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The AFL-CIO's Foreign Policy Program: Where Historians Now Stand

Abstract

The struggle to end the AFL-CIO's foreign policy program, as part of the effort to build global labor solidarity, began in the late 1960s but has qualitatively escalated since 2010. This paper details these efforts, while showing the advances over the preceding ten years. Interestingly, while labor historians have provided some important contributions in the past, they have refused to engage with the work of Kim Scipes, a major writer in the field, ignoring his path-breaking work yet supporting some of his major claims. The question is asked whether historians in this sub-discipline are being taught to over-prioritize archival works from governmental and organizational collections while ignoring what is happening in the real world.

Keywords

global labor solidarity, AFL-CIO foreign policy/operations, Philippines, Venezuela, labor studies

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Cover Page Footnote

Kim Scipes is a Professor of Sociology at Purdue University Northwest in Westville, Indiana, USA. He has been working to build global labor solidarity since 1983, and has published four books and over 230 articles and book reviews in the US and in 11 other countries, almost all on workers and their organizations. A list of Dr. Scipes' publications, many with links to original articles, can be accessed at <https://www.pnw.edu/faculty/kim-scipes-ph-d/publications/>.

Moving from being an area of study that had received only minimal and sporadic academic attention prior to 2010, the study of AFL/AFL-CIO foreign policy and operations (hereafter, critical US labor foreign policy studies) has taken a qualitative leap in garnering academic attention over the past ten years: this foreign policy program is increasingly being seen as an important component of US foreign policy and operations.¹ This paper seeks to demonstrate the change, and discusses what has been learned over this later period.

However, this also leads to serious questions of training of academic historians, as can be seen by the treatment of a major scholar in this field and, arguably, the reliance if not over-reliance on official government documents.

This paper begins by drawing attention to a key issue that resulted in the field opening up. That is followed by a review of the literature, focusing initially on that developed before 2010, then a look at the 2010 and later writings, with a concentration on what has been learned. Interestingly, we see historians entering the discussion, which is welcomed, but they are encouraged to break out of the confines of their discipline, and to engage with the existing work that has previously been done by activists and researchers/writers in other academic disciplines, something that so far, they have tended not to do.

The key issue motivating this sea change in studying labor's foreign policy took place with the recognition that labor's foreign policy was generated internally, inside the labor movement, and not a product of outside forces, such as the US government, the White House or the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) as had been previously argued (see Morris, 1967; Radosh, 1969; Sims, 1992).

While this may initially appear to be an "academic" matter, in reality, it cuts to the very essence of the issue. For many of us who come out of the labor movement and/or who supported the labor movement, finding out about what the AFL/AFL-CIO was doing against workers in other countries—as was being discovered and revealed over time—was abhorrent; it undercut almost everything we had been led to believe about the labor movement; for some, it felt like ultimate betrayal of something we had felt honorable.²

¹ By AFL/AFL-CIO, I refer to foreign operations begun by the American Federation of Labor (AFL) that have led to or been continued by the post-merger AFL-CIO (Congress of Industrial Organizations). The CIO, while independent and prior to the 1955 merger, also engaged in foreign operations, including receiving funding from the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency), but on a much more limited basis (Braden, 1967; Reuther, 1979). The CIO was the "junior partner" in the merger, and subsequent foreign operations were determined and initiated by men who came out of the AFL (Buhle, 1999). Arguably, since 1961-62, US foreign policy as a whole cannot be understood without considering labor's foreign policy efforts.

² It is this emotional response by labor activists that add intensity to the debate; this is not simply a detached academic exercise. Nonetheless, labor activists overall have sought to hold to the highest standards of research and truthfulness; in other words, they have expanded the "academic" discussion, and this needs to be recognized and appreciated.

Truth in advertising: this writer, while having worked in academia since 2004, actually came out of the labor movement; when he found out about the AFL-CIO's foreign operations in 1983, he was working on printing presses and an active member of the Graphic Communications International Union, AFL-CIO, and he is currently a member of the National Writers Union, AFL-CIO.

What to do in response? Labor activists and supporting scholars sought to understand the situation—what was causing this? If the initial response was correct, that it was being done by forces outside of the labor movement, then to address the situation, people had to address the US government, the White House, the CIA, etc.; i.e., it was a much larger, more abstract issue. On the other hand, if this was being done within the labor movement, then we could operate within the labor movement, appeal to people with similar goals and aspirations, and then confident of the democratic nature of the labor movement, we felt we had a much more likely chance to force through real change. Getting clear on this “debate” has been important.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to argue that one person or one article was responsible for making this change; if nothing else, lack of citations—for whatever reasons—precludes certainty. More than likely, these research efforts were done independently, without knowing of the other’s work. However, we know for certain that Kim Scipes (1989) and Anthony Carew (1998) published articles on the AFL foreign policy program in the late 1980s-late 1990s from this new perspective; that Ronald Filipelli (1989) and Greg Andrews (1991) published books from the same new perspective; and that David Nack (1999) completed a History Ph.D. at Rutgers, each operating on the assumption that labor’s foreign policy was generated internally. Scipes (1989) actually established that AFL foreign policy was established in the labor movement during the late 1800s/early 1900s under Samuel Gompers, long *before* the Bolshevik Revolution, and explicated the process, showing *how* this was established.³ Further, Scipes concludes in a later book on the subject, after an extensive review of the literature, “These four works, along with Scipes’ 1989 piece, have conclusively established that US labor’s foreign policy and operations are developed internally and not externally” (Scipes, 2010a: xxii).

To support his claim, Scipes published two additional scholarly works. He published an article in *Labor Studies Journal*, arguing that the archives of the AFL-CIO’s foreign policy program should be opened to interested researchers, and he reviewed the AFL-CIO’s role in the 1973 coup in Chile to support his case (Scipes, 2000b); see also Ancel (2000) in response. And then Scipes (2007b) published another article in the *Journal of the Indiana Academy of Social Sciences*, asking—and then answering—the question of whether or not the AFL-CIO was involved in the US-backed 2002 coup attempt in Venezuela.⁴

Developments Up to 2010

Now this is not to ignore the fact that a growing literature of critical US labor foreign policy studies had been emerging since the late 1960s. Ronald Radosh’s 1969 book was most

³ Most people who are aware of the AFL/AFL-CIO’s foreign operations believe that these operations began only in the late 1940s, in the Cold War against “communism.” As stated, in reality, they started in the late 1800s-early 1900s, long before the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917.

Scipes’ 1989 article was updated and republished as Chapter 1 in Scipes, 2010a. In either form, this built on the work of labor historians, and it was thought that labor historians would be excited to see how their work influenced a labor sociologist; instead, they have ignored it.

⁴ Both of these articles, along with a report from the Philippines, were incorporated into Chapter 2 of Scipes (2010a).

influential in establishing external forces as the primary reason for labor's nefarious activities around the world. Radosh (1969) had found that the labor movement, and especially Samuel Gompers, felt obligated to respond to the Wilson Administration's request for labor's participation in supporting the government's World War I policies; in fact, however, Gompers was actively seeking ways to get involved and advance the Allies' position among workers in the United States; he was initiating, not merely responding (see McKillen, 1995; Scipes, 2010a: 19-20;).

A number of studies were published over the years, primarily by activists who were eager to expose and then to try to get the AFL-CIO to reject these reactionary practices, and to build international labor solidarity with workers around the world⁵ (see, among others, Armstrong, Frundt, Spalding and Sweeney, 1988; Barry and Preusch, 1986; Berger, 1967; Blain, 2001; Bollinger, 1984; Boyer, 1986; Buhle, 1999; Cantor and Schor, 1987; Ciment and Ness, 1999; Eckstein, 1986; Eisenhower, 1991; Frutiger, 2002; Garver, 1989; Hirsh (correct Hirsch) and Fletcher, 1977; Hirsch, 1974, n.d. (but apparently 1975); Hirsch and Muir, 1987; Hoyt, 2002; Lens, 1967, 1972; Leopold, 2007: 164-190; Lujan, 1986; Morris, 1967; National Labor Committee, n.d. (but apparently 1983), n.d. (but apparently 1985); Schmidt, 1978; Scipes, 1987a, 1987b, 1989, 1993, 2000b, 2007b; Scott, 1978; Shorrock, 2003; Shorrock and Selvaggio, 1986; Sims, 1992; Slaney, 1988; Smyth, 1987a, 1987b; Spalding, 1984, 1988a, 1988b, 1992; Valentine, 1999; Weinrub and Bollinger, 1987; and West, 1991).⁶

These were coupled with journalistic reports, which provided additional information (see Bernstein, 1985; Bronstein and Johnson, 1985; Kwitney, 1984; Maas, 1986; and Newman and Walker, 2002).

⁵ Thus, this work is tied into building global labor solidarity. [Scipes (2016b: 38) explained his shift in terminology from “international” to “global” labor solidarity.] As Scipes (2010a: 216, FN #1) pointed out: “Radically reforming the AFL-CIO foreign policy program is a major, but not only, component of building [global] labor solidarity.... Thus, while this author focuses on the foreign policy program, it is to advance the larger project of building [global] labor solidarity, while seeing the AFL-CIO's foreign policy program as a major impediment to the success of this larger project.”

Scipes has written extensively and explicitly on the necessity of building global labor solidarity; among other works, see Scipes 1996; 2010a; 2016b, and 2020c; see also 2020b, 2020d.

⁶ Arguably, Hirsch (1974) is the most crucial of these studies. A plumber by trade and based primarily upon his research, Fred Hirsch had gotten the Santa Clara County (CA) Labor Council to pass an official resolution, condemning the AFL-CIO's AIFLD (American Institute for Free Labor Development—it's Latin American regional organization) for its involvement in the 1973 coup in Chile. When AIFLD's Executive Director, William Doherty, Jr., flew to San Jose in an effort to get the Labor Council to rescind the resolution, Hirsch and his colleagues were able to stop this, and the Resolution held. (The story is told in Hirsch and Muir, 1987; see particularly p. 745.). As detailed below, Hirsch remained a key actor over the next 40-plus years on these issues.

Hirsch and Scipes, two skilled trades members and labor activists, met in the late 1980s while members of CISTUR, the Committee in International Solidarity for Trade Union rights, a local organization in San Francisco. Scipes later went into academia, and joined his labor passion with academic training. Together, they played important roles in advancing the field of critical US labor movement foreign policy studies and in challenging the AFL-CIO's foreign policy program, especially in California and at the 2005 National Convention in Chicago (see Scipes, 2010a). Some of the other “activists” were also academics, but they were writing in activist journals instead of academic peer-reviewed journals, trying to reach broader audiences. I make this point to note that the distinction between “academics” and “activists” could be very porous, albeit generally one way.

These were joined by writings on forces such as the CIA, documenting at least in some places how they had affected the labor movement; see particularly Agee, 1975; Blum, 1986, 2000; Johnson, 2000; and Morris, 1967.

There were academic studies published prior to 2010 but they were generally one-off type of events, with efforts to document developments but with apparently little connection to activists in the labor movement and had no substantive effects on efforts to seriously try to change labor movement politics. Among others, these include Battista, 2002; Busch, 1983; Carew, 1998; Hughes, 2001; McKillen, 1995; Snow, 1964; Windmuller, 1967; Walters and Daniels, 2005; Welch, 1995; and Zeleza, 1987.

However, there were institutional and academic studies that challenged critical analysts and/or defended the policies of the AFL-CIO and/or its leadership. These included AIFLD 1984, 1987, 1988; Braden, 1967; Brown, 1985; Doherty, 1988a, b; Gacek, 2004a, b, 2005; Godson, 1974, 1975a, b, 1982, 1988; Goulden, 1972; Kirkland, 1984; Puddington, 2005; Romualdi, 1967; and Wehrle, 2001, 2005.

In short, there was a quite sharp “debate” about AFL-CIO foreign policy in the 1980s and into the 2000s, although most took place in the earlier part of the period. And then it ended.

What changed? There was the first contested election in the history of the AFL-CIO in 1995, and John Sweeney prevailed. At least some of his support was generated by his stated willingness to make changes in the AFL-CIO foreign policy. Sweeney disbanded the AFL-CIO’s three regional organizations in Africa, Asia and Latin America, and replaced them in 1997 with a centralized American Center for International Labor Solidarity or ACILS, also known as the “Solidarity Center.”⁷

Sweeney had promised a “New Voice” for labor, including a new foreign policy. However, somewhat skeptical, and knowing of the on-going connection with the so-called National Endowment for Democracy (NED)⁸—Scipes continued pressuring the AFL-CIO to break its ties with NED and institutionalize these changes in its foreign policy—see Scipes (2000, 2002, 2004a, 2004b, 2004c, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c, 2005d, 2005e, 2005f, 2005g, 2007a, 2007b). He was not the only one pushing. Scipes was joined especially by Hirsch (2003, 2004a, 2004b, 2005), but also by Judy Ancel (2000) and Peter Rachleff (2000). However, most importantly in this period, activists launched an independent, labor-based organization called US Labor Against

⁷ The name was later formally changed to the Solidarity Center. For an excellent discussion of ACILS, see Bass’ (2012) unpublished Ph.D. dissertation (on-line, for free); see also Cox and Bass (2012). For an account of the Solidarity Center’s operations in Bangladesh, written by its Asia Regional Program Director, Timothy Ryan, see Ryan (2016); for a more critical view of the Solidarity Center’s Bangladesh operations, see Rahman and Langford, 2014.

⁸ As described, the NED is “an organization that is the anthesis, the opposite of what it claims to be: it works semi-independently of the US Government, yet in collaboration, to ensure the continued domination of the US Empire” (Scipes, 2010a: xii). A look at Scipes’ index suggests a lot more about the NED; see particularly his section on NED (pp. 96-105). Also, additional references on this despicable organization are given below.

the War (see Fletcher, 2003; Onasch, 2003; Scipes, 2003; Zweig, 2005), seeking to change labor's foreign policy.

Second, the Solidarity Center indirectly supported a coup attempt in April 2002 against the democratically-elected government of Hugo Chávez in Venezuela, and this was established and condemned by activists in the US.⁹

And, third, prior to the AFL-CIO's National Convention in Chicago in July 2005, Fred Hirsch and activists in California were able to build solid support against the AFL-CIO's foreign policy program within the California Labor Federation. The CLF, which was 1/6th of the entire AFL-CIO membership at the time, demanded that the AFL-CIO change its foreign policy: in July 2004, over 400 delegates, representing approximately 2.5 million organized members, *unanimously* declared the need to change this foreign policy (see Hirsch, 2003, 2004a; Scipes, 2004c).

In the face of these developments and further mobilization locally (see Scipes, 2010a: 79-80), skullduggery at the 2005 National AFL-CIO Convention in Chicago—most importantly, by Gerald McEntee, head of the American Federation of State, Municipal and Country Employees, who chaired the Convention's Resolution Committee—changed the California Resolution from condemning the Solidarity Center to one approving it, and the new Resolution passed (Scipes, 2005g). The immediate challenge was defanged, while labor democracy was gutted like a fish. Things would remain quiescent until 2010.

From 2010 to Today

These developments, mentioned above, were brought together with the publication of *AFL-CIO's Secret War against Developing Country Workers: Solidarity or Sabotage?* (Scipes, 2010a). Scipes detailed how the labor movement's foreign policy emerged under Samuel Gompers, before the Soviet Revolution; gave an overview of the further development of AFL/AFL-CIO's foreign policy in Africa, Asia¹⁰ and Latin America¹¹; discussed the efforts within labor to change its reactionary, labor-imperialist foreign policy; and discussed how the US government under both Democrats and Republicans had tried to use the AFL-CIO to further its

⁹ While Scipes had sniffed this out within less than a month—see Scipes, 2002, 2004b, 2005d—and after doing an important interview with a CTV leader in Caracas, Venezuela during June 2006, he was later able to confirm these charges in Scipes (2007b), and he included this in his 2010a book (pp. 56-66); see also Hirsch, 2004b, 2005.

¹⁰ Scipes had done extensive research over the years on the KMU Labor Center of the Philippines, and documented that the largest affiliate of the AFL-CIO's ally in that country worked with a death squad—no exaggeration—to try to win a union election against the KMU in a large copper mine on the island of Cebu; see Scipes, 1996, 116-125, and for a briefer overview, see Scipes, 2010a, 48-56.

For a new set of writings based on his research in the Philippines, see Scipes, 2020c.

¹¹ For his account of AFL-CIO involvement in the 1973 coup against the democratically-elected Salvador Allende in Chile, see Scipes, 2000; 2010a, 40-48.

For his account of the AFL-CIO's indirect support for the April 2002 coup in Venezuela against the democratically-elected government of Hugo Chávez, see Scipes, 2004b, 2007b, 2010a, 56-66.

own imperialist foreign policy. In his final chapter, he concluded his study (and also discussed some ramifications of his findings on sociological theory) with the finding that:

In light of the extensively detailed history presented herein, and the extensive efforts to undercut those within the labor movement who have challenged AFL-CIO foreign policy leadership, *it is safe to conclude that Labor's foreign policy leadership is wedded to the idea of Empire; they believe the United States should dominate the world, that unlimited financial resources should be dedicated to ensuring this, and that all other considerations are secondary or less* (emphasis in original) (Scipes, 2010a: 113).

Further, “That they have been willing to mistreat workers around the world, especially in the developing countries, and disembowel labor democracy within the United States suggests the strength of these convictions” (Scipes, 2010a: 113).¹²

Scipes followed this up with a 2010 article published in the academic, peer-reviewed journal *Working USA*.¹³ Building off the important work of Jan Nederveen Pieterse (1989)—unhyphenated double last name—Scipes formally advanced the concept of “labor imperialism” to describe the activities of the AFL-CIO’s foreign program (Scipes, 2010b, 2016a).

Scipes subsequently published additional pieces in academic outlets on the AFL-CIO foreign policy. He published a peer-reviewed article in *Critical Sociology* (Scipes, 2012b), detailing how labor activists had emerged and collaborated to challenge the AFL-CIO’s foreign policy program.¹⁴ Later, he was asked for and contributed a formal article on “Labour Imperialism” (Scipes, 2016a) to the *Encyclopedia of Imperialism and Anti-Imperialism* (Ness and Cope, eds., 2016). He also has published book review essays on several books that have been published regarding labor’s foreign policy program, including Rodriguez-Garcia, 2010 (Scipes, 2012a), Hughes, 2011 (Scipes, 2011); Waters, Jr., and Van Goethem, eds., 2013 (Scipes, 2014b); and Carew 2018 (Scipes, 2018).¹⁵

One set of writers who have built on Scipes’ work have been the political scientists Ronald W. Cox and G. Nelson Bass (2012). Writing within the context of globalization, and in a short but packed-with-information chapter, Cox and Bass detail AFL-CIO foreign policy history, but specifically focus on the AFL-CIO’s relationship with the National Endowment for Democracy

¹² The endnotes of Scipes’ 2010a book alone deserve attention in addition to the body of the book.

¹³ The editors subsequently changed its name to *The Journal of Labor and Society*.

¹⁴ This article (Scipes, 2012b), generally built on Chapter 3 of Scipes (2010a), goes beyond it with details of how this challenge was developed.

¹⁵ In light of his extensive publication record alone, both as an academic and an activist, it is unclear why historians have so far refused to critically evaluate Scipes’ work, whether his 2010 book or numerous publications. His book has not been reviewed by any labor historian. Of the articles and books published since 2010—the date of Scipes’ book on the AFL-CIO—there is no mention of his work in Hughes, 2011 (we had met in 2001 at the North American Labor History Conference); no mention of Scipes in 13 out of 15 chapters in Waters, Jr., and Van Goethem, eds. (2013), and in the two places mentioned, that’s all there was, although with no discussion of any of his claims; no mention of his work in Carew (2018); no mention in Field, Jr. (2018), and only a mention in Schuhrke (2019), again with no discussion of his claims. Are historians afraid to discuss/debate Scipes’ work?

(see also Bass, 2012). Noting that over 90 percent of labor's foreign policy funding comes from the US government, they discuss some of the implications:

The pattern of funding has skewed the activities of the Solidarity Center toward locations where the US government is actively promoting a 'democratization' development and security agenda that privileges neoliberal reform and cooperation with conservative trade unions and civil society groups supportive of US foreign policy goals (Cox and Bass, 2012: 59).

What also has been very interesting, however, has been the steady increase of academic works by researchers other than Scipes who, while generally ignoring Scipes' contributions, nonetheless substantiate many of his claims. Quenby Olmsted Hughes (2011) published a detailed study of AFL operations in France during and immediately after World War II. She showed unequivocally that the AFL had worked with the CIA in Europe, and that for a number of years, was funded by them. However, she also substantiated that labor's foreign policy program was developed inside the American Federation of Labor (AFL), and not by the CIA.

In 2013, Robert Waters, Jr., and Geert van Goethem published an edited volume they titled *American Labor's Global Ambassadors: The International History of the AFL-CIO during the Cold War*. This brought together a number of scholars who presented a range of accounts about AFL-CIO foreign operations in the post-World War II period. A number of these scholars—Briogi, 2013; Chenoweth, 2013; Dower, 2013; Hughes, 2013; Stoner, 2013, and Von Bülow, 2013—substantiated (again) the claim that foreign policy is developed internally within the labor movement. However, Scipes (2014b) challenged the overall politics of the collection.

Perhaps the most important of these works, however, is *American Labour's Cold War Abroad* by Anthony Carew (2018). This is a detailed study of AFL and AFL-CIO foreign operations between 1945 and 1970. It fills in many of the areas during this period simply sketched by Scipes (2010a), and certainly supports Scipes' claim that foreign policy is developed internally within the labor movement.

And an important study was published by Thomas C. Field, Jr. (2018). Field, Jr., detailed the emergence of labor's foreign policy in Latin America, which was integrally assisted by the US Government, and specifically the Kennedy Administration of the early 1960s.¹⁶

This was followed by a couple of articles by Jeff Schuhrke, “Comradely Brainwashing” (2019) and “Agrarian Reform and the AFL-CIO's Cold War in El Salvador” (2020). The former discussed operations of AIFLD (American Institute for Free Labor Development, the AFL-CIO's regional operation in Latin America) in the early 1960s, while the latter focused on land reform

¹⁶ Cliff Welch shows that this labor-US government collaboration began in the late 1940s in Latin America: “Romualdi's June [1946-KS] trip to Latin America launched a pattern of collaboration between US policymakers and AFL operatives that came to characterize US involvement in regional union affairs” (Welch, 1995, 65). However, these links became attenuated during the 1950s, only be revived after the success of the Cuban Revolution (Field, Jr., 2018; Schuhrke, 2019).

efforts by AIFLD in El Salvador during the late 1970s-early 1980s, adding a new, rural-focused program to AIFLD's arsenal.

What Has Been Learned?

The results of the 2010 and later publications solidify three previous claims. First, they have established conclusively that the AFL-CIO's foreign policy—which was established before the Bolshevik Revolution, continued throughout the Cold War and has continued post-Cold War—is a reactionary, anti-worker program, primarily hurting workers in developing countries, but also the United States.

This labor foreign policy program was not initiated from outside of the labor movement, but was a product of internal factors (Scipes, 2010a, 2010b; in addition to the four other studies mentioned above that make this point—Andrews, 1991; Carew, 1998; Filipelli, 1989; and Nack, 1999—see also Briogi, 2013; Carew, 2018; Chenoweth, 2013; Dower, 2013; Hughes, 2001, 2011; Stoner, 2013; and Von Bülow, 2013).

Two, this foreign policy program has made the AFL-CIO foreign policy leaders major players in the US government's foreign policy "team." This literature now destroys the bogus rationale of "fighting communism" as a major motivation for these efforts, despite that its being the long-time stated "rationale" for these nefarious activities by top-level AFL-CIO leaders.¹⁷ And this involvement with the US government has been kept hidden and away from the knowledge of most AFL-CIO leaders as well as members to the greatest extent possible, because it undercuts and is against the ethos of the entire labor movement (Scipes, 2010a).

Thomas C. Field, Jr's 2018 article provides important independent and detailed confirmation of this claim. It details the private origins, through the AFL-CIO, of the "massive overseas labor program launched by the Kennedy administration in 1962" (Field, Jr., 2018: 307); in other words, it was labor that provided the background, experience and vision that fueled the Kennedy administration's operations especially in Latin America, not the government, although the government, in turn, funded these labor operations.¹⁸

To me, this article establishes that the Kennedy administration built on the labor movement's previous efforts, and then invited labor into the administration's core program on foreign policy alongside—not subordinate to—the CIA; in Latin America, this was through the Alliance for Progress. In other words, through the government-supported and -funded AIFLD, labor

¹⁷ "Communism," following the US government, was always seen by AFL-CIO leaders as an "outside" force, trying to subjugate the poor people of this country or that. They consistently refused to see the struggles of workers and peasants as being products internal to specific social orders, as it overwhelmingly has been. In fact, these were and are struggles against colonialism and its after-effects that motivated most if not all of these struggles, in whole or at least in part.

¹⁸ This gets to the heart of a long-standing controversy as to the relationship between labor and the CIA. While we know that labor worked closely with and received funding from the CIA between 1948 and 1958, we also know it got cut off by the CIA in 1958. This has been unequivocally verified (Hughes, 2011; Carew, 2018). As Field, Jr., discusses, this relationship was patched together again in 1961 by the Kennedy administration.

operatives could act like the CIA—and do similar nasty things—without being under the control of the CIA. Sometimes, this was done while working with the CIA and sometimes independently, but at all times for similar purposes, that being the furtherance of US foreign policy; which I call maintaining and extending the US Empire. Likewise, labor could get funding from the US government—which it did through US Agency for International Development (USAID)—and still honestly claim it did not get funding from the CIA. Labor could also claim that it worked independently from the CIA, which it often did, but they often worked together; in fact, Perry Fallwock, who formerly worked with the National Security Agency (NSA), has claimed that a CIA agent worked in every AIFLD office in Latin America (quoted in McCarthy, 2008: 28).¹⁹

This has been subsequently confirmed by US labor’s involvement in the establishment of the so-called National Endowment for Democracy (NED), as noted especially by Bass (2012); Buhle, 1999: 204-248; Ciment and Ness (1999); Cox and Bass (2012); Robinson (1996); Scipes (2010a: 96-105) and Sims, 1992.

Ironically, by joining the US government’s foreign policy team, having its operations overwhelmingly funded by the US state instead of members’ dues (which precludes members’ control over these operations), and keeping these hidden from many leaders and most members, AFL-CIO foreign policy leaders have adopted the very actions that they accused the “communists” of doing, which they have used to justify their own foreign policy program! (Scipes, 2010a: 114).

This is where Schuhrke’s (2019, 2020) work becomes so important as he confirms both claims. In “Comradely Brainwashing,” Schuhrke (2019) discusses the operations over time by AIFLD in Latin America. He concludes,

Rather than dissociate themselves from US policies that aided counterrevolutionary forces in Latin America, *AIFLD frequently helped carry out such policies*. Obviously not simply another school for Third World unionists, *the Institute was a de facto subsidiary of the US government, directly managed by the upper echelons of organized labor, and firmly allied with US capital*. With its highly dubious interventions in Brazil and elsewhere, the Institute was justifiably denounced by the Left as an imperialist project seeking not to educate Latin American workers to become agents of democratic development but to ‘brainwash’ them to become foot soldiers of reaction (emphases added) (Schuhrke, 2019: 64).

And Schuhrke’s (2020) latest contribution is also important. We learn not only that AIFLD was involved in land reform in El Salvador, but that this was coordinated with the State Department under Ronald Reagan. In other words, despite Reagan’s ferocious assault against the air traffic

¹⁹ However, there’s at least one researcher—Rob McKenzie (2020)—who thinks the major AFL-CIO foreign policy program leaders themselves were CIA agents and set up these operations for the CIA. He has some strong evidence that deserves consideration. This issue probably will not be definitively resolved until both the AFL-CIO and the CIA archives are opened to researchers with all restrictions removed. Thanks to Rob McKenzie for the McCarthy (2008) reference.

controllers' union (PATCO) that helped devastate much of the entire labor movement, AIFLD worked as part of Reagan's counter-insurgency project against the revolutionary uprising in El Salvador. This uprising, which included most of the people in the country, was against the land-owning elites in that country who dominated the land and much of the power in that social order, and who were willing to use fierce physical repression to maintain such. Any "benefit" projected for the peasantry by AIFLD was really to undercut the revolution and support US foreign policy, not to help people improve their lives on an on-going basis, as they claimed they were doing. Schuhrke's work expands our knowledge of what AIFLD was doing in that country and perhaps elsewhere, in addition to any work with the labor movement.

But it goes back more than these examples. It goes back to the larger effort

... by the US Government to incorporate Labor into its foreign policy program, thus making Labor's foreign policy program of direct interest to the respective political administration running the government, and Labor's foreign policy leadership's response to these efforts (Scipes, 2010a: 83).

Thus, labor's foreign policy leaders have been intimately involved in the US Government's foreign policy operations since 1961, with the establishment of the US Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, US AID, the Alliance for Progress; the establishment and propagation of the National Endowment for Democracy; and the State Department's Advisory Committee on Labor and Diplomacy (Scipes, 2010a: 83-112).²⁰

As Scipes concluded his chapter on "The US Government and Labor":

This chapter has shown the long-standing and on-going relationship between the AFL-CIO's foreign policy program and the US Government's. The government has actively worked to incorporate Labor's foreign policy program into its own, and overwhelmingly—behind the backs of their members—the AFL-CIO foreign policy leaders have acquiesced to this, and subsequently became active participants in consciously advancing US foreign policy efforts. The AFL-CIO's program overwhelmingly serves the interests of the US Government and its corporate allies—at the direct expense of working people around the globe, and increasingly at the expense of American workers (Scipes, 2010a: 112).²¹

²⁰ This means that if the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) is involved anywhere in the world, the AFL-CIO is involved, indirectly if not directly. So, for example, NED has long been involved in supporting efforts ultimately intended to overthrow the democratically-elected governments of Hugo Chávez and Nicolás Maduro in Venezuela. Like argued above, the Solidarity Center was indirectly involved in supporting the reactionary CTV labor center before, during and after the unsuccessful 2002 coup attempt. However, the NED has subsequently continued its efforts (see Daniels, 2020; Gill and Hanson, 2019; Gill, 2020; Hanson and Gill, 2019; and see Scipes, 2014a).

²¹ As shown in his book, sometimes the labor movement deviates from the policies of the US government. Scipes gives the examples of opposition to the bombing halt in Vietnam by the Johnson administration in 1968; opposition to the entire "détente" strategy of Nixon and Kissinger; and opposition to Carter's "acceptance" of the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua. He sums these up with "Interestingly, in each of these non-trade-related cases where the AFL-CIO opposed US Government policy, the AFL-CIO took the more reactionary and aggressive position!" (Scipes, 2010a, 200, FN #70).

And third, this has led to dictatorship and systematic oppression for workers, peasants, women, students, the urban poor and youth in a number of countries around the world, if not in all of them.²² We know for certain that the AFL and then the AFL-CIO were active participants in the 1954 coup in Guatemala, the 1964 coup in Brazil, the 1973 coup in Chile, and were indirect participants in the attempted but unsuccessful 2002 coup in Venezuela; the three successful coup attempts each lead to many years of repression under dictatorships. We know the AFL-CIO supported dictatorships in a number of other countries around the world (see Scipes, 2010a). We also know—with the possible exception of *Solidarnosc* in Poland, and that is arguable—none of these foreign operations improved the lives of workers and peasants, despite whatever rhetoric utilized; in fact, these operations made the lives of these people much worse.

Accordingly, this involvement by the AFL-CIO in US foreign policy efforts has also come at a major cost to American workers: it has undercut efforts to defend workers and their interests at home, in the United States, much less precluded efforts to try to expand them. This can be seen by the AFL-CIO's almost total lack of leadership in domestic labor struggles over the past 40 years at least (see Aronowitz, 2014; Fletcher and Gapasin, 2008; Scipes, 2017, 2020a), especially in light of the seriously detrimental economic calamity that had developed even before the Great Recession (see Greenhouse, 2008; Scipes, 2009) and the COVID-19 pandemic and later economic crisis of 2020 and beyond.

Synopsis

First, the post-2010 works by labor historians have further confirmed previous well-established claims. However, while these works have confirmed important aspects of the labor imperialist program, they have not confirmed the entire program—with the single exception of Anthony Carew, who has confirmed the program during the 1945-1970 period, although he has not adopted the conceptualization—nor has any labor historian critically evaluated the work of Kim Scipes (2010a, 2010b), who has established the broader, more comprehensive claim.

Regarding labor, historians are still dealing with the period under George Meany and Lane Kirkland; there has been no published work that I have seen by historians dealing with the John

²² While this might seem somewhat abstract, in the most concrete account to date of the impact of the AFL-CIO's foreign operations on "developing" country workers on the basis of extensive field research, Scipes (1996: 116-125) details the assault on a copper miners' union in the Philippines affiliated with the KMU Labor Center in the late 1980s by an affiliate by the AFL-CIO's ally in that country. In addition to murdering several miners themselves and wounding a number of others, the death squad involved with the union shot up a number of people's homes, wounding relatives and killing the mother of one miner in one incident. For a less detailed account, see Scipes (2010a: 48-56). This is the same case as described in FN #10.

This "ally" of the AFL-CIO in the Philippines, the Trade Union Congress of the Philippines, received approximately \$5.7 million through the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and the AFL-CIO's regional affiliate between 1985-88, more than any other labor organization in the world during this time, including *Solidarnosc* in Poland. International Labour Reports, 1989: 11).

Sweeney period (1995-2009).²³ There certainly is a crying need for a detailed historical account of the Solidarity Center's involvement in the coup attempt in Venezuela during April 2002, well after the end of the Cold War.²⁴ Also, the efforts leading to the 2005 Chicago AFL-CIO convention and actions there need to be further examined to see why, after a truly extensive and innovative effort within the labor movement—detailed in Scipes, 2012b—activists were unable to get the support necessary to even discuss the AFL-CIO's foreign policy program on the floor of the convention, much less change this reactionary program.

As this shows, particularly in regard to the AFL-CIO's foreign policy program, historians have not played a leading role on the subject, but have tailed not only other academics, but labor activists as well. And yet, they seem to give very little acknowledgement to those whose work has stimulated their own.

Accordingly, it seems that historians are more interested in protecting disciplinary turf than in advancing knowledge. This leaves them open for critique and disparagement.

While we know historians excel in doing in-depth archival research, the question must be raised if they have not gone overboard in this approach. This, obviously, leaves them subject to whether material has been saved, and if it has been saved in whole or only in part. This obviously biases their work toward organizations (including governmental ones) that save their output, and in reality, the range of material saved. But what about those who don't save their output—such as social movements and other activist projects? What about secondary sources—such as activist journals and oral histories, for example? What are labor historians teaching those entering the discipline?

In reality, good historians do use material much broader than found in the archives, although they tend to build on official records. But the really good ones also acknowledge the fields plowed by others, who make planting a crop easier and who help create a more bountiful harvest.

Conclusion

This paper has discussed the development of the field of critical US labor foreign policy studies over the past 50 years. It surveyed the literature from the late 1960s to 2010, and then notes the explosion in interest in the field over the past 10 years. It specifically recognized the role of Kim Scipes, as both a labor activist and a trained academic sociologist, who has played a major role in developing the field, yet whose work has all but been ignored by labor historians. It also has taken labor historians to task for tailing the field, rather than leading it.

²³ There has been already an unpublished Ph.D. dissertation by political scientist G. Nelson Bass (2012) on the Solidarity Center, as well as a chapter published by Bass and political scientist Ronald W. Cox (2012).

²⁴ Thus, Scipes (2010a) establishes that labor's foreign policy emerged before the Bolshevik Revolution and therefore, before the Cold War between the US and the USSR, and that it extends beyond the end of the Cold War. In other words, the myth that labor acted in response to the "communist menace" is shown to be just that; a myth. This rejection of "communism" as a driving force would seem to be a critical issue that historians would normally be all over, trying to explain. Yet, to this writer's knowledge, it has not been examined.

And finally—to shift our gaze to the academic world—it has to be asked if there are disciplinary boundaries that historians have confined themselves within, to the detriment of all those working on these issues? Historians have much to contribute to the field of critical US labor foreign policy studies, and other scholars welcome their participation. Yet, there is a crying need for historians to recognize that they are not alone; if they will work with activists and scholars of other disciplines, they will be able to address previously identified issues, and advance our understandings while building on an established solid foundation.

Having the time to do deep archival work is something historians have to add to the efforts of the rest of us; and that is important. Getting information from these sources, when possible, is invaluable and definitely adds to and strengthens others' claims; however, to ignore work by others outside of the archives, and to overwhelmingly confine “history” to those who work inside governmental institutions, misses much of the real world, as Howard Zinn (1980) first pointed out forty years ago, as David Detmer (2018) has more recently confirmed, and as I have discussed herein. We welcome historians' involvement in the struggle to reveal and detail the extent of the perfidy of the AFL-CIO's top leaders. It is not the “glorious” history perhaps some might expect labor historians to illuminate, but it is a necessary one; a history important to understand as we try to answer the larger question as to why the AFL-CIO leadership have done so little in the face of the escalating attacks on American workers over the past 40 years, and why they continue relentlessly forward through the fog today.

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