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## From Resistance to Adaptation

### *Organized Labor Reacts to a Changing Nominating Process*

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> The so-called McGovern commission was supposed to produce the most democratic convention in the history of the parties. . . . Oh, 300 labor delegates managed to get there, but only one was allowed to address the delegates. [Instead,] we listened for three days to the speakers who were approved to speak by the powers-that-be at that convention. We listened to the gay-lib people—you know, the people who want to legalize marriage between boys and boys and legalize marriage between girls and girls. . . . We heard from the abortionists, and we heard from the people who look like Jacks, acted like Jills, and had the odor of johns about them.
>
> —George Meany, AFL-CIO President, speaking in the aftermath of the 1972 Democratic National Convention[1]

> We must dominate this convention—with our spirit, with our signs, with our presence and participation in the convention hall. You, my brothers and sisters, are the largest delegation of down-home, uptown, grassroots, kick-ass union leaders in the history of the Democratic National Convention.
>
> —John J. Sweeney, AFL-CIO President, addressing a meeting of union delegates to the 2000 Democratic National Convention[2]

These two quotations—one a bitter denunciation of the Democratic party for allegedly excluding unions from the party's procedures for choosing a presidential candidate, the other a triumphal assertion of labor's continuing power and relevance at the last nominating convention of the twentieth century—illustrate the dramatic twists and turns in the history of labor unions in the Democratic party. Ever since the emergence of powerful industrial unions during the Great Depression, organized labor has been the single most important mass-membership interest group in the Democratic coalition. Dependent on the federal gov-

ernment for the effective enforcement of labor laws, and with an abiding interest in a vast range of public policy issues, the labor movement has been deeply concerned to have a friend in the White House (in some instances, the very survival of particular union organizations has depended on it). To secure an allied executive, unions have not only helped Democratic presidential candidates in the general election, but have gone a step further, becoming intimately involved in the party's initial choice of a presidential nominee. It is this effort to determine the party's nominee, and what it teaches us about the nature of the current nominating process and the role of interest groups within it, that will be my concern in this chapter.[3]

Political scientists have long recognized the role of institutional rules and procedures in altering political behavior, an insight well-summarized in the oft-quoted maxim: "When you change the rules, you change the game."[4] Nowhere is the point better confirmed than in the case of organized labor's evolving role in the presidential nominating process. The rules of this process underwent major reform in the early 1970s, forcing labor unions to significantly adjust the ways in which they sought to influence presidential nominations. After a period of resistance, including a failed effort by some leaders to rollback reform entirely, the unions spent the early 1980s adapting to the logic of the new system and learning how to manipulate it to their own advantage. In the nominating contests since that time, labor has been a crucial player, effectively promoting its favored candidates and often undermining those it opposes. In order to achieve this influence, however, the labor movement first had to undergo a wrenching set of internal changes, democratizing and opening up its own endorsement procedures and creating new methods to consult and mobilize the union rank-and-file. Without many noticing it, party reform thus catalyzed a process of labor reform, issuing in a new distribution of power within the contemporary union movement. This, too, counts as one of many unintended consequences of party reform.

## THE RISE OF A NATIONAL LABOR MOVEMENT

An understanding of the current nature of the labor/Democrat relationship requires some brief consideration of the historical origins of organized labor and the factors which have driven it so deeply toward political activism. Labor unions have always been interested in politics, if for no other reason than the need to prevent local, state, or federal governments from stepping in to repress their efforts to form effective workplace organizations. While other issues have always been on their agenda, the basic task of organizational survival has necessarily been paramount. A defense of the right to organize was, therefore, the main political goal endorsed by the fledgling craft unions that joined together in 1886 to form the American Federation of Labor (AFL). The unions of skilled workers

in the AFL, typically employed in the construction (or "building") trades or in small-scale craft production, succeeded in forming robust but small organizations that managed to survive despite their lack of a secure place in the nation's legal order. These unions did not aspire to represent all the workers in a specific firm or industry, but instead concentrated only on those who possessed a particular skill (such as carpenters, plumbers, bakers, tailors, and so on) regardless of employer. The typical form of organization for a craft union was a "local" based on a geographic area, and within that area its members could be found in many different enterprises.

Even in the best of times, the hostility of the federal judiciary to union activity always reminded unionists that a friend in the White House, willing to use his power to appoint liberal judges and to sign the occasional pro-union piece of legislation, could make a major difference for the future of their organizations. It was this reasoning that in 1908 led the AFL, then representing nearly three million union members, to endorse the election of Democratic presidential nominee William Jennings Bryan—an act that marks the definitive entry of labor unions into presidential politics. While the AFL would also work for the election of Woodrow Wilson in 1912, and gain some influence within his administration, the national shift toward conservatism following World War I drove labor away from both major parties, and in 1924 the federation went so far as to endorse a third party presidential candidate (the Progressive nominee, Sen. Robert LaFollette of Wisconsin). Thus, on the eve of the Great Depression, the AFL remained wedded to the idea of non-partisanship—the belief that labor should never make a serious and long-term commitment to any political party. With this approach prevailing, an intervention in the Democratic party's procedures for nominating presidential candidates remained virtually unthinkable.

All this was to change with the formation of the Congress of Industrial Organizations in 1935. For decades, the AFL had refused to organize the millions of unskilled workers, often African-Americans and immigrants from eastern and southern Europe, who had been drawn into such growing mass production industries as automobiles, rubber, steel, and electrical goods. Craft unionists saw these underprivileged, uneducated, and socially "inferior" masses as poor material with which to build strong and sustainable unions. Efforts to organize such workers in the past had always failed, AFL leaders argued, and they would do so this time also. Other union leaders, however, saw it differently. A few unions in the AFL, such as the mineworkers and textile workers, had always had a semi-industrial character, and they argued that the growing workforce was ripe for a new kind of organization: "industrial" unionism, in which workers of all skills and job types were brought together in a single organization based on the employer or industry in which they labored. Advocates of this brand of unionism were strengthened in 1935 when a Democratic Congress passed and President Franklin Roosevelt signed into law the National Labor Relations Act, a statute that created powerful new protections for workers seeking to achieve union rep-

resentation. With this legal framework in place, the mineworkers and other unions could be restrained no longer: they broke off from the AFL and established a second, rival federation called the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). The first task of the new organization was to launch a huge drive to organize mass production workers, an initiative that turned out to be spectacularly successful, resulting in millions of new union members in the space of only a few years and the creation of such powerful organizations as the United Auto Workers and United Steelworkers. The CIO's successes, along with the changes in labor law, also stimulated growth in the old AFL unions, so that by the end of the 1930s the nation had a much more powerful, albeit divided, labor movement, and one much more closely aligned with the national Democratic party.

By the early 1950s it was clear that both the CIO and the AFL were here to stay, with the CIO claiming a membership (in its affiliated unions) of some 6,000,000 workers, and the AFL achieving even greater success with more than 9,000,000 members. By 1952, total union representation in the workforce has risen to nearly 33 percent, a stunning increase over the 13 percent that unions had possessed at the start of the Depression.[5] With the successful unionization of formerly intractable workers and industries, and increasing overlap between the craft and industrial models of organization, the historic clash between the two labor federations began to soften. Thus, in the more placid setting of mid-century America, the two federations were finally able to set aside their differences, officially merging in 1955. Unable to agree on a new name, union officials simply christened the resulting body the AFL-CIO. With this development, the basic organizational structure of American unionism as we know it today was in place.

## ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE AND THE QUEST FOR LABOR UNITY

The foundational principle of the AFL-CIO is that workers will be organized into separate nationwide (or international) unions that have exclusive responsibility for the major functions of new organizing, collective bargaining, and contract administration. These unions are the sovereign entities of the labor movement. They are the only bodies that individual workers can directly join, and they are capable of performing most of their functions quite well without the assistance of the labor federation (indeed, some have never joined it, or have chosen to exit when they have concluded that affiliation was no longer helpful). Most unions do find affiliation worthwhile, however, for the AFL-CIO plays a helpful role in resolving jurisdictional disputes (i.e., conflicts over which unions get to organize which workers), in providing assistance to unions engaged in new organizing drives or embroiled in expensive strikes, and in planning and coordinating an overall political strategy. To carry out these tasks, the top officials of the federation—a president, vice president, secretary-treasurer, and a 54-member execu-

tive council—are elected for four-year terms at a national convention composed of delegates from the affiliated unions and local and state AFL-CIO bodies. Each national union in the federation (there were a total of 66 in 2002) provides a portion of its members' dues monies to the national headquarters, and with 13 million members in affiliated unions, the AFL-CIO can tap impressive financial resources. However, as with all federations, the use of these resources is deeply constrained by the need to hold together an organization that depends entirely on the voluntary affiliation of its members.

The decentralized structure of the labor movement ensures that the various national unions can, if they so desire, pursue a thoroughly independent path in electoral politics, even endorsing competing candidates and adopting divergent political demands. Cooperation has to be negotiated, not dictated. In the case of presidential nominating politics, this organizational structure allows three possibilities:

1. A **united front** in which the AFL-CIO throws its own organizational weight and that of each affiliated union behind a single candidate, ideally one selected well before the delegate selection process has commenced
2. A **free-for-all** in which the federation stands aside and lets each national union decide on its own which candidate (if any) to endorse, and when
3. An agreement for **collective neutrality**, in which the federation secures the agreement of all affiliated unions to endorse no candidate at all in the nominating process. Each one of these options has been used over the last several decades and, as we shall see, each carries with it a distinctive array of costs and benefits (see Table 5.1)

In the case of the free-for-all strategy, an obvious problem is that it may encourage a descent into fratricidal conflict as unions align behind competing and often antagonistic candidates. Although a more restrained and hospitable electoral competition is also possible, there is no question that a strategy that encourages unions to line up publicly behind different candidates is not conducive to labor unity. A united front, in contrast, would seem to offer organized labor the most effective form of influence. But this strategy, too, has its problems, the most intractable of which is that achieving unity behind a single candidate can be quite difficult. The labor movement is always torn by differing economic, cultural, and ideological commitments. Public employee unions have different interests than private sector unions, and the goals of private sector unions often reflect the competing industries and companies in which their members are employed. While many unions seek to restrict foreign competition, for example, others may find it unobjectionable or even desirable. With millions of workers in AFL-CIO unions, all the usual American conflicts over religion, guns, abortion, race, ethnicity, and gender come into play when unions make political endorsements. Some unions (especially those in the building trades) have a pre-

**Table 5.1 Union Strategies in the Reformed Nominating Process**

| | *Strategy* | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | *United Front* | *Collective Neutrality* | *Free-for-All* |
| Year of Utilization | 1984<br>1996<br>2000 | 1988 | 1972<br>1976<br>1980<br>1992 |
| Key Feature | Federation-level endorsement of single candidate | Federation-led agreement for all unions to remain neutral | Federation stands aside as individual unions make their own endorsement choices |
| Benefits | Labor unity enhanced; labor can control outcome; winner will have ties to federation, not just national unions; demonstration effect to other politicians | Union rivalries reduced; labor makes fewer enemies; saves energies for the general election | Each union has autonomy; victor is likely to have close ties to one or more unions; presence at the convention assured |
| Costs | Labor is made a target of criticism; difficult to achieve unity in absence of a clear front-runner; labor may get blame for general election defeat | Each union is more likely to be split internally; labor loses all direct control over selection of nominee; does not enhance labor reputation as a power-broker | Bitter inter-union rivalries are possible; may allow a disliked candidate to slip through; winner may be beholden to only narrow section of labor movement |

dominantly white male membership, with conservative cultural preferences and a willingness to consider the endorsement of Republican candidates. Other unions, especially those in the service sector or representing public employees, may have a large female or minority membership with very different cultural and political proclivities. The involvement of labor in a wide-range of foreign policy issues only adds another wild card to the mix. Thus, just as the national parties find it hard to aggregate the diverse interests of American society, so too does the comparably diverse union movement find it difficult to come up with common political positions.

The story of labor's involvement in nominating politics is, therefore, as much

one of managing internal discord as it is a tale of pressuring politicians or mobilizing voters. The way in which labor resolves conflict and attempts to reach unity will be determined not only by its internal procedures, but also by the rules of the nominating process, which dictate whether labor's influence will be exercised publicly or behind closed doors, across many states or in a single convention hall. To understand how changes in the rules have impacted union strategy, we must return once more to the postwar period and the moment of labor's full acceptance into the counsels of the national Democratic party.

## LABOR'S INCLUSION IN THE PRE-REFORM PRESIDENTIAL NOMINATING PROCESS

The dramatic increase in the size, scope, and power of labor unionism in the 1930s and 1940s did not go unnoticed by Democratic party politicians, who eagerly sought union votes, money, and organizational resources as they engaged in fierce electoral competition with their Republican adversaries. The acquisition of these resources, however, required the nomination of Democratic candidates for office who could generate enthusiastic union support. At the presidential level, therefore, it became increasingly important to ensure that the Democratic nominee was someone acceptable to labor leaders and their members. One obvious and easy way to do this was for party leaders to consult with union officials prior to the selection of presidential and vice presidential nominees. For their part, union leaders were eager to make their views known and to squelch the candidacies of those they considered unreliable or unelectable.

The character of the mid-century presidential nominating process made the exercise of union influence fairly straightforward, requiring mainly that union leaders clearly express their preferences to the party leaders who ultimately controlled the nomination. Prior to the reforms of the 1970s, each state party was free to adopt its own procedures for selecting delegates to the national convention, with the national party providing virtually no supervision or regulation. Left to do as they pleased, state parties usually set up procedures that allowed party leaders to effectively control the selection of delegates and the subsequent behavior of those delegates at the national convention. The most popular arrangement was to organize a series of local meetings or "caucuses" in which party members would elect delegates to district or state conventions that would in turn elect delegates to the national convention. While in theory open to widespread participation, the "caucus-convention" system in practice produced delegations that were frequently controlled by one or a small number of individuals (often a governor or other high-level elected official). Even in the minority of states that adopted some kind of primary, where ordinary Democratic voters could register their preferences, party leaders were willing and able to use a variety of techniques to ensure that the actual delegation at the convention remained

under their personal control. At the national convention, therefore, most of the power was concentrated among the leaders of the state delegations, who could then negotiate among themselves over the issue of which candidate would best serve the party's interests in the general election. The essence of convention decision-making was captured in journalist Theodore White's comment that the convention was "a universe in itself, a nucleus of thirty or forty tough-minded power brokers, making decisions behind closed doors."[6]

Insider bargaining of this kind was something with which union leaders were quite comfortable—they were, after all, "tough-minded power brokers" in their own right, professional bargainers who made deals with both employers and other union leaders on a daily basis. Lane Kirkland, AFL-CIO President from 1979 to 1995, described why the system was, from his perspective, decidedly advantageous for labor. There was a "tacit, invisible but real arrangement," he argued, in which "the party leaders knew that, in the general election, they needed labor to draw some of the water and hew some of the wood. The leaders of the party wanted to win. They wouldn't nominate anyone who was too offensive to the trade union movement."[7] This arrangement "was a collective bargaining relationship, in effect: the key people involved in the process would discuss with us the acceptability of various candidates. A relative handful of people exercised a profound influence on the process."[8] While union leaders could not always ensure the nomination of their first choice, Kirkland acknowledged, they knew that party leaders would listen to their concerns, anticipate their reactions, and avoid choosing a candidate they actively disliked. Because of this, union influence was mainly exercised behind the scenes, either in negotiations with party leaders before the convention or in the intense interactions at the convention itself. The union leaders with the most influence in this system were those who made the greatest effort to be heard, and these were typically the representatives of the larger unions that cared most deeply about national political outcomes. The president of the AFL-CIO, in contrast, would frequently play a secondary role, secure in the knowledge that whatever choice the convention made would already have incorporated the preferences of the most important union leaders.

A distinctive feature of this arrangement was that the scale of union involvement was generally kept well hidden from both the general public and the union membership. Even as union leaders actively pushed their favored candidates, they were careful to issue denials that they were playing any role at all in the party's internal deliberations. In the midst of the 1960 Democratic nominating contest, for example, United Auto Workers President Walter Reuther would publicly proclaim that "the UAW has not—nor will we—endorse a candidate for the presidential nomination of any party. This is properly the responsibility of the delegates who make up the conventions of both parties."[9] Yet, at almost the same time the *Washington Post* was reporting that at the Democratic convention Reuther had "played the key role for the Kennedy forces. Although technically

neutral, he quietly quarter-backed a campaign for Kennedy in his hotel suite. The Michigan delegation delivered 42 votes to Kennedy, which helped put him over the top."[10] As this episode suggests, in the old nominating system the leaders of the national unions could operate behind a facade of formal neutrality, enjoying a remarkable degree of autonomy from their own membership and even secondary leaders within their own organization; the power and autonomy of the AFL-CIO president, should he choose to exercise it, was equally privileged. This kind of informal and unpublicized influence rarely required the mobilization of even a portion of the rank-and-file membership, nor did it require the expenditure of a large quantity of union financial and organizational resources. This was truly influence on the cheap.

There was, however, a danger in this system that only a severe political crisis would make evident. What would happen if large numbers of Democratic party voters—including rank-and-file union members and lower-level union activists—began to develop strong preferences about the selection of the party nominee that were divergent from those of the union leadership? Would those preferences be taken into account? And if they were not, what would be the consequences? In the hothouse conditions of the late 1960s, it was precisely this possibility that would soon be realized, with momentous consequences for both organized labor and the rules of American politics.

## 1968: THE LAST HURRAH OF A "BOSSED" CONVENTION

The old system of elite brokerage would finally be destroyed as a result of the profoundly disruptive forces unleashed in the presidential nominating process of 1968. The most important stimulant to change was, of course, the Vietnam War, which had produced a fierce movement in opposition by the beginning of 1968. The raging energy of the movement was channeled into support for the candidacy of Minnesota Senator Eugene McCarthy, who launched a challenge to President Lyndon Johnson for the Democratic nomination. When McCarthy did unexpectedly well in the March 12 New Hampshire primary, suggesting that Johnson might actually be vulnerable, Senator Robert Kennedy also threw his hat in the ring. Then, just two weeks later, on March 31, an embattled President Johnson surprised everyone by withdrawing from the race altogether. With only the two insurgents—Kennedy and McCarthy—left as announced candidates, the more "establishment" forces in the party, including most of organized labor, now found themselves without a candidate of their own. Deeply satisfied with the policies of Lyndon Johnson, most union leaders wanted to see the selection of an electable Democratic nominee who would defend the prevailing liberal order in Washington: neither Kennedy nor McCarthy—each unpredictable and provocative in their own way—seemed likely to fit the bill.

At this point, the leadership of the labor federation decided to act. AFL-CIO President George Meany, a powerful and even domineering figure who led the federation from 1955 to 1979, moved quickly to encourage Vice President Humphrey, a loyal friend of labor and a favorite of other party leaders, to announce his own candidacy for the nomination. As Meany later boasted: "Lane [Kirkland] and I went over to see Hubert Humphrey and got him to agree he would run."[11] Meany also issued an AFL-CIO press release stating: "We . . . strongly urge that Vice President Hubert Humphrey declare himself now as a candidate for the presidency."[12] Although the use of "we" implied an official organizational commitment, Meany's announcement was not in any way the product of formal procedures or deliberation within the federation. Meany chose to endorse Humphrey, and to actively oppose the antiwar candidacies of Senators Kennedy and McCarthy, well before the electability of any of these candidates or their appeal to union members had been properly tested in caucuses or primaries.

The danger here for Meany was that he could be getting out ahead of not only union members, but also of other union leaders, who were slowly growing skeptical about the seemingly endless involvement in Vietnam. As the *Washington Post*'s David Broder observed, "Never before has the national labor federation become so openly involved at so early a stage in the fight for the Democratic presidential nomination."[13] At a time of great controversy, Meany was now leading the federation into a very public endorsement of a candidate who may well have been the second-choice of a large number of unionists. Moreover, Meany's own personal role was easily eclipsing that of the individual national union presidents who had in previous nominating contests typically been the main voice of labor. While Meany's reputation as the "unchallenged strong man of American labor" (as one journalist put it) was no doubt enhanced, the AFL-CIO leader was coming perilously close to overstepping his role as the leader of a *federation* of formally equal sovereigns.[14]

Despite such risks, Meany and the AFL-CIO went about promoting the vice president's nomination the old-fashioned way, pulling strings behind the scenes in elite party circles around the country. Entering the race on April 27, Humphrey chose not to enter a single primary, instead working with labor to secure the support of the party leaders who actually controlled the delegate votes at the convention. AFL-CIO Secretary-Treasurer Lane Kirkland described the federation's role: "I was involved with others in putting together a committee—a labor committee—for Hubert Humphrey. . . . Labor was instrumental in rounding up the delegate votes to get him nominated. We didn't do that by participating in primary elections. . . . But in the non-primary states, we rounded up most of the votes."[15] Humphrey himself credited labor with doing critical work for his campaign, and Theodore White concluded that the AFL-CIO delivered the delegations of Pennsylvania, Maryland, Michigan, and Ohio—accomplishments that made it unlikely that anyone could have defeated Humphrey at the August convention.[16] As it turned out, the assassination of Robert Kennedy on June 5 (the

very night of his victory in the California primary) made Humphrey's nomination a virtual certainty.

When the delegates finally met in Chicago, labor officials continued to smooth the way for the vice president; the *Wall Street Journal* reported: "Mr. Humphrey has no more important ally at this convention than labor. . . . The unions are the Vice President's bedrock of support."[17] Working closely with the Humphrey campaign, the AFL-CIO's political director used union delegates, spread across forty-four state delegations, to gather political intelligence and help control the unruly convention floor. Blocked by organized labor and the rest of the party establishment, the antiwar forces led by Eugene McCarthy failed to significantly shift the foreign policy commitments of the Democratic party, just as Meany and top AFL-CIO officials had hoped. The voice of opposition to the war would ultimately find greater expression in the streets of Chicago, where outraged protestors clashed with local police (themselves employees of the powerful Democratic machine controlled by Mayor Richard J. Daley). The hapless Hubert Humphrey would pay the cost for this debacle, as it no doubt helped Richard Nixon to eke out his victory over the vice president in the November election.

In so effectively containing the antiwar insurgency, however, the federation and its traditional party allies had perhaps succeeded too well. With Robert Kennedy dead, and Eugene McCarthy pushed to the margins, the antiwar forces felt they now had little voice in the affairs of the national Democratic party. In response, they raised numerous complaints about delegate selection procedures around the country, which they characterized as controlled by unelected party officials and as totally inaccessible to ordinary Democratic voters. In Pennsylvania, for example, McCarthy won the primary by a wide margin, but under the state party's rules was entitled to only a small fraction of the actual delegates, the vast majority going instead to Vice President Humphrey. Repeated episodes of this nature, inevitable under party rules that gave more weight to the views of elected party leaders than those of primary voters, were seen as fundamentally unfair by the "disenfranchised" supporters of the "New Politics." In response to these complaints, and in the hope of securing party unity for the general election, the convention agreed to establish a new party committee to study delegate selection procedures and suggest improvements: the age of party reform was about to begin.

## PARTY REFORM AND THE NEW LOGIC OF PRESIDENTIAL SELECTION

While the antiwar forces of 1968 were snubbed by labor and the party establishment, they soon had a taste of revenge when they gained a commanding influence over the party's new Commission on Party Structure and Delegate Selection (also known as the McGovern-Fraser Commission after its first chair, Sen.

George McGovern, and his eventual successor, Rep. Don Fraser). The commission's report, issued in 1970, proposed that each state party follow a set of "guidelines" for delegate selection prepared by the national party. States that did not follow these rules would not have their delegations accepted at the national convention. Starting in 1972, the national party agreed, delegates would have to be chosen either through primary elections or at caucuses that were publicly announced and open to all party members who wished to participate. The old procedures that had made it easy for state party leaders to control the delegate selection process from the top-down were now officially proscribed. In response to the new rules, states opened up previously closed convention systems or, in many cases, simply switched to primaries, which were easier to understand and unambiguously met the demands of reform. The ensuing increase in the number of primaries, from 17 in 1968 to 23 in 1972 and then to 29 in 1976, meant that the nominating process moved from a system where primaries played only a limited role—mainly serving as a test of a candidate's popularity and campaigning skills—to one where they were of crucial importance in allocating delegate votes at the national convention. The task for candidates also changed: instead of obtaining the support of key party leaders, the goal was to mobilize lots of supporters to attend caucuses or to vote in primary elections. The valued skills were now public campaigning and mass mobilization, not elite bargaining and personal persuasion. Without much fanfare, the incentives of the nominating system for both candidates and interest groups had been thoroughly transformed.

The adoption of these procedures meant that the old system of convention-based elite brokerage could no longer function as it had previously, and that labor would eventually be forced to adjust its strategy. If union leaders hoped to exercise power within the new system they would have to systematically influence outcomes in caucuses and primaries, either by sending their own members to the polls or by altering the preferences of other constituencies. While the allocation of union financial and organizational resources would undoubtedly be helpful, the most fundamental need of candidates was for the support of groups that could bring out their members to vote in a predictable fashion. One consequence was that if the union membership was significantly divided or even opposed to the leadership's choice, this fact would now have immediate political effects: the members could support a different candidate in primaries or caucuses. In addition, the candidates themselves could make appeals directly to union members in their capacity as primary voters, thus bypassing those union leaders who would otherwise be accepted as the sole brokers for labor's electoral and organizational resources; inevitably, the autonomy of union officials was reduced.

Having utilized the old system so effectively in 1968, the AFL-CIO leadership saw virtually nothing of value in any of the reform initiatives. As far as President Meany and his allies were concerned, the established procedures had done a fine job of selecting electable and friendly presidential nominees—there was no need to change them! But in an astonishing case of political misjudgment, the AFL-

CIO encouraged its representative on the McGovern-Fraser Commission to boycott its meetings altogether rather than make a principled defense of the existing system. The decision proved to be a major miscalculation, as the commission eventually issued a report calling for the dismantling of the old procedures. AFL-CIO operatives did recognize the dangers in the reform effort, but assumed they would be able to block any inimical changes at a later stage. To their surprise, however, they were soon outmaneuvered in party councils, and the reforms were quickly adopted nationally and implemented at the state level. In what one scholar has called a ''quiet revolution,'' the old and easy ways of elite negotiation were now rendered inoperable.[18]

While the AFL-CIO's opposition to reform was intense and bitter, a number of labor unions concluded that party reform—and the more open nominating procedures that it would create—could ultimately have beneficial consequences for both the Democratic party and organized labor. The political director of the United Auto Workers (UAW), for example, actually served on the McGovern-Fraser Commission, and local UAW members testified in favor of reform at commission hearings around the country. The UAW was joined in this support by the Communications Workers of America, the International Association of Machinists, and the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME)—three large and very powerful organizations. The pro-reform unions, composed mainly of industrial workers or service and public sector employees, had a strong commitment to the advancement of liberal policies at the national level, including civil rights, labor law reform, and the expansion of the welfare state in all its forms. They were sympathetic to reform because they believed that institutional renovation could help channel the energy of the new protest movements directly into the party, expanding the ranks of its supporters and encouraging the unity of the Democratic coalition. Reforms could also improve the quality of representation for individual union members, who might find direct participation in party affairs much easier than ever before.

President Meany and his allies had different interests, and a correspondingly different vision of the most appropriate political strategy. Meany's strongest base of support was among the building trades unions (Meany himself had begun his career as a member of the plumbers' union), organizations that traced their lineage back to the conservative craft unions that had originally founded the AFL in the 1880s. These unions were mainly focused on local politics, for policies decided at this level—zoning laws, the distribution of city contracts, licensing and apprenticeship statutes, police behavior during strikes, etc.—had the most impact on their immediate well-being. The first impulse of these unions was to ally with Democratic ''machine'' politicians in the big cities who could fulfill union demands at the local level. They had little interest in the plans for broad social reform, welfare state expansion, and economic regulation that were advanced by the industrial and public employee unions. Beyond these economic concerns, the construction unions were composed of workers who were likely

to be culturally conservative and disdainful of the movements of the 1960s that challenged existing attitudes toward sexuality, race, and patriotism: they had nothing but contempt for the protestors who had rallied outside the Chicago convention. Although Meany was considerably more liberal than most building trades leaders when it came to issues of economic policy, he shared their resentment of those forces that now threatened the political arrangements that, in his view, had served the working man quite well. Thus, by 1970 the labor movement was increasingly divided about how to respond to the new social movements in the Democratic party and the institutional reforms they so assiduously pursued.

## 1972–1980: LABOR DISUNITY AND FRAGMENTATION

The political conflicts of the 1960s that fractured the Democratic party were, by the early 1970s, also dividing the labor movement itself, as unionists found themselves increasingly torn over how to respond to the Vietnam war, political reform, and cultural change. The extent to which the labor movement, like so many institutions in American society at this time, was internally conflicted would only become clear in its response to the Democratic Party's selection of South Dakota Senator George McGovern as its presidential nominee in 1972. McGovern, who had briefly served as chair of the Democrats' party reform commission, stunned most observers by winning the Democratic party presidential nomination against the wishes of most of the party leaders and interest group leaders who, in earlier years, would have been able to block his bid and install their own choice. Mobilizing the same political forces that had been excluded four years before—opponents of the war in Vietnam, youthful liberal activists, reformers of all stripes—McGovern was able to obtain the nomination by appealing to party voters in primaries and in the newly open and more participatory caucuses. Delegates selected in this manner arrived at the convention already pledged to McGovern, rather than remaining open to persuasion as events at the convention unfolded. In achieving this victory, McGovern had effectively bypassed not only the party establishment, but the labor movement as well, and he now had no real political debts to these ancient forces. By winning the nomination in a new way, McGovern had demonstrated unequivocally that the amended rules of the system had fundamentally changed presidential politics.

McGovern was able to achieve his victory partially because of the unwillingness of both the AFL-CIO and the national unions to devote substantial resources to mobilizing their own membership and other voters in support of an alternative candidate. As the 1972 contest began, the field included several politicians who had established long records of productive cooperation with the labor leadership. Former Vice President Humphrey, now serving as a Senator from his home state of Minnesota, was again a contender, as were Senators Henry "Scoop" Jackson from Washington and Edmund Muskie of Maine. Any one of

the three would have been preferred by most labor leaders over McGovern, who was widely seen as too liberal and incapable of uniting the party effectively for the general election. But the federation's top officials were still entranced by the logic of the old power broker role that they had been playing for decades. Rather than quickly adapt to the demands of the new system by investing serious quantities of money, time, and effort into organizing union voters to turnout in caucuses or primaries, union leaders instead relied on personal contacts with state party leaders and the mere announcement of their preferences. Needless to say, these techniques would have little real impact on a race where voter mobilization was key. Like the party "regulars" who watched in dismay as McGovern accumulated more and more delegates, the AFL-CIO and national union leadership simply failed to adjust. In the aftermath, the *Wall Street Journal* quoted a Democratic political operative who concluded: "Labor let a bunch of long hairs and college kids beat them. . . . The new rules ruined the unions—absolutely ruined them."[19] While the assessment was overdrawn, the fact remained: for the first time in many decades, labor had lost most of influence over the Democratic nominating process.

The selection of McGovern was achieved, then, with almost no support from individual labor unions and against the strong preferences of the AFL-CIO leadership, which tried whatever maneuvers it could to block McGovern at the convention (all to no avail). This hostility was so great that George Meany chose soon after the convention to encourage the entire labor movement to stay neutral in the upcoming general election contest between McGovern and incumbent President Richard Nixon. Under great pressure from Meany, the AFL-CIO Executive Council chose to do the virtually unthinkable, and voted (by 27 to 3) to remain officially neutral in the general election contest. In justifying the decision, Meany accused McGovern of being weak on national security, unreliable in his political commitments, and disrespectful of the union leadership. He also criticized McGovern for being too close to the social movements of the 1960s, whose cultural innovations on issues of drugs, sexuality, and patriotism were deeply offensive to Meany's conservative cultural sensibilities. But another, and perhaps more important, reason for Meany's hostility went unmentioned: the unique route that McGovern took to the nomination itself. AFSCME President Jerry Wurf would make the point clearly in 1972: "The Executive Council vote had more to do with how McGovern won the nomination than with his record before or during the campaign. . . . The real concern was participation and access, the AFL-CIO's vested interests which ignored the rich opportunities for workers and their unions in the more open, 'new' party."[20] A McGovern operative had reached a similar conclusion earlier in the campaign: "The one thing the AFL-CIO can't forgive McGovern for is the one thing he can't do anything about: if he's nominated, he won't owe them anything."[21]

Indeed, Meany and his aides clearly felt that the party needed to be punished for the "crime" of party reform. Neutrality would teach the Democratic party a

lesson for not having properly consulted the labor leadership, they suggested, and force party leaders to initiate a rollback of the reforms and the reinclusion of labor on the old terms. The AFL-CIO's political director angrily lashed out at party leaders who aligned with McGovern: "You so-called responsible leaders of this party seem to think the kids and the kooks and the Bella Abzugs can win you some elections. Well, we're going to let them try to do it for you this year."[22] The problem with this strategy, however, was that teaching "party elites" a "lesson" would be of little consequence when the elites themselves had lost much of their control over the rules of the nominating process. The relatively easy passage and implementation of party reform prior to the 1972 convention suggested that the capacity of party leaders to return to the old system was highly circumscribed; a strategy that assumed they would do so in order to please organized labor always contained a strong element of wishful thinking.

Not only was the decision to remain neutral based on erroneous strategic premises, it was also reckless in its disregard for the views of union leaders and members who intended to support McGovern regardless of the Executive Council's decision. The lopsided vote for neutrality in the council made it appear that Meany had brought the entire labor leadership along behind him, but in truth the decision was widely unpopular. In keeping with the "federal" principles underlying the entire structure of the AFL-CIO, the neutrality policy was officially binding only on the federation itself and its local and state branches, and did not preclude independent action in support of McGovern by the affiliated national unions. In this context, dissatisfaction and anger with the neutrality decision soon spawned a separate campaign on McGovern's behalf by more than forty national unions, mainly from industrial and public employee backgrounds, and representing nearly half the union members in the AFL-CIO. These unions had traditionally been among the most politically active in the labor movement, regularly providing large amounts of money, staff, and volunteers to campaigns. As their anger with Meany's decision grew, several of them—including such power houses as the Communication Workers, Machinists, and AFSCME—took the extreme step of cutting off their financial support to the AFL-CIO's main political arm, the Committee on Political Education (COPE). Joseph Beirne, president of the Communication Workers, summarized the complaints of the dissident union leaders about the system of political brokerage that had developed under Meany's leadership:

> I withdrew from COPE because it was out of touch with what was happening in the political process—with the reforms which I think were a natural evolution in the Democratic Party, and with McGovern who was the candidate who had done the most for the working man. COPE must be changed. We who contribute to it have no control over it or participation in its policy decisions. The COPE leaders live in the dreams of the past, where they wheeled and dealed in politics. The Executive Council of the AFL-CIO should be reformed, too. All we do there is endorse candi-

dates and nothing else. Our union now feels we can make our own political decisions and spend our money more fruitfully by going it alone.[23]

The logic of reform, it seems, can be catching. As Beirne's lament reveals, it was not just long-haired antiwar protestors who were fed up with the old nominating process and the unaccountable role that party elites, including the AFL-CIO president, increasingly played within it. Major parts of the union leadership itself were also deeply dissatisfied, outraged at the AFL-CIO leadership's lack of accountability to the rest of the labor movement and the autocratic character of its maneuvers in party politics. The dissident unions thus chose to enlarge their own political machinery, allotting more money and personnel to this function than ever before; the result was a greatly expanded capacity to follow their own path in party politics. The significance of this new independence would be on full display in 1974, when the Democratic Party held a special mid-term convention to approve a new national charter and consider other party business. The old-guard AFL-CIO leadership under Meany's command arrived at the party gathering determined to rollback the McGovern-Fraser reforms, but had their plans dashed when the liberal unions spoke out forcefully against their proposed changes and chose to ally with the forces defending the new nominating system.[24] As this episode confirmed, the consequence of Meany's effort to maintain a system of elite brokerage was a backlash within the labor movement that only weakened his power further. From this point on, if the labor movement was to endorse a single candidate in the presidential primaries, it would have to do so on the basis of a genuine *consensus* among union leaders, not the peremptory declarations of the federation president. As with the bossed conventions themselves, the days of a boss-run labor movement were now over.

With both power and capabilities now more widely dispersed within the labor movement, unity around a single candidate would prove highly difficult in 1976 and even in 1980, when incumbent Democratic president Jimmy Carter was running for reelection. A key feature of the new nominating process was that effectiveness within it required the early and *public* endorsement of candidates, followed up by major expenditures of time, money, and effort to mobilize union members and others to the polls. This was problematic for union leaders in that it forced them to pick and choose among a field of candidates that, ideally, would include many friends of organized labor. The public nature of these endorsements could not only alienate important politicians with whom one would have to bargain in the future, but also encouraged conflict and even bitterness among labor unions aligned behind different candidates. But unless the unions could all agree on a single candidate early in the process (a united front strategy), or agree to endorse no one (collective neutrality), they would inevitably be left with a free-for-all in which egos would be bruised and competitive instincts unpleasantly aroused.

These considerations all came to the fore as unions debated what to do in the

1976 presidential nominating competition. The union leaders who had chosen to spurn the AFL-CIO's demand for neutrality in 1972 and to mobilize separately on behalf of McGovern discovered that they had enjoyed the experience of running their own political operation. Determined to avoid a repeat of the 1972 debacle, they now decided to enter the primaries and caucuses in a major way. A coalition of nine of these unions, now calling themselves the "Labor Coalition Clearinghouse," was established before the election season in order to coordinate involvement in the upcoming nominating campaign. While they hoped to make a unified endorsement of a single candidate, this plan was dashed when confronted with the unusually large field (including five U.S. senators, five governors, and one member of the House of Representatives) drawn out by the prospect of an especially good year for the Democrats in the aftermath of the Watergate scandal. Unable to agree on a first choice, the coalition defaulted back to a free-for-all strategy, united only by a strong commitment to make their presence known in the caucuses and primaries. At a minimum, the coalition unions hoped to guarantee a large union presence at the convention and good ties with whomever emerged as the nominee.

Several unions were attracted to a little-known southern governor, Jimmy Carter of Georgia. The influential leader of the UAW, Leonard Woodcock, saw Carter as a candidate capable of both winning the South for the Democrats and effectively blocking the presidential aspirations of Alabama Governor George C. Wallace. Woodcock's support was crucial in the Iowa caucuses, where autoworker activists and members showed up in large numbers, helping Carter win an important early victory. In the Florida primary, Woodcock also personally campaigned for Carter and strongly urged the state's large community of UAW retirees to support Carter's bid for the nomination. For his part, Carter consulted closely with UAW officials in the development of his position on national health insurance and several other policy issues. The public employees' union, AFSCME, also made an early endorsement of Carter, and mobilized volunteers in the crucial Florida primary. The support of these two powerful unions, as well as that of local unions in many other states, meant that Carter had established a solid linkage with at least part of the labor movement well before he actually won the nomination.

His ties with the AFL-CIO leadership, however, were to form much later, and in less auspicious circumstances. President George Meany announced early on that the federation would remain neutral in the nominating competition. "The biggest reason for staying out of the primaries is that you're forced to pick and choose among your many friends if you don't," said his political director.[25] Despite such proclamations, the AFL-CIO leadership and the building trades unions were soon making a major effort to help their own favored candidate, Washington Senator Henry "Scoop" Jackson. The senator was an attractive choice because of his virulent anti-communism, strong support for liberal social programs and economic policies, and, not least of all, his outspoken opposition

to the party's reform wing. But the old-guard politicos in the AFL-CIO had still not really learned the lessons of the new nominating system. Their efforts to promote Jackson in primaries in Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and New York all foundered when the federation leadership abjectly failed to orchestrate a sufficient mobilization of union voters. After this ill-conceived intervention, the AFL-CIO would lose all influence in the nominating struggle in 1976, and would only come to endorse Carter after he had officially won the nomination and was preparing for the general election contest.

The record in 1976 was, in summary, one of only partial adjustment to the new system. While the Labor Coalition Clearinghouse unions had not been able to maximize their influence through a united front, their free-for-all strategy did allow good ties with the eventual nominee, a significant role in some primaries, and a notable union presence at the convention. Moreover, the Coalition unions had learned more about how to work through the reformed system and, by successfully mobilizing their members, had enhanced their reputation and credibility among Democratic politicians. In contrast, the AFL-CIO as a distinct organization was still "out of it": unable to forcefully intervene in primaries and caucuses (partially because it lacked its own distinct membership base) and left in a basically marginal role until the general election rolled around. One consequence of this pattern of union involvement was revealed in Carter's allegiances once ensconced in Washington: for most of his presidency he would be more closely aligned with a few leaders of various national unions (such as those of teachers, public employees, and auto workers) than he was with the top leaders of the federation. This estrangement from a major part of the labor movement (exacerbated, to be sure, by labor's own robust internal divisions) was a significant factor in diminishing the quality of his relationship with the labor movement as a whole, and was clearly a contributory factor to the larger problems of his presidency.[26]

The 1980 election brought forth yet more evidence that the unions were having great difficulty in forging a coordinated strategy in presidential nominating politics. While one might have expected that the renomination of a sitting president would have united both party and union elites in near-unanimity, Carter's difficult record as president ensured a great deal of labor dissatisfaction. Angry at Carter for failing to deliver labor law reform or more liberal social and economic policies, many unions were drawn to the candidacy of Massachusetts Senator Edward M. Kennedy, who hoped to displace the president as the Democratic nominee. Among the unions that formally endorsed Kennedy were such powerful organizations as AFSCME, the International Association of Machinists (then led by a fiery self-declared socialist), the Service Employees International Union, and the American Federation of Teachers. Despite these and other union endorsements, Kennedy ultimately failed to secure the sweeping support within labor that he needed; with the movement deeply split, the efforts of the pro-Kennedy unions could not overcome the inherent liabilities of their candidate

and the impressive strengths of an incumbent president. As it turned out, Kennedy's failed campaign, in which so many unions played a major role, mainly had the effect of weakening Carter further as he faced the potent (and exceptionally conservative) challenge posed by Ronald Reagan.

After Carter's decisive defeat in the general election, the labor leadership could look back and assess the three nominating contests that had now taken place under the new rules. In 1972, the party had nominated an unelectable candidate with a bad relationship with large parts of the labor movement. In 1976, most of the movement ended up sitting on the sidelines as the party chose an outsider who had little natural affinity with the labor leadership. This candidate won the general election, but then proceeded to govern in a manner that unionists found frustrating and unimpressive. In 1980, the labor movement split right down the middle over Senator Kennedy's candidacy, and was neither strong enough to displace President Carter nor united enough to squash the Kennedy challenge in the first place. The question this history posed was obvious: Could there be a better way for unions to operate in the nominating system? Was there a way for labor to coordinate and plan union interventions so that a mainstream, prolabor, and electorally effective candidate could prevail?

## 1984: LABOR MANIPULATES THE REFORMED SYSTEM

The development of a new strategy for labor in presidential nominating politics was enhanced by the resignation in 1979 of the old war-horse George Meany, whose obstreperous character had often stood in the way of both compromise and innovation, and his replacement as AFL-CIO President by the less colorful but far more conciliatory figure of Lane Kirkland, a longtime official in the federation with deep experience in national politics. Long a witness to labor's difficulties in navigating the reformed system, Kirkland was as intent as anyone on coming up with a better strategy for both the federation and its affiliated unions. At his direction, the AFL-CIO began to gingerly pursue the possibility of securing some modest changes in the rules of the current nominating process. Although the AFL-CIO and party establishment had long recognized that a full rollback of the reforms was impossible, changing political currents suggested that the adjustment of a few key elements was no longer a pipe dream. It was this hope that animated union involvement in the Hunt Commission—a new Democratic party commission (formally known as the Commission on Presidential Nomination) that was set up to take yet another look at party rules and the delegate selection process.

Chaired by Gov. James B. Hunt, Jr. of North Carolina, the commission succeeded in winning approval for a set of incremental changes, beginning in 1984, that were intended to increase the power of party "regulars" and to advantage mainstream candidates. With UAW President Douglas Fraser serving as one of

two vice-chairs, and 15 of the 70 members associated with organized labor, the views of union leaders were well-represented in the commission's deliberations—a marked change from the situation in the previous decade, when the AFL-CIO had effectively boycotted such forums.[27] The re-engagement of the labor establishment with the reform process would bear fruit in two areas of change. First, about 14 percent of the convention delegates would now be composed of a new class of unpledged "super-delegates," mainly party officials and elected officeholders, who would, it was widely believed, help nominate a more electable, traditional Democrat. Second, an effort was made to help front-running candidates by relaxing the system of proportional representation that in previous years had allowed candidates with little support to go on accumulating delegates long after it was clear they had no chance of actually winning the nomination. To rectify this problem, the commission voted to prevent candidates that received less than 20 percent of the vote in a particular state or congressional district from receiving any delegate representation at all from those locales—a change that made continued campaigning a rather quixotic enterprise. At the same time, the commission made it easier for states to use a variety of procedures to award extra delegates to the candidate who came in first among Democratic voters. While small in scale, these changes were lauded by union leaders who desperately wanted to see the party unite early in the nominating process around an electable candidate with mainstream political affiliations.

But Lane Kirkland had a far more ambitious plan up his sleeves than a mere tweaking of party rules. The idea had long been floated in both union and academic circles that the new nominating system might actually *enhance* union power if the labor movement were to unify around a single candidate and then mobilize on his or her behalf even a fraction of its vast 13-million membership. It was this argument that led Kirkland and others to begin considering an official AFL-CIO endorsement of a candidate for the Democratic nomination (something that had never been done before, notwithstanding George Meany's informal role in promoting Hubert Humphrey in 1968). Kirkland argued that the involvement of unions in primaries had revealed "a pattern that . . . was damaging to the internal solidarity of the trade union movement. With a premium on early and active participation in support of a prospective candidate, different parts of the trade union movement went for various candidates without consultation among themselves . . . So you had the development of factionalism, with unions competing with and vilifying each other."[28] The obvious solution was for the federation to forge an agreement—a united front—in support of a single candidate. This initiative would simultaneously improve labor unity and enhance union power over the final outcome. Kirkland observed: "If we are not in it, if we wait until the convention is over, then we are stuck with other people's choices one more time. Why should we be stuck with other people's choices—particularly if it coughs up candidates who are not saleable?"[29]

With such calculations in mind, the Executive Council in 1982 approved a

plan for a unified federation endorsement in the 1984 nominating campaign. A key component of the plan was a provision that no candidate would be endorsed unless he attained the support of unions representing at least two-thirds of the total AFL-CIO rank-and-file membership—a stipulation that made an endorsement more difficult but ensured that the labor movement would go into the process with a high level of unity. Faced with this requirement, the first challenge for union leaders was to somehow converge on one candidate among a large field of announced aspirants for the nomination. The possible choices for labor included former Florida Governor Reuben Askew, Senators Alan Cranston, John Glenn, Gary Hart, and Ernest Hollings, former Vice President Walter Mondale, the Reverend Jesse Jackson, and, rather improbably, former presidential nominee George McGovern. Several of these politicians had long and impressive records of support for traditional labor issues. As fortune would have it, however, the implementation of the plan was eased by the fact that the clear front-runner for the Democratic nomination, Walter Mondale, was also a longtime friend of the labor movement. Mondale was pro-labor, an experienced campaigner, and favored by many party officials, Democratic office-holders, and liberal interest groups. Moreover, union leaders reported that their own internal surveys and straw polls meetings showed strong membership support for Mondale over such rivals as Senators Glenn and Hart. While it was possible that Mondale could win the nomination even without an AFL-CIO endorsement, union leaders were not in a mood to leave anything to chance: on October 1, 1983, the representatives of AFL-CIO's affiliated unions voted by an overwhelming majority to give Mondale their support.

As both union leaders and Mondale operatives were well aware, there were three distinct perils inherent in the federation's move. First, it was likely that Mondale would be publicly tagged as the "big labor" candidate and possibly suffer corresponding electoral damage. For their part, Mondale's advisers dismissed these concerns, arguing that since Mondale would be characterized as an errand boy for the unions even without the endorsement, it made sense to seek and accept the benefits that it would bring. Second, an endorsement of a single candidate meant that other candidates would have little reason to avoid attacks on the AFL-CIO itself. This problem was manifested shortly after the endorsement decision was announced, when Senators Hart and Glenn as well Rev. Jesse Jackson attacked the AFL-CIO endorsement as an undemocratic decision by union "bosses."[30] Third, and most pressing, there was the risk that the AFL-CIO and its affiliated unions would fail to deliver the promised resources. As one union leader noted: "If we are, in fact, a paper tiger, we certainly are going to be making that clear."[31]

Despite these challenges, the labor movement proved by most measures quite capable of providing highly beneficial assistance to its chosen candidate. Most important, labor protected its choice from some very serious electoral competi-

tion. Senator Gary Hart did surprisingly well in early primaries, winning a surprise victory in New Hampshire and suddenly threatening to steal the nomination away from the presumptive frontrunner. It was organized labor that became the crucial force in derailing Hart's campaign in the later primaries, as well as in squelching the aspirations of Jesse Jackson. Two academic observers noted: "Labor's endorsement of and activities on behalf of Mondale were an influential—and probably essential—factor in his nomination. Mondale won seven of the 10 states with the largest blocks of AFL-CIO affiliated unionists, including New York, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Michigan, and New Jersey."[32] Even in the South, where unions have historically been weak and small, union support proved surprisingly useful, as unionized public employees (especially school teachers) emerged as a large percentage of voters in Democratic primaries. In Alabama, for example, a state with a unionization rate of only 15 percent, nearly 30 percent of the Democratic primary voters were from union households.[33] Labor union financial assistance was also an important part of these electoral successes (though determining the exact amount spent by the unions is always difficult). While a total of $3.1 million in pro-Mondale expenditures by labor unions was officially declared, unofficial estimates placed the total monetary value of union activity in the nominating contest at well over 10 million dollars.[34] Bolstered by this robust support, Mondale succeeded in dispensing with his challengers, notwithstanding a few perilous moments on the campaign trail.

The successful installation of Mondale as the Democratic nominee proved that it was possible for organized labor to effectively utilize primaries and caucuses, thus confirming the argument that the liberal unions and other party reformers had made over a decade earlier (but which had long been resisted by the AFL-CIO establishment and its conservative allies). While critics have since argued that the unified early endorsement was foolhardy, both because it made labor itself a lightning rod for criticism and because it facilitated the nomination of a candidate who went down to a crushing defeat in November, union leaders themselves saw the endorsement as a definite success. Mondale did secure the nomination, after all, and was clearly in debt to the AFL-CIO for his victory. Moreover, labor had shown that it could defend its candidate against powerful rivals, and proven this to future Democratic hopefuls: Would any be so foolish as to spurn or ignore labor demands in the future? Most important, the labor movement had avoided the fragmentation and factionalism that had been the dominant tendency in the "wild nominations" of the previous decade.[35] Lane Kirkland observed: "Our motive in taking the new approach was designed as much to find a way to maintain trade union solidarity as it was to support any particular candidate. Because this was our major motive, we were wholly successful. We supplanted factionalism and division in the unions with a high degree of solidarity."[36]

## 1988: AN EXPERIMENT WITH COLLECTIVE NEUTRALITY

Given its positive evaluation of the 1984 experience, the AFL-CIO leadership gave serious consideration to orchestrating a repeat of the strategy in 1988. It soon became apparent, however, that achieving unity would be impossible in the absence of a candidate who stood out as either a uniquely close friend of labor or an especially electable one. At the beginning of the 1988 race, eight candidates were available to choose from: Massachusetts Governor Michael Dukakis, Arizona Governor Bruce Babbit, Rev. Jesse Jackson, Rep. Richard Gephardt, and Senators Gary Hart, Albert Gore, Jr., Paul Simon, and Joseph Biden. Although Hart remained anathema to most union leaders for his attacks on the AFL-CIO in 1984, most of the other candidates had their share of supporters within the labor movement. Internal polling and other forms of consultation undertaken by the AFL-CIO and the national unions suggested that the membership was itself widely dispersed in its preferences.

This dispersion of support meant that unions might end up in a mutually antagonistic free-for-all, much as they had in the contests from 1972 to 1980. In order to avoid this outcome, federation unions reached agreement prior to the 1988 campaign on a pledge that neither the AFL-CIO nor the national unions would endorse candidates or wage campaigns for them unless there was an official federation endorsement. The national unions would, however, be encouraged to have their members and leaders serve as convention delegates for the candidates of their choice. Union strategists hoped that this arrangement would lead to a significant labor presence in each candidate's delegation to the convention, yet do so without precipitating the division of the national unions into competing and hostile camps. In this respect, at least, the plan was successful. With only a few exceptions, the national union headquarters all remained formally and substantively neutral in the nominating process. A spokesman for Lane Kirkland expressed satisfaction at the outcome: "We're so proud of ourselves for staying out together, for not gutting each other as we did in the Carter-Kennedy fight of 1980."[37]

The costs of this approach, however, soon became apparent. While an agreement to avoid official union endorsements at the national level did prevent the mutual "gutting" feared by union leaders, the result of this policy was to disperse union support even more widely as activists *within the same union* ended up behind competing candidates. In the Iowa caucuses, for example, the leaders of the state branch of the United Auto Workers issued a "recommendation" that members vote for Rep. Gephardt, whose strong stance on trade issues made him a particularly attractive candidate for those employed in the manufacturing sector. Yet in the absence of an official endorsement of Gephardt, local UAW leaders were still expected to offer assistance to members who sought to become delegates for other candidates. One such leader commented: "This puts me in an

awkward position: I'm for Gephardt, but I have to train Jackson people how to participate in the caucus if they ask. Instead of hammering away for one guy, we're going every which way." Naturally, such fragmentation did little to increase the bargaining power of the labor leadership at the national level. A top AFL-CIO official observed: "When you have a concentrated effort behind a single candidate, your effort generates more influence. This time we have a lot of activity, but not that concentrated influence."[38]

Notwithstanding this overall pattern, at least one union found a way of evading federation policy and arriving at the equivalent of a national endorsement. The national headquarters of AFSCME chose to encourage and coordinate the activity of its locals in support of Michael Dukakis's nomination, thereby creating a de facto national endorsement by the union. In crucial primary states, AFSCME locals rented office space to the Dukakis campaign and provided telephones and volunteers. For the Iowa caucuses, the state AFSCME assigned six full-time workers to help expand turnout through phone banks and mass mailings. Because of such efforts, some observers within the labor movement expected that AFSCME would have special access to a Dukakis administration—a result decidedly at odds with the goals that had led to the neutrality policy in the first place.

Despite the general pattern of dispersed support, union involvement did result in a very large number of union member delegates—approximately 1,000 out of a total 4,161. This figure was, however, rather misleading. In the reformed nominating system, a large union presence at the convention provides notable bragging rights, and can be of relevance when it came to the writing of the party platform, but in truth the actual identity of the delegates in the is of little importance: they might as well be robots for all the autonomy they are actually allowed in convention decision-making. The sizable union presence at the convention could not disguise the fact that in the absence of a clear front-runner in party circles, the labor movement had found it impossible to unify in support of a single choice. Looking on the bright side, the Dukakis campaign's labor liaison would argue: "In 1984, we exhausted people financially and psychologically in the primaries. This time they haven't spent their resources and they are ready to go."[39] But while labor may have been energized for the fall campaign, with the nomination of Michael Dukakis the union movement was saddled with a Democratic candidate who simply did not generate much enthusiasm among union leaders, activists, and members (or, it would turn out, the general public) . The policy of collective neutrality had prevented the outbreak of bitter warfare between the national union headquarters, but in the end labor was, as Kirkland had put it six years before, still "stuck with other people's choices."

## 1992: THE UNIONS CONVERGE ON CLINTON

After the defeat of the Democratic nominee in 1988, unionists were more intent than ever to see the party nominate a viable candidate in 1992. The initial field

was composed of former Arkansas Governor Bill Clinton, former California Governor Jerry Brown, Senators Paul Simon, Bob Kerrey, and Tom Harkin, and former Senator Paul Tsongas. With no obvious front-runner, and several candidates with good ties to labor, the usual problem of dispersed preferences within the labor movement was confronted once more. Under these circumstances, the AFL-CIO Executive Council voted to abstain from an early endorsement, and to instead let each national union make its own choice: essentially the "free-for-all" strategy that had been labor's de facto option in 1972, 1976, and 1980. While this decision allowed a large number of union members to eventually be elected as delegates to the national convention, it also opened the door to a thorough (and all too familiar) fragmentation of labor's bargaining capacity.

The candidate that initially attracted the most union backing was Senator Harkin. With his traditional New Deal message, criticisms of free trade, and advocacy of strong pro-union changes in the labor law, Harkin was supported by many industrial unions threatened by changing economic circumstances. Most unions, however, adopted a "wait and see" attitude: if Harkin did well, surviving into the later primaries held in major industrial states, they might deploy more resources on his behalf—but they were not prepared to sink vast resources into a ship that might never get out of port. As one union leader put it: "If the Democrats are going to have a chance, a candidate has to show signs of starting fire before we get behind that candidate."[40] The wisdom of such reticence was confirmed when Harkin performed poorly in New Hampshire and subsequent primaries. By mid-March, the Senator had withdrawn from the race altogether.

Even before Harkin's withdrawal, however, several important unions had lined up behind Bill Clinton. The public employees in AFSCME and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) offered endorsements in January 1992, as did the Hotel and Restaurant Employees and the Retail, Wholesale, and Department Store Union. AFSCME's support was especially important, as the massive union had more than a million members and immense financial and organizational resources. Since the mid-1970s, the union had emerged as one of the most effective forces in nominating politics, with a membership highly motivated by the close relationship between the size of its pay check and the fiscal health of the public sector. The comments of an AFSCME official reveal the political calculations motivating their decision to endorse Clinton: "We believe that we need to be about winning in 1992. . . . If we went for Harkin we probably could get 90 percent of our agenda. If we went for Clinton we probably could get 85 percent of our agenda. But it's Clinton who, in my opinion, can get us to the White House."[41] The National Education Association (NEA) also endorsed Clinton early, joining with the AFT in citing Clinton's electability and his opposition to tuition credits for private schools. Ironically, despite his self-identification as a "new" Democrat, Clinton thus found himself aligned with large public sector

unions with a strong vested interest in big government. Meanwhile, the more conservative building trades unions sat out the nominating process altogether.

As the primary season progressed, Clinton increasingly benefitted from labor support. In the important New York primary on April 7, Clinton's success was attributed in large part to the mobilization of public employees by AFSCME, the NEA, and the AFT, and the activity among private sector workers by the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union and the Hotel and Restaurant Employees.[42] As Clinton went on to additional primary victories, his candidacy gained the endorsement of yet other labor organizations, including the UAW, the Service Employees International Union, and the Mineworkers. In this series of sequential endorsements, the national unions acted strategically and in conjunction with other elite actors (such as fund-raisers and elected officeholders) to unify the party around a candidate they saw as the most likely nominee, even if he had not been, for some, their first-choice. At the same time, the unions were intent on blocking the candidacy of Sen. Tsongas, who had angered them by publicly opposing labor law reform proposals that had previously been backed by the vast majority of Democrats in Congress. As Clinton gained increasing support from both national unions and primary voters, the AFL-CIO also joined the bandwagon, announcing in mid-April that it would endorse the governor officially at a May 5 Executive Council meeting, some two months before the Democratic convention. While this endorsement came late, after Clinton was the all-but-certain nominee, it would nonetheless help in the process of closing ranks behind the party's new standard-bearer.

In comparisons to other years, then, the 1992 campaign was unusual in that labor did converge on a single candidate, but only after that candidate had been tested in the primaries and shown to be an effective campaigner. In 1984, labor had made a collective endorsement very early, while in other years the AFL-CIO had made no official endorsement in the nominating contest at all. The 1992 contest added a twist in that the AFL-CIO did make a united endorsement well before the convention, but only after the primaries had revealed the presumptive nominee. With the success of Clinton in the general election and his renomination and reelection in 1996, unions could feel confident that their most difficult days in the Democratic nominating process were now over. In 1992, the unions had converged on a single choice before it was too late, avoided deep or bitter conflicts, and helped secure the nomination of a capable and generally labor-sympathetic candidate. When the unified party sailed to victory in November, unionists felt that their role in the "new" Democratic party was about as secure as could be hoped for in a time of declining union membership and widespread conservative sentiment. Four years later, union leaders would be sufficiently satisfied with Clinton's tenure, despite continuing disagreements on trade issues, to make an official federation endorsement of his renomination and actively discourage any primary challenges from the party's more liberal constituencies.

## 2000: A UNITED FRONT ONCE MORE

Much as in 1984, the 2000 nomination provides a vivid example of the labor leadership acting in conjunction with other party leaders to promote a quick resolution to the nominating contest in support of the larger goal of triumph in the general election. While Al Gore had made new friends in the labor movement as vice president, he had never been a traditional labor favorite, and his support for the Clinton administration's free trade policies severely disappointed several important union leaders. In addition, other potential candidates, such as House Minority Leader Dick Gephardt, Senators Paul Wellstone, Bob Kerrey, and John Kerry, and former Senator Bill Bradley, all had labor records that were as good as or better than Gore's. Despite these reasons for doubting Gore, from the very beginning of the pre-primary maneuvering in late 1998 the AFL-CIO leadership did nothing to recruit possible rivals to the vice president. When one liberal contender—Senator Bradley—did have the temerity to throw his hat in the ring, the labor establishment did almost everything in its power to ruin his candidacy. For union leaders, the most important thing was for a Democrat to retain the White House. If this meant supporting a candidate with a disappointing record on trade issues, but who could unite the party and campaign well in the general election, then so be it. With a vast array of day-to-day interests to protect, purism was not a luxury that most union officials could afford.

Determined to bolster the early front-runner, the new AFL-CIO President, John Sweeney (elected in 1995), was resolute in his support for Gore from early 1999 onwards, and he was seconded in this support by such powerful unions as AFSCME and the Communication Workers of America.[43] Sweeney and labor's top political operatives argued strongly for an early AFL-CIO endorsement of Gore, which they argued would allow the vice president to tap the massive resources of the labor movement when they mattered most. Gore was the right choice, in their view, because he was the most likely candidate to secure the support of other key party elites and mass constituencies, and thus the most likely to emerge as the victor even without labor's endorsement. If labor could move this process along more quickly and gain credit with the eventual nominee for doing so, this was all to the good, for internal party conflict only increased the likelihood of a general election defeat. Finally, there was every reason to believe that an experienced campaigner like Gore would be an effective candidate in the general election.[44]

From the standpoint of union leaders, moreover, Gore had demonstrated that he was a reliable politician with a sincere respect for the labor movement. As vice president he had made it a point to be accessible to union leaders and had insisted that they be included in relevant deliberations in the executive branch. For the status and protocol-conscious union leaders, this commitment alone was important and reassuring, but Gore was equally diligent in calling for enhanced legal protections of the right to organize. He strongly opposed GOP efforts to

limit union political spending and enact anti-union changes in existing labor law, and he spoke in favor of the controversial Clinton-appointed National Labor Relations Board and such longtime labor favorites as Medicare and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration. In this respect, at least, Gore's credentials as a pro-labor Democrat were about as good as those of any other Democratic presidential nominee in the postwar period.[45]

Not all union leaders, however, were willing to overlook Gore's drawbacks. The biggest single cause of dissatisfaction was Gore's commitment to continuing the free trade policies of the Clinton administration. Powerful unions such as the Autoworkers, Steelworkers, Machinists, and Teamsters found Gore's trade policy detrimental to their members and tantamount to a betrayal of union interests. These concerns were, however, of far lesser importance to the growing public and service sector unions, as well as to those unions in the private sector that did not feel negatively impacted by import penetration. A second complaint was much more unnerving to other union leaders: this was the claim that Gore was simply not a very popular candidate, and was unlikely to appeal to the crucial swing voters in the general election. With Texas Governor George W. Bush, the likely Republican nominee, way ahead in the polls in late 1999, and increasing signs that restive Democratic primary voters might bolt to Bradley in Iowa, New Hampshire, and elsewhere, a number of union leaders were reconsidering the wisdom of any early endorsement at all.

These concerns all came to a head as the AFL-CIO convention prepared to meet in Los Angeles in October 1999. The plan had always been to make an endorsement at this meeting, but now the convention was taking place at the very moment that Gore's candidacy was threatened by the rising popularity of Bradley. In this context, a decision even to delay the endorsement would be seen by the media and other party elites as a sign that Al Gore was in serious trouble. Conversely, a decision to endorse Gore would be seen as a strong vote of confidence, and an indication that his standing with the core constituencies of the party remained strong. Gore simply had to win this AFL-CIO vote, or face the danger that support for his candidacy might suddenly and thoroughly unravel.

It was, finally, John Sweeney who made the difference for the Gore campaign. Sweeney insisted that Al Gore had been there for labor over the past eight years, and that it was now time to repay him for his loyalty. A protracted nominating contest could only hurt the party in the general election, Sweeney maintained, and Bill Bradley was, in any case, no better than Gore when it came to trade issues. The AFL-CIO leader thus went all-out in support of the vice president, pressuring affiliated unions to support him in the days and hours preceding the convention. In making such an active and open commitment to Gore, Sweeney put his own reputation, and that of the federation, on the line. By making the issue one of personal loyalty and the federation's prestige, he made it all the more difficult for most union leaders to vote against an endorsement. Sweeney got the federation to this point, however, only through a long process of internal

consultation and persuasion—a far cry from George Meany's issuance of a peremptory press release to announce his endorsement of Hubert Humphrey in 1968.

On October 12, 1999, the AFL-CIO convention endorsed Gore with little open dissension, and Sweeney triumphantly introduced the vice president to the assembled delegates. In his acceptance speech, Gore expressed his support for union organization in terms that were unequivocal: "I believe that the right to organize is a basic American right that should never be stopped, never be blocked, and never be taken away. Let me tell you, that right needs to be strengthened today."[46] He also promised that as president he would veto all anti-union legislation and stand firmly against any Republican efforts to "take back the country to an anti-union, anti-worker past." With such words, Gore had strayed far from his previous "New Democrat" emphasis on markets and choice as the main vehicles for social progress—a leftward tilt that he would continue in the general election and in his criticisms of the Bush presidency after January 2001.

Gore's rhetorical adjustments would be well worth it, however, as the AFL-CIO's large apparatus of money, staff, and volunteers was now swung into action to ensure Gore victories in the crucial early caucuses and primaries. For the Iowa caucuses, the AFL-CIO and other national unions sent 35 full-time organizers to the state, and made at least 30,000 phone calls to union members. The AFL-CIO worked with the Iowa State Education Association to send four separate mailings, one of which included a five-minute video promoting Gore's candidacy, to 25,000 union households. A group of political scientists studying the caucuses reported that, "The AFL-CIO and affiliated unions actually brought a tractor-trailer to Iowa City and parked it outside the Gore headquarters just off Interstate 80. Inside the trailer was a 'war room,' with computer systems, telephones, and a sophisticated phone banking plan."[47] But the most important factor was simply labor's ability to bring out volunteers and members willing to attend the caucuses for a few hours on a cold winter's night; Bradley's amateurish (albeit well-funded) campaign would pose no challenge to this kind of operation. The results were clear on caucus night, when Gore beat Bradley 63 percent to 35 percent and union caucus attendees comprised an impressive 33 percent of the turnout (in a state where only 14 percent of the workforce was unionized). Among union participants, Gore received a landslide 69 percent of the vote to Bradley's paltry 24 percent, while non-union attendees gave Gore a more restrained 57 percent to Bradley's 35 percent.

Labor was also an important force in New Hampshire, despite the low union density in the state. Union volunteers made more than 5,000 house visits, and hand-delivered videos extolling Gore's "longtime support for working families." Labor's grassroots effort generated seven contacts for each union household, union leaders claimed, and was followed up in the days before the election by multiple telephone calls and yet more outreach in the form of get-out-the-vote

drives. On Election Day, members of union households constituted 24 percent of the turnout (more twice their 10.5 percent rate of representation in the state's workforce), and cast their vote 62 percent to 37 percent for Gore—crucial help in securing Gore's narrow 50 percent to 46 percent victory over Bradley.[48] With these defeats, Bradley's campaign was effectively over, and he was soon forced to withdraw. The capacity of unions to ensure that their members constituted a major fraction of the turnout in both Iowa and New Hampshire, despite a record of declining union density in both states and the nation at large, undoubtedly contributed much to the collapse of the senator's candidacy.

With Gore's successful nomination, the integration of organized labor into the national Democratic party reached a new highpoint. At the August convention, labor delegates numbered 1,500 (out of 4,368 total delegates) and were the largest single interest group bloc without question. President Sweeney, AFL-CIO Vice President Richard Trumka, and AFSCME President Gerald McEntee all spoke from the convention podium—a marked departure from the more discreet and behind-the-scenes role of the 1960s and earlier. And in successfully engineering the endorsement, Sweeney established himself as the unrivaled broker for the political resources of the labor movement—a fact which did not go unnoticed by Democratic politicians as they contemplated future presidential bids. The second use of a united front strategy had thus paid off in labor unity, great union influence in the nominating process, and a near-victory in the general election. With the peculiarities of Florida to blame for the general election result, there was every reason to believe that federation leaders would pursue the united front strategy again should the opportunity arise.

## LOOKING TO 2004: UNITED FRONT OR FREE-FOR-ALL?

As we approach the 2004 race, there is one prediction that can be made with certainty: organized labor will be desperate to win (i.e., elect a Democratic president), both because of the dispiriting reality of unified Republican party government at the national level following the 2002 congressional elections, and because of the still-bitter feelings left by the electoral debacle in Florida that allowed George W. Bush to ascend to the presidency. In the general election we are sure to see a mobilization of union resources to rival or exceed any ever witnessed before. In the nominating process, however, the nature and magnitude of union involvement is harder to foresee. On the minds of many observers in early 2003 was this question: Will the resources of the labor movement be concentrated behind a single candidate for the nomination, as in 1984 and 2000, or will labor adopt the less challenging free-for-all or collective neutrality strategies?

In previous elections, a united front strategy was adopted only if two things were true:

1. There was a clear front-runner for the Democratic nomination as measured in some combination of opinion polls, fund-raising, and public and private endorsements.
2. The front-runner was friendly to the labor movement and trusted by its leaders.

This confluence of conditions is not commonly found in contested nominations, however, which explains the rarity of the united front option. And it is no coincidence that the two contested nominations where labor was able to use the united front strategy were races featuring *a sitting or very recent vice president*. The high status and visibility provided by the vice presidency goes far to establish a candidate as a front-runner, and provides a natural coordination point for party elites (of which labor is one) who seek common agreement on a single electable candidate as early as possible in the race. In 2000, Gore had this unique status, and used it to rally the early support of labor and other key party elites (such as fundraisers, elected officials, and interest groups). With the withdrawal of Gore in late 2002, no obvious front-runner was apparent in early 2003, and it seemed quite possible that none would emerge until much later in the year, if at all.

The most likely scenario, therefore, was a return to the somewhat tarnished free-for-all strategy used so often in the past. By the end of 2002 it was clear that the emerging field would include several candidates with a legitimate claim on labor's loyalty. Such early entrants as former House Minority Leader Dick Gephardt, Senators John Kerry, Joseph Lieberman, and John Edwards, and Gov. Howard Dean of Vermont were all known figures with good to very good records on labor issues. While Gephardt had the longest and best ties with the union movement, especially with the industrial unions whose cause of ''fair trade'' he so strongly championed, as of January 2003 union political operatives were openly speculating that it would be very difficult for him to ever gain the two-thirds support needed for a unified federation endorsement.[49] As in previous years, a key concern for union leaders was electability. With one failed bid for the Democratic nomination behind him, and a mixed record in orchestrating Democratic efforts to retake the House of Representatives, Gephardt generated fears that he might turn out to be the Mondale of 2004: a labor favorite destined for a humiliating defeat. This anxiety, and the evident acceptability of most of the other candidates by labor's usual criteria, made it unlikely that union leaders would agree on a single choice for the nomination. Under these circumstances, and barring the emergence of a clear frontrunner in 2003, the 2004 contest was shaping up to look much like 1992. In that year, a few powerful unions made early endorsements, but many others kept their powder dry, watched and waited as candidates competed in the early contests, and then closed ranks to help the emerging victor wrap things up and get ready for the general election.

Assuming that the individual unions will be in play, their endorsements will be among those most prized in the 2004 election. The unique value of union

backing is best understood by considering a recent observation by a team of political scientists studying the effects of the party reforms adopted in the 1970s. By encouraging the proliferation of primaries, the authors note, the reforms meant that "seeking a presidential nomination required an active campaign in every state in the nation, often at the level of counties or congressional districts. This is a vast, vast undertaking. No presidential candidate has the staff, financial resources, or know-how to conduct what are, in effect, hundreds of campaigns all around the country."[50] While it is true that candidates may not have the resources, unions frequently do. A notable example is AFSCME, which ran the country's fourth largest political action committee (PAC) in the 1999–2000 election season and in 2003 had more than 1.3 million members.[51] Composed of well-motivated public employees located in virtually every state, the union was by any measure a highly desirable ally. It had, after all, made early endorsements (either officially or unofficially) of Carter in 1976, Dukakis in 1988, and Clinton in 1992, a track record that would certainly catch the eye of any serious Democratic hopeful. In addition, many other unions also have massive PACs and very impressive political operations. In the crucial state of Iowa, the United Auto Workers are especially influential, with a well-earned reputation for recruiting members for campaign rallies and mobilizing them to come out on a cold January night for the state's legendary caucuses. Only a profoundly foolish (or exceptionally cavalier) candidate would not want the support of these organizations, or, at a minimum, to secure their neutrality (a reality that, for example, went far to explain the pro-labor voting record of North Carolina Senator John Edwards, notwithstanding the conservative sentiments prevailing in his home state).[52]

Although labor may not adopt a united front strategy in 2004, it will still have the same deep interest in seeing the nomination wrapped up early once an acceptable candidate starts to emerge from the pack. Union leaders desire this for the same reason that elected officeholders and other party officials do: because they believe that ending the race soon, and converging upon a single favored candidate, is the best means for prevailing in the general election.[53] In this respect, at least, union leaders can be usefully thought of as actually being *part* of the party, not an "outside" interest trying to move "into" it. This partisan mentality, and the pragmatism and long-term perspective that it fosters, goes far to explain union behavior in the nominating process. In 1992, for example, most unions closed ranks expeditiously for Bill Clinton once he had demonstrated electability in the primaries, swiftly putting aside any lingering doubts about his labor record as governor of Arkansas. The analysis here predicts that unions will act the same way if given the opportunity in 2004, as long as the emerging frontrunner is receptive to their institutional and policy interests. Given the undeniable capacity of unions to alter outcomes in caucuses and primaries, their endorsement decisions will provide a leading and perhaps definitive indicator of which candidate for the Democratic nomination is likely to prevail.

## CONCLUSION

In the aftermath of the campaigns of 1972 and 1976, in which candidates with ambiguous ties to the labor movement were able to grasp the Democratic nomination, some authors concluded that the new primary-oriented nominating system had inherent disadvantages for organized labor.[54] The argument was that since "white-collar" Democrats were more likely to participate in caucuses and primaries than "blue-collar" Democrats, these venues would have an innate white-collar bias that would hurt traditional Democratic candidates concerned with economic issues and help those committed to "post-materialist" values like environmentalism, feminism, homosexual rights, and so on. In short, labor would get stuck with strange outsiders unsympathetic to the concerns of ordinary working people. While persuasive at first, experience has shown this analysis to seriously underestimate the capacity of unions to become "passionate factions" in their own right, mobilizing their members effectively to participate in Democratic nominating procedures. Once the unions demonstrated this capacity (with the result eventually being the "largest delegation of down-home, uptown, grassroots, kick-ass union leaders in the history of the Democratic National Convention," as John Sweeney pungently put it), the old charges of innate white-collar bias had to be amended. In truth, there were few real barriers to unions playing a major role in the reformed nominating process once they understood the logic of the new system and knew how to adapt to it. As early as 1984 this had become clear, and unions have only been refining their strategies and tactics since then (as the smooth exercise of union power in 2000 effectively demonstrated).

This is not to say, however, that the current structure of the nominating system is necessarily ideal for the exercise of union power. The need to make formal endorsements requires that labor publicly choose among friendly candidates, a practice that can create hurt feelings (or worse) and unavoidably stimulates divisions within the labor movement. Such public endorsements can also allow labor's antagonists—both inside and outside of the party—to make union involvement itself the issue, as happened in 1984 (although not in 2000, when Bill Bradley chose not to castigate the AFL-CIO as a "special interest" in the way Gary Hart had some sixteen years earlier). With its cozier and more insulated settings for elite bargaining, the old system usually avoided these problems, and labor certainly had less to fear about a completely disconnected outsider worming his way directly into the party nomination. In practice, though, the current system has itself become rather unreceptive to wild outsiders, and the candidates selected since 1980 seem to be just the kind of established, mainstream figures that any reasonable nominating system would have produced. Accordingly, unions have made their peace with the current system, and no longer constitute a major constituency in support of a further bout of reform (or counter-reform, as the case may be). Indeed, with the rise to power of a new generation of union

leaders with no experience at all with the old nominating process, proposals for a return to a more deliberative, elite-oriented system may increasingly fall on deaf ears.

The lasting impact of party reform on interest groups, then, is not its consequences for some putative white-collar/blue-collar power balance, but rather its consequences on the requirements that all groups must meet to exercise effective influence. Groups that can provide money, organizational heft, and, most important, the participation of their members in the caucuses and primaries, are the groups that will have an impact on the final outcome. The irony is that while this aspect of the system helps unions in one sense (since they are usually effective in getting their members to participate), it also poses new constraints on union leader decision-making. With the proliferation of primaries, it was no longer enough for union leaders to simply declare that their members wanted a certain candidate to be the Democratic nominee; they now had to *prove it* by getting those members to participate in the process on the candidate's behalf. In bringing this change, party reform had yet one more consequence: it created an additional democratic check on the leadership of organized labor (and, in fact, on all interest group leaders who claim to speak on behalf of a mass membership). In a political system based upon the idea of multiple checks upon established power, the reformed system can be considered, at least in this respect, more democratic than that which went before it. But however evaluated, this consequence of party reform, as well as all the others, needs to be added to the scales as we attempt to weigh the pros and cons of the current system for selecting our presidential candidates.

## NOTES

1. Meany is quoted in Archie Robinson, *George Meany and His Times* (New York: Simon and Schuster. Robinson, 1981), 322–323.

2. Sweeney is quoted in Robert Zausner, "Democrats Proudly Wear the Union Label," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 16 August 2000, A1.

3. In lieu of a massive proliferation of footnotes about party reform, labor history, and presidential politics, the reader seeking further background and documentation in support of the claims in this chapter should consult Taylor E. Dark, *The Unions and the Democrats: An Enduring Alliance*, Updated Edition (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001).

4. Perhaps the first use of this maxim with respect to the nominating process can be found in William Cavala, "Changing the Rules Changes the Game: Party Reform and the 1972 California Delegation to the Democratic National Convention," *American Political Science Review* 68 (March 1974): 27–42; a more recent example is Michael G. Hagen and William G. Mayer, "The Modern Politics of Presidential Selection: How Changing the Rules Really Did Change the Game," in *In Pursuit of the White House 2000: How We*

*Choose Our Presidential Nominees*, ed. William G. Mayer (Chatham, NJ: Chatham House, 2000), 1–55.

5. Figures on union membership for the entire twentieth century can be found in Barry T. Hirsch and David A. Macpherson, *Union Membership and Earnings Data Book: Compilation from the Current Population Survey* (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of National Affairs, 2000).

6. Theodore H. White, *The Making of the President 1972* (New York: Atheneum, 1973), 236.

7. Lane Kirkland to International Union Presidents, et. al., memo, November 12, 1982, "Politics and Labor" file, AFL-CIO Library, Washington, D.C.

8. Lane Kirkland, "Politics and Labor After 1980," *AFL-CIO Federationist*, January 1981, 20.

9. Reuter is quoted in Frank Cormier and William J. Eaton, *Reuther* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1970), 369.

10. William J. Eaton, "Labor Hails Kennedy Victory," *Washington Post*, 15 July 1960.

11. Meany is quoted in Robinson, *George Meany*, 276.

12. AFL-CIO Press Release, April 3, 1968, AFL-CIO Library, Washington, D.C.

13. David Broder, "COPE Director Al Barkan Flexing Labor's Big Muscle," *Washington Post*, 7 May 1968.

14. See Joseph Goulden, *Meany: the Unchallenged Strong Man of American Labor* (New York: Atheneum, 1972).

15. Memo, Lane Kirkland to International Union Presidents.

16. Theodore H. White, *The Making of the President 1968* (New York: Atheneum, 1969), 336; for Humphrey's views, see Hubert H. Humphrey, *The Education of a Public Man* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1976), 368.

17. James P. Gannon, "Unions Strive Mightily to Win the Nomination for the Vice-President," *Wall Street Journal*, 26 August 1968.

18. Byron Shafer, *Quiet Revolution: The Struggle for the Democratic Party and the Shaping of Post-Reform Politics* (New York: Russell Sage, 1983).

19. Norman Miller, "Democratic Reforms: They Work," *Wall Street Journal*, 16 May 1972.

20. Jerry Wurf, "What Labor has Against McGovern," *New Republic*, 5 and 12 August1972.

21. Quoted in Norman Miller, "As Convention Opening Nears, All-Out Warfare Threatens to Rip Party," *Wall Street Journal*, 5 July 1972.

22. Quoted in William J. Crotty, *Decision for the Democrats: Reforming the Party Structure*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1978), 111; Abzug was an outspoken feminist and liberal congresswoman from New York City.

23. Beirne is quoted in Stephen Schlesinger, *The New Reformers: Forces for Change in American Politics* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin,1975), 95.

24. See Denis G. Sullivan, Jeffrey L. Pressman, and F. Christopher Arterton, *Explorations in Convention Decision Making: The Democratic Party in the 1970s* (San Francisco: W. H. Freeman, 1976), 74.

25. Quoted in James Singer, "Election Victories Mean Labor Can Come in from the Cold," *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report*, 20 November 1976.

26. See Taylor E. Dark, "Organized Labor and the Carter Administration: The Origins

of Conflict,'' in *The Presidency and Domestic Policies of Jimmy Carter*, ed. Herbert Rosenbaum and Alexej Ugrinsky (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994).

27. David Price, *Bringing Back the Parties* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, 1984), 160. Price, who served on the staff of the Hunt Commission, provides a comprehensive description of its activities and recommendations.

28. Kirkland is quoted in Joseph Clark, ''Labor Remains in Politics,'' *Dissent* (Winter 1985).

29. Kirkland is quoted in Martin Schram, ''The Man Who Would Be Kingmaker: 'Boss' Kirkland and the AFL-CIO's Gamble on Electing the Next President,'' *Washington Post*, December 15, 1982.

30. See Howell Raines, ''Jackson Assails Labor's Support for Mondale as Move by 'Bosses','' *New York Times*, 28 November 1983.

31. Quoted in Robert S. Greenberger, ''Labor & Democrats: Can the Marriage Be Saved?'' *The Wall Street Journal*, 25 August 1982.

32. Herbert Alexander and Brian Haggerty, *Financing the 1984 Election* (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath, 1987), 183.

33. Jack W. Germond and Jules Witcover, ''Labor Unmoved by Kirk's No-Endorsement Plea,'' *National Journal*, 30 March 1985; A.H. Raskin, ''Labor: A Movement in Search of a Mission,'' in *Unions In Transition: Entering the Second Century*, ed. Seymour Martin Lipset, (San Francisco: Institute for Contemporary Studies, 1986), 30; *CBS/New York Times* exit polls; and Barry T. Hirsch, David A. Macpherson, and Wayne G. Vroman, ''Estimates of Union Density by State,'' *Monthly Labor Review* (July 2001). ''Union households'' refers to those households where at least one person is a member of a labor union.

34. Alexander and Haggerty, *Financing the 1984 Election*, 181.

35. This term is drawn from Marty Cohen, David Karol, Hans Noel, and John Zaller, ''Beating Reform: The Resurgence of Parties in Presidential Nominations,'' paper presented at the American Political Science Association meeting, San Francisco, September 2001.

36. Lane Kirkland, speech, December 5, 1984, AFL-CIO Library, Washington, D.C.

37. Quoted in David Broder, ''Renaissance of Labor's Power,'' *Washington Post*, August 19, 1988.

38. Both officials are quoted in David Shribman, ''Divided and Dispirited as Iowa Caucuses Near, Organized Labor Just Isn't Organized Politically,'' *Wall Street Journal*, January 19, 1988.

39. Quoted in Broder, ''Renaissance of Labor's Power.''

40. Quoted in Richard L. Berke, ''Unions, Changing Strategy, Try Local Approach on Candidate,'' *New York Times*, 14 January 1992.

41. Quoted in Berke, ''Unions, Changing Strategy,'' *New York Times*.

42. See Sam Roberts, ''Brown and Clinton Trade Blows in New York Contest,'' *New York Times*, 26 March 1992; and Todd S. Purdum, ''Union Members Do Footwork of Candidates,'' *New York Times*, 4 April 1992.

43. For the story of Sweeney's rise to the AFL-CIO presidency, see Taylor E. Dark, ''Debating Decline: the 1995 Battle for the AFL-CIO Presidency,'' *Labor History* (Summer 1999).

44. This description of labor's motivations is based on an interview with Steve Rosenthal, AFL-CIO Political Director, on Sept. 1, 2000 at AFL-CIO headquarters in Washington, D.C.

45. For comparisons of the view of the candidates over the twentieth century, see Dark, *The Unions and the Democrats*, and the detailed findings in John Gerring, *Party Ideologies in America, 1828–1996* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), esp. chapters 6 and 7.

46. Remarks of Al Gore, Vice President of the United States, at the 23rd Constitutional Convention of the AFL-CIO, October 13, 1999.

47. David Magleby, ed. *Getting Inside the Outside Campaign: Issue Advocacy in the 2000 Presidential Primaries* (Center for the Study of Elections and Democracy, Brigham Young University, 2000), 4.

48. Mike Hall, "Mobilizing for Labor 2000," *America@Work*, April 2000; union density figures in this and the previous paragraph are drawn from Hirsch, Macpherson, and Vroman, "Estimates of Union Density by State," *Monthly Labor Review*.

49. See comments by Steven Rosenthal in Katharine Q. Seelye, "Veteran Lawmaker is Restyling Himself as Can-Do Candidate," *New York Times*, 6 January 2003.

50. Cohen, Karol, Noel, and Zaller, "Beating Reform: The Resurgence of Parties in Presidential Nominations,"15.

51. For the size of AFSCME's PAC in comparison to others, see the web site of the Center for Responsive Politics: <http://www.opensecrets.org/pacs/index.asp>.

52. Edwards scored a remarkable (for a Southern senator) 94 percent "correct" record on AFL-CIO key votes; see David M. Shribman, "Democrats' Daring: To Dream of McCain," *Boston Globe*, 7 May 2002, A3.

53. They may not be *correct* in this reasoning, but this is a proposition that few party or union leaders care to test; for further discussion, see Lonna Rae Atkinson, "From the Primaries to the General Election: Does a Divisive Nomination Race Affect a Candidate's Fortunes in the Fall?" in *In Pursuit of the White House 2000: How We Choose Our Presidential Nominees*, ed. William G. Mayer (Chatham, NJ: Chatham House, 2000), 285–312.

54. See Thomas Edsall, *The New Politics of Inequality* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1984), 52–56; James I. Lengle, *Representation and Presidential Primaries: The Democratic Party in the Post-Reform Era* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1981); and Shafer, *Quiet Revolution*.