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EBB AND FLOW IN TRADE UNIONISM

LEO WOLMAN

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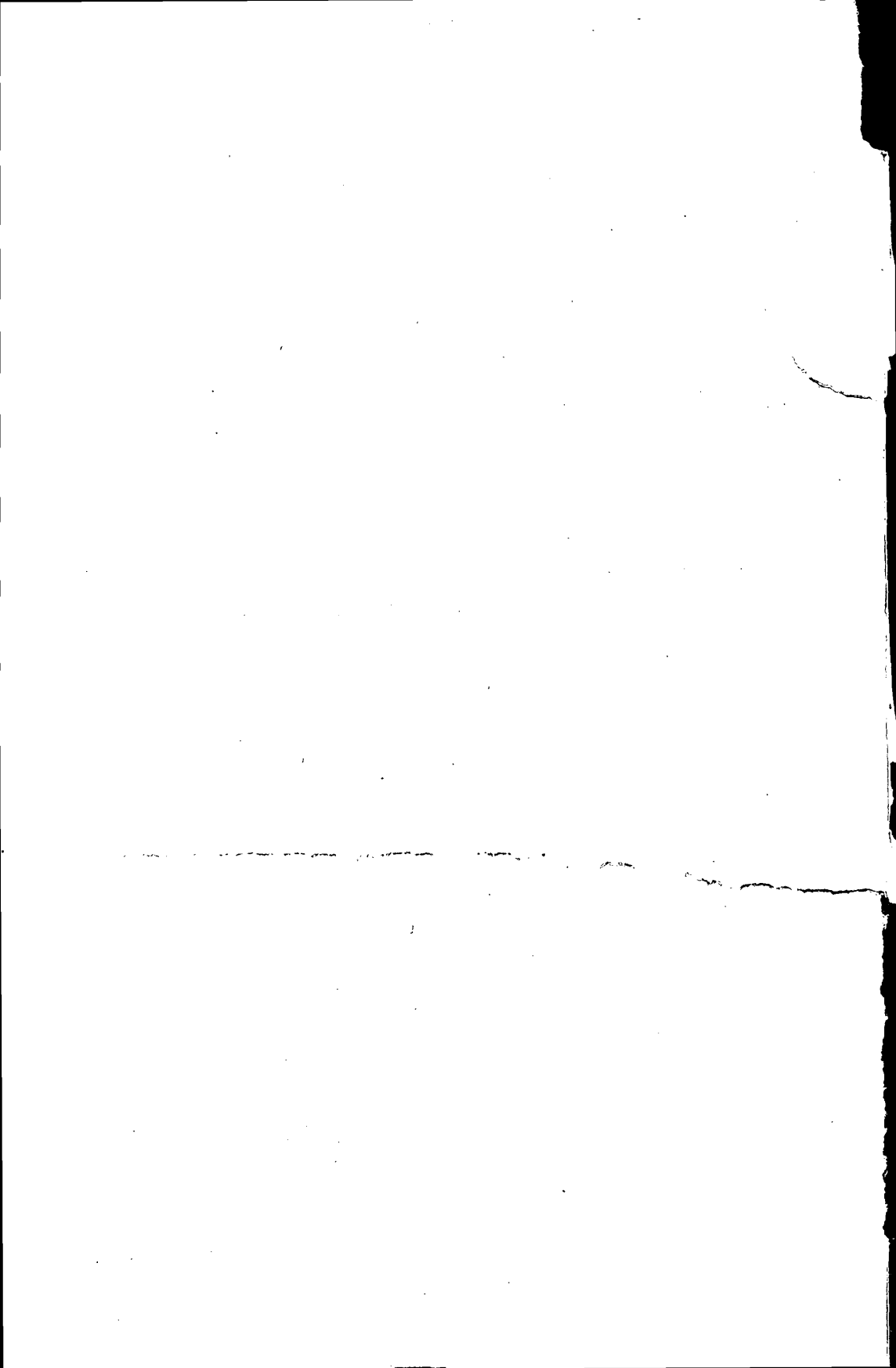
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(Resolution of October 25, 1926, revised February 6, 1933)



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LEO WOLMAN

Introduction

SINCE this book has come off the press, the conflict, which has for nearly a year divided the American Federation of Labor into two factions has, following the action taken by its Executive Council, precipitated open warfare within the ranks of organized labor. At its meeting held in Washington, D. C., August 3-5, 1936, the Executive Council of the Federation voted to suspend ten unions affiliated with the Committee for Industrial Organization from membership in the A. F. of L. The suspension was to become effective within thirty days, unless the unions in question meanwhile severed all connections with the C. I. O. Of the fourteen members of the Executive Council present at this meeting, one voted against suspension. The dissenting member was Mr. David Dubinsky, president of the International Ladies Garment Workers, a union affiliated with the C. I. O. and one of the suspended organizations. Two members of the Council, the presidents of the railway clerks and musicians unions, were absent and did not participate in its deliberations and decision.

This action is the culmination of many months of negotiation, formal and informal, to effect a peaceful settlement of the differences between these two groups of unions and to avoid an open split within the ranks of the Federation. Following the announcement of the Council's decision on August 5, 1936, Mr. John L. Lewis stated: "We will not disband the Committee for Industrial Organization", and the majority of the suspended unions have

indicated their refusal to disassociate themselves from the C. I. O. Unless upset by the courts, suspension is tantamount to expulsion, since the delegates of the suspended unions will in all probability not be seated at the next convention of the Federation in November 1936.

The decision and arguments of the Executive Council are given in the following excerpts from the statement issued by Mr. William Green, president of the American Federation of Labor, on August 5:¹

“The Executive Council of the American Federation of Labor decided that the Committee for Industrial Organization is a dual organization and that its originator and leader is John L. Lewis, president of the United Mine Workers of America.

This decision was reached after the Executive Council had made a careful study of the charges filed by President Frey of the Metal Trades Department against the Committee for Industrial Organization and of the evidence offered in support thereof.

This is the first attempt ever made during the existence of the American Federation of Labor, covering a period of more than fifty years, to set up a dual movement within it. It was the opinion of the Executive Council that it could not condone the setting up of a rival organization within the officially recognized family of labor, or tolerate and countenance it without sacrificing its self-respect, or making an unconditional surrender to a minority group composed of members who are in open rebellion to democratic procedure and majority rule, as exemplified at the latest convention of the American Federation of Labor.

The decision of the executive council to suspend those organizations from affiliation with the American Federation of Labor which hold membership in the dual organization (the Committee for Industrial Organization) within thirty days unless they withdraw therefrom means that said organizations are required to do nothing more than to discontinue holding membership in, and to cease fostering, financing and maintaining a dual, rival organization within the American Federation of Labor. The decision means just that and nothing else.

¹ Statement by Mr. William Green appearing in the *New York Times*, August 6, 1936.

Because there seems to be a public misunderstanding of the real issue which arose out of the formation of the Committee for Industrial Organization, the executive council declares in most positive terms that the industrial versus craft union dispute is in no way involved in its official decision.

No organization will ever be suspended from affiliation with the American Federation of Labor because its members believe in or advocate the acceptance of either the industrial or craft form of organization, nor are any of the organizations which hold membership in the Committee for Industrial Organization asked to withdraw their endorsement or espousal of industrial unionism.

They are not asked to give up industrial unionism. Instead, they are asked to give up a dual union. They may choose whether they will remain with the American Federation of Labor or cast their lot with the dual, rival organization. The decision of the executive council means they cannot belong to both organizations at the same time.

Both the industrial and craft forms of organization are widely applied in all the organizing work of the American Federation of Labor. As evidence of this fact some organizations affiliated with the American Federation of Labor are organized upon an industrial and some upon a craft union basis.

Through all the months intervening since November 10, 1935, when the Committee for Industrial Organization was formed, the council has shown great patience and forbearance under most trying and difficult circumstances. When it extended a cordial invitation to the representatives of the organizations holding membership in the Committee for Industrial Organization to meet with it on July 8, 1936, for the purpose of acquainting the members of the executive council with their reasons for refusing the request of the executive council to dissolve their organization set-up, the council hoped that through such a conference a settlement could be reached which would be fair and just to all.

But the invitation of the executive council was refused, its request for a conference was spurned and its authority to administer the affairs of the American Federation of Labor between conventions was treated with contempt.

Thus the issue has been clearly drawn. The executive council has met it in a definite and decisive way. A mere loss of membership could not be considered when a vital principle was at stake.

When ambitious men form a dual, rival organization for the purpose

of forcing the acceptance of minority rule within the American Federation of Labor, the executive council decides they cannot do so within and as a part of the American Federation of Labor."

Preliminary estimates of the membership in 1935 of the American Federation of Labor and of the unions affiliated with the C. I. O. are given below:

	MEMBERSHIP
American Federation of Labor	3,317,100
Unions affiliated with the C. I. O.	
<i>Ten suspended unions, total</i>	1,022,100
United Mine Workers	507,200
Amalgamated Clothing Workers	135,000
International Ladies Garment Workers	220,000
United Textile Workers	79,200 ¹
Oil Field, Gas Well and Refinery Workers	43,500
Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers	14,600 ¹
Federation of Flat Glass Workers	14,000
United Automobile Workers ²
United Rubber Workers ²
Iron, Steel and Tin Workers	8,600 ¹
<i>Two unions not suspended, total</i>	95,000
United Hatters, Cap and Millinery Workers	21,400 ¹
International Typographical Union	73,600
<i>Status uncertain</i>	
United Electrical and Radio Workers	30,000

¹ Membership for the year ending August 31, 1935.

² Membership not known.

The membership of the suspended unions was in 1935 not quite one-third of the total membership of the A. F. of L. Among these organizations no reliable figures are available for the national unions of automobile and rubber workers, since these unions were but recently chartered by the A. F. of L. and the amount of their payment of per capita taxes to the Federation for the fiscal year ended August 31, 1936 will not be published until this fall.

Suspension of the hat and cap and printers unions was held in abeyance pending a clarification of their position by these organizations. The United Hatters, Cap and Millinery Workers represents a merger in 1934 of two unions—the United Hatters of North America and the Cloth Hat, Cap and Millinery Workers International Union—which exist as separate departments of the amalgamated union. The hatters' department of this union has apparently informed the A. F. of L. that it is not affiliated with the C. I. O. and postponement of action in this case was clearly for the purpose of forcing the two departments of the union to indicate their official position. The present membership of the two departments is not known, but in 1933, one year before the merger, the United Hatters claimed 8,500 and the Cloth Hat, Cap and Millinery Workers, 6,100 members.

Affiliation of the Typographical Union with the C. I. O. is for similar reasons, likewise, in doubt. In this case no official action has been taken by the union but Mr. C. P. Howard, its president, personally associated himself with the C. I. O. at its inception and has been the Committee's secretary from the beginning. It is expected that official action on the question will be taken by the next convention of the International Typographical Union, to be held in September 1936.

The United Electrical and Radio Workers Union, claiming a membership of about 30,000, is independent of the A. F. of L. It is involved in disputes with the Electrical Workers Union, an A. F. of L. affiliate, concerning jurisdiction over employees of the radio and electrical manufacturing industries. While there is no record of the formal affiliation of the Electrical and Radio Workers Union with the C. I. O., it is for all practical purposes associated with that organization.



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