

Reuther Ranked No. 1 Labor Leader In U.S.

ANN ARBOR -- Walter P. Reuther, president of the United Auto Workers, is regarded as America's "greatest living labor leader" by the editors of four dozen U.S. newspapers.

Reuther's archival, George Meany, president of the AFL-CIO, was rated fourth in a University of Michigan poll. John L. Lewis, ex-president of the United Mine Workers, ranked second and David Dubinsky, former head of the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union, was third.

The poll, first to rate America's labor leaders, was conducted by Prof. David L. Lewis and Research Associate Nancy L. Brown of Michigan's Graduate School of Business Administration.

THE MICHIGAN researchers, who have previously ranked business leaders by polling businessmen, in recent weeks asked labor editors of the nation's largest newspapers to rate the country's five greatest living labor leaders in order of preference, and to give reasons. Respondents could define greatness in any way they wished, but were asked to consider "labor leaders' abilities, innovative ideas, ethical standards, and contributions to labor's and the nation's progress."

Among the 149 labor editors polled, 48 (32.2 per cent) from 42 cities in 24 states and the District of Columbia responded. Based on a 5-4-3-2-1 point formula for first through fifth places, Reuther received 168 points, Lewis 112, Dubinsky 75, and Meany 71. Reuther, who was mentioned on 48 of the 49 ballots, received 23 first-place votes, Lewis 10, Dubinsky three and Meany four.

Rounding out the top 10 were A. Philip Randolph, president of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters; Joseph A. Beirne, president of the Communications Workers of America; Harry Bridges, president of the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union; Cesar Chavez, head of the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee; James R. Hoffa, president of the Teamsters; and P.L. "Roy" Stenmler, president of the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace workers.

Reuther, 60, a tool and die worker who plunged into organization work for the fledgling UAW in 1936, has been president of his 1.5-million-member union since 1946. He was president of the CIO from 1952 to 1955, played a key role in merging the CIO with the AFL in 1955, and since that year has headed the AFL-CIO's Industrial Union Department, which embraces 50 unions with more than six million of the federation's 14 million members.

A TOUGH BARGAINER, Reuther has kept his auto workers at or near the top of the industrial wage structure. He has gained for his membership such innovations as cost-of-living and productivity adjustments, company-financed pension programs, supplemental unemployment benefits, health insurance plans, and profit-sharing programs.

The fiery auto workers' chief is one of labor's leading exponents of political and social action, especially in civil rights. A Houston labor editor who participated in the Lewis-Brown study praised Reuther as "labor's pace setter in new contract patterns and its most visionary, articulate spokesman as well."

Study participants also gave Reuther high marks for his ethical standards, for his flexibility in seeking solutions to labor's problems, for his responsiveness to social ills, for "making democracy within the UAW the model for all unions," and for his "continuing role as a useful gadfly to the labor movement."

"Whether confronting problems of technology, unemployment, race, or other troubled areas," said a Minneapolis newsman, "Reuther has sought new approaches, always tempered with responsibility to society as a whole." A New York journalist summed up the views of many respondents: "Reuther is an ethical, devoted, and militant trade unionist. I don't always agree with his tactics, but I admire him."

John L. Lewis, 88, rated the second greatest living labor leader, served as president of the United Mine Workers of America from 1920 to 1960. But he still spends most weekdays in his office at the union's Washington headquarters.

LEWIS DEVOTED much of his time during the 1930s to organizing workers in the auto, rubber, shipbuilding, textile, and other mass production industries. He played a key role in establishing the CIO in 1937, and served as CIO president between 1935 and 1940. The

controversial Lewis, one of America's last "rugged individualists," exasperated several Presidents and infuriated Congress with his frequent and forceful use of strikes. But he was beloved by his UMW membership.

For his miners, Lewis won abolition of payment in kind, a company script, restrictions on the age at which young men could go to work in mines, abolition of compulsory company housing, and strikes, shorter work days, a union shop, and a checkoff system for union dues and assessments. But he regards the UMW Welfare and Retirement Fund, won in 1946, as his greatest achievement for his workers. The fund, now the largest non-government industrial benefit program in the world, has served as a model for many funds in other mass production industries.

IN EXCHANGE for the Welfare and Retirement Fund, Lewis became one of the first union leaders to give a green light to technological advances.

"Lewis elevated mass labor from the gutter when he established the CIO," stated an Indianapolis editor. "He had the courage," added a Memphis newsmen, "to put his own men out of work by permitting mine owners to substitute machines for muscle. No one will ever know how many lives were thus saved, lengthened, or brightened."

Dubinsky, who emigrated from Russia to the U.S. at age 18 in 1911, rose through the ranks of the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union, serving as president from 1932 to 1966. He now heads the ILGWU's new Retiree Service Department.

Respondents in the study applauded Dubinsky for "carrying labor through its modern-day birth pangs, and setting it on the proper course," and, in the words of a Hartford, Conn. labor editor, for "seeing the labor movement in terms much broader than a bread and butter program—for using unions as instruments of social change, especially in the realm of civil rights."

GEORGE MEANY, 74, rated the fourth greatest labor leader, regards the 1955 merger of the AFL and CIO as his major achievement.

Meany, who received his journeyman plumber's certificate in 1915, moved through the ranks of organized labor to become president of the AFL in 1952. He has been the AFL-CIO's sole president.

Like Reuther, Lewis, and Dubinsky, he is a militant foe of racketeering and Communists in the labor movement. He is proud of his record in the civil rights and social spheres. But his critics, led by Reuther, insist that he has moved too slowly in these fields, as well as in organizing non-union workers.

Every labor editor who voted for Meany cited his role in uniting the AFL and CIO and in keeping the big federation glued together. "Only a man of Meany's stamp could have effected a 'shogun marriage' like the AFL-CIO merger and made it work," observed a Dallas editor. "When he goes, it's by no means certain there won't be a divorce."

A. Philip Randolph, 79, organized the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters in 1925 and has been its president since. The Negro leader has been in the forefront of the civil rights movement since 1941, when he directed a march on Washington which culminated in the establishment by President Roosevelt of the Fair Employment Practices Committee. Respondents who supported Randolph in the Michigan study noted that he was "fighting two wars at once"—one in behalf of his union, one in behalf of his race.

Joseph A. Beirne, 47, a former employee of the Bell System, has been president of the Communications Workers of America since that union was organized in 1947. He was rated highly in the Lewis-Brown study for his "imaginative leadership," "common sense," "clear thinking," and "dedication and responsible approach" to unionism.

SEVENTH-RANKED Australian-born Harry Bridges, 66, has been president of the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union since the mid-1930s. For years the Department of Justice, Congressional committees, and labor leaders accused him of being a Communist. Bridges' union was kicked out of the CIO in 1950 on charges of following the Communist party line.

For more than two decades, the union and employers were bitter enemies. Several times the longshoremen halted West Coast shipping and virtually

paralyzed Hawaii. In recent years, however, the union has been less militant.

Many participants in the Michigan study praised Bridges for signing a 1960 agreement which permits employers to automate the waterfront in exchange for a slice of productivity gains. "The historic mechanization and modernization agreement," noted an Oakland labor editor, "did not hamstring employers and at the same time softened the impact of automation."

"Bridges," echoed a Seattle journalist, "has been an outstanding leader in recognizing the need to adjust to industrial change, while gaining for his members wages and working conditions that are among the best in the country."

Cesar Chavez, 41, made headlines throughout the country between Feb. 14 and March 10 of this year, while fasting to dramatize the nonviolent efforts of his United Farm Workers

Organizing Committee to organize vineyard hands in California's Central Valley. Sen. Robert F. Kennedy has described the Mexican-American labor leader as "one of the most historic figures of our times."

A saint to his followers, a devil to employers, Chavez has

used nonviolence and economic boycott to win 11 union contracts from California growers. But many other growers continued to resist UFWOC demands for union recognition and higher wages.

Chavez, a field laborer at age 10, has a seventh-grade education. He is described by

a San Diego labor editor as "a natural leader, who quietly but forcibly became a respected figure to be reckoned with as Teamster and AFL-CIO organizers (as well as growers) have discovered."

"He is a grassroots leader who braved almost impossible odds,"

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