

POLITICS & GOVERNMENT

*“A Political Party
Known as COPE”*

“The Politics of American Labor” by Jack Barbash, in *Challenge* (May-June 1976), 901 N. Broadway, White Plains, N.Y. 10603.

An American labor party could have emerged from the mass unionism of the 1930s but it did not happen—and it’s not going to happen. Barbash, a University of Wisconsin economist, traces early American unionism from its anti-industrial and anti-capitalist origins to the New Deal era, when labor leaders like the coal miners’ John L. Lewis turned their backs on class theory and embarked on “political collective bargaining” in Congress and the state legislatures. So successful were these pressure-group tactics, argues Barbash, that even the class-conscious leaders of the CIO (Congress of Industrial Organizations) unions were unwilling or unable to create a genuine labor party. Why? Because young labor militants were reluctant to risk gains made under the New Deal for the “vague pie-in-the-sky of third-party politics,” because union leaders now had a role in the Democratic party, and because Marxist activists were ultimately driven out of big labor.

Since the 1940s, American unions have come to resemble their West European counterparts in some ways. The AFL-CIO maintains permanent political action organizations; it pushes Congress and the White House on domestic and foreign policy. “We have a political party and it’s known as COPE (Committee on Political Education),” AFL-CIO president George Meany once noted. Such efforts are likely to increase as labor seeks to stave off erosion of its gains in the face of slower economic growth and environmental pressures. No separate labor party will result, Barbash predicts, because union leaders fear isolation from the American middle class, and the Republicans and Democrats would co-opt the most palatable parts of any separate labor party program anyway.

*Voting for
Motherhood*

“Why So Few Women Hold Public Office: Democracy and Sexual Roles” by Marcia Manning Lee, in *Political Science Quarterly* (Summer 1976), 2852 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10025.

After 50 years of full citizenship, few American women hold public office today. Rutgers political scientist Lee surveyed 301 men and women who were active participants in local politics in four middle- and upper-income suburbs of Westchester County, New York. Her “regrettable conclusion” is that the percentage of women elected to office is unlikely to increase substantially in the future “unless radical changes occur in current sexual role assignments.” Annual per family income in the communities surveyed ranged from \$13,000 in Tuckahoe to \$42,500 in Scarsdale. (Eastchester with \$20,000 and Bronxville with \$27,000 were in between.)