

TRADE UNIONS
PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

VOL. 13

“In the Interest of Democracy”

The Rise and Fall of the Early Cold War
Alliance Between the American Federation
of Labor and the Central Intelligence Agency

Quenby Olmsted Hughes

PETER LANG

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Until recently, there has been little concrete evidence linking the American Federation of Labor (AFL) to the U.S. government's Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in the late 1940s and early 1950s. In this book, based upon recently opened archival collections, the author investigates this controversial and complicated early Cold War relationship. Contrary to arguments that the AFL's international activities were entirely controlled by the U.S. government to the detriment of the independent international labor movement, or that the AFL acted on its own without government involvement to foster legitimate anti-communist trade unions, the author's examination of the archival sources reveals that the AFL and the CIA made an alliance of convenience based upon common goals and ideologies, which dissolved when the balance of power shifted away from the AFL and into the hands of the CIA.

In addition to tracing the complicated historical threads which resulted in an apparently unlikely relationship, three specific examples of how the AFL worked with the CIA are investigated in this book: the development of the anti-communist trade union federation Force Ouvrière in France; the AFL campaign against the Soviet Union's use of "slave labor" at the UN; and labor's role in the activities of the National Committee for a Free Europe, including Radio Free Europe and the Free Trade Union Center in Exile.

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“In the Interest of Democracy”

Trade Unions Past, Present and Future

EDITED BY CRAIG PHELAN

Volume 13



PETER LANG

Oxford • Bern • Berlin • Bruxelles • Frankfurt am Main • New York • Wien

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Preface

In the autumn of 1995, as a first year history graduate student, I found myself in Silver Spring, MD puzzling over hundreds of pages of documents related to the American Federation of Labor's Free Trade Union Committee. I had arrived at the archives of the George Meany Memorial Institute of Labor Relations in the suburb of Washington DC expecting to investigate the international relations of the labor movement in the early Cold War. This topic, I naively believed, would be relatively straightforward and would form the basis for a respectable seminar paper incorporating my familiar undergraduate interests in the labor movement with the new issues raised in a course directed by Ernest May on the history of the American role in world politics. As a bonus, the archivists at the Meany Center had only recently opened the files, and I relished the opportunity to examine files almost entirely unknown to historians.¹ I had no idea, however, that the brief visit to the Meany Archives would lead to anything more substantial than a seminar paper. Nor could I have anticipated that I would discover documents that conclusively ended a controversy that had bothered historians of both labor and international relations for decades.

Many of the documents found in the Lovestone collections at the Meany Archives were just what I had expected to find in the files of a labor organization interested in international relations: interminable office memos, countless letters to trade unionists around the world, and folder upon folder of materials used to lobby the U.S. government to effect changes favorable to the labor movement's vision of international relations. As I continued to peruse the hundreds of pages of material, however, I discovered dozens of memos and letters that frankly made no sense to me whatsoever.

1 Among those first to undertake research in the files include Ted Morgan and Anthony Carew. Roy Godson examined portions of the archive when it was unprocessed and still located in New York during the 1970s.

Beginning in the spring of 1947, the letters of Lovestone and his colleague Irving Brown began to refer oddly to a series of “volumes,” “books,” “epic poems,” “libraries” and “book donors.” I could not imagine why a labor organization would be so interested in the literary world. Lovestone wrote the following to Brown:

First of all, I am today turning over to the Jewish Labor Committee three volumes for your reference and research library. Please make sure to acknowledge receipt of the same and the date when you get the books. ... As you know, I have a book of poems – 905 pages. I recently received from the same book collector another form of lyric poems – 446 pages. Do you think I should add it to the Committee reading room collection or shall I perhaps give it to the J.L.C. circulating library?²

Brown replied:

In addition to the two books of poems which you mention in your letter ... I am informed that you will receive very shortly an anthology just collected of about 2,000 pages. I suggest that ... the three volumes be given to the JLC Circulating Library as quickly as possible and that the first two, one of 905 pages, and the other of 446 pages be kept for the Geneva Reading Room.³

As I read on, it soon became clear that Brown and Lovestone hoped to use this rather opaque and tongue-in-cheek code to disguise the transferal of funds from an unnamed and apparently illicit source. The executive committee of the FTUC was fully aware of the existence of this under-the-table transferal, for in 1948 Lovestone confided to Brown:

[...] the Committee, particularly D.D. [David Dubinsky], have expressed anxieties regarding various volumes of literature you have gotten from other book shops and which you have been dispatching with great results of enlightenment, it is true. The Committee would like to have full knowledge in a basic sense how each volume is

- 2 Jay Lovestone to Irving Brown, 12 January 1948, International Affairs Department: Jay Lovestone Files 1939–1974, George Meany Memorial Archives, Silver Spring MD, box 11, folder 9: “Brown, Irving 1948.”
- 3 Irving Brown to Jay Lovestone, 19 January 1948, International Affairs Department: Jay Lovestone Files, George Meany Memorial Archives, box 11, folder 9: “Brown, Irving 1948.”

distributed and the reaction to its contents. This is not a matter of any disapproval of you, personally, it is a matter of sound literary relations.⁴

References to volumes, books and libraries continued to pepper the personal correspondence between Lovestone and the Brown family throughout 1949, and appeared more rarely throughout the 1950s. Another similar code identified the labor movements of various countries as industries (for example, references to the “lumber industry” indicated the FTUC’s activities in Norway, and the “perfume industry” indicated involvement in France).

For some reason, the American trade unionists felt compelled to hide their activities and financial transactions, and I determined to learn why. After investigating secondary sources devoted to the international relations of the labor movement and contemporary newspaper articles, I soon realized I had stumbled upon evidence of the relationship between the American Federation of Labor and the U.S. government’s Central Intelligence Agency, an alliance hotly disputed for decades by scholars, and stoutly denied by the AFL’s leaders. And I knew that my supposedly straight-forward and simple seminar paper had suddenly exploded into a project which might take a few lifetimes, and certainly several volumes, to chronicle. The issues raised by the alliance between the AFL and the CIA are many and mostly untouched by historians. This book, therefore, is intended to serve only as an introduction to a complex, multi-layered and fascinating subject.

4 Jay Lovestone to Irving Brown, 26 January 1949, International Affairs Department: Jay Lovestone Files, George Meany Memorial Archives, box 11, folder 11: “Brown, Irving 1949.”

Acknowledgments

I would like to extend my sincere thanks to the many individuals who have been instrumental in the research and writing of this book. First, I would like to recognize the advice and assistance of my doctoral committee at Harvard University: Professors Stephan Thernstrom, Ernest May, and John Womack, Jr. Each has in his own way contributed invaluable to the many steps in the construction of this manuscript. Archivists at the George Meany Memorial Archives, the Hoover Institution Library and Archives, the National Archives, and Wayne State worked tirelessly to aid my detective work. Two summer research grants from the Charles Warren Center for Studies in American History at Harvard allowed me to conduct research in Washington DC, Palo Alto, and Detroit. After I had completed much of the legwork required to collect the evidence for this text, a two-year fellowship from Harvard's Hauser Center for Nonprofit Organizations allowed me to take a break from teaching and devote myself to this book and the study of nongovernmental organizations. My colleagues at the Hauser Center, and since at Rhode Island College, provided a warm and intellectually stimulating environment for me, and I am grateful for their attention and support.

Even before I began graduate study at Harvard, several excellent teachers and scholars strongly influenced me to pursue my love of history and writing. I would like to recognize Dr Jane Lancaster and Professors Stanley Lemons, Robert Cvornyek, and Spencer Hall of Rhode Island College. Their enthusiasm, excellent teaching, and faithful dedication to their students and their craft have been an inspiration to me and numerous other appreciative students.

I would also like to celebrate the role of my wonderful friends and family; in particular, I would like to recognize Sheryl Krevsky Elkin, Tomas Klenke, Elisa Miller, Jonathan Lee, Stuart Schechter, Cynthia Soto, Katie Quigley Tzitzouris, and Jan Woike. My husband, Jason D. Hughes, provided

much-needed encouragement and love, and shared with me his immense strength and determination. Above all, I will be forever grateful to my parents, Dr Audrey Perryman Olmsted and Dr Richard Olmsted. It is to them, with all of my love, that I dedicate this book.

List of Acronyms

AFL	American Federation of Labor
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CGT	Confederation Générale du Travail
CGT-FO	Confederation Générale du Travail-Force Ouvriere
CIO	Congress of Industrial Organizations
FEC	National Committee for a Free Europe
FTUC	Free Trade Union Committee
FTUCE	Free Trade Union Center in Exile
ICFTU	International Confederation of Free Trade Unions
NCFE	National Committee for a Free Europe
OSS	Office of Strategic Services
RFE	Radio Free Europe
WFTU	World Federation of Free Trade Unions

Introduction

In 1967, former Central Intelligence Agency officer Thomas Braden revealed in a *Saturday Evening Post* article entitled “I’m Glad the CIA is ‘Immoral’” that he had personally provided funds to the American Federation of Labor’s foreign policy branch to assist their work overseas.¹ Braden stood by his actions proudly, but within the explosive context of the 1960s, this article, as well as other reports associating the covert intelligence branch of the government with cultural, labor and academic institutions, sparked a heated debate about the appropriate role of the Central Intelligence Agency within American society.

Allegations connecting the American Federation of Labor to Central Intelligence Agency, however, were not new to the 1960s. In the early 1950s, newspaper pundit Westbrook Pegler continuously harped on the Free Trade Union Committee’s foreign policy endeavors (“clandestine political activities of the American boss unioners”), and made direct references to the connection between the Committee and the CIA.² Unlike later journalists and scholars who suspected that the CIA corrupted the labor movement, however, Pegler argued that the AFL corrupted the CIA. Jay Lovestone, executive secretary of the Committee, complained irritably that “Inestimable damage has been done to the Free Trade Union Committee, AFL, both here and abroad, as well as to the interests of the United States by recent attacks of Pegler, inspired by CIA officials, according to Pegler’s

- 1 Thomas Braden, “I’m Glad the CIA is ‘Immoral,’” *Saturday Evening Post*, 20 May 1967, 10–14.
- 2 Westbrook Pegler, “Fair Enough,” *London Times Herald*, 27 November 1951, n.p., Jay Lovestone Files, George Meany Memorial Archives, box 51, folder 6: “Murphy, Ray 1950–1951.” See other Westbrook Pegler columns, “Fair Enough” 1950–1952.

own written and oral statements.”³ Lovestone’s opinions could scarcely have been much kinder when a journalist published a similar article in 1955. Edwin Lahey, a journalist for the *Chicago Daily News*, authored an article titled “Former U.S. Commie Boss is AFL Espionage Ace.” In his essay, Lahey admitted that Lovestone denied a “formal connection” with the CIA, but argued: “... it can be stated without qualification that the CIA, headed by Allen Dulles, brother of the Secretary of State, has in recent years obtained much of its primary information about international Communism from Lovestone.”⁴

These columns did not attract the kind of attention that the revelations of labor and CIA alliances did in the 1960s and 1970s.⁵ During those decades, many Americans condemned CIA intrusion into allegedly inappropriate realms. They insisted that the American Federation of Labor, funded heavily by the United States Central Intelligence Agency, had worked closely with the American government to undermine and divide legitimate labor movements abroad.⁶ Others, including the prominent

- 3 Untitled memo, n.d., Jay Lovestone Collection, Hoover Institution Library and Archives, Stanford University, Palo Alto CA, box 403, folder: “Subject File AFL Free Trade Union Committee.”
- 4 George Lahey, “Former U.S. Commie Boss is AFL Espionage Ace,” *Washington Post and Times Herald*, 21 August 1955, E3. Clipped, and found in Congress of Industrial Organizations – Washington Office Files, Wayne State University Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Detroit MI, box 44, folder 5: “American Federation of Labor – Lovestone, Jay 1955.”
- 5 Jay Lovestone reassured Dubinsky that Pegler was unlikely to cause much trouble in 1953, after speaking to Solicitor-General Philip Perlman: “... nobody takes Pegler seriously. There is nothing to be concerned about.” Jay Lovestone to David Dubinsky, 28 January 1953, Jay Lovestone Files, George Meany Memorial Archives, box 33, folder 8: “Dubinsky, David 1953.”
- 6 For examples of material connecting the American labor movement to the CIA, see George Morris, *CIA and American Labor: The Subversion of the AFL-CIO’s Foreign Policy* (New York: International Publishers, 1967). Ronald Radosh, *American Labor and United States Foreign Policy: The Cold War in the Unions from Gompers to Lovestone* (New York: Random House, 1969). Howard Frazier, ed., *Uncloaking the CIA* (New York: Free Press, 1978). Fred Hirsch and Richard Fletcher, *The CIA and the Labour Movement* (Nottingham: Spokesman Books, 1977). George Schmidt,

labor leaders charged with accepting CIA funds, vehemently denied CIA involvement, describing the AFL as an independent agent working to further the cause of democracy by encouraging the work of non-Communist trade unionists in Europe in order to prevent the spread of Communism.⁷ Supporters of this viewpoint, such as Roy Godson, who in 1976 published *American Labor and European Politics: The AFL as a Transnational Force*, emphasized that “neither in the archives nor in interviews with United States government officials” [Ambassadors Averell Harriman and Jefferson Caffery] were there “any indications that the government offered or that the AFL accepted government money” during the late 1940s.⁸

More recent histories of the Central Intelligence Agency link the spy organization to the American Federation of Labor’s foreign policy wing, the Free Trade Union Committee (FTUC) led by Irving Brown and Jay Lovestone.⁹ These texts, however, invariably use the Braden article as evidence for their arguments, or use interviews with major CIA figures to demonstrate a FTUC/CIA connection. In an interview with the author, for example, Franklin Lindsay, who worked for the CIA between 1949 and 1953, remembered Irving Brown as a “tremendous operator” who managed the FTUC with AFL money before accepting CIA aid.¹⁰ Beyond Braden’s testimony and that of other CIA officers such as Lindsay, historians have

The American Federation of Teachers and the CIA (Chicago: Substitutes United for Better Schools, 1978). See also Sidney Lens’s columns.

- 7 David Dubinsky and George Meany categorically denied receiving CIA funds, claims that this book refutes.
- 8 Roy Godson, *American Labor and European Politics: The AFL as a Transnational Force* (New York: Crane, Russak and Company, Inc., 1976), 47. In this text, Godson writes a comprehensive analysis of the FTUC’s foreign policy, benefiting from interviews from many of the principals, including Jay Lovestone.
- 9 John Ranelagh, *The Agency: The Rise and Decline of the CIA* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986), 248–249. Sallie Pisani, *The CIA and the Marshall Plan* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1991), 100. Evan Thomas, *The Very Best Men: Four Who Dared: The Early Years of the CIA* (New York: Touchstone, 1995), 62. Burton Hersch, *The Old Boys: The American Elite and the Origins of the CIA* (New York: Scribner’s Sons, 1992), 239.
- 10 Franklin Lindsay, telephone conversation with author, 4 January 1996.

had few sources upon which to base their conclusions regarding the use of governmental funds by the AFL in their overseas work.

In 1992, historian Sigmund Diamond lamented the lack of evidence that prevented him from analyzing U.S. government intelligence work with American labor unions.¹¹ In the mid 1990s, however, the George Meany Memorial Archives in Silver Spring, MD and the Hoover Institution Library and Archives at Stanford University opened collections of materials directly relating the CIA to the AFL and the Free Trade Union Committee. These correspondence files provide to me and other scholars concrete evidence of a link between Central Intelligence Agency and the FTUC. The evidence reveals a relationship much more complex than that imagined by conflicting parties of the 1960s and 1970s. Anthony Carew provided an excellent start to the scholarship with his 1998 article, "The American Labor Movement in Fizzland: the Free Trade Union Committee and the CIA" in *Labor History*.¹² More recently, journalists and historians such as Ted Morgan, Frances Stonor Saunders, Edmund F. Wehrle, and Hugh Wilford among others have used the Lovestone collections to investigate varying aspects of the American Federation of Labor's connection with the CIA.¹³ This growing body of literature also helps inform scholars who are turning their attention to examining labor history from a transnational perspective,¹⁴ and those who are investigating the role of nongovernmental

11 Sigmund Diamond, *Compromised Campus: The Collaboration of Universities with the Intelligence Community, 1945–1955* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 9.

12 Anthony Carew, "The American Labor Movement in Fizzland: the Free Trade Union Committee and the CIA," *Labor History* 39, no. 1 (1998): 25–42.

13 For example, see: Ted Morgan, *A Covert Life: Jay Lovestone: Communist, Anti-Communist and Spymaster* (New York: Random House, 1999). Frances Stonor Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* (New York: New Press, 2001). Edmund F. Wehrle, *Between a River and a Mountain: the AFL-CIO and the Vietnam War* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005). Hugh Wilford, *The Mighty Wurlitzer: How the CIA Played America* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).

14 The significance of this field is indicated by the decision of the Organization of American Historians' conference organizers to devote its 2010 Annual Meeting

organizations like the AFL in international relations. This book is designed to add to that scholarship by further illustrating the complex early Cold War alliance between the AFL and CIA.

To the uninitiated, the story of the Free Trade Union Committee of the American Federation of Labor in the late 1940s and early 1950s is jammed with seeming inconsistencies, incompatibilities, and impossibilities. In that plotline, intellectuals directed labor union policies. Former Communists espoused rabid anticommunism. Labor leaders opposed to the political involvement of the labor movement partner themselves with government officials. Labor leaders devoted more time to international politics than to domestic goals. Labor unionists chastised government spy agency officials for loose lips and shoddy covert activities. The AFL arguably had more power and significance than the CIA, and chose to terminate its relationship with the intelligence organization, rather than the other way around. From an early twenty-first century perspective, it is difficult to imagine how any of those plot twists could have developed.

In reality, however, the unusual relationship between the Free Trade Union Committee and the U.S. government's Central Intelligence Agency is a result of the intricately entwined dramas of American communism, anticommunism, and the labor movement in the twentieth century. Not only does each storyline depend upon the interactions of the institutions and ideologies of the three movements, but also the plots are shaped by common characters who figure prominently in each history. The first section of this book, "Getting Together," presents the tangled historical web that produced the moment in time in the mid twentieth century in which all of the above inconsistencies were consistent, the incompatible were compatible and the impossible was possible. The next section "Working Together," examines examples of projects shared by the AFL and the CIA, and the final group of chapters, "Falling Apart," analyzes the decline of the relationship in the early-to-mid 1950s.

Plenary to Transnational History, in a session entitled "The United States and the World," which the author attended.

During my research, I kept in mind three interrelated dimensions that I feel provides an interesting structure for understanding the FTUC-CIA alliance. I have labeled these dimensions “Individual,” “Institutional,” and “Ideological.” Interactions at each of the three levels helped determine the historical outcome of the relationship between the U.S. government and Jay Lovestone’s foreign policy organization.

A) *Individual:*

Many of the men and women who led the Cold War activities of the American Federation of Labor and the U.S. government impress historians with their vibrancy and personality. Jay Lovestone at his death was lauded as the “master strategist in the war against Communism,”¹⁵ and yet this was the man who helped found the American Communist party in the 1920s, before his dramatic purge by Stalin and his eventual position as director of AFL foreign policy. Lovestone plays a crucial role in the story that unfolds in the pages of this book. Other interesting characters include Carmel Offie, a flamboyantly homosexual diplomat, embraced by as many Washington elites as scorned him, who managed to keep his fingers in many political pots; Frank Wisner, the University of Virginia educated Director of the Office of Policy Coordination, who oversaw covert operations with the FTUC, and who was only one of the many blue-bloods who composed the CIA after its establishment; and Irving and Lillian Brown, who with their son “Bellybutton” Bobby, maintained the European branches of the FTUC during the late 1940s and early 1950s. The histories of each of these men and women shed light on the hows and whys of this intricate relationship. Each character interacts with the others based upon his or her own experience and history.

Questions raised at this level are many. How did the largely socialist and immigrant group of union organizers composing the FTUC interact with the elite and wealthy Ivy League graduates who led the early

15 Arnold Beichman, “Jay Lovestone, R.I.P,” *National Review*, April 1990.

Central Intelligence Agency?¹⁶ How did each character arrive at his or her anticommunism? How did the experiences of each person shape his or her actions against Communism and the subsequent establishment of policy?

B) *Institutional:*

On the institutional level, questions are raised which deal with the interrelation between the multiple organizations which dominate this Cold War tale. These groups include the American Federation of Labor, the Congress of Industrial Organizations, the Central Intelligence Agency, the State Department, the foreign unions and the international confederations of labor, among many others. Was the AFL's Free Trade Union Committee an independent organization, or was it beholden to the American government? Alternatively, it has been argued that the American government owed much of its labor foreign policy to the AFL; how accurate is that conclusion? How much influence did each exert over the other?

Relations among labor organizations are also highlighted by the new archival sources. How did the tension between the AFL and the CIO manifest itself in labor foreign policy? What was the role of the government in this inter-labor relationship? How dependent were the fledgling "free" labor unions of Europe upon the FTUC and U.S. government aid? What exactly was the role of the FTUC in international labor politics, and how was it perceived by foreign trade unions?

C) *Ideological:*

Finally, at the heart of the Cold War and this research project, remains the question of ideology. What was the anticommunist ideology of the FTUC, and did it differ from that of the U.S. government? How did the beliefs of the AFL differ from those of the trade unions it sought to bolster outside of the United States? The AFL and the CIO joined forces in the mid 1950s; how did their earlier policies differ concerning foreign relations

16 For information about the elite in the CIA, see Evan Thomas, *The Very Best Men: Four Who Dared: The Early Years of the CIA* New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995.