
**IMPACT OF POLITICAL PROCESSES IN 1946-1948 USA ON THE
DEVELOPMENT OF TRADE UNIONS**

**IMPACTO DOS PROCESSOS POLÍTICOS EM 1946-1948 EUA NO
DESENVOLVIMENTO DOS SINDICATOS**

Irina Koryakova

PhD in History, Mordovian State Pedagogical University named after M. E. Evseyev,
Saransk, Russia

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9084-4500>

koryakova@yandex.ru

Irina Firsova

PhD in History, Mordovian State Pedagogical University named after M. E. Evseyev,
Saransk, Russia

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4936-2948>

firina_06@mail.ru

Andrey Merkusihin

PhD in History, Mordovian State Pedagogical University named after M. E. Evseyev,
Saransk, Russia

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9687-229X>

amerkushin1976@mail.ru

Guseyn Zeynalov

Dr. in Philosophy, Mordovian State Pedagogical University named after M. E. Evseyev,
Saransk, Russia

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9426-6349>

zggo@mail.ru

Abstract

Objectives: The article analyzes the position of the US trade unions on communism and the Cold War in 1946-1948, examines the reasons for changed attitudes of the Congress of Industrial Organizations to these issues, and considers the factors that influenced the course of trade unions in this area.

Methodology: The research methods include the analysis of documents from the George Meany Memorial Archives, the US press, including trade union publications, and studies conducted by Russian and foreign authors.

Results: The authors of the article have examined opposite opinions on the Cold War within the Congress of Industrial Organizations and concluded that the adaptation of trade unions to the Cold War policies split them and undermined the struggle for workers' interests.

Contributions: The work demonstrates the negative impact of The Cold War on the US trade unions. It shows an ideological and political struggle over communism within the CIO with the predominant membership of left-wing trade unions.

Keywords: USA, Congress of Industrial Organizations, Cold War, Communism, H. Truman.



Resumo

Objetivos: O artigo analisa a posição dos sindicatos estadunidenses sobre o comunismo e a Guerra Fria em 1946-1948, examina as razões da mudança de atitude do Congresso de Organizações Industriais em relação a essas questões e considera os fatores que influenciaram o curso da sindicatos nesta área.

Metodologia: Os métodos de pesquisa incluem a análise de documentos do George Meany Memorial Archives, da imprensa norte-americana, incluindo publicações sindicais, e estudos realizados por autores russos e estrangeiros.

Resultados: Os autores do artigo examinaram opiniões opostas sobre a Guerra Fria no Congresso das Organizações Industriais e concluíram que a adaptação dos sindicatos às políticas da Guerra Fria os dividiu e prejudicou a luta pelos interesses dos trabalhadores.

Contribuições: O trabalho demonstra o impacto negativo da Guerra Fria nos sindicatos norte-americanos. Mostra uma luta ideológica e política pelo comunismo dentro do CIO com a adesão predominante de sindicatos de esquerda.

Palavras-chave: EUA, Congresso de Organizações Industriais, Guerra Fria, Comunismo, H. Truman.

INTRODUCTION

The Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) was one of the main trade union associations in the US along with the American Federation of Labor (AFL). Founded after the split of the AFL in 1938, the CIO began to more actively defend the interests of low-skilled and unskilled workers in the US, not only resorting to such an effective method of struggle as strikes, but also involving into political activities, both at the federal and local levels. The CIO's agenda included a wide range of issues that, if approved by the US political elite, would have seriously expanded the ability of workers to achieve a more equitable distribution of national products. At the end of World War II, the authority and importance of the Congress of Industrial Organizations increased not only among workers but also among common citizens. By the end of the war, the CIO's organizational capabilities had also strengthened to effectively defend the interests of trade union members. In the absence of a popular workers' party in the US, the CIO's political activities were of particular importance. In contrast to the AFL, which was



rather passive in the political sphere, the CIO involved more workers into political activity and increased its ability to exert a more significant impact on the formation of national and foreign policy.

One of the key issues of party and political struggles in the US in 1946-1948 was the beginning of the Cold War. The special position of trade unions on this issue should be formed since it conditioned an effective struggle in defense of liberal achievements of the New Deal that workers developed in 1933-1939. This article mostly aims at examining the attitude of the CIOs to the outbreak of the Cold War. The chosen topic is relevant due not only to a more progressive nature of the CIO's activities in upholding the issues that worried American citizens, but also to the fact that the transition of the US to the Cold War policy and the new agenda of trade unions made them change priorities in the struggle for the interests of workers. The study objective is to review and assess the position of the Congress of Industrial Organizations in relation to the outbreak of the Cold War. The research objective has determined the following tasks: to reveal factors and ideological origins that determined the struggle within the CIO on the US foreign policy; to study the evolution of the position of workers' organizations in this area; to determine the reasons that influenced the incorporation of trade unions into the anti-Communist and anti-Soviet camp in 1948.

LITERATURE REVIEW

B.Ya. Mikhailov's book (1959) assesses the CIO's attitude to the Cold War policy in the schematic manner and outside the historical context. The publication "The history of labor movement in the USA in contemporary time" (Mikhailov, 1971) presents an overly general assessment of the position of US trade unions on foreign policy after the end of World War II. G.E. Minasyan (1982) addressed the attitude of trade unions to the issue of forming a third party in the US. The above-mentioned publications lack a comprehensive analysis of the reasons that changed the official course of the CIO in the Soviet-US relations.

In the US scientific literature, the attitude of trade unions to the beginning of the Cold War is discussed by L. Lenberg (1973), T. Devine, (2013) S. Rosswurm



(1992), and R. Cherny (2004). An important feature of these publications is a reliable historiographic and source base. However, these scholars considered only some aspects of forming the position of the US organized labor movement on the Cold War, and their works do not provide a deep analysis of this topic.

METHODS

The research materials were documents from the George Meany Memorial Archives kept in the University of Maryland Libraries (USA), the US press, including trade union publications, and studies conducted by both Russian and foreign authors.

The methodological basis of the research is the principle of historicism, as well as the critical approach and the structural, comprehensive analysis of historical literature addressing the topic under study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The change in the US policy from cooperation with the Soviet Union to the Cold War, which began almost immediately after World War II, had a serious impact on the Congress of Industrial Organizations. This was mostly caused by the strong positions of the so-called left-wing trade unions, i.e. either headed by Communists or being influenced by them. In 1945, they amounted to 20-30% of all the CIO members (Lenberg, 1973, p. 149). The pro-Communist trade unions included the United electrical, radio and machine workers, International longshoremen and warehousemen union, mine, mill and smelter workers, food, tobacco, agricultural and allied workers, fur and leather workers union, United farm equipment and metal workers, National union of marine cooks and stewards, International fishermen and allied workers, office and professional workers, American communications association, public workers, United furniture workers of America. A number of important posts in the CIO, including the editor-in-chief of the "CIO News" (Len De Cox) or the General Counsel (Lee Pressman), were held by left-wing ideologists and affiliated with the Communist movement. Being



effective organizers, the Communists played a major role in the creation of many CIO unions, including electricians, automakers, steelworkers and packers. According to D. Stebenne, the Communists were absolutely committed to building the trade union movement, bringing militancy and dynamism into it (Stebenne, Goldberg, 1996, p. 79). Due to the "persistence of the Communists and their allies, the CIO protected civil rights and freedoms". Within the CIO, the Communists expressed the interests of trade union members (better than the others, as even their rivals noted) over the interests of the Communist party (Richter, 1994, p. 110). In addition, it was difficult to distinguish between the Communists and those who sympathized with them. The American historian R. Zieger mentioned that the line between party members and their allies was blurred (Zieger, 1995, p. 254).

Along with left-wing trade unions, the CIO had trade unions in which the anti-Communist sentiments prevailed. For example, the largest trade unions of textile and steel workers. In the spring of 1946, W. Reuther, an ardent anti-Communist, became the President of the United Automobile Workers, which also strengthened the right-wing positions in the CIO (the most numerous and influential group in this union).

Indeed, this situation could not but cause certain contradiction and ambiguity in the CIO's position on the beginning of the Cold War and the state starting the persecution of the Communists inside the country. During World War II, the CIO's leadership actively and consistently promoted the political, economic and military cooperation between the US and the USSR within the anti-Hitler coalition in order to defeat Nazi Germany and its allies. After the end of the war, the CIO tried to maintain its commitment to the cooperation of the Big Three. When 11 CIO representatives visited the Soviet Union in the fall of 1945, the head of the delegation, J. Carey, known for his anti-Communist sympathies, spoke about the community of interests with the Soviet trade unions. In the published report, the CIO officials urged the US to establish closer ties with the USSR and help it revive the war-torn economy. The CIO head, Ph. Murray, praised this document for promoting friendship and mutual understanding between the peoples of the two countries and warned against those who prefer to sow the



seeds of mistrust and suspicion about the Soviet Union (Lenberg, 1973, p. 133). According to Ph. Murray, this report could have prevented the split of the world into two blocks since the further Soviet-American cooperation was necessary for global peace and prosperity. The same idea was expressed in the resolution on foreign policy adopted at the 8th CIO Convention in November 1946 (Mihailov, 1959, p. 461).

In 1945-1946, like during World War II, the CIO had a unified position on the Soviet-American relations. The US policy initiated in 1946 and aimed at "toughing up" these relations was criticized both by left-wing and right-wing members of the CIO. The American scholar L. Lenberg wrote that W. Churchill's speech at Fulton in March 1946 and his proposal for a military Anglo-American alliance were unpopular not only among the left-wing but also among the right-wing ideologists (Lenberg, 1973, p. 138). This was also mentioned in the statement of the Political Action Committee (PAC) and at the CIO Convention in November 1946. After revisiting Moscow in June 1946, J. Carey said that he had not found the slightest evidence in favor of the "Iron Curtain" in Eastern Europe and the USSR tried to be friendly and create a basis for mutual understanding and cooperation. Giving a speech at a rally in New York, Jack Kroll, who replaced S. Hillman as the head of the PAC in July 1946, urged to vote for candidates supporting F. Roosevelt's course towards the unity of the Big Three.

As relations between the US and the USSR were worsening, disagreements in the CIO on this issue were also aggravating, which became clear in the fall of 1946. At the end of 1946, its left-wing representatives criticized US President H. Truman for abandoning the course of his predecessor in relations with the USSR. On the contrary, the militant anti-Communists in the CIO began attacks on the USSR and blamed H. Truman for being too soft on the Soviet Union. In October 1946, 34 right-wing representatives of CIO formed the Committee for Democratic Trade Unions which accused the Soviet Union of being the "most aggressive" power in the world and criticized H. Truman's administration for not making the Russians observe democratic freedoms.

The split within the CIO on the Communism issue was especially evident at the 8th Convention held in November 1946. In fact, it was a "rebellion" of right-



wing representatives who considered the Communist influence in trade unions. As a result, the Convention participants unanimously adopted a resolution prepared by the executive committee under the title "The Statement of the CIO on the Communists". This document stated that the delegates rejected the efforts of the Communist Party and its supporters to interfere in the CIO affairs. The fact that left-wing representatives supported the resolution proposed by the executive committee at the CIO Convention in November 1946 suggests that they wanted to avoid an open dispute or break with Ph. Murray. At the same time, the New York Times wrote that the resolution was a defeat for the Communists and expressed a visionary view that they would be expelled from the CIO.

In the fall of 1946 and throughout 1947, a certain balance was maintained in the CIO between left-wing and more numerous and influential right-wing members. It was possible to keep this balance due to the position of the CIO leadership, including Ph. Murray, J. Kroll and J. Potofsky. They did not hide their anti-Communist sentiments and had been expressing a neutral opinion on the Cold War until the fall of 1947. They smoothed out the left-wing criticism of H. Truman's administration and were reasonable and realistic enough not to take the militant anti-Communist position that weakened the union movement. In his Labor Day radio address in September 1946, Ph. Murray called on organized workers to oppose "aggressive imperialism" in international relations, no matter which country implemented this policy. Ph. Murray tried to ensure the neutrality of the CIO in relation to the Cold War and the persecution of the Communists in the USA, thereby he strived to preserve the unity of the organization. As a result, he saved the organization from splitting and kept it neutral to both H. Truman's foreign policy and the Communism issue.

At the beginning of 1947, the situation began to change fundamentally. This was due to the split of the US liberal movement on the Cold War. From the very beginning of H. Truman's presidency, the liberals were suspicious of the new head of state, who expelled reformists from the government and replaced them with outspoken conservatives. The president's status in the Democratic Party was further questioned when he proposed to dismiss the liberal icon, H. Wallace, in September 1946. As noted by the American scholar A. Hamby, most liberals



believed that he betrayed the memory of F. Roosevelt and the New Deal by his personal failure (Hamby, 1973, p. 137, 140). All this happened alongside the growing dissatisfaction of trade unions with H. Truman's internal policy (Koryakova, 2015a; 2015b).

Between late 1946 and early 1947, the tightening of the anti-Soviet rhetoric and hostile steps taken by H. Truman's administration towards the USSR caused the liberal polarization, when two organizations representing their interests entered the political stage: Progressive Citizens of America (PCA) and Americans for Democratic Action (ADA). Both organizations firmly supported the New Deal values and the continuation of this policy. However, they had opposite opinions on the Cold War and Communism. The PCA was loyal to the Communists and supported the constructive cooperation with the USSR, while criticizing H. Truman's course of toughening policy towards the Soviet Union. In January 1947, the ADA harshly criticized the "Communist totalitarianism" and adopted the anti-Communist ideas. This liberal schism of the Democratic electorate became a reality.

H. Wallace attended the founding conference of the PCA and declared himself as its leader. Some CIO leaders supported this organization: the head of the PAC J. Kroll, the trade unions of electrical workers, longshoremen and warehousemen union workers of the West Coast, leather and fur employees. Although Ph. Murray did not participate in the founding conference of the PCA, he did not protest against his election as Vice-President of this organization.

The founding conference of the ADA was attended by W. Reuther, the President of the United Automobile Workers, J. Carey, the secretary-treasurer of the CIO, E. Rieve, the President of the fourth largest trade union of textile workers in the CIO, S. Volchok, the head of the trade union of wholesale and retail employees. Ph. Murray sent his personal representative A. Haywood to participate in the convention.

As a result, the CIO was torn between two rival organizations. The former risked to be dragged into the so-called "political civil war" of these liberals (Brock, 1962, p. 46) gaining momentum since 1947. This posed a real threat of disintegration of this trade union association and made Ph. Murray take decisive



actions aimed at preserving the unity of the CIO. To attain this end, he initiated the consideration of the CIO's relation to the ADA and the PCA at the meeting of the executive board in March 1947. Ph. Murray insisted on the adoption of a resolution that would recommend the CIO members to stop all cooperation with the ADA and the PCA. He believed that the leaders of trade unions should withdraw from both organizations and effectively distanced from them (CIO Executive Board Proceedings, 1947, p. 328-330). Ph. Murray voted for the adoption of this document because the activities of these organizations led to the division of progressive forces and, accordingly, to a split in the CIO (CIO Executive Board Proceedings, 1947, p. 330). This resolution was adopted by a majority vote, with four members of the executive board voting against (CIO Executive Board Proceedings, 1947, p. 388).

The anti-Communist attack on progressive forces, including trade unions, had been posing a serious threat to the CIO since 1946. Ph. Murray criticized the US press for creating an "anti-union climate" in the country and labeling the CIO a "red" organization (Lenberg, 1973, p. 152). The American scholar B. Cochran emphasized that the anti-Communist campaign inside the country had become the main element of mass media by 1946 (Cochran, 1979, p. 260). According to the Russian historian A.S. Manykin, "the anti-Soviet sentiments reached out to a large number of ordinary Americans" (Manykin, 1990, p. 169).

The situation was aggravated by the issuance of executive order No. 9835 by H. Truman on March 21, 1947. It should check the loyalty of civil servants who were made prove their innocence and the injustice of slander by anonymous informants. The state of affairs of the Communists in the US and, accordingly, the CIO was further complicated by the final transition of H. Truman's administration to the Cold War policy, which was marked by the promulgation of the Truman Doctrine in March 1947 and the Marshall Plan in June 1947. Naturally, the leaders of right-wing trade unions welcomed these initiatives, and the Communists within the CIO opposed. A split in the CIO on foreign policy was inevitable. For the sake of preserving the unity and integrity of the organization, Ph. Murray had managed to adhere to neutrality and maneuver between right-wing and left-wing movements until the end of 1947.



At the same time, the position of right-wing members of the CIO strengthened, which inevitably changed the balance of power in favor of the anti-Communists in 1947. The latter occupied major posts and expelled the Communist supporters from the leadership. The most significant act was the resignation of Len De Cox as editor-in-chief of the "CIO News", who was replaced by a right-wing spokesman A. Swim. The left-wing influence within the CIO was seriously weakened. All this made Ph. Murray, as the head of the CIO, take a more definite position on the Cold War, which was clearly manifested at the 9th Convention of the CIO held in Boston in October 1947. Still trying to maintain unity, Ph. Murray invited nine vice-presidents to draft a compromise resolution on foreign policy that would satisfy both factions in the CIO and could prevent a fight on this issue at the convention. In the end, the resolution was compiled by Lee Pressman, the CIO's general counsel and prominent left-wing representative. It was drawn up so vaguely that each party could interpret it as the confirmation of its position on foreign policy issues. Later the journalist M. Kempton noted that this document managed to approve the Marshall Plan without mentioning its name (Devine, 2013, p. 29). Left-wing members of the CIO initially viewed this document as a victory since it achieved its main goal of preventing the official approval of the Marshall Plan. As a result, the resolution was adopted unanimously.

Unfortunately, it was too early to celebrate a victory for the left-wing movement since Ph. Murray took an unprecedented step by inviting Secretary of State George C. Marshall to speak at the CIO convention, presenting him as one of the world's greatest peacemakers (Devine, 2013, p. 30). Most delegates welcomed Marshall with deafening applause, while the Communists sat stone silent (Devine, 2013, p. 30). Thus, the convention provided unofficial support for the Marshall Plan, and the shaky unity of the CIO began to fall apart. After the congress, right-wing representatives of the CIO began to interpret the foreign policy resolution as an official endorsement of the Marshall Plan. The "CIO News" newspaper posted the photograph of Marshall, Murray and Carey on the front page and announced the unanimous support of the convention delegates for the



program of the US Secretary of State. In December 1947, Ph. Murray made the same announcement on the radio.

The final shift to right-wing sentiments of both Ph. Murray and the CIO was influenced by the decision of the PCA to transform itself into a party and nominate H. Wallace as its candidate in the 1948 presidential elections adopted in December 1947. On January 8, 1948, Ph. Murray sent telegrams to all branches and trade unions of the CIO with a request to refrain from public support of any party or candidate until this issue was resolved at a meeting of the executive board (CIO Executive Board Proceedings, 1948, p. 13-14). On January 22, 1948, he submitted a resolution to the executive board of the CIO and highlighted that it was politically unwise to bring a new party into the political arena in 1948 (CIO Executive Board Proceedings, 1948, p. 24). The resolution clearly stated that the CIO trade unions should not support H. Wallace's movement (CIO Executive Board Proceedings, 1948, p. 25) since the new party would only split and divide progressive forces at the moment when unity is the greatest necessity.

However, this document contained the basis for splitting the CIO and weakening the trade union movement, which Ph. Murray warned against. The resolution expressed unconditional support for the Marshall Plan (CIO Executive Board Proceedings, 1948, p. 24). Thus, Ph. Murray proposed that the CIO joined the Cold War policy pursued by the US government. This issue caused a heated debate at a meeting of the CIO executive board that lasted for eight hours. In the end, this initiative was approved by 33 votes to 11, with two abstentions. The leaders of left-wing trade unions voted against since they disagreed with the Marshall Plan.

On the one hand, the approval of this document symbolized the final departure of Ph. Murray personally and the CIO as a whole from the neutral position on the Cold War and reoriented trade unions to the anti-Soviet and anti-Communist policy of H. Truman. On the other hand, it testified that the CIO's leadership selected a course towards a split, which it had been trying to avoid for a long time. During the presidential election of 1948, the left-wing trade unions fought for the election of H. Wallace, and the right-wing trade unions who



defended the official line of the CIO sided with the Democratic Party's candidate – H. Truman.

CONCLUSION

The Cold War had a negative impact on the US trade unions, triggering an ideological and political struggle over communism within the CIO with the predominant membership of left-wing trade unions. The CIO did not form a principled and clear position on this issue, tried to be "above the battle" and prevent an internal split, thereby not allow the whole organization to weaken. At the beginning of 1948, Ph. Murray and his associates had to yield and include the CIO into the formulation and implementation of foreign policy defended by the ruling elite of the US, which provoked a split in this trade union. The factors that caused this split were external, objective, and independent of trade unions, namely, the persecution of dissidents inside the country by the US leadership and the adoption of the Cold War policy, whose escalation ultimately incorporated trade unions into the anti-communist camp. In 1949-1950, this led to the organizational split of the CIO, when the most active left-wing trade unions that belligerently and devotedly fought for the interests of workers were expelled. Of course, it seriously weakened this trade union association and limited the ability of trade unions to effectively defend the interests of organized workers in the USA.

REFERENCES

Brock, C. (1962). *Americans for Democratic Action. Its Role in National Politics*. Washington, D.C.: Public Affairs Press.

Cherny, RW., Issel, W., Taylor, K.W. (2004). *American Labor and the Cold War. Grassroots Politics and Postwar Political Culture*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004.

CIO Executive Board Proceedings. (January 1948). *George Meany Memorial Archives at the University of Maryland Library and Archives*.

CIO Executive Board Proceedings. (March 1947). *George Meany Memorial Archives at the University of Maryland Library and Archives*.



- Cochran, B. (1979). *Labor and Communism. The Conflict that Shaped American Unions*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Devine, T.W. (2013). *Henry Wallace's 1948 Presidential Campaign and the Future of Postwar Liberalism*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Hamby, A. (1973). *Beyond the New Deal: Harry S. Truman and American Liberalism*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Koryakova, I.K. (2015a). Profsoyuzy i borba vokrug voprosa o sozdanii gosudarstvennoj sistemy medicinskogo strahovaniya v SSHA (1945-1948 gg.) [Labor Union Struggle over the issue of National Health Insurance in the USA (1945-1948)]. *Vestnik NII gumanitarnyh nauk pri Pravitelstve Respubliki Mordoviya*, 1, pp. 32-41.
- Koryakova, I.K. (2015b). *Zabastovka profsoyuza stalelitejshchikov 1946 g. v SSHA* [Steel strike in the USA in 1946], in: *Amerikanistika: Aktualnye podhody i sovremennye issledovaniya. mezhvuz. sbornik nauch. Trudov*, pp. 118-128. Kursk.
- Lenberg, L.J. (1973). *The CIO and American Foreign Policy, 1935-1955*: Ph.D. thesis. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University.
- Manykin, A.S. (1990). *"Era demokratov": partijnaya peregruppirovka v SSHA (1933-1952)* ["Democratic Era": Party Realignment in the US (1933-1952)]. Moscow: Izdatelstvo Moskovskogo universiteta.
- Mihailov, B.Ya. (1959). *Kongress proizvodstvennykh profsoyuzov SShA, 1935-1955 (iz istorii amerikanskogo rabocheho dvizheniya)* [U.S. Congress of industrial organizations, 1935-1955 (from the history of the American labor movement)]. Moscow.
- Mihailov, B.Ya. (1971). *Istoriya rabocheho dvizheniya v SSHA v novejshee vremya* [The history of labor movement in the USA in contemporary time]: in two volumes. Volume 2. Moscow: Nauka.
- Minasyan, G.E. (1982). *Borba progressivnyx sil SShA za sozдание tretej antimonopolisticheskoy partii (1946-1948 gg.)* [The struggle of the progressive forces of the USA for the creation of the antimonopolistic party (1946-1948)]: An extended abstract of a thesis for a Candidate degree in Historical Sciences. Moscow.
- Richter, J. (1994). *Labor's Struggles, 1945–1950. A Participant's View*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Rosswurm, S. (1992). *The CIO Left-Led Unions*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- Stebenne, D., Goldberg, A.J. (1996). *New Deal Liberal*. New York: Oxford University Press.



Zieger, R. (1995). *The CIO, 1935-1955*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.

