

Petrillo Fails in His Bid for Reelection to Musicians Union

(Editor's note: A giant of the American labor movement fell this month when James C. Petrillo failed in his bid for reelection as president of the Chicago local of the American Federation of Musicians. The following dispatch looks back upon the history of the boy from Chicago's West Side who called his country's tune.)

By BARNEY SEIBERT
United Press International
Chicago - UPI - His middle name is Caesar.

The late Sen. Arthur Vandenberg called him a "musical Hitler."

The late dictator Benito Mussolini gave way before his wrath.

But James Caesar Petrillo, 70, whose barbed-wire personality for 40 years caused tremors from Hollywood to Tin Pan Alley, from the concert stage to the corner tavern, is a beaten man today.

He was shorn of the power which once made him the nation's highest paid labor leader, a man who could defy a president of the United States.

Jimmy Petrillo is still rich. But his hopes of a labor dynasty, which would survive him as husks of dreams gnawed clean by the ballots of those he had led with mutual profit for three generations.

The chair Petrillo held since 1922 as head of the wealthiest union local in the U.S. - Chicago's Local 10 of the American Federation of Musicians - became the property Dec. 4 of Bernard (Barney) Richards, obscure society dance band leader who had never before held union office.

Petrillo's son, James J., was voted out of his post as financial secretary of Local 10 and custodian of its \$5 million treasury. Of the eight Petrillo henchmen up for reelection, only two survived.

For the first time in 43 years, a Petrillo, who spurned a \$20,000 a year pension from the American Federation of Musicians four years ago and a \$26,100 annual pension from Local 10 last year, was off the union payroll.

Jimmy Petrillo had bulldozed his way from behind a beer spigot on Chicago's West Side slums to become one of the most powerful labor bosses in U.S. history.

Born March 16, 1892, he was one of five children of a poor Italian immigrant sewer digger.

When he was 8, Jimmy's parents scraped together enough money to buy him a trumpet. They hired a neighbor in the melting pot area around Jane Addams' famed Hull House settlement to give Jimmy music lessons.

When Jimmy Petrillo was 14, he organized his own eight-piece orchestra and played

ed for weddings. By the time he was 18 he had "lost his lip" and could no longer play a good trumpet. He tried his hands at drums without success.

Gets to Fourth Grade

Jimmy Petrillo had spent nine years in school without getting beyond the fourth grade. Approaching manhood, he ran an elevator, drove a delivery cart, ran a cigar store, ran a saloon.

In 1941, when he was 22, Petrillo was elected president of the old American Musicians union (independent). He was defeated for reelection in 1917 and joined the rival Chicago Federation of Musicians (Local 10).

Prohibition took Petrillo out of the saloon business. He concentrated on organizing the musicians in Chicago's Chinese restaurants and - agreed to double their salaries and in 1919 was rewarded with a union vice presidency. In 1922, Petrillo became president of Local 10 at \$100 a week. That was big money in 1922.

Raises Membership

When Petrillo became active in Local 10 it had 4,000 members. Most of them earned \$12 a week. In his 40 years of leadership he raised membership to 12,000 and made Local 10 musicians the nation's highest paid.

One of his first tests came in 1927 when Chicago movie theaters tried to replace their pit bands with pipe organs. After a brief strike, the theater owners surrendered.

In 1931 Petrillo forced Chicago hotel owners to sign union shop contracts by threatening to call a strike on New Year's Eve.

The same year Chicago's Italian consul hired a non-union band to play for a festival for the Italian-American colony. Petrillo dispatched a wrathful cablegram to Mussolini. Mussolini hedged at first. Then he ordered a union band.

Highest Paid in Labor

In 1940 he was elected president of the American Federation of Musicians. The new job plus his old one as head of Local 10 gave Petrillo a salary of \$46,000 a year, then highest in the American labor movement.

"Hell, when I need anything, I just tell the boys and they give it to me," he said.

Petrillo's first tilt with one of the nation's great came when the late Vice President Charles G. Dawes, a Chicago banker, persuaded a group of Hungarian musicians to play at a Chicago hotel. Petrillo forced the hotel to employ stand-by musicians from Local 10.

In 1937 John L. Lewis, head of the Congress of Industrial Organizations, offered the American Musicians Union a CIO charter. Petrillo countered by offering to take in members without the \$100 initiation fee. He never forgave Lewis.

No Mention of John
"There will be no mention of John L. Lewis, friendly or unfriendly, on any Chicago stage as long as I am running this union," Petrillo said, and he enforced his words.

Five days after his election to head the American Federation of Musicians, Petrillo fired the opening gun in his seven-year war with the radio networks. He barred name bands from Columbia Broadcasting System and National Broadcasting Co. stations in an attempt to force them to hire stand-by musicians.

That same year - 1940 - Petrillo insisted that union musicians serve as cannoners on the Pennsylvania National Guard artillery pieces for an outdoor concert at P. "Adelphi of Tchaikovsky's '1812 Overture'."

Blocks Record Making
Later that year he blocked the Boston Symphony from making recordings because he said the orchestra was non-union.

It was also in 1940 that Petrillo forced concert musicians to join his union.

"Heifetz plays a fiddle just like the guy down at the corner tavern," Petrillo said.



JAMES C. PETRILLO
Fails in Reelection Bid

In 1942 he banned radio broadcasts from the National Music Camp, Interlochen, Mich. Sen. Vandenberg of Michigan accused Petrillo of beginning a "battle with the school children of America."

In August, 1942, Petrillo ordered a musicians' ban on radio stations, is often called the anti-Petrillo bill. A provision of the Taft-Hartley law which

record companies agreed to make royalty payments to the union.

Petrillo became one of the few individuals who has been the specific target of congressional legislation. The Lea act, outlawing forcible hiring of stand-by musicians by radio stations, is often called the anti-Petrillo bill. A provision of the Taft-Hartley law which

outlaws record company royalty payments to the Musicians Union also was aimed at Petrillo.

He is a man of contrasts. Since the death of one of his sons following a football accident, he has had a fear of germs. He refuses to shake hands (but he'll hook little fingers), won't touch money, won't open doors, won't accept cigarettes from a package opened by another, won't even touch his own desk if he can help it.

Tailor-Made Suits
He is a bespectacled little round man, 5½ feet tall and weighing nearly 200 pounds. He likes loud ties and \$300 tailor-made suits. He sports a 2½ carat diamond ring given him by Local 10.

He gives liberally to charity, especially to veterans groups. For many years he was the star salesman for Chicago's annual newsboys' benefit.

For 25 years he has used union funds to subsidize Chicago's Grant park summer concert series, open to the public without charge.

Four years ago, tears coursing down his cheeks, Jimmy Petrillo retired as head of the American Federation of Musicians. He planned to live out his days as head of Local 10, grooming his son to succeed him.

The last time he had faced

a serious challenge for leadership of Local 10 was in 1933. He won handily.

Bitter Contract Dispute
Last summer members of the Chicago Symphony orchestra got into a bitter contract dispute. Some symphony members became embittered at Petrillo, accusing him of selling out. They became angrier when Petrillo banned outside work by symphony musicians.

Symphony musicians were in the forefront of opposition to Petrillo at the Dec. 4 election.

One of the defeated candidates for the local's board of directors, Leon N. Lichtenfeld, said, "Jimmy thought he had it in the bag and his boys just didn't get out the vote."

Petrillo was defeated, 1,690 to 1,393.

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10-20
by Marian Martin

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