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Unions Differ on Indochina War

By DAMON STETSON

The construction workers, who have so firmly and, in some cases, violently confronted antiwar demonstrators here, are members of building trades unions that have been traditionally conservative, strongly anti-Communist and unswerving in supporting the Government's war policy in Vietnam.

News Analysis

The longshoremen, who have joined the hard-hatted construction workers in protests and demonstrations at City Hall and in the financial district, have also had a long tradition of anti-Communist activities and support of American war policy in Southeast Asia.

Actually, the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations has probably been what one labor leader called the "strongest institutional supporter" of the Vietnam policy of the Johnson and Nixon Administration.

Meany Backs Policy

George Meany, president of the A.F.L.-C.I.O. and a former plumber and building trades leader in New York, has been the personification to many of a hawk on Vietnam and was one of the first national leaders to voice support of President Nixon's decision to move United States forces against North Vietnamese sanctuaries in Cambodia.

"The President has clearly

outlined the problem to the American people," Mr. Meany said. "It is unmistakably clear that he made his decision on the basis of his clear obligation as commander in chief to protect American servicemen."

"As other Presidents before him have done, he acted with courage and conviction. In this crucial hour, he should have the full support of the American people. He certainly has ours." Locally, Harry Van Arsdale Jr., president of the New York City Central Labor Council, and Raymond Corbet, president of the state A. F. L.-C. I. O. and secretary-treasurer of Local 40 of the Structural Ironworkers, have been supporters of the federation's policy of backing the Administration on Vietnam.

Leaders Disavow Violence

It is not surprising, therefore, one labor leader said yesterday, to find construction workers and other labor groups here taking a hawk-like approach toward the war. But Peter J. Brennan, president of the 200,000-member Building and Construction Trades Council of Greater New York, asserted that the unions had nothing to do with the violent confrontation last Friday.

He said that the men had acted on their own and had done so because they were fed up with violence and antiwar demonstrators and by those who "spat at the American flag and desecrated it."

The reactions of the construction workers could hardly be considered unique, another union official said. He noted that they were highly paid middle-class Americans who, like millions of others, have been upset by long hair, youthful scorn for traditional patriotism, and campus violence.

"Maybe construction workers are more simplistic," he said, "but a lot of them just don't understand the kids. A lot of us have had some weird ideas of what patriotism is. Some guys still don't realize that there's a lot more to patriotism than saluting the flag."

One labor leader who spoke out sharply in criticism of the violent outburst last Friday by a group of construction workers at City Hall and in the financial district was Victor Gotbaum, executive director of District 37 of the State, County and Municipal Employees.

He criticized Mr. Van Arsdale for failing to speak out against the violence in an effort "to cool it." He should have been the first to speak up, Mr. Got-

baum said. He described Mr. Brennan's reaction as "tragic."

At a news conference in Washington yesterday, however, Mr. Meany strongly condemned violence, whether by construction workers or students. Asked how he felt about construction workers here beating protesters against the war, he replied:

"I don't like anybody beating anybody up. I don't like students blocking traffic. I don't like students crashing the skulls of policemen. I don't like the National Guard shooting at students. I don't like construction workers or anyone else resorting to violence because in my book violence begets violence."

"And I certainly feel the construction workers are no more to be condemned than the students who resort to violence or anyone else who resorts to violence. This proves the old saying that violence begets violence."

Some unions of substance are now opposing the war in Vietnam and Cambodia. The State, County and Municipal Employees Union, which had long backed the policy of the A. F. L.-C. I. O., broke with the federation's stand at the union's convention in Denver last week.

Withdrawal Is Urged

The State, County union urged immediate and total withdrawal of all United States armed forces from Southeast Asia "consistent with the safety of our armed forces and without regard to the willingness or ability of the Thieu Government to carry on the war."

David Livingston, president of District 65 here of the National Distributive Union, said Action, composed originally of the big United Automobile Workers and teamsters unions, had supported last fall's moratorium. District 65 recently affiliated with the alliance. The auto union, Mr. Livingston noted, recently took a strong stand against the war and the Cambodian action.

"Our own union's stand in opposition to the war," Mr. Livingston said, "is the product of democratic action. I don't believe the construction unions have had the same kind of thoughtful discussion and democratic decisionmaking on the issue that we have."

In a speech in Washington last Saturday, he said, he had expressed a feeling of shame at the violence of the construction group in last Friday's protest.