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A MISGUIDED QUEST FOR LEGITIMACY: THE COMMUNITY RELATIONS DEPARTMENT OF THE SOUTHERN ORGANIZING COMMITTEE OF THE CIO DURING OPERATION DIXIE, 1946-1953

by

MICHAEL SLOAN

Under the Direction of Michelle Brattain

ABSTRACT

This thesis is a study of the Community Relations Department of the Southern Organizing Committee of the Congress of Industrial Organizations during the CIO's Southern Organizing Drive, often referred to as "Operation Dixie." The Community Relations Department was primarily interested in improving relations between organized labor and organized religion, in the hopes that improved church-labor relations would produce a situation more conducive to labor organizing, and reduce attacks on the CIO from religious leaders. This thesis examines the methods utilized by the CRD to achieve this end, and presents an analysis both of their efficacy and of their implementation. Specific programs that are explored are the CRD's compilation, and publication, of various religiously themed pamphlets, the formation of Religion and Labor Fellowship groups, and the CRD's relations with various anti-labor newspapers that made use of religious arguments to attack the CIO and Operation Dixie.

INDEX WORDS: Operation Dixie, Congress of Industrial Organizations, Southern Organizing Committee, John Ramsay, Lucy Randolph Mason, David Burgess, Militant Truth, Southern Religion, Labor, Labor unions, Billy Graham, Religion and Labor Fellowship

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MICHAEL SLOAN

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Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Nearly sixty years ago, the Congress of Industrial Organizations launched the largest organizing drive in the history of the South. This organizing campaign, directed by the Southern Organizing Committee (SOC,) and commonly referred to as "Operation Dixie," lasted from 1946 to 1953, and encompassed organizing efforts in twelve southern states, undertaken by as many as two hundred and fifty paid organizers.[1] In the more than fifty years since the drive came to an end, it has received some scattered attention from historians, but surprisingly little, when the historical significance of this pivotal moment in the history of industrial unionism is considered. Only one full-length book chronicling Operation Dixie, *The Crisis of American Labor*, by Barbara Griffith has been produced to date. In the preface to her book, Griffith writes that her "intent is to open up the topic by setting in place the broad historical framework, both national and Southern, within which the men and women of the CIO and their corporate opponents lived through the daily realities of the struggle."[2] While Griffith's work may well have succeeded in "opening up" the topic of Operation Dixie, her lead has not been followed in any significant way, and surprisingly little work has been published on the subject in the almost twenty years since *The Crisis of American Labor* was published. This is particularly unfortunate given the rapid pace at which the field of Southern labor history has expanded over the last two decades, both in the sheer size of the

[1] Griffith, Barbara, *The Crisis of American Labor: Operation Dixie and the Defeat of the CIO*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988, p. 26.
[2] Ibid, p. xiv.

field –the number of practitioners, the number of publications, etc – but also in terms of the scope of the issues deemed pertinent to the study of the Southern working class.[3]

There are many factors at work here, not the least of which is that the CIO, as a whole, was a predominantly Northern organization, whose strongest unions were in the Northeast and the industrial Midwest. For historians of the UAW, the UE, or the USWA, Operation Dixie, while perhaps of tangential interest, is largely irrelevant. In the sub-field of Southern Labor history, Operation Dixie has fared rather better. Any history of Southern labor in the period after the Second World War, must address the Southern organizing drive to some extent. Even here, however, the drive receives only limited coverage. Since many of these works have tended to be rather specialized case studies dealing with specific union locals, or histories of labor in a specific city or state, the coverage given to Operation Dixie has, naturally, tended to be rather glancing, limited to how the drive related to the author's particular object of study. A further complicating factor, perhaps, has to do with the emphasis placed, by the organizers of Operation Dixie, on the unionization of the textile industry. Although organizing also took place in other industries, including steel, meat-packing, and tobacco, the main concern of Operation Dixie was the textile industry. Textiles made up the largest component of Southern industry, and posed the clearest threat to the CIO unions of the North, as more and more textile manufacturers relocated their operations to the low-wage, non-unionized, South. The Southern textile industry, even more than Southern industry as a whole, has a uniquely depressing history of successive failures when it comes to

[3] For an overview of how the field has developed over the past twenty years, see: Brattain, Michelle, "The Pursuits of Post-exceptionalism: Race, Gender, Class, and Politics in the New Southern Labor History," in Eskew, Glenn, ed., *Labor in the Modern South*, Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2001.

organizing. While the events of Operation Dixie make a compelling story, they must compete with even more monumental failures that occurred in 1919, 1929, and 1934. Indeed, one textile historian, Timothy Minchin, has argued that Operation Dixie was not nearly as important in the post-war history of Southern textile workers as was the general strike of 1951, which, he argues, signaled the effective end of the TWUA's prospects in the South. Finally, for reasons that are not readily apparent, much of Southern labor history thus far, and it should be remembered that the field is a relatively new one, has tended to focus on the period prior to the Second World War.

Whatever the reasons may be, the end result has been rather limited coverage of Operation Dixie in the historiography of twentieth-century labor. However understandable this neglect may be, it is most unfortunate. Operation Dixie represented an opportunity for the labor movement of truly enormous proportions. By the end of the Second World War, the CIO was firmly entrenched in Northern industry, and had secured a level of respectability, and power, both economic and political, that had never before been achieved by a labor confederation. However these achievements were imperiled by the existence of the South as a large region typified by cheap, non-union labor. The South was also the home region for a significant contingent of conservative Democrats, whose fierce opposition to organized labor, and political power based on long years of congressional seniority, threatened a labor movement whose fortunes had been, by this point, firmly tied to the political success of liberal, New Deal Democrats. The South was thus the exposed flank of the labor movement, whose organization could spell the victory, or, if it remained

unorganized, threaten the defeat, of the labor movement as a whole. The advantages to be gained by organizing the South were monumental, and so were the consequences of failure. The vast potential of the South, and its importance to the future of organized labor were recognized by the leaders of the CIO, and it was this recognition that prompted the launching of Operation Dixie in May of 1946.

Operation Dixie was, in many ways, a pivotal event in the organizational life of the CIO. From its beginnings in 1935, the organization had expanded rapidly, scoring success after success, and expanding rapidly to include millions of workers within its various constituent unions. Until 1946, this rapid expansion had seemed all but unstoppable, but in the post-war years the CIO seemed to have hit head-on against a brick wall. Many factors were at work here: the nation's political swing to the right, the passage of Taft-Hartley in 1947, the multitude of state "right to work" laws that began cropping up after the war, and even ideological divisions within the CIO itself. Among these factors, was the failure of the CIO's Southern organizing drive, a failure that would have important long-run effects upon the viability of the organization, and indeed, upon the future of the labor movement as a whole. In 1946, the "fragile juggernaut" of the CIO, as Robert Zieger terms it, ran head-on into the intransigent wall of Southern society, and the juggernaut stalled out, while the wall held firm.[4] The failure of the CIO to organize the South during the 1940s held important long-term implications for both the CIO and the South. For the CIO, the South remained a low-wage haven for runaway Northern manufacturers who could escape the economic

[4] Zieger, Robert, *The CIO 1935-1955*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995, p. 227.

demands of the unions by relocating to the South. For the South, the lack of powerful, politically engaged unions, helped to perpetuate a system characterized by concentrated economic power, low wages, weak worker protection laws, and conservative politics, a system that would not be effectively challenged until the advent of the modern Civil Rights Movement.

Operation Dixie, launched amid high hopes, and expectations of success, was not a notably successful organizing drive, and evaluations of the project have varied from the purely negative to the highly mixed. Griffith maintains that the drive was a complete failure, and even goes so far as to argue that it effectively ended within a year, despite the fact that it remained formally operative through 1953[5]. Robert Zieger, in his overview of the campaign, agrees with Griffith's assessment, writing of the drive that "by the end of 1946 it had become a sideshow.[6]" Others have been somewhat more positive, noting that while the drive was perhaps a failure in terms of its declared goals, it produced some positive achievements. For example, Operation Dixie did bring many committed activists into the labor movement, and provided important learning experiences for future organizers, experiences that would aide them in future organizing efforts. Some of the organizers in Operation Dixie viewed the drive as at least a partial success, pointing to the important benefits derived by at least some newly-unionized workers who were organized during the drive.[7] Finally, Timothy Minchin argues that while the CIO failed to bring in many new recruits through its efforts, the climate

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[5] Griffith, *Crisis of American Labor*, p. 161.
[6] Zieger, *The CIO*, p. 228.
[7] Minchin, Timothy, *What Do We Need A Union For?*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997, p. 32.

produced by Operation Dixie helped to boost wages throughout the region, as many employers improved wages and conditions in order to ward off unions.[8]

Whatever the incidental benefits derived from Operation Dixie, it is clear that, at least in terms of the CIO's initial declared goals for the campaign, nothing less than the organization of Southern industry as a whole, it was a failure. The fact that Operation Dixie was a failure does not, however, mean that it is without interest, and indeed quite the opposite is true. In addition to their purely historical interest, organizing drives are of interest because of what they can tell us about the efficacy of various tactics utilized by labor unions to recruit new members. In this regard, failed campaigns are often more instructive than successful ones.[9] A successful organizing drive may succeed for a variety of reasons, not all of them having anything to do with the tactics adopted by union organizers. Many times when union elections are successful, it has been because the workers were ready and willing to organize, for reasons of their own having to do with local conditions and grievances. In situations such as this, the organizer's role is simply to make themselves available, and guide the workers through the process of forming a union.[10] Unsuccessful drives, on the other hand, provide the researcher with a better opportunity to study methods

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[8] Ibid., p. 65

[9] While strikes possess a dynamic distinct from, and somewhat different from, organizing campaigns, there are certain similarities. For examples of studies dealing with failed strikes, see Liston Pope's *Millhands and Preachers*, dealing with the failed strike at Gastonia, North Carolina in 1929, or the coverage of the general strike of 1934 in *Like a Family* by Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, et al.

[10] The classic example would be the explosive growth of the UAW in the aftermath of the Flint sit-down strike of 1937. In the South, a similar situation existed in the months leading up to the 1934 General Textile Strike, in which workers, angered by what they perceived to be the implementation of a "stretch-out" in the textile mills, formed UTWA locals almost faster than organizers could charter them. See for example, Waldrep, G.C., *Southern Workers and the Search for Community*, chapter 2.

and tactics. Clearly the strategy employed by unsuccessful organizers was ineffective, but the researcher is left with the task of explaining why this was so.

In the case of Operation Dixie, many explanations for its failure have been advanced in the years since the drive's conclusion. These explanations, indeed, have been almost as numerous as the writers who have approached the question. Some have focused on the culture of Southern mill and factory workers, arguing that Southern workers were simply too individualistic and backward to join labor unions.[11] Others have focused on the role played by employer oppression, often with the assistance of local authorities, in keeping workers from joining unions, and busting unions if, and when they are formed.[12] Another explanation focuses on the role of race in alienating Southern workers from the CIO, a body that formally supported rights for blacks, and which officially advocated integration (although it should be noted that these egalitarian goals were frequently ignored by CIO locals, and not just in the South.)[13] In addition to race-baiting, the CIO was also frequently attacked by anti-labor Southerners for being a supposedly communist-dominated organization, or at the very least, an organization infiltrated by communists.[14] Indeed, for many Southern critics of the CIO, its

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[11] Although not actually dealing with Operation Dixie, this argument is advanced in its classic form by W.J. Cash in *The Mind of the South*.

[12] Of all of the factors contributing to the failure of Operation Dixie, this is, arguably, the most significant. For arguments focusing on the role of employer resistance and repression, see Griffith, *Crisis of American Labor* pp. 88-105, Zieger, *The CIO*, p. 235, and David Burgess, *Fighting For Social Justice*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2000, pp. 73-76.

[13] For the role of race in Operation Dixie, see Griffith, pp. 62-87, and Zieger, pp. 234-235, and pp. 239-240. For a discussion of race in labor history and historiography, including a critical appraisal of the CIO's handling of race, see Herbert Hill, "The Problem of Race in American Labor History," *Reviews in American History*, vol. 24, no. 2, 1996, pp. 189-208.

[14] Nelson Lichtenstein, for example, explains the failure of Operation Dixie as the result of an "orgy of red-baiting and race-baiting" that "stopped the CIO's postwar organizing campaign, Operation Dixie, dead in its tracks and snuffed out the political career of many a regional liberal." Lichtenstein, Nelson, *Walter Reuther: The Most Dangerous Man in Detroit*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995, p 257.

racial policy served as proof positive of its communistic nature[15]. Southern opponents of labor were also quick to point out that the CIO was a Northern organization, and portrayed its representatives as "outside agitators," only interested in Southern workers for their potential union dues, and incapable of truly understanding Southern society.[16] At the other extreme, some historians, most notably Robert Korstad and Nelson Lichtenstein have argued that the CIO should have championed racial equality more strongly than it did, arguing that Operation Dixie lost an opportunity to build what Korstad has termed "civil-rights unionism" in the South.[17] Some historians, notably Griffith, have pointed to the fact that the CIO's commitment of manpower and money, large as it was by the standards of the time, were clearly insufficient to the mammoth task of organizing the entire South.[18] Finally, at least one historian, Timothy Minchin, has argued that the economic prosperity that followed the Second World War produced a situation in which Southern workers, experiencing rising wages and an improved standard of living, simply did not consider union membership necessary in order to achieve their economic and consumer goals, and were, indeed, leery of joining labor unions, perceiving such an act as a potential threat to their continued employment.[19]

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[15] As John Egerton has noted, southerners often objected to communism more on the grounds of its stances on race and religion, than on the basis of its economic critique of capitalism, which was often either not known, or understood. See Egerton, John, *Speak Now Against the Day,* p. 171.
[16] Much was made, for example, of the fact that officials of the TWUA had last names like Rieve and Baldanzi.
[17] Korstad, Robert and Lichtenstein, Nelson, "Opportunities Found and Lost: Labor, Radicals, and the Early Civil Rights Movement," *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 75, No. 3, 1988, pp. 786-811. See also: Korstad, Robert Rogers, *Civil Rights Unionism: Tobacco Workers and the Struggle for Democracy in the Mid-Twentieth Century South*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003
[18] Griffith, *Crisis of American Labor*, p. 26.
[19] Minchin, *What Do We Need A Union For?*, p. 48. While Minchin's point about rising wage standards negatively impacting the perceived need for labor unions is probably correct, the emphasis that he places upon workers' fear of losing material possessions is perhaps overstated. While it is true that the prospect of losing

As with any historical phenomenon, it is difficult to exactly pinpoint causation, and the failure of Operation Dixie was almost certainly the result of many of the factors mentioned above. Indeed, this is the conclusion that Griffith ultimately comes to, pointing to the role of race, religion, and employer repression, while also arguing that the CIO itself contributed to the failure of Operation Dixie by allocating insufficient resources to the drive, and seeking to apply "Northern" organizing techniques to a "Southern" situation, where alternative methods were needed.[20] This last explanation, that the CIO employed tactics which, while appropriate in the North, failed to meet the unique circumstances of the South, is Griffith's own unique contribution to the study of Operation Dixie, and will constitute one of the subjects which will be explored, and addressed, in the following chapters. In the context of Griffith's argument, the "northern methods" utilized by the CIO during Operation Dixie comprised a strategy of targeting the largest employer in a given industry for initial organization. This had been the tactic pursued by the CIO in their organization of the automobile and the steel industries. By organizing General Motors, the UAW had achieved what Griffith terms a "break-through," after which it became easier to organize workers at other companies. The theory behind this strategy was that once it had been demonstrated that the union could succeed at organizing the major company within an industry, workers would lose their fears of company reprisal, and be more ready to sign up with a union that was clearly on the march. This formed a sort of domino theory of labor organizing, in which an

one's car during the course of a long strike due to inability to make payments probably weighed heavily on the minds of many workers, workers prior to the war had joined labor unions and gone on strike, risking their jobs, housing, and future prospects of obtaining work in the textile industry. While a car might be (and was) a prized possession, even a symbol of independence, it hardly compares to one's very livelihood.

[20] Griffith, *Crisis of American Labor*, p. 169.

initial victory would result in the rapid expansion of the union as workers at smaller firms fell into line. While this seemed to work fairly well in the centralized, oligopolistic industries characteristic of the North, it failed miserably when it was attempted in the South textile industry, most notably with the Kannapolis campaign to organize Cannon Mills. Griffith's conclusion is that this effort to apply an organizing model which had been wildly successful in the North, to the Southern textile industry demonstrated a fundamental lack of understanding on the part of Operation Dixie's leadership of the nature, and structure, of Southern industry. One of the arguments of the current study will be that this critique may also be applied equally well to other parts of Operation Dixie's program for the South.

This thesis will also address a subject that has received little in-depth coverage in the existing historiography of Southern labor: the role of religion in defeating unionization efforts. While the fact that organized religion has often been hostile to organized labor in the South is both well-known, and relatively well-documented, the subject has received little in the way of extensive, in-depth analysis. The antagonism between these two institutions, religion and labor, when noted, has often been simply acknowledged as a given, and then dismissed. One of the novel aspects of Operation Dixie was that its organizers, rather than simply accepting that they would be opposed by local ministers, actively sought to do something about it. Building on outreach programs that had already been established successfully in the North, the CIO attempted to use the Community Relations Department as a vehicle to win over the clergy of the South to the side of the union. The efforts of the CRD, then, would seem to constitute a prime example of what Griffith classifies as Northern

methods, applied to a Southern situation. The fact that this effort, which had been successful in the North, failed in the South, seems, at first glance to be confirmation of her critique. The detailed study of the CRD then, provides a useful case study with which to test many of Griffith's conclusions, while at the same time exploring the relationship between religion and labor in the South, a subject that is both highly complex, and relatively little studied. It is, by no means, the intention of this paper to argue that religion was the primary factor in the failure of Operation Dixie, but it seems clear that the opposition of ministers, churches, and evangelists did play some role in persuading workers to stay out of the union. While Ray Marshall is probably correct in arguing that the extent to which religion was important in the defeat of the CIO in the South is impossible to determine, it *is* possible to say that religion had a role to play in this defeat, a role that is deserving of further, detailed, study.[21]

In a sense, the fact that the CIO was opposed by the religious leaders of the South should not be surprising. The Church, as with other social elites in the South, tended to identify with the interests of business when it came to unions. Church opposition was of a piece with the wider antagonism to the CIO expressed by other civic leaders ranging from chambers of commerce to newspaper editors, and including prominent doctors, lawyers, and private citizens. The New South vision, which emphasized the importance of industry to the emergence of the South as a prosperous and successful region, ready to take its place alongside the rest of the nation, viewed growth of industry as absolutely essential, and consequently tended to treat labor unions as a potential threat to this new-found economic

[21] Marshall, F. Ray, *Labor in the South*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967. (Sorry, I don't have the exact page number for this citation, as I don't own a copy of this text, and I haven't had a chance to check it out of the library yet this term. Will remedy this shortly.)

prosperity.[22] The civic leaders of the South were not prepared to countenance any developments that might upset their ability to attract, and retain, industry, and thus tended to be hostile when faced with the possibility of the South becoming a union stronghold. One of the principle reasons that the South was appealing to industry was, after all, its tradition of cheap, non-union, labor. Many of the textile factories that had sprung up around the South in the first half of the twentieth century were owned by firms that were fleeing the high-wage North, where textile unions were most heavily represented. Should these unions establish a presence in the South, it was feared, manufacturers would no longer have an incentive to relocate their operations, and the South would lose its competitive advantage in attracting industry. Church leaders who, along with other local elites, tended to share in this vision of civic boosterism, and who viewed their role in terms of promoting the fortunes of the community as a whole, were predisposed to be hostile to the CIO. Moreover, as Liston Pope has demonstrated in his classic account of the Gastonia strike of 1929, *Millhands and Preachers*, many ministers in industrial towns enjoyed a lucrative patronage relationship with local manufacturers, a situation that would tend to mitigate against their willingness to support unions opposed by employers.[23]

And yet, in many ways, churches seemed to be a natural ally for the labor movement. While the heyday of the Social Gospel may have passed with the end of the Progressive Era, its influence was still felt among many ministers who championed the interests of the poor

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[22] For an in-depth treatment of the New South ideology, see Gaston, Paul, *The New South Creed: A Study In Southern Mythmaking*, Random House, 1970.
[23] Pope, Liston, *Millhands and Preachers*, *A Study of Gastonia*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1942, pp. 143-161.

and the downtrodden. Several denominations, most prominently the Roman Catholic Church, had officially endorsed the right of workers to join unions and engage in collective bargaining. Moreover, the CIO had received help on occasion from ministers in the North during strikes and contract negotiations, assistance that had illustrated the advantages of religious support in dealing with employers.[24] Despite accusations that the CIO was a godless, atheistic, and communistic outfit, many of the top leaders within the organization were, themselves, deeply religious,[25] and indeed many within the labor movement felt that their work on behalf of organized labor was an outgrowth, and expression, of their commitment to the teachings of the gospel. Finally, the South was not without its own tradition of socially progressive religious activism, although this constituted, by and large, a marginal thread within the larger fabric of conservative Southern Protestantism.[26] For all of these reasons, there was some hope that a constructive relationship with Southern clergy could be established.

The attempt to form such a relationship forms the subject of this research. More specifically, the subject that will be examined will be the Community Relations Department of the CIO, and its mission of outreach to the clergy of the South. The organizers of Operation Dixie knew that community support would be essential to the success of the

[24] For a discussion of Catholicism and the CIO in the context of Detroit, including the role played by the Association of Catholic Trade Unionists (ACTU) in the UAW, see Lichtenstein, Nelson, *Walter Reuther: The Most Dangerous Man in Detroit*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995, pp. 187-189.

[25] Although it is perhaps worth noting that many of these leaders, including CIO president Phil Murray, were Roman Catholics, a denomination not heavily represented in the South as a whole, and practically negligible among textile workers.

[26]See for example Fannin, Mark, *Labor's Promised Land: Radical Visions of Gender, Race, and Religion in the South*, Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2003, which analyzes the development of alternative religious understandings of Southern society within the Brotherhood of Timber Workers and the Southern Tenant Farmers Union.

Southern Organizing Drive. It was out of consideration for local sensibilities, for example, that Operation Dixie's first director, Van Bittner, made the decision to exclude known communists from the ranks of Operation Dixie organizers, and to focus on recruiting World War Two veterans and native Southerners as organizers for the campaign. Indeed, Bittner went so far as to publicly repudiate the long-standing relationship between the CIO and the Southern Conference for Human Welfare (SCHW,) an organization of Southern liberals that had been accused (falsely) of being a communist front organization.[27] The plan for Operation Dixie was to play down the northern base of the CIO, and the union federation's policies on racial equality and liberal political activism, in order to present themselves in a more appealing light to Southerners. While the success of these attempts is ultimately questionable in light of the drive's results, they nonetheless indicate the lengths to which the CIO was willing to go in order to make the drive a success.

When, in the early days of the campaign, organizer's reports began to filter in citing the role of local clergy opposition as a reason for representation election defeats, the CIO leadership took these reports seriously. The South has long been identified as one of the most religious regions in the country[28], and the role of the local minister in small mill towns throughout the South was an important one. Among highly religious Southern workers, the opposition of the clergy to unionization could be a significant impediment to the work of union organizers. In order to address this challenge, the CIO created the Community

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[27] Egerton, John, *Speak Now Against the Day: The Generation Before the Civil Rights Movement in the South*, Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1994, p. 444.
[28] Matthews, Donald, "We Have Left Undone Those Things Which We Ought To Have Done: Southern Religious History in Retrospect and Prospect," *Church History*, Vol. 67, No. 2, 1998, p. 305.

Relations Department (CRD) headed by a Presbyterian layman, and United Steel Workers of America official, John Gates Ramsay.[29] Ramsay had previous experience working with local clergy, most notably during the USWA's victorious unionization campaign in Buffalo, New York.[30] Because of this past experience, as well as Ramsay's long history of active involvement in a variety of religious and community service organizations[31], he was considered to be well qualified for the job of serving as the CIO's liaison with Southern churchmen.

Two fellow CIO staffers who aided Ramsay in this work were Lucy Randolph Mason and David Burgess. Mason who had been working for the CIO since the mid 1930's, was a powerful asset to the union for several reasons. A dedicated and determined advocate of the interests of working people, Lucy Randolph Mason had been active in progressive causes for decades by the time of Operation Dixie.[32] By the time that the Southern Organizing Drive was launched, Mason was an elderly, white-haired lady, whose grandmotherly looks were often deceptive. Although always refined and genteel, Mason was a tireless and fiery activist who, though much more polite than Mother Jones, the famous labor agitator and "miner's friend," lacked none of her zeal or dedication. In addition to her labor credentials, Mason also had the advantage of belonging to one of the most distinguished families of Virginia.

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[29] Griffith, *Crisis of American Labor*, p. 110.
[30] Fones-Wolf, Elizabeth and Fones-Wolf, Ken, "Conversion At Bethlehem: Religion and Union Building in Steel, 1930-42, *Labor History*, Vol. 39, No. 4, 1998, p. 381.
[31] For a more extensive overview of John Ramsay's life and career, see Abrams, Brian, *John Ramsay and the Evolution of Church- Labor Relations in the CIO*, M.A. Thesis, Georgia State University, 1985.
[32] Prior to working for the CIO, Mason had been the general secretary of the Richmond YWCA, and later the general secretary of the National Consumers League. For a detailed description of Mason's pre-CIO work, see: Mason, Lucy Randolph, *To Win These Rights*, New York: Harper & Brothers, 1952, pp. 1-18.

Related to both the Masons and the Randolphs, she was also a relative of General Robert E. Lee, and counted Chief Justice John Marshall as one of her forebears.[33] In short, Mason added a good deal of legitimacy and credibility to the CIO as it moved into the South. David Burgess, who worked with Ramsay in addition to his other duties as an organizer in towns such as Rock Hill, South Carolina, was a recent graduate of Union Theological Seminary, and an ordained Congregationalist minister, and, as such, was uniquely situated to aid Ramsay in his efforts to cultivate the religious leadership of the South.[34]

Working with Mason and Burgess, John Ramsay lead the Community Relations Department's efforts to combat the opposition of local ministers to the CIO organizing campaign, and to recruit labor-friendly clergy to bestow the blessings of organized religion on the efforts of organized labor. As with Operation Dixie more generally, it is difficult to see the efforts of the CRD as notably successful. While it is admittedly difficult to quantify the results of a campaign to win the hearts and minds of working people, it is clear that the CRD did not make the difference in the CIO's efforts to unionize Southern workers. Moreover, while Ramsay was able to recruit some progressive ministers to the cause of organized labor, and was able to set up Religion and Labor Fellowship groups in various locales, it is by no means clear that these efforts did much to reduce the general opposition among ministers to the CIO. Again the reasons for this failure, as with the Southern Organizing Drive in general, are many and varied. In the pages that follow, some of these

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[33] Mason, *To Win These Rights*, pp. xi-xii.
[34] For an autobiographical account of Burgess's life and work, see Burgess, David. *Fighting For Social Justice: The Life Story of David Burgess*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2000.

reasons will be explored, and explanations will be offered, some of them strategic, and some of them more philosophical in nature.

One of the prominent themes which will emerge in this analysis, hearkening back to Griffith's critique concerning the use of "Northern methods," is the issue of what might be termed the CIO's "cultural competence" when it came to Southern society. To what extent was the CRD's approach to dealing with Southern clergy a realistic one, given the nature, structure, and societal role of Southern religion? Did Ramsay's attempts to reach local ministers reflect an understanding of organized religion and ecclesiastical structure more reflective of Northern conditions, than of the region in which he was working? There are several compelling reasons to think that this might well have been the case, and as the record of the CRD is explored, these are among the primary issues to which we will be returning.

Before the CRD's failings can be analyzed, however, its actual record must be examined, and the first four chapters of this study will be devoted to this task. The first chapter will provide a general historical background dealing with the development and general shape of religion in the South, along with a more detailed history of the Community Relations Department, the reasons for its creation, its mission, and its activities. Having laid the basic groundwork for a more in-depth study, the next three chapters will explore the actual work of the CRD. While the work of the CRD was quite varied, its main endeavors can be divided into three rough categories.

The first of these has to do with the efforts of Ramsay and his colleagues to answer the religious critics of the CIO in their own language. These efforts were directed towards

the compilation of arguments, based on the Bible, and on the pronouncements of various denominational bodies, on the subject of organized labor, that supported the cause of labor and sanctioned the joining of unions. These arguments were issued in the form of various pamphlets and leaflets that were distributed to local ministers and lay people. In addition to written communication, both Ramsay and Mason devoted much of their time during these years to public speaking, touring the South speaking to various ministerial alliances in the towns in which the CIO was attempting to mount organizing drives. These efforts, along with a critique of their effectiveness, and an analysis of their results, will form the basis of chapter two.

Chapter three will encompass the second area in which the CRD focused its efforts, and indeed the effort that was its signature program: the creation of local Religion and Labor Fellowship groups. These groups were designed to bring together religious and labor leaders in a friendly, and ostensibly neutral, environment for luncheons and lectures, in which issues of concern to the two groups could be discussed. It was hoped that through these meetings a more convivial environment could be created for organizing efforts, that useful friendships, or at the least working relationships, could be created, and mutual understanding fostered. Ramsay was always convinced that the relationship between religion and labor was both natural, and mutually beneficial. Indeed, Ramsay's own commitment to organized labor was, in part, an outgrowth of his profound religious convictions, and he felt that labor and religion were natural allies in carrying out the social vision of the gospels. In setting up Religion and Labor Fellowship groups, Ramsay's goal was to bring these two forces – religion and labor –

together for their mutual benefit. Particular attention will be paid here to the social, religious, and class backgrounds of the clerical representatives recruited by Ramsay for these groups, and what effect, if any, this might have had on their efficacy in promoting the efforts of the CIO organizing campaign.

A final arena in which the CRD operated, and the topic which will be considered in chapter four, was in refuting the claims of, and seeking to correct the damage done by, religiously oriented newspapers that attacked the CIO and attempted to persuade workers that joining a CIO union would be a violation of their Christian faith. The two most prominent such newspapers were *The Trumpet* and *The Militant Truth*. Both newspapers were consistent thorns in the side of the CIO in its attempt to organize the South. These newspapers, reportedly financed by Southern manufacturers, denounced the CIO as godless, communistic, and immoral, and were frequently cited by union organizers as a factor in union election defeats.[35] These newspapers, particularly *The Militant Truth* often found their way to worker's mailboxes just prior to union elections, and many within the CIO suspected (with good cause) that this was not coincidental.[36] The consistent message of these newspapers was that Christian workers could not be both good Christians and members of a labor union – that they must choose sides, one way or another. Considering the deeply held religious convictions of many Southern workers, it seems likely that these appeals were taken seriously, and held the potential of swaying already wavering workers to vote against the

[35] As Michelle Brattain has noted, in addition to religious arguments against the CIO, these newspapers also frequently appealed to worker's racism and anti-Semitism, pointing to the existence of Jewish union officials and arguing that the CIO supported racial integration. See Brattain, Michelle, *The Politics of Whiteness: Race, Workers, and Culture in the Modern South*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001, p. 127.
[36] Griffith, *Crisis of American Labor*, p. 115.

CIO. Regardless of the actual efficacy of these newspapers in defeating organizing drives, they were clearly perceived as damaging by Ramsay and his colleagues, who devoted a good deal of their time and efforts towards discrediting these papers. One particularly interesting episode in these ongoing endeavors concerns the well-known evangelist Billy Graham, one of whose sermons appeared in the pages of the *Militant Truth*. Although Graham claimed that the article appeared without his permission, he refused to denounce the newspaper, much to the chagrin of Lucy Randolph Mason, whose correspondence with Graham forms one of the more interesting episodes in the career of the CRD.

Having surveyed the various programs of the Community Relations Department, the concluding chapter of this study will constitute and overall examination of the effectiveness of these efforts and attempt to explain their successes and failures. While this analysis will, naturally, tend to revolve around issues of strategy and technique, there will also be a more philosophical component, dealing with issues of movement culture, internal democracy, and the rhetoric of social movements. This discussion is informed by, and deeply indebted to, work done by Lawrence Goodwyn and Michael Kazin on the nature, and rhetorical language, of social movements in general, and populist movements in particular. While it is perhaps not advisable to read too much into the history of this one department, it is perhaps possible to gain, through looking at the relations between the CIO and Southern churches, some insight into the nature, and the direction, of the labor movement more broadly. Particularly relevant to this study will be the ongoing critique of the CIO that emphasizes a purported shift within that organization to a more “respectable and responsible” type of “business”

unionism, characterized by increased bureaucracy and hierarchical structure, in the aftermath of World War II.[37] There has been much criticism of the CIO, mostly focused upon largely Northern unions such as the UAW and the USWA, that argues that, by the 1940s, the unions had become increasingly bureaucratic, and less concerned with the needs and desires of its rank-and-file membership than with forming a collegial working relationship with governmental and business elites. Perhaps not surprisingly however, little attention has been given to how this transformation might have affected the CIO's organizing efforts in the South. For example, does the very structure of the CRD's efforts to win over Southern clergy, themselves members of a civic elite, rather than build upon autonomous working-class understandings of religion and labor, reflect a larger institutional culture that was seeking to achieve an accommodation with the larger society, rather than engaging in the confrontational style of working class assertiveness that supposedly characterized the early years of the CIO? These are the sorts of issues that will be considered in the concluding section of this study. While there are, perhaps, no definitive answers to these questions, they are important because they address the very central question of the nature, and purpose, of labor unions themselves. Are unions simply a way for workers to improve their wages, hours, and conditions—the sort of "bread and butter" unionism espoused by Samuel Gompers, or are they something more, a vehicle for the transformation of society itself? Again while no definitive answers are perhaps possible, perhaps this discussion will, at the

[37] A shift which some historians, notably Nelson Lichtenstein, argue actually occurred well before the end of the Second World War. See: Lichtenstein, Nelson, *Labor's War at Home: The CIO in World War II,* New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

least, add an interesting angle to the continuing debate over the changing nature of the CIO as a democratic social movement as the labor confederation moved into the post-war period.

In a time when the relationship between progressive politics and Protestant fundamentalist religion has once again become a subject of intense interest, the experiences of the Community Relations Department are of renewed relevance. As Michael Kazin has pointed out in his history of populism, *The Populist Persuasion*, populism and evangelical Christianity, intimately intertwined during the nineteenth century, have diverged significantly during the twentieth.[38] John Ramsay's efforts were, in many ways, an attempt to reconnect these historic partners under the umbrella of an insurgent labor movement. That these efforts ultimately failed is significant, and worthy of further study. On the face of it, Southern workers had much to gain in the 1940s and 50s by joining with the CIO, and yet they, by and large, did not choose to do so. Admittedly, there were many factors at work in this outcome, not the least of which was the active opposition and repression exercised by Southern employers. But one factor, frequently cited by organizers, was the element of religious disapproval directed towards organized labor.

Twenty-first century observers have noted that working-class people often act against their perceived economic interests because of religion. This is not a new phenomenon. People act on the basis of a wide variety of motivations. While to those who tend to view the world in economic terms, the idea that race or religion might sometimes trump class may be puzzling, it is, nonetheless, empirically true. If Thomas Frank can ask "what's the matter

[38] Kazin, Michael, *The Populist Persuasion: An American History,* Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1998, p. 4.

with Kansas," at the beginning of the twenty-first century, so might labor historians studying Operation Dixie ask what's the matter with South Carolina? Or, for that matter, with the South in general? And the answer is, in part, religion. Religion, and more specifically the vocal opposition of Southern clergy to the CIO during Operation Dixie, was one of the many weapons within the arsenal of those who opposed the expansion of the CIO into Southern industry. The CIO attempted to counter this opposition with a sustained effort to win the support of Southern clergy. For many reasons, which this study will seek to examine, this effort was not, ultimately, successful, but the fact that it was tried at all is quite interesting and revealing. Even more interesting is the actual story of the Community Relations Department and the work that they did during this crucial period of post-war labor expansion. The efforts of the CRD form a tale replete with historical possibilities, tantalizing prospects, and consistent frustrations. What follows is an attempt to make sense of that story.

Chapter Two: The Big Picture Argument

In the introduction, several theories concerning the failure of Operation Dixie were discussed. Although there is much merit in many of these theories, almost all of them are lacking in one way or another. Whether placing the blame for Operation Dixie's failure on the southern workers whom the CIO was attempting to organize, or upon the employers who resisted organizing efforts, or even upon impersonal economic forces which combined to lessen the appeal of the CIO's pitch, what most of these explanations have in common is that the place the blame for the CIO's failure everywhere but with the CIO itself. This approach is not entirely wrong, per se, and indeed, there is quite a lot of truth to the argument that external forces played a decisive role in the failure of Operation Dixie. Indeed, the use of extra-legal violence and official repression against union organizers, coupled with the failure of the Federal government to aggressively enforce the provisions of the existing labor law, combined, in large part, to make the success of the campaign well-nigh impossible. And yet, by focusing purely on external factors, it is impossible to see the complete picture, and a key factor is overlooked.

To be sure, there have been some criticisms of the CIO here and there. Griffith points out, quite correctly, that the CIO should have devoted more resources, both in terms of money and manpower, towards the organizing effort.[39] Other historians, notably Robert Korstad, suggest that the CIO mistakenly wasted its organizing efforts on white textile workers, rather than black industrial workers who would have been more receptive to the

[39] Griffith, *The Crisis of American Labor*, p. 26.

CIO and more likely to join one of its unions.[40] Finally, some observers have criticized the CIO for failing to make use of experienced Communist Party members whose organizing experience was unparalleled, and who had proven their worth in earlier organizing efforts in the North.[41] Unfortunately, none of these arguments are particularly convincing, nor do any of them tell the whole story.

It is true that the Operation Dixie was under-funded, especially considering the geographical size of its organizing arena, and the sheer numbers of workers that it was set to recruit. However, it is hard to think of any union organizing campaign, ever, which has been adequately funded. Union organizers work under perpetually unfavorable conditions, and yet have, at other times, and in other places, somehow managed to muddle through. A lack of resources can, at best, only partially explain the failure of Operation Dixie's organizers.[42] The other two arguments are even less compelling. While it is true that black workers were, on the whole, much more likely to join CIO unions, focusing on organizing in black dominated industries would have made little impact on the overall economy of the south. The largest industry in the southern economy, far and away, was the textile industry, which was almost completely white. Historically, black workers had been excluded from all but the most marginal employment in the textile industry, a situation that would not begin to change

[40] Korstad, *Civil Rights Unionism*, p. 299.
[41] Honey, *Southern Labor and Black Civil Rights*, p. 229.
[42] Indeed, it is worth noting that Operation Dixie failed to gain traction even in situations where lack of organizers was not a problem. For example, in the Kannapolis, N.C. drive, ten organizers (half the total for the entire state) were committed to the organizing effort, and still very little progress was made, and an election was never held. If Operation Dixie failed to interest workers in union membership even in those instances where ample organizing resources were available, then it seems clear that some other factor, besides limited resources, was involved. On the whole, it seems likely that the problem lay less with the number of organizers, than with the approach taken by the organizers. For an in-depth analysis of the Kannapolis drive, see Griffith, *The Crisis of American Labor*, pp. 46-61.

until the 1960s. Moreover, the likely result of focusing on organizing black workers would have been to alienate white textile workers, workers who were often racist themselves, and who benefited economically and socially from the system of white supremacy.[43] While organizing black workers might have been a morally correct thing to do, it would not have led to the fundamental economic change in the southern economy that the CIO was seeking. Finally, given the ideological climate of the South in the late 1940s and early 1950s, it is difficult to see how employing communist cadre organizers would have been anything other than a complete disaster. Even downplaying their past connections with members of the CP, the CIO was subject to relentless red-baiting during the course of Operation Dixie, a situation that would have been even worse had the CIO fielded actual communists as organizers.[44]

What all of these explanations miss, I will argue, is the central fact that the CIO failed to offer southern workers a compelling reason to join a union during the course of Operation Dixie. This is not to say that compelling reasons did not exist, as they certainly did. Southern workers, compared to their counterparts in the North, were paid less, worked more, and had much less of a say in their working conditions. Even more fundamentally, southern workers lacked societal respect and social and economic power. From being derided as "lint heads" to standing powerless before the company's decision to decrease its workforce, increase production, or lower wages, southern workers were very clearly the junior partner in the power relationship that characterized southern industry. The irony, of course, is that this

[43] For an exploration of the ways in which white textile workers benefited from, and embraced, the system of white supremacy, see Michelle Brattain, *The Politics of Whiteness*, Princeton University Press, 2001, particularly pp. 3-10.

[44] For an overview of the uses to which anti-communism was put in attacking the CIO, see Minchin, *What Do We Need a Union For?*, pp. 44-47.

is precisely the situation to which the CIO had addressed itself to in the North, with its promotion of "industrial democracy," aiming to give workers a voice in their workplaces. In the North, through the achievement of contracts that guaranteed seniority, a strong system of shop stewards, and a grievance procedure, this power imbalance had been, if not wholly rectified, at the least noticeably reduced.

What is notable about the Southern Organizing Drive, and what, ultimately, ensured its failure, was the omission of this vision for economic democracy from the recruiting pitch of the CIO. To a remarkable degree the organizers of Operation Dixie limited their appeal to the traditional "bread and butter" issues of unionism: wages, hours and conditions. The problem with this approach was two-fold. In the first place, basic economic issues were not a burning concern among Southern workers in the years just after World War II. Wages, although lower than the going rate in the north, were increasing, and were good by the standards of the Southern economy. As Timothy Minchin has pointed out, southern workers were doing much better economically, both in terms of wages and in terms of access to consumer goods, than ever before.[45] Secondly, by limiting its appeal to the economic plane, the CIO made it fairly easy for employers to rebut its argument that workers had to join a union if they wanted their finances to improve. Employers in the post-war era demonstrated a willingness to raise wages in order to avoid unionization of their workforces. In effect, if workers could get a pay raise without joining a union, they perceived little need to stick their necks out by signing a union card. Employers utilized a sort of carrot and stick approach to

[45] Minchin, *What Do We Need a Union For?*, pp. 48-68.

thwarting unionization. One the one hand, they offered to raise wages on their own, and on the other, they threatened dire consequences if their workers insisted on joining a union, including the prospect of shutting down the plant completely.[46] Moreover, southern workers were well aware of the recent past, when union organizing campaigns and strikes, notably the 1934 General Textile Strike, had resulted in violence and bloodshed, often the result of employer's use of armed guards and militia.[47] In effect, by limiting their appeal to simply economic issues, the CIO was asking southern workers to risk their jobs, perhaps even their lives, for a pay raise that they could usually get without even joining the union. Simply put, it is possible to convince a person to risk his or her life and well-being for a grand ideal, a vision of a better, more just society, but it is not possible to convince a person to risk it all for a fifteen cent per hour pay raise. By downplaying the vision of fundamental social change that had characterized the vibrant early CIO in its northern phase, Operation Dixie was asking southern workers to put it all on the line for very little in terms of tangible, perceptible, benefit.

What this strategy reveals is a fundamental incompatibility between the goals of the CIO in Operation Dixie and its methodology. The goals of the CIO, to unionize the South in order to protect its northern unions, shift the political makeup of Congress to the left, and secure the gains made by the union during World War Two and the New Deal, required nothing less than massive social change, change that would remake the whole character of the South. This vision represented a degree of social change that simply could not be

[46] Ibid., p. 51.
[47] For a general overview of the 1934 strike, including a discussion of the role of violence and official repression, see Hall, et al, *Like A Family*, pp. 328-354.

achieved through a run-of-the-mill organizing campaign. Just as the later Civil Rights Movement required a level of organizing and commitment that reached well beyond merely organizing new local branches of the NAACP, so would the restructuring of southern society and the southern economy require more than simply organizing local unions.

As Lawrence Goodwyn has pointed out in his landmark history of the Populist Movement, *The Populist Moment*, change does not occur simply because it is needed, or because "times are hard." Indeed, throughout human history, times have often been hard, and yet meaningful social change is a relatively rare phenomenon.[48] Rather, Goodwyn asserts, social change comes about as a result of the hard work of social movements, movements that, in response to a perceived need for change among its members, proceed to organize, educate, and agitate for change. Social movements are, fundamentally, movements that oppose the existing status quo, what Goodwyn terms the "received culture," a culture that we are all a part of, and whose rules we have all internalized and been socialized to accept. The received culture is made up of cultural assumptions about power, who possesses it, and what uses it may legitimately be put to. Out of these assumptions grow hierarchies of social power and position, what Goodwyn terms "patterns of deference." Those segments of society that benefit from this hierarchical system of power and deference, naturally are keen to preserve their traditional status, and thus tend to oppose moves towards change. The role of a social movement then, in Goodwyn's theory, is first, to educate its members as to the realities of power relations within the received culture, and secondly, through the creation of

[48] Goodwyn, Lawrence, *The Populist Moment*, Oxford University Press, 1978, p. x.

self-respect and political self-confidence, to struggle against these inherited patterns of deference so that social change can be achieved.[49]

In light of this analysis of the means and ends of social change, and social reform movements, it rapidly becomes clear how the CIO went astray in its attempts to organize the South in Operation Dixie. The CIO, which had fulfilled the function of a social movement during its early organizational phase in the North, had abandoned many of these key elements by the time it came south in 1946. There are several reasons why this was so. Robert Zieger has argued that the leaders of the CIO were, primarily, not radicals at all, but more or less practical union leaders who were concerned with the well-being of their membership above and beyond any vision of achieving radical changes in society.[50] On the whole, and particularly as it relates to Philip Murray, who headed the Congress of Industrial Organizations throughout the period of Operation Dixie, this is probably a correct assessment.[51] And yet, the CIO *had* accomplished a series of radical changes in the power relations that characterized northern industry by the end of the Second World War. When one compares the situation in, for example, automobile manufacturing prior to 1937 with that prevailing a decade later, it is hard not to conclude that the CIO had fundamentally transformed labor-management relations. More importantly, this change was accomplished

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[49] This theoretical framework is laid out more thoroughly in Goodwyn, *The Populist Moment*, pp. vii-xxiv.
[50] Zieger, *The CIO*, pp. 240-41.
[51] Murray's conservative approach to the issue of power relations within industry can be seen in a telling incident cited by Robert Zieger. The CIO issued a pamphlet titled *Should Labor Have a Direct Share In Management?* in 1946 in which Philip Murray expressed the position of the CIO on the issue of workplace control. According to Zieger, Murray "called only for a 'new kind of [industrial] manager,' one who would encourage employees to take an active interest in the firm's affairs, and who would listen to worker's ideas. 'Organized labor,' Murray affirmed, 'does not question management's right to run business." Zieger, *The CIO*, p. 323.

by challenging, head-on, the received work culture prevailing at employers such as General Motors, demonstrating that, at least early on, the CIO had been willing to confront and contest the cultural assumptions that supported northern industry.

At some point, during the Second World War, or perhaps a few years earlier, a perceptible shift began to occur in the attitude of the CIO towards society. Nelson Lichtenstein, among others, has argued that the CIO, beginning with its involvement with New Deal agencies, particularly the National Labor Relations Board, and increasing through its cooperation with the Roosevelt administration during the course of the war, reached a sort of accommodation with government power through which it became a partner with the government in insuring social and economic stability.[52] On the one hand, this served to provide protection to the CIO at a vulnerable stage of its existence against the attacks of its enemies in the business community, while on the other hand it served the interest that the government had in stability, by constraining the CIO in its freedom to advance its interests through the use of socially, and economically disruptive strikes. Whether one views this bargain as wise and practical, or as a Faustian sell-out, the result was to give the CIO much more of a practical stake in preserving the status quo than it otherwise would have had. Some additional consideration should be given to the quite remarkably changed ideological climate of the mid 1940s as opposed to that which had prevailed during the Great Depression. With the passing of Roosevelt from the political scene, the end of the war, and with the political and cultural shift to the right which marked the years immediately

[52] This process of accommodation with the New Deal state is extensively documented in Lichtenstein, Nelson, *Labor's War At Home*, Cambridge University Press, 1983.

following the end of the war, radicalism of any stripe was decidedly less acceptable to the society at large. In this climate, the CIO became increasingly concerned with projecting an image of itself as a mature and "responsible" labor union, a body that was dedicated to preserving and defending the American way of life. To all of the preceding factors must be added the fact that Philip Murray was himself a much more practical, and a much less flamboyant, leader than his predecessor, John L. Lewis, a man who may be charitably characterized as a bit of a maverick.

Finally, and this is a factor whose importance to the outcome of Operation Dixie was to be pivotal, was the perception among the planners of Operation Dixie, particularly its director, Van Bittner, that it was important to modify the image of the CIO in such as way as to not offend the sensibilities of southerners. As Douglas Flamming has argued, this attitude "suggests one of the major problems with the drive – namely, that the CIO's national leaders viewed the South as a different country.[53]" In some ways, no doubt, the South did represent an organizing challenge different, and distinct, from that of the North. For example, southern industry, particularly in textiles, was structured quite differently from that in the North, and issues of race certainly played a more prominent role in southern society, and in southern industry than was the case in the North. However, the CIO's perceptions of the differentness of the South, and southern culture went much further than this. In general, southern workers were viewed with a fair amount of suspicion and often out-right condescension. Several years prior to Operation Dixie, Solomon Barkin, the research director for the TWUA had

[53] Flamming, Douglas, *Creating the Modern South*, University of North Carolina Press, 1992, p. 249.

written "the Southern Textile Worker is a small-town, suspicious individual, who is extremely provincial, petty, gossip-mongering, who is completely isolated and knows only his mill.[54]" This perception of southern workers, coupled with the generally conservative social climate of the post-war period, seemed to suggest that the CIO would not get very far with the militant approach that it had used in the North. It was with this consideration in mind that Bittner made the decision to avoid controversy by severing any association between Operation Dixie and the CIO's Political Action Committee (PAC,) excluding known or suspected communists from the ranks of Operation Dixie organizers, downplaying the CIO's position on race and civil rights, and, to the extent possible, using native white southerners as organizers.

Unfortunately, by seeking to strip Operation Dixie of anything that could even remotely be considered controversial or inflammatory, the CIO effectively removed that element of challenging the received culture that made the CIO a social movement with a powerful vision of social change. It is perhaps easier to perceive this process in retrospect than it was at the time. No doubt the planners of Operation Dixie perceived their efforts as a practical approach to dealing with a regional culture that was much less friendly towards the idea of industrial unionism than was the North. And, indeed, some of these decisions, such as the decision to proceed cautiously on the issue of race, were probably wise ones. Unfortunately, the net result was a campaign that was so intent on appearing non-threatening that it was unable to present a truly coherent view of the problems of southern industrial life,

[54] Quoted in Griffith, *The Crisis of American Labor*, p. 165.

or an alternative social vision that was capable of engaging and attracting potential new members.

Prior to 1946, southern workers had demonstrated, in the strikes of 1929 and 1934, that they were receptive to visions of a re-ordered set of economic and social relations that would provide them with dignity, a voice in their workplace, and more power in their relationship with their employer. The great resentment against the stretch-out system that prompted the General Strike in 1934 was a reflection of more than simply economic concerns, it reflected a deep dissatisfaction with the prevailing industrial culture of the textile south, in which workers stood helpless before the demands of management for increased production at whatever the cost.

The prevailing view in southern labor history for many years was that there was something in the nature of the southern worker, some personality trait, some defect of culture, that explained why the south didn't have labor unions. Thanks to a generation of historians who have studied labor in the South over the past twenty or so years, we now know that southerners, on the whole, were no less class conscious, or incapable of understanding the logic of union than any other set of workers, and indeed, that they possessed a great deal of agency in shaping both their own lives, and the development of southern industry.[55] In this era of post-exceptionalism[56], it is no longer sufficient to place all

[55] Although this is a theme which runs throughout what has been called the "new" Southern labor history, two especially significant works in this vein are Hall, et al., *Like A Family*, and Flamming, *Creating the Modern South*.

[56] For a detailed, and helpfully concise overview of recent trends in Southern labor history, see Michelle Brattain, "The Pursuits of Post-Exceptionalism" in Glenn Eskew, ed., *Labor in the Modern South*, University of Georgia Press, 2001, pp. 1-46.

of the responsibility for the failure of unions to take hold in the south upon southern workers. Instead, we must cast our net a little further afield in order to understand this central phenomenon of southern economic history. While there is no one, easy answer, it seems clear that at least one factor is the failure of the labor movement itself to present its case compellingly. It is not the intent of this work to present a grand master explanation that covers the entirety of southern labor history, but rather to argue that, for this one, important, episode in the economic history of the south, one of the major reasons for the failure of unionism was the union itself. Through pitching its case almost entirely upon the plane of bread-and-butter economic issues, while neglecting the larger duties of a social movement to identify cultural assumptions harmful to its constituents, to educate its members, both present and prospective, upon the issues, and to agitate for change through confronting traditional patterns of deference and oppression, the CIO doomed its efforts to attract members and placed itself in a position of perceived irrelevancy.

The sad spectacle that too often emerges from this situation is of an insurgent social movement that, by seeking to appear as something it is not, finds itself in the awkward position of seeking to mobilize the very pillars of the existing social hierarchy in order to achieve social change antagonistic to its own interests. Such, for instance, is the basic reality of the CIO attempting to convince employers that they should cooperate with the union in order to achieve a stable workforce, regimented by a “responsible” and “mature” industrial union. Again, we have the incongruous picture of organizers in the factory town of Kannapolis, North Carolina, careful not to speak too harshly of Charles Cannon, the

paternalistic operator of Cannon Mills, in order not to offend his cowed workers. Perhaps the most glaring example of this tendency was the decision to exclude PAC work from Operation Dixie. To a very great extent, the existing political structure of the South, with its limited franchise and concentration of political power in the hands of a tiny economic and social elite, was highly implicated in the perpetuation of an oppressive economic regime, a regime that victimized the very workers that the CIO was attempting to organize. Moreover, given that one of the central purposes of Operation Dixie was to lay the basis for a political transformation of the South, the decision to exclude political work from the campaign is more than a little puzzling. To make the decision to ignore this factor, in order to avoid controversy, seems to ignore the very basis of the problem.[57]

One of the most glaring failures of this type, and the subject of the present work, is the project of the Community Relations Department under John Gates Ramsay. The mission of the CRD seemed straightforward enough, in brief it was designed to deal with criticism of Operation Dixie on the part of local religious leaders who often sought to sway their congregations against joining with the CIO. The manner in which Ramsay sought to achieve

[57] Of course, it could be argued that focusing on PAC would have hampered the union's organizing ability, in that PAC was a highly controversial program that was viewed with a great deal of hostility and suspicion by opponents of organized labor who felt that the CIO was overstepping its legitimate authority by seeking to tell its members how to vote, and thus behaving in a non-democratic, perhaps even communistic manner. It is true that by playing down the role of PAC, the CIO probably avoided some criticism that it might have otherwise received, and the decision might even have been, on a purely pragmatic level, a prudent one. However, it is also true that one of the primary needs confronting a budding social movement is the need to give its new recruits something to do, an activity to get involved in, and a sense of purpose. PAC work, I would argue, would have fit the bill perfectly, and could have provided a sense of purpose and a measure of cohesion that was otherwise lacking. The question is really one of whether the positive benefits of PAC work, in terms of promoting activism and building a movement culture would have outweighed the negative results of increased criticism for the CIO's perceived authoritarianism. My own view is that PAC would have helped more than it would have hurt, but there is certainly room for legitimate disagreement on this issue, and it is probably impossible to formulate a definitive answer.

this mission, however, reflects many of the problems already identified in the approach of Operation Dixie as a whole. The following chapters will explore in some detail how Ramsay proceeded. The general conclusion that this study finds is that, in addition to a variety of tactical and strategic blunders (which illustrated Ramsay's lack of understanding of the very nature of southern religion, and the structure of the major denominations represented in the South) Ramsay's approach was fundamentally anti-thetical to the methods and aims of a social movement. What Ramsay attempted to do, with the best intentions imaginable, no doubt, was to mobilize a segment of the existing power structure dominating southern society against its very own vested interests. It is essential in this regard to recognize that the religious leadership of the South did not represent the figure of a disinterested bystander in the contest between the CIO and southern manufacturers. Rather, southern religious leaders were, themselves, members of a civic elite, power brokers in their own right, who had played a role in the boosterism which made possible the growth of southern industry, had close ties, both social, and economic, with southern industrialists, and who had, in short, a powerful stake in maintaining the status quo.[58] In attempting to interest religious civic leaders in the campaign of the CIO, a campaign, which, if effective, would have undermined the inherited power and privilege of these very same civic leaders, Ramsay was, at best, illustrating a fundamental misperception of the social realities of the South, and, at worst, undermining the very cause which he was attempting to further. That Ramsay was ultimately unsuccessful in wooing this section of the civic elite to endorse the cause of industrial unionism is not

[58] The classic account of this relationship can be found in Liston Pope, *Millhands and Preachers*, Yale University Press, 1942. For a thorough overview of the ways in which ministers assisted in, and actively promoted, the rise of the cotton mill economy, see Chapter Two, especially pages 21-27.

particularly surprising. What is tragic, however, is the waste of effort that this project represented, particularly when it is apprehended that Ramsay's considerable talents could have been better utilized in seeking to marshal that portion of southern religious sentiment that could very well have been beneficial to the cause of the CIO.

Although the nature of Southern religion will be explored in greater depth and detail in the following chapters, it is worth noting at this point that there are multiple streams which make up Christianity in the South, as indeed there are in all regions. One of these facets of Southern religion, and one that could have proven extraordinarily helpful to the CIO in combating the opposition it received from more institutional churches, is what may be termed "prophetic Christianity." It is this prophetic strain of southern religion, with its heavy emphasis on social justice, equality, and the rights of the poor and oppressed, which characterized the non-violent Civil Rights struggle of the 1950s and 1960s, and which, indeed, has a deep history in the South as a whole. While this variety of Christianity is most famous, perhaps, in connection with the struggle for Black equality and civil rights, it is a tradition that is, by no means, limited to the African-American churches of the south. On the contrary, this tradition is one common to both races, and one which has served as a powerful motivating factor in a variety of Southern economic and political struggles.[59] With its disregard for social hierarchy and insistence that "God is no respecter of persons[60]," this is a style of religious thought that seems tailor-made for the counter-hegemonic vision that must

[59] See for example, Fannin, Mark, *Labor's Promised Land*, University of Tennessee Press, 2003, for an exploration of the role of religion in the Southern Tenant Farmers Union and in the Brotherhood of Timber Workers.
[60] Acts 10:34-35

be present to provide inspiration and motivation for a movement dedicated to social change. That this source of potential strength was not tapped by the CIO, which instead attempted to mobilize existing patterns of deference and authority by appealing to established ministers and churches represents perhaps one of the greatest ironies of the Community Relations project of the CIO.[61]

Although it is to be hoped for that the argument outlined here, in its general form, will become increasingly clear as it is applied concretely to specific instances in the following chapters, it will, perhaps, be useful to address a few possible misconceptions regarding my argument here, at the outset. Most importantly, it must be stressed that this is not a single-factor analysis of the failure of Operation Dixie. I am not attempting to prove that the tactical approach adopted by the Community Relations Department played a decisive role in the failure of CIO organizers to gain recruits during their organizing campaigns. Rather, in using the CRD as a case study, I am attempting to illustrate a deeper, underlying, pattern, one that I argue characterized the conduct of Operation Dixie as a whole. While similar arguments could well be made focusing on other aspects of the campaign, the role of PAC activity, for example, the history of the CRD represents an aspect of Operation Dixie that has been little studied, and which, I believe, forms an interesting chapter in the story of Operation Dixie as a whole.

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[61] Some ministers, notably those associated with the Holiness churches, including Don West and Charlie Pratt of the Church of God of the Union Assembly, did become involved with the CIO and attempted to use their leadership positions to champion industrial unionism. However, these ministers were not courted in any systematic way by the CRD, and, in the case of the two mentioned above, were sometimes viewed with a fair amount of suspicion. For an account of the activities of the Church of God of the Union Assembly, and the role of anti-communism in the defeat of organizing efforts in the South, see Flamming, *Creating the Modern South*, pp. 289-306.

Further, while I strongly believe that the general attitude towards the South that this policy reflects contributed to the ultimate failure of Operation Dixie, I readily concede that it was not the sole factor in the campaign's failure. It is, indeed, quite likely that even had the CIO adopted the attitude of an insurgent social movement, challenging the hierarchy and power structure of the South, that the campaign would have failed, perhaps more quickly, and more miserably that it, in fact, did. Perhaps, when one considers the sheer amount of repression and stubborn opposition that the CIO was met with, by employers, civic groups, terrorist organizations such as the Ku Klux Klan, and by state and local government, the campaign might have failed even more spectacularly.

What I *am* arguing, however, is that by failing to elaborate a clear and compelling counter-hegemonic vision of social change for the South, the CIO precluded itself from ever having a realistic chance at achieving its goals. By limiting its appeal to basic economic issues such as wage increases, while failing to explain the implications of unions for the fundamental economic and social structure of the South, the CIO, in effect, gave southern workers, cognizant of the repression and hostility that they would face just by joining a union, very little reason to make the momentous decision to cast their lot with organized labor. People simply do not join social movements, and stay with them, for small adjustments in the status quo, particularly not when these adjustments may be gained in a more painless fashion. By focusing so narrowly on the issue of wages, and downplaying the socially transformative implications of unionization, the CIO made it possible for employers to effectively counter their efforts by granting small wage increases to their employees, a

form of insurance against unionization which has, indeed, characterized much of industrial practice for many decades. Again, although the articulation of an expansive vision for social change may not have insured the success of Operation Dixie, the lack of one certainly hampered any possibility that the plan may have had for success. In much the same way, as we will see in the coming chapters, the CRD's attempt to achieve religious sanction for the CIO, while avoiding controversy and courting the guardians of the status quo likewise stymied any possibility for achieving real change, and helped to stall the process of unionization in the industrial South.

Chapter Three: Stemming the Tide

During the course of Operation Dixie, the CIO encountered many obstacles to its organizing efforts. Some of these obstacles were expected ones, resistance on the part of employers who attempted to fire union sympathizers, unfriendly policemen and judges who made life difficult for organizers, and potential recruits who were dubious concerning the value of union membership. Other obstacles were somewhat less expected.

One day in August of 1946, during the early months of Operation Dixie, in the small town of Hogansville, Georgia, a local Baptist minister, the Rev. Marcus Drake of Antioch Baptist Church, approached the gates of the U.S. Rubber plant that the CIO was attempting to organize. The minister had brought some leaflets with him to the gates that day, which he began to pass around. These leaflets denounced the CIO in no uncertain terms as constituting "the mark of the Beast," invoking the demonic forces prophesied in the Book of Revelation to warn workers away from involvement with the CIO. This same minister later preached sermons against the CIO, and published a letter in the local newspaper attacking the union and its organizing drive. While this incident was, no doubt, shocking to organizers, it was not uncommon.[62]

Several years later, in 1949, on the eve of a representation election at a textile plant in Marietta, Georgia, the Reverend J. A. Landers of Clarksdale Baptist Church took to the airwaves of WFOM to denounce the CIO, and to urge its defeat in the upcoming NLRB

[62] "The Role of the Churches In Relation to the CIO Southern Organizing Drive," Folder 16, Box 1556, John Gates Ramsay Papers, Southern Labor Archives, Special Collections Department, Georgia State University, Atlanta. (Hereinafter referred to as "John Ramsay Papers.")

election. Rev. Landers blasted the CIO as an outside "intruder," as "communist," as "un-American and un-democratic," and quoting various scriptures to the effect that workers should be content with their wages, denounced the CIO by flatly stating that "it isn't Bible." Urging his listeners to accept his interpretation as correct, Rev. Landers stated that "If the Bible says it, I believe it, and that settles it and we all will profit by its guidance.[63]"

Opposition to the CIO cloaked in Biblical justification was not, however, limited to Georgia. Throughout the South, from Tennessee to Texas, CIO organizers encountered preachers who urged their followers to reject the CIO in the name of Christianity. In Lyman, South Carolina, during a drive at the Pacific Mills in 1949, a Baptist minister told his congregation that "its either Christ or the CIO," adding that "you can either be a Christian or a CIO man, but you can't be both!" In Tennessee, the CIO state director, Paul Christopher was faced with an evangelist named J. Harold Smith, the man who reportedly created the oft-quoted slogan that CIO stood for "Christ Is Out – Communism Is On.[64]"

These incidents were bad enough from a public relations perspective, but it appeared that such attacks were also successful in undermining organization efforts. Dave Burgess, a CIO organizer in South Carolina, felt that "the CIO has lost two NLRB representation elections at the Aragon-Baldwin Mill in Rock Hill, S.C., largely because of the active opposition of the Northside Baptist Church leaders and minister.[65]" Other organizers

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[63] Letter from David Burgess to Robert Cahoon March 26, 1950, Folder 155, Box 1568, John Gates Ramsay Papers.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Ibid.

reported similar experiences, blaming religious opposition for their inability to conduct an effective organizing drive.

Religious opposition to the CIO came in a variety of forms and formats. As already mentioned, sometimes this opposition took the form of individual preachers using their pulpits to denounce the CIO and urge their congregations against unionism. Sometimes this opposition took a more slick and polished form. Several newspapers, often mailed to workers at plants that had been targeted by the CIO for organization, attacked the CIO in primarily religious terms. The most notorious of these were the *Militant Truth*, and the *Gospel Trumpet*. The *Gospel Trumpet* was a newspaper published by "Parson Jack" Johnson, a Baptist minister in Columbus, Georgia, whose efforts were subsidized by textile manufacturers, including the Bibb Manufacturing Company, whose plant in Porterdale, Georgia was the targeted by the CIO for organization.[66] The *Militant Truth*, published by Sherman Patterson, had a wider circulation than the *Gospel Trumpet*, and was the longer lasting of the two, continuing to be published up through the 1970s. Both newspapers attacked the CIO as a communist organization devoted to the destruction of the American way of life, and anti-thetical to the teachings of Christianity. Both publications also had a tendency to find their way into worker's mailboxes in the days leading up to a representation election.

It is difficult to quantify exactly to what degree these attacks hurt the CIO in its organizing efforts. When workers voted against the CIO during a representation election

[66] The Role of the Churches In Relation to the CIO Southern Organizing Drive," Folder 16, Box 1556, John Gates Ramsay Papers.

they did not give their reasons for doing so. Some workers, no doubt, were not influenced at all by religious criticism of the CIO. Some workers supported the union despite such attacks, and many probably voted against it for a variety of other reasons. It is likely that some workers, wavering in their decision about whether or not to vote for the union, were influenced by religious arguments, or used them to justify a decision that they had already made for other reasons. Despite the difficulties involved, years after the fact, in untangling the motives of Southern workers, there is no doubt that organizers at the time felt that these attacks were having a negative effect on their efforts.

These religious attacks, although not entirely unexpected, must have, due to their personal nature and sheer virulence, come as a bit of a shock to many of the leaders of the CIO who were, by and large, religious men themselves. Moreover, the CIO had enjoyed generally good relations with religious leaders in the North, particularly with the Roman Catholic Church, although also with representatives of the mainline Protestant denominations. Indeed, it was common practice for CIO conventions during this period to open with a benediction from a priest or minister, and leaders of the CIO, particularly the organization's president, Philip Murray, often spoke of the CIO as acting out, in worldly affairs, the principles of Christianity. Given these factors, the assault on the CIO by religious leaders in the South must have come as somewhat of a surprise, and have been perceived as not simply hurtful, but as deeply unfair. It is, after all, one thing to go into an organizing situation knowing that one is likely to be attacked by clergy who see no need for unionism in their community, and quite another to be denounced as an agent of the Antichrist.

But there was a more practical consideration as well. If, as organizers were reporting, these attacks were hindering organization efforts, indeed, causing the union to lose representation elections, then something had to be done to address the problem. As noted, the CIO had generally positive relations with religious leaders in the North, but problems had arisen from time to time. One of these occasions had been the campaign by the United Steelworkers of America (USWA) to organize the Bethlehem Steel company in Buffalo, New York. Initially, local ministers, at the instigation of the company, had come out in opposition to the union. Through the efforts of USWA official, and Presbyterian layman, John Ramsay, the CIO had successfully convinced these ministers to change their minds and support the union. The election at Bethlehem was won by the CIO.[67] Ramsay continued to serve as the USWA's liaison to the religious community in the capacity of Community Relations Director for the union. Ramsay thus seemed the obvious person to send South, in the wake of religious attacks on Operation Dixie, to turn the tide of opposition to the CIO on the part of southern ministers. Ramsay would not be working alone, however. Joining him would be Lucy Randolph Mason, who had served as the CIO's roving community relations representative in the South since the late 1930s. Mason, a native of Virginia, was herself the daughter of an Episcopal minister, and the cousin of a bishop. Also on the staff of the newly formed Community Relations Department was Ruth Gettinger, who was likewise, active in religious affairs in the Methodist church.

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[67] For an account of this episode, see: Fones-Wolf, Elizabeth and Fones-Wolf, Ken, "Conversion At Bethlehem: Religion and Union Building in Steel, 1930-42, *Labor History*, Vol. 39, No. 4, 1998, pp. 381-395.

The initial task facing the CRD was, largely, a reactive one. Although a proactive response, in the form of the establishment of Religion and Labor Fellowship groups would come later, and will be discussed in Chapter Three, the initial task was to try to undo the damage that had already been done by ministers who claimed that the CIO was an irreligious organization that good Christians could not join. How this goal could be accomplished, however, was an interesting question. Ramsay and his staff could, and did, travel to cities where the CIO was conducting an organizing drive in order to speak before the local ministerial alliance in order to try to win support for the CIO, but with the small staff available to the CRD, this tactic was, perforce, of only limited viability. Rushing about the entire region attempting to counteract attacks on the CIO could quickly consume the entire energies of a small office, and assume the character of attempting to stamp out brushfires while the whole forest burned.

The approach taken by the CRD was, ultimately, a more pre-emptive one. In order to attempt to head-off possible religious objections to the CIO before they could be formulated, and at the same time to address current critics, the CRD embarked on a publicity campaign. The office produced a series of pamphlets, for distribution to ministers, that compiled various religious arguments in favor of unions, as well as statements made by denominational bodies in favor of worker's rights to join labor unions. These pamphlets were then made available for distribution to ministers across the South, and more particularly those in communities where the CIO hoped to conduct organizing campaigns.

Considerable amounts of energy went into producing these pamphlets. The question of worker's rights to organize was a burning issue during the years immediately preceding Operation Dixie, and most of the religious denominations had made some statement on the issue during the 1930s and 1940s. These official statements generally recognized the right of worker's to join unions, and were generally supportive of unions in the abstract.[68] The Federal Council of Churches, an interfaith body comprising representatives from the major mainline Protestant denominations, and a body that had a general reputation for theological and social liberalism, had, moreover, made numerous statements in support of organized labor over the years. The task then, for the CRD, was to collect this information and to disseminate it throughout the South. Additionally, some time was devoted to soliciting statements in support of the CIO from prominent religious figures as well as researching the policies of various religious bodies concerning labor unions. This work required constant updating and revision as new statements were issued, and new endorsements were received, and indeed, new versions of these pamphlets were being produced right up through the end of Operation Dixie in 1953.

These efforts produced a number of pamphlets, the most notable of which, were "Religion Speaks to Labor" and "Labor and Religion." The CIO had already received statements of support from Reformed Judaism, the Roman Catholic Church, and various Mainline Protestant denominations. "Religion Speaks to Labor" added to these pronouncements statements from additional groups, including the Southern Baptist

[68] It should be noted that this was, especially after the passage of the Wagner Act, hardly a courageous or extreme stance for denominations to take, considering that recognizing the rights of workers to organize merely reflected the realities of federal labor law.

Convention, the Methodist Church, and the Presbyterian Church, USA. This was a sound decision, as the proportion of the Southern industrial workforce that was either Jewish or Roman Catholic was minimal[69], and it is unlikely that statements from these two religious traditions would have carried much weight with the average Southern worker.[70]

Indeed, the religious situation in the South was quite a bit different than that prevailing in the North. While Northern society included sizable, and important, Jewish and Roman Catholic populations, the South was notable for its overwhelming Protestantism. This Protestantism was not, however, a monolithic unity. Underneath the broad banner of Protestantism teemed literally hundreds of denominations, splinter groups and sects. The two largest denominations in the South were the Southern Baptist and the Methodist churches, but in addition to these large denominations were a bewildering array of Free Will, Primitive, and Missionary Baptists, Holiness Churches, Pentecostal Churches, Pentecostal Holiness Churches, Churches of God, Churches of Christ, and other assorted sects and independent congregations.[71]

Independence was, in fact, a hallmark of southern religion generally. The churches of the South were, as a rule, much more autonomous and less hierarchically structured than was common in the North. As noted, the Roman Catholic church, with its rigid hierarchy of

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[69] The two notable exceptions to this general statement concerning the number of Catholics in the South are the states of Louisiana and Kentucky, although it should be noted that these two states were not particularly significant in Operation Dixie.

[70] Indeed, considering the rampant anti-Semitism and ant-catholic feeling that historically characterized the South, endorsements from these groups would probably do more harm than good. This is a topic that will come up again in the discussion in Chapter Three of Religion and Labor Fellowship groups.

[71] Odum, Howard, *Southern Regions of the United States*, University of North Carolina Press, 1936, pp. 141-149.

bishops and archbishops, papal bulls, and administration was relatively small in the South. The Episcopal Church, outside of Virginia was a small, and relatively, elite presence. The Presbyterian Church, although more populous than the Catholic or Episcopal denominations, was a distant third behind the Baptists and Methodists. Among the larger denominations in the South, the prevailing spirit was one of congregational independence and anti-hierarchical autonomy.[72] Baptist churches, for example, although they might belong to the Southern Baptist Convention, were completely independent bodies, and are in no way bound by the proclamations, or decisions of the Convention as a whole.[73] Indeed, the independence of the local congregation, extending even to the hiring and firing of ministers, was one of the traditional hallmarks of the Baptist religion. Other, smaller, denominations, such as the Churches of God, were even more fiercely independent and, of course, independent churches and itinerant evangelists were answerable to no one.

What emerges then, is a picture of Southern religion as consisting of a multitude of more-or-less independent congregations, headed by fiercely independent ministers who were unlikely to be persuaded by arguments from authority. Unfortunately it was just such an argument from authority which the CRD sought to make. The point, hammered home again and again by Ramsay and company, through pamphlets such as "Religion Speaks to Labor," radio addresses, and articles in religious publications was this: that the national councils of

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[72] Hill, Samuel S., "A Survey of Southern Religious History," p. 387, in *Religion in the Southern States*, Samuel S. Hill, ed., Mercer University Press, 1983.

[73] It should be noted that this has changed over the past several decades, and churches that are members of the Southern Baptist Convention are now a great deal less independent than they were at the time of Operation Dixie. Nonetheless, congregational independence has traditionally been a hallmark of the Baptist denomination, and was still the prevailing norm during the 1940s and 1950s.

the various religious denominations did not oppose labor unions, and thus local congregations should, at the very least, stand neutral when the CIO came to town for an organizing drive.

What this approach overlooked, unfortunately, were the very realities of Southern religion. To begin with, there is the factor of church's very real material interest in the non-unionization of the South. Whether the pastor in question was the minister of the church where the mill management attended[74], or ministered to the mill-village church that was subsidized by the owners of the mill, small town Southern pastors were not exactly disinterested parties. Moreover, due to the congregational independence of Southern churches, the fact that the national convention had recognized the right of workers to join labor unions would likely carry very little weight. The larger problem, however, was the very sources that the CIO was appealing to. The Federal Council of Churches (later renamed the National Council of Churches) had a particularly low reputation among southern religious leaders to begin with. Catholic and Jewish endorsements of organized labor were also unlikely to be of much help in the South. While endorsements from major denominations such as the Southern Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian were somewhat more helpful, these endorsements were often rather vague, generally stating that the denomination in question recognized the right of workers to organize and engage in collective bargaining.[75]

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[74] It is perhaps helpful to note that in many denominations, particularly the Southern Baptist, the minister is chosen by the congregation, and may be dismissed at their pleasure. This, of course, stands in marked contrast to the norm in more hierarchical churches, such as the Roman Catholic, or Episcopal denominations, where the priest is answerable to a bishop, rather than the parish. This fact no doubt caused many ministers to feel somewhat constrained when it came to taking positions that might not be popular with their congregations.
[75] "Religion Speaks to Labor," Folder titled "Religion," Box 53, John Ramsay Papers.

While such an endorsement could be read as approving the CIO, it could just as easily be read as endorsing unionism generally, but not the CIO specifically. Ministers could, and did, insist that local unions were allowable, but national unions were not permissible. Alternatively, a minister could admit that some unions were acceptable, but that the CIO was unacceptable because of its associations with communism, violence, strikes, racial policies, etc. Finally, these statements were made by national or regional bodies, and did not always reflect the sentiments and beliefs of the local community. While a national convention might recognize the right of workers to join unions, it is clear that many local representatives of those bodies did not, and further, that they felt no compulsion to accept the national convention's declarations as binding. Given the noted independence of Southern clergy, this is not particularly surprising. Given that very real material, economic, interests were often at stake, it approaches naivete to expect that ministers, hostile to organized labor, would suddenly accept the CIO with open arms simply because the national convention of their denomination had passed a resolution acknowledging the legal right of workers to join a union.

Unfortunately, for the CIO, naivete seemed to be the dominant characteristic of the CRD during Operation Dixie. For all of the experience that Ramsay, Mason, and company had of the South, for all that they seemed to be well aware of the fact that ministers often had an economic interest in preventing unionization, they still proceeded as if they could convince religious leaders to change sides if only they could present them with enough information. The CRD's vision for how this plan would work is laid out in a pamphlet

written by Dave Burgess, a Congregationalist minister and CIO organizer in Rock Hill, S.C., who worked closely with the CRD office. In "Unions and Preachers," Burgess tells a fictional tale of an organizing drive in a small mill town. The characters in this morality play are the union organizer, Pat Jones, the millhand, Fred Styles, the young, liberal minister Joe Black, and the older, established minister Rev. Rogers. Reverend Rogers is the minister of the uptown church attended by the mill owner, and is, initially, opposed to the union organizing drive.[76]

Pat Jones is in the midst of an organizing campaign that is proceeding slowly, and meeting with opposition from the mill management. Fred, the millhand, seems to be interested in the union, but is concerned that joining a union might violate his religious beliefs. These concerns are worsened by a revivalist named Smith, who we later learn has been hired by the mill owner to preach against the union. In order to allay Fred's concerns, Pat Jones gives him a "little pamphlet," telling him that it is a "statement on how the denominations stand of labor questions." Although the pamphlet is not named in the story, it is probably safe to assume that it was a copy of the CIO's "Religion Speaks to Labor."[77]

After looking over the pamphlet, Fred is still confused and uncertain about what to think. On the one hand, the pamphlet that Jones gave him seems to imply that unions have the blessings of the Church. On the other hand, he has been told by Evangelist Smith that Christianity and labor unions are incompatible. Unable to decide what he thinks about the issue, Fred goes to see the preacher at the "millhand's church," the young Rev. Black. To

[76] "Unions and Preachers," Folder titled "Religion," Box 53, John Ramsay Papers.
[77] Ibid.

Fred's evident surprise, Rev. Black agrees with the union organizer and unreservedly defends the need for labor unions. Reverend Black points out that Jesus loved the poor, and was despised by the rich, and rebuts Fred's concerns about kindness and brotherhood among Christians by stating "sure, be Christian. Kindness, however, must go with justice and equality. It's not right for you to be getting 30 cents an hour and your family going hungry while the company is making fat profits."[78]

Evidently convinced by Rev. Black and the union pamphlet, Fred proceeds to join the union. Meanwhile, organizer Jones and Rev. Black get together to discuss the situation in town. Black complains that ministers are opposing the union, citing Rev. Rogers as an obstacle to his organizing efforts. Keen to be of help to the union, Rev. Black arranges a meeting between Rogers and the Jones, where the two experience a true meeting of the minds, and Rev. Rogers is converted to a champion of industrial unionism. Rogers proceeds to go to the mill to meet with his Sunday School superintendent, the mill owner, and convinces him to cease opposing the union and recognize the new local, which has, meanwhile, elected Fred as its first president. There is a happy ending in which labor and management are reconciled, Evangelist Smith is summarily fired by the mill owner, and "a new era in millville" begins.[79]

This is, evidently, what the CIO hoped would be the result of the CRD's outreach efforts. As a dream scenario, it's not bad. If, on the other hand, this is what the CRD really expected to occur, they were, undoubtedly, extremely disappointed. As it happened, this was

[78] Ibid.
[79] Ibid.

not the usual turn of events during Operation Dixie. There were a few "Reverend Blacks" to be sure; young, idealistic clergy fresh out of seminary who held liberal views concerning economics and labor unions. That there were very many post-conversion "Reverend Rogers" figures, on the other hand, is exceedingly unlikely.

During the course of Operation Dixie, there was no massive change of heart among the ministers of the South. For whatever reason, whether they were unconvinced by the theological arguments put forth by the CRD, or because they were bought and paid for by the industrialists of southern industry, ministers continued to oppose the CIO, and champions of labor did not emerge in any significant numbers from among the ministers of the South. The CIO retained some ministerial support, but this came chiefly from its established allies – Roman Catholic clergy, rabbis, and a few liberal ministers from among the mainline Protestant denominations. This latter group tended to be young, idealistic, and recently graduated from seminary. Moreover, the CIO failed to make any real inroads among the group which most vociferously opposed them, and whose support might make the most difference, namely the working-class preachers from non-mainline denominations, who tended to be clustered in ministries which catered to mill-workers.

Ironically, this group of ministers, whose congregations were most likely to contain a high percentage of workers eligible for membership in the CIO, was viewed with a fair amount of suspicion and distaste by union leaders. The CIO's pamphlet "Labor and Religion," for example warned of "thousands of misguided cultist ministers," who "work side by side with those they would influence, or preach from churches located in working

class neighborhoods." The same publication lamented the fact that "unfortunately, most socially enlightened, formally trained young ministers locate in middle-class communities, far from the centers of the greatest need." While denouncing "cultist ministers" as not representing "true religion," the pamphlet argued that, rather than seeking to work with the materials at hand and win over the misguided, that the answer lay in the future. "Religious seminaries should train their best men to serve industrial workers," the pamphlet declared, leaving the issue of what to do in the meantime somewhat vague.[80]

This dismissive, and strangely, for the CIO, elitist attitude towards working class religion, seemed to characterize the outreach activities of the CRD during Operation Dixie. The CIO had the support of religious liberals, the Catholic church, and some segments of Judaism. None of these groups were particularly well represented in the South. What the CIO needed was religious support from local leaders with influence in the southern communities in which they were organizing. This support could come, potentially, from basically two main sources – mainline Protestant ministers, whether they be Southern Baptists, Methodists, or Presbyterians, or from smaller, non-mainline sects, such as the Holiness churches, the Pentecostals, or the Assemblies of God. What appears to have happened is this: the CRD largely wrote off the smaller, more working class organizations as a hopeless cause, and chose to focus on larger denominations which had gone on record as supporting some version of worker's rights to join labor unions.[81]

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[80] "Labor and Religion," Folder titled "Religion," Box 53, John Ramsay Papers.

[81] This was a particularly unfortunate decision on the part of the CRD, considering that many of the workers that they were seeking to organize were members of these smaller, non-mainline, sects. Although membership data is difficult to find, Liston Pope's study of Gastonia, *Millhands and Preachers*, found that in the textile town of Gastonia, North Carolina, in 1939, sectarian churches, such as the Pentecostal Holiness and Church of God,

Whether this was a conscious decision, or simply the way that events worked out, is difficult to determine. The CRD certainly did not go out of its way to antagonize the smaller sects, but neither did it devote a great deal of effort to cultivating them. A revealing incident in this regard occurred in July of 1947, when Dave Burgess, a CIO organizer based in Rock Hill, S.C. who worked closely with Ramsay, received a letter from G.H. Montgomery of the Publishing House of the Pentecostal Holiness Church. Montgomery wrote to Burgess after seeing an article in *Textile Labor* concerning Burgess and his work for the CIO. Montgomery requested that Burgess answer a few questions concerning his religious views on such basic issues as the authority of the Bible, the resurrection, the second coming, the existence of heaven and hell, the existence of a personal God, and the existence of the devil. None of the questions related to labor issues, and were, presumably, intended to determine Burgess' orthodoxy, or lack thereof.[82] Montgomery included a pre-addressed, stamped envelope, and requested that Burgess reply at his convenience. Rather than accepting this as a valuable opportunity to enter into dialogue with a representative of the Pentecostal Holiness Church, a denomination that was popular among mill workers, Burgess chose to ignore the letter completely. In a letter to John Ramsay, Burgess explained that he based this decision on the fact that "when in Union Seminary [Union Theological Seminary in New York City] I made a thorough study of the Pentecostal Holiness Church, and I found that it was viciously

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accounted for 36 out of a total of 83 churches predominantly attended by mill workers, and found, moreover, that the sectarian churches were rapidly expanding in membership. See Pope, Liston, *Millhands and Preachers,* pp. 98-103, particularly tables XIX and XXV. What this suggests is that, in choosing to ignore the smaller non-mainline sects, the CRD was, effectively, ignoring a religious community that included a larger percentage of the workers that the CIO was hoping to organize.

[82] G.H. Montgomery to Dave Burgess, July 22, 1947. Folder 151, Box 1568, John Ramsay Papers.

anti-labor in doctrine." Burgess noted that he had consulted with Franz Daniel (the director for Operation Dixie in South Carolina,) and Don McKee (another CIO organizer working in South Carolina with Burgess,) and that both men concurred with his decision.[83] Considering that the purpose of the CRD was, in theory, to neutralize anti-labor sentiment in the religious community, this was a strange position to take to say the least. Unfortunately, this decision to write off influential opponents to the CIO, while focusing on those who were already sympathetic, albeit unable to be of much help, was far from uncommon.

In a way, the decision to focus on mainline Protestant clergy made a certain amount of sense. These denominations were, after all, formally on record as acknowledging union's right to exist and this, at least, was a start. The situation among non-mainline Protestant churches was somewhat less clear. In a special, condensed, version of "Religion Speaks to Labor" published in the December, 1950 edition of *The Witness*, John Ramsay and Lucy Randolph Mason wrote that "we have not been able to discover any church among the Holiness, Pentecostal, and Church of God groups that forbids its members to join unions." For a section devoted exclusively to the Pentecostal Holiness Church, Ramsay and Mason noted that the church, in its "Discipline of the Pentecostal Holiness Church" published in 1945, expressly permitted its members to join labor unions, and excluded unions from its ban on "oathbound secret societies, social clubs, and corrupt partisan politics, etc."[84] While perhaps not a ringing endorsement, these positions hardly justified the outright dismissal that Burgess accorded the church.

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[83] Dave Burgess to John Ramsay, August 7, 1947, Folder 151, Box 1568, John Ramsay Papers.
[84] Ramsay, John, and Mason, Lucy, "Religion Speaks to Labor," *The Witness*, December 28, 1950, p. 8.

Nonetheless, it is somewhat understandable, and perhaps even to be expected, that the CRD largely chose not to focus its efforts on these groups. Ramsay, Mason, and Burgess were all members of mainline Protestant denominations themselves, and had ample experience in their churches. They had all, moreover, had first hand experience in bringing together religious leaders of their denominations and union officials for the purpose of cooperation. It probably seemed likely to them that they could do so again in the context of Operation Dixie. On the other hand, none of the members of the CRD, or the organizers they worked closely with, were, themselves, members of non-mainline evangelical churches. Working with Baptists or Methodists probably seemed the safer proposition, and this is, by and large, the one that they pursued.

What opportunities were lost in not working more closely with charismatics and sectarian evangelicals is, of course, hard to measure. Perhaps nothing would have come of it. What is certain, however, is that these groups counted among their congregations many of the workers that the CIO was attempting to organize. These workers, moreover, were unlikely to be swayed by the endorsements of ministers from "uptown" churches or mainline denominations, who commonly looked down upon, and shunned, Pentecostals and members of other sects. Relations between mainline and non-mainline Protestant denominations were not always cordial, and so it is doubtful whether the ministers the CRD was targeting would have been of much help with this group, even had they been persuaded to support the CIO.

Of course, these ministers were not, en masse, persuaded. Opposition to the CIO on the part of religious leaders was not noticeably weaker at the end of Operation Dixie than it

had been at the campaign's beginning. This should not be particularly surprising. Ministers, as much as anyone else, are a product of their time and their culture. The culture of the South, at the time of Operation Dixie, was vehemently pro-business and anti-union. Ministers, moreover, tended to be solidly middle class in terms of both economics and of social standing and prestige. In a uniquely religious region, ministers were highly respected and valued members of their communities and, as such, had a very real stake in maintaining the status quo. Ministers were invested in the prevailing social situation of the South and, lacking solid reasons to support social change, reasons far more compelling than vaguely worded endorsements of organized labor promulgated at a national level by their denominations, were extremely unlikely to sign on in support of wholesale economic and social upheaval.

This chapter began with a vignette from Hogansville, Georgia at the start of Operation Dixie, and it is perhaps appropriate to end it here with another scene, also from Georgia, but this time from the small town of Hazlehurst, from the year 1952, the year before Operation Dixie formally came to an end. During the summer of 1952, a CIO organizer named John Scott was working to organize the Cook Lumber Company in Hazlehurst. As the campaign moved forward, John Ramsay was called in to assist Scott by meeting with the local ministers to explain the CIO's position and solicit their help. Things seemed to be proceeding well, according to accounts, "considerable headway had been made," despite opposition from the local business community.[85]

[85] *Labor Letter*, September 12, 1952, Folder titled "Religion," Box 53, John Ramsay Papers.

Then, on July 31st, Scott was attacked by company guards while distributing literature at the plan gates. Later that day, Ramsay and Bill Strength, a labor singer who sometimes worked with Ramsay, went down to the plant to continue leafleting for an upcoming union meeting. They too were attacked by "seven men who had gathered on the other side of the main gate." Bleeding from their wounds, the two men fled the scene and went to look for help. While looking for aid, they found that "the Mayor of the town was 'absent,' the sheriff's office 'empty,' & a police car 'unmanned.'"[86]

The events of the 31st occurred on a Thursday. Two days later on Saturday a "mob of 50 men gathered outside of the hotel to renew their threats against the organizers. The CIO men were compelled to flee the town." Evidently not as much headway had been made as the union organizers had hoped. This sort of occurrence was common enough, in and of itself, during Operation Dixie, but what makes this scene of organizers run out of town interesting for our purposes is the comment made by Francis McPeek in his account of the incident for *Labor Letter*. McPeek observed that "the shocking thing has been the failure of the ministers & churches to condemn the outrageous incident."[87]

By 1953, Ramsay and the CRD had invested seven years in attempting to change the hearts and minds of the religious leaders of the South. Pamphlets, newspaper articles, radio addresses, and countless personal speaking appearances had been made throughout the South attempting to win the support of southern religious leaders. In the case of Hazlehurst, Ramsay had personally met with the local ministers and explained the CIO's purpose and

[86] Ibid.
[87] Ibid.

goals in their community. After all of this effort, the CIO was still being run out of small southern towns, while prominent industrialists broke the law with official approval. After all of this effort, the churches still stood silent when called upon to speak out in favor of the union. After all of this effort, the churches still remained silent in the face of violent repression and flagrant criminal behavior.

Chapter Four: Walking Together

The previous chapter examined the reactive efforts of the Community Relations Department to address hostility towards the CIO and Operation Dixie, but there was another side to the CRD's program in the South. There was also a proactive side to the department's community outreach efforts, and that program will be examined in this chapter. While attempting to answer the critics of organized labor was obviously a top priority, the CRD also sought to pre-empt criticism by courting religious leaders at the outset of an organizing campaign, before they had taken any firm position, for or against the union. This work usually consisted of informal visits, usually made by either John Ramsay or Lucy Randolph Mason, to local ministers in order to explain the CIO's position and to allay any concerns which minister's might have about CIO activities in their communities. These informal visits laid the groundwork for more formal organization later, with the ultimate objective being the formation of local Religion and Labor Fellowship groups. These groups brought local ministers and union officials together for luncheon discussions in which issues could be discussed and, ideally, some measure of mutual understanding could be achieved.

The motivating idea behind this concept was Ramsay's conviction that many of the differences between organized labor and organized religion were rooted in a mutual lack of knowledge and understanding. Many union members were alienated from the churches, or, if they attended, chose to keep their union membership secret, for fear that they would be stigmatized for their membership in a labor union. Similarly, Ramsay believed that many ministers simply were uninformed about labor issues, and did not really understand the

purposes and goals of organized labor. Fellowship groups, then, would serve as a forum for both sides to air their grievances, address their misperceptions, and move forward, united by common understanding and Christian brotherhood. At least, that was the way things were supposed to work out.

While this scenario may, at first blush, seem a bit naive, Ramsay had some reason to think it might work during Operation Dixie. Religion and Labor Fellowship groups were the flagship program of the National Religion and Labor Foundation, an organization with which Ramsay was very familiar, having served for many years on its Executive Board. The National Religion and Labor Foundation had been founded in 1931 by liberals within the Protestant religious community in order to solicit support for the labor movement. According to Elizabeth Fones-Wolf, the NRLF failed to gain much interest from within the ranks of the AFL, but "quickly attracted labor leaders from the ranks of the CIO. Over the years, members of the Foundation's Executive Board included such CIO leaders as Van Bittner, James B. Carey, Walter Reuther, Joseph Bierne, and David McDonald."[88] The NRLF enjoyed some degree of success and influence in the North, boasting "active chapters in the principal cities,"[89] and the Religion and Labor Fellowship Group model had worked successfully in a number of situations including the Bethlehem strike with which Ramsay was involved in Buffalo, New York.

As a result of the demonstrated success of the Religion and Labor Fellowship model in the North, Ramsay evidently felt that this plan could be successfully transplanted to the

[88] Fones-Wolf, Elizabeth, *Selling Free Enterprise*, University of Illinois Press, 1994, pg. 230.
[89] "The Churches and the Labor Movement," in *Social Action Newsletter*, September, 1948, Folder titled "Religion," Box 53, John Ramsay Papers.

South during the course of Operation Dixie. While the pamphlets produced by the CRD would serve as a forum in which to counter criticism, the fellowship groups could serve as a way to pre-empt criticism by making friends and forming alliances. The CIO was acutely aware of the role that ministers could play in either aiding or obstructing a strike or organizing campaign in their community, and thus it was thought to be of paramount importance by the CRD for ministers to be informed of both labor's overall goals and program, as well as labor issues in their own cities. If the CIO could gain the goodwill of local ministers, perhaps even their assistance in their organizing efforts, the task of organizing the South would be made noticeably easier. Even if all that was accomplished was inducing ministers to remain neutral in contests between labor and capital, the potential benefit would be substantial.

The first step to forming a Religion and Labor Fellowship group was to locate interested ministers. In the South, this was not as easy a task as might be thought. The usual approach was for either Lucy Mason or John Ramsay to visit a community in which the CIO was beginning an organizational drive and call on the local ministers, trying to sound them out in order to gauge sympathy and locate likely supporters. These visits were typically followed by a request to address the local ministerial alliance on the topic of organized labor and its aims. In these talks, Ramsay tried to reassure the ministers that the CIO was a responsible labor union, led by sober, religious men who sought simple justice for their members, and social stability for the country. Ramsay also took this opportunity to address misconceptions concerning unions that clergy might hold, rebutting charges of communism

and violence. If this initial presentation went well, a RLF luncheon group might subsequently be formed.

In a 1947 article describing the formation and functioning of a fellowship group in Ohio, written for the magazine *Prophetic Religion*, John Ramsay expressed his confidence in the ultimate success of the RLF model in the South. In describing the Ohio group, Ramsay wrote that "it could be Columbus, Georgia, although this story is of Columbus, Ohio…The same kind of story is now in the making in Columbus, Georgia, and many other southern towns and cities."[90] Unfortunately for Ramsay, this statement was overly optimistic. Columbus, Georgia was not Columbus, Ohio, and RLF groups never achieved the same success in the South that they had in the North. Indeed, there is a certain irony in the comparison, considering that Columbus, Georgia was the hometown and base of operations for Parson Jack Johnson, the publisher of the viciously anti-labor publication *The Gospel Trumpet*, which routinely attacked labor unions generally, and the CIO particularly, as anti-Christian organizations to which no god-fearing man could properly belong.

Despite a busy schedule of engagements, which included hundreds of speaking appearances before ministerial alliances throughout the South, Ramsay was never quite able to achieve his vision of Religion and Labor Fellowship Groups sprouting up in "towns and cities" throughout the South. While ministers often gave him a polite reception, and perhaps a few vague, if sympathetic comments, some met his advances with outright hostility, and others conveniently arranged to be unavailable when he called on them. As it turned out, it

[90] "Religion, Labor, and Social Action," *Prophetic Religion*, Summer, 1947, Folder title "Religion," Box 53, John Ramsay Papers.

was one thing to gain a polite hearing at a personal appointment, or even to be invited to speak at a ministerial alliance meeting, but quite another, and more difficult task, to convince ministers to actually take the step of forming a fellowship group. When things got past the point of mere talk, and proceeded to the plane of action, many ministers proved unwilling to take on an active role. Whether out of sincere conviction, unwillingness to take on controversial issues, or outright antagonism to labor, many clergy professed an unwillingness to get involved in labor issues. A common explanation for minister's reluctance to form a fellowship group was that they felt that the role of the church was to stand neutral in contests between capital and labor, that the role of the church was to attend to spiritual, rather than material, matters. Other ministers, who had proved friendly enough when the issue was merely one of talk, proved decidedly less friendly when called upon to actually take action.

By the end of Operation Dixie, the CRD had managed to form a mere nineteen RLF groups throughout the entire region.[91] Of these groups, several were located in major cities such as Atlanta, well outside of the major textile areas that were targeted by Operation Dixie. Among the groups that were formed, it is difficult to gauge whether any of these groups contributed substantially to the CIO's organizing efforts. Certainly, organizing did not go well during the campaign, and religious opposition to the CIO, as noted previously, was not noticeably less at the end of Operation Dixie than it had been at the start. No doubt this lack of results stems from the simple scarcity of fellowship groups, but in part the explanation probably lies in the nature of the groups' activities.

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[91] Fones-Wolf, Elizabeth, *Selling Free Enterprise*, University of Illinois Press, 1994, pg. 229.

Although the CRD hoped that fellowship groups would ultimately result in greater activism on the part of clergy, and *Economic Justice*, the newsletter of the National Religion and Labor Foundation requested its members to "support strikes, to write senators and congressmen in support of favorable legislation, and to communicate the concerns of the labor movement to their congregations,"[92] the actual activities of the RLF groups were mostly educational. Representatives from organized labor, or sympathetic organizations, would speak at luncheons on various topics such as minimum wage laws, or the role of the churches in society. A free lunch and an uplifting talk on general principles do not an organized, involved corps of activist clergy make.

Another problem with the implementation of the RLF program had to do with the makeup of its membership. On the one hand, simply finding enough interested ministers to start an RLF group could be a daunting task indeed, and to a certain extent the CRD obviously had to work with the materials at hand. On the other hand, the clergy recruited by a local RLF group tended to reflect the CIO's natural base in the religious community, not necessarily those ministers who could be most helpful to the union's cause. Thus, for instance, the CRD could usually count on recruiting the local Catholic priest, perhaps the local rabbi, if there happened to be one in the community in question, and a handful of liberal Protestants. While the moral support supplied by these clergy was, no doubt, heartening, their congregations did not usually contain many of the workers who the CIO was trying to enlist, and their influence in the community tended to be accordingly small. The largest

[92] Abrams, Brian, *John Ramsay and the Evolution of Church Labor Relations in the CIO*, Masters Thesis, Georgia State University, 1985, pg. 82.

denomination in the South, by far, was the Southern Baptist, followed by Methodists.[93] Although breakdowns of denominational membership by economic class and occupation are difficult to locate, it is clear from contemporary reports that these denominations were also in the majority among industrial workers.[94] Further, it should be noted, that smaller, more evangelical sects were also popular among working class southerners, particularly those employed in the textile industry.[95] If the Religion and Labor Fellowship groups established by the CRD were to have any significant influence in supporting organized labor, it would have been important to draw its constituents from these denominational groupings. There was, moreover, also a class dynamic at work. Southern religion, as a whole, was highly stratified by class.[96] Episcopalians, for example, tended to be of a higher social and economic class than, say, Baptists. Mainline Protestants, as a whole, tended to be higher class than members of evangelical sects. Within the mainline denominations themselves, moreover, there was stratification depending on what sector of the community the individual church catered to. For instance, there were "uptown" Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian

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[93] Howard Odum found that "of the more than 4,000,000 white adult members of Protestant churches in the Southeast, nearly 2,500,000 belong to the Southern Baptist Convention and a little over 1,500,000 to the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South." Odum, *Southern Regions of the United States*, p. 141.

[94] This observation is also supported by Liston Pope's findings in the community of Gastonia, North Carolina where, out of a total of 83 "mill churches" in the community, the Baptist denomination accounted for 27 churches, and the Methodists claimed another 11, for a total of 38, or nearly half of the churches which were predominantly attended by mill workers. Pope, *Millhands and Preachers*, p. 103.

[95] See footnote 80.

[96] For a discussion of this phenomenon, see Pope, *Millhands and Preachers*, pp. 96-116. Pope's findings indicated that "wide social differences appeared between Presbyterians and Methodists, Lutherans and Baptists, with each denomination becoming especially identified with one (or at most two) of the emerging social classes. When the older religious traditions proved too inflexible to meet needs arising from novel social situations, new sects arose to fill the gaps: the Church of God, the Wesleyan Methodists, the Pentecostal Holiness Church, and other neoteric cults." p. 96.

churches, that tended to cater to white collar workers, including bankers, clerks, lawyers, and mill managers. At the other end of the spectrum, there were mill churches, often subsidized by companies, that ministered to the employees who lived in mill villages, or in working class residential areas.

Thus, in order for a minister to be an effective advocate for the CIO, not only would he have to be of the right denomination, but also from the right socio-economic strata within that denomination. While a Baptist minister whose congregation consisted of mill workers would be an ideal ally for the CIO, an uptown Baptist minister, whose congregation excluded mill workers (presuming of course that he could be convinced to support the union) would likely be much less influential among the workers.

Of course, by and large, uptown ministers did not support the CIO. Many opted instead to remain neutral, and many who did choose to get involved did so on the side of employers.[97] This might not have been very significant, had the CIO been able to marshal its own supporters from the ranks of the mill village clergy, but this seldom happened. As was noted in the previous chapter, the CRD tended to be mistrustful of the sects, viewing them as predisposed to anti-labor views, uneducated as to the social and economic issues, and generally unreliable. While this was perhaps true in many cases, the Pentecostal, Holiness, and Church of God ministers were, nonetheless, influential leaders within their communities, and could have, if successfully cultivated, significantly aided in the work of organization.

[97] "In November 1951, Ramsay admitted that most religious leaders in the South were 'still skeptical of the labor movement, if not opposed to it." Elizabeth Fones-Wolf, *Selling Free Labor*, pg. 229.

There were a number of factors at work here. On the theological plane, southern Protestantism tended to be much less concerned with society, than with the relationship between the individual believer and God. The Social Gospel had not made deep inroads in the South, and religion in the region tended to be much more personal and spiritual than was the norm in other parts of the country.[98] This focus, in turn, led to a somewhat otherworldly view of the role of religion. If the world was corrupt, wicked, and plagued by a variety of social evils, the role of the church was to bring salvation to the individual and point the way towards a better day in the afterlife, rather than leading the way in social reform in the here and now. This tendency ran throughout southern religion, but was particularly noticeable in the non-mainline, evangelical sects. Broadly speaking, these denominations did not see their role as one of social involvement, and the idea of getting involved in labor disputes seemed both foreign and inappropriate.[99]

There existed also what might be termed a counter-cultural element to sectarian Protestantism. Members of these churches saw themselves as a people apart, uniquely sanctified and justified, separate from and apart from the common mass of sinners. This mass of sinners, it should be noted, often encompassed members of mainline denominations who were seen as corrupt, worldly, and insincere Christians, who compromised their faith by

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[98] Hill, "A Survey of Southern Religious History," pp. 396-7.

[99] In the course of his analysis of the sermons preached by ministers in Gastonia, Liston Pope noted that "there is much emphasis on the saving power of 'the blood of Jesus,' and continual admonition to follow the 'Jesus way.' There is almost never any direct application of these admonitions to practical problems of economic life; when it is made, references to such virtues as kindliness, forgiveness, and honesty comprise the net result." Pope, *Millhands and Preachers*, p. 177.

participating in the larger society.[100] This fact could, and did, work against the CIO, in that many ministers from these sects tended to remain unconcerned with social issues, and if the subject came up, were quite capable of telling their congregations not to concern themselves with such matters but instead to focus on God and the life to come.

However, the latent anti-systemic trend in sectarian evangelical religion could cut both ways. It is but a small step from denouncing the sinfulness of the world in general, to denouncing the sinfulness of *laissez-faire* capitalism run amok. The evangelical sects had no particular respect for wealth, and tended to regard the poor as both virtuous and oppressed. The prophetic books of the Old Testament with their ringing denunciation of those who profited through the oppression of the weak resonated particularly well with sectarian theology. Perhaps most importantly, non-mainline, evangelical ministers were low status outsiders with regard to the southern religious establishment. Pentecostal or Holiness preachers were not regarded with the same respect and esteem as were their Baptist or Methodist brethren, and thus had much less of a stake in preserving southern society as it was. If the clergy of these denominations were not natural allies for the CIO, then they were, at the very least, potential allies. This potential, however, was largely unrealized during the course of Operation Dixie.

This leeriness of smaller Protestant sects fits well with the overall pre-occupation of Operation Dixie's planners with presenting the union as a mainstream, non-radical, and, above all, respectable organization that posed no threat to the overall social structure. This

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[100] Hill, Samuel, S., and Mead, Frank, S. *Handbook of Denominations in the United States*, Abingdon Press, 2001, p. 162.

approach, as has been previously noted, did not square particularly well with the objectives of Operation Dixie. Had the South been fully organized, working-class people brought into electoral politics, and wages brought up to northern standards, southern society *would* have been drastically changed. Existing power structures, both economic and political, would have been overturned. In order for this to occur, however, traditional sources of influence and authority would have had to be challenged, and this is precisely what the CRD, and the CIO as a whole, failed to do. Instead, the CRD attempted to present the CIO as a sober, "responsible," organization that would insure stability and not upset the status quo. Whether this approach was deluded or disingenuous does not matter so much as the ultimate fact that southern religious leaders simply did not buy it. The CRD could talk all it wanted to of promoting Christian brotherhood, understanding between the classes, and the similarity between the purposes of organized labor and Christianity, but southern clergy, for the most part, were simply not convinced. Instead, they saw the CIO, correctly it might be added, as a divisive force whose agenda, if fulfilled, would upset the economic, racial, and social structure of southern society and, in the process, challenge their own standing within it.

In order to understand how this process worked, it might be helpful to present a case study in frustration: the CRD's attempt to form a Religion and Labor Fellowship in the textile town of Anderson, South Carolina. The CRD tried, over a period from 1947 to 1950, to gain a foothold in Anderson, without any appreciable success. The CRD's involvement began when John Ramsay made a visit to Anderson "in the spring of 1947… as a matter of routine." Initially, things seemed to go well. The head of the Ministerial Association was

out of town, but Ramsay was able to meet with the Chairman of the Association's Program Committee. Apparently this meeting went well, for the ministers voted at their April meeting to invite Ramsay to come and speak to them at their May monthly meeting.[101]

Ramsay spoke to the ministers on May 5, 1947, and reported that he received a "very cordial reception from the ministers," who "continued to question me after my address for about one and one-half hours." Although the ministers had received him politely enough, they were apparently unready to commit just yet to support for the CIO. As a follow up to the May 5th meeting, Ramsay received a letter from the Ministerial Association of May 30th, thanking him for his appearance, but, significantly, adding that "I think another meeting to hear a representative of the manufacturers would be interesting. Ministers should be informed of all currents of thought and actions about us."[102]

The letter also contained a clipping from the *Anderson Daily Mail* of May 19, 1947, which reported the Ministerial Association Meeting at which John Ramsay had spoken. The newspaper article reported that "the organizers would, indeed, gain a point if they could induce ministers to regard the CIO as a 'missionary' effort, and could line up pastors, either individually, or as a group, back of the movement." However, the report was confident that this would not occur, stating that "knowing Southern ministers as we do, we predict that the CIO organizers and leaders will have even less success in lining up ministerial support than they have had in convincing cotton mill employees that the CIO is the implement that will

[101] "Testimony of Mr. John G. Ramsay, Community Relations Director, CIO Organizing Committee, of Personal Experience in Anderson, S.C.," Folder 155, Box 1568, John Ramsay Papers.
[102] Ibid.

bring about an industrial millenium in the South." Unfortunately for the CRD, this prediction proved to be correct.[103]

After this episode, the CRD's efforts in Anderson were, apparently, put on hold for some time. In the Fall of 1949, Ramsay renewed his outreach efforts in Anderson by mailing a letter to various "civic and religious leaders" in Anderson, detailing the Community Relations Department's program. Clergymen were also mailed copies of two pamphlets, "The Church and the CIO Together," and "The Community Depends on Wages." This correspondence was followed by a personal visit by Ramsay to Anderson, during which he met with the Mayor, the head of the Chamber of Commerce, and the head of the Ministerial Association. At none of these meetings did Ramsay receive what might be called a warm welcome. The Executive Secretary of the Chamber of Commerce, E.W. Meeks, was perhaps most blunt, informing Ramsay that "the CIO is not welcome in our community, and my advice to you is to take your people and leave immediately while you can leave peacefully." The mayor informed Ramsay of his intention to maintain "law and order in our community."[104]

Ramsay's meeting with Reverend W. G. Newman, the President of the Anderson Ministerial Association, serves as an excellent illustration of the ways in which Southern ministers avoided involvement with the CRD. Evidently too polite to simply inform Ramsay that he had no intention of supporting the CIO in Anderson, Rev. Newman nonetheless managed to convey his position. After politely receiving Ramsay at his home, Rev. Newman

[103] Ibid.
[104] Ibid.

complemented him on his address two years prior, and conceded that, upon researching the position of the Methodist Church on the issue of labor unions, he had found that the church did, indeed, recognize worker's right to organize. However, the Reverend hastened to add, "that this meant local unions and not the CIO." Ramsay, naturally, argued this point, asking if "he felt that local management was sinning in joining the Chamber of Commerce which is a National Association of Management." Reverend Newman's reply is not recorded, but it seems doubtful that he was persuaded by Ramsay's argument.[105]

Perhaps as a way of shifting the discussion, Reverend Newman stated that "Anderson would not tolerate John L. Lewis in their community." Ramsay, quite correctly, pointed out that Mr. Lewis had not headed the CIO in quite some time, and asked what Lewis had to do with the CIO's drive in Anderson. Rev. Newman "said that Mr. Lewis was the President of the CIO," and, when corrected, "said that he was President of all the unions." Ramsay tried to address this misconception, pointing out that "Mr. Lewis was President of a great international union, the United Mine Workers of America, which is an independent union." Reverend Newman, however, was not to be persuaded on this point. Newman finally laid the matter to rest, declaring that "Anderson, S.C. and the Anderson Chamber of Commerce believes that Mr. Lewis is president of all the unions and I am going to believe with them." Perhaps sensing that further argument would get him nowhere, Ramsay requested that Lucy Randolph Mason be allowed to give a presentation to the Ministerial Association. Newman

[105] Ibid.

refused. It was clear that the head of the Anderson Ministerial Association was not going to support the CIO, no matter how persuasive the arguments presented to him.[106]

Nonetheless, the CRD persevered in Anderson, although continuing to make little progress. In early March of 1950, Lucy Mason made another trip to Anderson to meet with ministers and assess the CRD's chances of gaining support from religious leaders. Her report was not encouraging. Over the span of a three day visit, Mason spoke with, either in person, or by phone, six ministers, and searched, unsuccessfully, for five others. Of the six clergy that Mason met with, only one of them, the town's Catholic priest, Father Maurice Daly, was very supportive. Reverend Samuel Hardman, the rector of Grace Episcopal Church, "advocated my speaking to ministers when some one else brought that up – Father Daly," but was "much prejudiced by his feeling about John Lewis." Mason described Rev. Ross Johnson, of St. James Methodist Church, as "generally speaking, for unions, but had many questions to ask which indicated he was not very well informed and accepted some of the opposition's ideas."[107]

Other ministers were not as welcoming. Rev. Samuel Wiley, of the First Presbyterian Church, and the former president of the Anderson Ministerial Association, who Ramsay had described in 1947 as "an exceptionally fine fellow in a large and important congregation,"[108] told Mason that "as he and Mr. Ramsay had seen each other, he did not see that anything would be accomplished by his seeing me." Mason received a similar rebuff from Rev. Alton

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[106] Ibid.
[107] "Anderson, S.C., Memorandum by Lucy R. Mason on Her Visit There March 1-3, 1950," Folder 155, Box 1568, John Ramsay Papers.
[108] John Ramsay to Franz Daniel, March 20, 1947, Folder 151, Box 1568, John Ramsay Papers.

Clark, of Holy Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church. Mason reported that "he was polite and said nice things about J. Ramsay, but it was obvious he did not want to see me." Perhaps wisely, Mason did not bother attempting to meet with Rev. Newman, who had already expressed his hostility towards the CIO to Ramsay the previous year.[109]

A Religion and Labor Fellowship never did get off the ground in Anderson. After three years of work in the community, the CRD had very little to show for its efforts – the firm support of the Catholic priest, Father Daly, a handful of clergy, such as the Reverends Hardman and Johnson who, although not opposed to the CIO as such, were not very well informed and seemed ambivalent, and the active opposition of Rev. Newman, the leader of the town's Ministerial Association. Unfortunately for the CRD, the experience in Anderson proved to be more the rule, than the exception, for the South as a whole. Where religious leaders did not actively oppose the CIO, they tended to remain neutral, perhaps willing to listen to an address or two, perhaps even engage in polite conversation with Ramsay or Mason, but unwilling to take an active role. The net result of this was, of course, that most religious leaders remained silent, leaving the field to those who actively attacked the CIO. What allies the union did manage to attract tended to be men of little influence in their communities, or men whose congregations did not reflect the CIO's target demographic. For all of the CIO's hopes that the southern experience would conform to the hopeful slogan of one of their pamphlets titled "Walking Together: Religion and Labor," the walk, for the union at least, proved a lonely one.

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[109] "Anderson, S.C., Memorandum by Lucy R. Mason on Her Visit There March 1-3, 1950," Folder 155, Box 1568, John Ramsay Papers.

Chapter Five: Billy Graham and *The Militant Truth*: A Case Study of Misconceptions

The previous two chapters have examined, in some detail, the two major programs of the Community Relations Department of the Southern Organizing Committee of the CIO during the course of Operation Dixie. In the course of this analysis, several major critiques have been advanced, mostly having to do with the CRD's essential failure to grasp the realities of the southern social structure, and more particularly the role of the Church as a power broker with a significant stake in southern society. The present chapter will elaborate on some of these themes through the use of a case study which illustrates many of the points previously made, while demonstrating the general methodology of the CRD in dealing with southern religious leaders.

In the Fall of 1950, much to the dismay of the Community Relations staff, the September issue of a newspaper called the *Militant Truth* published a lengthy sermon by the Reverend Billy Graham.[110] The sermon itself was innocuous enough, titled "The Home God Honors," it set forth Graham's argument that the basic problem with American society was the family, or rather, the typical American family's failure to adhere to Biblical standards. The sermon set forth Graham's prescription for a happy home life and warned against the morally corrosive rise in divorce rates. The sermon contained nothing about organized labor, and indeed, nothing that would have been particularly controversial in 1950s society.[111]

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[110] *The Militant Truth*, September, 1950, Folder titled "Militant Truth," Box 269, Labor Periodicals, Southern Labor Archives, Special Collections, Georgia State University, Atlanta.
[111] The sermon was, not surprisingly, highly sexist, but no more so than, say, contemporary sit-coms of the era.

What shocked and worried the CRD staff was not the sermon itself, but rather the publication in which it was published.

The *Militant Truth* had been a thorn in the side of the CIO since the early 1940s. Along with similar publications, such as the *Gospel Trumpet*, the *Militant Truth* attacked the CIO relentlessly, using a combination of rabid anti-communism, racial and ethnic slurs, and religious rhetoric. There was a great deal of evidence that the papers were subsidized by industrialists seeking to prevent unionization in the South, and the newspapers were routinely distributed to workers during the run-up to a union election. The National Labor Relations Board had ruled that mailing these newspapers to their employees constituted an unfair labor practice on the part of employers, but distribution continued nevertheless, and the publications continued to plague the organizing efforts of the CIO. Whether these publications actually contributed to the CIO losing elections is an open question[112], but it is certainly the case that CIO officials perceived them to be a threat and blamed them for lost elections.

What was particularly troubling to the CRD about the publication of the Graham sermon was the possibility that workers, upon reading the article, would perceive its presence in the newspaper as an endorsement, by Graham, of the contents and editorial perspective contained in the rest of the newspaper. Billy Graham, although still a young man at the time

[112] On the one hand, the newspapers' attacks on the CIO were certainly vicious and, if believed, would have significantly damaged the organization in the eyes of workers. On the other hand, had organizers done their work sufficiently well that workers were already firm supporters of the union, it is unlikely that the reports would have been believed or taken seriously. On balance, it is likely that these newspapers had their greatest impact where workers were already pre-disposed to be against the union, or where they were uncertain as to their loyalties.

of this incident, was a rising star on the American religious scene, and had gained a great deal of notoriety and public acclaim as a result of his Los Angeles Crusade the year before. During the course of the Los Angeles crusade, Graham had attracted the favorable attention of the media, particularly the chain of newspapers owned by William Randolph Hearst, who had apparently perceived a great story in Graham's evangelism and had instructed his newspapers to provide favorable coverage.[113] As a result, Graham was becoming a national figure, well liked and respected, and whose apparent endorsement of the *Militant Truth* could be expected to carry a great deal of influence among the religious workers of the South.

The sermon, accompanied by a large photograph of Rev. Graham, and an advertisement for his recent book, *Revival in Our Time,* accounted for a total of two and a half pages of the eight page issue, and shared space with several other articles that attacked the CIO, the Textile Workers Union of America, the Federal Council of Churches, and communism in general. Given the prominence of the sermon, and the accompanying advertisement from the Van Kampen Press for Graham's new book, the impression that Billy Graham supported the views espoused by the *Militant Truth* was, if not unmistakable, at the very least a reasonable assumption. This was precisely what the CRD feared.

However, the case did not seem hopeless. Billy Graham was neither an outspoken reactionary, nor an avowed enemy of the CIO. Indeed, although Graham's ministry was primarily oriented towards the individual's personal relationship with God, he was known to have some liberal views, particularly on the subject of race.[114] Although Graham was not a

[113] Drummond, Lewis, *The Evangelist*, Nashville: Word Publishing, 2001, pg. 10.
[114] Graham's commitment to integration would become more clear in subsequent years through his insistence on integrated revivals, and his clashes with the KKK and the Citizen's Councils.

personal acquaintance of either Lucy Mason or John Ramsay, he was on friendly terms with various religious leaders, such as the Methodist Bishop Arthur Moore, who were, in turn, friends with Mason and Ramsay. Thus, the CRD decided that the way to handle this incident was to speak with Graham directly, to determine whether he was aware of the publication, and, if possible, secure a denial of involvement and a condemnation of the newspaper and its agenda.

To this end, Lucy Randolph Mason spent a good deal of time over the next year trying to talk to Graham. At first, the signs were promising. On October 23, 1950, Mason had a telephone conversation with Graham, in which the evangelist told her that he had never heard of the *Militant Truth*, "and had no idea that a paper of that kind had printed his sermon." Mason reported that Graham had told her that "he is for labor and some of his friends say he is too pro-labor." Summing up the encounter, Mason wrote that "I got an impression of great sincerity from Mr. G. and am sure he would not want anything done in his name that would hurt organized labor." During this same conversation, Mason set up an interview with Graham for later that week, presumably in order to discuss a statement which Mason wished Graham to put out concerning the publication of his sermon.[115]

While the ideal scenario, for the CRD, was one in which Graham publicly repudiated the *Militant Truth* and came out in favor of labor, a backup plan was also in the works. A number of rather unsavory groups had advertised in the *Militant Truth* over the years, and had been endorsed by the paper, including Joseph Kamp and his Constitutional Educational

[115] Lucy Randolph Mason to Paul Harding, October 24, 1950, Folder 55, Box 1559, John Ramsay Papers, Southern Labor Archives, Special Collections, Georgia State University, Atlanta.

League, an organization with ties to various domestic fascist groups, and whose publications had been endorsed by Adolph Hitler. Information about these connections, along with citations from the *Militant Truth* attacking Franklin Roosevelt, Jews, and the United Nations, had been compiled and was ready to be given to various sympathetic journalists for the purpose of discrediting the publication.[116] However these plans were put on hold for the moment, until it became clear how Billy Graham would respond. As Lucy Mason put it, "naturally, if we are going to get from Mr. G. a repudiation of MT, we don't want to start a story that implicates him with it, or starts a big fuss just as Mr. G. comes in here for a huge revival. So mum's the word for us until after we find just what sort of statement we will get from Mr. G. and I think it will be satisfactory judging by what he said on the phone."[117] If, as is evident, Mason hoped that a statement from Rev. Graham was soon to be forthcoming, she was to be disappointed.

By the end of November, Lucy Mason was no closer to getting a statement from Graham than she had been a month before. In a letter to Lloyd Vaughn, the South Carolina Director for the CIO Organizing Committee, Mason reported of Graham that "he and his public relations man, Beavan, gave both John Ramsay and me, but principally me, because John was mostly away, a complete run-around."[118] In a telephone conversation between Beavan and Mason on November 3rd, Rev. Graham's spokesman had even gone so far as to defend the newspaper, telling Mason that "other people might consider the same paper that I

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[116] "Memorandum Concerning Joseph P. Kamp," Folder 56, Box 1559, John Ramsay Papers. See also, "Militant Truth or Malicious Falsehood?" Folder 55, Box 1559.
[117] Lucy Randolph Mason to Paul Harding, October 24, 1950, Folder 55, Box 1559, John Ramsay Papers.
[118] Lucy Randolph Mason to Lloyd Vaughn, November 25, 1950, Folder 55, Box 1559, John Ramsay Papers.

[Mason] call scurrilous a very good paper."[119] By early December, the situation had evidently deteriorated further, as Lucy Mason felt compelled to seek outside assistance in order to arrange a meeting with Graham. On December 8, Mason sent letters to Bishop Arthur Moore and Dr. Lester Rumble in order to apprise them of the situation, and to ask their help in facilitating a meeting with Rev. Graham. In the course of the letter, Mason noted that Graham had broken two appointments to meet with Mason, and one with John Ramsay.[120] At the same time, Ramsay wrote to Billy Graham, regretting Graham's inability to keep his engagements, both with Mason, and with himself, and warning Graham that "your associates continue to surround you with protection," noting that Graham's association with a publication such as *Militant Truth* could damage his reputation.[121] Evidently, Ramsay believed that Graham's staff was preventing him from meeting with representatives of the CIO, and seemed confident that if he could simply meet with Graham in person, the whole affair could be sorted out agreeably.[122]

Mason's letter to Bishop Moore evidently had its desired effect. In February of 1951, Mason wrote to the Bishop to thank him for contacting Graham, and to inform him that a meeting had occurred between Graham and Ramsay the previous week. Evidently, a friend of Ramsay's had arranged that Ramsay and Graham have a meeting in Chapel Hill, North

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[119] "L.R. Mason's Memorandum On Conversation By Phone With Jerry Beavan, Public Relations Director for Billy Graham, November 3, 1950," Folder 55, Box 1559, John Ramsay Papers.
[120] Lucy Randolph Mason to Bishop Arthur Moore, December 8, 1950, Folder 55, Box 1559, John Ramsay Papers.
[121] Unfortunately for the CIO, and as Billy Graham was probably aware (if John Ramsay was not) quite the opposite was probably true. In the South, at least, Graham's association with anti-union forces would not have done much, if anything, to harm his reputation, while an association with the CIO, probably would have.
[122] John Ramsay to Billy Graham, December 8, 1950, Folder 55, Box 1559, John Ramsay Papers.

Carolina. According to Mason's account, "they met – they liked each other – they parted good friends. Billy told John he was anything but anti-union…" However, for all that the meeting went well, Mason's account contains no mention of a public statement by Graham on the *Militant Truth* issue, and, indeed, no such statement was ever released. Mason and Ramsay had prepared such a statement for Graham's approval, but it was never released. Indeed, there is no evidence to show that the statement was ever presented to Graham, or that he was asked to issue it.

In any event, despite the efforts of Ramsay and Mason, Billy Graham never made a public statement concerning the publication of his sermon in the *Militant Truth*. Despite the favorable impression that the minister made on the CRD staffers, nothing substantive was accomplished as a result of the episode, and the *Militant Truth* escaped unchallenged by Rev. Graham. The secondary plan for addressing the *Militant Truth*, involving criticism by newspaper columnists sympathetic to the CIO, which had been put on hold by Mason and Ramsay out of consideration for its possible effects on Billy Graham, was, ultimately attempted, but results were disappointing. As John Salmond notes, in his biography of Lucy Randolph Mason, "few of the journalists could use the material, however, and in any case, it was a poor substitute in the South for a statement from Graham himself."[123]

In the end, it seems that Lucy Mason's initial impression that she was being given the run-around by Billy Graham and his staff was probably correct. Much like the other ministers that the CRD encountered during its work in the South, Graham was willing to

[123] Salmond, John, *Miss Lucy of the CIO*, The University of Georgia Press, 1988, pg. 136.

speak with Ramsay and Mason, even sympathize with their objectives in a vague way, but unwilling to take any action, or engage in any controversy. In 1950, Billy Graham was in the initial stages of a public career that would last for over five decades, and make him one of the most well-known, and respected figures in the world. Already a national figure, Graham was in the process of obtaining an international reputation, one that enabled him to fill auditoriums around the world, and consult with presidents and statesmen on issues of national policy. At the same time, in 1950, this meteoric career was just beginning to take off, having only really begun a year or two prior, and it would probably not be unreasonable to conjecture that Graham wanted to avoid involvement in any controversy which might tarnish his reputation, or alienate his supporters. In 1950, and in the South, appearing as a public champion of labor unions, and particularly the CIO, would have placed Graham in the center of just such a controversy, and it is thus not surprising that Graham was leery of placing himself in such a position. Whatever Graham's own feelings on the topic of labor unions, and there is no real reason to think he was a staunch supporter of industrial unionism per se, it is certainly clear that he had no real incentive to insert himself into the contest between labor and employers, and potentially much to lose if he did.

While Graham's involvement in this particular episode provides a certain interest due to his celebrity, the point is one that encompasses much more than Billy Graham as an individual. The key point is that the same conditions that applied to Billy Graham also applied, more broadly, to southern clergy as a whole. Billy Graham had nothing to gain, and potentially something to lose by taking the side of the CIO, and so did southern ministers as a

whole. Being a minister in the South was a fairly comfortable life. Ministers were, in terms of status, if not always financially, members of the civic elite, important in their communities, and treated with deference and respect. Members of the religious establishment, that is to say, middle class, mainline Protestant clergy had very little reason to be discontent with the status quo of southern society. They were already power brokers and important men in their towns and had little reason to attack the existing order, or to aid in an attack upon the very system which had benefited them so much. There were exceptions to this general rule, of course, but they were few and far between, and not sufficient to really upset the balance.

This is not to say, of course, that these were corrupt or unprincipled men. There is every reason to believe that the majority of southern clergy simply did not think there was any need, or justification, for their involvement in industrial relations. As has been noted, the religious style of the South was intensely personal, focusing for the most part on the relationship between the individual and God, and largely unconcerned with larger social issues. The Social Gospel message never penetrated very deeply in the South, and was generally viewed with suspicion by fundamentalists, who tended to associate the social gospel with religious modernism, that is the school of theology which questions the inerrancy of the Bible.[124] In this context it is not surprising then to find that most southern clergy simply did not think that unions were any of their business. If anything, southern clergy probably saw unions as a threat to the industrialization that was commonly perceived, among

[124] Drummond, *The Evangelist*, pp. 81-82.

the southern middle class, as a desperately needed cure for the ills of southern poverty and backwardness. The southern clergy had been among the loudest boosters of the New South decades before Operation Dixie, and it hardly made sense to expect them to denounce the fruits of their efforts in the midst of the post-war economic boom.

In targeting Billy Graham and other members of the southern religious establishment, the CRD was, in effect, seeking the collaboration of societal insiders in a project that challenged the power structure of southern society. There are many reasons why this plan did not, indeed, could not, work. Other writers, particularly Liston Pope, have noted the financial ties between industrialists and southern religious leaders, particularly in the textile regions of the southern piedmont. The leaders of Operation Dixie liked to blame fear and intimidation, coming from industrialists and their political allies, for their lack of support, both from religious leaders, and from the population more generally. While both of these explanations have an element of truth, they both fail to grasp the larger point, namely that there was simply no compelling reason for southern clergy to aid the CIO during Operation Dixie. Some southern clergy *did* aid the CIO out of a sense of their religious duty to the poor and downtrodden, but southern religion, as it was practiced and understood by most clergy did not perceive any obligation to assist labor unions, and the decision to stay out of Operation Dixie probably caused few ethical qualms among those clergy who stayed aloof, or even among those who chose to actively oppose the CIO as divisive and contrary to Christian brotherhood.

On the other hand, the CRD consistently neglected outsiders, those clergy who stood, at the best, on the fringes of the southern religious establishment, and those who, thus, had the most to gain from the sort of social upheaval that would have accompanied a successful Operation Dixie. While other scholars have made similar points concerning other marginal figures in southern society, such as African-American workers and political radicals, what these writers fail to recognize is that the these groups simply did not have the numerical strength to marshal an effective coalition. One group that did, however—non-mainline evangelicals and charismatics—was never really taken seriously by the CRD, or consistently courted. That these religious communities could have been made into allies is, of course, far from certain. There were various obstacles here too, but strategically it at least made more sense than trying to win over established elites.

There are some reasons to think that, had the CIO been willing to reach out to non-mainline religious sects, they could have cultivated a base of support that could have proved quite helpful in organizing the South. As noted in a previous chapter, there was some interest on the part of some of the smaller sects in promoting industrial unionism. The Rev. Charlie Pratt, of the Church of God of the Union Assembly in Dalton, Georgia was an enthusiastic promoter of unionism in general, and the TWUA in particular, because it meshed well with his biblically-informed analysis of the evils of southern industry. Unfortunately for both Pratt and the CIO, Pratt's close relationship with Don West, a southern religious radical and suspected communist, opened the minister up to anti-communist attacks and red-baiting from employers and union opponents in Dalton. The CIO ultimately decided to distance itself

from Rev. Pratt due to the communist issue, but the situation is indicative of the possibilities for alliance that existed between the CIO and sectarian churches.[125]

Religion, and religious imagery had also been an important element in many other social protest and social reform movements throughout the South. Of course the strong role played by the black churches in the Civil Rights movement springs immediately to mind, but religion also played an important role, as documented by Mark Fannin, in the Brotherhood of Timber Workers, and in the Southern Tenant Farmers Union.[126] Church membership could also both inform workers understanding of labor issues as well as serve as an organizational base from which to organize, as Linda Frankel notes in her study of the 1958 Harriet-Henderson strike in Henderson, North Carolina. Frankel writes that "religion provided one important axis of solidarity for the strikers," and that "the emergence of revivalism and the growth of the smaller Pentecostal sects made possible a class-based religious organization.[127]"

For all of these reasons then, it seems clear that the problem with the CRD's approach to southern religion had less to do with southern religion, as such, than with the manner in which the CRD dealt with it. In a sense this is a close parallel to the problem with Operation Dixie as a whole. It was not the case that southern workers could not be convinced to join labor unions, or think in a class-conscious manner, indeed they had demonstrated the capacity to do so over and over again in the years prior to Operation Dixie. Rather, the

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[125] See footnote 60.
[126] Fannin, Mark, *Labor's Promised Land*. See particularly chapters seven and eight.
[127] Frankel, Linda, "Jesus Leads Us, Cooper Needs Us, the Union Feeds Us: The 1958 Harriet-Henderson Textile Strike," p. 115, in Jeffrey Leiter, Michael Schulman, and Rhonda Zingraff, ed., *Hanging By a Thread: Social Change in Southern Textiles*, Cornell University ILR Press, 1991.

problem was that the CIO went about trying to recruit southern workers in a way that could not possibly have succeeded. Similarly, the CRD, probably could have succeeded in its mission of forming an alliance with southern religious leaders, had they recognized which set of leaders to target. Instead, the CRD overlooked the very groups that it had the best chance of forming workable alliances with, in favor of trying to appeal to religious leaders who had no incentive, and no inclination, to look with favor on the cause of industrial unionism.

What the Billy Graham episode really represents then, is the failure of imagination on the part of the Community Relations Department that was characteristic of their broader program and, indeed, characteristic of Operation Dixie as a whole. To return to the analytic framework outlined in the first chapter, what the CRD did was this: rather than mobilize the discontented, educate them as to the situation and its possible solutions, and challenge the existing hierarchy and deference patterns of southern society, the CRD attempted to bypass this process altogether by appealing to the existing religious elite in the hope that they would voluntarily endorse the destruction of the very system that provided them with their elite status. That Billy Graham, and the rest of the southern religious establishment was not keen to sign on to this program, should not surprise us in the least.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

As has been demonstrated in the previous several chapters, the efforts of the Community Relations Department of the Southern Organizing Committee, as with Operation Dixie as a whole, were not successful. After years of effort, by the time of Operation Dixie's close in 1953, the religious community of the South was not noticeably more pro-labor than it had been at the beginning of the campaign in 1946, indeed, if anything the hostility towards organized labor was probably increased. Religious leaders, in significant numbers, never came out in favor of the CIO, and anti-labor religious attacks on the organization persisted, largely unaffected, until the end. The argument presented here, advanced at some length, and in some detail, has been that the reasons for this failure were two-fold.

In the first instance, the CRD went about its task with little regard for the anti-hierarchical structure characteristic of southern religion. By attempting to argue from authority, that is by appealing to the denominational statements favorable to organized labor promulgated at the highest levels of national church bodies, the CRD failed to recognize the tenuous nature of authority in the Protestant denominations that dominated the South. Unlike the Catholic Church, where the pronouncements of Bishops and Popes had binding authority on parish priests, Southern Baptist congregations, for example, were largely independent, and felt no need to abide by the statements of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Secondly, the CRD failed to recognize that there was no real advantage in aiding labor unions for southern clergy. Southern ministers were integral, respected members of their communities, a part of the civic elite which had shaped southern society in the years

after the Civil War, through the industrialization of the New South, and who, by and large, had sanctioned the very system of economic relations that the CIO was intent on overturning. That these leaders were not quick to join forces with the CIO is much less surprising than is the fact that the CIO entertained the idea that they might.

In seeking to court these members of the societal elite, the CRD was pursuing an agenda that was, frankly, quite a surprising one for a social movement. Rather than seeking to achieve social change from the ground up, the CIO was, in effect, hoping to short-circuit the long and arduous process of mobilization and struggle by convincing those at the top to agree to the proposed change willingly. In this, the campaign of the CRD was actually in accord with another tactic of the CIO during this period, namely the effort to convince employers that unionization would actually be a positive good for their factories, in that it would ensure labor force tranquility and increase productivity. Neither tactic, it should be noted, was particularly effective in achieving unionization. When it came right down to it, neither group of elites saw the need for labor unions in the South, and neither group was swayed by the arguments of the CIO. The reasons for this were really quite simple; both groups were already at the top of the social pyramid of the South, and neither needed the CIO to remain in place. Indeed, as the power elite of the South correctly perceived, the CIO, far from being an ally, was a potential threat to their continued power and position. While the whole thrust of Operation Dixie was geared towards portraying the CIO as a non-alien, non-disruptive force in the South, the reality was quite different. As the leaders of the CIO recognized, even if they were unwilling to admit it publicly, the unionization of the South

would have irrevocably transformed the region, economically, socially, and politically. The civic leaders of the South, not surprisingly, were fairly content with the economic system that they had built, and saw no reason, or advantage, in change simply because the CIO desired it.

Given, then, that the plan of action that the CIO adopted in the South was little short of disastrous, the question arises as to why they chose to proceed in such a manner in the first place. As noted towards the start of this paper, the historian of Operation Dixie, Barbara Griffith, has explained the CIO's failure during Operation Dixie as arising out of the inappropriate use of northern methods in the South. One element of this explanation, that having to do with the use of Religion and Labor Fellowship groups, has already been explored somewhat in chapter three, but there is more to it than this. In a larger sense, it seems as if the CIO, through the CRD, was attempting to replicate, in the South, the same sort of political coalition that existed in the North, only with a crucial difference. What the CRD was attempting to create in the South was a reflection of the current alliances prevailing in the North, rather than the embryonic New Deal coalition that had coalesced during the 1930s, the CIO's formative period in the North.

The CIO had come to power and prominence in the North, in large part, due to its alliance with the Democratic Party, and particularly with the New Deal political coalition put together by Franklin Roosevelt.[128] Seizing on the opportunity presented by the social and political upheaval of the Great Depression, Roosevelt had fundamentally transformed the Democratic Party by forging a new political coalition out of various disparate groups

[128] For an overview of the relationship between Roosevelt and the CIO during the union's formative period in the 1930s, see Zieger, *The CIO*, chapter 2, particularly pp. 39-41.

including the various immigrant communities of the Northeast, urban blacks, and the urban working class.[129] This represented an enormous shift in power in the North, away from the northern business interests that had dominated the Republican Party, and began a process of political realignment that would continue for decades to come. Through participating in this alliance, the Congress of Industrial Organizations was able to secure the patronage and protection of the Roosevelt administration, and thus was able to grow and flourish with the aid of the Wagner Act and the NLRB.[130] By the time of Operation Dixie, the CIO had been a major player in national politics, and had benefited from its association with the New Deal for a decade. The leaders of the various constituent unions were important figures on the national political scene and had become, in the North anyway, something akin to members of the elite in their own right. It would have been only natural then, for them to think that a similar arrangement could be achieved in the South as well.

The major flaw in this conception of possibilities, however, is that the leaders of the CIO, perhaps out of the present-mindedness to which people, and politicians in particular, are often prone, neglected to remember the actual details of their rise to power. The CIO had not come to its strong position of the 1940s through an alliance with the prevailing powers of the 1930s. Indeed, quite the contrary. What the CIO had done, was to ally itself with outsiders who, although they possessed potential, were not solidly in position. The New Deal coalition needed all the support it could get in the mid 1930s, and thus the support of organized labor was a valuable acquisition. If Roosevelt was going to solidify his position, and cement the

[129] Kennedy, David, *Freedom From Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945*, Oxford University Press, 2005, pp. 127-128.
[130] Ibid, pp. 291-2.

dominance of the Democratic Party in national electoral politics, he needed organized labor on his side, and thus he was willing to court their support with the not inconsiderable power of the federal government.

In contrast, the CIO, during Operation Dixie, attempted to garner the support of the established societal elite of the South. These civic leaders did not need the support of organized labor. The elites of the South were firmly entrenched, with no major challengers in sight. Indeed, far from needing the support of the CIO, the economic and political leaders of the South saw the union as a positive threat to their society, potentially disrupting the economic system on which their dominance was built.

Given this situation then, the failure of Operation Dixie represents no mystery. The existing social system of the South simply contained no place for organized labor. The CIO made a pitch to the southern elite for their support, but this elite was not interested in anything the CIO had to offer. The CIO made its pitch to the workers of the South, and the workers, by and large, were not convinced that the CIO had anything to offer which they could not get on their own with considerably less trouble. Those few workers who were convinced, and wanted to join a union, were, for the most part, fired, beaten, threatened, or otherwise coerced by their employers to the point where no significant union presence ever materialized in the South. Ultimately, the CIO simply failed to make the case for its existence in the South, and the campaign was a failure as a result.

What was true for Operation Dixie as a whole, was true for the Community Relations Department as well. The CRD tried to persuade southern ministers that supporting unions

was the right, proper, the Christian thing to do, and in this they failed. They failed, largely, for the same reason that Operation Dixie as a whole failed. They attempted to create change without creating controversy. Ramsay and the other staffers of the CRD appealed to a group of people, the clergy of the South, for help, when there was no real reason for this group to help them. They appealed to a sense of duty which, by and large, was not recognized in southern religion. Southern religion was not dominated by the Social Gospel; southern clergy, for the most part, simply did not see their role as one that involved meddling in industrial relations or power politics, and, in the absence of any compelling rationale for their involvement, most clergy were disinclined to intrude into matters which they did not feel related to their mission of bringing people into a closer relationship with God.

There was also, as had been brought out during the course of this analysis, a class element involved. The CRD was, for the most part, extremely distrustful of the non-mainline Protestant denominations. These denominations tended to be intensely personal, focused on an almost otherworldly style of religion that eschewed the day to day realities of the world, and emphasized instead the spiritual world to come. These denominations also tended to be antagonistic towards organizations of any kind, and particularly organized labor. And yet, as demonstrated by churches such as the Church of God of the Union Assembly, these groups could, if conditions were right, be powerful allies of organized labor. Moreover, as low-status outsiders, the members of these denominations had nothing to lose, and potentially much to gain, by an alliance with the CIO and the social change that the organization of the South would have set in motion. It is by no means clear that such an alliance between these

groups and the CIO would have been possible, much less successful, but the failure of the CRD to pursue such an option surely represents one of the missed opportunities of Operation Dixie.

In sum then, the CRD, through its various enterprises, focused its attentions on groups that had no logical reason to support the CIO, while at the same time neglecting those groups that, because of their low position in the hierarchy of southern society, not to mention their large constituency among the very workers that the CIO was attempting to organize, might have become allies in the organization of the South, and wasted a good deal of time and effort in an enterprise that was doomed from its beginning. That this was a tragedy of wasted time and talent, goes almost without saying, but that it was of a piece with the overall lack of vision and understanding that characterized Operation Dixie as a whole, must be comprehended in order to make sense of the overall failure of the CIO's campaign to organize the South.

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