

History of the Council for a Union-Free Environment, 1977-1994

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KEYWORDS

welfare capitalism, anti-unionism, employer organization, industrial relations, National Association of Manufacturers (NAM)

SUBJECT

Council for a Union-Free Environment (CUE)
a NAM subsidiary founded in 1977 to preserve the nonunionized sector of the U.S. economy

SOURCE

NAM records, Hagley Library

RESEARCH QUESTION

- What were CUE's activities?
- Who participated in the CUE, and why?
- What management techniques did they develop to prevent unionization?

HISTORICAL CONTEXTS

Changes in Postwar Industrial Relations

- Low productivity and international competition
- Globalization and plant closures
- Worker alienation
- Quality of Working Life (QWL) movement
- Employer anti-unionism intensified

Changes in Union Movement

- Rank and file diversifying
- Organizing drive increased in the 1970s
- Winning representation more difficult

ARGUMENT

This study of CUE's activism suggests that NAM members achieved their anti-union mission by adapting welfare capitalism to the economic and social realities of the 1970s and 1980s, emphasizing individualism and flexibility.

FINDINGS

CUE's Activities: Overview

Members

Manufacturing, energy, chemical, retail, service, and shipping industries
Companies served on the executive board multiple times include:



Activities

- Organize conferences to share knowledge and experience of "positive" employee relations
- Conduct research in collaboration with universities
- Create manuals and reports
- Compile relevant literature

CONCLUSION

CUE's "progressive" employee management strategies built on earlier welfare capitalist policies—incorporating human relations theory, communication, and supervisory training—while also adapting them to new economic and social contexts.

CUE's Activities: Management Education

Personnel Management Emphasis Shift

- More on employees' psychological satisfaction, less on wages
- More on flexible approach tailored for individual needs, more on identity-based approach (EEO guidance), less on community-building effort

Mimicking Unions

- Internal grievance procedure modeled after union grievance procedure
- Supervisors expected to play a role similar to union stewards

AFL-CIO criticized CUE/NAM's "progressive" management
Memo From Cope, AFL-CIO, April 24, 1978



Confrontation with Unions

- Guidance on how to detect and defeat organizing drives without violating the law