

BOARD OF GOVERNORS  
OF THE  
FEDERAL RESERVE SYSTEM

# Office Correspondence

Date December 6, 1940

To Chairman Eccles

Subject: \_\_\_\_\_

From Emile Despres

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The attached brief report on the C.I.O. convention seems to me much more illuminating than any of the newspaper accounts I have seen.

  
E. D.

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## Office Correspondence

Date December 5, 1940To Mr. DespresSubject: CIO ConventionFrom Guy T. NunnAtlantic City, Nov. 18-23

Unusual public interest attached to the CIO Convention in Atlantic City because it was thought that differences of opinion in the CIO leadership, which came to a head during the recent presidential campaign, would be excitingly settled in the course of the meeting. The anticipated explosion did not take place, however, and, while tension was high throughout the five days of the Convention, the snapping point was avoided, perhaps not even closely approached. Apparently the strength of the anti-Lewis faction had been exaggerated and the bulk of the Convention delegates realized that the organization could not afford excessive dissension at an extremely grave juncture in its history.

It was at the outset apparent that the Convention was roughly divided into two camps: a minority led by the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, supported by a substantial portion of the delegates from the Textile Workers, the Rubber Workers, and a number of delegates from the Automobile Workers; and most of the remainder of the Convention delegates. Points at issue between the two blocs were at no time clearly defined, however, and head-on clashes in debate were infrequent.

The position of the Hillman (Amalgamated) group was broadly as follows: They wanted some sort of endorsement of Roosevelt domestic and foreign policy, a resolution condemning communism, nazism, and fascism, implemented by an objective proposal to expel from the CIO all communist followers, a repudiation by the Convention of Lewis' position with respect to the Roosevelt Administration and especially of his endorsement of Willkie, a limitation of the powers of president of the CIO, and a conciliatory resolution regarding unity with the AFL.

On none of these issues can the Hillman group be said to have achieved more than a compromise. Amalgamated was unsuccessful in its push for debate on Lewis' campaign position, being partially immobilized by Lewis' opening-day announcement of his intention not to seek re-election to the CIO presidency. No plaudits for the Administration appeared in any of the resolutions adopted. Much criticism of its shortcomings from labor's point of view, on the other hand, did. The Amalgamated-backed resolution urging the immediate necessity for unity with the AFL was not accepted. The Hillman group came closest to success on the resolution condemning communism, which was passed without debate.

Significant here, however, was the fact that the resolution embodied no plan for expelling alleged followers of the three condemned "isms", and that Resolutions Committee Chairman Kennedy prefaced the motion to adopt the resolution with an explanation that the resolution was not intended to furnish a springboard for action against any known individuals nor as a signal for a red-hunt, but merely as a re-assertion of the CIO's freedom from ideological domination of foreign origin. That sections of the Amalgamated bloc wanted a stronger resolution was clear. That they did not get it is attributed to the widespread fear among delegates that a resolution of more specific content, whatever its intentions, might be used to implement an attempt to remove certain militant Lewis adherents regardless of their party or group affiliation.

Definite predictions based on specific results of the Convention proceedings will for some weeks at least be premature. Certain general conclusions, however, seem justified by events during and immediately following the Convention.

1. The influence of John L. Lewis on the main program and general tendencies of the movement has not been seriously diminished by his resignation. If for no other reason than that he remains head of the CIO's largest and wealthiest affiliate, the United Mine Workers, he will continue to have a large hand in CIO policy. Beyond this, much of the bitterness aroused among members by his endorsement of Willkie has now worn away. Should the CIO fail, in the coming months, to obtain satisfaction for what it considers its legitimate demands from the Administration, Lewis' position as spokesman for an independent labor movement will become progressively stronger, while Hillman and the policy of unconditional endorsement of the Administration will suffer a progressive diminution in prestige.

2. CIO national policy will undergo revision only in detail under Murray's leadership. While it is improbable that Murray is merely a "front" for Lewis, it is equally improbable that Murray will change much more than the "tone" of CIO strategy.

3. The CIO organization drive will increase as the defense program accelerates. In line with Convention resolutions, the drives in autos, aircraft and steel will be given particular emphasis. Along with continued insistence on denial by the Government of defense contracts to violators of the National Labor Relations Act will go a determined effort to secure objectives guaranteed by the Wagner Act through the organization's own efforts. Demands for wage increases will doubtless be made in the course of this organizing campaign.

4. The CIO will continue to oppose American military participation in the war and while endorsing the defense program in its protective aims, will seek increased labor participation in the carrying out of defense policy and firm guarantees of protection for labor's rights and standards.

5. Labor unity, in the sense of an outright amalgamation of the CIO and AFL is as far as ever from accomplishment, but likelihood of the attainment of fairly stable relations between the two organizations is strong, and a preliminary arrangement for the avoidance of organizational poaching has already been roughed out. It is worth notice, in this regard, that resolutions adopted at the AFL Convention in New Orleans, particularly those relating to the defense program, fairly closely paralleled the CIO resolutions, greater warmth towards Britain on the part of the AFL being perhaps the distinguishing feature.

6. Nothing in the tone of the CIO Convention nor in the concrete terms of its program indicates opposition to the announced aims of the national defense program. On the contrary, it is insisted that extension of democratic gains is and should be compatible with the development of means for their defense, but that the mechanism of defense should not destroy what it is designed to protect.