Neither an autobiography nor a scholarly analysis, *Labor's Struggles, 1945–1950: A Participant's View* is a skillful blend of both genres. Informative and original in its insights and analyses, this book provides the reader with information available from no other source. These insights must be included in any subsequent efforts to interpret this period in labor history.

Richter based this account largely on his own experience as legislative representative for the United Auto Workers-CIO from 1943 to 1947, as well as on documents and conversations from that period, supplemented with historical research. Active in the effort to educate the working class on all important historical and legislative issues and on the political process, Richter wrote and lectured often for UAW and other union audiences and authored a syndicated column that was frequently featured on the front pages of local union papers and city and state central council papers.

This study of policy making in union headquarters and in Washington focuses on the 1945 splits within the CIO as well as the sharp divisions between the “social” CIO and the “opportunistic” AFL. In addition, it focuses on the Labor Management (Taft-Hartley) Act of 1947, which divided an already fragmented movement.
LABOR’S STRUGGLES, 1945–1950
LABOR’S STRUGGLES, 1945–1950
A Participant’s View

IRVING RICHTER
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FOREWORD

In June 1947 Congress passed the Taft-Hartley Act over the veto of President Harry S. Truman. The law consisted of a series of amendments to the Wagner Act of 1935. It retained the Wagner Act’s framework of certification of unions through elections supervised by the National Labor Relations Board and its prohibitions against specified “unfair labor practices” through which employers attempted to prevent their workers from unionizing or tried to control unions, but it changed the thrust of the act by also outlawing such important union practices as closed shops, strikes in violation of contracts, mass picketing, secondary boycotts, and other actions of solidarity. It also banned union contributions to political candidates, forbade employees of the government from striking, permitted states to outlaw union security agreements, and authorized the president to seek a court injunction forbidding for eighty days any strikes that might affect national health or safety. Its most dramatic innovation was a requirement that no union could appeal to the protections of the law or the services of the NLRB unless its elected officers all signed affidavits stating that they were not members of the Communist Party.

Truman’s veto message contended that the bill would “reverse the basic direction of our national labor policy, inject the government into private economic affairs on an unprecedented scale, and conflict with important principles of our democratic society.” Union rallies across the land denounced Taft-Hartley as a “slave-labor law” or, in the words of President John L. Lewis of the United Mine Workers, as “the first ugly, savage thrust of Fascism in America.” The unprecedented size of the American union movement lent significance to those denunciations. In June 1947 fully 87 percent of all construction workers, 83 percent of all miners, 76 percent of railway workers, and 41 percent of workers in manufacturing belonged to unions, and during

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the preceding twelve months more NLRB certification elections (5,194) had been won by unions than in any other year in the board’s history. Seventy-seven percent of the 805,000 eligible voters had cast their ballots in favor of union representation. Nevertheless, Congress handily overrode the presidential veto. Moreover, in 1949, despite Democratic majorities in both houses of Congress, an attempt to repeal the law in fulfillment of the victorious party’s national platform was decisively defeated. Since that time Taft-Hartley has remained, with but minor modifications (though after 1959 without the non-communist affidavit), the uncontested law of the land.

Irving Richter was the legislative representative of the United Automobile Workers of America (UAW) during the battle over this momentous legislation. His “participant’s view” suggests that factional antagonisms in the labor movement made possible the enactment, perpetuation, and enforcement of the new law, and that the law itself (and especially the noncommunist affidavit) aroused that factionalism to the point of debilitating the entire movement. Moreover, he contends, the reshaping of the labor movement was inseparable from the development of Cold War foreign policy.

Richter had acquired his position in the UAW as a result of many years of government service and political activism. (Indeed, his recollections reveal the importance of consultation between key government personnel and top union leaders for all contending factions of the labor movement during the 1940s.) He had been graduated in 1934 from the University of Wisconsin, where he had studied labor economics under the influential Selig Perlman, and he had subsequently worked for New Deal relief agencies and the Labor Department before becoming the auto workers’ legislative representative and director of political action. Like the union’s general counsel, Maurice Sugar, Richter was one of many union staff members who either joined the Communist Party or worked in close alliance with it. His columns on legislative affairs were carried in many of the most important local union papers of the UAW. Because he was an influential adviser to the administration of President R. J. Thomas and Secretary-Treasurer George Addes, Richter was singled out for attack as a communist by their rival Walter Reuther, who defeated Thomas for the presidency in March 1946. As soon as Reuther’s supporters gained control of the UAW executive board in November 1947, he summarily dis-

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missed both Richter and Sugar.3 Richter subsequently managed election cam-
paigns for Henry Wallace’s Progressive Party and then operated his own service company for trade unionists until 1963, when he went to England to earn a Ph.D. in economics from Cambridge University. Thereafter he taught, first at Mount Holyoke College and then at the University of the District of Columbia, where he became an impressive and popular teacher, until his retirement in 1984. After a protracted battle with cancer, he died in May 1989.

Richter finished writing Labor’s Struggles, 1945–1950: A Participant’s View during the last months of his life. The book reflects his own unusual experience and training as well as his determination to clarify the record of the immediate postwar years, which critically shaped the character of the American labor movement and American social life. It is neither an autobiography nor a scholarly analysis of the impact of the Cold War on the labor movement, though it contains elements of both. Richter’s book is more a study of policy making in union headquarters and in Washington than social history or personal narrative. The author’s presence in his story is evident more in his selection of historical incidents for analysis than in discussion of his own experiences. Richter has supplemented his own recollections, syndicated columns, diary excerpts, and extensive notes from the period with archival research and a critical reading of influential studies written recently by such historians as Nelson Lichtenstein, Bert Cochran, and Howell John Harris.4

Richter’s View of the Reconversion Crisis

This unusual account of the disparity that made labor unions vulnerable to new legal tethers just when they were enjoying their greatest popularity and effec-
tiveness poses a serious challenge to historians who have interpreted the postwar labor movement in terms of corporate liberalism, and also to those who have depicted the policies of the Communist Party as the key to controversies inside the new industrial unions.5 Some of the major arguments for-

4Nelson Lichtenstein, Labor’s War at Home: The CIO and World War II (Cambridge, 1982); Cochran, Labor and Communism; Howell John Harris, The Right to Manage: Industrial Rela-
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mulated by Richter run counter to widely accepted conceptions of the mid-1940s. Although many historians may not be fully persuaded by any or all of his arguments, anyone writing seriously about this epoch in the future will have to take them into account.

Richter’s first contention is that the Labor-Management Charter, which spelled out conditions for postwar industrial peace, enjoyed little support in the unions and none worth mentioning in the business world. The charter presented to the public by President Eric Johnston of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce in the spring of 1945 had, Richter reveals, been drafted by two members of the United Steelworkers’ office staff, Robert K. Lamb and Edith Pratt, who had worked with Johnston in the Committee for Economic Development.

To describe the charter as a futile endeavor is nothing new. Howell John Harris demonstrated persuasively that the charter had little influence on the business delegates to the president’s Labor-Management Conference in November 1945. Those delegates, Harris argued, were truly representative of the business world and well briefed by the National Association of Manufacturers and the research of the Industrial Relations Counselors, to take the determined stand in favor of revision of the Wagner Act that Richter describes. Moreover, Richter shows that the most serious practical effort to secure reversion to a peacetime economy without strikes, Chester Bowles’ plan for a 10 percent wage increase for all workers in return for a continuation of the unions’ wartime no-strike pledge, did not meet with even President Truman’s approval.7

More important than Richter’s revelations about policy debates in Washington are his reasons (sometimes explicit and sometimes implicit) for shifting

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the focus of historical analysis away from the policies of the communists in the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). The first is that unions outside of the CIO had no sympathy for schemes of strike-free, managed reconversion. The second is that the guiding force of CIO policy was not the communists, but President Philip Murray.

Although the charter had attested to management’s “inherent right . . . to direct the operations of an enterprise,” all labor representatives to the president’s conference, including those of the CIO, rejected business’ proposals for an explicit listing of management’s rights. The officers of the American Federation of Labor (AFL), the railroad brotherhoods, and the United Mine Workers all opposed a national wage settlement or even discussion of the wage question. They all insisted on unrestricted collective bargaining. John L. Lewis of the miners denounced efforts to link negotiated wage increases to the cost of living, saying, “We say we are for free enterprise. We are opposed to the corporate state and all its manifestations as expressed in the CIO resolution.”

Richter thus reminds us that the CIO in 1945 was a minority force in the union movement despite its decisive importance in such major industries as steel, autos, and electrical machinery, representing fewer than 6,000,000 out of 14,800,000 organized workers. The AFL unions have attracted far too little attention from historians of the war and postwar years, even though four of the five citywide general strikes of 1946 were initiated by AFL affiliates. The support those strikes enjoyed from CIO members in the cities where they took place, and the role of AFL members like the New York longshoremen and the San Francisco machinists in initiating the postwar strike wave (in both those cases through wildcat actions) underscore the weakness of any interpretation of the labor movement based solely on the words and deeds of leaders of either the CIO or the AFL.

Moreover, the policy of the CIO itself was shaped by the United Steelworkers and its president, Philip Murray, to a degree that is seldom perceived by authors who focus on the battles between communists and their foes in the auto and electrical workers’ unions. Murray and his union had not only

--New York Times, November 9, 1945, as quoted by Richter.

spawned the ill-fated Labor-Management Charter but also been the driving force behind the much more successful Political Action Committee (PAC). The PAC was formed by the CIO, under the leadership of Sidney Hillman, in order to help reelect President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1944 as well as to defeat special enemies of labor and elect friends in congressional and state campaigns. Many historians have agreed with Bert Cochran that “the PAC was a powerhouse” of decisive importance in several industrial states, soon imitated by the American Federation of Labor, and “laid the foundation for the modern labor bloc in American politics.”10 Quire different is the impression left by Richter, who describes nominal participation by the UAW’s top officers and scarcely concealed disregard of the PAC by the ambitious Reuther, who was determined to develop his own independent ties to the Michigan Democratic Party.

Two historians have provided a useful context in which to situate Richter’s recollection of the PAC. Mark McColloch has demonstrated that the United Steelworkers poured money and salaried staff into the PAC in 1944, with dramatic success in wards where steel workers resided, and that that union incessantly linked the achievement of its social goals to the war leadership of President Roosevelt. In 1943 it had demanded a “substantial down payment on the Four Freedoms,” starting with democracy in the American South and national planning for postwar prosperity.11 But Nelson Lichtenstein observes that “the grand effort to link a progressive social program to the wartime mobilization effort had proved unsuccessful by 1943, and Reuther had the political intelligence to recognize this failure earlier than most CIO leaders.”12 These differing perceptions help us not only understand why Reuther was not chosen by Murray to be one of the CIO delegates to the 1945 Labor-Management Conference but also, and more important, the role of the inadequately studied Steelworkers as the balance wheel of CIO policy.

The Great Strike Wave and Taft-Hartley
In the year following Japan’s surrender, more than 4,600,000 American workers went on strike. Although most of the action was concentrated between

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10Cochran, Labor and Communism, pp. 242, 243. Cochran’s evaluation does slight the precedents of AFL political action in the 1906 and 1908 elections and the Conference for Progressive Political Action in 1922.


12Lichtenstein, Labor’s War at Home, p. 149.
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January and April of 1946, when the CIO's steel workers, auto workers, electrical workers, and packinghouse workers all conducted industrywide strikes, the work stoppages had begun in maritime and shipbuilding occupations and later brought out all the coal miners and, briefly in May, every railroad worker in the land. Richter depicts labor’s posture during these strikes as “largely defensive.” He agrees with Murray’s judgment that business wanted to maximize industrial turmoil in order to generate congressional support for new legislation to rein in unions. He illustrates the point by recalling the Republicans’ 1946 campaign slogan denouncing “Communism, Confusion, and Chaos” and by recounting at length the use made of the controversial strike of United Auto Workers Local 248 at Allis-Chalmers by the House committee preparing the Taft-Hartley bill.

Richter’s view of the 1946 strike is unlikely to be considered adequate by many historians. It is at this point that a view from Washington imposes the most restrictive blinkers. Other historians have noted that the strikes of rubber workers, machinists, dockers, and others in September and October 1945 were galvanized by enthusiasm for a 30 percent wage increase (forty-eight hours’ pay for forty hours’ work), which union officers could not restrain. Competing unions and leadership factions scrambled to identify themselves with the workers’ hunger for a major and immediate improvement in their standard of living. This competition doomed not only Murray’s dream of a government-imposed national settlement but also the efforts of the United Electrical Workers (UE) to coordinate the struggles of all CIO unions around concerted actions and demands. Previously unorganized workers by the hundreds of thousands became union members during the strikes. Ultimately Murray’s Steelworkers called out 400,000 workers in the largest single strike in American history. And, unlike the industry’s strikes of 1919 and 1937, it was not challenged by a single strikebreaker. In the months following the strike Murray dismissed his own union’s aides who had been the most ardent enthusiasts of labor-management cooperation, Clinton Golden, Joseph Scannlon, and Harold Ruttenberg, and castigated their celebrated proposals.15

Nevertheless, many historians would agree with Richter that business also took the offensive in 1946. They would locate that attack, however, in the

workplace, as well as in the committee rooms of Congress. Rulings by government agencies had significantly increased the authority of union representatives and regulations on the job, initiated the process of reducing (though not abolishing) wage differentials based on region, race, and gender, strengthened the institutional security of unions, and encouraged industrywide collective bargaining, while the high wartime demand for labor had enabled unions to ease piecework standards and had encouraged militancy in the workplace. Employers’ efforts to roll back these gains generated some of the most intense conflicts of that year – and of subsequent years. Although none of these observations refute Richter’s participant’s view, they do suggest a need to supplement it with other perspectives.

Finally, Richter has argued that labor’s resistance to the Taft-Hartley law was far less forceful than the speeches and resolutions at union conventions suggest. The noncommunist affidavit provided a weapon for use against foes within the union movement that was too tempting for most officials to resist. Despite the widespread refusal of left-Wingers to submit their political views to government approval, and in defiance of the eloquent appeals of John L. Lewis and President J. Woodruff Randolph of the century-old Typographical Union that the unions repudiate all government interference in the workers’ movement by simply refusing to sign and operating, as they had before 1935, without certification, most union officers hastened to sign. CIO unions whose officers initially refused to sign, like the electrical, farm equipment, packinghouse, and wood workers, found themselves raided by AFL (and eventually other CIO) unions whose names could appear on NLRB ballots, whereas those of nonconformists could not. Supporters of Walter Reuther confronted their rivals personally in local meetings and at the 1947 UAW convention, demanding that they sign. In 1949 when the CIO expelled eleven member unions as “communist-dominated,” their early refusal to comply with Taft-Hartley was taken in evidence.

Moreover, few unions chose to hazard life without NLRB protection (and in defiance of NLRB rulings), no matter how obnoxious they found the new legal restraints that came with that protection. This was made clear by the AFL’s response to Taft-Hartley. Lewis’ summons to the 1947 convention to

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ignore the affidavits and the board was answered by the Federation’s secretary-treasurer, George Meany. In a speech that made him heir apparent to Federation president William Green, Meany first recounted the practical problems any modern union would face if it defied the government, and then proclaimed himself ready to sign not only the required affidavit but also another stating “that I was never a comrade to the comrades.”

Rejecting defiance, labor could hope only for repeal of the new law. That aspiration tied unions more closely yet to the Democratic Party and to its foreign policy. At Meany’s urging, the AFL formed Labor’s League for Political Education to strengthen its political alliances and influence, while the CIO expelled any affiliated union that failed to support Truman’s reelection campaign. Despite their campaign promises, the Democrats in Congress brought to the floor a bill that actually retained several restrictive features of the new law, and then failed to muster the votes to pass even that. After the outbreak of the Korean War, repeal efforts only singled out specific features of the law. Union practice accommodated itself to the strictures of the law (except in the building trades), just as dominant union ideologies adhered to Cold War anticommunism.

Christopher L. Tomlins has concluded, in a recent history of labor and the law, that the “Taft-Hartley Act . . . proved much less of a break with the past than has usually been assumed.” He presents in evidence the increasingly restrictive pattern of development in NLRB rulings before 1947 and the basic consistency between board rulings before and since the enactment of Taft-Hartley. Richter’s participant’s view has a larger focus: It is concerned with the law’s role in restraining the power of organized workers at the moment it had reached full flood and in encouraging within the union movement debilitating factionalism and repression.

Despite their disagreements in interpreting the past, both Tomlins and Richter are aware of the importance of this historical controversy for contemporary politics. In recent years a sense of crisis has informed the labor movement’s debates over its own future and has encouraged the questioning of beliefs and practices that have been immune to challenge since the epoch of the noncommunist affidavit. Irving Richter’s parting thoughts and recollections can contribute not only to historical revision but also to the renewal of the union.

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movement, just as his earlier legislative work helped fashion its vigorous past. ¹⁷

DAVID MONTGOMERY

Yale University

¹⁷I am deeply indebted to Amy Stanley for providing me with information about Richter’s career and to Nelson Lichtenstein for his critical comments on a draft of this foreword.
PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book has had a long gestation period. It probably began in 1931, when I first became a dissident at the University of Wisconsin. In 1933, when Hitler came to power in Germany, I was in the classes of both John R. Commons and Selig Perlman. The former was ending a distinguished career as an economic theorist, reformer, and labor historian. Perlman, Commons’ disciple and already an eminent labor academician, was carrying on the “Wisconsin School” tradition: featuring the local union of the American Federation of Labor as the preferred model of labor organizations, frowning on industrial forms of organizations as dangerous, discouraging labor union involvement in politics.

At Wisconsin in the 1880s, Commons’ mentor Richard T. Ely had been placed on trial before the Board of Regents for discussing the subjects of socialism and trade unionism. In the early 1930s, it was no longer daring or risky for an academic to discuss AFL-style unionism or to give a course on capitalism, socialism, and communism, as Professor Perlman did each year. But Perlman made clear his strong disapproval of ideas popular in the 1930s with many undergraduates: mass or open unionism, radical politics, and a labor party.

I had then, and have now, great respect for Perlman’s insights. I am sure they influenced my own later views. Indeed, several influential critics of my Political Purpose in Trade Unions (published in 1973 from my doctoral dissertation at Cambridge University) viewed that book as a Perlmanish interpretation of American and British trade union attitudes toward politics.

While Perlman did indeed influence me and, much more so, the men and women who were my classmates as well as succeeding generations of scholars and trade union leaders and staffers, I have come to see his published views as provocative and thoughtful but highly subjective. I believe Selig Perlman’s theory of the labor movement was shaped by his bitter experiences as a socialist under the Polish colonels, and then by his fears of what might happen
to him as a Jew and former radical if U.S. labor should take the advice of radicals (“intellectuals”) and launch into industrial-type unions.

As a young man in pre–World War I Poland, Perlman had joined the socialists, probably through the Jewish Bund. After coming to the United States and securing acceptance at an institution of higher learning that was progressive enough to be studying labor and unionism, he decided to combat the notion – widespread in the 1920s and early 1930s – that the American Federation of Labor, which the Wisconsin School had come to admire, should be broadened by dropping its craft philosophy and embracing industrial unionism. This scared him. Prophetically, he saw that such forms of mass unionism, by opening the door to minorities and to unskilled and semiskilled workers, would bring a backlash. To survive, such a movement would be forced into political action. The combination of labor politics and mass unionism would be too much for “the bosses.” Professor Perlman believed that most American employers, frightened by such a power shift, would simply not accept broader organizational activity, even where they had come to live with the more limited craft-style unions. “It will only arouse the sleeping dogs of fascism,” I recall his telling a class at Madison in his heavily accented English.

A similar proposition, in modified form, was incorporated in Perlman’s classic Theory of the Labor Movement. This Theory is considered again in Chapter I of the present study. It is to be noted here that while the CIO succeeded in organizing and gaining contracts in mass-production industries, the leading employer organization, the National Association of Manufacturers, was and remains opposed, in principle, to all forms of unionism.

In 1934, B.A. in hand, I hopped a freight car to Washington, then the promised land of the New Deal, and won an appointment in the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA).

From FERA I went to the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and then to the Labor Department as an economist. In addition to these paid jobs, I worked at FERA, WPA, and Labor as a local union organizer and officer for the American Federation of Government Employees, AFL.

My full-time CIO connection began in 1943 when I became the national legislative representative of the United Auto Workers, a job I viewed as part of the great CIO crusade on behalf of the heretofore neglected mass-production workers. I joined, loudly, in the hosannas for the “labor movement.” However, I realized very soon after starting work on Capitol Hill for the UAW-CIO – although I never said so publicly – that the new CIO movement had nothing in common, socially or politically, with the American...
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Federation of Labor. I was very proud of carrying the CIO banner for what I regarded as its objective of not only organizing but representing in politics the open, mass unions; in my mind, the CIO and its affiliates stood for full and equal opportunity for political, racial, and religious minorities; for social reform; and for the defeat of Nazism and fascism. But because I was identifying with the left-center caucus in the UAW that I then considered to be on the side of the angels, I was fired in late 1947 when a right-wing group won power in the UAW and the CIO as a whole decided it was no longer opportune to be seen standing alongside lefties and radicals, including people known as communists, under the old united-front banner.

The pages that follow represent my own perspective on events of 1945–50, a turning point in postwar labor history. My perspective is based on prior study of, and activity in, AFL and CIO unions; extended shop work; and graduate study at American and Columbia Universities as well as five years of close observation and participation in events in Washington for the UAW (1943–7). Fortunately, I kept some records of my own and do not have to rely on my own and other people’s fading memories.

All this study and experience – and thought – have given me a particular place in the “historical procession,” and “an angle of vision,” to borrow two phrases from Cambridge professor E. H. Carr:

The historian is just another dim figure trudging along in another part of the procession. And as the procession winds along, swerving now to the right and now to the left, sometimes doubling back on itself; the relative position of the different parts of the procession is constantly changing . . . new vistas, new angles of vision, constantly appear as the process – and the historian with it – moves along. The historian is part of the history. The point in the procession at which he finds himself determines his angle of vision over the past.1

In these pages, my angle of vision necessarily intrudes on both my selection of facts and my interpretation of those facts.

Notwithstanding Selig Perlman’s admonitions, as soon as I became legislative representative of the auto union in the spring of 1943, I was ready to use political action for advancing what I considered the interests of the “working class” and the “labor movement.” I was dedicated to the job, which in my view meant educating the rank and file on all important historical and legislative issues and on the political process. I wrote and lectured often for UAW and other union audiences about legislative procedures in Washington as well as the nuts and bolts of political action. My syndicated column was frequently

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featured on the front page in local union and city and state central council papers, and occasionally in the Negro and foreign-language press. I was also persuasive with members of Congress and government officials in describing the war role of labor. I was good at my work. My column was mainly placed in so-called left-wing papers, but many of my most avid readers and vocal supporters were so-called right-wingers. Most were no-wingers.

The political orientation of all my work in Washington and elsewhere was consistent with CIO policy. At that time, I, along with most leftists and centrists, worked closely with the large and vigorous communist group. I knew and respected most of the Communist Party functionaries. When the Communist Party moved to a position opposed by the UAW or CIO, however, I ceased to be even a fellow traveler.

Communism loomed large in unions during the focal period of this study. Yet communism, as theory or practice, was not advanced or even debated by Communist Party members or others at UAW local meetings or at any other union level, at least to my knowledge. The longer-established American Federation of Labor still considered CIO PAC-style political action as “red.” Political action was still suspect among workers generally. Even in the UAW, the largest and politically one of the most active CIO affiliates, where some officers tried to overcome suspicions about American politics, factional motivation (internal politics) was a constant: in the UAW’s attitude toward political action and political parties, in the hiring and firing of staff representatives and technicians, and even in its approaches to strikes and labor law, as I show in later chapters.

During the 1943–4 presidential campaign, the auto workers’ union seemed to act as one unit for the reelection of Roosevelt; indeed, it was often cited by CIO Political Action Committee (CIO PAC) officials as a model for political actions.

This was an illusion, however. While the top officers, George F. Addes and R. J. Thomas, accepted positions and performed significant, and unpaid, duties with the national office of the CIO PAC, and were ostensibly part of a broad united front with the left wing of the CIO, they showed little enthusiasm or understanding for the undertaking. By contrast, Vice-President Walter Reuther, who did indeed have a full understanding of the political implications of the CIO, was in fact aloof from the CIO PAC because of the contemporaneous factional alignments in his own UAW and the CIO.

Addes and Thomas, who carried the ball for the UAW at the national Political Action Committee, had some nonpolitical motivations. First, the political channel could be urged as a plausible alternative to restless local
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unionists chafing under the restrictions imposed by the wartime no-strike pledge, which was unanimously approved by all UAW officers but was by 1943 a special burden for all officers in the left-center coalition; second, PAC work now carried with it far more prestige than the organizing and negotiating tasks associated with the early days of the UAW and CIO (I recall arranging a luncheon at the Capitol for R. J. Thomas, who as PAC spokesman basked in and clearly relished the company of Clare Luce and about forty other members of Congress); third, and possibly most important, Addes and Thomas knew that the CIO PAC was the special interest of Sidney Hillman and that the PAC was also supported by Philip Murray. The latter two, as vice-presidents of the CIO under John L. Lewis, had been at the very center of auto worker financing and growth, and they were still expected to be speakers at UAW conventions, where their influence could be decisive in the many close and divisive questions and candidacies facing UAW delegates.

In practice, the Reuther-led coalition, comprising about half the UAW membership and staff, stood apart from both Hillman and the CIO PAC. Indeed, as is shown later, this opposition half of the union until 1948 frequently actively opposed the CIO PAC and its leaders, even though Walter Reuther himself fully understood labor’s need for political allies in Washington and elsewhere.

The changes in the thinking of labor leaders and in the labor movement generally reflected those in the broader society. The roughly fifteen million adults who were members of labor organizations in 1945 rarely saw themselves as part of a movement. The AFL, unaffiliated labor unions, and the CIO were in fact sharply divided. One central point of this book is that even the CIO, the most “social” of the labor bodies and on the whole quite deeply involved in political action, was itself split on the Taft-Hartley labor law and other vital questions confronting organized labor in the period, far more so than might appear from the records.

The 1945 splits within the CIO, the division between the “social” CIO and the “opportunistic” AFL, the militant “free enterprise” leadership given to the miners by Lewis – all working without coordination or cooperation – prevented a postwar labor position from going forward to Congress, to the president, to the secretary of labor, or to the various union memberships. Similar splits occurred not only during the “slave-labor” bill but also over the great strike wave of 1945–6, which in turn helped usher in the Congress that enacted Taft-Hartley. The final two chapters of this book will focus on the Labor Management Relations (Taft-Hartley) Act of 1947, which seemed to unite, but actually further divided, an already fragmented movement.
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Acknowledgments

Although I question some labor sources, many useful public and private records do exist. I have my own records and some memory of events. I have cited many archival and library sources that contain the papers of, and oral interviews with, major actors of the period. I spent many hours with union people and conducted many interviews. I have also consulted many books and articles by authors who have studied one phase or another of the period. I trust that my notes give sufficient credit to all the people who helped me. Some who helped prefer to remain unmentioned. I thank them all. I owe a special debt, also, to the following individuals for having read, edited, and commented on my manuscript or parts of it: Peter Agree, Pat Aufderheide, James Billington, George W. Crockett, Jr., Hasea and Steven Diner, Kathleen Dockett, Elizabeth and Mark Edey, Steve Fraser, Irene Gordon, Herbert Hill, Noelle McAfee, Richard Sasuly, the late Rexford Tugwell and the staff of the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions at Santa Barbara, and the late F. Palmer Weber. I owe a special debt to my lifelong friend Harold G. Vatter for his comments, encouragement, assistance, and questioning. My wife, Jeanne, has been a source of critical comments, love, patience, and total support.

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