on James Carey's and other C.I.O. representatives' activities in Europe, and how a constant pressure was put on them in order that they eventually decide to leave the W.F.T.U. (9). Apparently this pressure was successful because they found a fertile ground in the shifting of C.I.O.'s internal balance toward a right-wing leadership which supported the Truman Administration's cold war policies and which was preparing the final purge of the Communists within the left-wing. But such an explanation could be too simple and certainly inadequate in order to the process of C.I.O.'s realignment. The Marshall Plan itself was a factor of a certain importance in the change of C.I.O.'s internal situation. Firstly, it threw the highly divisive issue of foreign policy right into the middle of C.I.O.'s political debate. The European Recovery Program was the main factor which won the C.I.O.'s support to the Truman Administration's foreign policy. Thanks to its stress on social progress, the Marshall Plan climinated the strong reservations previously held by unionists of Liberal and Social-democratic orientation on the Cold War attitude of the Administration (10). Besides, the C.I.O. had always considered the recovery of European economy of the greatest importance, since

the development of international trade was consistently seen as an important factor against the much feared danger of a return of depression in postwar America (11). The fragile compromise worked out by right— and left—wing on international issues in the immediate postwar months, essentially based upon participation in the World Federation of Trade Unions in the prospect of a continuing three Great Powers unity, was torn to pieces by the growing Soviet—American confrontation in 1947 and, specifically, by General Marshall's proposal of economic reconstruction and social stabilization of western Europe (12). Such an importance was attributed to the Marshall Plan by the federation's leadership as to make the approval in Congress of E.R.P. the C.I.O.'s "top legislative priority" in 1948 (13).

On the other hand, the Marshall Plan issue had a decisive importance in bringing the Communist left-wing to support the Wallace candidacy in the 1948 presidential elections. Thus it became one of the key issues of that deep division of the C.I.O. into two politically and electorally opposite camps which opened the way to the final clash and the expulsion of the left-wing in 1940 (14).

It seems to me that we cannot fail to compare the impact of the Marshall Plan on the C.I.O. with its much better known influence on European labor. In short, on both sides of the ocean, in western Europe as well as in America, the Marshall Plan proposal, bringing the highly divisive atmosphere of cold war confrontation right into the realm of economic and labor policies, transformed the already existing divisions along political lines within each trade union movement into a wide and final break. Since analogies are quite evident, we probably ought to go a little bit further in a comparison of European and American postwar labor development. What was the nature of the unity, or at least the coexistence, of diverse political

tendencies in each national confederation that in 1947-48 broke down? More importantly, how was such unity related to the social conditions and economic issues of the postwar period? It is all too evident that political unity and its successive collapse are only a small, visible part of a much deeper and larger process of social and institutional change, which modified labor's role in the reconstruction of postwar economies, its economic and political strategies, its bargaining attitudes. Our analysis shall therefore focus on the main features of labor's reconversion strategies at the end of the war and on the relevance and influence that such strategies attributed to trade unions in the political economy. In spite of profound historical differences between the United States and European countries, there seem to be large areas for possible and useful comparison, which could improve our comprehension of postwar processes of social stabilization in industrialized countries.

An illuminating typology of trade union developments in postwar Europe has been offered by Lutz Niethammer's comparative analysis of labor movements in Germany, France, Great Britain and Italy. At the end of the war in each country — and on the international level as well, with the establishment of the World Federation of Trade Unions — it is possible to identify a general trend toward the consolidation of "political united labor union" federations. Growing out of the wartime political alliance within the resistance movement against fascism, such a "political" model of union organization was established by the converging efforts of Socialists, Communists and, at least in the former fascist countries, Christian unionists. Politically, such cooperation was rooted in the memory of the devastating effects of labor's political divisions before the fascist threat in the inter-war period. All leaders and militants sought unity as the

obvious continuation of the conditions which enabled the international alliance and the resistance movements to achieve victory during the war.

"Leaders wanted the unions to attain a pivotal position within society as a whole. This task required participation in the antifascist purges. It also meant helping to start up and to increase production so as to overcome the postwar economic crisis by means of rapid growth. It meant institutionalizing a working-class role in economic management by means of state planning and control of monopolies — e.g. by nationalizing heavy industries and establishing factory councils or other forms of worker participation in individual firms or at the industry-wide level" (15).

Considering themselves "not merely as spokesmen for one of the groups in the productive process, but as advocates of the laboring (or jobseeking) masses" unions concentrated their efforts on "increasing production and ensuring labor discipline", in order to achieve a quick growth leading to a fullemployment economy. Such an active function in the reconstruction process gave the unions considerable political leverage (16). After analysing the four national cases, where the above factors are obviously mixed into quite varying blends in each country, Niethammer points out the reasons which brought both the political unity and the structural reform strategy to an end, if not a failure, by 1947-1948. He suggests two sets of reasons. in 1947 the previously "latent conflict" came to the surface be-Firstly, tween a strategy of "wage stabilization, growth, and structural reform for the sake of the economy as a whole" and, on the other hand, the rank-andfile pressure for a "more direct advocacy of the workers' immediate economic interests" (17). Such basic contradiction, - all the more sharp where structural reforms were not taking place and industrialists were regaining freedom of action and a leading function as in the Italian case, - soon became intertwined with, and strengthened by, political and organizational disputes among political parties. Secondly, the free-market reaction to the

social crisis of 1947 "looked toward the reestablishment of capitalist relations of production by replacing the political pact for growth with market mechanisms". Economic stabilization and balance of payments deficits required such "capital assistance from abroad" as the one soon provided by the U.S. with the Marshall Plan (18). The European Recovery Program and the stiff Soviet reaction to it brought the international conflict to bear directly on economic and labor issues. Within a year postwar "political unity" was falling apart and by early 1949 the schism of the W.F.T.U. definitely sanctioned its end. With the implementation of the Marshall Plan, the basic assumption of the politics of productivity increasingly substituted, among non-communist unionists, for the ideas and strategies of structural reform: "After the international union schism, the labor movement in most European countries went on the defensive for a good decade. In

the period of Cold War reaction the collapse of the political united union made it possible not only for businessmen to play off the unions against each other, but also led to a smouldering crisis of function and identity among competing unions, espein France and Italy. The structural reforms of the postwar years were partially reversed (e.g., some of the British nationalizations), or completely changed their social function under conditions of capital restoration - as in the case, perof planning and control of investment in France. For most unions the given way to overcome this identity crisis was to resume an aggressive wage policy, whether with long-term objecof class conflict or social partnership, and this tives generally led to a relatively high level of pay within limited national rates of economic growth. (Where bourgeois monetary reform redisclosed structural unemployment as in Italy, even wage possibilities remained very limited.)" (19).

Niethammer's typology - whose inevitable level of abstraction does necessarily sacrifice a more detailed analysis of national differences and therefore overshadows each country's peculiarities - is nonetheless quite useful insofar as it identifies a common pattern of labor's postwar main tendencies in European reconstruction. The main issues which I would like to

emphasize are: 1) the inextricable connection between broad political unity and a "compact for growth" strategy based on demands for structural reforms, and 2) the relevance to such a strategy of the issue of public controls on the economy, toward which the whole set of reforms demanded by labor (control on investment and of monopolies, if not their outright nationalization, welfare measures, price controls etc.) were evidently geared. It is, I believe, quite clear how such emphasis on a publicly controlled economy originated from the experience of post-depression and war-time increasing state regulations. In comparison to the waste and social disruption of prewar depression, public controls showed the way toward a social-security and full-employment economy which, in labor's view, reflected the widespread aspiration to social change (20). The question now is whether and how this typological framework can be used for a comparative analysis of labor's main developments in postwar America.

## U.S. LABOR IN POSTWAR RECONVERSION

At the end of the war American labor's strength appeared greater than ever before. Four years of productive boom, full employment and union participation in defense mobilization swelled the membership of trade unions from 10,500,000 in 1941 to about 14,750,000. "About 35 per cent of all American workers were organized, a density greater than at any time before and a level which for the first time equalled that of Northern (21). A standard maintenance-of-membership formula devised by the National War Labor Board in June 1942 for any union committed to the nostrike pledge and to cooperation in the war productive effort had "dramatically increased the size and financial stability of wartime industrial unions". Wartime mobilization had integrated unions into a complex machinery of tripartite government of industry and manpower. They did not a large power in policy- and decision-making, but cooperation with management representatives and government certainly provided labor organizations with a strong and new security. C.I.O.'s industrial unions had firmly established themselves in the main sectors of the nation's industry. Prospects for recruitment of new workers (in white collar jobs or in the non-unionized South, for instance) at the end of the war also seemed very promising. On the other hand, labor's new security and strength rested to such an extent on participation in the war production effort and on government guarantees as to make unions increasingly bureaucratic and distant from their own membership's urges, aspirations and attitudes. Reliance on politicized negotiations within public agencies rather than on industrial conflict and bargaining had pushed the labor movement, and especially the C.I.O., into a sort of "filial-dependent relationship with government" (22).

Perceptions of labor's powerfulness were not only based on unions' organizational and institutional gains. During the last two years of war, and even more conspicuously in 1946, American factories were swept by the largest wave of strikes ever in American history. From the wild-cat strikes late wartime - in open defiance to the unions' no-strike pledge - to the large strikes called in automobile, steel, electrical manufacturing, meatmining and several other mass-production industries in the winter of 1945-46, American society witnessed an extraordinary outburst of workers' militancy focused at first on issues of union power in the workplace and then, with the end of the hostilities, mainly on wage increases. With the approaching end of the war, workers' unrest and protest exerted an increasing pressure from below on a union leadership strongly committed to the set of controls and to the rigid wage policy established by the government during the war. As a result of the "Little Steel formula", which allowed wage increases only to compensate for the rise in living costs that occurred until May 1942, an actual wage freeze was imposed on workers for the duration of the war, while other prices were less rigidly controlled. Even if real wages improved, because of widespread overtime work, the uneven distribution of sacrifices made for a "deep-seated feeling of frustration and injustice" among workers. The imminent cancellation of defense contracts and the subsequent end to large overtime payments forecast a sharp drop in real earnings which, coupled with a predictable rise of unemployment, looked like the best prescription for the explosion of social conflicts (23). The postwar social agenda therefore tended to focus on two main issues: first and foremost, the question of how to keep the economy on a full-employment in the presumably abrupt reconversion from defense to peacetime

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production; secondly, the income distribution issue clearly revolved around the pace of wage and price controls' removal.

Both trade union federations (A.F. of L. and C.I.O.) were primarily concerned with the danger of the American economy plunging back into the depression and the massive unemployment of the 1930s. In order to counteract such a threat, as well as to reassert their own leadership on an increasingly restive rank-and-file, unions urged improvement in wage rates, public works' programs, increased unemployment compensation, higher minimum wage legislation. The common assumption behind such demands was that prosperity depended upon an increased purchasing power of workers and consumers. Labor's and liberals' main concern was typified by their concentration on the effort to push through Congress a Full Employment Act that would have established the federal government responsibility "to assure continuing full employment" (24).

Such a thrust toward a "high-wage, high-employment postwar strategy" - coupled with fears of a strong anti-union reaction by an industrial management also greatly strengthened by the war production boom - brought the two federations to sign, in March 1945, a "Labor-Management Charter" with the President of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Eric Johnston. It implied a "promise of labor peace" in return for a corporate cooperative attitude. As a consequence in August 1945, Johnston, William Green (A.F. of L. President) and Phil Murray (C.I.O. President) reached an interim agreement, providing for a 10 per cent wage increase with no relaxation of price controls and continuation of the no-strike pledge which however was not approved by the government (25). It soon turned out to be the last chance for an extension of the no-strike agreement into the postwar reconversion period. Interbureaucratic disputes and a general lack of coordination and of leadership

prevented the Truman Administration from a prompt enforcement of the agreement, even if many of its members favored its provisions. As a matter of fact, Truman had already announced, just a few days earlier, a new wage policy. legalizing wage raises which did not require any price compensation and announcing a forthcoming labor-management conference to fix guidelines on postwar industrial relations. The President's statement aroused criticism from industrialists and from much of the nation's press, which "pronounced it impossible to allow wage rates to rise while prices remained fixed", and even from the A.F. of L. which urged a quick dissolution of the National War Labor Board and an immediate return to free collective bargaining. These pressures magnified the administration's internal conflicts, which in turn made it impossible to translate the Johnston-Green-Murray agreement into a policy enforced by the government (26). Every decision was thus postponed to the labor-management conference, while strike figures markedly increased right after V-J Day: "in September the man-days lost to strikes doubled, and doubled again in October" (27).

The A.F. of L. postwar strategy centered upon demands for prompt removal of wartime controls, especially those on wages, closing down government agencies such as the N.W.L.B. which was responsible for wartime settlement of conflicts, and upon a rapid return to unlimited freedom of action in collective bargaining. While rooted in the federation's long-seated tradition of voluntarism, such an attitude also reflected the nature of its social and organizational base: its membership in 1945 was only about 35 per cent in manufacturing, while its craft-unions main strength lay primarily in construction and services, where no postwar depression was in sight, and where skilled workers' bargaining power could take advantage of a

collective bargaining process free of any government regulation or interference (28). The federation's Executive Council, as well as requesting N.W.L.B. dissolution, declared in October: "wage rates should be permitted to rise to their proper level through the free exercise of collective bargaining while every encouragement should be given to business to keep prices down through the operation of normal competition" (29). In their eagerness return to a free market, A.F. of L.'s leaders thus gave up even the for continuation of price controls. The C.I.O.'s industrial unions held quite a different view. Along the tradition of the New Deal's most progressive reformism, C.I.O.'s leaders aimed at "significant structural changes in the distribution of political and economic power ... [and at] a steady expansion of the general welfare state". In the circumstances of postwar reconversion such broad social aims came to be seen in the prospect of a continuation of wartime tripartite government of industry and of public controls on the economy. Philip Murray repeatedly proposed an "Industry Council Plan": it "represented an admixture of Catholic social reformism and New Deal era faith in business-labor-government cooperation. With public representatives appointed by a friendly president, the Industry Council Plan contemplated the fusion at the highest level of economic and political bargaining. It was the American version of European corporativism." Philip Murray defined the plan as "a program for democratic economic planning and participation by the people in the key decisions of the big corporations" (30). More boldly, the young and imaginative United Automobile Workers' leader, Walther Reuther, already in 1944 "proposed a Peace Production Board, to be composed of government, management, labor, farmers, and consumers, to direct the conversion of industry back to civilian production in such a way as to ensure full and continuous employment. He talked of area tooling pools and 'control of materials on the basis of social priority'. He suggested continuing government control over monopolistic industries" (31). These programs evidently implied a broad reshaping of the country's political balance along progressive lines. Besides, they rested on a conception of unrestricted political unity of the labor movement (which however did not exclude bitter factional fights for control of union structures, as was most noticeably the case in Reuther's U.A.W.). C.I.O.'s communist wing, at least as long as the Communist Party was under the direction of E. Browder, advocated a broad postwar cooperation, and even suggested continuation of the no-strike pledge, because it favored the continuation of the antifascist alliance, both domestically and internationally, well into the postwar era. During the war, after all, the communists distinguished themselves as champions of unrestricted productive efforts and of unlimited cooperation (32).

But Murray's corporativist strategy required cooperation by government and industry which was not at hand, as the Labor-Management conference, convened in November 1945, revealed very clearly. When President Truman opened the conference asking labor and management to find a way to settle differences without conflicts, but advancing no specific proposals concerning the main issues on the part of the government, workers' unrest and strikes were spreading and negotiations in major industries were already breaking down. Agreement proved impossible on two pivotal issues: the wagerelationship and the extent of management functions and "prerogatives". Both issues, as we shall see, involved the far-reaching and politically controversial question of control on industry. Following the pattern tentatively suggested with the "Labor-Management Charter", the C.I.O. had been consistently proposing a 20 to 30 per cent wage increase and continuation of price controls by the government. Wartime large profits, the C.I.O. argued, allowed corporations to raise wages without immediate compensation on price levels. More importantly, the very idea of fixing wage-price guidelines implied an extension of the wartime logic of tripartite negotiations and state action. In the Administration several officials openly favored a substantial wage rise in order to develop consumers' purchasing power. Some of them had publicly declared that industry could afford such increases. And on 30 October 1945, Truman himself declared:

"Wage increases are imperative - to cushion the shock to our workers, to sustain adequate purchasing power and to raise the national income."

Industries which granted increases could apply for new price ceilings, he also stated, but his speech stressed the necessity for continuation of price controls and it was essentially perceived as an endorsement of labor's demands (33). Labor obviously welcomed the speech, while industrialists and conservatives alike openly criticized it. While not denying the necessity for wage increases, business was determined to make them dependent on the possibility to increase prices as well, and possibly to dismantle the whole of price controls altogether. When the conference met in mechanism Washington a few days later, Murray's proposal of "labor peace in return for a pattern wage increase" was not even placed on the agenda. In the absence of any specific wage-price policy by the Administration, business opposition and A.F. of L. insistence on unrestricted collective bargaining successfully managed to prevent any discussion on the determination of new wage levels (34). In sharp disagreement on a number of other issues, the conference failed to advance suggestions on how to prevent the impending wave of strikes and conflicts, and achieved no substantial result. C.I.O. prospects for a corporative agreement were frustrated. In government, New Deal

liberals were growing less and less influential, while conservatives were gaining ground. Above all, "the C.I.O. had profoundly misjudged the tenor of the postwar business community". Progressive industrialists in favor of tripartite government of industry and public controls on the economy "were in fact a relatively uninfluential minority". To the contrary, most business leaders, economically and politically strengthened by the war boom, thought that labor-management relations should abandon the public arena of state agencies and return to traditional collective bargaining.

"They recognized the potential usefulness of the new industrial unions as stabilizers of the labor force and moderators of industrial conflict, but these industrialists also sought the restoration of managerial prerogatives that wartime conditions had eroded in the areas of product pricing, market allocation, and shop floor work environment. Until the character of postwar economic conditions became clear, they wanted to be free of government or union interference in determining the wage-price relationship in each industry" (35).

While Murray's hopes for a tripartite corporative agreement in the sphere of public policies vanished during the month-long conference, a much more direct and stronger challenge to management's prerogatives and to government's uncertain policies was cast on the industrial level. On 21 November about 180,000 workers in General Motors plants all over the country went on strike, the first of a series of massive struggles in the nation's major industries, The United Automobile Workers strike at G.M. soon became the main test of strength in the confrontation between union programs oriented toward public controls and corporate resistance in the name of enterprise rights. The U.A.W. platform, drafted by Walter Reuther, demanded a 30 per cent wage increase without any change in the company products' prices. Claiming that the corporation's large wartime profits afforded such an increase, Reuther not only challenged management's authority on profits' distribution and products' pricing: government was implicitly called on to

maintain control on prices and therefore to exert some sort of public control on the policies of major corporations. Since price control was under strong attack by management and conservatives (who claimed that the Office of Price Administration was in fact "controlling profits" (36)), Reuther's emphasis not only on workers' but also on consumers' interest in a noninflationary improvement of purchasing power, aimed at influencing the Administration's policies before pressures against any form of government control grew too large and strong. Thus the G.M. strike raised broad social issues such as patterns of income distribution, limits to managerial authority and independence, the nature and extent of social and public control on industry. Reuther's action was also aimed at bringing workers' increasing militancy again under union control and paving the way to the domination by his own faction over the whole of the U.A.W. (in fact within a year Walter Reuther became president of the union) (37). The strike started after the company had flatly refused the idea of submitting its pricing policy to collective-bargaining with the union, and counterproposed a 10 per cent wage increase. While calling the strike, Walter Reuther challenged the company to open its books and records to a board of arbitration which could estimate the company's "ability to pay" higher wages. With strikes spreading over the country, and an imminent nation-wide strike in steel industry, on 3 Truman asked Congress to enact legislation authorizing the President to appoint fact-finding boards on nation-wide industrial disputes, and prohibiting strikes for the duration of the board's investigation. In spite of labor's protest, and of Congress' refusal to vote such legislation, the President appointed fact-finding boards for the G.M. and steel disputes few days later. Thus, G.M. faced the actual threat of a public board actually controlling its "ability to pay": the company refused to submit its

books to the panel and left the hearings. G.M. president Charles E. Wilson declared:

"General Motors has made its choice. It refuses to subscribe to what it believes will ultimately become, through the process of evolution, the death of the American system of competitive enterprise. It will not participate voluntarily in what stands out crystal clear as the end of the road — a regimented economy" (38).

G.M.'s fierce resistance thus became the rallying point of a large corporate offensive against union demands for social control and planning. Defence of management prerogatives, from the shop-floor to the political economy at large, became a guiding principle of corporate attitude toward negotiations with unions and government. The Washington Post editorialized on 10 January, 1946: "the question how far employees should have a voice indictating to management is at present one of the hottest issues before the country" (39). Ultimately, the contest focused on the issue of price controls. In January more than one million workers in steel, electrical manufacturing and meat-packing went on strike. The steel corporations, as G.M. had already done, refused the fact-finding board's suggestion of an 18.5 cents per hour wage increase. The corporations' refusal to settle any major strike was clearly intended as a means to exert the strongest pressure on the Truman Administration for a relaxation, and eventually a complete removal, of price controls. It turned out to be very effective. Murray and other leaders of the C.I.O.'s industrial unions refused to follow Reuther's intransigence on price controls.

"The C.I.O.'s inability to secure a new wage-price formula at the November Labor-Management Conference convinced Murray that any attempt to increase wages and maintain a ceiling on prices would require a major showdown with industry and a probable political confrontation with the Truman administration. From this the C.I.O. leader characteristically shrank back" (40). By mid-February the Office of Price Administration agreed to revise steel's price in compensation of wage increases and Truman announced a new wage-price program "to permit wage increases within certain limits and to permit any industry placed in hardship position by an approved increase to seek price adjustment" (41). After this major breakthrough, steel, electrical, and later on also rubber companies agreed to an 18.5 cents per hour increase in wages, which became the pattern for most contracts signed in 1946. When steel and electrical workers' unions accepted such a settlement with no objections to the price increases, Walter Reuther's G.M. platform remained isolated in advocating public controls on industry. On 13 March Reuther accepted the 18.5 increase and the G.M. strike ended after 113 days. The company was soon allowed to increase its prices.

Thus management won the first major test of strength, drawing a definite line beyond which labor's influence and power could not go. Management's victory on the price issue did not only curb the threat of an expanded influence of the unions in the public policies' sphere. It also shattered any hope for even a mild level of public control based on the continuation of wartime regulations on industry. As a further step toward an unrestricted free-market economy in February Congress voted a revised and very weak version of the Full Employment Act, watering down the original bill's conception of Keynesian social planning of investments (42).

Restoration of managerial authority was extended to the shop-floor as well: in a few contracts (Ford, Chrysler, Kaiser-Frazer) "company security" clauses were incorporated, giving to management the "unqualified right to set production standard" and a "contractual assurance against unauthorized strikes". Soon extended to several others collective-bargaining agreements, they were an important part of what has been defined, by N. Lichtenstein, as

a "capitulation to management's definition of industrial order in the postwar era" (43).

Over the spring and summer of 1946 government machinery for price control was dismantled step by step. Once the unions had given up a social battle in defense of controls, the Administration's weak and inconsistent support of it did not resist the growing pressures from industrial and farming interests against price regulations. Congress yielded to such pressures and by the summer controls were substantially ineffective. In the month ending 15 July cost of living rose by almost 6 per cent, and food prices were up 13.8 per cent. Later on a meat shortage, caused by the cattle growers' refusal to accept controls on prices any longer, dealt a hard blow to any residual hope for price control enforcement. On 9 November, right after the conservative victory in mid-term elections, Truman announced the end of all controls (44).

The pattern of strikes and wage settlements in the winter of 1945-46 proved to what extent unions' chances for success, even when their action was supported by a remarkably militant workers' participation, depended on the policies and attitudes of the government. The C.I.O.'s main efforts to perpetuate tripartite cooperation had been frustrated by Truman's wavering policy on the wage-price issue as much as by corporate uncompromising opposition. Dependency of labor, and especially of the C.I.O., progressively turned into a serious liability as the influence of New Deal liberals in the Administration increasingly became less effective while conservative pressures grew stronger and heavier. Just a few weeks after the major strike settlements, Truman's inconsistent and shifting attitude toward labor disputes alienated much of the unions' sympathy for his administration. In May two large strikes, among railroad workers and coal miners, questioned the

cents wage-increase pattern just established by the steel 18.5 automobile contracts. The United Mine Workers especially asked for health and retirement funds financed by a royalty on each ton of coal mined, while some of the railroad unions demanded changes in the work rules. Faced with the threat of a coal shortage and a stoppage of railway transportation, the government seized both mines and railroads, and negotiated directly with the When two of the rail workers' unions refused the administration proposal (the usual 18.5 cents wage-increase but no change in work rules) and went on strike again, Truman threatened to draft the strikers and asked for emergency legislation to break strikes in industries operated the federal government. Labor organizations were shocked by the President's violent attack on workers' bargaining freedom, especially because Truman's action seemed to open the way to those conservatives who were preparing a permanent anti-strike legislation, the Case bill, soon to be voted by Congress (45). A few weeks later Truman vetoed the Case bill, but this was certainly not enough to repair the serious damage inflicted on the confidence of labor and of liberals in generals in the Administration. Distrust toward Truman encouraged progressive liberals and social-democrats in the labor movement to study new initiatives for a major political realignment. At the same time fear of conservatism's growing strength, sanctioned by the resounding victory of anti-labor Republicans in November's elections, reluctance to engage a direct confrontation with government and an increasing sensitivity toward the anti-communist issue, curbed any actual attempt to implement such progressive initiatives. Projects for a third based on a liberal-labor coalition, were often discussed in the party, of 1946 by unionists of social-democratic orientation (as C.I.O.'s and Emil Rieve or David Dubinsky, president of Walter Reuther

International Ladies' Garment Workers Union) but were soon dropped when the first effects of Cold War confrontation, in 1947, drew a dividing line on the question of anti-communism. Most C.I.O.'s leaders - to begin with Walter Reuther, who led the first anti-communist drive in the U.A.W. after having been elected president at the end of 1946 - rallied around those liberal groups, as the Americans for Democratic Action, which rejected any "popularfront" approach. When the Wallace candidacy in the 1948 election gave life to a real third party, his choice was flatly rejected by the C.I.O. which aligned itself with the Democratic Party and with Truman, starting the great purge of left-wing unions and officers (46). Similarly, C.I.O.'s great campaign to unionize the south - "Operation Dixie", launched in 1946 - which amounted also to "an ambitious attempt to mobilize an interracial labor electorate that could realign the very shape of Southern politics", turned into a failure primarily because the C.I.O. did not dare to openly defy the segregationist and anti-radical assumptions prevailing in Southern politics and mentality (47).

The Congressional election held in November 1946 can be considered as a key turning point. Giving a large majority to conservative elements it reflected the outcome of the previous winter's social conflicts. The electoral campaign had one of its main focuses on the labor issue and the electorate seemed to blame the massive strikes and the subsequent wage increase for the upsurge of inflation, let loose by the collapse of price controls over the summer (consumers' prices went up 15 per cent, and food prices almost 28 per cent between June and December 1946). After having won their battle against unions and price controls earlier in the year, business interests apparently conquered a large portion of public opinion to free-market values. The sweeping conservative victory was generally interpreted

not only as a pronouncement against social controls and the remnants of New Deal liberalism , but more specifically as a mandate to restrict labor's strength and to limit its political influence (48). The 80th Congress began to work toward such goals as soon as it convened in January 1947 and within five months it voted the major change in industrial relations and labor legislation from the New Deal era, the Taft-Hartley Act, with such a large majority as to be easily able to override Truman's veto. It imposed several legal restrictions on unions, mainly designed to outlaw the more radical forms of workers' action and to ban any labor activity that went beyond the restrictively defined boundaries of codified collective bargaining. The most important feature of the Act, however, lay in its politically symbolic value:

"The Act represented the definitive end of an era in which the state served as an arena in which the trade unions could bargain for the kind of tripartite accommodation with industry that had been so characteristic of the New Deal era."

Thus, it typified and sanctioned the defeat of labor's effort for an enlarged and influential role in the political sphere. The Act had a few farreaching effects on American labor. Firstly, it stopped the growth of trade unions, containing organized labor's representation into the geographical and social limits that it had already reached. Secondly, its provision requiring anti-communist affidavits for union officers turned labor's internal political struggle into a state-sponsored purge of left-wing forces and individuals. Thus it helped the drastic political realignment of C.I.O.'s industrial unions into the mainstream of Cold War culture and politics. Thirdly, by stiffening collective bargaining codes and making unions liable for contract's violations the Act fostered the transformation of labor

organizations into bureaucratic machines with a direct interest in enforcing work discipline and containing rank-and-file activism (49).

The sharp conservative turn taken by American politics in 1946-47, which was quickly magnified and solidified by the Cold War tensions, caused a profound change in union strategies and attitudes. Already in late 1946 the main industrial unions began a second round of negotiations for a wage The increases secured in the previous winter had already been wiped by inflation. Real earnings in manufacturing had already diminished in and, by summer 1946, they were down to the lowest level since the U.S. entry into the war. Profits, on the other hand, thanks to a reduced tax load were about a fifth above the level of the best war year. C.I.O.'s economic reports stated that industry could afford a substantial wage increase. The proposed an increase of 23 cents an hour, but unions were quite unwilling to engage again in long strikes and by spring 1947 automobile, as well as steel and electrical workers signed new contracts with a 15 cents an hour pattern increase (50). As a result employers charged higher prices for their products: thus an inflationary pattern, based on wages' and prices' was established throughout the postwar period with relevant boosts. consequences. Workers' incomes grew increasingly different between unionized sections of industry, where wages could more or less keep the pace of costof-living increase, and the unorganized portions of the working class whose wages were not protected against inflation. Besides, the priority given to the wage issue induced labor organizations to give up other important demands. The importance attributed to "income security" for their members brought unions to sacrifice the equally important factor of "employment security": the acceptance of laid-off benefits in union contracts left the -26-

issue of employment instability basically unchallenged and management was left in complete control of the labor market (51).

The failure of labor's ambitious programs for political controls in the immediate postwar period brought the unions to restrain themselves into collective bargaining within industry. They "moved away from a demand for structural changes in the political economy and toward negotiation of an increasingly privatized welfare program that left unchallenged essential power relationships in industry". Two sets of issues are particularly relevant and illuminating about such development. The first concerns the question of the "welfare state". American labor, and especially the C.I.O., favored the establishment of a public system of welfare measures. They consistently supported legislative proposals for a national health insurance system and improvements in social security benefits. But, as hopes for such progressive reforms were increasingly dimmed by the prevailing conservative mood, the most powerful unions slowly turned into considering collective bargaining with each single industry as the appropriate place where to obtain for their membership those benefits which could not be won in the political sphere for the public at large. As a result, in a few years "each individual union carved out a private welfare state for its own members" (52). The first one to move in this direction was the United Mine Workers which already in 1946 demanded, and secured, the establishment of two welfunds - a retirement fund jointly administered by union and management health fund controlled by the union - both financed by a royalty on ton of coal mined. It must be emphasized how such a financing system each the union a direct interest and responsibility in increasing inoutput and in improving productivity. The new path was soon to be dustrial followed by other major industrial unions. In 1949-1950 both the U.A.W. and the United Steel Workers negotiated retirement and health funds for their members. The privatization of welfare programs became another important factor in differentiating workers between a protected and unionized segment and a larger portion which could rely on a poor and incomplete public welfare system. Besides, it gave life to renewed paternalistic relationships between management and workers based on corporate welfare (53).

The second important issue was productivity. By the late 1940s the American economy was clearly set on a course of inflationary prosperity. The long-expected depression turned out to be, in 1949, a relatively mild and short-lived recession. The Truman Administration programs aimed at sustained growth and growth was becoming, both domestically and in the international arena, the new American gospel. Even the most advanced unions, once they had abandoned their demands for structural reforms, started looking toward new ways through which their membership, and even their own organizations, could participate in the advantages of prosperity. At the same time big corporations tried to find means for stimulating workers' productivity and preventing inflationary pressure from arousing repeated wage demands by labor. These converging tendencies gave life to sweeping changes in American labor relations. It was once more a G.M.-U.A.W. negotiation to pave the new in collective bargaining. In 1948 the company proposed to establish an "annual improvement factor" of wages geared to productivity's betterments and a cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) related to the general price index in return for longer contracts and labor peace. The agreement was completed in 1950 when contracts' duration was prolonged to five years, COLA and "annual improvement factor" rates were increased and a company's pension and health plan was established. In return the U.A.W. obtained the union-shop and the consequent organizing and financial security (54).

In this way growth, labor peace and productivity became in the 1950s the hallmarks of union policies and collective bargaining strategies. The "politics of productivity", while strongly promoted abroad by the Marshall Plan, was perfected and accomplished in late 1940s America as the outcome of reconversion's social and economic conflicts. It was, in fact, the product of the defeat of labor's effort to achieve structural reforms in the American political economy and in the social distribution of power.

A comparison between C.I.O.'s postwar developments and the typology offered by L. Niethammer for Western European unions therefore suggests a few interesting analogies. In spite of profound differences, of political situations as well as of economic conditions, industrialized countries on both sides of the Atlantic ocean experienced in postwar years a similar clash between labor's demands for social and public controls of the economy and business efforts to reassert a privatized conception of management's autonomy. With the noticeable exception of Great Britain, the outcome of this conflict in continental Europe and in the U.S. was the defeat of labor's bid for structural reforms and the rupture of trade unions' unity across the political spectrum. The inclusion of American events in the range of comparative analysis does not change the overall picture. To the contrary, it confirms the basic outline framed on the basis of European developments. But it has a few important implications which might enhance our comprehension of the whole scenery and define more precisely the knowledge of its causes.

A first question concerns the reasons and foundations of postwar political unity of labor and of its attempt to assume a societal function, to play a pivotal role in the political economy as a whole. Analysis centered on European societies, and more specifically on countries which experienced fascism or German occupation, tend to focus on the political background of the choice for unity. The experience of political divisions before the fascist phenomenon's insurgence, and the successive unity within the resistance movement during the war therefore come to the forefront as major driving forces toward unity. The subjective experience of antifascist resistance and the consequent reflections on the value of national and international unity were undoubtedly the major elements which oriented

labor's cadres in their postwar choices and attitudes. They probably were of relevant importance also among considerable portions of the working class. especially in those situations, as in Northern Italy, where factory workers had a large part in the resistance movement. A second set of reasons stems from the economic conditions of countries devastated by the war. The imperatives of reconstruction made workers' disciplined participation to the productive effort so important as to make unions' cooperation "so indispensable that they could demand a lot, especially in the way of structural reforms, from national leaders and from other social groups" (55). Although not completely absent, such motives had a lesser influence in the American situation, where the roots of C.I.O.'s strategy have to be located primarily in the experience of wartime negotiations in the public sphere and of tripartite cooperation. Both Murray's proposal for an Industry Council Plan and Reuther's platform at General Motors aimed at an extension and improvement of the war machinery of public controls on the economy. Political unity within the labor movement was deemed necessary as long as the unions were endeavouring to attain a broad social role and to restrict the boundaries of "management's prerogatives". Once such broad goals were given up and unions stepped back into privatized bargaining, even the cautious Murray abandoned any reluctance to divide the C.I.O. and unleashed the anti-communist crusade within the unions (56). Thus the American experience - as well as the British one - suggests that structural conditions of wartime mobilization and controlled economies should be taken into consideration when examining postwar labor attitudes. In fascist and occupied countries in Europe organized labor certainly experienced an opposite condition of repression and exclusion. But workers lived and worked in a publicly regimented economy during the rearmament of the late 1930s and in wartime. We should probably

investigate the nature and the extent of the influence that such experience had on workers' ideas and conscience, especially in those cases where the results of a state-controlled and organized economy have to be compared with the previous record of depression and unemployment. If the Nazi regime won some degree of consensus through a mobilized economy which attained full employment after a devastating depression (57), one might wonder whether behind the postwar popular orientation for public controls there were not only antifascist and anticapitalist sentiments against monopolies but also memories of the productive results brought about by economies bureaucratically planned for military purposes. Historiography so far has mainly emphasized the strong innovative impulse which inspired political and labor forces by the end of the war, reflecting the widespread desire for farreaching social changes. The picture probably ought to be completed by taking into account those elements of continuity which also converged into shaping the postwar reform-oriented action of workers and organized labor (58).

The heritage of wartime regulations and controls is everywhere - possibly with the exception of Germany - a central issue of postwar economic debate and social conflict. In countries where - as in Great Britain and in the United States - the war had produced, by increasing state regulations, a distribution of income relatively favourable to wage-earners, the rapidity and depth of controls' removal marked the failure, as it was clearly the case in America, of labor's attempt to widen its share of economic power and political influence. Conversely, Labour's success in Britain had one of its main foundations in the maintenance and improvement of the large set of regulations experienced during the war years (59). The Italian case also shows the relevance, albeit in an opposite way, of this issue. Several

historians have stressed the importance which the association of government controls with fascism had in paving the way to the postwar assault staged by business interests against any possible form of public planning and state regulations. Controls inevitably smacked of fascism. Leftist parties and progressive forces were culturally and ideally subordinate to the aggressive self-confidence of free-market ideologists (60). It is not just a matter of a lack of modern economic culture. For wage-earners the record of wartime regulations was a decidedly negative one, since controls were associated not only with the authoritarian face of fascism, but with the disastrous worsening of economic conditions throughout the war years. Rather than social cooperation and improved economic performances, the Italian wartime experience spelled inequality, poverty and organizational failure. Thus while enhancing the urge and aspiration for deep social changes, such historical background also deprived labor and other progressive forces of the structural foundations upon which reform programs in other countries were based.

Employers and business interests found in the offensive against public controls on industry a unifying theme and their most relevant political commitment. Enterprise rights, management's prerogatives, a privatized dimension of industrial relations and rejection of labor's thrust for social controls were characteristic aims of corporate policies throughout the postwar period. If labor's strategies revealed various analogies, policies pursued by such different business groups as, for instance, the Italian and the American employers' associations, had a striking similarity. For both groups postwar reconversion meant a rigid determination to regain complete control in the workplace and, possibly, on labor market conditions, to contain unions within a strictly regulated and centralized bargaining dimension and quite often to play off wage-increases against control demands

(61). The most remarkable aspect of business groups' struggle against social controls, and the least studied so far, lay in its successful attempt to win other social groups to its side and therefore to isolate labor's reformer claims. The American elections in 1946 gave life to a free-market oriented majority which spelled the end of any social democratic trend and cornered labor into a defensive posture. In Italy employers' "privatismo" had quite an influence on middle class orientations, contributing to shape the rising Christian Democratic social coalition and confining industrial workers' representation into a minority position (62). While in the opposite case of Great Britain Labour's ability to reach beyond the boundaries of working class was a decisive element of the electoral success which brought the party in control of government and parliament in 1945 (63).

The very nature of the dispute on social control and structural reforms, coupled with its inherent continuity with wartime economic regulations, gave to governments' attitudes a decisive role in the confrontation between business and labor. The extent to which each side's conceptions affected public policies and government's decisions had an enormous importance. Over the long run structural conditions obviously became a prevailing factor in determining the balance of social forces, as it is most clearly the case with Italian massive unemployment (64). But early decisions made by governments in the hectic months following the end of hostilities played a key role and had far-reaching effects. In the U.S. the declining and New Deal liberals could not prevent the influence labor of Administration from a quick dismantling of price controls. Thus, the foundations of C.I.O.'s reform strategies were shattered and the whole question of social control was relegated into a subject for academic debates. In the

British case the relevance of Labour's control of government for the implementation of reform policies is self-evident. Italian labor's broad social aims were even more thoroughly dependent on government's attitude since in 1945-46 C.G.I.L. negotiated primarily on wages and endeavoured to contain employers' pressure on employment levels, while substantially the presence of anti-fascist parties in government the development of structural reforms. The priority accorded by the Left, and especially by the Communist Party, to the achievement of institutional primarily the republican state and a democratic constitution scaled down its pressure toward structural changes in the political economy for the sake of cooperative unity with moderate and conservative forces. Thus, while reconstruction was taking place under the banner of employers' "privatismo", structural reform programs were postponed to the first republican Parliament: by the time it convened, after the 1948 elections, the Left had already been ousted from government and deflationary policies were drastically reducing labor's strength. The remarkable social and political influence enjoyed by labor in the early postwar months was therefore restrained, and progressively dissipated, by the deferring effect of political stalemate inside government (65).

Finally, comparative analysis of postwar labor developments in Europe and America emphasizes the importance of the relationship between U.S. international action and the pattern of social stabilization achieved at home. Labor's postwar thrust for structural reforms centered on public controls on industry was checked and defeated in the U.S. about a year sooner than in Europe. By mid-1946, well before the Cold War started to disclose its dividing effects, American labor renounced its broad social aims and began to step back into bargaining policies which would soon focus

on productivity. Studies on social aspects of the European Recovery Program ought to take into detailed account the successive steps through which industrial relations in America were progressively shaped along productivity's axioms. E.C.A. labor policy, and C.I.O.'s increasing involvement in its development and implementation, have to be considered not only as consequences of American trade unions' anti-communism (66) but in connection to the new path of industrial relations opened by, for instance, U.A.W.-G.M. negotiations in 1948 and 1950.

It has been persuasively argued that U.S. policies aimed at international stabilization in the post-World War I era rested, among other elements, also on labor's subordinate role in American society, as it was rigidly defined by the anti-union reaction following the large strikes of 1919 (67). Even more conspicuously and directly, a close relationship between domestic stabilization and U.S. international policies was at work in the 1940s.

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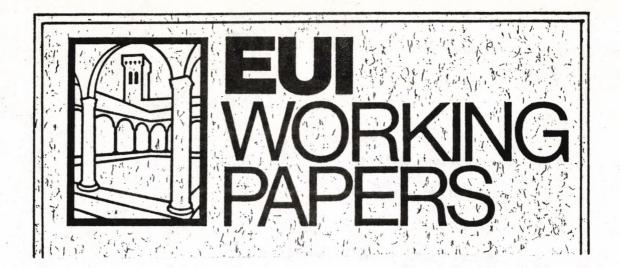
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