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A Study of the Labor Philosophy of George Meany, President of the AFL-CIO

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A STUDY OF THE LABOR PHILOSOPHY
OF GEORGE MEANY, PRESIDENT
OF THE AFL-CIO

by

John Cyboran

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of Loyola University in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of Master of
Social and Industrial Relations

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LIFE

John Cyboran was born in Chicago on the 28th day of October, 1928.

He attended Lane Technical High School, from which he graduated in June, 1946. He entered Loyola University in September of the same year and became a part time student in September, 1948. After a tour of duty in the United States Army from 1950 to 1952, he returned to Loyola and received his Bachelor of Science Degree in February, 1956. He began his graduate studies at Loyola University in February, 1956.

The writer was vice-president of Local 108, Central States Petroleum Union, for one year, 1958; editor of local union's newsletter, "The Bulletin," for two years, 1957-1958; served as board member of national union in 1958; and was a member of collective bargaining and policy committees during 1957-58.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Purpose

The American labor movement plays an important role in the American society. A study of the philosophy of the American labor movement should give us a better understanding of this particular segment of our society. The purpose of this study is to examine the labor philosophy of George Meany, president of the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations.

There are similar studies being conducted in the project of other labor leaders who are representatives of a large segment of the labor movement. An analysis of these theses should reveal a philosophy or perhaps the lack of one of the American labor movement.


George Meany is the head of the largest and most influential labor organization in the United States. As head of the AFL-CIO, Meany is recognized by many political leaders and labor officials
George Meany was born in the city of New York on August 16, 1894, the son of a plumber. After attending public schools in the city, he became an apprentice in the plumbing business in 1910, at the age of sixteen, and a journeyman plumber five years later. During this period he was active in the Plumbers' Union, and, in 1922, at the age of twenty-eight, he was elected the business representative of his local union, which position he held for the next twelve years. While serving his union, young Meany became widely known and respected for his effective and constructive work and, in the depression year of 1934, he was elected president of the New York State Federation of Labor.

Outstanding as a leader of this largest of the state federations, particularly in the field of labor and social legislation, he was elected, on the death of Frank Morrison, secretary-treasurer of the AFL, taking office in January, 1940. With the declining health of President William Green, Secretary Meany assumed an increasing amount of the administrative work of the federation and, on President Green's death in the fall of 1952, Meany was unanimously elected president of the AFL.¹

Upon assuming the office of president of the A. F. of L., Meany immediately began working relentlessly to bring about unity in the American labor movement, to bring together both major houses of labor into one strong organization. In this he succeeded. When the A. F. of L. and C. I. O. merged in 1955, he was elected presi-

dent of the newly formed organization, an office which he still occupies today. Because of his background and position in the American labor movement he possesses great influence with his colleagues. With this in mind, the author thought that George Meany would be an interesting personality to study and would also fit the type of influential labor leader required for this thesis.

B. Method

This thesis is a part of a joint project of the Institute of Social and Industrial Relations of Loyola University, on the philosophy of the American labor movement.

The method employed in handling this subject consists of a library survey. The author conducted a systematic review of the articles, statements and speeches of George Meany covering the period 1948-1958. Out of this maze of information, the writer attempted to define and analyze Meany’s concepts and views in regard to the objectives of the American labor movement, the means through which these objectives are to be attained, and important factors of the American labor movement.

The American Federationist, the official monthly publication of the AFL-CIO, was the major primary source used in this study. Other primary sources used were pamphlets, speeches, letters, and statements made by George Meany. The few secondary sources consisted of books pertaining to the American labor movement which were consulted mainly for historical background.
CHAPTER II

CONCEPTS OF GEORGE MEANY IN REGARD TO THE OBJECTIVES OF THE AMERICAN LABOR MOVEMENT

It is not difficult to determine Meany's objectives as a labor leader. He has on numerous occasions expressed his views in one form or another. Generally speaking, his objectives range from higher wages and better working conditions, to improved welfare benefits, adequate housing facilities, opportunity for a good education, community welfare programs, and defense of world peace and freedom.

Because of his position in the American labor movement, he speaks much more in generalities than particulars. Meany does not usualy talk about specific objectives of individual unions. He thinks in terms of the whole American labor movement and what effect the goals will have on the American society and the rest of the world.

The objectives of the labor movement as viewed by Meany may be classified into three categories: 1) which serve only the labor movement itself, 2) serve the American society as a whole and 3) serve the "world."
A. Objectives Which Serve Only

The Labor Movement Itself

During Samuel Gompers' time the objectives of the American labor movement were mostly limited to the "bread and butter" goals, that is, wages, hours, and working conditions. The basic objectives are still the same, although the American labor movement is now also concerned with national and world affairs. Meany calls these basic objectives the "basis of economic security." "The basis of economic security for working people is good jobs at good wages, under good conditions. The first objective of organized labor will always be to make good jobs and wages more secure."\(^1\)

This is basically the same thing he told the Forty-fourth Convention of the Union Label Trades Department. "The objectives of our movement are quite simple: To secure a decent share of the wealth produced by the worker for the worker. That objective over the many years has remained the same, but it is an accomplishment that may never be fully realized."\(^2\)

What does Meany consider a "decent share of the wealth produced"? By this Meany contends that, "That means more than a mere living wage. It means sufficient income to live in decency and comfort and the opportunity for a good education and environment

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for the worker's children." It also means "that the man who makes an automobile should earn enough to be able to buy one, that the man who builds a modern, up-to-date house should be able to live in one." Meany calls the aforementioned "the core of our trade union economic philosophy."

In regard to hours of work, Meany says that labor is looking forward to a thirty-hour week. He believes that by 1980, a thirty-hour week should be "easily attainable for all Americans."

According to Meany there is no restriction as to the type of worker or potential worker that is eligible to participate in labor's program. This is best exemplified in the constitution of the AFL-CIO, which Meany hailed in a joint statement with Walter P. Reuther. They said that this constitution, "recognizes that all workers, whatever their race, color, creed or national origin, are entitled to share fully in the benefits of trade unionism."

Meany maintains that the trade union movement has always been a humanitarian institution and that it is still a movement which is humanitarian to the very core. He contends the success of the

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5 Ibid.
6 George Meany, "What Labor Means by 'More:,'" Fortune, (March 1955),
7 "Constitution Wins Approval," Amer. Fed., LXII (June 1955),
American Federation of Labor has been very important for working people not in the bread-and-butter sense alone, but also what is most precious to the worker--"Dignity and self-respect, the assurance that an arrogant, feudal employer will not be allowed to treat him unjustly. . . . The A. F. of L. has defended the dignity of the individual; it has fostered his self-respect. It has protected the worker against victimization by an arbitrary or cruel employer."  

B. Objectives Which Serve The American Society As A Whole

In Meany's 1954 "Labor Day Message" he points out the scope of aid to whom it is to be given. "We in labor accept the fact that we are and must be our brother's keeper. The truth of that responsibility is basic in our philosophy. Our movement was built, not by one man, not by a small group of leaders, but by masses of workers joining together to help each other--the whole movement working for the benefit of every individual and for the benefit of all other citizens who make up the nation."  

Meany maintains that benefits derived from trade unionism were not and are not restricted solely to union members. He il-

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8 George Meany, "How We Have Served," Published by A. F. of L. (No date), 8.

lustrates this by drawing a parallel between Gompers' philosophy and his own. He says:

To Gompers, trade unionism was more than a bread and butter movement, vitally important as that is. The Gompers philosophy of labor can be best summed up in his own words. I quote:

"I do not value the labor movement only for its ability to give higher wages, better clothes, and better homes. Its ultimate goal is to be found in the progressively evolving life possibilities in the life of each man and woman! My inspiration comes in opening opportunities that all alike may be free to live to the fullest."\(^{10}\)

Meany maintains that his labor philosophy is very similar to that of Gompers. Meany, quite often, refers to Gompers' era and claims that there is no change in labor's objectives.

Another broad objective of labor according to Meany is to promote economic, social and political policies that will assure freedom and prosperity for all Americans."\(^{11}\) Here Meany realizes that our nation must remain economically healthy in order to continue to make democracy work. "The high standards we have won in our country serve as an all-powerful bulwark against subversion. Those standards must be safeguarded, not only for the welfare of our people, but for the security of our nation. We must, of neces-


sity, remain strong and economically healthy if we hope to resist and overcome the worldwide pressure of the Communists. An economic collapse in America would be hailed in Moscow with as great delight as a military victory. "12

Meany maintains that the objective of remaining strong and economically healthy is an objective not only of labor alone, but it should be an objective of all Americans. In an address before the National Grange in November, 1953, Meany told the farmers, "It is up to all of us—the farmers, private industry, labor and the government as well—to find out what has been going wrong and to correct it. We should seek and develop not merely a temporary, stop-gap solution but a long-range program—a program not merely to protect the farmers but to assure lasting prosperity for all American people in all fields of endeavor."13

At the time that Meany made the above statement, United States was in the midst of a recession. He was seeking a solution to reverse the downward trend of the economy. He probably had in mind built-in-stabilizers and government spending to spur the economic growth.

Civil rights is a much discussed issue. It is a major issue

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that confronts most Americans. It is also an issue in which Meany shows a great deal of interest. As could be expected, he is an outspoken adherent of civil rights. In a parley on civil rights, George Meany said, "The AFL-CIO stands in the foremost ranks in the defense of civil rights and of human rights as indispensable to freedom and to true democracy."14 He pointed out at this conference that the philosophy of equal rights is "the cornerstone of the constitution of the merged AFL-CIO."

Insofar as education is concerned, Meany is for adequate, safe, modern schools and improvement of standards of education.

Meany, being aware of the fact that America is still growing, advocates the need for more homes, better roads, more effective flood control and greater power development in addition to more modern schools mentioned above.15 He has on numerous occasions reiterated these objectives.

C. Objectives Which Serve The Whole World

The American labor movement is getting increasingly interested in the foreign policy of its government. The president of the AFL-CIO may be rightly considered as a spokesman of the labor movement in foreign policy matters. Therefore, Meany's views on

foreign policy reveal labor's objectives in this area. Labor
wants to have its opinions and advice heard and followed.

Meany does not believe in leaving foreign policy matters to
the exclusive jurisdiction of statesmen and professional diplomats.
He maintains that all people of America should be imbued with a
determination to take a hand in formulating the foreign policy.
He contends that the American people have too much at stake to
assume an indifferent attitude.

"In my book labor not only has a right to raise its voice in
regard to policies under which our federal government is adminis-
tered, but we have a duty as citizens to take part in shaping the
policies of our government; and as workers we have a special in-
terest . . . in seeing to it that our government makes its full
contribution to the preservation of human freedom everywhere on
this earth where it is possible to make a contribution."16

The objectives under this category are very broad and cover
a wide area. This was substantiated in 1951 when Meany pointed
out the status of the ideals of free labor, of their grave jeopardy
by the totalitarian tyranny in Russia, China, the satellite areas,
and through the vast international network of totalitarian subver-
sion, he stated, "the free trade unions have the greatest stake
in the preservation and promotion of liberty, social justice,

16George Meany, "George Meeay's Acceptance Speech," Amer.
orderly human progress and genuine world peace."\textsuperscript{17} As can be seen by this statement the goals of free trade unions are inclusive to the extent that any specific objective can easily fall under one of the above mentioned aims. Further on in this article Meaney said, "the free trade unions should lead in wresting the initiative from the totalitarian orbit and putting it firmly in the hand of the democracies. Towards this end, the free trade union movement in every country should set the pace in defending, strengthening and expanding democratic rights and liberties, in the promotion of social justice, security and welfare, in the abolition of all discrimination, in the advancement of labor's rights and voice in the economic life of the nation and in the elimination of every vestige of colonialism and imperialism."\textsuperscript{18}

In a memorandum submitted to the Third World Congress of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions in July, 1953 by George Meaney, it was stated that, "the bona fide trade unions of the democratic world should strive to meet such vital economic and social tasks as freedom from want and insecurity, the development of economically underdeveloped countries, the rational economic organization in the period of rearmament, and a practical program for meeting the numerous complex migration problems confront-

\textsuperscript{17}George Meaney, "Free Trade Unionism and Its Aims in the Struggle Against Totalitarianism," American Labor Looks at the World, V (September 1951), 71.

\textsuperscript{18}Ibid., 73.
The modern objectives of the American labor movement have also been expressed broadly by Meany on May 13, 1957, in a letter to Hans Detlev Becker, managing editor of Der Spiegel, of Hamburg, Germany. He said, "We have championed the Marshall Plan and aid to underdeveloped countries. We have been working energetically for the reunification of Germany in freedom. We have been in the forefront of the struggle against colonialism of every form—against the old Western brand and the new Soviet type." Further on in this letter he also reveals the American labor movement's viewpoint in regard to slave labor. "It was American labor which provided, through the UN, the initiative in the worldwide struggle against the menace of slave labor spreading from behind the Iron Curtain."

Hence, according to Meany, the trade unionist must strive to maintain world peace, must make his contribution to the security of our nation and to the preservation of the free way of life. If the trade unionist does the above, then it is possible to attain his "bread and butter" goals.

Meany feels that no freedom-loving nation in today's world can afford the luxury of being neutral or of being merely non-Communist; so great is the threat of totalitarianism to free trade unions and to the basic rights of humanity that every nation must be actively anti-Communist.19

George Meany recognizes the importance of the effect that the relation with other countries has on prosperity of our country. He says that the world is too small today with the modern methods of communication and travel to go into a shell of isolationism and conduct our affairs and manage our lives in an atmosphere of prosperity and material wealth if the rest of the world is going down, going into the Communist orbit, because of poverty and oppression.20

In a statement presented to the Commission of Foreign Economic Policy on October 28, 1953, he stated that "American foreign trade and exchange policy cannot be developed in a vacuum. It must be a means to a positive goal. We believe that the goal of such policy should be the achievement of expanding trade, rising production, high productive employment and increasing real income for all nations concerned."21

Further on in this statement he points out that the prosperity of America is increasingly dependent on exports of farm commodities and industrial products abroad; also the ability to produce is increasingly dependent on the supply of raw materials from across the seas. He says that "foreign trade has become the balance wheel which keeps steady the forward motion of our country's economic machine."22

20Eleventh General Convention, Building Service Employees' International Union, AFL-CIO, (April 25, 1955), 182


22Ibid.
The foreign policy to maintain peace and liberty advocated by the A. F. of L., which is basically the same now as that of the AFL-CIO, was summed up in a program adopted in August, 1954 by the Executive Council of the American Federation of Labor.

1) For the immediate future, complete rearmament—military, economic, political and social—on a scale adequate to discourage and defeat Communist subversion and aggression against free nations on all continents.

2) At the same time, in proof of our peaceful intentions, we must exert increased pressure for eventual disarmament—on both sides of the Iron Curtain—under a practical, step-by-step program effectively policed by rigid international inspections.

3) An end of colonialism by setting time limits for granting independence to the existing colonies of free nations—just as the United States did in the Philippine Islands.

4) Expansion of trade in the free world, with improvement of purchasing power and economic conditions in distressed countries.

5) Permanent opposition to admitting into the United Nations Red China or any other nation which denies its people the human rights specified in the U.N. Charter or has been found guilty of aggression.

6) Continued pressure for elections supervised by the U.N. in all areas of conflict so that the people themselves can decide their form of government.

7) Negotiations for the settlement of international disputes to be conducted through the U.N. rather than on the basis of power politics.

8) Reunification of the free world through the establishment of an all inclusive collective security system that will supplement regional or bilateral mutual-aid pacts.23

Meany feels that such a program if adopted and adhered to would enable us to "steer clear of the twin dangers of self-destruction and Communist aggression and eventually reach our goal—lasting world peace and security for the free way of life."\(^{24}\)

\(^{24}\)Ibid.
CHAPTER III

CONCEPTS OF GEORGE MEANY IN REGARD TO THE MEANS TO BE USED BY THE AMERICAN LABOR MOVEMENT

In the previous chapter the objectives of the labor movement conceived by Meany were presented. How does Meany intend to secure or realize these objectives? The means to be used may be classified into two broad groups, economic and political. Economic means may be divided into three parts: 1) organization of workers, 2) collective bargaining and 3) economic force. Political methods may be divided into three sections: 1) the relationship of the American labor movement to political parties, 2) legislation and 3) political education.

A. Economic Means

1. Organization of Workers

One does not have to delve too deeply into what Meany says about organization to determine his feeling on this subject. The division of labor into competing organizations has always disturbed him. Even at the eve of the merger between the A. F. of L. and C. I. O. he expressed his dissatisfaction with disunity.
"The United States of America was founded on the concept that
'in union there is strength.' That same idea, of course, is the
bedrock of the labor movement. Individual workers, helpless on
their own to promote their well-being in a materialistic world,
have found that in union there is strength. Yet for twenty years
the trade union movement itself has been handicapped by the inherent weakness of division."¹

So when Meany became president of the A. F. of L. he did not
waste any time in taking the initiative to bring together both
major houses of labor. He was very familiar with the reasons why
the A. F. of L. and the C. I. O. split in 1935. He also recognized
that those differences were not resolved at all by 1953 when he
began talking of a merger. There was a lot of talk about merging
in the past, but nothing constructive was accomplished. When
Meany began negotiating the A. F. of L. merger with the C. I. O.,
he stated the problem of merging concisely and bluntly. At a mer-
ger meeting between the heads of A. F. of L. and C. I. O., he said,"We can go after unity the long way or the short way. The short
way is to merge into one trade union center which will protect the
integrity of all affiliates. The long way is to solve all of our
problems before merging. Which will it be?"²

¹ "The Nation Hears George Meany," Amer. Fed., LXII (October
1955), 5.
Labor has everything to gain and nothing to lose by being united. To Meany though, labor unity as desirable as it is, does not mean that it should be realized or maintained at any cost. One thing Meany would not give up in realizing labor unity is principle. He would not compromise corruption in any union. Meany did not hesitate in taking necessary action in expelling the International Longshoremen's Association and International Brotherhood of Teamsters unions. When Meany tried to persuade the officers of the Longshoremen to clean up their union, they raised the question of the autonomy of affiliates. Philip Taft, the noted labor historian, mentions in his book that Meany informed them that there was no intention of modifying the traditional position; nevertheless, he made it clear that autonomy was not absolute. "The exercise of autonomy by affiliated units in an organization such as ours presupposes the maintenance of minimum standards of trade union decency. No affiliate of the A. F. of L. has any right to expect to remain an affiliate 'on the grounds of organizational autonomy' if its conduct, as such, is to bring the entire movement into disrepute. Likewise, the cloak of organizational autonomy cannot be used to shield those who have forgotten that the prime purpose of a trade union is to protect and advance the welfare and interests of the individual members of that trade union."

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As Meany sees it, there are numerous benefits in labor unity. One is added security to America because the AFL-CIO will be dedicated to the free American way of life. "One of its basic articles of its proposed constitution bars from membership any union dominated by Communist, Fascist or other totalitarian influences. There will thus be established in our country a mighty working force, immune to subversion and vigilant in its loyalty. No other free union in the world enjoys such built-in protection for democracy."  

"Provided that economic conditions do not deteriorate, labor unity is certain to pay off at the bargaining table in higher wages, better working conditions and improved welfare benefits. Such advances will, of course, be of direct help to union members. Unorganized workers also will share in the gains eventually. Business and the farmers likewise should benefit through greater demand for their increased production."  

Meany feels that more effective campaigns to organize the unorganized will result. "This effort is vital to the future prosperity of our nation. Low standards prevailing among unorganized workers act as a drag against the progress of the national economy."  

6 Ibid.
Meany looks upon the organization of the unorganized as being not only for the good of the unorganized, but also for the good of the organized. This is evidenced in an address before a Conference on Problems of the White Collar Worker, given February 20, 1957.

"Every unorganized person who works at wages we consider substandard is a menace and a potential threat to the conditions and the standards that have been established by the trade union movement." 7

He claims that the organization of millions of new union members is bound to result in lifting their standards and purchasing power. The business community and the farm community, faced with the danger of surplus production, need this great new market. Only in this way can new job opportunities be created to provide employment for our steadily increasing population. Meany does not expound on the methods that should be used in organizing the unorganized. He mentions the difficulty in organizing expressed by the organizers, especially since the revelations of the findings by the McClellan Committee. But he does not go any further than this on this subject.

Meany emphasizes that the increased power that labor will derive from unity must be accompanied by a corresponding increase in self-responsibility.

Labor must conduct its affairs in a way that will com-

mand the respect and approbation of our fellow citizens. It must give more time and effort toward making a constructive contribution to community improvement. Labor must be willing at all times to cooperate with management and industry for the public welfare.

Labor must strive in every way at the national level to promote policies and programs that will strengthen America, rather than weaken it.

Labor must be even more active in the international field toward the end that peace may be preserved and our free way of life safeguarded, along with the freedom and economic opportunity of the people of other friendly nations.

Meany is opposed to jurisdictional disputes between two unions, whether it be of the type where each union claims that a specific operation be performed exclusively by its members or whether it be of the type where each union claims the right to organize particular workers and to act as collective bargaining agent for them.

Meany favors settling jurisdictional conflicts involving performance of specific operation for example, "such work as alterations, major repairs and relocation of existing facilities, changeovers and other types of maintenance work" on the basis of "established past practices on a plant, area or industry basis."9

One of the first things Meany did as president of the A. F. of L. was to sign a "No-Raiding Agreement" with the C. I. O. According to Meany, the no-raiding pact represents a completely vol-

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untary program. Meaney condemned raiding. He said, "Raiding does not pay. It does not pay in dollars or cents. It does not pay in terms of organization. It does not pay in carrying out the basic objective of trade unions." Meaney would rather see unions divert their energies to more fruitful activities such as organizing the unorganized and gaining better conditions for the workers they represent.

2. Collective Bargaining

George Meaney recognizes that our economic system is not perfect in many details, nevertheless he points out that our country has adopted a flexible method for increasing the standard of living while maintaining freedom. He says:

It is the method of voluntary collective bargaining, of free decision-making outside the coercions of government, in the solution of economic disagreement. And it is through the give-and-take of collective bargaining that we seek to achieve our goals.

On its philosophical side, collective bargaining is a means of assuring justice and fair treatment. In the economic realm it is a means of prodding management to increase efficiency and output, and of placing upon trade unions great responsibilities to limit their demand to practical realities. A failure to recognize the unique role of collective bargaining is a failure to understand the distinctive new nature of American private enterprise as it has evolved over the past seventy-five years.


It is quite apparent that Meaney advocates freedom in the area of collective bargaining. He prefers differences be worked out by labor and management through the give and take method without undue pressures from the government.

Meaney contends that there is no set rule to the type of collective bargaining to employ. He maintains that the type of collective bargaining that is practical for a small, local employer is not suitable for a national, multiplant employer. Factors that are considered in dictating the type of collective bargaining to employ are: the economies of the industry, the structure of the enterprise, and the scope of union recognition. He gives as an example the atomic-energy field where a multiplicity of crafts creates bargaining problems. In this situation the craft workers are free to choose their own union, but bargaining is conducted through a joint council.12

The scope of collective bargaining is very broad and changeable. Issues that were considered unbargainable forty or fifty years ago, are a matter of fact today. An indication of the scope of collective bargaining of today is shown in the following statement.

14,000,000 out of the 17,000,000 organized workers in the United States are now covered by welfare plans secured through the voluntary efforts of collective bargaining over and above provision made by the state. Our trade unions have negotiated and secured pension plans covering more than

12Ibid.
7,500,000 of their members. Ninety per cent of all trade union members and in some cases their dependents are now entitled to some kind of medical, surgical or hospital care under voluntary labor-management agreements.

... these benefits are additions to, and not substitutes for, an acceptable level of wages.13

It is quite evident that fringe benefits are certainly a bargainable issue. What other issues will become a subject of collective bargaining in perhaps five, ten or fifteen years, is difficult to predict. Meany claims that the means in obtaining objectives are not static.

At numerous occasions he has reiterated the position of labor concerning the methods to employ in securing goals in this new age of automation. This is supported by the following statement. "Insofar as policy is concerned, our philosophy doesn't change. But we certainly got to change in our methods, in our approach to the collective bargaining, to legislation and to every other angle, in order to keep pace with this age of automation."14

Meany does not want to achieve co-determination through collective bargaining. He specifically states that "collective bargaining is not a means of seeking a voice in management."15


Meany feels that the guaranteed annual wage (supplemental unemployment insurance) brings forth a very important principle. He is not too concerned with the amount of money or the length of time involved, but he is concerned with the fact that "Large employers of labor at the collective bargaining table recognize and accept responsibility for some share of the economic effects of employment of their employees."16 By this he means the "statement of the Ford Company that the plan adopted by the negotiators was the one drawn up by the technicians and statisticians of the Ford Company itself."17 However, Meany contends that the application of this principle has to be worked out by each and every industry. There is no fast rule that can be embraced. This principle may apply to some industries to some extent and perhaps not at all to others. But the important item is the recognition of responsibility of "adverse economic effects that go with unemployment are to some extent at least a proper charge against the industry itself."18

High wages and full employment are items of primary concern to Meany. He asserts that trade unions should demand wage increases for the following reasons: "to improve living standards,

17 Ibid.
18 Ibid.
to protect their members' jobs and create new employment." He advocates this in order to keep abreast with various work saving devices that cause to eliminate or reduce the number of jobs available.

Meany contends that higher wages should come from an increase in productivity. As was stated earlier in this section, the demands of unions should serve as a "means of prodding management to increase efficiency and output" assuming, of course, that their demands are limited to a practical reality. He does not tell how often or how much of a higher wage should be sought. In addition to increase in productivity, there are other factors considered which influence union demands, such as economic conditions of the country and employer's or industry's economic well-being.

Meany's economic philosophy was best described when he said "that higher wages mean greater purchases. The higher the purchasing power, the greater the sales; the greater the sales, the greater the production; and the greater the production, the greater the employment; and the greater the employment, the greater the prosperity." 20

Meany further points out the effects wages have on our economy. "If wages go down, purchasing power shrinks, factories are

19"Economic and Social Tasks of Today," American Labor Looks at the World, VII (September 1953), 68.

forced to close and the nation is afflicted with disastrous deflation.

"If wages stand still, our country and its economy cannot go forward. When the economy is frozen, there is no incentive for increasing production and creating new jobs for the young people who enter the labor market each year." 21

In connection with wages, Meany deals with the accusation that high wages would be responsible for inflation. According to Meany, "Inflation, simply defined, makes your dollar worth less and less." 22 He points out that the blame for inflation is not higher wages, as some industrialists not only maintain but also have tried to blame labor for increasing the price of their products. He says, "In many cases higher wage rates do not mean higher wage costs, because of labor-saving production improvements. In other cases employers have raised prices far beyond their increased labor costs. Big business in recent years has taken more than its share of profits and has insisted on charging the consuming public all the traffic would bear." 23

What does Meany advocate in the event collective bargaining fails or an impasse is reached? In March 1953, in a letter to the

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22 Ibid., p. 16.

23 Ibid., pp. 15-16.
state and city A. F. of L. units, Meany expounds on proposals advanced in Congress and some state legislatures for the institution of compulsory arbitration as an official method of enforcing labor-management peace. Meany points out that the A. F. of L. was and is opposed to compulsory arbitration. He considers compulsory arbitration "unworkable, unconstitutional and dangerous to the maintenance of a free economy." 24 He contends that compulsory arbitration automatically kills collective bargaining. He feels that compulsory arbitration by a government agency is bound to lead to wage-fixing and price-fixing by the government. And if compulsory arbitration were adopted by the government only in disputes threatening a national emergency, he doubts if it would work. He believes that under the U. S. Constitution, the employers or workers could not be forced to work under conditions they consider intolerable. He says the A. F. of L. believes in voluntary arbitration. It is his conviction that an effective remedy for labor-management strife in industries which directly affect public safety and the national welfare is an agreement between management and unions under which both sides pledge themselves in advance to submit irreconcilable disputes to an impartial umpire for decision, and this decision is binding on both parties. 25


25 Ibid.
3. Economic Force

What happens when collective bargaining fails or an impasse is reached? Organized labor's weapon of final resort, the strike, is also its most effective economic weapon. The threat of a strike is the strongest bargaining power labor brings to the collective bargaining conference. Meany does not explicitly express his viewpoints on the strike. However, it can be taken for granted that as a last resort, Meany does not oppose the use of a strike. He favors peaceful means through voluntary efforts of labor and management. He opposes compulsory arbitration. However, he does express his viewpoints positively on secondary boycotts and picketing in relation to a bona fide strike.

In a statement before a Committee on Education and Labor, U. S. House of Representatives, March 3, 1953, and essentially the same statement was given to the Senate Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, April 27, 1953, Meany said:

Section 8 (b) (4) of the Taft-Hartley Law prohibits the so called "secondary boycotts." This prohibition precludes unions from engaging in many time-honored activities traditionally carried on to protect the established labor standards and to assist other unions. This provision has dealt a severe blow against the fundamental principles of brotherhood and cooperation which have contributed immeasurably to the elimination of cut-throat wage competition and undercutting of labor standards.

From the very earliest days of the trade union movement, workers have made known their objectives to their fellow workers and the general public by picketing. The carrying of picket signs and banners is an expression of free speech which, like any other exercise of free speech, is a fundamen-
right. Yet, the Taft-Hartley Law's provisions on the "secondary boycott" have been interpreted to forbid picketing which, in effect, forecloses workers from the most effective---and frequently the sole---means they have of publicizing their grievances.

We recommend that the present broad and general restriction on secondary boycotts be narrowed by making it necessary to prove that the illegal object was the principal object rather than any object, as under the present Law.26

Meany favors secondary boycotts when it involves employees at another plant who are asked to work on or handle the struck-work or do the same work as those on strike, when an employer is receiving goods or utilizing services from another employer, when such other employer is producing these goods or providing these services under conditions adversely affecting the standards of working conditions of the employees of either employer; Meany feels that the workers should be permitted to refuse in concert to work on or handle such work.27

The above union activities are considered illegal under the Taft-Hartley Act. Meany wants the Taft-Hartley Act amended to remove the restrictions which curtail the above activities.

He also favors amendment to the law to recognize subcontractors and distributors as not being neutral. "If two or more parties have a joint interest in the construction or production or

26 George Meany, "America Needs a Just Labor Law," Statement Before Committee on Education and Labor, U.S. House of Representa-

27 Ibid.
distribution of goods, materials or services, then all such employers should be regarded as one employer for the purpose of determining the legality of union activity directed against any of them." He also wants to see unions permitted to picket or strike against an employer who is dealing with another employer, when the other employer has refused to recognize or bargain with a certified union. In addition to the above, he wants "the right of free speech of workers be fully restored by according workers the right to make known at all times their views by such means as the carrying of picket signs and banners or other peaceful means of communication."  

Meany has at numerous times throughout the past ten years spoke out for amendment of Section 8 (b) (4) of the Taft-Hartley Act. His plea has remained the same as mentioned above.

B. Political Methods

In order to attain new objectives and maintain those that have been realized, the American labor movement has also subscribed to political methods. The reason why labor is in the political arena according to Meany, is because "those who are opposed to us have decided the way to hamper and render trade unions
impotent is in the legislative field."31 As an example, he cites labor laws that recently have been placed on the statute books, such as, Taft-Hartley Act and "right-to-work" laws. He fears that if labor's enemies can write such laws as the above, then they can write much stronger laws to prevent the trade union movement from advancing the cause of those who work for wages.

What methods does Meany advocate to combat what he calls, "the enemies of labor that have entered the legislative field?"

To answer this broad question, this sub-chapter is divided into three sections of which the last section is subdivided into two parts, namely, 1) the relationship of the American labor movement to political parties; 2) political education and 3) legislation. Legislation consists of two parts, a) labor legislation and b) non-labor legislation.

1. The Relationship of the American Labor Movement to Political Parties

The great labor bodies of yesterday did not ally themselves with any political party. Their policy was one that was stated many times by Gompers--"support your friends and defeat your enemies." This is the policy that Meany advocates. He claims that "Labor must be permanently in politics. Not as Democrats, not as

Republicans, but simply as workers. On that non-partisan basis, using the ballot box to promote our interests and those of the nation as a whole, labor is in politics to stay."³² He says "There has been and there will be no departure from that policy."³³ Again in 1951 Meany says, "We will permit no political party to place its brand on us. . . . We will support candidates for public office who deserve our support; we will oppose candidates who have earned our opposition. But in each case the record—not the political label—will be the controlling factor."³⁴ In his acceptance speech at the AFL-CIO convention he states labor's political philosophy. "Our political philosophy is to inform our own people on the issues that they have before them, and in particular the issues that affect the welfare of our own people."³⁵ Further on in his speech he says, "I don't see any sentiment for a labor party, and I don't see any sentiment for labor to take over one of the existing parties."³⁶

From the above, one would have to arrive at the conclusion

³³Ibid.
³⁶Ibid.
that Meany is not interested in aligning labor with either existing political party or in forming a labor party. But Meany has on other occasions made statements pertaining to a labor party that seem to differ somewhat from the above statements. In 1953 he pointed out "that if at some future date the American labor movement feels that it cannot carry out its objective, that the pressure is too strong politically in the legislative halls of the nation, that it would be necessary for a new political party . . . but I do not see that as of now and do not think it is necessary as of now."37

And in a pamphlet based on an address delivered June 7, 1957, in Washington D.C., at the Industrial Relations Conference sponsored by the Industrial Union Department of the AFL-CIO he again mentions that labor has never seriously considered a political party and does not at this time, but he also says, "I haven't the slightest doubt that if it were necessary, or if political action is not such as to bring us the desired results, and if we thought a political party was necessary to keep American labor moving forward, that we would take that step without any hesitation."38

The above statements are substantially the same as the one made by "William Green before the 1935 AFL convention opposing the


formation of a labor party at that time, but stating that the federation would declare itself 'in favor of independent political action, in the formation of an independent labor party, when the crystallized opinion of the workers indicates that they believe that their interests can better be served through such action rather than through the pursuit of non-partisan political action.' 39

The above statements pertaining to the formation of a labor party are just a lot of talk and no more. Meany has never and does not now seriously consider the formation of a labor party. Conditions would have to be very critical before he even began thinking seriously of a labor party. This is one thought he might entertain only as a last resort to combat unfavorable legislation that would have the consequence of making labor unions practically totally ineffectual.

In 1956, the Executive Council of the AFL-CIO endorsed the Stevenson-Kefauver ticket for president and vice-president. For this they were criticized by certain newspapers. Meany commented on this by replying that "Labor has a right to say we don't want any part of either candidate and that we won't endorse one, but labor also has the right to endorse." 40 As is evidenced above,

Meany sees no conflict of interest on the part of labor in the endorsement of candidates for public office.

The second AFL-CIO convention passed a resolution on political action of which a segment of this resolution referred to financial support to political candidates seeking office. It was resolved that "In order that elections may be free from the domination of corporate wealth and vested interests, it is vital that the American labor movement be in a position to assist financially candidates whose views and activities on behalf of social justice deny them contributions from special interest sources."41 This means that voluntary contributions received by organized labor's Committee on Political Education, may be used to assist individual candidates that merit the support of organized labor. Since Meany is the chairman of COPE, the author assumes that Meany is in agreement with this concept of financial support.

2. Legislation

Organized labor seeks legislation, labor legislation as well as non-labor legislation, more so today than ever before. In the days of Samuel Gompers, the lobbying activities were greatly limited. Whereas Gompers opposed minimum wages, old age pensions and unemployment insurance as "softening the moral fibre of the peo-

Meany, in direct contrast, is a staunch supporter of such programs. In fact, most labor leaders today favor some sort of legislation to varying extent. The scope of subjects in which Meany favors legislation is very broad. In fact, it touches upon practically every segment of our economic and social make-up of our country. Because of the broad scope in regard to legislation and the great political influence Meany possesses, the study of his viewpoints on legislation and the type of legislation is very important.

This subject is divided into two parts; 1) labor legislation and 2) non-labor legislation. Non-labor legislation will consist of such topics as public housing, education, social security, medical care and several others of this nature whereas labor legislation will cover among others, Taft-Hartley Act and "right-to-work" laws.

a. Labor Legislation

In April of 1953, Meany told a Senate Committee that he was not in accord with a recent statement made by John L. Lewis in which he suggested that Congress repeal both the Taft-Hartley Act and the Wagner Act. Meany contends, that the strong unions would not need the law but the weaker unions certainly would. He claims that the great mass of unorganized workers would be helpless with-

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out a law spelling out their right to organize. He says, "I'm for full freedom for workers and for full freedom for employers, but we do need some ground rules for fair play." 43

Hence, Meany favors labor legislation to some extent. What kind of labor legislation does he favor? What does he think of some of the labor laws in effect today? Answers to the above questions should impart Meany's concepts of the type of labor legislation he approves.

Since the passage of the Taft-Hartley Act, Meany has been as outspoken a labor leader on labor legislation as any labor leader has been, past or present. When the Taft-Hartley Act was passed, Meany did not hesitate in letting it be known what his feelings were toward this law. In June of 1948, he said, "The Taft-Hartley Act is the most vicious anti-labor legislation ever enacted in modern times in this country. It has a clear and unmistakable purpose, and that purpose, in one sentence, is to make it impossible for workers to maintain an effective progressive trade union." 44 His attitude toward this law was still the same in 1953. He said, "The Taft-Hartley Act, now on the books, does not merit nor enjoy the respect of American trade unions--and that is putting it mildly. We feel quite strongly that this law is unjustifiably

oppressive and that it has placed intolerable restrictions upon
the exercise of basic rights and freedoms by trade union members
just because they are part of organized labor." And in September,
1956, there was no change in his attitude toward the Taft-
Hartley Act. He was seeking a labor-management relations law
which "will be fair to those on both sides of the bargaining table
and protect the public interest at the same time."46

In a statement issued January 12, 1954, analyzing President
Eisenhower's recommendations to Congress for amendment of the
Taft-Hartley Act, Meany said, "The granting of the right to enter
into pre-hire contracts in the construction, amusement and mari-
time industries will prove helpful only in states which have not
entirely prohibited union-shop agreements. This same principal
should have been extended to numerous other casual, temporary or
seasonal industries."47

Meany is in favor of a full union-shop and the union shop with
preferential hiring in cases where labor and employers enter into
full union shop agreements. In April of 1953, Meany testified at
a public hearing conducted by the Senate Committee handling labor-


46George Meany, "Labor Day Message," Amer. Fed., LXIII (Sep-
tember 1956), 4.

47"President's T-H Message Analyzed," Amer. Fed., LXi (January
1954), 3.
management legislation at which time he urged an amendment to the Taft-Hartley Act to reestablish the full union shop as mentioned above.48

On March 3, 1953, in a statement before a Committee on Education and Labor, U. S. House of Representatives, he called for restoration of the full union shop; urged the Labor Committee to discard the present provision making state laws superior to the federal law in any state where anti-union-security provisions are stiffer than under Taft-Hartley Act; called for the elimination of all ex parte injunctions issued before trial of the facts and said the National Labor Relations Board should be authorized to speed the hearing of any case in which it believes damage is threatened by illegal actions; proposed that unions be permitted to make political expenditures from union funds but not contributions to candidates (this does not apply to political funds derived from voluntary contributions); and asked that the non-Communist affidavit be eliminated because it is an insult to loyal trade unionists and has not done a bit of good in getting rid of Communist union leaders.49 Other items such as boycotts and picketing have been discussed in other sections of this study.

Meany's opinion of "right-to-work" laws is no different than


that of Taft-Hartley Act.

He says that "right-to-work" is a shoddy proposition that is mislabeled and conveys neither rights nor work; will not create one new job nor restore one worker now unemployed to a payroll; and will not save the job of a single person who now faces an impending layoff.50

The open shop, especially compulsory open shop, is vehemently denounced by Meany. "Utah now becomes the eighteenth state to adopt the type of union-wrecking legislation masquerading under the sactimonious title of a "right to work" law. Pressure is mounting in a number of other states for such legislation. It stems from business groups anxious to create a compulsory open shop, on the theory that once union security has been destroyed by law, it will not be too difficult to destroy unions altogether."51

Meany claims that the advocates of the "right-to-work" laws maintain "that a union interferes with individual freedom, that each and every worker should be on his own, without interference from a trade union."52 To this sort of argument, Meany says, there are two aspects.

No. 1, it attempts to convey the impression that the indivi-


dual worker can successfully make an agreement with his em-
ployer for his own benefit. What that adds up to is that a
chairwoman, working for a million-dollar corporation, with
lawyers at its disposal of the very highest caliber, can make
a better deal for herself than can a union. And then the sec-
ond promise upon which this argument is based is that there
is some difference, some conflict, between a union and the
individual worker. That, of course, is contrary to the basic
philosophy of the trade union movement, which is that the
union is the worker, that the union is merely an instrumentality
of the workers, that it is something created by the work-
ers by which they can jointly do for themselves the things
that they cannot do as individuals. The so-called "right-to-
work" laws are all aimed at that particular philosophy.53

One type of organizational set up that Meany repudiates is
the "shape-up method" of employment. This is the method that was
practiced by the International Longshormen's Association. It re-
quired longshoremen to assemble before the piers so that the hiring
bosses would select workers for jobs. Meany's opposition to this
method is substantiated in a request resulting from a meeting on
February 2, 1953 of the Executive Council of the A. F. of L., of
which Meany was a member, to the ILA to abolish the "shape-up meth-
ood" of employment. Meany supported the request vigorously.54

Meany is very much opposed to any setup in which unions are
controlled by outside forces. He places in this category the com-
pany union controlled by the company. In an address presented to
the 48th Convention of the Union Label and Service Trades Depart-
ment in December, 1957, he said, "We refuse to accept a union con-

53Ibid.

54Philip Taft, A. F. of L. from the Death of Gompers to the
trolled by the boss, the company, the so-called company union. We
know that is bad."55

As is evident from what has been said above, Meany strongly
opposes the company union and the open shop. He is an ardent ad-
vocate of the union shop and the closed shop in certain industries.
He considers the so-called "right to work" laws as union-wrecking
type of laws. The company union, he believes, cannot properly
serve the members and cannot deliver the proper kind of represent-
tation. To Meany, union security is a necessity if a trade union
is to function properly.

The above proposals are substantially the same as the ones
Meany has been espousing at various times in the ten years with
which this study is concerned. He has not deviated from these
proposals nor has his opinion changed with regard to the Taft-
Hartley Act.

In regard to health and welfare funds, Meany, at the 1954
Convention of the A. F. of L., called for cooperation with any
legitimate investigation. He also said, "We must see that the in-
vestigation is fair. And if legislation is necessary, let us have
a hand in the writing of the legislation."56

In May, 1955, the Executive Council of the A. F. of L. adopted
by unanimous vote a code for the guidance of national and interna-

55 "Proceedings of the 48th Convention of the Union Label and
Service Trades Dept.," AFL-CIO, Atlantic City, N.J. (December 3-4,

tional unions in regard to health and welfare funds. The approved program called for federal and state legislation, as well as trade union action, to protect the interests of members in the funds established for their benefit. Meany is in full accord with this code even though it entails federal and state legislation. He is primarily concerned with the elimination of loose and corrupt practices through which such funds have sometimes been diverted through improper channels.

There is no mention of having a "hand in the writing of the legislation," however, it can be assumed that Meany wants to voice his opinion as to the type of legislation required to rectify improper union practices. This holds true for any legislation affecting labor.

The AFL-CIO, at its first constitutional convention in New York City unanimously adopted a resolution urging Congress "to extend the full protection of the Fair Labor Standards Act to all workers in industry engaged in or affecting interstate commerce." Meany is in full accord with this resolution. In a statement on May 8, 1956 to a Senate Labor Subcommittee, George Meany urged Congress to expand minimum wage protection now to the low-paid "forgotten workers of America." He said:

Certainly there can be no objections to this legislation on any moral or ethical grounds. The only possible objection can come from those who profit from substandard wages and

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from the continuance of sweat-shop conditions; one of the
greatest social evils of the industrial world.

... If there is a slightest economic justification for keep-
ing wages at the lowest possible level, for some employers' benefit, then this justification would apply to all employers, not just to a favored group of employers. But there is no such economic justification.

... But we can't have true prosperity in our land while one
group of workers prospers and another suffers, any more than
we can have prosperity in the city and depression on the farm.
We believe in a broad-based prosperity for our nation. It is
because of that belief that we are interested not only in
legislation that provides a sound farm economy, but we support
as well such measures as the school construction bill and the
measures to provide more highways and homes and hospitals.
It is in this context of a broader-based prosperity for all
our people that we support legislation that would bring mini-
imum wage protection to the millions of workers now paid sub-
standard wages. 58

Again in January, 1957 Meany in a letter to Congressmen made
an urgent appeal for extension of the coverage of federal minimum
wage legislation to the millions of workers who are not now receiv-
ing its protection.

On the subject of minimum wages, since as early as April,
1955, Meany has advocated a minimum wage of $1.25 per hour. At
that time, he considered as inadequate a recommendation by the ad-
ministration of the federal government in "The President's Economic
Report for 1955" that the minimum wage be increased from 75 cents
to 90 cents an hour. He pointed out the fact that since 1928 the
minimum wage has failed to keep abreast of the cost of living, in-

58 George Meany, "Wider Coverage is Needed," Amer. Fed., LXIII
(June 1956), 4.
crease in productivity and the general rise in wages. Here Meany implies that the minimum wage rate be reviewed from time to time and adjusted if need be, using as a yardstick the cost of living, productivity and wage rates. Meany, in his analysis of this report pointed out that full admission is made of the need to extend to more wage-earners the protection of unemployment insurance, the need to raise unemployment benefits to a level equal to 50 per cent of an unemployed worker's earnings, the need to increase duration of benefits to at least twenty-six weeks and the need to reduce the reasons for disqualifying unemployed workers from receiving benefits. The solution proposed by the Administration is to turn these matters over to the individual states to resolve. Meany maintains that the problem of unemployment insurance belongs to the federal government. He says that turning these matters over to the individual states to resolve, can mean only one thing: retrogression. The following words of Meany are the reasons why he opposes the problem of unemployment insurance as belonging to the individual states to resolve. He says, "All the progress made toward creating a genuine 'built-in stabilizer' will come to a halt as particular states seize upon this opportunity to stimulate the migration of industry from other states by not improving unemployment insurance. States will not compete to protect wage-earners from the results of unemployment; they will compete in finding ways and means of tear-

ing down this bulwark. We need only point to the record of the pitiable development of workmen's compensation under the doctrine of 'states' rights' to support this conclusion.60

b. Non-Labor Legislation

Non-labor legislation is considered a major method in obtaining the national and international goals of organized labor. Throughout the period studied, Meany had demonstrated a great degree of interest in the field of non-labor legislation. He had evinced concern over issues such as public housing, federal aid to education, adequate medical care, disaster insurance, recovery program, social security, agricultural economy, and reciprocal trade. According to Meany, if a program is concerned with the welfare of the worker, it then falls under the philosophy of the trade union movement of improving the standards of life of the worker. The above issues are discussed below.

One of the major programs Meany has and still advocates is a public housing program. In an article on "Public Housing," published in the American Federationist in February, 1953, Meany reduces the facts in this controversy to four major points. The first item or fact is the existence of slums in almost every large city in the United States. The resulting ill-effects from slum conditions constitute a community problem. However, Meany feels,

60 Ibid., p. 6.
that few communities have the means to finance an effective slum-clearance program. The second point is that the tearing down of slums is not enough. Meaney maintains that those who are forced to live in slums cannot afford to rent or buy better housing at present market prices. He claims that the high cost of available new homes or rental housing is far beyond the reach of the average low-income, slum-dwelling family. The third item is the claim by private home builders that they can handle this problem more effectively than any government agency. They say public housing is "socialistic." They call it "subsidized housing." The fourth point, according to Meaney, is that many communities throughout the nation have shown a willingness to clean up slums and construct decent, low-cost housing to replace them. These communities are confident they can do a good job with financial help in the form of loans and grants from the federal government.61

Meaney's viewpoint on public housing is further evident from the following statement. "From labor's point of view, an effective low-cost housing program, under combined federal, state and community auspices, for families in the low-income bracket makes good, hard, common sense.

"The American Federation of Labor . . . will not be content to remain merely on the defensive. We are determined to enlist the widest possible public support for a workable and comprehensive

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housing program that will meet the nation's immediate and long-range needs." 62

In September, 1953, Meany claimed that the construction of 12,000,000 new homes in the next six years would be needed to end the housing shortage. 63

In February 1956, Meany stated, "We urge Congress to adopt a comprehensive housing program which would encourage the construction of 2,000,000 new homes a year, for the next ten years, including ample provision for public housing to remove slums, low-cost housing for families with annual incomes under $5,000 who are now priced out of the market and also for elderly persons." 64

Meany's viewpoint on public housing to remove slums and low-cost housing for families who are now priced out of the market is in agreement with the viewpoint of Richard J. Gray, president of the Building and Construction Trades Department of the AFL-CIO. Gray, same as Meany, on numerous occasions, has expressed concern with an accelerated program to provide more homes for those families in the income group in the lower bracket of the economic ladder.

At the 1953 A. F. of L. convention Meany had a few remarks to

62Ibid.


say on the subject of federal aid to education. He said, "Powerful industrial forces are opposed to federal aid for education. Now, it is in the very nature of things today that we cannot get adequate school facilities unless there is federal aid for education. The American Federation of Labor is for federal aid for education. We are for any kind of aid to education that will insure adequate education of this priceless possession of ours—the nation's children." 65

For what would this federal aid be specifically used? "To eliminate firetraps, to provide our children with safe, modern schools, to improve standards of education by establishing higher salaries that will attract and keep good teachers—these are 'must' programs that can be effectively solved only through a comprehensive system of federal aid to education." 66

At the 1954 convention of the A. F. of L., Meany reiterated his viewpoints on the responsibility of the federal government in regard to education. He said,

What about building schools? We are told, of course, that schools are a local problem. Well, if you went over the statistics of General Hershey when people are examined for their eligibility and availability for military service, you would find that schools are a national problem, that the welfare of the children of this country, their education, certainly should be the concern of the national government; but

there is no federal aid to education, despite the fact that communities from one end of this country to the other are unable, because of the local tax load, to build schools to adequately house the children. 67

At the AFL-CIO 1955 Convention, a resolution on education was passed stating five principal specific and basic fields in which Federal aid is needed immediately. They are: "Federal aid for public school construction; for public school teachers' salaries; for loans and scholarships for all worthy students; for health and welfare services for all children regardless of race or creed; and for the eradication of adult illiteracy." 68

In April, 1956, Meany wrote on the "Educational Log-Jam."

He said:

Because of the turbulent controversy in which our school system is now embroiled, there is grave danger that the fundamental needs will be ignored and neglected. It is of the utmost importance, therefore, to restore the proper focus in considering this problem.

The Facts are plain and unchallengeable:

(1) The nation's educational facilities are suffering from lack of funds with which to provide decent schools and the high standard of teaching to which our children are entitled.

(2) The only way available to correct this situation promptly and effectively is by Congressional enactment of an adequate program of federal aid to education.

(3) There is overwhelming sentiment in Congress for the

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adoption of such a program.69

The above words of Meany further emphasize his feelings toward federal aid to education.

Meany, in his 1958 Labor Day Message, reiterates the areas in education that need improvement, namely, shortage of classrooms, teacher's salaries and waste of talent in the tens of thousands of qualified young students whose education ends before college primarily because of lack of financial means. He proposes as a solution a Federal Aid to Education program which would provide for 1) an adequate construction of schools (about 222,000 classrooms needed in the next five years), 2) proper compensation to good teachers and 3) federally financed scholarships for college study.70

Another important phase in maintaining and improving the standard of living of the workers is adequate medical care. The report of President Truman's Commission on the Health Needs of the Nation emphasized the gross inadequacy of existing health services. The Commission strongly recommended a number of vital steps to improve medical facilities and to provide adequate care for the health of the American people. This plan proposed state-controlled and federally-aided health insurance programs on an entirely volun-


tary basis of participation by the states and by the individuals. 

Meany criticized this proposal because it would leave wide-open gaps in coverage precisely in areas where the need is greatest. 

He says:

On one basic point the majority of the Commission failed to come to grips with the facts—that is, the question of how adequate medical care can be brought within the financial reach of the majority of American families.

The American Federation of Labor is even more strongly convinced than before that protection against the economic hazards of illness can be brought within reach of the average family only by a federal social insurance program with universal coverage.

Such a health insurance system would be compulsory only in the sense that taxes always are compulsory. It would not mean federal regimentation of medicine, since the emphasis would be on community administration. It would not interfere with the freedom of choice of either doctor or patient.

But it would mean a single, simple system of insurance against the high cost of medical care to which every family would contribute through taxes and from which every family could benefit.

This is the goal we seek and will continue to fight for.

Meany feels that in addition to giving substantial contributions to relief funds and generous assistance to the laborious job of repair and rehabilitation of homes and business enterprises in catastrophe areas due to floods, hurricanes, and other such adversities, that Congress should enact a disaster insurance program, and consideration should be given to extension of the tax write-off.

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privileges, now accorded some industries, to individuals and corporations whose homes and factories are damaged or destroyed by flood or hurricane. According to Meany, this type of program would encourage the people and industry to build anew promptly, thus preventing ghost towns and abandoned industries in the areas hardest hit.\textsuperscript{72}

Meany does not subscribe to the "trickle-down-theory" which is "if we keep Big Business fat and happy, it will contribute enough jobs to keep the economy sound."\textsuperscript{73} In speaking of the Administration's recovery program which was that if investment incentives were stimulated, there would be an increase in job-creating construction of plant and equipment by producers, he says, "We of the American Federation of Labor believed that the Administration erred in its single-purpose tax policy of aiding business producers almost exclusively. We urged the Administration to include in its program some stimulation for consumers. We saw that the accumulated inventories were simply unsold goods which could be most quickly liquidated by increased consumption rather than by increased production."\textsuperscript{74} In this respect, Meany claims that "If

\textsuperscript{72}George Meany, "After the Floods," \textit{Amer. Fed.}, LXII (October 1955), 19.


\textsuperscript{74}George Meany, "The President's Economic Report," \textit{Amer. Fed.}, LXII (April 1955), 5.
taxes can safely be reduced, the benefits should go to all American families but especially to low-income families whose buying power counts most. This should be accomplished through higher personal tax exemptions and lower tax rates on low incomes. The money thus released is bound to stimulate sales, reduce inventories, revive production and open more job opportunities quickly, giving the national economy the equivalent of a shot in the arm. 75

Meaney believes that the principle of investment incentives to business, such as tax reductions, larger and faster depreciation allowances, greater periods of time over which business losses could be carried back for tax purposes, relief from taxation on dividends, and the definition of research expenditures as current expenses, which should result in an increase in job-creating construction of plant and equipment by producers, does not coincide with the facts. 76 What he advocates in regard to any tax reduction during a recession is a tax cut that will place more money in the hands of the consumer rather than the producer.

Meaney is also a staunch advocate of the social security system. However, he contends even though it has proved its value, not only in humanitarian terms, but in providing a safety valve against the recurrence of depressions, it has failed to keep pace


with inflation and changing conditions. In December of 1953 he said he would like to see the social security act broadened to include millions still excluded from its protections. 77

Meany says that the A. F. of L. at one time opposed a government system of social security. The feeling at that time was that through private collective bargaining wages could be raised high enough for the individual to accumulate his own savings, or pay for his own annuity, thus assuring himself security. This type of thinking was changed by the "Great Depression." When savings were wiped out and families and individuals had to go on relief for lack of unemployment insurance, the A. F. of L. accepted the principle of government social security.

In the article "What Labor Means by 'More,'" Meany contends that only when industry has failed to accept social responsibility has labor, along with the people as a whole, turned to government for help. However, he warns that government alone should not be called upon to provide complete social security. 78

In his recommendations to Congress in 1953, Meany stated that the weakest point in our economy was the agricultural economy. He urged Congress to, "promptly enact a program of farm legislation which will stabilize prices, dispose of top-heavy surpluses and


protect the cost of living from further unjustified increases."  

Again in February, 1956, he pointed out the agricultural economy as an urgent problem that demands immediate action due to the shrinkage in farm income. He said, "The AFL-CIO, at its first convention, pledged labor to support a sound legislative program designed to raise the income of the nation's farmers.  

"We have taken this position because we realize that the prosperity of the entire nation, including city workers, becomes jeopardized when an important segment of the economy, like agriculture, is hard hit."  

Another aid in keeping our economy sound implies Meany, is the Reciprocal Trade Agreements. The American Federation of Labor has been in favor of gradual reduction of duties on imports. "Our friends abroad will be unable to buy our surpluses unless we permit them to sell their products here without crippling tariff penalties. Foreign trade must work two ways in order to flourish. And it is obvious that if we can expand foreign trade, our obligations to provide aid for our allies will be greatly diminished."  

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In June of 1958, commenting on the vote in the House of Representatives to extend the Reciprocal Trade Agreements Act for five years, Meany again declares his position on Reciprocal Trade Agreements. He feels that the free world was materially strengthened because of this action by the House of Representatives. He says, "The American labor movement, which has been one of the leading backers of reciprocal trade from its inception, staunchly supports this measure as a fundamental necessity in these days of international tension." Meany contends that failure on the part of the United States to provide adequate reciprocal trade agreements would result in uncommitted and free nations "trading" with the Communists and subsequently falling into the communist orbit. However, Meany was not content with the bill as it passed the House of Representatives. He claimed that the bill contained a fundamental weakness. "This weakness arises from the fact that, while there can be no doubt of the long-run advantages of foreign trade to the United States, certain industries in our land are being adversely affected by import competition." And in this respect, he points out escape clauses in the bill, under which the Administration can, "if it believes a peril point has been reached, negate the principle of reciprocal trade and raise tar-

83 Ibid., 9.
Meany believes this to be the wrong approach. He recognizes that workers, industries and communities experience real suffering as a result of the impact of increased imports following tariffs. He also maintains that great international good and national benefit result from the continued gradual reduction of these trade barriers. What does Meany propose for the seemingly dilemma? It might be well to point out at this time that there is much disagreement among labor leaders on the problem of Reciprocal Trade Agreements. This disagreement is due mostly to adverse economic conditions experienced by certain industries and workers in that industry. Meany believes that individual hardship can be avoided and international benefit achieved by supplying the administrative branch of the government with an alternative weapon, known as the trade adjustment program. This program is keyed to the uncontestable theory that increased trade is in the national interest. "But no single group of workers or single industry, for that matter, should be taxed with the full burden of a program that is in the national interest." He does not propose to either subsidize the affected groups or compensate them for injury. He does propose "to help them adjust to increased imports. That can be done either by helping these hard-hit groups to make more effective and efficient use of present facilities or

84 Ibid.
85 Ibid.
by developing new lines of production which would offer business opportunities to firms and communities and employment opportunities to workers.

"Thus, if the government decides that, for the greater good, tariffs should be reduced in a certain field and the result is injury to that industry, its workers and the communities where it is located, then the government simultaneously aids in the adjustment period." According to Meany, this may mean help in retooling a plant, aid in retraining workers, loans to communities to tide over the revamping period. He feels that "With this concept woven into the Reciprocal Trade Act, the United States will have a potent, essential weapon with which to combat the Soviet dictators, who use economic aid to a nation as a lever to infiltrate and ultimately seize political control."  

3. Political Education

Political education in reality is informing "union members and their neighbors about the issues and the candidates for public office and to organize them so they can act upon this information." This is accomplished through the Committee on Political Education (COPE). How and why was COPE formed?

86 Ibid.
87 Ibid.
The A. F. of L. at its 1947 convention laid down a plan to combat the political enemies of labor by the creation of a political arm which was known as Labor's League for Political Education. This organization merged in December, 1955 at the First Constitutional Convention of the AFL-CIO, with the CIO Political Action Committee to form COPE. Funds are obtained through an appeal for voluntary contributions of a dollar from each union member.

George Meany strongly urges union members to participate in labor's political educational program. In September, 1953, he said,

When you register and vote for C.L.P.E.-endorsed candidates, when you give a dollar to help elect labor's friends, you are not breaking any of the A. F. of L. traditions. You are doing one of the things for which our unions have been formed.

Political education is a legitimate trade union concern. It is your concern as a citizen. For your own sake, register and vote. Give your dollar to join Labor's League for Political Education. In that way you will do your part to elect men who will be concerned for the welfare of all of us. 89

COPE is made up of local and state committees of AFL-CIO members, and a national committee. As stated in the AFL-CIO constitution, it has the task "of encouraging workers to register and vote, to exercise their full rights and responsibilities of citizenship and to perform their rightful part in the political life of the city, state, and national communities." 90


90 "What is COPE," AFL-CIO Pamphlet, (No date), 2.
The main function of COPE is to report the facts about issues and candidates. "It follows the voting records of elected officials. It helps to educate AFL-CIO members so that they will vote and vote intelligently."91 In addition to the above, "COPE workers carry on registration drives and try to get out the vote on election day so that the result will be a decision of the true majority of the people."92

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91 Ibid., 4.
92 Ibid.
CHAPTER IV

VIEWS OF GEORGE MEANY OF SOME IMPORTANT FACTORS OF THE AMERICAN LABOR MOVEMENT

George Meany has been in union business for most of his working life. During this time, he has held responsible offices such as, president of the New York State Federation of Labor, secretary-treasurer of the A. F. of L., and presently, president of the AFL-CIO. His experience in this field is so extensive that it covers nearly every facet of our economic make-up. Certainly, he must have formulated some opinion in regard to certain important factors of the American labor movement. Therefore it should be interesting to analyze Meany's concepts on the following factors: Capitalistic Economic System, the Role of Government in Industrial Relations, Organized Labor and Technological Change, and the Relation of the American Labor Movement to the International Labor Movement.

A. Capitalistic Economic System

There is no question or room for doubt as to how Meany feels about the American way of life, free enterprise or capitalistic economic system. This is borne out in the subsequent statements.
In his 1948 Labor Day Message, he claims that the American way of life is the best ever devised by the minds of men. This is so, he says, not simply because "we have the most telephones and automobiles and bathtubs and skyscrapers," as important as this may be, there is much more to it than that. He points out that the "American way of life is best for various reasons and in various ways, but the most important point about America is that we have been free from the blight of what is often termed 'class struggle.'"\(^1\)

Meany conveys the thought that the reason the American people have more of everything is because the American economy is the most productive and that the goods produced are distributed to or are within reach of most Americans. This is made possible because the income of the American worker is more than just a mere subsistence wage.

Meany asserts that, "It is in the free countries that the workers have most bread, more on their bread, and most with their bread. It is in the democracies that labor has the best working conditions and the highest standards of living. In the democracies, labor has the freedom, enjoys the democratic rights of organization, association, collective bargaining and the right to strike for more bread and the better things of life."\(^2\)

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\(^2\)George Meany, "Economic and Social Tasks of Today," American Labor Looks at the World, VII (September 1953), 69.
He says that the American labor movement "recognizes the right of private capital and private management likewise to receive a fair share of the rewards of production. It is only when profits soar away out of line that we become critical of the profit system." In other words, there is no conflict between the goals of the American labor movement and the profit system. However, disagreement may exist in how the rewards of production and distribution are divided.

Meany claims that the American economy, even in a recession, "is healthier and does more for the American people than the Communist economy does for the Soviet peoples. Our free economy has its ups and downs. But we have always come up stronger after every downward swing."  

Cures or remedies that Meany advocates to combat a recession and assure full employment were expressed in a memorandum submitted by him to the Third World Congress of the I.C.F.T.U. in July, 1953. He said that a paramount prerequisite to obtain freedom from want and insecurity is the assurance of full employment. "Full employment is only a means to an end--a means for improving the conditions of life and labor." How can or should full employment be

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5 George Meany, "Economic and Social Tasks of Today," American Labor Looks at the World, VII (September 1953), 65.
attained? Speaking of national and international full employment policies, Meany encourages:

Simultaneous with their own independent efforts, the trade unions should insist that their governments and appropriate international bodies adopt measures to insure full employment. We cite as an example the United States Employment Act of 1946.

We should propose the following types of governmental measures to combat economic recessions: (1) public works projects, such as construction of schools, hospitals, low-cost housing, roads, flood control and drought-prevention; (2) easing credit regulations; (3) creating additional purchasing power through tax reduction for low income groups, extension of social security coverage and increase in social security benefits; (4) expanded investments especially in the industrially underdeveloped countries.6

According to Meany, government actions as important and necessary as they are to prevent economic recessions, must not solely be relied upon to combat an industrial decline. He claims that "Increased prestige and prowess of the trade union movement are the most effective antidotes to and preventives of an economic recession. It is only when we have a powerful trade union movement that minimum wages and plans for the guaranteed wage serve as sound factors for sustained employment and purchasing power rather than as means of freezing the possibilities of mass consumption."7

Speaking of social progress at the United Nations in 1957, he points out the belief that the primary factor in social progress must be government action, financed by the state, that the

6 Ibid., pp. 65-66.
7 Ibid., p. 67.
efforts of the people themselves could be successful only insofar as they are supported by the state, holds true only in states which in practice, deny their people the fundamental rights proclaimed in the charter of the United Nations.8

Meany professes that,

Voluntary organizations are a most vital force for the pursuit and attainment of these rights and aims. Thus, the extent to which any society is truly humanitarian--democratic rather than paternalistic--depends in very large measure on the initiative and energy displayed by the voluntary organizations in the community--on the extent to which the people themselves, through organization of their own choice and direction, mold the domestic and foreign policies of their country.

In seeking social and human progress in the United States, our goal is clear. We seek a free and democratic society which emphasizes equality of opportunity. We believe that if individuals have full and free access to ideas and the opportunity of personal expression, they will make the proper choice. There is no better way to true human advancement.9

Meany is a firm believer of aiding the underprivileged through welfare programs sponsored by the state.

In an address in 1949 at the Convention of Building Trades-Metal Trades, Meany said, "The campaign against 'statism' as it is called, against the 'welfare state,' against the things that government has been doing for the common people, the little people of America, is indirectly a campaign against the things that the Amer-


9Ibid., p. 6.
ican Federation of Labor has stood for and fought for a great many years."10

Again in 1950, he said, "Permit me to preface my remarks on 'Freedom and the Welfare State' by admitting that I believe in both. More than that, I believe that both freedom and a state of welfare can and should be enjoyed by the American people at the same time."11 And in 1952 he said, "We do not have a welfare state in America. However, what is so wrong about government action to promote the welfare of the people? Our forefathers, in the Constitution of the United States, stated flatly that one of its purposes was to 'promote the general welfare.' Article 8 of the Constitution says Congress shall have power to provide for the common defense and general welfare of the United States."12

Meany contends that the government was established to serve the people and not rule them. He declares that accepted government services, such as the police and fire departments and public schools, in a narrow sense, involve a degree of compulsion and infringe upon individual liberty. Whenever there are laws passed, there are specific rules set forth, which in a way restrict the freedom of an individual. Meany says he does not hear complaints


12 "Don't Fall for Hooverism," Amer. Fed., LIX (May 1952), 23.
from the opponents of labor of the above services. He also states that our government is not charged with being a "police state" on those grounds.13

In conjunction with the welfare state he also questions the criticisms of the bigness of government, that its powers have become too great, that it is encroaching upon the freedom of the American people and stealing their substance through excessive taxes. "Otherwise," he says, "we are warned, the federal government is bound to become a welfare state or a socialist state—either of the creeping or galloping variety."14 He then asks:

Was it socialism when our government subsidized the construction of grand trunk railroads spanning our country from coast to coast, or was it a sound investment in the development of a great nation? Is it socialism when our government spends large sums to help steamship lines and airplane transportation, or is that in line with sound national policy for the full development of these vital facilities? Is it socialism when the government provides a subsidy to newspaper and magazine publishers through a below-cost rate for second-class mailing privileges, or should we charge that up to education? Is it socialism when the government assumes all of the risk of mortgage lending under the Federal Housing Administration? Is it socialism only when the government puts a floor under wages or places price supports under crops?

Why are such functions, which protect the living standards of millions of our citizens from being downgraded, criticized as "socialistic" while not a harsh word is directed against the bonanza of billions of dollars received by the big corporations in fast tax write-offs on new plants?15

15Ibid.
Meany is for government help if this aid protects the living standard of millions of citizens. He does not worry about socialism, whatever that may be, as long as the American citizen is the one that tells the government what to do. The American citizen, as long as he does not forfeit his right, is what concerns Meany more than words, such as, socialism, welfare state, and other such terms, which are used very indiscriminately to the point that they have become practically meaningless.

B. The Role of Government In Industrial Relations

Meany feels that the aim of government in a free society should be to insure the settlement of industrial disputes by peaceful means and through voluntary efforts of labor and management, rather than through compulsion of the state. "Working people look to their government to hold inviolate their rights of self-organization and collective bargaining. To give these human rights full effect and full meaning and to harmonize them with the property rights and management prerogatives of business, as well as with the welfare of the whole community, must likewise be the guiding aim of government of a free nation."16 The guiding principle in this area should be "that relations between employers and workers

are governed best when they are governed least. And they are based on the assumption that when the government does intervene, it intervenes to harmonize differences and expedite agreement, rather than to judge and to punish.\textsuperscript{17}

In a reply to a question on whether the national government should have the power to call a cooling-off period or take industries over at a time of a strike, he reasons that taking industries over may be justified during a war period, however, "the government has no right to force workers to work through a compulsory waiting period of eighty days, ninety days, ten days or two days because, if the worker can be forced by his government to work when he does not desire to work, when the conditions of employment are not satisfactory to him, if he can be forced to work for one day or ten days, that is slavery and we will not accept even a little bit of slavery from our own government."\textsuperscript{18} He inquires what would prevent the government from extending the waiting period another eighty days.\textsuperscript{19}

"Right-to-work" laws, according to Meany, are an infringement on the freedom of workers and employers of this country. In addition to limiting the freedom of workers and employers, the real

\textsuperscript{17}\textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{18}"Young People's Questions," \textit{Amer. Fed.}, LX (November 1953), 24.
\textsuperscript{19}\textit{Ibid.}
reason for the passage of "right-to-work" laws is to weaken and possibly obliterate unions. This law, he says is a "union wrecking" piece of legislation that actually creates a compulsory open shop.

In a publication by AFL-CIO, it is stated that "'Right-to-work' laws simply don't fit into the American tradition of government impartiality.

"Unions and employers should be free to negotiate union security provisions if they wish to do so. They should be free, also, not to include union security provisions if they cannot agree on them.

"That is what unions want: freedom for American unions and American employers; freedom to agree or disagree on union security, without state government interference."20

C. Organized Labor’s Relation to Management

What should be labor’s relation to management? Should labor have a voice in managing the business of a corporation? If so, what about the responsibility involved? Meany would like to see an ever increasing harmony between American workers and American employers. However he observes two causes of distrust. One reason is the standpoint of the National Association of Manufacturers and

the Chamber of Commerce; and another source is the Taft-Hartley Act. Meany's viewpoints on many aspects of our economy are directly opposed by the NAM and the Chamber of Commerce organizations. He feels that they are living in a different age because of their support of outdated theories.

"The businessman of America, by and large, is forward looking. I think this is proven by his relations with the trade union movement. Yet, we are treated to a strange paradox. Although the businessman individually is forward looking, the NAM and the Chamber of Commerce speak a different language. We are still treated to the spectacle in which these representative businessmen's organizations talk in terms of 1880 or 1890, those good old days when the rules and decisions in regard to running a business were made by the fellow who put in the money and nobody else."21 Here Meany implies that property rights are not absolute, that workers also have rights that should be respected.

One reason why he disfavors the Taft-Hartley Act is because he feels that it does not aid in creating better relations. "Instead of increasing harmony between American workers and fair minded American employers, we find employers hiding behind the Taft-Hartley Act to reject legitimate requests of their employees for higher wages; we find employers using the general counsel's

21 George Meany, "Labor Looks at the White Collar Worker," Proceedings of Conference on Problems of the White Collar Worker, Industrial Union Department, AFL-CIO, (February 20, 1957), 76.
of the National Labor Relations Board to obtain injunctions against labor; we find that certain employers are bringing suits for hundreds of thousands of dollars against unions. As we warned, the anti-labor element among the employers is using the National Labor Relations Board as a weapon against the wage earner. 22 Meaney implies that these employers are using every legal measure available to deter labor from obtaining legitimate requests and that this type of action only antagonizes labor, thus creating poor relations that can become somewhat hostile. How can such a situation be remedied or alleviated? How can better relations be obtained?

Meaney perceives that the people in America have the greatest opportunity to make the future measure up to the highest ideals of mankind. This can be accomplished through voluntary cooperation of labor and management. Such cooperation in a free society can carry us far toward the attainment of this goal for all people. Meaney asserts, "The obstructions in the path to cooperation are not insurmountable. There is but a minority of employers who need drop their antagonism to the right of free men to choose trade-unionism as a way of life. Then, as truly free men, labor and management may join in a constructive effort to lay down simple rules of decency and to unite in promoting mutual advances." 23


In matters pertaining to public welfare and national security, Meany encourages cooperation with management and industry. He says, "Labor must conduct its affairs in a way that will command the respect and approbation of our fellow citizens. It must give more time and effort toward making a constructive contribution to community improvement. Labor must be willing at all times to cooperate with management and industry for the public welfare."\(^{24}\)

An example where this cooperation is needed is in the area of community programs for the physically handicapped. Meany says, "Union-management cooperation in this field is a prime necessity and the labor movement is doing its best to spur this kind of cooperation."\(^{25}\) The kind of program the AFL-CIO has developed is based on the principle that, if given adequate rehabilitation services and an opportunity for a decent job, the handicapped individual himself will eagerly utilize his own resources to become an active, productive worker. "We have the tools and the know-how. It is up to us--labor and industry alike--to translate this knowledge into practice for the benefit of the handicapped as individuals and for the ultimate benefit of all."\(^{26}\)

Speaking of our obligations to meet international responsibil-


\(^{26}\)Ibid.
ities and to safeguard our national security, he says, "We need unity in America. We need, above all, greater unity and greater cooperation between American business and American labor."\(^7\)

He believes that labor-management cooperation is needed, for the purpose to preserve the American way of life. If the American way of life is not preserved, he says this would mean "the end of free labor and the end of free enterprise."\(^7\)

Meany pays great respect to the job done by the Labor-Management Manpower Policy Committee. This is the type of cooperation, he feels, is needed to employ most effectively all its available manpower if war comes.

The Manpower Policy Committee started its work in October of last year /1952/ by appointing a special Subcommittee on Full Mobilization. After intensive study by both the subcommittee and the full committee, the group at its meeting in September approved a forty-six page document setting forth its recommendations for a manpower program for full mobilization.

... 

It is encouraging that, with such a diverse group of committee members, almost the entire report was adopted unanimously. Only three basic differences were noted among the forty-five specific recommendations made by the committee. Naturally, on many issues the final recommendation represented a compromise between the views of labor and management, but the goodwill prevailing on both sides of the table made a genuine agreement possible on many knotty issues.

... 


This simple fact underlies the basic theme running through this labor-management report--its insistence that the most effective way to mobilize American manpower resources is through a voluntary program.29

In a speech delivered at the Dinner Meeting of the National Industrial Conference Board's Meeting on January 19, 1956, Meany uses one word in this talk that describes how distrust can be eliminated--understanding. He says:

top-level cooperation between labor and management could only be achieved by a real understanding on the part of management of the objectives, ideals and principles of the trade union movement. Likewise, it is necessary that labor understand the problems and difficulties which confront management in the complex economy that we have in America today.

What are the basic requirements for such cooperation? First, there must be a definite and complete recognition that workers are represented only by organizations of workers. And, likewise, that employers are represented by organizations of employers.

Second, there must be full acceptance by management of the free trade union as a vital American institution.

The AFL-CIO and its unions accept the right of management to manage. More than that, over a period of years, many of our unions and the National Federations which have now merged, have pursued the policies of union-management cooperation at the plant and local level, wherever management was receptive to it.30

In March, 1955, Meany reiterates labor's relation to management in regard to the running of a business. He says:

We do not want so-called "codetermination"--the representation


of unions on the board of directors or in the active management of a company. In Germany, where trade unions have endorsed such a plan, codetermination emerges from a peculiar background—the political use of corporate power by cartel management. And in that country it has some logic as a means of maintaining economic democracy. Here in the U.S., with a different background and tradition, with a different kind of management, with the acceptance of collective bargaining, codetermination has no reality.  

Meany cites specific areas which are considered functions of management. "Those matters that do not touch a worker directly, a union cannot and will not challenge. These may include investment policy, a decision to make a new product, a desire to erect a new plant so as to be close to expanding markets, to re-invest out of earnings or seek new equity capital etc." However in areas where management decisions affect a worker directly, Meany says a union will intervene. These may include conditions such as expressed in the following example. "When a company renounces union standards, and arbitrarily disrupts the lives of thousands of workers because it may save 7 cents a hat, a union will resist."  

In regard to the concept of class struggle, George Meany claims that American labor, has always rejected the concept of the class struggle and has never been out to destroy the employers. He further states that labor has always recognized and defended  

31 George Meany, "What Labor Means by 'More,'" Fortune. (March 1955), 92-93  
32 Ibid.  
33 Ibid.
the legitimate rights of employers. He maintains that labor has asked and fought for recognition of labor's rights, has asked and fought for economic justice, and has always recognized that decent, fair employers were fully entitled to decent fair treatment at labor's hands.34

However, he declares the NAM and other reactionary organizations are driving to bring about a condition in which the emergence of the class struggle concept would be inevitable. This, he claims can have only one result, only one outcome—not the crushing of labor, as they desire, but the utter defeat of the initiators of the struggle, the powerful reactionary wing of Big Business."35

D. Organized Labor and Technological Change

George Meany acknowledges that technological change with increased productivity has been beneficial to the American worker and it has been a major factor in achieving economic expansion accompanied by high employment and rising living standards.36

In a statement in December, 1956, to the Subcommittee on Economic Stabilization of the Joint Economic Committee, he states that


35Ibid., p. 31

36"Economic and Social Tasks of Today," American Labor Looks at the World, (September 1953), 68.
"Organized labor welcomes the new advances in technology. We want to see the new equipment introduced as promptly as possible so that we and our heirs can receive the benefits of the lowered operating costs and higher productivity."\(^{37}\) A year later he stresses that "There should be no other purpose for machines and factories and rising productivity than to provide opportunity for the development and enrichment of human beings."\(^{38}\)

He recognizes that technological change does not necessarily present a threat of unemployment. Furthermore, he believes, in order for our national economy to remain healthy, it must continue to grow and expand, it must provide millions of additional jobs each year as our population grows, it must do this even during a period when the introduction of automatic, labor-saving machinery tends to reduce the number of jobs normally available. Increased production, he fears, can itself become a terrifying problem unless the American people enjoy sufficient purchasing power to buy and consume what they need.

"From labor's point of view, automation should not be considered a threat but a great opportunity. Automatic machinery requiring fewer man-hours of labor on a product ought to bring about


higher wages and drastically reduced working hours, eventually. But there is some danger of widespread displacement of workers in the transition period, and we believe that labor, management and the government should begin undertaking a program now to prevent needless unemployment and suffering."\textsuperscript{39}

In the statement to the Subcommittee on Economic Stabilization mentioned above, Meany advises the subcommittee of some of the human problems that will result from automation. He acquaints them with the questions to such problems as adjustment to change, preparation for new assignment, the possibility of large scale social dislocations, migration of industry, and economic impact to society as a whole. He also points out "according to various engineers, that it will be cheaper in many cases—if not most of them—to build entirely new automated plants in new locations, rather than to rebuild old plants. Furthermore, since automation may mean substantial changes in cost relationships—labor costs become a smaller part of the cost of production, for example—the shifts in plant location may well be from one state or region to another. The construction of a newly automatic factory in one locality could thus create dislocations in other communities if it forced the shutdown of older factories and idled workers in other localities."\textsuperscript{40}

\textsuperscript{39} George Meany, "President Meany's Labor Day Message," \textit{Amer. Fed.}, LXIV (September 1957), 16

\textsuperscript{40} \textit{Instrumentation and Automation}, (Washington, 1957), p. 189.
In 1955 he maintained that the answer to technological change lies in smoothing its transitions and cushioning the shocks that attend it. "This means, in the immediate sense, the establishment of severence pay, retraining of skills, reorganization of work schedules. These are social costs that industry will have to bear in order to avoid the wasting of human resources--and to avoid our calling on government to bear these costs if industry fails to do so." In regard to training, he proposes that "Workers whose jobs will be eliminated by installing the new equipment must be the first to be considered for work on the new equipment. Many of them will be mature people to whom learning new skills may not come easily. They must be given full opportunity, at company expense, to acquire new skills." Meany contends that "Companies usually plan technological changes long in advance--1, 2, or 3 years before they become effective." He suggests "managements to consult unions long before the new production processes are placed into operation--to work out the required shifts in the work force, the changes in jobs and skill requirements, the necessary retraining of workers. Only through such advance consultation and planning can orderly procedures be developed to achieve equitable adjust-

43 Ibid.
ments in the factories, offices, and other places of work."\textsuperscript{44}

In 1957 he said, "labor, management and the government should begin undertaking a program now to prevent needless unemployment and suffering."\textsuperscript{45} This is somewhat of a departure from what he said in 1955, leaving the job to industry unless it failed to do so. Perhaps in those two years, he concluded that industry was not doing the job that it should have been doing in this field and consequently is calling on the aid of government.

\section*{The Relation of the American Labor Movement To the International Labor Movement}

How does George Meany feel towards other unions of other countries? At a conference to pave the way for the establishment of a new and democratic international labor federation at Geneva, Switzerland in June, 1949, George Meany, then secretary-treasurer of the American Federation of Labor, addressed the conference, which was attended by representatives of most of the world's anti-totalitarian trade unions, and made the following allegation:

\begin{quote}
The issue for us has become clearly joined; the lines have been clearly drawn as between the Cominform World Federation of Trade Unions defending the principles of totalitarianism and free trade unions defending the principles of democracy.
\end{quote}

For us there is no turning back to the past, which is

\textsuperscript{44}Ibid.

finished and done with. We look forward to the organization of all the free trade unions of the world into a body dedicated to the principle of advancing the standards of workers on an international level. Toward these ends the A. F. of L. has adopted resolutions suggesting certain basic principles for the establishment of a new world organization of labor as follows:

(1) The existing vacuum in the field of world labor must be filled by the organized unity of free labor. The threat of totalitarianism must be met and thrown back by uniting together the non-Communist trade unionists.

(2) The new international trade union body must be divorced completely from big power politics. The rights and privileges of both large and small trade union centers must be fully recognized.

(3) The international trade secretariats must be drawn into the preparations and organization of this new world labor organ from the very beginning, thus maintaining and guaranteeing their independent autonomy as well as sound relations between the two international bodies.

(4) There must be created a truly worldwide organization not confined merely to Europe and/or America but embracing Asian, South American and African areas of the world. 46

Further on in this address Meany says that the American Federation of Labor stands ready to throw all of its strength into such a movement. He states that representatives of the A. F. of L. have been active in the fight against totalitarianism in the labor movement throughout the world and that it is anticipated to enlarge upon this activity in close collaboration and cooperation with the other free trade unions of the world. The purpose of this common world endeavor, in which Meany says the A. F. of L. is determined to put at its disposal its moral and material facili-

ties, is to maintain world peace, world economic progress and world freedom.47

From this conference the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions was organized. At the first congress of the I.C.F.T.U., on its final day it adopted, what Meany calls "a stirring manifesto."

This document was drafted by the Committee on Economic and Social Demands, on which the American Federation of Labor was represented by Brother Matthew Woll.

The manifesto began:

"BREAD--Economic security and social justice for all!
"FREEDOM--Through economic and political democracy!
"PEACE--With liberty, justice and dignity for all!"

The manifesto concluded thus:

"Workers of all countries, races and creeds: Join in this mighty movement of free and democratic labor!

"Together we can conquer poverty and exploitation and create a world of abundance and security. Together we can destroy tyranny and oppression and create a world of freedom and human dignity. Together we can defeat the forces of war and aggression and create a world of peace and justice."48

Meany endorses these objectives.

On numerous occasions, George Meany reiterated the objectives of the free labor movement. Although on one occasion he did say

47Ibid., 8.
that interest of the American labor movement in this particular field is not just one of sentiment.

Naturally, we have a great traditional feeling of sympathy and comradeship with those who work for wages in any part of the world, but we have what perhaps you might call an intelligent type of selfishness in this because we know each time someone goes back of the Iron Curtain, each time someone loses his right to conduct his affairs through the medium of a free trade union, each time that happens the menace comes a little closer to us.

So in this field we are associated, as I said before, with the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions. We are giving them whatever material aid we can. We are doing what we can to keep France free, to keep Italy free, to keep Germany free, and I think in this way we are making our contribution to the welfare of our country as a whole. 49

Meany calls the American labor movement international in nature. He says, "Yes, we are internationalists; yes, we think of the threat and the menace of world communism. We have made our contribution and we are going to continue to make our contribution to keep men free.

"We recognize the community of interests of every worker on the face of the earth. The things that bother us as workers, the things to which we aspire as workers are the same things to which the workers of Burma, the workers of Japan, the workers of Italy and the workers of Germany aspire." 50

Another international organization which has the wholehearted


support of George Meany is the International Labor Organization of which Samuel Gompers was one of the organizers. He says, "the I.L.O. is the one international instrumentality that has made a real contribution to human welfare over the past thirty years." 51 He points out that the purpose of the I.L.O. is to provide a meeting place for free labor and to provide a place for the democracies to exchange ideas and to build up conditions of life by international treaty all over the world.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Not too long ago, the author was told that Meany's philosophy changes from day to day depending on what suits him best at the time. This was said by an executive who is second in command of an industrial relations department of a corporation employing about twelve thousand people. Evidence to support this thinking was not found by the writer. It is hoped that such misconceptions are clarified to some degree by this study.

Meany's viewpoints are presented without any opposing arguments. Whether his convictions are the best or not is for the reader to judge. It is not the purpose of this thesis to present various arguments, either in opposition or in support of his views. To expound and present various opinions on his viewpoints would be an unending job. It would require volumes to cover the subjects to any satisfactory degree. The time involved to complete such a task is inestimable.

Any individual who strongly advocates governmental activities, such as public works projects, easing credit regulations, reduction of taxes, and expansion of investments to combat recessions and maintain full employment must be considered a liberal. And Meany
is a staunch supporter of the above programs. He is not satisfied with the status quo. He is for increasing the purchasing power through higher wages derived from an increase in productivity.

There is a tendency for more government intervention as the number of social needs increase. Meany sees nothing wrong with this. In fact, he contends that the government was established to serve the people and not rule them. He considers the fulfillment of the social needs by the state as a natural thing.

In addition to being an outspoken foe of communism and any form of totalitarianism, a characteristic, according to Meany, that is inherent in any true liberal, he is also an advocate of voluntary organizations that serve as a vital force for the pursuit and attainment of human rights that emphasize equality of opportunity of personal expression.

The goals of the American labor movement, either directly or indirectly, have as their basis the dignity of the human person. Meany asserts that the trade union movement has been and still is a humanitarian institution to the very core. By this he means that the worker be treated justly, with dignity and self-respect rather than victimized by an unscrupulous employer. He speaks in a tone which has morality in mind at all times. He applies moral principles to the economic life. To him morality has as much right in our economic system as it has in any other segment of our society. He sees no room at all for arbitrary decisions affecting workers. Any business decision that affects the workers and other
people in our society, must be made only after deliberation with
due respect given to the individual person or persons and organi-
sations in our society, regardless of race, color, creed or na-
tional origin, that might be affected by such business decision.

From what has been said above, one would think that Meany is
an idealist and is seeking some sort of an utopia. He may have
high ideals but he has to be considered a realist. If he is seek-
ing an utopia, he realizes that it cannot be attained in this
world. Actually Meany knows very well that any gains that have
been acquired and any further gains that may be secured, required
and still require a definite practical and flexible approach in
the method employed in striving for the realization of the goals
of the American labor movement. Meany is as much a pragmatist as
was Gompers although the make-up of our economic system is much
more complex now than under Gompers' reign, thus creating numerous
problems in the process of procurement of goals.

As a rule, Meany is consistent in his thinking although on
two occasions he did alter his viewpoints to some extent. One is
the role the American labor movement should have in politics; the
other is the course of action that should be taken to cope with
some of the problems that might result from automation. In regard
to politics, the policy of the American labor movement has always
been and still is "support your friends and defeat your enemies."
This is still the policy Meany advocates but now he occasionally
interjects the thought of a labor party if the present policy be-
comes ineffective. No doubt such change of policy would be quite a departure from the traditional one. It must be understood that Meany does not favor a change of policy unless the traditional one would become completely ineffective.

Problems arising from automation, such as retraining, relocation, lay-offs, and so forth, were considered by Meany in 1955. At that time he argued that industry must bear the social costs that would take care of these problems. He also maintained, although he did not specifically say so, that labor and management must come up with solutions to problems arising out of automation, otherwise the government will have to be called upon. In the latter part of 1957, he suggested that labor, management and the government get together to come up with solutions to these problems whereas before he suggested that it be handled by labor and management. Is this an indication that Meany is losing faith in voluntary organizations in handling such matters?

No, not at all. In the latter part of 1957, the American economy was entering a recession. Unemployment was rising, thus giving rise to many fears. Therefore it can be concluded that he felt either or both of the following conditions warranted the suggestion of government help: 1) that industry and labor were not doing the job that had to be done in this area and 2) that the job was too big for industry and labor to handle alone; consequently it was getting out of hand.

Meany is a dynamic, influential and energetic person with
deep convictions. Of his convictions, he is uncompromising. In many ways he is like Samuel Gompers. His objectives and goals are similar to those of Gompers. Meany states specifically at numerous occasions that the goals of the American labor movement are the same now as they were under Gompers. This is true to a degree. There is a difference in their philosophy of the methods employed in securing their goals. Gompers was conservative whereas Meany is liberal. In the field of foreign affairs, he is more outspoken than Gompers probably because our relations with other countries in various parts of the world are much closer now than they were thirty or forty years ago.

Meany, just as Walter Reuther, sees labor as an integral part of our society. This is evidenced by the scope of his objectives. Not only is he concerned with "bread and butter" objectives, but also with such items as civil rights, foreign policy, and any other function that effects the well being of the worker. He accepts the tenet that labor must be "our brother's keeper." He does not confine this tenet to the people of America only. He wants the free trade unions of the democratic world to strive to meet such vital economic and social tasks as freedom from want and insecurity, the development of economically underdeveloped countries, and the numerous complex migration problems. And to secure these ends, he promises the support of the American labor movement. Meany maintains that all people of America should be imbued with a determination to take a hand in formulating the foreign policy. In this
field he is as outspoken as one could be.

The economic philosophy of Meany coincides with the philosophy of the English economist John Maynard Keynes. Keynes argued that expenditures for public works will provide not only the employment necessary for the construction of the public works, but by raising the incomes of the people will enable them to spend and invest more, and so will increase employment in business generally, by an amount possibly several times as great as that required for the public works themselves. It is quite obvious that Meany subscribes to this theory. Hence it is only natural for Meany to be an ardent foe of conservatism or the wait and see attitude. Likewise, he refutes the philosophy of individualism.

Regardless of one's philosophy, so much must be said of Meany that he is a labor leader who is devoted to the cause of labor, who seeks to make life on earth more endurable and perhaps even pleasant not only for those he represents but for all people. He has dedicated his life to the cause of freedom, brotherhood and justice for people everywhere.
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