Small Crowd Watches Forum Debate: Labor Vs. Management On Anti-Trust

By BILL LIEBLICH

Representatives of labor and management discussed the applicability of anti-trust laws to labor in a Forum Commitee presentation before a sparsely populated Fondren Library Lecture Lounge last Monday, March 5.

Paul Gray of the Texas State AFL-CIO and Tom Martin Davis of the Texas Manufacturers Association expressed their views on the topic: “Should anti-trust laws be applied to labor unions?”

DR. GASTON RIMLINGER of the Rice Economics Department also contributed in the panel discussion. Dr. Louis Galambos of the Rice History Department was moderator.

Dr. Rimlinger began the discussion with a short exposition of some of the problems involved in the proposition under debate.

He gave a few of the arguments on both sides of the topic and asked a few specific questions about the possible uses and effects of applying anti-trust legislation to unions.

GRAY FOLLOWED Dr. Rimlinger with a history of the legal status of unions and of their activities. The specific reasons which have been advanced for applying anti-trust laws to labor unions are, he said, invalid because some of these reasons are already covered by existing law not in the anti-trust category, and others are problems which simply do not exist.

Gray cited price fixing as an example of the latter type of problem. Unions, he said, have no means for fixing prices. Management, he continued, is trying to use anti-trust legislation to weaken the striking and collective bargaining activities of unions and thus to weaken the unions themselves.

DAVIS COUNTERED Gray’s argument by stating that employers do not desire to weaken unions and that anti-trust legislation would not weaken them anyway. There are rights, he said, which labor occasionally abuses and it is these abuses which anti-trust legislation on labor unions would prevent or prosecute.

A few of these abuses which Davis mentioned were nationwide transportation strikes, restriction of the labor supply through closed shops, and price fixing which, Davis contended, unions can achieve through economic pressure on the employer.

A period of discussion and question-answering followed, in which the panel members defended their positions, queried those of the other panelists, and handled questions from the small audience.