

SOCIAL PROGRAM OF THE US LABOR UNIONS AND WORLD WAR II

^aELENA Z. GRACHEVA, ^bIRINA A. FIRSOVA, ^cYULIYA E. PAULOVA, ^dIRINA K. KORYAKOVA, ^eTIMOFEY D. NADKIN

Mordovian State Pedagogical University named after M. E. Evseviev, Studencheskaya str., 11 A, Saransk, Russia, 430007

email: ^ap629@yandex.ru, ^bfirina_06@mail.ru, ^cpaulova79@yandex.ru, ^dkoryakova@yandex.ru, ^entd2006@yandex.ru

Abstract: In the paper, the stance of the US labor unions on the question of the start of World War II and the USA entering it is considered. The authors analyze the struggle of the American Federation of Labor and the Congress of Industrial Organizations for higher wages, greater representation of workers in the defense industry authorities, for democratization of social legislation, and for protecting labor legislation of the New Deal. Poor efficiency of the struggle of labor unions for the benefit of hired workers is proven, which was due to a right shift in the labor policy of the US government and business attacking the rights of labor unions, among other things.

Keywords: the USA, World War II, F. Roosevelt, labor unions, Congress of Industrial Organizations, American Federation of Labor.

1 Introduction

The study of the labor union movement of the USA in the years of World War II is of a high scientific importance. The war has had a serious impact on many aspects of activity of the American labor unions. It started as the US economy had not overcome the consequences of the world crisis of 1929-1933 yet. Still, in conditions of the war, the American economy began to develop at an incredible pace. Gross national product of the USA more than doubled over 1939-1945 – growing from 91 billion to 214 billion dollars (Historical Statistics of the United States. Colonial Times to 1957, 1960, p. 139). The industrial production index surged from 57 points in 1939 to 110 in 1945 (Historical Statistics of the United States. Colonial Times to 1957, 1960, p. 418). The war drove agriculture out of crisis, too. Counting 9,5 million people in 1939, which amounted to 17,2% of the civilian work force (Historical Statistics of the United States. Colonial Times to 1957, 1960, p. 73), the unemployment had actually vanished by 1943.

It was big business that obtained the greatest economic gains from the war. The net revenue of corporations over its years was sized at 70 billion dollars (Historical Statistics of the United States. Colonial Times to 1957, 1960, p. 580). The war restored not only the economic pillars of business but also its political weight and standing (Manykin, 1990, p. 113).

The decisive role in the USA's economic upturn belonged to the state. However, while the series of social reforms ended in 1939, the state regulation of the economy was unprecedentedly wide-ranging. The economic takeoff was determined by the overarching state intervention. Alongside this, the nature of the state regulation was indicative of the right shift of the government's labor policy and placed the labor union movement into extremely complicated conditions of struggling for workers' rights.

The right shift of the labor policy pursued by the US government which took place in the war years changed the agenda of the country's labor union movement drastically. The United States' entering the war made labor organizations turn to other focus areas, forms, and methods of struggle.

The contribution of American workers into victory over fascism worldwide cannot be evaluated objectively without considering questions pertaining to particularities of the way social program of the labor union movement was formed in the years of World War II and narratives concerning the nature of their struggle for completing the tasks they had to face. Similarly, these aspects have to be studied for finding out the efficiency of labor union activity in protecting and expanding liberal gains of F. Roosevelt's New Deal achieved in the 1930s and for detailing

reasons behind exacerbation of social struggle in the USA in the first years after the war end.

2 Literature Review

In spite of a high scientific and political importance of this topic, Russian historic science has almost no research works dealing with it. One can only note the brilliant monograph by N.V. Sivachev (1974) where he details the principal lines of the US government's labor policy in the years of World War II, touching on individual aspects of activity of American labor unions. In his book, the most important issues of the right shift in F. Roosevelt's working course in 1939-1945 are addressed, and reasons behind this shift are explained. In the published work "History of the labor movement in the United States in recent times" (Mikhailov, 1971), some aspects of activity of labor unions in the war years are considered, including the questions of trade unions' clash with the attack of entrepreneurs on their rights, struggle of workers against the growth of inflation in the war years. However, the evaluations given by its authors are somewhat sketchy, and they are not dovetailed with the historical context.

In the American historiography, the questions pertaining to the nature of the labor union movement in the years of World War II are discussed in the works of such scientists as N. Lichtenstein (1987, 2013, D. Brody (2005), R. Zieger (1995), J. Seidman (1953), F. Taft (1964), and A. Kernsten (2006). These authors analyze the questions of causes and nature of the strike movement, opposition of the labor unions to the intensified state regulation of labor relations that was anti-labor in its character. They also detail the political struggle objectives pursued by the organized labor movement in the years of World War II and give characteristics of standpoints of individual labor union leaders. However, it has to be noted that these studies do not present a coherent picture of the US labor union movement in the war years. They only pay attention to individual aspects of activity of workers' unions, without fitting the struggle of labor unions into the general picture of historical development of the USA during the war years.

3 Research Methodological Framework

The objective of this research is the analysis of social program of American labor unions in the years of World War II. The authors pose the tasks of considering the question about the labor unions' attitude to the war and the USA's entering it, the stance of labor organizations on the questions of wages, labor and social legislation, extending workers' representation in the war production authorities. In the paper, they analyze forms and methods of struggle of labor organizations for completing the tasks they had to face.

The sources for the research were the American press, including labor union editions, books authored by the leaders of labor unions, and documents from G. Meany Memorial Archives that are currently held by Maryland University Libraries (USA).

For fulfilling the tasks set by the authors, they used the comparative historical and descriptive methods. The research relies on the principles of objectivity and historicism enabling the authors to analyze the phenomena with all historical facts taken into account within the context of the specific historical circumstances.

4 Results and Discussion

4.1 Beginning of World War II and the USA Entering the War

The beginning of the Second World War and the USA's entering it made the American labor movement face quite a lot of major concerns demanding urgent action.

One of the principal tasks was the question of identifying the labor unions' attitude to the war. In the 1930s, both labor union associations, the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) incorporating the majority of the country's labor unions took anti-fascist stances almost entirely. However, without giving a clear-cut definition of the nature of the war and making distinctions among standpoints of the powers at war, for the most part, the labor unions supported strongly the policy of neutrality conducted by the President of the country, F. Roosevelt, in the first days of the war (CIO News, 1939, 16 October, p. 1; CIO News, 1939, 6 November, p. 2; CIO News, 1939, 5 December, p. 1; United Mine Workers Journal, 1940, 1 December, p. 7; American Federationist, 1939, November, p. 1178; Lichtenstein, 1987, p. 30-31).

The labor unions' attitude to the war changed as the worldwide crisis aggravated, evolving together with the official line of the American state. After the defeat of France by Hitlerite Germany and the US government's approval of the "national defense" program, leaders of the American Federation of Labor started to speak in favor of assisting nations that were at war with the Axis countries. The Congress of Industrial Organizations also stood for the United States' rendering support to England and for embracing the Lend Lease bill (Advance, 1941, April, p. 1; American Federationist, 1941, November, p. 983; United Mine Workers Journal, 1940, 15 February, p. 5; Seidman, 1953, p. 23). Such an approach of labor unions was up to the interests of the worldwide fight against fascism and the interests of the working class of America.

After Japan attacked the United States on December 7, 1941, American trade unions got behind their government declaring the war to the Axis powers. Saying they were ready to do everything for the overthrow of fascism, worker unions approved of the measures taken by F. Roosevelt's administration that were aimed at stepping up the pace and magnitude of war production. Labor union leaders spoke in favor of the idea of military cooperation with the Soviet Union in the cause of defeating fascism. Representatives of the AFL and CIO voted for opening the second front in Europe as soon as possible.

Both labor union associations supported the "national unity" idea in fighting fascism. From the workers' viewpoint, this idea based on recognizing warfare as the primary objective of the society had to rely on preserving the labor legislation of the 1930s, on peaceful and not forced regulation of labor disputes by the state, with the employees' interests taken into account. Meanwhile, the workers settled for a certain sacrifice on their part to achieve continuous operation of the war production for the sake of the fastest possible victory over fascism. They were prepared to give up strikes. This was confirmed by labor unions at the conference with representatives of business under the auspices of the state on December 17-23, 1941.

4.2 Struggle Over the Wage Issue

However, the American business did not wish to agree to any concessions to workers. And, relying on the state support, it succeeded in securing a victory when resolving the key issue of labor relations of the war years – that of wages, which was crucial for American labor unions in their social agenda throughout the period of the war. This was explained by two principal reasons. Firstly, the war started in such conditions as the country still had a very high level of unemployment, on the one hand, and on the other hand, wage rates remained quite low for most workers. As a result, this highlighted an extremely low index of the social and economic situation level of the working population. Secondly, F. Roosevelt's government carried out the "national defense" program based on all-round state regulation of the economy and expanding the war production. This led to raging prices for products of the civic sector of the economy, including the essential goods, which affected workers' social and economic situation level adversely.

While in the peacetime conditions labor unions could use an efficient instrument of pressure on entrepreneurs – strikes –

rebuffing that and fighting for workers' rights successfully, now, having opted out of strikes in order to contribute to defeating fascism worldwide, they lost this leverage over business.

In this situation, much depended on the American state, too, and first of all – on the stance of the country's President, F. Roosevelt, who took the path of authoritarian administration in the labor relations domain in the war years. For resolving labor disputes, F. Roosevelt founded a special authority from representatives of labor unions, business, and the "public" – the National War Labor Board (NWLB).

Nevertheless, the hopes of organized workers to the effect that he would pursue a relatively fair wage policy did not come true. The essence of the policy conducted by F. Roosevelt simmered down to the state regulating wages up to the Little Steel formula enacted in October 1942. According to this formula, as of January 1, 1941, in the USA, there allegedly was a harmonious, perfect proportion of the wage rates and the cost of living. The cost of living was believed to have grown by 15% from January 1, 1941 to May 1942 (Sivachev, 1982, p. 266). This meant that basic work pay rates could be increased within these limits only. So, labor unions had no right to demand raising the rates by more than 15%, even if the financial standing of the entrepreneurs enabled them to do so.

Thus, it was in the NWLB that the task of containing the growth of wages was vested in fact. As quite correctly noted by R. Zieger (1995), an American historian, the NWLB was "simply an instrument for limiting wages" (p. 169).

As a result of the state pursuing the said policy, at the expense of a slight loosening in the Little Steel formula, the basic wage rates for workers got 24% higher, while the cost of living – 33%, during the period from January 1941 to July 1945 (Sivachev, 1974, p. 175). It is here that the anti-labor nature of the state policy consisted – the one aimed at freezing wages during the war years. Needless to say, this could not but trigger a negative response of American trade unions.

In the end, such an undoubtedly anti-labor trend of the policy pursued by F. Roosevelt's government in the state regulation of wages encouraged business to gain immense revenues in the years of World War II. Thus, the state turned out to be the paramount factor of curbing the growth of wages, and in doing so, it was accessorial to economic reinforcement of corporations. Both the AFL and the CIO disapproved of the economic dictate of the state and subjected the policy of all state agencies involved in regulating wages to strong criticism. The labor unions' displeasure with the economic policy of the government was tremendous. Anyway, the fight over the economic settlement problems was a losing one, without the workers having any real chances for victory, because according to the terms and conditions of the December 1941 agreement, the labor unions had lost their principal efficient instrument for struggle – strikes.

In the Congress and in mass media, representatives of the labor movement proved the incompetence of the state policy of wage regulation, justifiably indicating the serious lag of work pay rates behind the growth of prices. They emphasized with reason that this resulted in an unfair distribution of the war toils among various social groups of the public and, first of all, between workers, on the one part, and entrepreneurs, on the other.

D. Brody (1993), a distinguished American historian, noted that trade union leaders kept blaming F. Roosevelt's government for unfairness of the policy in the domain of wages conducted by it (p. 188). Anyway, it was a more serious challenge for labor unions to stand up against the state than to defend the interests of workers in struggling with entrepreneurs. As a result, labor unions lost out in this key issue of labor disputes of the war time. Yet, realizing the necessity of mobilizing all national resources for the overthrow of fascism, they had to accept the unfair distribution of the war toils.

4.3 Adoption of Anti-Labor Legislation

Organized workers sustained a defeat in another major focus area of their struggle in the war years, too, namely, in countering the adoption of anti-labor legislation. As the war started, the attacks of business and spokesmen of their economic interests – conservative forces of the USA – on the New Deal labor legislation grew more intense.

Entrepreneurs pushed for radical weakening of labor unions as an institution heatedly, arguing that their activity prevents the war production from functioning efficiently. In the country, a powerful anti-worker campaign was unfolded which pursued the objective of preparing the public opinion for passing anti-labor union acts. Sporadic strikes were depicted as "stabs into the back" of American soldiers, as hindering the war production. In its striving for essential re-orientation of the foundations of the state labor policy, big business exerted pressure on all governmental bodies, the President and the Congress included. In his turn, F. Roosevelt took a negative attitude to changing the New Deal labor legislation; he believed it to be the optimum political course to preserve the status quo over this issue. The government strived not to depart from the traditions of the 1930s, which was in line with the workers' interests.

However, in June 1943, overriding the Presidential veto, the Congress passed the Smith-Connally Anti-Strike Act on the procedure of settling labor disputes during the war time. This act made it difficult to declare strikes at enterprises manufacturing war items and declared it a criminal offence any assistance to striking in case the enterprise at strike passed under the government management. It also banned labor unions from making contributions to election campaigns of persons claiming federal offices. As a result of adoption of this act, the opportunities for labor unions to defend their rights were narrowed down considerably. The Smith-Connally Anti-Strike act was rated by trade unions as one of the worst in their history (Address by J.A. Padway to the 65th Convention of the AFL, 1946).

4.4 The Question of Workers' Representation in the Economy-Governing Institutions

Labor unions failed to achieve the set objectives in another strategic item of their agenda, too. It concerned the participation of labor organizations in mobilizing the American society's resources for defeating fascism. Leaders of the labor union movement of the United States made numerous constructive suggestions aimed at accelerating the deployment of defense production in the country, as well as at more extended participation of trade unions in the process. Such plans were developed and suggested by labor unions of steelmakers, car manufacturers, ladies' tailors, and mine workers. For example, W. Reuther, one of the leaders of the United Automobile Workers, proposed a plan aimed at boosting the production of the automobile industry plants, according to which the industry could turn out 500 fighter planes a day (Public Opinion Quarterly, 1941, June, p. 285-286).

Being the head of the CIO, Ph. Murray put forward a plan of creating production boards at the defense complex enterprises, with representatives of business, labor unions, and the government participating, whose activity had to be focused on improving the product quality and increasing the output at defense plants (Public Opinion Quarterly, 1941, June, p. 285-286). During the war, this idea of cooperation of business, labor unions, and the government got a broad coverage in labor union newspapers and magazines and won a massive support of delegates of the convention of the Congress of Industrial Organizations which took place in autumn of 1941. At the convention, it was emphasized that the workers were ready to use all their efforts and possibilities for establishing cooperation with entrepreneurs for the purposes of achieving the maximum efficiency of production at the plants fulfilling the "national defense" program (United Mine Workers Journal, 1941, 15 July, p. 18). Meanwhile, the workers deemed it necessary to put in

place the "joint control" of labor unions, entrepreneurs, and the state over the defense production (United Mine Workers Journal, 1941, 1 December, p. 18). Vast attention to propagating the idea of such cooperation is also paid in the book of the CIO head Ph. Murray (Cook & Murray, 1946).

While meeting the interests of the worldwide struggle against fascism, this idea had nevertheless seen no support both on the part of business and on the part of the state. Consequently, during the war, not only were labor unions barred from solving production questions at defense enterprises, but they were not allowed to participate in discussing them, either. Worker and entrepreneur committees created according to the idea suggested by Ph. Murray (Cook & Murray, 1946) at certain defense plants actually turned into formal structures while not playing any serious part in organizing the production. The principal reason behind this consisted in the stance of business which was not only unwilling but also fiercely opposed to the idea of admitting labor unions to discussing production questions.

Leaders of the labor union movement were extensive in voicing proposals of participation of labor union representatives in the state agencies responsible for regulating the economy and social relationships (CIO News, 1939, 18 September, p. 2; United Mine Workers Journal, 1940, 15 February, p. 15). So early as in 1939, head of the AFL, W. Green (1939) insisted that labor unions had to elect a large number of representatives of the organized labor movement to the legislative bodies (p. 52). However, they failed to achieve success in this question, too. Head of the United Mine Workers, J. Lewis disapproved of the war years formula of representation at the National Defense Advisory Commission (NDAC), as the organized labor movement had "an only representative per 100 millionaires" (United Mine Workers Journal, 1941, 15 July, p. 10). M. Dubofsky (1994), an American researcher, stressed that most fundamental decisions in the area of labor relations during the war years were made either by manufacturers who worked at war regulation agencies for the fee of 1 dollar, or by the federal government (p. 176-177).

4.5 Fighting for Democratization of the New Deal Social Legislation

Some other important tasks of the labor unions' social agenda touched on the problem of struggle for improving and extending the social security legislation adopted in the New Deal years. This can be traced down the most pointedly using the case of struggle for creation of the state medical insurance system in the USA. Both the CIO and the AFL, especially, demanded quite vocally and made major efforts to convince America's political class to found a state medical insurance mechanism which would enable all strata of the American population to have access to the quality medical service, regardless of their income (Yaushkina et al., 2019). The point made by labor unions to achieve democratization of the country's social security system is illustrated tellingly by the nature of the 1944 election campaign program developed and put forward by them, too. In it, they set the tasks of ensuring the rights for quality education, medical service, work, "decent conditions of living" for all citizens of the country, regardless of their race, confession, and occupation (Gaer, 1944, p. 199). It was the Political Action Committee created by the CIO in 1943 (Yaushkina et al., 2018) that defended bringing this program into life the most consistently.

Nevertheless, labor unions failed to get their objectives brought into life in this domain, too. On the one hand, there was business that stood up fiercely against the organized workers' efforts in making the American economy "more socialized", and the country's President, F. Roosevelt, could not afford confronting business, given the necessity of deploying and accelerating the war production. On the other hand, labor unions did not use the effective struggle methods and forms which they had used quite a few times and which had enabled them to succeed in their struggle for bringing the workers' interests into life back in the 1930s (Koryakova, 1991, p. 161-162).

5 Conclusion

Thus, the success of labor unions in defending the workers' interests in the years of World War II was largely determined by the stance taken by the American state. The US government that the labor union leaders had grown so accustomed to be counting on in 1930s took a right turn in their labor policy, which was a major factor of the labor unions' failures in bringing their program into life in 1941-1945.

On top of that, deprived of the opportunity to use radical tools for defending their interests in the war years, including strikes first of all, the US labor unions turned to political methods of convincing their opponents. This was most clearly demonstrated both by the labor unions' campaign for re-examining the Little Steel formula and by participation of industrial labor unions in the 1944 election via the Political Action Committee mechanism.

However, failing to create an influential labor party of their own, the American trade unions had no serious chances of changing the course of the social and economic policy pursued by the state. Acting as a loyal political ally of the Democratic Party, the workers' unions were not an authoritative and influential power for the political class of America to have to regard. The fact that labor unions had remained within the orbit of ideological and political influence of the Democratic Party liberal wing since the mid-1930s brought down the efficiency of the organized workers' struggle. By the end of World War II, the Liberals' influence on the labor movement of the USA got even higher, with the anti-monopolist tenor of the latter weakening. So, what was observed was not only the loss of warlike attitude and fighting spirit, but, to an extent, that of independence of the labor movement, too. According to the fair opinion of M. Halpern (1988), a distinguished American researcher, the war took the edge off the radicalism of the labor union movement, its "military progressiveness" (p. 40). The ideas of the "peace of classes" and cooperation not only with business, but also with the state became quite widespread among the organized workers in the years of the war. As head of the United Mine Workers, J. Lewis, noted correctly, there was a "cozy relationship" settled between labor unions and the Democratic Party (Zieger, 1988, p. 164).

All this resulted in lower efficiency of the struggle of labor unions for achieving their objectives. The most important of them was a fairer distribution of the toils of war among various social groups. As a consequence, in spite of a certain improvement of workers' material welfare during the war years, unlike business, they carried the principal burden of the war – manning the bulk of the armed forces and working dedicatedly in production of the USA.

Literature:

1. *Address by J. A. Padway to the 65th Convention of the AFL*. October 7, 13/9, 1946. AFL Pamphlets (1889–1955). George Meany Memorial Archives at the University of Maryland Library and Archives.
2. *Advance*. 1941. April. P. 1.
3. *American Federationist*. 1939. November. P. 1178.
4. *American Federationist*. 1941. November. P. 983.
5. Brody, D.: *In Labor's Cause. Main Themes on the History of the American Worker*. N. Y.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993.
6. Brody, D.: *Labor Embattled: History, Power, Rights*. Urbana; Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005.
7. *CIO News*. 1939. 18 September. P. 2.
8. *CIO News*. 1939. 16 October. P. 1.
9. *CIO News*. 1939. 6 November. P. 2.
10. *CIO News*. 1939. 5 December. P. 2.
11. Cook, M., Murray, Ph.: *Organized Labor and Production*. N. Y.: Harper & Brothers, 1946.
12. Dubofsky, M.: *The State and Labor in Modern America*. Chapel Hill; London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1994.

13. Gaer, J.: *The First Round. The Story of the CIO Political Action Committee*. N. Y.: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1944.
14. Green, W.: *Labor and Democracy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1939.
15. Halpern, M.: *UAW Politics in the Cold War Era*. N. Y.: Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1988.
16. *Historical Statistics of the United States. Colonial Times to 1957*. Washington: U S Department of Commerce, 1960.
17. *History of the labor movement in the United States in recent times: 1939-1965*. In B. Ya. Mikhailov (Ed.). Moscow: Nauka publishers, 1971.
18. Kernsten, A.: *Labor's Home Front: The American Federation of Labor during World War II*. N. Y.; London: NYU Press, 2006.
19. Koryakova, I. K.: *USA: Labor Unions and Political Struggle (1936-1941)*. Saransk: Publishing house of Mordovia University, 1991.
20. Lichtenstein, N.: *Labor's War at the Home: The CIO in World War II*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.
21. Lichtenstein, N.: *State of the Union: A Century of American Labor*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013.
22. Manykin, A. S.: *The "Era of Democrats": Party Regrouping in the United States (1933-1952)*. Moscow: Publishing house of MSU, 1990.
23. *Public Opinion Quarterly*. 1941. June. 285-286 pp.
24. Seidman, J.: *American Labor from Defense to Reconversion*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1953.
25. Sivachev, N. V.: *Labor Policy of the USA Government during World War II*. Moscow: Publishing house of Moscow University, 1974.
26. Sivachev, N. V.: *United States: the State and the Working Class (from the formation of the United States of America to the end of World War II)*. Moscow: Mysl publishers, 1982.
27. Taft, Ph.: *Organized Labor in American History*. N. Y.: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1964.
28. *United Mine Workers Journal*. 1940. 15 February. 5-15 pp.
29. *United Mine Workers Journal*. 1940. 1 December. P. 7.
30. *United Mine Workers Journal*. 1941. 15 July. 10-18 pp.
31. *United Mine Workers Journal*. 1941. 1 December. P. 18.
32. Yaushkina, N. N., Koryakova, I. K., Kapaev, M. A.: *Labor Unions in the 1944 Election Campaign in the United States*. *Humanities and Education*, 3, 2018. 151-156 pp.
33. Yaushkina, N. N., Koryakova, I. K., Nadkin, T. D., Grachva, E. Z., Mileshina, N. A.: *Harry Truman and State Regulation of Labor Relations in the USA in 1945-1947*. AD ALTA: Journal of Interdisciplinary Research, 9(1), 2019. 36-38 pp.
34. Zieger, R. H.: *John L. Lewis. Labor Leader*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1988.
35. Zieger, R. H.: *The CIO, 1935-1955*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995.

Primary Paper Section: A

Secondary Paper Section: AB, AD