

LETTERS

The methodological issues raised by Judith Stepan-Norris in her review of my book *Capitalist Development and Class Capacities* (ILWCH 39) have implications for the reformulation of working-class strategies and tactics, which, as I stated in the opening sentences of the book, are my real interest. For that reason her review requires a reply.

Stepan-Norris charges that the CIO unions from which I drew my data are an “inaccurate sample.” To minimize questions about a particular union’s inclusion in the sample, I used Walter Galenson’s list of twenty-seven unions affiliated with the CIO in 1937. Galenson’s list included the UMWA, ITU, ILGWU and two minor unions objected to by the reviewer. The inclusion of the UMWA in my study should be beyond reproach. The UMWA was the flagship of the CIO movement and the UMWA’s constitution was the prototype for other CIO unions. Stepan-Norris says the ITU never formally affiliated. Perhaps it was on the internal CIO list of affiliated unions that Galenson used because ITU president Charles Howard was the first secretary of the early CIO. Her questioning of the others amounts to nitpicking of the type I had hoped to avoid by using a discrete list from a credible source in the first place. In fact, even if all the unions she questions were eliminated from the sample, the strength of associations I found would have been unaffected.

Stepan-Norris also questions my comparison of five communist and five non-communist unions in Chapter 5. My comparison showed that communist unions provided greater rank-and-file control of leaders than non-communist unions did. “Why restrict this sample to ten?” she asks. First, the five communist unions are virtually *all* the communist unions on Galenson’s list. I compared the five communist unions with five others chosen for their size, industrial distribution, role in the history of the CIO, and centrality in the literature on democracy in CIO unions. If she wanted, the reviewer could expand the number of non-communist unions by looking at Table 2.2 where the relevant data for the other unions are presented. That data reveal that, of the seventeen unions (virtually all non-communist) not examined by me in Chapter 5, only three (one of which is the ITU) provided for referendum election of officers—a fact that only strengthens my argument. Her objection to my classification of the IWA as a communist union has no foundation. My own research supports Harvey Levenstein’s conclusion that the IWA was probably the most thoroughly left-wing of all the CIO unions.

Stepan-Norris also upbraids my operationalization of concepts and measure of variables. Some of our disagreements appear to be based on misunderstandings, but I cannot let pass her misrepresentation of my argument on one important point. I argue that workers organized by the UAW in the Detroit area were less proletarianized than their counterparts in outlying areas. This explains why the initiatives for more collective forms of organizational structures arose from

outside Detroit and were resisted by the leaders whose power bases were in Detroit. She reports correctly that I use a *ratio* of value added to wages as an indicator of proletarianization. She continues, "Because Detroit had a lower ratio than did Michigan or the United States as a whole, he concludes that it was least proletarianized." In the next sentence she says, "But higher wages do not necessarily mean a higher proportion of skilled workers." She then goes on to criticize my use of wages as an indicator of proletarianization. Of course, I agree that wages would not be a valid indicator of proletarianization—that is why I used wages in a ratio with value added. Nor should my quantitative data on proletarianization be considered in isolation from the related historical data I assembled in the book.

There is more at stake here than scoring methodological points. In my book I recount the history of how the UAW moved from "associational" forms of representation in 1937 to "pecuniary" forms in 1941. The 1941 changes occurred in the midst of factional fights related to the West Coast aircraft organizing drive. I contend that the changes in the UAW constitution that occurred during these years shaped the union's future. Specifically, the rule changes locked in a form of decision making that politically rewarded the "haves" in the organization for spending organizing resources in their own regions. The effect of that change is clear a half century later. The auto industry's decentralization during the 1970s and 1980s was a flanking move that left the UAW sitting on its resources. By 1989 33 percent of the UAW's voting power was still based in Michigan while only 13 percent of the workers (union and non-union) were located there.

Stepan-Norris correctly acknowledges the difficulty of doing research when the available data (much of it from U.S. Census Bureau) is not compiled for our purpose. The need for imaginative work on CIO-era unions is great and there are not many of us trying to do it. A structuralist approach to U.S. labor studies has been taking shape in recent years and sociologists are making important contributions to that trend. Our ability to influence the direction of labor studies will be best served by collaboration and constructive criticism.

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