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Poll Shows - -

Union Members Strong for LBJ

by Alexander E. Barkan

(The following article by COPE Director Alexander Barkan appears in the August issue of The AFL-CIO Federationist.)

Union members today would vote overwhelmingly for President Johnson's reelection against any potential Republican candidate. They support the President's legislative achievements and endorse the legislative goals of the AFL-CIO and the President. Yet there is some uncertainty and unease among unionists, notably concerning jobs and economic security, some areas of civil rights and Viet Nam, though the vast majority of union members support the President's conduct of the war there.

These are among the major general findings of a survey taken among union members by professional pollster John Kraft. Those interviewed did not know the poll was just of union members or who sponsored the poll.

Behind these generalities are a host of specifics that point up the attitudes of union members toward their unions and their government in the mid 1960s.

The scientific accuracy of the poll is above question. It was conducted among a cross-section of 1,700 union members representing 12 separate international unions—industrial, craft and service. An accurate age, sex, regional and racial sampling was involved.

Though 1,700 may appear to be a small figure among an overall AFL-CIO membership of some 13.5 million, in the world of opinion polling it is actually a large sampling, far more generous than most. Major national polls—Harris, Gallup and others—normally rely on a sampling of only between 2,000

and 4,000 in forecasting the outcome of presidential elections among a potential vote of more than 110 million.

The Kraft survey was commissioned by the AFL-CIO Committee on Political Education. Its findings reflect the feelings and opinions of members as of January 1967, when the poll was conducted.

From the survey, this general profile emerged of the trade union member today:

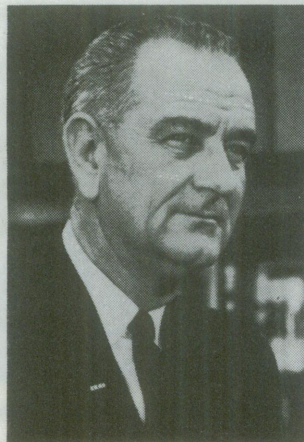
- 32 percent of union families are in the \$5,000 to \$7,500 a year income range (figures embrace total family income of the union member, thus including in many cases the working wife of a member and/or working offspring);
- 46 percent are in the \$7,500 to \$15,000 a year income range;
- 25 percent of union members are less than 30 years old;
- nearly 50 percent are less than 40 years old;
- nearly 50 percent of all members now live in suburbs;
- nearly 75 percent of members under 40 live in suburbs;
- about 20 percent of union members are women;
- about 13 percent of union members are Negro, and 4 percent are Mexican, Oriental or other;
- 25 percent of present members have belonged to their union for 5 years or less;
- 54 percent have belonged to their union for 10

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HOW MEMBERS WOULD VOTE



President Lyndon B. Johnson

The Kraft poll revealed that, as of January 1967, union members would have voted for President Johnson's reelection overwhelmingly against any of the prominently-mentioned potential Republican candidates. Since January represented a low ebb in the President's popularity with the public at large and since recent public opinion polls show a sharp upturn in his popularity, inevitably this would reflect an even higher standing for the President among union members than the following figures show:

	Total	Age Group		
		Under 30	30-49	50 and Over
Johnson	55%	55%	53%	55%
Nixon	22	25	21	21
Not Sure	15	12	18	14
Neither	8	8	8	10
Johnson	46%	42%	43%	51%
Romney	30	47	29	25
Not Sure	19	10	25	17
Neither	5	1	3	7
Johnson	60%	57%	62%	59%
Reagan	16	23	16	13
Not Sure	17	15	16	20
Neither	7	5	6	8
Johnson	55%	58%	55%	55%
Rockefeller	20	27	18	19
Not Sure	18	8	21	17
Neither	7	7	6	9

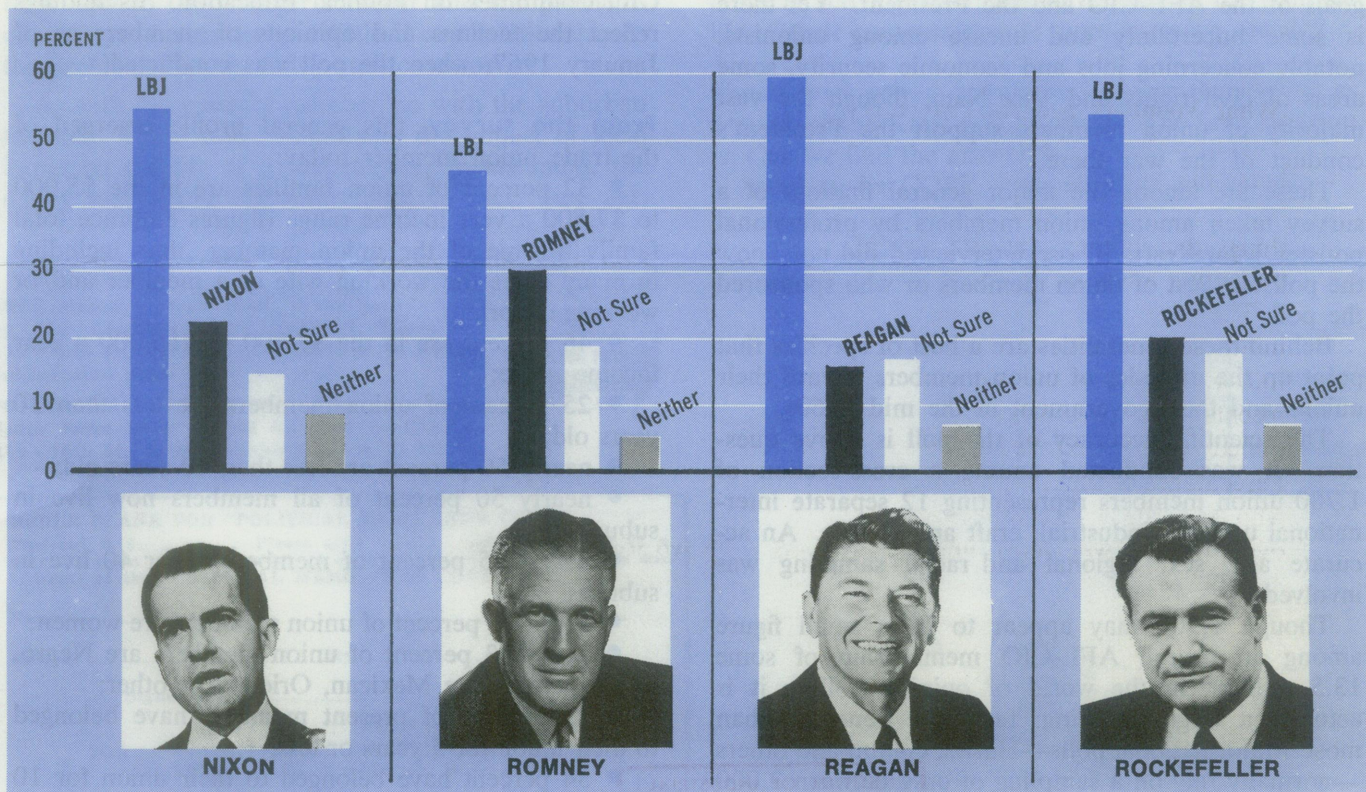
years or more;

• 58 percent identify themselves as Democrats, 16 percent as Republicans, 17 percent as independents and 9 percent are not sure.

When union members were asked their choice for President, they declared themselves emphatically for the reelection of Lyndon Johnson against any GOP contender. For example, the President would defeat former Vice-President Richard Nixon 55-22, Michigan Governor George Romney 46-30, California Governor Ronald Reagan 60-16, and New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller 55-20 (see box).

It should be kept in mind the Kraft poll was conducted in January, when the President's popularity as reflected in national polls generally was lower than today. The Louis Harris poll in January showed only 43 percent who gave the President a good job rating. By June, it had soared to 58 percent. Any increase in his popularity among the public-at-large inevitably would be accompanied by a like, or greater, increase in his standing among union members. In the January findings of the Kraft poll, among only one group of unionists did the President trail any potential GOP opponent. Union members under 30 at that time favored Governor Romney over LBJ, 47-42.

When members were asked how they voted in the presidential election of 1964, they responded Johnson over former Senator Barry Goldwater by 60-12. Asked how they would vote today if the same two were paired, members declared 56-15 for Johnson, a remarkably slight slippage given the President's length of time in office and the momentous events of his tenure.



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The President's popularity as a candidate is mirrored in the widespread acceptance of his legislative achievements and goals, most of which are supported by the AFL-CIO.

Members were queried the major national issues of recent years as to their degree of support or opposition. From medicare to pollution control, they backed by huge margins the achievements and aims of the Administration and projected improvements in most progressive programs already on the books (see box).

For example, when asked if medicare coverage should be expanded, 74 percent responded "yes." Asked if they supported federal efforts toward water pollution control, 94 percent said "yes" and 91 percent were for air pollution control programs. On expanding the scope of workmen's compensation, 76 percent said "yes." Ninety-one percent backed truth-in-packaging legislation and a like percentage supported truth-in-lending.

There were lower, but still substantial, percentages of support for expanded federal aid to education, 67 percent, and a minimum wage increase, 71 percent.

Support for repeal of Taft-Hartley Section 14(b) was 2-1 among members, with 54 percent agreeing 14(b) should be repealed, 23 percent disagreeing and 23 percent not sure. Support for repeal was strongest where awareness of the "right to work" issue was highest. In states where an open shop law prevails, and in states where it has been a live issue, union members overwhelmingly reject it and want 14(b) repealed.

The strongest support for AFL-CIO positions on almost all major issues occurred among women members.

Interestingly, a mild division between younger and older members crops up in the degree of support evidenced for certain issues. More recent prominent issues—like air and water pollution control and consumer legislation—achieve a slightly higher degree of support among younger than among older members. Conversely, issues that dwelled in Congress for years—issues with roots in the 1930s, 40s and 50s—garner higher support among older than among younger members. Medicare for example, gets 75 percent support from members in their 40s and 78 percent from members 50 and over, while it gets 70 percent support from members under 30, many of whom apparently view it as a problem that won't crop up for them until far down the road.

Despite their clear approval of President Johnson's performance and program, union members—like other Americans—do not view contemporary America as Elysium. They've got problems and in their minds the problems are big ones.

Members polled were asked this question: "What are the big problems on your mind—the things that bother you and should be getting attention?" The

issues clearly uppermost in their minds were those involving jobs and economic security, the war in Viet Nam and civil rights.

Fifty-three percent of all members listed economic problems ranging from the cost of living and taxes to the employment picture and wages. Forty-two percent listed the war in Viet Nam, with the largest percentage of these supporting the President's policies there. More than 33 percent listed civil rights as a major issue. While most members supported civil rights progress in voting and public accommodations, support for open housing was slightly below the 50 percent point.

Beyond these, concern about many other issues reflected the members' special individual problems. For example, one of the biggest problems for members in their 40s and early 50s turned out to be education. It is they, after all, who have children in the schools and nearing, or at, college age.

Members were asked what problems the President should wrestle with and which ones are in the province of congressmen and senators. The weight of responsibility for action on almost all major issues, in the eyes of members, falls on the shoulders of the President. The White House, in their view, is where the action is.

Finally, in terms of issues, Kraft found that suburban living naturally has directed members' attention to suburban problems, often in higher priority than national issues. Members in the suburbs share their neighbors' concern about local tax assessments, zoning, sewage and garbage disposal, street repairs, transportation and school bond issues. It is not that they change from liberal Jekylls to conservative Hydes the moment they cross the city line into the suburbs; it is that in many cases their roster of interests is shuffled and becomes more locally-oriented.

In his polling, Kraft found most union members—64 percent of them—quickly referred to their membership when asked to list affiliations with various public, private, church or job-related organizations. All of those sampled answered affirmatively when asked directly if they are union members.

Yet though their status as members is clearly in the forefront of their consciousness, this is no guarantee of member participation. Nor does it assure that the member is always listening when the union speaks. These facts became apparent when Kraft asked a related question about attendance at meetings and attention paid to union publications.

The poll revealed that about 20 percent of members reported attending almost every local union meeting—a surprisingly high figure—and that an additional 14 percent attend "quite frequently." However, some 36 percent attend "rarely." Members under 30 years of age rate highest in regular attendance, while this age group also has the largest percentage attending meetings only rarely.

Some 63 percent of all members answered that they read their union publications "a lot." The highest readership was among members 50 years and older,

HOW MEMBERS VIEW THE ISSUES

Following is the degree of union member support, expressed in percentages, on some of the major issues of today:

	Total	Age Group		50 and Over
		Under 30	30-49	
Expanding Medicare				
Agree	74%	70%	75%	78%
Disagree	13	15	14	9
Not Sure	13	15	11	13
Water Pollution Control				
Agree	94%	98%	94%	91%
Disagree	2	—	3	3
Not Sure	4	2	3	6
Truth-in-Lending				
Agree	91%	93%	91%	88%
Disagree	4	4	5	4
Not Sure	5	3	4	8
Repeal Section 14(b)				
Agree	54%	55%	55%	53%
Disagree	23	25	24	20
Not Sure	23	20	21	27
Air Pollution Control				
Agree	91%	95%	89%	89%
Disagree	4	3	6	4
Not Sure	5	2	5	7
Improved Workman's Compensation				
Agree	76%	77%	78%	73%
Disagree	11	15	10	8
Not Sure	13	8	12	19
Truth-in-Packaging				
Agree	91%	92%	93%	89%
Disagree	3	2	3	3
Not Sure	6	6	4	8
Higher Minimum Wage				
Agree	71%	72%	73%	67%
Disagree	21	23	20	20
Not Sure	8	5	7	13
Federal Aid to Education				
Agree	67%	71%	70%	61%
Disagree	20	19	21	21
Not Sure	13	10	9	18
Open Housing				
Agree	43%	48%	41%	39%
Disagree	46	48	48	43
Not Sure	11	4	11	18

77 percent of whom answered they pay a lot of attention to their union publications. (Four percent reported they receive no union publication, which suggests a problem in union administration or the age-old problem of keeping mailing lists up-to-date.)

The entire area of communications emerged as one of the most interesting sections of the poll. For, though members by and large read their union journals, they appear to rely generally on television, daily papers and magazines—in that order—as their most trusted sources of information.

Forty-seven percent responded that TV is their most reliable source (small wonder—the poll found that 58 percent of members spend 10 or more hours per week in front of the tube); 31 percent look to the daily newspapers and about 9 percent to weekly news magazines. Radio ran a poor fourth; only 6 percent of members consider it the most reliable information source.

Despite the overwhelming competition of the mass media, however, it was clear that a fair portion of members still look to union sources as helpful, reliable

providers of information. From a list of sources of information, only President Johnson, a leading nightly network TV newscaster and a major weekly news magazine came before AFL-CIO President George Meany as the “most helpful source for information.” Considered in context, this is an excellent showing. The regularity of national exposure for the President, a nightly network broadcaster and a news magazine obviously far exceeds the exposure President Meany achieves on a national platform. Of those who named President Meany, 78 percent did so because he “represents my interests, levels with me, tries to solve problems.” This was a far higher percentage of identity of interest between the persons polled and the information source selected than any other listed source achieved.

The Kraft poll on the whole is encouraging. It indicates that the policy positions adopted by the AFL-CIO convention accurately reflect the feelings of union membership, with the single exception of open occupancy housing. This has 43 percent overall support and 48 percent support among members

WHAT MEMBERS SEE AS PROBLEMS

What Members See As Problems

The Kraft poll asked union members this question: “What are the big problems on your mind—the things that bother you and should be getting attention?”

The three big issues on their minds and how they feel about them follow. The figure **in bold face** represents the percentage of those polled who mentioned the issue. Percentages under it represent those who felt the listed aspect of the overall issue was most important.

	Total	Age Group		
		Under 30	30-49	50 and Over
Economic	53%	61%	55%	44%
High Cost of Living		20	13	8
Taxes		13	28	21
Unemployment		13	3	5
Wages, salaries		10	5	4
Working conditions		2	1	1
Other		3	5	5
Vietnam	42%	56%	37%	33%
President doing best he can		20	13	11
Escalate war		13	9	5
End war—make peace		8	6	8
Escalate or get out		5	2	2
National unity, patriotism		5	1	1
Stop (lessen) foreign aid		3	5	5
All other foreign affairs		2	1	1
Civil Rights and Law Enforcement	33%	49%	20%	30%
Open housing		10	3	3
Juvenile delinquency		7	6	3
Back civil rights progress		7	3	3
More police protection		7	2	5
Crime rate		7	1	7
Highway safety		2	1	1
Auto safety		—	1	8
All other civil rights and law enforcement		9	3	—

under 30.

Yet there are warning signals. Where support appears least strong generally is among younger members and more and more the trade union movement is becoming a younger movement.

While two-thirds of members over 30, for example, said they pay a lot of attention to their union publications, only half of those under 30 do.

Though members under 30 were more emphatic in believing their union should take a stand on important issues, they responded generally in lower percentages in supporting their union's positions.

Though a higher percentage of young members reported they attend union meetings "nearly always," a higher percentage of them also answered they "never" attend.

On some basic union positions in support of old-line, though still crucial, matters it is the younger members whose support is softest. (This problem, it should be pointed out, is not unique to the labor movement. Throughout all groups in society today, it is the younger members who are most restive.)

It is the younger members who are both less informed and less concerned with these issues. The tribulations of 30 years ago are remote from a young member's experience. The Depression is a moment of history and the issues it spawned are tangential to his own life or unrelated to his problems. To younger members, Franklin D. Roosevelt, who was a live inspiration to many of us, is but a name in the history books and his great achievements a matter for the archives.

The 1960s and their unique problems are what is right now to the younger member and the problems of yesteryear seem to bear little if any relationship to the problems he sees today and tomorrow.

As with the younger member, so with the suburban member. There is no minimizing the impact of local issues on the life of a suburbanite. In his mind, the issues are deeply important and, in fact, they are.

They involve his welfare as intimately as most of the larger national issues. They involve his home, his money, his child's education, his security, his recreation. In effect, we compete with these problems when we attempt to capture the member's attention and these are problems which from a national level are hard to articulate and even harder to engage.

It indicates that for many members we have not yet succeeded in showing that national issues have as great an impact on their daily lives and welfare as local ones.

In all, the problems faced are far easier to define than to deal with and the Kraft poll projects more questions than answers.

For example, in terms of labor's political efforts, is there a way to channel the suburban member's natural interest in local affairs and candidates to constructive action in the COPE program, which is geared primarily to national issues and candidates? Can COPE organize in the suburbs first around local issues? Can it then branch out to involve suburban members in national issues and behind COPE-endorsed national candidates? We now have pilot projects seeking ways to reach and involve members in the suburbs.

Most importantly, can the labor movement in its political and all other aspects keep the commitment and loyalty of its younger members, who make up an ever larger part of the movement? There is evidence that most of them enter with commitment. Some international unions are making efforts now through new-member programs to fan the commitment and keep it burning. A COPE program with building trades apprentices is attempting to interest them in labor's political activities and to involve them in the political life of their communities. Is there more we can do?

These and other questions suggest themselves as a result of the Kraft poll's findings. The final question is: Can we find the answers?

Speaking for COPE, I say we must and we will.

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