

ABSTRACT

Title of dissertation: A HISTORY OF THE INTERNATIONAL
LABOR COMMUNICATIONS ASSOCIATION

Matthew C. Bates, Doctor of Philosophy, 2012

Dissertation directed by: Professor Linda Steiner
Philip Merrill College of Journalism

Keywords: labor, unions, press, media, journalism, International Labor
Press Association, ILCA, ILPA, AFL-CIO, social
movements

This dissertation examines post-World War II debates within U.S. unions over the role and character of the labor press. I use archival sources and interviews to construct a history of the International Labor Communications Association (ILCA). The AFL-CIO created the ILCA (originally, the International Labor Press Association) in 1956 to strengthen communications with union members and the public. Representing hundreds of publications, the ILCA remains the only national organization of journalists working on behalf of U.S. unions. The debates over the role and character of union media are put in the context of social movement and organization theory.

Like most modern social movements, organized labor exists as both a set of bureaucratic institutions and as diffuse agglomerations of individuals struggling against dominant social actors. Policies and practices that prioritize the needs of union organizations and leaders (i.e. tendencies towards “business unionism”) frequently conflict with the needs and impulses of rank-and-file workers (“social movement unionism”). The debates I examine—a campaign in the 1960s to win AFL-CIO support for community-based labor newspapers; divisions among union editors and leaders in the 1980s and 1990s over the use of electronic technologies for national public relations instead of local campaigns; a dispute in the late 1990s over editorial freedom for union journalists—express the underlying tensions between business and social-movement

unionism. Movements use internal media to create member identities, define opponents, frame issues, and set goals. Debates over the content of movement media and who those media should mobilize are debates over the nature of the movement itself.

U.S. unions are shrinking in size and influence. I conclude that union media will be indispensable in any successful effort to spark a new workers' movement. Given the constraints imposed by union leaders on the labor press, however, I conclude that the chances of igniting a new movement will be greatly enhanced if union journalists collaborate outside the current union structures. Digital media and networks of progressive media activists offer unprecedented opportunities for union journalists to communicate with vast numbers of wage earners rapidly, and at relatively low cost.

A HISTORY OF THE
INTERNATIONAL LABOR COMMUNICATIONS ASSOCIATION

by

Matthew C. Bates

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
2012

Advisory Committee:

Professor Linda Steiner, Chair
Professor Maurine H. Beasley
Professor Kalyani Chadha
Professor Julie Greene
Professor Don Heider

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2012

DEDICATION

To Pamela, whose love and encouragement made this study possible.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS FOR ARCHIVAL SOURCES

ILCA Office, AFL-CIO Headquarters Building, Washington, D.C. (ILCA).

Special Collections, University of Maryland Libraries, College Park, Maryland (UML).

George Meany Memorial Archives, Silver Spring, Maryland (GMMA).

The personal papers of Gordon H. Cole are in the possession of the author (Cole Papers).

Chapter 1

Social Movement Theory and the Labor Press

Introduction and Disclosure

I have spent most of the past thirty years writing and editing for the U.S. labor movement. As a rank-and-file activist, I produced local union newsletters in my free time, before and after my shifts in the factories where I worked. As a paid, full-time editor, I produced a statewide newspaper for the Connecticut AFL-CIO. I also produced national publications during my fifteen years in the communications department of the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers and during my three years as an officer in one of the AFL-CIO's nine "constitutional departments." (See page 8.) I have handled membership communications and press relations during strikes, organizing drives, and contract talks involving tens of thousands of workers at Boeing, McDonnell Douglas, Lockheed-Martin, United Technologies Corp., and other companies.

Time and again, I have seen the power of the labor press to mobilize people for collective action. I have seen how effective union media can stimulate debate, build bonds of solidarity, and turn generalized discontent into steely resolve. I have also seen how ineffective union communications can sow division, confusion, and demoralization.

I was drawn to communications by the social movements of the 1960s. Everywhere I looked, people were coming together to fight against war, racism, poverty

and other injustices. And on each front of what was loosely called “the Movement,” activists were busy creating their own media—including colorful “underground” newspapers—to advance their cause. I turned to the alternative press for information about rallies, meetings, issues, and ideas—information that I and millions of others needed in order to organize effectively; information that the mainstream press typically distorted or refused to report. The alternative press was the public face of that diverse, sprawling movement, and its organizing center, too. It helped to educate and mobilize the already-committed. And it inspired others to get off the sidelines and into the fight.

When I first became involved in the unions, I found that the labor press served the labor movement in many of the same ways that the “underground” press served the radical movements of the 1960s. It provided news and information that workers needed but could not obtain through mainstream media outlets. It mobilized activists and helped draw new, or less active, members into the union’s orbit. But I quickly found some major differences, too. For many workers, the labor press was their only point of contact with the union. The civil rights and anti-war movements were characterized by mass mobilizations and participatory democracy. Most union members, however, never attended union meetings, rallies, or other events where they could interact with union leaders and activists, and take part in the life of the organization.¹ Consequently, much of what the average members knew about a union—and the wider labor movement—came

¹ George Strauss, *Union Democracy*, Working Paper Series, Institute for Research on Labor and Employment (Berkeley: University of California, May 1, 1991), 9. According to Strauss, between 2 percent and 6 percent of U.S. union members employed in manufacturing attend monthly union meetings.

from the pages of the union newspaper. I found the labor press was more than the public face of the union. In important ways, for many workers, it *was* the union.

Labor newspapers were not the “center of the action” of the trade union movement: Certainly not in the way that the alternative press was central to the movements of the 1960s. Most union officers—including imaginative, forward-looking leaders—seemed preoccupied with processing grievances, legislative lobbying, and contract negotiations. The labor publications were a secondary concern, at best. As a union editor, I often felt isolated and frustrated, and most of the union editors I have known felt the same. Often, they performed their journalistic duties after work and on weekends for little or no pay. Many of them burned out after a year or two, and quit.²

Much of the understanding and support I received came from other union journalists who were active in the International Labor Communications Association (ILCA). The ILCA sponsored conferences where we could commiserate, share ideas, and sharpen our skills. The ILCA allowed us to form networks and friendships with editors from the biggest union magazines to the tiniest mimeographed newsletters. We received mailings full of news about the labor press from all across the country. We met union leaders and mainstream reporters who seemed to grasp the importance of what we were trying to do.

This dissertation is a history of the International Labor Communications Association, the only national organization of union journalists in the post-World War II

² 1979 Membership Survey, International Labor Communications Association files, Washington, DC. (Hereafter cited as ILCA.) In 1979, 54 percent of ILPA members responding to a survey described themselves as part-time editors with other union duties and/or shop work occupying most of their time. Twenty-five percent of local union respondents said they received no compensation for their editorial work. Another 25 percent reported receiving nominal payments of less than \$100 per-issue.

period. In the interests of full disclosure, I have been active in the ILCA since the early 1980s, including one term on the executive council from 2004 to 2006. Whatever biases I bring to this study (conscious or not) will, I hope, be offset by the value of my first-hand knowledge of labor media and the ILCA.

Terminology

Editors employed by the newly-founded AFL-CIO and its affiliates created the International Labor Communications Association in 1956. Its original name was the International Labor Press Association (ILPA). I will use the acronym ILCA as my “default” reference, but when writing about a particular period I will use the organizational name or acronym appropriate to that time. Occasionally a quote or reference may use the name or acronym from a different period, but it should be understood that the ILPA and ILCA are one and the same organization.

I will make frequent references to four levels of union organization:

1. The American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO or the “federation”) is a voluntary, national association of trade unions. It was created in 1955 through a merger of the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). The AFL-CIO performs a number of functions for its member unions, which I refer to as “affiliates” or “affiliated unions.” The functions include political lobbying and campaigns, public relations, research, policy development, and

the regulation of inter-union relations.³ An organizational chart of the AFL-CIO appears on page 8.

2. National and international unions are, respectively, unions that operate solely within the U.S., and unions that operate within the U.S. as well as countries or territories outside the U.S. (e.g. Canada). For convenience's sake I follow a widely-accepted convention within organized labor and refer to both categories as "internationals," or "international unions." A chart showing the structure of a typical international union appears on page 9.
3. "Central Labor Councils" ("CLCs, or "central labor bodies") are subdivisions of the national AFL-CIO that represent unions at the state or municipal level. I will refer to all such organizations as CLCs, central labor bodies, or labor councils. When greater specificity is required, I will insert the words state or local (e.g. "state labor council," "local labor council," or "local CLC").⁴
4. Local unions, or locals, are the smallest subdivision within organized labor. They are the organizational units located closest to the union rank and file, and in which rank-and-file members are most active. Locals typically represent members of one union under contract to one employer or (in the

³ In the fall of 2005, six unions quit the AFL-CIO to found a new labor federation, Change to Win (CTW). Overwhelmingly, my research involves events that occurred prior to the split.

⁴ Pavy, Gordon, director of the AFL-CIO Department of Collective Bargaining, Nov. 4, 2009, telephone interview by author. Currently, there 51 state and 484 local central bodies in the U.S., many of which include unions affiliated with both the AFL-CIO and CTW.

case of amalgamated locals) members of one union working for and having contracts with several employers.⁵

I use the terms “labor press” and “union press” interchangeably to describe the publications affiliated with the ILCA. I do so to underscore the reality that in the post-World War II era, no press speaks broadly for all workers, organized and unorganized alike.⁶ As Chapter 3 explains, from the 1800s through the early 1940s, a rich variety of union and independent publications served large swathes of the U.S. working class. The destruction of the labor left and the consolidation of a federalized industrial relations system during the 1940s and early 1950s killed off most of the independent workers’ publications and effectively turned the U.S. labor press into a *union press*. Historically, the overwhelming majority of ILCA publications have circulated solely among union members and (to the extent that they read them) members of union households. As the following section shows, many union editors are also responsible for communicating with people outside the ranks of organized labor (e.g. with mainstream reporters and public officials), and I use the term “public relations” to describe those activities. I use the terms “publications” and “media” as catch-alls for all manner of communications (e.g. print, video, Internet, and radio).

As explained later in this chapter, the U.S. labor movement has a dual character. It exists simultaneously as a set of large, formal organizations and as diffuse groups of workers scattered all across the country. I use the term “institutional labor” to refer to the

⁵ Ibid. There are more than 30,000 union locals in the U.S., virtually all which are affiliated with a national or international union.

⁶ The fact that the words “labor press” form part of the name of the ILPA (the International Labor Press Association) also argues for using the terms “labor press” and “union press” interchangeably here.

organizations themselves—the AFL-CIO and its affiliated unions—and their leaders. As I explain in Chapter 3, union leaders who focus on internal administration and economic bargaining have historically been said to practice “business unionism.” Union leaders who prioritize the needs and interests of rank-and-file workers in the unions and communities are said to practice “social movement unionism.” In Chapter 3, I also describe two tendencies within union journalism that reflect the dual character of organized labor. I use the term “institutional union journalism” to describe labor press practices (e.g. media content, the role of the audience, production, and distribution) that focus attention on union leaders, internal union policies, and officially-sanctioned activities. I use the term “social movement union journalism” to describe labor press practices that focus attention on union members, questions of social justice, and the lives of working people inside and outside the unions.⁷

The ILCA and a Profile of Union Journalists

The ILCA is an organization of publications (e.g. newsletters, web sites, and videos) produced by U.S. trade unions and other organizations deemed by ILCA’s leaders to share their goals and interests. Publications of any size, from any level of an eligible

⁷ Steven Brill, *The Teamsters*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978); Matthew Bates, “The Alliance for Labor Action,” *Labor Center Review* 6, (May, 1984): 54-56 [excerpted from a longer paper, which is available from the author]; Ralph Nader, “The Sorry State of the Labor Press,” *The Progressive* 41 no. 10 (Oct., 1977): 29-31; Michael Hoyt, “Is the Labor Press Doing Its Job?” *Columbia Journalism Review* 22, no. 2 (Aug., 1983): 34-39. Business unionism and social movement unionism are tendencies, or ideal types. Unions and union publications are pulled in conflicting directions depending on circumstances and the issues at hand. For example, the International Brotherhood of Teamsters has a well-earned reputation for anti-democratic internal practices. Yet, the IBT quit the AFL-CIO in 1969 to help launch a new progressive social movement. The IBT official directing that effort was the socialist leader of a large union local which ran non-profit grocery stores, medical centers, and recreational facilities for members and their families in and around St. Louis, Missouri. Union publications also reflect the conflict between labor’s “institutional” interests and the broad interests of grassroots labor. For decades, many mainstream and union journalists have praised the *Machinist* newspaper its in-depth coverage of controversial social issues. But the *Machinist* also had a longstanding policy against publishing letters to the editor.

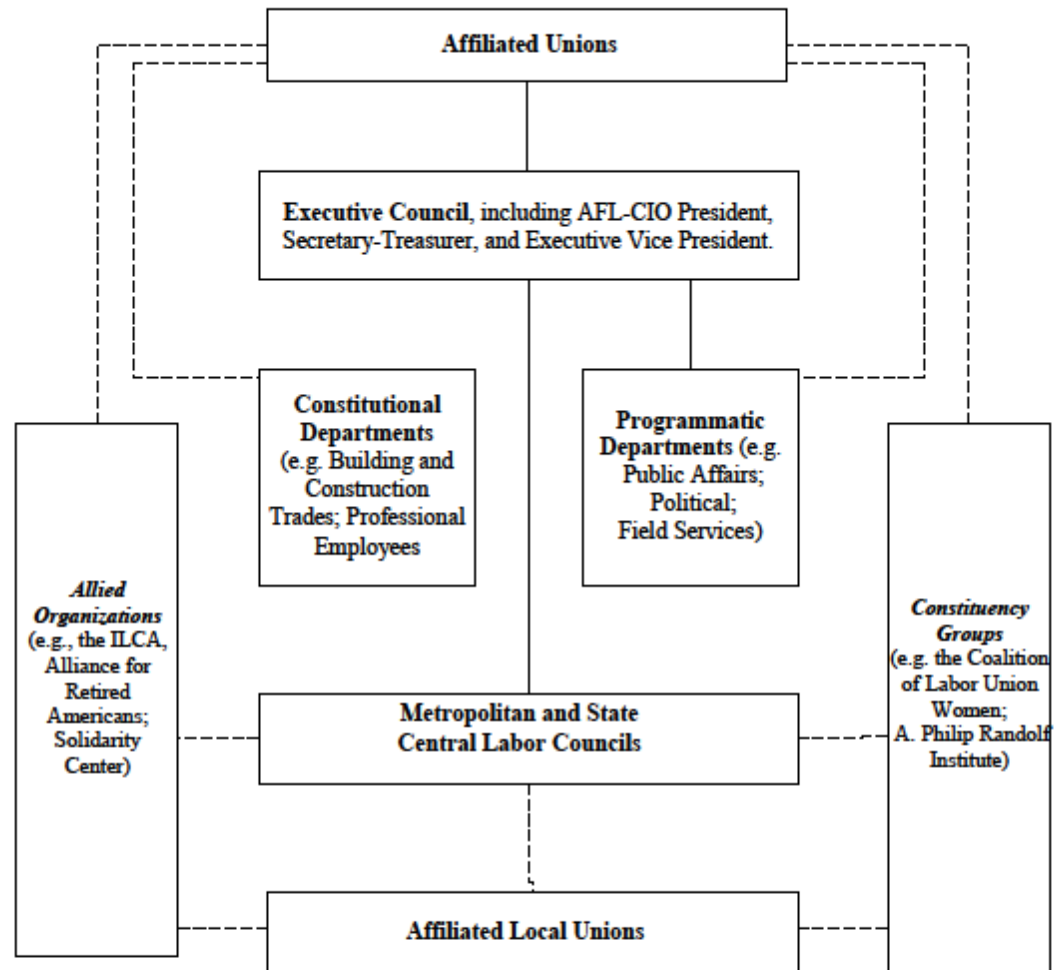


Figure 1: Organizational Chart of the AFL-CIO. Affiliated unions belong to the Executive Council, whose officers directly control the “Programmatic Departments.” The “Constitutional Departments,” are mandated by the AFL-CIO constitution, and run by the international unions, local unions, and CLCs that opt to support them. They are a formal part of the AFL-CIO structure. “Allied Organizations” and “Constituency Groups” are *not* mandated by the AFL-CIO constitution. They, too, are run by the international unions, local unions, and CLCs that opt to support them. The CLCs are a formal part of the AFL-CIO structure, and are bound by federation policy. In reality, CLCs have a history of challenging the federation. Local unions are not required to join their metropolitan or state CLCs.

Source: AFL-CIO, <http://aflcio.org/aboutus/thisistheafclcio/constitution/> and http://pffi.org/docs/0602%20AFL-CIO_organization%20chart_mission.pdf (accessed Dec. 15, 2010).

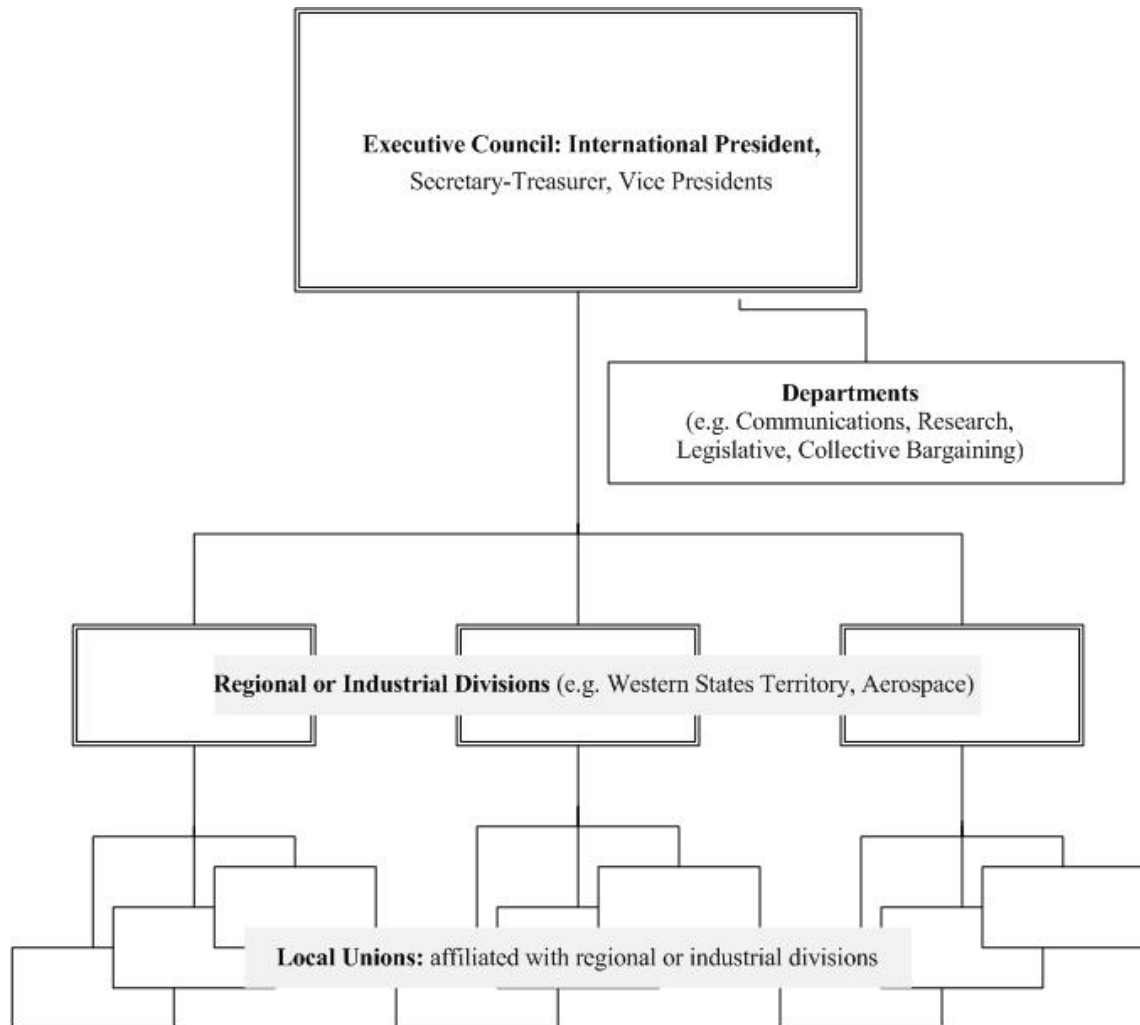


Figure 2: Organizational Chart of a Typical International Union. Executive council members are elected by delegates to the union's convention or by a direct vote of the membership. Union departments, under the direct control of international union leaders, provide such services as communications, research, and political lobbying. Internationals typically are subdivided along geographical or industrial lines to create administrative subunits. Local unions affiliate with appropriate regional or industrial divisions. *Sources:* UAW, <http://www.uaw.org/page/who-we-are> (accessed Dec. 20, 2011); SEIU Local 4, <http://seiu4.localsonline.org/appResources/scPages/organizationchart.cfm#chart> (accessed Dec. 15, 2011); International Brotherhood of Teamsters, <http://teamster.org/content/organizational-chart> (accessed Dec. 15, 2001).

organization, may join the ILCA. Consequently, multiple publications produced by the same organization often belong to the ILCA at the same time. Currently, nearly 1,000 publications belong to the ILCA. Structurally, the ILCA is an Executive Council with fifteen voting members: a president, secretary-treasurer, and thirteen vice presidents. In addition, there are two “ex-officio” (non-voting) seats on the council. One is reserved for the immediate past president of the ILCA, and the other for a representative of the AFL-CIO. The executive council meets quarterly, and its members serve on a voluntary basis. In 1999, the ILCA began to employ a full-time executive director.

Every two years, the ILCA holds a convention where delegates nominate and elect members of the executive council. Should a seat become vacant between conventions, other council members may appoint an eligible member of the ILCA to fill the position until the next convention.

ILCA members have created “regional” associations in various parts of the country and “industrial” associations within particular unions (e.g. The Midwest Labor Press Association, and the UAW’s Local Union Press Association). Currently, eight regional associations and some half-dozen industrial associations are affiliated with the ILCA. These groups are chartered by the ILCA and must adhere to the ILCA’s constitution and code of ethics. However, they are “free-standing” associations. They are affiliated with—but not run by nor a formal part of—the ILCA.⁸

⁸ This dissertation focuses mainly on activities involving the ILCA executive council, and the top staff and officers of the AFL-CIO and its affiliates. A study that additionally included the ILCA’s regional and industrial associations would tell a richer story—one that captured the experiences of union journalists in the shops and local communities, and within specific unions. At the time of this writing, I have not determined whether the various associations maintained records of their activities over the years. I expect that some did, and I hope to locate their records and write about them soon.

Similarly, the ILCA is an “allied organization” of the AFL-CIO. The ILCA represents publications produced by unions affiliated with the AFL-CIO. Like those unions, the ILCA must adhere to federation policy. However the ILCA is not formally part of the AFL-CIO, and it is not under direct federation control.

Once or twice a decade since 1956, the ILCA has surveyed its members to determine their interests and needs. The quality and focus of the surveys, as well as the questions they asked, varied widely. So did the response rates, which were sometimes too low to produce useful results. Still, there was enough commonality in the surveys conducted in 1974, 1994, and 1996 to construct a general picture of the journalists active in the ILCA.

The majority of respondents (between 63 percent and 73 percent) represented local unions. Between 11 percent and 12 percent represented international unions, and the remaining publications were affiliated with CLCs and other state or regional union organizations.

The majority of union editors (between 54 and 56 percent) said they performed their journalistic duties on a part-time and/or voluntary basis. No fewer than 60 percent (and as many as 78 percent) of the respondents indicated they performed other union tasks in addition to writing and editing their union publications. In 1996, only 22.3 percent of the respondents listed their job title simply as “editor” or “assistant editor.” The remainder indicated they were also responsible for such duties as grievance handling, community service programs, labor education, and holding elected union office. (Although the survey data did not say so, the editors who also held union office were

almost certainly from local union or CLC publications. I am not aware of any international union officers who were active in the ILCA.)

Sixty-one percent of the respondents said they produced their union publications alone, without any assistance from other union members or staff. Of the few who did report receiving assistance, the vast majority (78 percent) said their helpers worked on a part-time basis, or as volunteers. Between 53 percent and 66 percent of the respondents said they had no journalistic experience outside the labor press.

Communications, Social Movements, and the Labor Press

Leaders of the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) created the ILCA in 1956 to represent publications produced by members of the new federations and its allied organizations.⁹ Though technically the ILCA represents *publications*, in practice it has always been an organization of labor movement journalists—a discursive space where editors and reporters working inside organized labor could “network,” share information, commiserate, collaborate on projects, and debate ways to strengthen the labor press.

Curiously, most social movement scholars have ignored the role of internal movement media, a puzzling omission given the nature of social movements and the large body of research devoted to their study. Social movements mobilize people to undertake sustained collective action against more powerful groups. They are “meaning-making” processes through which people forge new identities, and craft internal

⁹ In 1983, the International Labor Press Association (ILPA) changed its name to the International Labor Communications Association (ILCA).

movement cultures that define behaviors, ideas, institutions, and social relations as just or unjust; acceptable or unacceptable.¹⁰

It is impossible to fully understand how movements recruit members, shape norms and identities, frame debates, and reach out to the press and public without considering the role of movement media. As media scholar John Downing observed, “It is on the edge of being weird that there is so little systematic analysis of communication or media in the social movement literature.”¹¹

On the other hand, journalism and media scholars have written extensively on radical and alternative media. But a significant gap exists in this literature, as well. As journalism historian Jon Bekken wrote, the labor press is “virtually unstudied in its structure, circulation and impact.”¹² The omission, too, is puzzling given the long history of labor struggles with employers, vigilantes, the National Guard, and even the U.S. Army.¹³ Historically, a colorful mix of independent radical publications, foreign language newspapers and union publications have sustained and popularized the struggles of U.S. workers. However, as Bekken pointed out, historians have treated these publications not as examples of journalism, but as *sources of information* about various social and political events. The study of the labor “press as a subject in itself has barely

¹⁰ Robert D. Benford and David A. Snow. “Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 26, (Aug. 2000): 611-39.

¹¹ John Downing et al. *Radical Media: Rebellious Communication and Social Movements*. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2001), 26.

¹² Jon E. Bekken. “No Weapon So Powerful: Working Class Newspapers in the United States,” *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 12, no. 2 (July 1988):111.

¹³ Jeremy Brecher, *Strike*, (Boston: South End Press, 1972); Oscar Ameringer, *If You Don't Weaken*, (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1983); Mary Harris Jones, *The Autobiography of Mother Jones*, ed. Mary Field Parton (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr Press, 1996).

begun,” he wrote.¹⁴ Scholarly neglect of the post-World War II labor press is particularly pronounced, as I show in Chapter 2.

Thesis and Research Questions

I address these gaps in the literature by examining the role played by the ILCA and its member publications in the post-World War II labor movement. Drawing upon a fusion of social movement and organization theory, and upon studies of alternative media, I examine several crucial debates involving the ILCA for insights into the role of social movement media—in particular, the role of the modern labor press.

I consider the ILCA and its member publications as discursive arenas within the labor movement: as spaces where ideas circulate and are contested, and where meanings are formed.¹⁵ As shown later in this chapter, the debates inside a movement over which issues to address, or who to mobilize and how, can reflect wholly different conceptions of the movement itself. Using studies of how social movements grow and transform themselves, I consider what the debates involving the ILCA reveal about the deeper conflicts between organized labor’s institutional interests and the needs of its grassroots social base. Specifically, I attempt to answer two questions:

1. Given the historical constraints placed on the ILCA and its member publications, can the labor press serve as an instrument to transform organized labor into a vigorous, expanding workers’ movement?

¹⁴ Bekken, “No Weapon So Powerful,” 114.

¹⁵ Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,” in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 109-142.

2. If the labor press can play that role, what might a “transformative” labor press look like? How would it be organized, and what would it do?

Preview of Chapters

In the following sections, I examine labor as a social movement. I also explore social movement and organization theories relevant to modern grassroots movements that are led by large bureaucratic institutions. I then review research by alternative media scholars for insights into the post-World War II labor press.

In Chapter 2, I review the work of historians who have studied the origins of “business unionism” and its conflicts with “social movement” labor. I examine crucial choices made by the top leaders of institutional labor—the AFL, the CIO, and major internationals—to narrow the movement’s goals and its range of discourse.

In Chapter 3, I examine the limited, but important, research on the labor press by historians and media scholars. Using the theoretical framework described later in this chapter and the insights into “business” unionism in Chapter 2, I describe journalistic practices that differentiate “institutional union journalism” from “social movement union journalism”—differences that help to explain the dynamics underlying key debates involving the ILCA, AFL-CIO, and other actors over the role of the labor press.

Chapter 4, “The Campaign for Community Labor Newspapers,” explores the ILPA’s efforts to convince the AFL-CIO leaders to create weekly newspapers in cities and states with large union populations. In the mid-1960s, leaders of the federation and the ILPA believed a massive communications breakdown was eroding the solidarity of

organized labor. Many influential union editors and high-ranking AFL-CIO staff backed the call for community papers, believing it offered a timely, practical plan for restoring communications with the federation's grassroots membership. But top AFL-CIO leaders refused to even consider the ILPA's proposal. In Chapter 5, I examine the reasons behind that startling disconnect between union leaders and union editors. I examine forces in the post-war political economy—including federal labor laws, postal regulations, and anti-communist/anti-corruption campaigns by government and business—that powerfully shaped the character of institutional labor and the labor press.

In Chapter 6, "In Whose Voice?" I look at two closely related debates concerning the labor press: (1) Should union newspapers serve as 'house organs' that focus on the actions and ideas of union leaders, or as "grassroots tribunes" that mobilize and speak for the union rank and file? (2) Should union communications take the form of public relations, and target politicians, the press, and the general public? Or should unions use mass media and other channels to organize working-class communities? Both debates exploded in a very public way as the political and economic clout of organized labor visibly declined in the late 1990s. Some ILCA leaders began advocating editorial independence for union journalists and blasting the AFL-CIO communications program as a top-down, corporatist operation. Federation officials responded by threatening to dismantle the ILCA.

In the final chapter, I consider what the campaign for community papers and the debates that erupted in the 1990s suggest about the potential for the labor press to transform the labor movement. I conclude that the labor press must be one of the primary instruments used by union leaders seeking to ignite a vigorous, new workers' movement.

However, I also argue that union journalists do not need to—and should not— wait for labor leaders to ignite that transformation. Union journalists can create the cultural conditions for a new movement by experimenting with innovative collective action frames: with new conceptions of what it means to be a worker, and new modes of organizing. But to do that, union editors must create spaces outside the union structure where they will be free to develop new ideas and practices that can successfully challenge the dominant logics of organized labor.

Labor as a Social Movement

Sociologist and political scientist Sidney Tarrow defined social movements as groups of ordinary people, possessing limited resources, who engage in “sequences of contentious politics based on underlying social networks and resonant collective action frames...which develop the capacity to maintain sustained challenges against powerful opponents.”¹⁶ According to Tarrow, collective action becomes contentious “when it is used by people who lack regular access to institutions, who act in the name of new or unaccepted claims, and who behave in ways that fundamentally challenge others or authorities. Contentious collective action... is the main and often the only recourse that ordinary people possess against better-equipped opponents or powerful states.”¹⁷ Social movements frequently employ non-disruptive tactics (e.g. petitioning) but, for Tarrow, contentious activities remained their “most characteristic” feature.¹⁸

¹⁶ Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 2.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

Rather than concentrating on contention, sociologists Doug McAdam and W. Richard Scott described four characteristic processes of social movements: “the mobilization of people and resources, the construction and reconstruction of identities, the building of alliances, and the crafting of ideologies and cultural frames to support and sustain collective action.”¹⁹ The processes they described closely parallel three core activities that Tarrow said characterize social movements: (1) mounting collective challenges, (2) drawing upon social networks, common purposes, and cultural frameworks, and (3) building solidarity through connective structures and collective identities.²⁰

The dominant social movement theories of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, discussed below, took as their unit of analysis a movement or group of movements.²¹ They offered useful insights into the past struggles that created today’s unions of today and into current upheavals involving unorganized or loosely organized groups of workers (e.g. the immigrant rights movements). But they failed to capture some of the fundamental dynamics of *the labor unions themselves*. As sociologist Paul Johnson explained, “Today’s labor organization is partly a product of labor movements of the past, partly a product of employer and governmental responses to those movements and...partly an

¹⁹ Doug McAdam and W. Richard Scott, “Organizations and Movements,” in *Social Movements and Organization Theory*, ed. Davis et al., (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 8.

²⁰ Tarrow, 5.

²¹ Ibid., 10-19. The dominant theories during these periods were known variously as Grievance/Collective Behavior Theory, Rational Choice/Resource Mobilization Theory, and Political Opportunity/Political Process Theory.

arena within (and sometimes against) which new labor movements may emerge.”²² In other words, organized labor is multi-layered and complex. Unions operate within a matrix of laws, regulations, and political obligations governing their interactions with employers, branches of the state, and other formal institutions. At the same time, organized labor exists as a decentralized agglomeration of groups that mobilize workers for contentious action. Moreover, rank-and-file workers sometimes self-organize for contentious actions directed against their own labor leaders.²³

Sociologists Gerald Davis and Mayar Zald might have been thinking about organized labor when they wrote, “Social movements are often represented by formal organizations, and organizations respond to social movements and have movement-like processes within themselves.”²⁴ It was this realization in the late 1980s and early 1990s that convinced scholars of the need to synthesize social movement and organization theory.

The Evolution of Social Movement Theory

Social movement theories of the 1950s (dubbed “collective behavior” and “grievance” theory) focused on shared beliefs and identities. They linked contentious

²² Paul Johnson, “Organize for What? The Resurgence of Labor as a Citizenship Movement,” in *Rekindling the Movement. Labor’s Quest for Relevance in the 21st Century*, ed. Turner et al., (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 27-28.

²³ Aaron Brenner, Robert Brenner and Cal Winslow eds., *Rebel Rank and File: Labor Militancy and Revolt From Below During the Long 1970s*, (Brooklyn: Verso, 2010); August Meier and Elliot Rudwick, *Black Detroit and the Rise of the UAW*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979); Dan Georgakas, Dan and Marvin Surkin, *Detroit I Do Mind Dying*, (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2005); Heather Ann Thompson, *Whose Detroit? Politics, Labor, and Race in a Modern American City*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001).

²⁴ Gerald F. Davis and Mayer N. Zald, “Social Change, Social Theory, and the Convergence of Movements and Organizations” in *Social Movements and Organization Theory*, ed. Davis et al., 335.

politics to feelings of mass alienation produced by social shocks and dislocations.²⁵ In one respect, this analysis echoed a commonplace of trade union doctrine: the notion that unions are the workers' natural response to exploitation. It also resonated with more radical ideologies that viewed unions as manifestations of an underlying class struggle—"uninterrupted, now hidden, now open"—inherent in capitalist society.²⁶ On the other hand, the dominant theories of the 1950s reflected the efforts of liberal-pluralist scholars to explain the mass appeal of fascism and Stalinism. Consequently, they tended to view social movements as "dysfunctional, irrational and inherently undesirable" phenomena.²⁷

With the rise of the U.S. civil rights movement, scholars began to consider social movements in a more positive light, as rational attempts to advance legitimate collective interests. They developed new theories of "resource mobilization" and "rational choice," which emphasized the ability of entrepreneurial leaders to leverage limited movement resources to acquire additional resources from outside the movement. They also focused on rational actors weighing costs and benefits to decide whether to support a particular movement.²⁸ In so doing, resource-mobilization and rational-choice theorists concentrated on a number of questions relevant to the labor press, including building solidarity between resource-poor members, and alliances with influential external actors.

²⁵ Doug McAdam, "Culture in Social Movements" in *New Social Movements: From Ideology to Identity*, ed. Enrique Laraña, Hank Johnston, and Joseph R. Gusfield, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 36.

²⁶ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "Manifesto of the Communist Party" in *Basic Writings on Politics and Philosophy*, ed. Lewis S. Feuer, (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1959), 7.

²⁷ David S. Meyer, "Protest and Political Opportunities," *Annual Review of Sociology* 30 (2004): 126.

²⁸ John D. McCarthy and Mayer N. Zald, "Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory," *American Journal of Sociology* 82, no. 6 (1977): 1212-1217; Tarrow, 15-16.

However, these theories had a significant shortcoming: They could neither explain why one movement succeeded while another (with similar resources) failed, nor why movements would appear at some times and places but not at others. To answer those questions, scholars in the 1960s and 1970s shifted their attention to changes in the movements' environment.²⁹ As sociologist David Meyer, an architect of "political opportunity theory," wrote, "Activists' prospects for advancing particular claims, mobilizing supporters, and affecting influence are context-dependent." Political, economic, and social conditions affect "the grievances around which activists mobilize," and make certain actions more or less attractive to the actors; more or less likely to succeed. "The wisdom, creativity, and outcomes of activists' choices—their *agency* — can only be understood...by looking at the political context and the rules of the games in which their choices are made."³⁰ Historian Robert Korstad used political opportunity theory to study the unionization of North Carolina tobacco workers during the 1940s.³¹ He identified a confluence of forces that created opportunities for union supporters, including a large community of African-Americans (which included middle-class professionals) surrounding the R. J. Reynolds factories, the presence of seasoned communist cadre, and employees with military and union experience. Efforts to form unions commonly failed throughout the south during this period, but the R. J. Reynolds workers exploited a particular set of opportunities and built an industrial union.

²⁹ Tarrow, 17-18.

³⁰ Meyer, 126-128.

³¹ Robert Rogers Korstad, *Civil Rights Unionism: Tobacco Workers and the Struggle for Democracy in the Mid-Twentieth Century South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

Social Movements as Meaning-making Processes

“Resource mobilization” and “political opportunity” theorists were correct to argue that political-economic change constrains (or facilitates) the growth of social movements in significant ways. However, they were wrong to privilege changes in the political-economic structure over the “cultural and ideational dimensions of collective action,” according to Doug McAdam.³² “The causal importance of expanding political opportunities...is inseparable from the collective definitional processes by which the meaning of these shifts is assigned and disseminated,” McAdam wrote.³³ People decide to engage in collective action based on how they perceive their individual and collective interests, the “rightness” of their cause, their own strength, and the strength of their opponents.³⁴ In a point with great relevance for the labor press, McAdam argued that successful leaders must learn to “join the cognitive orientations of individuals” with the goals and objectives of the social movement organization.³⁵

Social movements “become worlds unto themselves,” with their own cultural practices, identities, and beliefs.³⁶ A strong, internal culture creates the cohesion and willingness to sacrifice that resource-poor movements need to confront wealthier, more powerful opponents. Organized labor has its canonic songs and slogans (e.g. “Solidarity Forever;” “An Injury to One is an Injury to All”), movement heroes (e.g. Eugene Debs

³² McAdam, 36-37.

³³ Ibid., 39.

³⁴ Ibid., 39-41.

³⁵ Ibid., 37.

³⁶ Ibid., 45.

and Mother Jones), and such terms as “sister,” “brother,” “free-rider,” and “scab” to differentiate insiders from outsiders, and friends from foes. Because the very act of defining grievances generates an “us” and a “them,” identity construction is inherent in all social movements.³⁷

However, the task of creating collective identities is particularly critical and challenging for organized labor. Unlike most movement organizations, unions primarily represent people the organization did not organize, and who did not join of their own volition. Federal laws banning the “closed shop” granted employers the exclusive right to screen potential employees and decide whom to hire.³⁸ The union must then endeavor to win the loyalty of those employees. A union’s power rests largely on its ability to mobilize people handpicked by the boss.

Social movements are reflexive processes of discourse and collective action. Movements define problems, and cast people as protagonists, antagonists, or neutrals through the use of “diagnostic collective action frames.” They set goals, assign tasks, and select tactics by using “prognostic collective action frames.” They employ “motivational collective action frames” to energize supporters and to demoralize opponents.³⁹ William Gamson and Andre Modigliani’s model of “collective action frames” captures the

³⁷ Scott A. Hunt, Robert D. Benford, and David A. Snow, “Identity Fields: Framing Processes and the Social Construction of Movement Identities,” in *New Social Movements: From Ideology to Identity*, ed. Enrique Laraña, Hank Johnston, and Joseph R. Gusfield, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 185.

³⁸ Bruce Feldacker, *Labor Guide to Labor Law*, 4th ed. (Upper Saddle, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2000), 433. The National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) forbids “closed shop” agreements, which require employers to hire union members only.

³⁹ Benford and Snow, 614-615.

dynamic between discourse and collective struggle. The contending social actors advance competing “interpretative packages” comprised of “framing devices” (i.e. metaphors, examples, descriptive words and images) and “reasoning devices” (i.e. identifications of root causes, predictions of consequences, and appeals to principle).⁴⁰ Victory hinges on the cultural resonance of the competing frames, and on the practices, resources, and perceived credibility of the actors, including the media.⁴¹ Movement discourse, in other words, both *shapes and is shaped by* collective action. Debates about the content and deployment of movement media are debates over the identity and direction of the movement itself.

The ILCA as an Organizational Field

Because my purposes in writing a history of the ILCA are descriptive and explanatory, I do not employ theory to predict outcomes or to test competing models of social movement media. Nonetheless, I found the synthesis of social movement and organization theory developed by Davis, McAdam and others provided a useful framework for studying the ILCA and the post-World War II labor press. Specifically, in Chapter 7, I apply the following “analytic conventions” to key debates involving the ILCA in order to assess the potential of union media to transform the labor movement:

1. The “organizational” field is the fundamental unit of analysis.
2. To understand episodes of change in the organizational field, we must

⁴⁰ William Gamson and Andre Modigliani, “Media Discourse and Public Opinion on Nuclear Power: A Constructionist Approach,” *The American Journal of Sociology* 95, no. 1 (July 1989): 1-4.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

define the composition of the field by identifying the following “actors:”

- a) “Dominants” are individuals, groups, and organizations that enjoy a privileged position within the organizational field. The structure and operation of the organizational field provides dominant actors with superior access to resources, *and* the ability to influence the access of less-powerful actors to resources. The norms, values, and beliefs of dominant actors are the dominant “institutional logics” of the field.
 - b) “Challengers” are actors who seek to contest the advantaged position of the dominants, or the ways in which the field is structured and governed.
 - c) “Governance units” are organizations that wield power and authority within the field. They may operate within the field or within the field’s wider social environment. Governance units facilitate and constrain field-level interactions.
3. The organizational field exists within a “wider social environment” comprised of:
- a) “External actors.” These actors may not appear or directly participate in field-level interactions, yet they influence the course of events.
 - b) “External governance units” are authority and power structures wielding society-wide influence. They provide opportunities and constraints for field-level actors.
4. “Social actors” are constituted by—and their behaviors are guided by—“institutional logics” (i.e. norms, values and beliefs). “Primary, or dominant, logics” guide and legitimate the actions of dominant actors.

“Secondary logics” guide and legitimate the actions of subordinate actors or challengers. Social actors interpret and frame field-level events according to their institutional logics.

5. “Destabilizing events or processes”—typically, fundamental changes in the wider social environment—introduce the potential for field-level change. However, they do not, by themselves, trigger cycles of contention.
6. Episodes of field-level change are likely if and only if the actors respond to destabilizing events or processes through a process of “reactive mobilization,” which involves the following three mechanisms:
 - a) “Attribution of threat or opportunity”: The field-level actors interpret destabilizing events or processes as either threats or opportunities affecting their group interests.
 - b) “Social appropriation”: The field-level actors establish their interpretation of the destabilizing event or process as the dominant institutional logic for their groups.
 - c) “The appearance of new actors and innovative actions”: The new dominant institutional logics—the new perceptions of threats or opportunities—cause new actors to emerge and/or cause actors to adopt new innovative behaviors. The presence of new actors and forms of interaction can generate more conflict and destabilization.
7. If all three reactive mobilization mechanisms occur, field dominants and challengers are likely to interact in increasingly innovative and contentious ways. Periods of contention end with a “shift in the strategic

alignment”: a new balance of power between field-level actors that leads to a new “institutional settlement” regarding how the field is structured and stabilized. Social change takes place in stages. Each stage is triggered by particular destabilizing events; each involves different alignments of social actors with distinct institutional logics, or new actors and new forms of interaction.⁴²

Alternative Media and the Labor Press

As Chapter 2 will show, U.S. unions were largely isolated from, even hostile to, the mass movements of the 1960s that sparked so much scholarly interest in alternative media. On the other hand, the U.S. labor movement was often in the forefront of the mass struggles for social change from the 1880s through World War II when the Knights of Labor, Eugene Debs’ Socialist Party, the IWW, the Communist Party, and the early CIO roiled the country. And during those periods, much of the labor press reflected the rebellious spirit of the movement it served. With the crushing of the left-led unions in the late 1940s and the creation of a federalized industrial relations system, organized labor became more predictable and bland. And in important ways, the labor press became less interesting and, well, *less fun*. This may explain why so many scholars of social movements and alternative media have ignored the post-World War II labor press. Even so, their research is vital for a proper understanding of the ILCA.⁴³

⁴² McAdam and Scott, 17-19.

⁴³ Bob Ostertag, *People’s Movements, People’s Press: The Journalism of Social Justice Movements* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006); Lauren Kessler, *The Dissident Press: Alternative Journalism in American History*, (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1984); Rodger Streitmatter, *Voices of Revolution: The Dissident Press in America*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001); Chris Atton, *Alternative Media*,

In his book *People's Movements, People's Press*, historian Bob Ostertag argued that social movement media “can be understood only in the context of the particular movements” they serve and that this requires a “detailed historical analysis.”⁴⁴ For Ostertag, the important question was not “whether words are shared, but *how* they are shared... [and] the social relations that develop” from a movement’s use of media.⁴⁵ Indeed, as I show in Chapter 5, the post-World War II labor press has mirrored—and helped to reinforce—the structure and distribution of resources within the U.S. labor movement. Since the 1940s, a small number of well-resourced publications with nationwide circulations produced by the large, wealthy international unions have dominated the U.S. labor press, while thousands of poorly-resourced publications produced by local unions and CLCs have addressed smaller audiences in specific worksites and localities.

Media scholar John Downing also emphasized the importance of the social relations created by movement media. “Communications within and by social movements is...a vital necessity,” Downing wrote. But Downing wasn’t interested primarily in how media contribute to specific rallies or campaigns. Far more important to Downing, were the interlocking “webs of interpersonal communication that do not

(Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2002); Downing et al. Ostertag uses the term “social movement journalism” to describe reporting performed specifically to promote mass struggles for political- economic change. Kessler and Streitmatter use the term “dissident media” to describe the same phenomena. Atton refers generally to “alternative media,” while Downing differentiates between “alternative media” (i.e. media expressing alternative or non-mainstream values) and “radical alternative media,” which articulate oppositional political, economic, and social goals.

⁴⁴ Ostertag, 1-2.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.

operate through media yet are fed by media and feed into media.”⁴⁶ Movements rely upon activist networks to survive periods of inactivity, construct alliances, amass knowledge, and give birth to new movements.

Downing’s *Radical Media* is the single most comprehensive study of social movement media. He opened the book by faulting his earlier writings for defining “radical alternative media” too narrowly, as “pure opposition to mainstream media.”⁴⁷ He then offered a more expansive definition that included media operating “relatively free” of dominant group influence and only “sometimes in opposition” to dominant agendas.⁴⁸ His broader definition of radical alternative media certainly applies to the post-World War II labor press. Nonetheless, in *Radical Media*, Downing still focused overwhelmingly on media produced by small, intensely oppositional groups. His focus was the result, I believe, of the way Downing counterposed social movements (“dynamic expressions of resistance”) to “institutions such as unions or [political] parties,” which he described as “stable and enduring.”⁴⁹ That formulation prevented Downing from recognizing a hallmark of modern social movements: their simultaneous existence as grassroots struggles *and* formal institutions.

Chris Atton’s book, *Alternative Media*, also concentrated on media produced by small, highly oppositional organizations. However, Atton defined alternative media primarily by the degree to which they erased traditional distinctions between audience

⁴⁶ Downing et al., 31-34.

⁴⁷ Ibid., ix.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 8.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 23.

and producer.⁵⁰ Even so, Atton's book identified important tendencies within the modern labor press. He distinguished "advocacy media" (which speak *on behalf of* subordinate groups) from "grassroots media" which *speak for* and *are produced by* subordinate group members. In subsequent chapters, I repeatedly describe tensions between local union editors (who have intimate ties to the union rank and file) and international union editors who interact mainly with high-ranking officers and staff.⁵¹ Atton employed another useful term, "native journalism," to describe reporting produced by participant/activists about conditions they face and campaigns they are waging.⁵²

Atton pointed to Nancy Fraser's notion of multiple public spheres and "parallel discursive arenas" to argue that isolation actually benefits subordinate groups by providing spaces to engage in "prefigurative politics" and develop distinctive identities.⁵³ He explicitly rejected arguments that inadequate resources and ultra-democratic operating methods have trapped alternative media in "alternative ghettos" where they cannot affect the mainstream discourse.⁵⁴ (In a particularly descriptive turn of phrase, I. A. Boal wrote that modern media monopolies force subordinate groups into "communicative enclosures," in much the same way that the buying up of the commons

⁵⁰ Atton, 25; Downing et al., v.

⁵¹ Ibid., 16.

⁵² Ibid., 112.

⁵³ Atton, 37-40; Nancy Fraser, 122-4.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 33.

forced peasants off the land and into the mills of 18th and 19th century England.)⁵⁵

However, Atton has mischaracterized Fraser's arguments, and treated the corrosive effects of isolation far too lightly. Atton seemed fascinated by the purity of small, isolated sects, while Fraser emphasized the "emancipatory mission" of the alternative press. She viewed discursive spaces as liberated zones where subaltern groups could withdraw, regroup, and gain the strength necessary to fight their way into the mainstream discourse and make social change.⁵⁶

According to Fraser, social discourse is conducted by multiple "publics" who possess unequal power and occupy "parallel discursive arenas." Marginalized groups use debate and discussion to define themselves and to gain a sense of strength and common purpose. "Preferences, interests and identities are not given exogenously," Fraser wrote. "They are as much outcomes as antecedents of public deliberation."⁵⁷ Alternative media allow oppressed people to launch agitational campaigns directed *outwards* towards other groups and broader "publics."⁵⁸

In her study of the U.S. suffragist press, journalism scholar Linda Steiner explored the emancipatory potential of alternative media. Suffragist "periodicals provided the arenas in which women could come together to experiment with alternative definitions of and for women," Steiner wrote. Here, "they could try on various identities

⁵⁵ I. A. Boal, "A Flow of Monsters: Luddism and Virtual Technologies," in *Resisting the Virtual Life: The Culture and Politics of Information*, ed. J. Brook and I. A. Boal, (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1995), 3-16.

⁵⁶ Nancy Fraser, *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 130.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 124.

and then advocate those conceptions that offered a sense of significance and value.” Activist writers and editors helped craft to cultures and networks that were vital in “sustaining both individuals and the [women’s] movement as a whole.”⁵⁹

Discursive spaces; Arenas of Struggle

However, journalism scholar Lauren Kessler pointed out, alternative discursive spaces rarely encourage freewheeling debate. Historically, marginalized people have tended to divide, again and again, into like-minded groups, and debate has mainly taken place *between* those groups, not within them. Even so, Kessler argued, studying the alternative press is a crucial way to recover “a complex marketplace of ideas in the passionate rhetoric of the dispossessed”—ideas that were rarely recorded by the dominant media.⁶⁰ As Chapter 5 will show, from the 1940s on union leaders increasingly sought to muzzle the voices of rank-and-file workers. But muzzling is not the same as erasing. Studying the labor press is a way to recover dissident voices and perspectives that might otherwise be lost.

Labor scholar Ruth Needleman described how leaders and “non-leaders” create different types of discursive spaces in a struggle for political power. Union members (as well as low-level officers and staff) create “independent spaces” where they can come together outside “the dominant culture and controlled structures of the union.”⁶¹ Such spaces might include informal peer networks, ad hoc committees, or publications

⁵⁹ Linda Steiner, “Nineteenth-Century Suffrage Periodicals: Conceptions of Womanhood and the Press,” in *Ruthless Criticism: New Perspectives in U.S. Communication History*, ed. William S. Solomon and Robert W. McChesney, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 66.

⁶⁰ Kessler, 15-16.

⁶¹ Ruth Needleman, “Spaces and Opportunities: Developing new leaders to meet labor’s future,” *Labor Research Review* 20, no. 1, (Spring/Summer 1993): 6.

produced by the union rank and file. Union leaders create “structured opportunities” that provide members and subordinates with controlled experiences and limited responsibilities. Structured opportunities might include committee assignments, or the chance to work on official union publications, or to participate in the ILCA. Structured opportunities and independent spaces, alike, can be arenas of struggle. However, structured opportunities almost invariably reproduce and reinforce the existing union culture. Independent spaces, on the other hand, have the potential to produce new identities and ideologies that can displace those of the incumbent leaders.⁶² As I show in Chapter 7, the autonomy of the ILCA (and of union journalists) has a great deal to do with the potential of the labor press to transform the labor movement.

According to media scholars Nick Couldry and James Curran, political struggles always involve battles over “representational resources” (i.e. the resources required to define social reality by framing and disseminating ideas).⁶³ As subsequent chapters demonstrate, debates over the “appropriate” role of the labor press have invariably involved the distribution of money, staff, and other “symbolic resources” within the labor movement. On the most obvious level, the AFL-CIO and the international unions have always had the ability to influence the ILCA because they control much of the ILCA’s income and employ many of its leaders. But debates over symbolic resources and the labor press have hinged on more interesting questions than that: What matters should the

⁶² Ibid., 7; Rick Fantasia and Kim Voss, *Hard Work: Remaking the American Labor Movement*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 106. Fantasia and Voss argue that “the real potential for change” lies “in the space *between* unions”: in such organizations as the ILCA where members of many unions can meet, share ideas, and plan activities.

⁶³ Nick Couldry and James Curran, “The Paradox of Media Power,” in *Contesting Media Power: Alternative Media in a Networked World*, ed. Nick Couldry and James Curran, (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003), 4.

union members know about? What information should be closely held by the union leadership? Whose voices should be heard in news stories and on the editorial pages? And who gets to decide?

Chapter 2:

“Business” and “Social-Movement” Unionism

My Scope of Study

My study of the International Labor Communications Association (ILCA) is an “institutional” labor history. I focus on a set of labor organizations, officers, and journalists active in the post-World War II labor press. A “new labor” history, focused from the “bottom up” on the ways that everyday workers used the labor press, would make a fascinating study.⁶⁴ However, as explained in Chapter 1—and as subsequent chapters demonstrate—very little research exists on the U.S. labor press, particularly for the years after World War II. How could we make sense of the workers’ use of labor media without knowing how the labor press was structured, who controlled it, or the resources it possessed? I hope to fill some of those gaps in the literature by tracing the history of the ILCA, the only national organization of union journalists in the post-war period, and by examining key conflicts within that organization, and between it, the AFL-CIO, and the international unions.

Of course, the ILCA cannot be understood in isolation. The decisions of its leaders and the debates about the labor press occurred within a matrix of power relations—an organizational field—involving social actors driven by different norms, values, beliefs, and organizational needs. Political-economic forces do not determine human decisions in a mechanical, predictable fashion. Still, the social environment does

⁶⁴ David Brody, “The Old Labor History and the New: In Search of an American Working Class,” *Labor History* 20, no. 1 (Winter 1979):111-126.

create limits and exert pressures that shape human behavior in powerful ways by making certain courses of action more feasible, “thinkable,” or attractive.⁶⁵ To paraphrase Karl Marx, people *do* make their own history—but not as they please, or in circumstances of their own choosing.⁶⁶ The history of the ILCA, then, must be understood in the context of the labor movement that created the organization, and which that organization served.⁶⁷

In this chapter, I examine two conflicting tendencies which, most historians agree, have characterized the U.S. labor movement. “Business unionism” is a set of labor union policies and practices that emphasize centralized, hierarchical administrative controls, the pursuit of short-term economic and political objectives, and the suppression of independent rank-and-file activity. “Social movement unionism” is characterized by policies and practices that encourage internal union democracy, the pursuit of broad political and economic reform, and rank-and-file initiative.

Environment, Agency, and the Rise of Business Unionism

According to labor scholars Rick Fantasia and Kim Voss, the anti-communist purges and the creation of a federalized system of industrial relations in the 1940s and 1950s “produced a distinctive variety of unionism, which in turn and over time, also generated a distinctive type of labor leader.” This distinctive type of leader was more concerned with collective bargaining than with mobilizing the rank and file; more

⁶⁵ Raymond Williams, “Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory,” in *Media and Cultural Studies: Keywords*, Rev. ed., Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas M. Kellner (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 130-131.

⁶⁶ Karl Marx, “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte,” in *Marx & Engels: Basic Writings in Politics and Philosophy*, ed. Louis S. Feuerer, (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1959), 320.

⁶⁷ Ostertag, 1-2.

concerned with administrative duties than with social reforms.⁶⁸ Fantasia and Voss made an important point. As I show in this chapter, under the U.S. industrial relations system, labor leaders became responsible for administering complicated plans involving pensions, seniority, health and welfare, and other vital benefits. They also became legally obligated to enforce contracts which typically required the union to maintain production by quashing independent rank-and-file activity (e.g. slowdowns and wildcat strikes). But Fantasia and Voss overstated matters by asserting that the post-war system *produced* a distinctively parochial, conservative brand of union leadership. As I will show, it would be far more accurate to say that U.S. employers, judges, and politicians expressed a militant preference for a conservative brand of union leadership that was well-established decades before World War II. The federal industrial relations system legitimated “business unionism” and simultaneously attacked more radical “social movement” alternatives.

Historians broadly agree that since the late 1800s, U.S. unions have displayed a marked tendency—largely absent from European labor—towards the pursuit of incremental political reforms, and towards collective bargaining with employers over wages, benefits, and other so-called “bread and butter” concerns. This more cautious, conservative style of unionism has competed with currents inside organized labor that favored more militant mass action, and sweeping social change.

Labor historian Julie Greene identified an early “model of business unionism” in Cigar Markers International Union Local 144, led by Adolf Strasser and Samuel Gompers, founder of the American Federation of Labor (AFL). Starting in 1877, Strasser

⁶⁸ Fantasia and Voss, 81.

and Gompers introduced centralized administrative and fiscal controls, and adopted a political agenda that spurned “broad solidarities” in favor of practices aimed at protecting their “skilled, white, male” members. They did this partly in reaction to a failed strike involving less-skilled cigar makers, including women and recent immigrants. They also took these steps to combat socialist elements inside the unions that sought to organize all workers, regardless of skill, gender, or nationality, and favored large-scale social change over piecemeal, “practical” reforms.⁶⁹ During the Progressive Era, Gompers and the AFL perfected the practices pioneered by Local 144. Business unionism soon became the dominant ideology of organized labor, and it remains so today.⁷⁰

Historians differ, however, in their explanations of how and why business unionism came to dominate the U.S. labor movement. Some have argued that external political-economic forces (e.g. profoundly anti-union employers; an inherently conservative work force) *compelled* labor leaders to create centralized, narrowly focused labor organizations. Other historians have emphasized the *choices* labor leaders made at critical junctures about what U.S. unions should do, and fight for.

According to William Forbath, choices “were imposed upon the American labor movement” by “judge-made law and legal violence” that separated unions into small, autonomous units devoted to firm-specific bargaining.⁷¹ Forbath rejected many widely-held explanations for the dominance of business unionism. He pointed, for example, to

⁶⁹ Julie Greene, *Pure and Simple Politics: The American Federation of Labor and Political Activism, 1881-1917* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 29-31.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 285.

⁷¹ William E. Forbath, *Law and the Shaping of the American Labor Movement* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 168.

the broad support for the Knights of Labor following the Civil War as evidence that U.S. workers were not inherently individualistic or hostile to radical doctrines. Indeed, he wrote, members of the working class, “not meddling middle-class intellectuals,” were the core of the socialist movements of the Gilded Age. U.S. workers united in longer, more frequent strikes than their European counterparts during the late 1800s and early 1900s, and expressed their solidarity through a rich variety of community-based mutual aid societies, cultural and political associations.⁷²

Historians can no longer plausibly argue that the AFL arose “from a timeless bias among American trade unionists against broad reforms and radical visions,” Forbath wrote.⁷³ Labor’s preoccupation with firm-specific bargaining was better explained by the failure of federal and state government to regulate labor relations at the turn of the century. Conservative jurists happily filled the void by making “the common law...the premiere source of state policy” regarding worker and union rights.⁷⁴ The courts promoted business unionism by crushing sympathy strikes, boycotts, and other collective expressions of class solidarity. The “mass imprisonments and glint of bayonets behind the court decrees”⁷⁵ confirmed “Gompers and his cohorts in the view that broad, class-based strategies and industrial ambitions were too costly and self-defeating,” Forbath

⁷² Ibid., 10-19.

⁷³ Ibid., 18.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 32.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 23.

concluded.⁷⁶ Interestingly, from the point of view of the labor press, Forbath observed that labor's discourse changed with the rise of business unionism: Union "leaders at all levels began to speak and think more and more in the language of the law....[They] abandoned more radical ways of describing and criticizing the nation's political economy. They entered a discourse in which the legitimacy of corporations' power over economic life" was never seriously questioned.⁷⁷

Historian Christopher Tomlins also argued that U.S. labor leaders had "little choice but to conform" to the economically focused, bureaucratic roles favored by the "state-managers": the courts, the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), and the U.S. Congress.⁷⁸ After World War I, social and economic policies were increasingly engineered by powerful interest groups, including political parties, corporations, and agencies of the state. Organized labor demanded an equal, "legitimate" role in setting national policy and quickly found itself ensnared in a pluralistic industrial relations system that subordinated collective action rights to the goals of industrial stability, increased productivity, and capital accumulation.⁷⁹ Labor leaders and members sought legitimacy, political power, and security. What they received was "a counterfeit liberty... [an] opportunity to participate in the construction of their own subordination."⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Ibid., 78.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 7; 135.

⁷⁸ Christopher Tomlins, *The State and the Unions: Labor Relations, Law, and the Organized Labor Movement in America, 1880-1960* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 315.

⁷⁹ Ibid., xi-xii.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 326-327.

Only a few years after the Wagner Act granted federal protection to unions, the NLRB, Congress, and the courts began simultaneously to *expand* the laws requiring union organizations to administer contracts *and to restrict* the rights of workers to engage in collective action.⁸¹ The 1947 Taft-Hartley Act (which mainly codified post-Wagner bans against secondary boycotts, sympathy strikes, and closed shops) also barred front line supervisors from joining unions, granted the NLRB (not labor) control over the crafts or jobs a union could represent, and required union leaders to sign affidavits swearing they were not members of or affiliated with a communist organization.⁸² The affidavits “signified an intent to cripple by administrative process any union whose interpretation of its role was likely to be incompatible with pluralist values and assumptions,” Tomlins wrote.⁸³ By 1953, most U.S. unions had become regulated, “quasi-public ‘service organizations,’” that provided “expert wage-bargaining” to state-approved groups of workers and promoted production by mitigating industrial unrest.⁸⁴ Business unionism, in Tomlins’ view, resulted from legal coercion. Federal laws and regulations prohibited effective expressions of class solidarity (e.g. sympathetic strikes and boycotts) and barred unions from challenging corporate decisions to automate, reorganize, or relocate production.⁸⁵ Unions that dared to overstep the narrow role prescribed by federal labor law were vulnerable to raids by rival unions and to employer decertification campaigns:

⁸¹ Ibid., 247.

⁸³ Ibid., 296.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 313.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 303-304.

Having lost their protected status, they could no longer go to the NLRB and plead their case.⁸⁶

Labor historian Warren Van Tine described U.S. union leaders in the Gilded Age and Progressive Era as “prisoners of historical forces, unknowingly confined by the perimeters of their situation.”⁸⁷ Political-economic pressures during these periods produced a new set of social actors, according to Van Tine: professional union bureaucrats. As early as 1920, key characteristics of this new group were well-established: conservative men on “the fringe of the power elite,” using authoritarian tactics to stamp out radicalism and “rank and file spontaneity.”⁸⁸ Van Tine’s analysis left little room for human agency. Unrelenting attacks by employers and courts at the turn of the century denied U.S. unions the “sense of security” necessary “for the developing and flowering of democracy.”⁸⁹ Large bureaucratic unions developed because U.S. workers needed strong, disciplined organizations capable of confronting wealthy corporations across regional and national markets. Moreover, he wrote, union officials had to adopt a cautious, authoritarian style of leadership because the workers were prone to apathy and, occasionally, to abrupt, explosive outbursts.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ Ibid., 295.

⁸⁷ Warren R. Van Tine, *The Making of the Labor Bureaucrat: Union Leadership in the United States, 1870-1920* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1973), 161.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 180-181.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 47.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 90-102.

Van Tine, like Forbath, pointed to changes in labor's discourse that accompanied the rise of business unionism. He identified four principal metaphors used by labor leaders dating back to the Gilded Age: The union-as-fraternity (which stressed solidarity and mutualism); the union-as-democracy (which emphasized membership rights and allowed leaders to pin failures on the 'sovereign' rank and file); the union-as-army (which encouraged members to be loyal and obedient), and the union-as-business (which framed workers as customers exchanging dues for union services).⁹¹ According to Van Tine, by the end of World War I fraternal and democratic metaphors appeared less and less frequently in union newspapers and speeches, and images of the union as an army or business led by experts became "far more prominent and influential."⁹²

Historians Steve Fraser and Gary Gerstle, writing mainly about the CIO, argued that a new class of union leaders arose from a "proto-Keynesian elite" that developed during the 1920s and formed the core of the New Deal coalition. John L. Lewis and Sidney Hillman, founders of the CIO, were "entrepreneurs of the newer consumption-oriented industries." They—along with Senators Robert Wagner and Robert La Follette, Supreme Court Justices Louis Brandeis and Felix Frankfurter, and other progressive reformers—believed that a mass-production economy required government intervention in capital and labor markets, alike.⁹³

⁹¹ Ibid., 33-55.

⁹² Ibid., 56.

⁹³ Gary Gerstle and Steve Fraser, introduction to *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order, 1930-1980*, ed. Steve Fraser and Gary Gerstle, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), xiii; Steve Fraser, "The 'Labor Question,'" in *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order*, 57-62.

Fraser and Gerstle did not ignore human agency. Leaders of the CIO, they wrote, were determined to become part of a “new political elite.” In the 1930s, they saw their “opportunity and seized a portion of state power.”⁹⁴ Nevertheless, a strong sense of historical determinism pervaded Fraser’s account of a labor movement swept up in, and then marginalized by, the currents of the political economy. “Somehow, the political chemistry of the New Deal worked a double transformation: the ascendancy of labor and the eclipse of the ‘labor question,’” he wrote.⁹⁵ Unions that were once “the core of oppositional politics” became one more interest group within a vast coalition promoting production and economic growth. Fraser also observed that the labor movement’s discourse—its articulated sense of self—was transformed in that process, as “metaphors of pariahdom” morphed into “metaphors of social integration.”⁹⁶

A similar sense of determinism is evident in the work of labor historian Nelson Lichtenstein. “The stolid quality of postwar U.S. unions reflected the institutional constraints and legal structures under which the unions were forced to function,” he wrote. Chief among the structural constraints was the “baroque” system of collective bargaining.⁹⁷ In Western Europe, terms and conditions of work are typically determined in nationwide bargaining involving entire industries and labor federations. In the U.S., on the other hand, unions must negotiate contracts with thousands of employers, workplace by workplace: contracts that include complex benefit plans which workers in

⁹⁴ Gerstle and Fraser, xiii.

⁹⁵ Steve Fraser, 56.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 56-57.

⁹⁷ Nelson Lichtenstein, *State of the Union: A Century of American Labor* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 142.

most industrialized countries receive through government social welfare programs.⁹⁸

According to Lichtenstein, the burdens of collective bargaining fostered the growth of unions that were “administratively top-heavy” with experts and administrative staff.⁹⁹

“The very legitimacy achieved by American unionism in the postwar era contained a self-destructive contradiction,” Lichtenstein observed.¹⁰⁰ Walter Reuther—the very embodiment of CIO liberalism—“became a prisoner of the institutions he did so much to build.”¹⁰¹

Emphasizing Agency

Other historians reject the view of U.S. labor leaders as captives of circumstances imposed upon them and outside their control. Reuther, like many labor leaders, eagerly exploited the anti-communist crusades which eliminated thousands of labor’s best organizers and its strongest links to the civil rights struggle and other progressive movements.¹⁰² “The repression of the American left in late 1940s and 1950s was a project of liberals as well as conservatives,” historian Kim Phillips-Fein pointed out.¹⁰³ Many union leaders “hoped that by acknowledging their fundamental allegiance to the

⁹⁸ Ibid., 122-128.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 142.

¹⁰⁰ Lichtenstein, *State of the Union*, 149.

¹⁰¹ Nelson Lichtenstein, *The Most Dangerous Man in Detroit: Walter Reuther and the Fate of American Labor* (New York: Basic Books, 1995), 442.

¹⁰² Ibid., 186-193, 250-269; Len DeCaux, *Labor Radical: From the Wobblies to CIO, a Personal History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970); Melvyn Dubofsky and Warren Van Tine, *John L. Lewis: A Biography* (New York: Quadrangle, 1977).

¹⁰³ Kim Phillips-Fein, *Invisible Hands: The Making of the Conservative Movement from the New Deal to Reagan* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2009), 32.

social order, they could maintain the stable bargaining relationships with employers that they had won at last.”¹⁰⁴ If that was, in fact, their hope, they had badly underestimated the opposition. To conservatives, even de-radicalized unions “embodied the most social-democratic tendencies within liberalism,” Phillips-Fein wrote. The political right used the anti-communist crusades that Reuther and others in labor helped to inflame to weaken organized labor and accomplish their primary objectives: rolling back the New Deal and “dismantling the welfare state.”¹⁰⁵

In her history of the early AFL, labor historian Julie Greene focused on the choices made by union leaders. Taking careful account of the political-economic forces at work in the late 1800s and early 1900s, she concentrated on “the political possibilities” open to various elements within the AFL and “the political choices they made.”¹⁰⁶ As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Greene traced the dominance of business unionism to practices developed by Gompers and Strasser to combat socialists and to consolidate control of their union in the hands of skilled, white, native-born men.¹⁰⁷ She also traced the decentralized, fragmented character of today’s labor movement to decisions by Gompers and other AFL leaders to guarantee the autonomy of their member unions. Federation leaders set overall policies for organized labor (with the input and consent of the affiliates), but they pointedly stayed out of the internal affairs of the member unions. Leaders of the affiliates had tremendous latitude to speak and act as they pleased. The

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 88.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 60.

¹⁰⁶ Greene, 29-31; 285.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 285.

AFL's founders "intended their Federation to be weak and subordinate to the trade unions," Greene wrote, and it remains so today.¹⁰⁸

At the same time, Greene noted, AFL leaders "possessed a great deal of power" over their local and state central bodies and "frequently employed it aggressively" against grassroots movements that jeopardized federation control. Anti-socialism "became a central tactic in Gompers' campaign to consolidate his power," she wrote.¹⁰⁹ He conflated socialism and anti-unionism as a way of "disciplining AFL members" and "enforcing the AFL program."¹¹⁰ But Gompers also recognized that socialism was a potent force within the AFL—one that threatened his strategy of protecting fragile unions from employers and the courts through a "close but contingent partnership with the Democratic Party."¹¹¹

Historian Paul Buhle offered a far harsher assessment of the motives behind business unionism. Leaders of the AFL and, later, the CIO, repeatedly "cast their fate with what they perceived to be society's winners"—the ruling elites of an ascendant U.S. empire. According to Buhle, U.S. labor leaders embraced an industrial relations system that denied workers any meaningful autonomy in exchange for a small measure of influence in the operations of that system. They allowed U.S. workers to become

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 11; 275.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 76.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 134.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 221-223; 10. Greene's analysis of the exclusionary, inward-looking practices of the AFL adds an important dimension which is overlooked (or insufficiently stressed) in other histories recounted here. Skilled U.S. workers became increasingly separated from the swelling numbers of unskilled and semi-skilled laborers, in terms of their economic status, workplace power, political influence, and places of residence. To preserve their privileges, they adopted policies to prevent non-whites, women, and others from entering the unions.

politically and economically “degraded by the narrowing of the (labor) movement’s purpose from human emancipation to special favors for the connected.”¹¹²

Buhle conceded that labor leaders faced enormous external pressures. In the U.S., he wrote, a “few, immensely powerful firms” have historically had the power to ally with judges and politicians to “crush idealistic labor movements. ... [No] other modern empire, not even the British, showed the same capacity to shape its society or its labor leaders to such uniform purpose.”¹¹³ Even so, Buhle insisted, union leaders could have chosen a different path. They could have rejected the moral logic of the rising imperial order and organized mass resistance, as the Knights of Labor and the Industrial Workers of the World sought to do. They could have made common cause with poor and oppressed people in developing countries rather than aiding their oppressors.¹¹⁴ Instead, U.S. union leaders allowed themselves to be coerced and co-opted by the very elites that moved during the past several decades to destroy the labor movement.

Labor historian Robert Zieger, writing about the CIO, also focused on the choices of union leaders to explain the fragmented, economically-focused character of organized labor. His conclusions, however, are almost wholly opposed to Buhle’s. Writing about the CIO, Zieger argued that union leaders took “appropriate and necessary” steps to ensure the survival of organized labor by agreeing to suppress leftists and rank-and-file militants, and to collaborate with the business and political elites. “The CIO rightly acted

¹¹² Paul Buhle, *Taking Care of Business: Samuel Gompers, George Meany, Lane Kirkland and the Tragedy of American Labor* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1999), 263.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 136-145; 151-154; 225-230.

in this period as if the state and the political system were open to the influence of industrial workers, that they had a right to contest for influence within its structures, and that to attempt to operate in sustained fashion outside these structures was to invite futility and marginalization,” he wrote.¹¹⁵ It was risky for labor to rely on the government, he conceded: The “shotgun was always behind the door.”¹¹⁶ Yet, he continued, the pro-labor policies of the federal government during the 1930s and 1940s were “crucial for the achievement of permanent industrial unions.” The need to ally with the Democratic Party was obvious “to all but the most doctrinaire activists.”¹¹⁷

It is simply wrong to argue that organized labor became weaker by choosing a less militant path during the 1940s and 1950s, according to Zieger. There was no broad “leftward-tending working-class militancy” to support a more confrontational strategy, he wrote.¹¹⁸ And the continued presence of pro-Soviet elements in the CIO would “surely have crippled” labor’s political prospects and “invited increasing repression.”¹¹⁹ Furthermore, Zieger argued, the CIO’s strength after World War II was more apparent than real: the federation was internally divided, and—with the exception of the UAW and the Steel Workers—in a state of “utter weakness.”¹²⁰ Zieger conceded that purging the left and clamping down on rank-and-file activity undercut labor’s ability to organize and

¹¹⁵ Robert H. Zieger, *The CIO, 1935-1955* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 374-375.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 304.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 375.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 374.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 292.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 291; 306.

take effective collective action.¹²¹ He conceded, too, that when the AFL and CIO merged in 1955, all that remained was “a largely instrumentalist conception of unionism” as way for members to extract economic gains.¹²² But Zieger concluded that, given the options, U.S. labor leaders acted wisely, even if the results proved disappointing.

Kevin Boyle’s book *The UAW and the Heyday of American Liberalism* made a similar claim: The feeble state of today’s labor movement cannot credibly be attributed to a “failure of will” or “lack of vision” among union leaders in the 1940s and 1950s.¹²³ Indeed, according to Boyle, the UAW—one of the two most powerful CIO unions—strove to carry its social-democratic agenda into the post-World War II era. That effort failed because the union’s social-democratic ideology was fraught with contradictions and its agenda was poorly suited to the post-war political realities.¹²⁴ Reuther hoped to construct a new progressive coalition between trade unionists and middle-class liberals, Boyle wrote, but organized labor was too divided and the liberals Reuther courted were too estranged from his social-democratic vision. After World War II “most liberal policy makers had rejected the notion of a powerful federal state” micromanaging the U.S. economy, according to Boyle. The Democratic Party was bitterly divided over the New Deal and segregation, and the ranks of labor, including the UAW, were split along racial lines, as well.¹²⁵ In retrospect, Reuther’s quest for a new progressive movement based on

¹²¹ Ibid., 322-326.

¹²² Ibid., 327.

¹²³ Kevin Boyle, *The UAW and the Heyday of American Liberalism, 1945-1968* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 3; 7.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 4-5; 259-261.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 5-7.

labor and the Democratic Party seems hopelessly naive. But, according to Boyle, the fact that Reuther miscalculated does not negate the significance of his effort.

Conclusion

The constraints imposed on U.S. labor have been—and continue to be—substantial and, at times, overwhelming. If anything, the historians discussed in this chapter understated the extent of legal and extralegal repression directed against U.S. workers and their unions. To understand the dynamics of any movement we must examine the rules and power relations within the organizational field. To understand the dynamics of organized labor, we must understand the options open to union leaders and members, the advantages they enjoyed, and the obstacles they faced.

However, as important as environmental factors may be, people do not respond to the world in predictable, uniform ways. Ultimately, what matters—what is truly interesting—is what people do with the circumstances they are given. We do make our own history. When we consider the record of mass arrests, deportations, and vigilante “justice” visited upon U.S. workers, it is easy to understand why labor leaders would leap at the chance to win protection and security for their unions. On the other hand, we can look at that same ugly record and question whether people as canny as Walter Reuther or George Meany seriously believed that U.S. employers and political leaders could be trustworthy partners in a pluralistic labor relations system.

Whatever their motives—or mix of motives—might have been, U.S. labor leaders bought “a seat at the table” by suppressing the rank and file and attacking the political left. Their decisions were at least as important as the actions of the government and the corporations in defining the post-war labor movement. In the next chapter, I consider how the historical tensions between business unionism and social-movement unionism were reflected in the journalistic practices of the U.S. labor press.

Chapter 3:

“Social-Movement Journalism” and An Explanation of Research Methods

The U.S. labor movement, like most modern social movements, is led by large, formal organizations.¹²⁶ These organizations developed out of the mass struggles of workers and they perform a variety of services on behalf of the workers’ movement, including political lobbying, strategic leadership, financial management, and policy development. The union organizations and the grassroots labor movement are interdependent, but they coexist uneasily because the needs of institutions and popular movements do not always coincide. The point is not that one set of needs is more real or legitimate than the other. Rather, the point is that labor, like other modern movements, exists in tension with itself.¹²⁷ The needs of institutional labor and grassroots labor conflict from time to time, sometimes quite sharply.

¹²⁶ Davis et al.

¹²⁷ Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-1963* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1988), 807-809; 899; Manning Marable, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention* (New York: Viking, 2011), 256-257; 263-265; 403-404; Leora Broyo, “Mutiny at the Sierra Club,” *Mother Jones*, Nov. 3, 1988, motherjones.com/politics/1998/11/mutiny-at-the-sierra-club (accessed Jan. 28, 2012); Barbara Epstein. “What Happened to the Women’s Movement?” *Monthly Review*, May, 1, 2001, monthlyreview.org/2001/05/01/what-happened-to-the-womens-movement (accessed Jan. 28, 2012). Tensions between grassroots activists and institutional leaders have also characterized the history of the movements for civil rights, environmental protection, and women’s rights. In the early 1960s, the growing anger and impatience of blacks in communities from Birmingham, Alabama to New York was increasingly directed against the leaders of such established organizations as the NAACP, SCLC, and Urban League. Similar frictions have developed within the environmental movement. “With 550,000 members and an annual budget of \$40 million, “ the Sierra Club is “staffed with hundreds of professional environmentalists.” But there is increasing concern that “in its zeal to become a political force in Washington, the club is sacrificing its commitment to grassroots activism and chickening out on bold measures.” So, too, with the women’s movement. “Where there were once women’s organizations with large participatory memberships there are now bureaucratic organizations with paid staff. ...What we have now is a women’s movement composed on the one hand of relatively conservative organizations...[and activists] concerned with specific grassroots organizing.”

As I discussed in Chapter 2, the term “business unionism” describes policies and practices that prioritize labor’s organizational needs and interests (e.g. a focus on centralized internal controls, labor agreements, and union policies). “Social movement unionism” describes policies and practices that prioritize the struggles of grassroots workers (e.g. a focus on building solidarity between wage earners, or educating the rank and file).

In this chapter, I examine the historical role of the U.S. labor press. I will identify journalistic practices—specifically, questions regarding content, the nature and involvement of the audience, and media production and distribution—that manifest tendencies towards business unionism and social-movement unionism. The major debates involving the ILCA, which I explore in Chapters 4-6, revolved around those journalistic practices, and expressed deeper debates over the character of the U.S. labor movement.

My review of the historical literature shows that four principal forms of labor media have existed in the United States:

1. *Independent labor publications*: Prior to the widespread organization of unions in the 1870s and 1880s, editors and printers founded labor publications to support guilds and early working-class political parties. In the late 1800s and early 1900s, mutual aid societies also published independent labor newspapers.
2. *Left Wing political publications*: Numerous anarchist, socialist, and communist organizations have produced radical and revolutionary publications targeted to working-class readers since the late 1800s.

3. *Foreign language publications*: Particularly in the late 1800s and early 1900s, ethnic organizations and independent publishers produced foreign-language periodicals that served immigrant working-class communities.
4. *Trade union publications*: Since their beginning, U.S. unions have produced periodicals targeted to their members. Some union publications also aimed to influence unorganized workers, elected officials, and members of the press. Although typically produced by unions, these publications are sometimes produced by third parties and *endorsed* by the unions, giving organized labor effective, but less direct, editorial control.

Historians and media scholars have mainly focused on the first two categories (independent and political left publications), paying some attention to foreign-language periodicals, and little to the trade union press. I have found no research (e.g. dissertations, theses, books, or articles) focused on the ILCA.¹²⁸

In his article “Origins of the American Labor Press,” and his book *Voices of Revolution: The Dissident Press in America*, Rodger Streitmatter¹²⁹ attributed the birth of some fifty working-class newspapers between 1828 and 1835 to early industrialization and the appearance of “class distinctions” that offended democratic sensibilities in the newly formed republic.¹³⁰ Since the existing ‘party newspapers’ ignored the emerging

¹²⁸ Stephen J. Haessler, “Carl Haessler and the Federated Press: Essays on the History of American Labor Journalism” (master’s thesis, University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1977), 253-260. Haessler discusses the first few years of the ILPA’s existence but he describes the organization one-sidedly, as a tool for union leaders to control the labor press.

¹²⁹ Rodger Streitmatter, “Origins of the American Labor Press,” *Journalism History* 25, no.3 (Autumn 1999): 99-106; Streitmatter, *Voices of Revolution*, 4-19.

¹³⁰ Streitmatter, “Origins of the American Labor Press”: 99.

proletariat, workers created their own media, including the *Mechanics Free Press*, the *Free Enquirer*, and the *Working Man's Advocate*. The “common purpose of the publications was to ensure that American workers did not exist merely to enhance the power and abundance of the merchant capitalists,” Streitmatter wrote.¹³¹

The early labor press was highly effective, according to Streitmatter. Its editors helped draft and win support for legislation creating public schools and the 10-hour workday and banning debtors' prisons and child labor. Between 1828 and 1830, the Working Men's Party—with the *Free Enquirer* as its official newspaper—elected scores of labor reformers to city councils and state legislatures in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Delaware, New Jersey, and New Hampshire. In New York, the “entire labor ticket won in Syracuse, and all but one worker candidate was victorious in both Troy and Albany.”¹³²

Streitmatter detailed how Federalist and Democratic Party leaders reacted to these gains by using their own party newspapers to attack the labor press and undermine the Working Man's Party. They mounted a “savage editorial onslaught” against Frances “Fanny” Wright, editor of the *Free Enquirer* and an outspoken advocate of atheism, interracial marriage, and women's rights.¹³³ They simultaneously co-opted many popular demands of the Working Man's Party in a successful bid to siphon-off working-class

¹³¹ Ibid., 99-100.

¹³² Ibid., 103.

¹³³ Streitmatter, *Voices of Revolution*, 18.

votes. “By the 1831 election, not a single labor candidate nominated for office was elected,” according to Streitmatter.¹³⁴

“The viscous attacks in the nation’s newspapers followed by the voters’ rejection of labor candidates” left the labor press demoralized and weak. William Heighton, editor of the *Mechanics’ Free Press* and a founder of the Working Man’s Party, fell into a deep depression and resigned in 1831.¹³⁵ His paper folded that year, and the *Free Enquirer* ceased publishing in 1835. The *Working Man’s Advocate* continued to publish (under a half dozen different names) until 1849. Nonetheless, the first generation of U.S. labor newspapers “demonstrated—and unequivocally so—that labor journalism” could empower workers in significant ways by helping to define their interests, construct new political forms, and attract national support for their demands.¹³⁶

The handful of historical studies on the early labor press which predate Streitmatter’s 1999 journal article offered shorter, more cursory treatments of the subject.¹³⁷ However, they also raised important points that Streitmatter did not address. For example, historians C. K. McFarland and Robert Thistlethwaite¹³⁸ emphasized that the *Working Man’s Advocate* was the cornerstone of a strategic “effort to unite the working people”— the product of seven months’ deliberation by a “Committee of Fifty”

¹³⁴ Streitmatter, “Origins of the American Labor Press”: 104-105.

¹³⁵ Streitmatter, *Voices of Revolution*, 18.

¹³⁶ Streitmatter, “Origins of the American Labor Press”: 104-105.

¹³⁷ Streitmatter’s article “Origins of the American Labor Press” formed the core of the first chapter of his 2001 book, *Voices of Revolution*.

¹³⁸ C. K. McFarland and Robert L. Thistlethwaite, “20 Years of a Successful Labor Paper: The Working Man’s Advocate, 1829-49,” *Journalism Quarterly* 60, no.1 (Spring 1983): 35-40.

meeting in New York City to form a national pro-labor political party.¹³⁹ In other words, the longest-lived of the early labor newspapers¹⁴⁰ was the product of careful forethought and political base-building. Ultimately, the paper folded due to editorial burn-out and financial difficulties.¹⁴¹

Frank Kabelá's study of U.S. labor newspapers from 1828 through the early 1870s covered much of the same ground as Streitmatter, McFarland, and Thistlethwaite. However, Kabelá focused on the impact of economic change on the labor press.¹⁴² The early workers' movement, and most of its newspapers, "evaporated" between 1837 and 1842 during a nationwide economic panic. Only in the 1850s, with the opening of the west and resumed economic growth, were U.S. workers able to reorganize and launch new publications, including foreign-language periodicals. However, Kabelá wrote, "the greatest development of the labor press in United States history" occurred between 1863 and 1873 with the founding of "no less than 120 journals of labor" during the Civil War and the waves of industrialization that followed the conflict.¹⁴³

In his book, *The Making of the Labor Bureaucrat*, historian Warren Van Tine examined how labor leaders in the Gilded Age and Progressive Era exploited "institutionalized tools of communication" to boost their images and careers. "The most

¹³⁹ Ibid., 36.

¹⁴⁰ According to McFarland and Thistlethwaite, the *Advocate* survived for 20 years, compared to three and seven years, respectively, for the *Mechanic's Free Press* and the *Free Enquirer*.

¹⁴¹ McFarland and Thistlethwaite, 37.

¹⁴² Frank Kabelá, "The Labor Press: Its History, Nature, and Influence," *Labor Law Journal* 11, no. 5 (May 1960): 407-414.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 408.

important medium...was the union journal,” Van Tine wrote.¹⁴⁴ As unions grew into national organizations, the top officers made increasing use of union publications to legitimize their decisions, marginalize critics, and keep their names before the union membership. Some officers, including AFL founder Samuel Gompers and Teamsters president Daniel Tobin, insisted on editing their union publications, while other labor leaders hired editors and oversaw their work. Quotations or letters criticizing the unions rarely appeared in the labor press except “as targets for the editor to knock down,” while material praising the union and its leaders received “front page exposure.”¹⁴⁵

Within the unions, communication was a “one-way path from the top down,” according to Van Tine. He attributed this to what he termed “the insoluble dilemma” of managing dissent inside voluntary associations, but his reasoning seems too pat.¹⁴⁶ First, he failed to question the degree and nature of control over dissent that was actually needed to protect the unions. More to the point, he sidestepped the question of the kind of organizations U.S. labor leaders were trying to create. Were they hoping to construct mass organizations responsive to rank-and-file members, or hierarchical structures under centralized control? Nevertheless, Van Tine put his finger on a genuine dilemma with continued relevance to unions and the labor press: the inherent tensions between labor’s organizational needs for stability and control, and the needs of the workers’ movement for mass debate and rank-and-file initiative.

¹⁴⁴ Van Tine, 104.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 104-105.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 107-108.

The Labor Press Becomes a Union Press

No scholar has written more extensively about the U.S. labor press than journalism historian Jon E. Bekken, whose dissertation examined working-class newspapers in Chicago from 1880 to 1930. Bekken has authored a series of articles examining independent, left wing, foreign language, and union publications primarily from the late 1800s through World War II.¹⁴⁷ According to Bekken, the U.S. labor press shaped working-class political culture by fusing ethnic and class consciousness within communities while building unity *between* communities. He emphasized that working-class publications “survived only where they were embedded in a larger network of community institutions.” The labor press relied on radical parties, mutual aid societies, unions, and other working-class organizations for readers, news, and support. These groups, in turn, relied on the labor press to “communicate with their constituents, develop and clarify movement ideology, and reach out to broader publics.”¹⁴⁸

Bekken employed political opportunity theory to explain why working-class communities found it harder and harder to sustain their own media in the early 1900s. Government repression during World War I (including the revocation of mailing privileges for dissident publications, and the mass arrests and deportations of radical

¹⁴⁷ Jon E. Bekken, “Working-Class Newspapers, Community and Consciousness in Chicago, 1880-1930,” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana, 1992); Bekken, *The Working-Class Press at the Turn of the Century*, in *Ruthless Criticism: New Perspectives in U.S. Communication History*, ed. William S. Solomon and Robert W. McChesney, 151-175 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993); Bekken, “No Weapon So Powerful”; Bekken, “A Collective Biography of Editors of U.S. Worker’s Papers, 1913 & 1925,” *American Journalism* 15, no. 3, (Summer 1998): 19-39; Bekken, “Federated Press: An Independent Labor News Service,” an unpublished paper presented to the AEJMC History Division, Mar. 2003.

¹⁴⁸ Bekken, “Working Class Newspapers,” 1-4.

activists) destroyed oppositional parties and periodicals. “Only a handful of radical papers survived the war,” Bekken wrote.¹⁴⁹ At the same time, millions of second-generation immigrants grew up fluent in English, and commercial daily newspapers began tailoring their content to attract working-class readers. Foreign-language and community-based workers’ papers shrank in size and influence. As department stores and other large commercial outlets squeezed out neighborhood shops that advertised in the labor press, working-class publications found it harder and harder to replace the lost revenue by asking their hard-pressed subscribers and readers to pay more.¹⁵⁰ With the disappearance of radical, foreign-language, and independent workers’ papers, the U.S. labor press became a trade union press, according to Bekken. To be sure, lively, creative union newspapers existed during the heyday of the CIO. But much of that bold, innovative spirit disappeared, as well, with the crushing of the political left in the 1940s.¹⁵¹

In separate studies, Bekken and Stephen Haessler wrote about the anti-communist efforts of union leaders and editors in the late 1940s to destroy an important member of the U.S. labor press: the Federated Press news service (FP).¹⁵² The FP—whose history I explore in Chapter 5—was founded in 1919 by some three dozen union newspapers and the official publications of the Farm-Labor Party and U.S. Socialist Party. The FP’s board of directors grew to include editors of major craft and industrial union publications, as

¹⁴⁹ Bekken, “The Working Class Press,” 158.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 158-168.

¹⁵¹ Bekken, “Federated Press.”

¹⁵² Ibid; Haessler.

well as syndicalist and communist periodicals. By 1946, nearly one-third of all U.S. labor publications subscribed to the FP, which also supplied news to the *New York Post* and other commercial outlets.¹⁵³ For decades the FP walked a delicate line between advocating for labor and reporting important controversies within organized labor.¹⁵⁴ That was never an easy balance to maintain.

In 1949, during the height of the Red Scare, AFL leaders accused the FP's managing editor of having communist sympathies, and AFL and CIO editors joined to create an alternative news service, Labor Press Associates (LPA). Leaders of the two federations directed their affiliates to quit the FP and subscribe to the LPA. When the AFL and CIO merged in 1955, only a handful of unions still subscribed to the FP, which went out of business the following year.

Labor historian James Tracy showed how political repression and labor movement conservatism affected an influential labor newspaper paper in Iowa.¹⁵⁵ Founded as a cooperative in the early 1930s, the *Dubuque Leader*—which circulated throughout the community—investigated government and employer corruption, challenged the National Association of Manufacturers' attacks on the New Deal, and mobilized public support for strikes and union organizing drives. In 1936, the *Leader* helped elect labor-endorsed candidates in fourteen of Dubuque's fifteen precincts and put

¹⁵³ Bekken, "Federated Press."

¹⁵⁴ Haessler, 100.

¹⁵⁵ James F. Tracy, "A Historical Case Study of Alternative News Media and Labor Activism: The *Dubuque Leader*, 1935-1939," *Journalism Communication Monographs* 8, no. 4 (Winter 2007): 267-343; James F. Tracy, "'Smile While I Cut Your Throat:' Mass Media, Myth and the Contested 'Harmonization' of the Working Class," *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 25, no. 3 (July 2001): 298-325.

three union members on the city council.¹⁵⁶ Local elites pushed back, convicting the newspaper's editor on what many observers insisted were trumped-up morals charges. The *Leader* continues to publish today, but according to Tracy the "deterioration and depoliticization" of the union movement long ago transformed the newspaper into a small, inward-looking journal focused on "the vicissitudes of organized labor."¹⁵⁷

The "labor press was in retreat" at the close of World War II, Bekken wrote. An "increasingly institutionalized labor movement" had lowered its aims and narrowed its vision. More and more unions replaced their "worker-editors" with professional reporters and public relations experts, leaving less and less room for native labor journalists.¹⁵⁸

The post-World War II labor press is so understudied that one scholar termed it "uncharted territory."¹⁵⁹ One of the first studies appeared in May 1957, in the business publication *Management News*.¹⁶⁰ George Haas examined forty-five international union periodicals published earlier that year and commented, favorably, that the union publications were "much more than propaganda organs." More than 40 percent of the content concerned matters not directly connected to the unions, he wrote. However, a close examination of the data shows that the broad content which favorably impressed Hass consisted mainly of commercial advertisements, "fraternal intelligence" (social

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 296.

¹⁵⁷ Tracy, "A Historical Case Study," 325.

¹⁵⁸ Bekken, "Federated Press."

¹⁵⁹ Karla Kelling Sclater, "The Labor and Radical Press, 1820-the Present: An Overview and Bibliography," The Labor Press Project, Harry Bridges Center for Labor Studies, University of Washington, <http://depts.washington.edu/labhist/laborpress/Kelling.htm> (accessed Feb. 16, 2010.)

¹⁶⁰ George H. Haas, "The Trade Union Press, An Analysis of 45 Publications," *Management News* (May 1957), "Surveys" folder, ILCA.

news about union members), and trade news (e.g. announced changes in union jurisdiction, and information about work-related products).¹⁶¹ Overwhelmingly, the content focused on matters directly related to the union organizations.

Haas did find substantial differences between the publications of unions formerly affiliated with the AFL and the CIO. Former AFL publications, which tended to be magazines, carried more “fraternal intelligence” and more advertising, too—often for tools and equipment used by members of particular crafts and trades. Former CIO publications, on the other hand, tended to be newspapers and carried more stories about collective bargaining, political action, and internal union affairs. If they carried ads, they were typically for consumer goods. But the former AFL and CIO publications shared two notable characteristics: None of the forty-five periodicals Haas studied contained news about unfavorable labor agreements, and, in both sets of publications, stories about collective bargaining and political action received the greatest amount of space.¹⁶²

The most sophisticated analysis of postwar labor media appeared in 1958.¹⁶³ Journalism scholar Richard Garver examined a random sample of thirty-four international union periodicals (a total of 152 issues) published in 1956. He examined only large union publications (the “solid, definable core” of the labor press), explaining that their resources provided a measure of stability, continuity, and professionalism “not found in

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Richard A. Garver, “The Labor Press As a Leadership Tool,” *Journalism Quarterly* 35 (Summer 1958): 324-332.

many other segments of labor journalism.”¹⁶⁴ Based on a content analysis of 6,152 news stories, columns, and editorials, Garver concluded that the postwar labor press was “defensive in nature”: a “house organ...published primarily to sell the union leaders and the organization to the worker.”¹⁶⁵ If the labor press ever functioned “primarily as a mechanism for educating unionists,” Garver wrote, “this is no longer the case today.” Nor, he said was the post-war labor press used to primarily to counter anti-union bias in the commercial media, or “as a handy weapon for attacking management.”¹⁶⁶

To support his conclusions, Garver pointed to the absence of content containing dissenting views or negative information about unions. Only 0.2 percent of the articles contained material that questioned union policy. Only 1 percent of the articles criticized the union leadership or organized labor generally, and only 2 percent reported union failures to achieve particular goals. “The labor press presents a rose-colored picture of union success” in order to enhance “union administration prestige,” Garver wrote.¹⁶⁷ Furthermore, he argued, “reader opinion is not an important” element in labor press content. Only nine of the thirty-four publications printed letters from union members, and every letter praised the union and its policies. Dissenting or critical information anywhere in the publication was always “balanced’ by information supporting the union.”¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 325.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 332.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 324.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 331.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

But Garver also wrote that union propaganda was subtle and counterintuitive. Overwhelmingly, the “methods suggested by the labor press for achievement of union objectives place responsibility squarely on the individual union member and not on the organization.”¹⁶⁹ He found that fully 40 percent of the social actors mentioned in the articles were rank-and-file union members, and only 20 percent were union officers.¹⁷⁰ Rank-and-file members were mentioned in 63 percent of the stories about union successes and 73 percent of the stories about union failures, while union leaders were mentioned in only 37 percent of the ‘success’ stories and 27 percent of the stories that reported failures.¹⁷¹ Garver then argued that the focus on the union membership was intended to deflect blame for failures away from the leaders and onto the rank and file.¹⁷²

It seems odd that no one has attempted to replicate Garver’s study or to challenge his conclusions, given the near-universal complaint that the words, deeds, and images of union leaders dominate most modern labor publications. Garver’s claim that union periodicals mentioned members twice as often as leaders (in stories good and bad) cries out for confirmation. More to the point, faulting labor publications for foregrounding the union rank and file seems like a case of “damned if you do, damned if you don’t.”

Garver’s definition of “defensive” journalism is open to challenge, as well. He classified as “defensive” stories that built up and justified the union, rather than attacking

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 329.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 326.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 331.

¹⁷² Ibid., 329.

the union's opponents.¹⁷³ Here is how Garver described defensive content: "The chant which greets the reader on nearly every page of his labor publication is this: the union protects the worker's interests. ... [The] union fights sex and race discrimination; the union seeks protective legislation for the working class, or the union fights for improved conditions."¹⁷⁴ As I write in Chapter 5, the post-war labor press and the AFL-CIO did, indeed, react defensively to the anti-communist crusades and the McClellan Committee's investigations of union corruption. But it is curious to apply the word "defensive"—a term that connotes reactivity—to stories about unions leading the fight for equal treatment and improved conditions for the working class. The failure of scholars to challenge Garver's methods and conclusions is indicative of the lack of academic interest in the post-World War II labor press.

Writing in the *Labor Law Journal*, Frank Kabela also characterized the post-war union press as a leadership "tool to control the working mass."¹⁷⁵ In organized labor, communication "moves in only one direction—from union headquarters down," Kabela wrote. Union publications ought to have "the interests of all of labor at heart, and not only those of a few officers... [but] only very few labor editors can claim" this is true.¹⁷⁶

However, Kabela observed, surveys showed that more 80 percent of union readers felt their labor publication was doing a good job, and was more credible than the

¹⁷³ Ibid., 327.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 330.

¹⁷⁵ Kabela, 407-414.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 409.

commercial press.¹⁷⁷ He explained this result, in part, by arguing that workers expect and want a combative, partisan labor press. He also echoed Garver by suggesting that U.S. unions practice a sophisticated brand of propaganda: “If the [labor] press is a tool of leadership, it is certainly a good one, for the readers are not aware of any inaccuracies or slanting.” Ultimately, Kabela seemed perplexed by the labor press. It is “an institution of many faces,” he wrote: “The readers feel it is an honest and fair source of information; [union] editors feel it is an open forum for free expression and honest reporting; but outside investigators...see it as a biased tool of labor leaders.”¹⁷⁸

In 1964, reporter Morton Reicheck slammed the U.S. labor press in the *Columbia Journalism Review*.¹⁷⁹ Some “of the crudest characteristics of house-organ journalism show up in even the best trade-union publications,” he wrote, describing periodicals overflowing with the words and photographs of top union officials.¹⁸⁰ Paradoxically, Reicheck praised the ILPA and the AFL-CIO for “toning down the emotional and raucous style” of union publications, but then criticized postwar labor papers for lacking a “crusading spirit” and “missionary zeal.” He made two additional, important points. Reicheck noted that mailing 20 million union publications to members’ homes does not mean the labor press has 20 million readers. He also cited a study showing that most

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 413.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 412.

¹⁷⁹ Morton A. Reicheck, “Labor Press: Limited Hopes,” *Columbia Journalism Review* 3, no. 2 (Summer 1964): 36-39.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 36.

international union periodicals were written for people with at least 18 years of schooling—well above the abilities of the average union member.¹⁸¹

A comparison of AFL and CIO publications—quite similar to Haas’ 1957 study—appeared in a 1969 issue of *Labor History*.¹⁸² Martin Perline compared samples of periodicals published by AFL and CIO unions between 1938 and 1939, and between 1960 and 1961, after the AFL-CIO merger. While the definitions Perline used to categorize content were somewhat confusing, his findings were consistent with Haas’s of a decade before. Pre- and post-merger AFL publications focused more on contractual, workplace concerns, while the CIO publications reported more on politics and organizing. AFL publications also were far likely to carry ads for craft- and trade-related tools and equipment. Perline also observed that publications by the AFL-CIO carried three times more news about politics than the average international union journal, regardless of its AFL or CIO roots.¹⁸³ He also noted a “considerable decrease” throughout the 1960s in the number of stories about the broader labor movement. He suggested the trend reflected a decrease in the number of competitive organizing drives involving AFL and CIO unions.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 38

¹⁸² Martin M. Perline, “The Trade Union Press: An Historical Analysis,” *Labor History* 10, no. 1 (Winter 1969): 107-114.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 111.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 109.

Ralph Nader wrote a scathing, though thoughtful, critique of the labor press in a 1977 article in *The Progressive*.¹⁸⁵ The unions of the 1920s and 1930s “had shrunken treasuries and swollen imaginations. Now they have swollen treasuries and shrunken imaginations,” he wrote. Nader said U.S. unions need—but do not have—“a free, inquiring labor press to remind them of their broad mission” for social justice.¹⁸⁶ Despite mailing an impressive 800 publications a month to 30 million homes, the “impact and professionalism” of the labor press remains “largely imaginary,” Nader wrote.¹⁸⁷

Nader praised several prominent publications as well-written and engaging (he specifically mentioned the IAM’s *Machinist* newspaper, the United Mine Workers’ *Journal*, and the UAW’s *Solidarity*), but wrote that most union leaders harm the labor press through stingy budgets and excessive editorial control. Only two of the fifteen largest international publications published letters to the editor, Nader observed, and he pointed to an ILPA survey showing that 45 percent of national and international unions had reduced the size and/or frequency of their publications since 1964.¹⁸⁸

A 1983 article in the *Columbia Journalism Review* rendered a similarly harsh verdict.¹⁸⁹ Political meddling by top union leaders had stripped the modern labor press of any sense of vitality or controversy, according to Michael Hoyt.¹⁹⁰ He pointed to several

¹⁸⁵ Ralph Nader, 29-31.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 30-31.

¹⁸⁹ Hoyt, 34-38.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 34-35.

exceptions—all of them cooperatively-owned, independent publications that operated with few or no formal ties to organized labor. They included the *Midwest Center for Labor Research* (owned and run by labor educators, rank-and-file steel workers, and low-level union officers), *Labor Notes* (founded by radical leftists and activists from dozens of different unions), and the publications of insurgent rank-and-file groups inside the Teamsters, UAW, and other unions.¹⁹¹

However by the late 1990s, “the independent labor press had all but disappeared,” according to media scholar Mick Mulcrone. Only a “handful of publications such as *Labor Notes* and *Union Democracy Review* still struggled on the margins...Most union periodicals in the late twentieth century were little more than vehicles of self-promotion.”¹⁹² From 1980 on, few scholars seemed interested in the U.S. labor press. Serious discussion from that point forward took the form of debates involving union educators and union journalists, as I show in Chapters 5, 6, and 7.¹⁹³ Ironically, the academe lost interest in the labor press at the very moment that the debates over the proper role of union media began to sharpen inside organized labor. They exploded into public view shortly after John Sweeney’s insurgent slate won control of the AFL-CIO in 1995—a subject I explore in Chapter 6.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 37. *Labor Notes* became a member of the ILCA in 2009.

¹⁹² Mick Mulcrone, “Labor Media: Early Form of Alternative Media Serving a Specialized Audience,” in *History of the Mass Media in the United States: an Encyclopedia*, ed. Margaret A. Blanchard and Carol J. Burwash, (Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1998), 308.

¹⁹³ Jon Bekken is the exception that proves the rule. A professor of English at Albright College, Bekken is also a union activist and editor of the IWW’s *Industrial Worker* newspaper. In Chapter 6, I explore a number of debates over the labor press that broke out in the *Labor Studies Journal* and in a book titled *The New Labor Press*, published in 1992, which contains twenty essays by union journalists.

Defining “Institutional” and “Social Movement” Union Journalism

Based on the literature on social movements, business unionism, and the labor press, I have identified chief characteristics of two conflicting tendencies within union journalism. (See Table 1, page 73.) What I term “institutional union journalism” describes practices involving content, the audience, and production and distribution which express and reinforce business unionism—a mode of operations that prioritizes the needs and interests of labor organizations and leaders. What I call “social movement journalism” describes labor press practices that promote “social movement unionism”—a mode of operations that prioritizes the needs of the grassroots labor movement. Broadly speaking, institutional union journalism is focused on union leaders and internal organizational affairs, while social movement union journalism is focused on workers, in and out of the unions, and ways they can mobilize for collective action.

It is worth repeating: “Institutional” and “social movement” union journalism are ideal types that describe *tendencies* within the labor press. Unions and their publications are not monolithic. They will respond differently at different times to different constellations of issues and circumstances. Nonetheless, the characteristics identified in Table 1 describe journalistic practices historically employed by publications to promote union organizations and leaders or to empower rank-and-file workers. Identifying the different practices helped me understand the debates over union media (detailed in the following chapters) as conflicts between labor’s institutional needs and interests, and those of the grassroots workers’ movement.

Table 1. Characteristics of "Institutional" and "Social Movement" Union Journalism

Type	Content	Audience	Production/Distribution
<i>"Institutional"</i> <i>Union Journalism</i>	Focus is on union leaders, internal union business and workplace issues.	Circulation almost exclusively to members of one union, craft or trade.	Produced by full-time union staff or outside professionals.
	Stories not focused on the workplace discuss issues and events as they affect the union.	Letters to the editor are rare. When published, they almost always praise the union.	High production values.
	Stories portray union leaders and policies in positive light.	Little "mobilizing information" beyond union meeting notices.	Print publications are mailed to members' homes.
<i>"Social Movement"</i> <i>Union Journalism</i>	Focus is on members and community allies, and how issues and events affect workers inside and outside the union.	Circulation to members of many unions, crafts and trades; perhaps to entire community, including the unorganized.	Produced by volunteers, stewards or low-level officers.
	Stories frequently focus on broad social questions, and are framed in terms of social justice and human rights.	Letters to editor are published, including letters critical of union leaders and policies.	Publications may appear "rough" or amateurish.
	Articles often address union failures, problems, and internal debate and dissent.	Wide range of "mobilizing information" for members and community allies.	Print publications are often distributed by hand, in face-to-face encounters with audience.

Historical Research Methods

I relied on qualitative research methods to construct a history of the ILCA. Had I intended to test various theories of social movements or to rigorously analyze the content of various publications, I would have identified variables and employed statistical methods. But my purposes were descriptive and interpretive. Accordingly, I relied mainly upon participant interviews and archival research to understand the evolution of the ILCA and important debates involving that organization, the AFL-CIO, and other actors. When I employed numerical data, it was simply to describe important trends (e.g. the size and composition of the ILCA's membership, and its leadership body).

The framework of social movement and organization theory, described in Chapter 1, guided my research and analysis. It helped me understand the importance of organized labor's dual character as a set of institutions and as a sprawling social movement. It also helped me understand the interactions of primary and external actors (e.g. the ILCA Executive Council, leaders and top staff of the AFL-CIO, and the U.S. Postal Service) as the interactions of entities possessing different types and amounts of resources, and propelled by different institutional logics.

I located three major sources of primary documents related to the ILCA:

- 1) Special Collections, University of Maryland Libraries. The Hornbake Library, in College Park, Maryland, is the official repository of the ILCA.
- 2) The George Meany Memorial Archives, Silver Spring, Maryland: the official repository for the AFL-CIO.
- 3) The ILCA office at AFL-CIO Headquarters, Washington, D.C.

I spent several months simply trying to determine what was in those collections, and where. The entirety of the ILCA collection at Hornbake Library is unprocessed: a rough outline describes the contents of thirty-nine cartons of records occupying fifty-seven linear feet of shelf space. I am the only researcher who has systematically examined their contents. Detailed finding aids exist for most collections at the George Meany Memorial Archives. Nonetheless, the collection is enormous, and I was also granted access to unprocessed materials for which there are no finding aids. I had unrestricted access to all records at the ILCA's offices, except for personnel files. The ILCA's office files are clearly labeled and well-organized. They were extremely useful but more limited in scope than the larger collections in College Park and Silver Spring.

The family of Gordon H. Cole, founding president of the ILPA and a longtime editor of the IAM's *Machinist* newspaper, was kind enough to give me four boxes of papers related to his work with the labor press. I found drafts of speeches, memos, notes, and other primary documents that helped illuminate the early years of the ILPA.

As I reviewed the material in the various collections, I identified three episodes in ILCA history that seemed sufficiently important and well-documented to form the core of my dissertation:

1. the shaping of the labor press (i.e. the major institutions and forces that created the organization and influenced first three decades of its work)
2. the ILCA's campaign during the 1960s and early 1970s to convince the AFL-CIO to create community-based labor newspapers, and
3. the debates over whether union media should be house organs or grassroots

tribunes, and whether unions should use internal media primarily for public relations or grassroots organizing. Both debates erupted publicly and almost destroyed the ILCA in the late 1990s.

Interviews

Having identified key episodes and actors in the ILCA's history, I began to make lists of potential interviewees and to look for additional sources of documentary evidence. I conducted twenty interviews of varying length. The University of Maryland's Institutional Review Board approved my interview protocols, including a set of interview questions, in June, 2009. The questions, which are listed on the interview consent forms, were designed to elicit essential information about the individual's involvement with the ILCA and to provide a basis for open-ended discussion. However, I quickly found the questions too general to be of much value. They may have helped interviewees to think broadly about their experiences with the ILCA prior to the interview. But the actual interviews quickly jumped past the "boilerplate" questions and into the particulars of their experience, and their perspectives on various issues and events.

With the written consent of the interviewees, I made audio recordings of all interviews, and (per the consent agreement) I stored my recordings and interview notes in a locked file cabinet and on a password-protected hard drive. The consent forms guaranteed each interviewee the right to provide information on a confidential basis (i.e. to have their remarks published without disclosing her identity, or to use any information provided purely as background). No interviewee asked me not to publish her comments. Only a few asked me to mask their identities, and those requests covered only small

portions of their remarks. I also offered to destroy or return all interview records five years after the publication of my research, but no one requested that I do so.

Archival Research and Constructing a Narrative

For every archival document, I noted the name and number of the collection, as well as the box and folder in which the document was stored. I noted the title and nature of the document (e.g. a personal letter; the minutes of a meeting), the author(s), and the date the document was created. This allowed me to assess the *authenticity* of the document (to perform an “external criticism”) by determining who wrote it, when, and under what circumstances. It also allowed me to assess its *credibility* (to perform an “internal criticism”) by weighing the expertise, competency, and motivation of the authors.¹⁹⁴ To understand how the document fit into the life of the ILCA, I tried to determine how it was used, whether other records supported or contradicted its contents, and whether it had been revised or presented in different forms to different audiences.

The mass of material available to me was, at times, both overwhelming and a patchwork. I had to decide what information to select from cartons full of notes, periodicals, and audio and video recordings. Then I had to decide how to connect the dots—how to take hundreds of pieces of evidence and construct a story of the ILCA that was coherent, compelling, and well-grounded in fact. Inevitably, constructing a narrative requires making conjectures about why people and organizations did what they did at particular times. My years of experience in the labor press were extremely helpful in that

¹⁹⁴ Philip C. Brooks, *Research in Archives: The Use of Unpublished Sources*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1969), 83-91.

regard. But I tried as best I could to let the material I uncovered—not my suppositions—
inform my understanding.

CHAPTER 4:
“Communities of Interest”:
The Campaign for Community Labor Newspapers

By the fall of 1967, U.S. trade union editors were sounding the alarm. Barely ten years after the founding of the AFL-CIO, the labor movement was coming undone. Workers were drifting apart and turning against one another: union members against union leaders, young against old, black against white. More and more, rank-and-file members were voting down labor contracts bargained by their leaders, and younger workers seemed far more concerned about Vietnam and pollution than about their own unions.¹⁹⁵ As one union editor worried aloud, the building service man no longer understands the culinary worker, and the culinary worker does not understand the machinist.¹⁹⁶

The editors belonged to the International Labor Press Association (ILPA), a national organization comprised, at that time, of some 400 publications produced by unions affiliated with the AFL-CIO. The publications ran the gamut, from slick four-color magazines mailed to hundreds of thousands of workers nationwide, to crude mimeographed handbills distributed to a few dozen members in a single small shop. On a

¹⁹⁵ Tape recording of a panel discussion, “Why Don’t Union Members Believe Their Own Newspapers?” at the 1967 ILPA Convention, Box 26, Reel 12-4-67 (a), ILCA Collection, Special Collections, University of Maryland Libraries [hereinafter cited as UML]. Panel members included ILPA Secretary-Treasurer Kenneth Fiester, editor *AFL-CIO News* and Associated Press labor reporter Neil Gilbride; Tape recording of a panel discussion, “The Role and Function of the Labor Press,” at the 1967 ILPA Convention. Box 26, Reel 12-5-67(a), UML. Panel members included Walter L. Davis, assistant director of the AFL-CIO Committee on Political Education.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, remarks by Richard Strunsky, editor, Building Service Employees Local 32-B.

weekly, monthly, or quarterly basis, ILPA editors communicated with a combined estimated audience of 18 million workers in cities, towns, and villages in every corner of the country.¹⁹⁷

ILPA leaders believed they had identified a gap in union communications that was exacerbating the divisions within organized labor. The large international union publications did a decent job covering national news and the activities of their own unions. But as a practical matter the national publications could not report on day-to-day issues affecting workers where they worked and lived. On the other hand, the small, local union publications that did address specific on-the-job concerns almost always lacked the resources needed to report on events beyond the workplace doors. Furthermore, the ILPA editors pointed out, international and local union publications shared a major shortcoming: They addressed members of individual unions, but gave them little sense of belonging to a bigger, broader movement.

The ILPA editors felt the AFL-CIO could resolve these problems by creating “community labor newspapers”—union publications that would reach *all* workers in a given city or region, regardless of union affiliation. These newspapers would, on a weekly or semi-monthly basis, report from a workers’ point of view on events at City

¹⁹⁷ ILPA membership reports, Executive Council Meeting Minutes, Dec. 1965, Nov. 1966 and Dec. 1967, ILCA office files, Washington D.C [hereinafter cited as ILCA]; ILPA Labor Press Directory, 1968, Box 13, UML. In the mid-1960s, the ILPA represented more than 100 newspapers and magazines produced by the big internationals, nine publications of the national AFL-CIO and its various departments, 140 local union publications, and some 108 publications from state and local central bodies (CLCs), and regional labor organizations (e.g. building and construction trades councils, and union districts).

Hall and the State House, on matters affecting local schools and neighborhoods, and on the actions of employers, business groups, and, of course, organized labor.¹⁹⁸

Behind closed doors, AFL-CIO leaders were agonizing over the same internal divisions that were worrying the ILPA. The 1966 Congressional elections had been a disaster. Labor-endorsed candidates had lost forty-seven seats in the House of Representatives, three in the Senate, and half-dozen governorships. At the same time, the GOP had gained control of state legislatures in Alaska, Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Illinois, Kansas, Maine, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Utah, Vermont, and Wisconsin.¹⁹⁹

AFL-CIO leaders blamed the losses on a massive “breakdown in communications.”²⁰⁰ By failing to reach out and educate the rank and file, labor had allowed anti-union forces “to steal the loyalty of our members,” a top political operative told the AFL-CIO Executive Council. Because union leaders had such a poor “political understanding” of their members, they were surprised by potency of “white backlash,” black militancy, youth alienation, and the mounting concerns over inflation, Vietnam,

¹⁹⁸ In many different venues, ILPA leaders mentioned that community labor papers would circulate among elected officials, pro-worker community groups, libraries, and schools, but would overwhelmingly target union members.

¹⁹⁹ COPE Report on Nov. 1966 Elections, 19-20, in Minutes, Meeting of the Executive Council of the AFL-CIO, Nov. 14-16, 1966, RG4-006, AFL-CIO Executive Council Minutes, 1955-1969, Vol. 11, George Meany Memorial Archives [hereinafter cited as GMMA]. Remarks are by COPE Assistant Director Walter L. Davis.

²⁰⁰ Tape-recorded panel discussion, “Role and Function of the Labor Press,” 1967 ILPA Convention, UML. Quote is from Assistant COPE Director Walter L. Davis.

and government credibility.²⁰¹ “We were up against a tide that we did not see” coming, the national director of the AFL-CIO’s Committee on Political Education (COPE) explained.²⁰²

ILPA’s proposal to create community labor newspapers “was hitting the deck at a very good time,” ILPA President Ray Davidson declared.²⁰³ AFL-CIO President George Meany responded to the 1966 election debacle by appointing a special committee “to study all of our publicity” efforts and he directed the committee to return in a few weeks’ time with recommendations for change.²⁰⁴ Just as federation leaders began searching for ways to improve communications with the union membership, the ILPA had presented a detailed plan to do precisely that. The timing could hardly have been more auspicious. Yet the AFL-CIO Executive Council refused to even place the ILPA’s proposal on its agenda. The federation’s refusal to seriously consider creating community labor newspapers reveals much about the role of union journalism and the tensions between institutional and social movement labor after World War II.

The Revolution of ’65

Davidson’s election as ILPA president reflected the grassroots upheavals that were sparking such concern among top labor leaders. He had captured the presidency in

²⁰¹ Ibid.; Report by Executive Council Subcommittee of COPE, in Minutes, Meeting of the Executive Council of the AFL-CIO, Feb. 20-27, 1967, Appendix R-1, RG4-006, AFL-CIO Executive Council Minutes, 1955-1969, Vol. 12, GMMA, 92-92.

²⁰² “COPE Report on Nov. 1966 Elections,” GMMA. Remarks are by Alexander Barkan.

²⁰³ Speech by Ray Davidson to the 1967 ILPA Convention, Box 26, Reel 12-5-67(a), UML.

²⁰⁴ Minutes of AFL-CIO Executive Council, Feb. 1967, pp. 21-22. GMMA.

“a bitter election” fought out on the ILPA convention floor—“the Revolution of ’65,” Davidson would later call it.²⁰⁵ The contest unleashed long-festering resentments among union editors who believed a clique, hand-picked by the internationals and the AFL-CIO, had controlled the ILPA since its founding in 1956. Disgruntled editors formed a caucus at the 1965 ILPA convention and circulated a handbill headlined, “The old originals – 1955. Rigged by merger agreement.” The handbill noted, correctly, that AFL and CIO leaders had appointed the original fifteen-member executive council during the negotiations that created the organization. The text of the handbill complained that four elections later, the fifteen council seats had rotated among only twenty-nine individuals, and it listed their names year by year.²⁰⁶ It called on delegates to reject the incumbent leadership’s candidate for president, Richard Estep, editor for the United Papermakers and Paperworkers international union, and to rally around Davidson, instead.

Outgoing president Leon Stein denounced the insurgents in a keynote address the day before the election: “It is painful for me to note that in advance of this convention there has been broadcast a call for a caucus...It charges that an alleged establishment has suppressed free choice” in the ILPA. “This is a serious charge,” he said.²⁰⁷

Far harsher words than that were exchanged earlier in the day during an executive council meeting marked by charges of intrigue and betrayal.²⁰⁸ ILPA leaders were

²⁰⁵ Minutes of ILPA Executive Council meeting, Apr. 10-11, 1969, Box 8, UML.

²⁰⁶ “The old originals,” Box 8, “Executive Meeting Dec. 1965” folder, UML.

²⁰⁷ “President Stein’s Keynote Address,” Box 7, “1965 Convention” folder, UML.

²⁰⁸ Here is the roster of the 1965 ILPA Executive Council: President, Leon Stein, *ILGWU’s Justice*; Secretary-Treasurer Kenneth Fiester, *AFL-CIO News*, and vice presidents Marie Caylor, *AFT’s American Teacher*; Ray Davidson, *OCAW Union News*; Walter Davis, *Retail Clerks’ Local 880 News &*

sharply divided: six of the fifteen vice presidents had signed the caucus call. While the records are somewhat murky, the six dissidents were Davidson, of the Oil Chemical and Atomic Workers; Marie Downey, International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers; Fred Sweet, Hotel and Restaurant Employees; Richard Dickow, Meat Cutters; Richard Strunsky, Building Service Employees Local 32B, New York, and David Selvin, editor for the San Francisco CLC.

President Stein believed Estep was running unopposed, but only days before the convention Davidson reversed his previously-announced decision to quit the council and declared himself “available” as a candidate for the top position. Davidson said he received numerous calls from ILPA members urging him to run, and expressing frustration over the council’s practice of filling vacancies by appointment rather than by a vote of the general membership. At the meeting, Davidson accused the AFL-CIO of “heavy-handed king-making” and claimed he had received telephone calls from AFL-CIO headquarters staff pressuring him not to run, including one call warning that George Meany would personally intervene if Davidson stayed in the race.²⁰⁹

Views; Richard Dickow, Meat Cutters’ *The Butcher Workman*; Marie Downey, IBEW’s *Electrical Workers Journal*; Richard Estep, United Papermakers and Paperworker’s *United Paper*; James Gedling, *Loraine Labor Leader* (a CLC publication); Robert Gerhart, *The New Era* (published by five Pennsylvania CLCs); James Goodsell, *The Oregon Labor Press* (published by a dozen local unions and several CLCs); Harold Newton, *Kenosha Labor* (published by several Wisconsin locals); Dean Ruth, IAM’s *Machinist* newspaper; Henry Santiestevan, UAW, *Solidarity*; Richard Strunsky, Building Service Employees Local, 32B; Fred Sweet, H.E.R.E.’s *Catering Industry Employee*, and Ray Taylor, *Milwaukee Labor Press* (a CLC publication). The two non-voting council members were Saul Miller, director of AFL-CIO Publications Department, and past ILPA President Bernard Mullady, editor of the IBEW’s *Newsletter* and former editor of the *AFL-CIO News*.

²⁰⁹ Draft Minutes of ILPA Executive Council meeting, Dec. 2, 1965. Box 8, UML.

ILPA Secretary-Treasurer Kenneth Fiester, editor of the *AFL-CIO News*, admitted placing one of the calls but denied putting pressure on Davidson. In a rather tortured explanation, Fiester said he placed the call believing “Ray had removed himself” as a candidate, but that he had also “asked Ray about waiting till next time.”²¹⁰ Stein refused to apologize to the council for inviting Estep to succeed him, insisting he “was no man’s agent in this.” Estep, for his part, was far more defensive. “I am “not part of the establishment,” he protested. [Emphasis in the original.] He admitted Stein had drafted him but said, somewhat implausibly (he had, after all, served on the council since 1956) that he agreed to run before learning of “the doubts of Davidson” and others about “democracy in the ILPA.”²¹¹

Using the ILPA to Limit Labor Discourse

Estep may not have seen himself as “part of the establishment” but thousands of dissident members inside his own union likely would have disagreed. The contest between Estep and Davidson was, in fact, part of much a bigger battle over the right of international unions to control their local members and the labor press.

In July 1964, Estep had filed internal charges against fellow council member James Goodsell, editor of the weekly *Oregon Labor Press*, for publicizing a revolt by 22,000 union members against Estep’s union and a second international. Never before

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Ibid.

had “charges ...been made against a member publication whose editor is a constitutional officer” of the ILPA.²¹²

Week after week, Goodsell’s paper reported on the efforts of workers in fifty mills across Oregon, Washington, and California to quit the United Papermakers and Paperworkers (UPPW) and the International Brotherhood of Pulp, Sulphite and Paper Mill Workers and create their own union. The workers accused the internationals of negotiating sweetheart contracts with employers and suppressing rank-and-file democracy. Their accusations, and the actions of their rebel union, were front-page news in the *Oregon Labor Press*, which was supported by Oregon largest CLCs and numerous AFL-CIO-affiliated locals.

According to Edsel’s thirteen-page complaint, the *Oregon Labor Press* had aided “a rump organization” hostile to the AFL-CIO. In so doing, Edsel argued, the *Oregon Labor Press* had violated the ILPA’s Code of Ethics, which requires member publications to “serve the best interests” of the federation.²¹³ Estep also accused the *Oregon Labor Press* of biased reporting, and an examination of eighteen feature stories published by the paper supports his charge.²¹⁴ The stories focused almost exclusively on the complaints and actions of the rank-and-file rebels, and rarely carried quotes or other information supporting the two internationals. However, it was clear from the thousands of signed authorization cards submitted to the National Labor Relations Board by

²¹² Fiester to Goodsell, letters dated July 27, 1964 and Sept. 8, 1964. Box 12, “1964 ILPA Reporters and Mailings” folder. UML.

²¹³ Complaint by Richard Estep, Box 12, “1964 ILPA Reporters and Mailings” folder. UML.

²¹⁴ I obtained copies of the stories published in the *Oregon Labor Press* between May 1 and Sept. 25, 1964 from the archives of the *Northwest Labor Press* in Portland, Oregon.

disgruntled workers and by the overwhelming “no” votes against the sweetheart contracts that the grassroots insurgency reported by the *Oregon Labor Press* was real and massive. It should be noted, too, that union journalism is unabashedly partisan. As Chapters 2 and 3 showed, the labor press has never pretended to provide “balanced” coverage to its foes.²¹⁵ The *Oregon Labor Press* had merely done what union newspapers traditionally have done—but this time it criticized organized labor.

UPPW President Paul Phillips complained directly to AFL-CIO President George Meany about the *Oregon Labor Press*’ reportage, but there is no evidence that Meany directly intervened. “I can assure you that the officers of the ILPA are deeply disturbed by this case,” he wrote to Phillips.²¹⁶

And right he was. ILPA leaders convened a special council meeting on November 12 at AFL-CIO headquarters in Washington D.C. to hear the charges against Goodsell. It appears to have been a closed session: no minutes or transcripts of the meeting appear in the ILCA’s records. But the outcome is known. A majority of the members present voted

²¹⁵ Tape-recorded panel discussion, “Role and Function of the Labor Press,” 1967 ILPA Convention, UML. During the discussion, AFL-CIO editor Kenneth Fiester told delegates that the labor press does “represent a point of view” and urged union journalists not to “kid ourselves about what we are.” However, he added, union journalists should not be “blatant” when advocating labor’s interests: “We ought to try to sound as objective as *Time* magazine...but not really be more objective than *Time* magazine.” Leon Stein, editor of the ILGWU’s *Justice* newspaper, agreed, arguing that both the labor and commercial press speak for particular interests. The *New York Times* “is a house organ for somebody,” Stein said. “All I ask is, ‘Which house does your organ serve?’”

²¹⁶ Meany to Phillips, Sept. 15, 1964, , RG1-038, Series 3, Office of the President, George Meany Files, 1940-1980, File 43/11 (Labor Press, 1964), GMMA.

to expel Goodsell from the council, with Davidson (and, perhaps a few others) voting to acquit.²¹⁷

The blowback was severe. Goodsell was a popular, respected editor. His newspaper had repeatedly won top awards in contests judged by Harvard University's Neiman Foundation for Journalism.²¹⁸ He had served on the ILCA executive council since 1957, and worked closely with labor editors throughout the western states. In a letter to the ILPA council, Secretary-Treasurer Fiester kicked himself for not foreseeing that "Ray's candidacy...would inevitably involve the whole matter of the west coast paper workers."²¹⁹ But the damage was done: An international union had openly used the ILPA to punish a labor newspaper. Expelling Goodsell only fueled the growing perception among union journalists that a big labor establishment controlled the ILPA.

That perception was inarguably correct. The five-member Nominating Committee that recommended Estep to the 1965 convention included three former ILPA presidents, all of whom worked for large international unions.²²⁰ The Nominating Committee was, itself, appointed by the ILPA executive council, and ten of the seventeen voting council

²¹⁷ Fiester to ILPA Executive Council members, letter dated Oct. 11, 1965, Box 12, "ILPA Reporter and Mailings" folder, UML.

²¹⁸ Neiman judges, RG1-038, Series 3, Office of the President, George Meany Files, 1940-1980, File 43/11 (Labor Press, 1964), GMMA; "20 publications take ILPA top awards," *ILPA Reporter*, Dec. 1961, Box 12, "1960-1963" folder, UML, 2.

²¹⁹ Fiester to ILPA Executive Council members, Oct. 11, 1965, UML.

²²⁰ Nominating Committee Chair R.C. Howard edited *Labor Newspaper* for a consortium of 18 railroad unions. Pete Terzick, editor of the *Carpenter*, and *Machinist* editor Gordon Cole represented the AFL during negotiations with the CIO to create the ILPA. Cole became the ILPA's founding president.

members that year were employed by international unions or the national AFL-CIO.²²¹ Furthermore, two of the seven council members who did *not* work for an international or the federation were set to take jobs with the AFL-CIO after the convention.²²² The ILPA Executive Council was a “closed circle... [a] crony kind of thing,” recalled David Selvin, who served four terms on the council. To join, there were “important people that one had to know,” and once you were “accepted as one of the elite, then the way was open... You didn’t run for office or anything of that sort. The nominating committee puts you up and that was that.”²²³

True to form, the Nominating Committee opted for continuity in 1965. They endorsed Estep’s move from vice president to president, retained *AFL-CIO News Editor* Fiester as secretary-treasurer, and returned almost every eligible vice president (eight, in all) to their positions on the council.²²⁴ But anti-establishment feelings were running so strong among the convention delegates that the Nominating Committee felt compelled to make some concessions. They declined to recommend reelection of the two council members who were about to take jobs with the AFL-CIO: Walter Davis, of the Retail Clerks, and the UAW’s Henry Santiestevan. “It is no secret that there is a strong feeling

²²¹ The two non-voting council members were past president Bernard Mullady, editor of the *AFL-CIO News*, and Saul Miller, director of the AFL-CIO Publications Department.

²²² “1965 Nominating Committee Report,” Box 7, “1965 Convention” folder, UML. Walter Davis became Assistant Director of COPE and Henry Santiestevan became editor for the AFL-CIO Industrial Union Department.

²²³ David Selvin, Sept. 7, 2007. Interview by Harvey Schwarz. San Francisco Labor Archives and Research Center.

²²⁴ The Nominating Committee did not recommend re-electing Davidson and two other vice presidents who, like Davidson, had announced they would not run. A fourth council member changed jobs and became ineligible to serve.

within the ILPA that no one type of member publication should be over represented on the Executive Council,” the Nominating Committee told the delegates. “This feeling is strongest with respect to official AFL-CIO publications.”²²⁵

Even Estep tried to capitalize on the anti-establishment fervor. A campaign handbill lauded Estep as “the Local Editors’ Candidate.” It began: “For the first time in 10 long years labor press editors from the ‘smaller’ local union and central body papers have a chance to elect ‘one of our own’ as President of ILPA....Dick Estep is your kind of guy.”²²⁶ Not until the sixth paragraph did the handbill mention that Estep—who had, indeed, edited several CLC papers—was currently working for an international union.

Davidson was no local union editor, either, but he didn’t pretend to be. Like Estep, Davidson was one of “The Old Originals.” In fact, he was president of the CIO Press and Public Relations Conference during the negotiations with the AFL that created the ILPA.²²⁷ But Davidson was something of a rebel, too. Born “dirt poor” in a rural Texas town, he recalled his father describing “an eternal war between capital and labor...There were bosses and there were workers, and you had to know which side you were on.”²²⁸ In his mid-20s, Davidson was traveling throughout the southern states as a fulltime organizer for the CIO’s American Newspaper Guild. At age 29, he became a

²²⁵ “1965 Nominating Committee Report,” Box 7, “1965 Convention” folder, UML.

²²⁶ “Estep is the Local Editors’ Candidate for President,” handbill, Box 7, “1965 Convention” folder, UML.

²²⁷ To All Executive Council Members of the International Labor Press of America, Nov. 14, 1955,” memorandum on negotiations with the CIO, RG1-027, Office of the President, President’s Files, George Meany, 1947-1960, Correspondence, File 33/10, GMMA.

²²⁸ Ray Davidson, Apr. 12, 2000. Videotaped interview by OCWA/PACE Oral History Project.

full-time representative of the militant Oil Workers' International Union, CIO²²⁹—a group so devoted to rank-and-file control that members of the international executive board were forbidden to draw a dime in pay from the union treasury. “The greatest thing that ever happened to organized labor was the CIO,” Davidson would brag. “The AFL was lazy as hell ... They sat on their butt and kept their neckties tight—and we have a few of them left.”²³⁰

It was Davidson who embodied the determination of CLC and local union editors to play a bigger role inside the ILPA. They nominated Davidson from the convention floor, and he edged-out Estep 57-51.²³¹ Davidson won the first contested presidential election in the ten-year history of the ILPA.²³²

Davidson's First Step

Immediately after being sworn in as ILPA president in January 1966, Davidson presented the council with a three-page proposal for creating community labor newspapers. The labor movement's approach to communications was a wasteful “hodge-

²²⁹ United Steelworkers, “A Short History of the OCAW.” http://usw.org/our_union/who_we_are?id=0004 (accessed Dec. 12, 2010). In 1955, the Oil Workers International Union merged with another CIO union, the United Gas, Coke and Chemical Workers Union, to form The Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers Union (OCAW), which affiliated with the AFL-CIO.

²³⁰ Davidson interview, OCAW/PACE Oral History Project.

²³¹ Ballot slip, Box 7, “1965 Convention” folder, UML. Two other candidates besides Davidson were nominated from the convention floor. CLC editor Bernard Stern of the *Toledo Union Journal* was elected with 75 votes, defeating John McCarthy, an international union editor supported by the Nominating Committee. The second insurgent candidate, Burt Beck, of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers international union, failed to win a council seat.

²³² “ILPA: The First Ten Years,” an unpublished draft history of the ILPA by an unidentified member of the executive council, Box 9, “1968 Reading File” folder, UML, 2.

podge” marked by fragmentation, mediocrity, and duplication of effort, he wrote.²³³

Large national publications “can report only on general trends” affecting labor, Davidson argued, and the majority of local union papers cannot “provide real reporting outside the local shops.” Well-run community labor newspapers, on the other hand, would have the resources, including the advertising base, to “report on city hall, the state house, and local events,” as well as on the labor movement. They could educate the union membership, building common understandings and bonds of solidarity, week after week “with a water-on-stone effect.”²³⁴

“A snappy weekly can cover key local stories,” Davidson wrote. “It can scoop the dailies now and then. It can be interesting and provocative.” However, he pointed out, “many large cities with significant labor movements have no papers at all,” and the few community labor papers that do exist often “struggle for survival.” Underfunded and understaffed, they often “do a poor job of covering the news... [and] circulate to only a minority of the labor people in the territory covered.”²³⁵ Davidson called community newspapers “the most starved segment of the labor press.”²³⁶

Within days, Davidson issued documents detailing five areas of research that needed to be done to determine the feasibility of creating a community labor press. He set specific guidelines for the research and assigned council members to each area with

²³³ Minutes of ILPA Executive Council meeting, Jan. 17-18, 1966, Box 8, UML.

²³⁴ Ray Davidson to ILPA Executive Council, “Proposal for Research and Action on Community Papers,” memorandum, Box 8, “Executive Council Meeting, Jan. 17-18, 1966” folder, UML

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Ibid.

instructions to have their findings ready for presentation at the next scheduled meeting on May 19, barely eight weeks away. Davidson asked the council to investigate:

1. *the market*: cities and small states with high concentrations of union members that could support community papers
2. *the product*: the range of news and information that newspapers with modest but adequate financing realistically could provide
3. *services*: specific benefits that community papers could provide to organized labor beyond reporting the news;
4. *costs*: budget estimates for publishing newspapers of various lengths and circulation levels, and
5. *advertising*: suggested advertising rates and projections of potential revenue for newspapers reaching a majority of union members in various-sized communities²³⁷

Davidson was not the first person to urge the AFL-CIO to create community-based labor newspapers. In 1958, barely three years after the founding of the AFL-CIO, Machinists Union President Al Hayes called on the federation to “develop, in as many communities as possible, a labor-owned weekly or daily with the kind of features, news and readability that ...will interest people both in and out of the labor movement.” A “healthy democracy” is impossible when workers must depend on monopoly-controlled

²³⁷ Ray Davidson to the ILPA Executive Council, “Research Program on Community Publications,” Community Papers Proposals folder, ILCA.

commercial media for news and entertainment, Hayes warned.²³⁸ Five years later, Bernard Mullady—an editor of the *AFL-CIO News*—proposed that the ILPA organize union journalists in towns and cities that lacked labor newspapers, and invest resources to help create community-based publications.²³⁹

There is no evidence that the general suggestions by Hayes and Mullady were ever followed up in a serious way. But the campaign launched under ILPA President Ray Davidson would be comprehensive, methodical, and persistent. It would burn brightly as ILPA's central project for the next six years, and it would take a full decade to completely fade away. Despite lingering bitterness over Goodsell's expulsion and the "Revolution of '65," the ILPA executive council seemed genuinely united in their support for community labor newspapers, and its members tackled their assignments with a will.²⁴⁰ At the May 19 council meeting, Fiester produced a report listing every CLC in the country with 20,000 members or more, and he presented a large color-coded map that vividly depicted the "terrible shortage of community labor papers," state by state.²⁴¹ (A recreation of the map appears on page 96.) Aware of George Meany's desire for more

²³⁸ Al Hayes, "Broader Assignments, Stronger Financing for the Labor Press," speech to the Cincinnati Labor Conference, Sept. 16, 1958. Community Papers Proposal folder, ILCA.

²³⁹ Draft Minutes of ILPA Executive Council meeting Apr. 26-27, 1963, Box 8, UML.

²⁴⁰ Letter from Kenneth Fiester to Stanton Smith, AFL-CIO Coordinator for State and Central Bodies, May 14, 1965, Community Papers Proposal folder, ILCA. In a letter written months before Davidson's election as ILPA president, Fiester indicated there was broad support for community labor newspapers within the executive council. Fiester wrote, "Enclosed is a copy of a memo from Ray Davidson which is a full and accurate distillation of a discussion of community labor papers at our recent ILPA Executive Council Meeting... [It] will help, I hope, facilitate early and active consideration of the problem... Everyone in the ILPA leadership (and probably the membership, too) is in absolute agreement that good state and city papers, preferably weeklies, are essential to the lasting success of the AFL-CIO's political and legislative efforts."

²⁴¹ Speech by Davidson. ILCA Convention, Dec. 5, 1967.

local unions to join the CLCs, Fiester astutely included in his report the number of unaffiliated members in each community who might be drawn to the federation by a stimulating labor newspaper.

Machinists Union editor Dean Ruth projected the costs of publishing weekly tabloid newspapers of between eight and sixteen pages, and circulations of 25,000, 50,000, and 100,000 readers. His report encompassed every aspect of operations, including photography, composition, proofreading, printing, sorting, postal fees, staff salaries and benefits, office rent, equipment, stationary, telephones, gasoline, and subscriptions to wire services and essential periodicals. Harold Newton, editor of *Kenosha Labor*, surveyed forty-two community labor newspapers about their experiences, positive and negative, with advertising. He collected advertising rate cards, and compiled data on circulation, subscription sales, revenues, the size of sales staffs, and the commissions paid to advertising representatives.

A Strategic Choice: Go Broad, or Go High?

Three days later, on May 22, ILPA leaders unveiled the community newspaper proposal during a meeting attended by some 200 union editors in Washington D.C.²⁴² The council worked late the previous night and all that morning preparing the presentation, but the unveiling seems to have been poorly planned. Discussion of the “deadly serious” gap in labor communications was shoehorned between a Sunday

²⁴² “If you missed it, you missed a lot,” *ILPA Reporter*, June 1966, ILCA, 1-3.

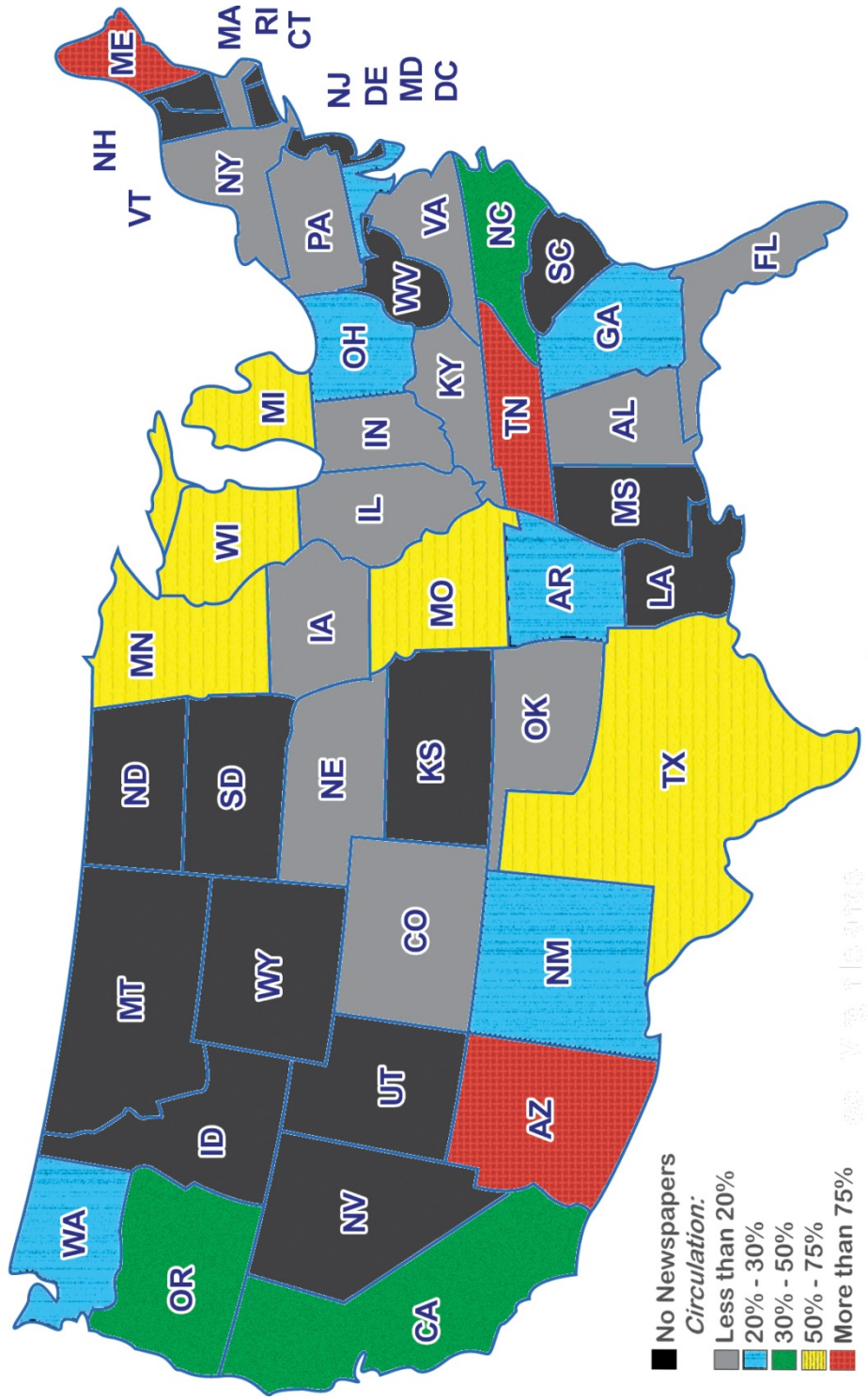


Figure 3: Community Labor Newspapers by Circulation (1966). Facsimile of a map created by the International Labor Press Association to show the scarcity of labor newspapers serving areas with high concentrations of union members. Source: Political Education and the Labor Press, Jan.24, 1967 "Community Papers Proposal," folder, ILCA, 5. Margin notes describe states and colors.

afternoon panel on politics and a lengthy awards ceremony. Due to a “lack of time,” the “proposals were explained and discussed all too briefly.”²⁴³ Monday, May 23 (the final day of the meeting) was taken up by a visit to the White House, where union journalists heard talks by President Johnson and Vice President Humphrey, and rubbed shoulders with Labor Secretary Wirtz and various members of Congress.²⁴⁴

The clumsy unveiling reflected uncertainty within the council about how best to advance the plan. Should they mount a “massive drive” across the country to build support for community papers among the CLCs and local unions?²⁴⁵ Or should they concentrate on persuading the top labor leaders who had the political and economic clout to enact the plan?²⁴⁶ The first approach would require the ILPA to mobilize its network of union journalists to “hammer on labor leaders” on behalf of the plan and “not be shy about it.”²⁴⁷ It would require the ILPA to take the lead by reaching out broadly and winning the support of state and local union editors, who would then join the ILPA in pressing the AFL-CIO and international unions for the resources needed to create a community labor press.

The second approach would require the ILPA to win over a much smaller group: the leaders of the AFL-CIO its affiliated unions. Davidson and other ILPA officers would

²⁴³ Ibid.; “The ‘Map’ is Still on the Map,” *ILPA Reporter*, Aug. 1966, ILCA, 1.

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ Minutes of ILPA Executive Council meeting, Nov. 18-19, 1966, Box 8, UML.

²⁴⁶ Davidson, “Research Program on Community Publications.”

²⁴⁷ Davidson, “Proposal for Research and Action on Community Papers.”

need to convince top labor leaders that community labor newspapers could help resolve the communications crisis within the AFL-CIO. They would have to demonstrate that labor could strengthen itself by speaking in a unified voice on a regular basis to large numbers of workers in key communities. They would have to demonstrate, as well, that the movement could save large amounts of time and money by eliminating overlapping and ineffectual publications. Once the top labor leaders supported the plan, they—not the ILPA—would take the lead, and press the CLCs to create community newspapers.

Both approaches would require “considerable salesmanship and much delicate political diplomacy,” Davidson cautioned. Resistance could be expected whether the aim was to consolidate several publications into a single new entity, or simply to overhaul an existing newspaper. “In some cases, this may mean ditching some old sheets— or ditching present incompetent editors,” Davidson wrote. Each “state and city has a complex of political breezes, personalities, old feuds, etc., which in human fashion tend to drown out the voice of reason.”²⁴⁸

In November 1966, the ILPA Executive Council settled on a course of action. There would be no “massive drive”; no broad mobilization of union journalists; no hammering on top union officers for a new approach to communications. Instead, the ILPA would seek the support of labor’s top leaders through quiet, low-key persuasion. As Davidson put it, they would “push the project discreetly and carefully through established channels” by meeting with the “many people around AFL-CIO headquarters – the department heads and others, whose thoughtful support and understanding is vital to the

²⁴⁸ Davidson to Fiester and L. Edward Lashman, “Re: Community Labor Papers and COPE,” Apr. 29, 1965, memorandum, Community Papers Project folder, ILCA, 3.

promotion of any program within the body.”²⁴⁹ ILPA leaders also decided to offer the AFL-CIO limited, alternative versions of the community newspapers plan. Instead of arguing for the creation of publications in many communities, they would seek AFL-CIO support for a few, select pilot projects. They would identify target cities with forward-thinking union leaders and large, active labor movements. This would allow them to craft precise budgets and plans that could be launched quickly, with maximum chances for success. “The best opportunity of all might come ... in localities where at present there is little or nothing in the way of a labor press,” Davidson suggested. “There, a fresh start could be made from scratch, with a minimum of old wounds to scar over.”²⁵⁰

A Proposal to Meany

In November, the executive council transformed the document drafted over the summer by Davidson, Fiester and Miller into a final, twenty-page proposal and, on Dec. 15, 1966, they submitted it to AFL-CIO President George Meany.²⁵¹ The proposal opened with a quote from Meany’s address on the tenth anniversary of the founding of the AFL-CIO: “After all the hurrahs and speeches attending the big merger faded away, there remained the hard, slow process” of bringing all of organized labor into the

²⁴⁹ Speech by Davidson. ILCA Convention, Dec. 5, 1967.

²⁵⁰ Davidson to Fiester and Lashman, memorandum, 4.

²⁵¹ “Community Paper Proposal To: AFL-CIO Leadership, From: International Labor Press Association,” Community Papers Proposal folder, ILCA. The proposal included a four-page appendix describing possible pilot projects in such target areas as Cincinnati, Ohio, Los Angeles, California, and the state of Connecticut.

federation, Meany said. The job of building the AFL-CIO is incomplete because “too many local unions stand apart from their brothers at the state and local level.”²⁵²

The ILPA report immediately continued that theme, arguing that “Strengthening central bodies requires strengthening labor communications at the community level.” The AFL-CIO should make “a major effort to build up labor papers published by state and local central bodies”—papers that would carry “labor’s message, both internally to present members and externally to the public and to people we would like to organize.”²⁵³

Creating broad solidarities requires time and repetition, the union editors wrote. “Political attitudes are formed gradually, the result of accumulated information and impressions.”²⁵⁴ Because “most people’s lives are focused on local events,” community labor newspapers are uniquely suited to “unite members of various unions” by reporting week after week on common problems, and then mobilizing workers to tackle those problems and support one another in times of need.²⁵⁵

Existing union publications kept labor *leaders* well-informed, but they failed to reach millions of rank-and-file members, the report pointed out. The members were often left to learn about the movement through “hearsay, shoptalk and fragmentary press” reports from commercial news outlets. “As a result, many relatively active union

²⁵² Ibid., 1. The quote is from the “Keynote address by George Meany to the 1965 AFL-CIO Convention.”

²⁵³ Ibid., 1; 3.

²⁵⁴ Ibid., 2; 7.

²⁵⁵ Ibid., 6-8.

members are only vaguely aware that the workers across the street are members of a sister union; many members who are reasonably well informed about activities in their own union half a continent away are unaware of the successes and tribulations of another union in their home town; many union members who have some understanding of the national issues are hazy in their knowledge of their own Congressman and certainly of their state legislatures.”²⁵⁶

The ILPA pointed to huge gaps in labor’s communications net:

- Seventeen states with a total 567,000 members of AFL-CIO affiliated unions had no known community labor papers—state or city.
- In fifteen states with a total 4.03 million union members, fewer than 10 percent had a community paper. (The fifteen states accounted for fully 51 percent of the total AFL-CIO membership.)
- In five states (home to 3.9 percent of all affiliated members) community papers reached only 20 to 30 percent of the membership.
- Three states containing 18.5 percent of the total AFL-CIO membership had publications reaching between 30 and 50 percent of the members.
- Only five states (accounting for 17.6 percent of the federation’s membership) had community papers that reached between 50 and 75 percent of all union members.²⁵⁷

²⁵⁶ Ibid., 3.

²⁵⁷ Ibid., 4.

The report provided some striking examples:

- In the heavily-unionized state of New York, only 5 percent of the union membership received a state or metropolitan labor paper.
- In Los Angeles, a weekly community paper reached 22 percent of all affiliated members, and that was “the best showing of any million-plus city in the country.”²⁵⁸

According to the report, economics was the primary reason for the lack of community labor newspapers, and for their often poor quality. In most cases, “community papers cost far too much to produce because circulation is too low,” ILPA leaders wrote. “Low circulation breeds a vicious downward spiral of higher unit costs, higher subscription rates, lower circulation and so on...[leaving] a publication of little if any legitimate value as an advertising medium.” Rivalries and political differences between unions created serious difficulties, too. But if the AFL-CIO threw its political and financial support behind community newspapers, both sets of problems could be solved, the ILPA argued.²⁵⁹

None of this would come cheap, as the ILPA frankly acknowledged. Larger central bodies with 100,000 members and more would have to spend \$13,000 a month (or \$156,000 a year) to adequately finance a weekly labor newspaper. CLCs with 25,000 members or less would face higher unit costs and need to spend proportionately more—

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 4-5.

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 5-6.

an estimated \$85,000 a year. “We recognize that this is an appropriation many central bodies are not likely to make,” ILPA conceded.²⁶⁰

However, costs could be reduced in a number of ways, the proposal explained. State federations could adopt the model of the *Michigan AFL-CIO News*, which carried national, regional, and local news to 200,000 union members a week. The *Michigan AFL-CIO News* published no fewer than 46 local editions. Individual unions could subscribe to the paper on a weekly, semi-weekly, or monthly basis—whatever best fit their budget—and they also had the option of producing their own pages with stories focused on their own organizations, which would appear as inserts in the larger publication.²⁶¹ Of course, the community labor newspapers, themselves, could cut costs by publishing monthly or semi-monthly, instead of every week. However, the ILPA warned, doing so would produce “far less comprehensive” news reporting, and a less attractive medium for advertisers, too.²⁶²

A “bright and attractive” weekly newspaper reaching the majority of union members in a given community could sell enough advertising to recover between 20 and 25 percent of its operating costs, the ILPA concluded. The balance of revenues would have to be recovered through subscription sales to area unions.²⁶³

²⁶⁰ Ibid., 8-10.

²⁶¹ ILPA Directory of Member Publications (1968), Box 14, UML. The directory lists the circulation of the *Michigan AFL-CIO News* at 204,000.

²⁶² Community Papers Proposal, 10-11.

²⁶³ Ibid., 12.

The report concluded with a recommendation that the AFL-CIO launch “one or more pilot projects” in partnership with the ILPA and a state or local central body. This could take the form of creating a community newspaper from scratch or upgrading an existing one. It could be a local paper or a statewide publication, with or without special editions for municipalities or individual unions. For example, the AFL-CIO would have to allocate only \$15,000, on a one-time basis, to upgrade and expand the community labor newspaper in Cincinnati, Ohio, the ILPA projected. Together, the two pilot projects (revitalizing an existing newspaper and starting a new one) would require the AFL-CIO to invest between \$150,000 and \$200,000.²⁶⁴

The AFL-CIO Responds

The AFL-CIO responded promptly to the ILPA’s proposal by inviting Davidson and Fiester to address a meeting of labor’s top political operatives—the Operating Committee of the Committee on Political Education (COPE)—on January 24, 1967 in Atlantic City. Davidson felt they were “very well received” and he returned from the meeting believing the project was “about to get substantial support from the labor leadership.”²⁶⁵ However, instead of committing to the ILPA plan, Meany appointed a Standing Committee on Public Relations during a February meeting of the AFL-CIO Executive Council. He directed the committee to evaluate the AFL-CIO’s

²⁶⁴ Ibid., 13; Appendix to Community Papers Proposal.

²⁶⁵ Speech by Davidson. ILCA Convention, Dec. 5, 1967.

communications programs and report back to federation leaders at their next scheduled meeting in May.²⁶⁶

According to AFL-CIO Publications Department Director Saul Miller (an ex-officio member of the ILPA executive council), both Meany and the Standing Committee on Public Relations showed “interest” in the community labor newspaper proposal.²⁶⁷ But the Standing Committee proved to be a farce. It met exactly once—two days before the May executive council meeting.²⁶⁸ And instead of conducting its own review, the committee asked the AFL-CIO Public Relations Department to critique the federations’ communications programs. In other words, it had asked the department responsible for AFL-CIO communications to evaluate its own work. Albert J. Zack, director of the AFL-CIO Public Relations Department, was a longtime Meany confidante. A review of Zack’s reports on the progress of his department, written during the 1960s, shows they were unfailingly positive and eerily similar in wording and format, year after year.²⁶⁹

It took the Public Relations Department less than eight weeks to write its report, which it described (perhaps accurately) as “by far the most comprehensive review of the AFL-CIO’s public relations operation ever compiled.” The report recommended that the federation:

²⁶⁶ Minutes, Meeting of the Executive Council of the AFL-CIO, Feb.20-27, 1967, RG4-006, AFL-CIO Executive Council Minutes, 1955-1969, Vol.12, GMMA, 21-22.

²⁶⁷ Minutes of ILPA Executive Council meeting, Mar. 10-11, 1967, ILCA, 5.

²⁶⁸ Minutes, Meeting of the Executive Council of the AFL-CIO, May 8-9, 1967, RG4-006, AFL-CIO Executive Council Minutes, 1955-1969, Vol.12, GMMA.

²⁶⁹ AFL-CIO Information Department. Unprocessed records, GMMA.

- 1) continue sponsoring the Edward P. Morgan radio show (the department's single largest expenditure)
- 2) mail the *AFL-CIO News* and *Federationist* to all local union leaders
- 3) create six new public relations field staff positions
- 4) “pursue” the ILPA’s community labor papers plan and explore the regular commissioning of surveys on public attitudes towards labor
- 5) increase AFL-CIO involvement in educational television
- 6) commission a series of special projects, including Labor Day films and newspaper supplements
- 7) produce and/or sponsor more pro-labor programs for television and radio
- 8) improve the department’s Speakers Bureau and promote the publication of more pro-labor books ²⁷⁰

Notably, the AFL-CIO Public Relations Department would have controlled all of the proposed new activities, except for the community newspapers (which would have been operated by the CLCs) and the expanded mailings of the *AFL-CIO News* and *Federationist* (which were produced by the Publications Department). The proposals would have added a half-dozen staff positions to Zack’s department, and increased its activities in books, television, radio, and film. Notably, too, none of the proposed activities—with the sole exception of the community labor newspapers plan—were primarily designed to reach the union membership as a distinct audience.

²⁷⁰ “Report of the Public Relations Department to the Public Relations Committee of the Executive Council,” Box 7, “Public Relations Study” folder, UML.

That the report listed the ILPA's proposal as a middling priority was not a promising sign. Less promising still, the report bundled the already-costly community labor newspapers plan with a second, expensive proposal to finance a continuing series of national opinion polls.

Inexplicably, the minutes of the AFL-CIO's May 9, 1967 Executive Council meeting contain no mention of the Standing Committees' "comprehensive review" of federation communications, and no mention of the ILPA's proposal. Indeed, the AFL-CIO Executive Council minutes for the balance of the year and for 1968, 1969, and 1970 contain no reports at all from the Public Relations Committee, and no mention—by any party—of community labor newspapers.

By the fall of 1967, Davidson was deeply discouraged. His term as president was drawing to a close and, despite the energy he and others had poured into the project, there had been "no official communication whatsoever" from AFL-CIO leaders responding to the plan.²⁷¹ I am "almost to the point of writing it off as a lost cause," he told the council in September.²⁷²

Davidson was still waiting for the AFL-CIO to respond on the morning of December 5, when he stood to address a session of 1967 ILPA Convention—his final convention as president. The consequences of the council's decision *not* to organize mass support for the community papers plan were vividly on display. The convention program

²⁷¹ Speech by Davidson. ILCA Convention, Dec. 5, 1967.

²⁷² Minutes of ILPA Executive Council meeting, Sept. 22-33, 1967, Box 8, UML, 3. Three council members disagreed with Davidson's pessimistic assessment: Ex-Officio member Saul Miller, Raymond Pasnick, editor for the United Steel Workers International Union, and Fred Sweet, editor for the Hotel and Restaurant Employees. Sweet succeeded Davidson as ILPA president in 1968.

didn't even mention community labor newspapers. The session was titled "The Role and Function of the Labor Press," and the panelists discussed everything from political reporting to the overabundance of stories and photographs of union leaders. Only Davidson spoke about community labor newspapers, and he spoke at the very end.

The timing of Davidson's remarks was odd, and he seemed unsure of how to proceed. "I got my signals crossed," he told the session chair. "I wasn't sure whether you wanted to hear my comments now or later...I suppose this is a reasonably good point to comment briefly." He then spoke for eleven minutes. He spent only five minutes explaining the need for community labor newspapers, which he described as "the major new project of ILPA during my term." The bulk of Davidson's speech was a blow-by-blow account of the council's attempts to convince AFL-CIO leaders to support the plan.

The twenty-page proposal delivered to Meany more than one year before the convention was never been mailed to the ILPA membership, and was only placed on the delegates' tables the night before Davidson rose to speak. "I hope some of you have read it," he said lamely.²⁷³ The delegates did not come to the convention prepared to discuss the plan, and the panelists all addressed other topics. It is not surprising, then, that during the thirty-minute question-and-answer session not a single comment from the floor or dais mentioned community labor newspapers.

²⁷³ Speech by Davidson. ILCA Convention, Dec. 5, 1967. The *ILPA Reporter*—a newsletter mailed, at that time, to members on a monthly basis—ran a half-dozen brief articles about the plan. However, there is no evidence that the council distributed the full proposal to ILPA members prior to the 1967 convention.

The ILPA Looks to COPE

Davidson admitted to the delegates that he felt badly discouraged, but he closed his remarks by asking the ILPA to persist and to “find new channels” to press for federation support. And the ILPA did exactly that. Three days into the New Year, incoming ILPA president Fred Sweet urged the council to “push” the community papers plan at its upcoming March meeting, “and give heart to those among us eager to see some action at this level of the labor press.”²⁷⁴

But in a confidential letter, Fiester—who worked at AFL-CIO headquarters—explained to Sweet the reasons for the federation’s silence and inaction. “There will be no PR committee report at the February AFL-CIO Executive Council meeting, by order of GM [George Meany],” Fiester wrote. Walter Reuther was preparing to pull the 1.3 million-member UAW out of the AFL-CIO, and federation finances would be severely damaged. No one knows “if the money is there to spend” on new public relations programs, including the hundreds of thousands of dollars sought by the ILPA for community newspaper pilot projects. “This is for you alone ... [and] I mean exactly that,” he cautioned.²⁷⁵

The effects of the UAW pull-out were indeed devastating. The national AFL-CIO lost approximately \$400,000 in 1968 alone and, just as Fiester predicted, the AFL-CIO ordered a complete “suspension of all PR proposals.” The freeze continued through 1968

²⁷⁴ Sweet to Fiester, letter dated Jan. 3, 1968, Box 8, “Executive Council Meeting, Mar. 15-16, 1968” folder, UML.

²⁷⁵ Fiester to Sweet, letter dated Feb. 7, 1968. Box 9, “1967 Reading File,” UML.

and into 1969, during which time the AFL-CIO's financial and political woes only "deteriorated."²⁷⁶ Sounding desperate, or in denial, Davidson (now an ex-officio member of the council) insisted in the fall of 1968 that "a lot that could be done, on the basis of the ILPA report without money."²⁷⁷ It is difficult to imagine what Davidson had in mind. The ILPA's work on community labor newspapers ground to a halt.

At an April 1969 council meeting, Davidson railed at "the lack of follow up of this important and painstakingly-prepared undertaking." After much bitter argument, the council agreed to switch to an aggressive grassroots strategy. The ILPA would "seek every opportunity" to present the community labor newspapers plan to "trade union audiences, especially state and city central bodies" before their year-end convention.²⁷⁸

But precisely at this point, Davidson withdrew from ILPA activities, and the ambitious outreach to state and local CLCs never materialized. In a personal letter to Fiester, Davidson expressed embarrassment over his outbursts, and apologized for his temper. "I am unable to convey my thoughts to the ILPA executive council," he wrote, insisting that the organization would benefit from "a deep and abiding silence on my part."²⁷⁹ Davidson was known as an affable raconteur, but also as an intensely-focused

²⁷⁶ Minutes of ILPA Executive Council meeting, Apr. 10-12, 1969, Box 8, ILCA. Remarks are by Saul Miller.

²⁷⁷ Minutes of ILPA Executive Council meeting, Oct. 25, 1968. "Executive Council Minutes 1970-1976" folder, ILCA.

²⁷⁸ Minutes, ILPA Executive Council meeting, Apr. 10-12, 1969, ILCA.

²⁷⁹ Davidson to Fiester, letter dated May 1, 1969. Box 8, "ILPA Executive Council Meeting, Commodore Hotel, New York City, Apr. 10-11" folder, UML.

man with a sometimes sharp tongue.²⁸⁰ He was quick to paint disagreements as battles between himself and a conservative labor establishment—“to find dragons where there ain’t no dragons,” as Fred Sweet put it.²⁸¹ “By his lights, only he had the right to say (or to threaten) that he would get his way or to hell with you all,” Fiester once wrote.²⁸² Davidson told Fiester he was disappearing into the back country of Mexico “where there ain’t even no roads,” and would not return until the end of the year.²⁸³

When the council revisited the community newspapers plan in September, “all the old hopes were updated, along with a necrology which dashed them.”²⁸⁴ But the council was ready with a whole new strategy: a “synthesis of several splendid ideas” developed by David Selvin, editor for the San Francisco CLC.²⁸⁵ His strategy centered on COPE. COPE was extraordinarily busy, spending vast sums of money on politics and communications during this period. During the 1968 election cycle, COPE dispatched more than 10,000 union staff members throughout the country in a difficult struggle to dissuade members from voting for George Wallace and Richard Nixon. COPE distributed some 175 million pieces of campaign literature that year targeted to young voters, people of color, women, retirees, and other key constituencies. COPE was also pioneering a revolutionary new technology: computerized direct mail that could generate lists of

²⁸⁰ Gerald Archuleta, former assistant to Davidson, Oct. 19, 2009, telephone interview by author.

²⁸¹ Sweet to Fiester, letter dated, Feb. 9, 1968, Box 8, “Executive Council, Mar. 15-16, 1968, Bismark Hotel, Chicago, IL” folder, UML.

²⁸² Fiester to Sweet, Feb. 7, 1968.

²⁸³ Davidson to Fiester, May 1, 1969.

²⁸⁴ Minutes of ILPA Executive Council meeting, Sept. 27, 1969, ILCA.

²⁸⁵ Secretary-Treasurer’s Report,” Box 7, “1969 Convention” folder. UML.

registered and unregistered union members, complete with telephone numbers, addresses, and organizational affiliations, with unprecedented speed and precision.²⁸⁶

ILPA saw COPE and the labor press as a “natural alliance.” COPE and the international unions maintained detailed mailing lists (which the community labor papers would need), and they were seeking to solidify the political support of their members. The ILPA could offer COPE the services of union journalists experienced in crafting messages for workers, as well as direct connections to hundreds of labor publications, large and small. Selvin suggested that COPE and the ILPA could begin by generating monthly mailings to union members in targeted communities. As they gained experience working together, they could expand the program to other regions, with the ultimate aim of creating high-quality, weekly labor papers in communities across the country.²⁸⁷

According to Selvin, the challenge would be to convince COPE leaders that well-edited, weekly community labor papers would be a “cheaper and infinitely more effective” way to educate workers than COPE’s usual practice of dumping “a billion leaflets” on targeted communities at election time. However, when Selvin, Pasnick and Fiester sat down with COPE officials, the projected costs sent them “into a swoon.”²⁸⁸

Undeterred, ILPA leaders refined their proposal and traveled to Miami in February, 1970 to meet with the COPE Operating Committee. According to Selvin’s notes, the “natural allies” were worlds apart in their thinking. The COPE leaders reacted

²⁸⁶ Memorandum to President Meany from Al Barkan, Nov. 11, 1971, RG1-038, Office of the President, George Meany Files, 1940-1980, File 98/18 (Political Education, 1970-1972), GMMA.

²⁸⁷ Minutes, ILPA Executive Council meeting, Sept. 27, 1969.

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

with “confusion and uncertainty,” he wrote. “The price tag obviously troubled some,” and “at least” two committee members “voiced substantial objections” to the very idea of community labor newspapers. One COPE leader insisted that the international union publications were fine vehicles for political education. Another argued that “community publications weren’t a suitable instrument and talked vaguely of radio or TV or what not.”²⁸⁹

COPE Director Alexander Barkan said “there was little likelihood of doing anything this year,” but he called ILPA’s plan “worthy of further discussion” and pledged to appoint a committee to do just that. Selvin suspected this was an “easy and gentle way of letting me down.”²⁹⁰

Attempts to win the support of CLC officers active in COPE were, if anything, more disappointing. In July, Selvin, Fiester, and new council member Charles Bosari, editor of the Ohio AFL-CIO’s innovative *Focus* newspaper, traveled to Piney Point, Maryland. They hoped to meet with four CLC leaders who, they believed, would be particularly receptive to the community papers plan. However, only one of the four—California AFL-CIO President Jack Henning—attended the COPE meeting, and he “was dubious about costs.”²⁹¹ When yet another hoped-for meeting with CLC leaders from across the country fell through, ILPA leaders declared that they would “arrange to visit

²⁸⁹ Selvin to “Dear John,” memorandum dated Feb. 17, 1970, Box 8, “Executive Council Meeting June 24, 1970” folder, UML. Selvin most likely addressed the memorandum to ILPA Secretary-Treasurer John Barry, editor of the *AFL-CIO News*.

²⁹⁰ Ibid.

²⁹¹ To ILPA Executive Council Members, memorandum from Fiester, Selvin, and Bosari dated Sept. 2, 1970, Box 8, “Executive Council Meeting, June 24 1970” folder, UML.

them.” The meeting minutes do not explain how those visits would be paid for beyond the cryptic entry, “Details were left to the officers.”²⁹²

Retreat Under Darkening Skies

The 1970s were a period of deepening crisis for the U.S. labor press. As postage and newsprint prices soared, many international unions and CLCs reduced the length and frequency of their publications, eliminated staff, or ceased publishing altogether.²⁹³

(I explore this period in detail in Chapters 5 and 6.)

In January 1972, the ILPA executive council created a Permanent Committee on Community Papers and directed it to devote time and money to finding new strategies to push the project forward.²⁹⁴ Committee chair Charles Bosari established two priorities. First, the ILPA would identify sources of money and support to develop new community papers. Second, the ILPA would strive “to preserve existing community papers, many of which are in a precarious position.”²⁹⁵ But one year later, with no progress to report, the committee’s priorities decisively flipped. Bosari resigned from the council and Sal Perrotta, editor of the *Los Angeles Citizen*, took over as committee chair. Perrotta argued “that while in the past the thrust was to try to start new papers, the question today is one of survival for those community labor papers that have to take advertising to exist, especially in light of the projected postal rate increases.” He then recommended that

²⁹² Minutes of ILPA Executive Council meeting, May 14-15, 1971, Box 8, “Executive Council Meeting, June 24, 1970 folder, UML.

²⁹³ Survey on Trends in Labor Publications, report to ILPA convention delegates, Sept. 30, 1975, “Surveys” folder, ILCA.

²⁹⁴ Minutes of ILPA Executive Council meeting, Jan. 7-8, 1972, ILCA.

²⁹⁵ Ibid., May 12-13, 1972.

ILPA: (1) contact state and metropolitan CLCs and offer to assist their publications, (2) pressure the international unions to subscribe to CLC publications, and (3) develop a list of advertising agencies for labor publications to use.²⁹⁶

But realistically, what assistance could the ILPA—with its volunteer membership and limited budget—offer to the CLCs that would make a major difference? What pressure could ILPA apply to the international unions whose own publications were facing cutbacks? Finally, the ILPA had distributed lists of labor-friendly advertising agencies since 1957. Continuing to circulate the lists wouldn't hurt, but it was unlikely to help much, either.²⁹⁷

By September 1972, the goal of launching new community papers had simply disappeared. The ILPA pledged to “continue with the program set forth by Perrotta ... [to] strengthen those community papers that are now in existence.”²⁹⁸

The community labor newspaper project is not mentioned in the minutes of the any ILPA executive council meetings for the rest of 1974, or for 1975, or 1976.²⁹⁹ Indeed, by January 1976, ILPA had set itself a new, far less ambitious goal: to make AFL-CIO leaders “aware of the special problems of local member publications.”³⁰⁰

²⁹⁶ Minutes of ILPA Executive Council meeting, Jan. 11-12, 1974, ILCA.

²⁹⁷ ILPA Directory of Member Publications, 1957. Box 13, UML.

²⁹⁸ Minutes of ILPA Executive Council meeting, Sept. 5-7, 1974, ILCA.

²⁹⁹ The ILPA created a “revitalized” community labor newspapers committee in early 1982 and appointed Gordon Spielman, editor of the *Union Advocate*—published by the St. Paul, MN CLC—as its chair. However, Spielman left the executive council one year later. I found no evidence that the revitalized committee met or accomplished anything after he left.

³⁰⁰ Minutes of the ILPA Executive Council meeting, Jan. 16-17, 1976, ILCA.

ILPA had abandoned its decade-long campaign to fill the “deadly serious” communications gap that was undermining organized labor.³⁰¹ The ILPA and the AFL-CIO had a chance to create a network of community newspapers at the very moment when scores alternative newspapers, rooted in the social movements of the day, were flowering in communities from coast to coast; when Wallace and Nixon were preparing strategic campaigns to split union voters away from Democratic Party; when General Electric and other corporate giants were organizing the Business Roundtable to launch legislative and public relations campaigns against the Great Society and New Deal reforms.³⁰²

Instead, the ILPA wound up pleading on behalf of the local publications it had previously insisted were incapable of showing workers from different unions that they faced common problems requiring a collective response—that they were part of a broad movement in which the building serviceman understood the culinary worker, and the culinary worker understood the machinist.

Conclusion

In the early 1950s, Ray Davidson had traveled across the country, visiting cities that were home to as many as a half-dozen, fiercely independent oil worker locals. He wrote glowing articles describing the wonderful things union members could accomplish—the money they could save; the staff they could hire; the new meeting hall

³⁰¹ “The ‘Map’ is still on the Map,” *ILPA Reporter*, Aug. 1966, ILCA, 1.

³⁰² Lichtenstein, *State of the Union*, 228-230; Ostertag, 117-160; Streitmatter, *Voices of Revolution*, 181-278; Jefferson Crowie, “Nixon’s Class Struggle: Romancing the New Right Worker, 1969-1973,” *Labor History* 43 no. 3 (Aug. 2002): 257-283; Raymond Mungo, *Famous Long Ago: My Life and Times with Liberation News Service*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970).

they could build— if only their locals would unite into a single citywide organization. “Well, well, well, we’ve always spoken for the people here,” the local leaders would tell him. We “don’t know if we’ve got anything in common with [those people] over there.”³⁰³

““I tried to sell it” but never could, Davidson recalled. “People are set in their ways.”³⁰⁴

Why, some fifteen years later, was Davidson unable to “sell” the AFL-CIO on community labor newspapers? The reasons lie in the origins of the ILPA and in the role of union journalism after World War II, which I examine in the following chapter. But I will close here with two observations.

Davidson’s attempts to unite the oil workers’ locals paralleled his later campaign to create community labor newspapers. Both were efforts to rationalize the larger labor movement by reducing fragmentation and waste. However logical his proposals may have been—whatever good they might have done for the movement as a whole—they could not overcome the parochial interests of leaders in the local unions, CLCs, internationals, and the AFL-CIO.

At a deeper level, Davidson’s efforts demonstrated that communities of interest are never “given” or logically self-evident. Perceptions of common interest and feelings of solidarity do not arise spontaneously, or without resistance. They must be constructed, fought for, and defended.

³⁰³ Davidson interview, OCAW/PACE Oral History Project.

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

CHAPTER 5:

Shaping the Post-War Labor Press: the ILPA's First Thirty Years

Introduction

As Chapter 4 explained, in 1966 the International Labor Press Association (ILPA) began urging the AFL-CIO to create community-based labor newspapers in regions with high concentrations of union members. The ILPA made its proposal at the precise moment that AFL-CIO leaders were anguishing over a “massive breakdown in communications” with the union membership.³⁰⁵ Federation officials blamed poor communication for major losses suffered by pro-labor candidates in recent state and congressional races across the country. They also believed poor communication was contributing to an erosion of solidarity among rank-and-file workers, and between union members and leaders.

The ILPA's proposal was explicitly designed to strengthen communications with members and boost labor's political. The proposal had been carefully crafted and vetted by high-ranking AFL-CIO staff and by the most respected editors working for the federation and its largest affiliates. Nonetheless, despite six years of lobbying, cajoling, and pleading, ILPA leaders could not persuade the AFL-CIO Executive Council to place the proposal for community labor newspapers on their agenda for discussion and debate.

The AFL-CIO's failure to even consider community newspapers frames a series of key questions about the post-World War II labor press. What role did leaders of the

³⁰⁵ Tape-recorded panel discussion, “Role and Function of the Labor Press,” 1967 ILPA Convention, UML.

newly-formed federation *want* the labor press to play? What was the status of union journalists inside U.S. unions? What political and economic resources did the ILCA command, and how effectively did it wield them? What kinds of internal and external pressures confronted union journalists, leaders, and other actors, and affected their decisions?

I begin this chapter by tracing the origins of the ILPA to the initial collaboration between the AFL and CIO editors who founded the organization. In the late 1940s, editors from the two federations joined forces to destroy the Federated Press—a popular, left-leaning labor news service which sometimes reported critically on the unions. In its stead, the editors created an explicitly anti-communist news service, financed by AFL and CIO leaders and under their firm control. When the AFL and CIO merged in 1955 and created the ILPA, the outlines of the “bona fide” labor press were already clear: it would be staunchly anti-communist and it would faithfully propagate the policies of the federation and its affiliates.

Next, I examine how—only two years after the founding of the ILPA— AFL-CIO President George Meany effectively deprived the labor press of access to advertising revenue. Meany restricted the sale of advertising by labor publications in response to highly-publicized charges of union corruption leveled by the Senate’s McClelland Committee. As a result, the labor press became almost wholly dependent on—and, thus, beholden to— the international unions and the federation. As I show, the international unions and the federation never gave the ILCA (or its member publications) the financial support they needed to become serious “players” in shaping the ideas and actions of

union members or the general public. As more and more local union publications joined the ILPA seeking training and support (but paying little in dues) the ILPA found itself chronically short of funds and frustrated in carrying out its programs. I close the chapter by examining political-economic pressures at work during the 1960s and early 1975s when the campaign for community labor newspapers was in full swing, and how those forces affected the actions of the ILPA, the AFL-CIO, and the international unions.

Origins of the ILPA; The Killing of the Federated Press

When the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) merged in 1955, leaders of the two federations merged their labor press associations, as well. After months of often-testy negotiations, editors representing AFL and CIO publications finally met in Chicago in 1956 to found the International Labor Press Association.

I will return to the founding of the ILPA shortly. But it is important to recognize that this was not the first time editors from the AFL and CIO joined forces to re-shape the U.S. labor press. The roots of ILPA lie in the anti-communist campaigns of the late 1940s, when editors from the rival federations collaborated to destroy an influential labor news service named the Federated Press (FP).

Union journalists created the FP in 1919, following a disastrous national strike against the U.S. Steel Corporation. The strike involved some 365,000 industrial workers, belonging to twenty-four unions in more than fifty locations in ten states, from Colorado

to Pennsylvania.³⁰⁶ The unions and the labor press found themselves hopelessly outmatched: too small, divided, and decentralized to contend with the concentrated power of a modern corporation. Steel executives used the mainstream press and their own public relations departments to plant rumors, suppress stories, and redbait the strike. Prohibited by police and hired thugs from meeting together, and “without a single dependable public or labor newspaper,” strikers in many locales were often badly misinformed, believing, for example, that the strike was collapsing in other parts of the country and the mills were back in business producing steel.³⁰⁷ Within months, the strike had collapsed—a calamitous defeat that set the U.S. labor movement back a decade or more.³⁰⁸

The strike exposed the weaknesses of the AFL’s fragmented structure and the cautious conservatism of its leaders at time when bolder currents favoring industrial organization—and even revolutionary change—still ran strong among U.S. workers.³⁰⁹ It also demonstrated an urgent need for labor publications throughout the country to coordinate coverage and share news more rapidly.³¹⁰

The thirty-two labor editors who met in 1919 to found the FP acted independently of any particular union or political party. They were attending the first national

³⁰⁶ David Brody, *Steelworkers in America: The Nonunion Era*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), 231-278; Philip S. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States, Volume 8: Postwar Struggles, 1918-1920*, (New York: International Publishers, 1988), 159-169.

³⁰⁷ Brody, *Steelworkers in America*, 243-249; 253-254.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 277-278.

³⁰⁹ David Montgomery, *Workers in Industrial America: Essays on the 20th Century Struggle* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 3-47; Brody, *Steelworkers in America*, 231-78; Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States, Volume 8*, 159-69.

³¹⁰ Haessler, 70.

convention of the Farmer-Labor Party, a group that was determined to avoid entanglements in the sectarian spats of the political left and the internecine power plays of institutional labor. The Farmer-Labor Party hoped to stay focused on uniting workers and farmers, and the editors who founded the FP reflected that spirit.³¹¹ They represented a broad cross-section of the U.S. labor movement, including important AFL central bodies (e.g. Chicago, Minneapolis, Reading, and Detroit), international unions (including the United Mine Workers, Amalgamated Clothing Workers, and the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers), and the IWW, Communist Party, and Socialist Party.³¹² They ran the Federated Press as a cooperative, and vowed that it would “go beyond divisions among unions and left-wing political parties and disseminate news that represented the movement as a whole.”³¹³

In one sense, the Federated Press simply reflected the diversity of the labor press as it existed in 1919. At that time, “daily newspapers and hundreds of substantial weekly publications” specifically targeted working-class readers, and the official union journals “co-existed with a vibrant radical press deeply rooted in working-class communities.”³¹⁴ But the FP was also the product of conscious struggle: It was an “independent space” carved out by union journalists hoping to escape the interference and second-guessing of the trade union leadership.³¹⁵ The founders of the Federated Press were “fighters” who

³¹¹ Ibid., 73.

³¹² Ibid., 73-73; 93-95.

³¹³ Ibid., 72.

³¹⁴ Ibid.

³¹⁵ Needleman, 6.

saw “the union movement as a social cause and acted on its behalf through labor journalism.”³¹⁶ Many were viewed as “heretics” by the top union leaders, but even their critics understood they were significant voices who reached large, influential constituencies of the AFL.³¹⁷

The FP provided thorough coverage of every issue affecting organized labor. It established bureaus in cities including Chicago, New York, Washington D.C., Berlin, Sydney, Moscow, and Mexico City. It received reports from pro-labor publications all around the world.³¹⁸ “The better labor papers rely on Federated Press,” *TIME* magazine wrote in 1938.³¹⁹ But the FP also insisted on covering the struggles of unorganized workers and the union rank and file. It reported on internal union disputes that seemed to have major implications for all of labor, including the “amalgamation movement”: The growing push for industry-wide unions that so threatened the craft-based AFL.³²⁰

The scope of the FP’s reportage rankled many conservative labor leaders. On October 1, 1923, AFL Vice President Matthew Woll stood before the American Federation of Labor convention in Portland, Oregon and denounced the Federated Press as “pro-Soviet, pro-Communist, pro-revolutionary, [and] anti-American Federation of

³¹⁶ Haessler, 95; 100.

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 100.

³¹⁸ Matthew Woll, G.W. Perkins, and Chester M Wright. “Report on Federated Press,” in *Report of the Proceedings of the Forty-Third Convention of the American Federation of Labor, Portland, Oregon, Oct. 1-12, 1923*, (Washington, D.C.: Law Reporting Company, 1923), 131; Bekken, “Federated Press.” FP staff writers often accepted part-time pay or worked for free to help the organization survive.

³¹⁹ “Proletarian Press,” *Time*, Feb. 21, 1938, 49.

³²⁰ Woll, Perkins, and Wright, 132-133; Haessler, 168-170.

Labor.”³²¹ His close friend, AFL President Sam Gompers, had appointed Woll to head a committee to investigate the FP’s leadership and journalistic practices. After spending months spent interviewing FP members and staff and reviewing their records, Woll’s committee issued a blistering report that focused on the FP’s broad conception of the labor movement. All manner of “protesting minorities” —syndicalists, and every other group that could “lay claim to a labor designation”—received coverage equal in “weight and importance” to that given to “the bona fide trade union movement,” the committee complained.³²² By reporting on such dissident groups as the I.W.W. and the Communist Party, the FP had assisted forces “hostile to the American Federation of labor” and to democracy itself. “The Federated Press upon its own record cannot hope to have and should not have the support of trade union publications or of trade union organizations,” the report concluded.³²³

Woll—“the ideological spokesman for the old guard” AFL³²⁴— wanted convention delegates to immediately expel FP correspondent Art Shields from the hall and to have all AFL unions (and their publications) cut ties with the Federated Press. But AFL leaders, including Gompers, were not prepared to do that.³²⁵ The FP was simply too

³²¹ Woll, Perkins, and Wright, 133.

³²² *Ibid.*, 131-132.

³²³ *Ibid.*, 132;134.

³²⁴ Dubofsky and Van Tine, 218.

³²⁵ Art Shields, *On the Battlelines, 1919-1939*, (New York: International Publishers, 1986), 116-117; *Report of the Proceedings of the 43rd Convention of the AFL*, 256-257; Bekken, “Federated Press.” Convention proceedings show that Federation leaders responded to Woll’s report by launching the A.F. L. Weekly News Service as an alternative to the FP. Bekken writes that, in contrast to the FP’s grassroots-oriented journalism, the “Weekly News Service offered a bland diet of official statements and ‘authentic news’ to labor papers not ready for headier fare.” Although Woll could not expel Shields or persuade AFL editors to abandon the FP, he did convince the convention to expel delegate William F. Dunne, an open

popular, and socialist sympathies were too strong within too many unions.³²⁶ Woll would have to wait, and work, for conditions to change.

During the next three decades, scores of AFL newspapers continued to ignore Woll and support the Federated Press. And the rise of the CIO during the 1930s only deepened the FP's base in organized labor. The Federated Press had seventy-five dues-paying members when Woll launched his attack in 1923. By 1946, the FP had 250 dues-paying members, and supplied news to nearly one third of the U.S. labor press.³²⁷

Four conditions allowed the Federated Press to take root in 1919, and to grow through the 1940s. First, left-wing organizations exercised substantial influence inside many unions and working-class communities across the country.³²⁸ Second, as Bekken has shown, a lively labor press existed that included the publications of trade unions, radical political groups, and ethnic associations. Significantly, during this period union

communist and editor of the *Butte Bulletin* labor newspaper. In a speech to the convention, Woll attacked Dunne for publishing articles critical of the United Mine Workers' handling of a Pennsylvania coal strike.

³²⁶ Greene, 221-223.

³²⁷ *Ibid.*, 113-114.

³²⁸ DeCaux; Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: the Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century*, (New York: Verso, 1998); Dubofsky and Van Tine; Gerstle and Fraser; Sidney Fine, *Sit Down: The General Motors Strike of 1936-37*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1967); Philip S. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States, Vol. 9: The T.U.E. L to the End of the Gompers Era*, (New York, International Publishers, 1991); Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States, Vol. 10: the T.U.E.L 1925-1929*, (New York: International Publishers, 1991); Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Defying Dixie: The Radical Roots of Civil Rights, 1919-1950*, (New York: W. W. Norton, 2008); Lichtenstein, *The Most Dangerous Man in Detroit*. Government repression effectively destroyed the I.W.W. after 1919, but left-wing organizations— including the Socialist Party, the Communist Labor Party, the Communist Party of America and, most notably, the Communist Party U.S.A.—continued organizing inside and outside the unions. Communist influence was particularly strong in the steel, mining and automotive industries. As Denning shows, left-wing ideals infused the popular culture of the 1930s and 1940s. As Korstad and Gilmore show, communists were also deeply involved in union and community organizing throughout the south from the 1930s through the 1950s.

publications were frequently produced by rank-and-file activists operating outside the direct control of the top labor leaders.³²⁹ Third, the top union leadership was deeply divided along craft and industrial lines. They were too busy competing with one another to unite against the left. Finally, until 1935, most unions lacked legal recognition and protection. Unions were weak and vulnerable, and labor leaders had to rely on a mobilized, militant membership to ensure their survival.

All of these conditions had changed by 1947, when Matthew Woll made his second, ultimately successful, move to kill the Federated Press.

AFL and CIO Editors First Join Hands

On November 7, 1947 the *AFL Weekly News* announced that the International Labor Press of America (the organization of AFL publications, headed by Matthew Woll for forty-two of its forty-four years of existence)³³⁰ had “voted not to use the Federated Press” because of its alleged adherence to “Communist Party policy.” The AFL, meeting in convention, promptly directed all members of the “loyal affiliated labor press” to stop subscribing to or using the FP’s services.³³¹

Four AFL editors immediately launched an alternative news service, Labor Press Associated (LPA): a part-time, “shoestring” operation whose “primary objective was to

³²⁹ Bekken, “Federated Press.”

³³⁰ *Opening Remarks to the 1956 Convention of the International Labor Press Association*, by ILPA President Gordon H. Cole, p. 2. Papers of Gordon Cole [hereinafter cited as Cole Papers].

³³¹ *AFL Weekly News Service Supplement*, Nov. 7, 1947, p. 1, microfilm, GMMA.

knock out the Communist-dominated Federated Press.”³³² The CIO soon joined the AFL in throwing their financial and political weight behind the LPA. In 1949, the two federations established the LPA as a cooperative news service, with a board of directors comprised of six editors each from the AFL and CIO, and two editors representing various railroad unions.³³³ Within months, the LPA was serving more than 200 labor publications, including such large, influential periodicals as the *CIO News*, *The Machinist*, and *Justice*, the official organ of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union.³³⁴

The LPA boasted an annual budget of some \$64,000—three times more money than the FP ever had³³⁵—which allowed it to undercut the FP’s subscription rates while offering “a far more extensive photo and cartoon service.”³³⁶ The LPA set up shop in Washington D.C. and hired three “Guild martyrs”—professional journalists fired during recent newspaper strikes.³³⁷

³³² Ruben Leven, president of Labor Press Associated, to AFL President George Meany, letter dated Mar. 24, 1953, RG1-027, Office of the President, President’s Files, George Meany, 1947-1960, Series 6, File 33/7 (Labor Press 1952-53) GMMA.

³³³ Harry W. Flannery to Meany, Schnitzler and Pearl, letter dated Jan. 11, 1954. Attached to report on LPA negotiations. RG1-027, Office of the President, President’s Files, George Meany, 1947-1960, Series 6, File 33/8 (Labor Press 1954), GMMA.

³³⁴ Haessler, 298-299.

³³⁵ Haessler, 299.

³³⁶ Bekken, “Federated Press.”

³³⁷ Flannery to Meany, Schnitzler and Pearl, Jan. 11, 1954.

The FP quickly fell into a death spiral. Its subscriber base dropped from a high of 250 in 1946 to 126 in 1950, and plunged to only seventy-four in 1952.³³⁸ The Federated Press finally folded operations in 1956, the same year Matthew Woll died. In a second ironic twist, the Federated Press managed to outlive the Labor Press Associated, which dissolved in February 1954 after an embarrassing battle with the Newspaper Guild over management's right to eliminate unionized staff positions.³³⁹

The trade unions would launch other news services, including the *Cooperative News Service*, the *AFL-CIO News Service*, and *Press Associates International*, which is still in operation. But none could fill the void left by the Federated Press. The FP had been more than a news service. It consistently sought to be the voice for all who labored, and it refused to paper over internal disputes and scandals "that could have sweeping consequences for either a particular union or for the labor movement as a whole."³⁴⁰ The growth of the Federated Press fueled "the growth of the American labor press, itself" by forging a "community of interest" between thousands of pro-worker journalists, irrespective of union or political affiliation.³⁴¹ No subsequent labor press organization, including the soon-to-be-created ILPA, would duplicate that role.

³³⁸ Haessler, 113.

³³⁹ Flannery to Meany, Schnitzler, and Pearl, memorandum dated Jan. 11, 1954, RG1-027, Office of the President, President's Files, George Meany, 1947-1960, Series 6, File 33/8 (Labor Press 1954, Jan.-Apr.), GMMA; *Ibid.*, Feb. 23, 1954. Believing the news service had become dysfunctional, the LPA's Board of Directors acted unilaterally, in violation of its Guild contract, to reorganize the staff. Unable to overcome Guild objections, and unwilling to spend more money to simply hire additional staff, the directors opted to disband the LPA on Feb. 23, 1954.

³⁴⁰ Haessler, 168; 170.

³⁴¹ Haessler, 170.

The world in which Matthew Woll died was far more to his liking than the world of 1923. The political left was in full retreat, and the independent radical press had all but disappeared. More and more unions were replacing their worker-editors with professional reporters and public relations experts.³⁴² Labor's top leaders had found a common cause in the crusade against communism and, thanks to the New Deal reforms, they now occupied a "seat at the table" (albeit a junior one) alongside leaders of industry and government. Their new-found legitimacy came with a price, however. The new federal system of industrial relations protected unions as long as they fulfilled their contractual commitments to the employers, and their legal obligations to the state. In the years after World War II, the militant rank and file that created the unions became more of a liability than an asset to labor's top leaders. These were the times into which the ILPA was born.

The Birth of the International Labor Press Association

During the fall of 1955—only months before the December merger of the AFL and CIO—editors from the two federations met in Chicago to hammer out a merger of their own. The AFL's chief representative was Gordon Cole, editor of *The Machinist* and president of the International Labor Press of America. Cole was accompanied by Phil Pearl, director of AFL press relations, and Fred Sweet, editor of the *Catering Industry Employee*. The CIO delegation was led by Henry Fleisher, editor of the *CIO News* and secretary-treasurer of the CIO's Press and Public Relations Conference (PPRC). Fleisher's team included Ray Davidson, editor of the *Oil Worker* and president of the PPRC, Al Herrington, editor of the *Communication Worker*, Ken Fiester editor of *Textile Labor*, and Art Riordan, editor of the *IUE-CIO News*. Five of the eight men (Cole,

³⁴² Bekken, "Federated Press."

Fleisher, Fiester, Herrington and Riordan) had served together as directors of the LPA.³⁴³ Six (Cole, Fleisher, Fiester, Davidson, Herrington, and Sweet) would lead the organization they were about to create for the next ten to fifteen years.

The CIO rankled the AFL by opening the talks with two major demands. Fleisher wanted to reserve one of the two top officers' posts in the new press association reserved for the CIO, and he demanded that CIO editors receive more seats on the executive council than would have been provided under the 2:1 ratio being used to fill positions throughout the federation. After many heated arguments—"Disagreement is a kind word for the disputes," one editor recalled³⁴⁴— the CIO caved in, and dropped both demands. PPRC members soon voted to join their AFL counterparts in a new organization with a name nearly identical to the old AFL group's (the International Labor Press of America became the *International Labor Press Association*), and a constitution and code of ethics lifted from the old AFL group with a few minor changes.³⁴⁵

The CIO editors had very little leverage. With forty-nine members, compared to the AFL's 115, they could never prevail in a "party line" vote.³⁴⁶ And, like so much of

³⁴³ Gordon Cole, "To All Executive Council Members International Labor Press of America, Nov. 14, 1955". A report on preliminary negotiations with the CIO Press and Public Relations Conference. "Code of Ethics" folder. ILCA; "What is Labor Press Associated?" RG1-027, Office of the President, President's Files. George Meany, 1947-1960, Series 6, File 33/6 (Labor Press, 1954, Jan.-Apr.) GMMA.

³⁴⁴ ILPA: The First Ten Years, 2.

³⁴⁵ Gordon Cole, Nov. 14, 1955, report on preliminary negotiations with the CIO's Press and Public Relations Conference, ILCA; Minutes of the First Meeting of the Executive Council of the International Labor Press of America (AFL-CIO), Mar. 26, 1956, Box 12, "1956-1959 ILPA Mailings and Reporters" folder, UML.

³⁴⁶ Ibid.

the CIO,³⁴⁷ the PPRC was a loose-knit association. The AFL's press association, on the other hand, was tightly run, with a formal board of directors and regular business meetings.³⁴⁸ The CIO editors struck the best deal they could and, despite receiving only six of fifteen council seats, they did not do badly. In lieu of a guaranteed officer's spot, the Newspaper Guild's Bernard Mullady (who was hired to edit the AFL-CIO's *American Federationist* magazine) was appointed secretary-treasurer, placing a CIO editor in the influential No. 2 position. PPRC officer Henry Fleisher became editor of the *AFL-CIO News*, ensuring him an ex-officio seat on the council for as long as he held that job. The AFL, of course, did even better. Gordon Cole, president of the "old ILPA," continued as president of the "new ILPA," and AFL editors held a commanding majority on the newly-formed executive council.

The founding convention of the International Labor Press Association opened on November 30, 1956 in Washington D.C. To the 200 editors gathered at the Mayflower Hotel, the future seemed bright with possibility. Together, they represented 145 publications which reached an estimated 20 million workers in the U.S. and Canada.³⁴⁹ They spoke for a freshly unified labor movement with vast resources and considerable

³⁴⁷ Robert H. Zieger, "Leadership and bureaucracy in the late CIO," *Labor History* 31, no. 3 (Summer 1990): 253-270.

³⁴⁸ Gordon Cole, "Opening Remarks," Founding convention of the International Labor Press Association, Mayflower Hotel, Washington D.C. Nov. 30, 1956. Cole Papers.

³⁴⁹ Ibid; "Circulation – 20,000,000. U.S. Labor Press: Cleaning Its Own House Organs," *Business Week*, Dec. 8, 1956, 158.

political clout. The union journalists who formed the ILPA were eager to show what they could do, and to earn “a seat higher up” in the labor hierarchy.³⁵⁰

Cole reminded the delegates of the vital role that they played. The “labor press represents the only direct means of communication between the members and their leaders” in this giant, sprawling movement, Cole said in his opening remarks. Because the “majority of members no longer turn out regularly to union meetings,” labor leaders will need lively, popular publications to keep the workers informed.³⁵¹

The ILPA set two broad goals for itself. First, it would work to raise the quality and prestige of the labor press. The ILPA would build ties between labor editors, encourage communication, and disseminate “professional information” to assist editors. Better labor journalism and a strict “code of ethics” would, ILPA leaders hoped, boost respect for editors and their publications, inside and outside the unions.³⁵² The code of ethics was integral to the ILPA’s second main objective: combatting “racket publications.”³⁵³ Racket publications pose as union newspapers and sell pages of advertising (with little or no news) by inflating their circulation figures and by suggesting that advertisers would be protected from union boycotts, organizing, and strikes. Though occasionally run by corrupt union officials, racket papers are typically produced by

³⁵⁰ ILPA: The First Ten Years, 3.

³⁵¹ Ibid.

³⁵² ILPA Constitution, Article II, Box 12, “1956-1959 Mailings and Reporters,” folder, UML.

³⁵³ Ibid.

professional con artists skilled at “putting the arm on businessmen for ads, then moving on to fresher pastures.”³⁵⁴

“There is no question of the steadily growing importance of the labor press to the trade union movement,” Cole told the delegates. “The question in my mind is how many of our union officers have recognized the importance of their publications.”³⁵⁵

Cole already knew the answer. The organization he had helped to found was starting out in debt. It received not a penny in start-up funds from the federation or its affiliates. Secretary-Treasurer Mullady “did a heroic job holding off creditors,” during the ILPA’s first year, one labor editor recalled.³⁵⁶ And the ILPA’s budgetary woes were only just beginning.

Meany Creates a Dependent Labor Press

By 1955, the anti-communist campaigns targeting organized labor were largely over. However, as the AFL and CIO were merging, labor confronted a fresh round of allegations from the U.S. Senate’s McClellan Committee.³⁵⁷ Commercial news outlets gave extensive play to committee revelations of racketeering, extortion, and gangsterism, while conservative groups including the National Association of Manufacturers and the

³⁵⁴ “U.S. Labor Press,” *Business Week*, Dec. 8, 1956, 159.

³⁵⁵ Cole, “Opening Remarks,” Nov. 30, 1956.

³⁵⁶ ILPA: The First Ten Years, ILCA, 3.

³⁵⁷ The proper name of the McClellan Committee was the Select Committee on Improper Activities in the Labor or Management Field. It was chaired by Democratic Senator John L. McClellan, of Arkansas.

U.S. Chamber of Commerce made “union corruption” the focal point of their work.³⁵⁸

The waves of propaganda caused public opinion to tilt sharply against labor. A poll conducted by *LOOK* magazine during the investigations showed the public feared the power of “big labor” more than the power of “big business” by a factor of three-to-one.³⁵⁹

Some of the McClellan Committee’s allegations pointed directly at the labor press. Unions were walking a “fine line” in their methods of soliciting advertising, warned McClellan Committee investigator Robert Dunne in a meeting with ILPA leaders. Many CLC and local union newspapers raised funds by printing special Labor Day editions stuffed with ads and very little news. How were these special editions different from the racket papers, Dunne asked? He also observed that many state federations raised money by selling ads in so-called labor “yearbooks.” A “large amount of money changes hands” in those transactions without finding its way into the union treasuries, he claimed. Furthermore, Dunne complained, some ads in union publications were signed “a Friend of Labor,” making it impossible to trace the source of the funds. ILPA leaders reminded Dunne that their code of ethics barred “friend of labor ads” and similar questionable practices, but they and Dunne were well aware that those practices continued.³⁶⁰

³⁵⁸ Elizabeth A. Fones-Wolf, *Selling Free Enterprise: The Business Assault on Labor and Liberalism, 1945-60*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 55-57; Gerald Pomper, “The Public Relations of Organized Labor,” *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 23, no. 4 (Winter, 1959-1960): 483; Minutes of ILPA Executive Council meeting, May 16-17, 1958, Box 8, UML.

³⁵⁹ Fones-Wolfe, *Selling Free Enterprise*, 56.

³⁶⁰ Confidential, Not for Publication, Box 8, “1957 Spring Meeting” folder, UML; Dear Brother Editor, June 15, 1956, Box 12, “1956-1959 Mailings and Reporters” folder, UML. ILPA leaders understood there was a wide variation in business and journalistic practices within the labor press. Part of the new organization’s task was to create and enforce ground rules. Six months before the founding convention, Bernard Mullady wrote editors of former AFL and CIO publications, announcing new that, because of new “stricter membership requirements,” they had to reapply for admission into the new ILPA.

To his credit, George Meany seemed genuinely offended by even the appearance of corruption in the labor press. Records show that throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the federation president corresponded extensively about the labor press with his staff and with leaders of the ILPA—and virtually every letter involved concerns about racket publications, or the advertising and business practices of union publications. In 1959, Meany repeatedly told the ILPA convention that labor was “on the defensive,” and this defensive mindset was reflected in his approach to the labor press.³⁶¹ Rather than focusing on proactive ways to use union media, Meany concentrated almost exclusively on what labor publications should *not* do. The labor press “does not exist to make a profit for anyone,” Meany wrote to ILPA President Peter Terzick. Nor, he continued, should the labor press serve as a “propaganda weapon”—although Meany clearly expected union periodicals to champion the AFL-CIO.³⁶²

On May 27, 1958, Meany issued a directive so strict and sweeping as to eliminate virtually all advertising from the labor press. Citing “adverse publicity” over advertising, Meany adopted the ILPA’s ban on “friend of labor” advertisements as official federation policy. He then went further, banning ads from all “employers who are not 100% unionized” by AFL-CIO unions. “This order is effective immediately,” he wrote.

Applicants had to provide information about circulation, advertising policies, and identify their advertising managers and salesmen. They also had to certify their compliance with the ILPA constitution and code of ethics, identify all labor organizations that endorsed their publication, and list other periodicals owned or operated by their publishers.

³⁶¹ “Meany Outlines Job of the Labor Press,” *ILPA Reporter*, 1959 Convention Issue, Box 12, “1956-1959 ILPA Mailings and Reporters” folder, UML, 3.

³⁶² Meany to Terzick, letter dated Nov. 7, 1958, “Advertising” folder, ILCA.

Technically, Meany's order was binding only on publications of the AFL-CIO and its state and local central bodies. In practice, it had far broader implications. The ILPA was created by the AFL-CIO, and was obliged by its code of ethics to "serve the best interests" of the federation. Whatever policies ILPA leaders applied towards their member publications could hardly ignore, let alone openly contravene, such a specific directive from the federation president.

The pushback from ILPA members was immediate. "There are no 100% unionized firms here," a representative of the Austin Texas Trades Council wrote Meany only days after receiving his letter. [Emphasis in the original.] He requested a written "exception to this directive." The president of the Indiana State AFL-CIO wrote Meany on June 4 to express his confusion. Was Meany saying his paper could accept ads only from companies with "union shop" or "closed shop" contracts?³⁶³ Or did the "100 percent rule" require that *everyone* working for an advertiser, including white-collar employees, belong to a union? "If the 100% unionized policy is to be strictly enforced, the Labor movement in Baltimore will be without an official organ," a doleful labor leader reported to Meany.³⁶⁴

After receiving dozens of such complaints and consulting with ILPA leaders, Meany softened his stance. "Friend of labor" ads were still forbidden, and labor papers

³⁶³ Feldacker, 432-434. Under a "union shop" contract, all workers hired by an employer must join the union. Under a "closed shop" agreement, the employer may hire only workers who already belong to the union. The 1949 Taft-Hartley Act outlawed closed shop contracts.

³⁶⁴ Hugh Tims, Austin Trades Council, to Meany, letter dated June 7, 1958, RG1-027, Office of the President, President's Files, George Meany, 1947-1960, Series 6, File 33/12 (Labor Press 1958) GMMA; Dallas Sells, Indiana State AFL-CIO, to Meany, letter dated June 4, 1958, Ibid.; Edward Johns, Baltimore Council of AFL-CIO Unions, to Meany, letter dated June 6, 1958, Ibid.

were ordered not to accept ads from companies actively resisting unionization. But union leaders in each community were free to apply “the rule of reason” in interpreting the directive. Meany insisted that he never intended to prohibit ads from “Mom and Pop” stores, or from unionized companies with a few unorganized departments.³⁶⁵ Nonetheless, Meany declared, “In my opinion it would be a good thing if no trade union paper accepted advertising...because experience has proved, time after time, that advertising in the labor press is particularly vulnerable to abuses.” The labor movement “should be willing and able to support our organs of internal communications without seeking assistance from the business community.”³⁶⁶

Sadly, experience also proved that organized labor was *not* willing to provide the support needed to make the labor press a potent force inside the unions or in the broader community. Unfortunately, too, the damage was done. Meany’s directive and his continued animus towards advertising caused the ILPA to pursue what can only be described as a schizophrenic set of policies for another twenty years.³⁶⁷ Starting in 1958, the ILPA published directories every few years listing member publications, their circulations, and contact information to connect advertisers with “bona fide” (i.e. non-racket) union papers. At the same time, secretary-treasurers Bernard Mullady and Kenneth Fiester spent a tremendous amount of time policing the advertising policies of labor publications, disciplining ILPA members, and rejecting applications for

³⁶⁵ Meany to Terzick, Nov. 7, 1958.

³⁶⁶ Meany to Edward Mergardt, vice president of the National Better Business Bureau, letter dated Feb. 5, 1963, RG1-038, Office of the President, George Meany Files, 1940-1980, Series 3, File 43/10 (Labor Press, 1961-1962), GMMA.

³⁶⁷ Minutes of ILPA Executive Council meeting, Jan. 8-9, 1982, ILCA. In 1982, ILPA leaders recommended a shift in policy from viewing advertising “as corrupt” to supporting “proper advertising.”

membership for various infractions, big and small. Why had a paper accepted advertising from a business located outside its circulation area? Did the name of a municipal labor publication imply that it reached a statewide audience? “You seem to be proud that your paper lives on advertising and subscriptions alone, rather than being financed by unions,” Fiester scolded an Ohio editor. “Neither we nor the AFL-CIO consider this anything to be proud of. Our strong preference is for labor papers entirely financed by unions with no advertising at all.”³⁶⁸

Despite the fact that AFL-CIO and ILPA policies actually *did* allow labor publications to accept advertising, an ILPA survey conducted in 2000—forty-two years after Meany softened his ban—showed that fewer than one-in-five labor publications accepted advertising. The “single biggest reason” for refusing ads was “simply, that it’s against policy. ... [In] many cases, it was the only reason given,” the survey showed. Many unions continued to ban advertising, either because they thought that was the right thing to do, or because they wrongly believed that was the policy of the AFL-CIO.³⁶⁹

It is likely that Meany helped to lessen corruption in the labor press by discouraging the sale of advertising. But he could have accomplished that goal through a well-financed crackdown on shady practices coupled with an aggressive push to build a legitimate advertising base. Meany’s efforts to eliminate corruption by banning advertising were similar to his efforts to eliminate communists by crushing the Federated Press. He used a sledgehammer against both targets, and built nothing new to replace

³⁶⁸ Fiester to Jerry Howard, editor of the *Labor Union*, Toledo, Ohio, letter dated Nov. 6, 1967, Box 9, “1967 Reading File” folder, UML. ILCA records show that, in some years, up to half of Mullady’s and Fiester’s correspondence concerned advertising.

³⁶⁹ A partial ILCA Survey assessment, “Surveys” folder, ILCA.

what he destroyed. Intentionally or not, Meany created a labor press that would be chronically starved for cash, and wholly dependent on institutional labor for its survival.

A Growing Mismatch Between Resources and Mission

The ILPA's very general mandate—to strengthen the labor press and combat racket papers—said nothing about *how* to accomplish those goals. In early 1959, ILPA leaders appointed a six-member committee to consider two questions: “What is the ILPA going to do in the way of a program?” And “Where are we going to get the money?”³⁷⁰ In May, the committee reviewed a survey showing that “the majority of members desired technical assistance,” in such areas as writing and design. A consensus emerged that the ILPA should concentrate on training and supporting local unions and small CLCs.³⁷¹

Gordon Cole was extremely skeptical about that approach. In very blunt language he offered a wholly different vision of what the ILPA should do. “Local unions have no place in ILPA” because the organization lacks the resources to assist hundreds of small publications scattered across the country, he insisted. Cole agreed that the ILPA should aid the grassroots labor press. However, he said, “We can't do it by recruiting them and then suggesting they look to us for help.”³⁷²

³⁷⁰ Minutes of the Washington Subcommittee of the ILPA Executive Council, Apr. 7, 1959, Box 8, “Executive Council Meeting, 1959, Chicago” folder, UML. The committee members were: Gordon Cole, Machinists, Marie Downey, International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, Ken Fiester, United Auto Workers, Bernard Mullady, AFL-CIO, Al Herrington, Communication Workers, Dick Howard, International Brotherhood of Railway Signalmen, and Saul Miller, AFL-CIO.

³⁷¹ Minutes of an Informal Meeting of the Washington Subcommittee, May 15, 1959, Box 8, “1959 Convention” folder, UML,

³⁷² Minutes of the Washington Subcommittee, Apr. 7, 1959.

Instead, Cole argued, ILPA membership should be restricted to AFL-CIO and international union publications. The organization should use its resources to upgrade the quality and prestige of the big publications by providing professional training and educational seminars for editors and writers. As the international union press grew in quality and stature, the ILPA would use its influence to encourage resource-rich internationals to create their own internal press associations, and it would assist the internationals in training and supporting their local editors. At the same time, Cole said, the ILPA would organize regional press associations comprised of local union and CLC publications in various parts of the country.³⁷³

No one on the committee sided with Cole. Indeed, Kenneth Fiester derided the Cole's plan as catering to the labor press "elite."³⁷⁴ Instead, the committee charted a course that set the ILPA in a completely opposite direction. They proposed that that ILPA produce a range of new materials geared to small CLC and local union publications, including regular news bulletins, pamphlets, reading lists, and a film depicting "a model newspaper" to "sell" union officers on the value of quality publications. They also proposed hiring a full-time staff member to work mainly on building state and regional labor press associations.

The committee briefly considered asking the AFL-CIO for funds to launch the new programs,³⁷⁵ but quickly decided that an increase in ILPA dues was a "more

³⁷³ Ibid.

³⁷⁴ From notes appended to the Minutes of an Informal Meeting of the Washington Subcommittee.

³⁷⁵ Report to the Executive Council of the ILPA from the Washington Subcommittee, Aug. 19, 1959, Box 8, "1959 Convention" folder, UML.

feasible” solution.³⁷⁶ They agreed to impose higher dues on international unions and large, well-funded CLCs. But they also agreed to keep dues low (and to temporarily waive initiation fees) for local union and small central body papers “to bring them into the ILPA as new members...Prime consideration was given to the needs of these same small publications which are seriously in need of help.”³⁷⁷

Just as the committee hoped, local editors poured into the ILPA. (See Figure 4, page 143.) In 1957, the local union press represented only 21.9 percent of all ILCA members. Five years later, they made up nearly 40 percent of the organization. By the late 1970s, the local labor press comprised a solid majority—57.5 percent of the ILPA membership— and their numbers continued to rise, reaching 74.4 percent of the total membership in 1993.³⁷⁸

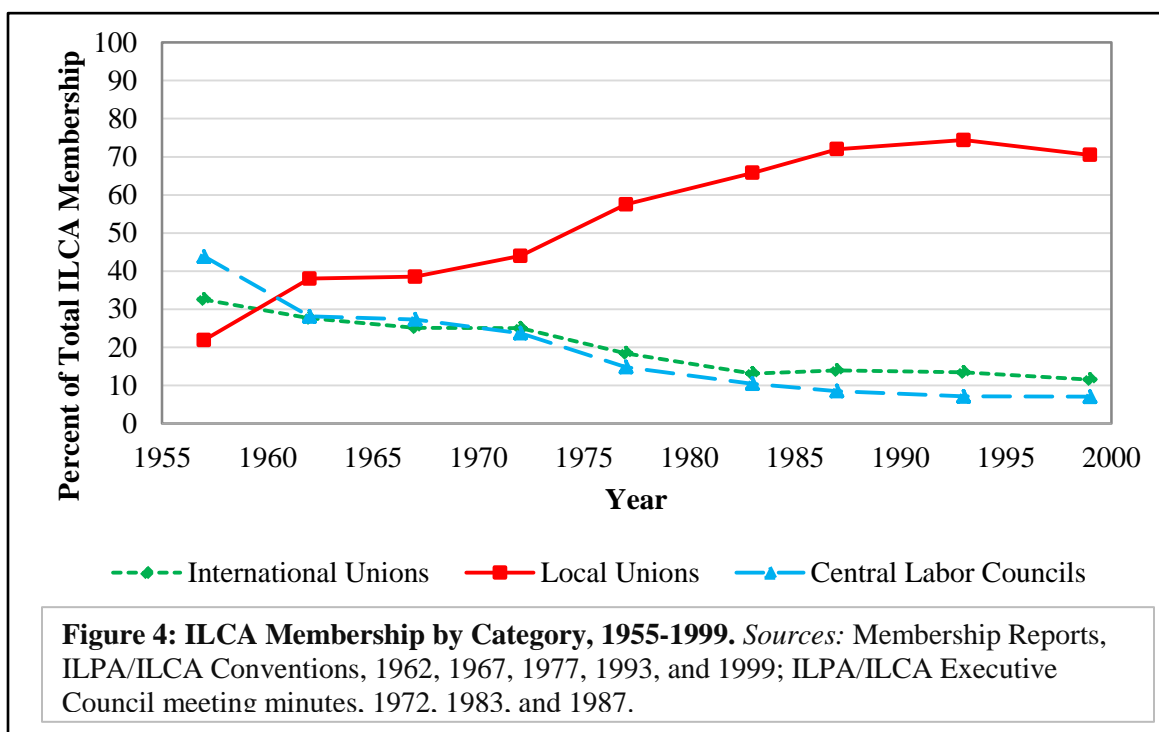
Clearly, the smaller publications found much to like in the programs and services offered by the ILPA (which haven’t changed much in the intervening fifty years). Members received an Editor’s Guide—a thick notebook packed with advice on everything from news writing to the complexities of libel law. They received a regular newsletter, the *ILPA Reporter*, which carried reports on events within the labor press and ILPA, as well as practical tips and suggestions. They received camera-ready graphics, campaign materials prepared by COPE and, occasionally, pre-written news stories. They received clear explanations of arcane postal regulations, and ILPA members could call an

³⁷⁶ Minutes of an Informal Meeting of the Washington Subcommittee.

³⁷⁷ Report to the Executive Council of the ILPA from the Washington Subcommittee.

³⁷⁸ Membership Reports to ILPA and ILCA Conventions, 1962, 1967, 1977, 1993, and 1999. Box 8, “Convention” folders, UML; Minutes of ILPA Executive Council meetings Oct. 1972, Oct. 1983, and Oct. 1987, ILCA.

AFL-CIO expert for help resolving problems with postal authorities. Members could mail their publications to the ILPA and receive critiques and suggestions. And they could enter a national contest and compete for awards in various categories which, if they won, reflected well on the union officers, and (hopefully) helped the editor to gain their trust and support.



In 1964, as planned, the ILPA used a portion of its increased revenue to hire a full-time field representative to organize regional press associations. The associations provided the ILPA with “a considerable source of additional membership,” but they were also inherently unstable—mainly because of high turnover rates among local union editors. Many local editors were inexperienced volunteers, trying to hold down jobs, meet family commitments, perform other duties for their unions, *and* produce a newsletter. Organizing regional associations and holding them together required a great deal of time

and effort.³⁷⁹ With the exception of Fiester, ILPA council members served without pay. On top of their own demanding jobs and normal council duties, ILPA officers were spending large amounts of time in the 1960s investigating the racket press and filing complaints with state attorneys general and the Federal Trade Commission.³⁸⁰

Just as Cole feared, the ILPA continually found itself spread too thin, lacking the time and money to accomplish much of what it set out to do. The ILPA started out in debt, but by scrimping and more than doubling its membership to 305 publications, the organization managed to gross \$11,154 in dues revenue in 1958.³⁸¹ By 1964, the ILPA's membership had grown by 25 percent and, thanks to the new dues structure, its income more than doubled to \$22,915, allowing the organization to hire a full-time field representative. But four years later, the ILPA was running out of cash again and had to let him go. The "ILPA has no staff worth mentioning," Fiester grumbled.³⁸²

By 1971, the organization—with 400 member publications—was running a \$16,000 annual deficit, and ILPA leaders again raised dues, this time by 25 percent. They soon reported that the dues hike "is not solving our problem" and that their programs were "too ambitious" for the money they had.³⁸³ They cancelled meetings, cut the

³⁷⁹ Minutes of the ILCA Executive Council meeting, June 4, 1994, ILCA.

³⁸⁰ Fiester to 108 advertisers in the *Labor Tribune*, form letter dated Sept. 28, 1965, RG1-038, Office of the President, George Meany Files, 1940-1980, Series 3, File 43/12 (Labor Press, 1965-66), GMMA; John T. Walker, Attorney for the Federal Trade Commission, to Fiester, letter dated Oct. 22, 1965, *Ibid.*; "Funny Business," *ILPA Reporter*, May, 1963, ILCA.

³⁸¹ Finance Committee Report, Dec. 4, 1957, Box 7, "1957 Convention" folder, UML.

³⁸² Fiester to Edwin Graves, letter dated Aug. 1, 1968, Box 9, "1968 Reading File" folder, UML. The 1968 crisis was largely caused by the UAW's withholding of dues and subsequent withdrawal from the AFL-CIO. Dozens of UAW publications, including the national magazine *Solidarity*, belonged to the ILPA.

³⁸³ Finance Report, Minutes of ILPA Executive Council meeting, Nov. 17-19, 1972, ILCA.

frequency of membership mailings, and embarked on a membership drive. Almost immediately, the ILPA became locked in an expensive, time-consuming battle with the U.S. Postal Service over hikes in second-class mailing rates that threatened to devastate the labor press and other non-profit mailers.³⁸⁴ Between 1974 and 1984, the ILPA spent an average \$16,000 a year fighting the rate hikes, and ILPA leaders spent a great deal of time raising funds for that campaign.³⁸⁵

By 1978, the ILPA was confronting a \$20,000 deficit, and the postal battles were only part of the story. The core problem, as Cole had foreseen, was the mismatch between the organization's resources and membership base. The ILPA had added 200 members since 1974, but the growth was "concentrated in smaller local union publications" that paid the least in dues but required the greatest amount of support. Most internationals already belonged to the ILPA, so there was little to be gained by recruiting the larger publications. To make matters worse, many CLC publications were going broke and folding operations during this period, as I discuss in the next chapter.³⁸⁶ Seeing no other options, ILPA leaders launched another recruiting drive and began a phased-in,

³⁸⁴ Dave Beal, Business Editor, "Attack on Free Speech," *Milwaukee Journal*, May 27, 1979; Minutes of ILPA Executive Council meeting, Apr. 6-7, 1979, ILCA. In 1971, before the USPS began a sixteen-year schedule of postal rate increases, the *Milwaukee Labor Press* paid \$1,595 to mail four, sixteen-page issues. In Mar. 1979, the paper paid \$1,641 to mail a single sixteen-page issue. ILPA Secretary-Treasurer Allen Zack said second class mailing rates rose 1,200 percent between 1971 and 1979. He blamed the increases for a 25 percent reduction between 1975 and 1979 in the number of labor publications mailed to union member households.

³⁸⁵ Minutes of ILPA Executive Council meeting, Sept. 6-7, 1985 and Sept. 22-23, 1967, ILCA; "Conference Report," *ILPA Reporter*, Sept. 1970, Box 8 "ILPA Conference June 25-27 1970" folder, UML, 7.

³⁸⁶ Draft Report of the Special Finance Committee, Apr. 1979, Box 2, "Finance Committee, 1973 Convention" folder, UML. The report, written in 1979, seems to have been misfiled.

55 percent dues increase. By 1988, ILPA Secretary-Treasurer Pat Ziska was able to announce that the organization (now named the International Labor Communications Association, or ILCA) would take in dues totaling \$93,000 that year. “We are on firm financial ground,” he proclaimed, before adding, paradoxically, that the ILCA was “spending more than we are collecting”—to the tune of \$10,000 a month!³⁸⁷

It is instructive to compare the ILPA’s dues income for 1957 and 1988 in proportion to the number of publications the organization had to serve. After adjusting for inflation, the ILPA (with 305 members) had dues receipts of \$88,709.32 in current (2011) dollars in 1957, or \$290.85 per-member. In 1988, the ILPA (with 756 members) had dues receipts totaling \$175,675.66 in current dollars, or \$232.38 per-member— 20 percent *less*, in real terms, than the ILPA had thirty-two years before.

The AFL-CIO did provide one important form of financial support to the ILPA during the first three decades of its existence. From 1956 through 1983, the federation assigned a top communications staff member to serve as the ILPA’s secretary-treasurer—a time-consuming job that entailed maintaining financial records and corresponding with members, union leaders, and outside organizations.³⁸⁸ This arrangement with the AFL-CIO allowed the ILPA to operate smoothly and professionally without having to “bear the salary and other expenses of a full-time Secretary-Treasurer,” which the organization, as constituted, could not have afforded to do.³⁸⁹ But having an AFL-CIO employee serve

³⁸⁷ Minutes of ILCA Executive Council meeting, May 6-8, 1988, ILCA.

³⁸⁸ The AFL-CIO stopped providing a full-time secretary-treasurer to the ILPA in 1983.

³⁸⁹ Financial Committee Report Dec. 4, 1957, Box 7 “1957 Convention” folder, UML.

as secretary-treasurer also allowed the federation to oversee and control the day-to-day business of the ILPA for the first three decades of its existence. As ILPA Secretary-Treasurer Kenneth Fiester explained, “There is much that only the secretary-treasurer can do, since he is more or less in residence. To a degree, ILPA reflects the interests, abilities and energy of the secretary-treasurer.”³⁹⁰

There is no record of the ILPA ever asking the AFL-CIO for substantial financial support. High-ranking AFL-CIO staff members said that ILPA leaders believed that accepting federation money might jeopardize the ILPA’s independence.³⁹¹ If so, that says a great deal about how the AFL-CIO was perceived by groups close to the federation. On the other hand, there is no record that the AFL-CIO ever approached the ILPA with offers of sharply increased assistance, with or without strings attached.

As Cole also predicted, the ILPA developed a leadership core and financial base badly out of synch with its locally-oriented mission and predominantly grassroots membership. Despite being a distinct minority, the wealthy internationals and the AFL-CIO held both of the ILPA’s top officer’s posts for twenty-eight of the first thirty years of the organization’s existence.³⁹² Indeed, as the next chapter discusses, no local union editor would serve as president or secretary-treasurer until 1996. The international unions also controlled, on average, 47 percent of the voting seats on the executive council during

³⁹⁰ Fiester to Sweet, Feb. 7, 1969.

³⁹¹ Murray Seeger, Sept. 3, 2010, interview by author, Silver Spring, MD. Seeger served as AFL-CIO Director of Information from 1981- 1987; Denise Mitchell, Aug. 14, 2009, interview by author, Washington, D.C.

³⁹² The two years in which this pattern was broken were “the exception that proves the rule.” When Fred Sweet became ILPA president in 1968, he left his job as editor of the H.E.R.E. international union’s *Catering Industry Employee*—a post he had held since the 1950s—to edit the *Union Advocate*, published by the AFL-CIO central body in St. Paul, Minnesota.

the first three decades of the ILPA's life, compared to only 10 percent for local union publications, which have comprised the largest single bloc of ILPA members since the early 1960s.³⁹³ The international unions were also the financial mainstay of the ILPA during its first thirty years, supplying between 60 percent and 70 percent of the annual dues for an organization whose programs were designed almost exclusively for the benefit of local unions and small CLCs.³⁹⁴

The ILPA did offer valuable programs and services: The steady rise in local union membership is evidence of that. The ILPA, allied with other non-profit mailers, also succeeded in blunting some of the proposed postal rate hikes. As damaging as they were, the rate hikes would have been larger and more harmful if not for the efforts of the ILPA. And ILPA leaders spent a great deal of time tracking phony labor papers and hauling them into court. Had they not done so, the racket press would almost certainly be an even bigger problem than it is today.³⁹⁵

³⁹³ I reconstructed the composition of the Executive Council from 1955 to the present, using convention reports, meeting minutes, articles from the *ILPA/ILCA Reporter* and even organizational letterhead. During the first three decades, editors representing the CLCs and regional labor organizations (e.g. the building trades associations and union districts, which were often relatively large and well-funded) provided the "swing votes" on the council.

³⁹⁴ I reconstructed the sources of ILPA's dues money for the first three decades by assembling convention reports and financial reports from the secretary-treasurer to the council. The source of dues income became harder to track in the early 1980s. For one thing, the organization began creating new membership categories (e.g. union video and public relations productions), which made it difficult to compare records year to year. Also, as I discuss in Chapter 6, the AFL-CIO stopped providing a full-time secretary-treasurer to the ILCA in 1983. This may explain subsequent, frequent changes in the way finances were reported and periodic gaps in the records.

³⁹⁵ Andy Zipser, "Preying on advertisers: Hints, innuendo have lured ads to 'labor' paper for 50 years," *ILCA Reporter*, Sept.-Oct., 2004, 1; 8-11. Fighting racket papers is like playing a game of "Whac-a-Mole." As soon as one phony paper is put out of business, another pops up in another locale, sometimes run by the same con artists.

However, chronic under-financing has continually frustrated many of the ILPA's plans, large and small. For example, the regional press associations—the ILPA's most direct link with grassroots union editors— have stagnated since the late 1960s. The ILPA established ten state and regional associations during the 1950s and 1960s. There are only eight today. Despite repeated attempts to build new associations in New England, the south and other regions, the ILPA finds itself more or less where it was fifty years ago.³⁹⁶

We will never know whether Gordon Cole's strategy of concentrating first on the international union press would have produced a better result. But there is little evidence that the strategy adopted by the ILPA in 1959—to build the ILPA by concentrating on local unions and small CLCs— has improved the overall quality of the labor press or increased its prestige inside or outside the unions. Indeed, the massive cuts in the size and frequency of union publications throughout the 1970s and 1980s (a trend I explore in the next chapter) provide powerful evidence to the contrary.

Why the Campaign for Community Labor Newspapers Failed

ILPA leaders may have thought they were merely critiquing the labor press when they pointed to gaps in labor's communications network and urged a technical "fix"—a reallocation of resources to create community newspapers. What the ILPA actually offered the AFL-CIO was, in fact, an incisive critique of the structure of organized labor and the methods union leaders used to regulate movement discourse.

³⁹⁶ Summary of 1965 Activities of Field Representative, Box 8, ILPA "Executive Council Meeting, Dec. 23, 1965" folder, UML; ILCA Directory of Member Publications 1968, Regional and Industrial Associations, ILCA; *ILCA Reporter*, Apr.-May 1991 and Mar. 1996. To track the evolution of regional press associations, I examined some 45 entries in minutes from Executive Council meetings, as well as "Regional Reports" to conventions, and issues of the *ILPA/ILCA Reporter* dating back to 1958.

David Selvin believed the AFL-CIO rejected the community papers plan because it asked the federation to spend “a lot of money for a relatively untried venture.”³⁹⁷ But community labor papers were hardly untried. Labor history is full of examples of community papers leading major struggles, and plenty of successful community papers existed in the 1960s, including Michigan’s *AFL-CIO News* and the Ohio AFL-CIO’s *Focus*. The leaders of COPE, the federation, and the international unions were well aware of them.³⁹⁸

So, *was* money a factor? It was *the* factor according to Allen Y. Zack, Jr., son of Meany’s public relations chief and ILPA secretary-treasurer from 1975 to 1981. “Who was going to pay for it?” he asked. “If somebody could have solved the money issue, I think the other problems would have gone away.”³⁹⁹ Davidson and other ILPA leaders argued that organized labor would save money by publishing large newspapers that reached every union member in a given region rather than dozens of smaller papers that reached bits and pieces of the union audience. That was undoubtedly true, but their argument neglected a crucial question: *Whose* money would be saved? Community papers would have required hundreds of thousands of dollars in start-up funds. And the CLCs and area unions would have had to purchase bulk subscriptions. Where was the money to come from? Unless community labor papers turned a profit and began paying for themselves (which no one expected to happen) organized labor could *save* money only by *reducing spending* on other programs.

³⁹⁷ Minutes of ILPA Executive Council meeting, June 24, 1970, Box 8 UML.

³⁹⁸ Ameringer; Brecher; DeCaux; Tracy, “Smile while I Cut Your Throat,” 298-325.

³⁹⁹ Allen Y. Zack, Sept. 10, 2010, interview by author, Stevensville, MD.

Labor, like all institutions, is made up of groups and individuals with their own priorities to protect. The AFL-CIO Public Relations Department had a raft of programs it sought to preserve and expand. COPE was pouring vast sums into political campaigns and direct mail technologies. And as I discuss in the next chapter, the international unions had their own financial woes and weren't terribly supportive of their own publications.

Without question, community labor papers represented an expensive undertaking. However, it is worth noting that the AFL-CIO apparently had no difficulties in 1966 collecting \$3.26 million from its affiliates for the John F. Kennedy Library and the Eleanor Roosevelt Memorial Fund.⁴⁰⁰ As Gordon Cole wryly observed, labor leaders always seemed to find “money for the *important* activities” like “modern office equipment... [and] extremely expensive legal talent.” The question, as Cole pointed out, was not money *per se*: It was what the labor leaders consider to be “important.”⁴⁰¹

Union journalists were in no position to challenge the priorities of labor's top leaders. Cole, Davidson, Fiester and other editors directed union departments with sizeable budgets and great visibility. But they were high-ranking union *staff members*, not officers. They did not make policy. They articulated policies made by the officers. And the CLC and local union editors were even less able to influence the allocation of resources within the movement, and the same is true today.

⁴⁰⁰ Minutes of the AFL-CIO Executive Council, May 8-9, 1967, RG4-006, Executive Council, Executive Council Minutes, 1955-1969, Vol. 12, GMMA, 20.

⁴⁰¹ Cole, Gordon H. “Union Communications in the Twentieth Century,” typewritten speech dated Nov. 13, 1957. The audience is not identified. Cole papers.

Sadly for the labor press, a 1975 ILPA survey showed the officers often viewed “editorial departments... [as] a lower priority than other union departments” when formulating their budgets.⁴⁰² Murray Seeger, Director of AFL-CIO Publications under during the 1980s, explained that most union officers considered membership communications to be “a tertiary function” compared to negotiating contracts and running the union.⁴⁰³ Organized labor had become so preoccupied with collective bargaining that its leaders often viewed demands for member education and communication as the special pleadings of “missionaries or idealists.”⁴⁰⁴

In 1959, an influential group of ILPA leaders called their organization “an integral part of the AFL-CIO, as are the various departments—Building Trades, Metal Trades, etc.,” and deserving of the same support from federation affiliates.⁴⁰⁵ This was wishful thinking, bordering on the delusional. The AFL-CIO Constitution *mandates* the existence of six “trade and industrial departments,” including the Building and Construction Trades Department, and the Metal Trades Department. (See Figure 1, “Organizational Chart of the AFL-CIO.”)⁴⁰⁶ These mandated bodies (often referred to as “constitutional departments”) are typically directed by boards comprised of the secretary-treasurers or presidents of the affiliated international unions. As an “allied organization”

⁴⁰² Convention Report: Survey on Trends in Labor Publications, Sept. 30, 1975, “Surveys” folder, ILCA.

⁴⁰³ Murray Seeger, Sept. 3, 2010, interview by author, Silver Spring, MD. Seeger served as AFL-CIO Director of Information from 1981- 1987.

⁴⁰⁴ Lichtenstein, *State of the Union*, 144.

⁴⁰⁵ Report to the ILPA Executive Council from the Washington Subcommittee.

⁴⁰⁶ During the 1970s, the AFL-CIO had seven constitutional departments. The AFL-CIO abolished the Industrial Union Department—essentially, what remained of the CIO—in 1999.

of the AFL-CIO, the ILPA was not part of the federation's constitutional structure. It has *never* enjoyed so high a status.

Tellingly, Allen Y. Zack said he knew “virtually nothing about the ILPA” when he succeeded AFL-CIO Public Relations Director Saul Miller as ILPA secretary-treasurer in 1975—and Zack had been working under Miller at AFL-CIO Headquarters for three years. “Like every other federation staffer, I had gone to ILPA cocktail parties and luncheons but that was about it,” Zack recalled.⁴⁰⁷ Miller provided “no real agenda” telling Zack what to do, beyond some general advice to keep the ILPA stable and out of “inter-union fights.”⁴⁰⁸

Miller's concern about the labor press becoming embroiled in union politics suggests another reason why Meany failed to consider the community papers plan: *control*. Miller expressed this very concern to Ray Davidson in 1966, when the community papers plan was first taking shape. The editorial policies of any paper using the AFL-CIO's political mailing lists “would have to be attuned very closely with those of COPE in the area,” Miller said, adding that this was “a situation which presently does not exist.”⁴⁰⁹ ILPA Secretary-Treasurer Fiester, then editor of the *AFL-CIO News*, made much the same point in two letters written the following year. Any newspaper endorsed by the AFL-CIO must agree to “surrender... [its] editorial independence” and adhere “without exception” to federation policy, he advised one union editor. He explained to

⁴⁰⁷ Zack interview.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁹ Miller to Davidson, memorandum dated May 13, 1966, Box 8, “Executive Council Meeting May, 1966” folder, UML.

another editor that the ILPA recognizes only community papers which are endorsed by state or local CLCs because the national AFL-CIO has ways to exert “control over its central bodies...and keep them from getting out of line.”⁴¹⁰

Controlling communications was part of Meany’s strategy for keeping the AFL-CIO out of the internal affairs of its affiliates, according to his director of public relations. The AFL-CIO communicates exclusively “with national and international unions,” Albert J. Zack wrote: “[We] have no direct contact with the local union member. The communication between a member and his union is the sole province of that union.”⁴¹¹ Why, then, would Meany support creating AFL-CIO-sponsored newspapers to keep rank-and-file workers informed about other affiliated unions? Simply by existing, community labor newspapers would have proclaimed that workers had a stake in issues affecting workers who belonged to other unions, worked for different employers, or labored under different contracts. Local unions also disagree all the time on all sorts of political and economic matters. And scandals and disputes involving unions can erupt in very public ways. Could a local labor paper ignore such stories and retain its credibility? Could it write about them without risking the support of union leaders who might be embarrassed by the coverage, or upset that the paper failed to take their side? Who would determine editorial policy? Who would police the paper’s performance, or mediate disputes that could easily reverberate all the way to AFL-CIO headquarters?

⁴¹⁰ Letters from Fiester to Vincent Murphy (June 30, 1967) and Jerry Howard (Nov. 6, 1967), Box 9, “Reading File, 1967” folder, UML.

⁴¹¹ Albert J. Zack. to Harold A. Clements, letter dated Dec. 3, 1970, AFL-CIO Information Department. Unprocessed records, GMMA.

Furthermore, it is precisely at the community level where the ties between individual workers are strongest, and where the impulse to respond collectively to problems affecting neighbors and friends is most keenly felt.⁴¹² By the time ILPA's proposal landed on Meany's desk, The *Oregon Labor Press* and other community papers had already dragged the federation president into local disputes over union jurisdiction, sympathy strikes, and the Vietnam War.⁴¹³ Throughout the 1960s, Meany was busy battling waves of protests from CLCs over the AFL-CIO's support for a federal EEOC and its staunch opposition to George Wallace's presidential campaign.⁴¹⁴

Labor newspapers that reported, week after week, on problems affecting workers across the lines of union, craft, and contract would have articulated a broad concept of "community" that subverted the principles of autonomy and contract-specific bargaining on which the AFL-CIO was built. Woll, Meany, and other federation leaders had killed the Federated Press for precisely that reason. Barely ten years after destroying the FP, why would Meany create community labor newspapers that would generate political

⁴¹² Jill Kriesky, "Structural Change in the AFL-CIO: A Regional Study of Union Cities' Impact," in *Rekindling the movement: Labor's quest for relevance in the 21st Century*, ed. Lowell Turner, Harry C. Katz and Richard W. Hurd, (Ithaca: ILR Press, 2001), 132-135.

⁴¹³ "It takes guts to defy an international union," the *East Bay Labor Journal*, Aug. 17, 1962, an editorial in support of a sympathy strike in San Leandro, California, RG1-038, Series 3, Office of the President, George Meany files 1956-1980, File 43/10 (Labor Press, 1961-63), GMMA; Meany to Lew W. Minton, International President of the Glass Bottle Blower's Association, letter dated Jan. 16, 1963, Ibid.; Edward E. Hester, President United Rubber Workers Local 154, to Meany, letter dated Apr. 21, 1967, RG1-038, Series 43/13 (Labor Press, 1967-1970), GMMA; Saul Miller, AFL-CIO director of publications, to Bill Payne, managing editor of the *Colorado Labor Advocate*, letter dated Apr. 28, 1969, Ibid.; Payne to Hester, letter dated, May 7, 1969, Ibid.; "Union leaders to take part in antiwar demonstrations," *Colorado Labor Advocate*, Apr. 1969, and a letter from Payne to Miller dated, May 12, 1969, Ibid. The letters between Meany, Miller, Hester, and Payne concern the *Advocate's* coverage of jurisdictional disputes involving a non-AFL-CIO union. They also discuss the *Advocate's* coverage of an anti-Vietnam War rally and how a Denver IBEW local protested the coverage by cancelling 1,300 subscriptions to the newspaper.

⁴¹⁴ Report by COPE Director Al Barkan, Minutes of the Executive Council of the AFL-CIO, Sept. 16-17, 1968, RG4-006, AFL-CIO Executive Council Minutes, 1955-1969, Vol. 13, GMMA, 17-18.

headaches, be difficult to control, and foster conceptions of labor as a broad, grassroots movement?

The Wider Environment

So far in this chapter, I have looked at the social actors most immediately involved in creating and shaping the ILPA. These included Matthew Woll, AFL-CIO President George Meany, the editors affiliated with the CIO and AFL before and after the 1955 merger, federation staff, and the leaders of COPE. These actors were propelled by different institutional logics—norms, values, and beliefs that caused them to prefer a labor press with more (or fewer) resources that discussed a broader (or narrower) range of subjects with a larger (or smaller) audience.

The *institutions* within which Meany, the editors, and other individuals operated were social actors, too. Institutions have distinct internal cultures (norms, values, and beliefs) and organizational imperatives that constrain and facilitate the actions of their leaders, staff, and members. For example, Richard Estep and other ILPA leaders worked hard for years to improve the quality and prestige of the labor press. Yet Estep's obligations to his own international led him to bring charges against fellow ILPA leader James Goodsell, whose reportage reflected poorly on Estep's union. Other ILPA leaders employed by other labor organizations sided with Estep. In this case, their obligations to the federation and the internationals (i.e. the dominant institutional logics of organized labor) led them to weaken the labor press in important ways by dividing the ILPA and constricting the "acceptable" range of discourse within union publications.

The *primary institutional actors* (e.g. the ILPA; the AFL-CIO and its affiliates) also operated within a broader social environment dominated by other, more-powerful institutions that shaped the post-war labor press in less direct but even more profound ways. As I explained in Chapter 2, the U.S. Congress, the National Labor Relations Board, and the federal courts produced laws and regulations that created a bifurcated, fragmented union structure, with large centralized institutions overseeing thousands of smaller, separate subunits. They also produced a labor movement characterized by an “overwhelming reliance” on firm-specific collective bargaining over economic concerns. In Europe, wages and working conditions are typically established through industry-wide bargaining between national labor confederations and employer groups. European states also typically provide their citizens with health insurance and other costly benefits.

In the U.S., however, wages, benefits, and working conditions must be negotiated between individual employers and unions— often worksite by worksite—every three to five years.⁴¹⁵ To get sense of the burden this places on U.S. unions, consider that 332,642 collective bargaining agreements—an average of 83,161 a year—expired and had to be renegotiated in the United States between 1966 and 1969 alone.⁴¹⁶ As Nelson Lichtenstein wrote, the need to negotiate and oversee “a private welfare state” created centralized labor organizations “administratively top-heavy with technicians,” and caused

⁴¹⁵ Ron Bean, *Comparative Industrial Relations: An Introduction to Cross-National Perspectives* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1985), 160. Only in Britain do we find a similar tilt towards firm-centered bargaining. Even so, the British welfare state has provided workers with health care and other benefits that U.S. unions must negotiate with employers.

⁴¹⁶ Mery Skolochenko, FMCS Freedom of Information Officer, to the author, letter dated Nov. 10, 2009. FMCS data do not include collective bargaining agreements in agriculture, in the airline or rail transport industries, or in states and municipalities that use of non-FMCS mediators; Interview with Gordon Pavy, director of the AFL-CIO’s Collective Bargaining Department, Nov. 4, 2009. According to Pavy, a single local union commonly negotiates multiple contracts involving one or more employers.

“even the most liberal” unions to become “narrowly focused” on economic concerns and “defensive” in their approach to bargaining and politics.⁴¹⁷

Conservative political and business groups also helped to narrow the range of discourse within the union publications and cripple the community labor press. The anti-communist crusades ostensibly targeted the U.S. Communist Party, but the main blows were actually aimed at the broad, pro-labor coalitions of the Popular Front.⁴¹⁸ These coalitions were based in industrial communities, where unionists, civil rights activists, artists, and radicals collaborated in “legislative battles, strikes, organizing campaigns, and labor negotiations [that] were seamlessly interwoven.”⁴¹⁹ State and local central bodies are natural incubators for dissidents and insurgent labor leaders. As such, national union officers have historically been wary of the CLCs, and have sought to curb their power.⁴²⁰ Many labor leaders exploited the anti-communist crusades to eliminate their most outspoken rivals. The purging of 13 million members of eleven left-led unions crippled scores of the most vibrant CLCs, as well as their community-based publications. The AFL-CIO’s reaction to the McClellan Committee’s anti-corruption investigations (which were heavily publicized by conservative business groups) further weakened the community labor press by limiting its access to advertising.

⁴¹⁷ Lichtenstein, *State of the Union*, 125-128; 142.

⁴¹⁸ Denning; Korstad; Sean Farhang and Ira Katznelson. “The Southern Imposition: Congress and Labor in the New Deal and Fair Deal,” *Studies in American Political Development* 19, no. 1 (April 2005): 1-30.

⁴¹⁹ Lichtenstein, *State of the Union*, 99-100.

⁴²⁰ Kriesky, 132-135.

These factors made the ILPA's critique of the structure of the labor press a critique of the structure of the unions, themselves. The organization and financing of the U.S. labor press mirrors the organization and the distribution of resources within organized labor. The labor press is dominated at the top by a relatively small number of well-financed publications produced by the federation and big internationals. At the grassroots level are hundreds of small, often poorly-financed publications produced by union locals. And in between, as Davidson and other ILPA leaders pointed out, are a relative handful of community labor newspapers, few of which are very good.

A State-Imposed Concept of Community

Federal labor policy also created a legal definition of a "community of interest" that defines workers in purely economic terms and divides them into "employer-specific" units. To constitute a "community of interest" (and to be considered eligible for union representation), workers must satisfy most or all of the following conditions: They must labor under a common management or supervisory system, perform similar jobs requiring similar skills and training, work in the same location or in close geographic proximity, interact regularly while performing their duties, and share common facilities, as well as rules and schedules related to wages, benefits and working hours.⁴²¹ Furthermore, federal law recognizes unions for one purpose only: to bargain with employers over wages, hours, and other terms and conditions of work.⁴²²

The state imposes harsh penalties on unions that engage in collective action based on broader notions of community. A union under contract with one employer cannot

⁴²¹ Feldacker, 43-44.

⁴²² Labor Management Relations Act, 1947, Section 9 (a).

legally strike to support workers engaged in a dispute with another employer—or even, in some cases, to support workers laboring for the same employer, but covered by a separate labor agreement. Unions that violate no-strike agreements or engage in sympathy strikes or secondary boycotts can be decertified by the Board and lose their legal standing and protection. They can be fined, found in contempt, and their leaders can be jailed.⁴²³

In sum, U.S. law creates powerful *disincentives* to use the labor press to promote concepts of community that encompass all wage-earners and—still less—that encourage workers to *act* on those broader sympathies. Nonetheless, within the very real constraints imposed by the state, the business sector, and their own institutions, Meany, Davidson, and other individuals made choices based on their personal priorities and idiosyncrasies.

After World War II, there were real possibilities for the labor press to attract advertisers, hire staff, expand circulation, and become an influential voice in the public discourse. Davidson and other union journalists strove to bring such a labor press into being. However, the leaders and members of the ILPA could not displace the narrower vision (the “institutional logics”) of the top labor leadership. The federation and international unions controlled the editors’ jobs and budgets, and dictated policies governing advertising, circulation, and editorial content. The result was a post-war labor press that spoke (and continues to speak) to myriad groups of workers separated by union affiliation, craft, contract, and workplace—a labor press trapped in a communicative enclosure; segregated from the mainstream discourse.

⁴²³ Feldacker, 277-283; 326-327.

Chapter 6: In Whose Voice?

The Debates over House Organs and Public Relations

During the 1990s and 2000s, two longstanding debates within the International Labor Communications Association escalated into a very public, bitter critique of the AFL-CIO. Relations between the two organizations became so strained that the federation moved in 2003 to dismantle the ILCA. For decades, union journalists had debated whether (or to what extent) union publications should be “house organs,” that focused on the union organizations and leaders, or “grassroots tribunes” that concentrated on the needs and activities of workers. As I discuss in this chapter, the debate over house organs escalated into an open call by some ILCA leaders for complete editorial freedom for union editors. A second major debate broke out during this period over labor’s use of electronic communications technologies and public relations. Leading voices within the ILCA argued that unions should utilize video and other electronic technologies mainly for local organizing rather than national campaigns to influence public opinion. This debate, too, became explicit, public rejection of AFL-CIO communication policies.

To understand why these debates became so bitter, and why the federation and the ILCA became so estranged, it is necessary to examine a series of crises starting in the 1970s that sharply raised the costs of membership communications and caused many unions to lessen their commitment to the labor press.

Labor Turns Away From the Labor Press

In the 1970s, U.S. corporations began a massive shift of investment out of basic industry and into mergers, acquisitions, and foreign ventures. They shuttered plants in unionized states and moved production to unorganized regions in the U.S. south and overseas.⁴²⁴ Unions lost millions of dues-paying members, while inflation eroded the value of the dues the unions did receive. Simultaneously, business conservatives launched well-financed propaganda campaigns to discredit union and government intervention in the so-called free markets.⁴²⁵ Increasing numbers of employers began to brazenly violate labor laws, hoping to cripple unions where they existed and stifle organizing where they did not. And labor quickly learned it could no longer count on the federal government for protection.⁴²⁶

Under President Nixon, the U.S. Postal Service became a self-supporting federal agency and proceeded to raise the mailing rates for unions and other non-profit organizations by 1,200 percent between 1971 and 1979. (During that same period, the cost of newsprint soared 150 percent.)⁴²⁷ In 1978, a Democratically-controlled Congress

⁴²⁴ Barry Bluestone and Bennett Harrison, *The Deindustrialization of America: Plant Closings, Community Abandonment, and the Dismantling of Basic Industry* (New York: Basic Books, 1982); Samuel Bowles, David M. Gordon, and Thomas E. Weisskopf, *Beyond the Waste Land: A Democratic Alternative to Economic Decline*, (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1984), 1-259. Lichtenstein, *State of the Union*, 98-177.

⁴²⁵ Phillips-Fein, 190-200; 238-262.

⁴²⁶ James A. Gross, "The Demise of National Labor Policy: A Question of Social Justice," in *Restoring the Promise of American Labor Law*, ed. Sheldon Friedman, Richard W. Hurd, Rudolph A. Oswald, and Ronald L. Seeber, (Ithaca: ILR Press, 1994), 45-58; Richard W. Hurd and Joseph B. Uehlein, "Patterned Responses to Organizing: Case Studies of the Union-Busting Convention," *Ibid.*, 61-74; Kate Bronfenbrenner, "Employer Behavior in Certification Elections and First-Contract Campaigns: Implications for Labor Law Reform," *Ibid.*, 75-89.

⁴²⁷ Postal Report by ILPA Secretary-Treasurer Allen Zack, Minutes of ILPA Executive Council meeting, Apr. 6-7, 1979, ILCA; Dave Beal, "An Attack on Free Speech," *The Milwaukee Journal*, May 27,

and White House refused to pass reforms specifically designed to curb the epidemic of labor law-breaking.⁴²⁸ And three years later, in his first year in office, President Reagan sent an unmistakable signal to anti-union employers by firing 12,000 striking air traffic controllers.⁴²⁹ The ineffectuality of the National Labor Relations Board during the Ford and Carter years became an open embrace of the business community under Reagan's board Chairman Donald Dotson.⁴³⁰

The economic and political assaults on U.S. unions had two direct, adverse effects on the labor press. The combination of higher postal fees and newsprint costs hit hard at lengthier periodicals that were mailed to large numbers of readers: namely international union and CLC publications. Second, labor leaders began looking to public relations as a way to counter the propaganda offensives of business and political conservatives.

According to a 1975 ILPA survey, 31 percent of international union publications and 44 percent of "regional and community" labor papers (i.e. publications of, or endorsed by, union districts and state and local CLCs) reported reductions in the number of pages published per issue. Forty-five percent of international union publications, 44

1979; Remarks by Gene Klare, editor of the *Oregon Labor Press*, to the Western Labor Press Association convention, Sept. 8, 1978, "USPS" folder, ILCA; Robert W. McChesney and John Nichols, *The Death and Life of American Journalism: The Media Revolution That Will Begin the World Again*, (Philadelphia: Nation Books, 2010), 121-126. In 1970, President Nixon transformed the U.S. Postal Service from a non-profit federal agency into a semi-private, "pay-as-you-go" corporation. To cope with inflation and other budgetary pressures, the USPS began to dramatically increase mailing rates, including those paid by non-profit mailers. This was a historic policy reversal for the USPS which had, since 1775, provided sharply-discounted mailing rates for non-profit political publications to ensure their growth and survival.

⁴²⁸ Gross, 50-51.

⁴²⁹ Lichtenstein, *State of the Union*, 234-235.

⁴³⁰ Gross, 48-49.

percent of “regional and community” newspapers, and 30 percent of local union periodicals had reduced the number of issues published per year. In addition, the survey showed 21 percent of all international papers and 14 percent of the “regional and community” papers reported losing at least one staff member. The primary reasons cited for the cuts: increased newsprint prices, postal rates, and general inflation.⁴³¹

Matters only worsened for the labor press between 1975 through 1985, a second ILPA survey showed. Thirty-three percent of the international union publications and 26 percent of the state and regional labor periodicals (a category that included CLC publications) reported reductions in budget and/or staff during that ten-year period. Twenty-two percent of all labor papers reported cuts in the number of issues they printed per year, with the majority reducing their frequency of publication by half or more. The second survey showed local union publications “endured the fewest cutbacks,” which was the pattern in the first survey, too. Once again, labor editors cited higher postal rates and general inflation as leading reasons for the cuts, but a new explanation now topped the list: the loss of union members due to plant closings and lay-offs.⁴³²

“The trend was going away from the weekly and monthly labor papers,” recalled Murray Seeger, former AFL-CIO Director of Information. “Membership was not growing and...the unions were looking at them as a cost item.”⁴³³ What the surveys failed to

⁴³¹ “Convention Report: Survey on Trends in Labor Publications,” Sept. 30, 1975, “Surveys” folder, ILCA. Local unions reported no cuts in the length of their periodicals or reductions in staff, but typically these papers were shorter to begin with and were produced by individuals working on a volunteer or part-time basis.

⁴³² 1987 ILCA Survey, *ibid.*

⁴³³ Seeger interview.

capture were papers that could not respond because they were no longer in business. ILPA records, however, reveal a dramatic drop in the number of CLC publications. Between 1970 and 1981, the number of CLC publications belonging to the ILPA plunged from ninety-eight to seventy-nine. In 1985, sixty-two CLC publications appeared on the membership rolls, and by 1991 only fifty-five remained. During this period, the number of local union members in the ILPA soared (locals were so numerous and the organization set their dues rates so low that it was relatively easy to recruit them) while the number of international union publications barely changed.⁴³⁴ The crisis mainly affected community and international union papers, but there was a big difference: The internationals had far greater resources to cushion the blows. Community papers (that “most starved segment of the labor press”) had operated on a shoestring for years and had little room to maneuver.⁴³⁵

Perhaps the most portentous finding in the surveys of 1970s was the widespread perception among union editors that labor leaders assigned a “lower priority” to member communications when allocating money and staff. “There is a general administrative trend in many unions to solve any budgetary problems by first singling out publications

⁴³⁴ Membership reports to ILCA’s Executive Council and ILPA/ILCA conventions in 1970, 1975, 1981, 1985, and 1991, ILCA; Lisa Williamson, “Union mergers: 1985-94 update,” *Monthly Labor Review* 118, no. 2 (Feb. 1995): 19-25. During the 1970s and 1980s, the number of international unions and AFL-CIO publications belonging to the organization held steady at 108-110. This reflected a relatively small universe of large labor publications and the fact that the majority of such publications already belonged to the ILPA. However, during this period, increasing numbers of international unions were merging in an effort to cope with steep losses in members and dues income. As unions merged, they typically merged their publications, too, which cost the ILPA members and dues income. The ILPA responded by recruiting newsletters produced by departments and divisions of the AFL-CIO, its affiliates and allied organizations, and by creating new membership categories (e.g. for union public relations operations).

⁴³⁵ Davidson, “Proposal for Research and Action on Community Papers,” UML.

for retrenchment or drastic curtailment—the only link a union has to its membership as a whole,” ILPA leaders complained.⁴³⁶

Labor Turns to Electronic Public Relations

In 1985, the AFL-CIO released a 34-page report, *The Changing Situation of Workers and Their Unions*, which acknowledged, in very frank terms, the dire problems facing organized labor. U.S. unions “find themselves behind the pace of change,” the AFL-CIO conceded. While the U.S. labor force added three million workers between 1960 and 1980, the number of union members didn’t budge, the report pointed out. More troubling still, the report continued, union membership began *falling* in the 1980s both in absolute terms and as a percentage of the total labor force.⁴³⁷

Washington Post columnist David Broder hailed the report as “a remarkable document...a blunt declaration” that union leaders were “ready to tackle” the crises in organized labor.⁴³⁸ But union journalists spotted a glaring omission. The “landmark study”—the product of “more than two years of deliberations by a blue-ribbon panel of AFL-CIO leaders”—contained “not one word about the labor press.”⁴³⁹

In a chapter titled, “Improving the Labor Movement’s Communications” (one of five major subjects addressed in the report), the panel called on unions to employ “every

⁴³⁶ “A Statement of Concern,” appended to the “Convention Report: Survey on Trends,” Sept. 30, 1975, ILCA.

⁴³⁷ AFL-CIO Committee on the Evolution of Work, *The Changing Situation of Workers and Their Unions*, Feb. 1985, 5.

⁴³⁸ David Broder, “A ‘New Day’ for Unions,” *Washington Post*, Mar. 10, 1985, final edition.

⁴³⁹ Sam Pizzigati and Fred J. Solowey, introduction to *The New Labor Press: Journalism for a Changing Union Movement*, (Ithaca: ILR Press, 1992), xi.

technology and medium available,” and then proceeded to list broadcast and cable television, radio, teleconferencing, spot advertising, and video, omitting any mention of print.⁴⁴⁰ They reminded labor leaders to be cognizant of “the limits of our resources” and to “improve the efficacy of our traditional programs,” but said nothing about improving the efficacy of labor’s existing network of publications and editors.⁴⁴¹

In sum, the federation’s 1985 report contained two messages of tremendous importance to the ILPA. First, the report concentrated on the need to reach out more to students, reporters, unorganized workers, and others outside the trade unions: in other words, it called for intensified public relations. Second, the report urged unions to shift to electronic media.

In fact, by 1985 both trends—the shift towards public relations and electronic technologies—were well established within the federation and many of its most important affiliates.⁴⁴² Half the international unions responding to a survey said they increased spending on public relations between 1976 and 1981, the same period when ILPA members reported widespread cut-backs in the labor press. More than one-third of the international unions said they made “significant” increases in their public relations expenditures during that period, and half said they expected to spend “more” or

⁴⁴⁰ *The Changing Situation*, 20.

⁴⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 20-23.

⁴⁴² Sara Douglas, *Labor’s New Voice: Unions and the Mass Media*, (Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1986). The AFL and CIO (and their member unions) have a long history of involvement in public relations, including early experiments in radio and television.

“considerably more” on public relations during the next five years.⁴⁴³ Two years before the *Changing Situation* report was released, the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) was completing work on a color television studio equipped with microwave satellite relays in its Washington D.C. headquarters building. AFSCME began producing television ads for national distribution in 1972, and by the early 1980s the union’s public relations department had thirty full-time staff members and a \$5 million annual budget.⁴⁴⁴ In 1977—two years after transforming the weekly *Machinist* newspaper into a monthly publication to save the union \$700,000 a-year— the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAM) sharply reversed course, expanding its communications department and throwing itself into television, video, and film.⁴⁴⁵ The IAM’s colorful new president, William W. Winpisinger, an avowed socialist and former automobile mechanic, appointed Robert J. Kalaski to succeed Gordon Cole as communications director. Kalaski built an in-house video studio, conducted labor’s first, live interactive satellite broadcast, and began to produce full-length television programs. (An IAM program on plant closings titled *We Didn’t Want it to Happen This Way*, won the top award for documentaries at the 1979 New York Film

⁴⁴³ Ibid., 112-113. Douglas cautioned that some union public relations budgets included monies spent on publications. Even so, the two ILPA surveys showing widespread cuts in labor publications during this period support the conclusion that unions increased spending for communications aimed at the press and general public during the 1970s and early 1980s.

⁴⁴⁴ Douglas, 59; Fred Glass, “Labor and New Media Technology in the ‘80s: A Union of Necessity,” Research report published by the Center for Labor Research and Education, Institute of Industrial Relations, University of California, Berkeley, Aug. 1983, 3-4.

⁴⁴⁵ ILPA Convention Report: Survey on Trends, Sept. 30, 1975; “The Machinist bids a fond farewell,” *Machinist*, Oct., 1994, 1; “The *Machinist* bows out after 48 years,” Ibid., 3. In the wake of huge membership losses, the IAM cut the *Machinist* newspaper from sixteen pages to twelve in 1983, and then to eight pages in 1991. Four years later, the IAM replaced its newspaper with a quarterly magazine. Even so, the IAM has continued to provide regular training and support for local and district union editors.

Festival.) That same year, the IAM trained 1,500 rank-and-file members in forty-three states to monitor television news and entertainment programs. The results of IAM's Media Monitoring Project showed that workers and unions were almost never depicted on T.V., and, when they were, they were typically portrayed as ignorant, corrupt, incompetent, and violent.⁴⁴⁶

Recognizing the enormous costs of electronic media, Winpisinger proposed creating a coalition of unions to pool money for advertising campaigns, program development, equipment, and training. It was Winpisinger's proposal—and an IAM media consultant who told the AFL-CIO Executive Council in 1981, “If you're not on T.V., you don't exist”—that inspired a new federation president to create the Labor Institute for Public Affairs.⁴⁴⁷

LIPA and a New Name for the ILPA

Lane Kirkland, who succeeded George Meany as AFL-CIO President in 1979, felt labor communications was “stuck in ancient history.” He was determined to make labor part of the mainstream social discourse.⁴⁴⁸ In November 1981, Kirkland convinced delegates to the national AFL-CIO convention to support a special dues assessment to create the Labor Institute for Public Affairs (LIPA). The new organization had two main objectives. It would provide labor with a consistent presence in the electronic media

⁴⁴⁶ Douglas, 82-89; Glass, “Labor and New Media,” 5-8; Jerry Rollings, “Mass Communications and the American Worker,” in *The Critical Communications Review, Volume 1: Labor, the Working Class, and the Media*, ed. Vincent Mosco and Janet Wasko, (Norwood, N.J.: Ablex, 1983), 131-152.

⁴⁴⁷ Seeger interview.

⁴⁴⁸ Seeger interview.

(television, in particular), and it would improve the ability of the federation and its affiliates to utilize electronic communication technologies.⁴⁴⁹

LIPA “appeared to have carte blanche” when it came to spending money, a union media activist recalled.⁴⁵⁰ When LIPA “went public” in 1983, its annual budget of \$1.79 million represented nearly two-thirds of the total monies allotted to the AFL-CIO Information Department, which was responsible for all federation publications, publicity, and press relations. In 1984, Kirkland separated LIPA from the Information Department and poured \$4.22 million into the new organization—twice what it spent on all Information Department activities combined.⁴⁵¹ LIPA opened offices in New York City and Hollywood, California and produced pro-labor advertisements (for print, radio, and television) featuring rock stars and movie actors, as well as documentary films, and pilots for T.V. variety shows. The AFL-CIO even gutted the ground floor of its Washington D.C. headquarters building to build LIPA a television studio, complete with satellite uplinks and a video editing bay.⁴⁵² During the mid-1980s, the AFL-CIO spent an average \$3 million a year on LIPA. Spending jumped to \$7 million in 1989 and to \$5.4 million the following year with the launch of the “Union Yes” advertising campaign.⁴⁵³

⁴⁴⁹ Douglas, 42.

⁴⁵⁰ Daniel S. Beagle, “‘We Do the Work:’ A Step Beyond Print,” in *The New Labor Press*, ed. Pizzigati and Solowey, 166. Beagle, editor for the International Longshore and Warehouse Union, produced a pro-union television series that aired nationally on PBS. He worked closely with LIPA and the ILPA.

⁴⁵¹ Proceedings of the 16th Constitutional Convention of the AFL-CIO (1985), Daily Proceedings and Executive Council Reports, 31, GMMA.

⁴⁵² Minutes of ILCA Executive Council meeting, Jan. 24, 1987, ILCA; Douglas, 42-44.

⁴⁵³ Proceedings of the 17th Constitutional Convention of the AFL-CIO (1987), Daily Proceedings and Executive Council Reports, GMMA, 14; Proceedings of the 18th Constitutional Convention of the AFL-CIO (1989), *Ibid.*, 15; Proceedings of the 19th Constitutional Convention of the AFL-CIO (1992), *Ibid.*, 14.

In November, 1981, when ILPA leaders learned of Kirkland's plans to create LIPA, they immediately drafted a statement expressing enthusiastic support for the initiative, and their eagerness to be involved. LIPA represents "a unique opportunity" to strengthen labor communications, ILPA leaders wrote Kirkland. The corporate interests are constantly developing technologies to mold "the minds of our members, our prospective members and the general public," they wrote. It is time for the unions to make a "total commitment" to exploit "all forms of communications." They also urged LIPA to take advantage of the experience of the ILPA and its members: "Working labor journalists are knowledgeable in many of the new forms of communication technology and can offer added insights."⁴⁵⁴

When ILPA leaders drafted their statement on LIPA, they also proposed renaming their organization the International Labor Communications Association (ILCA). "The survival of the labor press" is at stake, they declared. "The trend is towards electronic media" and anyone who continues to think of "print only" will be left behind. The proposed name change also signaled a new emphasis on "external as well as internal communications"—in other words, a heightened focus on public relations.⁴⁵⁵ The ILPA officially became the ILCA at its convention in fall 1983.

Throughout the 1980s, the ILCA repeatedly sought ways to collaborate with LIPA, but their efforts "never seemed to gain traction."⁴⁵⁶ Kalaski invited LIPA to co-

⁴⁵⁴ "Draft Statement of ILPA, Modern Communications," Minutes of ILPA Executive Council meeting, Nov. 10, 1981, ILCA.

⁴⁵⁵ "Trends in Labor Publications Committee Report," Minutes of ILPA Executive Council meeting, Nov. 10, 1981, ILCA.

⁴⁵⁶ Carolyn Jacobson, May 20, 2010, interview by author, Washington, D.C.

sponsor the ILCA's first-ever film and broadcast awards ceremony. The awards would be called "The Sammys," a mixed reference to AFL founder Sam Gompers and the Grammy awards. But LIPA's leaders backed out a few weeks before the event, informing Kalaski that they were "not ready."⁴⁵⁷ LIPA staffers conducted workshops at various ILCA gatherings and, when asked, shared lists of media groups that might wish to join or to work with the ILCA. But over time, ILCA leaders grew exasperated by their inability to forge a regular working relationship with the LIPA. Can we "encourage LIPA to assign someone to act as a liaison with the ILCA," they wondered?⁴⁵⁸ When the ILCA discovered it could cost up to \$25,000 to produce a planned video—far more than they could afford—LIPA offered its assistance.⁴⁵⁹ But that assistance never materialized, prompting ILCA leaders to look for strategies "to put pressure on LIPA to be more enthusiastic and supportive of the project."⁴⁶⁰ After months of haggling, LIPA's leaders announced they would have to subcontract the video work and present the ILCA with a bill. The ILCA completed the project using its own funds, volunteer labor, and resources donated by the IAM and other international unions.⁴⁶¹

LIPA acted as if the "working labor journalists" of the ILCA had little to offer in the way of useful "insights." In truth, the two organizations reflected different worlds.

⁴⁵⁷ Minutes of ILCA Executive Council meeting, Oct. 24, 1985, ILCA.

⁴⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, Mar. 24, 1983, Oct. 24, 1985, Jan. 24, 1987, and June 18, 1987.

⁴⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, Mar. 24, 1983, Oct. 24, 1985, and Sept. 9-10, 1988.

⁴⁶⁰ Minutes of ILCA Executive Council meeting, Jan. 8-9, 1988, ILCA.

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.*, June 22, 1990.

LIPA President Larry Kirkman was a high-power communications professional, and so were the people he hired. He held degrees in journalism and education from Columbia College and Harvard University. Kirkman had been an editor for the National Endowment of the Arts, a producer for PBS, an assistant professor at American University, and a director of the American Film Institute.⁴⁶² “Larry knew television but he knew nothing about labor,” explained Murray Seeger. He was “not a labor guy.”⁴⁶³

The “Benign Neglect” of the AFL-CIO

But Seeger was not exactly “a labor guy,” either, and from the moment he was hired as Lane Kirkland’s Director of Information in 1981, the ILCA and the AFL-CIO began drifting apart. Seeger was a professional journalist who came to know Kirkland while covering labor and economics for *Newsweek* and the *Los Angeles Times*. He had worked in a unionized steel mill one summer as a teenager, and even served as a picket captain during a Guild newspaper strike. But by Seeger’s own admission, he was an “outsider” when he arrived at the AFL-CIO. Kirkland was looking for “someone from outside” the unions who knew labor well and had strong connections to the mainstream press: “someone who could look at labor from the outside.”⁴⁶⁴

“No question, Murray was a qualified, professional journalist, but I don’t think he was committed to what we were doing,” said Carolyn Jacobson, an editor for the Bakery,

⁴⁶² American University, Washington D.C., “Biography of Larry Kirkman,” [www.american.edu/uploads/resume/Larry%20Kirkman\(2\).pdf](http://www.american.edu/uploads/resume/Larry%20Kirkman(2).pdf), (accessed June 30, 2011); Bill Keller, “Labor Discovers Television,” *The New York Times*, Sept. 13, 1984, national edition.

⁴⁶³ Seeger interview.

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid.

Confectionary and Tobacco Workers Union who succeeded Kalaski as ILCA president. “There was an arrogance...that, particularly those of us doing local publications, weren’t doing anything interesting or important.”⁴⁶⁵ Susan Phillips, a former ILCA secretary-treasurer, described Seeger’s tenure from 1981 to 1987 as a period of “benign neglect” towards the ILCA.⁴⁶⁶

In 1983, when ILCA Secretary-Treasurer Susan Dunlop left the AFL-CIO Information Department, Seeger failed to appoint a member of his staff to take her place on the ILCA council. It was the first time in twenty-seven years that the AFL-CIO failed to provide the ILCA with a full-time secretary-treasurer.

According to Dunlop, “there was nothing mysterious” about Seeger’s decision. “The secretary-treasurer’s job is a lot of work... [and] nobody wanted to do it.”⁴⁶⁷ However, Seeger could have followed precedent and simply *assigned* someone to take the job. But Seeger didn’t seem to view the ILCA as a major priority. Records show that Seeger, an ex-officio council member, almost never attended ILCA meetings. When he did, it was typically to explain the federation’s latest programs.⁴⁶⁸ His failure to fill the post required ILCA’s volunteer leaders to spend time on record-keeping and correspondence instead delivering programs and services to the labor press. Without a direct “pipeline to the AFL-CIO,” ILCA leaders found it harder to obtain resources from

⁴⁶⁵ Jacobson interview.

⁴⁶⁶ Susan Phillips, June 16, 2011, interview by author, Silver Spring, MD.

⁴⁶⁷ Susan Dunlop, June 21, 2011, telephone interview by author.

⁴⁶⁸ Meeting minutes show AFL-CIO postal expert Edwin Schmidt, who was on staff before Seeger’s arrival, regularly attended ILCA council sessions from the late 1970s through his retirement in mid-1990s.

federation staff.⁴⁶⁹ Intentionally or not, Seeger had sent a message that the federation was less interested in the labor press than before.

The paltry sums the federation spent on the ILCA, compared to the riches it lavished on LIPA, provide the starkest proof of the shift in AFL-CIO priorities. For example, in 1982, when the AFL-CIO gave LIPA \$4.22 million, it loaned \$10,000 to the ILCA, which was so broke it could not meet its expenses.⁴⁷⁰ In 1986, when the AFL-CIO spent \$3.89 million on LIPA, the federation gave the ILCA a used Zenith computer “in limited operation” and a printer “on loan” from another department. ILCA leaders had to purchase a printer stand, desk, and chair, and find a volunteer to program the computer in order to use the equipment.⁴⁷¹

Several factors explain the federation’s generosity towards LIPA and its “nickel-and-diming” of the ILCA. First, the AFL-CIO recognized that labor’s enemies were using television and other electronic media to “symbolically annihilate” workers and unions: to eliminate working-class people and perspectives from the public discourse or, at the very least, to marginalize them.⁴⁷² To its great credit, the AFL-CIO responded boldly, pouring massive amounts of money into LIPA, hoping to counter those attacks and win the “the hearts and minds” of the public. Ultimately the costs became too great to bear and the

⁴⁶⁹ Jacobson interview; Dunlop interview. Dunlop said, “Having a federation person gave you an entrée into other federation functions. You know the person in the mailroom. You have these relationships, and you have a person who can more readily tap into the federation’s resources when you need them.”

⁴⁷⁰ Minutes of ILPA Executive Council meeting, Nov. 20, 1982, ILCA.

⁴⁷¹ *Ibid.*, Sept. 9-10, 1988, and Feb. 17, 1989.

⁴⁷² George Gerbner and Larry Gross, “Living with Television. The Violence Profile,” *Journal of Communication* 26, no. 2 (June 1976): 182. They wrote: “Representation in the fictional world signifies social existence; absence means symbolic annihilation.”

federation disbanded LIPA in 1995. I will examine debates about the wisdom of the AFL-CIO's strategy later in this chapter, but it cannot be denied that LIPA represented a bold, sustained attempt by organized labor to exploit electronic mass media.

Second, the federation's growing interest in public relations coincided with a general decline in the interest shown by labor leaders' in print communications directed towards the union membership. "The ILPA was a symbol of reducing the investment in internal communication," Seeger said. "You could just see it sort of fading. That was a mirror of what was going on in the internal management of the unions."⁴⁷³ The turn away from the labor press was partly due to rising postage and printing costs but, as I showed, the unions had not run out of money for communications. They were *shifting* funds out of membership communications and into public relations. Union leaders were also starting to question the relevance of printed communications and becoming fascinated with video, cable television, and other electronic media that seemed more exciting and potentially powerful than traditional newspapers and magazines.⁴⁷⁴

Third, LIPA and the ILCA were very different organizations—"apples and oranges," in the words of Susan Phillips. Federation leaders created the ILCA, but they did not run it. The ILCA was a voluntary association of publications, most of which belonged to local unions attached to various AFL-CIO affiliates. LIPA, on the other hand, belonged to the AFL-CIO. It was an AFL-CIO department, staffed by federation employees. Pouring money into LIPA and turning it into a powerful organization posed

⁴⁷³ Seeger interview.

⁴⁷⁴ Phillips interview.

few political risks for the AFL-CIO. But empowering an organization that the federation did not control and that regularly addressed the rank-and-file members of its affiliates was fraught with political peril. The most obvious danger was that the ILCA or a member paper might report a story or raise questions that caused trouble for an affiliate. But Susan Phillips pointed to a deeper danger. By strengthening “local union communications you are strengthening the local union leadership,” she said, and “if you develop leaders, they are going to challenge” the incumbents. “Labor leaders are often paranoid about things they can’t control.”⁴⁷⁵

The federation’s fear of creating problems for its affiliates goes to the heart of the “institutional logics” of the AFL-CIO—the principal of autonomy that leaves each international free to conduct its affairs and deal with its members. Simply put, the AFL-CIO has a mandate to speak to the public. It has no mandate whatsoever to address the members of its affiliates. As Meany’s director of public relations explained, “The communication between a member and his union is the sole province of that union.”⁴⁷⁶ Lane Kirkland himself ran into trouble when he launched a barnstorming bus tour on behalf of presidential candidate Walter Mondale in 1984. “The individual union presidents didn’t like the idea of the AFL-CIO president reaching right to the members,” recalled Seeger, who accompanied Kirkland on the tour. “At these regional conferences, people would say, ‘Gee, I never met a president of the AFL-CIO before.’ And the second

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁶ Zack to Clements, Dec. 3, 1970, Unprocessed records, GMMA. Zack pointed out that even the *AFL-CIO News* was mailed exclusively to “the leadership...to local union officials, national and international officers and regional staff.”

line would be, ‘I’ve never met the president of my own union.’ And this is what they couldn’t stand.”⁴⁷⁷

The federation could have looked for ways to place the ILCA on a solid financial footing while maintaining an “arms-length” relationship with the organization. The AFL-CIO’s sponsorship of the American Institute for Free Labor Development and the Solidarity Center show the federation’s ability to do this in the arena of international affairs.⁴⁷⁸ Instead, the federation opted to keep an arms-length distance from the ILCA and leave it “free” to raise its own funds and run its own programs, as best it could. Michael Byrne, a former editor of the *AFL-CIO News*, said the federation treated the ILCA like “a stepchild—it was never given the resources it could have had.”⁴⁷⁹

With paid staff to organize and administer programs, the ILCA “could have done a lot more. Things would have been completely different,” Susan Phillips said. But ILCA leaders were accustomed to “piggybacking on what others were doing” and obtaining “freebies” from unions and volunteers, she said. Looking back, she reflected, “It was like growing up poor and not realizing it until much later.”⁴⁸⁰

⁴⁷⁷ Seeger interview.

⁴⁷⁸ Buhle, 151-152.

⁴⁷⁹ Michael Byrne, Sept. 24, 2010, interview by author, Washington, D.C.

⁴⁸⁰ Phillips interview. There is no record of the ILCA (or the ILPA) ever demanding greater resources from the federation. The campaign for community labor newspapers, described in Chapter 4, urged the AFL-CIO to spend large sums of money to start publications, not to finance the ILPA.

“New Voices” Take Over the Federation

If ILCA leaders did not feel poor in the late 1980s, they clearly felt ignored and underappreciated. During a January 1987 executive council meeting, ILCA President Carolyn Jacobson complained that AFL-CIO took her group for granted. The ILCA’s independence from the federation is largely “a fiction,” she said. It operates as a “support group [but] without recognition.” The ILCA should not give up its autonomy, Jacobson argued, but it should expect the AFL-CIO to acknowledge the ILCA’s contributions and involve it more directly in its programs.⁴⁸¹

Only weeks after that meeting, Seeger retired as AFL-CIO Information Director and was replaced by Rex Hardesty. Hardesty was a former sports writer for the *Tulsa World* and the *Washington Star* but, unlike Seeger, he was also a veteran union journalist, having worked for eighteen years as an editor at the AFL-CIO.⁴⁸² The federation also hired a young journalist, Dennis Beal, to serve as Kirkland’s assistant for communications. The two appointments lifted Jacobson’s hopes: “Dennis takes the ILCA quite seriously,” she told the council. “We are opening up an avenue of communications to the AFL-CIO that I feel has been blocked for some time.”⁴⁸³

Her optimism seemed justified. Hardesty became a regular at ILCA council meetings, and soon the federation began supplying ILCA with a \$10,000 dollar annual grant, which was used over the years to purchase computers, software, a photocopier, and

⁴⁸¹ Minutes of ILCA Executive Council meeting, Jan. 23-34, 1987, ILCA.

⁴⁸² Patricia Sullivan, “AFL-CIO Chief Spokesman Rex Hardesty, 67,” obituary, *WashingtonPost.com*, Jan.15, 2005 (accessed July 5, 2011).

⁴⁸³ Minutes of ILCA Executive Council meeting, June, 9, 1989, ILCA.

other items the organization would be hard pressed to afford.⁴⁸⁴ The AFL-CIO began to provide the ILCA with a semimonthly graphics pack to mail to its members. It paid to print an ILCA brochure on racket publications and contributed \$5,000 to create a database to help track and file complaints against bogus labor papers.⁴⁸⁵

However, even as it grew closer to the ILCA, Kirkland's administration was losing support among top labor leaders. The problems confronting labor were deepening, and the size and influence of the trade union movement were in free fall. Union membership rates plunged by nearly one third under Kirkland, from 23 percent of all U.S. workers at the start of the 1980s to only 16.1 percent when the decade ended.⁴⁸⁶ More and more openly, labor leaders complained that Kirkland was fixated on international and inside-the-Beltway intrigues, while U.S. unions were being decimated by layoffs, broken strikes, and concessionary contracts.

In 1994, Kirkland found himself facing the first open split in the federation's leadership since 1935—and the first contested federation election since 1894.⁴⁸⁷ Recognizing he could not be reelected, Kirkland stepped down as AFL-CIO president only months before the 1995 AFL-CIO convention. Federation Secretary-Treasurer Thomas Donahue succeeded Kirkland and began campaigning for election at the national

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid., Oct. 11, 1990.

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid., June 25, 1993, June 23-34, 1994, and Oct. 7-8, 1994.

⁴⁸⁶ Barry T. Hirsh and David A. Macpherson, "Union Membership and Coverage Data from the Current Population Survey: Note," *Industrial and Labor Relations Journal*, 56, no. 2 (Jan. 2003): 349-54. www.unionstats.com (accessed Jan. 6, 2004).

⁴⁸⁷ John B. Judis, "Sweeney Agonistes: Can a New Leader Save the AFL-CIO," *The New Republic*, 213, nos. 8 and 9 (Aug. 21, 1995): 23.

AFL-CIO convention that fall. But Donahue was too closely identified with Kirkland to straddle the split. He lost badly to John Sweeney, leader of the “New Voices” slate, whose grassroots-oriented agenda seemed a perfect fit for the ILCA.

Sweeney headed the Service Employees International Union (SEIU)—the fastest growing union in the country, and the only U.S. union based among janitors, nursing home workers, clericals, and others trapped in the low-wage service sector. Sweeney advocated confrontational actions, including blocking streets and bridges, and marching into executive office suites.⁴⁸⁸ Running with him was forty-five year-old Richard Trumka, the youngest person ever elected president of the militant United Mine Workers Union. During a prolonged struggle with the Pittston Coal Company in the late 1980s, Trumka had one of the first sit-down strikes and building seizures since the Great Depression.⁴⁸⁹ The third member of the slate, Linda Chavez-Thompson, was the daughter of Mexican-American sharecroppers. She worked in the North Texas cotton fields as a young girl, dropped out of high school, and in her early twenties traveled the Deep South organizing for the Laborers’ International Union.⁴⁹⁰

To the surprise and consternation of many, the victory of the “New Voices” slate ushered-in the most acrimonious relations ever between the ILCA and the AFL-CIO.

Initially, ILCA leaders were excited by the wide-open debates over labor’s future and the federation’s bold new proposals for mobilizing workers. Perhaps the ILCA

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid.; AFL-CIO, “Richard L. Trumka, AFL-CIO President,” http://www.aflcio.org/aboutus/thisistheaficio/leaders/officers_trumka.cfm (accessed July 6, 2011).

⁴⁹⁰ Judis; AFL-CIO, “Linda Chavez-Thompson, Executive Vice President Emerita,” http://www.aflcio.org/aboutus/thisistheaficio/leaders/officers_emeritus.cfm (accessed July 6, 2011).

should become a part of the AFL-CIO, one council member suggested at the New York convention where Sweeney, Trumka and Chavez-Thompson were elected. The council was not prepared to go that far, but ILCA Secretary-Treasurer Susan Phillips did announce plans to meet with Denise Mitchell, Sweeney's communications director, to discuss the "ILCA's integration into the AFL-CIO's new public affairs structure."⁴⁹¹

Phillips said that during her meetings with Mitchell, she discovered the two women shared the belief that the ILCA's primary purpose was to "reinforce federation policy." But she also sensed that Mitchell's commitment to the ILCA was more calculated and limited than Hardesty's had been. "I always felt that Rex actively tried to help... [while] Denise's support was political. She knew the people on the ILCA council and I think she realized she didn't want to simply dismiss the UFCW or the Machinists, so she was cooperative."⁴⁹²

Mitchell, who headed communications for Sweeney at the SEIU, practiced a disciplined, centralized brand of communications. She readily conceded that the ILCA never fit with that approach. In a lengthy interview, she explained that her communication plans flowed, first, from an analysis of the federation's mission, followed by an assessment of its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges—all of which varied by issue and circumstance. Furthermore, she said, her department strove at

⁴⁹¹ Minutes of ILCA Executive Council meeting, Oct. 19, 1995, ILCA. Mitchell's full title was Special Assistant to the President for Public Affairs. She headed the AFL-CIO's Public Affairs Department, which—under Sweeney—combined the federations' publications and public relations work, including speechwriting and media outreach. The AFL-CIO was already phasing-out LIPA prior to Sweeney's election. When Sweeney took office, he immediately disbanded LIPA, assigning its video production and related work to Mitchell's department.

⁴⁹² Phillips interview.

all times to accomplish three objectives: (1) to influence the public by injecting the AFL-CIO into key policy debates; (2) to influence the labor movement by promoting issues and campaigns through the labor press and other means; (3) to “position the federation within the labor movement” by creating a coherent image of its goals and activities.⁴⁹³

Mitchell viewed the labor press as a transmission belt for federation messages. During our interview, she described a strategy of “flowing information down” and “driving communications through” the unions.⁴⁹⁴ In a 1999 speech to the ILCA, written by Mitchell’s department, John Sweeney used identical language, over and over: The labor press is “spreading our message,” “delivering” information, and “telling” labor’s story. Labor publications “talk to,” and “speak for” working people.⁴⁹⁵ Nowhere in Sweeney’s speech or in Mitchell’s description of her strategy was the labor press described as a means for the workers themselves to have a voice.

Mitchell was emphatic that messages from local unions carried far more credibility with the rank and file than messages from the federation or the internationals: “All the survey work we’ve done shows that,” she said. “It has become a kind of cardinal rule for us.” Nonetheless, she said, the ILCA lacked the resources, organization, and professionalism required to reach the grassroots membership press on a regular, effective basis. “It would take a lot of resources to do that,” she said. “I don’t know how good a

⁴⁹³ Denise Mitchell, Aug. 14, 2009, interview by author, Washington, D.C.

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁵ AFL-CIO, “Remarks by John J. Sweeney, President of the AFL-CIO, ILCA Convention, Los Angeles, Calif., Oct. 7, 1999,” <http://www.aflcio.org/publ/speech99/sp1007.htm> (accessed Dec. 4, 2010). According to Denise Mitchell, the Public Affairs Department wrote the speech.

job most national unions have done figuring out how to flow information down to their local unions...and that's a primary relationship." Although the AFL-CIO is organized in every state and in some 500 communities, its decentralized, autonomous structure makes it "extremely difficult" to reach the local labor press, she continued. The state and local CLCs are, to a great extent, independent entities controlled by their own leaders and constituencies, Mitchell pointed out. Transmitting messages from the national AFL-CIO wasn't necessarily a high priority for them or, still less, for the international unions.

According to Mitchell, the ILCA's "elected structure" had politicized an organization that needed all its energies focused on the challenges of communications. Internal politics have created a sense of independence so strong that the ILCA has sometimes sought to compete, rather than cooperate, with the AFL-CIO. ILCA's overwhelming reliance on volunteer leaders was a weakness, too, she said: "Don't get me wrong, they have really committed people who are very good communicators, but that's a different thing than having time to run an organization."

According to Mitchell, some internationals have urged the AFL-CIO to improve the ILCA by encouraging more capable people to run for office. However, she said, doing that would put the AFL-CIO "in the middle" of ILCA elections—something she was loath to do. Furthermore, she argued, even a well-run ILCA—even one "brought within the AFL-CIO where people did have control over it"—would have a difficult time communicating with the locals" for all the reasons outlined above.⁴⁹⁶

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid.

Phillips tried to convince Mitchell that the ILCA did, in fact, offer the federation a way to reach levels of the union they “could not have reached in other ways...a way to get material directly into the hands of the locals.”⁴⁹⁷ But Michael Byrne, who edited the *AFL-CIO News* from 1989-1997, said Mitchell “made it clear to me when she came to the AFL-CIO that she did not have a lot of faith in the ILCA.” She felt the ILCA was “running its own show, and there was no way we could use them in ways that would advance the labor movement.” Indeed, Byrne said, Mitchell ordered him to stop spending time and money attending ILCA’s executive council meetings: “She said the ILCA is not that important.”⁴⁹⁸

Despite her reservations about the usefulness of the organization, Mitchell continued to meet regularly with Phillips, ILCA president George Burke, and other leaders. And, under Mitchell, federation support for the ILCA rose to unprecedented levels. The AFL-CIO replaced its annual \$10,000 grant to the ILCA with rent-free office space, saving the organization some \$6,000 a year. It began paying for the ILCA’s mailings, which saved the organization an additional \$25,000 in 1996 alone. Mitchell added the ILCA to the AFL-CIO’s in-house computer network, giving the group free access to many of the federation’s databases, and to its email system, software, and training. The AFL-CIO also invited ILCA leaders to provide media training to international union political directors, and to participate in high-profile campaigns, including the federation’s “Ask a Working Woman” survey. When John Sweeney

⁴⁹⁷ Phillips interview.

⁴⁹⁸ Byrne interview.

addressed the ILCA's 1999 Convention, he became the first federation president in forty years to do so.⁴⁹⁹

Notwithstanding the increased financial support and collaboration with ILCA leaders, records show that Mitchell never attended an ILCA executive council meeting, nor did her official designee Deputy Director of Public Affairs Donna Jablonski, who held an ex-officio council seat.⁵⁰⁰ The AFL-CIO and the ILCA were continuing to drift apart, though perhaps less visibly than before. Their historic "disconnect" would soon become an open feud.

The Rise of Local Unions in the ILCA

The crises in organized labor did not ease with the "New Voices" slate, nor did the frustration of labor activists inside and outside the ILCA. Union membership rates continued to plummet, year after year. Pro-labor reforms—including laws to strengthen OSHA and discourage strikebreaking—died in Congress, thanks largely to a Democratic Party that continued to pocket millions of dollars from the unions. However, the discourse of the "New Voices" leaders—their willingness to question old ways; their emphasis on militant grassroots action—energized labor activists, and heightened their expectations. Increasingly, activists used the federation's new rhetoric to challenge the federation and to advocate policies to empower rank-and-file workers.

⁴⁹⁹ Minutes of ILCA Executive Council meetings, Jan. 20, 1997, Feb., 28, 1997, Sept. 19, 1997, and Apr. 17-18, 1998, ILCA; "ILCA Convention Has a Story to Tell," *ILCA Reporter*.

⁵⁰⁰ As described in the next section, Mitchell and members of her staff did participate in panels at ILCA conferences and conventions. Also, James Parks, an editor in the AFL-CIO Publications Department held a council seat from October 2000 to Sept. 2002. He resigned in 2002 when George Burke stepped down and Martin Fishgold became ILCA president.

By the mid-1990s, local union publications comprised nearly three-quarters of the ILCA membership. In 1996, a local union editor— James Earp, editor for Operating Engineers Local 3 in California—was elected president of the ILCA. He became the first local editor ever elected to a top officer’s spot. Four other local union editors were elected that year to serve on the council with him. Since 1956, local unions had typically held one or two of the seventeen council seats. For a handful of years they held three. Between 1995 and 2000, local unions routinely controlled between four and five seats.⁵⁰¹

“There was a shift in power...towards more local-oriented leadership. They wanted more radical change and more radical tactics,” recalled George Burke, editor for the International Association of Fire Fighters, who succeeded Earp as ILCA president in 1998. The local union editors allied with editors from the CLCs, and a few more radically-minded international union editors on the council. They “looked at us—the AFL and the internationals—as institutional leaders, as the establishment. We had the money and the staff. We were the fat cats in the ivory tower, while they were leading the struggle in the streets, day after day,” Burke said.⁵⁰²

Local editor Martin Fishgold joined the ILCA executive council in January 1998, and he laid out his aims at the very first meeting. The ILCA should “encourage unions to use their publications as a place where the members can exchange ideas, even if critical of the union leadership,” Fishgold told his fellow officers. Labor had an “outside

⁵⁰¹ Data on the number of local union publications belonging to the ILCA and holding executive council seats were drawn from scores of membership reports and leadership rosters prepared for council meetings and conventions.

⁵⁰² George Burke, June 17, 2011, telephone interview by author. In 1998, when Earp resigned as editor for OE Local 3, he became ineligible to serve as ILCA president and had to step down.

enemy—the CEOs,” he said. But labor had an “inside enemy,” too: “Those who want to control the union members.”⁵⁰³

Fishgold was no stranger to many council members. He was president of the New York Metro Labor Communications Association (“Metro”), the ILCA’s largest, most active regional affiliate. For more than a dozen years, Fishgold had edited the *Unionist* newspaper for Service Employees Union Local 371, an AFSCME affiliate renowned in New York City labor circles as a “militant, rebel, dissident” organization.⁵⁰⁴ Local 371 officials gave Fishgold the time and freedom to work with “Metro” and the ILCA, and to report news that frequently riled the leaders of other city unions. He wrote about 300 Domino Sugar workers who were abandoned by their international union during a long, unsuccessful strike. When the *Village Voice* ran series on corrupt New York unions, Fishgold angered “the city’s labor establishment” by inviting the reporter who broke the stories to address a special “Metro” forum.⁵⁰⁵ “He did amazing connective work,” recalled a union journalist who interned for Fishgold. “He connected the labor press to

⁵⁰³ Minutes of ILCA Executive Council meeting, Jan. 16-17, 1998, ILCA. Fishgold died on Aug. 12, 2010. He was seventy years old.

⁵⁰⁴ Dania Rajendra, Dec. 10, 2010, telephone interview by author; SSEU Local 371, “Our History,” www.sseu.org/our-history (accessed July 1, 2011). In 1965, city officials fired 8,000 welfare agency workers represented by Local 371 and jailed nineteen of their leaders for staging an illegal strike. The strikers built a broad coalition of community, labor, and political groups that attracted support from such national figures as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The strike secured stronger bargaining rights for all New York City employees.

⁵⁰⁵ Handbill: “The New York Metro Labor Communications Association’s 3rd Critical Issues Forum, Oct. 21, 1999; “Fitch’s Smear Campaign,” email circulated among the New York Labor Communications Association Board Members, Oct. 12, 1999; Jane LaTour, “SSEU Local Unionist Editor Martin Fishgold, Dies,” *Public Employee Press*, AFSCME DC-37, Oct.-Nov., 2010; “Martin Fishgold, Editor of the Unionist, Dies,” *Unionist*, Sept., 2010; “In Memoriam: Martin Fishgold,” *Union Democracy Review*, Oct., 2010.

Bob McChesney's work on media reform.⁵⁰⁶ He connected us to the immigrant rights movement at a critical time. He really thought, 'Of course we have a role here. This conversation is not complete without our voice.' And I think he was right."⁵⁰⁷

Fishgold first crossed swords with the ILCA leadership in 1995, when he asked to address the council about 2,000 newspaper workers locked-out by the *Detroit News* and the *Detroit Free Press*. Susan Phillips rejected his request. "Why does he want to do this?" she asked herself. "He's not from the Newspaper Guild. ...Can he give us the latest on the strike? Or does he just want to criticize us for not covering it more? I told him 'No' ...and that forever set him against me."⁵⁰⁸ ILCA council member Sherry Halbrook, who belonged to the New York "Metro," recalled that Fishgold was "absolutely furious" over Phillip's decision, and that he complained for months that her actions were undemocratic and unjustified. "Frankly, I felt he should have been given a chance to speak," Halbrook said. "Susan ran things with quite a firm hand. ...She would make a lot of decisions, and then tell us about them later."⁵⁰⁹

Once on the council, Fishgold launched a protracted campaign to wear down the ILCA leadership. Meeting after meeting, he would object and force debate over matters trivial and not. He demanded that each council member's vote be recorded, even on non-

⁵⁰⁶ Rajendra was referring to University of Illinois Professor Robert McChesney, who helped found the media reform group, "Free Press." Fishgold involved New York "Metro" and, later, the ILCA in Free Press' activities and represented both organizations at the national media reform conferences.

⁵⁰⁷ Rajendra interview.

⁵⁰⁸ Phillips interview.

⁵⁰⁹ Sherry Halbrook, July 21, 2011, telephone interview by author.

roll call votes.⁵¹⁰ He refused to approve the hiring of a clerical worker for the ILCA office, insisting the entire council should have vetted her credentials. He argued that the council, not the top officers, should decide whether to share mailing lists or to endorse events involving outside organizations.⁵¹¹ He demanded changes in the minutes of a previous meeting to reflect his opposition to the choice of a keynote speaker.⁵¹² Even council members who generally supported Fishgold's positions described the meetings as "nasty, combative...no fun at all."⁵¹³

But Fishgold engaged the council in more substantive debates as well. And the lines of debate could hardly have been sharper. He proposed a code of ethics that called on ILPA members to report "the truth about internal union business... [to] adhere to high standards of accuracy and thoroughness," and to make the labor press "a forum for airing diverse opinions of our membership." Phillips objected, arguing that the "elected officials set union policy and the editors work with them... to convey those policies." That, she said, was "the very essence of democracy." ILCA President Burke insisted the proposed code was unenforceable and ill-advised. "One man's truth is another man's fiction," and the same is true for accuracy and thoroughness, Burke said. Furthermore, he said, labor papers are a vehicle "for advancing the cause of the current leadership." Fishgold was

⁵¹⁰ Rajendra interview.

⁵¹¹ Minutes of ILCA Executive Council meeting, Apr. 17-18, 1998, ILCA.

⁵¹² Ibid., Nov. 29, 2001.

⁵¹³ Steve Stallone, July 11, 2011, telephone interview with author.

unmoved. Labor papers exist to “keep the discussion going,” he shot back, “not for keeping our officers happy.”⁵¹⁴

In the fall of 1998, Fishgold joined forces with Andy Zipser, who, like Fishgold, had sought unsuccessfully to attend ILCA council meetings. Zipser, editor of the *Newspaper Guild Reporter*, was puzzled by Burke’s insistence that council meetings were for council members alone, not for ILCA members. He started circulating copies of his correspondence with Burke to the entire executive council. “The board was aligned behind Burke on this, with the sole exception—the sterling exception—of Marty [Fishgold],” Zipser recalled. “Marty was a bomb-thrower anyway, and I think he viewed me as a bomb-thrower. Suddenly, he saw an ally.”

After Fishgold convinced the council to open its meetings to ILCA members, Zipser thought, “Here is a guy who is going to push this organization forward. So let me back him.”⁵¹⁵ Fishgold and Zipser soon found they held common views about the role of union journalism. They believed most labor papers were boring house organs that lauded the union leaders, ignored internal dissent, and failed to engage the members in discussion and debate.⁵¹⁶ As I showed in Chapter 3, their complaints about house organs were not novel, or particularly controversial. But Zipser and Fishgold took the argument in a markedly more radical direction. Unions are supposed to belong to the members, they argued, and union democracy cannot exist unless the labor press is free to operate

⁵¹⁴ Minutes of ILCA Executive Council meeting, Sept. 18-19, 1998, ILCA. The proposed code of ethics – a weakened version of the New York “Metro” code– was never adopted by the ILCA. To this day, the ILCA’s code of ethics only covers policies on advertising.

⁵¹⁵ Andrew Zipser, Nov. 5, 2010, interview by author, Washington, D.C.

⁵¹⁶ Martin Fishgold, “The Sound of One Hand Clapping: Labor’s Silence on Union Media Democracy,” *New Labor Forum* 17, no. 2 (Summer 2008): 101.

“as a check on abuses of authority, as a way of promoting dialogue, as a way of providing information that people need to govern themselves intelligently.”⁵¹⁷ They believed the labor press should enjoy the same level of freedom and protection that is guaranteed to publications in the broader society.

Most controversially, they called for a radical change in the identity of union journalists. They argued, explicitly, that labor editors should be free to publish whatever they wished, without prior restraint or fear of retaliation from the elected union leadership. Zipser agreed that leaders of unions and other democratic organizations need platforms to articulate their policies and agendas. However, he argued, unions must separate their public relations functions from their publications. A “problem arises when...we confuse cheer-leading and truth-telling and combine both functions into one office,” he wrote. “One can’t be a propagandist and a journalist, because any person asked to wear both hats soon finds that one is far more comfortable than the other.”⁵¹⁸

In a lengthy article in *Labor Notes*, Zipser argued that independent union journalism was not a utopian scheme.⁵¹⁹ He pointed out that Swedish workers were served by popular, colorful union magazines with a quality of reporting on a par with *Time* or *Newsweek*. Several factors made this possible. Swedish law prohibited the owners of publications (including labor publications) from telling their editors what to

⁵¹⁷ Zipser interview.

⁵¹⁸ Andrew Zipser, “Some thoughts on labor journalism and ILCA’s role in preserving—or challenging—the status quo” (paper distributed at ILCA luncheon, Washington D.C., Nov. 20, 2000).

⁵¹⁹ Andrew Zipser, “The Labor Press: Watchdog, Lapdog, or Canary in the Mine Shaft?” *Labor Notes*, July, 2003. Online edition: www.labornotes.org/archive (accessed Dec. 1, 2010).

print.⁵²⁰ Union editors were further shielded from political pressure by long-term employment contracts, with ample severance packages. Finally, union magazines in Sweden carried large amounts of advertising, making them less dependent on union funds and encouraging higher levels of journalistic quality. After all, he wrote, why would advertisers purchase space in dull periodicals that nobody read?

Fishgold and Zipser began speaking at forums and writing articles that shoved their critique directly under the noses of the AFL-CIO leadership and under the noses of ILCA leaders and members, too. In the fall of 2000, Zipser arrived early for an ILCA awards luncheon—its biggest gathering outside the convention—and placed copies of a four-page critique of the labor press on more than 120 chairs arranged throughout the banquet hall. House organs are “a direct challenge to the Sweeney initiatives,” he wrote. The AFL-CIO wants to mobilize workers, but union editors are putting readers to sleep with pages full of photographs of union leaders and dreary stories about internal union business.⁵²¹ Zipser criticized periodicals by name (including his own), and the hall was full of representatives from those very unions “waiting for their meals, and very unhappy that I called them out. . . . Boy, did that piss off a lot of people,” he recalled.⁵²²

⁵²⁰ Web Site of the Swedish Parliament, “The Freedom of the Press Act. Chapter 5, On the publication of periodicals,” [http://www.riksdagen.se/templates/R_PageExtended_____6335.aspx_\(accessed Aug. 15, 2011\)](http://www.riksdagen.se/templates/R_PageExtended_____6335.aspx_(accessed_Aug_15_2011)). Article 3 of the Act states, “The responsible editor of a periodical shall be appointed by the owner. The tasks of the responsible editor shall include the power to supervise the publication of the periodical and to determine its contents in such a way that nothing may be printed therein against his or her will.”

⁵²¹ Andy Zipser, “Let’s hear it for our critics: without them, we’ll be talking to our navels,” *ILCA Reporter*, May, 2000.

⁵²² Zipser interview.

A Widening Rift

Other ILCA activists soon opened a second debate that directly challenged the “new” AFL-CIO. When it comes to using media, organized labor was “dominated by a corporate mindset,” Fred Glass—a longtime ILCA activist and communications director for the California Federation of Teachers—wrote in the *Labor Studies Journal*. The AFL-CIO was squandering millions of dollars on catchy sound bites and carefully-crafted images that treated workers as passive consumers, Glass argued. Sweeney’s hope of energizing grassroots labor required unions to adopt an “organizing model” of communications, he wrote. Unions must concentrate media resources on local organizing and education rather than transmitting messages from the top down. They should involve workers face-to-face, and train them to use media “in a collective effort at self-enfranchisement.” The “adherents of business unionism” will vigorously resist anyone who challenges the dominant approach to labor communications, Glass warned. The “‘Trojan Horse’ of corporate media theory” had entered the house of labor long ago.⁵²³

For union journalists, the victory of the “New Voices” slate was an “ironic historical twist,” ILCA council member Howard Kling wrote in the same issue of the *Labor Studies Journal*. Labor editors quickly discovered that the federation’s new slogan “‘You Have a Voice’” meant a voice “controlled from the top,” Kling wrote. They discovered, too, that the AFL-CIO’s commitment to grassroots organizing “did not come

⁵²³ Fred Glass, “Amplifying the Voices of Workers: An Organizing Model for Labor Communications,” *Labor Studies Journal*, 27, no. 4 (Winter 2003): 1-16. Glass raised similar concerns twenty years earlier, in his previously-cited paper “Labor and New Media Technologies.” He did so again in 1989, in “A Locally Based Labor Media Strategy,” *Labor Studies Journal*, (Winter 1989): 3-17.

with a parallel commitment to more democratic, alternative, grassroots approaches to labor media.”

Kling praised the AFL-CIO’s skillful use of public relations to influence reporters and elected officials, but he faulted the federation for neglecting the labor press. The ILCA had an alternative vision to offer the movement, he wrote. Labor media should be independent and democratic, not “mere vehicles for officer reelection.” Unions should train and provide resources to enable workers to utilize video, television, radio and Web-based media. As local labor media matured, Kling said, they would link with established pro-worker platforms via low-cost digital technologies into a potent, national network.⁵²⁴

Fishgold, Zipser and other ILCA leaders and activists were now raising their criticisms on a regular basis at national media reform conferences, labor education conventions, regional labor press meetings, and other public venues—frequently in the presence of Denise Mitchell and others from the AFL-CIO. “Marty was quite outspoken at these conferences...very emotional, volatile, and loud,” Zipser recalled. “He made Denise “quite uncomfortable...and I probably contributed to that. There was a pretty abrasive quality to the ILCA at that time from the AFL-CIO’s point of view.”⁵²⁵ But their critique of the AFL-CIO and the incumbent ILCA leadership resonated with many union journalists. In a post-convention survey in 1997, ILCA members said they were disappointed that AFL-CIO representatives failed to attend events and meet with the delegates. The delegates wanted the ILCA to provide more information on ways the labor

⁵²⁴ Howard Kling, “Organizing Media: Toward a National Labor Communications Strategy,” *Labor Studies Journal*, 27, no. 4 (Winter 2003): 26-36.

⁵²⁵ Zipser interview.

press could serve the membership, not just “the latest spin on politics.” They wanted fewer speeches and more opportunities for dialogue.⁵²⁶ Many ILCA members who worked directly with the union rank and file “understood instinctively that wherever we were with labor communications, it wasn’t working.” They wanted to expand the range of content beyond internal union business, and expand the conversation about social justice beyond the ranks of organized labor.⁵²⁷

The growing battle within the ILCA was, in part, “a culture clash,” one council member said. Fishgold hailed from a “gritty, cosmopolitan” city full of “strong progressive movements.” The federation and the internationals, who were mainly ensconced in Washington D.C., “always had the power to run things. ... [They] were very suspicious, very resistant of anyone outside their circle coming in and trying to change the way they did things.” Fishgold was “up against the old guard, and he wasn’t going to sit back. ...He was the ‘bull in the china shop.’”⁵²⁸

Fishgold was gradually gaining allies on the council, notably Steve Stallone, from the left-leaning International Longshore and Warehouse Union, and Tony Carobine, of the American Postal Workers Union. Others on the council “would vacillate back and forth” between the so-called “international faction” and the “local-oriented” faction, Burke said. “There was a lot of rock-throwing. ...It was very unpleasant.”⁵²⁹

⁵²⁶ Minutes of ILCA Executive Council meeting, Jan. 29, 1999, ILCA.

⁵²⁷ Alec Dubro, Sept. 25, 2010, interview by author, Washington, D.C.

⁵²⁸ Halbrog interview.

⁵²⁹ Burke interview.

Burke felt Fishgold made a strategic decision to take control of the council by thwarting everything the incumbent leaders sought to accomplish. If that was his strategy, it appeared to pay off. At a council meeting in September 2002, Burke's frustration finally boiled over. "That's it. I've had it," he said. He resigned and "walked away."⁵³⁰ Several council members walked out with him. Within weeks, fully ten of ILCA's seventeen leaders had quit the board.

At the next scheduled council meeting, in January 2003, Fishgold was elected interim president of the ILCA (there were no other nominations) and the *ILCA Reporter* immediately trumpeted the organization's new direction. One quarter of the front page was given over to a cartoon decrying the U.S. invasion of Iraq. The accompanying article, which filled the remainder of the page, began, "The beat of war drums, a corporate push to eliminate all media ownership rules, and an ever-more naked attack on unions..."⁵³¹ Nearly two years would pass before the AFL-CIO adopted a resolution criticizing the U.S. invasion of Iraq.⁵³²

Several international unions, including the Machinists, the IBEW, the Seafarers, and the Laborers pulled out of the ILCA to protest Fishgold's policies. Their withdrawal cost the ILCA \$25,000 in annual dues.⁵³³ The AFL-CIO, too, began to push back hard. In March 2003, Sweeney, Trumka and Chavez-Thompson all declined Fishgold's invitation

⁵³⁰ Ibid.

⁵³¹ *ILCA Reporter*, Feb/Mar. 2003, ILCA, 1.

⁵³² AFL-CIO, "2005 AFL-CIO Convention, Resolution 53," http://www.aflcio.org/aboutus/thisistheaficio/convention/2005/res_53.cfm (accessed July 22, 2011).

⁵³³ Minutes of Executive Council meeting, May 2-3, 2004, ILCA.

to address an upcoming ILCA conference.⁵³⁴ AFL-CIO and international union leaders started “asking very pointed questions,” Burke recalled. ““Why should we fund something that isn’t giving us any value and that is actually becoming a thorn in our side?””

In the fall of 2003, Mitchell announced the creation of a “Working Group” to consider ways to “take on some of the ILCA’s functions” in servicing the local union press. The group even considered sponsoring an annual journalism contest – one of the ILCA’s most popular programs, and a major source of revenue.⁵³⁵ The AFL-CIO also announced it would no longer provide the ILCA with free telephone service, computers, and technical support. A few months later, the AFL-CIO announced it was raising the rent for ILCA’s office from \$5,000 a year to \$50,000 a year. (Other organizations in the building continued to receive free or heavily subsidized rent, Fishgold complained.)⁵³⁶

Fishgold claimed to be “pleased” by the creation of the Working Group, saying he looked “forward to working with the international unions and the AFL-CIO” to better serve the local union press. He also told the council he planned to meet with Mitchell to

⁵³⁴ Ibid., Mar. 28, 2003.

⁵³⁵ Ibid., Nov. 04, 2003; “Report on the Local Union Working Group of Communications Directors with ILCA Leadership,” May 12, 2004,” an interim report; “Meeting the Needs of Local Union Communicators, Working Group Report and Recommendations,” Aug. 2004. Both “working group” documents are in the possession of the author. The “Working Group” consisted of Rick Sloan, director of communications for the Machinists Union, Suzanne Martin, director of communications director for the United American Nurses, and Donna Jablonski, assistant director of Public Affairs for the AFL-CIO. According to their interim report, the group met on Mar. 17, 2004 with international union communication directors, Apr. 27, 2004 with local union and CLC communicators, and on May 12, with ILCA leaders.

⁵³⁶ Marty Fishgold, “President’s Message: Major Financial and Programmatic Challenges Lie Ahead,” *ILCA Reporter* June/July 2005, ILCA, 1; 11.

improve relations between the ILCA and the federation.⁵³⁷ However, hopes for improved relations were immediately torpedoed by a front-page story in the *ILCA Reporter* that began: “The AFL-CIO, which in recent years has adopted a corporate, top-down communications style, is exploring grassroots alternatives.” The article skewered AFL-CIO concerns for the local labor press as “something new.”⁵³⁸ A second article in the same issue of the *Reporter* described many union editors as “mouthpieces for the labor bosses.” They were “handcuffed” by the labor leadership and compelled to write stories that covered up union defeats, corruption, and internal dissent.⁵³⁹

Even Fishgold’s staunchest supporters were finding him difficult and unpleasant to work with. Many who knew him well described Fishgold as “incredibly generous,” “affectionate,” and “kind.” But they also recalled how fiercely he reacted to criticism—even to mild, unintended slights—and how he nursed his resentments for years. His allies began to see that Fishgold’s “nasty, combative” manner was not reserved for the old guard conservatives. “It was just the way he did things, and it continued after George Burke,” said Stallone, who nominated Fishgold for president after Burke resigned. “It became clear to me after not very long that Marty could talk the talk but he couldn’t walk the walk,” Zipser said. “He said all the right things about democracy, and unions, and so on. But when it came to actually running an organization, he was authoritarian.”⁵⁴⁰

⁵³⁷ Minutes of ILCA Executive Council meeting, May 2-3, 2004, ILCA.

⁵³⁸ Andy Zipser, “AFL-CIO asks how it can be better heard,” *ILCA Reporter*, May/June, 2004, ILCA.

⁵³⁹ Gregory Heines, “Labor editors, yearning to be free,” *Ibid.*, 5.

⁵⁴⁰ Zipser interview.

Shortly after becoming ILCA president, Fishgold hired David Swanson (a former presidential campaign secretary for Dennis Kucinich and national communications coordinator for ACORN) as ILCA's full-time executive director.⁵⁴¹ Soon, Swanson recalled, Fishgold was telephoning him "multiple times a day" with orders and demands. "I had to run everything by Marty, and if he wanted to me do something that others on the council weren't going to like, I had to keep quiet about it, or tell them I was working on something else."⁵⁴² Swanson resigned after 10 months and was replaced by Alec Dubro, a former rock critic for *Rolling Stone* magazine and president of the National Writers' Union. "Marty was one for giving orders. ... He kept repeating his resentments and, at first, all his anger was directed at David Swanson... [but] then he forgot about Swanson and got on me." Dubro lasted eighteen months. He resigned rather than obey Fishgold's order to publish a copy of the *ILCA Reporter* against the wishes of the council. "He accused me of treachery," Dubro said, and the two never spoke again.

Fishgold was politically clumsy, too. He sabotaged his hopes to transform the ILCA by alienating his base—the council members who supported his vision. In 2003, he attempted to fire ILCA Executive Director Lynn Clark right before Christmas, ignoring the due process and progressive discipline requirements of her Newspaper Guild contract.

⁵⁴¹ Ohio Congressman Dennis Kucinich, a leading progressive Democrat, ran for president in 2004. His platform included withdrawing U.S. troops from Iraq and enacting single-payer national health care. ACORN, the Association of Communities for Reform Now, was deeply involved in registering poor and working class voters, and organizing oppressed communities around issues including housing, health care, and improved social services. In her interview with the author, Sherry Halbrook recalled that Fishgold, before becoming president, pressed the council to create a full-time Executive Director's position. He felt too little work was getting done with an all-volunteer council and one paid secretary. The council agreed to create an Executive Director's position but, over Fishgold's objections, they promoted ILCA secretary Judy Robbins to fill the post. When Robbins retired, the council hired Lynn Clark, again over Fishgold's objections.

⁵⁴² David Swanson, Sept. 17, 2010, telephone interview by author.

Clark was well liked and well connected at AFL-CIO Headquarters. The bungled attempt to fire her drew a great deal of negative attention to the ILCA. Fishgold seemed to delight in baiting Denise Mitchell and federation leaders, knowing full well that ILCA's leaders and members worked for unions that valued good relations with the AFL-CIO—and that the ILCA depended on those unions and the federation for dues and other vital support. Fishgold wanted to use the ILCA to recreate a “vigorous, independent labor press as there once had been” in the United States, “but he had neither the money nor the political support. ...He was willing to make a break from the AFL-CIO before there was an alternative plan.”⁵⁴³

Realizing he had lost the council's support and could not be reelected, Fishgold announced he was stepping down at the 2005 ILCA Convention in Chicago. Delegates elected Steve Stallone as president and Michael Kuchta, editor of the *St. Paul Union Advocate*, as secretary-treasurer. Within hours, Denise Mitchell sat down with the new ILCA leaders and “the first thing she did was offer us free office space in the AFL-CIO building,” Stallone said. One of Mitchell's staff, Tula Connell, began working with the ILCA and even joined the council for a time. Within months of the 2005 convention, the Machinists, IBEW, and Seafarers union had rejoined the ILCA, as well.⁵⁴⁴

The ILCA has not backed off its critique of top-down, corporate-style union communications since the 2005 convention, nor has Mitchell altered her opinion that the

⁵⁴³ Dubro interview.

⁵⁴⁴ Stallone interview.

ILCA is of marginal value to the AFL-CIO. Rather than polemicizing against corporate-style communications, the ILCA has concentrated on developing its own programs and working with the AFL-CIO and the international unions whenever possible and mutually beneficial. Notably, the ILCA has pursued a program proposed by Glass and Kling by launching Labor Media Centers, on a pilot basis, during its semi-annual conventions in New Orleans (in 2007, one year after Hurricane Katrina), in Pittsburgh, 2009, and in Seattle, in 2011. ILCA leaders provided delegates and local editors in the host cities with training, video cameras, computers, and other equipment, and then sent them out to gather stories and post them online.⁵⁴⁵

In May, 2011, AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka and several international unions announced they would cut back sharply on contributions to the Democratic Party and focus their resources, instead, on building state and local struggles. Democrats had stood by for too long while Republicans attacked U.S. workers, the labor leaders complained. Trumka (who has since voiced support for the Occupy Wall Street movement) argued that building powerful grassroots campaigns was the best way to construct a broad-based, national movement. And he pointed to the upsurge in pro-worker activities across the country sparked by the mass demonstrations in Wisconsin in early 2011, when thousands of people occupied the state capitol for several weeks to defend public-sector bargaining.⁵⁴⁶

⁵⁴⁵ ILCA, "New Orleans Labor Media Project," <http://neworleanslabormedia.org/> (accessed July 24, 2011); ILCA, "Pittsburg Labor Media Center," <http://ilcaonline.org/content/about-2009-labor-media-center> (accessed July 24, 2011); ILCA, "Labor Media Center, Seattle 2011," <http://seattle.ilcaonline.org/> (accessed Nov.6, 2011).

⁵⁴⁶ About.com, "Remarks by Richard L. Trumka at the National Press Club, Washington D.C., May 20, 2011," <http://usliberals.about.com/od/LaborLeaders/a/Richard-Trumka-Declares-Labor-Unions->

Once again, top U.S. labor leaders have adopted a strategy that seems tailor-made for a nationwide network of pro-worker editors and publications. Yet, once again, there is no indication that the federation or its affiliates have factored the ILCA into their plans, except as one more vehicle for delivering their message.

The historic disconnect between institutional labor and the labor press continues.

Chapter 7: Analysis and Conclusions

Social movements are processes of collective meaning-making. As such, they inherently involve processes of communication.⁵⁴⁷ Movements must recruit members, construct and reconstruct identities, build alliances, and generate a sense of common purpose sufficient to allow people with relatively few resources to undertake sustained, collective actions against more powerful social actors.⁵⁴⁸ Each movement evolves a distinct internal culture, or set of institutional logics: norms, values, and beliefs that define its character and guide its behaviors.⁵⁴⁹ As media scholar Robert Hackett wrote, communication is integral to “every stage of a movement’s trajectory.”⁵⁵⁰ Internal debates over the use of movement media are necessarily debates over the nature of the movement itself.

Organized labor is one of the oldest and largest U.S. social movements. Since the initial waves of industrialization in the early 1800s, millions of U.S. workers have formed organizations and engaged in various forms of collective action, including strikes, boycotts, and even armed confrontations, to wrest concessions from employers and the government. Industrialization forced some people to depend upon wages to survive, and allowed others to amass great wealth and political influence. The labor movement is a

⁵⁴⁷ Benford and Snow, 626-627.

⁵⁴⁸ Tarrow, 2-3, 5; Davis et al., 8.

⁵⁴⁹ McAdam, 45; McAdam and Scott, 17-19.

⁵⁵⁰ Robert Hackett, “Taking Back the Media: Notes on the Potential for a Communicative Democracy Movement,” *Studies in Political Economy* 63, no.1 (Autumn 2000): 61-62.

movement of wage earners: a sustained effort to compel a downwards redistribution of economic and political power.⁵⁵¹

Like many modern social movements, organized labor exists simultaneously as a set of formal organizations, and as a diffuse network of individuals.⁵⁵² The union organizations (i.e. the AFL-CIO, international unions, and their various subdivisions, which I refer to collectively as “institutional labor”) administer to and represent the grassroots workers’ movement. Institutional labor has fiduciary responsibilities to staff and members, legal obligations to employers and the government, political alliances to protect, and internal structures and processes to maintain.⁵⁵³ Labor’s “institutional needs” require stability and predictability. As a social movement, however, labor must mobilize workers for contentious actions against employers and other dominant interests. At the very least, unions must maintain enough members in a sufficient state of readiness to pose a credible threat of disruption at any given time. Labor’s “social movement needs” require agitation and risk. The needs of institutional labor and social movement labor are not the same, and they frequently conflict.

When unions use the labor press mainly to promote their institutional interests, they practice what I described in Chapter 3 as “institutional union journalism.” In institutional union publications, media content tends to focus on organizational policies

⁵⁵¹ Sar A. Levitan, Garth L. Mangum, and Ray Marshall, *Human Resources and Labor Markets* 3rd ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harper & Row, 1981), 432-438; Richard B. Freeman and James L. Medoff, *What Do Unions Do?* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), 6-11.

⁵⁵²Davis and Zald, 335.

⁵⁵³ Greene, 29-31. Practices that prioritize centralized control within labor organizations and limit independent rank-and-file activity are commonly referred to as “business unionism.”

and internal business; on specific workplace concerns (e.g. contractual disputes), and the actions of the incumbent union leaders. Such publications circulate almost exclusively among members of one particular union. They rarely carry material critical of the unions, and they provide little information to facilitate independent rank-and-file activity.

“Institutional union publications” are typically produced by professionals, far removed from the union rank and file, and mailed to members’ homes.

When unions use publications primarily to mobilize workers, they practice what I call “social-movement union journalism.” Content focuses more on the activities and concerns of rank-and-file members and their allies outside the unions. Stories frequently involve broad questions of social justice that affect the workplace *and* the community. “Social-movement union publications” are more likely to publish stories and letters that criticize the unions, and are designed to facilitate grassroots activism. Often, they circulate among members of many unions (and to unorganized workers) and are produced by volunteers, low-level union officers, and others close to the rank and file. Frequently, they are handed out in face-to-face encounters between activists and workers.

As explained in Chapter 3, historical tensions between labor’s need for order and control on the one hand, and for grassroots mobilization on the other, are reflected in debates within the movement over the “appropriate” role of the labor press.⁵⁵⁴ The AFL-CIO created the International Labor Communications Association (the ILCA, originally named the International Labor Press Association, or ILPA) in 1956 to establish a “bona

⁵⁵⁴ Bekken, “The Working Class Press,” 158-168. As explained in Chapter 1, I use the term “labor press” to describe media produced by the AFL-CIO and its affiliates and, targeted primarily to union members and staff. In the post-World War II era, independent labor media—that is, media targeted broadly to the working-class and not produced by the trade unions—have all but disappeared. The U.S. labor press has effectively become a *union* press.

“fide” labor press for the post-World War II era. ILCA leaders crafted a constitution and code of ethics to ensure that member publications adhered to AFL-CIO policies and were honestly run. Ostensibly an organization of union *publications*, the ILCA was (and remains) the only national organization of U.S. union *journalists*. Throughout the history of the ILCA, tensions between institutional and social movement journalism have played out, time and again, in debates among union editors, and leaders of the AFL-CIO and its affiliates. What matters should the labor press share with the union rank and file? What information should be closely-held by the union leadership? Should a labor publication address members of many different unions and, perhaps, people outside the unions, too? How much editorial control should the international unions and AFL-CIO exercise? How much editorial independence should local unions, Central Labor Councils (CLCs), and union journalists enjoy? These debates represented competing “collective action frames”—competing visions of what the post-World War II labor movement should stand for, and what it should do to accomplish its goals.⁵⁵⁵

In the following section, I employ the framework of social movement theory and organization theory (described in Chapter 1) to examine those debates and answer two questions:

1. Given the historical constraints placed on the ILCA and its member publications, can the labor press serve as an instrument to transform organized labor into a vigorous, expanding worker’s movement?
2. If the labor press can play that role, what might a “transformative” labor press look like? How would it be organized, and what would it do?

⁵⁵⁵ Benford and Snow, 623-627; Gamson and Modigliani, 1-4.

Examining the Key Debates

The ILPA's unsuccessful campaign for AFL-CIO-supported community-based labor newspapers (detailed in Chapter 4) started in 1966 and continued for nearly a decade. The campaign was triggered by an international union's decision in 1964 to use the ILPA to punish James Goodsell, editor of the *Oregon Labor Press*. (This was the "destabilizing event" that set off a cycle of contention in the organizational field.)⁵⁵⁶ Goodsell had published a series of front-page articles reporting favorably on a rebellion by 22,000 paper workers against two international unions affiliated with the AFL-CIO. ILPA council member Richard Estep, editor for one of the two international unions, brought internal charges against Goodsell for failing to "serve the best interests" of the AFL-CIO. A majority of ILPA leaders sided with Estep and voted to expel Goodsell from the ILPA executive council. The retaliation against the *Oregon Labor Press* angered local union and CLC editors (and some progressive international union editors, too) who already believed the AFL-CIO and large internationals exercised undue influence over the ILPA. Only weeks before the 1965 ILPA convention, disgruntled editors persuaded council member Ray Davidson (whose roots lay in a militant, rank and file-run union) to challenge Estep for the ILPA presidency. Davidson won, and immediately launched a campaign to persuade the AFL-CIO to create labor newspapers in communities with large union populations.

By the mid-1960s, ILPA and AFL-CIO leaders recognized that solidarity was weakening within the U.S. labor movement. Both groups also agreed that poor communications with union members was largely to blame. In 1966, the ILPA presented

⁵⁵⁶ McAdam and Scott, 17-19.

the federation with a detailed report showing a glaring gap in labor's communications network. Almost every union member received a regular publication from their international union that reported on broad trends and events affecting that union and the national labor movement. Many union members also received local union publications that reported on issues and events affecting their particular work site and local labor organization. However, the ILPA showed, fewer than one in seven U.S. union members received publications that reported on issues and events affecting *all* union members in their community, or that linked developments in local politics and business to the well-being of workers generally, or to the goals of organized labor. And the community papers that *did* exist were often poorly edited and under-financed, according to the ILPA.

Well-run, well-financed community newspapers were the missing link in labor communications, ILPA leaders wrote to AFL-CIO President George Meany. National publications simply could not address local concerns, and local union publications rarely had the resources to report on events beyond the workplace doors. As any union organizer can attest, "most people's lives are focused on local events... [and] political attitudes are formed gradually, the result of accumulated information and impressions," the ILPA leaders reminded Meany.⁵⁵⁷ Only newspapers that reported on community concerns, from the workplace to state house, "52 times a year" would have the "water-on-stone effect" required to make a lasting impact on worker attitudes, Davidson insisted.⁵⁵⁸

⁵⁵⁷ Community Paper Proposal, 2;7.

⁵⁵⁸ Davidson, "Proposal for Research and Action on Community Papers," 1.

The ILPA presented the AFL-CIO with a detailed plan (including cost estimates) for establishing community labor newspapers of various circulations and page lengths. Citing federation worries about a major communications breakdown with the union membership, Davidson said the report was “hitting the deck at a very good time.”⁵⁵⁹

However, in critiquing the existing labor press, ILPA leaders had unwittingly criticized the structure and operating principles of the AFL-CIO itself. The federation was founded on the principle of union autonomy which, among other things, guarantees each international union the exclusive authority to address its own members—to maintain its own, separate discursive space.⁵⁶⁰ The ILPA’s call for community-based publications that regularly addressed members of every union threatened the principle of union autonomy. The fragmented discourse criticized by the ILPA—scores of separate publications addressing separate segments of the work force—*reflected and reinforced* the fragmented, decentralized structures of organized labor. To begin with, the dearth of strong community labor papers was largely the result of the anti-communist crusades that destroyed many progressive, well-organized CLCs in the 1940s and early ‘50s, along with their publications and independent labor media, including the Federated Press news service. Many labor leaders used anti-communism to purge opponents and consolidate their personal positions. The lack of community labor newspapers meant that the vast

⁵⁵⁹ Speech Davidson, 1967 ILPA Convention, Dec. 5, 1967.

⁵⁶⁰ Greene, 32;35.

majority of union members after World War II received news about the labor movement solely from their own union leaders.⁵⁶¹

The ILPA's proposals threatened to push power *down* from the international unions, and *inwards* from the local unions to the CLCs that would operate the community newspapers. Publications that not only reported local news week after week but also mobilized readers to resolve local problems would have wielded tremendous influence in their respective communities. How could international union publications reporting national news, or local union newsletters reporting workplace-specific events hope to have a comparable impact?⁵⁶² The debate over community labor newspapers was a struggle over “representational resources”—a struggle within the movement over the power to define social reality for the union membership.⁵⁶³

Community labor newspapers also threatened to propagate a sense of community wholly at odds with the narrow, employer-specific definition encoded in federal labor law.⁵⁶⁴ By their very existence, community papers would have asserted that workers in one union had an active stake in knowing about the problems of other workers laboring for other employers, or belonging to other unions. Over time, readers would have begun

⁵⁶¹ Bekken, “The Working Class Press,” 158-168.

⁵⁶² Mitchell interview; Amy B. Dean and David B. Reynolds, *A New New Deal: How Regional Activism Will Reshape the American Labor Movement*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009). According to Denise Mitchell, AFL-CIO surveys consistently demonstrate that rank-and-file workers view messages from local union leaders as more far more credible than messages from union officials farther removed from the rank and file, including leaders of the international unions and AFL-CIO. Dean and Reynolds argue that the most powerful labor movements are “place-based”: rooted in communities where local workers can build coalitions and develop strategies tailored to their conditions.

⁵⁶³ Couldry and Curran, 4. Meany's bid to restrict advertising in the labor press (and the pushback from union editors, described in Chapter 5) was also a dispute over representational resources. Meany's directive created a cash-starved labor press heavily dependent on the union organizations.

⁵⁶⁴ Feldacker, 43-44.

to identify their own plight with the plight of wage earners generally. With regular exposure to labor-oriented news about politics, economics, and trends across multiple industries, workers would have begun to see patterns in contract disputes, plant closings, and other matters affecting their lives. Instead of seeing such developments as isolated, episodic events, readers would have begun to connect their hardships to the concerted actions of employers, financiers, and government officials.⁵⁶⁵ When people believe they share common problems stemming from common sources, they tend to respond through common, collective action. Such broad sympathies threaten anyone, including labor leaders, who would control a grassroots movement.

The debate over community newspapers demonstrated that “business unionism” and “social movement unionism” are fluid concepts. They are ideal types that exist along a spectrum of practices and beliefs, and bleed into one another. For example, Saul Miller, George Meany’s director of publications, and Kenneth Fiester, an editor for the United Autoworkers Union and the AFL-CIO, were by no means labor radicals. They were union journalists who, based on years of experience, proposed a new institutional logic—community labor newspapers—to strengthen solidarity within the labor movement. Broadening the discourse between workers at the community level would have pushed union journalism in a “social movement” direction. But in important ways, the community labor newspaper proposal was rather limited. It was silent, for example, on

⁵⁶⁵ Shanto Iyengar, *Is Anyone Responsible? How Television Frames Political Issues*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 2. Iyengar found television viewers were more likely to hold public officials accountable for events after viewing “thematic” news reports (i.e. stories that placed those events in a political, historic and social context). He found viewers were less likely to hold public officials responsible for events that were reported in “episodic” fashion—as isolated occurrences, with few (or no) references to social, economic, or political antecedents.

the question of reporting internal disputes or criticisms of organized labor. Miller, Fiester, and the majority of the ILPA council advocated the “top-down” social movement unionism practiced by Walter Reuther’s UAW (and, later, by John Sweeney’s AFL-CIO): a unionism that stressed community concerns and social justice within a centralized, top-down structure.⁵⁶⁶

The push for community labor newspapers failed because the ILPA could not muster a constituency strong enough to compel AFL-CIO leaders to reconsider—let alone alter—the dominant institutional logics regarding member communications. Two influential bodies within the federation—the Committee on Political Education (COPE) and the Public Relations Department—did meet with ILPA leaders and listen to their proposal. But the top officers, the AFL-CIO Executive Council, failed to even place community newspapers on their agenda.

Labor Public Relations and Journalism for the Rank and File

The debates over labor’s reliance on corporate-style public relations and over labor papers as house organs presented a more radical critique of union communications than the call for community newspapers. Unions began to shift spending from publications into public relations during the 1970s in response to a 1,200 percent hike in second-class postal rates initiated by the Nixon Administration.⁵⁶⁷ This was the “destabilizing” event that caused the ILPA and AFL-CIO to drift apart during the 1980s,

⁵⁶⁶ Steve Early, *Embedded with Organized Labor: Journalistic Reflections on the Class War at Home*, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2009), 63; 207-231.

⁵⁶⁷ Postal Report by Allen Zack, Apr. 6-7, 1979.

and then to collide in a bitter debate in the late 1990s.⁵⁶⁸ As the costs of print publications soared, organized labor cut back on communications with union members and stepped up efforts to reach out to elected officials, reporters, and the general public. International unions and CLCs reduced the size and frequency of their publications, and many publications simply folded. As Murray Seeger, director of the AFL-CIO's Information Department during the 1980s, recalled, "The trend was going away from the weekly and monthly labor papers. ... [The] unions were looking at them as a cost item."⁵⁶⁹ In 1983, Seeger signaled the AFL-CIO's diminished interest in the labor press by breaking a 27-year tradition and failing to assign a federation staff member to serve as ILPA's fulltime secretary-treasurer. He severed the most direct connection between the AFL-CIO and the ILPA, and over the next decade the two organizations steadily drifted apart.

In 1983, the AFL-CIO also launched the Labor Institute for Public Affairs (LIPA) to expand labor's use of television, advertising, and modern public relations. The AFL-CIO began pumping millions of dollars into LIPA while the ILPA struggled to stay solvent, year after year. That same year, the ILPA renamed itself the International Labor Communications Association (ILCA) to demonstrate that union journalists, too, recognized the importance of public outreach and electronic media. Time and again, ILCA leaders attempted to collaborate with LIPA, but their overtures were ignored.

As early as 1983, ILCA activist Fred Glass questioned why labor was using electronic technologies exclusively for national public relations campaigns. Concentrating the power of television and video on "small-scale, community-based"

⁵⁶⁸ McAdam and Scott, 17-19.

⁵⁶⁹ Seeger interview.

organizing would be less expensive and have a greater immediate impact, he argued. It would build upon existing structures within the labor movement and construct new activist networks linking people inside and outside the unions.⁵⁷⁰ During the 1980s and 1990s, as the number of labor television and video activists expanded, Glass's critique of corporate-style union public relations gained traction inside the ILCA.

In 1995, the insurgent "New Voices" slate took control of the AFL-CIO. John Sweeney, Richard Trumka, and Linda Chavez-Thompson swept into office promising to mobilize grassroots labor and give ordinary workers a voice. ILCA activists were excited by the speeches and new programs calling for militant grassroots action. However, they were soon disappointed to learn that the "new" AFL-CIO was even more committed to top-down public relations (and even less interested in the labor press) than its predecessors had been. ILCA leaders and activists, including Glass, video producer Howard Kling, newspaper Guild editor Andy Zipser, and local union editor Marty Fishgold (who became ILCA president in 2003) began to publicly criticize AFL-CIO communications for bypassing and disempowering rank-and-file workers. They called on unions not simply to "target" communications towards working-class communities (which labor leaders could have done without relinquishing control) but to go *further* by providing training and resources so local workers could use electronic media on their *own behalf*.⁵⁷¹ Their critique of corporate-style public relations became an explicit call to redistribute representational resources within the labor movement. It became a pointed, public challenge to the dominant institutional logics of the AFL-CIO.

⁵⁷⁰ Glass, "Labor and New Media Technologies," 22.

⁵⁷¹ Glass, "Amplifying the Voices of Workers," 2; Kling, "Organizing Media."

The third debate involving the ILCA and the AFL-CIO—the debate that broke out in the mid-1990s over house organs—was, at one level, old and uncontroversial. Generations of union journalists of every political stripe have grumbled about labor periodicals stuffed with photographs and stories promoting union officers and policies.⁵⁷² But the militant grassroots rhetoric of the “New Voices” slate had altered the dominant discourse of organized labor. The AFL-CIO had adopted social-movement terms and symbols, but it had refused to abandon the top-down communication practices so characteristic of business unionism. An old contradiction was thus thrown into new, sharper relief: How can a movement founded on mass collective action rely so heavily on leadership-centered publications?

As happened with the debate over labor public relations, the critique of house organs evolved into something far more radical. Instead of simply calling for a greater focus on the rank and file, the more vocal members of the ILCA began urging union editors to publish criticisms of union policies and leaders, and to report on internal dissent and corruption. Fishgold and Zipser took the argument even further than that, insisting that union editors should be free to make editorial decisions without prior restraint or fear of retaliation from union officials. Their call for editorial freedom was an explicit challenge to the union leadership’s control of the labor press. It was a direct challenge to union journalists, as well: a challenge to rethink their responsibilities to the union members and hierarchy. Fishgold and Zipser insisted that union journalists had a duty to protect union democracy by keeping the membership fully informed. That

⁵⁷² Van Tine, 33-55; Ameringer, 182-187. Ameringer, a socialist and union editor, derided labor papers of the early 1900s as “pieces of sales promotion for the union” jammed with “fulsome accounts of the junketings of...union officials, adorned with flattering pictures of these same officials.”

responsibility, they insisted, overrode any obligations editors might have to burnish the reputations of the union leadership.

Fishgold's attempts to use the ILCA to transform the labor press were a disaster. The federation responded by cutting off resources to the ILCA, imposing a tenfold increase in rent, and charging the organization for telephones and computer support. Several international unions pulled out of the organization, depriving the already cash-strapped ILCA of \$25,000 in dues. Fishgold had challenged institutional labor, seemingly without considering who could fire his members, or who controlled the resources the ILCA needed to survive. Unlike Davidson, Fishgold and his allies *had* tried to build a base of support for their proposals among to the ILCA membership. But what leverage could union journalists apply that might compel union leaders to agree to such a drastic shift in power?

The arguments that Fishgold and Zipser advanced for the independence of union editors were often loud and impossible to ignore. But they never even became the dominant institutional logics within the ILCA executive council, let alone the federation or its affiliates. As Steve Stallone, the council member who nominated Fishgold for president, said, "I could never understand how editors of union publications could possibly operate independently of our own union officers."⁵⁷³ Fishgold's blunt, confrontational style also alienated many of his closest supporters and provided a handy target for opponents seeking to sidestep the substance of his critiques.

⁵⁷³ Stallone interview.

As I discussed in Chapter 6, changes in the broad social environment (e.g. labor laws, economic trends, and political pressures) powerfully influenced the actions of union journalists, officers, and others involved with the ILCA. Yet, the personalities of Fishgold and other individual actors—and the choices that they made—profoundly shaped the ILCA, as well. George Meany’s reaction to the McClellan Committee’s charges of union corruption deprived the publications of a freshly-unified labor movement access to advertising revenue that might have allowed them to take root and grow. Ray Davidson’s determination to communicate with grassroots workers made community labor newspapers the focus of the ILCA’s work for nearly a decade. And his decision to discreetly lobby top labor leaders instead of rallying union journalists to support the plan likely doomed the project he so loved. Murray Seeger’s decision not to assign a staff member to serve as ILCA’s secretary-treasurer allowed the AFL-CIO and the ILCA to drift apart at the very moment union journalists were striving to adopt electronic technologies and link up with LIPA. It is important to understand how political-economic forces shape the options open to individuals and organizations. Ultimately, however, people confront the circumstances they are given and make their own history.

Can the Labor Press Transform the Labor Movement?

The labor press certainly can serve as an instrument to transform organized labor into a vigorous workers’ movement. Studies of unions that have successfully transitioned from an inward-looking bureaucratic mode of operation to an outward-looking “organizing model” stress the importance of educating and winning the support of members and staff. Successful transformations are the result of planned, sustained, multi-

pronged campaigns driven by a determined core of leaders.⁵⁷⁴ It is inconceivable that the U.S. labor movement could alter its internal culture, develop new programs, tactics and strategies, reach out to new members, and do all the other things necessary to transform itself without using internal media. Indeed, any serious bid to transform the movement will require union leaders to use the labor press in a more consistent, strategic, proactive manner than they have at any point since the founding of the AFL-CIO. A transformative labor press cannot be an afterthought or tertiary concern. It must be a primary instrument in a strategic offensive.

The most likely scenario for transforming the labor movement would be for a union, or small group of unions, to adopt innovative collective action frames and organizational methods (including the use of media) that inspire significant numbers of workers to engage in concerted action. Other unions, seeking to replicate that success, would adopt similar frames and practices, modifying them to suit their particular needs, structures, and ideologies. Through this process of diffusion, translation, and bricolage, change would work its way across the labor movement.⁵⁷⁵

The American Federation of Labor (AFL) was the product of one such transformation in the late nineteenth century. Skilled workers grew dissatisfied with the

⁵⁷⁴ Bill Fletcher and Richard W. Hurd, "Overcoming Obstacles to Transformation: Challenges on the Way to a New Unionism," in *Rekindling the Labor Movement: Labor's Quest for Relevance in the 20th Century*, 182-208, ed. Lowell Turner, Harry Katz and Richard Hurd, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001); Steven Henry Lopez, *Reorganizing the Rustbelt: An Inside Story of the American Labor Movement*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Kim Voss and Rachel Sherman, "Breaking the Iron Law of Oligarchy: Union Revitalization in the American Labor Movement," *American Journal of Sociology*, 106, no. 2 (Sept. 2000): 303-349; Debra C. Minkoff and John D. McCarthy, "Reinvigorating the Study of Organizational Processes in Social Movements," *Mobilization* 10, no. 2 (June 2005): 297.

⁵⁷⁵ John L. Campbell, "Where Do We Stand? Common Mechanisms in Organizations and Social Movements Research," in *Social Movements and Organization Theory*, ed. Davis, et al., (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 53.

Knights of Labor, a multi-class movement supporting an array of social reforms. They proceeded to found a new confederation comprised of tightly organized, autonomous unions, each representing a specific craft or trade, and heavily focused on economic bargaining.⁵⁷⁶ These well-financed organizations of white, native-born men survived the economic depression of the 1890s, which destroyed virtually every other form of labor organization. The “business unionism” of the AFL quickly became the dominate form of labor organization in the U.S.⁵⁷⁷

The Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) arose in much the same manner. Unions seeking to represent semi-skilled and unskilled workers became frustrated with the AFL’s refusal to organize the burgeoning mass production industries. They broke from the AFL in 1935 and launched organizing drives in steel, auto, textile, and other sectors. They employed innovative tactics, including the sit-down strike. They published militant newspapers that repudiated the AFL’s conservative, exclusivist stand by redefining “union member” to embrace all wage earners, regardless of skill, nationality, gender, and race.⁵⁷⁸ In 1937, U.S. unions nearly doubled their total membership, adding

⁵⁷⁶ Greene, 32-37.

⁵⁷⁷ Greene, 37; Philip S. Foner, *From the Founding of the A. F. of L. to the Emergence of American Imperialism*, vol. 2 of *History of the Labor Movement in the United States*, (New York: International Publishers, 1998), 347. “Craft unionism had proved it could survive such a crisis and forge ahead when it was over...tripling its membership between 1897-1901.”

⁵⁷⁸ Dan Clawson, *The Next Upsurge: Labor and New Social Movements* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 195; DeCaux, 206-218; James J. Matles and James Higgins, *Them and Us: Struggles of a Rank-and-File Union*, (Englewood, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1974), 37-50; Dubofsky and Van Tine, 197-201; 207-221.

some three million members, and “the vast majority of the newly organized workers belonged to [the] CIO.”⁵⁷⁹

The labor press will play a central role—but not an independent role—in any future effort by union leaders to transform the movement. Labor leaders would drive the process, and they would use the labor press as one element within a larger campaign.

Towards a Transformative Labor Press

However, I see no reason why union journalists should work solely within the existing union structures and wait for labor leaders to initiate a transformation. Indeed, I believe union journalists can—and should—organize and collaborate outside the unions. Doing so will increase the chances of igniting a successful new workers’ movement and hasten its arrival. Waiting for one union, or a handful of unions, to step forward and lead a transformation is inherently risky: Political conditions can change abruptly within individual organizations and reverse whatever progress they have made.⁵⁸⁰ Furthermore, strategies that rely on a few organizations will fail to leverage the skills, energies, and connections of hundreds of union journalists who work for other unions.

Igniting a new movement will also require a readiness to abandon old structures and methods of operation. If union journalists confine themselves to working within existing labor organizations (including the ILCA), they will tend to *reproduce* the existing structures and practices, not challenge them. The federal system of industrial

⁵⁷⁹ Dubofsky and Van Tine, 254.

⁵⁸⁰ Deepa Kumar, *Outside the Box: Corporate Media, Globalization, and the UPS Strike* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 178-179; Matt Witt, “Mobilizing an Informed Membership: the Mine Workers Experience,” in *The New Labor Press*, ed. Pizzigati and Solowey, 38-57.

relations (including the unions) was designed for an economic, social, and technological world that, in large part, no longer exists. Indeed, the mismatch is so profound today that the AFL-CIO may be in a state of irreversible decline.⁵⁸¹ The crises facing U.S. workers demand more from the labor press.

Large, diverse groups of labor editors *can* organize outside (as well as inside) the unions, and play a leading role in transforming the movement. There is precedent for this. The leaders of the CIO did not invent industrial organizing or new, more inclusive concepts of unionism. Millions of industrial workers were staging mass uprisings on the railroads, and in garments, textiles, steel, and other industries decades before the CIO was created. A lively, diverse labor press—including radical newspapers, foreign language publications, union periodicals, and the Federated Press news service—prepared the ground for the workers’ struggles, and helped to sustain them. Through mass agitation and education, they helped fuse ethnic and class consciousness within working-class communities and built bonds of solidarity between communities long divided.⁵⁸²

Fred Glass used the term “pre-organizing” to describe how articulating grievances and fostering debate create the psychological conditions for collective action.⁵⁸³

⁵⁸¹ Dorothy Sue Cobble, “Lost Ways of Unionism: Historical Perspectives on Reinventing the Labor Movement,” in *Rekindling the Movement: Labor’s Quest for Relevance in the 21st Century*, ed. Lowell Turner, Harry Katz, and Richard Hurd (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 83; Janice Fine, *Worker Centers: Organizing Communities at the Edge of the Dream* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 31-33; Taylor E. Dark III, “Organizational Theory and Stages of Decline: The Case of the AFL-CIO, 1955-2005,” *International Journal of Organization Theory and Behavior* 10, no. 2 (Summer 2007): 213-244.

⁵⁸² Haessler; Jon E. Bekken, “Fighting to Reclaim Lost Ground: the Internet and the Campaign for a National Labor Daily,” *American Journalism* 17, no. 4 (Fall 2000): 105; Bekken, “No Weapon So Powerful,” *Working Class Newspapers*,” “The Working Class Press,” and “A Collective Biography.”

⁵⁸³ Glass, “Amplifying the Voices of Workers,” 11.

Suffragist newspapers played precisely that role in the nineteenth century women's movement. Steiner wrote that suffragist newspapers offered spaces where "women could come together to experiment with alternative definitions of and for women...try on various identities and then advocate those conceptions that offered a sense of significance and value." Suffragist publications were instruments for "constructing and maintaining shared sensibilities, collective action and allegiances."⁵⁸⁴

A new workers' movement will require new identities, internal cultures, and modes of organization. These will not arise automatically or spontaneously. As Fraser pointed out, our "preferences, interests and identities are not given exogenously...They are as much outcomes as antecedents of public deliberation."⁵⁸⁵ A new workers' movement will require a labor press with the size and independence needed to stimulate broad experimentation and debate among a new generation of wage-earners.

An Independent Space for Union Journalists

The history of the ILCA shows that journalists working solely inside the unions will not have the freedom or resources required to develop new ideas and methods that can displace the dominant logics of organized labor. The ILCA does provide an important space for union journalists to collaborate and share ideas. But the ILCA is what Ruth Needleman calls a "structured opportunity," not an "independent space." There is an enormous difference. Union leaders create structured opportunities (e.g. committee appointments, and assignments to conferences) to give subordinates experience by

⁵⁸⁴ Steiner, 66.

⁵⁸⁵ Nancy Fraser, 130.

allowing them to exercise limited authority under controlled conditions. Structured opportunities reproduce and reinforce the dominant institutional logics of the union.⁵⁸⁶ Union *activists* create independent spaces to escape “the dominant culture and controlled structures of the union.”⁵⁸⁷ By operating outside the oversight of union officials, activists can develop new ideas and practices that can challenge those of the incumbent leaders.⁵⁸⁸

The ILCA operates with limited autonomy. Discourse within the organization has, at times, been sharply critical of institutional labor. And the ILCA allows journalists who normally work with members of their own unions to connect and collaborate with journalists from many other unions. But the ILCA and most of its members rely on the resources of the AFL-CIO and the international unions. The ILCA does not fundamentally challenge the fractured discourse of U.S. labor, where separate publications address bits and pieces of the union membership. Top labor leaders have generally left the ILCA alone, but they have never hesitated to rein-in the organization, its leaders, or individual publications whenever they felt the need to do so.

It is striking to look at the crises covered in this paper—the anti-communist and anti-corruption campaigns of the 1940s and 1950s; the loss of solidarity during the 1960s; the decline of the Democratic Party and the rise of Reaganism and the Business Roundtable in the 1970s and ‘80s—and to consider that, in every instance, labor leaders responded by *retreating* from membership communications. Given that record, it is

⁵⁸⁶ Needleman, 6-7.

⁵⁸⁷ Ibid., 6.

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid., 7. Fantasia and Voss, 106. Fantasia and Voss argue that “the real potential for change” lies “in the space *between* unions:” in activist networks and groups existing parallel to union institutions.

impossible to see how, in the present crisis, union journalists working solely inside the ILCA could conduct the sort of bold pre-organizing needed to spark a new movement.

Fishgold, Zipser and other ILCA activists were not wrong to decry the decrepit condition of labor communications or to call for sweeping change. But they were wrong to think that the ILCA was a space where union journalists could come together to do that. To transform the labor movement, union journalists must construct an independent space of their own. They must organize inside *and* outside the unions.

Union journalists throughout the country should create media, independent of organized labor, and link those platforms (including print publications) into a national, pro-worker communications network.⁵⁸⁹ Historically, two factors have undermined attempts to create an independent U.S. labor press, according to Jon Bekken: finances, and editorial control (which Bekken refers to as accountability or responsibility).⁵⁹⁰ He notes that independent pro-worker publications are often severely underfinanced and consist of a mish-mash of content of wildly varying quality. Bekken has suggested that both obstacles could be overcome (at least in part) if union journalists adopted the cooperative financing and collective-decision-making practices that sustained some of the the most successful independent workers' publications of the early twentieth century. Many foreign-language papers, the Federated Press, and the *Dubuque Leader* and *Racine Labor*—two of the longest-lived independent U.S. labor papers—were cooperatively

⁵⁸⁹ Phil Willon, “‘Don’t ask, don’t tell’ repeal means new challenges,” Oct. 17, 2011, *Los Angeles Times*. <http://articles.latimes.com/2011/oct/17/local/la-me-gay-military-20111017> (accessed Dec. 8, 2011). Prior to the repeal of “Don’t Ask/Don’t Tell,” gay members of the U.S. military used Facebook privacy protocols to create a secure, underground support network. Union journalists concerned about potential retaliation from union officers could employ similar protocols to collaborate online.

⁵⁹⁰ Bekken, “Fighting to Reclaim Lost Ground”: 105.

owned and operated. This lessened their dependence on the resources and good will of the top labor officials, and provided stable mechanisms for internal management.⁵⁹¹

For a century or more, union journalists have dreamed of creating a national labor newspaper, but that goal has always proved impossibly expensive. The costs of paper, printing, and distribution, as well as the cost of office space, equipment, and salaries for writers, editors, designers and other staff were—and are—simply prohibitive. But it is possible now for labor to enter the daily national discourse without relying on print. New digital platforms (e.g. the internet, videophones, laptop computers, and low-power radio) make it relatively inexpensive to compile stories and graphics, and rapidly disseminate them to millions of people across the country—indeed, around the world. Furthermore, digital technologies allow people with little training to generate content, so rank-and-file workers can become producers of news. People can participate on an elementary level simply by clicking “like” or “share” and forwarding content to acquaintances and friends.

Media critic Malcolm Gladwell has questioned the potential of social media to effect social change. Pointing to the U.S. civil rights movement, Gladwell argued that movement activists must be bound by strong personal ties to withstand the fury of powerful foes. Activists must also be deeply committed to their cause and have the support of strong, disciplined organizations, according to Gladwell. But social media construct *weak* ties and require low levels of commitment, according to Gladwell, because activists are only asked to click a mouse or post messages to friends.

⁵⁹¹ Tracy, “A Historical Case Study”; Richard W. Olson, “An Isolated Survivor: Racine Labor,” in *The New Labor Press: Journalism for a Changing Union Movement*, ed. Sam Pizzigati and Fred. J. Solowey, 173-183, (Ithaca: ILR Press, 1992).

Furthermore, he argued, online campaigns build diffuse virtual networks, not strong, capable organizations that involve people face to face.⁵⁹²

Other media scholars strongly disagree, arguing that social media have played a pivotal role in many of the most significant movements of the 2000s, including the battle to protect public unions in Wisconsin, Occupy Wall Street, and the so-called “Arab Spring.”⁵⁹³ Wael Ghonim, a Google marketing director, described using Facebook to encourage his fellow Egyptians to speak out against the Mubarak regime. The anonymity provided by Facebook allowed “the great mass of people who are normally risk averse...to overcome its fears and believe that change was possible.”⁵⁹⁴ Melissa Wall and Sahar El Zahed wrote that YouTube fueled the anti-Mubarak uprisings by providing a public platform, or stage, for people to act out their beliefs and inspire others—similar to the use of television by televangelists.⁵⁹⁵ According to sociologist Zeynep Tufekci, social media eliminate an important barrier to the growth of social movements: the so-called “collective action problem,” caused by individuals’ rational fear of being the first person to challenge a powerful opponent. Social media dramatically lower the risk of

⁵⁹² Malcolm Gladwell, “Small Change,” *New Yorker* 86, no. 30 (Oct. 4, 2010): 42-49.

⁵⁹³ Kristian Knutsen, “A Guide to Social Media Campaigns Against Scott Walker’s Agenda for Wisconsin Public Unions,” Feb. 13, 2011 *Isthmus the Daily Page*, Ithmus Publishing Co. <http://www.thedailypage.com/daily/article.php?article=32233> (accessed Dec. 8, 2011); Stephen Gandel, “Occupy Wall Street, Re-energized: A Leaderless Movement Plots a Comeback,” Dec. 8, 2011, *Time U.S.* <http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,2101802,00.html> (accessed Dec. 8, 2011); Racha Mourtada and Fadi Salem, “Civil Movements: The Impact of Facebook and Twitter,” *Arab Social Media Report*, 1, no. 2 (May 2011), <http://www.dsg.ae/en/publication/Description.aspx?PubID=236&PriMenuID=11&mnu=Pri> (accessed July 31, 2011).

⁵⁹⁴ Wael Ghonim, *Revolution 2.0: The Power of the People is Greater than the People in Power. A Memoir*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012), 293.

⁵⁹⁵ Melissa A. Wall and Sahar El Zahed, “‘I’ll Be Waiting for You Guys’: A YouTube Call to Action in the Egyptian Revolution,” *International Journal of Communication* 5 (2011): 1333-1343.

confronting authority, she wrote. They also allow large numbers of people to discover that others share their views, creating a “cascade effect” where more and more people join the movement and cause it to rapidly expand. Such “visible momentum” is a necessary “condition of success” for any social movement, she wrote.⁵⁹⁶

Writing about the 1999 anti-WTO protests in Seattle, Wall concluded that online networks helped craft movement identities by allowing activists to frame issues, develop feelings of emotional investment in the cause, and delineate boundaries between friends and foes.⁵⁹⁷ In an article with particular relevance to the ILCA, Sandra Gozález-Bailón et al. discussed the “amplifying” effects of social media. Online networks can connect so-called “spreaders” (activists having multiple communications links to other activists) with other “spreaders,” who are then connected to other “spreaders,” and on, and on. Very quickly, masses of people begin to receive calls to action from myriad sources, and the messages are reinforced because they are repeated in many different forms in a concentrated period of time.⁵⁹⁸ Many union journalists in the ILCA are “spreaders”: They are deeply integrated into communications networks that connect activists inside and outside of organized labor. The potential for union journalists to use social media to construct a potent national news service seems clear.

Gladwell sorely understated the potential of weak ties and small acts of participation. As sociologists Jonathon Freeman and Scott Fraser showed in 1966,

⁵⁹⁶ Zeynep Tufekci, “New Media and the People-Powered Uprisings,” *Technology Review* (Aug. 30, 2011) www.technologyreview.com/blog/guest/27122/ (accessed Jan. 15, 2012).

⁵⁹⁷ Melissa A. Wall, “Social Movements and email: Expressions of Online Identity in the Globalization Protests,” *New Media & Society* 9, no. 2 (Apr. 2007): 258-277.

⁵⁹⁸ Sandra González-Bailón et al. “Dynamics of Protest Recruitment through an Online Network,” *Science Reports* 1 (Dec. 15, 2011) www.nature.com/srep/2011/111215/srep00197.html (accessed Jan. 5, 2012)

individuals who simply sign a petition supporting a cause become significantly more willing to make far greater commitments to that cause.⁵⁹⁹ Even small public acts of support can cause people to see themselves differently, as people who *care* about that issue and are willing to take a stand. Social media make it simple—and relatively safe—for millions of people to take small actions and publicly state their views. It is possible, then, that social media can build social movements with stronger initial levels of commitment than earlier movements that depended on newspapers and other more passive, individualistic modes of communication.

A Road Forward

In December, 2000, labor educator Frank Emspak joined with ILCA activist Howard Kling to found Workers Independent News (WIN), a national, pro-labor, radio news organization. Supported by advertising, grants, and donations, WIN currently reaches an estimated one million listeners Mondays through Fridays on 200 radio stations throughout the country. WIN staff operate an interactive website, distribute programming to hundreds of progressive websites throughout the country, issue email news alerts, and employ Facebook, Twitter, and other social media to attract and inform listeners.⁶⁰⁰

Now, Emspak's organization is trying to create a cooperatively-owned, pro-worker news network in Wisconsin. The Forward! News Network (F!NN) could be replicated in other states to form a viable national network.⁶⁰¹ They began by launching

⁵⁹⁹ Jonathan L. Freeman and Scott C. Fraser, "Compliance Without Pressure: The Foot-in-the-Door Technique," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 4, no.2 (Aug. 1966):195-202.

⁶⁰⁰ "About WIN, "Workers Independent News, <http://www.laborradio.org/aboutwin.aspx> (accessed Dec. 9, 2011); Frank Emspak, "Projects of the Public Economic Service, Draft Plan," (a proposal to create the Forward News Network in Wisconsin, Aug. 9, 2011). In possession of author.

⁶⁰¹ Frank Emspak, Dec. 4, 2011, telephone interview by author.

an hour-long, talk radio program at the end of 2011. “The People’s Mic” (hosted by an experienced newscaster and senior producer at WIN) airs during afternoon “drive time” on a Clear Channel-owned FM station in Madison, the state’s capitol. There is already talk of syndicating the show. The next step involves building F!NN by tapping into existing networks of “citizen journalists,” progressive bloggers, radio broadcasters, and INDY media activists all across Wisconsin. F!NN would receive content and story ideas from grassroots journalists, then provide the additional reporting and editing needed to “ensure a high level of journalistic quality.” Emspak’s organization would also offer training and mentoring to expand the base of citizen journalists. The plan envisions F!NN maturing to the point where it could combine its own content and WIN’s national reportage into one- to three-minute daily newscasts for sale to Wisconsin radio stations.

Altogether, the “People’s Mic” and F!NN would cost an estimated \$100,000 a-year for equipment, staff, stringers, and related expenses. (Current WIN personnel would also participate in F!NN.) Emspak’s group is raising start-up funds from grants and donations, but their projections show that the “People’s Mic,” and F!NN should attract enough advertising revenue to cover half their operating costs after a few months in business. According to Emspak, the Forward! News Network could be replicated now in at least nine states with well-developed grassroots news outlets: California, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Missouri, Nebraska, New York, Ohio, and Pennsylvania. He said the ILCA’s network of editors and publications would be a natural fit with the Forward News Network: “They would be exactly the kind of staff we would want to work with.”

Conditions are ripe for a new mass movement of workers. Real median wages for U.S. workers have stagnated since the early 1970s, while union membership rates have continued to fall.⁶⁰² During the past five years alone, millions of wage earners lost their jobs, homes, and savings in a deep recession fueled by financial fraud and speculation. Institutional labor appears paralyzed; unable to reverse its own decline or to effectively respond to the problems facing U.S. wage earners. And the U.S. is no longer the ascendant world power it was in the 1950s and 1960s. As global competition tightens, living standards are likely to *worsen* for U.S. workers. The need to organize and fight will only grow. But the *need* for change is not enough.

New movements arise from broad, oppositional discourse; from bold experimentation with new identities, ideas, and forms of collective action. As Jon Bekken observed, working-class communities sustained the working-press in the early 1900s, but equally important, the workers' press helped *construct and sustain working-class communities* by providing spaces for people to share ideas and promote collective action.⁶⁰³ Nancy Fraser made the same point when she wrote that human preferences,

⁶⁰² Heidi Shierholz, "Fix it and Forget it: Index the Minimum Wage to Growth in Average Wages," *EPI Briefing Paper #251*, Dec. 17, 2009, Economic Policy Institute; http://epi.3cdn.net/91fd33f4e013307415_rum6iydua.pdf (accessed Aug. 1, 2011); "State of Working America Data," Economic Policy Institute, www.epi.org/research_data/state_of_working_america_data/ (accessed Dec. 12, 2011); Gerald Mayer, "Union Membership Trends in the United States," CRS Report for Congress, Aug. 31, 2004. http://digitalcommons.ilr.cornell.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1176&context=key_workplace&sei-redir=1#search=%22U.S.%20union%20membership%22 (accessed Aug. 4, 2011).

⁶⁰³ Bekken, "Working Class Newspapers," 1-4.

identities, and interests are not “given exogenously.” They “are as much outcomes as antecedents of public deliberation.”⁶⁰⁴

Union journalists *can* create a new movement, not by willing one into existence but by providing people in struggle with a voice and an instrument for self-organization. New waves of unrest are erupting across the United States. Activists are experimenting with new identities and organizational forms, including the Occupy Movement (“We are the 99 Percent!”), workers’ centers for immigrant and day laborers, and community unions that fuse workplace and neighborhood concerns.⁶⁰⁵ Union journalists need popularize these and other experiments, and stimulate broad debate about what people need, and what must be done to satisfy those needs. To ignite a new movement, union journalists must reach beyond the dwindling minority of workers who currently belong to unions and build a labor press for *all* who labor.

⁶⁰⁴ Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere.” 130.

⁶⁰⁵ Clawson, *The Next Upsurge*; Daniel HoSang, “All the Issues in Workers’ Lives: Labor Confronts Race in Stamford,” *ColorLines* 3, no. 2 (July 31, 2000): 20-23. Janice Fine, “Community Unions and the Revival of the American Labor Movement,” *Politics and Society* 33, no. 1 (Mar. 2005): 153-199; Michael D. Yates, ed., *Wisconsin Uprising: Labor Fights Back* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2012).

APPENDIX 1

Timeline

- 1949: AFL and CIO editors collaborate to kill the left-leaning Federated Press (FP) news service. They establish an alternative service, Labor Press Associated (LPA). AFL and CIO leaders pressure affiliates to quit the FP and join the LPA.
- 1955: The AFL and CIO merge to form the AFL-CIO.
- 1956: AFL and CIO editors merge their organizations to create the International Labor Press Association (ILPA).
- 1957: Local union publications comprise 20.1 percent of the ILPA membership.
- 1958: Reacting to charges of corruption from the U.S. Senate's McClellan Committee, AFL-CIO President George Meany restricts advertising in the labor press. The curbs are soon eased, but many union publications continue to refuse advertising.
- 1963: Local union publications comprise 38% of the ILPA membership.
- 1964: James Goodsell, editor of the *Oregon Labor Press*, is expelled from the ILPA executive council for reporting a revolt by 22,000 rank-and-file workers against two AFL-CIO international unions.
- 1965: Ray Davidson becomes president of the ILPA in a surprise, contested election. Union journalists, upset by Goodsell's expulsion and the domination of the ILPA by international unions and the AFL-CIO, urged Davidson to run.
- 1966: ILPA presents the AFL-CIO with a detailed proposal to create community-based labor newspapers. ILPA would continue to campaign for community labor papers for nearly a decade.

- 1971-1979: Mailing rates for non-profit newspapers rise 1,200 percent, while the cost of newsprint jumps 150 percent. Many labor papers reduce the size and frequency of their publications, or cease publishing altogether. Many unions shift funds out of the labor press and into public relations.
- 1979: Local union publications comprise 57.5 percent of the ILPA membership.
- 1980: Lane Kirkland succeeds George Meany as AFL-CIO president.
- 1983: AFL-CIO creates the Labor Institute for Public Affairs (LIPA) to encourage unions to adopt electronic communication technologies, and to provide the federation with advanced, in-house, public relations capabilities.
- 1983: ILPA changes its name to the International Labor Communications Association (ILCA). The change reflects a desire by union editors to embrace both electronic technologies and public relations.
- 1983: For the first time, the AFL-CIO declines to provide ILCA with a full-time secretary-treasurer. For the next decade, the AFL-CIO concentrates heavily on LIPA, and the federation and ILCA steadily drift apart.
- 1985: The AFL-CIO releases *The Changing Situation of Workers and Their Unions*. The report is a frank acknowledgement of labor's dwindling size and influence. However, none of its recommendations to rebuild the movement mention the labor press.
- 1991: Local union publications comprise 74 percent of the ILCA membership.
- 1995: John Sweeney's "New Voices" slate assumes control of the AFL-CIO in the federation's first contested election. Denise Mitchell, Sweeney's director of Public Affairs, practices a tightly-disciplined style of public relations that, she openly admits, has little use for the ILCA.

- 1996: James Earp is elected president of the ILCA, becoming the first local union editor to hold a top officer's spot in the organization. Four other local union editors are also elected to the council.
- 1998: Local union editor Marty Fishgold joins the ILCA executive council. He and other ILCA activists begin publicly criticizing the communications practices of the AFL-CIO. They argue that union journalists should be free to decide what to publish without interference from union officers.
- 2002: Fishgold is elected ILCA president when the incumbent leaders resign. Four international unions quit the ILCA in protest. The AFL-CIO applies threatens to take over many of ILCA's functions, and to charge the organization for services previously provided for free or at reduced rates.
- 2005: Isolated within the ILCA executive council, Fishgold declines to seek reelection. He is succeeded by Steve Stallone, editor for the International Long Shore and Warehouse Union. Public disputes between the ILCA and AFL-CIO come to a halt. Relations between the two organizations (historically, never close) improve somewhat.

APPENDIX 2

Archival Sources and Manuscript Collections

The George Meany Memorial Archives, 10000 New Hampshire Avenue, Silver Spring, Maryland. Official repository of the AFL-CIO. The AFL-CIO granted me with access to processed and unprocessed collections. (Abbreviated as GMMA.)

The personal papers of Gordon H. Cole, founding president of the International Labor Press Association. Mr. Cole's papers from his career as a union editor are in my possession. (Referred to as the Cole Papers.)

Special Collections, University of Maryland Libraries, University of Maryland, College Park. The unprocessed records of the International Communications Association are preserved at Hornbake Library. (Abbreviated as UML.)

International Labor Communications Association, AFL-CIO Headquarters, 815 16th Street, N.W., Washington D.C. The ILCA and AFL-CIO granted me access to the ILCA's office files. (Abbreviated as ILCA.)

The OCWA/PACE Oral History Project, United Steelworkers, 3340 Perimeter Hill Drive, Nashville, Tennessee.

San Francisco Labor Archives and Research Center, J. Paul Leonard Library, 1620 Holloway Avenue, San Francisco, California.

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