

REVIVING THE FEDERATION'S HISTORIC ROLE IN ORGANIZING

by

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The recent ascent of John J. Sweeney to the Presidency of the AFL-CIO has been accompanied by what generally is perceived as a break with the Federation's longstanding reluctance to take a leadership role in organizing the unorganized. When former AFL-CIO President Lane Kirkland characterized the Federation's historic relation to organizing as "one of service, backup, and assistance," no one contested that depiction.¹ Rather, the debate within the AFL-CIO centered on how far the Federation should depart from its traditional approach of ceding leadership in organizing to the Internationals.²

Yet the historical record tells a different story. From the birth of the American Federation of Labor (AFL) in the 1880s, through the formation of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) in the 1930s, and the eventual rejoining of the two federations in the 1950s, the ability of the American labor movement to organize new workers has depended upon aggressive and innovative organizing initiatives undertaken at the federation level. The vigorous leadership of the CIO in the 1930s and its indispensable role in expanding unionism into the mass production industries have been delineated most recently in Robert Zieger's book, *The CIO, 1935-55* (1995). The organizing initiatives of the AFL have yet to be detailed.

In 1886, the founders of the AFL declaimed the organizing of local labor unions and their formation into national organizations a prime object.³ And, as this essay will argue, to a surprising degree, the Federation itself took charge of translating this goal into concrete gains, chartering thousands of new local unions, aggressively seeking the affiliation of independent organizations, and actively promoting the creation of new national and international bodies. For much of its history, the Federation coordinated a far-flung network of AFL volunteer and paid organizers who worked not only to build up the membership of existing internationals but, when necessary, to set up new local unions directly affiliated with the Federation.⁴ Through the medium of these local union affiliates, the Federation encouraged the organization of marginal and forgotten sectors of the work force. The AFL-chartered local unions exhibited a range of organizational forms and objectives, suggesting that, at least in the early years of the AFL, the Federation recognized the need for innovative and diverse approaches to representation and deemed the Federation itself as a proper site for such experimentation.

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Sweeney's program to expand the Federation's commitment to organizing and to make the Federation itself the site of innovative organizing campaigns is thus a continuation of tradition not a break with it.⁵

But what was the extent and nature of the AFL's involvement in organizing and how did that commitment change over time? And, in what specific ways did the Federation depart from the conventional exclusive, craft-oriented organizing policies that have long been associated with the AFL? And, lastly, what role should the current Federation have in organizing? Are there historical traditions and practices worth reconsidering that have yet to be incorporated into the new AFL-CIO leadership's proposals for institutional reform and growth? In the rest of this essay, I will attempt to answer these questions.

THE AFL: CHARTERING LOCALS AND INTERNATIONALS

It is the record of the Federation's activities in chartering local and national unions that I think offers the most convincing evidence for a reassessment of the standard historical portrait of the AFL as exclusive, stodgy, and little interested in reaching out to those beyond its ranks. The story of these local unions also reveals the variety of institutional forms that once constituted the labor movement. These alternative practices, now forgotten, provide fertile ground for imagining new approaches for revitalizing today's labor movement.

Given the paucity of national and local labor bodies, the Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions (the forerunner of the AFL) of necessity dedicated itself to "organizing local Unions with the object of forming national or international bodies."⁶ The Knights of Labor, the largest labor federation of the nineteenth century, had a similar orientation, allowing for the direct affiliation of local as well as district and national bodies.⁷ Not surprisingly, then, at its founding convention in 1886, the unions comprising the early AFL, a group almost evenly divided between national and local bodies, penned as its first object, "the encouragement and formation of local Trades and Labor Unions." They dedicated themselves to using "every possible means to organize new National or International Trades Unions, and to organize local Trades Unions and connect them with the Federation, until such time as there are a sufficient number to form a National or International Union, when it shall be the duty of the President of the Federation to see that such organization is formed."⁸

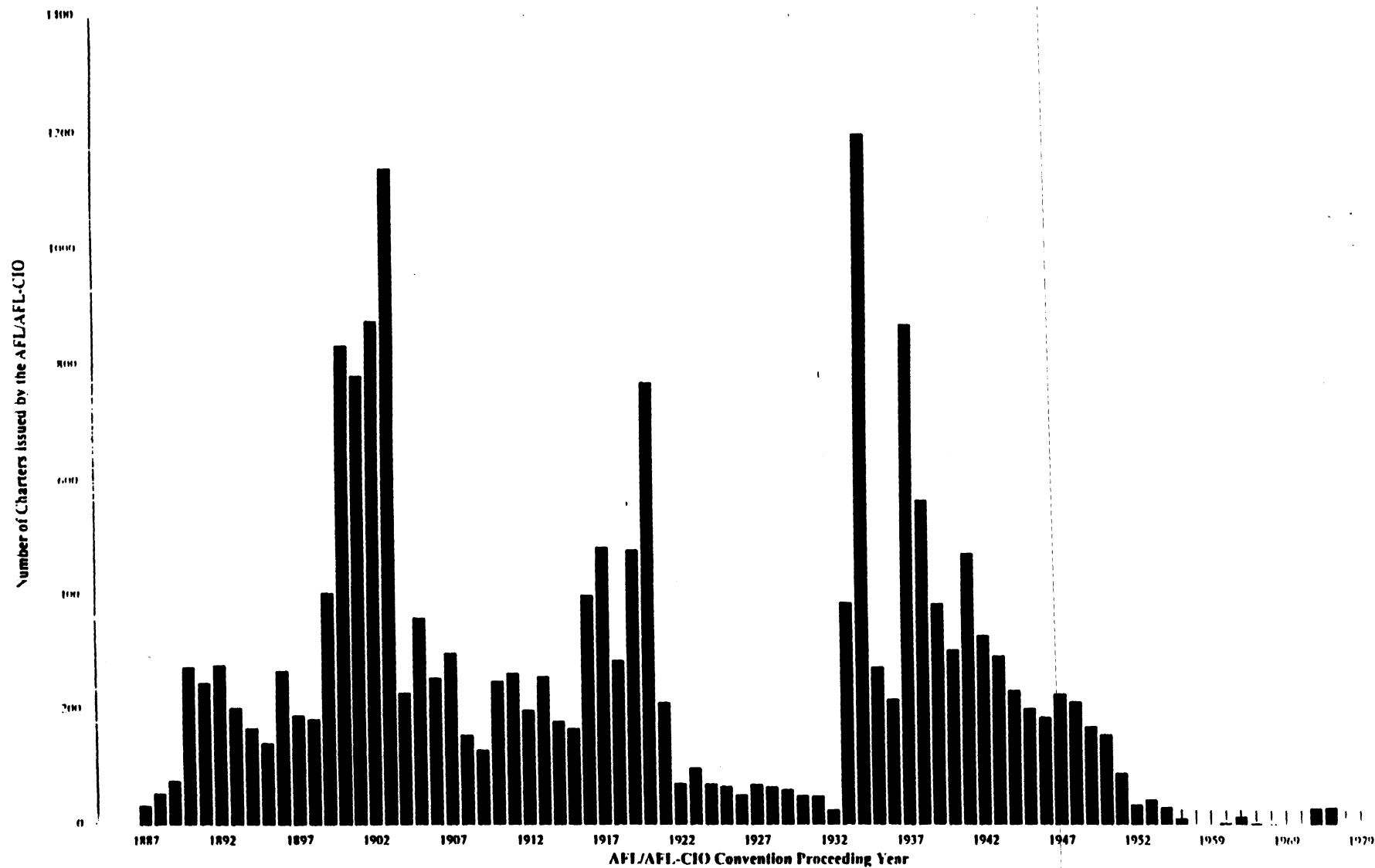
From the beginning, the Federation chartered local craft-based trade unions in occupations without national organization or where the national bodies were not affiliated with the AFL. They also organized federal labor unions or local bodies of workers from different trades.⁹ The 1886 Constitution provided for the formation of "a local body, to be known as a 'Federal Labor Union'" where "any seven wage workers of good character, and favorable to Trade Unions, and not members of any body affiliated with this Federation" desire membership.¹⁰ *The New York Tribune* explained that this latter provision "will obviate the difficulty of forming unions in small towns where there are not enough of one trade to form a union and will take the place of the mixed local assemblies of the Knights of Labor."¹¹

The number of charters actually issued indicate that the Federation took its organizing charge seriously. From the birth of the AFL in 1886 to its merger with the CIO in 1955, the Federation issued roughly twenty thousand charters to fledgling local unions around the country, some twelve thousand of these before 1933 (See Graph 1, Page 4).¹² An exact accounting of the fate of these locals is impossible to reconstruct. Many lasted only a few months and disbanded; others eventually affiliated with already-existing International unions or combined to form their own internationals; still others functioned as full-fledged unions for half a century.¹³

Beginning in 1897, however, records exist that allow the historian to chart the overall membership of local affiliates, the number of surviving affiliates in any one year, and the proportion of the AFL's membership residing in local unions. As Graphs 2 and 3 on Pages 5 and 6 reveal, the shifting membership of local unions and the numbers of local union affiliates in existence in any one year generally parallels the ups and downs of overall AFL membership. There is steady progress between 1897 and 1903. Overall membership fluctuates at a somewhat lower level between 1903 and 1916 with a corresponding drop in the number of new charters being issued. In the World War I era, membership expands quickly, but the gains evaporate after 1921. The nadir is reached in 1932, followed by sustained and substantial growth from 1933 to the end of the War. In the post World War II period, decline sets in, slowly at first and then accelerating after the merger in 1955. In large part, the decline results from the newly-merged AFL-CIO's campaign to link local affiliates with an appropriate parent International — the pool of possibilities having expanded with the addition of the CIO International affiliates — and its policy of discouraging the formation of new local and national affiliates.¹⁴ In 1957, for example, for the first time in the history of the AFL,

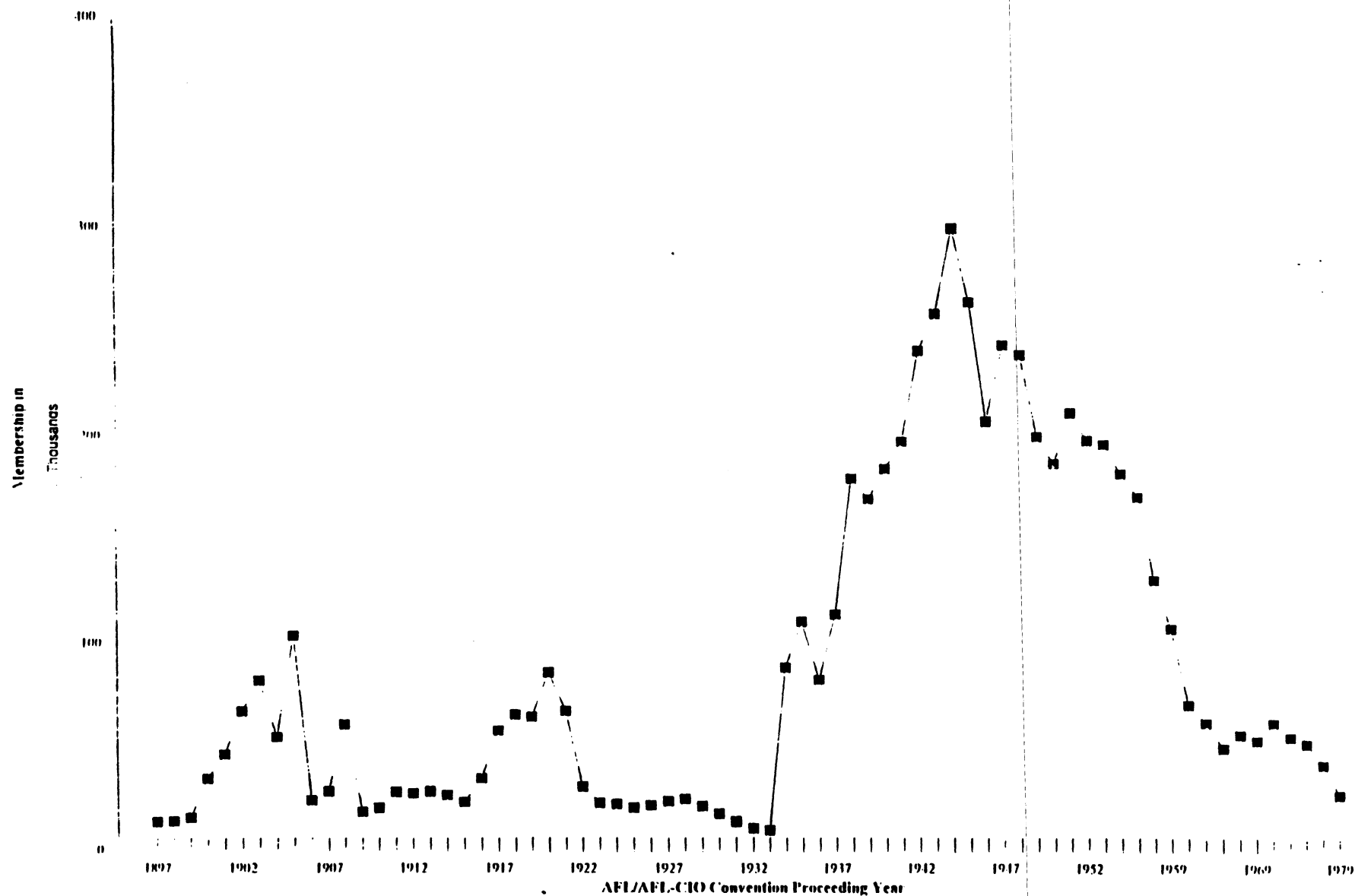
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Graph 1: Number of Charters for Directly Affiliated Local Unions Issued by the Federation, 1887-1979.



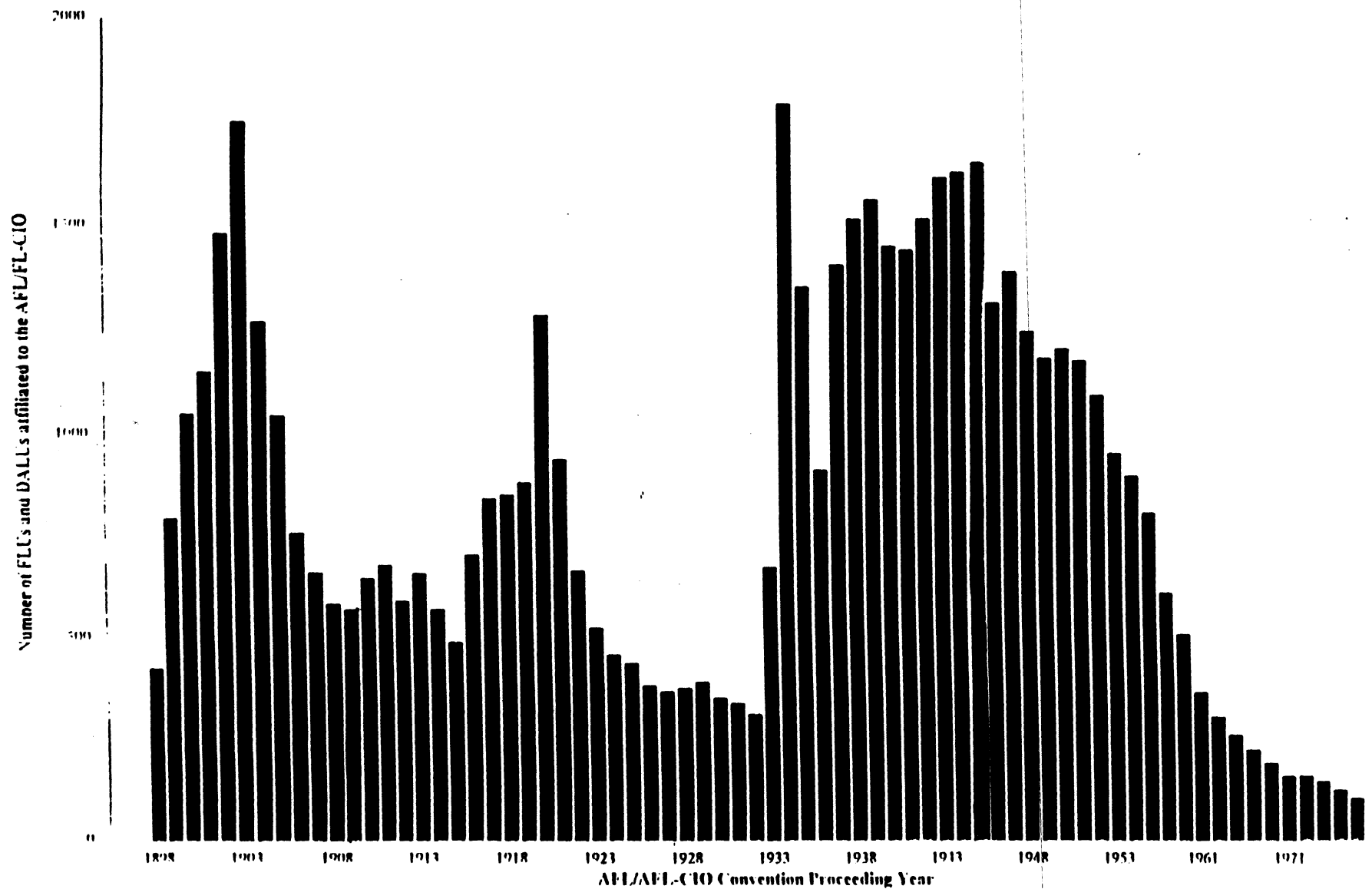
Data from 1887-89 compiled from "AFL Account Books December 1886-February 1890," AFL Records - Samuel Gompers Era (Microfilm Edition, 1979). For 1891-1979, see AFL Convention Proceedings. The Author Wishes to Thank Jeanne Nagrod, Haejin Kim, Gail O'Brien and Debbie McNeill for help in preparing these graphs.

Graph 2: Membership in Directly Affiliated Local Unions, 1897-1979.



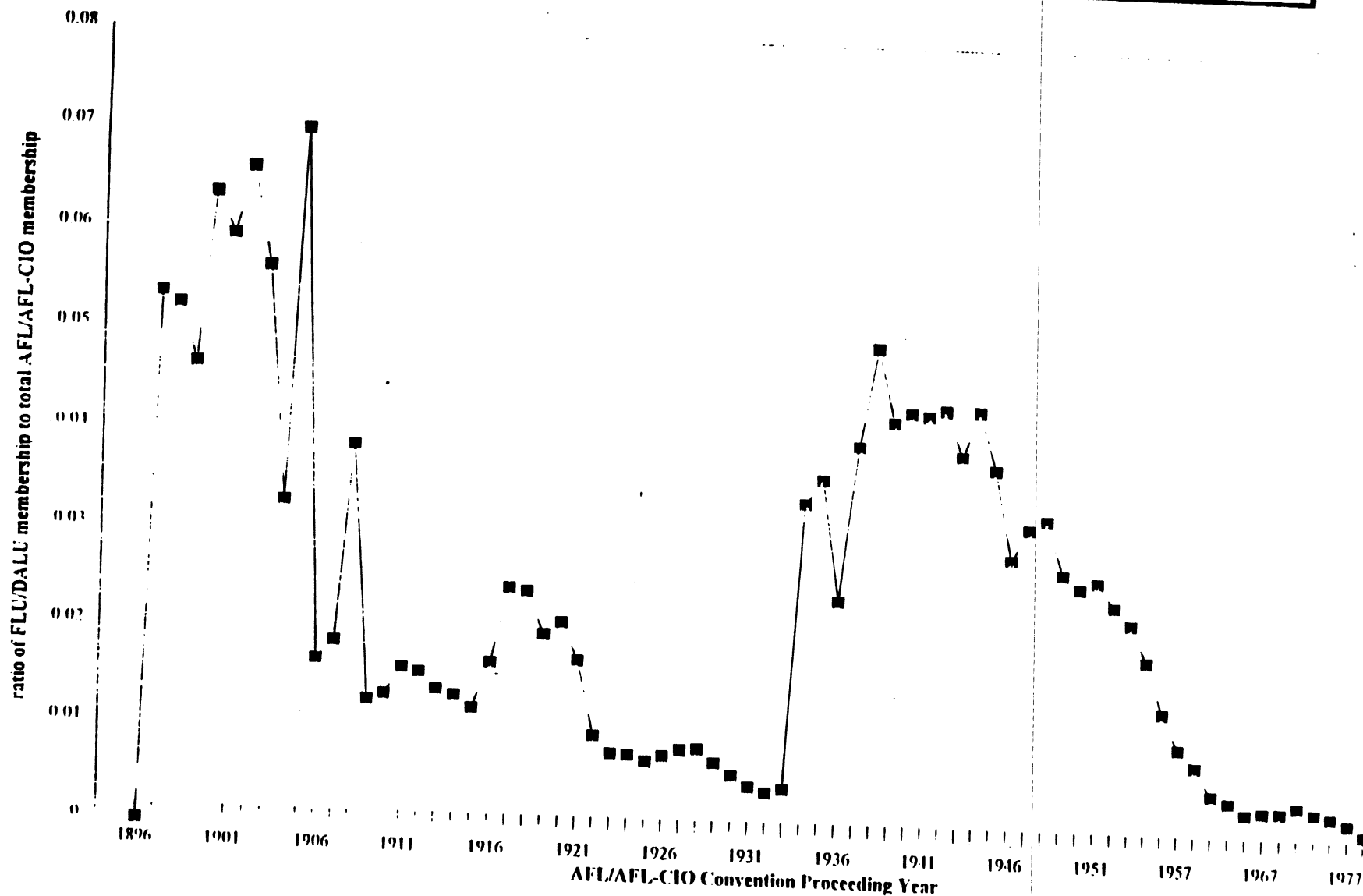
Data from 1897-1902, 1905, 1908 from Leo Wolman, *Up and Down in Trade Unionism* (New York: National Bureau of Economic Research, 1916), pp. 192-93. Other Years Compiled from AFL Convention Proceedings.

Graph 3: Number of Directly Affiliated Local Unions in Existence, 1898-1979.



The 1945 Figure is From Collection 18, Vol. 9, George Meany Memorial Archives. Other Years Compiled Using Data from AFL Convention Proceedings

Graph 4: Directly Affiliated Local Union Membership
in Proportion to the total AFL/AFL-CIO Membership, 1897-1979



[Compiled using data from AFL Convention Proceedings.]

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not a single local union charter is granted (See Graph 1, Page 4). As of 1995, only some twenty local affiliates remained.¹⁵

Graph 4 on Page 7 calculates the proportion of AFL membership residing in local unions in any given period. The largest percent of AFL membership in local unions occurred during periods of rapid overall growth and mass demand for unions, periods in which the AFL needed a mechanism allowing a wide range of workers to join immediately, whether or not an appropriate international union existed. The chartering of local unions was the principal strategy relied upon by the AFL in its large-scale organizing initiatives undertaken both at the turn of the century and again in the 1930s.

Once it had chartered a sufficient number of local unions, the AFL would call a national conference of all unions representing workers in that trade, whether affiliated with the AFL or not. Often, this conference would be the occasion for the founding of a new national union. As AFL President Samuel Gompers explained in 1890: "To my mind it was better to have the National Union started and set on its way to progress, though weak at first, than to have a fragmentary number of local unions of the same trade or calling without any central head or common concert of action among them."¹⁶

Of course, not all of the AFL national affiliates grew from local bodies directly tied to the AFL. Some national bodies predated the AFL's founding in 1886; others formed without the help of the AFL. But a surprising number of national organizations owe their existence to the organizing efforts of the AFL itself.

The AFL began in 1886 with some dozen or so national unions; by 1892 the Federation claimed 40 affiliates.¹⁷ Over the next decade, the AFL stepped up its organizing pace, chartering a large number of internationals, many of which survived into the present day. As David Brody reminds us in *The Butcher Workmen* (1964), his study of unionization in the meat industry, in its early years the AFL "operated as the organizing agency in fields outside the jurisdiction of existing internationals." In Brody's opinion, "Gompers fulfilled these instructions boldly." In the meat industry the AFL provided the initial impulse for some dozen butcher and packinghouse locals in the decade after its founding and then, in 1897, helped bring these scattered locals together into an International Union.¹⁸

The meat industry experience was not exceptional. Philip Taft estimated that "between 1896 and 1901 the AFL formed thirty-five international unions out of directly chartered federal and trade unions."¹⁹ Lewis Lorwin counted 69 national unions chartered from AFL local bodies between 1899 and 1904.²⁰ Although the chartering of new national unions slowed after 1905, at its 1921 Convention the AFL listed 86 still-surviving internationals that had been formed from directly chartered local unions in the past 26 years.²¹ Indeed, of the 107 AFL national affiliates listed in Florence Peterson's 1944 *Handbook of Labor Unions*, 23 of the internationals or 21.5% started as directly-affiliated local unions.²² These internationals include some of the major institutions currently comprising the AFL-CIO. The Service Employees International Union, for example, founded in 1917, grew from seven local AFL affiliates, 6 janitor locals (three in Chicago, one each in Boston, Seattle, and St. Louis) and one elevator operators and starters local.²³ Other current internationals formed through an amalgamation of AFL locals include the Hotel and Restaurant Employees, the Building Laborers, the American Federation of Teachers, the Teamsters, the Boiler Makers, the Office and Professional Employees, the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, the United Electrical Workers, the National Federation of Federal Employees and the Fire Fighters.²⁴

Yet despite the AFL's record in chartering local and national bodies, the predominant historical scholarship judges the AFL's organizing performance harshly. Partly this assessment stems from a counterfactual reading backward from the historical record: the AFL at its peak only represented a small portion of the U.S. work force, thus, the Federation must not have engaged in much organizing.²⁵ The presumption of AFL organizing inactivity, ironically enough, also is rooted in an unduly foreshortened historical memory. The activism of the early AFL is forgotten; its lackluster organizing record in the decade before World War I and its dismal decline in the 1920s overwhelms the AFL's earlier contributions.

Moreover, the resurgence of the AFL in the 1930s and 1940s has been overshadowed by the emergence of the CIO and its aggressive role in expanding unionism in mass production. Indeed, much of the new labor history relies rather uncritically upon stories told by the industrial unionists themselves: all too often their characterizations of the AFL as inactive and uninterested in organizing have been accepted as gospel. Yet as Christopher Tomlins and others, myself included, have argued, the rise of the labor movement in the 1930s and 1940s had as much to do with the

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growth and transformation of AFL unions like the Teamsters, the Carpenters, the Food and Commercial Workers, and the Hotel and Restaurant Employees as the emergence of the UAW and other mass production unions. The rise of "big labor" depended on successful organization outside of mass production as well as inside.²⁶

An examination of the organizing activities directly initiated by the AFL in the 1930s both confirms and challenges the current opinion of the AFL's organizing leadership in the 1930s. On the one hand, the organizing activities initiated by the Federation itself were extensive, and AFL President William Green recognized the need for industrial union structures, both local and national.²⁷ Yet, on the other hand, a minority of hard-line craft Internationals on the Executive Council held the AFL hostage and prevented it from successfully implementing an industrial union strategy. Only after the break with the CIO, did the AFL Executive Council moderate its ideological fervor for protecting "jurisdictional" sanctity and preventing "dual unionism." In the face of the CIO challenge, the AFL transformed itself. The battle for dominance in mass production already had been lost to the CIO, but outside of mass production, the AFL retained its leadership.

Despite William Green's exhortations in 1928 to "put emphasis on organizing federal unions in industries now unorganized" because from "such unions new nationals and internationals will emerge, strengthening the union movement all along the line," labor organizing slowed to a virtual standstill.²⁸ In 1933, however, "besieged with requests for organizing assistance," the AFL hired thirty-three paid organizers and began chartering thousands of new federal labor unions in manufacturing as well as in service and retail industries.²⁹ Most historians have read the AFL organizing in mass production in 1933 and 1934 as an abject failure: the bulk of these new local unions failed to sustain themselves for any length of time, and by 1934, there was widespread frustration with the AFL's refusal to charter new internationals with unrestricted industrial charters in these industries. There is another side to the story, however.

Many of the federal labor unions set up in the mass production sector not only survived but were a critical and at times dominant element in the formation of international unions.³⁰ Moreover, as James Morris has argued, despite the ambivalences and missteps in AFL policy from Washington, the majority of AFL paid organizers as well as the staffs of state and central bodies believed in industrial unionism and ignored jurisdictional lines when such

restrictions hampered organization.³¹ In the radio and electrical manufacturing, for example, AFL organizers were instrumental in fomenting union sentiment in 1933 and 1934. By 1935, the AFL federal locals in tandem with independent locals (both conservative and militant) formed national councils and began pressuring the AFL for national industrial charters. Green resisted, hamstrung by the jurisdictional claims of the AFL's constituent Internationals, and urged the locals to "affiliate with the IBEW [International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers] rather than create a new national union." In response, the bargaining committee for the workers (comprised of four representatives from the federal labor unions and four from the independent locals) refused Green's recommendation and called a national convention to form a new industrial international. The largest number of workers belonged to AFL federal labor unions (sizable ones existed at Philco in Philadelphia, Westinghouse in Springfield, Mass; GE at Fort Wayne, and King Colonial in Buffalo) and their candidate, James Carey, eventually became the President of the new organization, the United Electrical Workers.³²

The story of the auto and the rubber workers is comparable. Thousands of rubber and auto workers flocked to the AFL-initiated locals in 1933. Many of these locals went under within a few months; others lost their skilled workers to various internationals, but still others survived (some with skilled members and some without). Gathered into industry councils, they began agitating for national industrial charters. The 1934 AFL convention directed the Executive Council to issue what many thought would be industrial charters for these workers, but the charters granted in 1935 failed to provide for jurisdiction over the skilled.³³ The newly-chartered Internationals eventually left the AFL fold. Nevertheless, as was the case with the rubber workers, their early membership and the initiative for the founding of their national organizations came directly from AFL-chartered federal locals.³⁴

The AFL's organizing ventures in the 1930s undoubtedly suffered from the unwillingness of old-line craft unions like the International Association of Machinists [IAM] or the IBEW to give up their jurisdictional claims and allow new internationals to organize. Existing Internationals often used the AFL's federal labor union strategy cynically, waiting until the Federation organizers had "roped the workers in" and then demanding that the skilled be transferred into their international. The inability of the Federation to confront its own conservative voices on the Executive Council and subordinate their interests to the greater good of the whole crippled its campaign among mass production workers. The nar-

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row composition of the Executive Board allowed the entire Federation to be held hostage by a few powerful and conservative Internationals.

Thus, the story of the federal labor unions in the 1930s points as much to structural deficiencies in the relation between the Federation and its national and international bodies as to a lack of commitment to organizing on the part of the AFL or to flaws in their local organizing strategy. Revealingly, when the CIO set up its own Federation in 1937, it too adopted a local union organizing strategy, modeled in part after the AFL's direct affiliation mechanism.³⁵

The experience of the 1930s underscores Philip Taft's insight that from its earliest years, the commitment of the AFL to organizing existed in tension with its commitment to "trade autonomy."³⁶ The problem was not that the AFL was uninterested in organizing; rather, its organizing initiatives were undermined by some of its most cherished principles: decentralization of power, trade autonomy, and the sanctity of pre-existing jurisdictional claims.

The tension between organizing new workers and protecting the interests of existing internationals worsened as the number of Internationals grew and new constitutional language strengthened their jurisdictional claims. In its early years, the AFL had tolerated some degree of "dual unionism," chartering at times more than one union in the same industry or even in the same craft.³⁷ But by 1900, the AFL added constitutional language which expressly forbid the granting of new charters to national or International unions if "the jurisdiction claimed is a trespass on the jurisdiction of existing affiliated unions." In 1902, the AFL expanded the language restricting new charters to include trade and federal labor unions as well as national bodies.³⁸ As more Internationals formed over the next two decades, the possibilities for trespass increased. By the 1930s, little room for new industrial charters existed.

Yet despite these structural and ideological weaknesses, the AFL's organizing activities in the 1930s not only spurred the expansion of organizing outside of manufacturing but also helped lay the groundwork for mass production unionism. Many federal locals survived the early 1930s intact, becoming the nucleus of major mass production unions. Where no pre-existing Internationals exerted convincing jurisdictional claims, federal locals secured national industrial union charters from the AFL and

remained within the AFL fold. Where old-line AFL craft Internationals blocked federal labor union campaigns to secure industrial union charters, the locals often broke with the AFL, setting up renegade internationals that became the core of the CIO.

EVALUATING THE AFL LOCAL UNIONS

The general scholarly acceptance of the AFL's poor record in relation to organizing has been reinforced by a negative evaluation of the local union strategy itself. The very idea of chartering locals linked directly to the AFL, it is asserted, was flawed from an organizational and structural perspective. Unlike other locals housed under the auspices of Internationals, AFL locals were "anomalous appendages" to the AFL. They were isolated, required to pay inflated dues to the Federation for minimal institutional support in negotiations with employers, and lacked equitable voting representation in Federation affairs.³⁹

Moreover, chartering AFL locals may have discouraged organization rather than enhanced it. AFL locals, it is charged, amounted to "holding cells," a purgatory to which workers were banished until they could see the light of day, embrace craft unionism and be absorbed by a national union. The organizational needs of African-Americans in particular were ill-served by the AFL's local union strategy. Some of the sharpest criticism has been leveled at the Federation's policy of setting up separate locals for African-Americans after 1900 and its subsequent reluctance to either charter new national unions or convince Internationals to absorb African-American workers. AFL locals functioned as the "ghetto" of the labor movement from which African-Americans rarely emerged.⁴⁰

There is truth to much of the criticism. A close inspection of the history and character of AFL locals, however, reveals a more complicated and ambiguous practice and legacy.

For example, the "anomalous" structural relation between the AFL and the local unions offered advantages as well as disadvantages. As creatures of the AFL, each local union, like each central labor council and state federation of labor, was limited to one voting representative at AFL conventions; International bodies sent numerous delegates, the exact number determined by their membership count. The Federation justification — that the membership of affiliate bodies already had representation through the delegations of their national and international unions — covered every case but that of the local unions. Thus, the local unions clearly

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lacked equitable representation in AFL convention deliberations.⁴¹ The AFL locals, by the late 1890s, also paid higher per capita fees to the federation than other affiliate bodies such as International unions. In this instance, however, the Federation's rationale appears credible. The higher per capita fees included the representational services of AFL staff at the local, regional, and national levels.⁴² Indeed, in most cases, AFL "dues" compared favorably with those levied by Internationals on their affiliates, and some internationals even complained that workers preferred affiliating with the AFL rather than with them precisely because of the lower costs associated with direct Federation affiliation.⁴³

In some cases, locals unions did receive better "service" from Internationals than the Federation. The AFL employed fewer organizers than some Internationals, and their staff and resources often were stretched thin. Internationals at times also could exert more economic pressure on employers than the AFL and provided better strike benefits.⁴⁴ Yet some AFL locals enjoyed the attention of competent and energetic Federation organizers who negotiated contracts, handled grievances, and conducted strikes as well as close ties to powerful and generous state and/or local labor councils. With the legitimacy of Federation affiliation, they also gained the economic support of other AFL unions who typically honored AFL "sanctioned" picket lines and boycotts.⁴⁵

Indeed, many AFL locals preferred the sometimes distant relation with the federation to what they perceived as the more controlling management of an International. Direct affiliation with the Federation allowed them autonomy while linking them organizationally and in spirit to the larger labor movement.⁴⁶ Where no international existed, of course, affiliation with the Federation could rescue many a local from isolation and provincialism.⁴⁷

The most serious structural flaw, however, is connected to the charge that the local unions were simply "holding cells." Undoubtedly, the preference of the AFL for craft-based institutions hampered the full effectiveness of its local union strategy. The craft form was seen as the fully mature organizational state; the industrial or mixed form, a state through which workers would pass.⁴⁸ Samuel Gompers, for example, called federal labor unions "the recruiting grounds for the trade unions, both of the skilled and unskilled workers," but constantly reiterated that "as soon as a sufficient number of one trade or calling [exists], whether belonging to skilled or unskilled labor, they are required to form a union of those who follow the same trade or occupation."⁴⁹

In part because of this craft bias, the AFL at times denied charters to industrially-based locals and pushed federal locals to disband prematurely, requiring that they form craft-based locals or transfer their membership in whole or part to various pre-existing Internationals. Nevertheless, the charge that the AFL's local union organizing strategy should be dismissed because the locals functioned as mere "holding cells" is unwarranted.

First, many local unions disappeared from the AFL rolls precisely because they achieved one of the purposes envisioned by the AFL: enough strong local unions existed to provide the basis for the chartering of new Internationals. As the previous discussion suggested, where no international claimed jurisdiction, the AFL chartered new craft-based as well as more industrial-style Internationals. AFL locals, then, acted not only as temporary way stations but also as "nurseries for national unions."⁵⁰

Second, in some instances, having a temporary home for workers within the labor movement facilitated organizing rather than undermined it. Particularly in periods of mass demand for union organization, the AFL local unions functioned "as rallying centers for unorganized workers" who then formed their own internationals or joined existing ones.⁵¹ Without the intermediary of an AFL local, some groups of workers would have been lost to the labor movement. Workers often knew of the AFL even when they lacked familiarity with the various Internationals, and applying for an AFL charter was a simple procedure requiring a minimum fee. Affiliating with an International in some instances was a more formalistic, formidable, and costly process.

Moreover, as Stuart Kaufman notes, federal locals may have given "workers in jobs not immediately conducive to trade organization an avenue to affiliation."⁵² Gompers himself recognized this aspect of the federal labor union policy. Federal labor unions, he declared in 1888, were "an innovation in trade union organization. I regard it as a most progressive step, and as such fraught with possibilities for good or evil. It opens the door to an immense number who previously could not identify themselves with the labor movement proper."⁵³

Third, many AFL locals functioned not as temporary, undefined appendages but as long-term, autonomous local labor organizations. Some eventually disbanded as technological change undermined their crafts or employers moved to other locations, but many lasted for decades.⁵⁴ The majority of these consisted of workers in minor or regionally-based trades whose small num-

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bers precluded national organization. The San Francisco Sailmakers (FLU 11775), for example, chartered in 1904, existed as a functioning autonomous local until 1960 when it transferred into the Seafarers.⁵⁵ But large industrial-style locals such as the Madison, Wisconsin Battery Workers (1936-1963) depicted by Robert Zieger also enjoyed longevity.⁵⁶ After 1955, the AFL-CIO transferred many of these locals to International unions. The process often involved highly-contested affiliation elections overseen by the Federation, in which various International suitors courted locals and vied with each other over who could provide the best new home.⁵⁷

FEDERAL LABOR UNIONS AND MINORITIES

Ironically, while many white local unionists struggled to retain their AFL locals and resisted absorption into craft-based Internationals, African-Americans often lobbied hard for admittance into these same Internationals. For many "colored" locals, the "neglected stepchildren" or "forgotten ward" analogies invoked by scholars ring true: the "natural" parent International disowned them; the Federation reluctantly adopted them but paid them scant attention.⁵⁸ Philip Foner, Sterling Spero and Abram Harris, Herbert Northrup and others legitimately condemn the AFL's record in regard to African-Americans and in particular the AFL's reliance upon "colored" local affiliates.⁵⁹ Yet from the evidence I examined, it appears that the AFL itself never wholly abandoned its commitment to a racially-integrated labor movement and that its use of AFL locals (both mixed and separate) to organize African-Americans was in part an expression of that continuing commitment. The AFL local organizing strategy in regard to minorities enjoyed some early successes at the turn of the century, but by the World War I era its flaws and limitations became increasingly visible.

From its founding in 1886, the AFL proclaimed its commitment to a labor movement open to workers regardless of race and battled with recalcitrant Internationals over the question of admitting African-Americans. In 1891, the AFL refused admission to the IAM until it changed its constitutional restrictions on black workers, and Gompers even went so far as to set up a rival international union of machinists.⁶⁰ In an 1893 case, the AFL denied membership to the Boilermakers because of their exclusive racial policies. In 1894, however, as many scholars have noted, the AFL altered its admittance policy and began affiliating Internationals who refused compliance with the AFL's stance of racial nondiscrimination.⁶¹

The AFL's racial practices in regard to chartering local unions followed a similar trajectory: the AFL remained committed to interracial organizing but gradually allowed more biracial or race-segregated institutions to affiliate.⁶² Of the roughly two thousand charters listed in the AFL's charter records before 1899, for example, only two indicated racial separation: "Greater Western Union of Colored Musicians of St. Louis" (chartered May 18, 1894) and the Federal Labor Union (colored) in Galveston, Texas (chartered September 2, 1898). Other all-black local unions did exist, however.⁶³ Gompers chartered the "colored hod carriers" of East St. Louis on July 24, 1891 after an unsuccessful attempt to convince the (white) hod carriers of that city to accept black members. Gompers issued the charter and allowed both organizations (white and black) to retain their affiliation on the condition that each adopt "the same working rules and rate of wages."⁶⁴ Gompers also advised African-American organizer George Norton in 1892 that in certain situations in New Orleans "The race prejudice exists to such an extent that it seems it were better under the circumstances, to give the white men and the colored men the opportunity of organizing separate unions rather than to have them not organize at all."⁶⁵

The number of trade and federal labor unions charters issued to local affiliates indicating a racial and ethnic character increased noticeably beginning in 1899. The AFL chartered "colored" federal locals in Columbus, Ohio; Sherman Heights, Tenn.; Charleston, S.C.; Columbus, Indiana; and other towns in 1899; "colored" trade locals of laborers, electrical workers, hod carriers, blacksmith helpers, janitors, and others emerged in the years that followed.⁶⁶

In 1900, the AFL amended its constitution to allow the chartering of local unions "composed exclusively of colored members, where, in the judgment of the Executive Council, it appears advisable and to the best interests of the Trade Union movement to do so."⁶⁷ In offering the amendment, Gompers acknowledged that the AFL had already allowed for separate organization on a few occasions where locals excluded blacks.⁶⁸ In these situations, the AFL set up a joint council of representatives from both organizations (black and white) to ensure parity on wages and working conditions.

Certainly, the changes in AFL policy are lamentable and fall short of what from a present-day perspective would be viewed as desirable: that of insisting on open and integrated institutions in all arenas of society. Nevertheless, the AFL's policy shifts must be

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Some blacks argued that the needs of black workers might (have been) better served in separate organizations led by black workers.

put in the context of a general "societal move toward Jim Crow" and the growth of a new more virulent racism in society at large as indicated, for example, by the rapid rise of lynchings in this period.⁶⁹ Instead of ostracizing the more racist internationals, an action that risked the end of debate and the emergence of rival power centers of white-only labor, the AFL chose to lower its membership standards. The battle against racism was now to be engaged with the white-only proponents within the house of labor rather than outside.⁷⁰

Similarly, the decision to organize separate "colored" locals appears an unfortunate compromise in the face of stiffening resistance to racial integration from Internationals as well as from rank and file workers, especially in the South. Rather than lose the membership of either white or black workers, the AFL chose to organize black and white workers separately when the situation required. The struggle for integrated institutions and for eliminating racial hostility would continue with the workers inside the AFL, although in separate organizations. In the 1890s the AFL had tried expulsion, denial of membership, and even rival unionism to bring Internationals into compliance, perhaps chartering locals unions of the very workers barred by these Internationals would help spur some change.⁷¹ As one official of the Brotherhood of Painters worried, admitting a "colored painter to a Federal Labor Union [would] cause some trouble for our members ... as he would put up the claim that he was a union man affiliated with the AFL, and entitled to all the privileges with the right to work upon any job regardless of where it may be, or who were employed thereon ... and will be required to demand the same scale of wages which is paid to our local union."⁷²

Can there be racial separatism without racism? I have argued that gender separatism in some cases came at the instigation of women not of men. Separate sex-based locals held certain advantages for women that they recognized and desired. A similar argument is at least plausible for African-Americans. From the late 1890s to World War I, strong separatist sentiment existed among black workers as well as white. Some blacks desired both social and economic separation, argued that the particular needs of black workers might be better served in separate organizations led by black workers. In integrated organizations, African-Americans would be outnumbered and their specific concerns overlooked. As Eric Arnesen has noted, before the 1920s, "what black unionists most frequently objected to was not racially distinct locals but inequality between those locals or within the union international."⁷³

It is impossible to know whether more black workers would have joined unions had the AFL chosen to affiliate only racially-integrated organizations, but in the period 1897-1904, largely as part of its Southern organizing campaign, the AFL did reach out with some success to black workers, organizing them into both separate and integrated local organizations.⁷⁴ Paul Worthman estimates that in Birmingham, New Orleans, and other cities across the country some 2,000 unskilled black workers joined various Federal Labor Unions. "Between 1899 and 1904," Worthman asserts, "the Federation devoted as much attention to organizing Birmingham's black unskilled laborers as it did to organizing the city's skilled workmen." Nevertheless, most of these locals disappeared after a few years.⁷⁵ Organizing declined rapidly after 1904 among black as well as white workers, not to recover until World War I.⁷⁶

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During World War I, African-Americans once again flocked to federal labor unions, forming locals of boilermakers, blacksmiths, machinists' helpers, domestic workers, janitors, mail handlers, meatpackers, and numerous locals of freighthandlers, pullman porters, and other railway employees.⁷⁷ "Of the 900 unions affiliated directly to the AFL," Gompers stated in 1919, "169 are composed exclusively of Negroes."⁷⁸ By the late 1920s, only twenty-one "colored" locals remained: the percentage of black local unions had fallen from nineteen percent to five in a decade.⁷⁹ The precipitous decline of black locals paralleled the overall loss of union membership in the 1920s. Their disproportionate share of the loss, however, reflected in part the increasing tension between the now fully-expressed desires of black workers for integration and equal status at the national level and the inadequate AFL policies for achieving this goal. Particularly in the years following World War I, black workers endured the Kafkaesque experience of being denied admittance to existing national bodies while simultaneously being prevented from forming their own.

The experience of the Sleeping Car Pullman Porters is the best known, but black freighthandlers, express and station employees, and others struggled throughout the 1920s and 1930s for integration into white-only Internationals or for the chartering of their own Internationals.⁸⁰ Many of the Internationals were virulently and publicly racist. Often the petitions for admittance came from workers (albeit with black skins) who had proven their capacity for craft competency (by working in the trade) and for organization (having already formed viable AFL locals). Yet the Internationals flatly refused their applications even when black workers agreed to remain within separate organizations. For these

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Internationals, AFL "colored" locals acted as pressure valves, relieving the Internationals from the full explosive force of black workers' desire for representation and recognition.⁸¹ For blacks, the problem was not that the AFL locals were temporary holding cells but that they were permanent prisons.

The racial attitudes and policies of the AFL itself in this period appear mixed. Certainly, there were some within the AFL who championed the needs of African-Americans. Repeatedly, the AFL requested the removal of "white only" clauses from the constitutions of member Internationals. And, when Internationals refused to organize African-Americans, they in essence forfeited their jurisdictional privileges, at least at the local level. The AFL pointedly encouraged local petitions from racially-mixed and black-only organizations in sectors with racist Internationals.

Yet as was true for many federal labor unions chartered in mass production, the AFL offered no way for these locals to evolve as mature national entities. The AFL stopped short of treading on jurisdictional turf at the national level, refusing to set up rival national unions despite the refusal of Internationals to admit black workers. At other times, the AFL demanded that AFL locals transfer their affiliation to an appropriate International and accept "a subordinate, Jim Crow status ... despite the opposition of the affected black workers." In some cases, they revoked the charters of locals who refused.⁸² Equally telling, even where no rival jurisdictional claims prevailed, AFL officials hesitated to allow black locals to unify nationally. Paternalistic concerns prevailed: black workers were not thought capable of running their own internationals; they needed the parenting of the Federation.⁸³

The tension between African-Americans and the AFL persisted into the 1940s and beyond.⁸⁴ The success of A. Philip Randolph's Sleeping Car Porters in gaining an International charter in 1936, the changing racial climate of World War II, and the increased militancy of African-Americans in the postwar era finally forced a number of changes. The AFL stopped chartering separate locals for African-Americans after 1949, and many of the remaining recalcitrant AFL Internationals modified their official exclusionary policies.⁸⁵ Yet in contrast with the progressive racial policies advocated and practiced by many CIO Internationals in the postwar era, a significant handful of AFL Internationals adopted non-discriminatory language without enthusiasm and continued to tolerate informal practices that perpetuated racial exclusion.⁸⁶

At times the AFL chartered local unions segregated by ethnicity and sex as well as by race.⁸⁷ Asian workers experienced the most resistance to inclusion, particularly in the West, as Alexander Saxton and Michael Kazin have documented.⁸⁸ The record on women is more mixed. The AFL from its earliest days lived up to its pledge that "any number of wage-workers, not less than seven, of either sex, can obtain a Certificate of Affiliation (charter.)"⁸⁹ "Ladies FLU No., 2703 in Chicago" received its charter on June 14, 1888; soon after a half-dozen other "ladies" federal unions joined.⁹⁰ By the turn of the century, trade locals of women also began to populate the charter records: "the Laundry Girls Union," straw and wool hat workers, shirt ironers, feather dusters, household employees, and telephone operators. Black women organized as well as Puerto Rican.⁹¹

Unlike the case with African-Americans, however, the AFL refused to charter locals unions for women when the Internationals excluded them. In 1921, Ethel Hague of the Tobacco Strippers' Local #10422 called on the convention to stop this practice and do for women what it had done for African-Americans: that is, authorize the AFL to charter locals in situations where Internationals discriminate on the basis of sex. A substitute resolution calling on such Internationals to "give early consideration for such admission" of women passed instead.⁹² Thus, despite its early acceptance of female members in mixed and separate locals, the AFL was less willing to battle the Internationals over sex discrimination than race. Women were not only excluded from certain internationals but precluded from organizing locals affiliated with the Federation when the International objected. The 1918 petition of the Seattle "Lady Barbers" for a union met stony silence from the AFL and the Barbers' Union.⁹³

The AFL from its inception was diverse, contradictory, and at war with itself.

BEYOND THE CRAFT/INDUSTRIAL DICHOTOMY?

Scholars have been stymied in their study of the American labor movement by their proclivity to depict the AFL and the CIO in dichotomous categories. The CIO is characterized as inclusive, industrially-oriented, concerned with organizing the unskilled, politically astute, and committed to progressive social reform. The AFL becomes all the things the CIO was not: exclusive, craft-oriented, limited to skilled workers, politically dormant and wrong-headed, and socially conservative. This portrait is reductive, inaccurate, and riddled by unhelpful dichotomies. The AFL from its inception was diverse, contradictory, and at war with itself.⁹⁴ The records of the directly-affiliated local unions support this characterization. They also reveal the experimental nature of the AFL's

Many workers saw their "community of interest" organized along industrial or geographical lines as well as craft.

organizing program and the wide range of organizational forms relied upon by the Federation.

The AFL from its earliest years included industrial and semi-industrial internationals (miners, brewery, clothing, hotel and restaurant) as well as craft bodies.⁹⁵ It also initiated industrial or mixed-craft organizing, and with the exception of one short period from 1890 to 1892, the AFL constitution explicitly authorized alternatives to trade organization.⁹⁶ In 1887 Gompers hailed the formation of "quite a number of Federal Labor unions ... within the past year," and as the AFL charter books make clear, industrial organizing continued throughout the life of the AFL.⁹⁷ The AFL's 1891 call for workers to join local unions carefully explained that "unions may be formed of persons working at any trade or calling, or they may be composed of persons working at different or varied callings."⁹⁸ In the late 1920s, the US Department of Labor could still report in its exhaustive surveys of AFL affiliates that a federal labor union "may include any number of different crafts and callings, and is somewhat analogous to the 'mixed assemblies' of the old Knights of Labor."⁹⁹

In practice, federal labor unions resembled the mixed assemblies of the Knights not only because of ~~the~~ their mixed-craft character but because the federal labor form embraced "community-based" or geographic organization. Before the 1930s, the majority of federal labor unions were chartered in small towns and communities. Workers came from a variety of industries as well as trades; membership thus crossed industrial and craft lines. The jurisdictional rationale was geographic, based on either a town, community, or region.¹⁰⁰

Although the AFL tolerated a variety of forms, the preference was always for trade organization. Trade unions, Gompers believed, were the superior form of organization for all workers, "the natural outcome of our economic system." Workers in mixed bodies were not as well positioned to extract concessions from employers or to sustain their organization. Workers grouped by trade "know each other and they know whom to trust." They have that social glue so necessary for solidary economic action, he explained.¹⁰¹

Not all workers agreed. Many workers saw their "community of interest" organized along industrial or geographical lines as well as craft. The gap between the suggested names for their locals sent in by petitioners and the names eventually assigned the newly-chartered locals by the AFL reveals some of the tension

between the sentiments of grass roots workers and those of the Federation. The Federation preferred to name local unions using job classifications or simply to call them federal labor unions. In the early 1890s, they tolerated some variation, issuing charters to the "Working Women's Guild," "The Workingmen's Benevolent Association," "The Cooperative Labor Union," "The Pioneer Union," "The Working Girls of Toledo," "The Progressive Union," and others, but increasingly, as petitions bearing titles such as "Laborers Rights Protective Union," or the "Ladies Union Label League" reached AFL headquarters, the Secretary-Treasurer changed the name to "Federal Labor Union."¹⁰² In the early years, the AFL frequently crossed out geographical references in union titles, despite evidence of the geographical nature of these organizations.¹⁰³

The Federation and local petitioners also disagreed over who should join AFL locals. The conventional notion among scholars has been that the great dividing line for the AFL was between the skilled and the unskilled.¹⁰⁴ The federal labor union records reveal a different membership boundary. In Gompers's mind, for example, the federal labor unions were set up explicitly to organize the unskilled and those outside the existing jurisdiction of any international. "It has been the constant aim of the trade union movement to exercise its power and influence to organize our fellow workers engaged in unskilled labor. .. In providing for the organization of our unskilled workers in Federal Labor Unions, the American Federation of Labor has adopted a splendid haven of protection," Gompers declared in 1897.¹⁰⁵ And, indeed, the unavoidable conclusion that the majority of federal labor union members were "unskilled workmen or laborers" attests to the partial implementation of Gompers's plan.¹⁰⁶ The trade locals also had a preponderance of "semi-skilled and unskilled" members. The "trades" applying for AFL charters included conductors and drivers, machinists' helpers and laborers, cooks and waiters, clerks, longshoremen, hodcarriers, telephone operators, sugar boilers, teamsters and shovelers, agricultural workers, laborers, operative cotton spinners, bootblacks, house maids, button workers, janitors, hospital attendants, and countless other semi-skilled or "unskilled" occupations.¹⁰⁷ As Spero and Harris conclude, federal labor unions (as well as AFL trade locals) allowed the AFL to organize "the white helper and laborer who were excluded from unions of their crafts" as well as excluded minorities.¹⁰⁸

Moreover, Gompers made it clear that the terms skilled and unskilled were fraught with difficulty. "There is no such thing as unskilled work per se," he maintained; "the distinction between

Gompers made it clear that there is no such thing as unskilled work. The distinction ...is one of degree only.

Multiple forms of organization were and are necessary: craft, industrial, geographical, and other.

wage-earners is one of degree only."¹⁰⁹ For Gompers, all wage-earners had knowledge and "know-how" and the line between skilled and unskilled was impossible to draw.¹¹⁰ Partially for that reason, Internationals such as the carpenters, butchers, cigarmakers, or the iron and steel workers took in the unskilled or the helpers along with the skilled.¹¹¹ Skill was a social category: the perception of the difficulty and expertise of the worker depended on the social status and compensation of that worker.¹¹² For Gompers and others, the Federal Labor Unions were problematic not because the unskilled joined but because some workers, skilled or unskilled, refused to organize themselves into craft unions when the possibility arose.

Thus, the problem with Gompers's trade bias was not that it excluded the unskilled. Rather, the problem was that it failed to recognize the variety of identifications that existed among workers and the need to accommodate this diversity by offering a variety of organizational possibilities. Not all skilled workers preferred a horizontal or occupationally-based organization. Some preferred to organize alongside their unskilled co-workers in the same firm rather than with their skilled cohorts working in a different enterprise. Multiple forms of organization were and are necessary: craft, industrial, geographical, and other. This is the historical and contemporary truth insufficiently recognized by Samuel Gompers and by those today who exclusively advocate industrial unionism or any other one form of unionism.

The Federation's organizing policies suffered from another equally troubling ideological limitation: that of Gompers's rigid adherence to the notion of a movement limited to wage-earners. It was not the unskilled who were excluded but the unwaged. Gompers was explicit: In response to an inquiry about organizing in 1888, Gompers indicated that the workers could be in different trades or the same but must be "working for wages."¹¹³ The single-page charters issued to every AFL local affiliate listed very few rules governing behavior. But prominent among them was the admonition that membership must be restricted to wage-workers only.¹¹⁴

Gompers's rigidity about wage-earners was not necessarily shared by other labor leaders nor by the rank and file. It was necessary to remind local union members of the "absolute necessity to maintain the clear-cut character of our movement as a wage-earners' movement" over and over again because they resisted this fetter. Many locals desired the presence of the "employers, superintendents, foremen, and businessmen," Gompers lamented.

They drew the line differently than did he.¹¹⁵ Many Internationals were not as "class-conscious" as Gompers in this regard either. The Teamsters, for example, allowed team owners or "employers who controlled only one team" into the union.¹¹⁶

The AFL demanded more control over who could join than they did over the representational strategies pursued by local unions. Signing contracts with individual employers was but one strategy among many adopted by locals to raise the living standards of their members. The majority of AFL locals before the 1930s engaged in what I have elsewhere termed "occupational unionism."¹¹⁷ They adopted standards for their craft; they promised to abide by wages and work rules they themselves set; they enforced these standards through economic action and local legislative initiatives. Many emphasized benevolent functions, offering "relief to sick and suffering members," burial benefits, unemployment assistance, and job referrals. A few set up Arbitration Boards to mediate wage and other disputes between individual members and local employers.¹¹⁸

Social reform unionism is usually associated with the Knights of Labor, but it is evident in the AFL local unions as well. Frequently AFL local unions combined economic and fraternal aspects with a social reform orientation. The objects of the Muscatine, Iowa local, for example, included "the moral elevation of its members through educational methods" as well as the "fostering of fraternity," shorter hours and increased wages. They banned "partisan politics or sectarian discussion" but "permitted and encouraged ... questions of social and political economy." One of their officers, the "lecturer," was required to "furnish lectures, speeches, essays or readings of interest to laboring men at least once a month."¹¹⁹

In 1894, the AFL itself even advocated the formation of "non-partisan social reform clubs" under AFL charters to "bring together, for mutual aid and instruction, such persons of various vocations as entertain a serious interest in the social problem, and desire to influence public opinion in favor of union. labels and of the trades union movement in general, and such economic reforms as will serve to leave to the worker the wealth which he produces." Gompers himself joined one such club in New York City, but the AFL effort to set up clubs dedicated solely to social reform appears to have been stillborn.¹²⁰ The AFL accepted charters from social reform clubs throughout the 1890s, often renaming them federal labor unions after 1896. By the turn of the century few applications bearing names such as the "Social Reform

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Club," or the "Wonderful Progress Union" came in, and when they did, the AFL refused them charters.¹²¹

TOWARD THE FUTURE

What then, is the relevance of this revisionist history to the present day labor movement? Are there forgotten historical traditions worth reviving today? The new AFL-CIO administration already has come forward with a series of proposals that echo historical practice much more than is realized. They are building on past AFL practice rather than breaking with it. The Sweeney platform calls for a revival of the earlier activist legacy of the AFL: increased resources for organizing; a new Organizing Department charged with directing national organizing campaigns such as "Union Summer 1996;" making the Federation a site for organizing innovation and strategy.¹²²

But what about the AFL's long involvement with directly chartering local and international unions? Are there aspects of this history that are worth reconsidering for today's labor movement? Upon first reflection, it might appear as if the need for AFL chartered locals has disappeared. Perhaps they were necessary in the past, the argument would go, because there were large groups of workers in crafts and trades over which no International claimed jurisdiction. Today, however, jurisdictions are broadly defined and/or irrelevant to most organizing decisions. It is hard to think of a sector of the workforce over which no International claims jurisdiction. Hence the Federation's historic role of expanding the scope of organizing is unnecessary.

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Yet in one sense the jurisdiction of the labor movement today is even narrower than a hundred years ago, and contrary to popular wisdom, it is much in need of expansion. In the late nineteenth century, Gompers defined the jurisdiction of the AFL as all wage-earners, regardless of skill, race, sex, or national origin. The early AFL never lived up to these lofty ambitions, but today's labor movement does represent workers of all skill levels, and its membership is close to forty percent female and disproportionately minority. Minorities and women also comprise twenty-eight percent of the new AFL-CIO Executive Council.¹²³

Today's excluded are no longer defined by skill, race, or sex: the new untouchables are those considered "non-employees" under the National Labor Relations Act. Many of the new crafts

(technicians, knowledge workers) are ineligible for bargaining unit membership as are countless other so-called independent contractors, managers, professionals, and "supervisors." By restricting itself to "employees," the labor movement has written off close to a third of the private sector work force.¹²⁴ This one-third is growing rapidly. The labor movement must begin to think of itself as the advocate for all working people, not merely those allowed it by the Act. It must not simply focus on growing numerically but on redefining its membership criteria.

Of course, many independent contractors, assistant managers, and others are really "employees" as defined by the Act and should be reclassified. But the strategy of legally re-classifying workers, while necessary, is not sufficient. As the nature of work changes and employer/employee distinctions disappear due to the growth of sub-contracting, independent contracting, teamwork, and the reorganization of work, many non-salaried workers engage in what historically have been "managerial" responsibilities. The Federation must help organize these "new untouchables" and push the labor movement into new jurisdictional frontiers just as the Federation in the past helped expand the labor movement by organizing those outside the current jurisdictions of its constituent Internationals.

But if these workers are to be organized, the Federation will have to experiment with new organizational forms and representational strategies. The current proposals for "an organizing blitz" or for multi-union campaigns will not necessarily reach these workers. Their status under the Act and in some cases their own organizational inclinations require that the AFL-CIO offer them a new kind of representation. As the pre-Wagner Act labor movement recognized, organizing workers into enterprise-based bargaining units to secure contracts with employers is but one way of raising the living standards of American workers. Other means are necessary and must be pursued. Indeed, as Kathy Krieger recently has argued, union success or failure should not be measured solely in terms of collective bargaining representation. "Indeed, the modern form of bi-lateral collective bargaining agreement has prevailed for a relatively short period in history."¹²⁵

The early AFL local unions varied in organizational form and focus. They organized by occupation and industry as well as by geography. They offered a variety of services to their members and pursued collective bargaining as one among many representational strategies.

The Federation must help organize these "new untouchables" and push the labor movement into new jurisdictional frontiers.

The AFL locals of the past were self-constituted communities. Bargaining unit membership or majority status were not required for affiliation.

Today, a similar kind of experimentation is beginning to flourish. The phenomenal success of the SEIU's janitorial organizing in the last decade or the "market-wide organizing" of the Southern California drywallers are but two examples of innovative non-worksite oriented approaches.¹²⁶ Other unions have initiated representational campaigns that rely only marginally on traditional bilateral collective bargaining agreements. AFSCME's Baltimore local, for example, linked up with community and church groups to preserve the living standards of its own members and raise those of unorganized workers by pushing for new legislative provisions requiring city contractors to pay a living wage, health benefits, and provide training for minority workers. AFSCME organizers are now intent on convincing private sector employers to sign on to this "new social compact."¹²⁷ In San Francisco, CWA 9410 offered a form of direct affiliation to the San Francisco United Taxi Workers (UTW). Ineligible for bargaining unit certification because of their "independent contractor" status, the cab drivers formed their own association to lobby for favorable city ordinances, improve the public image of drivers, provide health care and other kinds of social insurance.¹²⁸

But what should the role of the Federation be? The Federation, of course, should continue to encourage this kind of experimental membership and representational practice by its Internationals and their affiliates. It also could serve, as did the AFL in the past, as the direct sponsor for many of these new groups of workers.

The Federation already has taken the lead in promoting the "associate membership" program which allows workers who are ineligible for bargaining unit membership a mechanism for AFL affiliation and opportunities for health and welfare coverage, credit cards, and legal representation. Yet this program is oriented primarily toward individuals and individual affiliation. Why not offer an associate membership program for organizations? That is, why not charter and affiliate local groups of workers that have an identity of interest, however that identity may be defined: occupationally, by employer, industry, community, race, gender, or ethnicity. The AFL locals of the past were self-constituted communities that believed in the goals and collective approaches of organized labor; bargaining unit membership or majority status were not required for affiliation. And, of equal importance, why not help these far-flung locals communicate with each other and if necessary form new national associations?

Many workers are already forming associations whose primary purpose is to represent their interests on the job through means other than collective bargaining. These associations offer workers information about their rights, help them set reasonable fees for their services, lobby for them with employers and government officials, offer life, health and supplemental unemployment insurance, job referrals, and other services relevant to their working lives. Many have constituted themselves along occupational or craft lines (the National Waiters Association, for example). "Working Today: A National Association of Employees," "open to all those who work or want to work: professional and service workers, managers and time-clock punchers, consultants, freelancers, and part-time and seasonal workers, as well as all those who are unemployed" has chosen the neo-Wobbly or "one big union" approach.¹²⁹

These associations need not be seen as competitors to unions. In some cases, those calling for such associations identify with the trade union tradition and speak explicitly about the need for "unions." A recent call for an organization to represent the needs of "the swelling ranks of executive and professional self-employed" — an organization that would help set fees, provide health, life, disability, dental coverage, provide job referrals, and lobby for their inclusion in the unemployment system — headlined its New York Times column with what is still seen as a contradiction in terms: "A Union for the Self-Employed?"¹³⁰

But whether these groups call themselves unions or not, the AFL-CIO should claim them as part of the movement it leads, a movement to better the conditions of all working people. Indeed, what history shows is that AFL unionism encompassed all the strategies now currently being employed by associations. Many of the craft unions of the past resembled today's employee associations. The AFL needs once again to open its doors to the unrepresented and reclaim its heritage of self-help and associationalism.

One last historical practice initiated by the early AFL bears pondering. By the 1930s, the federal labor unions functioned very much like modern-day industrial unions: they were often enterprise-based with a mix of skilled and unskilled workers, and their primary goal was obtaining a collective bargaining contract with an employer. The earlier federal labor unions, however, styled themselves quite differently. As we have seen, many organized as city-wide or region-wide bodies. These community-based organizations were not necessarily united on the basis of occupation,

What history shows is that AFL unionism encompassed all the strategies now currently being employed by associations.

The heritage of securing individual rights through collective means is central to the history of the labor movement and should be preserved.

gender, race, industry, or enterprise. They identified broadly with what they saw as the goals of the labor movement: to raise the intellectual, economic, and social status of working people. For a brief movement, it appears, the AFL even had a mechanism for affiliation based on a general political sympathy and identification. Why not create the possibility of membership once again for those who support the overall political and economic efforts of the labor movement? Why not have an associate membership or an at-large membership category that proudly offers people of all classes the opportunity to support labor's political agenda?¹³¹

In sum, the need still exists for directly-affiliated local bodies. As in the past, these bodies would range in organizational form and purpose. Some would be constituted along occupational lines, albeit occupations that are now excluded from representation. These AFL-CIO locals, together with unaffiliated locals in the same occupation, eventually might form new national bodies. Other locals might be constituted along geographical lines. Their membership would be more economically diverse but politically like-minded. Individual fee-based membership could continue to be an option, but ideally "associate membership" should facilitate identification with a social movement not just offer individual economic benefits. The heritage of securing individual rights through collective means is central to the history of the labor movement and should be preserved. A new kind of associate membership based on group affiliation perpetuates that ideological heritage. It also links itself firmly to the organizing traditions of the American Federation of Labor.

End Notes

1. Muriel H. Cooper, *Organizing Role of Federation to be Examined*, *AFL-CIO News*, March 6, 1995.
2. For convenience, I shall often use International to mean both national and International bodies.
3. **AFL Constitution**, 1886, Article II, Section 1 and Article VI, Section 2. For accounts that note the dual emphasis on organization and politics in the AFL's early years see Stuart B. Kaufman, *Samuel Gompers and the Origins of the American Federation of Labor* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1973); Norman J. Ware, *The Labor Movement in the U.S., 1860-1895: A Study in Democracy* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1929), pp. 294-5; Philip Taft, *The A.F. of L. in the Time of Gompers* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957, Report, 1970), pp. 31-62; Lloyd Ulman, *The Rise of the National Trade Union* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1955), p. 420.
4. AFL organizers worked closely with the State Federations and the Central Labor Councils — units historically relied upon to accomplish the organizing mission of the Federation as well as its political and public relations goals. See American Federation of Labor, *AFL: History, Encyclopedia Reference Book*, Vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: AFL, 1919), pp. 306-308 for the best brief overview of the AFL's paid and volunteer organizing staff from 1882 to 1919. By 1900, for example, the AFL had 20 salaried organizers and 680 volunteers. On AFL organizers also see Lewis Lorwin, *The AFL: History, Policies, Prospects* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institute, 1933), pp. 350-51; Ulman, *The Rise of the National Union*, pp. 420-21; Taft, *The A.F. of L. in the Time of Gompers*, pp. 100-102; Philip Taft, *Labor Politics American Style: The California State Federation of Labor* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1968), pp. 1-3; 27-31; 34-40; John Keiser, *John Fitzpatrick and Progressive Unionism, 1915-1925*, Ph.D. Dissertation, Department of History, Northwestern University, 1965; pp. 75-76; *AFL Proceedings*, 1888 p.12; *AFL Proceedings*, 1891, p. 19; *AFL Proceedings*, 1893, pp. 68-69; *AFL Proceedings*, 1897, p. 16.
5. Sweeney's reforms do break with the anemic role of the Federation in the post-merger years. But, as this essay will argue, the subordinate role of the Federation is a relatively recent development.
6. Quote from *Report of the First Annual Session of the Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions of the United States and Canada*, 1881, p.22. See also pp. 15-17, *Report of the Fourth Annual Session of the Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions of the United States and Canada*, 1884, p.17, and Kaufman, *Samuel Gompers and the Origins of the AFL*, pp. 122-125.
7. Norman J. Ware, *The Labor Movement in the United States, 1860-1895: A Study in Democracy* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1929), pp. 156-162; 206-257. Ulman, *Rise of the National Union*, pp. 354-355n.
8. *AFL Constitution*, 1886, Article II, Section 1; Article VI, Section 2. See also *AFL Proceedings*, 1886 and 1887, for evidence of local union presence in the early AFL.

9. Although two different types of AFL local unions existed, the terms used to describe them were not employed consistently. At times, the term "directly-affiliated local union" was reserved for the craft-based local trade unions. Other times, however, it was used to refer to both the single-craft trade locals and the multi-craft or federal locals. Similarly, the term "federal labor union" generally referred to the locals whose members worked in a variety of trades or callings. By the 1930s, however, AFL officials often used the term "federal labor union" to refer to all local bodies, mixed or craft-based. The usage changed again in the postwar era, when directly-affiliated local union became the term used to refer to all local unions. I will use "trade locals" to refer to the single-craft local unions, "federal labor unions" to refer to the multi-craft local unions, and "directly-affiliated local unions" or "AFL local unions" as generic terms.

10. See AFL Constitution, 1886, Article VIII, Sect. 3. Taft, *The A.F. of L. in the Time of Gompers*, p.97 and Ulman, *The Rise of the National Union*, pp. 354-5n are mistaken in asserting that before 1893 the AFL Constitution provided that federal labor unions could be formed only by workers in one trade. The 1886 Constitution allowed for mixed organization. In 1890, the language governing federal labor unions was changed, restricting them to "any seven wage workers *of one trade* and of good character" [new language underlined by author]. But within three years the Convention amended the constitution once again to return it to the original intent. The 1893 Constitution allowed for "seven wage workers of good character, *following any trade or calling*" to organize. In recommending the change, the AFL Secretary noted that "of one" be replaced with "following any ... so that Federal Labor Unions may be organized in accordance with the original idea which called them into existence." *AFL Proceedings*, 1892, p. 20.

11. *New York Tribune*, December 12, 1886 as quoted in Stuart Kaufman, et. al., eds. *The Samuel Gompers Papers*, Vol. 1, *The Making of a Union Leader, 1850-1886* (Urbana, Illinois, University of Illinois Press, 1986), p. 469. See also Gompers's enthusiastic discussion of "federal labor unions" in the *AFL Proceedings*, 1887, p. 10. Scholars divide over the degree to which the federal labor unions resembled the mixed assemblies of the Knights. Ulman, in *Rise of the National Union*, pp. 354-5n points to their dissimilarity. John Commons, *History of Labor in the United States*, Vol. 11 (New York: Augustus M. Kelley Publishers, 1918; Report, Macmillan, 1966), p. 347 sees them as "identical" as do Robert Hoxie, *Trade Unionism in the United States* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1931), p. 118 and Ware, *The Labor Movement in the U.S.*, p. 164.

It appears that many Knights of Labor assemblies did switch their allegiance to the AFL through the mechanism of direct affiliation. Throughout the 1880s and 1890s, petitions for AFL affiliation arrived from bodies calling themselves "trades assemblies" and "labor and trade assemblies." The AFL routinely granted them charters but changed their names to federal labor unions. Central Labor Council petitions also arrived with titles such as "trades and labor assembly." The language persisted until World War I. See Collection 18, AFL Charter Books, Vols. 1-4, George Meany Memorial Archives [hereafter Coll. 18]; Constitution and Bylaws of Federal Labor Union 6729, formerly Eureka Assembly No. 5519, Salem, Ohio, 1891, NY Public Library; Commons, *History of Labor in the United States*, Vol.II, pp. 346-347.

12. By my calculations (compiled from figures published in the *AFL Proceedings*), the AFL issued 12,165 charters before 1933 and 19,048 by 1955. My figures correspond to those gathered by Philip Taft for the years 1890 to 1905. For a higher estimate of the overall number of charters issued to local unions, see *Guide to American Federation of Labor Records: Part I: Strikes and Agreements File, 1898-1953*, Microfilm Edition, University Publications of America, 1979) p. vii. The discrepancy may be due to the latter source including charters issued to central labor councils, state federations, and international unions.
13. In many cases, in the *AFL Charter Books, 1890-1966*, Collection 18, the "fate" of individual locals is recorded in pencil next to the original entry indicating the date the AFL approved their charter application. A systematic record was not kept. The vast majority of the papers of individual locals were discarded in the early 1930s. Only those in existence in 1933 were retained and microfilmed. The resulting film is almost wholly unreadable. See *Directly Affiliated Local Unions, Charter Files (1900-1965)*, Microfilm 22, George Meany Memorial Archives [hereafter cited Micro. 22]. Some additional information is available from Collection 40, *AFL Federal Local Unions/AFL-CIO Directly Affiliated Local Unions Charter Records, 1924-1981*, George Meany Memorial Archives [hereafter Coll. 40] and *American Federation of Labor Records: Part I: Strikes and Agreements Files, 1898-1953*, Microfilm edition [hereafter *Strikes and Agreements Files*].
14. Robert Zieger, *Madison's Battery Workers, 1934-1952: A History of Federal Labor Union 19587* (Ithaca: Cornell University NYSSILR Paperback No. 16, 1977), pp. 78-87, discusses the reluctance of the AFL to charter new labor unions in the post-war period or help them form their own national body. See also Reel 9, Micro. 22, and Coll. 40, Box 2, File 10.
15. Telephone interview with Joe Shantz, Director, Department of Organization and Field Services, AFL-CIO conducted by the author, April 26, 1995; Letter to the author from Richard Drennan, Asst. Director, Department of Computer Systems and Services, May 10, 1995.
16. *AFL Proceedings*, 1890, p. 14.
17. The estimates for 1886 and 1892 are from the sketch by Merl E. Reed in Gary Fink, *Labor Unions* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1977), pp. 12-13. Other comparable estimates for these early years can be found in Leo Wolman, *The Growth of American Trade Unions, 1880-1923* (New York: National Bureau of Economic Research, Inc., 1924), pp. 30-31 and Commons, *History of Labor in the U.S.*, Vol. 2, p. 396n; U.S. Department of Labor, *Handbook of American Trade Unions*, Bulletin #506 (Washington, D.C., USDL, 1929), p. 5.
18. David Brody, *The Butcher Workmen: A Study of Unionization* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), pp. 22-23.
19. Taft, *The A.F.L. in the Time of Gompers*, p.98; pp. 102-106. See also his account of the organization of the barbers union by the AFL on p. 45.
20. Lorwin, *The AFL*, p. 67.

21. AFL Proceedings, 1921, p. 25.

22. Florence Peterson, *Handbook of Labor Unions* (Washington, D.C.: American Council on Public Affairs, 1944). I have found no other directories that indicate in any kind of systematic way the early origins of international unions.

23. Peterson, *Handbook of Labor Unions*, p. 73. The seven locals were Chicago Flat Janitors (FC 14332); Chicago Janitors (FC 15481); NY Elevator Operators and Starters (FC 16429); St. Louis Janitors' Protective Union (FC 15876); Boston Janitors (FC 14936); Seattle Theater Janitors (FC 14605); Chicago School Janitresses (FC 17506). See Tom Beadling, et.al. *A Need for Valor: The Roots of the SEIU, 1902-1992* (Washington, D.C. SEIU, 1984), p. 12.

24. Many former Internationals (meatcutters, hod carriers, garment, textile, auto, aluminum, rubber workers and others) also had their beginnings as federal labor unions. See Peterson, *Handbook of Labor Unions*, p. 35, 137, 169, 233, 258, 378 and Taft, *The AFL In the Time of Gompers*, p. 98. The impetus for the IBEW came from Federal Labor Union 5221 in St. Louis. See Grace Palladino, *Dreams of Dignity, Workers of Vision: A History of the IBEW* (Washington, D.C.: IBEW, 1991), pp. 6-9.

25. This counterfactual approach, I think, seriously underestimates the external opposition to union organizing in the U.S. In this essay, I can not detail the many reasons, both internal and external to the labor movement, that contributed to the limited union membership in the U.S. What I can do is challenge the continuing presumption of AFL organizing inactivity.

26. Christopher Tomlins, *AFL Unions in the 1930s: Their Performance in Historical Perspective*, *Journal of American History* 4 (March 1979), pp. 1021-1042; Dorothy Sue Cobble, *Dishing It Out: Waitresses and Their Unions in the Twentieth Century* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1991), chs. 4 & 6. On the problems of the industrial union model and the failures of the New Deal system, see also Christopher Tomlins, *The State and the Unions: Labor Relations, Law, and the Organized Labor Movement in the US, 1880-1960* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985); Charles Heckscher, *The New Unionism: Employee Involvement in the Changing Corporation* (New York: Basic, 1988); and Dorothy Sue Cobble, *Making Post-Industrial Unionism Possible*, in Sheldon Friedman, et.al. eds. *Restoring the Promise of American Labor Law* (Ithaca: Cornell University ILR Press, 1994), pp. 285-302.

27. On Green, see William Green Papers, 1891-1952, Microfilm Edition, Box 5, Folder 16, transcript from handwritten letter dated June 1936; Craig Phelan, *William Green: Biography of a Labor Leader* (Albany, State University of New York Press, 1989); Lorwin, *The AFL*, p. 244; James O. Morris, *Conflict Within the AFL: A Study of Craft versus Industrial Unionism* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1958), p. 153.

28. William Green, *Federal Unions*, *American Federationist*, Vol. 135, No. 12 (Dec. 1928), pp. 1425-6.

29. Morris, *Conflict Within the AFL*, pp. 150-209, esp. pp. 151-152; Leo Wolman, *Ebb and Flow in Trade Unionism* (New York: National Bureau of Economic Research, 1936), pp. 68-69. I estimate that from 1933 and 1945 be-

tween five and six thousand charters were issued. See Coll. 18, Vol. 9. On the 1930s and federal labor unions, also see David Saposs, *Industrial Unionism*, *Journal of Political Economy*, Vol. 43, No.1 (February 1935), pp. 78-79; Harry A. Millis and Royal Montgomery, *Organized Labor* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1945), pp. 203-08.

30. By my estimates, some twenty percent (approximately 1500) of the locals chartered after 1933 were still in existence by the end of the war. Eighty percent had been transferred, disbanded, or suspended. See the penciled notes in Vol. 9, Coll. 18.

31. Morris, *Conflict Within the AFL*, pp. 182-209.

32. James Matles and James Higgins, *Them and Us* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1974), pp. 29-54.

33. Phelan, *William Green*, pp. 79-81; 86-99; 121-127 and Estelle Stewart, *Handbook of American Trade Unions*, Bulletin No. 618 (Washington, GPO, US Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1936), pp. 8-13; Philip Taft, *The AFL from the Death of Gompers to the Merger* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1959, Report, Octagon Books, 1970), pp. 95-109.

34. Robert Zieger, *The CIO, 1935-55* (Chapel Hill, N.C: University of North Carolina Press, 1995): 29-31, 48-49, 128.

35. Micro. 25, CIO-LIUs, GMMA; Zieger, *The CIO*, pp. 68-71.

36. Taft, *The AFL in the Time of Gompers*, pp. 31-62. The Internationals were not subordinate to the AFL, rather the AFL to the Internationals.

37. For example, the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners and the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners held membership in the federation simultaneously. USDL, *Handbook of American Trade Unions*, Bulletin No. 506, p.5.

38. See AFL Constitutions 1900, 1902, Article IX, Sec. II.

39. The phrase "anomalous appendages" is from Zieger, *Madison's Battery Workers*, pp. 34-38. For a fuller elaboration of these criticisms see Philip Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the US*, Vol. 3 (New York: International Publishers, 1964), pp. 198-200; Sterling D. Spero and Abram L. Harris, *The Black Worker* (New York: Atheneum, 1931), pp. 96-99; Zieger, *The CIO*, p. 69; Lorwin, *The AFL*, pp. 70-72; 363-364.

40. See, for example, Spero and Harris, *The Black Worker*, pp. 95-98; Philip Foner, *Organized Labor and the Black Worker, 1619-1973*, (New York: International Publishers, 1974), pp. 92-93; Herbert Northrup, *Organized Labor and the Negro* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1944), pp. 8-9.

41. See Lorwin, *The American Federation of Labor*, p. 325-326.

42. The 1886 AFL Constitution required affiliated locals to pay the same per cap as International bodies: "one-half cent per month per member." In 1897

Gompers recommended a change. AFL locals, he explained, "demur against the transfer" to Internationals because "the per capita tax the local unions are required to pay the AFL is much lower than that naturally required to be paid to the headquarters of a national union." *AFL Proceedings*, 1897, pp. 15-16. For changes after 1897 see Lorwin, *The AFL*, pp. 335-336; Zieger, *Madison's Battery Workers*, p. 36.

43. Ulman, *The Rise of the National Union*, pp. 420-421.

44. The AFL didn't set up a strike fund for the directly affiliated local unions until 1902. Lorwin, *The AFL*, p. 71.

45. See, for example, *AFL Proceedings*, 1910, p. 24; Zieger, *Madison's Battery Workers*, pp. 20-21. The quality and range of service provided by the AFL to its affiliate locals can be glimpsed in Reels 1 and 2, Strikes and Agreements Files.

46. Zieger, *Madison's Battery Workers*, pp. 30-46.

47. Taft, *The AFL In the Time of Gompers*, p. 54.

48. Ulman makes this point as well in distinguishing between the mixed assemblies of the Knights and the federal labor unions. Federal labor unions were seen as "temporary" structures; the mixed assemblies were viewed as permanent bodies that had achieved a fully mature organizational state. See Ulman, *The Rise of the National Union*, pp. 354-55n.

49. *AFL Proceedings*, 1897, pp. 15-16; *AFL Proceedings*, 1898, pp. 16-17. See also *AFL, AFL: History, Encyclopedia Reference Book*, p. 230.

50. Hoxie, *Trade Unionism in the US*, pp. 116-117.

51. Saposs, *Industrial Unionism*, p. 77; Zieger, *Madison's Battery Workers*, pp. 1-8, 34; Gompers to John Goodhue, Secretary, Federal Labor Union 401, May 5, 1892, Gompers Letterbooks, Library of Congress; *AFL Proceedings*, 1919, p. 230.

52. Kaufman, *Samuel Gompers and the Origins of the AFL*, pp. 168-169.

53. Gompers to Louis Hartmann, June 30, 1888, in Stuart Kaufman and Peter Albert, et.al, eds. *The Samuel Gompers Papers*, Vol. 3 *Unrest and Depression, 1891-94* (Urbana, University of Illinois, 1989), p. 128.

54. In 1893, the AFL Constitution adopted new language requiring all locals to affiliate when a national or international of their trade formed or face the revocation of their charter within three months. *AFL Constitution*, 1893, Article VII, Section 2.

55. Coll. 40, Box 1, File 6. Other long-term locals include the Suspender Workers (1900-1958); Pattern Casters (1920-1956); Ordnancemen's Union (1919-1956); Bathtub Enamellers (1920-1959) and countless others. See Reel 8 Micro. 22 and Coll. 18, Vol. 7 and 8.

56. Zieger, *Madison's Battery Workers*, pp. 16-17; 47-87.
57. Jack Barbash, *Labor's Grass Roots: A Study of the Local Union* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1961), pp. 56-63. See also Reel 9, Micro. 22, for correspondence documenting the postmerger affiliation elections.
58. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the U.S.*, p. 200 uses this term and cites Hyman Hirsch, *Emergence of Industrial Unionism*, unpublished M.S. thesis, New York University, 1937, pp. 58-59 and Knight, p. 63n. Later Foner uses the term without crediting a source. See Foner, *Organized Labor and The Black Worker*, p. 93.
59. Foner, *Organized Labor and the Black Worker*, pp. 92-93; Spero and Harris, *The Black Worker*, pp. 95-100; Northrup, *Organized Labor and the Negro*, pp. 8-9.
60. *AFL Proceedings*, 1891, p. 12.
61. See, for example, Marc Karson and Ronald Radosh, *The American Federation of Labor and the Negro Worker, 1894-1949*, in Julius Jacobson, ed. *The Negro and the Labor Movement* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1968), pp. 155-156; Bernard Mandel, *Sam Gompers and the Negro Workers, 1886-1914*, *Journal of Negro History* 40 (January 1955), pp. 34-60.
62. Public affirmation of the AFL policy of organizing "without regard to creed, color, sex, race, or nationality" occurred frequently. See for example, *AFL Proceedings*, 1897, p. 78.
63. It is impossible to know the exact number of racially segregated locals, however, since the racial character of locals was not always indicated either in the title or in parenthesis next to the title in the Charter Books. See Coll. 18, Vols. 1-3.
64. Letter Samuel Gompers to Louis Klinger, 18, July 1891, in Kaufman and Albert, eds. *The Samuel Gompers Papers*, Vol. 3, p. 80.
65. Letter from Samuel Gompers to George L. Norton, 17, May 1892 and 7, February 1893 in Kaufman and Albert, *The Samuel Gompers Papers*, Vol. 3, pp. 172-173, 275.
66. Coll. 18, Vols. 1, 2, 3.
67. See AFL 1900 Constitution, Article XII, Sec. 6.
68. *AFL Proceedings*, 1900, p. 263.
69. For quote and a similar point, see Gerald N. Grob, *Organized Labor and the Negro Worker, 1865-1900*, *Labor History* 1 (Spring 1960), pp. 174-5. For background, C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1957).

70. The AFL continued to pressure Internationals to drop their "color bar." See *AFL Proceedings*, 1896, p. 19 for one debate involving the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen.

71. Herman Bloch, *Labor and the Negro, 1866-1910*, *Journal of Negro History* No. 3 (July 1965), p. 179. Foner, in particular, simply argues that Gompers and the AFL abandoned blacks. I find the more complex historicized treatment of scholars such as Bloch, Grob [see footnote 69 above], and more recently the work of Eric Arnesen more convincing. See *Following the Color Line of Labor: Black Workers and the Labor Movement Before 1930*, *Radical History Review* Vol. 55, (1993), pp. 53-87.

72. Letter from J.C. Skemp, Sec-Treas of Brotherhood of Painters, Decorators, and Paperhangers, to Frank Morrison, 9 July 1904 in Philip S. Foner and Ronald Lewis, ed., *The Black Worker from 1900 to 1919*, Vol. V (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980), pp. 122-23.

73. Arnesen, *Following the Color Line of Labor*, p. 61.

74. Paul Worthman, *Black Workers and Labor Unions in Birmingham, Alabama, 1897-1904*, in *Black Labor in America*, ed. by Milton Cantor (Westport, Conn: Negro Universities Press, 1970); Arnesen, *Following the Color Line of Labor*, pp. 60-68.

75. Worthman, *Black Workers and Labor Unions in Birmingham, Alabama, 1897-1904*, pp. 54-62; p. 72 for quote. For other discussions of black unionists in this period see Eric Arnesen, *Waterfront Workers of New Orleans: Race, Class, and Politics, 1863-1923* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1991), ch. 4; W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Negro Artisan* (Atlanta: Atlanta University Press, 1902); and Foner, *Organized Labor and the Black Worker*, pp. 92-93.

76. National Urban League, Department of Research and Investigations (Ira De A. Reid, Director), *Negro Membership in American Labor Unions* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1930, Report, Alexander Press, 1969), pp. 25-30 notes the existence of three African-American organizers on the AFL staff from 1912-1916.

77. Spero and Harris, *The Black Worker*, pp. 101-105; Foner, *Organized Labor and the Black Worker*, p. 142, pp. 154-55.

78. Coll. 18, Vols. 3 & 4; National Urban League, *Negro Membership in American Labor Unions*, pp. 104-105, 110.

79. National Urban League, *Negro Membership in American Labor Unions*, pp. 104-105, pp. 110-111. See also Spero and Harris, *The Black Worker*, p. 78, 103.

80. Northrup, *Organized Labor and the Negro*, pp. 9-10, 76-77; Saposs, "Industrial Unionism," p. 77; National Urban League, *Negro Membership in American Labor Unions*, pp. 107-108; Ray Marshall, *The Negro and Organized Labor* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc. 1965), pp. 91-92; Foner, *Organized Labor and the Black Worker*, pp. 154-157; Charles Wesley, *Negro*

Labor in the United States (New York: Vanguard Press, 1927), pp. 267-275; Spero and Harris, **The Black Worker**, pp. 102-115.

81. For letters expressing such attitudes see 1919 correspondence between officials of the Brotherhood of Railway Clerks and the AFL in Micro. 22, Reel 1, or the 1944 records pertaining to chartering "colored" local #23605 in Birmingham in which the Machinists ask the AFL to take the black workers off their hands and grant them a Federal Charter. Coll. 40, File 1, Box 1.

82. Northrup, **Organized Labor and the Negro**, pp. 9-10.

83. National Urban League (1930), **Negro Membership in American Labor Unions**, pp. 25-33; Karson and Radosh, *The American Federation of Labor and the Negro Worker, 1894-1949*, pp. 160-163.

84. See, for example, Northrup's account of the treatment received by black federal locals of freighthandlers and redcaps under the jurisdiction of the Brotherhood of Railway Clerks in **Organized Labor and the Negro**, pp. 82-92. See Coll. 40, Box 1, File 4 and Coll. 18, Vols. 4 and 5 for multiple examples of "colored" locals throughout the 1930s and 1940s. For an example of a racially-mixed local, see correspondence related to FLU 20674 in Memphis, Tenn in Coll. 40, Box 1, File 47.

85. The last "colored" local I found was an Ordnancemen's Union (colored) from Yorkton, Virginia, chartered July 18, 1949. See Coll 18, Vols 4 and 5. Throughout the 1940s, requests for separate locals emanating from the South cited the lack of available meeting places for interracial groups and the desire by both black and white workers for social separation as justification. See, for example, FLU 23030 records, Coll. 40, Box 1, File 1.

86. On the AFL, see Karson and Radosh, *The American Federation of Labor and the Negro Worker*, pp. 164-187; On the CIO, see Zieger, **The CIO** and Bruce Nelson, *Class, Race, and Democracy in the CIO: The 'new' labor history meets the 'wages of whiteness'*, **International Review of Social History** (forthcoming). AFL (colored) locals persisted into the 1950s. See Coll 40, Box 1, File 1, for an example of black cotton compress workers who were not transferred into the Firemen and Oilers until 2-29-56. See also File 14 (Georgia) for other examples.

87. For examples of locals chartered for Italians, Mexicans, Filipinos, "Orientals," and other minorities see Coll. 18 and Coll. 40.

88. Alexander Saxton, **The Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California** (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971); Michael Kazin, **Barons of Labor: The San Francisco Building Trades and Union Power in the Progressive Era** (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1987), ch.6.

89. **AFL Proceedings**, 1891, p. 154.

90. **AFL Account Book**, December 1886-1890, in **AFL Records: The Samuel Gompers Era**, microfilm edition, (Microfilm Corporation of America, 1979); Stuart Kaufman, ed. **The Samuel Gompers Papers, Vol.2, The Early Years of the AFL, 1887-90** (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), pp. 175-77, es-

pecially 176-177n. Almost all the "ladies" locals in these early decades were designated as Federal locals. At times the AFL refused affiliation to "Women's Label Leagues"; at other times they issued a charter under the federal labor union rubric.

91. Coll 18, Vols. 1, 2 and 3. A decline in the numbers chartered occurs after 1909. For details on one women's local see Belle Tronland, *The Women's Local*, *American Federationist*, Vol. 36, No. 8 (1929), pp. 970-971.

92. *AFL Proceedings*, 1921, pp. 436-37.

93. Coll. 18, Vol. 3, see "no action" written next to the petition of the "lady barbers", September 20, 1918. See also Barbara Wertheimer, *We Were There: The Story of Working Women in America* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977) p. 272 for other examples.

94. For example, David Montgomery, *The Fall of the House of Labor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

95. See Wolman, *The Growth of American Trade Unions, 1880-1923*, pp. 53-54; Saposs, *Industrial Unionism*, pp. 70-73.

96. See footnote 10.

97. *AFL Proceedings*, 1887, p. 10. See Coll. 18, Vols. 1-5. Dozens of mixed federal labor unions were chartered during 1890-1892 despite the constitution restricting federal labor unions to one trade.

98. *AFL Proceedings*, 1891, p. 54.

99. U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Handbook of American Trade Unions*, Bulletin No. 420 (Washington, D.C.: USDL, 1926), pp. 3-4; U.S. Department of Labor, *Handbook of American Trade Unions*, Bulletin No. 506, pp. 6-7; Commons, *History of Labor in the U.S.*, Vol. II, pp. 346-347.

100. Ulman points to the dissimilarity of federal labor unions and the mixed assemblies by arguing that many federal labor unions were multi-craft but one industry. Thus, they more closely resemble what we would think of as "industrial" unions than "mixed" unions. The records I looked at showed that many were multi-craft and multi-industry. Hoxie in *Trade Unionism in the United States*, p. 118 refers to these locals as "indiscriminate" unions of all trades and industries. There were also numerous examples of industrial locals, that is, multi-craft but single industry.

101. See the 1888 Gompers speech published in Kaufman, ed. *Samuel Gompers Papers*, Vol. 2, p. 88.

102. Coll. 18, Vols. 1 and 2.

103. In the 1930s and 1940s, tensions arose over the use of a company's name as requests for more enterprise-based industrial charters increased. Some company-based titles squeaked by, but once organizing slowed, the AFL took care to keep names uniform. "We definitely do not include companies' names

in titles and avoid using terms in the titles other than, as I said before, the classification titles of the particular workers or as Federal Labor Unions," George Meany explained in 1948. Letter Meany to AFL Organizer Bowman, 4/9/48, Coll. 40, Box-1, File-5. Nevertheless, the AFL chartered enterprise-based locals even though refusing to call them such. By the end of the 1930s, a company name was often penciled in next to many federal labor union charters. See Coll. 18, Vol. 4.

104. Labor historians writing before the 1960s tended to see the AFL as more inclusive than those that followed. Taft, in *The AFL In the Time of Gompers*, for example, argued that the AFL was "as anxious to recruit the unskilled as the skilled;" (pp. 96-97) this desire, in part, prompted the AFL to set up federal labor unions. Of the new labor historians, only a few have taken the AFL's commitment to the unskilled seriously. See, for example, Kaufman, *Samuel Gompers and the Origins of the AFL*, p. 169.

105. *AFL Proceedings*, 1897, pp. 15-16.

106. Coll. 18; Quote from *AFL Proceedings*, 1902, pp. 9-10 or see the conclusion of the official surveys conducted by the U.S. Department of Labor in the 1920s that members of federal labor unions were "chiefly unskilled workers in unclassified occupations." U.S. Department of Labor, *Handbook of American Trade Unions*, Bulletin No. 420, pp. 3-4; U.S. Department of Labor, *Handbook of American Trade Unions*, Bulletin No. 506, pp. 6-7.

107. See Coll. 18, Vols. 1-5 or the *Reports from Organizers and Local Unions* section in the *American Federationist*, 1903-1907. Taft, *Labor Politics American Style*, pp. 112-116; Kaufman, ed. *Samuel Gompers's Papers*, Vol. 2, p.222.

108. Spero and Harris, *The Black Worker*, pp. 94-96.

109. Samuel Gompers, *Seventy Years of Life and Labor: An Autobiography* (Ithaca: ILR Cornell University Press, 1984, rpt. 1925), p. 106 and *AFL Proceedings* 1918, p. 84. See also, for example, one AFL organizer's argument for the skilled character of button cutting because it required six months for proficiency. Coll. 40, Box 1, File-Arkansas, Application from #19372 Button Workers Union.

110. I have used the terms adopted by Ken Kusterer, *Know-How on the Job: The Important Knowledge of the "Unskilled"* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1978) to emphasize the contemporary quality of Gompers's notions.

111. Although most contemporary historians reject earlier dichotomies of intellectuals vs. workers or reformers vs. trade unionists, the scholarship continues to rely heavily upon the false dichotomy of skilled vs unskilled. It is often assumed that trade unions by definition include almost exclusively skilled elite workers. Some Internationals such as the Machinists or the Electrical Workers may have excluded helpers or the "unskilled," but others did not. See Brody, *The Butcher Workmen*, pp. 34-58; John H. Ashworth, *The Helper and American Trade Unions* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1915); Wolman, *The Growth of American Trade Unions*, p. 56; Morris, *Conflict Within the AFL*, pp. 59-63; see also the *Baltimore American*, Dec. 16, 1887

discussing the 1887 Convention debates in Kaufman, ed. **The Samuel Gompers Papers**, Vol. 2, p. 73.

112. Gompers's arguments in this instance are uncannily similar to those of feminist scholars who would "deconstruct" the category of skill and insist on its social nature. See Anne Philips and Barbara Taylor, *Sex and Skill: Notes Toward a Feminist Economics*, **Feminist Review** 6 (October 1980), pp. 79-88.

113. Gompers to Thomas Purdy, March 16, 1888, Reel 1, vol. 2, pp. 371-373, Samuel Gompers Letterbooks, Library of Congress as reproduced in Kaufman, ed. **Samuel Gompers Papers**, Vol. 2, p. 95.

114. The Knights, for example, admitted small businessmen and farmers. Gompers, however, although sympathetic to the Farmers' Alliance, preferred to ally the AFL with the "Farm Hands Labor Union," an organization of farm laborers only. See Kaufman, **Samuel Gompers and the Origins of the AFL**, pp. 185-89. On the limitation to wage-earners see also **AFL Proceedings**, 1898, p. 17; pp. 91-92; Micro. 22, Reel 1 and Reel 7.

115. **AFL Proceedings**, 1897, p. 16.

116. Taft, **The A.F. of L. In the Time of Gompers**, pp. 109-113.

117. As I have argued elsewhere, the occupational unionism of the AFL differed markedly from the industrial or worksite unionism that came to dominate by the 1930s. See Dorothy Sue Cobble, *Organizing the PostIndustrial Workforce: Lessons from the History of Waitress Unionism*, **Industrial and Labor Relations Review** 44 (April 1991), pp. 419-36 and Cobble, *Making Post-Industrial Unionism Possible*, pp. 285-302.

118. See *Constitution, Rules, and By-laws of Nine Mile Federal Union No. 6804*, Nine Mile Montana, Adopted July 9, 1897 and *By-Laws and Rules of Order*, Federal Labor Union No. 6736 of Negaunee, Michigan, 1896; Hamilton, Montana, FLU 6640, 1897; By-laws, FLU 6303, Muscatine, Iowa, Revised and Adopted March 1897; Constitution, FLU #6623, Clinton, Montana, organized, 1896; Constitution and Bylaws of Federal Labor Union 6729, formerly Eureka Assembly No. 5519, Salem, Ohio, 1891. All at the New York Public Library. See also Constitution FLU Local 18181, enclosed in letter from AFL Organizer C.O. [Doyle?] to Frank Morrison, 19 June 1931, Reel 1, Micro. 22; and letter Fred Stenson to Hugh Frayne, April 3, 1920, Reel 9, Micro. 22; Suspenders Makers #9560 Files, Reel 1, Strikes and Agreements Files.

119. By-laws, FLU 6303, Muscatine, Iowa, Revised and Adopted March 1897. Hamilton, Montana, FLU #6640, 1897.

120. Stuart Kaufman, ed. **Samuel Gompers Papers**, Vol. 4, **A National Labor Movement Takes Shape, 1895-98** (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1992), p. 57; **AFL Proceedings**, 1894, p. 46.

121. Coll. 18, Vol. 1.

122. Daily Labor Report No. 125, June 29, 1995, **Bureau of National Affairs**; Interview with Richard Bensinger, Director, Organizing Institute, April 24,

1995; *A New Voice for American Workers: A Summary of Proposals from the Unions Supporting Sweeney*, Washington, D.C., ed.; Michael Byrne, *Federation Prepares for Major Changes*, *AFL-CIO News*, 5, February 1996, p. 1.

123. Dorothy Sue Cobble, *Women and Unions: Forging a Partnership* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), pp. 10-12; Coalition of Labor Union Women, *Newsletter*, January 1996.

124. Cobble, *Making Post-Industrial Unionism Possible*.

125. Kathy Krieger, *Labor Organizing in the 1990s: A Union Perspective*, A Paper Presented to the 28th Annual Pacific Coast Labor Law Conference, June 8-9, 1995.

126. Dorothy Sue Cobble, *The Prospects for Unionism in a Service Society*, in Carmen Sirianni and Cameron MacDonald, *Working in a Service Society* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996) and Krieger, *Labor Organizing in the 1990s*.

127. On Baltimore see *Daily Labor Report* No. 238, December 14, 1994 and *Daily Labor Report* No.1, January 3, 1995, Bureau of National Affairs. Other so-called "living wage" campaigns are underway in other cities and states as well, including Jersey City, Milwaukee, Chicago, Montana, Oregon. For more information, consult literature available from the New Party, 227 West 40th Street, Suite 1303, New York, NY 10038.

128. Steve Early and Larry Cohen, *Jobs with Justice: Building a Broad-Based Movement for Workers' Rights* *Social Policy* 25 (Winter 1994), pp. 7-18.

129. Bob Herbert, *Strength in Numbers*, *New York Times*, 3 November 1995; xeroxed literature from Working Today, 25 W. 43rd St., Rm 620, New York, New York 10036 in author's possession.

130. Edith Rotkopf, *Workers Out on Your Own, Unite*, *New York Times*, 26, November 1995, p. 12F.

131. AFL charters would allow for such groups to ally themselves with the initiatives undertaken by Central Labor Bodies as well as by the Federation at the state and national level.