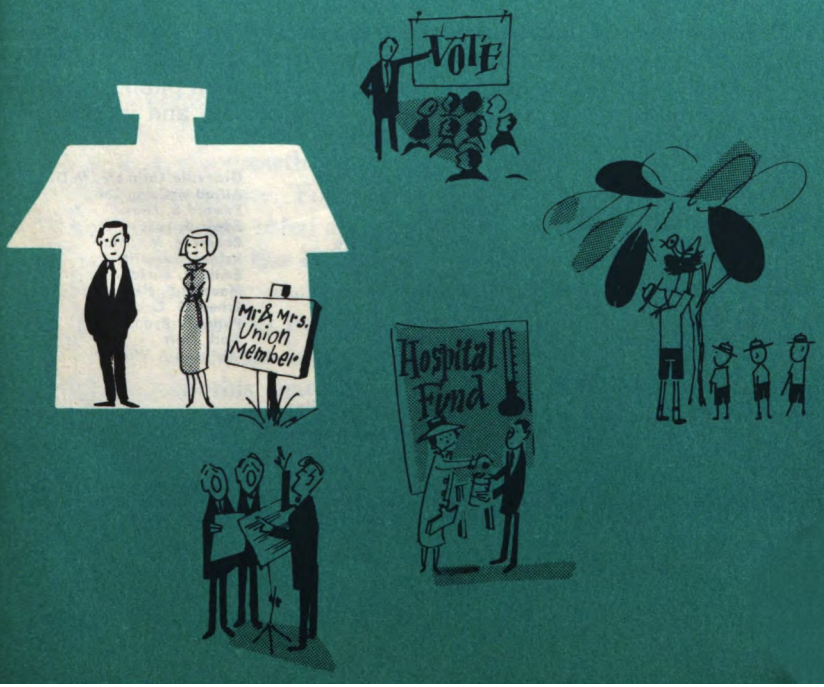
25¢

LABOR AND THE PUBLIC

BY MAXWELL S. STEWART

PUBLIC AFFAIRS PAMPHLET No. 301



Generated on 2021-05-03 00:59 GMT / https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uiug.30112067089281
Public Domain in the United States, Google-digitized / http://www.hathitrust.org/access_use#pd-us-google
Digitized by Google
Original from
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT
URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

The National Institute of Labor Education, which cooperated in the preparation of this pamphlet, is a nonprofit, educational organization set up in 1957 with assistance from The Fund for Adult Education and the AFL-CIO. Its establishment reflects:

– a recognition of the inadequacy of present educational efforts (in regard to aim, scope, quality, and volume) considering the vast needs and the growing responsibilities of unions in contemporary society;

– the heightened interest of universities and other non-labor agencies in the education of members of labor unions as well as in research in problems relating to the education of workers.

the public affairs committee

This pamphlet is one of a series published by the Public Affairs Committee, a nonprofit educational organization founded in 1935 "to develop new techniques to educate the American public on vital economic and social problems and to issue concise and interesting pamphlets dealing with such problems."

Erling M. Hunt, Chairman
Telford Taylor, Vice Chairman
Maxwell S. Stewart, Secretary
Howard Henderson, Treasurer
Theodore Abel
Ethel P. Alpenfels
Eleanor C. Anderson
William H. Baldwin
Erik Barnouw
Edward W. Barrett
Leona Baumgartner, M.D.
Stuart W. Cook
C. Ward Crampton, M.D.
Hubert T. Delany
Roma Gans
Ira Glick
Sidonie M. Gruenberg
George T. Guernsey
William L. Holland
Freda S. Kehm
Otto Klineberg
Harry W. Laidler
Benson Y. Landis
Granville Larimore, M.D.
Alfred McClung Lee
Edward S. Lewis
Edwin J. Lukas
Robert M. MacIver
Robert McDevitt
Emily H. Mudd
Maurine B. Neuberger
Ernest G. Osborne
Philip E. Ryan
Mark Starr
Wellman J. Warner

Maxwell S. Stewart, Editor
Mabel C. Mount, Managing Editor

Copyright 1960 by the Public Affairs Committee Inc. First edition, August 1960.

64

Generated on 2021-05-03 00:59 GMT / https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uiug.30112067089281
Public Domain in the United States, Google-digitized / http://www.hathitrust.org/access_use#pd-us-google
Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

LABOR AND THE PUBLIC

331.87
St 49a

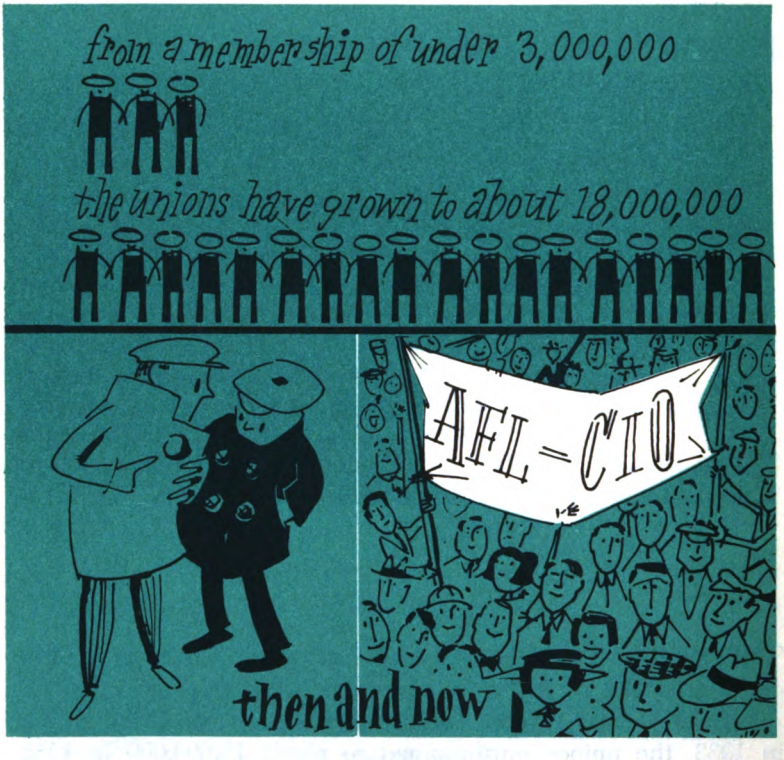
BY MAXWELL S. STEWART

This pamphlet is based largely on the papers presented at the Conference on Labor's Public Responsibility sponsored by the National Institute of Labor Education and held at the University of Wisconsin, November 17 - 20, 1959. Publication was made possible with the assistance of a grant from the Fund for Adult Education — an independent organization established by the Ford Foundation in 1951. . . . Visual Services Inc. prepared the art work for this pamphlet.

The growth of the organized labor movement in the past three decades is one of the most significant developments in recent American history. From a membership of less than three million in 1933, the unions mushroomed to about 18,000,000 in 1956. And with the growth went a parallel increase in prestige, power, and responsibility. For years, confused by employer pressures, most Americans shied away from union membership as not quite respectable. By the 1950's and 1960's the contrary was true. The vast majority of workers in our richest and most advanced industries wore the badge of union membership with pride and dignity. American labor unions had reached maturity.

But with this maturity came new problems. The period of struggle to gain recognition and a living wage was over. As the large mass industries became fully organized, the pace of growth slowed down. By the second half of the 1950's the roll of union members stabilized and then began to decline slightly. With

Generated on 2021-05-03 01:00 GMT / https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uiug.30112067089281
Public Domain in the United States, Google-digitized / http://www.hathitrust.org/access_use#pd-us-google
Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN



the advent of automation the number of mass production workers in some industries was substantially reduced. Although some progress was made in organizing new industries, the proportion of union membership in the labor force was lower in 1960 than in 1950. A widely heralded drive to organize the growing number of white-collar workers never got off the ground. And in the late 50's, anti-labor groups in Congress, in the press, and among employers began a counteroffensive to discredit the labor movement as much as possible. Partly as a result of the McClellan hearings in the Senate, the public's attitude toward the labor movement began to deteriorate. The assumption that the interests of labor and of the general public were the same began

Generated on 2021-05-03 01:00 GMT / https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uiug.30112067089281
Public Domain in the United States, Google-digitized / http://www.hathitrust.org/access_use#pd-us-google
Digitized by Google
Original from
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT
URBANA-CHAMPAIGN



internal union affairs and the public

In the past some union leaders have insisted that a union's internal affairs are of no concern to the general public. They argued that in order to be effective against an autocratic management a union must be strong, even if it denies full democratic participation to its membership. It cannot be denied that some of the strongest unions have been the least democratic in their internal affairs. Moreover, some of the most autocratic union leaders have undoubtedly served their members well. They have taken the position that the average union member is concerned only with results, and — unhampered by opposition from within — they have been formidable at the bargaining table. They have maintained their position — and their power — year after year because they effectively represented the membership and won substantial gains for them.

The leadership, for many reasons, may be more sensitive than the rank and file to the public interest. The desires and aspirations of union members are frequently short-sighted and do not necessarily reflect the broader interests of the public. A demo-

Generated on 2021-05-03 01:00 GMT / https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uiug.30112067089281
Public Domain in the United States, Google-digitized / http://www.hathitrust.org/access_use#pd-us-google
Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN



Others have welcomed the idea of open hearings in order that the public might judge whether or not negotiated wage increases necessarily cause higher prices to rise. They insist that if the public knew the facts it would be in a better position to say whether organized labor was meeting its responsibility to society as a whole. Still others propose informal conferences of government, labor, and management to discuss the general economic issues involved in collective bargaining. While it is still too early to say what plan might work best in this country, further exploration along these lines is obviously desirable. Anything which can bring employers and employees together with representatives of the public for discussion of the broad issues would seem to be all to the good. Informal discussions may well yield results that are impossible under the rigid pattern of the bargaining table. In fact, many persons believe that one of the main weaknesses of the traditional collective bargaining process is that it tends to intensify the differences between employee and employer and obscure their very important common interests. Stronger representation from the public might tend to reduce bitterness and hasten a fair settlement.

Generated on 2021-05-03 01:00 GMT / https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uiug.30112067089281
Public Domain in the United States, Google-digitized / http://www.hathitrust.org/access_use#pd-us-google
Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN



Generated on 2021-05-03 01:00 GMT / https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uiug.30112067089281
Public Domain in the United States, Google-digitized / http://www.hathitrust.org/access_use#pd-us-google
Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN