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Fractured Beyond Repair: Organized Labor and The Civil Rights Movement's Divergent Approaches to the Revised Philadelphia Plan

Sensing an opportunity to woo an interest group that had long been hostile toward the Republican Party, President Richard Nixon extended a bold invitation for the evening of September 7, 1970: he invited labor movement leaders to the White House for a Labor Day dinner. For decades, the partnership between organized labor and civil rights groups was the backbone of a powerful coalition that routinely helped Democrats win control of the White House and maintain strong majorities in Congress. But, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, after a decade of social upheaval and transformational social reforms, the Democratic coalition was falling apart. The rupturing of Democratic alliances was no secret to the political establishment or to the leaders of the groups that were abandoning a once formidable partnership. In an interview before attending the 1970 Labor Day dinner at the White House, George Meany, President of the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO), the largest federation of labor unions in the United States, admitted that “the Democratic Party ha[d] disintegrated.”¹ As an astute political observer, Nixon sensed an opportunity to court the labor movement—a constituency he had long viewed as a foe—and convince them to join a burgeoning “Silent Majority” that would secure Republican electoral dominance in future elections. Meany was aware of Nixon’s motivations, but he was also aware of a once strong

¹ Jefferson Cowie, *Stayin’ Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (New York: The New Press, 2010), 141.

coalition's declining clout—he knew the bonds that had kept the Democratic Party in power for the better part of the previous half-century were withering away.

President Nixon's efforts to take advantage of the deepening fissure between the labor movement and civil rights groups, however, did not end with a dinner invitation, nor did they begin in 1970. Soon after defeating Hubert Humphrey in the 1968 Presidential election, newly elected President Nixon began to formulate his civil rights policy, and began advocating for the implementation of a revised Philadelphia Plan—a targeted effort to boost the hiring of minority workers by Philadelphia-area contractors. President Lyndon B. Johnson had devised his own version of the Philadelphia Plan, but never implemented it. Then, in mid-1969, the Nixon Administration began to examine Johnson's plan, and ultimately decided to launch a new version in September 1969, mere months after Nixon assumed the Presidency. Nixon's Philadelphia Plan required contractors performing federally funded projects to set goals and timetables to ensure the increased hiring of minority workers. Contractors were obliged to meet these targets, or at least show a good faith effort to comply with the policy.

Although the historical literature effectively analyzes Nixon's political motivations for endorsing the Philadelphia Plan, historians have neglected to analyze the roots of union opposition to, and civil rights groups' support of, the Philadelphia Plan. Why did two closely aligned interest groups take diametrically opposed stances toward one of President Nixon's most important and controversial domestic policy initiatives? And, why did the labor movement and the civil rights movement both decide that advocating on behalf of their respective constituencies would yield more benefits than collaborating to preserve an influential and powerful political coalition?

Both the civil rights movement and the labor movement knew that Nixon's advocacy of a revised Philadelphia Plan was at least partly rooted in political opportunism—a chance to break an already damaged bond between two groups with a vested interest in returning the Democratic Party to power. However, even Nixon did not realize the depth of the animosity and mistrust that already existed between labor and civil rights groups in the late 1960s. And, by the time Nixon introduced his revised Philadelphia Plan, both camps had already concluded that the alliance was broken beyond repair. Instead of fighting to preserve a coalition that was already fully ruptured, civil rights and labor leaders planned their respective support of, and opposition to, the Philadelphia Plan, with a singular goal in mind: protecting the interests of their members and constituents. Civil rights leaders were frustrated with what they viewed as the deeply rooted racial discrimination that tainted the labor movement's progressive goals of fighting for worker's rights. African Americans bemoaned a hierarchical seniority structure that reduced black union membership, and they criticized seemingly fruitless and insincere efforts made by the labor movement to correct systematic and entrenched racial injustice. The Philadelphia Plan, therefore, was a gift to black workers—an opportunity to force unwilling union leaders to admit African Americans into their ranks. In contrast, organized labor scoffed at the notion that in the post-Civil Rights Act era they maintained a system of racial injustice. Meany and other labor leaders emphasized training programs that the labor movement had developed to help cultivate skilled black workers. But, to labor leaders and rank-and-file union members, the Philadelphia Plan was nothing more than an unconstitutional, government-imposed quota system that would eradicate union culture and threaten the jobs of countless white union members.

To answer my research questions, I consulted primary source documents in the George Meany Memorial Archives, located at Hornbake Library on the University of Maryland, College

Park campus. These archives are an exhaustive collection, but are only one part of a larger collection, the AFL-CIO archives, that are housed on the University of Maryland campus. I relied chiefly on correspondence from top AFL-CIO officials, including George Meany and Don Slaiman, Director of the AFL-CIO Civil Rights Division, correspondence from leading civil rights activists, newspaper articles from the early years of the President Nixon's first term in office, and speeches delivered by labor, civil rights, and government officials.

President Nixon's Political Calculus

Frustrated with the inability of President Herbert Hoover and the Republican Party to remedy the perils of the Great Depression, Americans elected Franklin D. Roosevelt, a Democrat from New York, to the Presidency in 1932, ushering in almost four decades of virtually uninterrupted Democratic control of the White House and Congress.² The Democratic Party assembled an unlikely coalition—a seemingly unbreakable bond between social conservatives in the solid South and economically progressive New Dealers. With the emergence of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s, two identifiable planks came to make up the core of the Democratic coalition: civil rights groups and the labor movement. This coalition represented a diverse segment of the American populace—African Americans fighting for racial justice, progressive whites who opposed both de facto and de jure segregation, and millions of blue-collar workers who increasingly considered themselves part of the middle-class. However, with the ascension of Lyndon B. Johnson to the Presidency in 1963, and with the passage of both progressive civil rights legislation and sweeping social welfare programs, the Democratic coalition began to splinter.³ Southern whites who had ruled the solid South were alienated by the Democrats' progressive stance on civil rights, just as many blue-collar workers felt alienated by

² Kevin P. Phillips, *The Emerging Republican Majority* (New Rochelle, N.Y.: Arlington House, 1969), 37.

³ Ibid.

what they perceived to be overly intrusive and redistributive Great Society legislation.⁴ The evidence of this splintering was revealed in 1964, when Republican Presidential nominee Barry Goldwater swept the formerly Democratic South, and again in 1968, when third-party candidate George Wallace, the segregationist Governor of Alabama, attracted large support from “conservative Southern Democrat[s]... William Jennings Bryan-era Democratic populis[ts]... [and] urban Catholic[s]”—voters who “represented Democratic voting streams quitting their party.”⁵

With the splintering of the Democratic coalition in the late 1960s, the Nixon Administration and the Republican Party sought to seize the opportunity to bring formerly Democratic constituencies into the Republican fold. President Nixon and his staff even launched outreach efforts to constituencies very closely aligned with the progressive left, including African Americans. Although no complete plan or goal seemed to guide Nixon’s outreach to the black community—African Americans exhibited strong support for the Democratic Party after President Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965—the Nixon Administration’s overtures to African Americans did not consist of only empty rhetoric, but were substantive.⁶ Even before his inauguration, Nixon met with a group of black leaders, “including Ralph Abernathy of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Dr. Nathan Wright, chair of the Black Power Conference,” and told them “that he would ‘do more for the underprivileged and more for the Negro than any President ha[d] ever done.’”⁷ Indeed, when he took office in 1969, Nixon established ““a single coordination point for matters pertaining to

⁴ Phillips, 37.

⁵ Ibid, 35.

⁶ Paul Fryer, and John David Skrentny, “Coalition Building and the Politics of Electoral Capture During the Nixon Administration: African Americans, Labors, and Latinos,” *Studies in American Political Development* 12, no. 1 (April 1998): 144.

⁷ Ibid, 144.

minority affairs” in the White House.⁸ While African Americans seemed like an unlikely constituency to join Nixon’s “Silent Majority,” the President saw an opportunity: the Democratic Party coalition was falling apart, and its members needed somewhere to turn.

While political observers argued that outreach to African Americans was a fruitless effort to recruit voters uninterested in supporting the Republican Party, by espousing policies that benefitted the black community, including the Philadelphia Plan, Nixon knowingly drove a wedge between black Americans and the labor movement—two pillars of the Democratic coalition. Richard Nixon believed that the Philadelphia Plan could be used not only as a way to increase minority hiring, but to split the Democratic coalition and help build a new Republican electoral majority. Although both the civil rights movement and the labor movement had long been supporters of the Democratic Party, Nixon understood that much of organized labor was eager to move past 1960s liberalism, and harbored a more culturally conservative ideology that did not mesh with many of the goals of the civil rights movement. Unions, therefore, would surely oppose government efforts to impose minority hiring goals on Philadelphia-area contractors, and this opposition would certainly appear to civil rights leaders as an affront to minority workers. In *Stayin’ Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class*, Jefferson Cowie, Professor of Labor History at Cornell University, argues that Nixon’s endorsement of the Philadelphia Plan “probably had more to do with outflanking the liberals...than anything else,” and that Nixon believed the plan would “help foment the conflict between two core constituents of the New Deal coalition—labor and blacks.”⁹ Similarly, Nelson Lichtenstein, Professor at the University of California, Santa Barbara, argues in his book, *State of the Union: A Century of*

⁸ Fryer, and Skrentny, “Coalition Building and the Politics of Electoral Capture During the Nixon Administration: African Americans, Labors, and Latinos,” 144-145.

⁹ Jefferson Cowie, *Stayin’ Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (New York: The New Press, 2010), 150.

American Labor, that one of the chief purposes of the Philadelphia Plan was to “drive a wedge between the unions and the civil rights community.”¹⁰ Lichtenstein explains that AFL-CIO leaders were themselves representative of a culturally conservative generation that “battled communism,” experienced “great internal difficulty when it came to confronting embedded patterns of racial discrimination” in its ranks.¹¹ While the AFL-CIO expressed public support for the civil rights acts of the early 1960s, it refused to support the 1963 March on Washington and viewed many affirmative action programs as a threat to seniority—a “part of the moral economy of the work regime...representing the most important ‘property’ interest a worker held in his job.”¹² Both Lichtenstein and Cowie argue that Nixon recognized the roots of labor’s opposition to affirmative action, and the movement’s increasingly fragile relationship with civil rights leaders, and therefore advocated for the Philadelphia Plan to exacerbate these tensions.

An Unreciprocated Desire to Remain United

Understanding the importance of the Democratic coalition to achieving substantive policy successes that would benefit African Americans, civil rights leaders harbored a strong desire to try and salvage their relationship with the labor movement in the late 1960s. Even after President Nixon’s outreach to the African American community at the beginning of his Presidency, civil rights leadership still viewed the new Republican White House as a foe. Black leaders believed that a continued partnership with the labor movement was essential to being able to effectively fight for progressive policy while a Republican occupied the White House. In a 1968 letter to George Meany, Roy Wilkins, Chairman of the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, said that with “the new Administration and the new Congress...it [is] imperative that we strengthen and

¹⁰ Nelson Lichtenstein, *State of the Union: A Century of American Labor* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 206.

¹¹ Ibid, 187.

¹² Ibid, 206.

expand our collective efforts.”¹³ Wilkins believed that the partnership with labor had been a successful one, encompassing “efforts on behalf of minimum wage, guaranteed jobs, [National Labor Relations Board] coverage for farm labor, housing, and education”¹⁴ After extolling the benefits of the partnership between civil rights and labor, Wilkins made his yearly plea to Meany for a financial contribution from the AFL-CIO to be placed in the coffers of the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights.¹⁵ Only a few months after sending this letter to Meany, in August 1969 Wilkins once again solicited a financial donation from the AFL-CIO,¹⁶ only to request another contribution the following year in September 1970.¹⁷ In his letters, Wilkins routinely praised the bonds between civil rights leadership and the labor movement—insisting that together they could “deal with the growing complexity of social and economic issues that confront all of us working for full equality.”¹⁸ In contrast, while Meany would always enclose checks in his responses to Wilkins,¹⁹ his responses to Wilkins were short and curt, revealing an unreciprocated desire to strengthen the partnership between the AFL-CIO and civil rights leaders.²⁰

While the civil rights movement’s progressive policy goals had little in common with

¹³ Roy Wilkins to George Meany, February 3, 1969, box 31, folder 24, The George Meany Memorial Archives, Office of the President, George Meany Files, 1956-1980, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Roy Wilkins to George Meany, August 4, 1969, box 31, folder 24, The George Meany Memorial Archives, Office of the President, George Meany Files, 1956-1980, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland.

¹⁷ Roy Wilkins to George Meany, September 22, 1970, box 31, folder 24, The George Meany Memorial Archives, Office of the President, George Meany Files, 1956-1980, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ In his August 1969 and September 1970 letters, Wilkins asked Meany to double the typical AFL-CIO donation to the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, increasing it from \$10,000 to \$20,000. However, Meany never agreed to Wilkins’ request, giving only \$10,000 per year.

²⁰ George Meany to Roy Wilkins, March 6, 1969, box 31, folder 24, The George Meany Memorial Archives, Office of the President, George Meany Files, 1956-1980, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland.

Nixon's conservative ideology, rank-and-file union members did find common ground with Nixon, and therefore felt less insecure about the prospect of a shattering Democratic coalition. In addition to being Vietnam war hawks, many rank-and-file union members aligned culturally with President Nixon—they were disillusioned with the women's rights and civil rights movements that helped define the liberalism of the sixties and, were "tough, blunt, gutsy, and operat[ed] outside the political mainstream."²¹ Many labor leaders and rank-and-file members who "seethed in resentment against liberals" felt a cultural link with the new President—desiring what they viewed as a restoration of law and order—even as the labor movement recognized the rift between their economic policy goals and Nixon's espoused domestic policy priorities.²² While the civil rights movement viewed the Nixon Administration as a genuine threat to black progress, the labor movement approached the Nixon Administration cautiously, skeptical of the new President's economic policies, but excited to inaugurate a President who would eradicate the liberal consensus. Wilkins' letters to Meany, and Meany's responses, therefore, can be situated in a useful historical context: whereas Wilkins felt intense pressure to maintain an alliance that could combat Nixon's policies, Meany was less eager to invest heavily in saving a partnership that seemed doomed to collapse.

Eruption of Anger and a Dying Coalition

Although civil rights leaders harbored deeply rooted anxieties about the fate of racial progress under a conservative Nixon White House, and therefore desperately wanted to maintain a working alliance with the labor movement, even before the Philadelphia Plan was passed, civil rights leaders began to express anger toward the discriminatory practices of labor unions. At the 1968 Convention of the United Steelworkers of America in Chicago, Illinois, members of a

²¹ Edmund F. Wehrle, "Partisan for the Hard Hats': Charles Colson, George Meany, and the Failed Blue-Collar Strategy," *Labor: Studies in the Working Class History of the Americas* 5, no. 3 (September 2008): 46.

²² *Ibid.*, 47.

nationwide caucus of black steelworkers handed out a series of leaflets bemoaning what they viewed as racist practices perpetuated by the labor unions.²³ In these leaflets, members of the caucus argued that “the time has come for black workers to speak and act for ourselves. We make no apologies for the fact that we as black workers and loyal trade unionists now act on our own behalf. Furthermore we are fully prepared to do so.”²⁴ These caucus members did not view their message as a baseless request; rather they believed that unity among black workers was essential to protecting African Americans against the discriminatory practices of labor unions. According to one of the leaflets distributed by caucus members:

“The present director of the AFL-CIO Civil Rights Department [Donald Slaiman] has no involvement with Negro workers and their problems. He does not know of our problems. He does not represent us. He does not act in our interests. We believe we speak for many thousands of Negro workers not only in the Steelworkers Union but in other AFL-CIO affiliates with large Negro memberships when we demand the replacement of a white paternalist with a Black trade unionist.”²⁵

Herbert Hill, Labor Director for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), echoed the sentiments of the caucus members, and foreshadowed the coming conflict between the labor movement and African Americans fighting for equality in the workplace: “The racial intransigence and insensitivity of many labor unions to the interests of the black community and to the increasing radicalization of Negro demands suggest sharp confrontations in the near future.”²⁶

While African Americans did indeed vocalize their frustration with, and anger toward the labor movement, this proclamation of grievances did not exist in isolation, but rather led to the

²³ Herbert Hill, “Black Protest and the Struggle for Union Democracy,” *Issues in Industrial Society*, New York State School of Industrial and Labor Relations, Cornell University, The George Meany Memorial Archives, Office of the President, George Meany Files, 1956-1980, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

formation of independent black unions. Frustrated with the “adamant resistance of organized labor to Negro demands for fundamental changes in racial policies and practices,” Herbert Hill argued that several “black unions and black caucuses with unions” developed to illustrate that black workers were committed to fighting for what they believed to be fundamental rights that labor unions were denying them.²⁷ These independent black unions, which sprung up all over the country in the late 1960s and early 1970s, were unaffiliated with umbrella union organizations such as the AFL-CIO and represented workers who engaged in a wide array of different trades. These independent unions included: The Independent Alliance of Skilled Crafts in Ohio, the Maryland Freedom Labor Union, the United Community Construction Workers of Boston, the United Construction and Trade Union in Detroit, the Allied Workers International Union in Gary, and comparable groups in Seattle, Chicago, and Oakland. Moreover, “in several cities, including Detroit, Philadelphia, and Chicago, sharp differences...developed between Negro teachers and the American Federation of Teachers on educational issues vital to the Negro community.”²⁸ Consequently, black teachers organized, forming independent teachers unions and black caucuses in many cities across the country.²⁹ The emergence of independent black unions—and even the development of black caucuses within preexisting trade unions—accentuates the frustrations felt by many African American workers in the late 1960s. These workers believed that to achieve equal treatment in the workplace they could no longer rely on the existing labor union structure, but instead had to form their own entities that could advocate on behalf of oppressed black workers. Indeed, “the growth of [black unions and caucuses] attests to their appeal to two groups of black workers: those Negroes who live and work in ghetto areas where AFL unions make no attempt to organize and those Negroes in the building trades who,

²⁷ Herbert Hill, “Black Protest and the Struggle for Union Democracy.”

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

having been denied admission to AFL-CIO craft unions, are attracted to black-controlled hiring halls.”³⁰ Even AFL-CIO officials, including Don Slaiman, expressed concern that Black Power was infiltrating the labor movement, a consequence he attributed to the unhappiness of black union members.³¹

Just as the formation of independent black labor unions in the 1960s reveals the tangible results of black anger toward the labor movement, the proliferation of litigation in the 1960s—cases protesting the treatment of black workers in the workplace—reveals that African Americans were beginning to feel compelled to take proactive steps to mitigate the effects of a perceived racist and impenetrably hierarchical labor union structure. For example, in his address to the Sixty-First Annual NAACP Convention in Cincinnati, Ohio, Herbert Hill spoke at length about the implications of a landmark case sponsored by the NAACP, *Ethridge v. Rhodes*, that he believed established legal principles that undergirded the rationale for issuing the revised Philadelphia Plan.³² The aforementioned case “arose after two Negro craftsmen in Columbus, Ohio had unsuccessfully attempted to join local crafts unions and had been told by contractors that union membership was a prerequisite for employment in their companies.”³³ Therefore, by denying the black craftsmen union membership, the union was effectively denying them opportunities for employment. Moreover, the “State of Ohio...waived provisions of the Governor’s executive order designed to ensure equal job opportunities for Negroes.”³⁴ After hearing about the unfortunate fate of black workers in Ohio, the NAACP decided to sponsor a

³⁰ Herbert Hill, “Black Protest and the Struggle for Union Democracy.”

³¹ Don Slaiman to Lane Kirkland, April 9, 1969, box 31, folder 24, The George Meany Memorial Archives, Office of the President, George Meany Files, 1956-1980, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland.

³² Herbert Hill, Address at the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Sixty-First Annual Convention, June 30, 1970, Cincinnati, Ohio, box 34, folder 14, The George Meany Memorial Archives, Office of the President, George Meany Files, 1956-1980, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland.

³³ Lewis M. Steel, “Effective Action in Equity to Insure Equal Job Opportunities: *Ethridge v. Rhodes*,” *Law in Transition Quarterly* 4, no. 1 (March 1967): 75.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

class-action lawsuit, revealing the commitment of the NAACP to eradicating discrimination within labor unions. By bringing suit, the NAACP also revealed its belief that it could not end what it believed to be the racist practices of labor unions by only working with unions and attempting to persuade them to alter their practices; rather, civil rights leaders believed that to promote fairer employment practices, they needed to rely on the courts.

Just as the vocalization of anger by civil rights groups toward labor unions, the formation of independent black unions, and the proliferation of litigation aimed at ending discriminatory labor practices all signaled a belief among civil rights leaders that the alliance between civil rights groups and organized labor was broken beyond repair, by the late-1960s, the labor movement also believed that the Democratic coalition was unsalvageable. Indeed, when President Nixon proposed the revised Philadelphia Plan in late-1969, labor movement leaders understood that many of their typical allies—progressive Democrats who supported civil rights efforts—would support Nixon’s efforts. However, the AFL-CIO was more concerned with protecting the interests of union members, and maintaining the integrity of union culture than with appeasing their allies in Congress, even if this meant delivering a deathblow to their alliance with progressive advocates for civil rights. Instead of working with the labor movement and with legislators committed to protecting minorities in the workplace, the AFL-CIO joined forces with unlikely allies who often vehemently opposed the ideals and practices of the labor movement—“Southern Democrats and conservative Republicans”—to “[drum] up votes against the Nixon Administration’s ‘Philadelphia Plan’ to provide more construction jobs for Negroes.”³⁵ The AFL-CIO was not embarrassed that they were courting traditional foes “like Sen. Barry Goldwater of Arizona and Sen. Peter H. Dominick of Colorado [who were] almost never found

³⁵ Stanley Levey, “AFL-CIO Lobby Labors in Vain: How AFL-CIO Lost of Philly Plan,” *The Pittsburgh Press*, December 23, 1969, box 35, folder 2, The George Meany Memorial Archives, Office of the President, George Meany Files, 1956-1980, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland.

on labor's side."³⁶ Instead, by saying that ““when we lobby, we lobby with all members,”” labor leaders expressed pride in their ability to court Senators who had not only long opposed collective bargaining rights, but who staunchly opposed efforts made by civil rights groups to boost minority hiring in the workplace.³⁷

In addition to courting unlikely allies in their effort to kill the Philadelphia Plan, by adamantly opposing the revised Philadelphia Plan even though they were aware of Nixon's political motives for introducing it—to drive a wedge between labor and civil rights—the labor movement revealed its belief that the Democratic coalition was broken, and that attempts at preserving the coalition were not worth sacrificing important legislative goals. The American Labor Life Insurance Company, in its January 1970 “Labor Letter Newsletter”—a newsletter described by the company as “a service to our clients...America's union members”—explained that according to the AFL-CIO, “Nixon's support of the Philadelphia Plan [was an] attempt to drive a wedge between labor and minorities, and [to] cover for [a] GOP strategy to woo the south by appeasing segregationists.”³⁸ George Meany even asserted that the revised Philadelphia Plan was merely “a ‘concoction and contrivance of a bureaucrat's imagination’ used to win the Nixon administration a few ‘Brownie points’ [with civil rights groups] to offset its bad civil rights record.”³⁹ The basis for the labor movement's knowledge of Nixon's political motivations was not sheer speculation, but rather admission from sources within the Nixon White House. By late-1969, just after the Nixon Administration released the revised Philadelphia Plan, some people “who worked on the President's team [said] that they were skeptical of his motives. They did not

³⁶ Stanley Levey, “AFL-CIO Lobby Labors in Vain: How AFL-CIO Lost of Philly Plan.”

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ “Labor Letter Newsletter,” *American Labor Life Insurance Company* 3, no. 1 (January 1970), box 34, folder 6, The George Meany Memorial Archives, Office of the President, George Meany Files, 1956-1980, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland.

³⁹ Frank C. Porter, “Philadelphia Plan is Mask for Rights Lag, Meany Says,” *The Washington Post*, January 13, 1970, box 34, folder 6, The George Meany Memorial Archives, Office of the President, George Meany Files, 1956-1980, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland.

doubt...his commitment to minority employment, but they...privately suggested that he might have sensed political profit in pitting the civil rights movement against its natural allies in the labor movement.”⁴⁰ Labor leaders knew that a politically deft President was plotting to pit them against their traditional allies. They knew the choice was clear: work with civil rights leaders to craft a plan acceptable to both constituencies in the Democratic coalition, or pursue their own self-interests, thereby guaranteeing the success of Nixon’s political motives. Ultimately, the labor movement chose the latter, abandoning any efforts to save their alliance with civil rights groups, and instead exhausting their resources to doom the revised Philadelphia Plan to defeat.

While the issuance of the revised Philadelphia Plan helped expose the cleavages that divided organized labor and the civil rights movement, these divisions were not sudden, but rather reflected a deeply rooted ideological divide between the core constituencies of each interest group. In a December 1969 article in the *New York Times*, reporter John Herbers traced the relationship between Clarence M. Mitchell, Washington Director of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and Andrew J. Biemiller, chief lobbyist for the AFL-CIO, as a way of illustrating the fracturing of the labor-civil rights alliance.⁴¹ Although these two men both represented core elements of the civil rights lobby that “helped achieve landmark civil rights legislation throughout the [1960s],” by the end of the 1960s, they represented organizations with divergent views on Nixon’s revised Philadelphia Plan.⁴² This divergence “was a manifestation of a deeper division between the constituencies of the two men,” and a reflection

⁴⁰ Robert B. Semple Jr., “Philadelphia Plan: How White House Engineered Major Victory,” December 25, 1969, box 34, folder 6, The George Meany Memorial Archives, Office of the President, George Meany Files, 1956-1980, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland.

⁴¹ John Herbers, “Labor and Blacks Part Company,” *The New York Times*, December 28, 1969, box 34, folder 6, The George Meany Memorial Archives, Office of the President, George Meany Files, 1956-1980, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland.

⁴² *Ibid.*

of the “differences between the constituencies of the Johnson and Nixon Administrations.”⁴³

During the Johnson Administration, “the Democrats, with the coalition of urban interests, the poor and intellectuals, were able to move on a broad front in civil rights, but were so closely aligned with the labor organizations that they were reluctant to move with force against one of the strongholds of discrimination, the building trades.”⁴⁴ However, “the Nixon Administration, with its white, middle-class suburban base of support, is less attuned to civil rights in general but has no ties to prevent a movement against the labor unions.”⁴⁵ Consequently, according to Herbers, the Democratic coalition did not stick together during the Johnson Administration because its members saw eye-to-eye on most issues. Rather, President Johnson orchestrated several compromises between the civil rights movement and organized labor that helped preserve the coalition. For example, Johnson helped convince civil rights groups not to attack the building trades in exchange for a promise from organized labor to support civil rights legislation. Johnson knew that to succeed legislatively and electorally, Democrats needed both organized labor and the civil rights movement on the same team; so, he forged backroom deals to placate both sides. However, because President Nixon’s political support was not derived from either union members or civil rights activists, Nixon had no incentive to preserve the Democratic coalition, but instead thought it in his interest to destroy it. The maintenance of the labor-civil rights alliance during the Johnson years, and its abrupt collapse during the Nixon years suggests that what held the Democratic coalition together was not common interests or shared goals, but rather shrewd political calculations by the Johnson White House. Thus, when the former allies were faced with a stark choice during the early Nixon years—whether to support or oppose the revised Philadelphia Plan—both groups chose individual group interests over preserving the Democratic

⁴³ John Herbers, “Labor and Blacks Part Company.”

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

coalition.

Labor: Roots of Opposition

Although organized labor freely recognized that union practices did formerly involve discriminatory practices that adversely affected minority workers, by the 1960s union leaders expressed a belief that while certain small steps still needed to be taken to guarantee equal employment opportunities for minorities, the labor movement had already made substantial progress toward including black workers. In a speech honoring the eightieth birthday of A. Phillip Randolph, a famed civil rights leader who helped organize the 1963 March on Washington, George Meany acknowledged that “the trade union movement played a role in the pattern of discrimination and exploitation that marked the industrial life of our country in years gone by.”⁴⁶ However, Meany claimed that while “the trade union movement still ha[d] a job to do if it [wa]s to completely remove the specter of race discrimination from its ranks...it [was] not infrequent...to find unions and civil rights leaders working together to bring the benefits of unionism to the most exploited Negro.”⁴⁷ Certain concrete steps, such as helping improve “the skills of the Negro worker,” could be taken by the labor movement to help boost minority hiring, argued Meany, but this should not cloud the progress that the labor movement had already made toward ensuring equal treatment in the workplace.⁴⁸ The Philadelphia Plan, which imposed minority hiring goals on Philadelphia-area contractors, represented massive government overreach, designed to cure a problem that, according to organized labor, was already well on its way to being fixed.

⁴⁶ George Meany, “Address Honoring 80th Birthday of A. Phillip Randolph,” Waldorf-Astoria Hotel, New York City, May 6, 1969, box 31, folder 24, The George Meany Memorial Archives, Office of the President, George Meany Files, 1956-1980, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

In addition to addressing a problem that was already being steadily fixed, the labor movement argued that the Philadelphia Plan imposed an unrealistic burden on Philadelphia-area contractors—obliging them to hire African Americans even when most prospective minority workers did not have the training necessary to make effective employees. At a Press Conference following an AFL-CIO Executive Council Meeting in August 1970, George Meany explained that the Philadelphia Plan was fundamentally flawed because “contractor[s] ha[d] no labor supply of [their] own,” and they had “no way of creat[ing] or develop[ing] a labor supply.”⁴⁹ Contractors, according to labor leaders, had no way of meeting minority hiring goals because there were simply not enough trained black workers available for hire. Don Slaiman, at a 1970 Labor Department Panel, explained that the real reason for low levels of minority employment within labor unions was not overt discrimination, but rather because there were not enough qualified African Americans to work.⁵⁰ Slaiman argued that the Philadelphia Plan was based on a false premise: “that there were outside of the union thousands of already qualified [workers] in these trades who weren’t in the union. The government said so. But they can’t produce them.”⁵¹ Because it provided no means to train minority workers, “the Philadelphia Plan provide[d] no means for achieving [its] ranges or quotas. It surely d[id] not indicate at all how minority workers c[ould] become part of the permanent work force in those unions whose small minority

⁴⁹ George Meany, Press Conference at AFL-CIO Executive Council Meeting, August 3, 1970, Chicago, Illinois, box 34, folder 14, The George Meany Memorial Archives, Office of the President, George Meany Files, 1956-1980, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland.

⁵⁰ Labor Department Panel on Philadelphia Plan, August 27, 1969, box 34, folder 13, The George Meany Memorial Archives, Office of the President, George Meany Files, 1956-1980, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland.

⁵¹ *The Advocate*, “Should the Philadelphia Plan be extended to all federal and federally assisted construction?” June 29, 1971, on PBS, box 31, folder 25, The George Meany Memorial Archives, Office of the President, George Meany Files, 1956-1980, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland.

membership the plan seem[ed] to be directed toward increasing.”⁵² Thus, organized labor viewed the Plan not as a sincere effort to boost minority hiring, but as an “ill-conceived political gimmick” that would force employers to hire droves of unqualified workers.⁵³

Organized labor’s opposition to the Philadelphia Plan was not simply defined by a chorus of complaints; rather, they argued that the labor movement already had robust programs in place that offered prospective black union members opportunities to receive adequate training for an eclectic range of trades. Labor leaders maintained that they were committed to providing training opportunities to minorities, as evidenced by labor’s large-scale initiative: Operation Outreach. In August 1969 testimony delivered at a U.S. Department of Labor public hearing, James Loughlin, Business Manager of the AFL-CIO’s Building and Construction Trades Council of Philadelphia and Vicinity, described Operation Outreach as “a plan entered into by agreement between the government, the Building Trades Councils and other interested parties by which the use of government funded monies, minority or negro youth are recruited for purposes of preparation for apprenticeship training and it involves special efforts to bring such youth into existing apprenticeship training programs by affirmative action.”⁵⁴ Labor leaders argued that as part of Operation Outreach, they also made genuine attempts to reach out to federal officials, including John Wilkes, Director of the Labor Department’s Office of Federal Compliance, to secure

⁵² Don Slaiman to Lane Kirkland, Memorandum: Notes on Philadelphia Plan, October 9, 1970, box 34, folder 14, The George Meany Memorial Archives, Office of the President, George Meany Files, 1956-1980, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ James L. Loughlin, Testimony on the Revised Philadelphia Plan, August 27, 1969, Public Hearings, U.S. Department of Labor, Philadelphia Pennsylvania, box 34, folder 9, The George Meany Memorial Archives, Office of the President, George Meany Files, 1956-1980, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland.

government support for the program.⁵⁵ In testimony at a Labor Department public hearing about the revised Philadelphia Plan, Loughlin touted Operation Outreach's successes:

“In Philadelphia, for the sum of \$59,000 the original goal set by the agreement with the government for the year 1968-1969 was the bringing in of fifty such youth. The goal was revised to sixty. The initial goal has been exceeded by some thirty-three and the results of Operation Outreach have been to bring into apprenticeship training programs throughout the crafts some eighty-three Negro youth who were recruited for this purpose.”⁵⁶

Loughlin, however, was not the only AFL-CIO official to cite the success of Operation Outreach as a way of justifying organized labor's opposition to the revised Philadelphia Plan. In a February 1970 press conference, George Meany argued that the revised Philadelphia Plan “could never do anything to solve the problem [of low minority employment] because the problem has got to be solved by getting black youngsters into the trades. Getting them trained, the same as we are doing through ‘Operation Outreach.’”⁵⁷ Even reporter Stanley Levey, a noted and widely respected American journalist, wrote that the AFL-CIO used its outreach programs as justification for opposing the Philadelphia Plan:

“The AFL-CIO takes the position that the Administration Plan is an ‘unrealistic and unfeasible’ way of doing the job. It contends that construction unions are doing it better through a so-called ‘outreach program’ that have been in operation for three years in cooperation with the Labor Dept., the Urban League and other various other groups working in the civil rights and social welfare fields. Under the outreach program, the building unions seek out, train and counsel minority group members in the skills, aptitudes, and attitudes necessary to become an apprentice in one of the construction trades.”⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Robert McGlotten to Don Slaiman, Memorandum: Philadelphia, May 7, 1970, box 34, folder 14, The George Meany Memorial Archives, Office of the President, George Meany Files, 1956-1980, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ George Meany, Press Conference at AFL-CIO Executive Council Meeting, February, 1970, Bal Harbour, Florida, box 34, folder 14, The George Meany Memorial Archives, Office of the President, George Meany Files, 1956-1980, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland.

⁵⁸ Stanley Levey, “AFL-CIO Lobby Labors in Vain: How AFL-CIO Lost of Philly Plan,” *The Pittsburgh Press*, December 23, 1969, box 35, folder 2, The George Meany Memorial Archives, Office of the President, George Meany Files, 1956-1980, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland.

Levey, in a *Washington Daily News* article published in July 1969, even corroborated organized labor's claims that Operation Outreach had yielded some successes, noting that by mid-1969 the program had effectively trained 3,400 new black apprentices.⁵⁹ Only through these training efforts, labor officials argued, could black workers be effectively trained, and thus be truly empowered. As Don Slaiman noted: "one cannot make skilled journeymen with a magic wand. Perhaps, maybe mathematical formulas can be concocted to beat a roulette wheel. There is no numbers game that can make instant journeymen."⁶⁰

While organized labor's opposition to the revised Philadelphia Plan was indeed partly rooted in its belief that the plan forced employers to hire untrained workers, labor leaders also argued that the plan would obliterate traditional union culture, threatening the seniority and apprenticeship systems that had long been so central to union ethos. Even before Nixon officially released his plan, the Philadelphia, Pennsylvania Building and Construction Trades Council authored a resolution condemning the plan for failing to protect the integrity of union culture. The resolution claimed that the plan would "lower established wage rates, conditions, and standards of employment earned during many years of sacrifice and effort," and would "defeat or demoralize apprenticeship training as established by so very many years of experience, trial and error and which is so important in the development of qualified skilled craftsmen necessary in building construction."⁶¹ Thus, instead of requiring prospective employees to attend years of apprenticeship training, and rewarding workers who committed themselves to mastering their

⁵⁹ Stanley Levey, "Management, Labor Fight Federal Decree for 'Quota' Hiring," *The Washington Daily News*, July 17, 1969, box 35, folder 2, The George Meany Memorial Archives, Office of the President, George Meany Files, 1956-1980, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland.

⁶⁰ Don Slaiman to Lane Kirkland, Memorandum: Notes on Philadelphia Plan, October 9, 1970, box 34, folder 14, The George Meany Memorial Archives, Office of the President, George Meany Files, 1956-1980, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland.

⁶¹ Philadelphia, Pennsylvania Building and Construction Trades Council Resolution, September 5, 1969, box 34, folder 13, The George Meany Memorial Archives, Office of the President, George Meany Files, 1956-1980, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland.

trade, the Philadelphia Plan destroyed this culture, and permitted untrained and unskilled employees to receive the same benefits as workers who spent years practicing their trade. Moreover, union leaders begrudged what they viewed as an inevitable consequence of Nixon's plan—undercutting “the union securities which [were] so important for existing members.”⁶² While potentially bringing new minority workers into the workforce, labor leaders believed the plan would cause “a great deal of resentment among the people who are trying to do that real job”—existing union members.⁶³ If contractors were obliged to hire untrained workers just to meet hiring goals, that could threaten the jobs of existing union members—people who in many cases spent years attempting to master their trade.

While labor leaders worried that the revised Philadelphia Plan would threaten union culture, rank-and-file union members opposed the Plan because they worried it would threaten their jobs. In the late 1960s, and into the early 1970s, it was growing increasingly difficult to remain in the middle class. The number of available well-paying blue-collar jobs was shrinking, being replaced instead by lower-class non-union jobs that required little training. In the early 1970s “stagflation—stagnant wages and rising prices—first reared its ugly head as the cost of living inched upward, accompanied by rising unemployment. The hard hats were hardest hit. By mid-1971, unemployment among construction workers stood at twice the national average with some trades edging toward 50 percent unemployment.”⁶⁴ Consequently, “rank-and-file members of the building trades...the newest members of the affluent society...want[ed] to keep the door

⁶² Labor Department Panel on Philadelphia Plan, August 27, 1969, box 34, folder 13, The George Meany Memorial Archives, Office of the President, George Meany Files, 1956-1980, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland.

⁶³ George Meany, Press Conference at AFL-CIO Executive Council Meeting, February, 1970, Bal Harbour, Florida, box 34, folder 14, The George Meany Memorial Archives, Office of the President, George Meany Files, 1956-1980, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland.

⁶⁴ Edmund F. Wehrle, “‘Partisan for the Hard Hats’: Charles Colson, George Meany, and the Failed Blue-Collar Strategy,” *Labor: Studies in the Working Class History of the Americas* 5, no. 3 (September 2008): 54.

closed to ‘outsiders’ to protect their jobs and pay scales.”⁶⁵ For many rank-and-file union members, opposition to the Philadelphia Plan was not rooted in denying that fact that minorities “want[ed] their [fair] share of construction jobs.”⁶⁶ Indeed, many “union leaders and the federal government want[ed] to give them a fair share” of jobs, but for the average union worker, stopping the revised Philadelphia Plan was a matter of self-preservation—a simple choice about limiting the competition for a shrinking number of well-paying middle class jobs.⁶⁷

Aside from rank-and-file opposition that was rooted in practical economic considerations, many labor leaders opposed the revised Philadelphia Plan because they thought it to be an illegal quota—a gross expansion of government into the realm of private industry. According to C.J. Haggerty, President of the AFL-CIO’s Building and Construction Trades Department, the hiring goals listed in the revised Philadelphia Plan represented a quota system that was not consistent with the intent of Executive Order 11246—an executive order first issued by President Kennedy and then reissued by President Nixon in conjunction with the rollout of his Philadelphia Plan.⁶⁸ Haggerty argued that the Nixon Administration should be mindful of the original intent of Kennedy’s executive order:

“President Kennedy who issued the first Executive Order on discrimination in Federal employment and in private construction employment financed by the Federal Government was asked at a press conference in August 1963 what his views were with respect to the quota system. He explicitly rejected the idea and said among other things: ‘So, I don’t think we could undo the past...I don’t think quotas are a good idea...we’re too mixed a society of ours, to begin to divide ourselves in the basis of race or color.’”

⁶⁵ Harold Chucker, “Racial Conflict in Construction,” *Minneapolis Star*, box 35, folder 2, The George Meany Memorial Archives, Office of the President, George Meany Files, 1956-1980, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ C.J. Haggerty, “Statement Before Subcommittee of the U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary,” October 28, 1969, box 34, folder 14, The George Meany Memorial Archives, Office of the President, George Meany Files, 1956-1980, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland.

In addition to violating the original intent of the Executive Order that was used by Nixon to justify the Philadelphia Plan's goals, John Lyons, General President of the International Association of Bridge, Structural, and Ornamental Iron Workers—an association representing four Philadelphia-area unions impacted by Nixon's Plan—argued that the Plan was also “illegal [because] it violate[d] the prohibition against quotas in the Civil Rights Act.”⁶⁹ “Attempts to fulfill the suggested quotas,” according to Lyons, “w[ould] require job opportunity consideration based on race which is illegal and the very thing that the Civil Rights Act attempt[ed] to eliminate.”⁷⁰ Even WTOP Radio—a respected Washington D.C. area radio station—read an editorial on-air to support labor's position that the Philadelphia Plan was a quota. While the radio station recognized that “many craft unions...ha[d] an atrocious history of excluding blacks,” it still maintained that “there's a lot of rationalizing going on in an attempt to make a ‘goal’ different from a ‘quota.’ As an illustration, *The Washington Post* decreed the employment floor [to be] acceptable. But a hiring requirement based on race is wrong—whatever the color, whatever it's called.”⁷¹ Emboldened by a belief that Nixon's plan violated a statutory prohibition against quotas, the AFL-CIO Building and Construction Trades Department even filed an *amicus curie* brief in a 1970 court case that challenged the legality of the revised Philadelphia Plan, *Contractors Association of Eastern Pennsylvania and Morrissey, et al. v. The Secretary of Labor*. In the brief, the AFL-CIO argued:

“Petitioners believe that the Philadelphia Plan is violative of the Executive Order under which it purports to have been issued, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Labor Management Relations Act of 1947, as amended, the Pennsylvania Human Relations Act and other applicable legislation. In having such a plan promulgated

⁶⁹ John Lyons to Sam J. Ervin, November 17, 1969, box 34, folder 14, The George Meany Memorial Archives, Office of the President, George Meany Files, 1956-1980, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Norman Davis, “The Philadelphia Plan,” WTOP Editorial, Broadcast January 20 and 21, 1970, Washington D.C., box 34, folder 14, The George Meany Memorial Archives, Office of the President, George Meany Files, 1956-1980, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland.

and applied in violation of all such existing legislation, the rights of Petitioners, the collective bargaining of their members, the interests of individual members are all being improperly adversely affected.”⁷²

By writing an *amicus curie* brief arguing against the legality of Nixon’s plan, organized labor revealed the sincerity of its belief that not only was the Philadelphia Plan bad for rank-and-file union members, and not only did the Plan fail to provide a means to train black workers, but it established an illegal quota system that baselessly mandated the hiring of a predetermined number of black workers.

The Civil Rights Movement: Underpinnings of Support

While organized labor, in its opposition to the revised Philadelphia Plan, claimed that the labor movement had made significant progress combating low minority employment levels, civil rights groups maintained that aggressive government action was needed to increase what they believed to be embarrassingly low levels of black employment in union trades. According to Delores Tucker, Vice President of the Pennsylvania NAACP, “black people have systematically been kept out of the building and construction trade industry, and the apprenticeship and journeymen programs.”⁷³ Although “black people represent over 30% of the population” in Philadelphia, civil rights leaders lamented that African Americans made up “less than one-half of one-percent” of the membership in Philadelphia’s seven trade unions.⁷⁴ The black employment picture in better-paying crafts was even bleaker. Even “Labor Department figures,” civil rights groups argued, “show[ed] that in many cities blacks comprise[d] less than two percent of the

⁷² Project Outline of the Building and Construction Trades Council of Philadelphia and Vicinity, AFL-CIO, box 34, folder 14, The George Meany Memorial Archives, Office of the President, George Meany Files, 1956-1980, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland.

⁷³ C. Delores Tucker, Testimony on the Revised Philadelphia Plan, August 27, 1969, Public Hearings, U.S. Department of Labor, Philadelphia Pennsylvania, box 34, folder 13, The George Meany Memorial Archives, Office of the President, George Meany Files, 1956-1980, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

workforce in the better-paid crafts.”⁷⁵ And, black workers even accused the AFL-CIO of trying “to smother that fact with minority employment figures in other crafts, but these involve most dead-end or dying skills.”⁷⁶ Tucker, and other civil rights leaders, including Herbert Hill, believed that low levels of black employment were not simply coincidental, but that “for generations there ha[d] been an unofficial quota system established by the discriminatory construction unions against the employment of black workers in the craft occupations.”⁷⁷ To civil rights groups, the Philadelphia Plan was needed to eradicate systematic racial injustice within labor unions— “the unofficial quota system which rigidly enforced the exclusion or limitation of black workers from jobs in federally financed construction.”⁷⁸

While organized labor argued that existing programs, including Operation Outreach, were successfully increasing black employment in union trades, civil rights groups maintained that the programs were ineffective, and therefore a more sweeping program like the revised Philadelphia Plan was needed to end decades of racial injustice. In Philadelphia, while “some industry unions and voices [were] asking for more time for internal reform” in the late 1960s, civil rights leaders posited that “during the entire history of these unions, internal reform has produced only 23 black youths in apprenticeship programs of the seven unions cited by the government” of Philadelphia.⁷⁹ Organized labor touted Operation Outreach as an effort that was successfully increasing black employment in trade unions, but civil rights leaders argued that “Outreach programs...[were], in fact, another device to perpetuate the racial status quo in the building

⁷⁵ Norman Davis, “The Philadelphia Plan,” WTOP Editorial, Broadcast January 20 and 21, 1970, Washington D.C., box 34, folder 14, The George Meany Memorial Archives, Office of the President, George Meany Files, 1956-1980, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Herbert Hill, Address at the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Sixty-First Annual Convention, June 30, 1970, Cincinnati, Ohio, box 34, folder 14, The George Meany Memorial Archives, Office of the President, George Meany Files, 1956-1980, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ C. Delores Tucker, “Testimony on the Revised Philadelphia Plan.”

trades.”⁸⁰ They noted that an examination “of data from the Manpower Administration of the U.S. Department of Labor reveals that well over half of all those in the Outreach programs [were] concentrated in the job classifications where, traditionally, there has always been a high percentage of black workers, such as, carpenters and the various towel trades or ‘mud jobs.’”⁸¹ Moreover “in several cities, including Newark and Buffalo, black youth who graduated from Outreach apprenticeship programs and were certified as fully competent craftsmen [were still] denied journeymen membership status in several craft unions.”⁸² Consequently, even if these programs were effectively training black workers—a dubious assumption—employers were still not hiring them, or were giving them unsustainable short-term jobs, largely because hiring halls, “mechanism[s] for matching qualified workers with transient and frequently short-lived employment opportunities” in the construction trades, allowed for easy discrimination of prospective black employees.⁸³ In a hiring hall, the dispatcher, often a white union official in charge of matching employee with employer, would “discriminatorily match jobs by referring his friends to the longer term jobs while sending other applicants to the shorter jobs.”⁸⁴ And, many black workers that were indeed being trained and hired were being shuffled into trades that already had high levels of black employment—a practice that inhibited black workers’ ability to expand into new, potentially more lucrative trades.

Even Labor Department programs that were designed to boost black hiring, according to civil rights leaders, were ineffective in their efforts to increase black representation in labor

⁸⁰ Herbert Hill, Address at the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Sixty-First Annual Convention, June 30, 1970, Cincinnati, Ohio, box 34, folder 14, The George Meany Memorial Archives, Office of the President, George Meany Files, 1956-1980, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Barbara J. Fick, “Political Abuse of Hiring Halls: Comparative Treatment Under the NLRA and LMRDA,” *Industrial Relations Law Journal* 9, no. 3 (1987), 341.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 347.

unions. Soon after Nixon proposed the revised Philadelphia Plan, the Labor Department launched a program entitled, “home-town” solutions—an effort to persuade cities to develop plans that placed “hiring goals on businesses with federal contracts exceeding \$50,000.”⁸⁵ Hometown solutions contained no enforcement mechanisms, and “employed negotiation and mediation rather than coercion and punishment.”⁸⁶ To the chagrin of civil rights groups, “lacking funds and personnel, the Labor Department failed to police the mushrooming number of hometown plans.”⁸⁷ Black leaders argued, “home-town solutions perpetuate control of entry into construction industry jobs by the building trades unions and employers who have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo. Continued control of job opportunities by the racist building trades unions is the heart of the matter.”⁸⁸ Only by placing explicit obligations on employers—mandates to hire a certain number of black workers—would the Department of Labor be able to break the white racial hierarchy that excluded blacks from union ranks. Frustrated with the lack of progress made by the hometown solutions, and viewing the revised Philadelphia Plan as a program that had the potential to place a mandate to hire black workers on employers, civil rights groups decided to support Nixon’s Plan.

Whereas organized labor believed the revised Philadelphia Plan to be an illegal quota, civil rights groups predicated their support for Nixon’s Plan on asserting that it was not illegal, but rather was merely one step that built on the goals of previously enacted legislation. In a letter to President Nixon in July 1969, Whitney Young, President of the National Urban League, an influential civil rights organization, argued that not only was the “affirmative action of the Labor

⁸⁵ Dean J. Kotlowski, *Nixon’s Civil Rights: Politics, Principle, and Policy* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2002), 110.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Herbert Hill, Address at the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Sixty-First Annual Convention, June 30, 1970, Cincinnati, Ohio, box 34, folder 14, The George Meany Memorial Archives, Office of the President, George Meany Files, 1956-1980, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland.

Department's Philadelphia Plan...[the] first positive step of [the] new administration," but that "it [was] in keeping with the equal opportunity compliance standard set by the federal government."⁸⁹ Young did not believe that Nixon's Plan violated Civil Rights Act, but rather that the underpinnings of the Plan "[grew] out of already enacted legislation."⁹⁰ Thus, Young, speaking on behalf of the millions of African Americans affiliated with the National Urban League, argued that the "Philadelphia Plan should become model for rest of nation" and "should be put into effect in the rest of the country without delay."⁹¹ Labor Secretary George Schultz corroborated Young's argument that the Plan did not qualify as a quota, positing in a 1969 interview that the hiring goals in the Plan were "really the kind of objective that you use in any kind of management process and are not a quota. A quota historically in this country has been a device for excluding people and these goals are devices you might say for including people."⁹²

Conclusion

Closely aligned through the middle twentieth century, by the end of the 1960s, the partnership between organized labor and the civil rights movement began to fray. However, this fracturing alliance was only a microcosm of the quickly disintegrating Democratic coalition—the bond that had kept the Democrats largely in control of Congress and the White House since the New Deal. Party realignment—engendered by a disappearing of the "solid south" and a backlash of middle-class whites against some aspects of 1960s liberalism—fueled the break-up of the Democratic coalition, and two of its central constituencies, civil rights and organized labor. By the time President Nixon introduced his revised Philadelphia Plan in late-1969, both

⁸⁹ Whitney Young to Richard Nixon, July 21, 1969, box 34, folder 14, The George Meany Memorial Archives, Office of the President, George Meany Files, 1956-1980, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Interview of Secretary Schultz, Today Show, December 27, 1969, box 34, folder 13, The George Meany Memorial Archives, Office of the President, George Meany Files, 1956-1980, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland.

interest groups had determined that pursuing their own self-interests would be more fruitful than trying to preserve a dead coalition. Thus, civil rights and labor found themselves on opposite sides of a bruising political fight, with civil rights groups leading the charge in favor of Nixon's plan to boost black representation in Philadelphia-area union trades, and organized labor fighting desperately to oppose a plan that they believed to be a threat to their culture and to the jobs of rank-and-file union members. Coalition politics was largely ignored in the fight over the implementation of the revised Philadelphia Plan. Instead, a politics of self-interest—a desire by both civil rights and organized labor to defend the interests of their constituents—illuminated what George Meany knew before his 1970 Labor Day Dinner at the White House: the Democratic coalition was already dead.

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