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A Discourse of True and False: An Analysis of the Publications of the AFL-CIO Between 1955-1965 as Archived in the Tamiment Library

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A DISCOURSE OF TRUE AND FALSE: AN ANALYSIS OF THE PUBLICATIONS OF THE
AFL-CIO BETWEEN 1955-1965 AS ARCHIVED IN THE TAMIMENT LIBRARY

by

John J. Gorham, Jr.

A master's thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, The City University of New York

2018

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in satisfaction of the thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

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ABSTRACT

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by

John J. Gorham, Jr.

Advisor: Ira Shor

In 1955 the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations healed their twenty-year schism. Provisions of the NIRA and the Wagner Act had given promising opportunities for union organization in the early 1930's. Unions in coal and steel saw possibilities in organizing vertically entire industries, rather than according to traditional crafts. In 1935 some unions left the AFL to form more aggressive organizations under the banner of the newly formed CIO. The public perception of aggressive strikes led to anti-labor laws, most noticeably the Taft-Hartley Act of 1947. The increasingly hostile political climate, as states enacted the "right to work" laws permitted by Section 14(b) of Taft-Hartley, created the conditions for reuniting labor.

This thesis examines the decade following that reunion. Using theories of Foucault, Bourdieu, and Habermas, it looks at the historical background of labor's perception of itself in the century leading up to the topic period, but focuses primarily on the AFL-CIO's documents of the decade 1955-1965, how those documents defined the role of unions in a democracy, the battle of discourse in claiming the mantle of "individual freedom", and the compromises involved in the process of "collective bargaining."

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Chapter 1: Introduction, “A Discourse of True and False”

Foucault stated, “My general theme isn’t society but the discourse of true and false, by which I mean the correlative falsifiable discourses that bear on them; and it’s not just their formation that interests me, but the effects in the real to which they are linked.”¹ In the decade 1955-1965 the American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations, the umbrella organization of American labor, engaged in a struggle over the truth or falsehood of the American foundation myth, the liberal philosophy of John Locke, which posited personal property as the foundation argument against despotic government. The American Constitution enshrined Locke’s notion of property in two senses, possessing physical property and having a property in one’s own being. For two centuries the discourse of American political life has assumed the rectitude of Locke’s philosophy as exploitation of the continent’s natural resources increased possibilities for white immigrants and conflated the American experience of democracy with the economic benefits of emerging industrialization and capitalism. The thesis of this paper is that this myth of “individual freedom” worked within American political life to isolate the individual, thus reducing the individual’s ability to act collectively. Specifically, the thesis will examine the discourse surrounding the collective bargaining strategy of the AFL-CIO in the decade 1955-1965. The theories of Foucault, Bourdieu, and Habermas will act as reference points to examine the internal conflicts and difficulties of implementing the process of collective bargaining in a discourse controlled by the dominant theories of Lockean individualism.

¹ Michel Foucault, and Paul Rabinow, *Power: Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984*, (New York: The New Press 2000) 237.

In the decade 1955-1965 “collective bargaining” stood at the center of the discourse struggle within liberalism, whether it entailed “positive freedom”, the fulfillment of one’s potential in life, or merely “negative freedom”, the right to one’s property without outside interference. This thesis will look at the linguistic restrictions that the AFL-CIO placed upon itself in the decade 1955-1965 by examining the archives of the AFL-CIO held in the Tamiment Labor Library at New York University. These archives consist of pamphlets, press releases, shop steward manuals, and magazines published by the AFL-CIO. The documents are not complex philosophical treatises, but according to Bourdieu, we can “take an example from the most humdrum and ordinary sphere of politics, that which we see in front of us every day . . . to think in completely astonished and disconcerted way about things you thought you had always understood.”² These documents depict a decade in which the AFL-CIO seemed to be an essential part of the American political landscape. The documents avoid a depiction of class struggle, but rather display a struggle in discourse, in which the leaders of the AFL-CIO failed to master the complex array of social and financial changes following WWII and the Korean War.

This decade was a high water mark for the American labor movement. In 1954 American labor union density peaked at 34 percent of wage and salary employees in non-farm workplaces.³ As a starting point for the analysis, in 1955 the American Federation of Labor healed an almost twenty-year schism in organized labor by reuniting with the Congress of Industrial Organizations. This reunion forged a united front against the surging economic and social capital of American business, which consolidated its position as partner with government in maintaining the

²Pierre Bourdieu, et al, *Language and Symbolic Power*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003) 207.

³Sean Farhang and Ira Katznelson, "The Southern Imposition: Congress and Labor in the New Deal and Fair Deal," *Studies in American Political Development* 19, no. 01 (Spring 2005): 29, doi:10.1017/s0898588x05000015.

American dream. According to Foucault, “there is no relationship of power without the means of escape or possible flight. Every power relationship implies, at least in potential, a strategy of struggle, in which two forces are not superimposed, do not lose their specific nature, or do not finally become confused. Each constitutes for the other a kind of permanent limit, a point of possible reversal.”⁴ As will be expanded upon later in this thesis, a long history of confrontations established the power relationships between the AFL-CIO and business, defining the limits and conflicts of their struggle between 1955 and 1965.

As the closing year for this analysis, George Meany’s Labor Day on September 3, 1965 presented a high point of AFL-CIO influence on the political process. George Meany, president of the AFL-CIO, cited the recent achievements of the AFL-CIO in achieving the legislative victories of Johnson’s Great Society. “This is a memorable Labor Day, not only for the trade union movement and its members, but for the nation. The will of the people, so strongly expressed last November, has been translated with unparalleled speed and scope into legislative action. And what a legislative record it is: Even now, with fruitful days still to come, the 89th Congress has written an indelible chapter in American history and has opened the way to a far better life for the generation now alive and those yet to be born.”⁵ Meany added a caution, which indicated the isolation of the AFL-CIO in its dependence upon political action, “There is no automatic assurance that future Congresses will be in the same pattern. On the contrary, political writers are already taking it for granted that many Congressional liberals, especially new

⁴ Foucault, *Essential Works*, 346.

⁵ George Meany, Speech, Press Release, “News from the AFL-CIO NA.8-3870 For Labor Day Editions of Daily Papers: Release for Use in P.M. Editions, September 3, 1965, ‘1965 Labor Day Message by President George Meany AFL-CIO’”, (BOX 9, AFL-CIO Archives of the Tamiment Library & Robert F. Wagner Archives PE 201, Bobst Library, New York University, New York City, March 19, 2015.)

members, will lose their seats to conservatives and reactionaries in 1966. This, they write, is the “normal” result in non-Presidential years... We cannot afford to be complacent, trusting in our conviction that most Americans support the cause of social and economic progress.” In the following half a century, Meany’s “conservatives and reactionaries” attacked those legislative achievements continuing the attack on New Deal policies.

The theories of Bourdieu, Foucault and Habermas contextualize the problems of this specific period in the light of prior American labor history. According to Foucault, “The first thing to check is what I should call the ‘conceptual needs.’ I mean that the conceptualization should not be founded on a theory of the object—the conceptualized object is not the single criterion of a good conceptualization. We have to know the historical conditions that motivate our conceptualization. We need a historical awareness of our present circumstance. The second thing to check is the reality with which we are dealing.”⁶ The thesis considers the period 1955-1965 as a point of disruption in the history of the labor movement and to see within that period the seeds of future decline.

Bourdieu defined “Heretical subversion” as exploiting the possibility of changing the social world by changing the representation of this world which contributes to its reality, or more precisely, by counterposing a paradoxical pre-vision, a utopia, a project or programme, to the ordinary vision which apprehends the social world as a natural world.”⁷ During the period 1955-1965 the AFL-CIO struggled with the definition of worker as automation increasingly reduced industrial capital’s dependence on the physical bodies of workers. It battled about language, the meaning of work, the meaning of democracy, and ultimately the meaning of the founding myth of American society, individual freedom for as Bourdieu points out, “All linguistic practices are

⁶ Foucault, *Essential Works*, 327.

⁷ Bourdieu, *Language*, 128.

measured against the legitimate practices, i.e. the practices of those who are dominant.”⁸ Marx foresaw that unions could also become a special-interest group although he most likely would not have termed it so. In the *Poverty of Philosophy* he proposed that one can date the birth of a social group from the moment the members of its representative organizations do not struggle merely for the defence of the economic interests of their supporters and members but for the defence and development of the organization itself . . . This means that by a strange irony the concentration of political capital is at its greatest—in the absence of a deliberate (and improbable) intervention against this trend—in parties whose aim is to struggle against the concentration of economic capital.”⁹ As the AFL-CIO solidified its position in the collective bargaining process, it gained political capital, but lost social capital, as members it as a provider of benefits, and non-members, the mass of American workers, resented the unattainable gains of unionized workers. Bourdieu pointed out, “The more advanced the process of institutionalization of political capital is, the more the winning of ‘hearts and minds’ tends to become subordinated to the winning of jobs.”¹⁰ But the “winning of jobs”, which focused on the immediate needs of workers, distracted from the broader philosophical problem of where the workers stood in the myth of American “individual freedom.”

“The great Question which in all Ages has disturbed Mankind, and brought on them the greatest part of those Mischiefs which have ruin'd Cities, depopulated Countries, and disordered the Peace of the World, has been, Not whether there be Power in the World, nor whence it came, but who should have it.”¹¹ As John Locke acknowledged in 1689, the question of power is an

⁸ Bourdieu, *Language*, 53.

⁹ Bourdieu, *Language*, 174.

¹⁰ Bourdieu, *Language*, 197.

¹¹ John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government: (an Essay Con- ..* (IBooks, 2016), 101.

old one. His *Second Treatise of Government* disputed the monarchy's patriarchy, and in its place posited the role of individual freedom, a freedom represented by property, both internal and external. With Locke's philosophical underpinnings the founders of the American republic justified independence with lasting philosophical implications for democracy and capitalism in the United States. In 1955 Louis Hartz called Locke the continuing philosophical presence in the United States: "Locke dominates American political thought, as no thinker anywhere dominates the political thought of a nation."¹² He called Locke's "atomistic social freedom" the master assumption of American political thought, and that a government could only control the individual by "uniting him with a capitalist movement."¹³ This master assumption lay at the heart of power conflicts in the American labor movement 1955-1965 as the foundation myth of individual freedom conflicted with the AFL-CIO's reliance on collective bargaining.

In 1959 the Industrial Union Department of the AFL-CIO, held its third annual Conference in Philadelphia. The theme was "Collective Bargaining Today." Walter Reuther, a vice-president of the AFL-CIO and head of its Industrial Union Department, spoke, "We have been trying to get people to understand that collective bargaining is a democratic tool with which free labor and free management must work together in finding answers to common problems; that collective bargaining transcends the quest of competing equity between the worker and stockholder and consumer. It gets to the very core of the basic unsolved problem in the American economy, namely, how do we work out these competing and relative equities between

¹² Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America: An Interpretation of American Political Thought since the Revolution* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1991), 62.

¹³ Hartz, *Liberal Tradition*, 108.

the basic economic groups in our free society?”¹⁴ Key words in this speech, “democratic tool”, the equivalence of “free labor” and “free management”, “common problems”, “equity” summed up the ideological essence of American unionism. In the anti-Communist fervor of the Cold War the AFL-CIO pledged portrayed itself as totally committed to the equivalence between capitalism and democracy. “Collective bargaining” was not a seizure of property by the workers, but rather perfectly in keeping with the long history of liberalism as identified with Locke. But by its reliance on collective bargaining and by pledging support of the ruling ideology, unions boxed themselves into a linguistic trap. Because they were working within the basic theory of liberalism, they could only discuss themselves within that framework and there was a battle going on as to the nature of that liberalism.

The starting point of any societal dialectic in capitalist society is the acceptance that money informs the habitus. Poverty creates its own habitus of day-to-day need and the immediacy of desire, how to put off until tomorrow the need for food and shelter today. Individual freedom was the creation myth of American society, not myth in the sense that was false, but myth in the sense that it formed the foundation of a secular society that, as much as it honored religion, lacked the social unity of more homogeneous cultures. The Constitution enshrined the late eighteenth century apotheosis of individual freedom and its most physical expression, property. Thus enshrinement of property was the club that would beat back temporary gains won by collective action. Ultimately, when one had only one’s body to offer, the competition from innumerable other bodies was a losing proposition. The paradox of individual freedom in the

¹⁴ Walter Reuther, Speech, “Collective Bargaining Today”: Proceedings of the Third Annual Industrial Relations Conference of the IUD AFL-CIO June 15 and 16, 1959 Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (BOX 6, AFL-CIO Archives of the Tamiment Library & Robert F. Wagner Archives PE 201, Bobst Library, New York University. New York City. March 20, 2015).

United States was that since it revolved around property, it neither valued the individual nor freedom. And another great myth of the American polity was its apotheosis of the “middle class” and the vague notion of “working class.” Bourdieu encapsulated the uses of language in domination of the lower classes, “This nostalgic yearning for the protodoxa is expressed with utter naivety in the admiration that all conservatisms display for ‘decent people’ (most often personified by the), whose essential property is designated clearly by the euphemisms (‘simple folk’, ‘working people’) which feature in orthodox discourse: their submission to the established order.”¹⁵ Inevitably, capitalism drew resources into fewer and fewer hands. As Chesterton noted, “Too much capitalism does not mean too many capitalists, but too few capitalists; and so aristocracy sins not in planting a family tree, but in not planting a family forest.”¹⁶

Bourdieu illustrated the difficulty in discussing issues surrounding the working class, “the indeterminately extensive notion of ‘working-class areas’ owes its mystifying virtues, in the sphere of scholarly production, to the fact that, as in a psychological projection, everyone can unconsciously manipulate its extension in order to adjust it to their interest, prejudices or social fantasies.”¹⁷ To rephrase Martin Luther we live in a world of justification through money alone. Bourdieu points out, “The propensity to reduce the search for causes to a search for responsibilities makes it impossible to see that intimidation, a symbolic violence which is not aware of what it is (to the extent that it implies no act of intimidation) can only be exerted on a person predisposed (in his habitus) to feel it, whereas others will ignore it.”¹⁸ The habitus of the workers led them to believe that that the demands of capital were legitimate because money was

¹⁵ Bourdieu, *Language*, 132.

¹⁶ G.K. Chesterton, “Divorce”, In *The G. K. Chesterton Collection (50 Books)*, Kindle ed. (Catholic Way Publishing, 2012), 20940.

¹⁷ Bourdieu, *Language*, 91.

¹⁸ Bourdieu, *Language*, 51.

the symbol of power. Demanding a role in their working lives crossed the entrenched linguistic line of justification by money alone.

The Tamiment Archives illustrate Bourdieu's dictum that "Every speech act and, more generally, every action, is a conjuncture, an encounter between independent causal series."¹⁹ Examination of these speech acts explores the conjuncture of these independent causal series, and explores the domination of capital over the union movement in that the movement could only use the mode of thinking of the dominant.

A theory effect imposes a reductionist theory of class in the struggle. As Bourdieu explains, "The pre-vision or theory effect (understood as the effect of imposition of the principles of division which occurs whenever an attempt is made to make something explicit) operates in the margin of uncertainty resulting from the discontinuity between the silent and self-evident truths of the ethos and the public expressions of the logos: thanks to the allodoxia made possible by the distance between the order of practice and the order of discourse, the same dispositions may be recognized in very different, sometimes opposing stances . . . the fact remains that is only after Marx, and indeed only after the creation of parties capable of imposing (on a large scale) a vision of the social world organized according to the theory of class struggle, that one could refer, strictly speaking, to classes and class struggle . . . paradoxically, Marxist theory, which has exercised a theory effect unrivalled in history, devotes no space to the theory effect in its theory of history and of class."²⁰ This was especially true in the period after the Korean War as the manufacturing interests reinforced their symbolic capital that they had achieved in WWII. In wars that had pitted "democracy" against totalitarian regimes, the very term itself became a form

¹⁹ Bourdieu, *Language*, 38.

²⁰ Bourdieu, *Language*, 132.

of symbolic domination as the communicative function of language disappeared in the public discourse between labor and management.

American democracy created the great theory effect in that it imposed its authorized way of seeing the social world, and the great project was to construct that reality; however, that reality could only be achieved in the context of capitalism, the great theory that overrode the populist possibilities of democracy. By controlling the use of language the capital interests fulfilled Bourdieu's observation that "One should never forget that language, by virtue of the infinite generative but also originitive capacity in the Kantian sense—which it derives from its power to produce existence by producing the collectively recognized, and thus realized, representation of existence, is no doubt the principal support of the dream of absolute power."²¹

The AFL-CIO had no other option given its decrease in symbolic power after the wars than to engage in the game of language for in Bourdieu's terms, "the struggle tends constantly to produce and reproduce the game and its stakes by reproducing, primarily in those who are directly involved, but not in them alone, the practical commitment to the value of the game and its stakes which defines the recognition of legitimacy . . . The game is over when people start wondering if the cake is worth the candle."²² Ultimately the struggle in the years 1955-1965 was one of language, a battle of hearts and minds about the meaning of individual freedom and in a sense, what the recent wars had meant for American democracy. On one hand for the moneyed interest of the country, the victory represented individual freedom as represented in the capitalist system in which every citizen could rely on personal talent and resolve to achieve goals unfettered by government or the group think of unions; whereas for the unions the gains made during the war represented both the triumph and personification of individual freedom as

²¹ Bourdieu, *Language*, 42.

²² Bourdieu, *Language*, 58.

workers united for the common goal of defeating the enemy and sharing in the productivity gains of industrialization. The industrial complex emerged from the war with not only the symbolic capital of having saved the world against fascism and communism, but also as wielders of the ultimate symbolic power in American society, money. Having considered itself an equal partner in World War II, but relegated during the Korean War, the AFL-CIO concentrated on “collective bargaining,” which led to its isolation. After the war, business controlled the legitimate competence so that labor agreed to collective bargaining in each industry, rather than a broader social agenda that seemed impossible to achieve politically.

Unions were at a disadvantage because business controlled the linguistics norm as the dominant speaker in the interaction. As Bourdieu pointed out, the higher degree of formality, in this case, collective bargaining as recognized by the Wagner Act, the more rigorous the domination by capital. “Everything happens as if, in each particular situation, the linguistics norm (the law of price formation) is imposed by the holder of the competence which is closest to the legitimate competence, i.e. by the dominant speaker in the interaction, and in a way that is all the more rigorous when the exchange has a higher degree of formality (in public, in a formal setting, etc.)”²³ Aside from the day to day problems that unions posed for management, the nature of unions posed a philosophical threat to the underpinnings of Capital. As Chesterton pointed out, “Capitalism believes in collectivism for itself and individualism for its enemies. It desires its victims to be individuals, or (in other words) to be any bond, if there be any brotherhood, if there be any class loyalty or domestic discipline, by which the poor can help the

²³ Bourdieu, *Language*, 77.

poor, these emancipators will certainly strive to loosen that bond or lift that discipline in the most liberal fashion.”²⁴

According to Foucault “the political and economic conditions of existence are not a veil or an obstacle for the subject of knowledge but the means by which subjects of knowledge are formed, and hence are truth relations.”²⁵ The AFL-CIO was a part of that struggle to form subjects of knowledge because unions were at the center of economic and intellectual struggle. During the period 1955-1965 the unions achieved some economic success but did not succeed in conveying the intellectual message of their utilitarian liberalism as viable alternatives to the spread of consumerism and anti-communism.

Bourdieu explained the problem, “Knowledge of the social world and, more precisely, the categories which make it possible, are the stakes par excellence of the political struggle, a struggle which is inseparably theoretical and practical, over the power of preserving or transforming the social world by preserving or transforming the categories of perception of that world.”²⁶ At the very heart of the union movement lay an epistemological problem produced by the lack of acceptable language to explain the unions’ position to American worker, and ironically, the unions helped codify the workers as a dominated group. As Bourdieu noted “the dominated exist only if they mobilize or avail themselves of instruments of representations.”²⁷ In the post Civil War period, unions created the notion of a dominated group in order to give workers the instruments of representation. Unions created a “theory effect” in how we think of American capitalism. Unfortunately, unions also had an “organization effect”, which Bourdieu described as “a sort of historical realization of what is described by the theoretical model of the

²⁴ Chesterton, “Divorce”, 21050.

²⁵ Foucault, *Essential Works*, 15.

²⁶ Bourdieu, *Language*, 236.

²⁷ Bourdieu, *Language*, 194.

process of delegation. People are there and speak. Then comes the official and people speak less often. And then there is an organization, which starts to develop a specific competence, a language of its own.”²⁸ The problem for the unions was that their language had boundaries, produced by over 150 years of American trumpeting of “individual freedom” dating from before the American Revolution, becoming an article of faith in the development of American culture. The unions struggled to determine knowledge, power in Foucault terms, but a long accumulation of philosophical thought lay against them. Michael Zuckert described Locke’s reformulation of natural law as part of the history of Protestant reemphasis on the power of God as finding “familiar and receptive response” in the white, Protestant population of the United States.”²⁹ Zuckert described the logic of Locke’s individual freedom, “the foundation or ground of rights is according to Locke, self-ownership. Notice that Locke here claimed to achieve the allegedly impossible—the derivation of an ‘ought’ from an ‘is.’ He concluded from an ‘is’ (the fact of self-ownership) the ‘ought’ of moral inviolability. . . . So, to have property is to have moral inviolability.”³⁰

According to Foucault “behind all knowledge (savoir), behind all attainment of knowledge (connaissance), what is involved is a struggle for power. Political power is not absent from knowledge, it is woven together with it.”³¹ Power in the period 1955-1965 could only be discussed in terms dictated by the dominant business group, a group with the power of American history behind it. The unions and business were involved in a chess match, but as Bourdieu points out, “If the technique of the game of chess did not exist, I could not intend to play a game

²⁸ Bourdieu, *Language*, 218.

²⁹ Michael P. Zuckert, *Launching Liberalism: On Lockean Political Philosophy* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2002), 190.

³⁰ Zuckert, *Launching Liberalism*, 194.

³¹ Foucault, *Essential Works*, 32.

of chess. . . A political intention can be constituted only in one's relation to a given state of the political game and, more precisely of the universe of the techniques of action and expression it offers at any given moment. . . The market of politics is doubtless one of the least free markets that exist . . . the political field in fact produces the effect of censorship by limiting the universe of political discourse, and thereby the universe of what I politically thinkable, to the finite space of discourses capable of being produced or reproduced within the limits of the political problematic, understood as a space of stances effectively adopted within the field—i.e., stances that are socio-logically possible given the laws that determine entry into the field.”³² Many unionized workers failed to see that their rising purchasing power was a direct result of their union being able to wrest some of the benefits of automation for the dwindling number of workers. The propertied class had always controlled the discourse in American history. Even before the Civil War, slavery represented the ultimate logic of the capitalist system, treating persons as things.

The unions exercised a form of self-censorship in that they could only produce discourse within the framework of the anti-communism frenzy in the period after the World War II and Korean wars. As Bourdieu pointed out, “The metaphor of censorship should not mislead: it is the structure of the field itself which governs expression by governing both access to expression and the form of expression, and not some legal proceeding which has been specially adapted to designate and repress the transgression of a kind of linguistic code.”³³ The unions constantly censored themselves in painting themselves as equal partners in American capitalism, thus by extension, legitimizing the control of the country by the business community.

³² Bourdieu, *Language*, 171.

³³ Bourdieu, *Language*, 135.

Foucault explored the conflicts in human society, the need to examine the ways in which power flows through society, and not to assume the justification for subjection. Foucault warned that “everything is dangerous”, and “if everything is dangerous, then we always have something to do”³⁴ Unions in the period 1955-1965 helped crystallize the power structures in post-war America. However, power in this period flowed in many rivulets.

The period 1955-1965 in a sense was a cold war of words between labor and business. Gone were the hand-to-hand physical battles of the Great Railway Strikes of 1877, the Haymarket riots of 1888, the Homestead strikes, and the physical battles of the 1930s. Instead there was a war of words and the AFL-CIO found itself at a disadvantage because the rules of the game were in the hands of business, elaborating the concept of individual freedom upon which the Republic was founded.

Foucault examined specific historical periods to examine the resistance in a power relationship and to see in that struggle and strategy the underlying assumptions of society at that time in order to challenge the assumptions that linger on to the present day. This paper will specifically look at the public statements of the AFL-CIO as collected in the Tamiment Library at NYU, and examine the discourse of their resistance to the power of American business. It will examine the discourse of the AFL-CIO from the vantage point of Foucault’s theory of power, Bourdieu’s theory of language, and Habermas’s theory of communication. Of course, any discussion of labor involves the template of discussion produced by Marx. According to Marx, “communism creates the free, social individual whose rich inner being is dependent upon

³⁴ Mark Olssen, "Chapter 14: Invoking Democracy: Foucault's Conception (With Insights from Hobbes)," *Counterpoints* 292, no. Why Foucault? New Directions in Educational Research (January 01, 2007): 218

conditions of social equality where the freedom of each requires the freedom of all.”³⁵ This idea of the social individual can be tied in with material from the Tamiment archives of the AFL-CIO. In the light of Foucault’s type of analysis, the main point of Marx is to try to explain something new in the history of human interaction. Capitalism as a source of modernity was relatively new at the time of Marx so it is important to remember that his theories were not tablets from the mountaintop, but the beginning of a philosophical inquiry, and a step away from Kant’s reliance on reason and the Enlightenment. Comparing and contrasting, Steven Best laid out the ways in which Marx, Foucault, and Habermas dealt with history in the post-Enlightenment era. Marx believed while communism represented the next stage of history, it did not create itself; rather, Marx believed that communism required “a conscious and practical act of appropriation.”³⁶ Foucault also used “critical theory” to illuminate the situation of the present. Like Marx, Foucault employed historical analysis in an effort to defetishize and denaturalize the present, to underline the discontinuities between the present and the past. Foucault maintained that to criticize is to specify ‘how the present is absolutely different from all that it is not, that is to say, from our past.’”³⁷ Habermas also examines history, but to see the process of communication as the essence of the human experience and that consensus through communication is a driver of history. According to Best, “in many ways, Habermas advanced beyond Marx and Foucault. He undertook an important defense of the Enlightenment that avoided Marx’s uncritical acceptance of key tenets and Foucault’s totalizing rejection of rationality.”³⁸

³⁵ Steven Best, *The Politics of Historical Vision: Marx, Foucault, Habermas* (New York, NY: Guilford Press, 1995), 44.

³⁶ Best, *Politics*, 40.

³⁷ Best, *Politics*, 114.

³⁸ Best, *Politics*, 201

The term “labor” is an imposition of a theory effect upon the present way of life in the modern world in which work has become disassociated from the spiritual life of humanity and transformed into a commodity. As Foucault explained, “labor is absolutely not man’s concrete essence or man’s existence in its concrete form. In order for men to be brought into labor, tied to labor, an operation is necessary, or a complex series of operations, by which men are effectively—not analytically but synthetically—bound to the production apparatus for which they labor. It takes this operation, or this synthesis effected by a political power, for man’s essence to appear as being labor.”³⁹ Political power has accomplished this transformation by the imposition of discipline upon the ordinary citizen. Centralized national authority first imposed duties upon the individual, which advanced the capitalist system in a mutually advantageous relationship. An aggregated improvement in the standard of living supported the claims of superiority for the capitalist system, while the central authority consolidated its hold on democracy by taking credit for the improvement, and at the same time depending upon the wealth of the capitalist system to maintain its hold. But this story of the transformation of American life is complex due to the benefits derived from the capitalist system. As Foucault pointed out, “If power were never anything but repressive, if it never did anything but to say no, do you really think one would be brought to obey it? What makes power’s hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn’t only weigh on us as a force that says no; it also traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse.”⁴⁰ The history of the United States has demonstrated the triumph of this productive network of power as the principle of individual freedom has allowed individuals to feel a part of this

³⁹ Foucault, *Essential Works*, 86.

⁴⁰ Foucault, *Essential Works*, 120.

network, to engage in the discourse of democracy, while at the same time provide their labor in the service of an overarching idea.

In the decade 1955-1965 labor saw itself as an important part of the discourse on social issues, but in attempting to place itself as a vital upholder of democracy, labor argued on its opponents terms. This decade is a fragment of history and to use Foucault's means of analysis to study this period is to see history as the particular instance of the way power works, as the rules of the construction of truth create power, as those rules are a site of struggle, and those struggles have their own effects for truth. The AFL-CIO struggled to redefine individual freedom in American history.

Foucault wrote, "My role—and that is too emphatic a word—is to show people that they are much freer than they feel, that people accept as truth, as evidence, some themes which have been built up at a certain moment during history, and that this so-called evidence can be criticized and destroyed. To change something in the minds of people—that's the role of an intellectual."⁴¹

This thesis will look at the core truth of American history, that individual freedom was the foundation for its democracy and that by extension, capitalism was the freest expression of that freedom. The thesis will look at the archives of the AFL-CIO between 1955-1965 as found in the Tamiment library to explore how the unions during that period tried to accommodate themselves to that truth.

⁴¹ Best, *Politics*, 110.

Chapter 2: Labor between the Civil War and New Deal, “The Ironic Silences of Heaven”

Gilbert K. Chesterton wrote in 1922 that the truth about “Trusts and Trade Combines and the concentration of capital” is that “they endure under one of the ironic silences of heaven, over the pageants and the passing triumphs of hell.”⁴² His observation was just one of many attacks on the injustices of unfettered American capitalism. In 1888 Edward Bellamy wrote *Looking Backward* in which its protagonist visited a socialist utopia of the future, and is told, “We belong to a future of which you could not form an idea, a generation of which you knew nothing until you saw us.” He replied, “I had not thought of it in that way. There is much in what you say. One can look back a thousand years easier than forward fifty.”⁴³ In 1955 the AFL-CIO could look back on a long history of struggle to give the American worker a share in industrial capitalism. The AFL-CIO could not create a utopia of the workers for the same reason that *Looking Backward* failed to create a utopia in the real world. Like the discourse of the AFL-CIO, Bellamy’s utopia assumed the basic premise of American capitalism, that industrialization provided a higher standard of living for all. Writing in 1955, Louis Hartz noted with regard to Bellamy, “Could there be any sweeter release for the tormented trustbuster than to dream of a perfect trust, a trust so big that it absorbed all other trusts, so big that the single act of its nationalization collectivized all America”⁴⁴

By the time of Bellamy’s book, changes accelerated by the Civil War had transformed the raw materials of America into commodities.⁴⁵ Increased industrialization caused an increased

⁴² G.K. Chesterton, *What I saw in America*, In *The G. K. Chesterton Collection [50 Books]*, Kindle ed., (Catholic Way Publishing), 7832.

⁴³ Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward: 2000-1887*, Kindle ed. (Dover Thrift Editions), 231.

⁴⁴ Hartz, *Liberal Tradition*, 235.

⁴⁵ Steve Fraser, *The Age of Acquiescence: The Life and Death of American Resistance to Organized Wealth and Power* (New York: Little, Brown &, 2015), 11.

number of wage earners who depended upon the new organization of society. Organized labor rose to counteract this dependence and the powerlessness of individuals in the changing workplace. J.A. Dacus, no friend of labor, described the Railroad Strike of 1877 in his contemporaneous account, *Annals of the Great Strike in the United States*, “The conviction was universal that the four trunk railways from the seaboard to the West that the railroads had seriously crippled themselves by carrying on a cut-throat war against each other in regard to the rates of freights and fares, especially the former, and that this was the chief immediate reason why they found themselves obliged to diminish the wages of employees down to the mere living point, if not below it. The sudden reduction of the wages of the railway employees, combined with the fact that even at the new rates, they could only get work part of the time, fell heavily upon a vast number of honest, hardworking men; but even this was no ground for riots or violence of any kind, which always aggravate the evils they are designed to cure.”⁴⁶ Despite the admission that wages had fallen below a subsistence level, Dacus refused to allow that the laboring person had a right to resort to physical means to address wrongs, the only means available to the workers, given the power of money in American society. During the Great Railway Strike the government solidified its power by aligning with business and calling out the militias to fight the strikers. The crisis gave opportunity for the government to mend the rift of the Civil War, part of the process of restoring political power to the South in the Compromise of 1877, which allowed for the Election of Republican Rutherford Hayes on the promise of removing Federal troops. Dacus pointed out, ‘This complete restoration of good feeling between the North and South, was well illustrated in Louisville, KY during the strikes . . .

⁴⁶ J. A. Dacus, *Annals of the Great Strikes* (Chicago, IL: L.T. Palmer &, 1877), 235.

Hundreds of ex-soldiers of the blue and grey stood shoulder to shoulder in the ranks.”⁴⁷ Dacus dismissed angry laboring people as troublemakers, “The communists and the vicious of all classes and trades were sufficiently numerous to create no little trouble. It was well to be prepared to act with promptness and celerity, and make quick, sharp work with public offenders.”⁴⁸ The controlling discourse associated the workers with immigrants, a depiction meant to reinforce the American myth that the individual had no need of collective action although the discourse failed to see the irony in the creation of armories after 1877 in cities like New York to bring collective action against civic unrest.⁴⁹ Labor unrest continued with the original May Day on May 1, 1886 when half a million staged a strike and in the next seven years local governments used the National Guard to deal with worker unrest.⁵⁰

The dominant discourse had reason to demonize socialism as un-American. The American Federation of Labor had a sizable socialist minority among its trade-union members until at least WWI, and in 1893 it circulated a political program that included the collective ownership of the major means of production.⁵¹ Samuel Gompers, first president of the AFL steered the organization to embrace the myth of individual freedom, arguing that the union movement should avoid involvement with both government and socialism. He developed his position on the government’s role during the last decade of the 19th century, and he maintained it consistently throughout the progressive era. As he stated in 1898,” our movement stands for the wage earners doing for themselves, working out their own salvation. But those things that they

⁴⁷ Dacus, *Annals*, 432.

⁴⁸ Dacus, *Annals*, 311.

⁴⁹ Fraser, *Age of Acquiescence*, 176.

⁵⁰ Fraser, *Age of Acquiescence*, 138.

⁵¹ Greenstone, *Labor*, 25.

cannot do for themselves the government should do.”⁵² Gompers expected the government to provide a level playing field for workers. His Lockean principles fit into the ideal of the individual worker having a “property” in his labor, which could not be violated by the employer or the government. Skilled workers found common ground in this type of property, thus eliminating a need for the philosophical theories of socialism and communism. This element of a property in the skill of workers created tension in the 1930s as the traditional skill unions of the American Federation of Labor conflicted with the Congress of Industrial Organizations, which united both skilled and unskilled workers under the banner of one industry.

Despite Gompers’s endorsement of individual freedom, this “working out their own salvation” proved difficult when business held the reins of government. Democratic presidential candidate William Jennings Bryan built his campaign on the slogan “Shall the people rule”, demanding an income tax and direct election of Senators. These issues might have attracted broad working class support, but Bryan accommodated Gompers’s agenda and focused on injunctions when courting workers’ votes. Republicans used individual freedom to make political capital of Gompers’s small turn to the Democratic Party. They charged that AFL leaders sought to “deliver the labor vote” to the Democrats, that they were, in other words, dictating to workers how they should vote.⁵³

Even though Gompers advocated “voluntarism”, self-reliance on strikes and boycotts rather than a radical philosophy, the Democratic Party became a natural ally given the business control of the Republican Party. In the Wilson administration, the Adamson Act established an eight-hour day for interstate railroad workers. A pattern developed that the Democratic Party would

⁵² Kevin Boyle, *Organized Labor and American Politics: 1894-1994: The Labor-liberal Alliance* (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 1998), 77.

⁵³ Boyle, *Organized Labor*, 75.

aggregate the interests of northern workers while at the same time ignoring non-white workers to placate the political views of southern Democrats who held a stranglehold on political power due to the disenfranchisement of black voters, loyal to the party of Lincoln.⁵⁴

Wars offer opportunity for the dominant group to consolidate power. In the aftermath of the WWI, Republicans in alliance with business diminished the strength of the American Federation of Labor. By the time the Roosevelt administration came to power, the labor movement had disintegrated, with union membership falling to 5% of the workforce. The AFL had more than 4 million members in 1919 but fewer than 2 million in 1933. Companies in the 1920s had set out to break the unions. As joblessness mounted, the remaining workers faced falling wages and lengthened work hours. Union leaders had to fight the insurmountable combination of implacable employers, a receding economy, and hostile courts.⁵⁵ Even though Gompers' campaign efforts as early as 1906 had anticipated ensuing developments, the 1930s were a turning point in labor history because they marked an increase in the rate and magnitude of the unions' entry into national politics.⁵⁶ The experience of the depression had thrown the variations in the term "liberalism" into relief, whether a strict Lockean interpretation of individual freedom would prevail or a more utilitarian Benthamite version. The New Deal under Roosevelt was the ultimate utilitarian experiment as it tried several means to bring capitalism back from the brink of disaster. Presidential election voting increased more than 50% between 1924 and 1936 versus a population increase of 18%. The New Deal aggregated a new coalition. According to Kevin Boyle, the New Deal offered economic benefits to the mass of ethnic voters without cultural preconditions. The New Deal suggested a "much bigger American house with rooms for all,

⁵⁴ Boyle, *Organized Labor*, 89.

⁵⁵ Kirstin Downey, *The Woman behind the New Deal: The Life of Frances Perkins, FDR's Secretary of Labor and His Moral Conscience* (New York: Doubleday, 2009), 176.

⁵⁶ Greenstone, *Labor*, 39.

regardless of religion or birthplace or accent, and maybe even color.”⁵⁷ A temporary myth arose that allowed for unions to appear to be part of the American democracy, and by extension, democracy. That myth served the nation well in the wars, but it was a myth to which the ruling group never ascribed, and to which the AFL-CIO would cling during the period 1955-1965, but which became increasingly hollow as capital gained the upper hand.

⁵⁷ Boyle, *Organized Labor*, 39.

Chapter 3: The New Deal, “A Place at the Table”

The signal achievement of the New Deal in promoting the rise of unions had within it the kernel of capitalist philosophy. The New Deal saw the unions as a partner in a utilitarian approach to reversing the Depression by increasing consumer demand. The National Industrial Recovery Act of 1933 guaranteed workers the right to form and join unions. Section 7(a) of the act stated that “employees shall have the right to organize and bargain collectively through representatives of their own choosing”, banning “yellow-dog” contracts that forbade union membership. Under section 7(a) of the NIRA every industrial code recognized the employees’ right to organize, to bargain collectively, and to choose their own representatives without management interference. Even though these provisions were not vigorously enforced, they enabled union leaders to claim that President Roosevelt had personally endorsed unionism. By 1934 the AFL membership increased to over 4 million from less than 3 million in 1933, with industrial unions making the greatest gains.⁵⁸

In 1936 John Maynard Keynes would publish his *General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*, which would theorize the utilitarian approach of the New Deal. Keynes attacked the premise of classical economics, that when there’s a recession, employers lower wages. If they lower wages, they hire more workers: therefore, the market would bring an automatic end to every slump or recession. Keynes pointed out that lower wages lower demand. With lower demand, employers would not hire more workers thus worsening recession.

The NIRA provided no mechanism for enforcement, and was declared unconstitutional in 1935. Later that year Congress passed the National Labor Relations Act, or Wagner Act, which

⁵⁸ Greenstone, *Labor*, 48.

established the National Labor Relations Board and spelled out labor's right to organize and bargain collectively. In only 10 years, the Wagner Act led directly to an increase in union representation from approximately 1 worker in 10 in 1934 (the year before the passage of the act) to more than three out of 10 in 1945, and strong unions forced corporations to raise wages roughly the same rate that the economy expanded.⁵⁹ In manufacturing, between 1930 and 1940, the proportion of workers in unions rose from 9 to 34 percent; in mining from 21 to 72 percent. By 1948, overall union membership reached 14.1 million. The proportion of the non-farm labor force in unions reached 25 percent by 1940, and topped 30 percent a decade later.⁶⁰ The benefits of war employment and New Deal policy had economic benefits that spread broadly through American society. By 1945 the family income of the bottom 2/5 of Americans increased by over 60% more than double the rate of the rest of the population.⁶¹

But without a unified philosophical structure, the American Federation of Labor fissured under the conflicting demands of workers in major industries. The American Federation of Labor had traditionally relied on the common interests of skilled workers within the same trade. John Lewis, president of the mineworkers, organized the Committee of Industrial Organizations within the AFL to meet the demands of workers within an industry, many of whom lacked specific skills. In 1938 the tensions between the two strategies would lead Lewis to form a rival organization, renamed the Congress of Industrial Organizations.

Absent a parliamentary system in which a minority labor party might use its leverage to influence policy, the American system negated worker power. The American two-party system,

⁵⁹ Boyle, *Organized Labor*, 22.

⁶⁰ Ira Katznelson, *When Affirmative Action Was White* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2005), 55.

⁶¹ Nelson Lichtenstein, *Walter Reuther: The Most Dangerous Man in Detroit* (University of Illinois Press, 1995), 168.

gathered disparate groups to form coalitions to gain political power. In the quest to make coalitions, the AFL and the CIO lacked the coherent philosophical underpinnings provided to capitalism by John Locke. According to J. David Greenstone, despite their militancy in trade-union matters, the CIO leaders of the 1930s had no coherent intellectual system that could have stabilized and radicalized their demands for reform. They were a group of “workaday unions, not a labor movement built on theory.”⁶² As practical men, CIO leaders were powerfully attracted to the New Deal’s moderate social reforms, to the governmentally sanctioned security for the unions that the Wagner Act promised, and finally to the status as valued allies of the dominant political party.

The unions in the period also faced the problem at the heart of the American consumerist society. The capitalist economy made the prospects of a more ideological class-based politics more difficult. Capitalism created variations in the economic prospects of different regions, industries, occupations and individuals.⁶³ The portentous problem for unions was the perception among non-unionized workers that they were losing economically and that unions only cared for their own members.

But as much as a success in practical terms as the New Deal may have been in utilitarian terms, it ran counter to the underlying basis of American polity. In an article in *The Saturday Evening Post* “The Challenge to Liberty,” former president Herbert Hoover bemoaned how the United States had joined a process in which “peoples and governments are blindly wounding, even destroying, those fundamental human liberties which have been the foundation and the inspiration of Progress since the Middle Ages.” Lamenting the “vast centralization of power in the executive,” he excoriated the New Deal for its “economic regimentation” and what he

⁶² Greenstone, *Labor*, 53.

⁶³ Boyle, *Organized Labor*, 35.

viewed as its coercive “code restrictions on business.” All told, he concluded, New Deal activism, characterized as “the daily dictation by Government, in every town and village every day in the week, of how men are to conduct their daily lives.” Referencing the long history of individual freedom as represented by Locke in American history, he called the New Deal “the most stupendous invasion of the whole spirit of liberty that the nation has witnessed since the days of Colonial America.”⁶⁴

Despite the underlying philosophical opposition, by 1940 unions had won acceptance. Business needed uninterrupted production as war orders from Europe mounted. Government policies put corporations on the defensive, and in 1941 the entry of the United States into the war created a need for national unity.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Ira Katznelson, *Fear Itself: The New Deal and the Origins of Our Time* (New York: Liveright Publishing, 2014), 235.

⁶⁵ Daniel Bell, *The End of Ideology* (Glencoe, IL: Free Pr., 1960), 197.

Chapter 4: World War II and the Korean War, “What is to be Done”

As happened after World War I and the Civil War, business emerged in a strong position after World War II and the Korean War. One might also point to the Revolutionary War as the very beginning of the propertied class asserting its privileges. A major discourse battle took place during WWII as the Advertising Council originated in response to the shocks produced within the advertising industry by the Great Depression, the rise of the New Deal. The approach of war had seemed especially threatening. Conversion to wartime production would eliminate many consumer durables and with them the need for large advertising budgets; while the government, through defense contracts and tax rulings, might disallow advertising as a business expense altogether.⁶⁶ The Advertising Council became a propaganda arm of business to win the war of ideas so that the idea of democracy for which ostensibly so many working class men were fighting and for which the women at home were sacrificing would not be taken so seriously as to mean that ordinary citizens had a voice in the running of business in which their very lives were at stake. According to Robert Griffith, “advertising would safeguard the economy against the possibility that an undisciplined special interest (e.g., labor) would insist too much or that the American people, not understanding the economic system and possessed of ‘an emotional hostility toward business, ‘ would demand public policies which might impair the system itself.’⁶⁷ After the war the advertising industry served the purposes of business as part of a general lobbying and anti-communist scare approach, negating the wartime warnings and promises of Roosevelt. Facing labor unrest and growing impatience with the rationing of sugar, coffee, and tires, rising prices, pervasive shortages, overcrowded housing, and long work hours,

⁶⁶ Robert Griffith, "The Selling of America: The Advertising Council and American Politics, 1942–1960," *Business History Review* 57, no. 03 (Autumn 1983): 389, doi:10.2307/3114050.

⁶⁷ Griffith, “Selling”, 394.

Roosevelt had appealed for national unity by attacking advantages being taken by “pests who swarm through the lobbies of the Congress and the cocktail bars of Washington . . . to make profits for themselves at the expense of their neighbors,” and, most notably, by pledging a postwar “Second Bill of Rights” to guarantee work and economic security, supply health care, provide decent housing, and enhance public education.⁶⁸

Unions lost the battle of discourse in the post war years to fulfill those promises. Union membership had grown enormously during World War II, but the accompanying layoffs that accompanied postwar reconversion challenged the unions newly won gains. The revival of business’s symbolic capital during the war added to the labor movement’s weakness. Bruce Catton derided them as the ‘warlords of Washington,’ but business leaders’ new authority in Washington enabled them to stymie the federal government’s postwar planning. The labor movement’s internal divisions hampered the CIO’s ability to counter the corporate resurgence. When the CIO proposed a national wage agreement to Pres. Truman’s Labor management conference in September 1945, the AFL and independent mineworkers president John L Lewis joined with employer representatives in rejecting the idea. The union’s subsequent massive strikes incurred the wrath of leaders in both major political parties. The Truman administration intervened in several strikes in 1945 and 1946, badly compromising the union positions. The Democratic-controlled Congress overwhelmingly passed anti-labor legislation, the Case bill in 1946, although Truman vetoed the measure. Then the Republican Party took advantage of low voter turnout to win a solid victory in the fall congressional elections. The Republican-controlled Congress proceeded to pass the National Association of Manufactures-drafted Taft-Hartley act of

⁶⁸ Katznelson, *Fear*, 196.

1947.⁶⁹ According to Kevin Boyle, “By polarizing the labor issue, Taft-Hartley had the effect of catapulting labor more squarely into politics than ever before. It intensified the efforts of both labor and industry to win over that ambiguous animal known as public opinion.”⁷⁰

The political climate after World War II drove unions deeper into the arms of the Democratic Party. CIO leaders wanted an alliance with liberal Democrats to transform the party into a programmatic reformist party that would promote a full-employment welfare state program. For example, a more programmatic Democratic Party, led by a sympathetic president, could take a party-line vote to overturn the Taft-Hartley Act. In fact, union leaders thought this would be accomplished in 1949 after the Democrats won the 1948 congressional and presidential elections. The events of 1949 made it clear that the unions needed to commit to political action and to position themselves as part of the political mainstream. The CIO merged with the AFL in 1955 and took the lead in the new labor federation’s Committee on Political Education. It also led labor social Democrats to join with liberal Democrats in their commitment to civil rights and to anti-Communist patriotism.⁷¹

Ironically, during the war the American government had become a socialist enterprise. By war’s end, the federal government owned fully 40 percent of the country’s capital assets. The federal budget had grown from \$ 9.5 billion in 1940 \$ 92 billion in 1945.⁷² Overall, the economy surged and unemployment disappeared, dropping from a rate of 14.6 percent in 1940 to just 1.2 percent in 1944.⁷³ In opposition to labor leaders like Walter Reuther who called for the government to use its assets to produce housing and social objectives, the rhetoric of anti-

⁶⁹ Boyle, *Organized Labor*, 167.

⁷⁰ Bell, *End of Ideology*, 203.

⁷¹ Boyle, *Organized Labor*, 171.

⁷² Katznelson, *Fear*, 345.

⁷³ Katznelson, *Fear*, 346.

communism reinforced opposition to any kind of collective action on the part of workers, and fed into the American myth of individual freedom. The threat of communism became mantra for the government and its allies in big business. Coming out of the war, the unions had no reasonable path to motivate workers, other than bread and butter issues because the ideological ground had been taken by business. Business returned to normal after the war and with an increased labor supply and decreased war demand, the overtime paychecks of worker decreased. Workers looked to unions to maintain their improved standard of living, thus cementing the role of unions as providers of benefits. The strikes following the war only improved the ideological position of business, which could portray the unions as just one of many interests in a pluralist society.

Ira Katznelson analyzed the political situation following WWII in terms of the racial predilections of Southern congressmen who saw unionization as threatening white domination in the South. After the period of Reconstruction in the South, Democrats controlled state offices, but Republican control of the presidency and Congress had limited their ability to control chairmanships. With the coming of the New Deal and Democratic national power, Southern Democrats were willing to acquiesce to progressive ideas in exchange for increased government spending in their states so long as it maintained the social status of the white electorate. With government spending in the South, however, came union penetration, rising from 10 percent to 20 percent during the war.⁷⁴ Fearing the loss of social control and the attraction of the South as a low wage sector, the southern Democrats joined with pro-business Republicans to pass anti-labor legislation, such as the Taft-Hartley Act of 1947. Since the AFL and the CIO had depended upon the political process, the control of Congress by an anti-union coalition led to a retreat from the broader goals of a united worker movement to reliance on collective bargaining

⁷⁴ Katznelson, *Fear*, 327.

as its contribution to democracy, when in fact, one could argue that the unions were retreating from the democratic project as a whole, that is, ensuring a level of equality. The AFL and the CIO focused resources on the greatest return, the large industries centered in the North while defending themselves against charges of anti-communism.

The Korean War reinforced the threat of world anti-communism in the discourse between business and labor, contributing to the isolation of organized labor as a special interest. During WWII, Roosevelt's call for a united front against the Axis powers had enshrined labor, government and business as bastions of democracy against tyranny. Seth Widgerson analyzed the effect of the Korean War upon American labor and determined that "The Korean War crystalized the position of business as a bulwark against the perceived aggressiveness of communism as seen in Korea, and business wrapped itself in the cloak of free enterprise as defender of the American way of life against godless communism and its perceived abolishment of individual freedom."⁷⁵ Government and business could not have ignored the fact that unions were in a strong position to further the "class" consciousness of the workers in line with Lenin's Marxist thinking about the need for an elite group of leaders to educate workers on their condition and need for unified action. As Lenin wrote in *What is to be Done*, "the masses will never learn to conduct the political struggle until we help to train leaders for this struggle, both from among the enlightened workers and from among the intellectuals."⁷⁶ Ironically, because unions still set a pattern for wages in the early 1950s, their gains fed into the general acceptance that capitalism went hand in hand with democracy as the superior way of life versus communism.

⁷⁵ Seth Widgerson, "The Wages of Anti-communism: U.S. Labor and the Korean War" in *Labor's Cold War: Local Politics in a Global Context*, by Shelton Stromquist (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 237.

⁷⁶ Vladimir Lenin, *What Is to Be Done*, Marxists Internet Archive, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/download/what-itd.pdf>, (accessed 11/4/2016)

The wartime consensus was fragile as the leaders of industry acceded to worker demands given labor shortages, but at the same time used government regulations to stifle union activism. Labor unrest after the war led a Republican majority to pass the Taft-Hartley. The solid gains of the New Deal and WWII began to melt into air, but with a holding action of collective bargaining.

Chapter 5: The Decade 1955-1965, “The Cornucopia”

At midcentury, the distinguished American historian David Potter argued that America as a “people of plenty had eluded, thanks to the cornucopia produced by its marvelous economic machinery, what might otherwise have been bitter political and social acrimony arising out of the abrasiveness of class inequities.”⁷⁷ In the decade 1955-1965 the AFL-CIO strove to share that “cornucopia” broadly across the American population.

Writing in the December 1967 issue of *The AFL-CIO American Federationist*, the union’s official magazine, research director Nathaniel Goldfinger reflected upon the past decade in his article “The Growth of the AFL-CIO.” “In 1955 the AFL-CIO consisted of 12,486,000 members or 19.2 percent of the civilian labor force. Membership fell to a low point in 1962-1963 with 17.6 percent, but surged to 18.6 percent in the first six months of 1967. Union membership gains have been in an upsurge since 1963. . . . In 1966-1967 the average paid membership of AFL-CIO affiliates rose to 13.8 million. By the first six months of 1967, per capita dues payments of unions affiliate . . . were up to 14.3 million—representing 18.6 percent of the civilian labor force. This was a gain of 1.8 million since the 1962-1963 low-point, when the . . . paid membership represented 17.6 percent of a much smaller labor force.”⁷⁸ Goldfinger pointed to the recessions of 1958 and 1960-1961 as contributing factors to union difficulties, but his article emphasized the political environment as the major factor in union fortunes, citing the Eisenhower administration as hostile to labor issues.

The AFL-CIO’s alignment with the Democratic Party had paid dividends as Goldfinger described, “The political situation changed considerably in 1961 after the inauguration of

⁷⁷ Fraser, *Age of Acquiescence*, 231.

⁷⁸ Nathaniel Goldfinger, “The Growth of the AFL-CIO”, *The AFL-CIO American Federationist*, December, 1967, (Box 1, AFL-CIO Archives of the Tamiment Library & Robert F. Wagner Archives PE 201, Bobst Library, New York University. New York City. March 18, 2015)

JFK . . . On January 17, 1962, President Kennedy issued an executive order which directed federal agencies to recognize and bargain with unions representing their employees. While this executive order dealt directly with federal employees, it provided an atmosphere of support for union organization and in public employment generally—state and local government, as well as federal.” In another article “Negroes and Jobs”, Goldfinger elaborated on the downward pressure on union jobs, “the number of factory production and maintenance jobs dropped 1.5 million or 11 percent between 1953 and 1963. In that same period, the number of non-supervisory employees in mining was cut 267,000 or 35 percent, employment of production and related workers in soft coal mining alone dropped about 60 percent. And railroad employment fell 530,000 or approximately 44 percent”, but emphasizing the economic role of government, he added, “Between 1963 and the early months of 1966, the general economic improvement picked up steam. The faster pace of economic growth—under the impact of the tax cut of 1964, followed in mid-1965 by the additional impact of rising military spending as well—was concentrated in heavy goods manufacturing, construction and related activities.”⁷⁹ But despite this pressure upon unions, the ability to pressure business to share the profits of a consumerist society led to societal change in the post-war period for a certain portion of the working class.

Industrialization had begun the societal change of a dependence upon men to be the provider of wages as women maintained the domestic sphere. It increased dependence upon wages, and the formation of unions of the railroad strikes of 1877. John Hay in his anti-union novel of 1883 *The Breadwinners* reflected the division as wives demanded their husbands stop their strike, “Every woman went for her husband and told him to pack up and go home . . . but the bigger part

⁷⁹ Nathaniel Goldfinger, “Negroes and Jobs”, *The AFL-CIO American Federationist*, November, 1966 (Box 1, AFL-CIO Archives of the Tamiment Library & Robert F. Wagner Archives PE 201, Bobst Library, New York University, New York City, March 18, 2015.)

talked hard sense, told ‘em their lazy picnic had lasted long enough, that there was no meat in the house, and that they had got to come home and go to work.”⁸⁰ The success of the AFL-CIO increased union wages and reinforced dependence upon one, typically male wage-earner. Television programs of the time idealized the male role, the father working (albeit in a white collar job, such as Ward Cleaver) and the mother at home to care for the children. Sociologist Talcott Parsons argued that this arrangement was suited to an industrial society. A family could easily follow economic opportunity as jobs migrated.⁸¹ The analysis of Mr. Parsons of course posited the strong industrial position of the United States at this time; more attractive jobs might open in a different part of the country, as witness the Great Migration of blacks from the South between 1915-1960.

The arrangement was not only suited to industrial mobility, but also the rise of fertility. The period from just after the war to the early 1960s was the only period of sustained rising fertility in the nation’s history. Cherlin posits that one reason lay in the unique life histories of young adults who were in their twenties and thirties. They experienced the Great Depression as children or adolescents and then a world war erupted as they reached young adulthood. Family life was the domain in which they found that security. “Raising children provided a sense of purpose to adults who had seen how fragile the social world could be.”⁸² But it is important to consider the mindset of the mostly male workforce in this postwar period, which along with union leaders saw a well-paying job as part of what the war had been about, and that democracy and capitalism naturally went together.

⁸⁰ John Hay and Clarence L. Hay, *The Breadwinners: A Social Study* (New York and London: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1901), 366.

⁸¹ Andrew J. Cherlin, *Labor's Love Lost: The Rise and Fall of the Working-class Family in America* (New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation, 2014), 3.

⁸² Cherlin, *Labor's Love Lost*, 95.

The decade 1955-1965 may have been a high point for the AFL-CIO, but the vast majority of American workers stood outside the union movement. Private sector unionization peaked at about 35% in the postwar era.⁸³ Southern states had imposed “right to work” laws hampering union organization, and had ceded management of the shop floor to management in return for improved wages.⁸⁴

The theme of the “Second Annual Industrial Relations Conference IUD, AFL-CIO”, held in New York City in 1958 was the “Union Shop and the Public Welfare.” Walter Reuther lamented that “We face two basic challenges in the American labor movement. One is the job of organizing the unorganized . . . but the most important job is the job of education, the job of unionizing the organized, so that they carry not only a union card in their wallet, but understand and carry unionism in their heart as well.”⁸⁵ Bourdieu pointed out that “all symbolic domination presupposes, on the part of those who submit to it, a form of complicity which is neither passive submission to external constraint nor a free adherence to values.”⁸⁶ Reuther could not overcome the symbolic domination imposed by allowing collective bargaining to maintain control of the workplace by management. Union members fell victim to the post-war mantra of consumerism, which ensconced capitalism as the purveyor of plenty, particularly in comparison to the lack of consumer goods in communist countries.

In this decade the AFL-CIO engaged in “hyper-correction” in attempting to share the American values of the dominant, and to share in the language of democracy and capitalism.

⁸³ Boyle, *Organized Labor*, 163.

⁸⁴ Fraser, *Age of Acquiescence*, 197.

⁸⁵ Walter Reuther, Speech, “‘Union Shop and the Public Welfare’: Proceedings of the Second Annual Industrial Relations Conference, IUD, AFL-CIO May 17 and 18, 1958 New York, NY” (BOX 6. AFL-CIO Archives of the Tamiment Library & Robert F. Wagner Archives PE 201, Bobst Library, New York University, New York City, March 20, 2015) 20.

⁸⁶ Bourdieu, *Language*, 50.

Labor, convinced of the justice of its cause, reconciled its cause with capitalism. Like Bourdieu's *petits bourgeois*, the AFL-CIO appropriated "prematurely, at the cost of constant tension, the properties of those who are dominant."⁸⁷ The AFL-CIO internalized the "American Dream" and the adoption of the hegemony's interpretation of communism. The hegemony equated capitalism with democracy, and the American system with the achievement of a better way of life. According to Bourdieu, "The language of authority never governs without the collaboration of those it governs, without the help of the social mechanisms capable of producing this complicity, based on misrecognition, which is the basis of all authority."⁸⁸

Union leaders had made the step into the political realm where power is a struggle over words, and as such ran the hazard that any spokesperson suffers in the way in which language works in the political arena because according to Bourdieu, "the speech of the spokesperson owes part of its 'illocutionary force' to the force (the number) of the group that he helps to produce as such by the act of symbolization or representation; it is based on the metaphorical *coup d'etat* by which the speaker invests his utterance with all the power his utterance helps to produce by mobilizing the group to which it is addressed. . . . It is because it is enough for ideas to be professed by political leaders in order to become mobilizing ideas capable of making themselves believed . . . that mistakes are misdeeds or, in the native language of politics, 'betrayals.'"⁸⁹ Granci called union officials " 'A banker of men in a monopoly system'"⁹⁰ By entering into the world of politics the unions entered into the struggle of power through knowledge, as Foucault states, "If we truly wish to know knowledge, to know what it is, to

⁸⁷ Bourdieu, *Language*, 83.

⁸⁸ Bourdieu, *Language*, 113.

⁸⁹ Bourdieu, *Language*, 191.

⁹⁰ Bourdieu, *Language*, 194.

apprehend it at its root, in its manufacture, we must look not to philosophers but to politicians—we need to understand what the relations of struggle and power are.”⁹¹

In the United States money defined the reality. The collective notion involved in unionism was destined to fail once immediate needs were satisfied in a crisis such as the Depression, only to rise again in another crisis such as WWII, and then to be thrown aside again. The utopian ideal of Looking Backward promised to end the cycle, but utopian dreams only come true for the dominant class. The AFL-CIO answered the question of identity in terms of “individual freedom.” Unions thus accepted the same definition of truth as the forces they opposed. But unions in this period disassociated themselves from the philosophical underpinnings of Marx. According to Victor Best, Marx believed that the proletariat would break its capitalist chains once it attained “a rational understanding of the material conditions of its oppression.”⁹² Marx might have asked whether the AFL-CIO understood the “material conditions” of its oppression. By agreeing to collective bargaining in isolated locations (as opposed to grasping control of the narrative through national action), it masked the “material conditions” through temporary gains in a consumerist society. The AFL-CIO contributed to the grand narrative that American capitalism was the world’s best system because its workers enjoyed a comfortable life style even though those gains came through union effort. The ability of business to control the field of discourse in that capitalism proved the superior system because of the material benefits fit into Foucault’s theories. According to Best, Foucault “induced an important skepticism about the achievements of liberalism and democracy by showing that behind the rhetoric of increased

⁹¹ Foucault, *Essential Works*, 12.

⁹² Best, *End of Ideology*, 36.

freedom lies the mechanisms of detailed control and coercion. He pointed to ways in which ‘reason’ is violence and ‘truth’ is the concealment of power.”⁹³

The AFL-CIO worked from a minority position in the nation, and business acted to minimize union labor by diminishing the work force through replacing high wage union jobs with machines. The AFL-CIO acknowledged the threat to jobs, but accepted the premise that increased productivity led to higher wages. In a 1961 pamphlet title “Automation” the AFL-CIO looked to government to help mitigate the dangers to workers: “Even though automation is in one sense only an extension of the industrial revolution to new frontiers, it is in many respects more frightening to wage-earners. There are several reasons: the nature of the equipment itself, many of the new devices impress the average person as almost superhuman; the change in skill required of workers; automation, replaces many unskilled or semi-skilled workers with a handful of highly-trained technicians; the change in the general job outlook, the industrial revolution took place at a time when the United States was expanding its borders and when Americans were moving into new, rich, virtually-unoccupied lands in the West.”⁹⁴ This part of the pamphlet assumed an acceptance of the Lockean idea that man made nature productive. The pamphlet makes no mention of indigenous peoples who apparently were not making use of their “virtually-unoccupied lands.”

The pamphlet goes on to invoke an almost Bellamy-type utopia of management and labor cooperation: “To reach the Utopia that, in a technical sense, seems only a few steps away, our society must be able to consume what it produces. That means we must somehow devise a way

⁹³ Best, *End of Ideology*, 132.

⁹⁴ AFL-CIO Pamphlet, “Automation”, 1961, Publication No. 124 (Box 1, AFL-CIO Archives of the Tamiment Library & Robert F. Wagner Archives PE 201. Bobst Library, New York University, New York City, March 18, 2015).

to adjust to automation; to assure full employment in an era of expanding population and man-hour productivity. It is not too much to say that this is a challenge to the future of our civilization itself.” However, that utopia was not to be reached by the “voluntarism” of Gompers, but rather by partnership with government and business: “Organized labor insists that rapid technological change must not be at the expense of workers and the community. Government and business must assume their responsibilities to minimize social dislocations and prevent distresses by providing the cushions needed during periods of change. No other course is tolerable in a humane and democratic society.”

Faced with the inevitability of automation, productivity became part of the philosophy of union demands. A 1956 AFL-CIO pamphlet “Wages and Prices: Let’s Keep American Prosperous” analyzed the economy: “The problem of our American economy requires keeping these two things in mind: America’s wage and salary earners, who are more productive at their jobs each year, need rising incomes to buy the rising volume of goods produced by America’s factories and farms. Without that rise in buying power America’s factories and farms will lose their markets. Jobs will get scarce and we will find ourselves headed for recession, or worse.”⁹⁵ The pamphlet accepted the Keynesian argument of putting money into the hands of consumers to provide the demand that would maintain and stimulate supply while appealing to the self-interest of business. To refute the claim that higher wages promoted inflation, the pamphlet suggested the unlikely remedy of business acting in a unified manner to control prices: “America’s basic industries, the pace-setters, can do a far better job of absorbing all-time peaks, and the productive efficiency of industry and labor is at a record high level. There is no reason why each wage

⁹⁵ AFL-CIO Pamphlet, “Wages and Prices: Let’s Keep American Prosperous”, 1957, Publication No. 57, AFL-CIO (BOX 1, AFL-CIO Archives of the Tamiment Library & Robert F. Wagner Archives, PE 201, Bobst Library, New York University, New York City, March 18, 2015).

increase in these basic industries must be passed along in the form of greatly higher prices.” The pamphlet implied a utopia in which all players acted for the common good without the pressure of competition. Walter Reuther returned to this concept in the Conference on Collective Bargaining, “What we have been trying to do at the bargaining table is basic. We have been trying to provide a contribution to working out the kind of approach that will make it possible to achieve a dynamic, expanding balance between greater productive power and greater purchasing power. ‘Purchasing power’ tries to appeal to the self-interest of the capitalists, but since the capitalists are competing against each other, they are not going to see the benefits of increasing that power of their workers if it is going to be spent with a competitor. For the theory to succeed would require large scale organizing so that all capitalists would be paying the higher rates.”⁹⁶

Automation was a constant theme of the decade. A panel discussion held under the auspices of The Industrial Union Department in 1958 included an analysis by Daniel Bell, labor editor of Fortune Magazine: “The meaning of industrialization as a peculiar modern fact arose out of the measurement of work. It’s when work can be measured, when you can hitch a man to the job, that you have got modern industrialization. Unless that fact is understood, it seems to me one doesn’t understand the whole historical impact of what automation itself imposes.”⁹⁷

An undated pamphlet from the late 1950s “Progress and Productivity” promoted this supposed partnership between labor and business: “Our unions negotiate with the employer as a partner in our free economy, not as a class enemy. We want him to prosper—so that we too, can

⁹⁶ Reuther, “Conference on Collective Bargaining”, 10.

⁹⁷ Daniel Bell, “Automation and Major Technological Change: Impact on Union Size, Structure and Function” A panel discussion held under the auspices of The Industrial Union Department, AFL-CIO April 22, 1958 Washington, DC. (Box 6, AFL-CIO Archives of the Tamiment Library & Robert F. Wagner Archives PE 201 Bobst Library, New York University, New York City) 8.

prosper with ‘more . . . now!’”⁹⁸ The line echoed Gomper’s reply when asked what the workingman wanted, “more . . . now”, but by the time of this pamphlet the AFL-CIO had become institutionalized to the detriment of the militancy of its early beginnings.

The AFL-CIO considered itself such a part of the anti-communist, pro-capitalist American system that in his preface to “Platform Proposals to the Republican and Democratic National Conventions 1964”, George Meany proudly stated that “the modern labor movement long ago outgrew the role of “special interest group” in the narrow sense. The AFL-CIO is made up of 13.5 million men and women who live in every state of the Union; who are engaged in virtually every occupation except business proprietorship; and whose interests, not only as union members but as citizens, embrace every facet of American life.”⁹⁹ The “The International Situation” section of the proposals described the AFL-CIO as avowedly anti-communist, “The continuing struggle between democracy and totalitarian dictatorship is the all-important feature of the international situation. It is the basic source of the world crisis . . . communists everywhere are bound together by an all-encompassing aim—to attain the worldwide triumph of communism and remold the entire world on their totalitarian pattern.” This denunciation implied the need for the capitalist system to embrace unionism as part of the anti-communist bulwark.

The unions had a history of anti-communism, but the Internal Security Act of 1950 and the Communist Control Act of 1954 ensured that government would enforce that anti-communism.¹⁰⁰ Business interests possessed a unifying philosophy in the post-war period, the

⁹⁸ “Progress and Productivity.” (mid-1950s) Publication No. 26, Undated, (Box 1, AFL-CIO Archives of the Tamiment Library & Robert F. Wagner Archives PE 201, Bobst Library, New York University, New York City.)

⁹⁹ George Meany, “Preface to Platform Proposals to the Republican and Democratic National Conventions 1964” (BOX 5, AFL-CIO Archives of the Tamiment Library & Robert F. Wagner Archives PE 201 Bobst Library, New York University, New York City).

¹⁰⁰ Best, *End of Ideology*, 51.

Lockean “individual freedom” represented by private property, and were able to use government regulation to restrict unions. But the AFL-CIO rejected a workable philosophical analysis, Marxism, because it was tied to Russian communism. In an October 1966 issue of *The AFL-CIO American Federationist*, president George Meany seemed to revel in this lack of philosophy in his article “Labor’s Role in a Free Society”: “Let us look briefly at the nature of the American labor movement. The one word that best describes its day-to-day operation is “practical.” We deal with one problem or one set of problems at a time. We avoid pre-conceived notions and we do not try to fit our program into some theoretical, all-embracing structure. This down-to-earth, one thing at a time approach is uniquely American. And it can be said, I think, that the same pragmatic approach is a unique feature of the American legislative system.”¹⁰¹ Unfortunately, Mr. Meany’s avoidance of “pre-conceived” notions reflected a denial of the collective nature of unionism and overlooked the long-range strategies of the business sector. Mr. Meany went on in that article to declare a significant role for unionism in American history “For nearly 200 years, trade unions have contributed to the marketplace of ideas. We believe our contributions have been greater as our movement has grown stronger. And we believe that the life of every American, and the hopes of every child, are brighter as a result.” Meany’s argument overlooked the important role played by the Roosevelt administration in equalizing the playing field for unions after management gained the upper hand in the 1920s and the Depression.

Unfortunately for Meany, anti-communist rhetoric had the distinct advantage of falling in line with the two hundred years of American perception of liberty as individual freedom. Business

¹⁰¹ George, Meany, “Labor’s Role in a Free Society”, *The AFL-CIO American Federationist*. October, 1966 (Box 1, AFL-CIO Archives of the Tamiment Library & Robert F. Wagner Archives PE 201, Bobst Library, New York University, New York City)

promoted itself as heir to the traditional Lockean ideal of individual freedom; whereas, the AFL-CIO portrayed itself as advancing the ideal of individual freedom by empowering the individual versus the power of business. As Reuther saw in his need to “unionize the organized”, the labor movement operated on an assumption that individuals would participate as active members of a democracy. However, as described by David Croteau, “Liberty does not necessarily require the active engagement of citizens in political or social spheres. . . The right wants to guarantee a person’s freedom to be left alone—a decidedly private vision.”¹⁰² According to an analysis by Barry Hindress, personal autonomy is an ambiguous notion, “In one case the focus is on the ‘natural’ status of human autonomy, and therefore on behavior that is subject to no involuntary constraint. In the other case the focus is on the “artefactual” status of autonomy, and therefore on the conditions under which it may be created.”¹⁰³

The conundrum for the AFL-CIO was that the individual worker had no power as an individual. As Chesterton pointed out, in his essay “Divorce”, “Capitalism believes in collectivism for itself and individualism for its enemies. It desires its victims to be individuals, or (in other words) to be any bond, if there be any brotherhood, if there be any class loyalty or domestic discipline, by which the poor can help the poor, these emancipators will certainly strive to loosen that bond or lift that discipline in the most liberal fashion. If there be such a brotherhood, these individualists will redistribute it in the form of individuals; or in other words smash it to atoms.”¹⁰⁴ However, the relative successes of the AFL-CIO prior to 1955 resulted in an institutionalization of the inherent struggle between business and labor, which placed the

¹⁰² David Croteau, *Politics and the Class Divide: Working People and the Middle-class Left* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), 8.

¹⁰³ Barry Hindress, "Liberalism, Socialism and Democracy: Variations on a Governmental Theme," in *Foucault and Political Reason: Liberalism, Neo-liberalism, and Rationalities of Government*, by Andrew Barry (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1996), 76.

¹⁰⁴ Chesterton, “Divorce”, 20935.

struggle at a remove from the daily life of union members, and by focusing on a largely white, male membership increasingly isolated that struggle from the mass of American workers. Those non-union members were fair game for the constant drumbeat of anti-communist rhetoric from both government and business, which portrayed the collective aspects of unionism as antithetical to American ideals.

Croteau posited that the AFL-CIO merger in 1955 marked the symbolic end of labor unions as broad social movements and signaled their reconstitution as special-interest groups that held a junior partnership in the newly formed labor-management accord.¹⁰⁵ Union rhetoric claimed its place in democracy as a voice for the people. George Meany reflected the self-imposed restraints as he summed up the AFL-CIO's position in his address to the 50th anniversary World Convocation of the National Industrial Conference in September 1966: "The New Deal redefined the role of government as the protector of the total public interest. And it tried to promote the welfare of all the people—workers as well as business. . . .The AFL-CIO will continue its efforts as a free institution to advance the cause of democracy under freedom. . . . Whenever workers participate in deciding the issues that affect their working lives, a sense of personal dignity is achieved and their regard for freedom is enhanced. . . .Unions want a fair share for workers who make their contribution to the economic system. . . . We think that the American economic system, with its potential for progress, works quite well. We see no better system anywhere in the world today or in the history of the past."¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ Croteau, *Politics*, 20.

¹⁰⁶ George, Meany, "Labor looks at Capitalism", address to the 50th anniversary World Convocation of the National Industrial Conference New York, September, 1966, reprinted in *The AFL-CIO American Federationist*, December, 1966 (BOX 1AFL-CIO Archives of the Tamiment Library & Robert F. Wagner Archives PE 201. Bobst Library, New York University. New York City. March 19, 2015).

An AFL-CIO publication in 1956 “The Greater Danger: The Post-Stalin Pattern for Communist World Conquest” categorized the errors of the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union held in February of that year. The AFL-CIO equated union gains with the democratic process, thus conflating democracy and capitalism. “The phenomenal rise in productivity, the increased living standards of the workers, the enhanced prestige and social status of labor, the growth of the numerical, economic and political power of trade unions, the emergence of the welfare state—all these facts which have characterized the development of the democracies in the last decades—were completely ignored by the 20th Congress.”¹⁰⁷

Although the New Deal ascribed to the Keynesian theory that improving wages would create increased demand for goods and services, the post-war period saw the pendulum swing back to the holders of capital. In his book *The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties* Daniel Bell wrote in 1960, “Yet what the Socialists, who thought only of winning full power, did not see, and what the capitalists, who sought to retain all power, did, was that unionism, in a fashion, is a revolutionary force. While it does not aim at overthrowing power, it means by curbing the arbitrary and unilateral right of an employer to hire, fire, promote, and set the pace and conditions of work, a distinct sharing of power. And, more important it challenged the older justifications of unilateral power which gave a moral and psychological strength and unity to the business class.”¹⁰⁸ Thus the Republican party under Eisenhower combined with anti-labor southern Democrats to thwart the AFL-CIO agenda.

¹⁰⁷ AFL-CIO Pamphlet, “The Greater Danger: The Post-Stalin Pattern for Communist World Conquest.” 1956, Publication No. 37, November, 1956 (Box 8, AFL-CIO Archives of the Tamiment Library & Robert F. Wagner Archives PE 201, Bobst Library, New York University. New York City, March 20, 2015).

¹⁰⁸ Bell, *The End of Ideology*, 195.

The election of 1958 epitomized the problem of AFL-CIO alliance with the Democratic Party. In this recession year Senate Democrats held nearly a two thirds majority, 64 to 34; in the House they picked up 42 districts to give the party a commanding 282 seats, with Republicans holding but 154. Walter Reuther announced, “the people chose to identify themselves with the forces of labor. . . I personally think this is the most significant political election in terms of the basic loyalties that taking place in American politics in many, many years.”¹⁰⁹ Despite political success, in the “Collective Bargaining Today” conference in 1959, Reuther would tell the assembled delegates that, “this is the backdrop of our conference—a hardening of the attitudes, a deterioration in the general relationship of labor and management with respect to the discharge of their responsibilities . . . I have just emerged . . . from a year of difficulties. 1958 was the most difficult year in the 20-odd years of our collective bargaining experience.”¹¹⁰ The alliance of southern Democrats and Republicans prevented any pro-labor agenda and the institutionalization of collective bargaining encapsulated the AFL-CIO as just one faction to be considered in the increasingly factionalism of post-war government.

The period 1955-1965 saw great advances in standard of living in terms of consumerist values. The emphasis on becoming a part of the consumerist society reflected a change in the Marxist paradigm as worker compensation could no longer be strictly defined in terms of “surplus value” as technology increased the output of the diminishing work force, a term that came to be considered “productivity.” However, a consumerist society led to increased demand and increased debt. Debt increased the control of the moneyed class, a method of control over workers, which Bellamy had warned against in 1888, “It was the misfortune of your contemporaries that they had to cement their business fabric with a material which an accident

¹⁰⁹ Lichtenstein, *Walter Reuther*, 300.

¹¹⁰ Reuther, “Collective Bargaining”, 8.

might at any moment turn into an explosive. They were in the plight of a man building a house with dynamite for mortar, for credit can be compared with nothing else.”¹¹¹ Consumerism played into the myth of individual freedom against the strands of collective good represented in Bellamy’s call for a unified approach to the needs of all.

“Freedom Forever: Labor Rejects Communism”, an undated AFL-CIO pamphlet from the mid-1950s, described how the union movement actually perfected capitalism, which the pamphlet equated with democracy: “The American labor movement rejects every type of totalitarianism because such ideologies destroy freedom. The AFL-CIO knows that the workingman cannot prosper unless he is free. However much communists and other dictators may claim to help wage earners, the record shows that they enslave workers. Communism is one of the most insidious forms of enslavement. It is reactionary and barbaric. . . Communist agitators and propagandist stir up discontent wherever real or fancied grievances exist. It is easy for them, when enjoying the privileges of the Free World, to criticize inequalities and injustices. It is easy for them to promise all things to all people, but only free people—such as those in free trade unions—can actually correct evils fairly and justly.”¹¹² This pamphlet like other literature of the AFL-CIO attempted to follow Habermas’s five key processual requirements of discourse ethics as summarized by Bent Flyvbjerg. First, a requirement of generality, no party affected by what is being discussed should be excluded from the discourse. Second, autonomy, all participants should have equal possibility to present and criticize validity claims in the process of discourse. Third, ideal role taking, participants must be willing and able to empathize with each

¹¹¹ Bellamy, *Looking Backward*, 313.

¹¹² AFL-CIO Pamphlet, “Freedom Forever: Labor Rejects Communism”, undated (mid-1950s) Publication no 28, AFL-CIO (BOX 1, AFL-CIO Archives of the Tamiment Library & Robert F. Wagner Archives PE 201, Bobst Library, New York University, New York City. March 18, 2015).

other's validity claims. Fourth, power neutrality, existing power differences between participants must be neutralized such that these differences have no effect on the creation of consensus. Fifth, transparency, participants must openly explain their goals and intentions and in this connection desist from strategic action. Flyvbjerg added a sixth given the implications of Habermas's requirements, unlimited time."¹¹³

Point by point, the AFL-CIO engaged in this discourse at a disadvantage. First, after WWII government and business saw no need to enlist labor as a partner, thus negating the requirement of generality. Second, business undermined union autonomy by its anti-communist rhetoric. Third, although the unions portrayed themselves as essential to the capitalist system, business worked to marginalize that "ideal role taking" by supporting the "right to work" laws in southern and western states. Fourth, given the role of money in American culture, business emerged from the war with a power difference, thus eliminating "power neutrality." Fifth, since business could cloak itself with the mantle of anti-communism and individual freedom, it was able to cloud the "transparency" of the move to weaken union power. And finally, time ran out after 1965, in the changed social climate of the Civil Rights and anti-Vietnam War movements.

The AFL-CIO compromised their discourse by sublimating the message of worker needs to its continued involvement with the Democratic Party. The AFL-CIO had obviously benefited from the Roosevelt and Truman pro-labor legislation, and the Republican anti-labor legislation in the post-war period cemented the political allegiance; however in this period the AFL-CIO became increasingly involved in aggregating voters for the party, even on issues that were not strictly beneficial to union workers. According to the analysis of David Greenstone, "the labor

¹¹³ Bent Flyvbjerg, "Habermas and Foucault: Thinkers for Civil Society?" *The British Journal of Sociology* 49, no. 2 (June 1998): 213, doi:10.2307/591310.

movement vigorously supported Medicare, reapportionment, and civil rights measures not because they necessarily benefited the lower classes but because their beneficiaries primarily voted Democratic or might be induced to do so.¹¹⁴

Foucault wrote, “History has no ‘meaning,’ though this is not to say that it is absurd or incoherent. On the contrary, it is intelligible and should be susceptible of analysis down to the smallest detail—but this in accordance with the intelligibility of struggles, of strategies and tactics. Neither the dialectic, as the logic of contradictions, nor semiotics, as the structure of communication, can account for the intrinsic intelligibility of conflicts. ‘Dialectic’ is a way of evading the always open and hazardous reality of conflict by reducing it to a Hegelian skeleton, and ‘semiology’ is a way of avoiding its violent, bloody, and lethal character by reducing it to the calm Platonic form of language and dialogue.”¹¹⁵ In order to analyze the period, it is important to examine the history of the movement in order to explain the way in which the unions thought of themselves, their goals, fears, and the internal demands put upon them by their members and the external pressures of government and capital. The public writings of the AFL-CIO in this period are not profoundly philosophical, perhaps somewhat banal, but as Foucault points out, “since Kant, the role of philosophy is to prevent reason from going beyond the limits of what is given in experience . . . the role of philosophy is also to keep watch over the excessive powers of political rationality . . . What we have to do with banal facts is to discover—or try to discover—which specific and perhaps original problem is connected with them.”¹¹⁶

As Foucault explains, “In effect, what defines a relationship of power is that it is a mode of action that does not act directly and immediately on others. Instead, it acts upon their actions: an

¹¹⁴ Greenstone, *Labor*, 352.

¹¹⁵ Foucault, *Essential Works*, 126.

¹¹⁶ Foucault, *Essential Works*, 328.

action upon an action, on possible or actual future or present actions. A relationship of violence acts upon a body or upon things; it forces, it bends, it breaks, it destroys, or it closes off possibilities. . . . A power relationship, on the other hand, can only be articulated on the basis of two elements that are indispensable if it is really to be a power relationship; that ‘the other’ . . . is recognized and maintained to the very end as a subject who acts; and that, faced with a relationship of power, a whole field of responses, reactions, results, and possible inventions may open up.”¹¹⁷ For a period of time the struggle the AFL-CIO fit not only into Foucault ‘s theory of power because it dovetailed with the American foundation myth of “individual freedom” because the union leaders saw themselves as free actors in a democracy, and although the owners of capital seemed to have a free hand in their conduct of business, labor leaders could define themselves in the struggle as free agents. As Foucault explained, “Power is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are ‘free.’ By this we mean individual or collective subjects who are faced with a field of possibilities in which several kinds of conduct, several ways of reacting and modes of behavior are available . . . At the very heart of the power relationship, and constantly provoking it, are the recalcitrance of the will and the intransigence of freedom.”¹¹⁸ The struggle can be perceived in evolutionary terms in that the constant struggle to survive led to changes in the philosophies of the participants. The political environment led the AFL-CIO to adopt the discourse of the dominant class in claiming a central role in capitalism and democracy.

At the same time as this was going on, the AFL-CIO dealt with the complexity of relations as Americans felt racial lines much stronger than economic lines. Boyle described the structural impediments to a purely class politics as “utterly overwhelming” as the uneven benefits of

¹¹⁷ Foucault, *Essential Works*, 340.

¹¹⁸ Foucault, *Essential Works*, 342.

collective bargaining divided workers.¹¹⁹ Ideally, the AFL-CIO in this period would have borne out Habermas's theories of communication as unions gave voice to a segment of the population that lacked individual means to express its goals. But even within the unions, the pluralism of American society and the deeply entrenched bedrock of the theory of individual freedom diminished the voice of the unions, versus the voices of capitalism, which however discordant within the framework of competition, were united against the threat of the perceived collective voice of unionism.

The turn to the Democratic Party meshed with Foucault's theory of governmentality as the increasing power of the federal government necessitated an acknowledgement that power struggles, although they did not begin with the federal government, certainly were part of the government's perception of its pastoral role towards its citizens, in the sense that the government controlled the welfare of its citizens. As Foucault pointed out, "The exercise of power is not a naked fact, an institutional given, nor is it a structure that holds out or is smashed; it is something that is elaborated, transformed, organized; it endows itself with processes that are more or less adjusted to the situation . . . Power relations are rooted in the whole network of the social. . . Using here the restricted meaning of the word 'government,' one could say that power relations have been progressively governmentalized, that is to say, elaborated, rationalized, and centralized in the form of, or under the auspices of state institutions."¹²⁰ Unfortunately this meshing worked against the purpose of the unions. Labor in effect transformed itself from an opposition social movement into virtual vassals of Democratic politicians. As Gompers would have predicted, politicians were interested in aggregating power for the larger party.

¹¹⁹ Boyle, *Organized Labor*, 4.

¹²⁰ Foucault, *Essential Works*, 345.

Given the need to emphasize democracy in the rhetoric of the time it was not totally outside Foucault theory for the unions to act as they did.

The closing years of 1955-1965 saw the AFL-CIO working closely with the Democratic Party to aggregate a coalition of labor, the elderly and minorities. The strategy enabled a counter-strategy by the Republican Party to take advantage of regional differences. As Gompers warned in the early years of the American Federation of Labor, involvement with politics would lead to compromise and opposition. The missed opportunities of the 1930s and 1940s with its compromises with Southern Democrats over Civil Rights came back to haunt the AFL-CIO as blacks ignored the AFL-CIO and relied on government action to further their cause. Thus, the Civil Rights movement made the same mistake as the AFL-CIO by depending upon a political party, narrowing themselves as a special interest.

Chapter 6: Conclusion, “Much Unfinished Work”

On November 15, 1963 President Kennedy addressed the Fifth Constitutional Convention of the AFL-CIO in New York City. His speech captured the symbiotic relationship of the AFL-CIO and the Democratic Party: “I come here today to express my appreciation to the AFL-CIO which is attempting in the 1960s to do what its fathers did in the 1930s in supporting a program of progress for this country of ours. So we ask your help not next year but now. Marshal Lyautey, the great French marshal, went out to his gardener and asked him to plant a tree. The gardener said, ‘Why plant it? It won’t flower for 100 years.’ ‘In that case,’ the Marshal said, ‘plant it this afternoon.’ That is what we have to do.”¹²¹ President Kennedy could look back in history, but could not predict the future, neither his tragic death the following week, nor the decline of the organization before him. According to statistics gathered by the U.S. Department of Labor, the percent of wage and salary workers who were members of unions fell to 10.4 percent in 2016. Public-sector unions, a legacy of President Kennedy, bolstered that figure with 34.4 percent union membership. Private sector unions organized only 6.4 percent of American workers.¹²²

Even with their devotion to the Democratic Party, the AFL-CIO had only a tenuous hold at a seat at the table of power. Much depended on the Democratic Party’s priorities. In 1965, after the democratic landslide of the previous year, Lyndon Johnson and the Democratic Congressional leadership prevailed on the AFL-CIO to slow its insistence on replacing Taft-Harley’s

¹²¹ John F. Kennedy, Press Release, “News from the AFL-CIO NA.8-3870 for release Monday, November 16, 1959, ‘The White House Remarks of the President to the Fifth Constitutional Convention of the AFL-CIO’, American Hotel, New York City (as actually delivered)” (BOX 9, AFL-CIO Archives of the Tamiment Library & Robert F. Wagner Archives PE 201, Bobst Library, New York University, New York City).

¹²² U.S Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Union Members Summary.” Released January 26, 2017, <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/union2.nr0.htm>

restrictions on union organizing. The Congress then passed other widely popular laws, such as Medicare and Medicaid, which the AFL-CIO supported, but served more to aggregate support for the Democratic Party, than benefit labor specifically.

Racial animus erupted at the end of the period. At its 1961 the AFL-CIO had gone on record for equality among races. But despite the rhetoric, discrimination persisted within the AFL-CIO. A few unions maintained racial discrimination clauses in their charters until 1964. Many more unions practiced discrimination in particular cases, especially, but not exclusively, in the apprentice programs for skilled trades. Thus, progressive union leaders faced a double task, unions had to clean their own houses as they pushed the country at large to end white supremacy.¹²³ The unions were unable to overcome the racial divides that the New Deal had been able to smooth over because of the change of strategy of southern legislators who broke apart the Democratic coalition.

The legislative victories of Medicare and the Civil Rights Act, which George Meany trumpeted in his 1965 Labor Day speech, endured. Johnson's larger social vision, the metaphorical "War on Poverty", fell victim to the immense social and fiscal costs of the Vietnam War. The war produced philosophical fissures within the Democratic coalition as anti-war protest weakened Johnson's political capital, returning a Republican to the presidency in 1968.

Politics, being the art of the possible, prevented even Lyndon Johnson with his landslide victory from repealing the "right to work" section of Taft-Hartley. The gap between the promise of the "War on Poverty" and its performance left many African-Americans frustrated with and suspicious of the administration's efforts.

¹²³ Boyle, *Organized Labor*, 184.

The inability of the AFL-CIO to expand upon its racial gains in the southern states during the war and the lack of political will of the Democratic Party in the 1930s to confront Jim Crow laws came back to haunt both the AFL-CIO and the Civil Rights movement. A labor movement with a militant philosophy might have demanded improved economic conditions for black workers, leading change from a broad base of economic power. Instead, the Civil Rights movement focused on political action, with the attendant problem that bedeviled the AFL-CIO, isolation as a special interest.

In the November, 1966 issue of *The AFL-CIO American Federationist* “Labor’s Role: Democracy on the Job” by Donald Slaiman, director of the federation's civil rights department, summed up the AFL-CIO’s commitment to democracy, “When it comes to making democracy complete for all Americans, this nation has to use Abraham Lincoln’s phrase, ‘much unfinished work.’ Trade Unions are crucial to this task of making democracy complete because they are closest to the people and are made up of people.”¹²⁴ Like Julian West in *Looking Backward*, one can see the lost opportunities of labor’s past to make “democracy complete”, but looking to the future, perhaps a leaner union movement can shed its label as a “special interest” and rethink its role in empowering “individual freedom” as a positive force in American society.

¹²⁴ Donald Slaiman, “Labor’s Role: Democracy on the Job”, *The AFL-CIO American Federationist*, November, 1966 (Box 1, AFL-CIO Archives of the Tamiment Library & Robert F. Wagner Archives PE 201. Bobst Library, New York University. New York City)

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