

MELVYN DUBOFSKY AND JOSEPH A. McCARTIN

LABOR IN AMERICA

A HISTORY

[NINTH EDITION]



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Labor in America: A History

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ABBREVIATIONS

AA	Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel, and Tin Workers
ACA	Affordable Care Act
ACTWU	Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union
ACWA	Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America
AFL	American Federation of Labor
AFSCME	American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees
AFT	American Federation of Teachers
ALA	Alliance for Labor Action
ARU	American Railway Union
BCTGM	Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers International Union
BSCP	Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters
CIO	Committee for Industrial Organization/Congress of Industrial Organizations
CMIU	Cigar Makers' International Union
COPE	Committee on Political Education
CPUSA	Communist Party of America
CtW	Change to Win
DLC	Democratic Leadership Council
EFCA	Employee Free Choice Act
EITC	Earned Income Tax Credit
EMOs	education management organizations
FEPC	Fair Employment Practices Commission
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
GM	General Motors
IAM	International Association of Machinists
ICFTU	International Confederation of Free Trade Unions
ILGWU	International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union
ILWU	International Longshore and Warehouse Union
IWW	Industrial Workers of the World
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement

NAM	National Association of Manufacturers
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NCF	National Civic Federation
NDLON	National Day Laborers Organizing Network
NDMB	National Defense Mediation Board
NDWA	National Domestic Workers Alliance
NLRB	National Labor Relations Board
NLU	National Labor Union
NRA	National Recovery Administration
NTWA	National Taxi Workers Alliance
NUHW	National Union of Healthcare Workers
NWGA	National Guest Workers Alliance
NWLB	National War Labor Board
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
OPEC	Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries
OUR Walmart	Organization United for Respect at Walmart
PAC	Political Action Committee
PATCO	Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization
SEIU	Service Employees International Union
SEIU-UHW	United Healthcare Workers West
SPA	Socialist Party of America
SWOC	Steel Workers' Organizing Committee
TDU	Teamsters for a Democratic Union
TPP	Trans-Pacific Partnership
TSA	Transportation Security Administration
TTIP	Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership
TUUL	Trade Union Unity League
UAW	United Automobile Workers
UBC	United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners
UFCW	United Food and Commercial Workers International Union
UFW	United Farm Workers of America
UMW	United Mine Workers
UNITE	Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees

UPS	United Parcel Service
USAS	United Students Against Sweatshops
USW	United Steelworkers of America
WFM	Western Federation of Miners
WTO	World Trade Organization

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PREFACE

The contours and content of this book have evolved in response to the experiences of American workers and their organizations as they have played out over the course of the last 70 years. When Foster Rhea Dulles began drafting the first edition of this textbook after World War II, the American labor movement was ascendant, benefiting from a surge of organizing which had unionized mass production industries. With nearly one-third of the nation's workers in unions, workers experiencing unprecedented improvements in their living standards, and organized labor emerging as a powerful political influence, many believed that the country was entering what the leading labor economist of the time, Sumner H. Slichter, called a "laboristic age." By the time the first edition of Dulles's book was published in 1949, such boundless optimism was already tempered by the onset of the Cold War and an equally hardnosed war of position between employers and unions in the postwar era. Yet the fact that labor drew the interest of Dulles, whose first books dealt with the history of the US in the Pacific, indicated an important shift in scholarly attention to the history of workers and their movement. Up to that point, labor history was still largely the province of labor economists who had followed in the footsteps of John R. Commons. Few trained historians had embraced the subject before Dulles began this textbook, which he revised twice before his death in 1970.

By the time Melvyn Dubofsky began his first revision of the text for the fourth edition in 1980, both the nature of labor history scholarship and the condition of labor in America had changed markedly. Scholarship was blossoming as the "New Labor History" attracted a generation of historians who sought to break from the institutional focus on trade unionism and collective bargaining characteristic of the Commons school. Influenced by the intellectual and political currents of the 1960s, this generation set out to discover the history of the American working class in all of its diversity. These scholars did their job so well that it became difficult to craft a unitary synthesis of US labor history that took account of all of their findings.

But even as this new scholarship poured forth, the union movement was entering a period of crisis from which it has yet to emerge. Union membership and the practice of collective bargaining had been temporarily buoyed by the organization of public sector workers in the 1960 and 1970s. However, during the fiscal crisis of the 1970s, the expansion of public sector organization halted and the nation first encountered a series of economic, social, and political developments that were to undermine union strength in the years to come. Dubofsky's first edition of this text appeared in 1984, and coincided with President Ronald Reagan's landslide reelection. The only former union president to win the nation's highest office, Reagan's administration and the antilabor policies it promoted ironically came to symbolize the breakdown of a once broad and bipartisan support for collective bargaining that had held sway in the years

since World War II. As Dubofsky continued to revise this text over the last thirty years, globalization, financialization, increased antiunionism, and the rise of neoliberal economic policy accelerated the breakdown of the labor relations model that was just taking shape when Dulles began his work.

As Joseph McCartin joins this enterprise, it seems clear that American labor history is entering a new and as yet uncharted era. Over the past forty years, world capitalism has undergone an enormous transformation with huge implications for American workers. Globalization has tied the fates of workers around the world to each other as never before. New models of corporate structure and employment, driven by technological innovations and the power of financial markets, are remaking the nature of the firm and of workers' relationships to their work and their employer. Workers and labor movements everywhere have struggled to find their footing in this new world, and arguably none have struggled more than the American labor movement, whose story is chronicled in these pages.

The arrival of the Great Recession in 2008 punctuated the turn into this new epoch. The last edition of this text came out in the midst of that recession. Although the Great Recession has now passed, it has left social upheaval and an increased sense of economic and political insecurity in its wake, developments that have led to the surprising election of Donald J. Trump to the presidency. It seems clear that a new era is dawning, one that resembles that of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in its implications for workers. As in that earlier time, work is being reorganized in ways that undermine solidarity, unions are in retreat, inequality is surging, and there seems to be little hope in the near term for the enactment of national policies that would bring more stability and justice to the lives of workers, let alone empower them to have more say over their working lives and the direction of the economy. Yet, as in that earlier time, public unease with the concentration of power and wealth is growing and creative ideas are percolating through the ranks of workers and worker organizations. As the twentieth-century model of union organization, government regulation, and welfare state support breaks down, unions have begun developing unprecedented forms of international cooperation, and new kinds of worker organization that some have taken to calling “alt-labor” have begun to emerge. Whether this creativity foretells a twenty-first-century revival of worker organization is as yet unclear. In this volume we seek to put these new developments in historical perspective.

This text focuses, as previous editions have, on the history of workers' collective responses to the conditions of working life that they have faced over more than two centuries. It does not aspire to be a history of the American working-class experience as such. In one volume we cannot evoke the full variety of that experience, or fully limn the polyglot complexities of working-class culture and consciousness. Nor is this volume written in the framework of the “history of capitalism” that has become a recent focus of scholars – although, to be sure, it draws insights from that scholarship. While the history of capitalism provides a necessary context for

understanding American workers and US labor history, the story of workers' responses to capitalism's development constitutes its own tale and requires its own stage, for it is a long, rich, and complex story. As a world takes shape around us in which workers' ability to act collectively to influence their futures seems more enfeebled than it has been in a century, it is also a history that demands deepened understanding and refreshed remembrance – now more than ever. In that spirit we commend this work to you.

Melwyn Dubofsky
Joseph A. McCartin

1

CONDITIONS OF LABOR IN COLONIAL AMERICA

The development of the American colonies depended upon human labor. That labor came in a variety of forms – free, slave, bonded, skilled, unskilled, agricultural, and artisanal. In the first two and a half centuries of colonization, the area of the New World now known as the eastern United States was an overwhelmingly rural society. Especially during the colonial period (1619 to 1776), and for some time afterward, upwards of 90 percent of the people lived in the countryside. The vast majority of free people were also self-employed, either as independent farmers, artisans, or in a host of urban retail trades and professions.

From the onset, the American colonies included a number of bustling seaport cities. In the cities a real need existed for casual day laborers and hired craftsmen, both of whom were paid wages. Moreover, as the southern colonies shifted their agricultural base from the production of food crops for local consumption to cash crops (first tobacco and rice, then cotton) for sale in the world market, the need for laborers mounted.

To satisfy the rising demand for labor in a new land, potential employers turned mostly to indentured servants and enslaved Africans. For the seventeenth century and much of the eighteenth century, free independent wage laborers formed a small part of the colonial labor force. At first, indentured servants – those who signed contracts of indenture in Britain or on the Continent, and those “redemptioners” whose cost of passage to the New World was paid by their indenture (sale) at auction in their port of arrival – formed the bulk of a labor force in which waged work proved the exception. Indentured laborers worked the tobacco farms of the Chesapeake region, provided household labor on farms and in city homes in all the colonies, and engaged in all sorts of other labor for their masters and mistresses. As the southern colonies found an increasing demand for their agricultural products abroad, whether in the English metropolis, the Caribbean sugar islands, or on the European continent, indentures failed to satisfy the planters' demand for labor. The African slave trade held out a remedy. Not only did the slave trade seem to offer an endless supply of bound labor, but African slaves, unlike indentured Europeans, were bound in perpetuity and defined as chattel (property), while their children inherited their parents' bound status. The advantages that slave labor provided in comparison to indentured labor led more prosperous landowners and merchants in the northern colonies to turn to slave labor as well. Over the course of the next two centuries, as indentured labor decreased, slave labor increased.

Free workers, a minority of the total colonial labor force, included such skilled craftsmen as carpenters and masons, shipwrights and sailmakers, as well as

tanners, weavers, shoemakers, tailors, smiths, coopers (barrel makers), glaziers (glass makers), and printers. A number of less skilled but also putatively free laborers found employment as carters, waterfront workers, and in other irregular forms of work. The skilled craftsmen among these workers at first plied their trades independently, but as the centers of population grew, master workmen set up small retail shops and employed journeymen who worked for wages and apprentices who offered their services in return for learning the craft. The journeymen may have earned a wage but they were not entirely free laborers; instead, they were ordinarily bound by contracts that determined their length of employment and forbade them to leave their position until full satisfaction of the contract.

By the close of the eighteenth century, these journeymen had begun to form local trade societies – the genesis of the first unions and of what was to become, in time, the organized labor movement. They did so because their interests began to clash with the goals of their masters, who had become increasingly interested in increasing their profits at the expense of their journeymen and apprentices. Masters who had once toiled alongside their apprentices and journeymen often evolved into merchant-capitalists who marketed the goods produced by their waged employees.

The simple economic pattern of those distant days bears no resemblance to the complex economy of the twenty-first century. The status of a small handful of independent artisans and mechanics has little relationship to that of the many millions of waged and salaried workers in twenty-first-century society. Certain underlying conditions, however, were operative in colonial days that would strongly influence the whole course of American labor.

From the first, the history of labor in America was affected by the availability of arable land. As long as land was abundant and European settlers could seize it from indigenous tribes of native Americans who occupied it – which was the case from the seventeenth century to the close of the nineteenth century – life for the majority tended to be salutary. Regardless of class, most New World residents enjoyed more material comforts, better health, and greater life expectancies than their Old World counterparts. That at least is the evidence as compiled by scholars who have studied and accumulated statistical data about morbidity, mortality, and body types. The abundance of land also made it more difficult for the colonial upper class to transport English feudal patterns, which required common people to defer to their social betters, to the new environment. This reality encouraged farmers, artisans, and ordinary workers to assert their own independence and equality, and to become active participants in a vigorous movement for broader democracy. No matter how much America changed in the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, white workers maintained their belief that they should be free and equal citizens in a democratic republic. Such beliefs endowed American workers and their institutions with a distinctive character.

The early settlers had no more than landed in Virginia and Massachusetts than they

realized the imperative need for workers in the forest wilderness that was America. In the first voyage to Jamestown and three succeeding expeditions, the Virginia Company had sent over to the New World a motley band of adventurers, soldiers, and gentlemen. In growing despair of establishing a stable colony out of such unsatisfactory material, Captain John Smith finally entered a violent protest. "When you send again," he wrote home emphatically, "I entreat you rather send but thirty carpenters, husbandmen, gardeners, fishermen, masons, and diggers of trees' roots, well provided, than a thousand such as we have."

Plymouth fared better. Artisans, craftsmen, and other laborers largely made up the little band of Pilgrims, and the Bishop of London rudely characterized even their leaders as "guides fit for them, cobblers, tailors, feltmakers, and such-like trash." Among the Puritan settlers of Massachusetts Bay in 1630 there was also a majority of artisans and tillers of the soil. In spite of this advantage, the founders of New England soon felt, as had those of Virginia, the scarcity of persons content with performing the humble tasks of society. Governor Winthrop of Massachusetts wrote despairingly in 1640 of the difficulty of keeping wage earners on the job. They were constantly moving on to frontier communities where pay was higher, or else were taking up land to become independent farmers. Cotton Mather made it "an Article of special Supplication before the Lord, that he would send a good servant."

While tillers of the soil and "diggers of trees' roots" were a primary consideration in these early days of settlement, the demand for skilled workers rapidly mounted. The colonists were compelled to become carpenters and masons, weavers and shoemakers, whatever their background, but both on southern plantations and in New England towns, trained artisans and mechanics were always needed. In time, on southern plantations masters tutored some of their slaves in the skills of such necessary trades as carpentry, masonry, blacksmithing, and even cordwaining (shoemaking). Learning went both ways, as slaves taught masters in the South Carolina Low Country how to adopt rice-growing practices they had used on West Africa's Grain Coast. Rice production was so labor intensive that the Low Country became home to the colonies' largest plantations.

The ways in which the labor problem was met varied greatly in different parts of America. The circumstances of early settlement and natural environment led New England to rely more on free workers than indentures, while the South was ultimately to depend almost wholly on slaves from Africa. In the majority of colonies during the seventeenth century, and continuing on through the eighteenth century in the middle colonies, the bulk of the labor force was recruited from indentured servants. It is probable that at least half of all the colonists who came to the New World arrived under some form of indenture and took their place as free citizens only after working out their terms of contract.

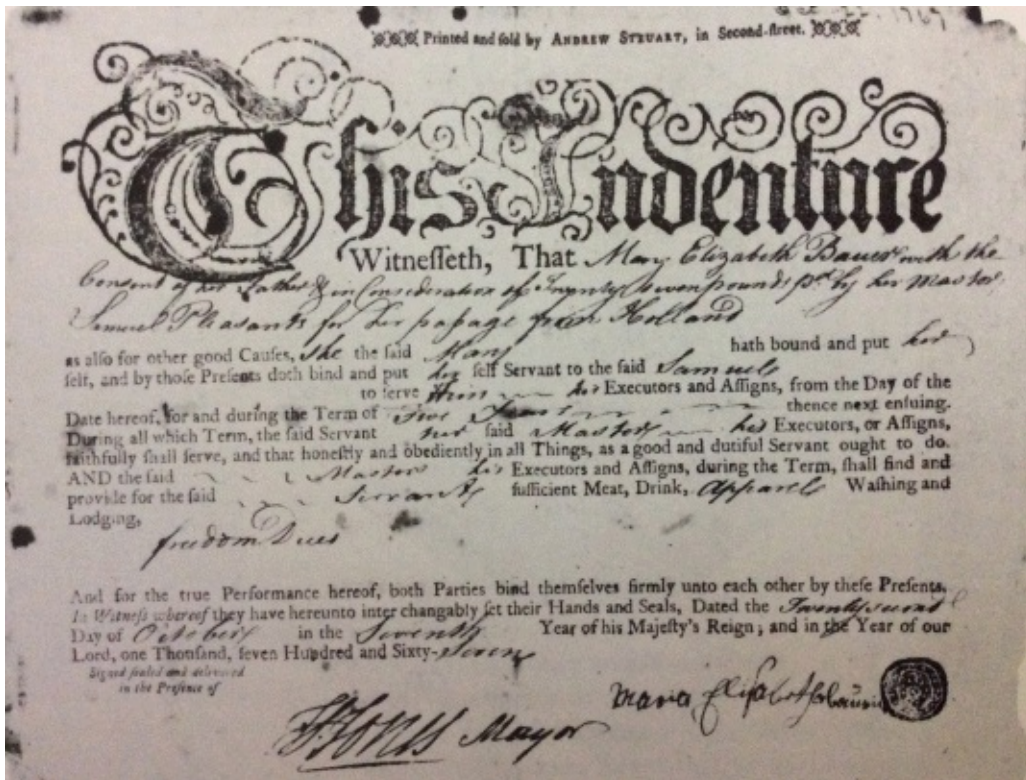


Figure 1.1 Certificate of indenture, 1767. This certificate bound one Mary Elizabeth Bauer to Samuel Pleasants for five years of labor in return for his payment of her passage to the American colonies. (Historical Society of Pennsylvania).

There were three sources for such bound labor: men, women, and children whose articles of indenture were signed before leaving the Old World; the redemptioners, or so-called free-willers, who agreed to reimburse their passage money by selling their labor after landing in the colonies; and convicts sentenced to transportation to America. Once in the colonies, these various groups coalesced into the general class of bound servants, working without wages and wholly under their masters' control for a set number of years.

So great was the demand for labor that a brisk trade developed in recruiting workers. Agents of the colonial planters and of British merchants scoured the countryside and towns of England, and somewhat later made their way to Europe, especially the war-devastated areas of the Rhineland, to advertise the advantages of emigrating to America. At country fairs they distributed handbills extravagantly describing the wonders of this new land, where food was said to drop into the mouths of the fortunate inhabitants and every man had the opportunity to own land. The promises held forth by the agents were often so glowing and enthusiastic that the poor and aspiring gladly signed articles of indenture with little realization of the possible hardships of the life upon which they were embarking. The "crimps," agents who worked the English countryside, and the so-called "newlanders" operating on the Continent, did not hesitate at fraud and chicanery.

Thousands of persons were “spirited” out of England under these circumstances, and far from trying to prevent such practices, the local authorities often encouraged them. The common belief that England was overpopulated led them to approve heartily of the overseas transportation of paupers and vagabonds, the generally shiftless who might otherwise become a burden upon the community. Indeed, magistrates sometimes had such persons rounded up and given the choice between emigration and imprisonment. It was also found to be an easy way to take care of orphans and other minors who had no means of support; the term “kidnapping” had its origin in this harsh mode of peopling the colonies.

In 1619, the Common Council of London “appointed one hundred Children out of the swarms that swarme in the place, to be sent to Virginia to be bound as apprentices for certain yeares.” The Privy Council initially endorsed the move and authorized the Virginia Company to “imprison, punish and dispose of any of those children upon any disorder by them committed, as cause shall require; and so to Shipp them out for Virginia, with as much expedition as may stand for convenience.” Some 40 years later, the Privy Council appears to have become aroused over the abuse of this practice by the Virginia Company. Two ships lying off Gravesend were discovered to have aboard both children and other servants “deceived and inticed away Cryinge and Mourning for Redemption from their Slavery.” It was ordered that all those detained against their will should be released at once. Most often, however, the line between voluntary and involuntary transportation – especially when it involved young children and the poor – was very hard to draw.

As time went on, prisons contributed an increasing number of emigrants who crossed the Atlantic as “His Majesty's Seven-Year Passengers.” They were at first largely made up of “rogues, vagabonds and sturdy beggars” who had proved “incorrigible.” However, during the eighteenth century more serious offenses were added to the list for which transportation overseas was meted out. The prerevolutionary roster of such immigrants in one Maryland county, adding up to 655 persons and including 111 women, embraced a wide range of crimes – murder, rape, highway robbery, horse-stealing, and grand larceny. Contemporary accounts succinctly described many of the women as “lewd.”

The colonies came to resent bitterly this influx of inmates from English prisons – “abundance of them do great Mischiefs...and spoil servants, that were before very good” – and they found it increasingly difficult to control them. But in spite of these protests, the practice was continued, and in all some 50,000 convicts are believed to have been transported, largely to the middle colonies. In Maryland, a favored dumping ground, they made up the bulk of indentured servants throughout the eighteenth century.

“Our Mother knows what is best for us,” a contributor to the *Pennsylvania Gazette* grouched in 1751. “What is a little Housebreaking, Shoplifting, or Highway-robbing; what is a son now and then corrupted and hanged, a Daughter debauched, or Pox'd,

a wife stabbed, a Husband's throat cut, or a child's brains beat out with an Axe, compared with this Improvement and Well peopling of the Colonies?" Benjamin Franklin bitterly declared that the policy of "emptying their jails into our settlements is an insult and contempt the cruellest, that ever one people offered another."

Although contemporaries and subsequent scholars emphasized the involuntary aspects of colonial immigration and the role played in the migration stream by paupers and criminals, the most recent research discloses a different reality. First, in the New World, indentured servitude largely replicated English patterns of rural employment with variations to adapt it to colonial conditions. Second, the immigration of indentured servants proved a rational response to the realities of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century markets for skilled and unskilled labor; it effectively redistributed labor from a sated English market to a hungry colonial one. Third, the indentured servants were a cross-section of the English laboring classes. As the economist David Galenson observes in his book, *White Servitude in Colonial America* (1981), "the indentured servants probably came in significant numbers from all levels of the broad segment of English society bounded at one end by the gentry, and at the other by the paupers."

The first African slaves arrived in Virginia not long after the founding of the colony. At first little distinguished the status of slaves from that of indentured laborers, and the two groups often worked together, especially on the tobacco plantations of the Chesapeake and Virginia, socialized together, and even mated. While slaves lacked contracts that specified the terms and duration of their service, their future paths seemed partly open. Some slaves took advantage of the demand for labor to negotiate arrangements with their masters that allowed them to hire themselves out and accumulate savings, eventually purchasing their freedom. In the 1660s, in some areas of Virginia nearly one-third of African Americans were free people.

Over time, however, at first slowly and then more rapidly in one colony after another, lawmakers began to distinguish more clearly between the statuses of indentured servants and slaves. A turning point came in Virginia in 1676 when landless whites and aggrieved indentured servants under the leadership of Nathaniel Bacon stormed into Jamestown attempting to depose the colonial government. Thereafter, landowners replaced white servants with black slaves. By the end of the seventeenth century, a series of newly enacted laws (consolidated in the Virginia slave codes of 1705) defined slaves (early on colonists enslaved a number of native Americans as well as Africans) as chattel property bound in perpetuity, as were their offspring. Slaves, unlike indentured servants, could be sold, rented out, or used as collateral by their masters and mistresses. As their permanently unfree status became defined and enforced in law, the difference between black slaves and white laborers, whether indentured or free, crystallized with the latter receiving a higher status on the basis of their skin color. Whether racism caused Africans to be enslaved or their status and condition as slaves made them seem inferior (and therefore encouraged racism), white racism assumed a dynamism and life of its own.



Figure 1.2 An African American servant at work tending to a white master. Slavery operated in Northern cities as well as on Southern plantations during the colonial era. (New York Public Library).

By the middle of the eighteenth century, the future growth and profitability of southern staple agriculture – at first primarily tobacco but then rice, indigo, sugar, and most importantly cotton – depended on slave labor. In time, the staple crops produced by enslaved people would become the engine that drove the national economy, as cotton most especially became a good in great demand in the international market, and the generator of enormous earnings that enriched those who marketed the crop and financed the planters. Accordingly, the number of slaves in the colonies grew from 7,000 in 1680 to 250,000 by 1750. Although slavery became the predominant labor system in much of the South, it existed across the colonies in the mid-eighteenth century. In the 1740s, slightly less than a third of workers in New York City were slaves.

Life and Labor in the Colonies

Whatever their Old World circumstances, the emigrants to the New World, whether white or black, experienced great discomfort and suffering on their voyage across the Atlantic. Often as many as three hundred passengers sailed on small vessels – overcrowded, unsanitary, and with insufficient provisions. Typhus and other diseases invariably took a terrible toll of lives. The mortality rate was sometimes as high as 50 percent, and young children seldom survived the horrors of a voyage that lasted

anywhere from 7 to 12 weeks. The infamous Middle Passage that carried enslaved Africans to the Americas packed even more souls in the most cramped of circumstances, and in which they were shackled. The mortality and morbidity rates among African slaves far exceeded those of white indentures. Magnify the descriptions of the Atlantic passage written by white passengers as recorded below and you scarcely comprehend the horrors of the Middle Passage.

“During the voyage,” reads one account of the experiences of redemptioners recruited from the German Palatinate, “there is on board these ships terrible misery, stench, fumes, horror, vomiting, many kinds of seasickness, fever, dysentery, headache, heat, constipation, boils, scurvy, cancer, mouth rot, and the like, all of which come from old and sharply-salted food and meat, also from the very bad and foul water, so that many die miserable....Add to this want of provisions, hunger, thirst, frost, heat, dampness, anxiety, want, afflictions, and lamentations, together with other trouble, as e.g., the lice abound so frightfully, especially on sick people, that they can be scraped off the body. The misery reaches a climax when a gale rages for two or three nights so that everyone believes that the ship will go to the bottom with all human beings on board. In such a visitation the people cry and pray most piteously.”

Nor did the hardships of the voyagers necessarily end when port was finally reached. Those for whom contracts had already been arranged were handed over to their unknown masters. If the redemptioners did not immediately find employment themselves, they were put up for sale by the ship captains or merchants to whom they owed their passage money. Families were often separated when spouses and offspring were auctioned off to the highest bidder. The terms of servitude varied with age and might run from one to seven years. More generally, those over the age of 20 without specific articles of indenture were bound out for four years “according to the custom of the country.”

The colonial newspapers often carried notices of prospective sales. On March 28, 1771, this one appeared in the *Virginia Gazette*:

Just arrived at Leedstown, the Ship Justitia,
with about one Hundred Healthy Servants.
Men, Women and Boys, among which are many
Tradespeople – viz. Blacksmiths, Shoemakers,
Tailors, House Carpenters and Joiners, a
Cooper, several Silversmiths, Weavers,
A Jeweler, and many others. The Sale will
commence on Tuesday, the 2nd. of April, at
Leeds Town on Rappahannock River. A
reasonable Credit will be allowed, giving
Bond with Approved Security to

Thomas Hodge

If the sales were not concluded at the port of entry, “soul drivers” took groups of redemptioners to the backcountry, herding them along the way “like cattle to a Smithfield market.” The “soul drivers” then put the redemptioners up for auction at public fairs.

The importation of servants was highly profitable. Fifty acres of land was granted as a headright in some of the colonies for each immigrant, and there was always the sale of the indenture. In the case of sturdy farm hands and particularly skilled artisans, prices might run high. William Byrd reported to his agent in Rotterdam, in 1739, that he was in a good position to handle heavy shipments. “I know not how long the Palatines are sold for who do not pay passage to Philadelphia,” he wrote, “but here they are sold for Four years and fetch from 6 to 9 pounds and perhaps good Tradesmen may go for Ten. If these prices would answer, I am pretty Confident I could Dispose of two Shiploads every year.”

The auction market for slaves proved even more brutal, as prospective purchasers examined the bodies and probed for signs of weakness or disease. Kinship and community among the slaves dissolved under the auction hammer as planters made their choices solely on the basis of the cash value of their purchases. Some cultural practices survived the diaspora of slaves across the American colonies. Over half of the slaves imported into South Carolina in the mid-eighteenth century came from Senegambia and Sierra Leone on the Grain Coast. Their concentration in the region helped them perpetuate and adapt aspects of African cultures, including some spiritual rituals and work habits. Low Country slaves developed a Creole language called Gullah that drew on both English and West African languages.

The treatment accorded to slaves and slaves' ability to negotiate aspects of their

oppression differed across regions as well as across time. In the northern colonies, slaves often were able to hire themselves out and accumulate enough to buy their freedom. In the Chesapeake tobacco region, where slavery first grew in the colonies, some small farmers worked side by side with their slaves, while larger planters created an oppressive system of gang labor in which white overseers drove slaves from morning to evening. In the densely concentrated rice plantations of the South Carolina Low Country, enslaved Africans enjoyed a level of autonomy uncommon in the Chesapeake region. They worked according to a task labor system in which they could define the pace of their work, as long as they completed the customary one-quarter acre of hoeing or one-half acre of ditch digging in a day. Slave families there tended their own garden plots, traded goods and services, and hunted and fished to supplement their diets.

Although levels of oppression could vary, the system of slavery as a whole rested on violence. Owners were free to impose the most stringent punishments, including whipping and maiming, with impunity. Slave owners frequently raped black women, broke up slave families whenever it suited them, and prevented slaves from learning to read or write.

The most common form of resistance among slaves was to run away. In the southeast, runaways often fled into the interior lands and set up Maroon communities. Occasionally, slaves rebelled. In 1712, a group of slaves killed nine whites in New York City. Seventy slaves were arrested and a dozen executed for the affair. In 1739, in Stono, South Carolina, a literate Angolan slave named Jemmy led an armed band of slaves south toward Spanish Florida, where they hoped to win their freedom, before they were intercepted by the colony's militia. Their leaders were executed and others sent back into slavery. In 1741, New Yorkers uncovered a conspiracy led by the slave Caesar Varick, in which a group planned to set fire to the city and flee to French Canada for their freedom. The authorities ordered Varick and a dozen of his followers burned at the stake.

The treatment accorded bound white servants, while often oppressive, was never as brutal as that endured by slaves. George Alsop, himself an indentured servant, wrote home in 1659 almost glowing accounts of life in Maryland. "The servants of this province, which are stigmatiz'd for Slaves by the clappermouth jaws of the vulgar in England," he declared, "live more like Freeman than the most Mechanical Apprentices in London, wanting for nothing that is convenient and necessary." Other accounts, however, give a harsher picture of general conditions. While colonial laws called upon masters to provide their servants with adequate food, lodging, and clothing, there were many instances where the diet was as meager as the labor was exhausting. Moreover, servants were rigidly confined to the immediate vicinity of the place where they were employed, tavern keepers were not allowed to sell them liquor, their terms of service might be extended for a long list of minor offenses, and they were subject to whippings and other corporal punishment by their masters for disobedience or laziness. Servant girls could be held in longer bondage if they became pregnant, and

their masters sometimes conspired to this end. "Late experiments shew," read one report, "that some dissolute masters have gotten their maides with child, and yet claim the benefit of their services."

The indentured servants were recognized as fellow Christians and were entitled to their day in court – in these respects, at least, their status was quite different from that of African slaves. But their masters' quasi-proprietary rights naturally made it extremely difficult for indentured servants to secure redress for any injuries or indignities.

Court records concerned with instances of willful ill treatment are revealing of how vulnerable servants were. A certain Mistress Ward whipped her maidservant on the back so severely, with the added brutality of putting salt in the wounds, that the girl died. On the finding of a jury that such action was "unreasonable and unchristianlike," Mistress Ward was fined 300 pounds of tobacco. In another case, Mistress Mourning Bray defiantly told the court that in no circumstances would she allow her servants to "go to play or be Idle," and the unlucky complainant was stripped and given 30 lashes. A third trial resulted more favorably for another maidservant. She was discharged from the further employ of a master who had climaxed frequent beatings by hitting her over the head with a three-legged stool when he found her reading a book on Sunday morning.

Advertisements often appeared in the colonial newspapers for runaway servants. One such notice referred to an English servantman who had "a pretty long visage of a lightish complexion, and thin-flaxen hair; his eye tooth sticks out over his lower teeth in a remarkable manner," and another to a shoemaker and fiddler who "loves to be at frolics and taverns and is apt to get in liquor and when so is subject to fits." Other advertisements offered special rewards for runaway bricklayers, tailors, carpenters, and even schoolmasters.

For the servants who faithfully served out the term of their indenture, there were substantial rewards. Grants of land were the exception rather than the rule, but in some cases, at least, the industrious were given "a competent estate," and there was universal provision for some form of "freedom's dues." In Massachusetts, for example, the law specifically stated that all servants who had served diligently and faithfully for seven years should not be sent away empty-handed. What this meant varied, of course, not only from colony to colony but in terms of individual articles of indenture. The freed person's dues generally included at least clothing, tools of some sort, and perhaps such livestock as would enable the servant to start farming on their own account. Typical indentures called for "a pigg to be pay'd at every years end" and "double apparell at the end of the term."

Those indentured servants who survived the rigors of the ocean crossing, the seasoning period in a new environment, and the experiences of enforced servitude in relatively good health could then seek to make a free life of their own. Once they had established their freedom, Hugh Jones wrote in 1724, they might "work Day-Labour,

or else rent a small Plantation for a trifle almost; or turn overseers, if they are expert, industrious and careful, or follow their trade...especially Smiths, Carpenters, Taylors, Sawyers, Coopers, Bricklayers, etc.”

Some of the indentured servants succeeded as independent farmers or artisans. Others were less successful. They drifted off to the rough frontier where they seldom achieved landowning status. Instead, they formed what rapidly became a large, discontented rural class of poor whites. Still others became the casual day laborers needed in seaport cities. Whatever their ultimate destinies, the indentured servants were vital to the economic development of colonial America.

Free labor in the colonies was made up of immigrant artisans and mechanics who had been able to pay their own passage money and of recruits from the ranks of bound servants who had served out their terms of indenture. The available supply of such labor at first failed to satisfy the demand for it, which is why all the colonies sought and used both indentured servants and bound slaves. Not till the mid-eighteenth century, when the supply of available land diminished, especially in the New England and middle colonies, did labor scarcity somewhat abate. In the quarter century before the Revolution, the number of urban poor grew apace, and the gap between rich and poor widened in the seaport cities.

“The genius of the People in a Country where every one can have Land to work upon,” a colonial official reported to the Board of Trade in 1767, “leads them so naturally into Agriculture, that it prevails over every other occupation. There can be no stronger instance of this, than in the servants imported from Europe of different trades; as soon as the Time stipulated in their Indentures is expired, they immediately quit their Masters, and get a small tract of land, in settling which for the first three or four years they lead miserable lives, and in the most abject Poverty; but all this is patiently borne and submitted to with the greatest cheerfulness, the Satisfaction of being Land holders smooths over every difficulty, and makes them prefer this manner of living to that comfortable subsistence which they could procure for themselves and their families by working at the Trades in which they were brought up.”

In New England, where relatively few indentured servants were available, this situation led to such high wage rates and such an independent attitude on the part of both skilled and unskilled workers that the colonial authorities felt compelled to act. Colonial rulers looked to the Old World for the proper patterns of social organization. Those who ruled seventeenth-century England believed that a society prospered insofar as its laborers received only a *minimum* subsistence income. Only dire necessity compelled common people to toil hard, and high wages would cause indolence. Colonists carried such beliefs across the ocean. The result was the first labor legislation in America affecting free workers. Maximum wages were established by law, changes in occupation were prohibited, and various class distinctions in dress and deportment were prescribed by “sumptuary laws” to keep the lower classes in a subordinate role.

As early as 1630, the General Court in Massachusetts undertook to enforce a wage ceiling of two shillings a day for carpenters, joiners, bricklayers, and other artisans, and of 18 pence for all day laborers, with the further provision that “all workmen shall worke the whole day, alloweing convenient tyme for food and rest.” To combat what appears to have been a prevailing practice of supplementing such wages with allowances for liquor (“without which it is found, by too sad experience, many refuse to worke”), the Court further decreed that anyone who gave wine or strong liquors to any workmen, except in cases of necessity, would be fined.

Forty years later, another law reaffirmed these general wage rates, stating more specifically that the working day should be “10 houres in the daye besides repast,” and extended its provisions to additional artisans. Carpenters, masons, stonelayers, coopers, and tailors were to be paid two shillings a day, special piece rates were established for shoemakers, coopers, and smiths, and, finally, the new statute declared “that whereas it appears that Glovers, Sadlers, Hatters, and Several other artificers doe at present greatly exceed the rules of equitie in their prizes, they are all required to moderate the same according to the rules prescribed to others.”

These maximum wages were in part compensated by the regulation of the prices of certain basic commodities to hold down the cost of living, but the clear intent of the General Court was both to help employers and to keep workers in their place. The high wages some workers were able to command were felt to have highly unfortunate consequences in the puritanical eyes of the New England fathers. “The produce thereof,” they sternly declared, “is by many Spent to mayntayne such bravery in Apparell which is altogether un-becomeing their place and ranck, and in Idleness of life, and a great part spent viciously in Tavernes and alehouses and other Sinful practices much to the dishonor of God, Scandall of Religion, and great offence and grieffe to Sober and Godly people amongst us.”

The idea that low wages and long hours were conducive to the workers' well-being flowed directly from the reality of work in preindustrial times. Both in the city and the country, workers set their rhythms by nature, not the machine. Custom, not the clock, determined the pace of work and its daily length. Bouts of intense toil alternated with long periods of idleness. It was not uncommon for toilers to break their workday for a period of hard drinking or heavy eating or to observe “St. Monday,” a day off after a long weekend of drinking or feasting. Such customs were obstacles for those who planned to use the labor of others to enrich themselves. Hence long hours and low wages were necessary to reduce idleness and protect workers from the temptations of tavern, cockpit, and playing field.

An even more direct restriction on what might be called conspicuous consumption by workers was laid down in another law regulating just what they should wear. “We declare our utter detestation and dislike,” this edict read, “that men and women of mean condition should take upon themselves the garb of gentlemen.” The ban included “wearing gold or silver lace or buttons, or points at their knees, or to walk in

boots, or women of the same rank to wear silk or tiffany scarfs, which though allowable to persons of greater estates, or more liberal education, yet we cannot but judge it intolerable in persons in such like conditions.”

These laws could not be enforced. Although the authorities continued to link the demand for higher wages with intemperance, Sabbath breaking, gaming, and mixed dancing, they could not control the situation. The General Court ultimately relegated the task to local town governments, but even then material realities proved to be a more decisive factor than arbitrary legislation in determining wage rates and social customs.

Although the bulk of settlers tilled their own land and provided through home manufactures most of their immediate needs, craftsmen and artisans played an increasingly important economic role as the eighteenth century advanced. Many of them were itinerants, going from town to town to work at whatever job was offered. One man sometimes plied several trades. A blacksmith would be also a toolmaker, a tanner, a shoemaker, a soap boiler, or a tallow chandler (candle maker). How far a craftsman might be prepared to extend his services is suggested by an advertisement in the *New York Gazette* in June 1775. John Julius Sorge announced that he could make artificial fruit; do japan (varnishing) work; manufacture cleaning fluid, toilet water, soap, candles, insecticides, and wine; and remove hair from ladies' foreheads and arms.

With the further growth of colonial towns, the demand for artisans increased. There were more and more of the small retail shops in which a master workman employed a number of journeymen workers – that is, artisans or mechanics who worked for wages – and also trained boys as apprentices to whatever trade was being practiced. Printing shops, tailoring and shoemaking shops, hat shops, cabinetmaking shops, and bakeries were among such establishments. The work was generally done to order – “bespoke work” – and the shop might often be the master's home, where the journeymen and apprentices could board as well as work. At the same time, the expansion of the building trades led master carpenters and master masons to employ journeymen and train apprentices.

In both New England and the middle colonies, there were also all manner of little mills needing both skilled and unskilled wage earners; in need of labor also were shipyards, ropewalks (rope factories), distilleries, breweries, and paper and gunpowder factories. On the large plantations of the South, home manufactures created a need for skilled labor. Robert Carter had a smithy, a fulling mill, a grain mill, salt works, and both spinning and weaving establishments on his plantation, where he employed free white workers as well as African slaves.

There was at least a beginning of manufacture on a larger scale. By the middle of the eighteenth century, ironworks had been established in Pennsylvania, Maryland, and New Jersey, which employed a considerable number of men. One set up by Peter Hasenclever, the best known colonial ironmaster, included six blast furnaces, seven

forges, and a stamping mill, and he is said to have brought 500 workers over from Germany for their operation. Linen factories with as many as 14 looms foreshadowed mounting employment in textile mills. In 1769, a “manufacturing house” in Boston had 400 spinning wheels, and six years later the United Company of Philadelphia for Promoting American Manufacture employed 400 women in the production of cotton goods. Some of these latter enterprises provided work for the indigent and for orphans – without wages – as a service to the community.

Besides those in manufacturing establishments, other groups of wage earners were of growing importance. The most numerous were sailors, fishermen, and day laborers. Household servants were never available in sufficient numbers to meet the needs of the more wealthy members of the community. “Help is scarce and hard to gett, difficult to please, uncertaine,” remained a familiar complaint in colonial society. This is why in all the colonies, including Puritan New England, the urban upper class turned to African slaves for domestic help.

As the Revolution approached, there were increasing opportunities for wage earners and a diminishing labor supply as men were drafted for military service, which drove up wages. The earlier attempts to fix maximum rates and control prices were consequently renewed. The Articles of Association adopted by the Continental Congress stressed the importance of such regulations, and several of the new state governments undertook to enforce them. At a convention held in Providence in 1776, attended by delegates from Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Connecticut, agreement was reached on a general program of price and wage control. Farm labor was not to be paid more than three shillings and four pence a day (almost three times the rate of a century earlier), and the wages of artisans and mechanics were to be so fixed as to maintain their normal relationship to farm wages at this new rate. The states concerned acted promptly on this resolution – an early example of an interstate compact – and, when the matter was brought before the Continental Congress, it referred to the remaining states “the propriety of adopting similar Measures.”

Other conventions, however, were not as successful as the one held at Providence in reaching mutual agreement upon prices and wage scales. The Continental Congress finally decided that the whole program was not only impractical “but likewise productive of very evil Consequences to the great Detriment of the public Service and grievous Oppression of Individuals.” It advised the states to repeal existing laws, and this first attempt at a controlled economy made no further headway.

Still, it is well to remember that on the eve of the Revolution no truly free working class existed. A clear majority of those who did not own their own land and who toiled for others were either African slaves or indentured laborers, the former lacking essential human rights and the latter enjoying such rights only in a most limited manner. Even free workers, those not bound or indentured, found their liberty restricted to some degree by statute and contract. It would require decades of

political and legal struggle for non-slave workers to achieve real freedom and a bloody civil war to emancipate slaves.

Workers, Politics, and Revolution

Although the material conditions of colonial life made for greater comfort and health for common people than prevailed generally in the Old World, free workers still lacked basic political rights. The right to vote was restricted to property owners, and skilled artisans and mechanics were as helpless in asserting their rights as day laborers. Thus it was no surprise that many such workers sought to turn the struggle for independence from the British Empire into a battle for liberty in the colonies. During the Revolution, artisans and day laborers protested not only against oppression by a distant England, but also against the controls exercised by the ruling class at home.

The role of small tradesmen, artisans, and mechanics in promoting the revolutionary cause was particularly important in Massachusetts. Again and again, when the ardor of merchants and farmers appeared to be subsiding, the “rage of patriotism” was stimulated by the zeal of those whom the colonial Tories derisively called the “Rabble.” The popular party in Boston, so astutely led by Sam Adams, was in large part made up of wharfingers (wharf operators), shipwrights, bricklayers, weavers, and tanners who were equally opposed to rule by British officials and colonial aristocrats. The Sons of Liberty, and later the local Committees of Correspondence, were generally recruited from workers from the docks, shipyards, and ropewalks. The famous “Loyall Nine,” which was to instigate the mob action that led to the Boston Massacre and the Boston Tea Party, included two distillers, two brass workers, a printer, a jeweler, a painter, and a ship captain.

Such an alignment of forces was also true of other colonies. The Ancient and Honorable Mechanical Company of Baltimore, the Firemen's Association of Charleston, and the Heart-in-Hand Fire Company of Philadelphia were the nuclei for the Sons of Liberty in those cities. In each instance, their muster rolls show that their membership was primarily made up of small tradesmen and artisans.

Although the first protests against British taxation came largely from the merchant class, which provided the original leadership in organizing the Sons of Liberty, the mechanics, artisans, and small tradesmen voiced the more radical demands in support of colonial liberties and kept up their agitation when the merchants were willing to compromise. The workers' zealous activity, indeed, often aroused conservative fears that the revolutionary movement was getting wholly out of hand. “The heads of the mobility grow dangerous to the gentry,” Gouverneur Morris wrote agitatedly on one occasion, “and how to keep them down is the question.”

They could not be kept down. Their demonstrations, sometimes leading to riot and disorder, both reflected and intensified an increasing hostility toward the British

authorities on the part of the common people. The Boston Massacre, for example, grew directly out of a dispute that had arisen between colonial workingmen and British troops. "A particular quarrel happened at a Rope-Walk with a few Soldiers of the 29th. Regiment," General Gage reported, "the Provocation was given by the Rope-Walkers, tho' it may be imagined in the course of it, that there were Faults on both Sides. This Quarrel, it is supposed, excited the People to convert a general rising on the Night of the 5th. of March."

Not surprisingly, a considerable number of African slaves joined the British cause, their decision based on the promise of their emancipation. However much the American Revolution may have been a struggle for human liberty, it promised only continued servitude for colonial slaves. Those slaves who served the British throughout the Revolution maintained their freedom by leaving the colonies of their enslavement mostly for the British North American possessions to the north, namely the provinces of Canada.

While the role of artisans and mechanics in the Revolution has long since been recognized, it is more difficult to determine their part in the adoption of the Constitution. They had been neither directly nor indirectly represented at the Constitutional Convention, and little consideration was given in its deliberations to either their rights or those of the common people generally. But in granting greater power to the central government, especially in the regulation of foreign trade, the new Constitution promised certain direct benefits to urban artisans. A central government able to levy protective tariffs against the importation of manufactured English goods promised American craftsmen a more secure domestic market. A central government empowered to promote foreign commerce promised maritime workers, onshore and offshore, greater opportunities for employment. Moreover, the Constitution did legitimate the basic republican principles won in the Revolution. Thus workers demonstrated in many cities in favor of ratification, and their support has been held partly responsible for the victory of the pro-Constitution group in New York.

Whatever their contribution to the movement for independence and the establishment of the United States, the workers' political gains were limited. There were everywhere fears of the "levelling spirit" which had seemed so pronounced during the Revolution, and of the threat to national stability in any further concessions to the democratic masses.

Even Thomas Jefferson, who stoutly declared that "the influence over the government must be shared by all the people," had no intention of including propertyless workers within the scope of those to be granted the vote or access to public office. The democracy that he supported was a democracy of small freehold farmers, and he gravely doubted whether artisans, mechanics, and laborers, without the stabilizing influence of being landowners, could ever develop the republican virtues which he felt to be essential to the functioning of a free society.

Jefferson strongly opposed the development of manufactures in the United States

because he was afraid of the influence on its institutions of an increasing number of urban workers. “The mobs of great cities,” Jefferson wrote in fearful contemplation of what he felt was happening in Europe, “add just so much to the support of pure government, as sores do to the strength of the human body.”

Thus, in spite of the high promise of the Declaration of Independence, the political status of the wage-earning class in American society remained restricted. While free laborers lived well by European standards, with advancing prices in the post-revolutionary period, workers in the little towns strung along the Atlantic seaboard seldom enjoyed much of a margin over extreme poverty. While John Jay complained bitterly in 1784 of “the wages of mechanics and labourers, which are very extravagant,” the pay for unskilled workers hardly ever exceeded 15 shillings a week – barely subsistence level.

“On such a pittance,” the late nineteenth-century historian John Bach McMaster has written, “it was only by the strictest economy that a mechanic kept his children from starvation and himself from jail. In the low and dingy rooms which he called his home were wanting many articles of adornment and of use now to be found in the dwellings of the poorest of his class. Sand sprinkled on the floor did duty as a carpet. There was no glass on his table, there was no china in his cupboard, there were no prints on his walls...[H]is wife cooked up a rude meal and served it in pewter dishes. He rarely tasted fresh meat as often as once in a week.”

Artisans and mechanics were citizens in a “people's” republic and could use their citizenship to advance their material interests and to seek to build a society of free and equal, independent, self-employed craftsmen. The ideals of that greatest of American revolutionary pamphleteers, Tom Paine, resonated among urban artisans. In a society still based upon agriculture and handicraft industries, moreover, the craftsman had a recognized and respected status. His way of life may have been simple, but it also seemed to the artisan to be customary, sensible, and satisfying.

On the plantations of the South and the seaboard and interior cities of all the new 13 states, a majority of toilers were neither freehold farmers nor respected artisans. In the South, slaves provided the labor for the largest, most productive, and profitable plantations. And in the cities everywhere day laborers loaded and unloaded ships, transported goods to and from the docks, dug wells, latrines, and water courses, and removed night soil, among other necessary services, all with minimal compensation and no security or stability of employment. Neither slaves nor day laborers had bargaining power or political rights. For skilled workers, defined as artisans or mechanics, a gap between master craftsmen, many of whom had become successful merchant-capitalists, and journeymen widened. The latter, because their skills were in real demand and because truly skilled journeymen were often in short supply, enjoyed a measure of bargaining power that they could enhance by organizing themselves into early trade unions.

2 VARIETIES OF WORKER RESISTANCE AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE FIRST UNIONS

Over the first two decades of the nineteenth century, the economy of the new nation grew apace. Internal improvements, the construction of turnpikes and canals, the application of steam power to water transport, and the deepening of seaports, among other capital investments, widened markets for agricultural and manufactured products. Economic growth in turn increased the demand for labor, especially the skilled variety, which remained in short supply. Partly to satisfy that demand, the new nation instituted relatively liberal immigration regulations, hoping especially to stimulate emigration by skilled workers who commanded exceptionally high wages in the United States. At the same time, however, the contractors who constructed turnpikes and canals needed a steady supply of less-skilled workers for the hard work of leveling and smoothing ground for turnpikes and digging canals. Many of those less-skilled workers were Irish immigrants, many of whom had already done such work as navvies (manual laborers) in England.

The invention of the cotton gin coupled with soil depletion in the tobacco-growing region of the Chesapeake and Virginia led to a restructuring of southern plantation agriculture. Now that short-staple cotton could be grown profitably and the rising English textile industry seemed to have an insatiable demand for the product, plantation owners concentrated on growing the crop. A cotton kingdom spread to the southernmost seaboard states and from there into the territories and then states of Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana (which also nurtured a thriving slave-based sugar plantation economy), and Arkansas. The growth and spread of the cotton kingdom gave new life to slavery, an institution that had appeared somewhat moribund at the end of the eighteenth century. In fact, slavery had seemed so marginal at the birth of the new nation that the Constitution banned the importation of slaves beginning in 1808. The ban, however, instituted by Congress in 1808, did little to diminish the spread and growth of slavery. Because the conditions for slaves were more salubrious in the southern states than in the Caribbean islands and South America, Louisiana's sugar plantations being the exception, the bound population steadily reproduced itself. And not only did African slaves in the United States reproduce themselves, but an internal slave market redistributed slaves from the depleted soils of Virginia and the Chesapeake to the more fertile and productive lands of the new cotton kingdom. Slave labor made cotton the most profitable good produced in the United States, and the South the wealthiest region in the nation.

Among the millions of laborers in the new nation, only the skilled craftsmen held real bargaining power. Day laborers, whether casual urban workers or canal diggers,

enjoyed only the power of exit, a power that was partly limited by law and in the case of canal workers by geographical isolation. As Peter Way has shown in his book *Common Labour: Workers and the Digging of North American Canals, 1780–1860* (1993), their only recourse to brutalization at work was riot. Throughout the first part of the nineteenth century, then, unskilled workers remained largely at the mercy of their employers and lived an unstable, insecure existence.

Slaves lacked even the right of exit. They could – and did – run away, but slave patrols hunted them down and fugitive slave laws threatened those who succeeded in reaching free states (even emancipated blacks became victim to the fugitive slave laws legitimized by the Constitution). The one form of resistance open to slaves was to labor less than diligently in the fields, or even to engage in forms of sabotage. Such resistance, however, was not easy under the watchful eyes of overseers, masters, and mistresses, and the penalty for sabotage and others forms of protest could be exceptionally severe, including brutal whippings and even executions. In cities such as Baltimore where slavery persisted, enslaved people exercised more autonomy. Runaways were common, and in order to forestall them some masters allowed slaves to purchase manumission set for a predetermined future date, making them “term slaves” (at least one-fifth of Baltimore slaves had this status by the 1830s).

Only craftsmen had substantial bargaining power, including the right of exit unless otherwise bound by written and attested contract. Because their skills could not be easily replicated and they remained in relatively short supply in a growing economy, journeymen artisans drove as hard a bargain as they could. As workshops grew in size and employed larger numbers of journeymen, collective action became the best and preferred choice of resistance among artisans.

At first, however, a “moral economy” carried over from England bound masters, journeymen, apprentices, and even local elites in a common bond. Such was the motivation behind statutes that sought to fix maximum wages, control prices on the necessities of existence, and provide relief for ill, injured, and superannuated local citizens of good character. Moral considerations, not the laws of supply and demand as enforced by an impersonal marketplace, remained an essential part of the social order of the early republic.

The Origins of Worker Organization

The real beginnings of labor organization awaited the economic transformation brought about early in the nineteenth century by the rise of merchant-capitalists who established business on a wholesale basis. The master workmen in the colonial period, who brought together journeymen and apprentices for work on common projects or joint enterprises, and paid them wages, had not created an employer–employee relationship like the one that would develop by the twentieth century. There was no real differentiation between the interests of the journeymen and those of the

masters who labored side by side with them. The price lists set up for “bespoke work” determined wages, and the functions of merchant, master, and journeyman were often united in the same person.

In such circumstances, masters and journeymen acted together to maintain the standards of their craft, uphold price lists, and generally protect themselves from unfair competition. There were occasions when journeymen protested against the controls exercised by masters in their capacity as employers. In occupations that did not bring them together in close and natural association, disputes sometimes arose that led to sporadic strikes and incipient labor revolt. But, generally speaking, the extremely simple economic organization of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries precluded any significant concerted action on the part of workers.

The earliest record of what might be considered a labor disturbance goes back to 1636. A group of fishermen employed by one Robert Trelawney at Richmond Island, off the coast of Maine, were reported to have fallen “into a mutiny” when their wages were withheld. Some 40 years later, the licensed cartmen of New York, ordered to remove the dirt from the streets for threepence a load, not only protested such a low rate of pay but “combined to refuse full compliance.” Other comparable incidents occasionally were noted in the colonial press during the eighteenth century, and in 1768 a “turn-out” of journeymen tailors in New York – perhaps the first really authentic strike against employers – has an almost modern ring. Some 20 workers walked out on strike because of a reduction in their wages and publicly advertised that, in defiance of their masters, they would take private work. They would only return to their jobs, they said, at the rate of three shillings and sixpence per day, with diet.

That masters themselves sometimes joined forces to protect their interests is revealed in a somewhat earlier account of trouble among Boston barbers that appeared in the *New England Courant*. Thirty-two master barbers jointly agreed to raise their rates for shaving from 8s. to 10s. per quarter, and “to advance 5s. on the Price of making common Wiggs and 10s. on their Tye ones.” It was also proposed that “no one of their Faculty should shave or dress Wiggs on Sunday morning.”

The Revolutionary period, with its wartime inflation, stimulated further protests on the part of workers who found living costs rising much faster than wages. The New York printers were a case in point. “As the necessaries of life are raised to such an enormous price,” read the journeymen printer's protest as it appeared in the *Royal Gazette* in November 1778, “it cannot be expected that we should continue to work at the wages now given; and therefore request an addition of Three Dollars per week to our present small pittance; it may be objected that this requisition is founded upon the result of a combination to distress the Master Printers at this time, on account of the scarcity of hands; but this is far from being the case; it really being the high price of every article of life, added to the approaching dreary season. There is not one among us, we trust, that would take an ungenerous advantage of the times – we only wish barely to exist, which it is impossible to do with our present stipend.” To this letter,

James Rivington, the well-known Tory printer and publisher of the *Gazette*, briefly replied: "I do consent to the above requisition."

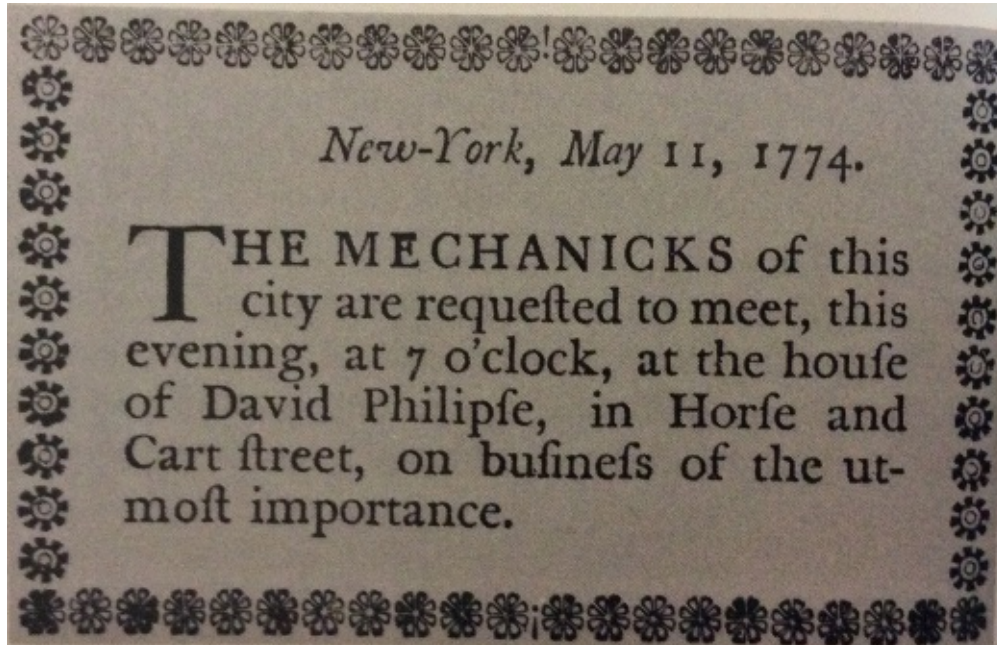


Figure 2.1 Notice of a mechanics' meeting, 1774. As agitation against British rule rose, mechanics, like other colonists, met to discuss their interests. (Library of Congress).

There were other concerted protests or strikes in these and the immediately following years – on the part of seamen in Philadelphia in 1779, New York shoemakers in 1785, and journeymen printers in Philadelphia in 1786. "We will support such of our brethren," these printers declared, "as shall be thrown out of employment on account of their refusing to work for less than \$6 per week." The employers at first refused to meet their demands, but the turnout was ultimately successful.

Members of the building trades were also restive, and a long smoldering conflict broke out in 1791 between journeymen and master carpenters in Philadelphia. The former declared that their employers were trying to reduce wages "to a still lower ebb, by every means within the power of avarice to invent." They specifically demanded a shorter working day and additional pay for working beyond their usual hours. They bitterly complained that they had heretofore "been obliged to toil through the whole course of the longest summer's days, and that too, *in many instances*, without even the consolation of having our labour sweetened by the reviving hope of an immediate reward."

What settlement may have been reached in this dispute is not known. The masters blamed the conditions of trade for the low wages and declared that they "had in no instance, discovered a disposition to oppress or tyrannize."

These strikes and turnouts did not in any case involve an organization that could be termed a labor union. The workers merely acted together on a temporary basis to

press their demands or to take joint action to protect their interests. Such trade societies as did exist, and a number were formed in the latter part of the eighteenth century, promoted philanthropic rather than economic goals. They were mutual-aid societies, often including both journeymen and masters, which provided sickness and death benefits for their members. Almost every important trade in such cities as New York, Philadelphia, and Boston had such a society by the 1790s, and in some instances there were organizations of broader scope – the General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen in New York, the Association of Mechanics of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, and the Albany Mechanics' Society.

In supporting such members as might by accident or sickness be in need of assistance, and aiding the widows and orphans of those who died in indigent circumstances, these societies sought to free both masters and journeymen from “the degrading reflection arising from the circumstances of being relieved...by private or public charity.” The workers were self-respecting and proud. Thus early in American history they were prepared, as the charter of one society stated, “to demand relief... as a *right*.”

Many mutual-aid societies also had social features and provided meeting rooms and recreation. The house rules of the Friendly Society of Tradesmen House Carpenters, organized in Philadelphia in 1767, reveals both the scope of such activities and also the strict regulations governing members' deportment. A fine had to be paid into the common stock of the society by any member who presumed “to curse or swear, or cometh disguised in Liquor and breeds Disturbance...or promoteth Gaming at Club Hours.”

Although economic activity fell generally outside the scope of the New York Society of Journeymen Shipwrights (its charter stipulated automatic dissolution if the organization made any attempt to fix wages), it was inevitable that these societies would in time become concerned about problems of employment. The line between mutual-aid societies and bona fide trade associations thus becomes almost impossible to distinguish. The Federal Society of Journeymen Cordwainers (shoemakers), established in Philadelphia in 1794, has, however, been called the first “continuous organization” of wage earners in the United States and is perhaps entitled to be considered the original trade union. Its membership was solely made up of journeymen shoemakers, it conducted a strike and picketed the masters' shops in 1799, and it remained in existence for 12 years.

A few months after the Philadelphia cordwainers organized, the journeymen printers in New York formed what was to be the first of a long line of unions in that trade, and two years later there was also established in New York a relatively long-lived society of Journeymen Cabinet Makers. The latter organization published in the papers a complete price list – which in effect meant wage scales – with the further provision that the journeymen chair makers would “work ten hours per day; employers to find candles.”

Early Unions

These tentative beginnings of organization pointed the way toward the more general growth of trade societies – as the first unions were long called – that followed upon the rise of the merchant-capitalists. It was not until the retail shop and custom-order work gave way to wholesale business, and the old easy relationship between master and journeyman was broken down, that the workers really felt compelled to combine against their employers. But with the beginning of the nineteenth century, the skilled artisans and mechanics in trade after trade followed the earlier examples of printers and shoemakers in forming societies whose avowed purpose was to guard their interests against “the artifices or intrigues” of employers and to secure adequate reward for their labor. These societies remained united by mutual-aid benefits, but now they added specifically economic goals to their more customary fraternal obligations.

As capitalism developed apace in the early nineteenth century, the gap between employers and workers widened. Merchants who sought direct control over the supply of the goods they marketed, and ambitious artisans, who used the labor of others to enrich themselves, combined to enlarge the scale of production. Responding to the opportunities of widening domestic markets, these early entrepreneurs struggled to reorganize traditional methods of artisan manufacture, to lower the costs of production, and to discipline the actual producers. To the extent that they succeeded, the aspiring capitalists put the higher-cost, limited-market, custom-craft shops out of business. Capitalists, who employed labor to manufacture goods for the market, steadily displaced petty commodity producers, who produced for customers only on special order.

The development of improved means of transportation – canals, turnpikes, and steamboats – widened the market further and expanded business opportunities. The “market revolution” opened the growing American interior to the products manufactured on the eastern seaboard. A national market was in the making that would overshadow the old local markets dependent upon retail trade and “bespoke work,” and it set the pace for economic progress. The eclipse of the master artisan's custom shop by the capitalist's hired hands foreshadowed the local manufacturing plant and the industrial combinations and mergers of the 1880s and 1890s.

Under constant pressure to reduce costs to meet the highly competitive conditions of this new world of business, employers sought to hold down wages, lengthen the working day of their employees, and tap new sources of cheap labor. They tried to break down the restrictions of the traditional apprenticeship system; they began to employ both women and children wherever possible; they introduced the sweatshop and the practice of letting out contracts to prison labor. For skilled craftsmen, whatever their trades, such moves were a threat not only of lower standards of living, but also of loss of status. They were at once aroused to combat such developments and realized that only through concerted action could they hope to protect their rights.



Figure 2.2 Mechanics' Association membership certificate, 1800. This ornate document combines patriotic republican imagery with symbols of the trade and prosperity. (Library of Congress).

For a time the artisans and mechanics were able to mount an effective resistance to the “new capitalism” since the rapid growth of the nation between 1800 and 1819, and again from 1824 to 1837, kept skilled labor relatively scarce. Newspapers of the period afford constant evidence of this demand for workers. There were frequent advertisements of jobs: “Wanted, two or three journeymen cooper-smiths; liberal wages will be paid,” “Wanted, six or eight carpenters; will be allowed the use of tools,” and “Wanted, four or five journeymen bricklayers.” The contractors building the City Hall in New York in 1803 were forced to advertise for stonecutters in the papers of Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Charleston, and to promise high wages, repair of all tools, and to assure that, although there was yellow fever in other parts of the city, the workingmen need have no fear of it.

Nevertheless, the skilled workers soon found themselves fighting a defensive war against the mounting resources of the employers. Although data on real wage rates and standards of living for the early nineteenth century are far from complete and much in dispute, it seems clear that for most workers wages barely kept pace with prices. In 1818, the average general wage probably did not exceed \$1.25 a day, except in a few special trades such as that of ship carpenters. New York typesetters, for example, were earning \$8 a week and journeymen tailors in Baltimore \$9. In comparison, the great demand for laborers on canals and turnpikes and in the construction of buildings and on other comparable projects had driven up the wages

of day laborers from about \$4 a week at the close of the Revolution to \$7 a week and sometimes more. When such workers were fed and lodged, their actual pay might amount to more than artisans and mechanics could command. An advertisement for men to work on the road being built from the Genesee River to Buffalo promised \$12 a month, with food, lodging, and whiskey every day.

Although skilled craftsmen maintained a wage advantage over other workers, they realized that conditions were changing to their disadvantage and that it was going to grow harder rather than easier for them to maintain old standards. The organizations that sought, under these circumstances, to safeguard the status of skilled workers were most general among printers, cordwainers, tailors, carpenters, cabinetmakers, shipwrights, coopers, and weavers. Especially important were the journeymen printers and cordwainers. It has already been noted that they were union pioneers and succeeded in maintaining active societies throughout the first 20 years of the nineteenth century, not only in New York and Philadelphia, but also in Boston, Baltimore, Albany, Washington, Pittsburgh, and New Orleans. The members of the building trades were also organized in almost every city, and among other societies were those of millwrights, stonecutters, handloom weavers, and hatters. Prior to 1820, there were no organizations among factory operatives – although some 100,000 persons were employed in cotton mills by that year – and no evidence yet of women organizing.

These early trade societies were in effect closely restricted craft unions, wholly local in character and necessarily small in membership. The workers who belonged to them were bound to conform to strict rules and regulations, to keep union proceedings secret, agree under oath to abide by established wage scales, and always to assist fellow members to get employment in preference to any other workers. Initiation fees were about 50 cents, with monthly dues amounting to 6 to 10 cents. Attendance at regular meetings was required, with fines for unjustified absence. Moreover, rigid discipline was enforced and union members could be expelled for such lapses as frequent intoxication, gross immorality, or “giving a brother member any abusive language in the society-room during the hours of meeting.” The societies were deeply concerned with maintaining the standards of the crafts they represented and thereby providing assurance that their membership included all the best workmen in the community.

Among their other objectives, the early local unions already sought those things most commonly associated with movements of organized workers ever since – higher wages, shorter hours, and improved working conditions. The attempts on the part of employers to lower standards by hiring untrained workers – foreigners and boys, eventually women – also led to vigorous efforts to enforce a shop closed to employment of non-society members, in other words a “closed shop.” The New York Typographical Society complained bitterly that the superabundance of learners, run-away apprentices, and halfway journeymen undermined the wage rates of “full-fledged workers.” Like many other societies, it maintained a strict rule that none of its

members should work in any shop that employed workers who did not belong to the organization. There were many turnouts in this and later periods against employers who tried to hire artisans or mechanics who were not union members in good standing, and the society regulations were rigidly upheld. The pressure being exerted against craftsmen appears, in fact, to have led to a more concentrated effort to establish the principle of the closed shop than in any later period. The Journeymen Cordwainers of New York not only had a specific provision in its constitution against working in any nonunion establishment, but was also prepared to impose fines upon any journeyman who came to the city and did not join the society within a month.

In their dealings with employers, the societies introduced the principles of collective bargaining. In the case of the Philadelphia shoemakers, a deputation had “waited upon the employers with an offer of compromise” as early as 1799, and many instances might be cited of journeymen submitting a price list and coming to terms after protracted negotiations. When agreements had been reached between a society and the employers, a member of the former was often designated “to walk around” from shop to shop to see that it was being kept. In other instances, early unions set up “tramping committees” to supervise enforcement of the contract.

The strikes, or turnouts, as they were more frequently called – whereby the workers sought to uphold their interests when wage negotiations failed, employers refused to abide by the terms of an agreement, or nonmembers of the society were employed – were generally peaceful. The employees simply quit their jobs and stayed at home until some sort of settlement could be reached. The struggle appears often to have been fought out in the newspapers rather than in violent action. Workers and employers would put their respective cases before the public through notices in the press.

There were, however, occasions when strikers took more forceful measures. Six journeymen stayed on the job during a turnout of Philadelphia shoemakers and were kept hidden in their employer's garret. The strikers kept up a sharp eye for them and, when they briefly emerged one Sunday night to visit a nearby tavern, beat them up severely. On another occasion, when a shop was boycotted because of refusal to accept the prescribed wage scales and the employer advertised for 50 new journeymen, the strikers established what was in effect a picket line and forcefully maintained it. There was deep resentment against those who would take the place of strikers, and attacks were not unusual upon strikebreakers, who were already being called “scabs.”

Noisy demonstrations and sometimes violence marked the rather frequent turnouts of sailors. During one strike in New York, in which the seamen demanded an increase in wages from \$10 to \$14 a week, so much turmoil was created that constables broke up a parade of strikers. Another time, the sailors tried to storm a vessel whose owner had especially aroused their ire. Learning of the planned assault, a group of citizens took over the defense of the vessel and, when the strikers moved in behind a drum

and five corps with colors flying, “they were three times repulsed, with broken and bloody noses.”

Law versus Labor

The growth of journeymen societies and their militant activity were matters of mounting concern to employers. They in turn soon began to cooperate to block demands for higher wages and to combat the closed shop. While the journeymen had organized in self-defense as changing economic conditions undermined their former independent status, the masters also found themselves hard pressed to maintain their position in an increasingly competitive capitalist society. When they were unable to meet the challenge of organized employees on their own ground, they sought protection through the courts and attacked the journeymen societies as combinations or conspiracies in restraint of trade.

The first of such actions was the prosecution, in 1806, of the Journeymen Cordwainers of Philadelphia. The case grew out of one of the recurrent strikes for higher wages, and the trial judge proved to be a sympathetic supporter of the employers. In his charge to the jury, he characterized the strike as “pregnant with public mischief and private injury,” letting the jurors know what verdict he expected.

“A combination of workmen to raise their wages,” the judge declared, “may be considered in a two-fold point of view; one is to benefit themselves...the other is to injure those who do not join their society. The rule of law condemns both.” The grounds for such a decision were found in the old common-law principle that wherever two or more persons conspired to do something jointly, even though they were individually entitled to take such action, the public interest was endangered. While its application to labor organizations which sought no more than an increase in wages would appear to have raised some doubts even in the judge's own mind, he quickly brushed them aside.

Four years later, the Journeymen Cordwainers of New York, and then in 1815 another organization of Pittsburgh shoemakers, were indicted on similar charges of criminal conspiracy. On both occasions, the court again found for the employers. The emphasis, however, had somewhat shifted from outright condemnation of any combination to raise wages. The New York judge did not wholly deny the right of workingmen to organize for such a purpose, but he declared that the means they were employing “were of a nature too arbitrary and coercive, and went to deprive their fellow citizens of rights as precious as any they contended for.” In the Pittsburgh case a further point was stressed. A combination of workingmen attempting to enforce their demands by concerted action against an employer was said to be an illegal conspiracy, not only because of its injurious effect upon the employer, but also because it was prejudicial to the interests of the community.

These conspiracy cases aroused widespread resentment among workingmen. Were

all other combinations, among merchants, politicians, sportsmen, “ladies and gentlemen for balls, parties, and banquets” to be permitted, they asked, and only the poor laborers combining against starvation to be indicted?

“The name of freedom is but a shadow,” read one appeal to the public, “if, for doing what the laws of the country authorize, we are to have taskmasters to measure out our pittance of subsistence – if we are to be torn from our firesides for endeavouring to obtain a fair and just support for our families, and if we are to be treated as felons and murderers only for asserting our right to take or refuse what we deem an adequate reward for our labor.”

The issue was injected into local politics. Federalists and Jeffersonian Republicans were at the time engaged in a bitter controversy over the general use of English common law in the United States, and the latter considered the application of what they termed its undemocratic principles to labor unions a challenge to the whole cause of liberty. The right of association could not be divorced from other fundamental rights, the Republicans declared, and they zealously took up the workingmen's cause. An 1806 editorial in the *Philadelphia Aurora* asked: “Was there anything in the Constitution of the United States or in the Constitution of Pennsylvania which gave one man a right to say to another what should be the price of labor? There was not. It was by the English common law that such things became possible.”

The controversy was to continue for many years to come, but the decisions against the workingmen stood. They did not stop the further organization of labor societies nor wholly prevent the use of strikes and boycotts. When employers resorted to the courts, however, workingmen were hard pressed to defend themselves against charges of conspiracy. Principles established in these early labor conspiracy cases remained in effect well into the future. Even when unions had become recognized as legally valid institutions, courts continued to insist that closed-shop arrangements infringed the constitutional rights of nonunion members and that strikes, often accompanied by violence, violated the rights of the community.

The Growth of Labor Organization

If these cases were a first blow at the early movement for labor organization, the new unions were soon confronted by a much more serious threat to their existence. In 1819, the country suffered a severe depression. As business activity contracted and the demand for labor automatically declined, even skilled workers found it increasingly difficult to get jobs. They could no longer afford to hold out for higher wages or seek to enforce a closed shop. They were driven to accept whatever jobs were offered, regardless of wages or working conditions. In such circumstances, the young labor unions collapsed. While some of them managed to survive, the great majority fell by the wayside as economic distress spread.

This was to be a recurrent phenomenon during the nineteenth century. Labor unions

thrived in periods of prosperity when the rising demand for workers gave their members effective bargaining power. They suffered whenever depression and the scarcity of jobs forced workers to look out for their own interests, no matter how it might affect other workers. Labor did not succeed even partially in maintaining union strength during hard times until the 1890s. This was far in the future, however.

The newly organized unions of the opening years of the nineteenth century were so local in scope and so weak that they had no chance whatsoever of holding the line when employers aggressively took advantage of every opportunity to break down wage scales and undermine the closed shop. But in what was to become a familiar pattern, returning prosperity after 1822 led to a reemergence of unionism. The few societies of artisans and mechanics that had managed to survive the depression took a new lease on life as the bargaining position of their members was strengthened, and new organizations sprang up to replace the ones that had succumbed.

Not only were the societies of journeymen printers and cordwainers, tailors and carpenters, and other skilled workers revived, but for the first time there was a tentative beginning of organization among factory workers in the textile mills of New England. Moreover, these new unions were especially active and did not hesitate to resort to strikes and boycotts to enforce their demands. Successful turnouts for both higher wages and shorter working hours were reported by tailors in Buffalo, ship carpenters in Philadelphia, cabinetmakers in Baltimore, and journeymen painters, tailors, stonecutters, and even common laborers in New York. The organization of mill hands also led to the first strike on the part of female workers when the weavers at Pawtucket, Rhode Island, turned out in 1824. The meeting at which the women agreed on this action was reported in the *National Gazette*: "It was conducted, however strange it may appear, without noise, or scarcely a single speech."

Even more significant than the revival and militancy of these local labor societies was a further step in the organization of labor that went beyond limited craft lines. In 1827, a Mechanics' Union of Trade Associations was established in Philadelphia, which was, in effect, an association of unions, or a "city central." It was the first labor organization in the country that brought together the workers of more than a single craft, and it aimed to make possible concerted action by workers in Philadelphia on a citywide basis.

This new association grew out of a strike by carpenters, who were demanding a ten-hour day and had obtained the support of such other members of the building trades as bricklayers, painters, and glaziers. The strike failed, but the experience in working together led to a call for more permanent organization. All existing labor societies were asked to join the association, and those trades that had no unions were requested to organize at once and send delegates.

The Mechanics' Union was not primarily concerned with such limited goals as higher wages and shorter hours, even though it had grown out of a strike for the ten-hour day. A new note was introduced into the activity of labor societies when the broad

issue of equality for producers in general was raised. The changes effected by the new economic order had aroused among the workers increasing concern over their social as well as economic status. The Philadelphia labor leaders sought some means to maintain the position of workers in the face of what appeared to be a hardening of class lines caused by the growth of larger regional and even national markets, and the ensuing growth in both the scale of productive enterprises and the wealth and power of their entrepreneurial owners. Journeymen and mill hands thought of themselves as the real producers, in contrast to the emerging parasitic capitalists who neither toiled nor benefited society. In fact, the former believed that labor produced all value and that labor was both prior to and superior to capital. Committed to an embryonic labor theory of value, these Philadelphia workers argued that the labor movement promoted the prosperity and welfare of the entire community. For the first but not last time, leaders of the labor movement saw their organizations as the beneficiaries of the entire community of toilers and their families, and not solely of union members.

“If the mass of people were enabled by their labour to procure for themselves and families a full and abundant supply of the comforts and conveniences of life,” the preamble of the new organizations' constitution stated, “the consumption of articles, particularly of dwellings, furniture and clothing, would amount to at least twice the quantity it does at present, and of course the demand, by which employers are enabled either to subsist or accumulate, would likewise be increased in an equal proportion...The real object, therefore, of this association, is to avert, if possible, the desolating evils which must inevitably arise from a depreciation of the intrinsic value of human labour...and to assist, in conjunction with such other institutions of this nature as shall hereafter be formed throughout the union, in establishing a just balance of power, both mental, moral, political and scientific, between all the various classes and individuals which constitute society at large.”

Such aims had definite political implications. The Mechanics' Union of Trade Associations of Philadelphia, indeed, never engaged in direct trade-union activity but turned at once to politics. It appealed to the artisans and mechanics of Philadelphia to “throw off the trammels of party spirit, and unite under the banner of equal rights.” It also called for the nomination of candidates for local office who would represent the interests of the working classes.

3

THE GROWTH OF THE MARKET AND LABOR'S RESPONSE

As the economy recovered from the depression of 1819, the nation experienced a surge of economic growth linked to the rise of “King Cotton.” Flush times in the new cotton fields of Alabama and Mississippi spread prosperity across the nation. Upper South planters enriched themselves either by selling their slaves for transport farther south and west or themselves purchasing plantations and growing cotton for export in the more fertile soils of the lower South. The Mississippi and Ohio rivers brought northern agricultural and manufactured products south for purchase by plantation owners or for shipment from New Orleans abroad. New York bankers and merchants thrived by financing cotton plantation expansion, insuring and collateralizing slave labor, and supplying domestic and foreign manufactured goods to planters. The southern cotton trade, together with the completion of the Erie Canal that tied New York to the Midwest via the Great Lakes, made New York harbor the nation's busiest port. Southern cotton supplied the multiplying textile mills of New England, and New England manufacturers in turn supplied the cheap cotton garments and shoes to clothe plantation slaves. Slave labor, then, underwrote economic expansion, the rise of capitalist markets, and embryonic industrial growth while creating a wealthy and powerful class of plantation lords, bankers, merchants, and industrialists.

Along the eastern seaboard a polyglot working class took shape. The labor market of coastal cities included an impossibly diverse array of occupations and workers – native-born artisans, Irish dockers, free black day laborers, domestic servants, seamstresses and seamen, laundresses and sex workers, teamsters, barrel makers, street scrapers, and more. Their working lives varied widely, but they shared in common the experience of selling their labor in a society in which the market was broadly redefining social relations and in cities where privation and prosperity not only coexisted but reinforced each other.

To share in the fruits of economic growth and not become wage slaves to the new capitalist masters of the loom, lash, and vault, workers resorted to collective forms of action. They initially created political movements that sought to unite skilled and unskilled white workers in alliance with farmers and petty producers and merchants in a common people's alliance. Simultaneously, they built trade unions to bargain with employers in an effort to share in the rewards of economic growth and to bring a measure of stability to their lives.

Workingmen's Parties

As noted in the previous chapter, unionists in Philadelphia precipitated labor's rising interest in political action. In urging its members to nominate candidates for public office, the Mechanics' Union of Trade Associations in Philadelphia broke fresh ground for labor and inaugurated what was to become a widespread political movement of workingmen's parties. It soon spread to other towns in Pennsylvania; to New York, where wide popular support developed, not only for local parties in New York City itself, but also in many upstate localities; and into Massachusetts and other parts of New England. Ultimately, workingmen's parties were established in at least a dozen states. As far west as Ohio, as well as along the Atlantic seaboard, local groups of farmers, artisans, and mechanics named their own political candidates and in some instances elected them. For a brief time these workingmen's parties were highly important because they sometimes held an actual balance of power between the major parties in local elections.

An equally widespread growth of labor newspapers took place in the early 1830s, with no less than 68 such journals upholding the workingmen's cause and agitating for labor reforms. Their enthusiasm knew no bounds. "From Maine to Georgia, within a few months past," commented the *Newark Village Chronicle* in May 1830, "we discern symptoms of a revolution, which will be second to none save that of '76." "Throughout the vast republic," the *Albany Working Men's Advocate* stated shortly afterwards, "the farmers, mechanics and workingmen are assembling...to impart to its laws and administration those principles of liberty and equality unfolded in the Declaration of Independence."

These developments were early expressions of both the producer ethic enunciated by the Philadelphia labor leaders, and the swelling popular democratic movement, which would be partly absorbed by Jacksonian Democracy, the political tendency galvanized by the era's dominant political figure, President Andrew Jackson. The country rapidly expanded during these years. The opening up of new western territory, the building of turnpikes and canals, the steady growth of manufactures, and the rise of cities created a spirit of buoyant confidence. What the workers of the country basically sought was to prevent the emerging capitalist class from monopolizing for itself the seemingly boundless opportunities of the growing national economy. The workers had newly obtained political power through the removal of property qualifications for voting, and they were ready to use their votes to ensure that producers received a proper share of the wealth they created.

Workers and their allies acted because divisions within society were deepening. Contemporary critics saw, on the one hand, the producing masses, made up of the laboring poor, and, on the other, a wealthy nonproductive capitalist aristocracy bulwarked by special privilege. Banking and other alleged monopolies accentuated social cleavage, and the great majority of the country's workers saw little improvement in the conditions under which they labored, even though trade and commerce expanded and the nation as a whole grew more prosperous.

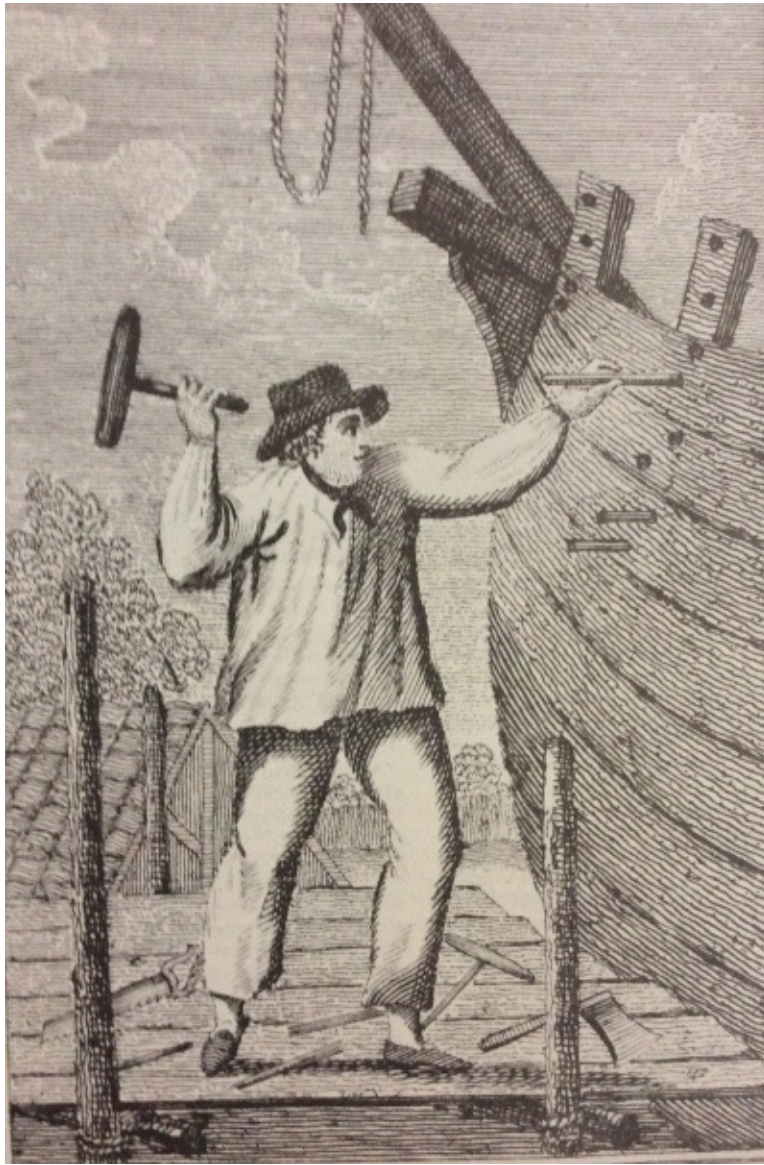


Figure 3.1 Ship carpenter at work, 1807. Shipbuilding, among the most important industries of the early republic, included many skilled crafts and wage laborers. Not surprisingly, port cities like New York and Philadelphia became hotbeds of worker organization. (Library of Congress).

Wages rose, but not in proportion to the rise in the cost of living. Twelve to fifteen hours remained the usual day's work. During the summer, artisans and mechanics were on the job as early as four in the morning, took an hour off for lunch at ten and another for dinner at three, and then quit work only at sunset. They were often paid in paper bank notes, the value of which was constantly fluctuating. Should their employer fail and be unable to pay them, they had no redress. Yet when they could not meet their own obligations, they were liable to imprisonment for debt.

Moreover, the workingmen felt that government was wholly on the side of the capitalists and that its policies were helping to perpetuate the conditions that were depressing the position of all labor. They lacked faith in politicians, whatever their professions of good will, because the men chosen for public office were invariably

representatives of the class that they had come to believe was oppressing them. Heretofore they had been politically helpless to do anything about redressing a balance of power that they saw swinging steadily against them. Armed with the vote, however, they declared themselves unwilling any longer to accept passively policies that in government, finance, or business sought to reserve special privilege for the favored few at the expense of the great majority.

In forming their own parties, workers tried to secure participation in government by members of their own class – the producers – and they were convinced that, in doing so, they were serving the best interests of the people as a whole. Their party platforms vigorously attacked every instance of special privilege, particularly banking monopoly. Indicative of their general objective of equal citizenship, their foremost demand was invariably for free public education. Seeking to secure representation for “the plain people” in every governmental process, they recognized that education for the masses was a first step toward an effective democracy. On more specific grounds, workingmen also demanded abolition of imprisonment for debt and mechanics' lien laws; the revision of a militia system that bore heavily upon the workingman; the direct election of all public officials; greater equality in taxation; and the complete separation of church and state.

The political agitation of the workers and the formation of their local parties occurred simultaneously with the emergence and rise of Jacksonian Democracy. Although Jacksonian Democracy arose largely in response to agrarian interests, including those of the large slaveholders (such as Jackson himself), it contained a core of antimonopolism and producer ideology that appealed to some urban workers. Arising independently of Jacksonianism, the local labor parties did occasionally march behind Jackson's banners, especially when Jackson and his supporters lauded “the humble members of society” and attacked capitalist parasites.

The local parties formed by the workers were to become inextricably involved in the complex and shifting political patterns of the 1830s. Whatever their ultimate fate, however, their influence in quickening the demand for reform and promoting progressive principles was important. Commenting on the course of one workingmen's party in Massachusetts, a Whig newspaper sourly charged that there was no distinction between “Working-Menism and Jacksonism.” If this was not necessarily true, it did reveal the link between the more radical anti-entrepreneurial side of Jacksonian Democracy and the influence of working-class politics.

The significance of the growing political power of workingmen was demonstrated in other ways. In opposition to Jackson's espousal of the cause of the common man, the newly organized Whigs for a time sought to uphold Federalist Party traditions that favored government by the rich and the well-born. Whigs especially attacked the proposition of “throwing open the polls to every man that walks.” But when they found themselves unable to stem the growing political power of small farmers and urban workers, they began to shift their ground. Attacking Jackson for emphasizing class

distinctions, they maintained that there was no justification for setting off aristocracy and democracy as opposing forces in American national life. “These phrases, *higher and lower orders*,” one Whig editor declared, “are of European origin and have no place in our Yankee dialect.” However conservative their ideas might still be, it was no longer politically feasible for Whigs to uphold aristocratic principles, and they were compelled to recognize the right of all classes in society to share in government.

By the end of the Jacksonian period, the original workingmen's parties had long since fallen by the wayside, but the producing masses of the nation had won the political recognition that had been their first objective. Both major parties continually angled for labor's support. Indeed, the extension of the franchise and the growing political awareness among workers caused the major political parties to appeal directly, as never before, for labor's vote.

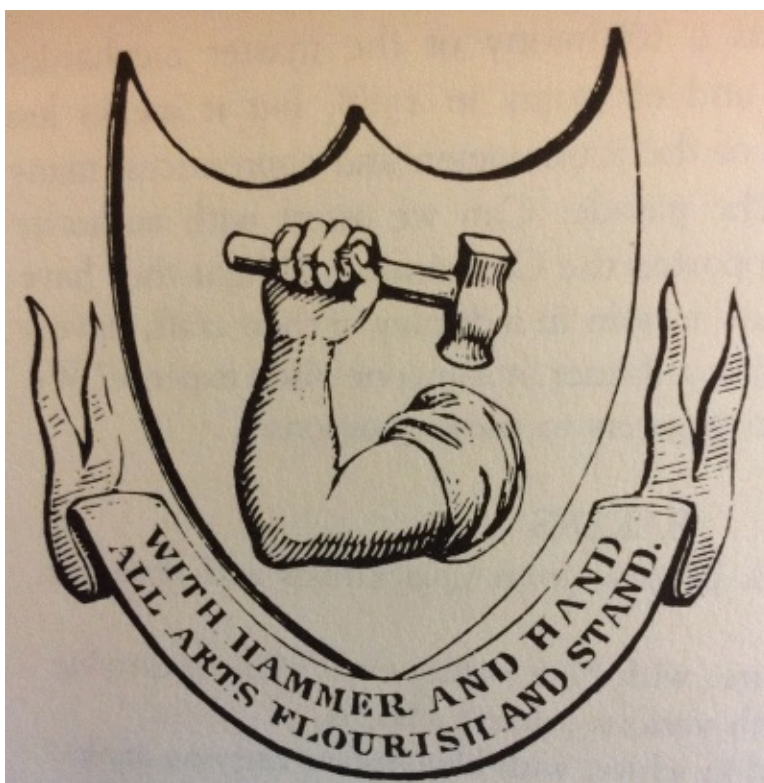


Figure 3.2 “By Hammer and Hand All Arts Do Stand” was a common refrain among Jacksonian-era skilled workers. It spoke to their belief that free labor provided the foundation of their society and democracy. (Alexander Anderson Scrapbooks, New York Public Library).

Among the various local workingmen's parties, the experience of the one organized in New York is at once most revealing of the influence they were temporarily able to exert and of the complicated factors that brought about their collapse. This particular party grew out of a meeting of “mechanics and others” that had been summoned on April 23, 1829, to protest against any lengthening in the prevailing ten-hour day already won in that city by the early trade unions. Deciding to broaden the scope of their activity, the delegates sent out a call for a larger meeting. Some 6,000 persons

attended it, and those gathered adopted a set of resolutions dealing with the broad principles of workingmen's rights. Consideration of ways and means for implementing the program was then delegated to its Committee of Fifty, which, on October 19, issued a manifesto that vigorously attacked the existing social order and called for a convention to nominate for the New York assembly political candidates from among those "who live by their own labour *And None Other.*" Four days later, this convention met. After all nonworkers, "such as bankers, brokers, rich men etc.," had been expressly warned to leave the hall, the workingmen agreed upon an assembly slate that included a printer, two machinists, two carpenters, a painter, and a grocer.

Leadership

From the very first, however, rivalry and intrigue over the leadership of New York's new workingmen's party threatened to split its ranks. It was to be dominated by several highly individualistic reformers whose philosophy and ideas caused heated controversy. Four such persons stand out especially for their influence on the labor party in New York and on the course of workingmen's political activity in general.

In its earliest stages, New York's party was largely influenced by Thomas Skidmore, a machinist by trade, who had been instrumental in persuading the workers to broaden their program as a means of "coercing their aristocratic oppressors" into maintaining the ten-hour day. Wholly self-educated, he was totally committed to the workers' cause and had developed a radical philosophy that questioned the entire basis for existing property rights. He believed that, in giving up his original and natural right to land to become a smith, a weaver, a builder, or other laborer, every man was entitled to a guarantee from society "that reasonable toil shall enable him to live as comfortably as others." Any system that failed to provide such social security was inherently wrong in his opinion, and he hoped to lead a workingmen's revolt in favor of basic political reforms.

Skidmore's views were shortly to be set forth in a formidable treatise he comprehensively entitled *The Rights of Man to Property; Being a Proposition to Make It Equal among the Adults of the Present Generation; and to Provide for Its Equal Transmission to Every Individual of Each Succeeding Generation, on Arriving at the Age of Maturity.* Skidmore specifically proposed that all debts and property claims should be at once canceled, and that the assets of society as a whole be sold at public auction, with every citizen having equal purchasing power. After such a communistic division of property, the maintenance of equality would be assured by doing away with all inheritance.

The members of the Working Men's Party of New York allowed Skidmore to draw up their original platform. It was based upon the forthright premise that "all human society, our own included as well as every other, is constructed radically wrong," and it condemned both the private ownership of land and the inheritance of wealth. Its

more specific provisions, however, set forth the objectives fundamental to the workingmen's movement everywhere: communal education, abolition of imprisonment for debt, mechanics' lien laws, and the elimination of licensed monopolies.

A second leader, who accepted at least in part Skidmore's program but was to be far more influential in the workingmen's movement in these and later years, was George Henry Evans. A printer by trade, he founded the *Working Man's Advocate*, perhaps the most important labor journal of these years, as the organ for the New York party, and he turned out a continuous stream of articles and editorials. Reflecting the influence of Skidmore, Evans's paper first carried the slogan: "All children are entitled to equal education; all adults to equal property; and all mankind, to equal privileges." He later grew more moderate, but he remained throughout his life a strong advocate of basic property reforms.

As if such leadership were not enough to condemn the Working Men's Party in the eyes of all conservatives, it was further damned by the participation in its activities of another brace of radical reformers: Robert Dale Owen and Frances 'Fanny' Wright. Having but recently moved to New York from the cooperative community at New Harmony, Indiana, where the former's father, the English reformer Robert Owen, had attempted to put into practice his socialistic program for replacing the factory system, Owen and Wright naturally seized upon the workingmen's movement as a medium for promoting their own particular brand of reform. They had founded a paper, the *Free Enquirer*, to publicize their ideas, and it was soon campaigning vigorously in support of the new party.

Robert Dale Owen was 28 years old at the time – a short, blue-eyed, sandy-haired young man whose idealism and earnest sincerity gave him real influence. In spite of a rasping voice, he was a forceful speaker at workingmen's meetings, and he was also a prolific and able writer. He believed strongly in a more equitable distribution of wealth, was opposed to organized religion, and advocated more liberal divorce laws, but his primary interest was in free, public education. He single-mindedly believed that it was the only effective means to regenerate society, and he had developed an elaborate educational program calling for "state guardianship."

All children, whether of the rich or of the poor, according to this scheme, were to be removed from their homes and placed in national schools where they would receive the same food, be dressed in the same simple clothing, and taught the same subjects in order to promote the general cause of democracy. "Thus may luxury, may pride, may ignorance be banished from among us," read one report on state guardianship, "and we may become what fellow citizens ought to be, a nation of brothers." While the workers did not wholly approve of this particular program, Owen contributed a great deal to their educational ideas.

Fanny Wright was at once the most zealous, the most colorful, and, in the eyes of contemporaries, the most dangerous of the reformers associated with the Working Men's Party. Although a free thinker and so outspoken an advocate of women's rights

and easier divorce that she was generally accused of advocating free love, she did not look the part of a radical agitator. Tall, slender, with wavy chestnut hair, she completely dazzled the workingmen's audiences she constantly addressed. Conservatives were as much shocked by the daring effrontery of a female appearing on the lecture platform as by her unorthodox views, but few of those who actually heard her speak were wholly immune to her charms. "She has always been to me one of the sweetest of sweet memories," Walt Whitman, taken to one of her meetings by his carpenter father, was to write in later years. "We all loved her; fell down before her: her very appearance seemed to enthrall us."

Fanny Wright was born in Scotland, and, falling early under the influence of the English reformer Jeremy Bentham, as a young woman became the militant champion of reform that she was to remain throughout her life. On first coming to the United States, she had taken up the cause of enslaved blacks and established at Neshoba, Tennessee, a colony where she tried to prepare groups of slaves, purchased at her own expense, for freedom and eventual colonization outside of the United States. When this project failed, she joined the community at New Harmony and then accompanied Robert Dale Owen to New York to cooperate with him in editing the *Free Enquirer*.

Undaunted by her disappointments at Neshoba and New Harmony, and with her zeal for reform in no way abated, Wright enthusiastically adopted the workingmen's movement. She saw in it not only a protest against social inequality but also a basic revolt on the part of the oppressed for which history offered no parallel. "What distinguishes the present from every other struggle in which the human race has been engaged," she wrote in the *Free Enquirer*, "is, that the present is, evidently, openly and acknowledgedly, a war of class...It is the ridden people of the earth who are struggling to throw from their backs the 'booted and spurred' riders whose legitimate title to starve as well as work them to death will no longer pass current; it is labour rising up against idleness, industry against money; justice against law and against privilege."

The newspapers railed against Fanny Wright, dismissed her as "an exotic of some notoriety," and called her "the great Red Harlot of Infidelity." But no matter what abuse they flung at her, she boldly continued to express her "alarming principles" on public platforms and in the press.

When the Working Men's Party candidates, a slate of tradesmen and artisans, took the field under such sponsorship in the New York elections of 1829, the conservatives were nonplussed. They at first attempted to dismiss any possible threat to their own interests, but, as the vote of the laboring classes appeared to be swinging heavily behind the new party, they became thoroughly aroused. "We understand with astonishment and alarm," both the *Courier* and *Enquirer* protested, "that the 'Infidel Ticket,' miscalled the 'Workingmen's Ticket,' is far ahead of every other Assembly ticket in the city. What a state of things we have reached! A ticket got up openly and

avowedly in opposition to social order, in opposition to the rights of property, running ahead of every other!"

In the result, such fears proved to be exaggerated. The Working Men's Party did not sweep the city. Nevertheless, it polled some 6,000 votes, out of a total of 21,000 cast in the election, and sent one of its candidates – a carpenter – to the assembly.

Nevertheless, a growing divergence in the views of the party's self-constituted leaders, and a revolt on the part of the rank-and-file membership against Thomas Skidmore, soon led to internal dissension and factional fights. At a meeting in December 1829, a resolution was adopted in which the workingmen explicitly stated that they had "no desire or intention of disturbing the right of property in individuals, or the public." As Robert Dale Owen then moved in to try to take over Skidmore's repudiated leadership, opposition also arose to his program of state guardianship. The workingmen were ready to make education their foremost party plank, but they would not support "any attempt to palm upon any man, or set of men, the peculiar doctrines of infidelity, agrarianism, or sectarian principles." They declared that the school system should be based "upon a plan that shall leave to the father and the affectionate mother the enjoyment of the society of their offspring."

The consequences of these inner conflicts, in part promoted by politicians who sought workingmen's support for their own purposes, was a three-way split in the original organization. Skidmore and the few followers he could hold in line established a straight-out Agrarian Workingmen's Party. Another faction, whose interests George Henry Evans promoted in the *Working Man's Advocate* and which still garnered the support of the Owenites and Wright, struggled to maintain the original party. A third group broke away under new leadership, with the support of the *Evening Journal*, another labor news sheet, and became known as the North American Party, after the name of the hotel where its meetings were held.

Between the last two groups especially there was embittered and continuing strife. They were soon endorsing rival politicians, putting rival tickets in the field, flinging verbal brickbats at each other through the pages of their respective organs, and breaking up each other's meetings. The original Working Men's Party, finding itself under attack because of the radical views of Owen and Wright, frantically denied the implications of these charges. "The cries of Infidelity and Agrarianism are mere political scarecrows," it asserted, "such as were formerly set up to terrify the democrats of 1801." The North American Party was accused of selling out to local politicians, and workingmen were called upon to avoid "the political trimmer, the pettifogger, the office hunter."

While the intra-party contest raged in New York City, local parties sprang up in such cities as Albany, Troy, Schenectady, Rochester, Syracuse, and Auburn. Plans were made to hold a state convention of workingmen and to nominate candidates for governor and lieutenant governor. It was finally summoned, with 78 delegates from 13 counties, but the split in New York City proved disastrous when rival delegations

attended the convention. The professional politicians took over and succeeded in winning the workingmen's vote in support of a Democratic Party office-seeker. "The Working Men Betrayed," shrieked the *Advocate*, and declared that its adherents would nominate their own slate.

In the resulting confusion, the election of 1830 found three factions of workingmen each putting forward its own nominees in the city elections and endorsing rival candidates for the governorship. Without cohesion or unity, the Working Men's Party as originally constituted fell easy prey to professional political influences and the blandishments of Tammany Hall, the club that controlled New York City's Democratic Party, and it broke up. The Democrats won both the state and local elections, and there was an end to any further effective organization among the forces of labor in New York. The *Working Man's Advocate* insisted that nothing could so effectually prevent the final accomplishment of labor's objectives as a coalition with any other party for the temporary purpose of electing particular men. The workers' votes, however, had already swung over to Tammany.

Political Action

If the experience of the New York artisans and mechanics in trying to set up an independent political organization was short lived, very much the same story might be told of the activities of other workingmen's parties. In many instances, particularly in Pennsylvania and Massachusetts, they succeeded for a time in aligning the labor vote behind their own candidates and exercising an important and occasionally decisive influence in local politics. But just as in New York, internal friction and external pressures led to factionalism and gradual disintegration. Self-constituted leaders sought to promote their own visions of reform, which, as in the case of the programs promoted by Skidmore, Evans, Owen, and Wright, sometimes failed to interest workers. And when reformers were ousted, politicians were quick to move in to take over control and try to swing the workingmen's votes for one or another of the major parties.

In Massachusetts, an attempt to bring about a broader political organization of workers came in 1832 with the formation of the New England Association of Farmers, Mechanics, and Other Workingmen. The successes won by this group in local elections inspired the nomination of a governor, but the association could not avoid entanglement in major party politics, with its own gubernatorial candidate urging the working class to rally in support of the Democrats.

In spite of the failure of the workingmen's parties themselves, they did cause both Whigs and Democrats to appeal for the labor vote by adopting several of the workers' demands. Generally, Democrats proved more adept than Whigs in attracting worker support. When Jackson vigorously indicted monopoly and special privilege in his war against the Second Bank of the United States, many workers cheered him on.

More working-class voters than not probably supported Jackson as the foe of monopoly and the friend of producers in the election of 1832.

The conservatives gave warning in terms that were to be repeated often in the future. "Elect Jackson," one factory owner told his employees, "and the grass will grow in your streets, owls will build nests in the mills, and foxes burrow in the highways." But many workers turned out nevertheless to help return Jackson to office. In New York they marched to the polls singing:

Mechanics, cartmen, laborers,
Must form a close connection,
And show the rich aristocrats,
Their powers at this election...
Yankee Doodle, smoke 'em out
The proud, the banking faction
None but such as Hartford Feds
Oppose the poor and Jackson.

The twists and turns of politics in the 1830s was one thing, but the practical achievement of the reforms workers sought was another. As popular support for the original aims of the workingmen's parties gathered increasing force, the major parties responded. Steady progress was made in meeting the demands that first flared forth in the labor press.

A first case in point was educational reform. At the head of the editorial column in almost every workingmen's newspaper was the demand that figured so prominently in the campaign of the New York party: equal universal education. At this time, only a vague consideration was being given to the needs of children whose parents were unable to afford private institutions. New England was ahead of the rest of the country in having tax-supported schools, but even in such populous and wealthy states as New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Delaware (to say nothing of the new states in the West or the states of the South), the only provision for the children of workingmen and other poor families was the charity school – inadequate and socially degrading. The Public School Society of New York reported in 1829 that there were over 24,000 children between the ages of 5 and 15 in that city who had no schooling whatsoever. Some years later, a more extensive report in Pennsylvania declared that 250,000 out of the 400,000 children in that state did not attend school. For the country as a whole, estimates placed the total at over one million.

The workingmen resented equally the lack of opportunity for an education as reflected in these figures and the odium attached to such public schools as there were because they were charitable institutions. Workingmen insisted upon the importance of free, republican education available on terms of complete equality for

the children of both the rich and the poor. They based their position on the philosophy of equal rights inherent in the Declaration of Independence and bulwarked it with the unassailable argument that, as future citizens, it was imperative that all children have the education that would enable them to vote intelligently. Never have a people had greater faith in education – “the greatest blessing bestowed upon mankind” – than this generation of Americans. The workers could not have been more determined in demanding it for their children as a right.

Opinions differed as to the type of education that should be provided, but stress was in most instances laid upon the importance of practical training as well as the liberal arts. Public institutions, it was urged in another report of the Philadelphia workingmen, should be “so located as to command health, exercise at the various mechanic arts, or agriculture, at the same time [that] a knowledge of the natural sciences, and other useful literature is taught.”

Of course, the educational campaign also had support outside the working class. It was taken up by many reformers and attracted increasingly wider attention. Even conservatives began to speak out in favor of public education. If common people were to vote, then they had to be taught in public schools to respect social distinctions and property rights, asserted Daniel Webster, the Massachusetts Whig. In other words, public education could accomplish conservative as well as liberal ends.

Soon, the campaign waged so vigorously for public education began to bear fruit. State legislatures took the issue under more serious consideration than they ever had before and new laws were gradually adopted, first authorizing and then requiring local communities to levy taxes for public education. The turn perhaps came when Pennsylvania, where workingmen had been so active, finally adopted a free, tax-supported school system in 1834. The bill embodying this program narrowly missed defeat. In response to a protesting petition with 32,000 signatures, the Senate tried to substitute a provision “for the education of the poor gratis.” But the principle of a public school system free to all on terms of equality triumphed. Other states fell into line, and the victory for which workingmen had so long contested was ultimately won.

Another issue for which labor battled hard and successfully during this period was the abolition of imprisonment for debt. The antiquated practice of throwing a man into jail when he could not meet his financial obligations was still in almost universal effect in the 1820s. The Boston Prison Discipline Society estimated that at the close of the decade some 75,000 persons were being imprisoned annually for debts and that, in at least half of the cases, the sums involved were less than \$25. In one instance, a woman was taken from her home and from caring for her two children for a debt of \$3.60; in another, a man was thrown into jail for a \$5 debt owed his grocer, even though it had been contracted while the debtor was ill. Thirty-two persons were found in one prison for debts that in every case were less than \$1.

Obviously this system bore most heavily on the poor, and its injustice rankled deeply.

“A law that makes poverty a crime,” one workingman political candidate declared, “and a poor man a felon, after these very laws have made poverty inevitable, is not only cruel and oppressive, but absurd and revolting.” Adding to the miseries of the situation, the debtors' jails were shockingly overcrowded and unsanitary, and there was often no provision for feeding the prisoners, who remained wholly dependent upon private charity. In New Jersey, according to one report, there were “food, bedding and fuel” for criminals, but for the debtors only “walls, bars and bolts.”

The workingman's drive first led to the passage of laws whereby the poor debtor could win release by taking a bankruptcy oath, and then to limitations upon the amounts for which he could be imprisoned. But soon the states were one by one forced to accept the inescapable logic of abolishing the system altogether. Ohio took this step in 1828, and the next decade saw its example followed by New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, Virginia, and other states. The practice still lingered on in some parts of the country, but its complete disappearance was clearly foreshadowed by the end of the 1830s.

The attack upon the militia system, largely promoted by workingmen's parties, was also successful. In most states, attendance at annual drills and parades, generally lasting three days, was compulsory for every citizen. The militiamen had to pay all their own expenses and provide their own equipment, while failure to attend was punished by fines or imprisonment. For workingmen, such regulations meant not only a loss in wages while attending the drill, but also what were for them heavy expenses. The rich, on the other hand, could easily afford to escape their obligations by paying the fines without difficulty. After 1830, compulsory service was either modified or completely abolished.

Other instances of economic or social advance owed much to the workers. Their demand for mechanics' lien laws (which would protect workers in the event of their employers' bankruptcy), at once taken up by Tammany Hall in New York, led to the widespread adoption of such legislation. Their opposition to the existing auction system, to general incorporation laws, to the issuance by local banks of small currency notes, and to other economic abuses was an important factor in the passage of remedial laws.

The rise of workingmen's parties did not presage Marxian socialism, but it did signify a realization by many workers that capitalism bore down on them unfairly, and it did place in question society's dominant property relations. It added to the political agenda many demands associated with the labor theory of value.

As internal dissension and the manipulation of major party politicians disrupted the labor parties, the workers' movement began to focus on winning improved material conditions. The rapid economic growth between 1829 and 1836 increased the demand for labor and suggested to workers that trade-union economic action offered far greater possibilities for success than politics.

Yet political action had produced several substantial gains for workers. Memories of this success would in the future lead to further instances of labor-based political action. But the history of labor parties in the Jacksonian era also carried less positive lessons. It showed that internal divisions among working-class leaders sowed dissension among the rank and file, and that the major parties could preempt labor's demands. Politics, moreover, revealed a split personality among many workers. On the one hand, many wanted to reform or abolish capitalism as it then existed. On the other hand, many more merely wanted to share in the benefits of an emerging capitalism.

Unlike their contemporaries in Europe, American workers did not have to unite behind radical or socialist leaderships to obtain the vote. It was already in the hands of white men to use when worker movements began to emerge on a broader scale. The continued buoyant growth of the economy, the spreading of population across the continent, and persistent infusions of new immigrants from abroad combined to keep American workers and the movements they built internally divided.

If for a time the workingmen's parties of the 1830s seemed to foreshadow the possible creation of a labor party, their decline disclosed the limits of independent working-class political action. Still, for those workingmen and women, although the latter lacked the right to vote, whose lack of special skills reduced their marketplace and workplace bargaining power, political action remained an arena in which they could promote their cause.

4

LABOR ORGANIZING IN THE 1830S

The original workingmen's parties rose and fell within a brief span of time. The return of the early trade unions to economic action was in many ways a far more significant development. During these years in which marked progress was being made in social reform in the country as a whole – particularly during President Andrew Jackson's second administration from 1833 to 1837 – union activity was more widespread and more militant than it would be again for several decades.

Workingmen continued to experience degradation of their changing social position. The revived trade unions were concerned primarily with wages and hours, but they also reflected the desire of their members to regain status in the community. The old society they had known appeared to be dissolving, with formerly independent craftsmen sinking to the level of wage earners; artisans and mechanics more than ever hoped through union membership to reaffirm the dignity of labor and to win greater public recognition of their social as well as economic values.

“As the line of distinction between employer and employed *widened*,” wrote one labor leader in 1834, “the condition of the latter inevitably verges toward a state of vassalage...hostile to the best interests of the community, as well as the spirit and genius of our government.” The trade societies sought to combat this trend by creating solidarity among workers.

Conditions in the early 1830s encouraged the growth of unions. On the one hand, mounting prosperity strengthened the bargaining power of workers; on the other, determined efforts on the part of employers to hold down wages in the face of rising prices forced them, too, to organize in self-defense. Not only did trade societies among almost all classes of workers multiply rapidly, but further attempts were made to link these local unions in citywide federations to promote labor unity. Still broader organization began, foreshadowing the establishment of a truly national labor movement. Moreover, the aggressive attitude of the members of these unions led to a wave of strikes that provided a dramatic chapter in the long struggle of workers to establish their rights.

So general did this activity become that no trade appeared to be immune to its contagious militancy. “The barbers have struck,” the *New York Times* exclaimed in April 1836, “and now all that remains for Editors is to strike, too.”

Union Growth

Never before in time of peace had there been such a rapid increase in the cost of living as that which resulted from the boom of the early 1830s. The easing of bank

credit and the profligate issue of paper money, which were the immediate consequences of Jackson's successful attack upon the Second Bank of the United States, forced prices up all along the line. In New York, flour went from \$5 a barrel in 1834 to \$8 in April 1835 and then to \$12 a year later. Other foodstuffs followed the same upward spiral, clothing and household goods rose phenomenally, and the advance in rents was from 25 to 40 percent over the same period. It was generally estimated that the cost of living increased some 66 percent between 1834 and 1836.

Wages invariably lagged amid this upward march, and the further measures taken by employers to hold down their own costs constituted an even greater threat to workers' living standards. With the virtual collapse of the apprenticeship system in many trades, young half-trained boys were taken on at lower wages than the prevailing rate for journeymen.

Women also were joining the paid labor force in increasing numbers. Employed most commonly as tailoresses, seamstresses, and shoe binders, they now began to find work as printers, cigar makers, and in other trades. Because employers paid women less than men for comparable labor, a committee of the Philadelphia general trades assembly declared in 1836 that "of fifty-eight societies, twenty-four are seriously affected by female labour, to the impoverishment of whole families, and the benefit of none but the employers."

Finally, the use of convict labor was becoming widespread. Mechanics and artisans complained bitterly that, whatever the benefits for the convicts themselves, articles were being manufactured for sale at prices "from 40 to 60 percent below what the honest mechanic, who supports himself and family, can afford."

In such circumstances, there was hardly an urban community in which workingmen were not driven to act together in mutual defense of their interests. In Philadelphia, the cordwainers reorganized, the handloom weavers formed a new society, and bricklayers, plumbers, blacksmiths, cigar makers, comb makers, and saddlers, among other tradesmen, unionized. The older societies in New York were revived, with the printers, cordwainers, and tailors once again in the lead, and with cabinetmakers, hat finishers, basket makers, locksmiths, piano makers, and silk hatters joining the union ranks. The organizations in Baltimore included boot makers, stonecutters, coopers, carpet weavers, and coach makers. The same story could be told of every other city on the Atlantic seaboard, as well as of upstate New York, Washington, DC, Pittsburgh, Louisville, and other manufacturing centers in the West.

BILL OF PRICES,

AGREED ON BY THE

BRICK-LAYERS OF CINCINNATI,

MARCH 1, 1814.

	Dolls. Cts.
Brick laid (labor only) for brick & half walls, per thousand,	3 00
Do. for all exterior 9 inch walls, per thousand,	3 50
Do. for the 3d story of houses, per thousand, extra,	1 00
For finding lime, sand, loam and water, per thousand,	1 00
Outside arches, in front, common size, extra,	1 50
Back and side arches, outside, do. do.	1 00
For all inside arches,	50
Brick cornice, per foot, running, do.	25
Oiling and Penciling per yard, superficial,	12 1-2
For setting door sills,	1 00
For trimmers, common size,	1 00
For laying hearths, do.	1 00
Brick pavement, per yard, superficial,	18 3-4
For filling-in with brick, do.	18 3-4
Ovens, 3 feet by 2 feet 6 inches, or under, each,	5 00
Do. larger, per foot in depth,	2 00
Chimneys to frame houses, per thousand, counted solid,	4 00
Walls, laid Flemish bond, to be counted solid in all cases.	
All other walls, doors and windows <i>only</i> , to be deducted.	
The number of brick to be ascertained by counting them after they are laid.	
Scaffold-boards and cords to be found by the employer.	
We, the subscribers, have duly considered the above prices as low as can be worked for.	

ISAAC STAGG, LOFTUS KEATING, JABEZ C. TUNIS, JONATHAN PANCOAST, HENRY CRAVEN,	SAMUEL BROADWELL, NATHAN DICKS, ELIAS FISHER, JOSEPH PANCOAST.
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CINCINNATI—PRINTED BY LOOKER AND WALLACE.

Figure 4.1 Bricklayers' bill of prices, 1814. This leaflet shows early evidence of skilled workers coming together to set minimum prices for their work. Out of this impulse the first trade organizations would develop. (New York Historical Society).

The further organization among workers other than the traditional mechanics and artisans was making at least some headway. By this time, there was a rapidly developing textile industry in Massachusetts and Rhode Island; factories in Connecticut were turning out clocks and watches; and iron foundries in Pennsylvania presaged the further growth of large-scale industry. In addition to the employees in such establishments, other new groups of wage earners included machinists and engineers, freight handlers, firemen on steamboats, stage drivers, and gatekeepers on turnpikes and canal bridges. While these workers still remained largely unorganized, pioneering unions among the cotton factory operatives, tinsmith and sheet-iron workers, and many other groups won increasing support.

Women also eagerly founded their own trade societies. Baltimore had a United Seamstresses Society (which undertook a strike in 1833); New York had its Ladies'

Shoebinders and Female Bookbinders, as well as a female Union Association; and Philadelphia had a Female Improvement Society. In the cotton textile industry, the first large-scale type of machine factory, young single women, especially in Massachusetts, dominated the labor force. They, too, organized themselves, forming in 1833 the Female Society of Lynn and Vicinity for the Protection and Promotion of Female Industry, and a year later, the Factory Girls' Association.

Although they did not form lasting unions in this period, Irish immigrants and free African Americans, who competed against each other for jobs on the docks or as laborers, also demonstrated a willingness to act collectively – often in self-defense. In January 1834, a strike erupted among the Irish laborers employed digging the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal in Maryland. The disruption was triggered by a dispute between Irishmen from Cork and Longford, but had its deeper roots in the poor pay, authoritarian overseers, and malaria the Irish encountered in their work. Their rebellion was quelled when President Jackson dispatched federal troops to the scene.

Black workers played an important role in the trade of ship caulking in shipyards along the Atlantic coast, even though in many locations whites refused to work alongside them. In 1835, conflict erupted at the Washington Navy Yard when a group of African American ship caulkers were brought in from Baltimore during a period of agitation for a shorter workday. The black caulkers refused to be driven from the yard by hostile whites who opposed their hiring and saw their presence as undermining the unity of the shipyard workers. White fears that blacks might play the role of strikebreakers in the workplaces from which blacks had been excluded did not diminish in the aftermath of this controversy. To the contrary, such fears led whites to exclude blacks from the unions that formed in the mid-nineteenth century.

A National Labor Movement?

The rapid growth and development of trade societies led naturally to a movement for closer association to promote common aims. A precedent for such cooperation had been established by the Mechanics' Union of Trade Associations in Philadelphia. What workers now sought in forming “trades' unions” – that is, unions of local trade societies or central trades councils – was a basis for joint economic activity. The central trades councils, in the words of the constitution of one of these new organizations, were a “compact, formed of Societies and Associations of Mechanics and Working Men, which, having discovered that they were unable to combat the numerous powers arrayed against them, united together for mutual protection.”

The General Trades' Union of New York was the most important of these new central trades councils, but there were comparable organizations in Philadelphia, Boston, Baltimore, Washington, Cincinnati, Pittsburgh, Louisville, and other manufacturing cities. Their number had grown to 13 by 1836, with 52 associated societies in New

York, 53 in Philadelphia, 23 in Baltimore, and 16 in Boston.

The final coordinating step in this activity came in 1834, when the summons went out to establish a national organization embracing all trades. Representatives of local societies in New York, Brooklyn, Boston, Philadelphia, Poughkeepsie, and Newark met in New York and formed the National Trades' Union. Its purposes were to advance the welfare of the laboring classes, promote the establishment of trades' unions in every part of the country, and publish such information as would be useful to mechanics and workingmen. In the light of the failure of the workingmen's parties, its leaders were determined that the new organization should not be drawn off into political activities. The workingmen "belonged to no party," one Massachusetts labor leader declared; "they were neither disciples of Jacksonism nor Clayism, Van Burenism nor Websterism, not any other ism but workeyism."

National organization of the workers did not prove to be effective at this time. Success had to wait upon the nationalizing of business in the years following the Civil War. But the attempt to form such a federation attests the strength and vitality of the labor movement of the 1830s. As the result of the zeal of local societies, city trades councils, and the National Trades' Union, the total number of unionized workers in the country stood somewhere between 44,000 and 131,000 in the mid-1830s, the lower estimate being the more likely number. On a relative basis, so large a number of wage earners would not again be enrolled in union ranks for half a century. In New York, some two-thirds of all the city's workers were said to be members of one or another of its fifty-odd labor unions.

An Urge to Strike

In increasingly active defense of their rights, trade union members did not hesitate either to threaten or actually go out on strike when their employers refused to meet what they felt were their legitimate demands. When employers tried to hold down wages or bring in untrained workers at lower pay, turnouts resulted in almost every trade and in every city. Printers and weavers, tailors and coach makers, masons and bookbinders walked out. Carpenters in New York earning \$1.50 a day went on strike for \$1.75 and, having won it, promptly went on strike again for \$2.

The young women working in New England cotton mills also went on strike. "One of the leaders mounted a pump," the *Boston Transcript* reported, "and made a flaming... speech on the rights of women and the iniquities of 'monied aristocracy' which produced a powerful effect upon her auditors, and they determined to have their own way, if they died for it." As in the first waves of strikes instigated by the original trade societies, such turnouts were almost always peaceful, but they became so general that the business community became increasingly alarmed. Between 1833 and 1837, no less than 168 strikes were recorded in contemporary newspapers.

As in later periods, the employers sought to attribute these disturbances, not to

labor's legitimate grievances, but to the activity of radical and subversive agitators, generally supposed to be foreigners. "I fear the elements of disorder are at work," a conservative New Yorker and former mayor, Philip Hone, noted in his diary; "the bands of Irish and other foreigners instigated by the mischievous councils of the trades union and other combinations of discontented men, are acquiring strength and importance which will ere long be difficult to quell." Whatever the workers' complaints (and Hone noted himself the tremendous increase in the cost of living), he felt that any strike, however orderly, was an "unlawful proceeding."

The demands of workers throughout the East for a ten-hour day came to a head during this period in a concerted outbreak of strikes. There had been earlier agitation for such a reduction in the length of the workday. It had been the background to the formation of the Mechanics' Union of Trade Associations in Philadelphia in 1827, and of the Working Men's Party in New York two years later. But the workers were now ready to use their strongest weapon as a means to coerce employers to grant their demands.

"All men have a just right, derived from their creator," stated a resolution of the journeymen carpenters in Philadelphia, "to have sufficient time each day for the cultivation of their mind and for self-improvement; Therefore, resolved, that we think ten hours industriously employed are sufficient for a day's labor."

On this same note, New England workingmen also demanded a shorter day and, surprisingly, found support from such a conservative paper as the *Boston Transcript*. "Let the mechanic's labor be over," it urged, "when he has wrought ten or twelve hours in the long days of summer, and he will be able to return to his family in season, and with sufficient vigour, to pass some hours in the instruction of his children, or in the improvement of his own mind."

In other periods of labor's long struggle for shorter hours, stress would be laid upon the ill effects of prolonged, exacting toil on workers' health and well-being, or upon the importance of spreading work to combat the danger of unemployment. In the 1830s, however, the emphasis upon time for self-education, which was considered essential to enable the newly enfranchised laboring classes to fulfill their obligations as citizens, was a great deal more than merely a facile argument. There is compelling evidence that workers were deeply interested in education for themselves as well as for their children. The crowded audiences of workingmen at the popular lyceum lectures of these years, the growing vogue for circulating libraries, and the insistent demand for free, public schools all attest to a deep concern born of the idealistic belief that education alone could provide the basis for a successful democracy.

A circular of striking workingmen in Boston in 1835 protested "the odious, cruel, unjust and tyrannical system which compels the operative Mechanic to exhaust his physical and mental powers....We have rights, and we have duties to perform as American citizens and members of society, which forbid us to dispose of more than Ten Hours for a day's work."

Such arguments did not, however, carry much weight with employers. The proposal for a ten-hour day, one newspaper declared, "strikes the very nerve of industry and good morals by dictating the hours of labour.... To be idle several of the most useful hours of the morning and evening will surely lead to intemperance and ruin." However deeply grounded was the real objection to shorter hours because of its effect upon business profits, it was, indeed, this professed fear that leisure would undermine workers' morals and foster intemperance that became the chief stock in trade of the conservative opposition to any change in the traditional sun-up-to-sunset system.

The organized workingmen in city after city, however, stood their ground. Their universal demand was for a working day from six in the morning until six in the evening, with an hour off for breakfast and another for dinner. In Baltimore, the members of 17 trades joined forces in a strike for this reform in 1833. Two years later, the carpenters of Boston, with the support of masons, stonecutters, and other workers in the building trades, walked out with similar demands. Both of these movements failed. In Philadelphia, on the other hand, an even more widely organized and popularly supported strike won a resounding victory in 1835, and had wide repercussions.

Coal heavers and other common laborers initiated the strike, but cordwainers, handloom weavers, cigar makers, saddlers, printers, and members of the building trades soon joined them. A circular relating the experiences of the Boston workers had an electric effect in unifying those of Philadelphia and strengthened their determination not to give in. Workers of all trades paraded through the streets, with fife and drum and banners emblazoned, "from 6 to 6."

"We marched to the public works," wrote their leader, John Ferral, a handloom weaver and fiery labor agitator, "and the workmen joined in with us.... Employment ceased, business was at a standstill, shirt sleeves were rolled up, aprons on, working tools in hand were the order of the day. Had the cannon of an invading enemy belched forth its challenge on our soil, the freemen of Philadelphia could not have shown a greater ardor for the contest; the blood-sucking aristocracy, they alone stood aghast; terror stricken, they thought the day of retribution was come, but no vengeance was sought or inflicted by the people for the wrongs they had suffered from their enemies."

The common council of the city was the first to give in, and it established a ten-hour day for all public servants. The master carpenters and master cordwainers followed, and other employers then quickly fell in line until the ten-hour day prevailed throughout the city. "The mechanics of Philadelphia stood firm and true," Ferral wrote, "they conquered, because they were united and resolute in their actions."

The movement spread to other parts of the country and in many instances won a corresponding success. Soon the ten-hour day had widely replaced, for artisans and mechanics, the sun-up-to-sunset norm. In the factories that were being established for the New England textile industry, and in many other manufacturing industries, the

workday was long to remain 12 hours and more. And in some trades, the gains of the 1830s were to be lost. But a very real victory had been won for the workers by their concerted stand in the strikes of Philadelphia and other cities. Moreover, the federal government was soon to be induced to establish a ten-hour day for all public works. Congress had refused to take any notice on the frequent memorials addressed to it on the subject, but when striking shipwrights appealed directly to President Jackson in 1836, the system was installed at the Philadelphia Navy Yard. Four years later, President Martin Van Buren even more directly admitted his debt to workingmen for their political support by an executive order that established a ten-hour workday on all governmental projects.

An Employer Counterattack

The employers held out as long as they could in combating workers' demands for both higher wages and a shorter working day. They continued whenever possible to undermine their employees' bargaining power by drawing upon cheaper sources of labor. But where skilled artisans and mechanics were concerned, employers found it increasingly difficult to maintain their position. The craft unions succeeded in enforcing a closed shop, which tied the employers' hands. Through public cards listing as "unfair" any journeyman who did not join a union and designating as "foul" any establishment where an "unfair man" was given work, they largely controlled the labor market. Of course, this was not true everywhere, but the records of the time reveal an unexpected power on the part of organized workers in the skilled trades.

In these circumstances, employers turned more and more to mutual protective associations that were prepared to act together in opposing "every injurious combination" of workingmen. In New York, a group of employers, furriers, and leather dealers took up arms against the General Trades' Union and mutually agreed that they would not employ "any man who is known to be a member of that or any other society which has for its object the direction of terms or prices for which workmen shall engage themselves." In Philadelphia, the master carpenters took the lead and called for the formation of an Anti-Trades' Union Association. A set of resolutions was adopted which declared the trades' union to be arbitrary, unjust, mischievous, and a powerful engine of the leveling system that would reduce masters to the status of journeymen. Employers had every right, it was maintained, to make whatever contracts with their employees they chose – without the interference of any workingmen's society.

When the employer associations were again unable to hold out against the labor societies, court action was once more in order. The drive to break up unions as conspiracies in restraint of trade was vigorously renewed, and, as in the opening years of the century, the employers found willing allies among conservative members of the bench.

The case of *People v. Fisher*, decided in the New York Supreme Court in 1835, was an important demonstration in this period that the opposition of the courts to labor unions continued. A society of journeymen cordwainers in Geneva, New York, was prosecuted for conspiring to raise wages and thereby, as claimed by the plaintiffs, committing an act injurious to trade and commerce and a misdemeanor under existing laws. The presiding judge ruled in the employers' favor. On the theory that the interests of society were best served when the price of labor was left to regulate itself, he declared that, in combining to raise wages, the cordwainers were working a public injury because "a conspiracy for such an object is against the spirit of the common law." "Competition is the life of trade," the decision concluded. "If the defendants cannot make coarse boots for less than one dollar per pair, let them refuse to do so; but let them not directly or indirectly undertake to say that others shall not do the work for a less price."

The effect of this decision was to encourage other employers to seek to suppress the trade societies even though they did not engage in strikes. And when the courts continued to follow a flagrantly antilabor policy, a storm of protest arose among workingmen and their sympathizers. It came to a head in New York after a further case in 1836, where the presiding judge strongly charged the jury to find a society of journeymen tailors guilty of conspiracy in restraint of trade.

"They were condemned," William Cullen Bryant wrote in vehement defense of the tailors in the *New York Evening Post*, "because they had determined not to work for the wages offered them! Can any thing be imagined more abhorrent....If this is not Slavery, we have forgotten its definition. Strike the right of associating for the sale of labor from the privileges of a freeman, and you may as well at once bind him to a master or ascribe him to the soil."

The outraged labor leaders of New York distributed circulars, inscribed with a coffin, throughout the city, calling upon all workingmen to attend court on the day set for sentencing the convicted tailors. "On Monday, June 6, 1836," the circulars read, "these Freemen are to receive their sentence, to gratify the hellish appetites of the Aristocracy. On Monday, the Liberty of the Workingmen will be interred! Judge Edwards is to chant the requiem! Go! Go! every Freeman, every Workingman, and hear the melancholy sound of the earth on the Coffin of Equality! Let the court-room, the City Hall – yea, the whole Park, be filled with Mourners!" The crowd that actually turned out does not appear to have reached the hoped-for proportions, and it was entirely peaceful. A week later, however, after the tailors had been punished with heavy fines, another mass meeting drew some 27,000 persons. The offending judge was burned in effigy.

The reaction against these trials was in fact so strong that juries could not fail to be influenced by it, and in two other conspiracy cases during the same summer, verdicts of not guilty were returned. Finally, in 1842, Chief Justice Lemuel Shaw of the Massachusetts Supreme Court rendered an important decision in *Commonwealth v.*

Hunt, which appeared to provide a firm basis for the legality of unions.

The case was that of the Journeymen Bootmakers' Society of Boston, whose members had agreed not to work for any person who employed a journeyman who did not belong to their organization. Shaw stated that the manifest purpose of the society was to induce all those engaged in the same occupation to become members, and that this could not be considered unlawful. Nor could he see that, in attempting to accomplish it by refusing to work for any employer who engaged a journeyman who was not a member, the boot makers were employing criminal means. He cited as a possible parallel a society whose members might undertake to promote the highly laudable cause of temperance by agreeing not to work for anyone who employed a user of strong spirits. In other words, agreement for common action to achieve a lawful object was not necessarily a criminal conspiracy. "The legality of such an association," the decision concluded, "will...depend upon the means to be used for its accomplishment."

Since labor societies might still have to prove that the means they adopted to attain their ends were in every case lawful, this decision was not a complete victory for labor. It had, indeed, turned upon certain technicalities in the indictment. But both union organization and even the principle of the closed shop had nevertheless received substantial support. It would not be until a much later period that labor again found itself on the legal defensive, fighting renewed conspiracy charges under antitrust laws and the arbitrary use of injunctions against strikes and boycotts.

The National Trades' Union

In the ten-hour movement, in the revolt against the conspiracy laws, and in their strikes, the workingmen of the 1830s had the full and active backing of their general trades' unions. These organizations were ready to render whatever assistance they could, both in supporting the local societies in their demands and in extending financial assistance when workers went out on strike. In New York, Philadelphia, Boston – wherever general trades' unions had been formed – there was close cooperation among the workers as a result of this leadership. Monthly dues were paid to the central organization, making possible the creation of a strike fund, and in many instances additional union appropriations aided the members of other societies out on strike. Occasionally such aid was extended from one city to another. When a delegation of Philadelphia bookbinders appealed to New York's General Trades' Union for aid in February 1836, a resolution favoring such action was at once adopted. It called upon all members to support "their fellow mechanics who are at this inclement season driven to a stand for their rights against aristocratical tyranny." Varying sums of money were sent to the bookbinders not only by unions in New York but also by those of Washington, Baltimore, Albany, and Newark.

The National Trades' Union, which had met first in 1834 and held conventions in the

two succeeding years, did not have the close organization of the general trades' unions. It remained little more than an annual conference that debated labor issues and occasionally addressed memorials to Congress – on the ten-hour day, prison labor, or public lands. It also went on record, although it refused to enter upon direct political action, in support of many of the reforms being promoted by the Jacksonian Democrats. It attacked “this American banking system, this rag-money system, this system of legalized monopolies which makes the rich richer and the poor poorer.” It was in no sense a class-conscious movement, however. “Our object in the formation of the Trades' Union,…” declared its organ, the *Union*, on April 21, 1836, “was not to create a feeling of enmity against the non-producers;…[but] to raise in the estimation of themselves and others, those who are the producers of the necessaries and luxuries of life.”

Perhaps the greatest contribution of the National Trades' Union to the cause of labor was to bring together workingmen's leaders from various parts of the country. It gave them a sense of common purpose and of support for their activities that encouraged them, as in the case of the ten-hour movement, to keep up their local struggles for labor rights.

John Ferral, the aggressive handloom weaver who led the successful ten-hour strike in Philadelphia, was a prominent figure at union conventions. No one more strongly urged direct economic action by labor societies or warned more often of the danger of their being diverted from their main purposes by political blandishments. “The office holders and office seekers of all parties have tried to lure us into the meshes of their nets,” he wrote, “but experience came to our aid, and, coy as the young deer, we shied off from their advances; we felt grateful for their proffered aid, but told them ‘we knew our own rights, and knowing dared maintain them.’” His initiative and energy were perhaps the most important factors in the organization of the Philadelphia General Trades' Union. He served as chairman of one of its original organizing committees and was constantly involved in its activities. References to his “spirited addresses” run through all the proceedings of the union.

Another Philadelphia delegate was William English, for a time secretary of his city's General Trades' Union. He was a journeyman shoemaker and a radical, highly erratic champion of the workers' cause. His critics declared that he did not have an idea that he had not borrowed or stolen from someone else, but his impassioned addresses always held popular attention.

The principal representative of the New England workingmen was Charles Douglas, one of the founders of the New England Association of Farmers, Mechanics, and Other Workingmen, and editor of the *New England Artisan*. His opposition to political activity was no less pronounced than that of John Ferral. Douglas's special interest was the status of factory operatives in the textile mills, and he was one of the first spokesmen for this class of workers.

Attending at least one of the National Trades' Union meetings was his coworker in this

cause, Seth Luther, the so-called "Traveling Agent" of the *Artisan* and a prototype of many later labor agitators. One of the most picturesque leaders of this period, a tall, lanky, tobacco-chewing Yankee in a bright green jacket, Luther toured the factory towns calling upon workers to defend their rights. "You cannot raise one part of the community above another unless you stand on the bodies of the poor," he repeatedly declared. In support of this thesis he issued a stream of pamphlets depicting the harsh life of the women and children who worked in the cotton mills under the lash of factory managers. His style was grim, sardonic, and highly colored. "While music floats from quivering strings through the perfumed and adorned apartments...of the rich," Luther wrote, "the nerves of the poor woman and child, in the cotton mills, are quivering with almost *dying agony*, from *excessive labor* to support this splendor."

The first president of the National Trades' Union was Ely Moore. Originally a student of medicine, he had abandoned that profession to become a journeyman printer and then entered actively into the labor movement. He suffered from ill health, which eventually forced his retirement from the political scene, but not before he had proved himself both an able organizer and effective administrator in union activities. Tall, handsome, with curly black hair brushed back over a broad forehead, invariably well dressed and habitually carrying an ivory-headed cane, Moore possessed, according to contemporaries, a thrilling power of eloquence. Before taking his post in the National Trades' Union, he headed the General Trades' Union in New York, where he sounded the keynote of the developing labor movement in addressing the workingmen as Pioneers in the Great Cause.



Figure 4.2 Ely Moore, a printer by trade, emerged to lead both the General Trades' Union in New York City and the short-lived National Trades' Union. His labor activism served as a springboard for his election to Congress in 1834. (Library of Congress).

“To you, then, gentlemen, as the *actual* representatives of the Mechanic interests throughout the country,” Moore declared, “the eyes of thousands and thousands are turned; for should the experiment succeed here, and the expectations of the friends of the ‘Union’ be realized, other Unions of a kindred character will be formed, in every section.” But should they fail, he warned his audience, “the haughty aristocrats of the land will hail the event with exulting hearts and hellish satisfaction.”

Moore soon made his position in labor circles a springboard for entry into active politics, and, with the support of the unions and Tammany Hall, he was sent to Congress the same year that saw him chosen head of the National Trades' Union. He won national prominence in the capitol as a spokesman for the interests of labor, and played a notable part in introducing the various memorials addressed to Congress by the union. Whenever he spoke, he seems to have commanded rapt attention for his pleas on behalf of workingmen's rights and his vehement attacks upon “the heartless cupidity of the privileged few.”

During the aftermath of the popular excitement aroused in New York by the conspiracy trial of the journeymen tailors, Moore rose on one occasion in April 1836 to defend labor under unusually dramatic circumstances. A representative from South

Carolina had warned of a possible workingmen's insurrection. Although he was so ill that he had to steady himself by leaning on his cane, Moore addressed his audience in a ringing voice that reached to every corner of the House. How could the interests and safety of the state be plotted against, he asked peremptorily, by a group composing three fourths of the state? "Sir," he declared, glaring at the Speaker as his audience listened intently – one southern congressman was heard to murmur that the high priest of revolution was singing his swan song – "there is much greater danger that capital will unjustly appropriate to itself the avails of labor, than that labor will unlawfully seize upon capital."

Moore recovered from this illness but would not again address the House. His friends felt that he was in too poor health to undergo the strain that public speaking imposed upon a person of his excitable, nervous temperament. But his oration went rapidly through four editions and played its part in arresting the drive to outlaw unions by court action. Public opinion was increasingly swinging to their support. "What but a general revolt of all the laboring classes is to be gained," William Cullen Bryant asked in the *New York Evening Post*, "by these wanton and unprovoked attacks upon their rights?"

The Decline of Unionism

The labor movement of the 1830s, to be sure, differed substantially from the one that emerged a century later. The former originated in a society in which the great masses of free workers were either skilled artisans or their apprentices in small-scale shops, or unskilled fetchers and haulers. Hence the founders of most early trade societies, or unions, thought of themselves as respectable, independent mechanics, men who preferred to obtain a just price for their product rather than a fair wage for their labor.

The lines the artisans drew in American society were between rich and poor, parasites and producers, aristocracy and democracy, as well as between employers and employees. They were greatly aroused, as was stated in an address of the New England Association, by "the low estimation in which useful labor is held by many whose station in society enable them to give the tone to public opinion." They resented the trend whereby all those who could sought to find some means of living without hard work and condemned the more useful and industrious portion of the community to a life of constant toil – "stripped of the better share of their earnings, holding a subordinate, if not degraded situation in society, and frequently despised by the very men, and women and children who live at ease upon the fruits of their labour." The dignity of labor and the respect due to workingmen were as much the concern of the labor unions of the 1830s as improvements in actual working conditions.

Whatever may be said of the high purpose of the labor unions of the 1830s, and whatever progress they made in achieving both their broader and more immediate

aims, their days were numbered. In 1837, the prosperity that had provided the background for their growth and accomplishments came to a sudden end. The bubble of speculation was rudely punctured. As prices plunged precipitately downward, hard times again swept over the entire nation. Trade and commerce dried up, manufacturing sharply declined, and business stagnated in the formerly prosperous towns and cities of both the Atlantic seaboard and the West.

Workingmen again faced what depression had always meant, and always would mean, for them: declining wages and unemployment. When the alternative to work was starvation for them and their families, they deserted the unions, as they had in 1819, for fear of employer retaliation, and they did not dare to strike to protect the gains they had won when things were going well. With few exceptions, the journeymen societies that had seemed so powerful completely folded. They were crushed by economic circumstances, and in their collapse their newspapers and their federations also disappeared, almost overnight. The depression of 1837 brought the emerging labor movement to a halt, as the Panic of 1819 eighteen years before had broken up the original trade societies.

Had organized labor survived this financial and economic panic, its subsequent history might have followed a quite different course. Strong unions would perhaps have been able to cope with the new needs and new problems that confronted labor when the full impact of the industrial revolution made itself felt in American society.

Industrialization's long shadow was already falling over the land in the 1830s, and the new class of factory operatives was constantly growing. The skilled workers, already organized, were prepared to cooperate with these weaker wage earners, and they could have helped to promote at this early stage of industrialization the establishment of effective unions among the unskilled. But this was not to be.

5

FREE LABOR IN AN EMERGING INDUSTRIAL ECONOMY

The spread of a market-based capitalist economy in the third and fourth decades of the nineteenth century encouraged the growth and spread of factory production. New England became home to thriving textile and shoemaking industries; the middle states – New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and to their south Delaware and Maryland – also developed a variety of industrial enterprises, including salt and coal mines as well as iron and munitions enterprises. Even the slave state of Virginia saw the growth of one of the nation's larger iron works, an enterprise that employed far more slave than free labor. Still, at the time, the New England textile mills seemed the most notable of the new factory-based industries.

In the course of his American tour in 1842, for example, the English novelist Charles Dickens visited Lowell, Massachusetts, where the new textile manufacturers of New England had established one of the country's first factory towns. The young women and girls who made up most of the working force appeared to him paragons of virtue – happy, contented, and exemplary in their conduct. With their neat and serviceable bonnets, warm cloaks, and shawls, “they were all well dressed, but not to my thinking above their station....From all the crowd I saw in the different factories that day, I cannot recall or separate one face that give me a painful impression.”

The English traveler also admired the well-ordered rooms in the factories, some of which had plants growing in the windows, and the fresh air, cleanliness, and comfort; he was impressed with the boarding houses where the young women lived under careful chaperonage; and he was particularly struck with what he reported as three startling facts: there were pianos in many of the houses, nearly all of the young ladies subscribed to circulating libraries, and a magazine was published – the *Lowell Offering* – that was entirely made up of stories and articles by the factory's operatives. Gazing happily upon this industrial paradise, Dickens compared it with the manufacturing centers of England and earnestly begged his countrymen “to pause and reflect upon the difference between this town and those great haunts of misery.”

Although it could also have been pointed out, even in 1842, that the young women and girls who labored in textile factories worked incredibly long hours, that the boarding houses where they lived were badly overcrowded, and that they found their lives wholly ordered and controlled by the paternalistic factory owners, the picture that the enthusiastic Dickens drew of Lowell was not wholly out of keeping with the facts. Other visitors confirmed his general impressions. They, too, wrote of the pleasant atmosphere, of the cultural opportunities of circulating libraries and lecture rooms, and of the gay appearance of the young ladies with neat bonnets over their carefully curled ringlets, and wearing silk stockings and carrying parasols. Lowell may not have

been amusing, as the French traveler Michael Chevalier wrote, but it was “clean, decent, peaceful, and sober.”

Because of the relative scarcity of labor in New England, the textile mills of Massachusetts at first avoided the most unwholesome aspects of the early stages of the industrial revolution as it had developed in Europe. The Massachusetts capitalists who established the first textile mills at first had to attract their labor force from the New England countryside. In order to recruit young rural women of strict Protestant background, the mill owners created a clean, controlled environment.

The mill women had to live in the boarding houses, where they were under strict supervision and the doors were closed at 10 p.m. They were expected to attend church. Not only was discharge an immediate consequence of immodesty, profanity, or dancing – to say nothing of more serious lapses of morality – but, concerning male workers, the Lowell Manufacturing Company stated that it would not “continue to employ any person who shall be wanting in proper respect to the females employed by the company, or who shall smoke within the company's premises, or be guilty of inebriety.”

Although the long hours of tending looms in the mills could be oppressive to them, the mill women who worked in the mills also found new opportunities. In Lowell and similar towns, they met hundreds of young women just like themselves, fresh from the farms of Vermont and New Hampshire. They talked to each other, socialized, and built bonds of sisterhood. For the first time, many of these young women experienced liberation from the bondage of repressive patriarchal families. Indeed, the wages they earned, small as they may have been, offered them a measure of economic independence. Their savings could be used for frivolous purchases as well as to support their rural families or amass a dowry.

Equally important, the young mill-working women of the 1820s and 1830s did not form a permanent factory proletariat. Few entered the mills with the intention of remaining. Some hoped to save enough money for their dowry, others to obtain enough cash to finance a move west, and still others the funds to preserve the family farm. Moreover, throughout the period, in slack times and boom times, the young women moved constantly back and forth between farm and factory. They were neither firmly attached to the mills nor wholly dependent on them.

Such an exceptional work situation was of short duration. Far-reaching changes were already well under way at the time of Dickens's visit to Lowell. As competition increased in the textile industry, the original concern of the mill owners for their employees gave way to stricter controls that had nothing to do with the well-being of the workers. Employers reduced wages, lengthened hours, and intensified work. For a workday of between 11.5 and 13 hours, making up an average week of 75 hours, the women operatives generally earned less than \$1.50 a week (exclusive of board) by the late 1840s, and they were compelled to tend four looms, whereas in the 1830s they had only taken care of two. When the manager of one mill at Holyoke,

Massachusetts, found his hands “languorous” because they had breakfasted, he ordered them to report to work before breakfast. “I regard my work-people,” an agent at another factory said, “just as I regard my machinery. So long as they can do my work for what I choose to pay them, I keep them, getting out of them all I can.”

Embittered complaints began to take the place of satisfaction as these conditions grew steadily worse. “These ladies have been imposed upon egregiously by the aristocratic and offensive employers, assuming to be their lords and masters,” wrote the *Lynn Record*. Orestes Brownson, radical friend of labor, declared that “the great mass wear out their health, spirits and morals without becoming one whit better off.” In the *Voice of Industry*, a new labor newspaper devoted to the cause of mill workers, there were frequent attacks upon the policies that employers were following.

“Your factory system is worse by far than that of Europe,” stated an open letter in the *Voice of Industry* addressed to the mill owner, Abbott Lawrence. “You furnish your operatives with no more healthy sleeping-apartments than the cellars and garrets of the English poor....The keepers are compelled to allow...but one room for six persons and generally crowd twelve and sometimes sixteen females into the same hot, ill-ventilated attic....You shut up the operatives two or three hours longer a day in your factory prisons than is done in Europe....You allow them but half an hour to eat their meals....You compel them to stand so long at the machinery...that varicose veins, dropsical swelling of the feet and limbs, and prolapsus uteri, diseases that end only with life, are not rare but common occurrences.”

The factory girls themselves resented more and more “the yoke which has been prepared for us” and tried to combat the reductions in wages and increase in work. Even in the 1830s, as we have seen, they had experimented with strikes, and now, a decade later, they pledged themselves not to accept additional looms without wage increases and called for shorter working hours. But they made little headway. A number of former farm girls remained in the mills permanently, but the number of new recruits from the countryside fell precipitately. The promise of easy work and high wages no longer lured masses of farm girls.

Yet the mill owners were not left without an abundant labor force. Hard times in Europe and the potato famine of the 1840s drove millions of Irish and German immigrants to the United States. In New England especially, immigrant Irish families, and particularly their women, supplied the textile mills with a needy labor force. Since they lived on the edge of starvation, the immigrant Irish took whatever wages or hours the mill owners offered. The infusion of cheap immigrant labor, as a committee of the Massachusetts legislature noted in 1850, was causing “an entire modification and depression of the state of society in and about manufacturing places.”



Figure 5.1 Women shoe workers from Lynn, Massachusetts, striking for better wages, 1860. (Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University)

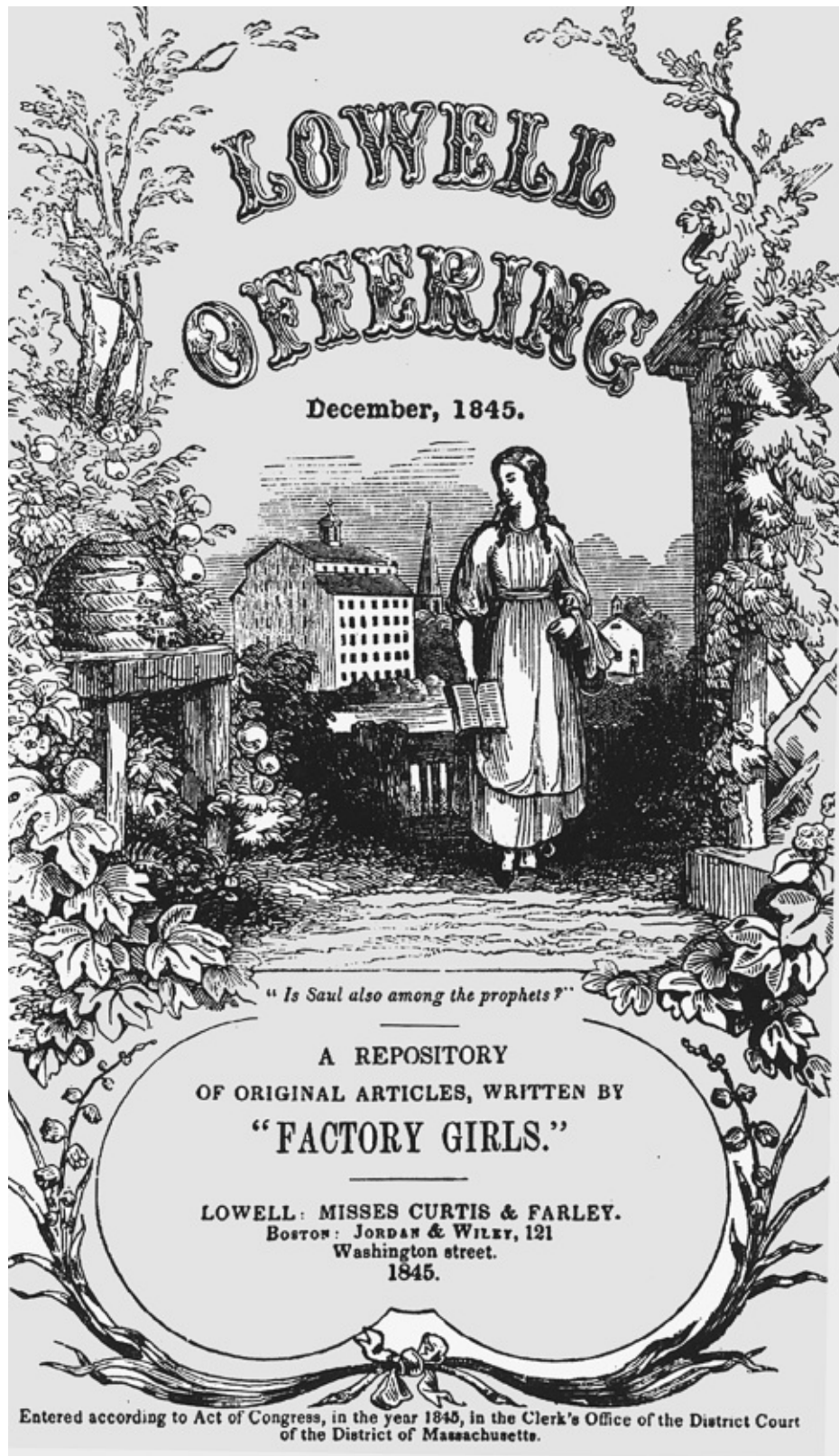


Figure 5.2 Lowell, Massachusetts, became the model mill town of the world in part because the mill owner assured that the young women were carefully chaperoned. The *Lowell Offering* was a paper written, edited, and published by the mill workers. (*Lowell Offering*, Ser. 5, No. 5, May 1845)

Industrialism, Technological Change, and Reform

While the textile trade provides a striking example of what happened to working conditions with increasing industrialization, the same thing was taking place in other trades. The shoemakers of Lynn, Massachusetts, had enjoyed a high degree of independence in the 1830s, with their own workshops and the opportunity to fall back on farming or fishing should trade fall off. “When the spring opened,” read one perhaps too idyllic account of a worker's life, “the horizon of his hopes expanded. Less clothing and fuel were needed. The clam banks discounted more readily; haddock could be got at Swampscott so cheap that the price wasn't worth quoting. The boys could dig dandelions. . . . Then if the poor man had his little ‘spring pig’ that he had kept through the winter, ‘pork and dandelions’ were no small item in the bill of fare while ‘greens’ lasted.” But the masters steadily tightened their control over manufacturing, and wages were reduced and paid in store orders rather than cash. The shoemakers gradually found themselves forced from their own workshops, from their fishing and farming in off hours, into the new factories with whose machine processes they could no longer compete.

The *Awl*, a journeymen shoemakers' newspaper, repeatedly expressed resentment against manufacturers who pretended to pay the workers a living wage but “did by other means reduce them to degradation.” The protesting shoemakers of Lynn called upon their fellow artisans in the larger cities to take concerted action to demonstrate “that we are not menials or the humble subjects of a foreign despot, but free, American citizens.” Nothing came of this agitation. A way of life was inevitably passing, and the shoemakers as well as textile workers were inextricably caught in the toils of the factory system.

The printing trade was also being revolutionized by the invention of new presses and the use of steam power. These developments not only tended to throw men out of work and to depress wages, but they also encouraged the transfer of control over their trade from printers themselves to outside management. A highly independent profession was transformed through the widened gulf between employer and employee. Their long record of organization helped the printers, and they were to continue to enforce union rules governing apprentices and working conditions with considerable success, but they were facing new forces that made it increasingly difficult to maintain either their wages or their general status.

Among other trades, the introduction of power looms worsened conditions for handloom weavers, whose weekly wages, never very high, were virtually halved by the mid-1840s; the relatively well-paid journeymen hatters suffered a decline in their pay between 1835 and 1845 from about \$12 to \$8 a week; and the cabinetmakers found themselves compelled to work longer and longer hours to earn as much as \$5 a week in the face of competition from the wholesale production of German immigrants who were said to “work rapidly, badly and for almost nothing.”

The greater supply of cheap labor, indeed, was as important as the introduction of machinery in cutting wages, not only in the New England cotton mills but throughout industry. In the first half century of American national history, approximately 1 million immigrants entered the country, but in the single decade from 1846 to 1855, the total was almost 3 million. Famine in Ireland and suppression of the revolutionary uprisings on the Continent accounted for a swelling stream of workers crossing the Atlantic. They tended to settle in the East, drawn to the rapidly growing cities and manufacturing centers, where the demand for labor was greatest and both the skilled and the unskilled might find employment. Immigration was for the first time, but not the last, providing American employers with an abundant supply of labor, and this acted to depress wage rates especially for the less skilled and in those skilled trades where machinery and the division of labor undermined skill. This process was to repeat itself on an even more massive scale between 1881 and 1914.

The general conditions among common workers in the seaboard cities graphically revealed the effect of such immigration. Two separate estimates of a workingman's family budget in the early 1850s, one in the *New York Times* and the other in the *New York Tribune*, gave a minimum for essential expenditures – rent, food, fuel, and clothing – that amounted to approximately \$11 a week. “Have I made the workingman's comforts too high?” asked Horace Greeley in commenting on this budget. “Where is the money to pay for amusements, for ice-creams, his puddings, his trips on Sunday up or down the river in order to get some fresh air?” But except for persons in the building and metal trades, whose relatively high wages just about met this budget, there were few urban workers who even approached it – not the factory operatives, not the workers, men and women, employed in the clothing trades, and most assuredly not the common laborers. Shortly before publishing his budget, Greeley had actually estimated that “the average earnings of those who lived by simple labor in our city – embracing at least two thirds of our population – scarcely, if at all, exceed one dollar per week for each person subsisting thereon.”

Contemporary descriptions afford ample evidence of the part inadequate wages played in creating the slum areas of such cities as New York, Philadelphia, and Boston. Overcrowding, lack of sanitary conveniences, dirt, filth, and disease already stood in stark and glaring contrast to the comfortable, spacious, well-furnished homes of the wealthy. New York sheltered a cellar population, estimated to total over 18,000, crowded into damp, unlit, ill-ventilated dens with anywhere from 6 to 20 persons – men, women and children – living in a single room. In the notorious Five Points, hundreds of families were squeezed into ramshackle buildings, their only sanitary conveniences outside privies. Boston had equally depressing and unhealthful slums. “This whole district,” a Committee on Internal Health reported in 1849, “is a perfect hive of human beings without comforts and mostly without common necessities: in many cases huddled together like brutes without regard to sex, age or a sense of decency, grown men and women sleeping together in the same apartment, and sometimes wife, husband, brothers and sisters in the same bed.”

The situation that Thomas Jefferson had foreseen when he spoke of the mobs of great cities adding just as much to pure government “as sores do to the strength of the human body” appeared to have materialized. The workers themselves began to protest against immigration as creating “a numerous poor and dependent population.” The abject condition they had known in their own countries, the *Voice of Industry* declared, made such immigrants all the more helpless victims of exploitation in the United States, satisfied to work “fourteen and sixteen hours per day for what capital sees fit to give them.” It was not immigration, however, that created a dependent labor force and miserable living conditions. Rather, a capitalist economy in which producers competed for market share led employers to intensify work, stint on wages, and offer insecure forms of employment. A labor force that lacked bargaining power, steady employment, and basic material security could ill afford to house itself well, clothe itself adequately, and afford wholesome food.

The harsh effect of industrialism and the mounting tide of immigration served in large measure to prevent any reconsolidation of the ranks of labor. Workingmen did not resume on a comparable scale either the political or trade union activity that had surged so dynamically before the Panic of 1837. Workers split along ethno-religious lines. American-born Protestant workers participated in broad evangelical reform movements or more nativistic groups, while immigrant Roman Catholic workers withdrew into insular ethnic communities. In the absence of general trade unions, which linked workers across the boundaries of nationality and religion, workers also fractured politically. Many American-born Protestants supported nativistic Whigs or a straight-out Native American (Know Nothing) Party. Immigrant Catholics increasingly swung to the Democratic Party. Protestant workers participated actively in a myriad of general reform activities (many led by middle-class evangelicals) from temperance to dress reform to general social purity. On such social issues as temperance, religion in public schools, Sabbath observance, and many others, American-born and immigrant workers went their separate ways.

The decade of the 1840s was one of perfectionist moral reform and romantic utopianism. The perfectionist reformers and utopians repeatedly sought support from working people. They descended in droves upon every meeting or convention that might be summoned to consider labor issues, and sometimes they succeeded in wholly dominating them. The first formal meeting of the New England Workingmen's Association in 1844, called to inaugurate a revived ten-hour movement, had only a scattering of delegates from labor societies in comparison with the brilliant array of reformers eagerly seeking to win new disciples. The meeting was thrown open with sweeping enthusiasm “to all those interested in the elevation of the producing classes and Industrial Reform and the extinction of slavery and servitude in all their forms.” However generous the impulses behind such activity, they could not have been more vague and diffuse.

The imagination of some of the workers during this period was caught by the glowing promises of the Associationists. Through the formation of independent, socialistic

communities – all of whose members would work toward a common end – the Associationists promised an escape from the consequences of the industrial revolution and hoped to recreate the simpler society of an earlier day. This idea was primarily derived from the utopian socialism of the French reformer Charles Fourier, with its elaborate system of phalanxes, secular communes designed both to dignify labor and increase production. Albert Brisbane had introduced Fourierism to the United States. In 1840, Brisbane published *The Social Destiny of Man*, a detailed exposition of Fourier's program, but far more important in spreading the gospel of Associationism were his writings in the column which editor Horace Greeley placed at his disposal in the *New York Tribune*.

Greeley was, indeed, to do everything possible to promote this tempered form of socialism as one phase of his general support for the interests of workingmen. An idealistic Yankee, who had come to New York as a farm boy to enter the printing trade, Greeley was a familiar figure at labor gatherings, and his round moon face, with its fringe of whiskers, was known to thousands of workers. “Why should those by whose toil ALL commodities and luxuries are produced or made available,” he asked, “enjoy so scanty a share of them?” He realized, perhaps to a greater degree than any of his contemporaries among public men, the effects of the exploitation of the workingmen that resulted from the industrial revolution, and he felt that any lasting betterment for society depended upon their organization. He not only opened the columns of the *Tribune* to Albert Brisbane but also ran a weekly letter dealing with socialism from a European correspondent: Karl Marx.

Fourierism, in any event, won many converts through the *Tribune*. Even before Brisbane laid out his own plan for a North American phalanx, a group of workingmen launched the Sylvania phalanx in western Pennsylvania. Other communities quickly followed on the heels of this experiment, and even the idealistic founders of Brook Farm, whose colony represented an intellectual revolt against the spirit of the times, were persuaded to adopt the form and organization of a Fourierite community. In all, some 40 phalanxes, with perhaps 8,000 members, were established during the 1840s.

They were not a success. One by one they fell by the wayside, the North American phalanx itself ceasing operation in 1854. Community living and community production did not prove practical. Nor did they meet the needs of workers. In spite of the enthusiastic propaganda, the answer to industrialization did not lie in an attempt to escape from it. The hopeful dreams of the Associationists foundered on the rock of economic and social forces, which could not be so easily withstood or diverted.

As the phalanxes collapsed, some attempt was made to provide a partial substitute in the interests of the workingmen by establishing both consumer and producer cooperatives. “The direction and profits of industry,” the proponents of cooperation declared, “must be kept in the hands of the producers.” In Massachusetts, New York, and other parts of the country, protective unions were organized that undertook to set

up self-employing workshops whose products were to be sold at wholesale prices for the benefit of the union's members. There were other instances of cooperatives, such as the Journeymen Molders' Union Foundry, which established a plant near Cincinnati, the Boston Tailors' Associative Union, and a Shirt Sewers' Cooperative Union Depot in New York. But whether consumer or producer cooperatives, these early ventures were no more successful than the phalanxes. Cooperation would be revived again and again in the future with some limited success, but neither in the 1840s nor later could it provide an effective solution to the problems confronting the laboring classes.

Another and more significant reform that won widespread labor support was a new agrarianism. The original workingmen's parties had been in part wrecked by the internal friction and external attacks resulting from their flirtation with the radical agrarian ideas of Thomas Skidmore. The agrarianism of the 1840s and 1850s was far more moderate. Its thesis was simply that the people as a whole had a natural right to the existing public lands, which should be equally distributed in farm lots of 160 acres that would be both inalienable and exempt from seizure for debt. Through such a program, it was maintained, the workingman would be assured of his just share in the national wealth and be freed from his complete dependence on the masters of capital.

The high priest of this reform was George Henry Evans. After the dissolution of the Working Men's Party in New York, he had retired in 1836 because of ill health to a farm in New Jersey, only emerging with his new message in 1844. Reestablishing the *Working Man's Advocate*, his old paper, he dedicated himself to agrarianism and in season and out demanded action by Congress to promote his program. "This is the first measure to be accomplished," he wrote in the *Advocate*, "and it is as idle to attempt any great reforms without that as it is to go to work without tools. Place the surplus mechanics on their own land in the west in Rural Townships with their large Public Square and Public Hall in the center of each, leaving full employment to those who remain in the cities." There was hardly a labor meeting at which he did not appear to present this plan.

The climax of Evans's activities was the establishment of the National Reform Association in 1845. His earlier experience had led him to distrust third-party political action, and the purpose of the new organization was to demand support for his program from all candidates for public office as the condition for securing workingmen's votes. Evans hoped to demonstrate that the agrarians meant business. "We, whose names are annexed, desirous of restoring to man his Natural Right to Land," the membership pledge of the National Reform Association stated, "do solemnly agree that we will not vote for any man, for any legislative office, who will not pledge himself, in writing, to use all the influence of his station, if elected, to prevent all further traffic in the Public Lands of the states and of the United States, and to cause them to be laid out in Farms and Lots for the free and exclusive use of actual settlers."

Although support for this program was by no means limited to workingmen, their close ties with the National Reform Association were clearly revealed in the membership of the original central committee. It included four printers, two cordwainers, a chair maker, a carpenter, a blacksmith, a bookbinder, a machinist, a picture-frame maker, and a clothier. Associated with Evans, moreover, were such trade union leaders of the 1830s as John Commerford, who had been president of the General Trades' Union in New York, and John Ferral, leader of the Philadelphia Trades' Union. The new labor journals, reemerging after the Panic of 1837, almost universally made land reform one of their basic demands.

The movement was strongly opposed by capitalists and employers in the eastern states. "By your policy you strike down our great manufacturing interests," one of their spokesmen declared in Congress, "You make a bid for our population, by holding out inducements for our productive labourers to leave their old homes, under the seductive promise of land for nothing, and railroads without taxes, thereby decreasing our population and consequently increasing the burden of those that remain in the old states." But farmers and other settlers in the West joined forces with the eastern workingmen in supporting the movement. With its alluring slogan of "Vote Yourself a Farm," the National Reform Association appeared to be making substantial headway.

The workingmen of the 1840s were not to profit from this program, and its relevance to their immediate needs may also be questioned. Even if they could, it was unclear how many workers were interested in suddenly pulling up stakes and farming in the distant West. After all, how many ordinary workers had the material resources to obtain the farm implements and seeds necessary to make virgin soil productive, the previous experience or knowledge of how to do so, and the means to survive before the first crops were ready for market? The movement instituted by Evans, however, was to lead directly to the Homestead Act of 1862. While this measure did not provide for either inalienability or exemption from seizure for debt, it granted 160 acres of free land to all bona fide settlers.

Land reform may have been closer to the interests of workingmen than many of the mid-century humanitarian movements, but the most immediately practical undertaking was the renewed drive for the ten-hour day. While it had been widely won for artisans and mechanics in the 1830s, factory employees, as we have seen, were not generally affected. The new movement was primarily for the relief of this new group of wage earners. Unlike the earlier drive, it did not take the form of trade union activity – the factory operatives were unorganized – but of political pressure upon state legislatures to establish a ceiling on work hours in private industry. The National Reform Association even unbent sufficiently to make the demand for a ten-hour day one of its subsidiary planks, and many other workingmen's associations formed for this specific purpose.

The most protracted struggle took place in Massachusetts, where the development of the textile industry created both the greatest need for reform and the strongest

opposition to it. A call for concerted action on the part of workers, seeking to bring together various local associations, was first issued in 1844, and was responsible for the formation of the New England Workingmen's Association. Both Fourierites and land reformers tried to take control of this organization and for a time appeared to have succeeded in diverting attention from the ten-hour issue, but agitation in favor of the latter reform nevertheless gained increasing headway. Women played an important role in this agitation, and none more so than Sarah G. Bagley, a Lowell mill worker, who founded the Lowell Female Labor Reform Association in 1844 to campaign for the ten-hour day. Almost swamped with petitions (one from Lowell being 130 feet long with some 4,500 signatures), the Massachusetts General Court felt compelled to make an official investigation.

Its committee reported that the average working day in the textile factories ranged from 11 hours and 24 minutes to 13 hours and 31 minutes, according to the season, and that there was no question but that shorter hours and more time for meals would benefit the workers. It also asserted the right and duty of the legislature to regulate hours whenever public morals or the well-being of society were menaced. Nonetheless, fearing that industry would be driven from the state by regulation, the committee ducked any government responsibility for the problem. "The remedy is not with us," the committee stated. "We look for it in the progressive improvement of art and science, in a higher appreciation of man's destiny, in a less love for money, and a more ardent love for social happiness and intellectual superiority."

The factory operatives attacked the report as clearly reflecting "a cringing servility to corporate monopolies," and renewed a struggle that now crossed state lines and aroused workers throughout the country. New arguments and counterarguments were advanced. Labor did not emphasize, as it had in the 1830s, the need for more time for self-education and the fulfillment of the duties of citizenship. It stressed instead the improvement in the quality of work that would result from shorter hours. The employers, however, were more concerned about production costs. In combating workingmen's views, they stated that fewer hours would have to mean a lower day's wage. At the same time, they reasserted a paternalistic attitude toward workers' welfare. "The morals of the operatives will necessarily suffer," one of them stated, "if longer absent from the wholesome discipline of factory life."

While the debate still raged over conditions in Massachusetts, the reformers succeeded in winning at least partial victories in a number of other states. New Hampshire passed the first state ten-hour law in the nation's history in 1847; Pennsylvania adopted a bill the next year providing that no person should work more than a ten-hour day or sixty-hour week "in cotton, woolen, silk, paper, bagging and flax factories." During the 1850s, Maine, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Ohio, California, and Georgia also fell into line with some sort of ten-hour law. There was a catch, however, in almost every case. The ten-hour provision could be circumvented by "special contracts." The employer could virtually disregard the law, that is, by refusing to hire anyone unless they were willing to accept a longer working day, and, by

combining with other employers, the employer could effectively blacklist any workers who attempted to stand up for their legal rights.

Employers defended the inclusion of the special contract clause as necessary to protect the right of citizens to sell their services as they themselves saw fit. It was an argument to be advanced even more aggressively in later years when the Fourteenth Amendment was interpreted as specifically safeguarding individual freedom of contract from any infringement by state laws. Horace Greeley, although he had originally opposed work-hours legislation, exposed its speciousness.

“To talk of the Freedom of Labor, the policy of leaving it to make its own bargains, etc.” he wrote in the *New York Tribune* on September 18, 1847, “when the fact is that a man who has a family to support and a house hired for the year is told, ‘If you will work thirteen hours per day, or as many as we think fit, you can stay; if not you can have your walking papers; and well you know no one else hereabout will hire you’ – is it not most egregious flummery?”

Workers in Massachusetts undoubtedly thought so, and in continuing their struggle through a series of “ten-hour conventions,” they insistently demanded effective legislation that would not mean simply a standardization of the working day but a real – and enforceable – abridgment of the hours of labor. “We do declare, explicitly and frankly,” it was stated in 1852, “that our purpose, and our whole purpose, is the enactment of a law which shall prohibit, in stringent and unmistakable terms, and under adequate penalties, the corporations, chartered by the laws of the State, from employing any person in laboring more than ten hours in any one day. This is just the law – and all the law – we want on this subject.”

This straightforward demand was not realized in Massachusetts – or in any other state. The inclusion of the special contract clause rendered such laws as were passed unenforceable, and factory workers remained subject to whatever conditions their employers chose to impose upon them. “The ten-hour law will not reduce the hours of labor,” one newspaper emphatically stated in regard to the New Hampshire bill, for its authors “did not intend any such result.”

A final effort to keep the ten-hour movement alive was undertaken through a series of industrial congresses, a further outgrowth of such organizations as the National Reform Association and the New England Workingmen's Association. They were first set up on a national basis, and then in the form of state or other local conventions. Instead of furthering practical labor aims, however, they proved to be somewhat vague assemblages, controlled by reformers rather than trade union delegates. They tried to influence legislation in favor of free land, cooperation, and the ten-hour day by promising political support to those who would advocate these reforms, but no real progress was made. Moreover, while reformers hoped to “eschew partyism of every description,” the politicians were soon successfully taking over. The Industrial Congress in New York, for example, originally sought to limit membership to delegates of labor organizations, but before long Tammany Hall was in almost

complete control.

The old story of reformers dividing among themselves and professional politicians preying on the idealistic repeated itself. James Gordon Bennett predicted the fate of the New York Industrial Congress in 1850. "It will fall into the hands of a few wire-pullers, who will turn it to their own advantage and sell the trades to the highest bidder," he wrote prophetically in the *New York Herald*. "Then will be acted over again the farces already played in this city, in which the trades have been made the ladder of needy or ambitious politicians, who kicked them away the moment they gained the summit of their aspirations."

Rebuilding a Union Movement

Not until well into the 1850s did workers begin to rebuild unions because the depression between 1837 and 1843, the ensuing "hungry forties," and the rise of mass immigration combined to reduce labor's bargaining power. An improvement in economic conditions, although interrupted by another brief depression in 1857, promoted this shift. Once again, the bargaining position of workers was strengthened and the way was opened to effective action through the practical weapon of strikes. The unions of this period, however, were to reveal in one important respect a somewhat different philosophy from that held by the earlier societies of the 1830s. They were much less concerned over the solidarity of labor and fastened their attention far more narrowly on the needs of their own individual membership. Little effort was to be made to form city centrals or any other labor federations comparable to the general trades' unions.

The unions of both periods were primarily made up of artisans and mechanics, that is, skilled craftsmen; they were largely concentrated in the old established trades. But whereas those in the earlier period were more sympathetic toward the organization of unskilled workers and factory operatives, there was less interest in these groups of workers on the part of the trade unions of the 1850s. The division between skilled and unskilled workers hardened, as the former became reluctant to link their fortunes to the latter. Part of the reason for the split between the more skilled and the less skilled resulted from the wage premium that skilled workers received in the United States as compared to Europe, and from the fact that newer immigrants and women composed such a large proportion of the semi-skilled and unskilled.

The more limited scope of the labor movement in the 1850s resulted partly from the factors noted above. The bulk of skilled workers were American-born and Protestants, the unskilled overwhelmingly immigrants, Catholics, women, and children. This split between the two broad sectors of the working class was to weaken the labor movement well into the twentieth century.

While the revived unions of the 1850s consequently stressed the maintenance of apprenticeship rules, the closed shop, and higher wages and shorter hours for their

own members, they promoted the labor movement as a whole with less vigor. They lacked the dynamic drive of their predecessors. Still they recognized, as a resolution of one society frankly stated, that under existing conditions, "there exists a perpetual antagonism between Labor and Capital...one striving to sell their labor for as much, and the other striving to buy it for as little, as they can." But their efforts to combat capital on these grounds were only partly successful.

The most interesting development of the time was the first real attempt to form national trade unions. Workers really had no choice as the growing integration of a national market eliminated local and regional monopolies, while tramping artisans traveled widely to obtain superior employment. The National Typographical Union, the National Molders' Union, and the Machinists' and Blacksmiths' National Union were organized, and a National Protective Association was founded by railway engineers with delegates representing 14 states and 55 railways. Other embryonic national unions were also started by shoemakers, upholsterers, plumbers, stonecutters, and cotton-mule spinners. None of these organizations was too successful, but they helped to pave the way for more effective activity in later years.

In other respects, the general organization of labor conformed to familiar patterns. Local unions still retained various benefit features, collected dues from their members, sought to maintain strike funds, engaged in collective bargaining with employers, and were prepared to call strikes when their legitimate demands were not met. At times strikes were widely prevalent. "Each spring," the *New York Tribune* declared on April 20, 1854, "witnesses a new struggle for enhanced wages in some if not most of the trades of this and other cities." Public opinion recognized that there was real reason for the restlessness of the workers in the already customary failure of wages to keep pace with advancing living costs, and the unions' demands often received sympathetic support in the press.

One strike toward the end of the period, which broke out early in February 1860, evoked widespread concern and was to prove the most extensive yet recorded in American history. It was called by the shoemakers of Natick and Lynn, Massachusetts, and spread throughout New England. With the formation of mechanics' associations in some 25 towns, close to 20,000 workers were ultimately reported to have turned out. In making the demand for higher wages responsible for the strike, the shoemakers declared that they were acting in the interests of the whole community, "inasmuch as the wealth of the masses improves the value of real estate, increases the demand for manufactured goods, and promotes the moral wealth and intellectual growth of society." Their emphasis upon the purchasing power of wages did not, however, persuade their employers of the desirability of meeting their demands.

The strike was described in newspaper headlines as "Revolution in the North," "Rebellion Among the Workmen of New England," and "Beginning of Conflict between Capital and Labor." The police and militia were called out, but there was no violence,

and in many towns the workers had the sympathy and support of their fellow citizens. Many female employees took part in the strike, and in their demonstrations and parades proved to be zealous advocates of the cause. "They assail the bosses," a reporter for the *New York Herald* wrote from Marblehead, "in a style which reminds one of the amiable females who participated in the first French Revolution."

Relatively early in the strike some employers began to meet the strikers' wage demands. But then, and more so subsequently as the strike dragged on into the early spring, shoe manufacturers fought the organized, collective strength of labor. Employers would not recognize unions or sign written agreements with them. Their strike was only partly successful; in the end, the strikers settled for increased wages but lost the union that they had struggled to build.

The Coming of War

As the 1850s drew to a close, the slavery issue began to impinge on the labor movement as it did on every phase of economic or political activity throughout the country. Among northern workingmen, the same divisions of opinion were evident as among other elements of the population. In New England, there was strong abolitionist sentiment, especially among operatives in the cotton mills, but in other parts of the country white workers were wary of a conflict that might go so far as to free African Americans from slavery and hence make them competitors. Many believed that the form of slavery under which the white wage earner toiled was often as degrading as the chattel slavery blacks endured, and that reform might better begin at home. Even after Abraham Lincoln's election as president in 1860, many unions vigorously supported the various compromise proposals being put forward to reconcile northern and southern differences.

Thirty-four leading trade unionists banded together for action early in 1861, and with the slogan "Concession not Secession," they summoned a national workingmen's convention to protest against the government's course. "Under the leadership of political demagogues and traitors," they vehemently stated in the *Mechanics' Own*, "the country is going to the devil as fast as it can, and unless the masses rise up in their might, and teach their representatives what to do, the good old ship will go to pieces." Their meeting was held in Philadelphia on February 22, with parades, speech making, and resolutions upholding the Crittenden Compromise, a last-ditch effort to appease secessionists by guaranteeing federal protection for slavery. It was not a very impressive affair, however, and it could not in any event exercise any appreciable influence on the forces that were so soon to plunge the country into violent conflict.

Material factors caused many northern workers and their allies to seek compromise with southern slaveholders rather than resort to war. On the eve of the Civil War, the South remained the wealthiest region in the nation and cotton the primary source of domestic and international trade, as well as the source of the greatest profits.

Northern banks, insurance companies, and merchants relied heavily on cultivation by slave labor for their profits. Even workers and farmers in the free states benefited from the purchases of southern planters. A significant number of northern workers also felt threatened by the potential labor market competition provided by millions of emancipated slaves.

Once hostilities were declared, the workers enlisted in great numbers in response to President Lincoln's call for troops, and many of those who had been most strongly opposed to war were among the early volunteers. In a number of cases, members of unions entered service as a group. "It having been resolved to enlist with Uncle Sam for the war," read a typical resolution by one such organization, "this union stands adjourned until either the Union is safe or we are whipped."

Workers generally supported Lincoln and the Union because Republican ideology and principles appealed to them strongly. Republicans portrayed the civil conflict as a struggle between freedom and slavery, democracy and aristocracy, equality and privilege. Workers marched to war against the "slave power" under the democratic banner of free men and free soil. As historian Eric Foner has shown in his book *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War* (1995), the Republicans, through their free-labor ideology, made northern workers a vital element in a new political coalition.

The war was to tax labor heavily. Workers were subject to the draft, while the wealthy could escape service by paying bounties or buying substitutes, and the former suffered severely from an inflation that for manufacturers and tradesmen meant rising profits. There were rumblings of discontent as the issuance of greenbacks caused the cost of living to climb even higher. "What would it profit us as a nation," the workers asked, "were we to preserve our institutions, save our constitution, and sink the masses into hopeless poverty and crime?" They were prepared to play their full part in the war effort, but their resentment flared against profiteers and speculators.

By 1863, the situation in New York shockingly reflected what a good thing war could be for those in a position to make money out of it. The hotels, theaters, jewelry establishments, and other luxury stores were doing a phenomenal business. The "shoddy," as the profiteers were called, were spending fortunes with reckless, shameless extravagance. "The men button their waistcoats with diamonds of the first water," said *Harper's Weekly*, "and the women powder their faces with gold and silver crust." Hard-hit workingmen earned no such profits, and strikes soon spread as they demanded that wages be kept in some reasonable relation to rising prices.

Bricklayers in Chicago insisted on a raise; conductors and horsecar drivers walked out in New York; union printers in St. Louis struck for higher wages; carpenters, painters, and plumbers were everywhere threatening to throw down their tools unless their demands were met; the iron molders sought a 15 percent advance; shipwrights and longshoremen went on strike; so did locomotive engineers.

In occasional instances, martial law was proclaimed to combat such disturbances, with troops acting as strikebreakers. But labor had a friend in the White House. Lincoln may not have fully understood the implications of an organized labor movement, but his sympathies were with the workers. With one possible exception, he would not support strike intervention by the government. "Thank God we have a system of labor where there can be a strike," he had declared prior to the war, and he steadfastly maintained his faith in labor and respect for labor's rights throughout the national emergency. The democracy that he affirmed was predicated on his belief that "working-men are the basis of all government." In his first annual message to Congress he had declared that labor was prior to, and independent of, capital, which would never have been created without the existence of labor. Meeting a delegation from the New York Workingmen's Democratic Republic Association in 1864, he reiterated these views: "Labor is the superior of capital, and deserves much the higher consideration."

In these circumstances, the strength of labor increased during the Civil War, and the trade unions took on a fresh lease of life. Between 1863 and 1864, the number of trade unions rose from 79 to 270, and it was estimated that the total of organized workers exceeded 200,000 – more than at any previous time. Moreover, these unions included 32 national organizations, showing far greater stability than their 1850s counterparts. The most prominent among them was the reorganized Iron Molders' International Union – "international" because it included Canadian workers. Other strong organizations, the Machinists and Blacksmiths National Union, the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, the American Miners' Association, and the Sons of Vulcan (iron puddlers), revealed the industrial character of the emerging movement.

The wartime revival of unionism was accompanied by the reemergence of an influential labor press that began to put forward organized labor's views and advocate labor reform. *Fincher's Trades' Review*, the organ of the Machinists and Blacksmiths, was the most important of these papers; with representation on its editorial board from other unions, it spoke for the whole labor movement. Its editor, Jonathan Fincher, was an able and indefatigable reporter, and a forthright commentator on labor issues. Other labor journals were a new *Working Man's Advocate*, published in Chicago, the *New York Trades' Advocate*, and the *Weekly Miner*.

A further advance was the establishment of new trades' assemblies, which resembled the old general trades' unions. The local unions of Rochester, New York, first revived this form of organizing; within a short time, almost every city had a trades' assembly. They became a source of real strength and introduced a new labor weapon – the boycott – as a means of forcing employers to yield to union demands. "All the trades unite for this purpose," read a contemporary report of the boycott, "and when a case of oppression is made known a committee from the Trades' Assembly calls upon the offender and demands redress. If the demand is not complied with[,] every trade is notified, and the members all cease trading at the obnoxious establishment." The trades' assemblies also sponsored picnics, balls, and other social activities, and in

some instances maintained libraries and reading rooms.

Labor emerged from the Civil War on the offensive for the first time since the 1830s. This time, it was prepared to move into fields of even broader national organization, to bring the new unions together in a unified movement that could meet more effectively the consolidated forces of capital.

6

TOWARD NATIONAL ORGANIZATION

Between the Civil War and the end of the nineteenth century, the United States underwent phenomenal industrial expansion. Transcontinental and regional railroad networks spanned the continent and knit the country into an economic whole. The burning stacks of steel mills both lighting and darkening the skies over Pittsburgh, Youngstown, and Chicago symbolized the growth of a gigantic industry made possible by the discovery of the incalculable iron resources of the Mesabi Range in Minnesota and highly productive coal mines that spread from western Pennsylvania to Illinois and across southern Appalachia. Oil gushed from wells in western Pennsylvania and Ohio. In the great slaughterhouses of Chicago, Cincinnati, and St. Louis, thousands of cattle and hogs were butchered daily. The textile mills of New England hummed with activity and a ready-made clothing industry developed in the nation's larger cities built with the labor and entrepreneurial skills of immigrants. Everywhere new factories and mills reflected the triumphs of the machine and the growth of mass production. Industrialism transformed the face of the nation.

The economic development that turned the United States into the world's most productive nation at the end of the nineteenth century, surpassing Great Britain and competing with Imperial Germany in the petrochemical and metallurgical industries that marked this second industrial revolution, flowed from an abundance of natural resources. The nation's coal reserves seemed unlimited; no nation produced more petroleum, iron ore, copper ore, or lead and zinc ore; its forests were beyond compare; and the fertile soils of the western prairies and plains supplied domestic and world markets with the wheat, corn, beef, and pork that fed growing populations.

Not only did the economy grow prodigiously, but the captains of American industry built immense corporations, exemplars of growth that concentrated capital resources. Commodore Vanderbilt, E. H. Harriman, James J. Hill, and Collis Huntington and his associate Leland Stanford built railroad empires. Andrew Carnegie did the same for iron and steel, while John D. Rockefeller built Standard Oil into the world's dominant producer and refiner of petroleum, and Gustavus Swift did the same for meatpacking. These entrepreneurs used the limited liability corporation to amass previously unimaginable accumulations of capital and to seek marketplace dominance for their products or services. Unlike earlier entrepreneurs who had sought local or regional dominance, the entrepreneurs of the late nineteenth century created their corporate empires on a national and even global basis. However much such gigantic economic entities may have stirred fear of abusive monopoly power among the nation's citizenry, politics and law gave a largely free rein to the goals of businesspeople. The result was a concentration of economic wealth and power that the country had never known before.

Unlike the industrial Northeast, agrarian Midwest, and resource-laden West, the defeated former slave states benefited little from postwar economic growth. Where “King Cotton” had once made the South the nation's wealthiest region and the largest producer of foreign exchange, the Civil War and its aftermath, Reconstruction, left it the nation's poorest and most backward region. The emancipation of 4 million slaves eliminated planters' primary capital resource, an expropriation of capital quite unprecedented. Emancipation also at first revolutionized the South's labor system, turning chattel slaves into free laborers theoretically able to sell their labor power to the highest bidder and to seek work elsewhere if their demands or the conditions of their labor proved unsatisfactory. During Reconstruction and its aftermath, planters and freed people battled persistently over how to rebuild the cotton economy and the proper relationship between planters and producers.

Planters needed their now-freed slaves to return to labor in the cotton fields, but had to devise new methods of work discipline in order to produce cotton at a profit. Freedmen preferred to keep their women and children away from field labor and to work on their own terms and not as ordered by their bosses. In the initial aftermath of defeat, planters used their control of the land and the law to institute forms of labor control not all that different from slavery. The imposition of federal control and military occupation under congressional reconstruction acts thwarted the planters' plans for labor control. Unable to reimpose a form of bonded labor, planters hit upon the compromise of sharecropping and tenant farming. The freed slaves who lacked land, tools, and capital would be provided the resources to grow cotton by planters or merchants who, in return, would have first claim in the form of a crop lien on the cotton grown in satisfaction of the tenant's or cropper's debt. Cotton tenants or croppers were free to work the fields as they chose, but the debts that they carried limited their mobility. Small minorities of freed people were able to acquire land of their own and survive as independent farmers, but the vast majority were condemned to lives of semi-servitude as tenants or croppers for large planters and merchants. Other freedmen worked on the docks of southern ports, in coal and iron mines, turpentine camps, on the railroads, and in lumber mills in southern forests as wage workers, but always in the dirtiest and least desirable jobs and paid at a lower rate than white workers. As wage workers, African Americans may have had greater mobility than they did as croppers, but wherever they moved these workers faced white racism.

If the southern economy could not be reconstructed without the labor of former slaves, the larger national economy could not continue to grow at its spectacular pace, for such growth depended on an abundant supply of workers. Coal and copper mines, steel mills, packinghouses, railroads, forests, and sawmills needed armies of machine operators and fetchers and haulers. Employers found such laborers among surplus farm populations, including the emancipated slaves, and masses of newly arriving European immigrants. Industrial growth and the machine age may have eliminated some traditional skills, leaving many craft workers bereft of employment

and income, but it created new skills and rendered certain older skills in high demand, only widening the gap between the more generous wages offered the skilled and the penurious ones offered the less-skilled. Skilled machinists, for example, grew more important than ever to the growth of industry, and they proved essential in the machine shops that kept railroad rolling stock in good order, and in the engine rooms of the steamships that had come to dominate maritime transport. Because their skills were in high demand, the remaining skilled workers, whether organized or not, maintained real marketplace bargaining power, while those workers who had only their labor to sell lacked comparable power. Employers treated the latter as a commodity, to be bought as cheaply as possible. Large corporations treated their workers like the raw materials of manufacture: commodities to be purchased solely on the basis of supply and demand.

In the midst of this corporate concentration, Edward Bellamy wrote in *Looking Backward* (1888), the utopian romance novel that critiqued the industrial order, “The individual laborer, who had been relatively important to the small employer, was reduced to insignificance and powerlessness against the great corporation, while at the same time the way upward to the grade of employer was closed to him. Self-defense drove him to union with his fellows.”

With employers intent on making the laws of supply and demand determine wages, they did all they could to make certain that the supply of labor was plentiful. During the Civil War, the business interests of the country enlisted Congress to assure an adequate supply of labor. In 1864, Congress passed a contract-labor law that permitted the advance of passage money to prospective immigrants in return for a lien upon their wages. The American Emigrant Company, capitalized at \$1 million and backed by such prominent figures as Chief Justice Samuel Chase, undertook to meet the requirements of an expanding economy by building up the resource of available workers. It planned “to import laborers, especially skilled laborers most in demand, from Great Britain, Belgium, France, Switzerland, Norway and Sweden, for the manufacturers, railroad companies, and other employers of labor in America.” Its advertisements declared that it was prepared to provide, at short notice and on reasonable terms, miners, puddlers, machinists, blacksmiths, molders, and mechanics of every kind. The agents of the American Emigrant Company, together with those of the railroads, steamship companies, and many industrial corporations, were soon drumming up trade in this new form of contract labor, as had the “newlanders” two centuries before in their continental quest for indentured servants.

In fact, however, relatively few immigrant workers entered the United States as contract laborers. Moreover, the Civil War reduced the flow of immigration substantially, and it would not be until the decade of the 1880s that a true mass movement resumed. But contract, or specially recruited, skilled workers did compete with craftsmen in such industries as the flint-glass trade.

In California, and in the construction of the first transcontinental railway, employers

turned to Chinese labor. Because the mass of Chinese immigrants lacked the funds to cover the cost of their transport to the West Coast, they typically owed large debts to Chinese contractors who hired them directly or as the agents of railroad companies. To pay off their debts, the Chinese who helped build the transcontinental railroad across the Sierra Nevada mountains and suffered brutally in the process labored under a form of indenture. Many of those who repaid their initial debt and survived the cruel regime of railroad construction later found work in general construction, precious-metal mining, cigar making, and such service trades as laundries and restaurants. Some of the more industrious and luckier among the Chinese immigrants became successful small-business owners, primarily in hand laundries, restaurants, and retail enterprises that catered to the Chinese community. On one occasion, eastern employers turned to Chinese workers to weaken union power among laborers in the shoe industry in North Adams, Massachusetts. "They are with us!" exclaimed the *Boston Commonwealth* in June 1870, "the 'Celestials' – with almond eyes, pigtails, rare industry, quick adaptation, high morality, and all – seventy-five of them – hard at work in the town of North Adams, making shoes."

In response to West Coast white workers, who had rioted against Chinese competition for jobs, and pleas from their unions as well as white businessmen threatened by competition, Congress in 1882 enacted a law excluding Chinese immigrants that reflected the racist sentiments then so dominant, and it subsequently reauthorized Chinese exclusion by law in 1892 and 1902. Unable to use Chinese immigrant workers, West Coast employers turned first to Japanese and then to Filipino immigrants, the latter becoming easier to obtain after the United States took control of the Philippines in 1898. Immigrant Japanese workers stirred as much racist opposition as did their Chinese predecessors, and, like the Chinese, often became the victims of white mobs. So strident and popular was white antagonism toward so-called Asian "coolie labor" that Congress banned entry to all Asian immigrants – temporarily in 1921, then permanently in 1924.

As time went on, the number of European immigrants mounted steadily – almost half a million entered the country in 1880 and more than 5 million arrived in the following decade, nearly twice the total for the previous ten years. Moreover, the source of immigration gradually shifted, as the great bulk of the newer immigrants came from Southeastern and Eastern Europe. Italians, Poles, Czechs, Slovaks, Hungarians, Greeks, and Russians – displaced peasants and ambitious townspeople eager to seize the job opportunities and wages promised by American employers – crowded the steerage of trans-Atlantic steamships. They provided an apparently inexhaustible reserve of cheap labor for mines, mills, and factories.

Periodically US-born and older immigrant white workers insisted that unrestricted immigration threatened their living standards, never more so than at the close of the nineteenth century and the first part of the twentieth century, when immigration reached massive proportions. Although European immigrants constantly augmented the supply of unskilled labor, their presence often benefited American-born and skilled

workers, whose skills were scarce by contrast and who were now needed as foremen and supervisors. No clear evidence, moreover, proves that mass immigration reduced the real wages of less skilled workers, which climbed slowly but steadily between 1865 and 1914. For while new immigrants flooded the labor market, they also enlarged markets for consumer goods and the products of industry, hence increasing demand for labor.

Clearly, as enterprises grew in scale and size, the chance for individual workers to become self-employed or succeed as small businesspeople diminished. Industrialization challenged the faith of many in the concept of the self-made man. “The hope that the workingmen may enter this circle,” the *Working Man's Advocate* of Chicago declared as early as 1866, “is a glittering delusion held up before him to distract his attention from the real object of his interests.”

Economic growth and expansion were undeniable facts, as were the rise in national income and the improvement in living standards for the country as a whole. Yet at the same time many millions lived in abject poverty in densely packed slums, all too often without the most basic comforts that their own labor made possible for others. They struggled merely to maintain their families above the level of hunger and want in a nation of growing wealth, a cruel paradox that reformer Henry George attempted to explain in his wildly popular book *Progress and Poverty* (1879). While circumstances were better for those who still retained special skills, the great majority worked long hours for little pay despite the prosperity so generally enjoyed by business and industry. George and his many followers bemoaned the rising levels of inequality and sought a means to distribute income and wealth better. For George, a “single tax” on land that had risen in value through no effort on the part of the owner might reverse wealth concentration. But corporate leaders and their political, legal, and academic allies condemned proposals like George's single tax as forms of communism alien to US values and institutions.

As business nationalized, moreover, competition between different manufacturing areas meant that prices and wages were no longer determined by local conditions or custom. They fluctuated as a consequence of economic changes wholly beyond the control of local employers or workers. In this new national market, for example, the makers of stoves in Troy and Pittsburgh, Philadelphia and Detroit had to meet the competition of manufacturers in Chicago and St. Louis. Wage scales in the East were linked with those in the West. If the iron molders in Troy or St. Louis wished to protect themselves from wage cuts in time of business recession, they had to look beyond merely local conditions and search out means to uphold the wages of comparable workers in other parts of the country.

Even more threatening to workers both skilled and unskilled were the periodic crises that afflicted the transformed national economy. Twice in the late nineteenth century major economic contractions, or depressions – once between 1873 and 1878 and later between 1893 and 1897, and a lesser contraction from 1883 to 1885 – laid the

economy low. Such economic contractions resulted both in substantial wage reductions and high levels of unemployment. Employment, which had always been insecure and intermittent for the less skilled, became more so during depressions, and even affected considerable numbers of the skilled. The tramping craftsmen, the tramp, or hobo, or vagrant became a stereotypical figure of the late nineteenth century, the latter three types evoking fear and loathing among their social betters and a series of local and state laws that penalized or victimized them. The new century did not bring with it a more stable economy, as a financial panic and ensuing contraction from 1907 to 1909, and another contraction from 1913 to 1915 (ending as world war led European belligerents to purchase enormous quantities of American products), caused high unemployment. Typically, during such economic contractions, more workers emigrated from the United States than immigrated to it. Overall, then, even as wages and the standard of living improved slowly for nearly all workers between 1865 and 1914, instability of employment, periodic bouts of unemployment, and an inability to support oneself or one's family or household acted as an ever-present fact of life. For a worker lacking organizational support in a society without a coordinated public support or welfare system, life remained perilous.

It became increasingly clear that under these new conditions of periodic depressions in an economy marked by corporate concentration, labor had no choice but organize itself on a nationwide basis. This meant, in the first instance, an attempt to create national unions that could enable workers in any trade to safeguard their wage scales against competition from whatever quarter. In the second instance, it meant an effort to confront the community of interests growing up among all employers with a like community of interests among all workers. Talk of the solidarity of labor rose as a new group of leaders sought to bring national unions, labor parties, cooperatives, and other labor reform associations into a united front to combat the rising power of organized capitalism.

In seeking to effect broader national organization in the years immediately following the Civil War, labor remained uncertain as to what course it should follow. Workers were drawn into various political movements, beguiled by new promises of reform, and intrigued by socialist theory and radical concepts of class struggle. Workers debated over the relative benefits of political versus economic action, and the advantages of craft unions as opposed to more all-inclusive unions.

Often workers took matters into their own hands, regardless of the fine-spun theories being discussed at labor conferences. Feeling themselves oppressed under the heel of capitalists, they ignored leaders who appeared to be out of touch with the actualities of economic circumstance and rose in spontaneous revolt to protect their rights. Before the Civil War, strikes had been local, short lived, and generally peaceful, but in the latter half of the nineteenth century their character changed drastically. The country soon experienced widespread and violent industrial strife.

The National Labor Union

The initial step toward a national organization of labor was taken in 1866. A group of union leaders, wholly forgetful of similar moves in the 1830s, summoned what they called “the first National Labor Congress ever convened in the United States.” It was held in Baltimore and attended by some 77 delegates from various local unions, trades’ assemblies, and national unions. The avowed purpose of the conference was to create a new unity within the ranks of labor as a whole. In organizing what was to become the National Labor Union (NLU), provision was made for the membership of not only skilled workers enrolled in existing trade unions, but also of unskilled workers and farmers. At last all those who toiled were “to rise in the majesty of their strength” and challenge the employing class to acknowledge their rights and privileges.

From the outset, the NLU aimed primarily at reform through political action. It was the first broad attempt to bring all labor together on a common program that joined trade unionists, social reformers, and even feminists in an alliance to remake society in a more egalitarian manner. Like many antebellum and subsequent nineteenth-century labor movements, the NLU committed itself to abolition of the wage system.

The leaders of the NLU preferred to leave to the trade unions the achievement of such practical objectives as the immediate improvement of working conditions. They declared that the labor movement was dependent on trade unions and urged every workingman to join one. Meeting in Baltimore, however, they upheld political action as the most effective means of promoting workers’ interests, and they strongly deprecated resort to strikes. The advocates of economic rather than political action were able to defeat a motion for the immediate formation of a straight-out political labor party, but the conference nevertheless agreed that one should be set up “as soon as possible.”

The general aims of the NLU were set forth in an *Address to the Workingmen of the United States*. It emphasized a demand for the adoption of laws establishing eight hours as a legal day’s work in every state in the Union. A reform with deeper implications than the earlier drive for a ten-hour day, for a time it appeared to dominate labor activity. The NLU, however, also sought to promote both consumer and producer cooperatives, and, partly as a means to make capital more readily available for such enterprises, it grew more and more absorbed in currency and banking reform. The abolition of convict labor; the restriction of immigration, particularly of Chinese to the West Coast, in order to safeguard the living standards of white American-born workers; the disposal of public lands only to actual settlers; and the establishment by the national government of a Department of Labor were further objectives set forth in 1866.

These largely political goals were supplemented by appeals for the broader organization of working people. The interests of women in industry were recognized; the new union pledged individual and undivided support to “the sewing women, factory

operatives, and daughters of toil,” and Kate Mullaney, the head of the Troy Laundry Workers, a union of female workers, was made one of the association's assistant secretaries. A group of African Americans, led by Baltimore ship caulker Isaac Myers, who had recently founded the Colored Caulkers Trade Union Society, was invited to the 1869 convention of the NLU. At that gathering, blacks were encouraged to form their own unions rather than being invited to join the NLU. Myers responded by convening over 200 black reformers, workers, and union advocates in Washington, DC, in December 1869, where they formed the Colored National Labor Union. The new organization drew energy from the Colored Conventions movement that emerged after the Civil War, as African American freed people and reformers in many states gathered to set a political agenda for their communities. Indicative of the Colored National Labor Union's connection to the broader African American cause, Myers served as the organization's first president, and abolitionist Frederick Douglass succeeded him.

Meanwhile, the NLU for the first time created a national leadership, and its president, William H. Sylvis, elected in 1868, became a model for a new kind of labor leader. Sylvis was at this time a man of forty, medium-sized, and strongly built, with a florid complexion, light beard and mustache, and “a face and eyes beaming with intelligence.” Few labor leaders have been more devoted to the cause, more willing to sacrifice every personal consideration for labor's interests, or more able to command the loyalty of their fellow workers. He was literally to wear himself out in their behalf. “I love this Union cause,” he declared on one occasion. “I hold it more dear than I do my family or my life. I am willing to devote to it all that I am or have or hope for in this world.”

Sylvis's views on the policies that labor should promote were never fixed, as he changed his approach over time, but whatever his position at a particular moment, he defended it aggressively. He once assailed his critics as a “two-faced, snarling crew, who act the part of puerile wiffets.” His most telling shafts were always reserved, however, for the new capitalist class which he strongly felt sought only to exploit workers – “withering everything it comes in contact with.”



Figure 6.1 William Sylvis, elected president of the National Labor Union in 1868, provided a new model of union leadership. (Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University)

Sylvis was born the son of a wagon maker, in Annoph, Pennsylvania, in 1828, and as a boy worked in the local iron foundry. In the 1840s he graduated from his apprenticeship and was invested with the “freedom suit” that marked his new status as a journeyman molder – a fine broadcloth coat, white shirt, woolen hose, calfskin boots, and high silk hat. Continuing to work at his trade in and about Philadelphia, he joined the local Stove and Hollow-Ware Molders' Union and at once became an active labor organizer. He was inspired with the idea of bringing all molders together in a single organization, and it was largely through his efforts that a convention was held in Philadelphia in 1859, at which 46 delegates from 18 local unions (known simply as “locals”) established the National Molders' Union.

The molder's union collapsed with the outbreak of the Civil War, and Sylvis himself enlisted for a short period of army service. In 1863, however, he was again back at his chosen work and was elected president of the revived Iron Molders' International Union. His only interest was in building up this organization, and through his unflagging zeal he introduced new methods and techniques in labor organization. Traveling back and forth across the country, often begging a ride in the engineer's cab because he

had no money for his rail fare, he met with groups of local molders in city after city, helped them to organize locals, and admitted them to membership in the national union. Returning for the annual convention in 1864, he was able to boast that “from a mere pigmy, our union has in one short year grown to be a giant.” With 53 affiliated locals and a total membership of 7,000 (soon to rise to 8,500), the Iron Molders' International Union had by 1865 become the strongest and most closely-knit labor organization in the country.

Sylvis was to look back upon this period when he traveled so widely as the happiest of his life. But he exhausted the slight capital at his disposal and was wholly dependent upon small funds given him by the molders. “He wore clothes until they became quite threadbare and he could wear them no longer,” his brother wrote of him in these days. “The shawl he wore to the day of his death...was filled with little holes burned there by the splashing of molten iron from the ladles of molders in strange cities, whom he was beseeching to organize.”

Sylvis also proved himself to be as capable in administration as he was in organization. He centralized power in the national union, instituted a per capita tax on all union members that provided revenue to build up a substantial strike fund, and promoted the issuance of union cards and publication in the labor press of a “scab album” that made possible general enforcement of a closed shop. Sylvis believed strongly in collective bargaining and did not encourage strikes, but when they proved to be the workers' only resource, he was ready to back them to the hilt – “the results will depend on who can pound the hardest.”

Until the winter of 1867/1868, the policies pursued by the Iron Molders' International Union proved successful, but during that difficult season the National Stove Manufacturers' and Iron Founders' Association launched an all-out counterattack. Wages were cut and members of the union laid off. When the workers went out on strike, the employers were then in a strong enough position to resist forcefully. The embattled molders fought back for months, but their strike funds became exhausted, internal dissension eventually broke their united front, and they began to straggle back to work on the employers' terms. Sylvis was able to save the union from complete extinction, but with the failure of the strike it largely lost the strength and influence it had once exerted.

Sylvis was so discouraged by this experience that he increasingly shifted his attention from trade unionism to more general labor reform, and thus found in the new National Labor Union broader scope for his activities. He was ready to support, as vigorously as he had formerly supported union organization, the drive for the eight-hour workday by legislative enactment, the formation of cooperatives, and currency reform. Reversing his earlier views, he threw all his influence behind the trend within the NLU to promote these reforms by political action. “Let our cry be REFORM,” he demanded in his first circular as its president. “Down with a monied aristocracy and up with the people.”

Meetings of the NLU clearly revealed its growing absorption with political reform. Among the delegates at the convention in 1868 (whose “philosophic and statesmanlike views of the great industrial questions” were warmly commended by the *New York Herald*) were representatives of eight-hour leagues, land-reform associations, antimonopoly societies, and many other political causes. Conspicuous among them were two advocates of women's suffrage, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony. While Sylvis and other leaders supported women's suffrage, the women's presence created something of a furor, and the delegates as a whole were not prepared to go this far. They agreed to seat the suffrage leaders only after making it plain that in so doing they were not endorsing their “peculiar ideas.”

At this same convention the NLU took a step that clearly foreshadowed its own transformation into a third party. It encouraged the formation of labor reform parties in several states and urged them to undertake direct political action. Its activities showed that in the 1860s and 1870s no clear division separated trade unionists from social reformers. The two types were interchangeable.

The impetus given to the NLU by the election of Sylvis as its president was short lived. On the eve of its annual convention in 1869, he suddenly died. The blow was a harsh one for the labor movement and “cast a veil of despondency upon the whole working class.” There was scarcely a union that did not adopt laudatory resolutions, and the labor press published innumerable editorials upon the irreparable loss of a great leader at the zenith of his fame. “Sylvis! The National Calamity,” one paper headed its comment upon his death; the *Working Man's Advocate* appeared with black borders.

From Europe came further condolences from the leaders of the International Workingmen's Association – the First International – with which Sylvis had sought to establish an alliance in the “war between poverty and wealth.” A letter signed by Karl Marx, among others, declared that the world could ill afford the loss of “such tried champions in the bloom of life as him whose loss we mourn in common.”

Short as his life was, Sylvis stands out as the first truly national labor leader in the United States. Whether the history of the NLU would have been much different had he lived longer is problematical. It had already become largely political, and Sylvis had encouraged rather than sought to restrain the diversion of its energies to reform efforts. In any event, its days were numbered. Richard F. Trevellick, a coworker with Sylvis and head of the International Union of Ship Carpenters and Caulkers, succeeded him as president. Trevellick, too, had moved toward mounting concern with politics. Under his presidency, the NLU made the final plunge and, at its annual convention in 1872 transformed itself into the National Labor Reform Party. A program primarily emphasizing currency reform was adopted, and Judge David Davis of Illinois was nominated for the presidency. When Davis withdrew his name, the political movement largely collapsed. With that collapse, the NLU ended its days.

The NLU and Social Reform

Although the NLU was both short lived and unsuccessful, certain issues with which it was concerned deserve further consideration. The first of these was the campaign for a legislated eight-hour workday, which in 1866 was declared to be “the question of all others, which at present engrosses the attention of the American workingman.” It was based upon theories that went much deeper than the old arguments upholding a shorter working day in order to promote the health, moral well-being, or educational opportunity of workers. The eight-hour day, according to its advocates, was to transform the existing organization of society by raising both the wages and status of the workers, thereby gradually narrowing the gap between employer and employee “until the capitalist and laborer are one.”

The great theorist of the eight-hour movement was Ira Steward, a Boston machinist and loyal union member, who was deeply convinced that his ideas were the solution for all of labor's problems. “Meet him any day as he steams along the street, . . .” wrote a contributor to the *American Workman*, “if you only introduce the topic of ‘hours of labor,’ and show a willingness to listen, he will stop and plead with you till night-fall.”

Steward addressed innumerable workingmen's audiences on the eight-hour day, testified before the Massachusetts legislature, wrote pamphlets and articles for the labor press, and organized first the Labor Reform Association and then the Grand Eight Hour League of Massachusetts. His ideas fired the imagination of workers. Eight-hour leagues sprang up all over the country and, in making their program its own, the NLU was reflecting a nationwide interest in the reduction of labor's working day.

Steward's basic theory clearly pointed to ideas and practices that in the twentieth century were to be even more widely accepted. In favoring the reduction of the working day to eight hours, he assumed that it would not mean any loss of wages. The workers would demand pay at least equal to what they had been receiving for ten and twelve hours' work, and, since such a demand would be universal, the employers would have no valid ground for refusing it. And with the increased leisure time the workers would then be in a position to enjoy, they would want to purchase more of the products of industry. Maintaining that it was a “mechanical fact, that the cost of making an article depends almost entirely upon the number manufactured,” Steward then asserted that the manufacturers would immediately profit from an expansion of their markets because onetime luxuries would become widely sold to the working population. Steward's major point was that the reduction of working hours could be effected without any cut in wages, and this idea was popularized by a jingle attributed to his wife:

Whether you work by the piece or work by the day,
Decreasing the hours increases the pay.

It was at the very least problematical whether employers would actually pay their old wages for an eight-hour day in the hope of building up purchasing power for their goods, but the eight-hour leagues were highly successful in promoting this concept. Both the national government and those of a number of states, moreover, were induced to take action to meet the workers' demands. The former established an eight-hour day for all its employees in 1868, and six states also made eight hours "a legal day's work."

As in the case of the earlier legislative drive for a ten-hour day, however, the action taken by the states was to prove illusory. The new laws were again subject to the reservation "where there is no special contract or agreement to the contrary," and there appeared to be no way to circumvent such limitations. A contemporary report to the NLU was wholly discouraging. "Your committee wishes also further to state," it read, "that Eight Hour laws have been passed by six states, but for all practical purposes they might as well have never been placed on the statute books, and can only be described as frauds on the laboring class."

Faced with these actualities, the movement lost the support it had temporarily commanded. Nonetheless, maximum-hour laws were to remain an objective of social reformers. They were eventually to be adopted by states without qualifying clauses, and in the 1930s Congress approved comparable legislation for all employees engaged in inter-state trade. But during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, labor gave up the attempt to secure a shorter working day by political action and returned to the use of economic pressure. The eight-hour movement of the 1880s and the 1890s found the unions making demands directly upon employers, and seeking to enforce compliance through strikes.

As the maximum-hour drives of the 1860s subsided, the NLU embraced cooperation as the solution of labor's problems. Again more was involved than in the comparable agitation of the 1840s. The latter-day cooperationists envisaged the complete reformation of society through the establishment of producers' cooperatives in every trade. Workingmen were to set up a system of self-employment that would ultimately do away with the wage system, provide practical means for an equitable distribution of the profits of industry, and free labor from its bondage to capital.

Sylvius had himself taken the lead in this movement with the establishment of cooperatives by the iron molders. Not only had their local unions set up foundries at Troy, Rochester, Chicago, Cleveland, Louisville, and other cities, but after its disastrous strike experiences, the national union itself went directly into cooperation in 1868. Impulsively changing its name to the Iron Molders' International Cooperative and Protective Union, it embarked on an ambitious project, building a large foundry at Pittsburgh. So enthusiastic was Sylvius about this program that at one time in 1868 he appeared to be ready to give up everything else to promote it. "The time has come," he stated, "when we should abandon the whole system of strikes and make co-operation the foundation of our organization and the prime object of all our efforts."

Other unions followed the molders' example. The machinists set up a number of shops on a joint-stock basis; the shoemakers established both producer and consumer cooperatives; the coopers organized some eight shops in Minneapolis; and comparable projects were started by bakers, printers, hatters, carpenters, and shipwrights.

For a time some of these cooperatives appeared to be successful, but one by one they gradually failed. They faced cut-throat competition from a business community that relentlessly attacked such "Frenchy theories of communism," struggled to overcome inefficient management, and confronted an insurmountable handicap: in a day when large outlays of capital had already become necessary for any productive enterprise, the unions faced a shortage of funds and the virtual impossibility of obtaining credit.

The latter consideration, indeed, caused the NLU to turn its attention to currency reform as a basic factor in any move by labor to help itself. This agitation grew in response to the financial community's efforts to remove wartime "greenback" paper dollars from circulation in the postwar money supply, a move that would benefit lenders and investors while hurting debtors, especially farmers. Greenbackers opposed this deflationary move. The NLU's embrace of greenbackism seemed a strange shift of emphasis from the days when workers had favored hard money, but the theories underlying greenbackism went deeper than any mere change in the money supply. Labor aligned itself with the farmers on this issue because it promised radical reform of the whole financial and economic system. Indeed, it promised to eliminate bank control of the currency and to make monetary policy a governmental function. Like those behind the eight-hour day and cooperation, currency reformers also looked toward the creation of a producers' commonwealth to replace capitalism.

Taking their ideas in large part from the proposals for a new monetary system advanced as early as 1848 by Edward Kellogg, the currency reformers urged the transformation of the public debt into bonds bearing 3 percent interest and convertible at will with a legal tender currency based not upon gold but upon the physical wealth of the country. Such a program, it was believed, would break down the monopoly of "irresponsible banking associations," abolish the "robbery of interest rates," and free the economic system from a dependence upon gold whereby "the very heart's blood of the workingman was mortgaged from the cradle to the grave."

Here was a final panacea for assuring labor its natural rights. "It would effect," the NLU declared in already familiar phrases, "the equitable distribution of the products of labor between non-producing capital and labor, giving to laborers a fair compensation for their products, and to capital a just reward for its uses, remove the necessity for excessive toil and afford the industrial classes the time and means necessary for social and intellectual culture."

Sylvis preached this newest reform as eloquently as he had advocated trade unionism, the eight-hour movement, and cooperation. It was through adopting this

program and allying itself with the political Greenback movement, however, that the NLU lost the support of trade unionists and then collapsed after trying to run a political campaign in 1872. Still, currency revision had its impassioned devotees among both farmers and workers, and local Greenback Labor parties were formed throughout the country in succeeding years to press monetary reforms. Eventually such parties coalesced to set up a national Greenback Labor Party, which in the mid-term elections of 1878 succeeded in polling over a million votes and sending 14 representatives to Congress.

The pressure this party exerted helped to bring to a halt the further retirement of greenbacks, but the basic measures for which the currency reformers agitated were not enacted. Greenbacks were made redeemable in gold by the Resumption Act of 1878. With the adoption of this measure, the Greenback Labor Party, which had temporarily aligned labor and agriculture with a common program, soon disappeared.

Depression and Union Decline

After the collapse of the NLU in 1872, there were various efforts to set up some new organization that would eschew politics and get labor back on the path of trade unionism and economic action. A series of industrial congresses were held between 1873 and 1875, the delegates to which declared that “the great desideratum of the hour” was no longer the eight-hour day, currency revision, or any other reform but “the organization, consolidation, and cooperative effort of the producing masses.” Two secret societies were also formed – the Industrial Brotherhood and the Sovereigns of Industry – with the same general aims. These efforts, however, represented moves on the part of a few leaders to impose some sort of control over labor from the top down, and they did not have substantial backing. They provided little more than forums for discussion and debate.

Moreover, economic conditions at this time had once again cut the ground out from under the labor movement and created seemingly insuperable barriers to any effective activity. In 1873 the country was swept by a panic that ushered in an even more prolonged and severe depression than that of the 1830s. There was a repetition of the old story of falling prices, business stagnation, curtailed production, wage cuts, and unemployment. As mines, mills, and factories reduced operations or actually closed up, some 3 million persons were thrown out of work. Hard times not only brought an abrupt end to the NLU and the industrial congresses, but they almost completely shattered the existing national unions, which could no more survive the harsh impact of wage cuts and mounting unemployment than could the once-promising unions formed some forty years earlier, none of which had survived the disruptive consequences of the Panic of 1837.

There were some thirty national unions when the crisis developed in 1873; there were only nine in 1877, and the total strength of unionized labor was reported to have

declined from 300,000 to perhaps 50,000 members. Union after union had the same experience. The Knights of St. Crispin was a remarkable organization of shoemakers that had been established on industrial lines, rapidly built up a membership of 50,000, and proved itself to be amazingly effective in enforcing the closed shop through a series of successful strikes. But it collapsed as quickly as it had risen and had completely disappeared by 1878. The Machinists and Blacksmiths had lost two-thirds of their members and the Coopers International Union of North America almost three-fourths. Even the more stable National Typographical Union suffered a loss of half its members, while the newly organized Cigar Makers' National Union fell from almost 6,000 members to little more than 1,000. Trade unionism was not entirely crushed, but with employers taking every advantage of hard times to combat it, and the workers unable to protect themselves, it was virtually forced underground.

In the decade after the Civil War, the labor movement struggled to adjust to the new conditions of an industrialized society and survive another economic depression. Labor leaders had yet to devise a formula that could unite the mass of workers behind a program that would adequately address their immediate needs.

To the extent that there had been any definite philosophy behind the activities promoted by the NLU, it was based upon the belief that the wage system should be abolished and that an economic order based on cooperatives be erected in its place. This is understandable, for those who led the labor movement had direct knowledge of a past substantially different from the present. They knew the history of the emerging industrial capitalist order. Hence they refused to accept its permanence. The eight-hour movement, greenbackism, and cooperation all sprang from a comprehension that the economy had once been organized in radically different ways and thus might be so reorganized again. The depression of the 1870s killed the organizational manifestations of such beliefs, but the ideas themselves remained alive and would reemerge in the worker movements of the 1880s and 1890s.

7

AN ERA OF UPHEAVAL

The depression of the 1870s ushered in one of the most tumultuous periods in American labor history. Against the somber background of hard times, workers rose to protest violently against what they considered ruthless exploitation by employers.

Demonstrations by the jobless were held in city after city, often leading to forceful intervention by the police; strikes among miners led to bloodshed and killing; and in 1877 what began as a spontaneous uprising on the part of the railway workers caused such widespread rioting that the country seemed to be facing a general labor insurrection.

Even after these disturbances had subsided, the unrest and dissatisfaction of the workers continued to simmer dangerously below the surface and when, in the 1880s, the country again experienced depression, so many strikes broke out that the period has been called “the Great Upheaval.” As never before, the nation came to realize the explosive force inherent in the great mass of industrial workers who were the product of its changing economy.

It was not surprising that many people, especially conservative business interests, believed that the country was endangered by these disturbances. Among the immigrants entering the country were many radicals, especially Marxists fleeing Bismarck's antisocialist laws in Imperial Germany. These German immigrants were central participants in the founding of socialist organizations and parties in the United States. In the early 1870s they moved the headquarters of Karl Marx's International Workingmen's Association – the First International – first to New York City and then to Philadelphia, where it expired in 1876. Their fascination with revolution and resort to violence-laden rhetoric frightened many moderate citizens, who associated anarchism and socialism with strikes and demonstrations by the unemployed.

In their outcries against communism and anarchism, however, conservatives exaggerated the radicalism of American labor. In spite of its left-wing elements and however discontented it may have been, labor was no revolutionary force. The improvement of existing working conditions, rather than the overthrow of capitalism, remained the goal of most workers. In holding foreign radicals responsible for the disturbed labor scene of the 1870s and 1880s, the newspapers of that era tended to disregard the low wages and high levels of unemployment underlying working people's discontent.

The labor violence that marked these years must therefore be set against the background of a long depression unrelieved by any public support for those whose wages were cut, or who were unable to earn any wages whatsoever, the unfeeling

attitude of such great employers as the railroads – which were controlled by bankers and financiers interested only in profits – and the lack of sufficient organization among workers to direct their protests against injustice in effective form.

These years of labor strife would witness the slow growth of the largest labor organization of the nineteenth century, the Knights of Labor, as well as national trade unions which, in mounting rivalry with the Knights, would later form the most durable labor organization in American history, the American Federation of Labor. But in the 1870s these organizational trends were overshadowed by episodes of violent conflict.

Unrest and Conflict

As the effects of the Panic of 1873 deepened and widened, there were scenes of disorder in cities throughout the country. With factories and workshops closed down in New York, Chicago, Boston, Cincinnati, and Omaha, crowds of unemployed workers gathered in huge meetings to protest the intolerable circumstances in which they found themselves. Unemployment in the industrialized society of the day was far more serious than it had ever been in the agrarian society of the first half of the nineteenth century. Homeless, hungry, and despairing, workers refused to disperse when the police sought to break up their gatherings. They fought back in defense of their right of free assembly and challenged society to meet their demands.



Figure 7.1 New York City witnessed the rise of significant labor agitation in the wake of the Panic of 1873. One outcome of worker organization in this period was the first Labor Day parade, held in New York City, September 5, 1882. (Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University)

The most noted of these outbursts was the Tompkins Square riot in New York on January 13, 1874. It began when a meeting of the unemployed was called to impress upon the city authorities the need for relief. It was approved at first, the mayor himself promising to speak. Then, evidence that radical agitators were prepared to address the proposed gathering (members of the American section of the International Workingmen's Association had participated in the arrangements) caused a last-minute cancellation of the police permit. At the scheduled hour, Tompkins Square was nevertheless densely packed with working people who knew nothing about the change in the official attitude toward the meeting. Suddenly a squadron of mounted police appeared on the scene. Without warning, they charged into the crowd, indiscriminately swinging their clubs and hitting everyone within reach. Men, women, and children were ridden down as they fled in panic, and scores of innocent bystanders were severely injured.

Reporting the next day that the police applied their clubs with "reasonable but not excessive severity," the *New York Times* took the attitude that the demonstration was wholly the work of alien radicals. "The persons arrested yesterday," it editorialized, "seem all to have been foreigners – chiefly Germans or Irishmen. Communism is not a weed of native growth."

One young laboring man was profoundly affected by the Tompkins Square riot. The youthful Samuel Gompers was on hand when the mounted police charged the crowd. By jumping down a cellarway, he barely escaped having his own head cracked open. "I saw how professions of radicalism and sensationalism concentrated all the forces of society against a labor movement and nullified in advance normal, necessary activity," Gompers wrote years later in his autobiography. "I saw that leadership in the labor movement could be safely entrusted only to those into whose hearts and minds had been woven the experience of earning their bread by daily labor." In 1874, however, Gompers remained a radical of the first order, even a serious student of Marxist economics, and only slowly over time, as he gained greater experience in trade unionism, did he grow far more moderate in his beliefs.

In the wake of such disturbances as the Tompkins Square riot and demonstrations in other cities, outbreaks of violence in the anthracite coal fields of eastern Pennsylvania next evoked widespread public attention. The workers in this industry, following the lead of the soft-coal miners who had established the Miners' National Association in Ohio in 1873, had formed a union of their own, the Miners' and Mine Laborers' Benevolent Association. The new organization succeeded in reaching a trade agreement with the Anthracite Board of Trade, but in December 1874 the operators independently cut wages below the agreed upon minimum rate. The miners at once walked out of the pits and, in what became known as "the long strike," tried to compel the operators to restore the cut wages. As hunger and want began to exact their toll among the workers and compelled many of them to return to the pits, something like open war developed between the remaining strikers and the coal-and-iron police sent into the area by the operators to protect strikebreakers.

Into this troubled situation was then projected another element whose exact role in the long strike is still debated. Sensational reports appeared in the press of the operations of a secret organization among the miners, popularly known as the Molly Maguires, which was said to be terrorizing the coal fields and preventing those miners who wished to return to work from doing so. In fact, the Mollies were as much a fraternal society of immigrant Irish Catholic workers, who felt discriminated against by their Protestant English and Welsh-origin employers and foremen, as they were a traditional labor organization. The members of this society were also charged with attempting to intimidate the coal operators – as they had once sought to intimidate Irish landlords under the leadership of a redoubtable widow named Molly Maguire, from whom they took their name – by violent threats against foremen and superintendents, sabotage and destruction of mine property, and outright murder and assassination. It has subsequently been revealed that the operators themselves instigated some of these attacks on the mines in order to provide an excuse for moving in, not only to crush the Molly Maguires, but also all union organization.

Franklin Gowen, the bitterly antilabor president of the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad, which controlled many of the mines, took the initiative in suppressing the Mollies. He hired a Pinkerton detective, one James McParlan, to obtain proof of the

criminal activity of the Molly Maguires at any cost. Posing as a fugitive from justice, McParlan won his way into their confidence, and under circumstances not entirely clear, finally succeeded in turning up evidence in the fall of 1875 which led the authorities to make a series of arrests. His testimony on the stand and that of other witnesses who turned state's evidence was in many instances suspect, but the trials resulted in the wholesale conviction of 24 of the Molly Maguires. Ten of them were hanged for murder, and the others were sentenced to jail for terms from two to seven years.

Thus was order restored in the coal fields. Whatever the power and influence of the secret society had actually been, it was shattered by this attack. But the operators had also succeeded in breaking the Miners' Benevolent Association and forcing the strikers back to work on management's terms, which all along had been the aim of Franklin Gowen. The long strike ended in complete failure for the workers and the collapse of their union.



Figure 7.2 Illustrating the intensity that often accompanied labor conflict in the coal fields, men and women harass a “blackleg” strikebreaker during a coal miners' strike in Ohio, 1880s. (Courtesy Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University)

The Great Railroad Strikes

Riots by the unemployed and violence in the anthracite coal fields served as a prelude to the railroad strikes of 1877, which led to disorders and rioting so intense as to trigger the intervention of federal troops to suppress them.

The railroad strikes first broke out early in July 1877 as a protest against wage cuts, without coherent leadership or organization. The first such strike broke out among workers on the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, and was followed swiftly by railway workers on the Pennsylvania, the New York Central, and the Erie railroads. Within a brief time, all rail lines east of the Mississippi were affected, and the movement then spread to the Missouri Pacific, the St. Louis, Kansas and Northern, and other western lines. Now railroad traffic throughout the nation was interrupted and paralyzed in broad sections. As rioting flared up dangerously in Baltimore, Pittsburgh, Chicago, St. Louis, and San Francisco, the country was confronted with its first national industrial outbreak. "It is wrong to call this a strike," the *St. Louis Republic* exclaimed, "it is labor revolution."

The strikers on the Baltimore and Ohio were the first to clash with authority; along that line at Martinsburg, West Virginia, order was restored only after President Rutherford B. Hayes dispatched 200 federal troops to the scene. Rioting on a much larger scale occurred in Baltimore. There the strikers stopped all trains, refused to allow them to move, and began to seize railroad property. When the militia, called out by the governor of Maryland, marched from their armory to the railway station, a gathering crowd of workers and their sympathizers attacked them with brickbats, stones, and clubs. The troops opened fire and broke for the station, but the rioters kept up the assault and set fire to it. When police and firemen arrived, the mob for a time tried to prevent them from putting out the blaze, but finally gave way. Disturbances continued through a wild and riotous night, and only the arrival of federal troops the next morning quelled the rioting. By then the toll of victims had mounted to nine persons killed and more than a score gravely injured (three of whom later died).

In the meantime, a still more serious outbreak took place in Pittsburgh, where the strikers also stopped trains and took possession of railway property. Popular sympathy there was wholly with the railway workers because of a deep-seated resentment against the policies of the Pennsylvania Railroad. The local militia, openly fraternizing with the strikers, refused to take any action against them. The arrival of a force of 650 soldiers, dispatched from Philadelphia to protect railway property, consequently precipitated a pitched battle in which the troops opened fire and, after killing some 25 persons and wounding many more, took over possession of the roundhouse and machine shops.

The infuriated strikers, their ranks swelled by miners, mill hands, and factory workers, returned to the attack with arms seized from nearby gun shops and laid siege to the troops. As night fell, freight cars were set afire and pushed into the roundhouse until it, too, was blazing. The troops, surrounded by flames and nearly suffocated with smoke, fought their way out amid a hail of bullets and retreated across the Allegheny River.

An enraged crowd, swelled to between 4,000 and 5,000 persons, now had the field to itself. Angry workers tore up railway tracks, broke open freight and passenger

cars, and set fire to what they could not otherwise destroy. Some 2,000 rail cars, the machine shops, a grain elevator, and two roundhouses housing 125 locomotives went up in flames. The Union Depot itself was burned down. As the rioting continued unchecked, the more unruly, the desperately poor, and those who simply hoped to take advantage of the chaos broke into Pittsburgh's liquor stores and, allegedly after sampling what they had looted, proceeded to pillage other types of stores in the city at will. They carried off furniture, clothing, and provisions.

“Here a brawny woman could be seen hurrying away with pairs of white kid slippers under her arms,” read one contemporary description; “another carrying an infant, would be rolling a barrel of flour along the sidewalk, using her feet as the propelling power; here a man pushing a wheelbarrow loaded with white lead. Boys hurried through the crowd with large-sized family Bibles as their share of the plunder, while scores of females utilized aprons and dresses to carry flours, eggs, dry goods, etc. Bundles of umbrellas, fancy parasols, hams, bacons, leaf lard, calico, blankets, laces and flour were mixed together in the arms of robust men, or carried on hastily constructed hand barrows.”

It was not until after the angry poor and unemployed had spent a whole weekend seizing or despoiling an estimated \$5 million to \$7 million worth of property that the police, reinforced by bands of armed citizens, began to restore some semblance of order. In the meantime, the entire state militia had been called out, and, following an emergency cabinet meeting, President Hayes ordered all federal troops in the Atlantic Department be made available to cope with the emergency. Only when the regulars arrived in Pittsburgh did railway property finally receive protection.

Headlines and editorials declared that communism lay at the bottom of the strike and was responsible for its violence. The event was described as “an insurrection, a revolution, an attempt of communists and vagabonds to coerce society, an endeavour to undermine American institutions.” The *New York Tribune* stated that only force could subdue this “ignorant rabble with hungry mouths”; the *New York Times* characterized the strikers as “hoodlums, rabble, bummers, looters, blacklegs, thieves, tramps, ruffians, incendiaries, enemies of society, brigands, rascallions, riffraff, felons and idiots”; and the *New York Herald* declared that the mob was “a wild beast and needs to be shot down.” Reading such headlines as “Chicago in the Possession of Communists” caused many citizens to become hysterical.

As federal troops reached the scene in city after city, however, the rioting subsided as quickly as it had flared. The strikers not only made no further attempts to interfere with the railroads' operations, but gradually went back to work. They had made their point and they knew they could do no more with the government upholding the railroads. By the end of July, the trains were generally running again and the strikes were over.

The outbreaks of violence associated with the railroad strike brought the vigorous enforcement of law and order, but in the suppression of the strikes the original

grievances of the railway workers were discounted. The *New York Tribune*, which at first had admitted that public opinion was largely with the workers, took the position that they should have been willing to practice greater self-denial and economy until conditions had settled down. It was not impossible to sustain life on \$2 or even \$1 a day, it editorialized, and if employees were unwilling to work for such wages, they had no right to prevent others from taking their jobs; because of their attitude, “they deserve no sympathy, but only punishment.”

The month of July 1877 had, in any event, been one of the most turbulent in American history, and the long-term consequences of its disorder and rioting proved to be highly important. The business community was aroused as never before to the potential power of industrial workers and embarked on an aggressive program to suppress all labor activity. Businessmen revived the old conspiracy laws, sought to intimidate workers from joining unions, imposed the “iron clad” oath, and enlisted strikebreakers whenever trouble threatened. The lesson driven home for labor was the need to develop organizations sophisticated and strong enough to prevent workers from letting strikes turn into uncontrolled mob actions that would inevitably invite suppression by state or federal troops. Capitalism had won this first round of industrial strife, but it was fearful of the future. Labor had lost, but it had a new realization of its latent strength.

The Haymarket Square Riot

The violence that marked both demonstrations by the unemployed and railway revolts in the 1870s had its counterpart in another round of strikes during the next decade, but the eruption in Haymarket Square in 1886, more than any other outbreak in these years, served to alarm the public. Chicago's civic leaders and businessmen held anarchists responsible for the tumult and deaths caused by the “riot.” And while far less than a majority of the city's workers were influenced by the anarchists' “propaganda by the deed,” the repercussions of the Haymarket incident affected the entire labor movement. The foes of unionism used the incident to discredit organized labor and stigmatize it as radical, revolutionary, and un-American.

Left-wing groups within the labor movement remained active and even popular into the 1880s. The International Workingmen's Association had been dissolved in 1876, but the socialist forces in the United States had formed a new Workingmen's Party, its small membership largely drawn from German and other European-born immigrants who formed a substantial proportion of the working classes in larger cities such as Chicago.

Persistent internal quarrels regularly split factions on the left. Marxian socialists, who promoted trade unionism as a base for the revolutionary activity that was eventually to overthrow the capitalist state battled Lassalleans (followers of the German socialist Ferdinand Lassalle), who urged direct political activity as a more effective

means of achieving socialism. Other leftists flirted with the far more radical doctrines of anarchism than being preached in the United States by Johann Most, a big, black-bearded German immigrant and former socialist who, after arriving in the United States in 1882, had become a fiery exponent of revolutionary violence. The radicals who espoused his brand of anarchism established an International Working People's Association (known as the Black International), which won control of the Central Labor Union in Chicago. It had some 2,000 members drawn from German and Polish metal workers, cabinetmakers, and packinghouse employees, and through the pages of its organ, the *Alarm*, it openly called for immediate revolution.

Anarchism itself had a long history in America, a tradition of suspicion of all government and authority influenced by the moral philosophy of the Massachusetts writer Henry David Thoreau. Hence it was not odd for an American-born worker like Albert Parsons to ally with the immigrant Johann Most to propose a combination of trade unionism and anarchism as the solution to labor's plight. These radicals, not all of whom favored violent deeds, built a real following among Chicago workers. Thus the Chicago newspapers constantly stressed the danger of violence in every demonstration of labor militancy. "The Nihilistic character of the procession," read one report of a labor parade in which members of the Central Labor Union participated, "was shown by the red badges and red flags which were thickly displayed throughout it."

When in 1886 a movement spread across the country for general strikes in favor of the eight-hour day, the Chicago anarchists were ready to take advantage of every opportunity to preach their own doctrines of revolution. The day set for the eight-hour strike – May 1 – passed quietly, but two days later a clash between strikers and strikebreakers at the McCormick Harvester plant in Chicago led to police intervention and the death of four men. Here was the sort of situation for which members of the Black International had been waiting. That night they circulated leaflets through the city calling upon workers to avenge their slaughtered comrades.

"The masters sent out their bloodhounds – the police," this appeal read; "they killed six of your brothers at McCormick's this afternoon. They killed the poor wretches because they, like you, had the courage to disobey the supreme will of your bosses. ...To arms we call you, to arms!"

Anarchists summoned a protest meeting for Haymarket Square the next evening, May 4, and some 3,000 persons gathered to hear impassioned speeches by anarchist leaders. But it was an entirely peaceful meeting in spite of all these alarms (the mayor himself attended it and left upon finding everything quiet). And when a cold wind began to blow gusts of rain through the square, the crowd gradually melted away. The meeting had, in fact, virtually broken up by the time a police detachment of 200 arrived, their captain ordering what remained of the crowd to disperse. Suddenly a sharp explosion rang out. Someone had hurled a bomb into the ranks of the police, killing one of the officers outright. The other officers at once opened fire, this amid

answering shots from the crowd. During the fray, which erupted without warning and ended nearly as abruptly as it began, seven police in all were either killed or fatally wounded and some 67 were injured; four workers were killed and at least 50 of them were injured.

The authorities and the press immediately blamed the anarchists for the violence and an outraged cry arose for the punishment of the perpetrators. The police combed the city for suspects, and finally eight known anarchist leaders were arrested and charged with murder. In a frenzied atmosphere compounded equally by fear and the desire for revenge, the suspects were thereupon promptly found guilty, with seven of them sentenced to death and the eighth to 15 years' imprisonment. Only primarily circumstantial evidence connected any of these people with the bombing. Civic leaders and respectable citizens alike condemned the eight anarchists out of hand for their revolutionary views and their incitements to violence that supposedly caused the bombing. "Convict these men, make examples of them, hang them," urged the state's attorney, "and you save our institutions."

Two of the convicted men pleaded for executive clemency and were given life imprisonment. Six years later, Illinois governor John Peter Altgeld pardoned them, together with the eighth man who had been sentenced to 15 years, on the grounds that they had not been granted a fair trial. So violent was the feeling against the anarchists, even at this late date, that newspaper editorialists, business leaders, and more conservative political leaders condemned Altgeld for what the governor believed was an act of simple justice.

Organized labor denied all association with the Haymarket Square bombing and also denied any sympathy whatsoever for the accused anarchists. Some unionists even parroted the condemnation of the most conservative newspapers. "Better that seven times seven men hang," declared the paper of the Knights of Labor, "than to have the whole labor movement tarred with the brush of communism and anarchism." It scarcely mattered to business and political leaders that comparatively few labor leaders or ordinary workers believed in anarchism or socialism; but it did serve their purposes that by associating trade unionism with radicalism, they could place all labor on the defensive.

8

THE RISE AND DECLINE OF THE KNIGHTS OF LABOR

Seventeen years before the Haymarket Square incident and eight years before the great railway strike that made 1877 the “year of violence,” the first step had been taken to organize what was to become the Noble and Holy Order of the Knights of Labor. Nevertheless, the years of labor unrest and industrial strife that played out between 1877 and 1886 propelled the Knights' rise to an unprecedented pinnacle of power. Even though those same years saw the slow revival of national trade unions and Samuel Gompers's rise to prominence as a labor leader and a founder of the American Federation of Labor, the future of American labor in the mid-1880s appeared to lie squarely with the Knights of Labor. For the first time, a labor association seemed strong enough to challenge industry on its own grounds. “It is an organization,” one contemporary writer stated emphatically, “in whose hands now rests the destinies of the Republic....It has demonstrated the overmastering power of a national combination among workingmen.”

Conservatives accused the Knights of promoting the radical ideas being preached by foreign agitators, and they associated the organization with the Haymarket Square incident and alien anarchists. But the Knights were in reality an indigenous response to the conditions under which many Americans toiled and – as the National Labor Union (NLU) had been – a combination of trade union and general reform philosophy. The Knights' leaders looked forward to the abolition of “wage slavery” and the construction of a “cooperative commonwealth.” However hazy their goals may have been, they stressed organization, education, and political agitation as the best means to build a new society. They also insisted that the existing economic system could only be changed peaceably, which often led them to oppose the use of strikes.

Even more significant, they sought to promote a form of unionism that would embrace skilled and unskilled, white and black, male and female, in a single labor organization. They recognized the vital importance of the role of industrial workers in the emerging capitalist system and were convinced that trade unionism had to give way to labor organization on a much broader basis. Their attitude in some measure foreshadowed the industrial unionism of a later day, but rather than being a federation or congress of individual unions, the Knights continually emphasized the solidarity of labor and looked toward a centralized association that would include workers in all industries and occupations.

Their ideal of a pervasive unity among workingmen everywhere – “an injury to one is an injury to all” – was a high-minded concept, but one rarely achieved in the United States or anywhere else. Thus the Knights' efforts to bring unskilled workers, whites and blacks, and men and women within the fold of organized labor won only

temporary success. However committed they may have been in theory to fairness and the importance of organizing all workers regardless of skill, race, or gender, they confronted almost insuperable barriers of race, language, and religion that worked to divide and separate the great mass of workers, especially the newer immigrants and emancipated African Americans. Indeed, the Knights themselves reinforced such barriers in one respect: they strongly supported the exclusion of Chinese immigrants from the United States.

For their part, employers were quick to take advantage of every opportunity to stir up friction and animosity among an ethnically, racially, and religiously diverse working class. Moreover, as the ranks of workers were constantly swelled by new arrivals, a reserve army of labor was always at hand to furnish cheap replacements for those who dared to take part in any union activity. The industrial workers of the 1880s lacked either the cohesiveness or the bargaining power to make their inclusion in the organized labor movement easy. In the face of unrelenting employer opposition, it was not until after the restriction of immigration in the 1920s and government support for labor organizations in the 1930s that industrial unionism – with some few notable exceptions, such as in coal mining – succeeded.

The members of the traditional trade unions – the counterpart of the mechanics and artisans of an earlier day – realized as much in the 1880s, and they became increasingly unwilling to link their fortunes with unskilled workers. They felt compelled to create a more structured, stable, and ultimately successful alternative to the Knights of Labor, one that drew its strength from the solidarity of skilled workers. As they increasingly distinguished themselves from the Knights, the trade unions in the American Federation of Labor became the embodiment of a “new unionism” concerned primarily with the needs of craftsmen.

The Origins of the Knights of Labor

Nine inconspicuous tailors, meeting in Philadelphia in the hall of the American Hose Company, founded the Knights of Labor on December 9, 1869. Former members of a local garment cutters' association, which had been forced to dissolve for lack of funds for its benefit program, they decided to form a new association. Originally this organization differed little from any other craft union except that it was a secret society and its activities were centered about an elaborate ritual. But one of the group, Uriah S. Stephens, had a far broader vision of labor organization, and his fellow members were soon caught up by his idealistic enthusiasms. This was the concept of a new labor solidarity that would make it possible to include all the nation's workers in a single unified order, without regard to nationality, sex, creed, or color.

The thinking of the founders of the Knights of Labor was devoid of the idea of class struggle. They did not plan any attack upon the citadels of industry – “no conflict with legitimate enterprise, no antagonism to necessary capital.” While they looked

ultimately to “the complete emancipation of the wealth producers from the thralldom and loss of wage slavery,” this was to be brought about gradually by mitigating the evils of the existing economic system and by establishing producers' cooperatives. In time a new industrial commonwealth would be created in which moral worth, rather than material wealth, would be accepted as the true standard of individual and national greatness.

The leader of the nine tailors who met in Philadelphia, Stephens, was born in Cape May, New Jersey, in 1821 and educated for the Baptist ministry. Forced to abandon his studies after the Panic of 1837, he became apprenticed to a tailor, and the 1840s found him working at his trade in Philadelphia. Some time later he traveled extensively – to the West Indies, Mexico, and California – but on the eve of the Civil War he was back in Philadelphia. He attended the workers' antiwar convention in 1861, and the next year helped to organize the Garment Cutters' Association. Never a trade unionist in any strict meaning of the term – he believed that unions were too narrow in their outlook and circumscribed in their operations – Stephens drew from his religious background the vision of the universality of labor symbolized in the mysticism of the Knights of Labor's secret ritual.

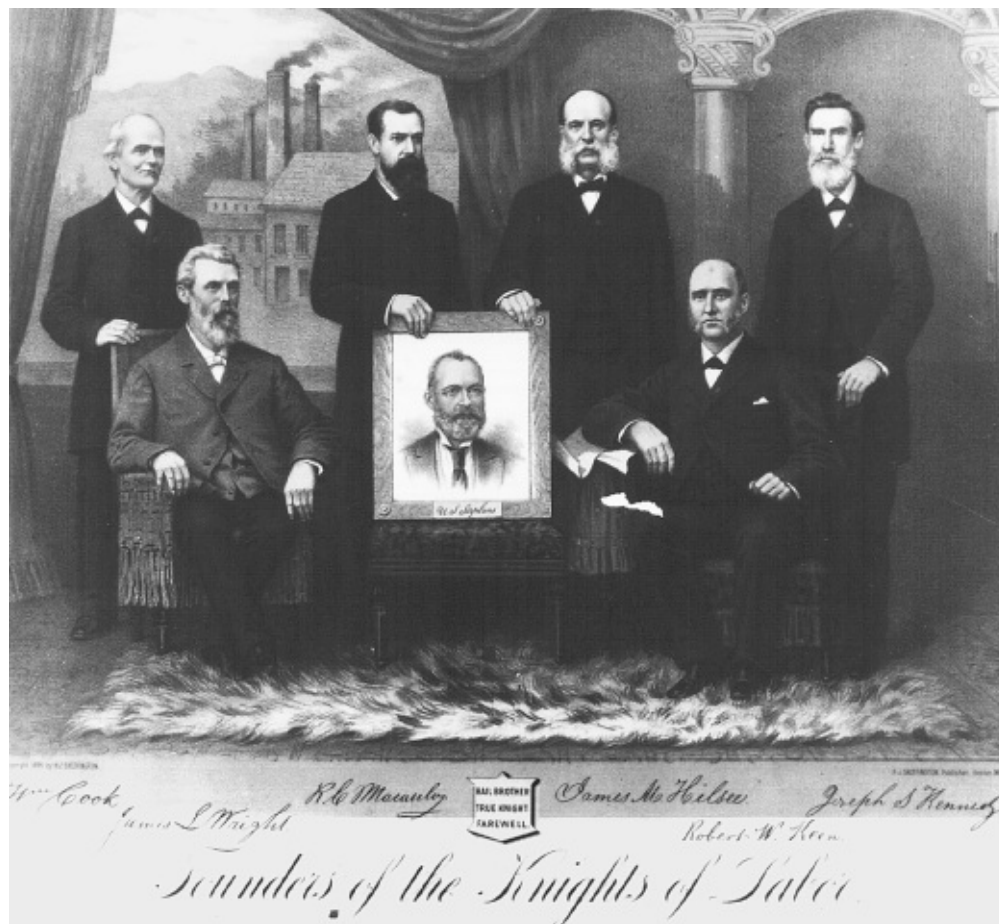


Figure 8.1 Founders of the Knights of Labor depicted in an 1886 engraving holding a portrait of their organization's first leader, Grand Master Workman Uriah S. Stephens. (Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University)

“Cultivate friendship among the great brotherhood of toil,” he would advise his followers; “learn to respect industry in the person of every intelligent worker; unmake the shams of life by deference to the humble but useful craftsman; beget concert of action by conciliation....The work to which this fraternity addresses itself is one of the greatest magnitude ever attempted in the history of the world....It builds upon the immutable basis of the Fatherhood of God, and the logical principle of the Brotherhood of Man.”

This was the strain that ran through all Stephens's writings and addresses. In pursuing the ultimate goal of consolidating “all branches of labor into a compact whole,” he dismissed the idea of organizing separate trades or callings and wished to do away with both boycotts and strikes, whose benefits he felt were “partial and evanescent.” His vision embraced all mankind. “Creed, party and nationality,” he wrote, “are but outward garments and present no obstacle to the fusion of the hearts of worshippers of God, the Universal Father, and the workers for man, the universal brother.”

Stephens's role in the foundation of the Knights of Labor was all-important, and he became its first Grand Master Workman when it was nationally organized. Thereafter, however, he did not end up staying with the Knights much longer. Turning to politics and becoming interested in currency reform, he ran unsuccessfully for Congress on the Greenback ticket in 1878. Resigning his post in the Knights, he drifted away from the labor movement altogether and died in 1882 without witnessing the Order's rise to unprecedented prominence.

In the meantime, the original Philadelphia assembly of the Knights of Labor grew slowly. The secrecy that had been adopted to enhance the mystical appeal of ritual and ceremony, as well as to protect members from possible retaliation by employers, was rigidly maintained. Prospective new members would be invited to attend a meeting of the group without being told what it was, and only after having given satisfactory answers to various questions as to their opinions regarding “the elevation of labor” would they be considered eligible for initiation. The ritual was passed on by word of mouth, and outsiders had no way of knowing the existence of the order, let alone its purposes. In all public documents or notices, ***** designated the name.

Provision was made for expansion through the admission of “sojourners,” workers in other crafts than that of tailoring, on the payment of an initiation fee of \$1. When their number became sufficient, they could “swarm” and form an assembly of their own. But it was not until 1872 that a second assembly, made up of ship carpenters, was actually established. The pace of growth then accelerated. In the next two years, some 80 locals were formed in and about Philadelphia, and in 1874 the first assembly outside this immediate area was established in New York. These groups were all composed of workers in distinct crafts – garment cutters, ship carpenters, shawl weavers, masons, machinists and blacksmiths, house carpenters, tinsmiths and iron workers, stonecutters and gold beaters.

The next step in the evolution of the Knights was the formation of district assemblies made up of delegates from the local assemblies. The first of these units was established in Philadelphia in 1873. The next year, one was set up in Camden, New Jersey, and another in Pittsburgh – a first step toward invasion of the West. Soon there were district assemblies in Ohio, West Virginia, Indiana, and Illinois, as well as Pennsylvania, New York, and New Jersey, with a membership that included unskilled and semiskilled workers in addition to craft workers.

As time went on, many local assemblies were established as mixed assemblies of workers in different trades. Miners, railway workers, and steelworkers joined the Knights in increasing numbers, and wherever there were not enough members of a single trade to form a trade assembly, especially in small towns and rural areas, the mixed assembly became a general catchall. Eventually, the mixed assemblies outnumbered the trade assemblies, and with their inclusion of unskilled workers they gave the Knights their distinctive character. In all, some 14 district assemblies, with a total membership of about 9,000, had been formed when the leaders of the movement decided that the time had come to send out a call for a general convention to form a national body.

This meeting was held in Reading, Pennsylvania, in January 1878 with 33 delegates present. After long discussion, a constitution was adopted that established a General Assembly as the supreme authority of the Knights, with control over both districts and the assemblies. In theory, the new organization was highly centralized, but the district assemblies had authority within their own jurisdictions and were never subject to control as rigid as the constitution theoretically contemplated. The Knights became, however, a truly national organization in a sense never attained by its predecessors, and it further differed from them in that membership remained on an individual basis rather than through affiliated unions. The workingman anxious to join simply applied for membership in a local assembly, was duly initiated, paid chapter dues, attended meetings, and so became an accredited Knight of Labor.

Membership was open to all wage earners and to all former wage earners (although the latter could not exceed one-fourth of the membership in any local assembly). Only lawyers, doctors, bankers, those who made their living through selling liquor, and later stockbrokers and professional gamblers were excluded. “It gathers into one fold,” stated a later provision in the constitution, “all branches of honorable toil.”

The preamble to the constitution, taking over the general principles that had been put forward by the earlier Industrial Brotherhood, called attention to “the recent alarming development and aggression of aggregated wealth,” and stated that, unless it were checked, it would inevitably lead “to the pauperization and hopeless degradation of the toiling masses.” Only through unification could labor be assured of the fruits of its toil, the Knights declared.

The constitution itself set forth many of the traditional demands of organized labor, and also outlined certain new goals. It called for the establishment of cooperatives,

the reservation of public lands for actual settlers, an eight-hour workday, and a greenback currency in much the same terms employed by the NLU. It demanded abolition of the contract system for prison labor, the prohibition of child labor, equal pay for the sexes, the establishment of bureaus of labor statistics, and, by later amendment, the government's ownership of railways and telegraphs, and the adoption of a graduated income tax.

Insofar as industrial action was concerned, the Knights of Labor supported boycotts, which were to become increasingly important, but they strongly favored arbitration rather than resort to strikes, which they at first wholly opposed. While a resistance fund was eventually set up for use in certain carefully defined contingencies, it was provided that only 30 percent of the money collected could be directly used for strikes, with 60 percent set aside for cooperatives and 10 percent for education. The Knights knew that strikes might sometimes be necessary, but they were unwilling to support them except when specifically approved by their Executive Board. "Strikes at best afford only temporary relief," the Knights' revised constitution of 1884 was to state, "and members should be educated to depend upon thorough education, cooperation and political action, and through these the abolition of the wage system."

This cautious attitude was in part due to the experience of workers during the railway strikes of 1877. The violence resulting from these strikes, and consequent intervention by federal troops, seemed to make such direct action a dubious expedient in the minds of the leaders of the Knights of Labor. But they had no solution to the problem of how arbitration was to be enforced should employers refuse to deal with their representatives. The Knights consequently became involved in strikes in spite of themselves, and when the local assemblies were threatened by retaliatory measures on the part of industry, the Executive Board felt bound to come to their aid.

The ambiguities of its position on the strike issue also seemed to mark the stand of the Knights on political questions. The contemplated reforms in some respects went even beyond those put forward by the NLU, and yet the Knights sought to remain primarily an industrial rather than a political organization. While they engaged in lobbying activities and in time entered more directly into politics, they made no attempt to set up a labor party. "Politics must be subordinated to industry," the General Assembly declared in 1884, and made it clear that "this Order is in no way bound by the political expression of its individual members."

The basic policies of the Knights of Labor, in short, sometimes appeared to be highly contradictory. The Knights sought to emphasize their industrial character, and yet agitated for an all-inclusive program of social reform; they discouraged strikes and yet became deeply involved in them; they called for political action and denied that they had any direct concern with politics. Moreover, while the Knights were theoretically highly centralized, leading to charges that their policies were dictatorially determined by a handful of leaders, its membership actually took matters into their own hands and went their own way.

The first General Assembly set the stage for further expansion. A membership of 9,287 rose to 28,136 a year later, and then declined to 19,422 in 1881. The secrecy that had at first provided a protective screen safeguarding members from employer attack, especially during the depression of 1873 to 1878 with its mass unemployment, began to hamper the Knights' growth. The Knights became associated in the public mind with such other secret societies as the Molly Maguires, and aroused such suspicion on the part of the Roman Catholic Church that, in Canada, all Catholics were forbidden to join them. Measures were consequently taken to make the name of the Knights public, remove the oath from the initiation proceedings, and eliminate all scriptural passages from the ritual. Through the intercession of James Cardinal Gibbons, who was persuaded that there was nothing about the revised ritual offensive to religious doctrine, Pope Leo XIII was induced to withdraw his condemnation and uphold the propriety of the Roman Catholic Church's approval. The Knights' membership rapidly recovered after it dropped secrecy, the depression ended, and the economy expanded. Its membership had doubled in 1882 to more than 42,000, and within the next three years it swelled to over 100,000.

The man who led its revival was Terence V. Powderly, who was chosen to succeed Stephens as Grand Master Workman in 1879. This young labor agitator, only 30 years old at the time, had been born in Carbondale, Pennsylvania, in 1849. The son of Irish Catholic parents who emigrated to the United States in the 1820s, he worked while a young boy as a switch tender in the local railway yards but soon decided that he wanted to become a machinist. When 17, he was apprenticed to this trade, and three years later he got a journeyman's job in the shops of the Delaware and Western Railroad in Scranton.

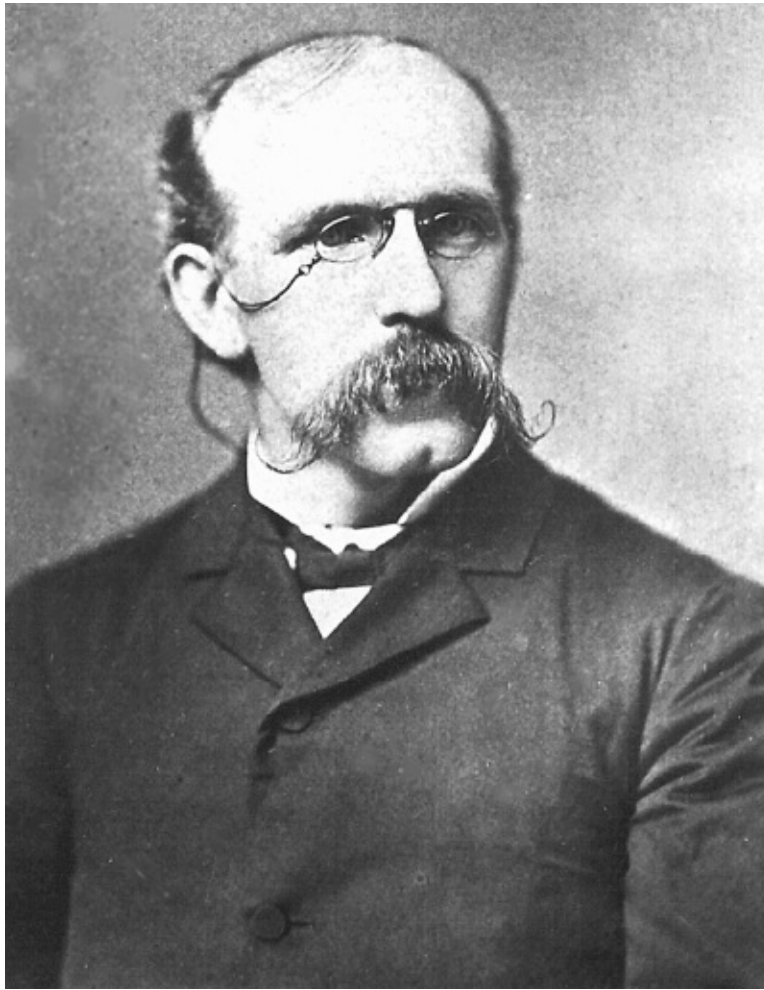


Figure 8.2 Terence V. Powderly, leader of the Knights of Labor from 1879 to 1893. (Ohio Historical Society)

In the next few years he successively joined the International Union of Machinists and Blacksmiths, became the Pennsylvania organizer for the Industrial Brotherhood, and, in 1874, was initiated into the Knights of Labor. After a brief period of “sojourning,” he organized and became Master Workman of Assembly No. 222 and corresponding secretary for District Assembly No. 5. His mounting interest in labor politics also led to participation in the activities of the Greenback Labor Party and, in 1878, he was elected on its ticket as the mayor of Scranton.

Powderly was to continue to hold this latter post until 1884, even though he had in the meantime been elected Grand Master Workman of the Knights. He always had many and varied interests. He studied law and later practiced at the Bar, served as a county health officer, was part owner and manager of a grocery store, and became vice president of the Irish Land League. At one time he applied, unsuccessfully, for the post of head of the Bureau of Labor Statistics in Washington, established largely through the efforts of the Knights. After he lost the presidency of the Knights in 1893, he obtained a governmental post in the Bureau of Immigration. He lived until 1924, when his stormy career as a labor leader was almost forgotten by a generation far removed from the turbulent industrial strife of the 1880s.

Powderly did not look like a labor leader. Slender and under average height, he had wavy light-brown hair, a blond drooping mustache, and mild, bespectacled blue eyes. He dressed conventionally and well, his usual costume being a double-breasted broadcloth coat, stand-up collar, plain tie, dark trousers, and small, narrow shoes. His manners were formal and polite, and gave every appearance of a man of breeding and refinement.

Powderly was straitlaced, almost puritanical in his views. A convinced teetotaler, he warred incessantly against the saloon and had little toleration for those who liked to drink. While he inspired both affection and loyalty among his followers, he was never an easy mixer or really at home in labor gatherings. He had his own sense of humor, as is shown in his autobiographical writings, but there was no natural give and take about the man.

On assuming his post as Grand Master Workman, Powderly did yeoman work in building up the Knights of Labor's membership. He was an eloquent and persuasive speaker and an indefatigable letter writer. Yet even in these early days of enthusiasm, he never dedicated himself to the labor movement with the wholehearted devotion of Sylvis. Powderly continually protested that his other interests did not allow him to give full time to his job as Grand Master Workman, and on occasion he petulantly complained that his health (which was never very good) was not equal to the heavy demands being made upon it. He not only resented the incessant requests for him to speak, but with a sense of his own importance, which time did not diminish, he insisted that, when he did speak, it should be under circumstances suitable to his high office in the Knights.

"I will talk at no picnics," he once wrote exasperatedly in the *Journal of United Labor*. "When I speak on the labor question I want the individual attention of my hearers and I want that attention for at least two hours and in that two hours I can only epitomize. At a picnic where...the girls as well as the boys swill beer I cannot talk at all....If it comes to my ears that I am advertised to speak at picnics...I will prefer charges against the offenders for holding the executive head of the Order up to ridicule."

For all Powderly's narcissism, there was no gainsaying his skill as an organizer. His able handling of the dispute with the Roman Catholic Church was largely responsible for Cardinal Gibbons's intercession with Pope Leo XIII on the Knights' behalf. Powderly was also a master at labor politics and built up a personal machine that enabled him to keep close control over the General Assembly during its years of growth and expansion. There were times when he declared that there was nothing that he wanted more than to hand over his post to someone else, but this did not prevent him from vigorously combating any opposition to his policies, sharply assailing his opponents, and clinging firmly to office.

Powderly's ideas and theories were closely in accord with the underlying aims of the Knights of Labor as expressed in their original First Principles – and they had the same idealistic, broadly humanitarian, and often contradictory scope. He believed in

education more than direct economic action, but he avoided clearly defining his goals. He possessed a gift for uttering vague generalities clothed in the most grandiloquent phrases.

“The Knights of Labor is higher and grander than party,” he declared on one occasion. “There is a nobler future before it than that which clings to its existence amidst partisan rancor and strife....We seek and intend to enlist the services of men from every society, of every party, every religion, and every nation in the crusade which we have inaugurated against these twin monsters, tyranny and monopoly; and in that crusade we have burned the bridges behind us; we have stricken from our vocabulary that word fail; we aim at establishing the complete rights of man throughout the world.”

Powderly was a staunch advocate of land reform and temperance, but cooperation was the means by which he hoped to achieve labor's ultimate liberation. Under his leadership, the Knights became active in various cooperative ventures. Many of the district assemblies set up both consumers' and producers' cooperatives, some 135 in all, and the national organization itself purchased and for a time operated a coal mine at Cannelburg, Indiana. These undertakings, whether in mining, cooperage, shoe manufacturing, printing, or other industries generally failed, however, for the same reasons as had most previous experiments along these lines.

Powderly nevertheless clung to his conviction that cooperatives represented the way in which labor could establish the self-employment that was its ultimate salvation. “It is to cooperation,...” he told the General Assembly in 1880, “that the eyes of the workingmen and working women of the world should be directed, upon cooperation their hopes should be centered....There is no good reason why labor cannot, through cooperation, own and operate mines, factories, and railroads....By cooperation alone can a system of colonization be established in which men may band together for the purpose of securing the greatest good to the greatest number, and place the man who is willing to toil upon his own homestead.” He likened the movement to the Revolution, and long after the Knights had abandoned it, he continued to assert his faith in the ultimate creation of a cooperative commonwealth. Although these long-term aims were his real concern, as head of the Knights he had to deal with such immediate and practical issues as shorter hours and higher wages – objectives in which the Knights themselves were far more interested.

This raised the question of strikes. As an idealistic man of peace, Powderly opposed them. He was later to boast that “not once did I, during my fourteen years' incumbency of the office of General Master Workman, order a strike.” But in his attitude on this vital issue of the 1880s, lay perhaps his greatest weakness. As the Knights of Labor repeatedly became involved in strikes, both with and without the approval of their governing body, the Grand Master Workman had a responsibility, which he could not avoid, to support them. There were times when Powderly did so courageously, in spite of his own inner conviction that they were futile; but in other

instances he seemed to be so timid as to be ready to conclude any sort of settlement with employers. In these cases, more forthright leadership might have carried the strikes through to success.

Powderly was at heart a humanitarian who thought in terms of the general elevation of the producing class to a higher level in society. "If I had the right to give myself a name," he later wrote in his autobiography, "I would call it equalizer." Nothing could have more clearly portrayed his impatience with the immediate, short-run objectives that most interested the great majority of workers in their growing acceptance of their status as wage earners.

"Just think of it!" he once wrote in self-pitying explanation of his position. "Opposing strikes and always striking.... Battling with my pen in the leading journals and magazines of the day for the great things we are educating the people on and fighting with might and main for the little things. Our Order has held me in my present position because of the reputation I have won in the nation at large by taking high ground on important national questions, yet the trade element in our Order has always kept me busy at the base of the breastworks throwing up earth which they trample down."

The Rise of the Knights

It was when hard times again hit the country in the 1880s, leading to widespread wage cuts and unemployment in the traditional pattern of the economic cycle, that the Knights of Labor became involved in the strikes that were first to promote their spectacular growth and then to precipitate their gradual decline. Powderly was to be tried and found wanting. But both the rise of the Noble and Holy Order of the Knights of Labor and its ultimate collapse were in reality due to economic and social forces far beyond his control.

As restive workers sought to combat the exactions of employers trying to reduce operating costs, there were walkouts in 1883/1884 by glass workers, telegraph operators, and cotton spinners in Fall River, Massachusetts, shoemakers and carpet weavers in Philadelphia, miners in Pennsylvania and Ohio, iron molders in Troy, New York, and shopmen on the Union Pacific Railroad. Knights of Labor participated in each of these strikes and played a major role in four of them. What was most significant was that, while the other strikes were crushed by the employers, those in which the Knights most actively engaged resulted, with a single exception, in victories for the workers. The most important of these was that of the Union Pacific Railroad's shopmen, the workers who kept trains repaired and running. The strike forced the railroad to rescind wage cuts all along the line.

The victory of the workers in this strike was due in large part to the aggressive leadership of Joseph R. Buchanan, a militant labor agitator who had joined the Knights in 1882. A onetime prospector in Colorado, he typified the new West – a large, rough, domineering man. His success in leading the shopmen's strike was

primarily due to the creation of a feeling of unity among the workers through organization of the Union Pacific Employees' Protective Association and the subsequent establishment of local assemblies of the Knights of Labor.

A year after the Union Pacific affair, another strike of railway shopmen broke out on the lines making up the so-called Southwest System: the Missouri Pacific, the Missouri, Kansas, and Texas, and the Wabash railroads. It had no sooner got under way through spontaneous work stoppages than Buchanan hurried to the scene, as a representative of the Knights of Labor assemblies on the western railroads, and repeated his earlier success on the Union Pacific by organizing the disaffected workers of the Southwest System into local assemblies. With the support of the trainmen, the striking shopmen were able to put up such a strong front that again they won their demands.

These victories, so surprising in the light of the disastrous experience of the railway strikes in 1877, redounded to the credit of the Knights of Labor, and their prestige began to soar. But an even more sensational success was won in 1885, when the Knights clashed directly, as a result of further disputes on the Wabash Railroad, with Jay Gould, the powerful, astute, and unscrupulous financier who controlled the entire Southwest System. The Wabash had begun in April and May to lay off shopmen who were members of the Knights in what appeared to be a determined effort to break the local unions. The district assembly, which had been organized the previous year in Moberley, Missouri, at once called a strike and appealed to national headquarters for help. The Executive Board was still seeking to maintain a general antistrike policy, but it was forced to recognize that the existence of the Knights was at stake in this challenge to the organization of railway workers. When the Wabash bluntly refused to halt its layoffs, the Executive Board consequently felt driven to take action. All Knights of Labor still working on the Wabash were ordered out on strike, and those on other railways in the Southwest System and on the Union Pacific were instructed not to handle any Wabash rolling stock. The workers responded enthusiastically. Trains were stopped and the cars uncoupled, engines were "killed," and widespread sabotage, in some cases leading to disorder and violence, spread throughout the Southwest.

The threat to his entire transportation system, which the Knights appeared to be strong enough to tie up completely, forced Gould to consider compromise. A series of conferences was held in New York, and the country was treated to the amazing spectacle of the management of one of the nation's greatest railway systems negotiating with the Executive Board of a nationwide labor organization. Nothing like it had ever before happened. Moreover, it resulted in an understanding between them. Gould agreed to end all discrimination against the Knights on the lines he controlled, reputedly saying that he had come to believe in labor unions and wished that all his railroad employees were organized. Powderly called off the strike and promised that no further work stoppages would be authorized until conferences had been held with the railway officials. "The Wabash victory is with the Knights," exclaimed the *St. Louis*

Chronicle in astonishment. "No such victory has ever before been secured in this or any other country."

For the nation's workers generally, Gould's apparent capitulation was the signal for an overwhelming rush to join an organization that had proved itself to be so powerful. During the next few months, more local assemblies of the Knights of Labor were formed than in the previous 16 years. It is not at all clear what sorts of workers now joined the organization. Some thought that the Knights had a special appeal for unskilled and semiskilled workers in such basic industries as coal, steel, and the railroads. The more rapid growth of mixed rather than trade (craft) assemblies seemed to confirm such an assumption. Indeed, even some farmers, shopkeepers, and petty producers joined. Moreover, female and black membership surged. But craftsmen remained the core and cadres in the Knights of Labor. As the organization attracted the skilled and unskilled, male and female, black and white, between July 1, 1885 and June 30, 1886, the number of local assemblies rose from 1,610 to 5,892, and total membership shot up from around 100,000 to over 700,000. "Never in all history," exulted the editor of one labor paper, "has there been such a spectacle as the march of the Order of the Knights of Labor at the present time."

So great was the influx that harried organizers found themselves initiating new members so rapidly that they wholly lost control of the situation and were for a time compelled to suspend the formation of new assemblies. The Knights were expanding much too rapidly. Powderly was later to state that "at least four hundred thousand came in from curiosity and caused more damage than good." Nevertheless, in the spring of 1886, the Knights of Labor appeared to have taken control of the entire labor movement and to be virtually all-powerful.

Wild rumors magnified even the astounding growth that had actually taken place. The membership was said to be almost 2.5 million and the war chest some \$12 million. The conservative press conjured up the frightening prospect of the Knights wholly dominating the country. It was prophesied that it would name the next United States president or, even more fearfully, that it would overthrow the whole social system.

"Five men in this country," an article in the *New York Sun* stated, "control the chief interests of five hundred thousand workingmen, and can at any moment take the means of livelihood from 2.5 million souls. These men compose the executive board of the noble order of the Knights of Labor of America.... They can stay the nimble touch of almost every telegraph operator; can shut up most of the mills and factories, and can disable the railroads. They can issue an edict against any manufactured goods so as to make their subjects cease buying them, and the tradesmen stop selling them. They can array labor against capital, putting labor on the offensive or the defensive, for quiet and stubborn self-protection, or for angry, organized assault as they will."

As the head of this powerful organization, Powderly was said to have become an absolute czar of labor, ruling his followers with "despotism and secrecy." Actually, he

was overwhelmed by the uncontrolled expansion of the Knights and the tremendous responsibility suddenly thrust upon him. "The position I hold," he ruefully commented, "is too big for any ten men. It is certainly too big for me."

The Knights of Labor were at the peak of their astounding prestige. Everywhere workers were singing:

Toiling millions now are waking –
See them marching on;
All the tyrants now are shaking,
Ere their power's gone.

Chorus:

Storm the fort, ye Knights of Labor,
Battle for your cause;
Equal rights for every neighbor –
Down with Tyrant laws!

The magnitude of the early victories, however, held the seeds of dissolution. Success produced its own problems. Despite warnings from the Knights' Executive Board and its official journal concerning precipitate strikes, many rank and filers felt their power to be unlimited. In an organization with relatively few full-time paid officials and without any real managerial structure, little discipline or restraint could be exercised over the membership. Hence the workers continued to press their demands upon employers and to count upon the Knights to support them. Out of this situation were to come a succession of defeats, as discouraging for the Knights as their original triumphs had been stimulating.

An early setback resulted from another strike by the railway workers on the Southwest System. The employees of the Missouri Pacific and the Missouri, Kansas and Texas were still discontented. They had been ready to strike in support of the shopmen on the Wabash in 1885, and, with exaggerated ideas of the strength of the Knights of Labor, were seeking an opportunity the following spring to walk out in demand for higher pay. When a Knights of Labor foreman on the Texas and Pacific Railway was fired, the master workman of District Assembly No. 1, a local leader named Martin Irons, promptly called a strike without awaiting any official authorization. It quickly spread from the Texas and Pacific to workers on the other lines.

"Tell the world that men of the Gould Southwest system are on strike," read one appeal. "We strike for justice to ourselves and our fellowmen everywhere. Fourteen thousand men are Out....Bring in all your grievances in one bundle at once, and come out to a man, and stay out until they are all settled to your entire satisfaction. Let us

demand our rights and compel the exploiters to accede to our demands.”

Such demands were all that Gould and the officials of the railways he controlled needed to convince them that the Knights of Labor should be crushed. Gould never really favored unionization in the slightest; he had retreated in 1885 only to gather force for a counterattack in 1886. Powderly, indeed, was later to charge that the management of the Texas and Pacific had instigated the strike, actually coercing Irons into calling out the men against his will. However that may be, the Southwest System railroads now fought the strikers with all the weapons at their command. When the workers again uncoupled cars and killed engines, management hired strikebreakers and Pinkerton guards, and appealed to state governors for military protection. This time there were to be no concessions.

Powderly was in an impossible situation. He did not approve the strike and had had nothing to do with calling it, but he found himself accused by the railways of violating the pledge he had made not to authorize any work stoppage without previous conferences. He sought out Gould and tried to find a basis for a settlement the strikers could accept. But the railway magnate now had no intention of negotiating with the Knights, and the conversations were entirely fruitless.

In the meantime, things were going badly for the workers. Only some 3,000 out of 48,000 employees on the Gould system were reported to have actually turned out, and in their battles with the scabs, they were being worsted. Respectable opinion was also against them. “They are, in fact,” the *Nation* declared, “trying to introduce into modern society a new right – that is, the right to be employed by people who do not want you and who cannot afford to pay what you ask.”

Finally, with the railroads refusing all concessions, a congressional committee investigating the strike, and opposition to the workers' cause gaining strength, Powderly in effect washed his hands of the whole affair. He recognized the importance of the controversy for the prestige of the Knights and was reluctant to capitulate to Gould, but he saw no way in which the strike could be carried through successfully. Left with the responsibility that the Grand Master Workman evaded, the Executive Board then gave way and ordered the men back to work. The Knights had suffered their first serious reversal, and their organization on the Gould system collapsed.

There were to be further defeats as other employers, following Gould's lead, marshaled their forces to crush every workers' uprising and permanently break the power of the Knights. During the latter half of 1886, some 100,000 wage earners were involved in labor disputes, with the great majority of these strikes and lockouts wholly unsuccessful. Employers, not workers, had moved on the offensive, deciding that they could no longer tolerate resistance by their organized employees and that the trade assemblies affiliated with the Knights must be combated and eliminated.

The Knights suffered most severely from a strike in the Chicago stockyards in which

meatpackers struck for the eight-hour day against defiant employers who responded by declaring they would no longer employ any members of the Knights. The strike tied up the packing houses completely, and there seemed to be some chance of a compromise agreement when, suddenly and without warning, Powderly ordered the men back to work with the threat to take away their charters if they refused. He was later accused of both selling out to the employers and of being unduly influenced by the intercession of a Roman Catholic priest. He maintained that the strikers were bound to be defeated and that he had merely tried to prevent further suffering and possible bloodshed, likely the truth given the relative power of meatpacking barons and their corporate oligopoly compared to that of their readily replaceable workers. In any case, the failed strike was yet another blow to Powderly's prestige and the Knight's strength.

It was clear that the tide had turned. The aggressive counterattack of industry, quick to take advantage of every opportunity, rolled back labor's earlier gains. As early as July 1886, labor journalist John Swinton had declared that, while at the opening of the year the Golden Age appeared to be on hand, it already looked as if the workers "had been deceived by the will-o'-the-wisp." Now he was wholly convinced of it: "the money power had swept all before it and established its supremacy beyond challenge."

The Decline of the Knights

The onslaughts of industry and consequent loss of strikes were not the only developments that now served to undermine the strength of the Knights of Labor; Powderly's leadership worsened matters.

Among Powderly's tactical blunders was his response to the effort by the national trade unions in 1886 to promote a general strike for the eight-hour day. Although the Knights of Labor strongly favored an eight-hour day, Powderly would not associate them with the strike call. "No assembly," he stated in a secret circular, "must strike for the eight-hour system on May 1st. under the impression they are obeying orders from headquarters, for such an order was not, and will not be given." Instead of such direct action, he suggested that the local assemblies have their members write short essays on the eight-hour day for simultaneous publication in the press on Washington's birthday. Many of the district assemblies simply disregarded the Grand Master Workman. When May 1 arrived, thousands of Knights took part in this first mass demonstration on the part of the nation's workers to demand the eight-hour day.

It was not a success. Some 340,000 workers were estimated to have participated in the eight-hour movement, and over half of this total actually went out on strike on May 1. But while 200,000 were said to have secured employer recognition of the eight-hour day, their gains proved to be short lived. It was reported by the close of the year that employers had retracted for all but some 15,000 workers the concessions that

they had temporarily felt compelled to grant. The antilabor reaction that followed the Haymarket Square affair, which occurred in the midst of the eight-hour campaign, played a part in its downfall, as did the failure of the Knights of Labor to support the movement. As had happened during the strikes lost by the Knights in 1886, resolute opposition by employers proved most responsible for the defeat of the eight-hour movement.

When the Knights of Labor met for its convention in the fall of 1886, appearances still belied the inner weaknesses that were leading to dissolution. The national assembly at Richmond, Virginia, was the most impressive labor gathering that the country had ever witnessed; the governor of Virginia formally welcomed the 700 delegates, the assemblage of which heard the impassioned eloquence of assembly speakers decrying "the lash of gold" that was falling upon "the backs of millions." However impressive the convention may have seemed on the surface, the Knights suffered by holding it in a segregated southern city. In 1886 the Knights had thousands of African American members, some of whom attended the convention as delegates, including Frank Farrell, a leader of New York City's militant District Assembly No. 49, who addressed the convention. Powderly and fellow officers tried to extend a brotherly hand to their African American members, but those intentions were difficult to carry out in a city that by custom and law separated the races in meeting places, dining places, hotels, and all forms of public accommodation. While Powderly embraced his black brothers and sisters, many other white delegates shared the racist assumptions that governed social conventions in Richmond and rejected Powderly's stand.

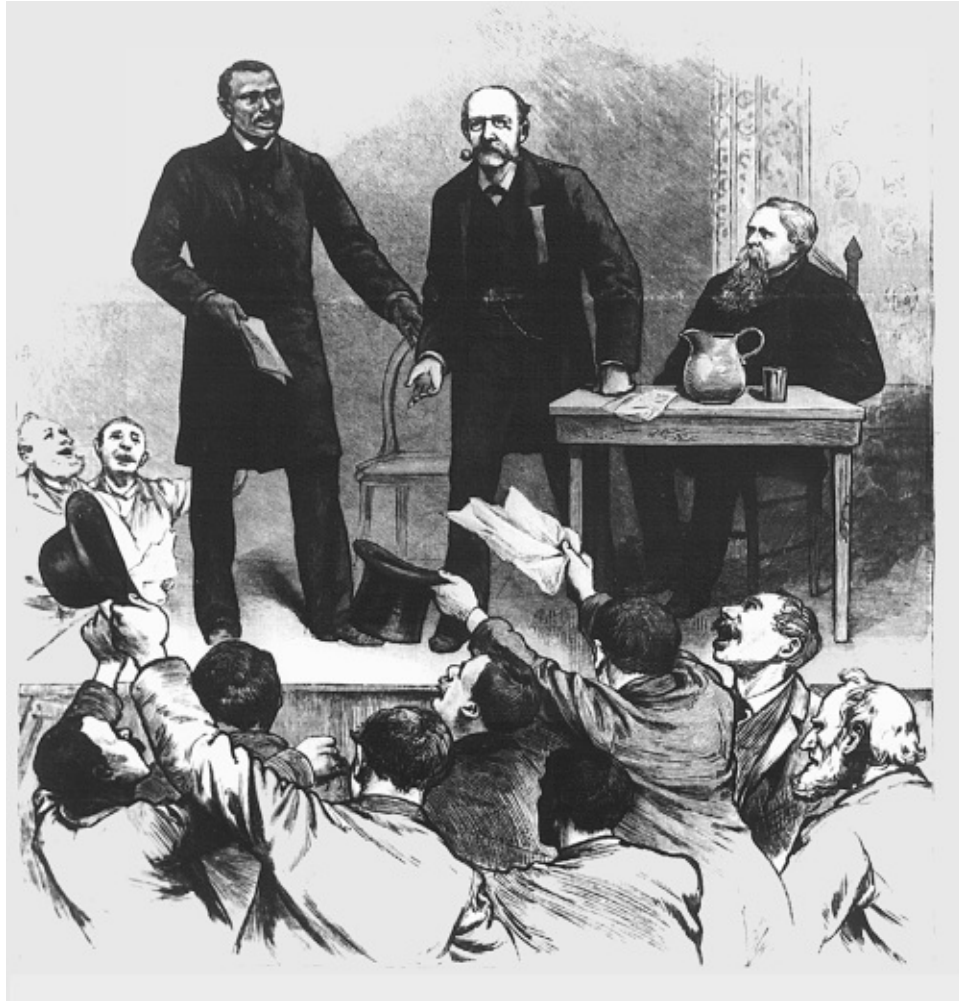


Figure 8.3 Terence Powderly introduces African American delegate Frank J. Farrell of New York City's District Assembly No. 49 at the tenth annual convention of the Knights of Labor in Richmond, Virginia, 1886. (Library of Congress)

Racist realities, the failure of so many strikes, the collapse of the eight-hour movement, the dissolution of most of the cooperative ventures, and the aftereffects of Haymarket Square combined to start the Knights of Labor on its decline. Many of the local assemblies simply dissolved, and others made up of skilled craftsmen drifted toward an alternative movement that would eventuate in the formation of the American Federation of Labor. By the end of the 1880s the Knights were already involved in a losing battle for members with the rising trade unions that represented more skilled workers. A membership of 700,000 dropped to 200,000 within two years; by 1893, the Knights had fallen to 75,000. The conservative press rejoiced at the disintegration of an organization that they had once portrayed as holding the destiny of the republic in its power. "The only wonder," one editor commented with relief, "is that the madness lasted so long."

For a time the leaders of the Knights of Labor sought to combat this trend by turning toward political as opposed to industrial activity. Powderly urged the workingmen to protect their interests by making their concerted pressure felt "upon that day which of

all days is important to the American citizen – ELECTION DAY.” The Knights supported local labor candidates for political office in a dozen cities in the fall of 1886, and the Grand Master Workman himself campaigned energetically for Henry George and his single-tax program in the mayoral election in New York. Although Powderly still did not believe in a third-party movement, his feeling of frustration over the failure of economic action led him more and more to politics as a last resort. In 1889, he urged the Knights “to throw strikes, boycotts, lockouts and such nuisances to the winds and unite in one strike through the legislative weapon in such a way as to humble the power of the corporations who rule the United States today.”

In the final stages of decline of the Knights of Labor, its political and reformist tendencies, always powerful within the organization, became dominant. In 1893, James R. Sovereign of Iowa replaced Powderly as Grand Master Workman. A product of the trans-Mississippi West, where farmer-labor politics seemed both an actuality and a success, Sovereign concerned himself overwhelmingly with reform politics. “It is not founded on the question of adjusting wages,” Sovereign stated in 1894 in describing the function of the Knights, “but on the question of abolishing the wage system and the establishment of a cooperative industrial system. When its real mission is accomplished, poverty will be reduced to a minimum and the land dotted with peaceful happy homes.”

The words had a familiar ring – Sylvis, Stephens, or Powderly himself might have uttered them – but Sovereign now spoke to and for a dying organization. As assembly after assembly drifted away, a handful of politically minded leaders occasionally met to urge measures that they were wholly unable to carry through.

In spite of its sorry end, the Noble and Holy Order of the Knights of Labor had given a tremendous impetus to the organization of labor, and both its successes and failures were to be of continuing significance for the growth of the labor movement as a whole. The Knights had failed, but as one of its earliest historians, Norman J. Ware, wrote: “The Order tried to teach the American wage-earner that he was a wage-earner first and a bricklayer, carpenter, miner, shoemaker, after, that he was a wage-earner first and a Catholic, Protestant, Jew, white, black, Democrat, Republican after. This meant that the Order was teaching something that was not so in the hope that sometime it would be. It failed, and its failure was perhaps a part of the general failure of democracy – or is it humanity?” As Ware suggested, the Knights had created a sense of solidarity among workers which had been but dimly felt before their advent, and they offered a challenge to the power of industry which revealed as never before the potential power of organization. After all, the growth of the Knights within less than 25 years from a little secret society of seven journeymen tailors to a nationwide organization of 700,000 workers was in itself an incredible achievement.

9

THE AMERICAN FEDERATION OF LABOR

In 1885, Adolph Strasser, president of the Cigar Makers' International Union (CMIU), was called before the Senate Committee on Education and Labor, and asked what the “ultimate ends” of his organization were. His answer surprised his interrogators. “We have no ultimate ends,” he said. “We are going on from day to day. We fight only for immediate objects – objects that can be realized in a few years.”

In this answer we find the core of the philosophy that underlay the revival of trade unionism and was to inspire the formation of the American Federation of Labor. The new leaders of organized labor were as interested in winning higher wages and shorter hours for their followers as in seeking a total reformation of society. Although they retained the humanitarian, idealistic goals of their predecessors, they prided themselves above all else on being “practical men.” However much they may have remained wedded to dreams of liberating their members from the shackles of “wage slavery,” they defended the interests of their trade union followers within the framework of the existing industrial system.

The Triumph of Business Unionism

While the old national trade unions had been almost wholly broken up during the somber days of depression in the 1870s, the same years that witnessed the dramatic rise of the Knights of Labor found craft unions slowly coming back to life. In some instances they were associated with the Knights, joining them as national trade assemblies; in other cases, they stayed aloof and maintained complete independence. Their role in the labor movement appeared in either event to be largely overshadowed by that of the Knights throughout the greater part of the 1880s. A public impressed with the apparent unity and strength of the Noble and Holy Order of the Knights of Labor little realized that the future was to lie with the trade unions, rather than with the inchoate masses of skilled and unskilled workers who were believed to be so completely at the beck and call of Terence V. Powderly.

The history of the national unions during these years conforms to no set pattern. Rivalry, conflict, and all the intricate maneuvering of labor politics marked their revival after the 1870s. But the “new unionism,” which Strasser had in mind with his emphasis upon immediate and practical goals, gradually took shape and form as events demonstrated that the program of the Knights of Labor was failing.

This practical approach to labor problems was not of course entirely new. The original trade societies half a century earlier had stressed organization on a strictly craft basis, job protection, and such forthright objectives as higher wages and shorter

hours. The national unions of the late 1860s and early 1870s had these same ends in view, and an immediate progenitor of the new program could be found in the molders' union in the days before William Sylvis was converted from trade unionism to reform. Nevertheless, there was to be in many respects a fresh approach to the basic problem of the organization of labor born of the unhappy experience of the national unions during earlier periods of depression. By then, American union leaders also had witnessed the success of the new model of British trade unionism that had arisen in the mid-nineteenth century and created stable craft unions focused on immediately achievable objectives.

Among such unions, one that had narrowly escaped complete extinction was the CMIU. Its membership had dwindled to little more than a handful when its reorganization was undertaken by three militant leaders – Adolph Strasser, Ferdinand Laurrell and, most conspicuously, Samuel Gompers – who undertook to put it back on its feet with the adoption of sound, efficient practices. A New York local was established in 1875, with Gompers taking over the presidency. In 1877 Strasser was elected president of the international. A strike among New York cigar makers in protest against the sweatshop system failed disastrously that year, but defeat merely strengthened the determination of the new union officials to carry their program through and give the cigar makers an organization that could protect their interests effectively. “Trade unionism,” as Gompers wrote, “had to be put upon a business basis in order to develop power adequate to secure better working conditions.”

Initiation fees and high dues, together with a system of sickness and death benefits, all features associated with British new unionism, were adopted to insure the stability and permanence of the new union. The principle of equalization of funds, whereby a local in a strong financial position could be ordered to transfer some part of its reserves to any local in distress, was also borrowed from the practice of British trade unions. A highly centralized control gave the international officers virtually complete authority over all local unions and guaranteed both strict discipline in the promotion of strikes and adequate support when they were officially authorized. The CMIU laid paramount stress on responsibility and efficiency. While they were prepared to use the strike as the most effective weapon in enforcing a demand for trade agreements, it was to be employed only when the union commanded the resources to make it successful.

Other unions adopted similar procedures, notably the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners under the able leadership of Peter J. McGuire. But the CMIU were the real pioneers, and they carried their reorganization through so successfully that they became the model for the new unionism. Their experience graphically illustrated what could be done on a firm foundation of financial stability and centralized authority. There was no talk of producers' self-employment, a cooperative commonwealth, or any other utopian goal. “Necessity has forced the labor movement to adopt the most practical methods,” it was stated emphatically. “They are struggling for higher wages and shorter hours....No financial scheme or plan of taxation will

shorten the hours of labor.”

This pragmatic approach taken during the last quarter of the nineteenth century did not signify the repudiation of more general reforms or the traditional search for emancipation from “wage slavery.” Rather, it reflected the ability among the proponents of the “new unionism” to distinguish what was immediately attainable from what was ultimately desirable. It also flowed from their belief that ultimate ends could never be won in the absence of stable organizations that satisfied the urgent needs of their members. Many of the new-style unionists, including Gompers and especially McGuire, remained wedded to egalitarian, radical, and socialist ideals. Their philosophy was based on the notion that only through self-action could workers emancipate themselves, and that the craft union was essential to such action. For the present, they sought to win for wageworkers the greatest attainable benefits from the economic system. Its overthrow could be left to an undetermined future.

Hence the reorganized labor movement remained hospitable to radicals. The revolutionary element, which had had a part in the upheavals of the 1870s and 1880s, found a place in the trade unions. The adherents of both Marxian and Lassallean socialism continued “to bore from within” in their attempts to swing labor into their respective camps, and they were to win converts among members of unions affiliated with the American Federation of Labor. Only after 1900 did the more exclusive craft unions publicly repudiate socialism and become more moderate on many economic and social issues.

Samuel Gompers and the New Union Model

If the driving force behind the new unionism came largely from the CMIU, it was Samuel Gompers above all others who was its most able spokesman and the principal architect of the national organization that was to promote its basic principles. He was not only to become the first president of the American Federation of Labor (AFL), but, with the exception of a single year, he held that post until his death in 1924. The reorientation of the labor movement upon the decline of the Knights of Labor, and the success of the AFL in surviving the depression of the 1890s, were in large part the work of this stocky, matter-of-fact, stubborn labor leader whose character and philosophy were in such glaring contrast to the character and philosophy of Powderly.

Gompers was born in London's East End in 1850. His father, of Dutch-Jewish stock, was a cigar maker, and the young Samuel was apprenticed to this trade at the age of ten. When the family emigrated to the United States in 1863, he first helped his father to make cigars in their tenement home in New York's East Side, but he soon got a job of his own and joined a local union as early as 1864.

The cigar-making shops at this time were schools of political and social philosophy as well as factories, and there was no more avid student than the young immigrant from

London already steeped in the background of British trade unionism. As he sat at his bench in the dark and dusty loft, dexterously fashioning cigars, he listened with eager attention to the talk of socialism and labor reform among his fellow workers. Most of them were European-born, and many of them were members of the International Workingmen's Association. They had the custom of having one of their number read the labor periodicals and other magazines aloud to them (they chipped in to make up the pay he would otherwise have lost), and Gompers was often given this assignment.

Gompers's thorough exposure to Marxian philosophy did not, however, make the young cigar maker a theorist. On the contrary, it appears to have confirmed his hard-headed, practical approach to the problems of labor. He was perhaps greatly influenced in maintaining this point of view by Ferdinand Laurrell, a tough-minded Swedish immigrant experienced in all phases of radicalism. Laurrell advised him to read Marx and Engels, but to be constantly on guard against being carried away by their theorizing. He warned him not to join the Socialist Labor Party. "Study your union card, Sam," he told Gompers, "and if the idea does not square with that, it ain't true."

It was with such a background that Gompers plunged into the task, in cooperation with Strasser and Laurrell, of rebuilding the cigar makers' union. Looking back upon the experiences of those days, Gompers was always to think of them as responsible not only for his own career, but also for the future course of American labor. "From this little group," he wrote of the men with whom he had thrashed out his ideas in endless discussion, "came the purpose and initiative that finally resulted in the present American labor movement... We did not create the American trade union – that is the product of forces and conditions. But we did create the technique and formulate the fundamentals that guided trade unions to constructive policies and achievements."

Gompers was 29 when the CMIU was reorganized. At this time in his life, he was both an advocate of stable business unionism and broad reforms, of working to get the most from the existing system and seeking ultimately to transform it. In 1887 he said, "I believe with the most advanced thinkers as to ultimate ends, including the abolition of the wage system." Almost simultaneously, he declaimed that in America he saw "the arrogance of the rich ever mounting in proportion to the debasement of the poor." In the midst of the depression of the 1890s, Gompers snarled: "The ownership and control of the wealth, of the means of production, by private corporations which have no human sympathies or apparent responsibility, is the cause of the ills and wrongs borne by the human family." Finally, he made no bones about the class character of trade unionism. "Class conscious?" he asked in the early 1880s. "As a matter of fact there is no other organization of labor in the entire world that is so class conscious as are the trade unions."



Figure 9.1 Samuel Gompers as he appeared in 1886, the year that the American Federation of Labor was officially launched. (Samuel Gompers Papers, University of Maryland)

Gompers tried to synthesize the socialist ideals of his youth with the practical demands of union leadership and responsibility. He sought to protect the immediate interests of workers without sacrificing the chance to build a new and better future society. He concentrated on building the strength of the more highly skilled workers in the hope that their successes would redound to the benefit of all workers. While the organizations he led from the 1870s through the 1890s were small and weak, Gompers held a grand vision of labor's place in the social order. After 1897, as the trade unions grew robust, Gompers's vision blurred and he lost sight of the cause of labor as a whole.

In promoting his views, his zeal was reinforced by an apparently inexhaustible font of energy. There were never to be any complaints of being unable to meet the demands made upon his time. As an organizer and administrator, Gompers was tireless, traveling all over the country to address labor meetings and conventions. Once known as "Stuttering Sam," he outgrew any hesitations in his speech and eloquently boomed forth the exhortatory platitudes that were so much his stock in trade. His speeches, it is true, were sometimes rather vague and confused, for he had no real gift for oral expression. His manner was often solemn and pontifical. But with a flair for the dramatic, he knew well how to hold the center of the stage.

Off the platform and outside the conference room, Gompers was friendly, easygoing and very much one of the boys. His nature was warm and openhearted. He liked beer parlors, the theater, music halls, show girls, and the Atlantic City boardwalk. He completely shed his official character when he gathered with a group of friends for the evening, comfortably relaxed in the congenial atmosphere of the back room of a saloon, a big black cigar gripped in his teeth, and a foaming stein of beer on the table. His conviviality shocked his straitlaced, puritanical rival in the Knights of Labor. "The General Executive Board," stated a pamphlet issued by the Knights in the midst of their struggle with the AFL, "has never had the pleasure of seeing Mr. Gompers sober." It was an unfair comment by an ardent temperance advocate, but there was no question that Gompers enjoyed his beer.

In appearance, Gompers looked far more like a labor leader than Powderly. Gompers's short, thickset, sturdily built body – he was only five feet, four inches tall – seemed to justify his boast that "the Gompers are built of oak," and the strong jaw beneath a broad forehead revealed both the force and stubbornness of his character. In the early 1880s he had dark, unruly hair and wore a drooping walrus mustache with a little tuft of hair on his chin. In later years, he was to be clean shaven, with a glittering pince-nez shielding his dark, snapping eyes. He dressed well, was quite accustomed to a silk hat and Prince Albert coat on important occasions, and his manners were gracious. Business leaders somewhat patronizingly spoke of his being "very much a gentleman."

For all his later hobnobbing with the great, he liked to refer to himself as "one who had not grown up from the ranks but still is proud to be in the ranks." He was intensely loyal and always ready to sacrifice his personal well-being and comfort for the cause for which he worked. Impeccably honest, he was to die a poor man, and in the 1930s his widow had to accept work from a welfare agency of the federal government.

None of this is to say that Gompers was not ambitious. He felt himself born to leadership and clung tenaciously to the presidency of the AFL. He built up both a powerful political machine and a closely knit labor bureaucracy. He was something of a dictator in pushing his policies and refused to yield to younger, more progressive leadership as he grew older. But his ambition for power and a public career did not lead him to seek either riches or political preferment. He was to remain wholly content with "serving his class" by making trade unionism and the AFL his lifework. "I look back over the years of work for my trade," he wrote in his autobiography, "and I rejoice in the conviction that the bona fide trade union movement is the one great agency of the toiling masses to secure for them a better and higher standard of life and work."

The Emergence of the AFL

The first move toward the alliance of national and international unions that resulted in the AFL occurred at a Pittsburgh meeting of labor leaders in 1881. Attended by delegates from both the trade unions and the Knights of Labor, the original purpose of the conference was to set up an association that might embrace all labor. "We have numberless trade unions, trades' assemblies or councils, Knights of Labor and other various local, national and international unions," the call for the meeting stated. "But great as has been the work done by these bodies, there is vastly more that can be done by a combination of all these organizations into a federation of trades." The growing rivalry between adherents of the new unionism and the leaders of the Knights of Labor, however, was to make achievement of such a goal impossible, and the Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions which grew out of the Pittsburgh meeting was to be short lived.

Some of the national unions were affiliated with the Knights as trade assemblies, but they were becoming increasingly uncomfortable with their doctrines. More and more of them were breaking away altogether, and they naturally resented any attempted interference in their affairs or infringement on the territory that they believed to be within their jurisdiction. Their attitude was frankly expressed by McGuire of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners: "While there is a national or international union of a trade, the men of that trade should organize under it and...the Knights of Labor should not interfere."

The Knights nevertheless did interfere. Recognizing the importance of skilled workers belonging to trade unions, and their strategic position in the labor world, the Knights were anxious to hold their allegiance. Powderly, for example, promised the newly organized Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel, and Tin Workers – a craft union – that, if it would join the Knights, it could retain its separate identity and maintain its own system of government. But the skilled workers in this and other organizations saw themselves pulled down to the level of unskilled workers in submission to the Knights' control. They declared that they would maintain their autonomy against all outside pressure "to protect the skilled trades of America from being reduced to beggary."

Gompers attended the Pittsburgh meeting in 1881 as a delegate of the CMIU and was chosen chairman of the committee on organization. Although he was actually a member of the Knights of Labor, having joined them in the 1870s, his opposition to their basic principles led him to make every effort to keep the proposed new federation a strictly trade union affair. His proposals were defeated after vigorous debate. The new organization did not draw any line between skilled and unskilled workers, and was theoretically to include all labor without distinction of creed, color, or nationality.

The Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions was in many ways a transitional stage in labor's swing toward the program of the new unionism. While the ideal of solidarity was upheld, the Federation was primarily concerned with such

immediate gains as the wage earners might be able to win rather than fundamental reforms of the economic system. Its legislative program, for whose support it asked all trade bodies to seek representation in the legislature, called for the legal incorporation of trade unions, the abolition of child labor, enforcement of the statutory eight-hour day, prohibition of contract labor, uniform apprentice laws, and repeal of the conspiracy laws.

The Federation did not, however, win any active support. The representatives of the Knights withdrew almost at once, and most of the national unions soon followed them. There were only 19 delegates at the second annual convention and 26 at the third. Gompers was elected president in the latter year, 1883, but even he did not attend the next meeting. Out of touch with the workers themselves, the new organization soon became, like the old National Labor Union, little more than an annual conference. Its only significant action was its promotion of the eight-hour strike on May 1, 1886, but, as we have seen, it was unable to succeed in this movement without the support of the Knights of Labor.

The Federation nearly gave up the ghost entirely in 1886. The leaders of the national unions had become convinced that it did not offer any hope of addressing their problems. In the face of continued attacks being made on their form of organization by the Knights – who in the flush of victory were now stating that there was no place in the labor movement for independent trade unions – they decided to take a more forthright stand in their own defense. Another meeting of national unions was consequently called for May 18, 1886, in Philadelphia with the express purpose of seeking means “to protect our respective organizations from the malicious work of an element who openly boast that ‘trades unions must be destroyed’.”

The ire of the trade unionists had been especially aroused by the interference of the Knights in the affairs of the CMIU itself. As a result of internal dissension in the New York local, involving the related issues of admitting unskilled workers and promoting socialism, a dissident faction had withdrawn from the parent body to form the Progressive Cigar Makers' Union. Strasser strongly condemned this move, refused to recognize the rebels in any way, and caustically described them as “tenement house scum.” In the face of this situation, District Assembly No. 49 of the Knights of Labor jumped into the fray, aggressively supported the rebel union, and campaigned for its admission into their organization.

The Philadelphia conference approved one more effort to discover common ground between the Knights and the national unions, a “treaty” to reconcile the divergent aims of the two groups and end their feuding. The Knights were to agree that they would not initiate any trade union member without the permission of their union, or any other wage earner who worked for less than the prescribed wage scale of their craft, and they were also called upon to revoke the charter of any local assembly organized by workers in a trade where there was already a national union.

But the terms of this “treaty” amounted to a demand for the Knights' complete

capitulation to the national unions. Some might have viewed it as an opening bid from which they would be willing to retreat if the Knights proved conciliatory. But the real aim of the advocates of the new unionism was to swing the support of the national unions behind a new federation which would break away from the Knights altogether and concentrate wholly upon protecting the interests of skilled craft workers. Gompers had wished to do this five years earlier, but the time had not been ripe. Now the increasing hostility between the Knights and the national unions, emphasized by the struggle over dual unionism among cigar makers, provided the opportunity for decisive action.

The Knights played right into the hands of those who favored a complete break. It took no official action whatsoever in regard to the proposed treaty. Even though the failure of their strikes and the repercussions of the Haymarket Square affair already weakened their position, the Knights saw no need to make concessions. Powderly did not even submit the treaty for consideration at the Richmond assembly in October 1886. The establishment of new national trade districts defied the national unions; the Progressive Cigar Makers' Union was formally admitted to the Knights of Labor, and no gesture whatsoever was made toward settling other jurisdictional quarrels.

The answer of the national unions was to meet again, at Columbus, Ohio, on December 8, 1886, and at this conference they were joined by the handful of delegates still representing the almost defunct Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions. Altogether, there were present some 42 representatives of 25 labor groups. Among the national unions participating were those of the iron molders, miners and mine laborers, typographers, journeymen tailors, journeymen bakers, furniture workers, metal workers, granite cutters, carpenters, and cigar makers. Their total membership approximated 150,000. The sole concern of the delegates had now become the promotion of the interests of the crafts which they respectively represented, and, after due deliberation, they formed a new organization for this purpose and elected Samuel Gompers as its first president. Thus was born the American Federation of Labor. Its leaders would subsequently claim the AFL was founded in 1881, the year in which the Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions was established, but although the AFL took over the treasury and records of its predecessor, the two groups were quite distinct. The history of the AFL really begins in 1886.

The Principles and Policies of the AFL

A guiding principle of the new organization, growing out of the circumstances of its birth, was "strict recognition of the autonomy of each trade." The executive council set up to handle affairs on a national level was given no power whatsoever to interfere in those that fell within the jurisdiction of member unions. The unity of labor was to be promoted through education and moral suasion, rather than through the centralized controls inherent in the structure of the Knights of Labor. Nevertheless, the executive

council had important functions. It issued the charters for constituent unions, and, as a means for stamping out the dual unionism that threatened the labor movement as a whole, was authorized to settle all jurisdictional disputes between unions. A per capita tax was imposed on all member unions in order to build up the financial reserves which would enable the AFL to extend practical assistance in strikes and lockouts, and a legislative program was drawn up. Finally, there were to be formed, under the general authority of an executive council, both city centrals and state federations to further the passage of labor legislation.

Major emphasis was placed upon economic or industrial action. The AFL was to support national and international unions in winning recognition from employers, entering into collective bargaining agreements, and maintaining a position that would enable them to strike effectively when other measures failed. The legislative program, which included most of the objectives that had been sought by the old Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions, was subordinated to this basic line of attack in frank recognition of the inadequacy of the policy of its predecessor.

With few exceptions, the unions affiliated with the AFL had practically no members from the new immigrant groups from the east and south of Europe that were refashioning the nation's demography, even fewer non-white members (the organization supported the total restriction of immigration from Asia), and pitifully few women. Its membership of skilled workers consisted almost totally of white workers of American or north European extraction, men who cherished their "manhood." As an essential part of their manly character, they insisted upon a "living wage" that would enable them to keep their wives and children out of the paid labor force (later historians would call this the "family wage").

The relationship between AFL unions and African Americans was particularly significant. At its formation, the AFL declared that its affiliated unions should have no color bar that blocked entry of African Americans to their ranks. In practice, however, many AFL unions actively barred African Americans from entry. Some unions, such as the International Association of Machinists, which was founded in Atlanta in 1888, dropped references to the exclusion of blacks from their union constitutions (which were subject to review by the AFL), and instead simply included this language in their initiation rituals (which were not subject to review). Although he held enlightened racial views, Gompers turned a blind eye to this rampant discrimination in the interest of building up the union movement. To be sure, some AFL unions, such as the United Mine Workers (founded in 1890) were more progressive on racial matters. Although mine workers populated segregated locals in the South, its members cooperated across racial lines. The AFL's failure to combat the racism endemic in the labor markets of these years would prove costly in the long run, however, as black workers spurned by white unions felt little compunction about crossing picket lines during strikes.

In its early years, the AFL was almost entirely Samuel Gompers. He had loyal

associates, but it was he who gave the new organization life and direction. "There was much work, little pay, and very little honor," he later wrote of the early days, but such considerations did not daunt him. Setting up his headquarters in an eight-by-ten-foot office made available by the CMIU, with little furniture other than a kitchen table and a filing case made out of tomato boxes, he set about breathing vitality into the new organization with a zeal, devotion, and tireless energy that largely accounted for its survival. He wrote innumerable letters, always in his own hand, to labor leaders throughout the country; for a time he edited the *Trade Union Advocate* as a means of publicizing his campaign; he issued union charters, collected dues, handled all routine business, managed conventions, went on speaking and organization tours, and slowly but persistently transformed the AFL from a purely paper organization into a militant and powerful champion of labor's rights. He felt himself to be engaged in a holy cause, and from the day that the AFL came into being until his death 38 years later, it was his entire life.

While the long-term struggle of the AFL was to be with the forces of industry, its early years were also marked by its continuing feud with the Knights of Labor. The situation was not unlike that which would develop almost half a century later, when the AFL found itself in turn challenged by the dissident unions that were to form the Congress of Industrial Organizations. There were principles at stake, but the political rivalries and ambitions of contesting leaders often overshadowed them.

Powderly moved steadily toward complete scorn of national unions. "I will tell you frankly," he wrote an associate in 1889, "I don't care how quick the National Trade Assemblies go out. They hinder others from coming to us and I am strongly tempted to advise them all to go it alone on the outside and see how it will go to turn back the wheels of the organization for the benefit of a few men who want to be at the head of something." Gompers grew equally caustic in his opinion of the Knights and their aims and aspirations. "Talk of harmony with the Knights of Labor," he said in 1894, "is bosh. They are just as great enemies of trade unions as any employer can be, only more vindictive. It is no use trying to placate them or even to be friendly."

In such circumstances, the possibility of labor unity faded, and the gradually dwindling strength of the Knights was counteracted by the slow growth of the AFL. The latter was anything but spectacular. The original membership of 150,000 had increased to only 250,000 six years later. The violent counterattack of industry upon all unions during these years, the generally repressive attitude of the government and the courts, and, finally, the trying times of the depression that began in 1893 made it highly difficult to hold any labor organization together, let alone promote its expansion. But Gompers stuck grimly to his task. He refused to allow the AFL to be drawn away from its practical aims, and, at the annual convention in 1893, he was able to look with pride upon what had already been accomplished. "It is noteworthy," he told the assembled delegates, "that while in every previous industrial crisis the trade unions were literally mowed down and swept out of existence, the unions now in existence have manifested, not only the powers of resistance, but of stability and permanency."

The importance of the AFL in promoting the practical concepts of the new unionism should not obscure the fact that the national unions were the real basis for the revived labor movement. They could exist without the AFL, but the AFL had no meaning without them. Their autonomy was complete, and it was they who controlled the local unions that made up the membership of the labor movement. Their functions were to direct the activities of the locals, extend union organization through the trade or industry over which they had jurisdiction, provide such assistance as they could in collective bargaining and strikes (for which per capita taxes were levied for a general defense fund), and participate in the more general program of the AFL.

With time the original craft unions extended their jurisdiction, and their names often reflect the history of this expansion. Many examples might be given, but one often cited as illustrating this trend is the International Association of Marble, Slate and Stone Polishers, Rubbers and Sawyers, Tile and Marble Setters' Helpers and Terrazzo Workers' Helpers. Continuous changes in technology and job content repeatedly raised questions concerning which craft union had the right to organize a given set of workers, making the settlement of jurisdictional squabbles among its unions one of the major concerns of the AFL from the days of its foundation.

One important group of unions that did not affiliate with the AFL was the railway brotherhoods. The organization of railroad employees had followed its own course, and, while based on craft lines, it had for reasons peculiar to itself differed considerably in other respects from that of other groups. The Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers organized as early as 1863, the Brotherhood of Railroad Conductors five years later, the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen in 1873, and a decade later the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen. Although involved in the railway strikes of 1877, the four brotherhoods became increasingly conservative in subsequent years, and because of the hazardous nature of their members' work, the insurance and benefit features of their union programs had always been of primary importance. These so-called Railroad Brotherhoods practiced a policy of cautious, exclusive unionism that brought recognition from the railroad companies and that denied membership to non-whites. The permanent organization of other railway employees was to develop more slowly. After an attempt by Eugene V. Debs to form an all-inclusive American Railway Union in the 1890s, to which we shall return, separate unions of shopmen, switchmen, yardmasters, signalmen, telegraphers, and railway and steamship clerks were formed as affiliates of the AFL despite the continuing independence of the four brotherhoods.

The fact that the international unions survived the depression of the 1890s did not mean that even the most strongly organized unions were able to meet employers on anything approaching equal terms. Wages remained low and hours long for skilled workers in the 1890s, while the great mass of unskilled workers existed on the barest subsistence level. Labor was still considered a commodity to be bought at the cheapest rate possible, and its right to organize and bargain collectively had by no means been accepted. As industry sought to break the power of the unions with

blacklisting, iron-clad oaths that required workers to swear never to join a union, strikebreakers, and Pinkerton detectives, as well calling upon state militia and federal troops to combat strikes in the name of law and order, workers found themselves struggling against what were still overwhelming odds.

10

LABOR CONFLICT AND ECONOMIC CRISIS IN THE 1890S

The decade of the 1890s proved one of the most turbulent in the history of the United States. Violent industrial conflicts shattered everyday life in such cities as Homestead, Pennsylvania, and Chicago, mining communities in the Rocky Mountain states, and on the nation's railroads. The century's deepest economic depression between 1893 and 1897 created legions of the unemployed, who organized in Coxey's Army and Kelly's Army, marched across the nation, seized railroad cars, and assembled in the nation's capital by the thousands to implore the government to provide jobs and income for the unemployed. Mass unemployment once again impelled respectable and conservative citizens to warn about the peril associated with tramps and vagabonds. As had happened in the past and would occur again in the future, cities, counties, and states adopted vagrancy laws that criminalized the existence of the unemployed and the homeless. In the South especially, authorities used vagrancy statutes to obtain coerced labor from unemployed African Americans who took to the road in search of work. Slavery by a different name – debt peonage, chain gangs, and cheap convict labor for private businesses – became prevalent in the former Confederate states. If life generally had been unstable for the masses of new immigrant and US-born rural unskilled workers, depression magnified their perilous struggle to maintain employment, income, and individual or family security.

In such turbulent times, it was no wonder that conventional politics seemed to be turned upside down. A Democratic administration had been in power when depression struck. Little wonder that in 1894, in congressional elections, state gubernatorial elections, and local contests everywhere outside the Democratic South, voters ousted Democrats and replaced them with Republicans. Even in the South, the Populist uprising that united poor white farmers with wage workers and that at first sought to attract African American sharecroppers, tenants, and laborers threatened Democratic supremacy. The Populist Party, whose strength was concentrated in the South, where economic suffering was greatest, and in the plains and the mountain states, where party loyalties remained fluid, appeared to have achieved the unlikely feat of uniting farmers and workers in a potent national political movement. Unlike earlier third-party movements that had retained their independence only to fade into obscurity, the Populists chose to unite with insurgent Democrats in 1896 who had taken over their party at its turbulent 1896 convention by nominating William Jennings Bryan as its presidential candidate. Bryan, the “great commoner,” claimed to speak for the nation's farmers and workers and to condemn the greed of bankers and industrialists – do not “crucify mankind on a cross of gold,” he declaimed. So great did the threat of the Populists allied with a transformed Democratic Party appear that

conservatives, including so-called “Gold Democrats,” everywhere rallied behind Bryan's opponents. In the South, conservative Democrats used racism and violence to crush their Populist and more radical Democratic adversaries. Republican victory in the election of 1896 and the nearly simultaneous end of the economic depression brought a respite from political, social, and economic turmoil, but not before a wave of industrial conflict afflicted the nation.

Worker Resistance and Industrial Conflict

In the early morning of July 6, 1892, two barges were being towed slowly up the Monongahela River toward Homestead, Pennsylvania. There had been trouble at the local plant of the Carnegie Steel Company. The skilled workers at Homestead, members of the Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel and Tin Workers (AA), had refused to accept new wage cuts and were supported in their stand by the rest of the labor force. The company's general manager, the tough-minded, stubbornly antilabor Henry Clay Frick, thereupon peremptorily shut down the entire plant and refused any further negotiations with the union. Special deputy sheriffs had been sworn in to guard company property, which was enclosed by a high boarded fence topped with barbed wire, but the locked-out workers had run the deputies out of town in the conviction that these preparations foreshadowed the use of strikebreakers. It was a challenge to his authority that Frick was only too glad to accept. Here was his chance to crush the AA once and for all. Aboard the two barges being towed up the Monongahela were three hundred Pinkerton detectives armed with Winchester rifles.

As the steel company's private army drew alongside the Homestead mills and prepared to land, there was a sudden exchange of shots between the barges and the shore. The workers had entrenched themselves behind a barricade of steel billets and, as the Pinkertons tried to take possession of the plant they were beaten back in a raging battle that swirled along the riverfront. All that day, from four in the morning until five in the afternoon, the fusillade of shots continued. The strikers set up a small brass cannon behind a breastwork of railroad ties and opened fire on the barges. Failing to sink the vessels, they poured barrels of oil into the river and set the oil afire. With three of their men already dead and many more wounded, the Pinkertons were trapped. Deserted by the tug that had towed them upstream and helplessly crowded onto the barge lying farthest from the shore, they finally ran up a white flag and agreed to surrender. In return for a guarantee of safe conduct out of the community, they gave up their arms and ammunition.

But feelings were running too high at Homestead, where the casualties included seven killed, for any easy reestablishment of order. When the Pinkertons came ashore, they were again attacked and had to run the gauntlet of an infuriated mob of men and women armed with stones and clubs before they were safely entrained for Pittsburgh. An uneasy calm then settled over the little town as the Homestead workers, victorious in this first round, awaited the next moves by the company.

Six days later, on July 12, the state militia, mobilized eight-thousand strong by the governor of Pennsylvania upon Frick's appeal for aid, quietly marched in to take control of Homestead under martial law. With such protection, the Carnegie Company began bringing in scabs – the “blacksheep” whom the locked-out workers knew were being hired to take their jobs – and proceeded to file charges of rioting and murder against the strike leaders for the attack on the Pinkertons. The plant was then reopened under militia protection, and with the AA members' jobs given to nonunion men. When the strike was officially called off in November, 2,000 strikebreakers had been brought in and only some 1,800 of the original Homestead working force of nearly 4,000 had been reinstated.

In the aftermath of the original battle, another act of violence had occurred. On July 23, a Russian-born anarchist, Alexander Berkman, who had no connection whatsoever with the strikers but who had been aroused by the Carnegie Company's employment of Pinkerton operatives, forced his way into Frick's office in Pittsburgh and tried to assassinate him. Although shot and stabbed, the steel executive was not fatally injured, and his assailant was captured. The assault had been planned by Berkman and his female companion, Emma Goldman, a no less ardent advocate of “propaganda by deed,” and only lack of funds to make the trip to Pittsburgh, as she later revealed in her autobiography, had prevented her from accompanying Berkman on his mission. He was sentenced to 21 years in prison for assault with intent to kill. Released after thirteen years of his term, he and Goldman were later deported to Soviet Russia in the “Red Scare” that followed the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 and the end of World War I.

These events aroused the country in some ways even more than had the Great Upheaval of the 1880s or the railway strikes a decade earlier. Far more than a spontaneous uprising on the part of unorganized workers, the Homestead affair was war between one of the most powerful of the great modern corporations and what was then one of the strongest unions in the country. Each party to the dispute used the law that favored its cause. The workers relied on their power in Homestead and control of the local government and judicial offices in their efforts to defend their rights. The company and its owner, Andrew Carnegie, whom Frick served loyally, believed that the rights of private property entitled them to the protection of the state and federal governments, which they received from Pennsylvania's Democratic governor. The *Chicago Tribune* gave over its entire front page on July 7 to a vivid account of what was described as “a battle which for bloodthirstyness and boldness was not excelled in actual warfare.”

Until the Homestead strike, relations between the Carnegie Company and the union had been amicable, and working conditions had been governed by a three-year contract for skilled workers providing for a sliding wage scale based on the price of steel billets. Carnegie had professed himself to be wholly in favor of unions, stating in an article for the *Forum* some years earlier that the right of workingmen to combine was no less sacred than that of manufacturers. Moreover, he had expressed real

sympathy for workers threatened by the loss of jobs through the use of strikebreakers. "To expect that one dependent upon his daily wage for the necessities of life," he had written, "will stand by peacefully and see a new man employed in his stead is to expect too much." But when the old union contract at Homestead expired in 1892, Carnegie opportunely removed himself to Scotland and left negotiations wholly to Frick.

Although Carnegie had expressed sympathy in print for workers and unions, it is unlikely that his presence would have changed the course of events. He had in fact given Frick a free hand and was aware of the latter's intention to crush the union. Indeed, he told a reporter in the course of the strike that "the handling of the case on the part of the company had my full approval." If Carnegie differed from Frick, it was in Carnegie's preference to starve the men rather than to beat them into submission. By 1892, Carnegie had grown convinced that unions levied an unjustified tax on production and profits, and therefore that union power had to be eliminated.

Frick, however, was in control, and his intention in bringing in strikebreakers and Pinkerton guards, for which arrangements had been made even before the failure of the wage negotiations, was clearly to smash the union. He succeeded: it collapsed completely at Homestead and was greatly weakened in other steel mills in the Pittsburgh area, where sympathetic strikes led to sharp reprisals. In the aftermath of Homestead, Carnegie and Frick acted to remove unions from the other steel mills owned by the company. The AA subsequently tried to organize the steelworkers, but in the face of continued opposition by the Carnegie Company and its successor, the United States Steel Corporation, it failed abysmally. An effective steelworkers' union would not be established until some forty years later.



Figure 10.1 The Battle of Homestead, 1892. Steel strikers leading away captured strikebreakers. (Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University)

The AA was affiliated with the American Federation of Labor (AFL), and its president, Samuel Gompers, strongly expressed his sympathy for the strikers and aided in raising funds for the defense of those charged with responsibility for the attack on the Pinkertons. In the *Pittsburgh Leader*, Gompers praised the strikers. “You refused to bow down to this wonderful autocrat, and the first answer he gave you was to send that band of hirelings into this peaceful community to force you to bow down to him, and ultimately drive you from your peaceful homes. I know not who fired the first shot on that memorable morning of the 6th of July but I do know the hearts of the American people beat in unison and sympathy with the brave men of Homestead.” But the AFL was not in a position to offer any effective assistance, and Gompers's grandiloquent phrases must have been cold comfort for the strikers.

Homestead was to take its place in the annals of labor history as one of the great

battles for workers' rights, and its immediate repercussions were nationwide. There was agitated discussion in Congress over what industrial warfare of this kind meant for the nation. Senator John M. Palmer of Illinois declared that the Pinkerton army had become as distinctly recognized as the regular army – “the commander in chief of this army, like the barons of the Middle Ages, has a force to be increased at pleasure for the service of those who would pay him or them” – and he maintained that the workers had the right to resist its attack in defense of their jobs and homes. The AFL and its affiliates sought state and federal legislation that would outlaw both the use of strikebreakers and the hiring of private armed guards.

Outside the ranks of labor itself, however, such ideas found little support. Politics governed many expressions of opinion. Democratic newspapers opposed to protective tariffs seized the opportunity to show that, for all the claims made that high duties safeguarded the wages of American workingmen, the steel industry was nevertheless reducing wages and exploiting its employees. They condemned the use of Pinkerton mercenaries and expressed sympathy for the locked-out workers. Some Republican papers, resenting the injection of the tariff issue, urged the Carnegie Company to follow a more conciliatory course to refute Democratic charges. But, more generally, the press took the stand that, even though the Homestead employees did not want to work for the wages offered them, there was no justification for their seeking to prevent others from accepting such terms. “Men talk like anarchists or lunatics,” the *Independent* stated, “when they insist that the workmen at Homestead have done right.” The steel company's right to assert its power to provide protection for whomever it chose to employ was upheld.

“If civilization and government are worth anything,” the *Cleveland Leader* declared, “the right of every man to work for whom he pleases must and will be maintained.” In an article in the *North American Review*, George Ticknor Curtis further developed this theory. “The first duty of the legislative power,” he stated, “is to emancipate the individual workman from the tyranny of his class. The individual workman should not be permitted to commit moral suicide by surrendering his liberty to the control of his fellow-workmen.” The antiunion attitude of conservative employers could not have been more clearly expressed. More important, with few exceptions, state and federal judges interpreted the law to secure the right of individual workers to contract with employers freely about wages, hours, and conditions of work regardless of union rules or bargaining agreements to the contrary.

There were a number of other violent strikes during the turbulent 1890s, especially during the depression years as corporate leaders rode roughshod over the right of their workers to organize in defense of their interests. Metal miners in the Cripple Creek district of Colorado and Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, railroad switchmen in Buffalo, New York, and coal miners in Tennessee walked out in defiance of their employers, and in each instance violence erupted that brought the intervention of the state militia, whose commanders assisted employers in breaking up strikes and union power. As depression settled ominously over the land and the army of the unemployed swelled

to some 3 million, labor disputes reached a peak involving some 750,000 workers – more than had participated during the strikes in 1886. Among all these conflicts, the Pullman strike of 1894 stood out most vividly.

In one respect, the employees of the Pullman Palace Car Company were in quite a different situation from that of most industrial workers. The workers who built the ubiquitous sleeping cars that were attached to most of the nation's trains lived in a company town just outside Chicago. In 1881, the head of the company, George M. Pullman, had established for his employees Pullman, Illinois, a community with neat brick houses grouped about a little square, where bright flowerbeds alternated with green stretches of lawn. The whole was “shaded with trees, dotted with parks, and pretty water vistas and glimpses here and there of artistic sweeps of landscape gardening.” In the exuberant enthusiasm of the company's press agent, Pullman was “a town, in a word, where all that is ugly and discordant and demoralizing is eliminated and all that which inspires self-respect is generously provided.”

But were these happy attributes of life in Pullman actually so “generously provided?” The employees had little choice but to live within this feudal domain, rent their homes or apartments from the company, buy their water and gas from the company, pay the company for such other services as garbage removal and the daily watering of streets, buy supplies from the company store, and subscribe to the company's rental library. And in the model town, rents for apartments, which in most instances had no bathtub and but one water faucet for every five families, were some 25 percent higher than in nearby communities. A high premium was also charged for public utility services. “Oh, Hell!” the forthright Mark Hanna was quoted as commenting on his brother industrialist's baronial domain. “Go and live in Pullman and find out how much Pullman gets selling city water and gas 10 per cent higher to those poor fools!”

With the depression of 1893, the Pullman Company was for a time hard hit, and after laying off more than 3,000 of its 5,800 employees it cut the wages of those kept on from 25 to 40 percent without any corresponding reduction in rents for company housing. The consequences were disastrous. A worker seldom earned as much as \$6 a week after the company had made its deductions. In one instance, an employee found that after payment for the rent was taken out, his paycheck came to two cents. “He never cashed it,” the Reverend W. H. Carwardine, of the Pullman Methodist Episcopal Church, reported. “He has it framed.” And yet at the same time such things were happening, the Pullman Company kept on paying dividends. Even after business began to improve, enabling the company to take back some 2,000 of its employees, no steps were taken to restore the wage cuts or reduce rents.

Finally, in May 1894, a committee of employees asked for some consideration of their grievances. Pullman flatly refused to consider any wage adjustments on the ground that the company was still losing money, and he would take no action in regard to rents. There was no relationship whatsoever, he declared, between the company's dual functions as employer and landlord. Almost immediately after the interview, in

spite of definite assurances that there would be no discrimination against the grievance committee, three of its members were summarily discharged.

During this year of hardship and suffering, the Pullman workers had been extensively organized in locals of the American Railway Union (ARU). This new association, independent of all other labor federations, had been formed only the year before by Eugene V. Debs and was open to all white employees of the railroads. Upon the dismissal of the three members of the grievance committee, who were also members of the ARU, the Pullman locals called a strike. When the company countered by laying off all workers and closing the plant, the local union appealed to the ARU's national convention for assistance. Union leaders attempted to submit the issues in dispute to arbitration, but when Pullman met these overtures with an uncompromising statement – “there is nothing to arbitrate” – the ARU prepared for action. On June 21 it adopted a resolution that if arbitration were not accepted within five days, its members around the country would refuse to handle any Pullman cars.

When this boycott, which involved not only the Pullman Company but railroads using its cars, went into effect, the challenge of the union was promptly taken up by the General Managers' Association, a group composed of executives of 24 railways entering Chicago which altogether controlled some 40,000 miles of track. It ordered the discharge of any worker who detached a Pullman car from any train. But the membership of the ARU was not so easily frightened. Every time a man was fired for refusing to handle a Pullman car, the entire train crew would quit. By the end of July, the strike had become so general that nearly every railroad in the Middle West was affected, and the nation's entire transportation system was disrupted.

“The struggle...” Debs declared in a ringing appeal to the railway workers, “has developed into a contest between the producing classes and the money power of the country. We stand upon the ground that the working men are entitled to a just proportion of the proceeds of their labor.” But while there was sympathy for the strikers in some quarters, Mark Hanna again privately expressing his scorn for Pullman's refusal to arbitrate, the conservative press solidly supported the General Managers' Association. “The necessity is on the railroads to defeat the strike,” the *Chicago Herald* declared, while the *New York World* stated that the union was making “war against the government and against society.”

As leader of the railway workers, Debs sprang overnight into nationwide fame. The ARU was only a year old and yet, under his shrewd and capable leadership, it had already gained a membership – some 150,000 – which was greater than that of the four Railroad Brotherhoods and rivaled both the declining Knights of Labor and the slowly emerging AFL. Both management and the trade unions feared that should Debs carry the ARU to success in this contest with the railroads, the principle of industrial unionism – bringing all workers in an industry both skilled and unskilled into one organization – might win a victory that would set the pattern for future labor organization.

Debs was the son of French-Alsatian immigrants who had settled in Terre Haute, Indiana, where his father kept a grocery store. Born in 1855, he had gone to work in the railway yards at the age of fourteen and had become an engineer at sixteen. For a time he left the yards to work as a grocery clerk and play about with politics, but in 1878 he turned to the labor movement and, two years later, at the age of 25, was elected both national secretary-treasurer of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen and editor of the *Locomotive Firemen's Magazine*. It was largely through his efforts that this union was built up during the next dozen years into a flourishing and financially sound organization.

However, Debs grew increasingly concerned over the exclusive attitude maintained by the Brotherhood and the complete lack of cooperation between its members and other railway employees. He became convinced that only through the union of all workers on the nation's railroads in a single association could the interests of this important branch of labor be successfully promoted. In 1892 he suddenly resigned his well-paid post in the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen and undertook almost single-handedly to form the American Railway Union as an industrial union organizing all railway workers regardless of their job categories.

Debs was an able organizer, shrewd and practical; he was an eloquent and forceful speaker, and he was also an idealist prepared to make any sacrifice for a cause in which he believed. Throughout his life, he commanded an amazing measure of respect and loyalty. During the Pullman strike, he was to be vilified as few men have been. He was attacked as a labor dictator, a criminal, an anarchist, and a madman, but with time even those who continued to denounce the things for which he stood could not help but honor the man. There could be no doubting his unflinching honesty and sincerity, whether in the 1890s as an aggressive labor leader or in later years as the spokesman of American socialism. No one ever identified himself more closely with the struggling masses in American national life or was a more passionate defender of the underprivileged.

"While there is a lower class I am in it," Debs once said in a much-quoted statement. "While there is a criminal element I am of it; while there is a soul in prison I am not free." Tall and gaunt, nearly bald even at the time of the Pullman strike when he was 39, with a high forehead and candid eyes, his manner was quiet and modest. Something about him inspired not only confidence but also affection. "There may have lived some time, somewhere," Clarence Darrow, the Chicago labor lawyer, was to write, "a kindlier, gentler, more generous man than Eugene Debs, but I have not known him."

Debs had not desired the strike that was forced upon the ARU by the appeal of the Pullman workers. Even though his young organization had already won a surprising strike victory on the Great Northern Railway the previous year, he knew that it was not yet strong enough for such a formidable encounter with the united railway corporations. But when Pullman refused to arbitrate, he felt that the union could not

stand aside without betraying the Pullman employees. Forced to back them up, Debs consistently counseled moderation and restraint. He ordered the strikers to remain wholly peaceful and in no way to injure railroad property, and during the first phase of the strike these orders were rigidly obeyed.

The General Managers' Association, however, could not afford to endure a peaceful strike. It was soon importing strikebreakers from Canada, secretly instructing them to attach mail cars to Pullman cars so that when the strikers decoupled the latter, they could be accused of interfering with the mail. Conjuring up a still nonexistent danger of violence, it induced US Attorney General Richard Olney, a former attorney for railway companies and the General Managers' Association, to have 3,400 men, who were actually hired and paid by the railroads, sworn in as special deputies to help keep the trains running. These tactics were successful. There were clashes between strikers and deputies; rioting broke out, and railway property was destroyed. Promptly asserting that such violence had already become uncontrollable, the General Managers' Association thereupon appealed to President Grover Cleveland to send federal troops to restore order, safeguard the mail, and protect interstate commerce. Four companies of the Fifteenth Infantry were sent to Chicago.

Governor Altgeld of Illinois immediately protested against this move. The situation was not out of hand, he wired the president, and local officials were entirely capable of handling it. "The Federal Government," he stated, "has been applied to by men who had political and selfish motives for wanting to ignore the State government....At present some of our railroads are paralyzed, not by reason of obstruction, but because they cannot get men to operate their trains....As Governor of the State of Illinois, I ask the immediate withdrawal of Federal troops from active duty in this State." But Altgeld's protest went unheeded. He had recently pardoned the anarchists involved in the Haymarket Square affair, and the newspapers fiercely attacked him as the "friend and champion of disorder." Even though President Cleveland had in an earlier message to Congress called for the investigation of wage disputes and their arbitration, he looked no further on this occasion than to the maintenance of order. He stoutly maintained the position he had assumed and justified the use of federal troops, in spite of charges of usurping the functions of the state, on the ground that it was his constitutional duty to keep the mail trains operating. "If it takes every dollar in the Treasury and every soldier in the United States to deliver a postal card in Chicago," he was reported as saying, "that postal card should be delivered."

Still the ranks of the strikers held firm, and in spite of strikebreakers, special deputies, and the army, three-fourths of the railroads running into Chicago were almost at a standstill. Moreover, the strike was spreading. Sympathetic walkouts by engineers, firemen, repairmen, signalmen, yardmasters, and other workers occurred on many lines, especially in the trans-Mississippi West and South where Populism fanned the flames of anticorporate sentiment and railroad workers and their community allies were not above using force and even violence to win the day. As the struggle intensified, the strikers could no longer be held in check by Debs's peaceful

persuasion. When trains began to move under the protection of troops, angry mobs sought to stop them. Railway stores were looted, freight and passenger cars burned, and damage inflicted on other property.

As disorder spread, newspapers and magazines declared a danger to society in what the *New York Tribune* called “the greatest battle between labor and capital that has ever been inaugurated in the United States.” It almost universally insisted that “this rebellion must be put down” regardless of every other consideration. The attempt was made to draw a line between the railway workers and strike agitators. The former were said to be “the victims of selfish, cruel and insolent leaders,” and all honest workingmen were called upon to free themselves from such “insufferable tyranny.” The *New York Times* attacked Debs as “a lawbreaker at large, an enemy of the human race,” and the *Chicago Herald* asserted that “short work should be made of this reckless, ranting, contumacious, impudent braggadocio.”

News stories carried alarming accounts of mob action and battles with the police and troops. With such a newspaper as the *Washington Post* screaming in its headlines that “Chicago Is at the Mercy of the Incendiary's Torch,” the general impression given was that the entire city was in the throes of revolution and anarchy. However, a correspondent for the *New York Herald*, somehow keeping his balance amid such exaggerated fears and alarms, reported to his paper on July 9 that business was going on as usual, the stores were crowded with shoppers, and “there is no sign of mob or riot or strike, even, about the main part of the city.”

But the railroads had already played their trump card. They had persuaded Attorney General Olney to intervene directly and, on July 2, a blanket injunction was obtained from Judge Peter J. Grosscup, of the Federal District Court, forbidding any person to interfere with the operation of the mail or other railroad transportation in interstate commerce and to seek to induce any employees of the railroads to refuse to perform their normal services. The US Army patrolled the western states in which the major transcontinental railroads carried freight and passengers, and troops operated to keep the trains moving. With the whole force of government and the courts thrown against him, Debs was desperate. For a time he hoped to win labor support for a general strike, only to be rebuffed by the AFL. Gompers felt constrained to call a labor conference to consider the issue, but he was entirely opposed to a strike. It was, indeed, hardly surprising that a weak, struggling organization would have reservations about supporting the ARU against the massed strength of the railroads and the federal government.

“We declare it to be the sense of this conference,” a statement issued by Gompers on July 13 read, “that a general strike at this time is inexpedient, unwise and contrary to the best interests of the working people. We further recommend that all connected with the American Federation of Labor now out on sympathetic strikes return to work, and those who contemplate going out on sympathetic strike are advised to remain at their usual vocations.”

Without help from any quarter, Debs then offered to call off the strike and boycott if the Pullman Company would agree to reinstate all workers without discrimination. With the courts swinging into action, the railroads had no further cause for concern. They bluntly rejected Debs's peaceful overtures; there would be "no recognition of anarchism."

Judge Grosscup now summoned a special jury to hear charges that the strike leaders were guilty of conspiracy in obstructing the mail, and, under instructions from the court, Debs and three of his aides were promptly indicted. Arrested on this count, they were released on bail, but within a week were rearrested for contempt of court for disobeying the original injunction. This time they went to jail. Other injunctions were enforced against individual strikers and nearly 200 of them were arrested on federal charges in addition to the several hundred jailed by local police. Deprived of all leadership and direction and completely demoralized, the railroad workers gave up what had become a futile struggle and gradually drifted back to work. The troops were withdrawn on July 20. Government by judicial injunction had won a solid victory.

After some delay, the contempt charges brought against Debs were sustained in the Circuit Court on the ground that, under the terms of the recently enacted Sherman Antitrust Act, the strike leaders had engaged in a conspiracy to restrain interstate commerce. The following spring, the Supreme Court, while not expressly ruling on the applicability of the Sherman Act, upheld the lower court. The federal government was declared to have inherent authority to intervene to protect any obstruction to interstate commerce or the transportation of the mail.

Debs went to jail in Woodstock, Illinois, for six months. The action of the courts had made him a martyr and, on returning to Chicago after expiration of his sentence, he was wildly acclaimed by a crowd of over 100,000 sympathizers. At a gigantic mass meeting he was hailed by the Chicago reformer and publicist Henry Demarest Lloyd as "the most popular man among the real people today...the victim of judicial lynch law."

Imprisonment radicalized Debs. Once simply a Democrat and a trade unionist, he left prison a Populist, soon to declare himself a socialist. The strike of 1894 and its aftermath convinced him that labor could not receive justice under capitalism. From this time forward, he dedicated his life to struggle against a system that enabled employers, as he repeatedly declared, to call upon government to enforce their dictate, "work for what we want to give you, or starve." Until his death in 1926, Debs campaigned ceaselessly for labor's rights under the socialist banner and was five times the candidate of the Socialist Party of America for the presidency.

Labor and its sympathizers bitterly denounced the intervention of federal troops and use of the injunction in the Pullman strike, but the policy of the government was vigorously upheld in other quarters. Both the Senate and the House adopted resolutions supporting President Cleveland. There were innumerable statements from public leaders praising his handling of the situation, and the conservative press hailed

him as a national hero for so vigorously suppressing what some called the “Debs Rebellion.” The power of government had been asserted in no doubtful fashion.

Perhaps the most important consequence of the Pullman strike was its revelation of the power that the injunction placed in the hands of industry in combating the demands of labor. What chance had wage earners when their employers could so easily go into court and obtain injunctions against both strikes and boycotts, when government was ready to enforce them with its full weight and the dispatch of regular army troops. The campaign for abolition of government by injunction that at once got under way was taken up by the AFL in spite of its reluctance to run any risks in supporting the ARU. That campaign became one of labor's primary concerns.

Labor, Populism, and Socialism

The forceful suppression of such strikes as those at Homestead and Pullman fanned the mounting discontent of workers, but unemployment in the 1890s depression created even greater discouragement and despair. Throughout the country, “industrial armies” of the jobless took to the road and began to march on Washington to demand relief. The most famous of them was Coxe's Army, which was led by Ohio reformer Jacob Coxe. It actually reached the capital only to be dispersed after its leader was arrested for trespassing on the White House lawn. But there were other groups of ragged, down-at-heel workers on the march. Throughout the country, local authorities were called upon to break up these demonstrations and maintain law and order in the face of a constant danger of mob action.

In the meantime, growing unrest among the nation's farmers, who also found themselves increasingly hard-pressed in a period of falling prices that cut the value of agricultural products almost in half, was fanning the sparks of agrarian revolt. Populism swept through the cotton and tobacco states from Texas to North Carolina and the trans-Mississippi wheat states. But it also appealed to coal miners, gold, silver, and copper miners, machinists, and railroad workers. In such western states as Montana, Idaho, Colorado, and Washington, Populism was as much a workers' as a farmers' movement. Populism challenged the whole concept of government by organized wealth. It strove to recover for the common people the political power felt to have been usurped by the business community.

The People's Party, or Populist Party, formally organized in 1892, accepted as its basic premise the idea that wealth belonged to those who produced it, and called for a union of all the laboring elements in the nation to uphold their rights. Every effort was made to win the adherence of industrial workers. While the demand for the free and unlimited coinage of silver was meant to help farmers pay debts and raise the prices of their commodities by inflating the money supply, other demands the party put forward were wholly industrial in character.

“The urban workmen,” the Populist platform stated, “are denied the right to organize

for self-protection, imported pauperized labor beats down their wages, a hireling standing army, unrecognized by our laws, is established to shoot them down, and they are rapidly degenerating into European conditions.” To combat this situation, the Populists supplemented their program for currency and other general reforms by taking over many of the demands traditionally pressed by the National Labor Union, the Knights of Labor, and even the AFL. They called for restrictions on immigration, enforcement of both the Foran Act of 1885 banning contract labor and of the eight-hour day on government projects, an end to the use of injunctions in labor disputes, and the outlawing of the “army of mercenaries known as the Pinkerton system.”

The Knights of Labor were ready to throw their enfeebled strength behind the Populists. Eugene V. Debs, while brooding over the failure of the Pullman strike, wholeheartedly backed the Populist platform, believing it provided ground for common people to unite against the power of money. Only the AFL, once again reflecting the influence of Samuel Gompers, officially held aloof.

A determined effort on the part of socialists within the AFL to swing it in favor of a labor third party on a platform demanding “collective ownership by the people of all means of production and distribution” had been defeated only a short time before. Gompers won this struggle, but not before losing the AFL presidency in 1894. John McBride, of the United Mine Workers, was elected to this post, and the headquarters of the AFL was moved to Indianapolis. Gompers's eclipse, however, was only temporary. At the next convention he was not only restored to the presidency, but the stand he had taken against socialism was emphatically reaffirmed. When the demand was voiced for the AFL to take a partisan position in support of Populism, its reelected president was all the more determined to steer clear of any direct participation in politics. The AFL was not prepared to endorse the party of inflation. “These Middle Class issues,” Gompers declared in reemphasizing the importance for wage earners of concentrating all their energies upon the problems of unionism, “simply divert attention from their own interest.”

When the Democrats took over the Populist program in 1896 and challenged not only the Republicans but the conservatives within their own party, they nevertheless commanded widespread support among industrial workers. Both parties fully recognized the importance of the labor vote. William Jennings Bryan, the Democratic presidential nominee, went so far as to state in one speech that if elected he was prepared to make Gompers a member of his cabinet – a gesture that failed to move the AFL chieftain. The Republican high command, with Mark Hanna astutely managing William McKinley's campaign from the wings, tried a different tack. Workers were warned by notices in their pay envelopes that a Democratic victory would mean the further closing of factories and the loss of jobs. Every effort was made to keep them in line by dire prophecies of economic disaster should “the socialistic and revolutionary forces” led by Bryan, Altgeld, and Debs win the election.

The organized forces of capitalism, represented by the Republican Party, were able

to hurl back the onslaught of farmers and workers campaigning under Democratic banners. McKinley was elected. The alliance had not been powerful enough, or strongly welded enough, to create a farmer–labor party that could carry through successfully a program of economic and social reform. The AFL under Gompers practiced a cautious yet opportunistic nonpartisanship. The Republicans of 1896 astutely appealed to the labor vote, stressing the protective tariff and business confidence as the prescription for full employment and prosperity. In the slogan of the campaign, Republicans promised workers “a full dinner pail.” If the triumphant Republicans feared militant labor and defended government by injunction, they also identified themselves as the party of high wages and positive government.

Gompers's politics responded to the quite real interests of most AFL members. As representative citizens of old stock groups and firmly established immigrants, most AFL members had held the right to vote ever since they had reached legal age; many had formed their political loyalties in the party struggles just before secession and had them solidified in the inferno of the Civil War. Thus many trade unionists still saw the Republicans as the party of “free men, free soil, and free labor,” and the Democrats as the party of slavery, secession, and disloyalty. Republican support of the Homestead Act, hard money as an antidote to the inflation that threatened worker living standards, and the protective tariff that defended wage rates further tied some workers to the Grand Old Party. Meantime, immigrant Catholic workers, especially the Irish who had become quite important in many AFL affiliates, preferred the Democratic party because it defended their interests from that of Republicans who attacked “Papism,” enacted Protestant Sunday laws, led campaigns to outlaw alcohol consumption, and otherwise denigrated non-Protestants. Had Gompers and the AFL formally endorsed a political party, no matter the party chosen, such an act would have led to controversy and divisiveness in the AFL – something a small and immature organization could not afford. In fact, in later years Gompers would lead the AFL into an informal alliance with the Democratic Party, one that during the New Deal, World War II, and afterward would grow more formal.

Labor at Ebb Tide

As the excitement of the campaign of 1896 subsided, labor had reason for discouragement in taking stock of the situation in which it found itself. The gains that had been made in wages prior to the depression had been largely wiped out. The average annual earnings for manufacturing employees were estimated at no more than \$406. Except in a few of the highly skilled trades, working time was far longer than the eight-hour day for which labor had been struggling so long. It generally ranged between 54 and 63 hours a week – and even more in steel mills, textile factories, and the tenement sweatshops where women and children in the garment industry toiled endless hours for a pittance. Nowhere was there any real economic security for the industrial worker.

While there was a beginning of labor legislation, little progress had been made in attaining the goals first put forward in the late 1860s by the National Labor Union. A Bureau of Labor Statistics had been set up by the federal government, and there were comparable bureaus in 32 states; an Alien Contract Labor Law had been enacted in 1885; the Chinese Exclusion Acts were on the statute books; and in 1898 President McKinley was to recommend the creation of an industrial commission to investigate the causes of industrial violence. There were also numerous state laws regulating working conditions in dangerous trades, especially underground mining and metal smelting, and seeking to improve safety and limit hours in factories. But these were only moderate gains in the face of the weakened position of the unions in general. The old conspiracy laws had, in effect, been revived through the application to unions of the Sherman Act's ban on combinations in restraint of trade and the use of the injunction in suppressing strikes and boycotts.

Moreover, the number of organized workers had declined from the peak figures of the 1880s. A total of approximately 1 million had fallen to little more than a third of that. Even though Gompers had been able to boast in 1893 that the national unions had for the first time withstood depression, the AFL had only some 250,000 members in 1897, and there were perhaps another 100,000 workers in the Railroad Brotherhoods and other unaffiliated unions. This was a more compact and effectively organized nucleus than in earlier years, but in total union strength it was not very much greater than organized labor had claimed in either the early 1830s or the late 1860s. The great mass of less-skilled industrial workers remained unorganized.

For most workers, skilled as well as unskilled, instability of employment remained a major threat. Not only did economic contractions lead to mass unemployment, but seasonal variations in production, injuries on the job, illness, and technological innovations that eliminated jobs regularly put men and women out of work. The life of a wage worker remained perilous at best.

THE LABOR QUESTION IN THE PROGRESSIVE ERA

The Progressive Era, which extended from Theodore Roosevelt's accession to the presidency following McKinley's assassination in 1901 to American entry into World War I sixteen years later, was a time of vast changes that affected the place of workers and unions in the United States. Within both major political parties and in a myriad of voluntary reform associations, individuals grappled with the growing concentration of industry, the influx of immigrants, heightened labor conflict, and the increasingly urban character of life – a constellation of issues that contemporaries called simply “the labor question.”

One group of reformers sought social justice by curtailing corporate influence in government and ending special privilege in whatever form; others tried to prove that large corporations could simultaneously serve the interests of their stockholders, employees, and the community. One group favored laws and programs to regulate the hours of work, wages, sanitary conditions in factories, unemployment, and retirement; others looked forward to achieving the same goals through voluntary corporate action. Moreover, some advocates of what became known as “welfare capitalism” even conceded to the government a role in those areas of policy beyond the effective reach of corporate programs. It was the emergence of this rudimentary combination of “welfare statism” and “welfare capitalism” that gave the years between the Spanish–American War and World War I its distinctive character and the appellation “an age of reform.”

In this era, the federal government regulated the railroads, reformed the monetary system, and lowered tariffs. Some state governments regulated the working conditions of women and children, enacted protective laws for men laboring in dangerous occupations, established systems of workers' compensation, and initiated programs of housing reform. Some private corporations instituted job-safety programs, sanitary work environments, profit sharing, and health, accident, and retirement benefits for their employees. Increasingly, it seemed, people were accepting the need for collective public and private action to meet the problems raised by industrialization and urban growth.

Although labor participated in the reform ferment of the era and benefited from federal and state legislation, such gains as it achieved were unevenly distributed. The material conditions of the great bulk of working people did not keep pace with the enormous growth in national wealth. The real income of workers, in fact, grew less rapidly than that of professionals, holders of stocks and bonds, and property owners in general. Moreover, the increasing introduction of labor-saving machinery on the one hand, and the rising tide of immigration on the other, combined to maintain a constant

surplus of labor. Not only did this situation hold down wages, it also heightened the feeling of insecurity among workers over whom the dread shadow of unemployment always hung.

In spite of the new legislation, actual working conditions for the great majority of wage earners were slow in showing any real change. Factory codes remained inadequate and all too often ineffectively enforced. In the coal mines, steel mills, and packing houses, in the textile factories still exploiting women and children, and in the sweatshops of the urban clothing industry, the harsh circumstances of life were a sad commentary on the prosperity enjoyed by the country as a whole. Industrial accidents, especially those that resulted in workers' deaths, proved far more common in the United States than in comparable industrial nations. Moreover, statistics probably undercounted the toll on workers of industrial accidents and diseases because so many of the injured immigrant workers returned to their lands of origin and disappeared from the official count.

As far as labor organization itself was concerned, the gains of these years were uneven. The unions representing skilled workers who exercised considerable marketplace bargaining power flourished as never before. Unions that emerged among less skilled workers, especially those that organized newer immigrants and women, experienced a more checkered pattern. For as the unions grew in strength, employers counterattacked and unions that organized among immigrants, women, and the less skilled suffered sharp setbacks. Only after the outbreak of war in Europe, which cut off mass immigration and tightened the US labor market, did the newer unions and the more established ones again make substantial gains in union membership and enhanced bargaining power.

The American Federation of Labor (AFL) remained the dominant national trade union body, and its affiliates served their largely skilled male workers well. A number of AFL unions, however, such as those in coal mining, the garment industry, and textiles, opened their membership to everyone who worked in the industry, including less-skilled workers, new immigrants, women, and even non-whites. But the overwhelming number of employees – largely newcomers from the east and south of Europe – in the great mass-production industries where corporations resisted unions with all their might remained outside union ranks. Prior to World War I, less than 10 percent of the nation's wage earners belonged to unions.

Employers and Unions Experiment with Accommodation

Some have called the years from 1898 to 1904 “the honeymoon period of capital and labor.” While this is too sanguine a description, at least in comparison with the turbulent industrial strife of the 1890s, there appeared to be considerable improvement in industrial relations in these years. In many industries, employers and wage earners alike seemed determined to seek out peaceful solutions to their

problems. Many labor leaders had become convinced of the perilous nature of the massive and often violent strikes that marked the late nineteenth century, and many industrialists had come to realize the dangerous economic and political implications of strikes, even when they were successfully suppressed. The country had been sobered by past experience and increasingly demanded some way of dealing with industrial disputes that would safeguard the public interest.

The National Civic Federation (NCF) seemingly held out the possibility of a new approach to labor problems. It had been first set up in Chicago in 1898, but at the turn of the century was operating on a nationwide basis with the avowed object of bringing capital, labor, and the public together in a joint campaign to maintain industrial peace. In sharp contrast to the prevailing corporate attitude of the 1890s that tended to identify all labor agitation with anarchy, it was founded on the premise that “organized labor cannot be destroyed without debasement of the masses.” The NCF accepted unionization and trade agreements as basic principles and was prepared to offer its services “in establishing right relations between employers and workers” whenever both parties were willing to submit their disputes to its arbitration.

Mark Hanna and Samuel Gompers served as leaders of the NCF, and associated with them were a group of significant public figures. Grover Cleveland, Charles W. Eliot, president of Harvard, and Archbishop John Ireland were among the representatives of the public; John D. Rockefeller Jr., Charles M. Schwab, and August Belmont were included in the employer group; and John Mitchell of the United Mine Workers, James O’Connell of the International Association of Machinists (IAM), and James Duncan of the Granite Cutters International Association spoke for labor. The membership list was impressive, and for a time the NCF appeared to be a hopeful augury for labor–capital cooperation.

Several important employer groups came to terms with the unions on the basis of mutually acceptable trade agreements in these years. Pacts were concluded between the National Founders’ Association and the IAM, the Newspaper Publishers’ Association and the International Typographical Union, and between railroad operators and the railway brotherhoods. There were important exceptions to this apparent progress. A final attempt on the part of the Amalgamated Iron, Steel, and Tin Workers to organize the steel industry, for example, failed completely when the United States Steel Corporation, whose board of directors had secretly adopted a resolution stating its unalterable opposition to any extension of union labor, crushed a hard-fought strike in 1901. This was an important and highly significant defeat. The growing number of trade agreements that were the fruit of the AFL’s program and policies seemed to indicate a positive change in general employer attitudes, but events in the steel industry revealed the attitudes of the corporate chief executives who joined the NCF. They praised responsible unions and their leaders in the abstract, but in practice believed that a responsible union was always found in someone else’s enterprise; in their own firms they wanted nothing to do with unions and collective bargaining.

Unions flourished, however, where workers' skills gave them bargaining power and where they could create local power bases, economically and politically. Under such circumstances and in many parts of the country, unions representing such skilled workers as printers, cigar makers, carpenters, molders, machinists, brewers, longshoremen, and machinists gained substantial local market power and growth in membership. Even coal miners, who belonged to one of the few proto-industrial unions in the AFL – the United Mine Workers – experienced great growth and exercised bargaining power as skilled miners allied with their less-skilled brothers.

The exposures of the journalists of the day, who delved into every phase of industrial life and came to be known as “muckrakers,” aroused a certain measure of popular sympathy for labor's efforts to improve its bargaining position. “Capital must make up its mind to get along with organized labor,” the *Springfield Republican* declared in 1902. “The sooner this fact is recognized, the sooner will the country be placed on the way toward attaining a permanent industrial peace.” Several years later, as a spokesman of the new progressivism, Herbert Croly was equally emphatic. “Labor unions,” he wrote in *The Promise of American Life* (1909), “deserve to be favored because they are the most effective machinery which has yet been forged for the economic and social amelioration of the laboring classes.”

Also indicative of changing popular attitudes was the role that government assumed in the most important strike of these years. For when the anthracite coal miners became locked in a bitter struggle with the mine operators in 1902, President Roosevelt exercised his influence not to crush the strikers, as had President Cleveland when he sent federal troops to quash the railway workers' strike in Chicago in 1894, but to enforce arbitration. While Roosevelt's primary concern was to avert a possible coal famine, he was not blind to the legitimate grievances of labor.

The Anthracite Coal Strike of 1902

Since the 1870s, the turbulent days of “the long strike” and the Molly Maguires, there had been periodic strikes in the coal fields as miners struggled to improve working conditions. But not until the organization of the United Mine Workers (UMW) in 1890 were the miners able to present a solid front against the combined strength of the operators. This new union succeeded in organizing the workers in the bituminous mines of Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois, and won full recognition in 1898 from the operators in an agreement governing both wages and hours. Fresh from this victory in what was known as the Central Competitive Field, the union then moved upon the anthracite area of eastern Pennsylvania.



Figure 11.1 United Mine Workers membership certificate, 1890s. (Library of Congress)

Its task here was more difficult. The operators were organized in a virtual trust dominated by the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad and could hardly have been more opposed to union recognition, while there was such a large element of Poles, Hungarians, Slovaks, Italians, and other newly arrived immigrants among the workers that they at first lacked unity. Moreover, the operators did all they could to stir up ethnic animosities.

The UMW made slow progress in the face of such handicaps, but while their membership in the anthracite area was still less than 10,000, ten times this number of miners in the region responded to a first strike call in 1900. The operators prepared

to counterattack, but Mark Hanna intervened and persuaded them to avert a prolonged conflict. His motive was wholly political. The Republicans were campaigning in 1900 on a platform of prosperity symbolized by the full dinner pail, and a coal strike would have sounded an unfortunate note of discord in the primary theme enunciated by party orators. The operators reluctantly concluded an unwritten understanding with the miners, which refused recognition of their union but did bring a 10 percent wage increase.

This was merely a temporary truce. The strikers had not won their real objectives, and the operators regretted even the slight concessions they had made. With no real improvement in conditions, the UMW consequently put forward further demands in 1902. This time the operators, resolved to let nothing postpone a showdown, bluntly refused to consider the miners' new proposals or to deal in any way with the union. Another strike call was issued, and 150,000 workers now walked out of the mines.

Their grievances were very real. The pay was low by any standard, the ten hours of work a day were hard and dangerous, and frequent layoffs cut down average earnings to less than \$300 a year. Accidents were common, with a death toll of 441 in 1901, and the mine owners did nothing to insure greater safety or to compensate their employees for injuries. But even more galling to many miners than low wages and poor working conditions was the exploitative system maintained by the operators through their control over the company towns. The workers, Samuel Gompers later wrote, "were brought into the world by the company doctor, lived in a company house or hut, were nurtured by the company store...[and] laid away in the company graveyard."

With the outbreak of the strike on May 9, 1902, the operators at once threw 3,000 coal-and-iron police into the area, together with 1,000 other special deputies, and began moving in strikebreakers. They trumped up charges of violence, sabotage, rioting, and anarchy against the workers, and demanded the further protection of the state militia.

In spite of such provocation, the strikers seldom resorted to violence. It was perhaps the most orderly strike that the coal fields had ever experienced. The workers simply stayed away from the pits and maintained a completely passive attitude. Their ranks held firm in spite of all the suffering and hardship that the strike entailed for their families. If it was to be a fight to the finish, they were ready for it; they would not mine coal until their demands were met.

Many of the miners in the anthracite region belonged to diverse and insular ethnic cultures; before the great strike, this had acted as a source of divisiveness, but it now served to bind them more tightly to the union cause. For these miners of southern and eastern European extraction, the battle became more than a workers' or union struggle. For them, it was also a matter of community pride in the face of the companies that dominated their lives; any miner who shirked the fight appeared to be a traitor to his ethnic group. This ethnic context provided the anthracite miners with

the resiliency and solidarity to wage a peaceful and orderly strike.

They also benefited from astute leadership by the president of the United Mine Workers. Since 1898, John Mitchell had held this post. He had started work in the mines as a boy of twelve, thrown in his lot with the union during its darkest days, and risen to leadership while still only 28, in large part through his skill in organizing the many nationalities who worked in the mines. Slight and wiry, with brown eyes and a swarthy face, he had a modest – almost diffident – manner. His strength was in his patience, his conciliatory attitude both in union politics and in employer relations, and his willingness to compromise on anything but what he thought were major issues. No labor leader of the period was more moderate, more willing to accept arbitration, or more disapproving of radicalism and violence. And no trade unionist had proved more adept at using contacts with capitalists and public officials to enrich himself.

Mitchell had originally opposed the strike in 1902, consistently refused to call out the bituminous miners in support of those in the anthracite fields because the former had signed a contract with the operators, and was ready at any time to submit the issues in dispute to settlement by any impartial body. He suggested a committee of five to be appointed by the NCF, or one composed of Archbishop Ireland, Bishop Henry C. Potter of New York, and any third person they might choose.

“If they decide that the average annual wages received by the anthracite miners,” he stated, “are sufficient to enable them to live, maintain and educate their families in a manner conformable to established American standards and consistent with American citizenship, we agree to withdraw our claims for higher wages and more equitable conditions of employment, providing that the anthracite mine operators agree to comply with any recommendations the above committee may make affecting the earnings and conditions of labor of their employees.”

In contrast to the moderation displayed by Mitchell was the truculent attitude of George F. Baer, the hard-boiled spokesman of the operators. His reply to Mitchell's proposals was that “anthracite mining is a business and not a religious, sentimental or academic proposition.” He was out to break the union at whatever cost. He refused to submit the dispute to any outside mediators, let alone hold direct negotiations with the union. He believed wholeheartedly in the paternalistic controls maintained by the operators.

“I beg you not to be discouraged,” Baer wrote his correspondent. “The rights and interests of the laboring man will be protected and cared for – not by the labor agitators, but by the Christian men to whom God in His infinite wisdom has given the control of the property interests of this country.”

As the strike dragged on, a growing scarcity of coal, reflected in steadily rising prices, began to create mounting public concern and a popular demand for settlement. Whereas popular sympathy had originally been with the miners, the conservative press now trumpeted exaggerated claims of coalfield violence. The New

York Journal of Commerce declared that what was taking place was “insurrection, not a strike,” and the *New York Evening Post* called for “stern measures of suppression.”

Most Americans simply wanted coal. Prevailing public opinion was aptly reflected in a cartoon in the *New York Herald* depicting the public stretched on a rack with the operators pulling at one end, the miners at the other. Its caption read, “The victim is not particular which quits first.”

President Roosevelt felt the force of this demand for peace in the coal fields. His own position on labor issues was somewhat equivocal, but his concern now was in getting the mines open. He felt compelled to protect the public interest, and he feared the political repercussions of a coal famine. His program was not to crush the strike, although the operators were demanding an injunction against the UMW as a conspiracy in restraint of trade under the Sherman Act, but to compel arbitration. To that end, he summoned a conference of both operators and strike leaders, which was held at the White House on October 3, 1902.

While Mitchell declared himself willing to accept the findings of any commission appointed by the president, Baer once again bluntly refused arbitration. His intransigent stand, as contrasted with the conciliatory attitude of the miners' leader, infuriated Roosevelt. The conference was stormy. “If it wasn't for the high office I hold,” Roosevelt is reputed to have said of Baer, “I would have taken him by the seat of the breeches and the nape of the neck and chucked him out of that window.”

Still, almost no hard coal was being mined. Although 10,000 state troops were thrown into the territory to protect the strikebreakers, the miners would not go back to work. The public grew more and more restive.

Roosevelt decided to intervene even more directly. He secretly drew up a plan to put the army in the field to dispossess the operators and run the mines as a receiver, and he dispatched Secretary of War Elihu Root to inform J. P. Morgan, the real power behind the operators, that this was his alternative if arbitration was still refused. Under such direct governmental pressure, the mine owners were finally induced to capitulate. They requested the president set up an arbitration commission. Even at this point, however, they declared that they would not accept a labor member on the commission. The prospect of negotiations again hung in the balance until Roosevelt overcame this last obstacle by the appointment of the grand chief of the Order of Railway Conductors and Brakemen to the commission, not as a labor representative but as “an eminent sociologist”! On October 23, after more than five months in which their lines had held almost without a break, the miners went back to work.

The award of the president's commission, announced in March 1903, granted a 10 percent wage increase, reduced the working day to eight and nine hours for different classes of workers, and set up a special board to settle disputes arising during the three years in which the award was to remain in force. The miners had not won

recognition of their union. They had failed to achieve their full aims and accepted the award reluctantly. But in the face of the operators' stubborn opposition, they had made real and important gains that established the basis for the UMW to gain union recognition in the anthracite area.

The Employers Fight Back

For all the advances made in the opening years of the century (total union membership increased from 868,500 in 1900 to over 2 million in 1904), and in spite of the more generally sympathetic public attitude shown during the coal strike, there was trouble ahead for organized labor. Employers who had for a time seemed willing to recognize unions now became alarmed at their growing power. Largely abandoning the program for industrial peace originally sponsored by the NCF, they were beginning by 1903 to join forces in a vigorous campaign to block any further labor gains.

Their efforts in this regard included: encouragement of the use of "yellow-dog" contracts, which obligated employees to agree that they would not join a union; playing upon the natural rivalries of immigrant groups to discourage solidarity; employing spies to inform on labor agitators who would then be summarily fired; and exchanging blacklists of workers charged with radical views. The corporations were also able to call upon the courts for support in conspiracy indictments and injunctions.

The earlier accords in the machinery and metal trades broke down as employer associations in both instances reverted to their original antilabor attitudes. Following the action of United States Steel in bluntly refusing to deal with union labor under any circumstances, there was open warfare in the structural iron industry, with the workers resorting to violence and dynamite. Meatpackers suppressed a strike in which their employees sought collective bargaining; delivery firms in Chicago joined forces to crush completely a teamsters' strike for recognition. Organized labor seemed to have been set back in almost every area.

Faced with actual union power, the employer and public members of the NCF appeared to lose their early enthusiasm for unionization. Those employer members who still professed their friendship for labor now directed their energies primarily toward combating socialism and the closed shop. Gompers remained a member of the NCF, being no less opposed to socialism, but he and his union associates lost confidence in the practices and goals of the NCF.

Even more opposed to labor organization were the local Industrial Alliances, which met in national convention in 1903 to form the Citizens' Industrial Association. Their lobbying and propaganda were highly successful in swinging public opinion against labor. After a meeting in 1906 that brought together some 468 delegates, representing almost as many employers' associations, the president of the Citizens' Industrial Association, C. W. Post, reported enthusiastically on the progress that he felt was being made. "Two years ago the press and pulpit," he declared, "were

delivering platitudes about the oppression of the workingmen. Now all this has been changed since it has been discovered that the enormous Labor Trust is the heaviest oppressor of the independent workingman as well as the common American Citizen.”

The antiunion campaign was at the same time carried forward even more conspicuously by the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM), organized in 1895 but embarking on its first real attacks on organized labor in about 1903. Its slogan and war cry was “the open shop,” a guarantee of the right of individuals to work regardless of union affiliation. This appeal in the name of individual freedom, however, thinly disguised an all-out drive against collective bargaining. The NAM stood for industry's sole and exclusive right to determine both wages and the conditions of employment.

The principle of the open shop, often sustained with a conviction that went beyond all purely economic considerations, was used to justify or condone the most drastic measures in seeking to crush unions. This was perhaps most graphically illustrated in the suppression of the strike of employees of the Colorado Fuel and Iron Company and other coal companies in Colorado in 1913. The real issue at stake in this dispute was recognition of the United Mine Workers, who had sent their organizers into the territory. Rather than make this concession, the companies fiercely fought the strikers with hired detectives, special deputies, and the state militia.

The struggle in Colorado reached a bloody climax when the militia attacked a colony of the strikers at Ludlow on April 20, 1914. After several rounds of indiscriminate machine gun fire, the tents in which the workers' families were living were soaked in oil and put to the torch. Women and children huddled in pits to escape the raging flames, and in one of them eleven children and two women were later found burned or suffocated to death. The nation was horrified by this massacre, but still the coal companies refused to consider negotiations with the union to end the strike. As a result, the miners, many of whom had their own guns and were familiar with explosives, waged an on-going guerilla war against the mine owners and the state militia. The struggle that followed the “Ludlow massacre” caused more injuries and deaths than the massacre and led President Woodrow Wilson to dispatch regular US Army troops to the state in order to separate the combatants.

The Colorado Fuel and Iron Company was controlled by Rockefeller interests, and in an investigation of the strike by the House Committee on Mines and Mining, John D. Rockefeller Jr. was called to the witness stand. In replying to questions as to why “the killing of people and shooting of children” did not lead to efforts on his part to reestablish peace, he implied that rather than give in to the miners, his company was prepared to go to whatever lengths were necessary. He resented particularly the idea that outside organizers should seek to stir up men who were “thoroughly satisfied with their labor conditions.” There could be no surrender. “It was upon a similar principle that the war of the Revolution was carried on,” Rockefeller declared. “It is a great national issue of the most vital kind.”

This was not an isolated instance of uncompromising opposition to unionization, and the courts generally sustained employers in making nonmembership of a union a condition of employment. In 1898, Congress had passed a law, the Erdman Act (partly a delayed response to the Pullman boycott), which prohibited any discrimination against workers by the interstate railways because of union membership. Ten years later, in *Adair v. the United States*, the Supreme Court held this provision of the Erdman Act unconstitutional as an invasion of both personal liberty and the rights of property. Seven years later, the court declared a comparable state statute unconstitutional as well in *Coppage v. Kansas*, and then proceeded to uphold an injunction granted at the request of the Hitchman Coal and Coke Company, in West Virginia, which prohibited the UMW from seeking to organize company employees who had been compelled to sign yellow-dog contracts under which they agreed never to join a union.

These legal obstacles to unionization did not pass without criticism in the Supreme Court. Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes strongly dissented, even if he failed to sway the opinion of the majority of his brethren. The decisions upholding and enforcing yellow-dog contracts stood until 1932, when passage of the Norris-La Guardia Act finally reversed public policy.

The courts also sustained the employers in their counterattack against union-led boycotts. The AFL had found the boycott a highly effective weapon in promoting union recognition. By persuading its members to refrain from buying any goods that did not bear a union label, the AFL brought many recalcitrant employers into line. To meet this situation, employers established the American Anti-Boycott Association to pursue legal action on the ground that such boycotts were conspiracies in restraint of trade and subject to injunction as “malicious” interference with the “probable expectancies” of property rights. Two important cases involving these issues dragged through the courts between 1902 and 1916, and in each instance resulted in a decisive defeat for the AFL.

In 1902, the United Hatters declared a nationwide boycott of hats made by D. E. Loewe & Company, of Danbury, Connecticut, in support of a strike by a local union to win recognition. The company at once instituted a suit charging the United Hatters with conspiring to restrain trade in violation of the Sherman Act and claimed triple damages from the individual members of the local union who had gone on strike. After a long period of legal wrangling, the courts ruled in favor of the company in 1916 and awarded total damages and costs assessed at \$252,000. The judgment attached the bank accounts of union members and instituted foreclosure proceedings, but the AFL, aided by contributions from individual union members, eventually paid the fines.

The Danbury hatters' case particularly awoke the resentment of labor because of its effect in bringing secondary boycotts within the scope of the Sherman Act and subjecting individual members to damage suits. But even while it was making its tortuous way through the courts, the AFL itself became involved in another dispute

that had even wider repercussions. In 1906 the metal polishers employed by Buck's Stove and Range Company of St. Louis went on strike for a nine-hour day and appealed for aid. The AFL responded by placing the company on its "We Don't Patronize" list in its magazine, *American Federationist*, and advising all union members to boycott its products. J. W. Van Cleave, president both of the Buck's firm and of the National Association of Manufacturers, promptly secured an injunction not only restraining the officers and members of the AFL from placing his firm on the "We Don't Patronize" list, but also from calling any attention to the metal polishers' strike either orally or in writing.

The AFL refused to heed this sweeping court order. While the offending company was taken off its list of companies deemed unfair to labor, Gompers continued to state that union men could not be coerced into buying Buck's stoves and ranges. He was thereupon found in contempt of court and sentenced to a year's imprisonment; two other officers of the AFL were also adjudged guilty and given somewhat lighter sentences. Gompers was never to serve this sentence. Court proceedings continued even after the death of Van Cleave and withdrawal of the original injunction, but the case was finally dismissed by the Supreme Court. Although the AFL leaders consequently escaped jail, their conviction was nevertheless a shock that aroused labor even more against injunction law than its earlier defeats on this score. Gompers could not be reconciled to the position in which he found himself: a moderate, the friend of cooperative employers, the arch foe of labor radicalism, attacked by the courts as though he were a revolutionary or an anarchist.

The effect of these decisions, and others in which injunctions were freely granted to employers, appeared to labor to represent a revival of the old conspiracy laws against which it had so often fought. Labor felt itself to be fighting again for the basic right to organize and strike, arrayed against a judiciary that had wholly gone over to the employers' camp in banning union activity as being in restraint of trade.

The AFL considered it imperative to seek legislative relief from such restrictions. Yet Gompers and his allies on the AFL's executive council still firmly rejected the pleas of the labor Left for independent political action along with public ownership and control of the means of production. Although socialists claimed the allegiance of about one-third of total AFL membership, Gompers roundly condemned their agenda in 1903 – "economically, you are unsound; socially you are wrong; industrially you are an impossibility" – and was upheld by a vote of 11,282 to 2,147. But Gompers and his allies knew that somehow the unions had to be freed from the disabilities under which they were suffering. Protection for the right to organize, to bargain collectively, to strike, to boycott, and to picket had become of immediate and vital concern. This meant that the AFL and its unions had to become more active politically, a reality which by World War I brought them into a working alliance with the Democratic Party.

AFL Political Action and a Nascent Labor–Democratic Alliance

A first step in trying to exercise more effective political pressure in support of its aims came in 1906, when the AFL submitted a “Bill of Grievances” to President Roosevelt and Congress. This included most of the traditional demands that labor had been voicing since the Civil War and approved most of the more general measures being promoted by progressives throughout the country. Most important, however, were demands for the exemption of labor unions from the Sherman Act and relief from injunctions that were said to represent a judicial usurpation of power that properly belonged to the legislature. “We have waited long and patiently and in vain for redress...” the bill concluded. “Labor now appeals to you, and we trust it may not be in vain. But if perchance you may not heed us, we shall appeal to the conscience and support of our fellow citizens.”

Congress did not heed labor's demands. The bills that labor sought to introduce were sidetracked or pushed aside, and the AFL entered actively into the congressional campaign of 1906. It not only called for the support of all congressional candidates friendly to labor's aspirations, but where neither party had named an acceptable candidate, it advised the nomination of a trade unionist. Two years later, Gompers appealed to both party conventions for support. The Democrats adopted an anti-injunction plank in their platform, but the Republicans completely ignored him and nominated William Howard Taft, who had built a reputation as a notorious antilabor injunction judge while serving on the federal bench. The *American Federationist* openly opposed Taft and came out defiantly in favor of William Jennings Bryan. When Taft was elected and the Republicans continued to ignore labor's demands, the AFL's support of the Democrats grew. Thus, in the election of 1912, the AFL openly worked for Wilson's election, even cooperating with the Democratic National Committee in scheduling trade union campaign speakers.

Gompers stoutly defended these political tactics as in no sense departing from the AFL's traditional nonpartisan stand of rewarding labor's friends and punishing its enemies. Legislation was needed to free the unions from existing restrictions, according to his thesis, and the Democrats had shown themselves to be more open-minded and sympathetic than the Republicans. “In performing a solemn duty at this time in support of a political party” he declared in 1908, “labor does not become partisan to a political party but partisan to a principle.”

How successful such political activities were before the Wilson administration was unclear. State legislatures adopted a number of measures that materially improved conditions for industrial workers, with special reference to women and children, but, as has been suggested already, these laws came in response to the awakened sense of social responsibility that typified the whole Progressive Era rather than the result of political pressures exerted by organized labor. They had grown out of a

humanitarian feeling that was not so much concerned with labor's rights – union recognition and collective bargaining – as with the more general aspects of an industrial society that harbored so much poverty, disease, and crime.

While labor supported these reforms, moreover, they were not priorities for the AFL and Samuel Gompers. Suspicious of the state, Gompers was unwilling to rely upon government for the protection of labor's interests. He favored laws to safeguard women and children in industry, but he did not want laws to govern either hours or wages for union members. The only effective means for improving general working conditions, in his opinion, was the economic pressure of organized labor. All that he asked of the state were guarantees of the right to exercise such pressure.

Gompers's and the AFL's antipathy to public regulation of social and economic conditions – what today is known as welfare state practices – flowed from their commitment to the principle of “voluntarism.” Voluntarism served the trade unions and their leaders in several ways. First, it cemented rank-and-file loyalty to an institution that alone protected workers against unemployment, injury, illness, and indigent old age. Second, it shielded unions and their leaders from any form of potentially harmful public intervention and regulation. Third, it served as an ideological shield between unions and agencies of the state, especially courts, which were perceived as enemies of the working class. Fourth, it resonated with the traditional American stress on voluntary associations, self-help, and private initiative. For skilled workers organized in stable trade unions, voluntarism made sense.

In an editorial in the *American Federationist* in 1915, Gompers offered his fullest explication of his organization's commitment to voluntarism and the superiority of self-organization over state intervention. “Where there is unwillingness to accept responsibility for one's life and for making the most of it, there is a loss of strong, red-blooded, rugged independence and will power,” he wrote. “We do not want to place more power in the hands of the government to investigate and regulate the lives, the conduct and the freedom of America's workers.”

The economic and social reforms enacted during the Progressive Era were nevertheless important, and whether directly or indirectly they greatly benefited working people. While Gompers and the AFL executive council disdained most government-initiated regulatory actions, individual unions, state federations, and city central unions tended to lobby for the elimination of child labor (one action that Gompers and the AFL supported), maximum hours for all workers, minimum wages, employers' liability laws or workers' compensation (another reform supported by Gompers and the AFL), and safer and more sanitary working conditions. Under the Constitution as understood in the first third of the twentieth century, all those reforms fell within the sphere of the separate states, not the federal government.

At the state and local level, trade unionists found powerful allies among middle- and upper-class Progressive reformers who sought to humanize industrial capitalism and to tame industrial conflict. Women reformers proved especially effective allies.

Florence Kelley, the first translator of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels into English, herself a socialist, and the head of the National Consumers' League, and Jane Addams, the head resident at Hull House, the most famous settlement house of the era, worked tirelessly to promote legislation that would regulate factory hours, ensure safe and sanitary working conditions, eliminate child labor, and even institute minimum wages. Because legal interpretations drew a sharp distinction between the rights of adult men and those of women and children, Kelley and Addams achieved their greatest success in pushing for maximum hours for women workers and stringent regulation and even elimination of child labor. Although they and their reformer allies concentrated their lobbying on behalf of women and children, it was because they understood legal realities and the obstacles that limited the regulation of adult male labor. Under pressure by such reformers, some 38 states by 1912 enacted child-labor laws, which placed restrictions on the age at which children might be employed, limited their hours of work, and otherwise safeguarded their health and safety; meanwhile, 28 states protected women in industry through legislation setting maximum hours.

Equally important was the widespread adoption – in at least 35 states by 1915 – of workmen's compensation laws providing for compulsory benefit payments for the victims of industrial accidents, a reform supported by many of the largest corporations. These latter measures were often inadequate and not always effectively enforced, but they demonstrated significant progress toward ensuring employer responsibility for the health and safety of workers in mines and factories.

A beginning was also made in the passage of general maximum-hour laws for special classes of adult males. The demand for such legislation by the states, which had been pressed so vigorously in the 1840s and again in the 1860s, was not taken up by labor as it had been in those earlier periods. Collective bargaining, rather than legal limitation, was the means on which the unions principally relied to reduce the working day. As a result of progressive rather than special labor agitation, however, some 25 states enacted laws during this era that, in the interests of public health and safety, limited hours of work for men as well as women. They differed sharply from the earlier maximum-hour legislation in that the old clause exempting “special contracts” was finally eliminated. For the first time, state hours laws were enforceable.

The courts had originally blocked the passage of much of this labor legislation, taking the stand that exercise of the state's police power could not be carried so far as to interfere with either the property rights of the employer or the individual freedom of the worker to conclude whatever contract they desired. Beginning in the 1890s, however, courts began to approve legislation that regulated hours and even working conditions in so-called dangerous trades, especially underground mines and in noxious smelters and refineries. But for adult males who worked in what were deemed “normal” settings, the courts still drew a line. In *Lochner v. New York*, a case in which a maximum-hour law for bakery workers was declared unconstitutional in 1905, the Supreme Court stated that such legislation subverted the guarantees of

liberty in the due process clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. And *Lochner* stood as a precedent until the New Deal of the 1930s.

Gradually, however, the Supreme Court moved toward a more liberal interpretation of constitutional safeguards, and it finally upheld the maximum-hour laws for women in *Muller v. Oregon* in 1908, a case pursued by the National Consumers' League and its attorney, Louis D. Brandeis. Brandeis presented the court with a famous sociological brief that deemphasized legal principles and amassed abundant sociological and medical evidence that made the case for restricting the hours of women's labor. His sister-in-law, Josephine Goldmark, a colleague of Florence Kelley's, helped craft the brief. Feminist scholars subsequently argued that the paternalistic arguments in behalf of women workers undermined the earning capacity of women and diminished their economic opportunities. In fact, Kelley, Addams, and their female contemporaries believed in the legislative regulation of working conditions for all workers, regardless of gender or age, but they were prepared to take what the law then offered: regulation of the labor of women and children. They hoped that such initial steps would lead, sooner rather than later, to the regulation of adult male labor.

The court's decision, however, drew the line at minimum wage legislation even for women, especially after the passage of a constitutional amendment guaranteeing the vote for adult women. In 1923, three years after passage of the suffrage amendment, the Supreme Court ruled in *Adkins v. Children's Hospital* that wage regulations affecting women (in this particular case, hospital workers) could not be reconciled with women's liberty of contract.

It is important to bear in mind how vital such reforms were to the vast majority of workers who remained outside trade unions and the protections of collective bargaining. It was fine and well for Gompers and his allies in the AFL to insist that union rules and collective bargaining best protected workers. Such a position may have worked well for skilled printers, machinists, carpenters, and other unionized craftsmen, but the vast majority of men, women, and children who worked for wages lacked both irreplaceable skills and union membership. They needed protection by and from the state. Although "equal rights feminists," such as Alice Paul of the National Woman's Party, viewed the *Adkins* decision favorably, reasonably contending that any laws regulating the pay, hours, and working conditions of women would effectively bar their entry into certain better-paying occupations, this did not matter to most wage-earning women. "Social feminists" such as Kelley and Addams would carry on the fight to win back what they felt the Supreme Court had taken away from women workers.

In general, while legislation in behalf of industrial workers made significant strides in some states during the first half of the Progressive Era, reform stalled at the federal level even as advanced European nations were successfully experimenting with old-age pensions and unemployment insurance. The "Bill of Grievances" submitted by the AFL in 1906, appeared to have been permanently tabled by hostile committees in

both the House and the Senate, and the injunction and prosecution of unions under the Sherman Act remained powerful weapons in the hands of labor's foes. But the attitude of the Democratic House elected in 1910 was an early sign of a more favorable attitude toward labor. Over the next several years Congress finally enacted an effective eight-hour day for workers on public contracts, launched the Commission on Industrial Relations "to discover the underlying causes of dissatisfaction in the industrial situation," and created the Department of Labor to promote wage earners' welfare. With the inauguration of a Democratic president, Woodrow Wilson, in 1913, a real turning point was reached so far as broader legislation by the national government was concerned.

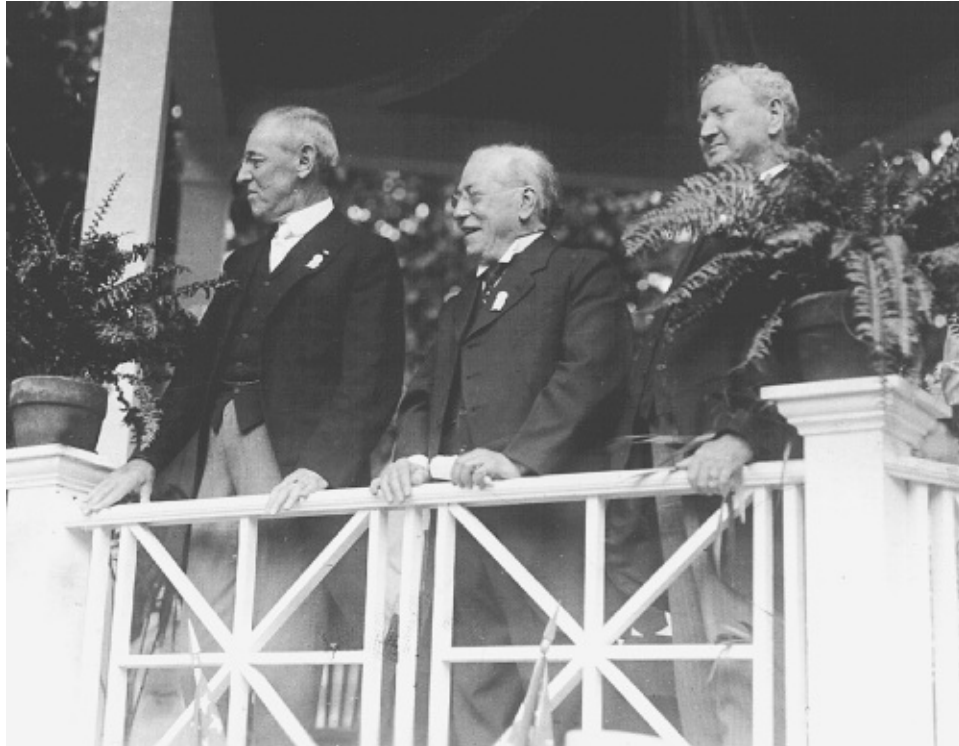


Figure 11.2 Left to right: President Woodrow Wilson, Samuel Gompers, and first Secretary of Labor William B. Wilson, 1916. (Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University)

Wilson had attacked what he called "the antiquated and impossible" laws currently governing the relations of employers and employees during the presidential campaign of 1912. His inaugural address further emphasized the need for legislation that would not only safeguard workers' lives, improve conditions under which they worked, and provide rational and tolerable hours of labor, but also give them "freedom to act in their own interest." He denied that such laws could be considered class legislation and asserted that they were in the interests of all the people. Labor rejoiced in such a defense of its position. "We are no longer journeying in the wilderness," Gompers proclaimed. "We are no longer in the season of mere planting. We are in the harvest time."

The results appeared for a time to bear out his optimism. In 1914, Congress passed

the Clayton Act, which both strengthened earlier antitrust legislation and incorporated important clauses affecting the rights of labor. Specifically declaring that “the labor of a human being is not a commodity or article of commerce,” the new law stated that nothing in the antitrust laws should be construed to forbid the existence of unions, prevent them from “lawfully” carrying out their legitimate objects, or hold them to be illegal combinations or conspiracies in restraint of trade. Furthermore, it outlawed the use of injunctions in all disputes between employers and employees “unless necessary to prevent irreparable injury to property, or to a property right...for which injury there is no adequate remedy at law.”

Gompers hailed this statute as the “Magna Carta” of labor – a final guarantee of workers' right to organize, to bargain collectively, to strike, to boycott, and to picket. Other opinion varied as to the real meaning of the new law. Although the *Wall Street Journal* described Congress as “a huddled mob of frightened cowards...watching for the labor boss to turn down his thumb,” many newspaper editorials, political leaders, and even some labor spokesmen pointed out that the cautious phraseology of the Clayton Act showed that labor had really won no new rights and that injunctions had not actually been outlawed. Gompers chose to ignore all such practical considerations, and, perhaps in order to justify the policies he had followed and to build up the prestige of the AFL, he admitted no doubts as to the great victory that the unions had theoretically won.

The skeptics were soon proved correct. The guarantees of the Clayton Act proved to be largely illusory once they were subjected to interpretation by the courts. Loopholes were discovered in the supposed exemption of unions from antitrust laws; the provisions in regard to the use of injunctions were so interpreted as to provide no real relief. The statement of principle that labor was not a commodity remained, and had a real significance as marking a change in public attitudes, but it had no practical effect on employer–employee relationships.

Yet there were substantial gains for organized labor during the Wilson administration and, despite disappointment over the later interpretation of the Clayton Act, these years were to find organized labor advancing on multiple fronts. It won legislative support on three important issues. Passage of the La Follette Seamen's Act in 1915 remedied many of the most glaring abuses in the employment of sailors and immeasurably improved conditions in the forecastles of American merchant vessels. A demand by railway workers for shorter hours was met the next year when the Adamson Act established an eight-hour day, with time-and-a-half for overtime, for all employees of interstate railways. And congressional enactment of a literacy test for all European immigrants in 1917 was a first step toward the policy of immigration restriction that the AFL had so long demanded.

The work of the Commission on Industrial Relations, whose members Wilson chose when he took office in 1913, also aided labor. The commission included three business executives, three union leaders, and three representatives of the public, one

of whom was its chair, a Kansas City labor lawyer and populist Democrat named Frank P. Walsh. With a flair for the dramatic, Walsh led his commission in a two-year muckraking investigation of labor violence that highlighted rampant employer abuses of workers' rights, revealed the glaring inequalities that underlay economic growth, and limned the exploitative conditions under which most common workers toiled. He pilloried John D. Rockefeller Jr. in a public hearing in New York City for his family's role in the Ludlow massacre and excoriated "industrial autocrats."

In 1915 Walsh and his aide, Basil Manly, wrote a final report that was disowned as too radical by the business executives and other public members of the commission. It called for legal recognition of workers' rights to organize and bargain collectively, and contended that unless the nation installed democracy in industry its political democracy would not long survive. Although the commission elicited no internal consensus, let alone congressional action, it helped make the call for "industrial democracy" central to the rhetoric of trade unionists and reformers of all stripes.

Organizing Immigrant Workers

The growth of labor unions during the first decade of the new century had been temporarily halted by the industrial counterattack launched in 1904. Membership of the AFL actually declined in 1905, and for the next five years remained almost stationary; it was only 1,562,000 in 1910, compared to 1,676,000 six years earlier. Between 1910 and 1917, however, the AFL gained some 800,000 new members, and trade union enrollment as a whole surpassed 3 million – almost four times what it had been at the opening of the century.

The urge to join a union, in these years as in other periods, came not only from the expectation of economic gain through collective action. The hope that workers would attain greater security – a square deal and protection from arbitrary discipline – was always highly important, but there was also a desire on the part of the wage earners to strengthen their feelings of individual worth and dignity. Machinery was, more and more, making workers an automatic cog in a process over which they had no influence or control. The complete impersonality of corporate business, with management far removed from any direct contact with employees, further accentuated this loss of individual status. The wage earner could find validation in a labor union that was not available as a solitary employee. The desire to take part in some group activity was, indeed, particularly strong during the Progressive Era. It was a period marked by the rapid growth of social clubs, lodges, and fraternal and professional associations. The unions, which often used some of the ritual of the fraternal lodges, met a real need entirely apart from the support they provided for collective bargaining.

The expansion in union ranks by 1917, in any event, was brought about both by the increase in membership of old unions and the establishment of new ones. The UMW

had built up a membership of 334,000, by far the strongest union in the country; the building trades – carpenters, painters, masons, and bricklayers – had over 300,000 workers in their various unions; and important additions to the organized labor movement were the unions among immigrant garment workers.

Activity in the latter industry had received dramatic impetus from the “uprising of the twenty thousand” among shirtwaist makers in New York. This strike in the fall of 1909 sensationally dramatized the plight of young immigrant female workers, mostly Jewish and Italian, who worked long hours for low wages. More important, it demonstrated the will and the ability of semiskilled female workers to act collectively in order to gain their aims. The women withstood strikebreakers, police brutality, and harsh winter weather until they won higher wages, better conditions, and partial union recognition. Their courage enabled the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU), the organization to which they belonged, to transform itself from bankruptcy to vigor. But their victory was limited. One of the shirtwaist sweatshops that had resisted the ILGWU, the Triangle Waist Company, continued its abusive practices and was the scene of a horrific fire on March 25, 1911, which killed 146 garment workers.

The shirtwaist makers' 1909 walkout nonetheless had a ripple effect. The ILGWU led a general walkout in the summer of 1910 by 60,000 cloak and suit makers in New York City, the center of the women's garment industry. These strikers, mostly immigrant men representing the more skilled, better-paid sector of the trade, showed equal solidarity. They walked the picket lines for over four months, until Louis D. Brandeis, the lawyer who had previously advised the NCL, and who was soon to be appointed an associate justice of the Supreme Court by Woodrow Wilson, brought the union and employers together in a compromise settlement. Acting as mediator, Brandeis devised the famous “Protocol of Peace,” which awarded workers higher wages, reduced hours, the preferential union shop (union members to be given preference over nonunion members in employment), and established grievance-arbitration machinery as a substitute for strikes. These victories transformed the ILGWU from a feeble organization into one of the nation's larger, more militant unions.

A similar set of events occurred among workers in the men's clothing industry. The AFL union in that trade, the United Garment Workers of America, was larger and more successful than the ILGWU before the upheaval of 1909/1910. But the United Garment Workers had neglected those who worked in the most rapidly growing sector of the industry: the men's ready-made suit and coat branch. In New York, Chicago, Baltimore, and Cleveland, immigrant tailors of Jewish, Italian, and Lithuanian extraction, among a large variety of other ethnic groups, found themselves ill served by the United Garment Workers. Again and again the union negotiated strike settlements that sold out immigrant workers. Unable to make their voices heard effectively or to reform the United Garment Workers from within, the Jewish and Italian tailors rebelled. They walked out of the 1914 United Garment Workers' convention and a year later founded their own organization, the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America (ACWA), headed by a young Lithuanian Jewish

immigrant named Sidney Hillman.

From its founding in 1915 until 1934, the ACWA existed outside the AFL, which opposed it as a rival “dual union.” Yet it succeeded in organizing the bulk of the immigrant men's clothing workers, women as well as men, and leading them to victory in a series of strikes. By World War I, the ACWA had grown to become a large and militant union.

The successes and growth of the ILGWU and the ACWA were significant for many reasons. The experiences of these unions proved, contrary to much AFL rhetoric, that new immigrant workers could be organized. They also proved that women as well as men could be organized if unions made a real effort to attract women and to offer them a role in the union. This was especially important at a time when the number of women in the wage-labor force continued its steady growth and when female workers dominated such industries as clothing. The ILGWU and the ACWA, moreover, organized all workers in an industry, regardless of specific skill or job description, into one organization. They showed that industrial or horizontal unionism could work as well as more conventional craft unionism. Additionally, the garment unions also preached and practiced socialism, and they did so without impairing their success at collective bargaining. Indeed, it can be argued that their socialism, militancy, and concern for their membership's general welfare strengthened the two unions – so much so that many contemporary commentators could not shower too much praise on the “new unionism” of the ILGWU and ACWA, which many heralded as the wave of the future.

If the ILGWU, ACWA, and perhaps the United Mine Workers, were industrial organizations and practiced the “new unionism,” they remained exceptions to the general rule. As of that time there were still no unions of any significance in steel, automobiles, agricultural machinery, electrical manufacture, public utilities, tobacco manufacture, or meatpacking. Corporations in these industries remained stubbornly antiunion and AFL unions were unconvinced that their workers could be organized.

The continued low wages and long hours for workers in these mass-production industries largely accounted for the unevenness of the gains made for workers during the Progressive Era. Labor reforms and wage advances for skilled workers in the unions comprising the AFL were counteracted by the continuing insecure and unstable lives of the great hordes of unorganized industrial workers who still accounted for approximately 90 percent of the total non-agricultural labor force.

12

THE RISE AND REPRESSION OF LABOR RADICALISM

Although the AFL and its affiliated craft unions solidified their ranks and evolved into more durable, quasi-professionally managed organizations during the Progressive Era, changes occurring in the economy and politics threatened the place of skilled workers and craft unions. New managerial techniques altered workplace practices and undermined the independence treasured by more skilled workers, especially in the metal trades. In their eagerness to gain market share and raise profits, large, professionally managed corporations that pioneered a “second industrial revolution” sought to increase worker productivity by applying the principles of science to production. Most closely associated with the principles promulgated by Frederick Winslow Taylor and applied under the rubric of scientific management, “Taylorism,” as it was often known and sometimes condemned, used photography, time-and-motion studies, and other means to demonstrate how skilled workers, machine operators, and common laborers alike could do their assigned jobs most efficiently. Taylorism promised to reward the most productive workers handsomely and to prove to them that the application of science to industry would benefit workers more than trade unionism would. Skilled workers, especially, saw Taylorism as a sophisticated scheme to drive laborers ceaselessly by regularly increasing production quotas while cutting piece rates.

As workplace conflict heated up, a growing socialist movement won over trade unions representing about one-third of the membership of the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and saw the Socialist Party of America take power in scores of small and even mid-sized industrial cities across the nation, posing a threat to Gompers and traditional craft unionism from the left. That threat grew more imposing yet as the militant Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) promised to organize the machine operators and mass-production workers heretofore neglected by most AFL unions, and promised to eliminate capitalism and abolish wage slavery through the One Big Union and a general strike.

Radicals and labor militants capitalized on the increased attention that reformers gave to the labor question after 1910. Labor advocates, especially those to the left of Gompers, received a sympathetic hearing and positive reviews from Frank P. Walsh and the Commission on Industrial Relations. The commission gave an effective platform to advocates of socialism, industrial democracy, and IWW-style industrial unionism as well as traditional craft unionists. But no group stirred the public imagination more in these years – for good or ill – than the IWW.

The Rise of the IWW

For a time the themes of worker control, organization of the great mass of workers, industrial democracy, and abolition of capitalism merged in the founding and growth of the IWW. The “Wobblies,” as its members came to be called in the West, asserted that the working class and the employing class had nothing in common. The IWW called upon the workers to take over possession of the machinery of production. “Instead of the conservative motto, ‘A fair day's wage for a fair day's work,’” their ringing manifesto declared, “we must inscribe on our banner the revolutionary watchword, ‘Abolition of the wage system.’ It is the historic mission of the working class to do away with capitalism.”

The IWW grew out of a secret meeting in Chicago in 1905 that drew together radical and dissident elements from across the labor movement. These militant western miners, socialists of various persuasions, advocates of industrial unionism, and anarchistic exponents of direct action closed their ranks for a unified and direct attack upon capitalism. Subsequent events proved that they agreed upon little else than their mutual scorn for the program and tactics of the AFL. Accepting the thesis of class struggle as their common starting point, however, they set up an organization whose aim was to work on both the political and industrial fronts for the final emancipation of labor.

The most important group behind the organization of the IWW was the Western Federation of Miners (WFM). It had once been affiliated with the AFL but let its membership lapse in 1897 as a result of the AFL's apparent disinterest in the travails of workers in the mountain states. Hardened by a series of violent strikes, which they had fought with the mine owners of Idaho, Montana, and especially Colorado between 1894 and 1904, the leaders of the hard-rock miners became militant socialists. Dynamitings, train wrecks, strikebreakers, private detectives, murders, and the imposition of martial law had taught these western workers harsh lessons in social reality. Daily life, not Marxist treatises, exposed for them the reality of class conflict. When in 1903/4 the full weight of the State of Colorado was used to crush their strike in the Cripple Creek district, the WFM's leaders decided that they needed radical allies.

They had previously formed the Western Labor Union in 1897, and then the American Labor Union in 1902, in an effort to bring together all workers in the western states in a single industrial organization, and now the leaders of the WFM were ready to welcome any move toward even broader organization. They answered the call for the Chicago convention that was to result in the formation of the IWW. Their delegates numbered only five out of a total of some 200 at this meeting, but with 27,000 members, the western miners were far and away the strongest union represented.



Figure 12.1 Socialist Party leader Eugene V. Debs, a forceful and eloquent speaker, is seen here delivering an antiwar speech in Canton, Ohio, 1918. (Library of Congress)

Socialists composed the other principal group represented at the convention of 1905. They were, however, divided into two competing factions. One, under the domineering leadership of Daniel De Leon, a brilliant orator and pamphleteer known as the “socialist pope,” had long waged open war against the AFL. De Leon called the AFL “a cross between a windbag and a rope of sand,” while condemning Gompers as “labor faker” and “a greasy tool of Wall Street.” The other faction included men and women who had chafed at De Leon’s iron party discipline and his version of revolutionary practice. Friendlier to the trade unions and more willing to seek immediate reforms, these insurgents coalesced in 1901 to form the Socialist Party of America (SPA). With Eugene V. Debs as its five-time presidential candidate, the SPA was from its founding until 1920 the most successful national radical political party in twentieth-century America. Although the SPA declined to send an official delegation to the Chicago convention, Debs and other prominent party members attended individually. At odds since the 1890s, Debs and De Leon promised in 1905 to shake hands “over the bloody chasm of the past.”

While other independent radical unions were officially represented, including the American Labor Union, the United Metal Workers, and the United Brotherhood of Railway Employees, individuals rather than organizations were primarily responsible for the establishment of the IWW, and the convention was enlivened by the clash of their divergent personalities. In addition to De Leon and Debs, there were other delegates: William D. Haywood, of the WFM; Father Thomas J. Hagerty, a big, black-bearded Catholic priest who was the editor of the American Labor Union’s

official organ and a militant advocate of industrial unionism; Algie M. Simons, the socialist intellectual and editor of the *International Socialist Review*; Charles O. Sherman, the general secretary of the United Metal Workers; William E. Trautmann, a radical leader of the United Brewery Workers and editor of its German-language paper; and Mary Harris “Mother” Jones, a fiery, intrepid woman of 75 years with curly white hair and kindly gray eyes, a woman whose zeal as an agitator kept her in the front lines of labor's fight for almost half a century.

Among these varied and colorful figures, the most arresting was Haywood. A rugged hulk of a man, he had a tough, almost sinister appearance. “Big Bill” Haywood was a powerful and aggressive embodiment of the spirit of the militant western worker. Forced to leave school as a young adolescent, Haywood worked at odd jobs on the streets of Salt Lake City until going down into the mines at the age of fifteen. He soon became a skilled miner and, at the end of the 1890s, was a leader in the WFM local in Silver City, Idaho. In 1900 he left the mines permanently, becoming a secretary-treasurer of the WFM. For the remainder of his life, “Big Bill” acted as a labor radical. Nowhere did he play that role better than at the founding convention of the IWW, of which he was chairperson. He addressed it as “the Continental Congress of the working class” and from the onset revealed that his real interest was in organizing the forgotten unskilled workers and especially the migratory laborers of the West. “We are going down in the gutter,” Haywood shouted, “to get at the mass of workers and bring them up to a decent plane of living.”

Except for Haywood, none of these convention delegates had many followers to bring into the IWW. They largely spoke for themselves, and their individualistic attitudes on labor policy appeared to be irreconcilable in the excitement of convention debate. After giving full vent to their opposition to what they derisively called “the American Separation of Labor,” they nevertheless agreed upon a general program for the IWW.

Gompers had nothing but scorn for this form of labor organization, which he roundly condemned as “fallacious, injurious, reactionary.” He struck out particularly at his old foe, De Leon, whose adherence to the IWW he hoped would “bring unction to the soul” of its other promoters. “So the trade union smashers and the rammers from without and the ‘borers from within,’” he wrote, “are again joining hands; a pleasant sight of the ‘pirates’ and the ‘kangaroos’ hugging each other in glee over their prospective prey.”

Gompers's belief that such strange bedfellows could not long work together soon appeared to be substantiated. Faction and controversy soon split the ranks of the IWW. At the convention of 1906, a conflict between the more moderate elements, primarily represented by the SPA, and the proponents of revolution led to wholesale desertions by reformists. The next year, the WFM itself withdrew, reducing the actual membership of the IWW to less than 6,000, and then in 1908 a final struggle broke out over the basic issue of whether to pursue political or economic action. The group favoring the former policy was led by De Leon and the latter by Trautmann (who had

been expelled from the United Brewery Workers for his participation in the IWW), but the decisive element at the convention was a delegation of western rebels – “the Overalls Brigade” – which beat its way to Chicago on freight trains and had scant interest in doctrinaire squabbling.

The majority ousted De Leon's followers, who promptly held a rival convention to form a new organization, and then proceeded to amend the Chicago constitution to their liking. The amended constitution eliminated political action and party affiliation as means to achieve a workers' revolution. IWW members instead sought to overthrow capitalism by direct economic action. Openly revolutionary in theory and practice, the IWW pledged never to make peace with capitalists, or to sign binding time contracts with employers. It promised to gain its cooperative and harmonious utopia one day through the general strike – the ultimate weapon of working-class power.

Only through “One Big Union,” breaking through all craft lines, it was now declared, could the workers present an effective united front in the class struggle. The AFL had betrayed labor and fallen under the complete domination of employers. “Tie 'Em Up,” sang the Wobblies:

We have no fight with brothers of the old A.F. of L.
But we ask you use your reason with the facts we have to tell.
Your craft is but protection for a form of property,
The skill that you are losing, don't you see.
Improvements on machinery take your skill and tools away,
And you'll be among the common slaves upon some fateful day.
Now the things of which we're talking we are mighty sure about. –
So what's the use to strike the way you can't win out?
Tie 'em up! tie 'em up; that's the way to win.
Don't notify the bosses till hostilities begin.
Don't furnish chance for gunmen, scabs and all their like;
What you need is One Big Union and One Big Strike.

Refusing to abandon the right to strike at any time or on any occasion, the IWW viewed everyday struggles for wages and hours as only the first line of attack; the decks had to be kept clear for the final assault. Industrial unions were to provide the “structure of the new society within the shell of the old,” and a workers' government would replace what in a capitalistic society was “simply a committee employed to police the interests of the employing class.”

The Spirit of the IWW

The IWW made its greatest appeal to western miners, construction gangs, loggers, and migratory harvest hands who were not interested in political action since they seldom had the vote. Ill-paid, homeless, often unmarried, drifting from job to job, largely cut off from the usual ties of society, they considered themselves victims of an economic system designed solely to exploit them. They were ready to strike for ownership of the means of production. Converts were also won among the immigrant workers of steel mills, packing plants, and textile mills whom the IWW was prepared at all times to aid. More stable and settled than the western workers, and also more firmly integrated into ethnic communities, the eastern factory workers found direct action to be an appealing doctrine and the Wobblies to be firm allies.

The membership of the IWW was probably no more than 60,000 at its pre-World War I peak. Several hundred thousand union cards were issued, but migratory workers did not remain long in the ranks. The significance of the IWW, as has been suggested, was its revolutionary leadership. The Wobblies became commonly but unjustly associated with violence. "Hanging is none too good for them," the *San Diego Tribune* exploded on one occasion in 1912. "They would be much better dead, for they are absolutely useless in the human economy; they are the waste material of creation and should be drained off into the sewer of oblivion there to rot in cold obstruction like any other excrement." Yet without this class of workers, however obstreperous, the West would hardly have developed so rapidly. Wobblies did the rough and heavy work: they cut the timber, harvested the crops, and dug out the minerals. And however hopeless their struggle against society, they had courage and militancy which were colorful and exciting.

Their spirit found expression in the IWW songs sung at their union meetings, in harvest camps, and on the picket line: "Are You a Wobbly?" "Dump the Bosses off Your Back," "Paint 'Er Red," "What We Want," "The Red Flag," and "Hallelujah! I'm a Bum!"

O! I like my boss,
He's a good friend of mine,
And that's why I'm starving
Out on the picket-line!
Hallelujah! I'm a bum!
Hallelujah! Bum again!
Hallelujah! Give us a hand-out
To revive us again!

There were IWW strikes in the mining fields, on lumbering projects, in the construction camps of the Northwest, in Pacific Coast canneries, eastern textile mills, Midwestern steel and meatpacking plants, and among streetcar workers, window cleaners, and

longshoremen. The IWW leaders, and notably “Big Bill” Haywood, who had stayed with the IWW in spite of the withdrawal of the WFM, were ready to back up the unorganized workers – anywhere, anytime. They directed strike activity, filled picket lines, provided relief for workers' families, and agitated and organized with a reckless ardor that made the tactics of the AFL seem pale and insipid.

When local authorities tried to suppress the IWW and threw its organizers into jail, “free-speech” fights broke out from Walla Walla, Washington, to New Bedford, Massachusetts. There was no sooner news of arrests in some particular town than the Wobblies would arrive upon the scene by the scores to exercise their constitutional rights and defy the police. When the first contingents were jailed, others took their place until the harassed authorities found the burden upon the community so great that they had no alternative but to set their prisoners free. The Wobblies would pour from the jail triumphant, ready again to agitate, to picket, and to battle for their rights.

The Lawrence Strike

The West was the scene of the most spectacular strikes and free-speech fights waged by the Wobblies, but one of their greatest victories came in a struggle of textile workers in Lawrence, Massachusetts, in 1912.

A reduction in wages for the 30,000 workers in the Lawrence textile mills, about half of whom were employed by the American Woolen Company, brought on the strike. The earnings of the mill hands – largely Italians, Poles, Lithuanians, and Russians – averaged less than \$9 a week when the mills were running full time. Moreover, in addition to insufficient wages and long hours, a premium system had been introduced to speed up work under conditions that imposed terrific pressure and tension. The pay cuts, an employer response to a state maximum-hours law, were the last straw. The angry workers spontaneously began to walk out on January 12, 1912, as the bells of the city hall rang a general alarm, in a concerted protest that soon involved some 20,000 men and women.



Figure 12.2 Members of the Massachusetts state militia keep strikers away from the mills during the Lawrence textile strike, 1912. (Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University)

There were some union members in the mills. A few belonged to the United Textile Workers, an AFL affiliate, and perhaps a thousand to the IWW; the rest were unorganized. Foreseeing the strike, the IWW members had already sent an appeal to headquarters for help, and Joseph J. Ettor, a member of the general executive board, hurried to Lawrence and was soon joined there by another IWW leader, the Italian immigrant agitator Arturo Giovannitti. The two men at once took over virtual control of the strike, organized it on a realistic basis, and imposed strict discipline. Ettor arranged great mass meetings to keep the strikers united, established picket lines, and saw that relief was given to the needy and suffering families whose sole sources of income had been abruptly cut off. Relief was, indeed, Ettor's greatest problem because strikers and their dependents represented over half of the city's population of 85,000. General committees were formed for each separate national group to distribute supplies, maintain soup kitchens, and provide other aid.

The first suggestion of lawlessness was the discovery, announced in scare headlines in the press, of dynamite planted in various parts of the city. Lawrence newspapers and city leaders accused the IWW of importing terrorism. The strikers protested at once that the dynamite planting was none of their doing. Events vindicated them. Before the strike was over, it was proved that a local undertaker had planted the

dynamite, in an obvious effort to discredit the strikers and particularly the IWW, and that the plot had been contrived by persons closely associated with the mill owners themselves. With the arrest of the head of the American Woolen Company on the charge of being implicated in the scheme, even the most conservative newspapers strongly assailed the mill owners.

In the meantime, the American Woolen Company, still refusing even to consider the workers' demands, tried to reopen the mills. This move caused a violent clash between strikers and police, and during the struggle an Italian woman was shot and killed. The authorities promptly declared martial law, militia companies arrived to patrol the streets in order to prevent any public meetings or talks, and Ettor and Giovannitti were arrested as accessories to murder.

“Big Bill” Haywood took charge after the arrest of Ettor and Giovannitti, and he continued to insist upon an attitude of passive resistance. Under his leadership, the workers held firm. The protection offered by the militia to employees desiring to return to their jobs did not encourage any defections from the ranks. “In the spinning room every belt was in motion, the whir of machinery sounded on every side,” wrote a newspaper reporter visiting one of the mills, “yet not a single operative was at work and not a single machine carried a spool of yarn.”

The problem of feeding the strikers became increasingly difficult, however, and early in February the committee evolved a plan that had the double objective of helping to meet immediate needs and dramatically calling public attention to them. Labor sympathizers in other cities were asked to provide temporary homes for the children of the strikers. The response was immediate, and several hundred children were sent to other communities. Alarmed at the effect of this move, the Lawrence authorities stated that no more children would be allowed to leave the city. When the strike committee undertook to send another group away, the police forcibly interfered under circumstances that were more successful in creating sympathy for the strikers than anything else could possibly have been.

When strikers attempted to take their children to the Lawrence train station where they were to be escorted to temporary homes in Philadelphia, they suffered a shocking assault. As one witness recalled, the police “closed in on us with their clubs, beating right and left, with no thought of the children, who were in the most desperate danger of being trampled to death. The mothers and children were thus hurled in a mass and bodily dragged to a military truck, and even then clubbed, irrespective of the cries of the panic-stricken women and children.”

This was perhaps the turning point in the strike. Neither the Lawrence authorities nor the mill owners could withstand the flood of protests from every part of the country. There were to be further attacks on the strikers and further arrests – the latter totaled 296 during the two months of the strike – but with the picket lines holding firm, the American Woolen Company finally admitted defeat and on March 12 offered terms that virtually met all the workers' demands. Wages were to be increased from

5 to 25 percent, with time-and-a-quarter for overtime; the premium system was equitably adjusted; and there was to be no discrimination in rehiring the strikers. At a great mass meeting on Lawrence Common, Haywood advised acceptance of this offer, and the mill operatives agreed to return to their jobs.

A final episode was the trial of Ettore and Giovannitti. For a time it appeared that they would not be given a fair hearing and were likely to be convicted in spite of the lack of any evidence directly implicating them in the murder with which they were charged. The IWW organized a defense committee, which collected \$60,000, and the workers in Lawrence, declaring that unless the authorities opened the jail doors they would close the mill doors, went on a twenty-four-hour protest strike – 15,000 strong. In the final outcome, both men were found innocent and on being released were wildly greeted by crowds who held them in no small part responsible for the victory that the Lawrence textile employees had won under their direction.

Before the trial ended, the two accused men made speeches to the jury setting forth their position in which they frankly avowed the revolutionary aims of the IWW and their refusal to be intimidated by the police. That of Giovannitti, a poet in his own right, whose revolutionary verses are to be found in many anthologies, was eloquent and moving.

“Let me tell you,” he declared, “that the first strike that breaks again in this Commonwealth or any other place in America where the work and help and the intelligence of Joseph J. Ettore and Arturo Giovannitti will be needed and necessary, there we shall go again, regardless of any fear or of any threat. We shall return again to our humble efforts, obscure, unknown, misunderstood soldiers of this mighty army of the working class of the world, which, out of the shadows and darkness of the past, is striving towards the destined goal, which is the emancipation of human kind, which is the establishment of love and brotherhood and justice for every man and every woman on this earth.”

The Decline, Repression, and Lasting Legacy of the IWW

The IWW had won an astounding triumph in Lawrence. Its membership among textile workers jumped almost overnight to 18,000, and this renewed vitality appeared to promise still further growth. Alarm was created within the AFL as to the future development of the IWW's aggressive strike tactics, while even greater fears were aroused in the business community over the possible spread of radical doctrines among American workers.

These fears soon dissipated. Lawrence represented the high point of the IWW's success among immigrant industrial workers, not the beginning of a revolutionary groundswell. The aftermath of Lawrence also disclosed how much more powerful employers were than unions. With the textile industry deep in recession by 1913, Lawrence employers shifted production from union to nonunion mills, discharged union

militants, and showered promotions and favors on the ethnic groups most resistant to the IWW, mostly Irish and French Canadian. As the IWW seemed unable to protect Lawrence's workers against employer tactics, most of its members drifted away and sought comfort and security in their families and ethnic associations.

The next important strike in which the IWW participated was a harbinger of its decline. Trouble developed in 1913 in the silk mills of Paterson, New Jersey, and among other leaders of the Wobblies, Haywood and Ettor were again on hand. This strike was a prolonged and embittered struggle. The Paterson authorities were determined to crush the revolutionary menace of the IWW, and it in turn felt that too much depended on a victory in this strike to give in. The brutality of the police in arresting strikers on any pretense, clubbing them into insensibility when they resisted, and breaking up their picket lines, was notorious. Yet the strike went on. Among others who came out in sympathy for the silk workers was John Reed, the young Harvard-educated revolutionary who was to write *Ten Days that Shook the World* (1919) and be buried in the walls of the Kremlin. Describing the scene at Paterson, he said that he could never forget “the exultant men who had blithely defied the lawless brutality of the city and gone to prison laughing and singing.” But after five grueling months, the exhaustion of their funds and the growing need of their families forced the strikers to surrender. The IWW had to admit defeat.



Figure 12.3 An IWW gallery: William D. “Big Bill” Haywood (far right), Elizabeth Gurley Flynn (center), and Carlo Tresca (to her left), Paterson, New Jersey, 1913. (Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University)



Figure 12.4 A sample of IWW propaganda stickers. (Personal collection of Melvyn Dubofsky)

Succeeding years saw the Wobblies engaged in scores of minor strikes, while their membership greatly fluctuated as local unions broke up and the migratory construction workers and harvest hands drifted in and out of the organization. There were clashes with authority in many instances and, in the western states, a mounting tendency to suppress strikes by any means and at any cost. A free-speech fight at Everett, Washington, in 1916, for example, resulted in seven deaths when deputized sheriffs opened fire on a boatload of Wobblies landing in the harbor.

Upon the outbreak of the European conflict in 1914, the IWW took a decisive stand against war. "We, as members of the industrial army," read a resolution adopted at

its convention that year, “will refuse to fight for any purpose except for the realization of industrial freedom.” When the United States entered the war in April 1917, the IWW deemphasized its antiwar rhetoric, yet declined to end class conflict and temporarily suspend the right to strike. Hence, in the summer of 1917 the Wobblies led strikes by western copper miners and northwestern timber workers. Employers and public officials asserted that the strikes were sabotaging vital war industries. Wobblies retorted that as soon as hours were reduced, wages increased, and working conditions improved, the strikes would end.

Public opinion, as reflected in newspaper editorials and congressional speeches, condemned the IWW as unpatriotic, pro-German, and treasonable. In the frenzied atmosphere of war, popular feeling was everywhere whipped up to fever pitch against “Imperial Wilhelm's Warriors.” And employers, seeing their chance to smash the IWW once and for all, did everything possible to add fuel to these blazing embers of hatred – with the enthusiastic cooperation of much of the press. “While the country is at war,” said the *Cleveland News*, “the only room it can afford IWW's...is behind the walls of penitentiaries.”

Such sentiments found concrete expression when the federal government acted under the provisions of the Espionage Act of 1917. In September of that year, federal agents raided IWW headquarters nationwide and seized everything they could lay their hands on. They also arrested all the organization's leaders, several hundred in all. Beginning in 1918, federal authorities held a series of mass trials of Wobblies, who were charged with obstructing the war effort. The largest such trial was held in Chicago, where Haywood and 100 other Wobblies were found guilty of sedition and conspiracy and sentenced to up to twenty years in prison. Smaller federal trials were held in Sacramento, California, and Wichita, Kansas, with similar results. The evidence in all the trials proved flimsy and contradictory. Rarely did the prosecution link a Wobbly defendant to an overt criminal act. But in the frenzied atmosphere, patriotic jurors did not seek or require substantial evidence of wrongdoing. Radical intent sufficed to convict the Wobblies.

When the authorities did not act promptly enough, loyalty leagues and local vigilantes often took the law into their own hands. Brutal clubbings, horse-whippings, and tar-and-featherings took place in many communities; in at least two instances, IWW members were lynched by lawless mobs. In July 1917, some 1,200 striking miners at Bisbee, Arizona, of whom less than half were actually IWW members, were forcibly deported from the town by a posse deputized by the sheriff at the insistence of a local loyalty league. They were put into cattle cars, taken across the state line, and abandoned in the desert. After 36 hours without food or water, they were rescued by federal authorities and taken to a detention camp in Columbus, New Mexico.

The energies of the IWW were largely absorbed during the war years in trying to defend its “class war prisoners.” Unable to do so successfully, it soon found itself without leaders. Haywood himself eventually skipped bail and fled to Soviet Russia.

The organization did not break up – it later experienced recovery of a sort – but it never regained its militant prewar strength. Not only was the IWW shattered by this wartime repression, so too was the Socialist Party of America (SPA), whose leader Eugene V. Debs had helped birth the Wobblies. The party was split by the war, its newspaper was barred from the mails, and Debs himself was arrested for expressing opposition to the draft. Like the IWW, it never regained its prewar influence.

Changing economic conditions in the West, marked by the increased use of farm machinery and developing automobile transportation, depleted the ranks of the migratory workers who were such an important element in the IWW membership. The Communist Party of America, which broke away from the diminished SPA and organized as a branch of the Third International in 1919, drew away many of the radical socialists. Finally, what was left of the IWW became far less aggressive with the loss of its old leadership. By the mid-1920s, the old fighting IWW had already become a legend.

The impact of the IWW on the labor movement was nonetheless significant and lasting. Apart from such direct results as may have been obtained in improving working conditions in western mines, lumber camps, harvest fields, and occasionally in eastern factories, this revolutionary movement spectacularly centered attention on the desperate needs of vast numbers of common workers and gave a new impetus to industrial unionism that the AFL could not entirely ignore. The radical doctrine of class struggle badly shook, for a time at least, the complacency of more moderate labor leaders.

In its time the IWW surely failed to achieve its avowed goals. It neither abolished the wage system nor destroyed capitalism. The AFL continued to dominate the labor movement and to preach its brand of “business unionism.” But many of the ideas and actions associated with the IWW resonated elsewhere in the labor movement. Direct action and industrial unionism found echoes in the United Mine Workers, the International Ladies’ Garment Workers Union, and the Amalgamated Clothing Workers – all advocates of the “new unionism” with a social conscience. Moreover, as long as millions of workers earned too little, worked too long, lacked job security, and had no union representation, the IWW cause lived on.

13

THE GREAT WAR'S AMBIGUOUS LEGACY

As the shadow of impending war fell over the United States and events rapidly drove the country toward participation in the European struggle, organized labor was forced to consider its position toward the coming conflict. On the eve of hostilities, labor was stronger than it had ever been before and had won for the first time what was effectively official recognition of its role in the national economy. Opinion seemed to be turning labor's way. The 1915 final report of the Commission on Industrial Relations ascribed much labor discontent to denial of the right to organize and upheld trade unionism as an essential institution for the settlement of industrial disputes. The Clayton Act apparently exempted unions from prosecution under the antitrust laws, the Adamson Act had extended the eight-hour day to railroad workers, and President Wilson had demonstrated his friendliness on many occasions and declared that no future president would ever be able to ignore the organized labor movement.

So it was with a new sense of both power and responsibility that the spokesmen of some 3 million wage earners undertook to define the attitude of labor toward war in Europe. The issue was first taken up at a conference held on March 1, 1917 – almost a month before the United States engaged in hostilities, but at a time when the nation's entrance into them already appeared imminent – attended by representatives of 79 international unions, the Railroad Brotherhoods, and the executive council of the American Federation of Labor (AFL). There was no chance that the AFL would follow the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) or the Socialist Party of America in opposing US participation in the war, or that Samuel Gompers would emulate the Socialist Party leader Eugene V. Debs, who would go to jail for opposing the war. At the meeting's conclusion, the conferees issued a public statement on “American Labor's Position in Peace or in War.” It pledged the full support of all labor organizations should the country become directly involved in conflict with Germany.



Figure 13.1 Samuel Gompers in a World War I propaganda picture, circa 1918. (Ohio Historical Society).

It was not an unconditional pledge. Organized labor was determined that such gains as had been made in recent years should be protected in the event of war, and, in pledging support to the Wilson administration, insisted on full recognition of its newly attained status. The unions were to be the medium through which government would operate to seek the cooperation of wage earners, and they were to be given representation on all boards dealing with national defense. Labor was to be free to exercise the right to organize, and while it remained prepared to use all possible restraint, it did not agree or intend to surrender the weapon of the strike. These conditions for labor cooperation were said to be necessary because of the nature of the aims for which the country was prepared to go to war.

“Wrapped up with the safety of this Republic,” the labor leaders asserted, “are ideals of democracy, a heritage which the masses of the people received from our forefathers, who fought that liberty might live in this country – a heritage that is to be maintained and handed down to each generation with undiminished power and usefulness.”

The Wilson administration was prepared to work with labor on this basis, and, after American entry into the war, tried to pursue a policy in respect to industrial relations that would forestall strikes. Agreements with the AFL specifically provided for the enforcement of trade union standards in all government contracts; labor representatives were appointed to all appropriate government agencies, and Gompers was made a member of the Advisory Commission of the National Council of

Defense. "While we are fighting for freedom," President Wilson told the AFL convention in November 1917, "we must see among other things that labor is free."

But industrial peace was not easily maintained during 1917. As prices rose under the stimulus of wartime purchasing without a corresponding increase in wages, there was discontent among workers and general demands for increases in pay. When such demands were not met, strikes broke out on an unprecedented scale. Before 1917 ended, more than 1 million workers had been involved in 4,450 work stoppages.

Many strikes were instigated by the IWW. Under its radical leadership, there were threatening outbreaks in the lumber camps of the Northwest, among shipyard workers on the Pacific Coast, and in the copper mines of Arizona. Labor unrest was by no means limited to IWW supporters. Many unions affiliated with the AFL felt justified in making wartime demands and backing them up with strikes that seriously interrupted production in defense industries.

By the beginning of 1918, this situation threatened to block the flow of military supplies overseas. While efforts were constantly being made to resolve labor disputes through special wage adjustment boards and the Mediation Commission, set up by President Wilson in August 1917, the government felt obliged to intervene still further in order to assure essential industrial output. Both the friendliness of the administration toward organized labor and simple expediency dictated a policy that would win the workers' support rather than one of suppressing strikes by force. Representatives of labor and management were consequently appointed to a War Labor Conference Board, and, after that body had unanimously agreed upon a set of principles to govern future labor relations, the president set up, upon its recommendation in April 1918, the National War Labor Board to serve as a final court of appeal to settle all industrial disputes that could not be resolved through other means. The board was composed of five representatives of labor and five of management, with two joint chairmen representative of the public: former President Taft and Frank P. Walsh, who had been chairman of the Commission on Industrial Relations.

The general principles upon which the National War Labor Board operated were immensely significant as a reflection of new governmental attitudes toward labor, and they also foreshadowed the labor legislation of the New Deal. In return for a general pledge that there would be no further strikes or lockouts for the duration of the war, the Wilson administration was prepared to accord labor full support for virtually all its traditional demands. The right to organize and bargain collectively through "chosen representatives" was recognized and was not in any way to be abridged or denied by employers (employers who refused to formally recognize unions were allowed to bargain with shop committees elected to represent their workers); all existing agreements in respect to union or open shops were to be upheld on their prewar basis; the eight-hour day was to be applied as far as possible; women entering industry were to be given equal pay for equal work; and there was complete

acceptance of “the right of all workers, including common laborers, to a living wage... which will ensure the subsistence of the worker and his family in health and reasonable comfort.”

Federal labor policies promoting “industrial democracy” succeeded in curbing resentment among workers and in satisfying the demands of most AFL trade unions. As a result of the tight labor market and organized labor's greater status, more workers than ever before won the eight-hour day and trade unions grew enormously. Because few industrial disputes paralyzed war production, no such drastic measures as a manpower draft, compulsory arbitration, or antistrike laws were enacted. In those few cases, however, in which strikes interfered with the war effort – most notably among loggers in the Pacific Northwest and munitions workers in Bridgeport, Connecticut – stronger action resulted, including in the former case the use of troops as workers. But, overall, the AFL upheld its side of the bargain into which it had tacitly entered, and Secretary of War Newton D. Baker declared on one occasion that it had proved to be “more willing to keep in step than capital.”

As the principal spokesman for labor, Gompers continued to support the war effort in every possible way and succeeded in completely identifying the AFL with American foreign policy. He vociferously attacked all pacifist or suspected pro-German groups, applauded the repression of the IWW, promoted the American Alliance for Labor and Democracy as a countermove to socialist propaganda for peace, and staunchly upheld his vision of Americanism. “I want to express my admiration of his patriotic courage, his large vision, and his statesmanlike sense of what had to be done,” was President Wilson's warm tribute. Wilson sent Gompers abroad in 1918 to attend a labor conference among the Allied nations, and Gompers was in Paris during the peace conference as a member of the Commission on International Labor Legislation.

Labor policy was reflected in the wartime gains of the workers. Wages gradually rose until average annual earnings in manufacturing, transportation, and coal mining topped the \$1,000 mark, and the unions in 1919 had over 1 million more members than in 1916 – a total of 4,125,000. When the government took control of the railways, the recognition previously granted only to the railway brotherhoods was extended to shopmen, yardmen, maintenance-of-way workers, railway clerks, and telegraphers. In other industries where unionization had struggled, there were important advances – among packinghouse employees, seamen and longshoremen, electrical workers, and machinists. The war opened up great opportunities, and unions made the most of them.

The war emergency also led to substantial, if sometimes temporary, changes in the composition of the American labor force. Eastern and southern European immigrants, who had once formed the mudsill of the industrial labor force, improved their skills and jobs. Employers substituted them for more skilled or better-paid American-born workers who had volunteered or been drafted for military service. Many immigrant workers who before the war considered their American experience a temporary

sojourn now began to think of themselves as Americans. Wartime job promotions and governmental and corporate Americanization campaigns transformed large numbers of recent immigrants into US citizens, who now demanded their due in the factory as well as in the public arena.

Employers turned to other new sources of labor to fill empty factory places. Migration of southern blacks to the North, which had been a small stream from the end of Reconstruction to 1914, now became a torrent known as the Great Migration. Between 200,000 and 300,000 African Americans migrated to regions associated with heavy industries and the production of primary metal products – Pittsburgh-Youngstown, Cleveland-Akron, Chicago-Gary, St. Louis-East St. Louis. Black, native-born Americans, for half a century outdistanced in the job market by white European immigrants, were suddenly wanted, if not preferred. The same could be said of another group: Americans of Mexican origin and also Mexican citizens in the United States. They, too, helped to fill the ranks of new workers in northern centers of heavy industry and war production.

Women formed a third new element in the wartime workforce. Once confined primarily to low-paying secondary jobs in domestic and retail service, they now found employment in foundries, steel mills, public transit, railroads, indeed anywhere labor was needed. Not only did a great many women already in the workforce move from secondary to primary labor-market jobs, but hundreds of thousands of women also left the household to take wage-labor jobs for the first time.

All in all, hitherto socially and economically marginal individuals and groups, people whose main prewar function had been to form a reserve labor army, now became citizen-workers, essential elements in the national war machine. Moreover, they had been promised industrial democracy and had seen the wartime government sponsor the election of shop committees in staunchly antiunion companies such as General Electric and Bethlehem Steel. Their expectations about what they were owed as citizen-workers had been elevated and they looked forward to a new world that would follow the so-called Great War.

Postwar Labor Upheaval

The conclusion of hostilities in 1918 at once created a new situation. As wartime restraints were removed and the government dismantled such agencies as the National War Labor Board, both labor and industry prepared for the inevitable renewal of their historic contest. The precarious wartime truce expired. Labor was militantly determined not only to maintain the gains it had made during the war but also to win further recognition of its rights, and industry was no less bound to free itself from all governmental control, check any further advance of unionization, reassert its power, and roll back union gains. The strikes in 1919 were to be nationwide in scope and much hinged on their outcome.

Wages were an immediate cause of many of these disputes. The wartime price rises continued unchecked in 1919 – the cost of living would ultimately reach twice the prewar level – and workers began to feel the pinch despite the high pay they were still able to command. But the basic issue of union security was far less easily settled than wage adjustments. Many employers were willing to compromise on wage demands, but saw in any extension of collective bargaining a threat to the management of their own business. They refused to recognize union spokesmen, and widely withdrew concessions that had been granted under the pressure of war.

The vital importance of union recognition was brought out in the one attempt that the Wilson administration made to reconcile the differences between management and labor in 1919. The various agencies for handling labor disputes had been promptly scrapped after the armistice, but as the number of strikes increased, the president summoned a National Industrial Conference, this time composed of representatives of labor, industry, and the public, in the hope that some basis could be found for labor peace. Fundamental disagreements at once developed over the nature of collective bargaining. The labor representatives insisted on the right “to organize without discrimination” as the only means of assuring recognition of national unions, but the conference collapsed when the public representatives, who somehow included leading industrialists John D. Rockefeller Jr. and Elbert H. Gary, chairman of the United States Steel Corporation, sided with their employer colleagues in refusing to recognize independent trade unions.

While the conferees met in Washington, workers acted for themselves in the streets and factories of America. Before the year ended, over 4 million workers participated in more than 3,500 strikes. A general strike paralyzed Seattle for four days, Boston police walked off the job, and in the fall steelworkers and coal miners engaged in nationwide strikes. Events in Europe gave the American strikes a foreboding character. The Bolshevik Revolution in Russia and the ensuing Russian civil war, a revolution in Bavaria, street fighting in Berlin, a communist seizure of power in Hungary, and Italian workers' occupation of factories in Turin all seemed to turn the world upside down. Many worried employers, governmental officials, and citizens saw the American strikes as the cutting edge of domestic revolution, not as expressions of justified grievances.

Employers and their governmental allies lost no time in identifying strikers as “Reds” or in suggesting that the strikes were ordered by Bolsheviks in the Kremlin. The Communist International (Comintern) indeed preached world revolution and had American adherents in the two communist parties that left-wing rebels from the Socialist Party of America founded in 1919. But domestic communists, whether American- or foreign-born, had little influence or visibility in the mainstream labor movement.

The employers and public officials who linked strikers to Bolsheviks found an unwitting ally in Gompers. In his own eagerness to dissociate trade unionists from Bolsheviks

and to establish labor's respectability, Gompers acted as a strident Red-baiter. His persistent attacks on Bolshevism magnified the extent of domestic radicalism and inadvertently assisted employers in their efforts to associate strikers with subversion. His warnings about radical influences lent credence to demands for forceful suppression of the strike wave in 1919.

The more sympathetic feelings about organized labor that had arisen between 1912 and 1918 evaporated as a reaction swelled against Woodrow Wilson's foreign and domestic policies. The strikes awoke "unstinted condemnation from almost every walk of life," one newspaper stated; another declared that the only One Big Union the nation would tolerate was "the one whose symbol is the Stars and Stripes." The advocates of economic and social stability demanded a national antistrike policy. By the end of 1919, as strike after strike was collapsing, the *Literary Digest* pointed out that sentiment had strongly and definitely crystallized in favor of federal, state, and local police intervention in support of employers and against workers.

A strike that aroused anxiety in the postwar period was the general strike that broke out in Seattle in February 1919. The incident that set off this strike was a demand on the part of shipyard workers in the city for higher wages. When their employers bluntly rejected the demand, the men walked out. The Central Labor Committee in Seattle at this time was controlled by James A. Duncan, a member of the International Association of Machinists who had risen to power amid the embittered industrial strife promoted throughout the Northwest by the IWW. He was an outspoken opponent of the conservative labor policies followed by the AFL, had strongly opposed entry into the war, and was sympathetic toward Soviet Russia. Seizing the opportunity to show labor solidarity, he called a general strike of all workers in Seattle. Some 60,000 responded, and for five hectic days the industrial life of the city was almost paralyzed, although a union committee insured that all citizens received essential health and welfare services.

The general strike engendered considerable local and national resistance to labor's demands, causing labor unity to fray. Unable to coerce their adversaries to surrender, the local Seattle unions began to withdraw their support from the Central Labor Committee, and the strike collapsed. In the meantime, however, Seattle's mayor, Ole Hanson, had burst into the nation's headlines with sensational statements that the whole thing had been a Bolshevik plot, which was crushed only by his own heroic measures.

Even more disturbing was the strike some months later by the Boston police. Discontented with low wages and other aspects of their jobs, the police had formed a union and applied to the AFL for a charter. The Boston police commissioner promptly stated that no members of the force would be allowed to join a union, suspended 19 of the men who had already done so, and began to recruit volunteers to take over should any union activity continue. Outraged at what they considered such arbitrary action, the police took matters into their own hands and, on September 9, suddenly

went on strike. Boston found itself without police protection that night, and its nervous citizens hardly knew what outbreaks of crime and violence to expect. There was some rowdiness by bands of hoodlums, but none of the general lawlessness that had been feared. The next day volunteers and state guards took over the duties of police.

Settlement of the highly involved issues at stake was not so easy. The police commissioner and the mayor were at odds. While the commissioner refused to consider the grievances that had led to the strike or to reinstate any of the men who had taken part in it, the mayor showed a good deal more sympathy for the strikers and charged that the whole affair had been miserably mishandled. From AFL officials came accusations that the police commissioner was more interested in trying to discredit labor than in solving the controversy, and that he had virtually goaded the police into striking. Ethnic conflict between a city administration and police force largely Irish, Roman Catholic, and Democratic in character and a police commissioner and state government essentially Protestant and Republican exacerbated the issues in dispute.

Influential citizens generally condemned the strikers for deserting their posts. A "crime against civilization" was President Wilson's sharp comment on the strike, and a future US president won nationwide fame with his own statement. Calvin Coolidge, then governor of Massachusetts, was requested by Gompers to remove the police commissioner and reinstate the strikers. He refused. "There is no right to strike against the public safety," read his terse telegram, "by anybody, anywhere, anytime." Most observers cheered, the Boston police were not reinstated, and Coolidge was started on the road to the White House.

Although events in Seattle and Boston attracted the attention of the entire country, they were local affairs. A great deal more significant in their national, industry-wide implications were strikes in steel and coal. They were defeated under the conditions prevailing in 1919, but they foreshadowed a new pattern of nationwide industrial conflict. The steel strike was especially important. If the steelworkers had been successful, the labor history of subsequent decades might have followed a completely different course. Defeat postponed effective organization of the workers in this basic industry for another 18 years.

Conditions in the steel mills fostered universal discontent and underscored what labor leaders declared was an imperative need for unionization. Wages remained low in spite of wartime advances, and were steadily falling further behind the continued rise in living costs. A twelve-hour day, six days a week, was still in effect for over half the labor force, and the average working week was just under 69 hours. Among the highly diversified immigrant groups that composed the majority of employees, living conditions were a bitter travesty upon the promise of a more abundant life that had drawn them to the "land of opportunity."

Organizational progress in other sectors of the labor front had no parallel in the steel industry. Since the suppression of strikes by the Amalgamated Association of Iron,

Steel, and Tin Workers (AA) in 1901 and 1910, no further efforts had been made toward unionization. While the AA was still in existence, it was a small craft union that did not touch the interests of most steelworkers.

The first step leading toward the strike was the formation, in the summer of 1918, of an organizing committee made up of representatives of 24 unions having jurisdiction in the steel industry. Its objective was not only improvement of working conditions in the mills but also the conquest of this key industry by union labor. The guiding spirit was William Z. Foster, a radical exponent of direct economic action whose early experience in industrial conflict was won in the ranks of the IWW and who later was to become a leading communist. His organizational skill was outstanding and, as secretary-treasurer of the associated union committee, he was put in charge of this “one mighty drive to organize the steel plants of America.” When Foster's organizing campaign began, several federal officials, most notably Frank Walsh, co-chairperson of the National War Labor Board, assisted it.

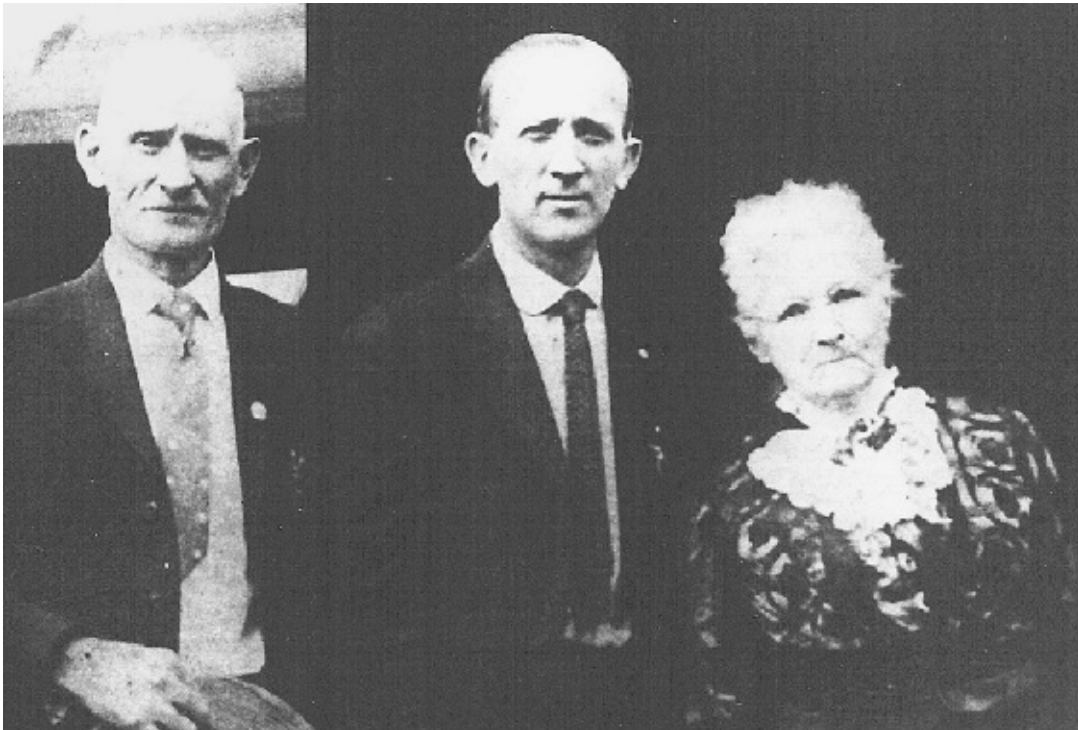


Figure 13.2 Legendary labor activist Mary Harris “Mother” Jones, the “coal miners' angel” on the right. Next to her, William Z. Foster, leader of the 1919 steel strike and later Communist Party leader. (Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University).

Within a year, the number of organized workers in the steel mills jumped to 100,000, and an attempt was made to open negotiations with Elbert H. Gary, chairman of the United States Steel Corporation. When Gary completely disregarded this request, a strike vote was taken and the union committee demanded collective bargaining, the eight-hour day, and an increase in wages. Gary's reply to further overtures for discussion of these demands was blunt and unequivocal. “Our corporation and

subsidiaries, although they do not combat labor unions as such," he stated, "decline to discuss business with them." The strike was then officially set for September 22, and by the end of the month nearly 350,000 men had quit working in nine states.

The steel industry was ready to meet this challenge, and in its determined efforts to break the strike received the full cooperation of local, state, and even federal authorities. Thousands of strikebreakers were brought in, particularly large numbers of blacks; labor spies were hired to stir up animosity and antagonism among the different ethnic groups in the mills; and deputized guards, local police, and state constabularies smashed picket lines and broke up strike meetings with little regard for civil liberties. Violence was held down by the enforcement of martial law in many localities, federal troops being dispatched to Gary, Indiana, under Major General Leonard Wood, but some 20 persons were killed – 18 of them workers – before the strike ended.

The steel companies also opened up a terrific barrage through newspaper advertisements to discourage the strikers and convince public opinion that the whole thing was a plot hatched in Moscow for the overthrow of American capitalism. The strike was not between the workers and their employers, the steel companies proclaimed, but between revolutionists and America. It could not win because the United States would "never stand for the 'red' rule of Bolshevism, I.W.W.ism or any other 'ism' that seeks to tear down the Constitution."

So great were the excitement and controversy stirred up under these circumstances that a commission of inquiry was set up by the Interchurch World Movement, an organization of Protestant churches, to investigate the strike. It could find no evidence whatsoever of the sinister intrigues that the steel companies alleged they had uncovered, and it urged the public to consider the workers' uprising in the light of industrial history rather than "in the glare of baseless excitement over Bolshevism." The repeated emphasis upon the radical, anarchistic, communist aspects of the strike, however, and Foster's left-wing views, served steel company purposes in spite of disclosures, which were not contradicted, about the harsh conditions in the mills. Bolshevism became an issue. The fact that so many of the steelworkers were "hunkies," "dagoes," and "wops," was taken by many as convincing evidence that they were un-American, revolutionary, and controlled by Moscow.

The strike committee could find no way to combat this propaganda successfully. Sponsoring unions withdrew their support, and discouragement spread through the ranks of the strikers. Late in November the union committee consequently asked the Interchurch Commission to mediate and agreed to accept whatever plan it might suggest for ending the dispute. Gary refused peace proposals. Spurning mediation, he declared that the strikers sought "the closed shop, Soviets, and the forcible distribution of property." The strike dragged on but the disheartened men now began to drift back to work. In January 1920, the leaders gave up. They ended the strike and such men as had not in the meantime been blacklisted returned without having

won a single concession.

“The United States Steel Corporation,” the Interchurch Commission declared in a final report, “was too big to be beaten by 300,000 workingmen. It had too large a cash surplus, too many allies among other businesses, too much support from government officers, local and national, too strong an influence with social institutions such as the press and the pulpit, it spread over too much of the earth – still retaining absolutely centralized control – to be defeated by widely scattered workers of many minds, many fears, varying states of pocketbook and under a comparatively improvised leadership.”

The organization of steel was decisive if labor was to unionize other mass-production industries from which it had so far been barred. The business and financial community fully recognized the significance of the strike of 1919 as a showdown between the open shop and industrial unionism. They backed the United States Steel Corporation to the hilt. J. P. Morgan assured Gary of his full approval of the stand he had taken in refusing to deal with the unions. The results of the strike were not only a return to the twelve-hour day, but a return to uncontrolled paternalism and antiunionism in the country's most important industry.

Even before the end of the steel strike, conflict in the bituminous coal fields came to a head. The United Mine Workers had concluded a contract with the operators covering the war period, and with the higher prices of 1919 asked for an adjustment in wages, which had not been raised since 1917. They proposed a 60 percent increase in pay and adoption of the thirty-hour week in order to combat the unemployment resulting from the falling off of wartime need for fuel. The operators not only refused to consider the miners' demands, but they also insisted that the old contract was still in effect because the war was not yet technically over. A strike that was to involve 425,000 miners was then called for November 1.

The danger to the national economy of any prolonged stoppage in the mining of coal was a matter of grave public concern. The government had already warned that a strike would be illegal under wartime legislation governing the coal industry. The issue of Bolshevism again complicated matters. Senator Miles Poindexter of Washington blamed the strike on “anarchists and murderous communists.” Feeling public pressure, and much to the consternation of union leaders, the formerly friendly Wilson administration now took the drastic step of securing an injunction, granted by Judge Albert B. Anderson of the federal district court in Indianapolis, which prohibited any further strike activity by union officials and called upon them to cancel the strike.

The AFL condemned the injunction as “an outrageous proceeding...which strikes at the very foundation of justice and freedom.” It called upon the miners not to give in to governmental pressure and promised them full support in continuing their struggle.

The acting president of the United Mine Workers in 1919 was John L. Lewis, a 40-year-old labor leader who during the war years had been the union's chief statistician

but who was not well-known outside union circles. He was, however, just about to step into the limelight. He did so by calling off the strike. Aware that Justice Department officials were tapping his phones, that unnaturalized immigrant strikers and union officers were subject to peremptory deportation, and that Washington was prepared to use force to break a national coal strike, Lewis refused to heed the AFL's advice to stand firm. Instead of risking his own imprisonment and the destruction of his union, he advised retreat. First criticizing Wilson and government by injunction, Lewis then declared publicly: "We are Americans. We cannot fight our government."

The miners themselves, as Lewis expected, refused to follow his orders. They stayed away from the pits. Before they could be induced to return, further conferences were held in Washington, and an understanding was reached whereby the operators granted an immediate 14 percent wage increase and agreed to leave final settlement of wage demands and other issues in dispute to a special Bituminous Coal Commission. The final award raised the wage increase to 27 percent, almost half of what the miners had originally asked, but ignored altogether the demand for a thirty-hour week.

The strike had been ended by government action. Even though the miners won considerable gains, the important aspect of the controversy was the application of injunction law, which established a vital precedent. In his decision to comply with the government's orders, Lewis showed a keen realization of how far the government was prepared to go to suppress the strike and to avert a fuel famine as winter deepened.

President Wilson declared the coal strike as "wrong both morally and legally." Congress endorsed his position, and editorials throughout the country applauded the use of the injunction. "Neither the miners nor any other organized minority," the *Public Opinion* of Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, commented, "has the right to plunge the country into economic and social chaos....A labor autocracy is as dangerous as a capital autocracy." The *Chicago Daily News* bluntly stated: "The public is weary of industrial strife. It is determined to protect itself."

The Last Throes of Postwar Labor Militancy, 1919 to 1922

Although the strikes of 1919 resulted in a sharp setback for labor and a feeling of embittered disillusionment with what was regarded as betrayal at the hands of the Wilson administration, the wartime advance in unionism was not yet halted. Labor remained militant in spite of defeats. In many important areas, workers succeeded in winning the wage increases for which they fought, and there was continued expansion in union membership. Among the 110 unions now affiliated with the AFL, machinists, nonoperating railway workers, textile operatives, and seamen showed especially important gains, and in such industries as food and clothing, both unskilled and

semiskilled workers were being organized.

The AFL, nevertheless, found itself in an increasingly difficult position. The government support on which it had counted in pursuing its program of business unionism had given way to a revival of injunction law, and consequently there was strong pressure to adopt more aggressive tactics. The AFL leadership still refused, however, to be drawn into political action, and, in the face of new suggestions for the formation of a labor party, expressly reaffirmed the traditional nonpolitical objectives that had always governed AFL policy. At a conference in December 1919, a new "Labor's Bill of Rights" was proclaimed that called for union recognition, a living wage, and restrictions on the use of injunctions, but beyond this the AFL would not go.

Circumstances soon made such a program more difficult than ever. Before the end of 1920, a sudden, sharp depression struck the country. The collapse of the inflationary postwar boom led to tumbling prices all along the line, followed by business failures, industrial stagnation, universal wage cuts, and unemployment on a large scale. By midsummer 1921, an estimated 5 million workers had lost their jobs. Industry took quick advantage of these circumstances to intensify its antiunion campaign. Injunctions and arrests broke a strike of the seamen's union, and subsequent blacklisting reduced it to less than one-fifth of its wartime strength. Packinghouse employees were so badly defeated that the industry reverted to the open shop. In West Virginia, a remaining pocket of UMW strength was broken in 1921 after an armed confrontation between coal miners and operators known as the "Battle of Blair Mountain." And in 1922 the railway shopmen, who repaired and maintained the nation's rolling stock, suffered an even more significant reversal.

The latter strike broke out when the Railway Labor Board, set up to govern employee relations after the railroads had been returned to private ownership in 1920, abrogated agreements that had been negotiated during the war, abolished overtime, and authorized wage cuts totaling \$60 million. The Railway Brotherhoods were not affected by these pay reductions and the maintenance-of-way workers agreed to arbitration, but the members of the shopmen's six craft unions were incensed at the board's apparent submission to employer pressure. A strike was called and, on July 1, 1922, the shopmen walked out, 400,000 strong.

From the first, they found the going hard. With the Railway Labor Board declaring their action an outlaw strike, the Brotherhoods cooperating with management to keep the trains running, and President Warren G. Harding warning against any interference with the mails, the balance of power was almost entirely against the shopmen. Reality was perhaps most graphically revealed by the presence of hundreds of college boys among the strikebreakers brought in under the protection of deputized guards and militias. But this was not all. On September 1, 1922, as the strike effort wavered, the government stepped in to deliver the coup de grace. Attorney General Harry M. Daugherty obtained from Judge James H. Wilkerson, of the federal district court in Chicago, what has often been described as "the most sweeping injunction ever issued

in a labor dispute.”

It prohibited picketing of all sorts, strike meetings, statements to the public, the expenditure of union funds to carry on the strike, and the use of any means of communications by the leaders to direct it. No one was permitted to aid the strikers “by letters, telegrams, telephones, word of mouth,” or to persuade anyone to stop work by “jeers, entreaties, arguments, persuasion, rewards or otherwise.” Daugherty intended to break the strike at any cost.

This drastic move caused vehement debate throughout the country. Not only those newspapers sympathetic to labor but many others, perhaps influenced by partisan considerations in a good many cases, assailed the injunction as wholly unwarranted and a denial of freedom of speech. The *New York World* criticized it severely as “a clumsy step.” On the other hand, conservative Republican papers tried to defend administration policy. The last word on the part of labor's enemies was perhaps spoken by the *Manufacturers' Record*. The injunction, it declared, merely commanded the workers “to cease their adulterous intercourse with lawlessness.”

For the railway shopmen, governmental intervention was the final straw. They eagerly seized upon a proposal by Daniel Willard, president of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, for separate settlements with individual roads and came to terms as best they could. The friendlier attitude of some lines enabled them to retain their organization for some 225,000 workers, but 175,000 others were forced into company unions. Governmental intervention had swung the scales in favor of the employers, and railway labor had suffered a disastrous blow.

Labor had come out of the World War I years strongly organized, determined to extend its gains, and confident that with governmental protection it could raise the standard of living for all American workers. Between 1920 and 1923, however, union membership as a whole dropped by nearly one-third, from its peak figure of a little over 5,000,000 to approximately 3,500,000.

Several factors explained the losses experienced by organized labor, which affected various sectors of the labor movement differently. The wartime and immediate postwar surge in inflation had caused unease among almost all Americans, the solidly middle class and independent professionals as well as wage workers. Employers and conservatives used the economics and politics of inflation to blame trade unions and their demands for higher prices. Republicans – elected to power in Congress in 1918 and gaining the White House in 1920 – played the politics of inflation expertly, to the detriment of labor. The end of the war led the national government to withdraw the support it had given to union organizing and collective bargaining, leading to the defeat of the 1919 steel strike and the elimination of unionism from the meatpacking industry. The depression of 1920 and accompanying mass unemployment further weakened unions and caused aggressive wage cutting. Moreover, the IWW and the Socialist Party of America, which had posed growing threats to the established order before the war, had been decimated by wartime repression and a postwar “Red

scare.” As a result of these factors, organization among mass-production workers and the less skilled collapsed, with only the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union and Amalgamated Clothing Workers retaining at first a measure of power. For the most part, the vast majority of new immigrant workers and their children, the massive labor army of mass-production industry, remained outside unions. The core unions of the AFL, however, which included the mostly highly skilled workers, especially those concentrated in the construction trades, retained their wartime gains, became stronger than ever, and proved the dominant element in the labor movement.

ECONOMIC CHANGE AND UNION RETREAT IN THE 1920S

The seven years from 1922 through 1929 constituted a period of expanding production, further concentration of economic power, rising national income, and pro-business government, all of which operated on the principles of prewar progressivism and economic efficiency, not antiquated nineteenth-century notions of laissez-faire. It would not be incorrect to say that business dominated government. Such presidents as Warren G. Harding, Calvin Coolidge, and especially Herbert Hoover, saw the world much as enlightened capitalists did. Private businesspersons and public officials shared a common belief that a new cooperative capitalism with a conscience could simultaneously provide workers with steady employment at high wages, consumers with quality goods at stable prices, and stockholders with dividends adequate to stimulate greater investment. Few doubted him when Herbert Hoover proclaimed in his acceptance speech in 1928 that “we in America are nearer to the final triumph over poverty than ever before in the history of any land.”

Enough truth underlay such images of a prosperous, poverty-free United States in the 1920s to draw working-class families into a widening consumer market based on expanding access to credit. Those workers who had steady jobs at good wages could for the first time buy now and pay later for washing machines, refrigerators, vacuum cleaners, radios, and even automobiles. Current savings provided cash for down payments; future earnings covered the monthly installment debt. The national economy floated ever higher on a tidal wave of mass consumption in which working-class families played a part. If few workers actually participated in the decade's feverish stock market speculation, that reality did not stop the Wall Street investment firm of Halsey, Stuart and Company from sponsoring a radio broadcast by William Green, Gompers's successor as president of the American Federation of Labor, on “The Worker and his Money.”

The image of America as the world's first mass-consumption society led the French writer André Siegfried to comment in 1927: “A workman is far better paid in America than anywhere else in the world and his standard of living is enormously higher. This difference, which was noticeable before the War, has been greatly accentuated since, and is now the chief contrast between the old and the new continents.” And it led domestic observers to proclaim for perhaps the first, but certainly not the last time, that American workers had been absorbed into the middle class. All Americans, it was alleged, now took Sunday drives in their Fords and “Chewies,” watched the same movies, listened to the same radio programs, wore look-alike factory-made clothing, and danced the Charleston. If the sons and daughters of the working class

did not go to Ivy League colleges, they did enter state and municipal ones. Clearly, then, the United States had become a classless society, such observers concluded.

Racial and ethnic tensions were another matter. First, temporarily in 1921 and then permanently in 1924, Congress ended the era of mass immigration. It did so on a basis that discriminated against immigrants from southern and eastern Europe and excluded those from Asia. Meantime, the prewar immigrants experienced the process of Americanization while their children and grandchildren absorbed it. Ethno-religious factors still divided the working class, but much less so than in the past.

The elimination of mass immigration spurred fear that industry would face a labor shortage. Two sources of labor eased that fear. The mass migration of African Americans from the former slave states northward that had begun during World War I persisted in the 1920s. African Americans who had improved their material lives by moving north and finding industrial employment, however dirty and laborious their jobs, welcomed family, neighbors, and friends to follow their migratory path.

Simultaneously, changes in Southern agriculture pushed tenants and croppers off the land and made them mobile by necessity. The destruction wrought by the boll weevil, falling demand for US cotton on the global market, rising cotton production in the far West, and increasing use of machinery in cultivation reduced the need for labor in the old plantation lands of the South. So a steady migration of African Americans moved north, where they supplied employers with a reserve army of labor, one that was spurned by unions, hired for only the worst and lowest-paying jobs by industry, and found de facto segregation in place of segregation de jure. The other source of labor came from women, as more married women, many of whom had benefited from wartime jobs, either stayed in the workforce or joined it anew in order to help their families enjoy the benefits of a mass-consumer society, keep their children in school, enable them to enroll in college, or to supplement or replace the income of a disabled, injured, ill, poorly paid, or unemployed husband.

If, despite the increasing diversity of the labor force, it seemed to many that the working class was becoming more homogeneous and less segmented, this was because racist and sexist thinking dominated national culture. The millions of African Americans and Hispanics who worked for a living remained in second-class citizenship, akin to excluded castes. And women in the workforce, who now worked outside the home for wages in greater numbers than ever before, still carried the stigma of temporary employees. Women, it was widely believed, worked outside the home only between leaving school and marriage, or, if married, merely for “pin money” (that is, to make possible frivolous or incidental purchases). No matter how much evidence appeared that women, like men, worked mostly to sustain themselves and their families, the image of the female as temporary employee proved resistant to the truth.

Yet the concept that workers were just like everyone else – a part of the great middle class – also conflicted with reality. One of the classic books in American social-

science literature, Robert and Helen Lynd's *Middletown* (1929), dissected the social structure of Muncie, Indiana, in the mid-1920s. The Lynds found this middle-sized, mid-American industrial city to be sharply divided between a laboring class (75 to 80 percent of the population) and a business class (20 to 25 percent) in all aspects of life and behavior – from how they earned a living to what part of town they lived in, to when they slept and arose, to what they ate, and even where and how they prayed. Most important, laboring people and business people looked at the world and the future differently. Businesspeople expected each year to be better than the preceding one, to rise in their careers and income over time, and to be in full control of their community and their future. Workers, in contrast, looked from one year to the next with foreboding, expected advancing age to rob them of work and wages, and felt themselves powerless to shape their communities and futures.

Yet not a hint of rebelliousness stirred among Muncie's workers. However much their lives and behavior differed from those of the business class, local workers shared similar values and measured success mostly in terms of money; they also valued education for its income-producing potential.

Other complexities and contradictions marked American society in the 1920s. Many segments of labor did not share in the feast of plenty provided by economic expansion, and even those groups of workers who profited most from the upward trend of wages could still feel that their share of prosperity's rewards were by no means commensurate with increases in productivity or the profits being made by businessmen.

More important, unemployment was by no means banished from the land, and in some areas was unusually high. Technological advance, which was constantly enabling industry to produce more goods with fewer workers, led to declines in factory payrolls in many basic industries. New machinery and labor-saving devices in road construction, textiles, the rubber industry, and electrical equipment, to cite a few instances, cut the necessary labor for given output anywhere from 25 to 60 percent. It was estimated that in manufacturing, railroads, and coal mining, the labor of 3,272,000 fewer workers was necessary to maintain old rates of production, and that increased economic activity called for the addition of only 2,269,000. This left a net decline in employment in these industries in excess of a million. New opportunities in trade and service industries helped to offset this situation, but there was nevertheless persistent unemployment throughout the 1920s, which was estimated to have affected from 10 to 13 percent of the total labor supply. At least 2 million persons were out of work in 1928, a year before the Great Crash.

The insecurity of industrial workers in respect to their jobs that resulted from such conditions could never be wholly compensated for by high wages while they were employed. The Lynds found that fear of being laid off was a constant obsession among the working-class families whom they interviewed, even though Muncie was a prosperous community. These people were far more interested in the job itself than in

wages or hours. Whatever the general statistics of employment, the individual out of work faced the always-bleak prospect of trying to find something else to do before their meager savings melted away altogether.

As for the status of organized labor – rather than that of wage earners in general – conditions in the 1920s had a paradoxical effect. In flat contradiction of what had been its record in every previous period of national prosperity, the labor movement lost ground. Not only was no further progress made in organizing the unskilled workers in the mass-production industries, but several existing trade unions steadily declined in membership. We have seen that, under the impact of the depression in 1921, the total enrollment in American unions fell from more than 5 million to approximately 3.5 million. Far more significant, however, was the failure during succeeding years to make up any of these losses. At the peak of prosperity in 1929, total union membership stood at 3,443,000 – less than it had been in any year since 1917.

In the happy light of continued good times and generally rising wages for those who had work, none of this seemed to matter. While job insecurity may have deterred some employees from joining unions in the face of employer opposition, many employees apparently no longer believed that unions were all that necessary. What point was there in strikes or other agitation for collective bargaining when the pay envelope was automatically growing fatter and a more abundant life seemed to be assured with the rapid approach to the final triumph over poverty? Indeed, for highly skilled workers in general and particularly for union members among them, real wages never seemed higher and their wage advantage over the less skilled wider than ever.

There was no way for workers to foresee in the halcyon atmosphere of those days that just over the horizon was another depression, a more devastating, long-lived depression than even those of the 1830s, the 1870s, or the 1890s, when 15 million helpless workers would find themselves thrown on the streets, queuing up before soup kitchens, and crowding the breadlines.

The American Plan and the Open Shop

Business leaders emerged from the brief depression of 1920/1921 determined to prevent organized labor from advancing. The antiunion campaign that had achieved such success in 1919 was intensified and a new emphasis placed on upholding the open shop. Theoretically, the open shop still implied nothing more than the right of employers to hire whomever they chose, regardless of membership or nonmembership in a union. But, as in the early 1900s, the open shop actually meant a policy whereby union members were almost invariably subject to discrimination, and employers refused to recognize a union even if a majority of the employees belonged to it. The open shop thus became more than ever a recognized technique to deny the

whole process of collective bargaining.

To promote the drive against unions, open shop associations were formed throughout the country in the 1920s, as they had been during earlier periods of industrial counterattack. Fifty such employer groups were set up in New York alone, 46 in Illinois. Local chambers of commerce, manufacturers' associations, and citizens' alliances further supported the campaign, and behind them stood the National Association of Manufacturers, the National Metal Trades Association, and the League for Industrial Rights. With inspiration born of the heightened nationalism of these postwar years, a conference of these various associations, which met in Chicago in 1921, formally named the open shop the "American Plan." The traditional values of rugged individualism were set against the subversive, foreign concepts of collectivism. "Every man to work out his own salvation," the proponents of the American Plan proclaimed, "and not to be bound by the shackles of organization to his own detriment."

Full advantage was also taken of every indication of corrupt union leadership and racketeering to convince both workers and the public that they were being duped by the supposed advantages of collective bargaining. And both corruption and racketeering could be found in some unions during the 1920s. Unlawful collusion between union leaders and employers, extortion by labor bosses, and outright graft were exposed in the building trades and service industries of such cities as New York, Chicago, and San Francisco. In some instances, gangsters, sensing an opportunity for even greater profit than bootlegging moved in on the unions and fleeced both employers and employees by intimidation and violence. The conservatives' attack upon labor unions, however, made no distinction between these occasional examples of corrupt and antisocial policies and the overall picture of responsible leadership in the great majority of unions. When labor leaders were not luridly depicted as Bolsheviks plotting revolution, they were described as conscienceless racketeers, exploiting union members to build up their own power and wealth.

"The palatial temples of labor," John E. Edgerton, president of the National Association of Manufactures grandiloquently declared in 1925, "whose golden domes rise in exultant splendor throughout the nation, the millions of dollars extracted annually by the jewelled hand of greed from the pockets of wage earners and paid out in lucrative salaries, tell the pitiful story of a slavery such as this country never knew before." The employers of the nation, he continued, were summoned to fulfill their duty "to break the shackles that have been forged upon the wrists of those who labor" and to free their employees from "the false leadership of designing pirates who parade in the guise of the workingmen's friend."

Nor was propaganda the only weapon employed to fight unionism and promote the open shop. Many employers continued to force yellow-dog contracts upon employees, to place labor spies in their plants, to exchange blacklists of undesirable union members, and to follow openly the most discriminatory practices in hiring

workers. It was the old story of intimidation and coercion, and when trouble developed in spite of all such precautions, strong-arm guards were often employed to beat up the troublemakers, while bringing in strikebreakers under the protection of local authorities crushed incipient strikes.

In the coal fields, unionism found itself particularly hard pressed, with factionalism and conflict within labor's own ranks making it vulnerable to attacks. Coal was a sick industry, failing to share in the country's general prosperity as a result of competition from new sources of power, and the mine owners were doubly determined to meet the problem of cutting production costs by beating down labor. They sought to undermine wage agreements already signed with the miners, and, even more dangerously for unionism, began to shift production from the central bituminous field to nonunion mines in West Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Alabama, where they could operate without union restraints upon wages and hours.

A hard dilemma confronted the United Mine Workers (UMW). When strikes broke out in the nonunion fields, there were insistent demands for help. Should the union violate its contracts in the central bituminous field by declaring a sympathetic strike, or should it stand by passively and allow conditions to deteriorate in the nonunion mines and ultimately drag down the entire industry? The union's president, John L. Lewis, insisted upon maintaining contractual agreements. He refused assistance to all strikes not authorized by the union and proposed to meet the problem of the nonunion mines by organizing the workers in the South and bringing them under disciplined control.

His program failed. The UMW steadily lost ground in the unionized fields, and organization in the nonunion mines of the South made no headway. The union agents who entered the region were tarred and feathered, beaten up by armed guards, and sometimes murdered. Increasing strikes and disorder led, in some mining communities, to virtual civil war with an ugly record of violence, shootings, and assassination.

The more radical elements among the UMW bitterly resented the failure of Lewis to call a general strike in support of the nonunion miners. They helped to stir up discontent against a policy that was said to be destroying the union. There was rebellion among Lewis's own lieutenants and outlaw strikes were undertaken even within union ranks. When Lewis countered by attacking his union opponents as communists, insisting upon complete submission to his authority, and expelling local leaders who countenanced unauthorized walkouts, it resulted in widespread dissatisfaction among the rank and file who saw in his stance only surrender to antiunion operators.

Lewis managed during this difficult period to retain control of the UMW, but it was badly split and in no position to maintain the influence it had formerly exercised in the mines. The operators, meanwhile, were able to whittle away the gains won through earlier national strikes. In 1922, the UMW had attained 500,000 members – some 70 percent of all coal miners. Ten years later membership had sunk to 150,000 or less.

In seeking to combat the antiunion campaign of employers, whether in the coal fields or elsewhere, labor could no longer look for any support from government or the courts. The validity of yellow-dog contracts, so widely enforced in the southern coal mines, was still upheld; there was no legal redress for discrimination against union members, and successive court decisions wholly invalidated the supposed safeguards of the Clayton Act against injunction law.

Early in 1921, the Supreme Court stated in *Duplex Printing Press v. Deering* that nothing in the Clayton Act legalized secondary boycotts or protected unions from injunctions that might be brought against them for conspiring to restrain trade. Later that same year, in the notable case of *Truax v. Corrigan*, any remaining hope of legal relief for labor was effectively killed. Arizona had passed a law that sought to do away altogether with injunctions in labor disputes, but the Supreme Court in effect declared it unconstitutional. In preventing an employer from obtaining an injunction, the court decreed, the state took away their means of securing protection and thereby deprived them of property without due process of law. With such encouragement, employers resorted to injunctions even more frequently than in the days before passage of the Clayton Act. In 1928, the AFL compiled a list of 389 injunctions that had been granted by either federal or state courts over the preceding decade, and this list was far from complete because of the large number unrecorded in the lower courts.

Perhaps the most revealing of all court decisions during this period came in the previously noted case of *Adkins v. Children's Hospital*, which was handed down in 1923. In invalidating a minimum-wage law as a violation of constitutional safeguards of liberty of contract, it marked an abrupt reversal of the earlier trend toward sustaining such legislation, but it was even more significant because of a reassertion of the old concept that labor was a commodity. While the Supreme Court conceded "the ethical right of every worker, man or woman, to a living wage," it declared that the employer was not bound to furnish such a wage and that there was no warrant for the state to seek to establish it by legislation.

Even Chief Justice William H. Taft – the "injunction judge" – protested this conclusion, pointing out that individual employees were not on a level of equality in contracting with employers and therefore "peculiarly subject to the overreaching of the harsh and greedy employer." Associate Justice Holmes also dissented, with sharp criticism of the court's one-sided support of "the dogma Liberty of Contract."

Although both government and courts theoretically recognized the desirability of labor unions – President Harding declared that the right of workers to organize was "not one whit less absolute" than that of management and capital – they consistently restricted the activity for which unions were formed. The one exception to such repressive policies during the 1920s was the passage and approval of the Railway Labor Act of 1926. This measure provided for the formation of unions among railway workers "without interference, influence or coercion." In upholding this law, the

Supreme Court protected railroad workers from “interferences with freedom of choice” to join a union. But rights upheld for railway workers were not extended to other classes of employees until the 1930s.

Welfare Capitalism

Workers also found themselves wooed by their employers in new ways. Many large employers complemented their aggressive enforcement of the open shop with an emerging program of welfare capitalism. They sought to discourage trade unionism and mollify workers by making working conditions so favorable that the workers would no longer consider unions of any value, at the same time increasing production and industrial efficiency through closer labor–management cooperation.

Industry had long since tried to promote greater production per worker, to reduce labor turnover, and generally to improve technical standards through a process of “rationalization” in industrial management. During the Progressive Era, a program developed by Frederick W. Taylor had begun to be widely adopted. Time-and-motion studies, the development of piece work, increased productivity on the assembly line, and “scientific” adjustment of employee relations were the subject of universal experimentation. In the postwar era, “Taylorism” won even wider attention in the constant search to reduce manufacturing costs. Trade unionism had no place in this program of industrial efficiency, but employers recognized the need for some substitute to help to create the idea of “one big family” working cooperatively in the mutual interests of industry and labor. They thought that they had found it in shop councils, employee representations plans, and, most specifically, company unions.

An early move along such lines was a program adopted by the Colorado Fuel and Iron Company after the bloody massacre at Ludlow in 1914. The Rockefeller interests had refused to recognize the UMW and instead instituted a company union, which was to provide “industrial democracy” without the dangerous implications of any association with organized labor. Prodded by the National War Labor Board's promotion of worker-elected shop committees for collective bargaining purposes during World War I, many other corporations embraced Rockefeller-style employee representation plans. Some 125 of them set up company unions in one form or another during the war, and the open-shop campaign of the postwar years led to still further emphasis on this trend toward employer-controlled substitutes for outside unions. By 1926, the number of company unions had increased to over 400, with a membership of some 1,369,000, or about half the membership of unions affiliated with the AFL.



Figure 14.1 A 1920s poster from the Goodyear Company extols the virtues of the company's newly created employee representation plan and grievance system, a typical form of welfare capitalism in reaction to postwar labor unrest. (Personal collection of Joseph A. McCartin).

As personnel managers made further studies of the labor problem (almost 3,000 books on the subject were published in the first five years after the war), other measures were adopted to strengthen the role of company unions and win employee allegiance. Hundreds of corporations set up profit-sharing schemes, paid out bonuses in company stock, or otherwise sought to give workers a direct financial interest in corporate activities. It was estimated in 1928 that over 1 million employees owned or had subscribed for over \$1 billion worth of stock in the companies that employed them. Group insurance policies, which were forfeited should the employee change their job, were also introduced, and some 5 million industrial workers were insured under such plans by 1926. At the same time, various old-age pension programs were established, free clinics were set up to help maintain health standards, and employee cafeterias and lunchrooms were installed. Under the direction of personnel departments or company unions, picnics, glee clubs, dances, sports events, and other recreational activities were also sponsored for plant employees, while hundreds of company magazines proclaimed the goodwill and friendly human contracts between labor and management.

Welfare capitalism succeeded to a considerable extent in improving working conditions. Its immediate benefits for the worker were quite real. Yet the entire program remained subject to the control of the corporation sponsor, and there was no reality to employee representation under such conditions. It was not without significance that those corporations which most generously provided for the workers'

welfare were also those which were most strongly antiunion in their basic policies. How quickly welfare capitalism might collapse – and especially its stock-distribution program – should prosperity give way to depression was hardly realized at the time. Few of the members of company unions understood how dependent they had become upon their employers for the favors they were receiving in lieu of union recognition and genuine collective bargaining. The Committee on Education and Labor of the US Congress reported, in 1926, that the National Association of Manufacturers had done its work in combating unionism so well that it was able to settle back “to the quiet enjoyment of the fruits of their efforts during the years of prosperity.”

The consequences of the double-edged program of seeking to suppress bona fide labor unions and building up employee allegiance through the benefits of company unions and welfare capitalism caused not only a decline in overall union membership but also a greater measure of industrial peace than the country had enjoyed for many years. This does not mean there were no strikes. Those on the part of the depressed textile workers, for example, were persistent, hard-fought, and marked by violence and bloodshed. In such southern mill towns as Gastonia and Marion, North Carolina, and Elizabethton, Tennessee, open clashes between strikers and state troopers led to heavy death tolls. The overall record, however, was one of a steadily declining number of labor disputes. During the war period, the total number of strikes had averaged over 3,000 a year and involved well over 1 million workers annually. By the mid-1920s, such figures had been halved. At the end of the decade, the annual number of strikes was around 800 and engaged only some 300,000 workers, slightly more than 1 percent of the aggregate labor force.

The new capitalism of the 1920s provided the nation's workers with a greater rise in wages over the decade than in any comparable previous period. Annual earnings rose between 1921 and 1928 from an average of \$1,171 to \$1,408. In terms of actual purchasing power, since there had been no comparable rise in living costs, this represented a gain of more than 20 percent.

Both actual wages and their rate of increase were nevertheless very uneven. The hourly rate for bricklayers in New York rose between 1920 and 1928 from \$1.06 to \$1.87 and that of newspaper compositors from 92 cents to \$1.20, but in the case of bituminous miners their hourly rate declined from 83 cents to 73 cents, and for mule spinners in the cotton mills it dropped from 83 cents to 63 cents. The gains of the 1920s went primarily to skilled workers and trade union members. Millions of working-class families still had incomes of less than \$1,000 a year in 1929.

As for hours of work, the general picture shows substantial improvement. The eight-hour day generally prevailed, and it was estimated that, since 1901, the working week for wage earners had been cut by 15 to 30 percent. But wide discrepancies appear when available statistics are broken down. While a 43.5-hour work week was the average in the building trades, for instance, a 60-hour week was still being maintained for blast-furnace workers in the steel mills.

Factors other than wages and hours also affected the well-being of the nation's workers in these as in other years. The speeding up of industrial processes added to the strain and nervous tension under which people operating machines and working on the assembly line constantly labored. For many factory employees, the substitution of wholly mechanical operations for the exercise of individual skills meant grinding monotony and boredom, conditions rarely compensated by higher wages and shorter hours.

The gains that had been made were more precarious than impersonal statistics might suggest, especially since those that might be attributed to welfare capitalism were unprotected by any contractual understanding. Workers were almost wholly dependent on the continued willingness and ability of employers to treat them fairly.

The Failure of Insurgent Politics, 1922 to 1924

Against the successes of American capitalism, 1920s-style, organized labor had few effective defenses or responses. Early in the decade, when employer antiunion impulses were most prevalent, the AFL and the Railroad Brotherhoods began to feel that more direct political pressure would have to be exercised were they to win any freedom of action in combating the employers' antiunion campaign. The drive for a labor party, which had developed in 1919, gathered increasing force with further revelations of the Supreme Court's pro-employer attitude.

This agitation had first come to a head in 1922, when a Chicago meeting of some 128 delegates from various farm, labor, and other liberal groups formed the Conference for Progressive Political Action. William H. Johnston, president of the powerful International Association of Machinists, was a leading figure in this movement; the Railroad Brotherhoods, smarting under the restrictions of the Railway Labor Board and the revival of injunction law, backed it vigorously, and support was also forthcoming from 28 national unions, eight state labor federations, several Midwestern farmers' parties, the Women's Trade Union League, and the Socialist Party of America. When two years later both the Republicans and the Democrats nominated highly conservative candidates – Calvin Coolidge and John W. Davis – these progressives offered an independent nomination to Senator Robert La Follette of Wisconsin. On the condition that no attempt be made to run candidates for other offices than the presidency and vice-presidency (Senator Burton K. Wheeler of Montana was given the latter nomination) La Follette accepted this proposal, and the Conference for Progressive Political Action formally entered the campaign of 1924.

The platform, declaring that the principal issue before the country was the control of government and industry by private monopoly, was in large measure a carryover of the progressive principles of prewar years. It called for public ownership of the nation's waterpower and railroads, the conservation of natural resources, aid for farmers, tax reduction on moderate incomes, downward tariff revision, and remedial

labor legislation. "We favor abolition of the use of injunctions in labor disputes," it stated, "and declare for complete protection of the right of farmers and industrial workers to organize, bargain collectively through representatives of their own choosing, and conduct without hindrance cooperative enterprises."

The AFL was at first opposed to the Conference for Progressive Political Action, but when both major parties ignored labor's demands, it took the unprecedented step of endorsing the La Follette candidacy. The Republican and Democratic parties, declared the AFL's executive council, had "flouted the desires of labor" and were "in a condition of moral bankruptcy which constitutes a menace and a peril to our country and its institutions." Yet the AFL aligned itself with the Progressives of 1924 cautiously. In keeping with his policy during the political flirtations of prewar years, Gompers tried to make it clear that the AFL made no commitments except to support La Follette as "a friend of labor" in this single campaign and was not countenancing the formation of a third party. While recognizing the need for legislation to free labor from the restrictions represented by injunction law, Gompers reaffirmed his faith in "voluntarism" by declaring that "we do not accept government as the solution of the problems of life."

Nonetheless, many AFL leaders refused to go along with the action of the executive council. John L. Lewis and William Hutcherson, of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners, gave their support to Coolidge, and George L. Berry, of the International Printing Pressmen and Assistants' Union, at the last moment shifted over to the camp of John W. Davis. Although the AFL had so far departed from its traditional policy by coming out openly for a presidential candidate of a third party, its support was tepid, and only \$25,000 was raised as a campaign fund.

La Follette secured nearly 5 million votes – a substantial indication of popular discontent with both Republican and Democratic conservatism – but he carried only his home state of Wisconsin. The labor vote had not been delivered, and the Progressives' failure was widely interpreted as labor's failure. "The radical movement of this year," wrote the Washington correspondent of the *Seattle Times*, "represented the first attempt on the part of organized labor, through its governing bodies, to secure separate political action. The radical failure seems likely to end the possibility, for a good many years, of labor endorsement of a third-party presidential ticket." There was "no such thing as a labor vote," the *New York Herald Tribune* stated in analyzing the election returns, and the *Washington Star* agreed that "the workingmen of this country have not joined the insurgency against the established parties." The *Philadelphia Bulletin* simply stated that "labor's incursion into politics was a dud."

The AFL apparently read very much the same meaning into the election. It promptly withdrew its support from the Conference for Progressive Political Action and reasserted its opposition to a third party. The entire movement collapsed. While in succeeding years labor continued to press for relief from injunctions, it made no further direct forays into third-party politics.

The political Left and its labor allies appeared totally marginalized in the 1920s. The socialists failed to recover from their wartime repression and as a result worked with progressive political advocates of labor and coalesced with the La Follette campaign. Not only had socialists lost political influence and vitality but they seemed a relic in a post-Bolshevik Revolution world in which communist parties appeared to be the rising power on the Left. Yet communists in the United States and elsewhere marginalized themselves in the 1920s, following the lead of Soviet Bolsheviks in adopting “Third Period” policies that condemned trade unionists and socialists alike as “social fascists.” With few and ineffective friends on the Left, wage earners continued to adapt to the conservative politics that characterized national affairs until the advent of the New Deal.

The AFL after Gompers

Shortly after the unsuccessful La Follette campaign – in December 1924 – the grand old man of the AFL, Samuel Gompers, died at the age of 74. In his later years, it had become increasingly difficult for him to carry on his work. Nothing except death, however, could make him surrender his precious office.

His control had momentarily appeared threatened in 1921 when Lewis entered the lists as a presidential candidate, but Gompers had put down this incipient rebellion as he had so many others. He was the acknowledged leader of organized labor, and there was no real rival to his preeminence in this field. Both the successes and the failures of the AFL largely reflected the application of the instrumental philosophy he so consistently upheld.

Labor mourned his death, and so did the business community. Newspaper editorials were an interesting commentary on the extent to which his moderate policies were applauded for forestalling more radical tendencies on the part of the nation's workers. Gompers was said to have held trade unionism to a straightforward, nonpolitical path by the sheer force of his personality, and he was generally praised for having consistently tried to bridge the gap between capital and labor. Some feared his death might enable extremist elements to come to power.

When word came that the AFL had chosen William Green as its new president, all such fears evaporated. Green wanted no radical shift in labor policies, an assurance that seemed to be made doubly sure by an immediate statement to the press that it would be his “steadfast purpose to adhere to those fundamental principles of trade-unionism so ably championed by Mr. Gompers.” “Labor is safe under his leadership,” the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* declared in a typical comment upon Green's election; “capital has nothing to fear, and the public is fortunate in having him as spokesman of a highly important group of citizens.”

Green was born in Coshocton, Ohio, in 1873. Like so many labor leaders, he was a second-generation American, the son of Welsh immigrants, and as a boy had

followed his father into the coal pits in Ohio. Joining the UMW, he was chosen as subdistrict union president in 1906 and started upon a gradual climb to the high councils of organized labor. As leader of the miners in Ohio, he was sent to the state legislature as a trade union representative, and then elected secretary-treasurer of the UMW in reward for his faithful services. When in 1913 Gompers decided that the miners should be represented on the executive council of the AFL, he turned to Green and appointed him an eighth vice president. As death removed the higher officers one by one, Green slowly rose in scale to third vice president. It was from this post, with the backing of Lewis, that he was raised to the pinnacle of the AFL presidency.

Green appeared in 1924 a rather undistinguished figure without the forceful, dramatic characteristics that in different ways had marked Gompers, Mitchell, and Lewis. Sober and sedate – he had taught Sunday School as a young man and originally hoped to train for the ministry – Green was not one to drink beer with the boys in the Gompers tradition. Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins was later to describe him as “the mildest and most polite of men,” and his plump figure, round, humorless face, soft voice, and quiet manner did not add up to an arresting personality. But Green was a great joiner (he belonged to the Elks, the Odd Fellows, and the Masons), and his pleasant, affable manner and general friendliness made him popular. He was also respected for his unquestioned integrity and conscientious, hardworking devotion to the concerns of union labor.

In 1917, Green had declared himself, as a result of his own experience with the UMW, completely in favor of industrial unionism, one reason why Lewis had supported him. “The organization of men by industry rather than by craft,” Green had stated, “brings about a more perfect organization, closer cooperation.” But in his new office Green had to be responsive to the views of the leaders of the AFL's craft unions, so he quietly dropped his industrial union advocacy. His conversion to craft unionism would contribute to a split in labor's ranks by the mid-1930s.

In proving himself every bit as cautious as Gompers, Green appeared no more willing than his predecessor to recognize the need for changes in AFL policy to meet changing circumstances. He continued to uphold the concept of voluntarism, which Gompers had so stoutly defended with an emphasis upon “strong, redblooded, rugged independence,” and which might well have come from President Hoover himself. It was not until 1932, when the impact of the Great Depression had undermined many AFL principles, that Green finally gave up his opposition to such forms of state intervention as old-age pensions and unemployment insurance.

The Demoralization of Organized Labor

Far from seeking to revive labor militancy, the AFL under Green made every effort to encourage labor–management cooperation. While the AFL could not countenance company unions, it passively acquiesced in many other aspects of welfare capitalism.

Content with the gains that its own membership was making as wages rose in response to the demand for skilled workers, it made little effort to broaden the scope of union activity.

This was the situation when depression gradually engulfed the country after the sudden collapse of the stock market in 1929. The story is a familiar one: the shock to national confidence as billions of dollars of security values melted away, the frantic assertions by government that economic conditions were fundamentally sound, and the slow strangulation of business as the cracks in the industrial system slowly widened and the whole structure seemed threatened with collapse. This depression might have been yet one more historic turn in the economic cycle, but its impact on society was greater than that of any economic downturn in the nation's past.

Before the Great Depression had run its course, farm prices fell to 40 percent of their previous levels, the value of exports declined to one-third of their former peak, industrial production was almost halved, and the balance sheet of corporate enterprise revealed a deficit of \$5.65 billion. In three years, national income was cut in half. Even more significant – and far more devastating – the number of unemployed rose to over 7 million persons by the end of 1930, and then, in another two years, to approximately 15 million.

Statistics, however, give only a vague idea of the dramatic, even disastrous effects of the Great Depression. They can hardly depict the scrimping and saving forced upon millions of middle-class families, the privations and hardships caused those in lower-income groups, and the cruel suffering of unemployed workers and their families. Bread lines, tramp jungles called “Hooverilles” that sprang up on the outskirts of countless cities, and armies of young men and boys wandering back and forth across the country in a hopeless search for jobs signified the depth of suffering that afflicted the country.

The country's wage earners stood by helplessly as the Depression cut into production, paralyzed normal trade, and caused many factories, mines, and workshops to shut down altogether. Early in 1930, a series of industrial conferences had been held in Washington at which employers promised to uphold wages and maintain employment. The workers accepted these pledges in good faith. Like the rest of the country, they were still hopeful that recovery was just around the corner. But there were no collective bargaining agreements in the mass-production industries – steel, automobiles, electrical equipment – to compel observance of wage scales. Paychecks were gradually cut and then all too often replaced by blunt notices of dismissal.

The whole program of welfare capitalism collapsed as employers were forced to withdraw the benefits that in the piping days of prosperity had often been granted in the place of wage increases. Profit-sharing schemes, employee stock ownership, industrial pensions, and even workers' health and recreational projects were rapidly discarded. Circumstances forced retrenchment, but in some cases it was carried out

at the expense of workers while full dividends were still being paid on common stock. The company unions were powerless to protect their members' interests. The benefits of welfare capitalism had proved to be a delusion.

Organized labor seemed completely demoralized. The national unions did not even try to exercise any direct pressure upon the government in favor of recovery measures. Nor did they pursue economic action. Strike activity was at a minimum and in 1930 fell to a new low point when less than 200,000 workers were involved in all work stoppages. Continued declines in union membership were also the general rule. The total number of organized workers fell by 1933 to less than 3 million – or the approximate level of 1917.

In some ways, the most surprising phenomenon of the Depression years was a quiescent attitude on the part of industrial workers while the unemployment figures steadily mounted and the bread lines lengthened. There was no suggestion of revolt against an economic system that had let them down so badly. There was no parallel of the railway strikes of 1877 or of the Pullman strike of 1894. In Park Avenue drawing rooms and the offices of Wall Street brokers, there was a great deal of talk of “the coming revolution,” but the unemployed themselves were more discouraged than militant.

Writing in *Harper's Magazine* in midsummer 1932, the economist George Soule found that, while there was a distinct drift on the part of intellectuals into the radical camp, with a rising interest in communism, no such trend could be discovered in the ranks of labor. “The masses are in a desperate condition all right,” he wrote, “but unfortunately there is no sign that they feel the slightest resentment. They just sit at home and blame prohibition.” In another article in the same magazine, a journalist commented with astonishment on “the quiet acceptance of the situation by men who have lost their jobs and everything else through the operation of the policies that were to abolish poverty.”

The AFL made no effort to galvanize protest. Maintaining until the end of 1932 its strong opposition to unemployment insurance, the AFL urged nothing more concrete in the way of governmental action to promote recovery or relieve unemployment than “the stabilization of industry” through adoption of its program for increasing jobs by a shorter work week.

The press praised this attitude. “Today labor stands patient and hopeful...” the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* wrote. “Never has there been a period of depression so free from labor strife. Unemployment has harassed it. Closed factories have taken away its livelihood. But, in the face of enormous hardship, labor has showed its good citizenship and sturdy American stamina. Labor deserves a salute.”

The consequences of government inaction and labor passivity were with every passing month more graphically reflected in the increasing number of jobless workers dependent upon state or private charity. The vaunted campaign to spread the work by

reducing individuals' hours of labor in order to retain more employees did not seem to have any effect other than to reduce workers' income and seldom opened any opportunities for those who had already been laid off.

Some of the states attempted to pass legislation to improve working conditions. New workers' compensation laws were adopted in a number of instances, 14 states approved old-age pensions, and Wisconsin was pioneering with its new Labor Bill of Rights and unemployment insurance. Early in March 1932, a highly significant victory for organized labor as a whole was won through the passage by Congress of the Norris-La Guardia Act. This measure at long last declared it to be public policy that labor should have full freedom of association, without interference by employers; it outlawed yellow-dog contracts and prohibited federal courts from issuing injunctions in labor disputes except under carefully defined conditions. Although at least one congressman rose to state that this bill represented a "long march in the direction of Moscow," it was overwhelmingly supported in both the House and Senate and received widespread popular approval. For all the importance of the Norris-La Guardia Act in pointing the way to the soon-to-be enacted labor policies of the New Deal, it did little to solve the immediate problem of the nation's wage earners: unemployment.

As conditions reached their nadir in the summer of 1932, the presidential campaign offered a practical opportunity for political protest against the failure of the Hoover administration to cope adequately with the depression. Franklin D. Roosevelt, as Democratic nominee, clearly demonstrated his sympathy for the working masses of the country and for "the forgotten man at the bottom of the economic pyramid." He repeatedly stressed the imperative need to provide direct relief and vigorously advocated unemployment insurance. Yet the AFL declared its neutrality in the presidential campaign. Willing to endorse friends of labor among the congressional candidates, it refused to announce itself in favor of either Hoover or Roosevelt. Industrial workers helped to swell the great popular majority that Roosevelt won in 1932, but the AFL did not officially play a part in his election.

After the election, economic conditions continued to deteriorate. Still the AFL was slow to rouse. Finally, it came out in favor of unemployment insurance and urged a thirty-hour week and expanded public works programs to help the needy. Yet it took no positive action to promote such measures. Like the rest of the country, unions were waiting to see what the new president would do.

THE NEW DEAL

When Franklin D. Roosevelt took office in March 1933, his stirring inaugural held out a promise of action to cope with the national emergency and created throughout the nation a new feeling of hope and confidence. The government was at long last prepared to accept the responsibility of extending that measure of direct aid to agriculture and labor, as well as industry, which alone could restore the disrupted balance of the national economy. As the president spiritedly declared that “the only thing we have to fear is fear itself,” most listeners felt that the nation had found the leadership for want of which it had been floundering helplessly in the deepening morass of the Great Depression.

There was nothing in Roosevelt's immediate program that applied directly to labor except his promise to put people to work. Social Security – with unemployment and old-age insurance – was already under consideration, but specific labor reforms were not yet envisaged when FDR entered office. They would evolve only gradually, out of the needs of the times, but a basic understanding and sympathy for the rights of labor were nevertheless inherent in the emergent philosophy of the New Deal. For the first time in American history, a national administration was to make the welfare of industrial workers a direct concern of government and act on the principle that only organized labor could deal on equal terms with organized capital. Heretofore, labor unions had been tolerated; now they were to be encouraged.

The advent of the New Deal was thus to prove a momentous watershed in the history of the labor movement and working people. Age-old traditions were smashed; new and dynamic forces were released. Never before had as much economic and political power seemed within the reach of organized labor.

Section 7(a) and the Revival of Organizing

New Deal policy toward labor was based upon a premise that had already been set forth in the general recognition of the right to organize, which was written into the Norris-La Guardia Act in March of 1932, some seven months before the election, but a definitive step toward implementing this right was taken in Section 7(a) of the National Industrial Recovery Act, the Roosevelt administration's first experiment in overall economic control.

This important move was the result of highly complex maneuvering. In March 1933, a bill to establish a thirty-hour week was introduced in Congress by Senator Hugo Black of Alabama and Representative William P. Connery Jr. of Massachusetts. The American Federation of Labor (AFL) had been demanding a shorter work week as a means of spreading available work and thus relieving unemployment. Roosevelt was skeptical of the bill's value unless it included a provision for maintaining wages. On behalf of the president, Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins consequently suggested amendments that would have combined a guarantee of minimum wages with a reduction in work hours. The theory underlying the new bill was not unlike the one that Ira Steward had promoted way back in the 1860s – except now increasing pay by decreasing hours was secondary to wage stabilization. There was as yet no intention of going any further.

The idea of minimum wages provoked a storm of opposition from business interests and at first found little support within the AFL, which was more interested in widening union recognition and obtaining collective bargaining rights. In place of such a limited approach to the problems of the Great Depression, business and labor urged that the administration raise its sights and institute a far broader recovery program. The United States Chamber of Commerce proposed that business should be freed from the restrictions of antitrust laws so that it could take steps to restrain competition as a means of stabilizing the economy. As a spokesman for labor, John L. Lewis, the president of the United Mine Workers, advocated that controls over production, prices, and wages that he had been demanding in coal mining should be extended to industry as a whole. As scores of such plans began to arouse interest both in and out of Congress, independent groups of presidential advisers began to try to work out specific measures. Little real progress was being made, however, and Roosevelt decided to intervene. Withdrawing administration support from the Black-Connery Bill, in which his interest had been lukewarm, he called upon his advisers to get together on a common program – shutting themselves up in a locked room if necessary – until they could come to agreement.

The plan finally adopted and incorporated into the National Industrial Recovery Act allowed industry to write its own codes of fair competition, but compensated labor for granting industry such a free hand by providing special safeguards for its interests. Section 7(a) of the new measure, drawing in part from provisions of the Railway Labor Act of 1926, stipulated that the industrial codes should contain three important

provisions: (i) employees should have the right to organize and bargain collectively through representatives of their own choosing, free from interference, restraint, or coercion on the part of employers; (ii) no one seeking employment should be required to join a company union or to refrain from joining any labor organization of their own choosing; and (iii) employers should comply with maximum hours, minimum rates of pay, and other conditions of employment approved by the president. Thus, the ideas underlying the Chamber of Commerce's program, labor's traditional demand for union recognition, and certain modified provisions of the Black-Connery Bill were brought together in a single omnibus measure, to which overall plan was further added, under a separate title, a vast public-works program authorizing appropriations of \$3.3 billion.

The basic purpose of the National Industrial Recovery Act, as approved in June 1933, was, in the president's words, "to put people back to work." Its agency, the National Recovery Administration (NRA), was at once to insure reasonable profits for industry by preventing unfair competition and disastrous overproduction, and living wages for labor by spreading work through shorter hours. Roosevelt termed the law "the most important and far-reaching legislation ever enacted by the American Congress."

The NRA virtually collapsed through internal stress and strain even before it was finally declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in 1935. Nevertheless, its implications for labor went far toward justifying Roosevelt's statement. The guarantee of collective bargaining and the establishment of wage and hour controls by congressional action, in spite of loopholes that were to develop in enforcement of the law, represented the most forward steps ever taken by government during peacetime in the field of industrial relations. And it was most significant that these steps were not to be retraced even when other provisions of the NRA went by the board. Indeed, the New Deal picked up the shattered fragments of Section 7(a) and put them together again, far more carefully, in the National Labor Relations Act (known as the Wagner Act) and the Fair Labor Standards Act. There was to be no retreat under Roosevelt from this advance in safeguarding the interest of industrial workers.

In June 1933, the NRA was hailed enthusiastically throughout the country. It is true that such a conservative organ as the *Manufacturer's Record*, looking with a jaundiced eye upon any concessions to labor whatsoever, was soon to state that "labor agitators...are trying to establish a labor dictatorship in this country," but this critical note was lost in the general chorus of excited approval for the new recovery program. In the bright dawn of its inception, the NRA started off under the dynamic direction of General Hugh Johnson amid a fanfare of patriotic oratory and popular demonstrations. A symbol of code acceptance, the Blue Eagle was soon being proudly displayed by participating manufacturers and merchants the length and breadth of the land.

Labor joyfully acclaimed Section 7(a). "Millions of workers throughout the nation," declared the AFL president, William Green, "stood up for the first time in their lives to

receive their charter of industrial freedom.” Countless unions awoke overnight from the doldrums of depression lethargy. Confident in the protection of the law, organizers set out to restore the depleted strength of moribund locals, form new ones, and invade territory from which they had formerly been barred. In the coal fields, placards at the mine pits announced: “The President wants you to join the union.” The UMW left it to individual miners to decide whether the “President” referenced was President Roosevelt or President Lewis. The workers themselves often did not wait for official organizers, but set up their own locals and then applied for charters from the parent organization.

When the AFL met for its annual convention in October, Green confidently announced that an unofficial count showed over 1.5 million new recruits added to its ranks, recouping the losses of more than a decade. He envisaged a goal of 10 million, eventually 25 million.



Figure 15.1 The New Deal represented a turning point for workers and the union movement. Left to right: director of the Civil Conservation Corps (CCC) Robert Fechner, a former leader of the International Association of Machinists, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, and labor ally Secretary of Agriculture Henry Wallace with formerly unemployed CCC workers. (National Archives and Records Administration)

The greatest gains were in the so-called industrial unions, and particularly in those that had suffered most heavily during the Depression. Within a few months, the UMW recouped 300,000 members and concluded new agreements in the formerly nonunion coal fields of Kentucky and Alabama; the International Ladies' Garment Workers

Union added 100,000 to its rolls, recapturing lost territory in New York and runaway shops in other parts of the country; and the Amalgamated Clothing Workers made up its earlier losses with some 50,000 recruits. But this was not all. Under the spur of Section 7(a), even the AFL seemingly stood ready, with the new slogan of "Organize the Unorganized in the Mass Production Industries," to invade territory from which it had formerly held aloof. Nearly 100,000 workers organized in the automobile industry, 90,000 in steel, 90,000 in lumberyards and sawmills, and 60,000 in rubber.

It was soon clear, however, that this burst of activity among unorganized workers had a precarious foundation and that the proud boasts of Green were not to be fully justified. The traditional skepticism of the AFL toward industrial unionism, reinforced by the determination of old-line craft union leaders to retain control of the labor movement, retarded any campaign to organize workers in mass production along industrial lines. The AFL favored the formation of so-called federal unions, directly affiliated to the AFL, until jurisdictional problems could be worked out and the new union membership in steel, automobiles, rubber, and other industries could be allocated to existing craft unions. Between 1932 and 1934, the number of federal charters outstanding rose from 307 to 1,798. Federal unions failed, however, to satisfy industrial workers, and soon the initial flurry of activity in the mass-production industries began to subside as workers grew disenchanting and employer resistance intensified.

Such evidence of failure gave rise to an insistent demand on the part of many leaders within the AFL for a change of tactics. They called for a more aggressive campaign to bring the unorganized workers into industrial unions in automobile and steel, as well as in rubber, aluminum, and radio. When the oligarchy in control of the AFL rejected these demands, a widening breach between adherents of craft unions and those who favored industrial unions pointed toward a coming split in the ranks of organized labor.

In the meantime, the older unions discovered that the high promise of their new charter of liberties required further struggles. Pending adoption of its industrial codes, the NRA required all employers to subscribe to the President's Re-Employment Agreement – a blanket code prescribing a forty-hour week, minimum wages set at either \$15 a week or 40 cents an hour, and child labor abolished for all those under the age of sixteen. More permanent agreements were then to be drawn up by the trade associations, with workers' interests supposedly protected by a labor advisory board in each industry. In the final analysis, however, the trade associations generally acted independently and employees had no real part in the formulation of the permanent codes. A majority of the codes established the forty-hour week, with minimum wages from \$12 to \$15 a week, but while some 95 percent of the nation's industrial workers were ultimately given this protection, labor's rights in other respects were largely ignored. The safeguards for collective bargaining were either not definitely recognized or were gradually whittled away. Automobile manufacturers, for example, succeeded in having inserted in their code a clause that enabled them to select, retain, or advance their employees "on the basis of individual merit." In theory,

such a right could hardly be disputed, but for antiunion employers it provided the means to discriminate against union members on any convenient pretext. President Roosevelt subsequently ordered that interpretations of Section 7(a) should not be included in any code. It did not interfere with the bona fide right of employers to hire whom they chose, he asserted, but it clearly prohibited the exercise of this right as a device to keep employees from joining a union.

As industry began to recover and fearful employers crept cautiously out of the cyclone cellars into which they had been driven by the Depression, further resentments developed over the concessions granted labor in return for management's freedom to control production and fix prices. The *Iron Age* warned of the dangers of what it chose to call "collective bludgeoning." Viewing fearfully predictions of a membership of ten million in the AFL, the *New York Commercial and Financial Chronicle* declared that the country would then have "an organized body, or class within the State, more powerful than the State itself." Responding to such dire warnings, some employers bluntly refused to comply at all with the labor provisions of the codes, and others sought every possible means to evade the spirit if not the letter of the law.

One of the principal weapons used in combating the clear intent of Section 7(a) was the company union. Employees could not be required to join such an organization, but their employers were still free to exercise every possible kind of pressure to make it seem advisable. And they managed to do this so effectively that enrollment in company unions rapidly rose, from 1.25 million to 2.5 million. The NRA not only tacitly approved such unions, stating that the government had not endorsed "any particular form of organization," but encouraged them by allowing company unions proportional representation in collective bargaining. Even when a national union enrolled a majority of workers in a plant, it was not accepted as the spokesman for the whole labor force, and management was still free to deal with any other employee group. Labor attacked such an interpretation of the law as completely nullifying the whole principle of collective bargaining.

As the old lines of industrial strife began to reform and once again tighten, the NRA found itself caught between two fires: the recalcitrant attitude of many employers and the militant demands of labor. First a National Labor Board, then special boards in certain industries, and finally, in July 1934, a National Labor Relations Board was set up to handle the growing volume of industrial disputes. These boards failed to win the confidence of either management or of labor. The National Labor Relations Board adopted important principles: majority representation, secret elections, bona fide collective bargaining, and a refusal to approve company-dominated unions. But it was hampered and restricted by the NRA and had no power to enforce its decisions.

To defend their interests, workers resorted to strikes. The number of industrial disputes rose precipitately in the latter half of 1933 – almost as many in this six-month period as in all of 1932 – and the next year saw the total number rise to 1,856,

involving nearly 1.5 million workers, or more than 7 percent of the total labor force. In steel, automobiles, and textiles, among the longshoremen of the Pacific Coast and the lumber workers of the Northwest, and in scores of other industries, strikes were either threatened or erupted on a scale comparable to that of 1919. Many of these strikes were for wage increases, but a great number of them, at least one-third, were for union recognition.

Fearful that strikes, especially in such basic industries as automobiles and steel, would irreparably damage its economic recovery program, the Roosevelt administration did its best to avert such conflicts. In automobiles and steel, where unions had few durable traditions and AFL officials were loath to stimulate rank-and-file militancy, Washington deferred to the demands of employers. Roosevelt's lieutenants arranged settlements in the spring of 1934 that averted threatened strikes but left the AFL federal locals crippled. In coal and clothing, however, where the unions had long traditions of militancy and exercised real power, the federal government served as midwife to pro-union settlements.

But the eruption of working-class militancy in 1934 was not easily contained, especially where it emerged under the leadership of non-AFL labor radicals. Three conflicts in the spring and summer of 1934 demonstrated as much. A dispute in Toledo, Ohio, between workers at Electric Auto-Lite and their employers ultimately involved the entire local labor community. Led by A. J. Muste and other non-AFL radicals, the Toledo strikers united with the city's unemployed to fight Ohio's National Guard for control of the streets. Militancy there produced a worker victory. Next, in San Francisco in May and June 1934, a violent dispute along the waterfront, which involved maritime and dock workers, tied up the whole Pacific Coast and led to a citywide general strike similar to the one that had paralyzed Seattle in 1919. In San Francisco, too, employers, public officials, and even officers of the AFL's International Longshoremen's Association accused the strikers of Bolshevism. Under the leadership of Harry Bridges, who was indeed sympathetic to communism and for a time a party member, the strikers refused to surrender. Forming their own non-AFL union, the International Longshoremen and Warehousemen's Union, the West Coast workers won a settlement far beyond anything yet achieved by waterfront workers on the East and Gulf coasts. Finally, in late July 1934, a violent strike among teamsters in Minneapolis–St. Paul caused the governor of Minnesota, Floyd B. Olson, to place the Twin Cities under modified martial law. Once again, radicals, this time former Wobblies and a faction of communists who followed Leon Trotsky (Trotskyites) led the strikers. Again militancy and confrontation brought a union victory.

Each of these strikes proved that workers were willing, even eager, to act forcibly. They also disclosed that struggle rather than accommodation – the AFL's preferred strategy – produced gains. Moreover, they hinted at the emergence of a new radicalism among some workers and their leaders.

While militant workers and radical leaders were writing an important chapter in

American labor history, the AFL unions suffered from a paralysis of will. In automobiles and steel, where AFL leaders had accepted federal mediation in preference to calling strikes, workers grew disillusioned and unions began to dissolve. Worse, a debacle resulted from the largest single strike in 1934 (and the largest in American history to that time): the general textile-workers strike, which spread from Maine to northern Alabama and involved between 400,000 and 500,000 men and women.

Demanding a thirty-hour week without reduction in the minimum \$13 wage, abolition of the “stretch-out” (arbitrary assignment of additional work tasks), and recognition of the United Textile Workers, the mill employees walked out during August 1934 – 110,000 in Massachusetts, 50,000 in Rhode Island, 60,000 in Georgia, and 28,000 in Alabama. In the South, where “flying squadrons” rushed from one mill town to another to call out workers and set up picket lines, there were inevitable clashes with the police and special deputies. At the height of the struggle, some 11,000 national guardsmen patrolled mill towns in eight states.

As violence escalated, President Roosevelt intervened and promised the appointment of a new Textile Labor Relations Board to study conditions in the industry. Reluctant to continue the conflict further, union leaders resolved to await the results of that investigation and called off the strike on September 7, 1934. Employers immediately seized the opportunity to break the union. In southern textile towns, employers refused to hire returning strikers, blacklisted strike leaders, and effectively demoralized their initially unionized workers. A historic opportunity to create a powerful national union of textile workers appeared lost.

The gains that labor had made in the early days of the NRA failed to hold. The antiunion actions of employers, the failure of the government to safeguard workers in strike settlements, and the inability or reluctance of the AFL to give mass-production workers the support they needed combined to dash labor's high hopes. Although union membership in 1935 was 1 million greater than it had been two years earlier, it was below the 4 million mark that Green had so proudly announced for the AFL alone at the close of 1933. Hundreds of thousands of new recruits had fallen by the wayside, and some 600 federal unions disbanded. The organized strength of the automobile workers dwindled to 10,000; the burst of activity in steel subsided with a residue of only 8,600 members in the Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel, and Tin Workers; and of the several hundred thousand who had joined the United Textile Workers during the textile strike, only 80,000 remained with the union. The dramatic surge in unionization touched off with the adoption of Section 7(a) had lost its momentum.

The Wagner Act

By the beginning of 1935, the failure of the NRA not only to solve the problem of labor

relations but also to stimulate recovery could no longer be disguised. It was being openly attacked on all fronts in sad contrast to the exuberant fervor of the parades and flag waving with which it had first been greeted. Big business was generally in revolt against the labor provisions of the codes. Small business felt itself squeezed to the wall, both by the revival of monopoly and by union demands. Labor was convinced that it had been betrayed. The whole program was bogging down because of inner contradictions. So it was with relief rather than regret that the nation accepted the announcement in May 1935 that the Supreme Court had pulled the plug on the entire set-up by declaring, in *A. L. A. Schechter Poultry Corporation v. the United States*, that the National Industrial Recovery Act was unconstitutional.

This development completely swept away such safeguards for labor as had been written into Section 7(a). However, an amendment to the Railway Labor Act had definitely extended these measures to railroad employees, and a drive to secure them on a firmer basis for all other workers had already been launched. In March 1934, Senator Robert F. Wagner of New York had introduced a bill to close the loopholes that enabled industry to cripple labor's strength by setting up company unions and refusing to bargain collectively with any other group. Wagner had temporarily withdrawn this measure on the president's plea for a further trial period under existing legislation, but he reintroduced it early in 1935. Just eleven days before the NRA was declared unconstitutional, it passed the Senate.

The Wagner Bill had strong support from labor, and the collapse of the NRA naturally intensified the demand for its immediate acceptance by the House. "I do not mind telling you that the spirit of the workers in America had been aroused," an unusually militant Green testified before one congressional committee. "We cannot and will not continue to urge workers to have patience, unless the Wagner bill is made law and unless it is enforced once it becomes law."

Roosevelt had no part in developing this new measure, and, according to both Secretary Perkins and Raymond Moley, one of Roosevelt's chief advisers, FDR did not particularly like it when it was described to him. But with the NRA out of the picture, the president suddenly embraced it. Labor could not be completely let down, and here was the means to reenact a stronger Section 7(a) so far as collective bargaining was concerned. With administration support, the measure promptly passed the House. Roosevelt signed it on July 5.

Although the general policy of the Wagner Act – or the National Labor Relations Act as it was officially called – had been foreshadowed by Section 7(a) of the National Industrial Recovery Act, the new law heavily underscored the basic change in governmental attitude toward labor. Not only were old notions of a laissez-faire stance toward industrial relations repudiated, but now the government upheld the right of wage earners to organize without making corresponding concessions to management. It strengthened the bargaining position of workers, and consequently their ability to obtain a larger share of the national income, over against whatever

claims might be put forward by industry. Its sponsors, especially Senator Wagner, maintained that only through government support could labor meet management on anything like equal terms, and that the time had come when the scales, always so heavily weighted in favor of employers, should be redressed in favor of workers. Every unfair labor practice banned by the Wagner Act applied to employers, and it imposed no restraints whatsoever on the unions.

Under the Wagner Act, labor's right to organize was not only expressly reaffirmed, but all employer interference was explicitly forbidden. It defined as unfair labor practices for an employer to restrain or coerce their employees from exercising their rights, to try to dominate or even contribute financially to the support of any labor organization, to encourage or discourage union membership by discrimination in hiring and firing, or to refuse to bargain collectively. Moreover, representatives designated for collective bargaining by a majority of the employees in an appropriate unit, whether it was an employer, craft, or plant unit, were to have exclusive bargaining rights for all employees. The Wagner Act also outlawed company unions.

The administration of the Wagner Act was placed in the hands of a new National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), made up of three members, with sole authority to determine the appropriate bargaining unit and to supervise the elections wherein employees chose their exclusive representatives for dealing with employers. The board could also hear complaints of unfair labor practices, issue "cease and desist" orders where they were found to be justified, and petition the courts for the enforcement of its orders. The NLRB was not concerned with the substance of disputes over wages and hours, or any other issues affecting conditions of work, but solely with the practical encouragement and facilitation of collective bargaining.

"It should be clearly understood," President Roosevelt said in explaining the quasi-judicial functions of this administrative agency, "that it will not act as mediator or conciliator in labor disputes. The function of mediation remains, under this Act, the duty of the Secretary of Labor and of the Conciliation Service of the Department of Labor....It is important that the judicial function and the mediation function should not be confused. Compromise, the essence of mediation, has no place in the interpretation and enforcement of the law."

At the time of its passage, the Wagner Act had widespread support except from the business community. The leaders of most major corporations criticized the one-sidedness of the law, predicted union irresponsibility under its provisions, and stressed the dangers to management's control. Another source of opposition to the law as written came from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the American Civil Liberties Union on the grounds that it failed to deny its benefits to unions that excluded members on the basis of race or religion. In truth, the law's primary sponsors favored equal rights for all, but in 1935 Southern Democrats, who resisted any breach in their system of racial segregation, wielded significant power in the Senate. As with so much other New Deal reform legislation, the

Roosevelt administration had to defer to Southern white sensibilities in order to pass needed legislation.

While black workers as a whole benefited from the Wagner Act and other New Deal labor policies, this was not true for all black workers and trade unionists. Amendments made to the Railway Labor Act in 1934 strengthened the position of the lily-white and racially exclusive operating craft unions, and inadvertently empowered those unions in their efforts to further dislodge African Americans from the operating crafts. Moreover, unions controlled by black workers, such as the Colored Trainmen of America, were outflanked and marginalized by white-controlled unions in contests for exclusive representation in white-majority workplaces, thus depriving African Americans of a valuable institutional voice.

The implications of the Wagner Act overall, however, were tremendous. Public opinion polls repeatedly emphasized popular sympathy for labor's aspirations and a general feeling that the workers were fully entitled to governmental protection. At long last, the general expressions upholding labor's right to organize – in the Clayton Act, the Norris-La Guardia Act, and the National Industrial Recovery Act – were given substance. Unions had for over a century fought for freedom from legal restraints that hampered their activity. They had struggled against conspiracy laws, enforcement of yellow-dog contracts, judicial interpretations of liberty that actually nullified the individual worker's freedom, and the arbitrary use of injunctions. The Wagner Act not only removed past obstructions to union activity but also erected substantial barriers to any interference on the part of employers to the full mobilization of labor's economic strength.

The New Deal Political Order

The battle to realize the full benefits of the new law, however, had yet to be fought. While a minority of employers were ready to accept the provisions of the Wagner Act and bargain collectively with their employees in good faith, most remained implacably determined to continue their resistance to unionization at all cost. In many quarters, labor had to push its campaign for organization against as fierce an opposition as it had ever faced. Workers again resorted to strikes to win the union recognition that many companies withheld in spite of the Wagner Act and the NLRB.

Corporate attorneys advised their business clients that the Wagner Act was unconstitutional. Assured by their lawyers that the Supreme Court would almost certainly invalidate it as exceeding the power of Congress over interstate commerce, on which its provisions were based, antiunion employers did not hesitate to violate the law and obtained scores of injunctions to prevent the NLRB from enforcing it. They launched an attack on labor that was aimed especially at unionization in steel, automobiles, rubber, and other mass-production industries. They tried to maintain their control over company unions. Corporations hired labor spies, stool pigeons, and

agents provocateur to ferret out any evidence of union activity, sow seeds of distrust and suspicion among workers themselves, and furnish the information that would enable employers to discharge all those who might be classed as agitators. Strong-arm squads assembled by employers discouraged union membership by more forcible methods, beating outside organizers, running them out of town, and threatening them with further violence should they ever return.

The report of the La Follette Civil Liberties Committee – headed by Senator Robert M. La Follette of Wisconsin, son of the 1924 Progressive candidate for president – provided a shocking revelation of the disregard of legal and constitutional rights that widely characterized industrial relations between 1933 and 1937. A first installment, made public in December 1937, disclosed that some 2,500 corporations had long followed the practice of hiring labor spies from agencies specializing in industrial espionage. The records of such firms as the Pinkerton and Burns agencies, the Railway and Audit Inspection Company, and the Corporations Auxiliary Company showed that they had furnished, in the three-year period under review, a total of 3,871 agents to spy on union activities and generally block labor organization. In carrying out their secret activities, individual operatives had become affiliated with 93 unions, and one-third of the Pinkerton detectives had actually succeeded in becoming union officials. It was further stated that a selected list of companies had spent from 1933 to 1936 a total of \$9,440,000 for spies, strikebreakers, and munitions – the General Motors Corporation alone footing a bill of \$830,000.

“The public cannot afford to let this challenge presented by industrial espionage go unnoticed,” the La Follette Committee concluded. “Through it private corporations dominate their employees, deny them their constitutional rights, promote disorder and disharmony, and even set at naught the powers of the government itself.”

When this same committee investigated the “Little Steel” strike of 1937, the disclosures of the amounts of weapons amassed to wage industrial war were even more startling than the disclosures of the depth of industrial espionage. The Youngstown Sheet and Tube Company alone had on hand 8 machine guns, 369 rifles, 190 shotguns, and 450 revolvers, with 6,000 rounds of ball ammunition and 3,950 rounds of shot ammunition, along with 109 gas guns with over 3,000 rounds of gas ammunition. The Republic Steel Corporation possessed a similar cache. La Follette declared that the arsenals of these two steel companies “would be adequate equipment for a small war.”

The committee also brought to light one especially notorious example of industrial techniques in combating unionism, first developed by the Remington Rand Company and then widely publicized by the National Association of Manufacturers under the name of the Mohawk Valley formula. This formula blueprinted a systematic campaign to denounce all union organizers as dangerous agitators, align the community in support of employers in the name of law and order, intimidate strikers by mobilizing the local police to break up meetings, instigate “back to work” movements by secretly

organizing "loyal employees," and set up vigilance committees for protection in getting a plant where there was a strike back in operation again. The underlying purpose behind the Mohawk Valley formula was to win public support by branding union leaders as subversive and threatening to remove the affected industry from the community if local business interests stood by and allowed radical agitators to win control over workers otherwise ready and anxious to cooperate with their employers.

The evidence made public by the La Follette Committee unveiled previously hidden aspects of industrial warfare. Even the most conservative newspapers, while suggesting that the committee's investigation had been one-sided and its report undoubtedly exaggerated, recognized a state of affairs that could not be condoned.

Labor combated this antiunion campaign with its own militant tactics. Widespread industrial unrest continued throughout the whole period in which the basic principles underlying the Wagner Act lay at stake. In 1937, the number of strikes rose to a peak even higher than that of 1934, totaling 4,720 actions involving nearly 2 million workers.

The constitutionality of the Wagner Act had of course remained undetermined as this new wave of unrest rose, but the Supreme Court finally acted on April 12, 1937. In a series of decisions, of which the most important was that rendered in the case of *National Labor Relations Board v. Jones and Laughlin Steel Company*, the court sustained the law. This was a spectacular victory for the New Deal and for organized labor, and reflected the change in the attitude of the court, dramatically punctuating the struggle over its reorganization initiated earlier in 1937 by President Roosevelt. The court majority ruled that regulation of labor relations as they might affect interstate commerce was clearly within the province of Congress under the commerce clause.

Its authority now established, the NLRB was finally in a position to apply the law effectively. It interpreted as unfair any labor practice on the part of an employer to interfere with, restrain, or coerce employees in the exercise of their rights. Not only were such old practices as yellow-dog contracts, blacklisting, and other overt forms of discrimination outlawed, but the employment of labor spies and antiunion propaganda were also prohibited. Company-dominated unions were disbanded, both union shops and closed shops upheld, and interference with peaceful picketing forbidden.

The majority of cases coming before the NLRB in regard to unfair labor practices were actually handled without prejudice to the interests of industry, contrary to the claims of a generally hostile press, which lost no occasion to attack the board for its supposed partiality to labor. Between 1935 and 1945, the NLRB handled a total of 36,000 cases involving charges of unfair labor practices and 38,000 concerned with employee representation. Considering them as a whole, 25.9 percent were withdrawn with no action taken, 11.9 percent were dismissed by regional directors, 46.3 percent were settled by informal procedures leading to mutual agreement, and only 15.9 percent required official hearings. The latter cases led to the disbanding of some

2,000 company unions and the reinstatement of 300,000 employees, with back pay totaling \$9 million, where employers were found guilty of discrimination against bona fide union members.

In addition to hearing cases of unfair labor practices and issuing cease-and-desist orders when it found them justified, the NLRB from 1935 to 1945 also held some 24,000 elections, in which 6 million workers participated, to determine collective bargaining agents. In these elections only 16.1 percent of voters opted for no union representation. It should be remembered that the NLRB had nothing whatsoever to do with disputes over wages and hours, but in respect to the issues it was authorized to handle, its activities greatly helped to stabilize industrial relations.

The protection given labor's right to organize and bargain collectively was the most important phase of the pro-labor policy generally followed under the New Deal. Once embarked on its course, the Roosevelt administration went far beyond any previous administration in encouraging the growth of unions and accepting the basic role that they played in the national economy. But the Wagner Act was not the only New Deal measure that aided unions or industrial workers.

From his earliest days in office, Roosevelt's insistence on the obligation of government to cope directly with the fundamental problems of unemployment and relief clearly demonstrated a sympathetic understanding of the needs of the nation's wage earners. The public-works program included in the National Industrial Recovery Act was principally intended as a means to prime the pump of industry, but both the Civilian Conservation Corps and the Federal Emergency Relief Administration had as their direct objectives relief for the great army of unemployed. These new agencies represented Roosevelt's approach to the vital problem of human needs, which differed sharply from that of President Hoover, who had long held out against direct relief as undermining individual initiative and self-respect. The Roosevelt administration acted much more realistically in recognizing the plight of the unemployed and the necessity of governmental aid until industry revived and could provide greater opportunities for employment.

This was further borne out in the program that culminated in the Works Progress Administration. This agency was set up in 1935 not only to aid the unemployed, but also to provide them with jobs that would give them a chance to retain their self-respect. The slow pace of recovery, and the relapse into recession in 1937 as a result of administration budget-cutting policies, involved the government far more deeply in offering alternative employment on public works than had been originally contemplated. Clearly the administration considered the well-being of industrial workers as more important than an unbalanced federal budget – even though the latter was an impediment to economic recovery – and held firm to its new course in spite of all the criticism of the expense involved.

A much more far-reaching measure, considered by Roosevelt “the cornerstone of his administration,” was the Social Security Act of 1935, with its comprehensive provision

for unemployment insurance, old-age insurance, and other aid for the needy. The AFL had opposed the principles underlying this law until the reversal of its traditional policy on unemployment insurance at its convention in 1932. Thereafter, the AFL president, William Green, came out in support of governmental action, arguing that the national government was “compelled to care for the needy and unemployed.”

Roosevelt instituted studies on the best method of providing for social security early in 1933, talked continually with his advisers about what he termed “cradle to the grave” insurance long before the phrase became current in England, and appointed a Committee on Economic Security to reconcile differing views on how the whole program should be handled. A proposed bill was placed upon his “must list” in 1934, and when Congress failed to act that year, he renewed his insistence upon its adoption at the next session. Final action was then taken, and in August 1935 the Social Security Act was overwhelmingly approved.

The new law had three major parts. First, unemployment compensation was to be handled by the states through remission of 90 percent of a national payroll tax to every state adopting an insurance program that met federal specifications. Second, old-age pensions were to be administered directly by the federal government from funds secured through equal taxes upon employers and employees which were to start at 1 percent of the latter's wages and gradually rise to 3 percent. Third, other assistance for the needy was to be provided through grants to the states for the aged, the blind, dependent children, and the disabled, while federal funds were allocated for maternal and child health services, child-welfare work, the rehabilitation of the disabled, and general public health.

This social security program was limited in its scope and uneven in its impact. It excluded several categories of employees (including agricultural laborers, civil servants, and domestic workers). Its benefit payments were not overgenerous by any standards, and it fell far short of the cradle-to-grave insurance about which Roosevelt liked to talk. Once again resistance by Southern Democrats in Congress reduced the number of potential beneficiaries. African Americans who provided white Southerners with the bulk of their domestic servants and field laborers gained nothing but exclusion from the benefits of the Social Security Act. Prevailing attitudes about the proper place and status of women insured that men would benefit more than women from the act. Because it tied benefits to full-time work, it reinforced the breadwinning status of men and created a system in which most women received access to most benefits through their relationship to male earners. Finally, because of their commitment to “states' rights,” Southern members of Congress saw to it that only the old-age provisions of Social Security would be implemented fully by the national government. Unemployment insurance and the welfare provisions of the act remained largely in the hands of state governments, enabling the Southern states to adopt the most parsimonious unemployment and welfare payments in the nation. It took many decades of lobbying, protest, and pressure from several presidential administrations before Congress incorporated nearly all workers under old-age retirement benefit

provisions, though reformers persistently failed to transform unemployment insurance and welfare benefits into federally run programs.

While the United States thus still lagged other countries that had long since developed more comprehensive welfare plans for their citizens, Social Security was nevertheless an epochal development in the history of a nation so long wedded to concepts of the limited role of government in economic and social matters. That Social Security now enjoyed wide support was a highly significant indication of how the stress of dire economic circumstances had changed popular attitudes since the start of the Great Depression.

In addition to direct relief for the unemployed and social security, the New Deal also committed itself to the improvement of working conditions, first attempted in the wage and hour provisions of the NRA codes. Other means to attain this goal were at once sought after the National Industrial Recovery Act was declared unconstitutional. One such initiative was the 1936 Walsh-Healey Public Contracts Act, which established the forty-hour week and minimum wages for all employees of contractors providing services and materials for the federal government. This measure was obviously limited in its scope, so the real question remained of how to effect a more general measure, one that could overcome the constitutional objections that had been brought not only against the NRA but also against minimum-wage legislation by the states. Secretary of Labor Perkins explored the possibilities of a new approach to the problem, but the attitude of the Supreme Court and resistance by Southern congressmen seemed an insuperable barrier.

Minimum-wage legislation became an issue in the presidential campaign of 1936. The Republicans came out in favor of minimum-wage legislation through state laws or interstate compacts, but the Democrats declared that they would continue to seek national legislation. Early in 1937, Roosevelt finally authorized the introduction of a bill providing for maximum hours, minimum wages, and, as an almost last-minute addition, the abolition of child labor, which had first been sought in the NRA codes.

The Fair Labor Standards Bill, as it came to be known, met vigorous opposition, and it was at first given only equivocal support even by labor. Many of the conservatives in the AFL were still opposed to wage legislation in principle, fearing that minimum wages would become maximum wages, and William Green took an unyielding stand against what he considered important shortcomings in the administration's proposals. With spokesmen for the AFL and the National Association of Manufacturers in dubious alliance in opposition to the Fair Labor Standards Bill, few New Deal measures faced tougher sledding. An even more imposing obstacle was the Southern Democratic and Northern Republican alliance that controlled a majority in Congress.

Roosevelt repeatedly and emphatically stressed the importance of the bill both in messages to Congress and in "fireside chats" (radio addresses) to the country. "A self-supporting and self-respecting democracy," he declared in May 1937, "can plead no justification for the existence of child labor, no economic reason for chiseling

workers' wages or stretching workers' hours." But entirely apart from justice to wage earners themselves, the provisions of the proposed bill were touted as an essential means to sustain and build up national purchasing power.

The importance of high wages from this point of view was, of course, hardly a new idea. Labor had always maintained that only when workers were paid enough to enable them to buy the products of their own country's industry could the economic system function successfully. The assertion of this principle went back at least as far as the statement of the Mechanics' Union of Trade Associations in 1827 on wages, consumption, and manufacturing output. The purchasing-power theory in support of high wages had been traditionally overshadowed by the counterargument that, by increasing costs of production, high wages actually narrowed the market for manufactured goods and consequently slowed down production. The Great Depression buried that counterargument.

When Congress failed to act on the Fair Labor Standards Bill in the summer of 1937, Roosevelt returned to the attack on this broad front and, after calling a special session of Congress in November, again demanded prompt passage. "I believe that the country as a whole," he stated, "recognizes the need for congressional action if we are to maintain wage increases and the purchasing power of the nation against recessive factors in the general industrial situation...What does the country ultimately gain if we encourage businessmen to enlarge the capacity of American industry to produce unless we see to it that the income of our working population actually expands sufficiently to create markets to absorb that increased production?"

After successive delays, redrafts of the original bill to meet labor's objections, and the exercise of strong administration pressure, the opposition finally gave way. The Fair Labor Standards Act became law in June 1938. It established a minimum wage of 25 cents an hour, to rise to 40 cents an hour in seven years, and a 44-hour week, to be reduced to 40 hours in three years. It prohibited the labor of children under the age of 16 in industries whose products entered into interstate commerce. Yet once again as a result of Southern resistance, those economic sectors that employed the great mass of African American and women workers were excluded from coverage under the act. Still, a movement whose origins may be traced back to the demands for a legislative ten-hour day voiced by labor over a century earlier had come to fruition.

Government had come to support the interests of labor, and so had the courts. The series of cases in which the Wagner Act, the Social Security Act, and the Fair Labor Standards Act were upheld marked a judicial reversal of earlier decisions and gave the final stamp of approval to New Deal policies. The long-held view that laws that affected union membership or prescribed minimum wages violated constitutional guarantees of liberty of contract was finally abandoned when the Supreme Court stated that "regulation which is reasonable in relation to its subject and is adopted in the interests of the community" could not be construed to violate the due-process clause of the Fifth or Fourteenth amendments.

Moreover, the courts now went on to exempt unions completely from prosecution under antitrust laws and to reverse other restrictive policies by generally upholding the right to strike, to boycott, and to picket. Whereas, even during the Progressive Era, labor found supposedly guaranteed privileges repeatedly curtailed by the Supreme Court, its position was now being constantly bolstered by favorable decisions. For example, in one notable case, *Thornhill v. Alabama*, a majority of justices declared peaceful picketing to be a legitimate exercise of free speech, as guaranteed by the Constitution.

The New Deal revolution in labor law found a generally receptive response in the mid-1930s. President Roosevelt was undoubtedly justified at this time in asserting his belief that a majority of the people were glad “that we are slowly working out for labor greater privileges and at the same time greater responsibilities.”

The continued strikes of these years, and particularly those of 1937, clearly showed that no final solution had been found for industrial relations, and a pronounced reaction to the pro-labor policies of the New Deal was soon to set in. In spite of both labor disturbances and a growing demand for modification of the Wagner Act, however, Roosevelt remained convinced that the increased strength of unionism would in time lead to greater industrial stability. He believed thoroughly in the principle of collective bargaining. “It must remain,” he declared, “as the foundation of industrial relations for all time.” He was prepared not only to help labor maintain its gains but to advance them still further.

“Only in free lands,” he stated in an important address to the convention of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters in 1940, “have free labor unions survived. When union workers assemble with freedom and independence in a convention like this, it is a proof that American democracy has remained unimpaired; it is a symbol of our determination to keep it free.”

Labor was still suffering from growing pains, in his opinion, and more responsible leadership was bound to emerge and make possible a larger degree of cooperation with equally responsible management. When warned on one occasion that the unions might become too powerful, he was quoted as replying, “Too powerful for what?” His attitude was that their power should prove an antidote for that of big business.

Even so, one should not overstate Roosevelt's commitment to organized labor. The New Deal's policy was decidedly pro-labor, but it was pro-labor in order to stabilize an unbalanced economy. The important point was that FDR's administration looked to the well-being of workers in the conviction that upon their contentment and security rested the future stability of American capitalism and democracy, and that made an enormous difference.

THE RISE OF THE CONGRESS OF INDUSTRIAL ORGANIZATIONS

At the same time that the New Deal reforms in labor law promoted an upsurge in trade unionism, a dispute about the best way for organized labor to respond to the new situation shattered the ranks of the American Federation of Labor (AFL). The split within the AFL led to the establishment of the Committee for Industrial Organization (CIO) and a trade union civil war that persisted spasmodically until 1955.

On the surface, the dispute within the AFL was between craft unionism and industrial unionism. Should union organization be pursued principally in the interests of skilled workers, or should it aim to include more effectively the great mass of unskilled workers? Ever since the decline of the Knights of Labor in the late 1880s, a few exceptions notwithstanding, the craft union structure had prevailed. For half a century, the great mass of semiskilled factory operatives concentrated in the mass-production industries lacked the economic ability and opportunity to form stable unions. The New Deal, however, promised to change that situation. The labor upheaval of 1933/34 had already demonstrated mass-production workers' ripeness for organization. Yet the cautious leaders of the AFL, especially its dominant craft-union faction, had wasted that opportunity. And the failure to unionize mass-production workers had weakened the whole labor movement. By 1935, with the passage of the Wagner Act, a second opportunity to build a mass labor movement came. The question for labor leaders now became whether to expend the funds, personnel, and energy to organize on a mass basis. As the leader of the insurgent faction within the AFL, John L. Lewis argued, again and again, that the immediate issue was unionization of the unorganized on whatever structural basis they preferred. Questions about jurisdiction and whether to assign workers to craft or industrial unions must be postponed, Lewis asserted, until after workers were actually organized. In other words, the struggle that split labor's ranks in the 1930s was fundamentally over the will to act, about whether the AFL would seize an unprecedented opportunity to organize millions of mass-production workers.

Unfortunately the substantive issue involved in the labor split became entangled in a bitter, invective-filled personal dispute between the leaders of the two factions. William Green of the AFL and John L. Lewis of the CIO, once close associates and fellow leaders in the United Mine Workers (UMW), hurled charges and countercharges back and forth at each other. Green accused Lewis of pursuing "dualism and disunity" in service of his own "personal ambition." Lewis struck back savagely, pointing to the AFL's "twenty-five years of unbroken failure" and asserting

that Green was simply unable to meet the opportunities of the hour. “Alas, poor Green,” Lewis told reporters in 1936, “I knew him well. He wishes me to join him in fluttering procrastination, the while intoning *O tempora, O mores!*”

In taking over command of the campaign for industrial unionism and directly defying the oligarchy in control of the AFL, Lewis soon revealed himself as the most aggressive and colorful figure that American labor had ever known. During the early days of the New Deal, the spectacular growth of the union he led, the UMW – whose membership rose from 150,000 to 400,000 – attracted nationwide attention. The magazine *Fortune* wryly commented that “he made a noise like the whole labor movement,” and in time the noise rose to a deafening roar. It was characteristic of popular attitudes toward Lewis in this period that he was invariably described, whether by friend or foe, in gaudy superlatives – an unexampled hero or an unspeakable villain.

Philip Murray, a lieutenant who later broke with him, declared that Lewis was “without a peer in the realm of America”; Earl Browder, chairman of the Communist Party of America, hailed Lewis not merely as the greatest of American trade union leaders but “as a leader of world democracy”; Senator Huey Long of Louisiana could pay Lewis no higher compliment than to single him out as “the Huey Long of labor.” The chorus of condemnation, on the other hand, would reach its peak during World War II. When *Fortune* held a poll in 1943 on the most harmful individuals in the United States, 70 percent of the ballots bore the name of John L. Lewis.

Both Lewis's family origins and early life were typical of British immigrants to industrial America. Of Welsh stock, his parents came from a mixed agrarian and laboring background and, like many Welsh immigrants, fled a native land being relentlessly transformed by capitalism and industrialism. John's father took a circuitous route to the place of his son's birth in 1880 – the coal-mining town of Cleveland, Iowa. In that Welsh immigrant community in south central Iowa, the elder Lewis worked in the coal mines. For much of John's childhood, his family, like so many other working-class families in late-nineteenth-century America, moved from town to town. The father tried his hand at farming and even city police work as well as mining. By the late 1890s, the Lewis family was back in the Cleveland-Lucas area, where the father and three sons, John included, combined farmwork and coal mining. At this time, John first evinced an interest in unionism, becoming a member of the UMW in 1900. A restless and ambitious young man, in 1901 he left home for five years, during which he roamed the Rocky Mountain region working at various odd jobs. When he returned to Lucas in 1906, Lewis still lacked a vocation or a chosen career. He tried his hand at the feed and grain trade, only to be wiped out in the panic and recession of 1907/8. Then, for reasons still unclear, Lewis chose a “career” in trade unionism. In 1908, he moved with his entire family (a new wife, his parents, and his brothers and sisters) to the small town of Panama in the rapidly growing Illinois coal fields. There the Lewises built a family-based union political machine, which took John L. in rapid succession from the presidency of the Panama local to a position as

an organizer for the AFL (from 1910 to 1916) and then to chief statistician, vice president, acting president, and president of the UMW (1916 to 1920).

Lewis's early career as a union president was filled as much with failure as success. During the 1920s, he defeated all his opponents inside the UMW and became the union's unchallenged leader – some said dictator. Externally, however, the miners' union reeled from defeat to defeat. Having taken charge of a union with more than 500,000 members in 1919, by 1932 Lewis presided over one with fewer than 100,000 dues-paying members. Yet it was his prompt seizure of the chance presented by the New Deal to recoup his union's fortunes that showcased Lewis's shrewd tactical sense and astute opportunism reinforced by great courage, which were to make him a national leader.

No public figure other than President Franklin D. Roosevelt was more familiar to the American people as Lewis pursued his stormy, turbulent career after 1933 – militantly challenging industrialists (“They are striking me hip and thigh...right merrily shall I return their blows”), vilifying his enemies within the labor movement, making and breaking alliances as he shifted the grounds of his attack, and challenging the government in pursuit of his and the coal miners' interests. Innumerable articles attempted to find the answer to the question which he once asked: “What makes me tick? Is it power I am after, or am I a Saint Francis in disguise, or what?” An elemental force, a consummate actor, a consecrated leader, a self-willed opportunist – what was John L. Lewis? If the answer was indeed a Saint Francis, the disguise could hardly have been more complete. Cartoonists had a happy field day drawing the jutting jaw, the glowering scowl, and the bushy eyebrows of this mighty protagonist of labor.

No consistent philosophy could be discerned in the tortuous windings of Lewis's career. Revealingly, Lewis once commented on receiving a portrait of himself presented by coal-mine operators: “I value the portrait although I am going to have a hard time reading all the facets of his character.” There were indeed many facets. He paid eloquent tribute at one time to Herbert Hoover's “genius for constructive industrial statesmanship”; eagerly embraced the New Deal and threw the full weight of his influence behind Roosevelt in 1936; then dramatically broke with the president four years later to stake retention of his office in the CIO on the election of Wendell Willkie. In politics and within the labor movement, Lewis was a mercurial union leader who defied American presidents as well as fellow labor barons. Observers could never decide whether he was devoted more to promoting his own self-interest or advancing the cause of the American working class. Whatever his real motives – Lewis once responded to an inquisitive reporter: “Questions as to motive will be purely speculative. Some philosopher has said that the pursuit of motives is the most elusive task in the world” – Lewis proved himself the most constructive and creative labor leader of the 1930s.

To the interviewers who flocked to discuss national problems with him in 1936 and

1937, Lewis talked pompously of industrial democracy but completely failed to clarify what the term meant. Like FDR, he sought to preserve what he valued as the positive aspects of democratic capitalism, yet believed that they could be preserved only through dramatic reforms and a redistribution of social and economic power. Lacking a long-range program or an ultimate goal, in many ways he also resembled Samuel Gompers. Equally opportunistic, Lewis used the New Deal to rebuild the labor movement inherited from Gompers on a new foundation but never sought an American revolution. As Gompers built an informal political alliance between labor and the Wilsonian Democrats, Lewis constructed a more formal one between workers and the Roosevelt Democrats. Yet when asked about the future of labor, his answers were lost in hazy and verbose platitudes. “It would be unwise to paint a picture that would only alarm our adversaries of tomorrow,” he told one inquiring reporter. “Neither can I bond the purity of motive or the administrative rectitude of the labor movement of tomorrow.”

On the platform, in public meetings, and over the radio, Lewis showed a flair for the dramatic that inevitably arrested public attention. He well knew his ability as an actor – “My life is but a stage,” he said on one occasion – and he would alternately cajole, denounce, threaten, and pontificate with equal self-assurance. His sense of his own importance was magnificent.

He performed prodigies of valor in building up the UMW and launching the industrial union crusade. Labor was to owe him an immense debt. But his domineering personality kept labor divided, and his defiance of the government during World War II was a highly important factor in alienating the public sympathy that labor had enjoyed in the early days of the New Deal. Whatever the losses he suffered in either public or labor support, Lewis could never be relegated to the background. With his miners standing firmly behind him and accepting his dictatorial control of their union because he got results, he continued to play an important role in labor politics.

John L. Lewis and the CIO

The discontent with the fumbling policies of the AFL, which gave Lewis his chance to lead the movement for industrial unionism, came to a head at their annual convention in San Francisco in 1934. With union members in textiles, steel, automobiles, and rubber drifting away, the demand for industrial charters to replace federal charters became increasingly vocal. The leaders of industrial unions within the AFL attacked the policy that required new unions to be subordinated to the jurisdictional claims of existing craft unions. They vigorously reasserted their conviction that only the organization of all workers – the skilled and the unskilled – in single industry-wide unions could meet the needs of workers engaged in mass production.

The old-line craft union leaders remained unconvinced. They insisted that such a departure from traditional practice would destroy the foundations upon which the AFL

had been built. Wage earners could not be successfully organized, they reiterated, except by bringing them into “the respective national and international unions where jurisdiction has been established.” The fact that between 1933 and 1935 the membership in existing industrial unions had increased 130 percent, while that of craft unions had grown only 10 percent, pointed to another danger of granting the new industrial charters the insurgents demanded: the influx of millions of new members might weaken their control of the labor movement.

The convention delegates temporarily resolved the controversy at San Francisco by a compromise engineered by moderates on both sides. While the delegates agreed to grant charters for unions in automobiles, rubber, cement, radio, and aluminum, and to launch an intensive drive to organize the steel industry, they also concluded that the rights of existing craft unions would be fully protected and that all jurisdictional disputes would be submitted to an executive council enlarged to include representatives of the industrial unions.

This was at least a partial success for the insurgents, but the succeeding year saw little or nothing done to carry out the agreement. The AFL leadership had not in reality been aroused from its complacency. The craft-union leaders, and especially those of the building trades, had not been persuaded of the need for aggressive organizing. They still primarily saw dangers to their own hold on power in any broadening of the bases of the labor movement. They continued to postpone and delay any action along the lines to which they had supposedly agreed. The next convention of the AFL, held at Atlantic City in 1935, met against a background of growing union demoralization in the mass-production industries and an executive council report that stated “we did not deem it advisable to launch an organizing campaign for the steel industry.”

Lewis came to Atlantic City demanding action, particularly in steel. He had succeeded in organizing workers in the captive coal mines belonging to that industry and was convinced that this new union redoubt could not be held unless the steel workers were also organized. Now he was determined, together with other leaders favoring industrial unionism, to compel the executive council to live up to its promises – or else.

The issue was placed fairly before the convention in majority and minority reports submitted by its resolutions committee. The majority declared that, since it was a primary obligation of the AFL “to protect the jurisdictional rights of all trade unions organized upon craft lines,” industrial charters would violate the agreements that had always existed between the AFL and its craft affiliates. The minority insisted that in any industry where the work performed by a majority of the workers fell within the jurisdictional claim of multiple craft unions, industrial organization was “the only form that will be acceptable to the workers or adequately meet their needs.”

On the majority side in this embittered controversy were William Green, cautiously following the policies bequeathed to him by Samuel Gompers in spite of earlier advocacy of industrial unionism; the hardboiled and hard-hitting head of the carpenters' union, William L. Hutcheson, firmly resolved to keep all workers in wood

or its substitutes within the comfortable fold of his own union; Daniel J. Tobin, the pugnacious leader of the teamsters, who scornfully characterized the unskilled workers in the mass-production industries as “rubbish”; Matthew Woll, of the photoengravers, whose conservatism was exemplified by his role as acting president of the moribund National Civic Federation; and the dignified and scholarly John P. Frey, head of the Metal Trades Department of the AFL. The “old guard” was ready to fight mass-production unionism with all the weapons at its command.

Lewis led the insurgents and had the support of some of the most forceful labor leaders of the day. Among them were Charles P. Howard, the calm, persuasive head of the International Typographical Union and the actual author of the minority report; Philip Murray, the somewhat retiring and soft-spoken, but extremely able, alter ego of Lewis in the UMW; Sidney Hillman, the Lithuanian-born needle-trades leader, who harbored a font of nervous energy and ambition beneath his quiet manner, and who had just led the formerly independent Amalgamated Clothing Workers into the AFL; and David Dubinsky, one of the shrewdest of trade unionists and president of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU).

The debate among these chieftains over AFL policy continued for several days, the issue sharpened by attack and counterattack on the floor of the convention. Its peak was reached when Lewis excoriated tactics that resulted in the new unions “dying like the grass withering before the autumn sun” and vehemently assailed what he regarded as the betrayal of the promises made at the preceding convention.

“At San Francisco, they seduced me with fair words,” he thundered, “Now, of course, having learned that I was seduced, I am enraged and I am ready to rend my seducers limb from limb, including delegate Woll. In that sense, of course, I speak figuratively.” He called upon the convention delegates to make a contribution to the welfare of their less fortunate brethren, to heed their “cry from Macedonia,” to organize the unorganized and make the AFL into the greatest instrument that had ever been forged to befriend the cause of humanity. And he solemnly warned that, if they let slip this opportunity, the enemies of labor would be encouraged “and high wassail will prevail at the banquet tables of the mighty.”

But for all his eloquence, his appeals, and his warnings, Lewis was unable to make the delegates see why they should modify traditional policies. They closed their ears to all cries from Macedonia, seemingly undisturbed by the picture of high wassail at the banquets of the mighty. When the final vote was taken, the program for industrial unionism went down to defeat by a margin of 18,024 to 10,933 in favor of the majority report of the resolutions committee favoring craft unions.

Shortly afterward, an incident occurred that appeared to crystallize the break that this crucial vote symbolized. In the course of further wrangling over procedure, Hutcheson so far departed from parliamentary decorum as to call Lewis a term which bystanders identified as “bastard.” The rejoinder of the miners' chieftain was an uppercut that, with all the force of some 225 pounds behind it, caught the equally

burly czar of the carpenters squarely on the jaw. The assailants were separated and the danger of a free-for-all happily averted, but the altercation exacerbated feelings, already so touchy, in the two camps into which labor had been divided.

Immediately after the AFL convention, the advocates of industrial unionism met to consider further action. Unwilling to accept a decision that once again put off any effective organizational work in the mass-production industries, on November 9, 1935, they took the first steps to set up the CIO. As originally constituted, it consisted of Lewis, Howard, Hillman, and Dubinsky, together with Max Zaritsky, of the Cap and Millinery Department of the United Hatters; Thomas F. McMahon of the United Textile Workers; Thomas H. Brown of the International Union of Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers; and Harvey C. Fremming of the Oil Workers' International Union. The committee declared its intent to work within the framework of the AFL rather than to establish an independent organization. Its functions were to be "educational and advisory" in an effort to promote "modern collective bargaining" in the mass-production industries. In spite of such statements, Green at once accused the leaders of the CIO of violating the majority decision of the AFL convention. Their sole motive, he repeatedly declared, was to force acceptance of their own views. The answer of Lewis was to bid further defiance to the executive council. "Dear Sir and Brother," he wrote to Green on November 23, 1935: "Effective this date I resign as vice president of the American Federation of Labor."



Figure 16.1 The CIO's founders, Sidney Hillman, John L. Lewis, and Philip Murray (by the desk, center stage), at their first convention, 1937. (Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University)

The CIO at once began to lay plans for its own organizing campaign and, early in January 1936, submitted to the executive council of the AFL for a final time a demand for industrial charters in steel, automobiles, rubber, and radio. But there was no break in the ranks of the old guard. More fearful than ever of what the aggressive tactics of the new committee might mean to the established position of craft unions in the AFL, the members of the executive council now countered with an order for the immediate dissolution of the CIO. They charged that it was fomenting insurrection, a dual organization created only to serve the interests of "a few self-seeking individuals."

Throughout the next few months, angry controversy raged between the leaders of the AFL and those of the CIO, the cleavage in labor's ranks steadily widening. Green alternately pleaded and threatened in trying to bring the rebels back into the fold. Lewis adamantly went his own way. Finally, in late summer, the AFL executive council suspended the ten unions that had in the meantime affiliated with the CIO. Far from submitting to such discipline, Lewis declared that the council had acted without authority. "I fear his threats," was his answer to Green's charges on one occasion, "as much as I believe his promises." When the AFL met for its 1936 convention at Tampa, Florida, delegates from the CIO unions were conspicuously absent. The AFL voted by an overwhelming majority that the suspension of the absent unions should remain in effect until "the breach be healed and adjusted under such terms and conditions as the Executive Committee may deem best."

The CIO marched ahead with its own organizing program. New unions in steel, automobiles, glass, rubber, and radio joined the original members. In increasing alarm, the AFL again denounced the movement as threatening to destroy the whole basis of labor federation. In March 1937, amid the nationwide excitement caused by organizational drives in both steel and automobiles, the executive council decisively ordered all CIO unions expelled from state and city federations of the AFL.

Toward the end of 1937, again under the influence of moderate leaders in both camps, belated efforts were made to find some basis for peace. They were doomed to failure. The AFL proposed the return of the original CIO unions and the merger of its new ones with existing AFL unions. The CIO demanded admittance of its entire membership, now grown to some 32 unions, with full voting power. Each organization expected dominance in any proposed merger, and neither AFL nor CIO leaders were willing to make the concessions that might have enabled them to work together.

Never a simple dispute between craft and industrial unionists, the labor conflict intertwined issues of principle, power, and personality. The insurgents refused to concede to the old guard either power or antiquated labor traditions. The old guard feared that the "new" mass-production unionism would not only dilute their power but also misdirect trade unionism away from its true path. And by this time Green and Lewis had developed a deep, visceral, and highly personal dislike of one another. However, the failure of the AFL and CIO leaders to reconcile their differences actually benefited workers and the labor movement. Competition between the two union

federations led to more vigorous organizing efforts and to an enormous increase in the size of organized labor. By the end of 1937, the CIO claimed 3.7 million members (although precise figures are lacking because many CIO members did not pay dues) and the AFL 3.4 million, yielding a total more than twice as great as in 1932/33.

After the failure of peace negotiations in the autumn of 1937, the AFL confirmed the action of its executive council in expelling all CIO members, except for the ILGWU, which soon returned to the fold. Then, in May 1938, Lewis and his lieutenants took the final steps to transform what had originally been only an organizing committee into a permanent Congress of Industrial Organizations. These moves, however, were only formalities. The rift in the house of labor was already complete.

If in some respects the CIO seemed much like the AFL, in others it differed fundamentally. Like AFL affiliates, the CIO unions sought to advance the interests of workers through collective bargaining within a democratic capitalist system. Like their counterparts in the AFL old guard, such CIO leaders as Lewis, Hillman, and Murray preferred to act as labor generals who led their troops in battle, not as temporarily elected representatives who reflected the wishes of the ranks. Yet unlike typical AFL unions, the CIO unions promoted interracial solidarity (several even established union civil rights units), more aggressively advanced the interests of workers of new immigrant stock, and proved more receptive to the demands of women workers. The CIO also was much more active politically, linking its success and future directly to that of Roosevelt and other New Deal Democrats. A major reason that the CIO adopted more radical policies on many issues was that many of the organization's secondary leaders and cadres came out of the Socialist and Communist parties. Thus it was not surprising that many contemporaries saw the CIO as a new kind of labor movement, one akin to continental European social democratic movements, one that held much promise and peril for the future of the American nation.

The growth of the CIO, moreover, coincided with communism's moment of greatest influence. In 1935, the Communist Party (CPUSA) abandoned its "Third Period" policy of condemning noncommunist trade unionists and socialists as "social fascists," a sectarian policy that had marginalized the party in the labor movement. Instead, it called for a "popular front" of all progressive and labor groups to resist the growing worldwide fascist threat. In the spirit of this new departure, party leader Earl Browder proclaimed "communism as twentieth-century Americanism." The coalition politics of the "Popular Front" enabled communists to attain substantial influence in major CIO affiliates. Lewis, who had fought an internal war against leftists in the UMW during the 1920s, now invited them into the CIO and put scores of them to work helping it organize the steelworkers. At least five of the more successful and major CIO affiliates – the United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers, the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union, the United Packinghouse Workers, the National Maritime Union, and the Transport Workers Union – were led by communists. Communists also maintained considerable influence in the United Automobile Workers, where they fought many a battle with other union leaders who remained

loyal socialists or social democrats. From 1935 to 1939, communists played a major role in the commitment of CIO unions to civil rights and greater opportunities for women workers, and in promoting pro-labor culture through a network of artists, musicians, intellectuals and others who were in the party's orbit.

Working together with their left-wing allies, the CIO's more traditional leaders wasted little time in building institutions to compete with the AFL for the loyalty of the American worker. It established state and city industrial councils (many of which were dominated by communists) as counterparts to the AFL's state federations and city centrals. It invited all new industrial unions to join, and it formed its own special organizing committees in steel, meat packing, and textiles. Also, unlike their counterparts in the AFL, the CIO leaders claimed more power over their affiliates and, especially in the cases of the new unions and organizing committees, intervened more often and more forcefully than had been the practice in the AFL.

The response to the CIO's vigorous campaign for industrial unionism, set in motion soon after its revolt against the dilatory and delaying tactics of the AFL in 1935, was immediate and nationwide. Here was what the great body of workers in mass-production industries had been waiting for, and they flocked to join unions that really met their needs and freed them from the AFL's control of federal unions. As organizers went out from the new CIO headquarters, supported by funds made available through contributions from the miners', needle workers', and other sympathetic unions, they were greeted with enthusiasm. With the energetic, skillful leadership of Lewis and Murray, Hillman and Dubinsky, progress was phenomenal.

The CIO launched its key drive among the nation's steel workers in June 1936 with the establishment of the Steel Workers' Organizing Committee (SWOC). Under Murray's direction, it replaced the inept Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel, and Tin Workers, set up district headquarters in Pittsburgh, Chicago, and Birmingham, and soon had some 400 organizers distributing union literature, holding mass meetings, and canvassing from house to house in the steel towns of Pennsylvania, Ohio, Illinois, and Alabama. With average annual wages among the workers as low as \$560, compared with a minimum \$1,500 standard-of-living budget, they found fertile ground for effective union propaganda.

The steel industry, whose obdurate antiunionism could be traced from the battle between strikers and the Carnegie Steel Company at Homestead, Pennsylvania, in 1892 through the great steel strike of 1919, prepared to meet this new challenge. The Iron and Steel Institute inserted full-page advertisements in papers throughout the country declaring that the companies' own employee representation plans fully met the needs of the workers, that the CIO was trying to intimidate and coerce them into joining the union, and that radical and communist influences were again at work.

Lewis took to the radio in a nationwide broadcast to counteract this propaganda barrage and warned not only the steel operators but all industry that the drive sponsored by the CIO to unionize industrial workers could not be withstood. "Let him

who will, be he economic tyrant or sordid mercenary,” he shouted into the microphone, “pit his strength against this mighty upsurge of human sentiment now being crystallized in the hearts of thirty million workers who clamor for the establishment of industrial democracy and for participation in its tangible fruits. He is a madman or a fool who believes that this river of human sentiment...can be clammed or impounded by the erection of arbitrary barriers of restraint.”

But while the SWOC prepared to confront the steel industry, an even more dramatic and significant event occurred in the automobile industry. There had been seething unrest among its workers since the advent of the National Recovery Administration and the failure of the incipient strikes of 1934. In spite of high hourly rates, seasonal lay-offs held down annual wages to an average of less than \$1,000, while another widely held grievance was the speed-up on the assembly line. For the worker whose sole task was to stand by a conveyor belt and put a wheel on a passing chassis, set a fender, or simply tighten a bolt, the tense strain of working under increasing pressure sometimes became almost unbearable. But every attempt to secure modification of such conditions by concerted protest was beaten down by management. The automobile industry had developed its spy system so extensively that union activity appeared to be blocked before it could get started.

Nevertheless, CIO organizers persevered. The United Automobile Workers (UAW) had been established through a merger of the federal unions originally set up by the AFL, and its organizers never stopped proselytizing among automobile workers. Still, progress was slow. Growing discontented with the meager support of the AFL, the new union thereupon broke away from it in 1936 and threw in its lot with the CIO. Members elected Homer S. Martin as president and prepared for a revitalized organizational campaign that was eventually to make the United Automobile, Aircraft, and Agricultural Implement Workers the largest industrial union in the country.

Martin was young and idealistic, with little experience as either a worker or union member. After graduating from a small Missouri college, he had entered the Baptist ministry, and in 1932 became pastor of a small church in a Kansas City suburb. His outspoken sympathy for workers soon led to his losing his position, and he took a job in a Chevrolet factory, where he began to preach unionism with evangelical zeal. Fired as a troublemaker, he devoted all his time to union work and rose to be vice president of the struggling UAW. Described in appearance and manner as an almost typical YMCA secretary – friendly, quiet, bespectacled – Martin took control of the union after his election to the presidency and infused it with a new spirit. What he lacked in experience, he made up in energy. Under the impact of his inspirational appeals, which turned union meetings into something very much like old-fashioned revivals, the automobile workers joined up in rapidly increasing numbers.

There were some scattered strikes during the summer of 1936, and by late fall the UAW – some 300,000 strong – was coming out into the open, prepared to demand recognition from the giants of the industry – General Motors, Chrysler, and Ford. “We

don't want to be driven; we don't want to be spied on," was the workers' new refrain. But the companies, defying the provisions of the Wagner Act, refused to make any concessions. When Martin asked the officers of General Motors for a conference on collective bargaining, William S. Knudsen, vice president, merely suggested that if the workers had any grievances they should take them up with local plant managers. Before the national UAW or CIO leaders could respond, union militants in Flint, Michigan, a General Motors stronghold, took matters into their own hands. This small, militant minority, composed mostly of union radicals, seized the day. On the evening of December 30, 1936, without warning, they and a small group of loyal followers closed down and occupied the Chevrolet No. 1 factory in Flint. Thus began the "Great Sit-Down Strike," which, before it ended on February 11, 1937, paralyzed production throughout the General Motors empire and affected 112,000 of the company's 150,000 workers.

This strike proved the first full-scale use of a new labor tactic: the sit-down strike. There had been some earlier use of this radical technique, notably among rubber workers at Akron and elsewhere, but this was to be the tactic's most vital test. The automobile workers refused to leave the plant; they just sat at their work benches. It was not an act of violence but one of passive resistance, doubly effective in that such a strike could be broken only by the forcible removal of the workers from company premises.



Figure 16.2 Sit-down strikers hanging effigies from the windows of Fisher Body Plant No. 2 in Flint, Michigan, January 1937. (Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University)

Excitement ran high in Flint and neighboring Detroit. General Motors management and the Flint Alliance, a company-sponsored association supposedly made up of loyal employees, assailed the sit-down as an unlawful invasion of property rights and called for the immediate ejection of the strikers. Martin countered with charges that General Motors proposed to invade the property rights of the workers. "What more sacred property right is there in the world today," he demanded, "than the right of a man to his job? This property right involves the right to support his family, feed his children and keep starvation away from the door. This...is the very foundation stone of American homes...the most sacred, most fundamental property right in America."

Although Lewis was then deeply involved in the steel organizing drive, he and his CIO associates did not hesitate to offer the Flint strikers their total support. "You men are undoubtedly carrying on through one of the most heroic battles that has ever been undertaken by strikers in an industrial dispute," Lewis declared. "The attention of the entire American public is focussed upon you."

The latter part of his statement was unquestionably true, and became even more so as violence broke out in Flint and the strikers showed their stubborn determination not to be dislodged from the occupied plants. The cutting off of all heat – even in the dead of winter – made no difference. When the police tried to rush Fisher Body Plant No. 2, they were met by a hail of missiles – coffee mugs, pop bottles, iron bolts, and heavy automobile door hinges. When the police then returned to the attack with tear-gas bombs, the strikers retaliated by turning streams of water on them from the plant fire hoses. The forces of law and order were finally compelled to make a hasty retreat in what the exultant workers promptly termed the "Battle of the Running Bulls."

The strike dragged on from week to week as the General Motors employees continued to sit it out with food and other supplies brought in to them through the picket lines. Discipline was rigid. "Brilliantly lighted," reads a contemporary description by a union organizer, "this vast plant was heavily guarded inside and outside – to keep strikebreakers and other interlopers from entering and to protect the building and its contents. Especially did these strikers guard the company's dies, the specialized tools used to shape auto parts. No liquor was permitted on the premises, and smoking was prohibited on all production floors. Forty-five men were assigned to police patrol duty inside. Their word was law."

Both the company and the Flint Alliance now demanded that the state militia be mobilized to clear the plants since the police had failed to do so. But Governor Frank Murphy of Michigan, sympathetic with the automobile workers and fearful of the bloodshed that would certainly result, refused to take the step. Finally, however, General Motors obtained a court order setting 3:00 p.m. on February 3 as the deadline for evacuation of the plants under penalty of imprisonment and fines. The strikers were undismayed. "We the workers..." they wired the governor, "have carried on a stay-in strike over a month to make General Motors Corporation obey the law and engage in collective bargaining....Unarmed as we are, the introduction of the

militia, sheriffs or police with murderous weapons will mean a bloodbath of unarmed workers....We have decided to stay in the plant.”

Realizing that the strikers meant what they said, Murphy coolly summoned a peace conference. John L. Lewis rushed to Detroit (“Let there be no moaning at the bar when I put out to sea,” he cryptically told reporters as he entrained in Washington) and began negotiations with Vice President Knudsen, whom Governor Murphy had prevailed upon to meet him. But the morning of February 3 arrived without any settlement having been reached. The sit-downers remained barricaded in the factories, armed with iron bolts and door hinges, and protected against the expected tear and vomiting gas with slight cheesecloth masks. Outside the besieged plants, thousands of sympathetic workers and members of the UAW's Women's Emergency Brigade milled about as sound trucks blared forth the anthem “Solidarity Forever.”

The zero hour approached – and passed. Murphy refused to order national guardsmen to enforce the court order. In spite of mounting popular pressure, he remained unwilling to make a move that would have precipitated violence on an unpredictable scale.

The next day, President Roosevelt added his request for a continuation of negotiations to that of Governor Murphy, and the Lewis–Knudsen talks (with other representatives of both General Motors and the strikers present) resumed. For a full week, while the sit-downers grimly held the fort, the conference proceeded until, at long last, the weary, haggard governor announced that agreement had been reached. General Motors undertook to recognize the UAW as the bargaining agent for its members, to drop injunction proceedings against the strikers, not to discriminate in any way against union members, and to take up such grievances as the speed-up and other matters.

It was not a complete victory for the union. The UAW did not achieve exclusive representation rights, although General Motors promised not to bargain with any other organization of its employees during the term of the agreement. Nor did the temporary settlement provide any form of union security. Yet it achieved important objectives for labor. For the first time, the CIO had defeated and wrested an agreement from a basic open-shop industry, in this case the largest multinational business enterprise in the world. It proved to be only the first step in the ultimately total unionization of the auto industry. More important, its impact rippled throughout the economy and caused a wave of unionism and strikes across the nation.

Steel was among the first sectors of the economy to react to the news from Flint. By the end of 1936, the SWOC claimed over 150 union lodges with a membership in excess of 100,000. It appeared strong enough to demand recognition and a contract, militant enough to threaten a national strike should the steel corporations reject its demands.

In this situation, the chief executive officer of the United States Steel Corporation,

Myron C. Taylor, acted with the skill of a diplomat. Having seen the militancy of the autoworkers and, more decisively, the refusal of state and federal officials to evict the sit-downers, Taylor decided not to risk a strike in steel. Instead, in February he began a series of secret meetings with John L. Lewis. On March 2, 1937, only three weeks after the settlement between the UAW and General Motors, Philip Murray, representing the SWOC, and Benjamin Fairless, of US Steel, signed a union-management contract. The agreement recognized the SWOC as the bargaining agent for its members, granted a 10 percent wage increase, and conceded an eight-hour day, forty-hour week. Although US Steel still proclaimed its commitment to the open-shop principle, it had for the first time since its formation in 1901 bargained honestly with a labor union and signed a contract – all this without even a strike. Over a hundred other independent steel companies followed US Steel's lead, and by May 1937, the SWOC claimed over 300,000 members.

The CIO's successive victories over General Motors and US Steel had no parallel in the history of the American labor movement. The nation's two greatest open-shop citadels had fallen before the onslaught of an awakened labor movement. The whole traditional pattern of labor relations in the mass-production industries seemed to be unraveling. What the AFL had failed to accomplish in half a century, the CIO had achieved in three weeks. Having conquered autos and steel, in March 1937 the CIO's future seemed unlimited. Lewis himself told other CIO leaders on March 9: "As years go by, this period will be marked as epoch in life of labor organizations – and economic, social, political history of America." And a contemporary journalist added that Lewis's leadership had made the CIO "the most progressive and vital force in American life today."

At first such claims seemed more than true, as sit-down strikes and union victories infected all parts of the nation. The workers of the Chrysler Corporation were among the first to join the strike wave. After a relatively brief sit-down, they succeeded in winning recognition for the UAW and a collective-bargaining agreement comparable to that exacted from General Motors. Indeed, only Ford continued to hold out among the automobile companies, successfully resisting all attempts of the UAW to organize its plants for another four years.

Other industries also felt the impact of labor's new weapon. Between September 1936 and June 1937, almost 500,000 workers were involved in sit-down strikes. Rubber workers, glass workers, and textile workers sat at their benches; striking Woolworth clerks stayed behind their counters but would not wait on customers; pie bakers, opticians, dressmakers and apartment-house janitors sat down. The longest strike of this kind was that of some 1,800 electrical workers in Philadelphia. Two bridegrooms sat out their honeymoons, and the wives of six other married strikers greeted their returning husbands with newly born babies.

As workers throughout the country eagerly took up this militant strategy to force antiunion employers into line, they enthusiastically sang their song of revolt:

When they tie the can to a union man,
Sit down! Sit down!
When they give him the sack, they'll take him back,
Sit down! Sit down!
When the speed-up comes, just twiddle your thumbs,
Sit down! Sit down!
When the boss won't talk, don't take a walk,
Sit down! Sit down!

The Impact of the CIO

These strikes aroused increasing popular resentment. Conservative newspapers grew hysterical in condemning such a flagrant invasion of property rights, and there was little support for the sit-downs from any quarter. While Upton Sinclair wrote from California that “for seventy-five years big business has been sitting down on the American people, and now I am delighted to see the process reversed,” even among labor sympathizers few echoed this sentiment. The AFL explicitly disavowed the sit-down, and while the CIO had supported the automobile workers, its officials never formally approved the sit-down's general use. After lively and acrimonious debate, the US Senate resolved that such strikes were “illegal and contrary to public policy,” and the courts eventually outlawed them as constituting trespass on private property.

For all the excitement it had occasioned during the first half of 1937, the sit-down strike in fact proved to be a temporary phenomenon. It had been the quick and ready response of new and impatient union members fighting for recognition in the strongholds of antiunionism and embittered by the refusal of employers to comply with the provisions of the Wagner Act. When the law was sustained by the Supreme Court in May 1937 in its *NLRB v. Jones and Laughlin* decision, and the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) was empowered to hold elections for collective bargaining units, the sit-downs diminished. Two years later, the court would rule that sit-down strikes violated labor law in *NLRB v. Fansteel Metallurgical Corporation*, ensuring that the tactic would not be revived.

The immediate consequences of the CIO's activity throughout 1937 were, in any event, immense gains for all affiliated unions. If the dramatic victories won in steel and automobiles were the most important fruits of the new organizing, there were other developments that played their part in revolutionizing the labor scene. Organized drives among rubber workers, radio and electrical workers, lumbermen, and longshoremen, among others, served to build up strong and powerful unions. The campaign of a new Textile Workers' Organizing Committee, under the skillful management of Sidney Hillman, was particularly significant as it succeeded in

organizing many Southern mills where the AFL had failed to make any appreciable headway.

More important than the actual strength of CIO unions at the close of 1937 – 600,000 mine workers, 400,000 automobile workers, 375,000 steel workers, 300,000 textile workers, 250,000 ladies' garment workers, 177,000 clothing workers, 100,000 agricultural and packing workers – was the broader base that its campaign had finally achieved for organized labor as a whole. The CIO had successfully organized mass-production workers into industrial unions and broken through the narrow lines of craft unionism fostered by the AFL. The CIO had welcomed, as the AFL never had, immigrants, blacks, and women, without regard to race, sex, or nationality.

The impact of the CIO proved most transformative on the lives and values of newer immigrants from the south and east of Europe and on their sons and daughters. The immigrant generation had by the 1930s evolved from “sojourners,” men and women whose ties to their lands of origin remained substantial, into American citizens whose present and future became more tightly tied to their lives in the United States. Their children, citizens by birth, had already been largely acculturated by public schools, by peer social groups, and by popular culture as advanced by radio and film. CIO unions completed the process of Americanization, as many new immigrants and more especially their children played key roles in building the new unions and even gaining union office. Not only did the CIO make the new immigrants more American and fuller citizens, but it also tied them closely to the New Deal and the Democratic party, for whom they remained a core electoral component for the next four decades.

CIO unions had nearly as great an impact on workers of color. Unlike the AFL unions, many of which in practice excluded non-white workers and nearly all of which treated them as second-class members, CIO unions welcomed nonwhite members and struggled to end race-based differences in pay, though in most cases they were unable to eliminate company employment policies that offered preferential opportunities to white employees. (In too many of the CIO unions, moreover, white members, especially the more skilled among them, resisted equal rights for African American brothers and sisters.) Among the more left-wing CIO unions, especially those led by CPUSA members, African American workers were not only welcomed, but recruited into leadership roles as part of those unions' push for civil rights nationally as well as equal rights in the workplace. At the time, the CIO seemed a firm ally and advocate for its African American members, promising its own version of a New Deal. And in doing so, it linked African American members even more firmly to the Democratic political order than those of south and east European origin. Similarly, the CIO struck an alliance with El Congreso del Pueblo de Habla Española (the Spanish-Speaking People's Congress) and made a concerted effort to organize workers of Mexican, Filipino, and Asian origins through unions such as the United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing, and Allied Workers of America.

The Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters (BSCP), a union with an overwhelmingly

non-white membership led by an African American president, A. Philip Randolph, also benefited dramatically from the labor policies of the New Deal Democrats. A union composed almost entirely of Black and Filipino members, the BSCP between 1935 and 1937 finally won union recognition from the Pullman Palace Car Company and a contract achieved through collective bargaining. Somewhat oddly, however, it spurned the CIO and remained an affiliate of the AFL, in which Randolph played the role of solitary agitator fighting against the AFL's racist inclinations and policies. Other African American unions that had prior to the 1930s remained independent of the AFL and represented workers neglected by established unions saw their appeal and membership decline as CIO unions promised black workers firmer rights on the job.

The CIO also helped change gender dynamics within the labor movement. Although the AFL had paid lip service to the organization of working women, it had done little to empower them. Thanks to the CIO's organizing drives in electrical manufacturing and other industries employing concentrations of women, the number of women in US unions quadrupled to some 800,000 between 1935 and 1940. As members of the UAW's Women's Emergency Brigade had done during the Flint sit-down strike, women participated enthusiastically in the CIO's social movement. Some rose to leadership positions, such as Eleanor Nelson, who became the first woman to lead a major national union when she was elected president of the CIO's United Federal Workers of America in 1944. Women also participated in the CIO through an extensive network called the Congress of Women's Auxiliaries, through which they addressed issues of special interest to working-class housewives. Although women still did not occupy a position of full equality with men within the CIO, and were starkly underrepresented in union leadership, the organization promoted a more progressive gender ideology than had prevailed to that point. It was no coincidence that Betty Friedan, whose book *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) had helped launch "second wave feminism" in the early 1960s, worked as a journalist for the United Electrical Workers' *UE News* in the early 1940s.

The CIO influence, moreover, extended to the entire labor front. The AFL, as has been suggested previously, soon found that it could not ignore unskilled workers while its new rival made such giant strides in organizing them. The AFL had, of course, never done so altogether. The lines between skilled, semiskilled, and unskilled workers had, indeed, become so blurred with the advance of machines and the assembly line that many AFL unions effectively included all types of workers. There also had been industrial unions in the AFL for decades, as we have seen in tracing the growth of organization among coal miners and workers in the garment industry. But the example of what had been done in steel, automobiles, and other mass-production industries aroused the AFL to the need of expanding its own organization to prevent the CIO from monopolizing the new opportunities for unionization. Thousands of workers whose skill was no greater than that of the rank and file of the industrial unions were drawn into such multiple-craft or semi-industrial AFL unions as the machinists, the boilermakers, the meat cutters, the restaurant employees, the hod

carriers (who carried supplies to skilled workers in the building trades), laborers, and the teamsters. Galvanized into more strenuous activity than ever before, the AFL admitted new recruits wherever it could find them, and though its development was not as dramatic as that of the CIO, it experienced large gains in membership. Even with the defection of those unions that went over to the rival organization, the AFL's enrollment at the end of 1937, as we have seen, was about a million greater than in 1933.

The AFL and the CIO continued to strive to build up their strength in jealous competition. The former reached out to set up new industrial unions; the latter did not hesitate to charter craft unions. As labor leaders increasingly realized that there was no one formula for organization and that different working conditions demanded different approaches to unionization, debate over the old issues that had led to the split in the labor movement became wholly academic. While the CIO had a majority of industrial unions in the mass-production industries and the AFL included by far the larger proportion of what might still be called craft unions, old distinctions had largely broken down, and both organizations, becoming more and more alike, prepared to welcome all comers.

The unhappy byproduct of these developments was the spread of jurisdictional quarrels between competing unions. The AFL carpenters fought the CIO woodworkers; the CIO automobile workers fought the AFL machinists; and AFL and CIO longshoremen, textile workers, electrical workers, packinghouse workers, and retail clerks battled indiscriminately. The heavens rang with charges of union raiding, scabbing, and mutual betrayal. The bitterness of these family squabbles often exceeded that of labor–capital disputes. The recriminatory attacks of the two organizations upon one another, and sometimes union battles within either the AFL or CIO, were on occasion more fierce than labor clashes with industry.

In their efforts to win recognition for their respective unions, the AFL and the CIO embroiled the National Labor Relations Board in their feud. The NLRB, created under the Wagner Act to defend labor's rights against antiunion employers, from 1936 to 1939 found itself under as much attack from the AFL as from industry. AFL leaders accused it of favoring the CIO and of sheltering communists. Such charges coming from a labor federation lent credence to employers' accusations that the NLRB exceeded its authority and acted in a biased manner. Before long, several AFL officials joined with leading industrialists to seek congressional restraints on the NLRB's power. Labor's civil war thus diluted the authority of a governmental agency created to foster union recognition.

Even more serious setbacks thwarted the labor movement's growth beginning in the spring of 1937. The first sign of weakness on the part of the CIO came during a clash with the so-called "Little Steel" companies. Republic, Youngstown Sheet and Tube, Inland Steel, and Bethlehem refused to come to terms with the SWOC and began to mobilize their forces to resist any further union pressure. Under the leadership of Tom

M. Girdler, the tough reactionary, virulently antilabor president of Republic, the battle lines were drawn.

The leaders of the SWOC replied with a strike call, and during May some 75,000 workers in the plants of Little Steel walked out in a concerted move to compel recognition of their union. The companies fought back and, through their strong control over the steel towns, did so successfully. Citizens' committees formed to support a campaign of intimidation and violent coercion; back-to-work movements emerged with the protection of local police and special deputies; and attacks upon the picket lines, tear gassing of union headquarters, arrests of strike leaders, and the use of militia to protect strikebreakers gradually broke down the morale of the workers.

Violence flared up in a score of steel towns and reached a peak in a bloody clash near the South Chicago works of Republic Steel. On May 30, Chicago city police sought to disperse a peaceful holiday picnic crowd of steel strikers and their families. Whatever their actual reason or cause, the police opened fire on the gathering, which had refused orders to disperse. The unarmed workers broke ranks and frantically fled for safety from the hail of bullets, but they left ten of their number dead on the street and over a hundred others injured. While some 22 of the police were also wounded in the affray, not a single one suffered any critical injury.

The "Memorial Day Massacre," as it was at once called by union labor, did nothing, however, to bolster the strikers' cause. Later investigations, including careful study of moving-picture films, clearly revealed that strikers had not provoked the attack. But the sentiment in the steel towns themselves still remained strongly antiunion, and, with such support, the companies were too well entrenched for the workers to hold out. Propaganda, force, and terrorism broke the strike, and the CIO suffered a major defeat. Equally important, neither state nor federal officials interceded to protect labor's right to organize. Indeed, in the state of Ohio, the Democratic governor, unlike Frank Murphy of Michigan, used police power to help break the strike.



Figure 16.3 As the Little Steel strike failed, so too did a union organizing effort at Ford, which used brutal tactics to block the drive. Organizers Richard Frankenstein (right) and Walter Reuther after being beaten by Ford servicemen while trying to hand out union circulars at the Dearborn plant, May 26, 1937. (Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University)

Even worse fortune would befall the CIO before the end of 1937. The rapid and real economic recovery of 1936 prompted President Roosevelt to seek to balance the federal budget, and he began to cut expenditures and public-works programs. But instead of bringing about a balanced budget, the president's cuts precipitated a deep economic decline in 1937/38, sometimes called the "Roosevelt depression," and deeper federal deficits. The new, if short-lived, economic collapse also increased the rate of unemployment and bolstered employers' resistance to unions, especially in the sectors of the economy in which the CIO was concentrated. As a result, CIO membership plummeted; its income from dues, never as large as its expenses, fell even further behind, and Lewis wielded an ax in discharging national staff. By late 1937, retrenchment became the norm for the CIO and grand organizing drives a memory of better days.

In contrast, the AFL seemed to thrive under the altered circumstances. Having many more old, stable unions than the CIO and a steadier dues-paying membership, as well as being more broadly spread across the nation, the AFL used its fuller treasury to organize aggressively, as it had rarely done before. AFL affiliates also seemed an attractive alternative to employers fearful of the radical CIO. By the end of 1937, the AFL had many more dues-paying members than the CIO, was growing more rapidly, and was more secure in its power. It had finally learned that the workers whom Dan

Tobin had once dismissed as the “rubbish at labor's door” made good union members.

In this situation, one in which the policies and power of government were much more vital to organized labor than ever before, workers acted as a core element in the New Deal political coalition.

LABOR AND THE NEW DEAL STATE

The role of labor in politics took on new significance with the New Deal. With governmental intervention in industrial relations on such a broad scale, the maintenance in office of a presidential administration and a Congress sympathetic to labor's aspirations became more important than ever. The limited objectives sought by the lobbying activities of the American Federation of Labor (AFL) back in the days when Samuel Gompers opposed minimum wages, old-age pensions, and unemployment insurance as "softening the moral fibre of the people" no longer met the needs of the nation's workers. The new industrial unions were especially dependent on the protection afforded them by New Deal legislation and were consequently ready to do everything in their power to assure the continuance of a pro-labor administration in Washington.

The pronounced swing toward more extensive participation in politics was not, however, entirely due to the desire for effective enforcement of the new labor laws. There was a growing awareness of the larger issues involved in the Roosevelt program. The New Deal became a rallying point for all the progressive and leftist elements in the labor movement. For former socialists, Roosevelt's policies promised the achievement of long-sought social reforms. Thus trade union socialists in increasing numbers deserted their old party for Roosevelt's Democracy or such halfway houses as New York's American Labor Party. Especially after a shift in Comintern policy in 1935, communists saw the New Deal as part of a broad anti-fascist Popular Front. Finally, for less ideological trade unionists, Roosevelt symbolized a type of democratic capitalism with a large degree of social justice.

It was natural that in this burst of political activity, the Committee for Industrial Organization (CIO) should be far more aggressive than the AFL. The liberal and insurgent spirit that characterized the CIO's advocacy of industrial unionism was carried over to the promotion of social reform. While it did not stray far from the old tradition of rewarding labor's friends and punishing its enemies, the CIO went much further in trying to make this policy effective. Unlike the AFL, which continued to uphold nonpartisanship in presidential elections, it supported Roosevelt vigorously.

CIO affiliates also realized more fully than the long-established craft unions in the AFL the extent to which all wage earners now depended upon government. The experience of the Great Depression had convinced CIO leaders of the need for additional governmental controls over the economic life of the nation.

"With the guarantee of the 'right to organize,' such industries may be unionized," Lewis wrote in regard to mass-production enterprises, "but, on the other hand, better living standards, shorter working hours and improved employment conditions for their

members cannot be hoped for unless legislative or other provisions be made for economic planning and for price, production and profit controls. Because of these fundamental conditions, it is obvious to industrial workers that the labor movement must organize and exert itself not only in the economic field but also in the political arena.”

To carry forward such a program, the CIO leadership established Labor's Non-Partisan League in 1936 and also supported the formation of the American Labor Party in New York. Both of these organizations campaigned for the reelection of Roosevelt, and sought support from both AFL and CIO members. The first president of the Non-Partisan League was George L. Berry, of the International Printing Pressmen's Union, an AFL affiliate. Many state labor federations and member unions cooperated with the league, although the AFL refused to have anything to do with it officially. The AFL's executive council was divided on political issues: William Hutcheson headed the Republican Labor Committee and Daniel Tobin the Democratic Labor Committee. While Green personally backed Roosevelt, he condemned the Non-Partisan League as a dual movement in politics, just as the CIO was allegedly a dual movement in labor organization.

There was never any question, however, as to where either the CIO or the new industrial unions stood. They made heavy contributions to the Non-Partisan League's campaign fund (the United Mine Workers alone advanced \$500,000), and Lewis called for unequivocal support for the New Deal. “Labor has gained more under President Roosevelt,” he declared, “than under any president in memory. Obviously it is the duty of labor to support Roosevelt 100 per cent in the next election.”

The Democrats had appealed for labor's backing and had every reason to expect it. “We will continue to protect the worker,” the Democratic platform pledged, “and we will guard his rights, both as wage earner and consumer.” The Republicans also promised to uphold the right to organize, but neither their previous record nor general attitude offered any assurance that labor's broader aims would receive from them the support that had been obtained under the New Deal.

The campaign of 1936 was a bitter one. The divisions of opinion created in American society crossed party lines and aligned class against class, as had not happened since the Populist Party challenged the conservative rule of the dominant business community forty years earlier. While former President Hoover and the Liberty League, an organization founded by conservative Democrats, charged that the Roosevelt administration sought “to introduce the foreign creeds of Regimentation, Socialism, and Fascism,” FDR struck back no less vigorously with the countercharge that the “economic royalists” considered government as their own instrument. “Government by organized money,” he declared, “is just as dangerous as government by organized mob.”

The votes of labor – of AFL as well as CIO union members – played an important part in enabling Roosevelt to sweep the country in 1936. Wage earners had aligned

themselves with other liberal elements in the country in a nationwide popular response to a dynamic program of recovery and reform. Labor endorsed agricultural relief and business reform as well as a new order of industrial relations and social security; it endorsed a measure of economic recovery reflected in rising business activity and higher farm income, as well as reducing unemployment and increasing wages.

The campaign activities of the Non-Partisan League and the vote won for Roosevelt in New York by the American Labor Party appeared to demonstrate the effectiveness of direct labor action in politics. The CIO developed a broad and comprehensive legislative program, and, in a new "Declaration of Purpose," the Non-Partisan League stated that it would attempt in future elections to insure both the nomination and the election of candidates pledged to support labor and other progressive measures. It was ready to work "with every progressive group whose purpose is to secure the enactment of liberal and humanitarian legislation."

The Non-Partisan League entered into local elections in several states during the next few years, sought to capture control of the Democratic party in Pennsylvania, played an active role in New Jersey politics, and threw its support behind a campaign for a labor administration in the city of Detroit. In New York City, the American Labor Party drew largely from socialist-minded members of the needle-trades unions, but it also attracted enough liberal supporters outside the ranks of labor to rally 500,000 votes for the reelection of Mayor Fiorello La Guardia, a Republican aligned with the Roosevelt administration, in 1937. On the national stage, there was continued activity in backing up New Deal legislation, supporting Roosevelt's program for the reorganization of the Supreme Court, and promoting further reform measures all along the line. The Non-Partisan League entered into the congressional elections of 1938 and energetically tried to defeat all opponents of the New Deal and to elect its adherents regardless of party affiliation, although for the most part that meant Democrats.

Sidney Hillman played an important part in this political activity of the late 1930s. A strong proponent of "constructive cooperation" between labor and management, he also urged broad participation by wage earners in politics to assure the basic conditions that would make such cooperation feasible. Few unions had been more politically conscious than his Amalgamated Clothing Workers. Sometimes characterized as the very embodiment of "social-engineering" union leadership, at once highly practical and idealistic, Hillman was one of the foremost labor strategists of the day, one with a visionary view of the society he believed could be created in the United States. "Having realized our dreams of yesterday," Hillman told a union convention in 1938, "let us dedicate ourselves to new dreams of a future where there will be no unemployment; a future where men and women will be economically secure and politically free."

Labor leaders and social reformers debated the possibilities of developing an even more active political role for labor than that represented by the Non-Partisan League.

They revived the notion of forming a labor party, which had so often been raised in the past. Many reformers saw the league as the possible nucleus for a movement in which labor, farmers, and other liberal groups might be brought together in a coalition that would either capture control of the Democratic party or set up an independent third party should it prove desirable.

These ideas failed to take form in practice. The AFL would have none of them, and the CIO, while repeatedly calling for a constructive program of economic security, never endorsed independent political action. Past experience with third-party movements discouraged further experiment along these lines, and the friendly attitude toward labor of the New Deal appeared in any event to make it inadvisable. Most workers seemed tightly bound to Roosevelt's Democratic party and unlikely recruits for a new labor or third party. As one observer of the former socialist-inclined garment trades unions noted, for their members there existed this world, the afterlife, and the president who championed their cause: "*die welt, jener welt, und Roosevelt.*" Yet for organized labor the threat of a third party always lurked in the background should the Democrats disappoint the workers.

Third party or no third party, conservative and anti-New Deal forces became increasingly alarmed over the effect of the political pressure that labor was exerting in the late 1930s. To combat such influences, they lambasted the program of the CIO as radical and un-American. Conservatives charged that left-wing elements were wholly in control of the Non-Partisan League and forced it to follow the Communist Party (CPUSA) line. The National Association of Manufacturers and other employer groups seized every opportunity to press such attacks. One pamphlet widely circulated by various antiunion groups had the engaging title of "Join the CIO and Help Build a Soviet America." They assailed the active leaders of the Non-Partisan League and the American Labor Party, particularly Hillman and Lewis, for their supposed sympathies with communism and willingness to promote policies dictated from Moscow.

There were only glowing embers where the opponents of the CIO saw dense clouds of smoke. The radical elements always present in the labor movement, which were once represented by Chicago anarchists, left-wing socialists, and the IWW, were now generally enrolled in the communist camp. Their labor front had originally been the Trade Union Educational League, founded by William Z. Foster after the failure of the steel strike in 1919, and subsequently the Trade Union Unity League (TUUL) set up some ten years later during the CPUSA's "Third Period" to promote industrial unionism independently of the AFL. The shift in the Moscow party line in the mid-1930s, which swung communist support to a Popular Front against fascism, then led to the abandonment of the TUUL and a return to the older socialist techniques of boring from within. The communists did everything that they could to build the CIO and influence its direction.

Lewis did not hesitate to draw upon their experience and organizing skill – he needed

help from every quarter. "We have to work," he stated, "with what we have." While he fully recognized that the communists would seek to use the new unions to strengthen their own position, he nevertheless thought that he could disregard their politics so long as they aided him in promoting industrial unionism. As a result of such hospitality, communists and other leftists won important positions in some unions and even in the high councils of the CIO itself. Within the United Automobile Workers, left-wing and anticommunist factions persistently struggled for power. Members of the CPUSA and their allies controlled several CIO unions, including the United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers, the International Fur and Leather Workers Union, the International Union of Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers, and the International Woodworkers of America. Their zeal and enterprise, particularly in parliamentary strategy and organizational legwork, as well as the degree to which they served the needs of their members, gave the left-wingers influence over a generally noncommunist or anticommunist rank and file.

The great bulk of union members, even in communist-led unions, remained steadfast Democrats. Moreover, the three top CIO leaders – Lewis, Hillman, and Murray – were themselves anticommunists. In the mid- to late 1930s, however, they did not see communists as a threat to the labor movement. Rather, as long as the CPUSA supported the CIO and the New Deal, Lewis and his associates took full advantage of the dedication and discipline that young communists brought to the labor movement.

The political support that the left wing was prepared to give to Roosevelt and the New Deal as part of the program for a united front added further confusion to the labor scene. Anti-New Deal forces made the most of communist backing for Roosevelt in attacking his administration for what they declared were its socialist and radical policies. But while the president could repudiate communist support as such, he continued to need that of organized labor. It was consequently greatly in his interest to have a united movement strong enough to rally the progressive forces of the nation behind his policies. Since 1937, he had continually urged reconciliation between the AFL and the CIO with such ideas in view, and in 1939 he again called upon both organizations to make a real effort to settle their differences.

Upon Roosevelt's insistence, peace negotiations resumed that year, and representatives of the AFL and the CIO tried to get together. The issue of craft unionism versus industrial unionism had long since lost any real validity, as we have seen, but the rival drives for power had been intensified by the conflicts of the previous few years. Lewis put forward an ambitious proposal for the merger of the AFL, the CIO, and the Railroad Brotherhoods. It was wholly impractical, for the Railroad Brotherhoods were not even remotely interested in such a project, and Lewis was immediately charged with not acting in good faith.

The AFL counteroffered readmission of the CIO unions to the parent organization, but without recognition of their extended jurisdiction. Lewis adjourned the meeting without giving a definite answer to this proposal, but he soon declared that peace was

“impossible” because of the obstructive attitude of the AFL leaders, who were pursuing a policy of “rule or ruin.” The truth of the matter was that neither side was willing to make real concessions. In spite of their professed acceptance of the need for labor unity, both the AFL and the CIO put their own interests first. Green continued to express his “passion for peace,” but upon his own terms. Lewis was perhaps more frank in stating, “we must expand our movement.”

War, Lewis, and the Election of 1940

The internal difficulties confronting labor were complicated in 1939 by more important developments on the world scene. The Soviet Union and Germany concluded a nonaggression pact in late August 1939, and immediately afterward Europe was plunged into war by Hitler's attack on Poland. The United States found itself menaced by the growing possibility of being drawn into the raging struggle against fascism, and popular attention was increasingly diverted from domestic problems to larger issues of foreign policy. The country divided into opposing camps on the overshadowing question of whether aiding the Allies could keep war from American shores, or whether the United States should seek to maintain a strict neutrality as the only means to safeguard its own peace.

As expressed in resolutions adopted by both the AFL and the CIO, labor entirely opposed American entry into the war but was prepared to support Roosevelt's policy of extending aid to the Allies and building up American defenses. There were differing viewpoints within union ranks, however. As among other elements in the population, trade unionists differed over foreign policy, while the CPUSA line had abruptly shifted from a united democratic front to absolute conformity with Soviet policy as demanded by Joseph Stalin. Communist trade union leaders now attacked the Roosevelt administration as vigorously as they had formerly defended it. With the approach of the election of 1940, the question of how labor would vote consequently became of utmost importance. In these circumstances, Lewis's position attracted nationwide attention, and he chose to play a strange, unpredictable role.

In the aftermath of Roosevelt's reelection in 1936, Lewis expected the Democrats to pay their political debts to organized labor. During the summer of 1936, Roosevelt had made numerous promises to the CIO in return for Lewis's endorsement. During the General Motors “Great Sit-Down Strike,” Lewis expressed publicly what he expected the president to do. “For six months the economic royalists represented by General Motors,” Lewis told reporters, “contributed their money and used their energy to drive this administration out of power. The administration asked labor for help and labor gave it. The same economic royalists now have their fangs in labor. The workers of this country expect the administration to help the workers in every legal way and to support the workers in General Motors plants.”

In this case Roosevelt delivered, although he left to Governor Murphy the actual

implementation of a pro-labor policy. Less than six months later, however, another strike – the fierce struggle between the Steel Workers' Organizing Committee and “Little Steel” – caused a rift between Lewis and Roosevelt. When the CIO leader again turned to the president for help, Roosevelt replied, a “plague o' both your houses.” After brooding over this rebuff, Lewis, in a radio speech on Labor Day, 1937, in which he enumerated the deaths and injuries suffered by workers in the steel industry, attacked the president: “It ill behooves one who has supped at labor's table and who has been sheltered in labor's house to curse with equal fervor and fine impartiality both labor and its adversaries when they become locked in deadly embrace.”

Pundits immediately tried to explain the cause of the rift between Roosevelt and Lewis. All sorts of explanations were offered, but the one that gained the widest credence, perhaps because it seemed most dramatic and made for the best story, concerned Lewis's political ambitions. According to Frances Perkins, the primary source of this tale, Lewis went to Roosevelt in late 1939 or early 1940 with a political proposal. “Mr. President, I have thought of all that and I have a suggestion to make for you to consider,” Perkins quotes Roosevelt, who in turn was quoting Lewis. “If the vice-presidential candidate on your ticket should happen to be John L. Lewis, those objections would disappear. A strong labor man would insure the full support, not only of all the labor people, but of all the liberals who worry about such things as third terms.”

The suggestion did not appeal to the president, and he ignored it. But there is another account of this incident, probably apocryphal. It has Lewis proposing to Roosevelt that, as the “two most prominent men in the nation,” they would make an invincible ticket, and the president blandly asking, “Which place would you take, John?”

Perkins's tale, however, is one of those historical anecdotes that amuses people but misses the truth. Roosevelt and Lewis were indeed coming to a political parting of the ways in late 1939 and early 1940. But it had nothing to do with Lewis's personal political ambitions. In fact, after the Republicans had rejected his desire to serve as secretary of labor in the 1920s, Lewis neither sought nor wanted public office. Abundant historical evidence shows that what Lewis wanted from Roosevelt was not a position as his running mate, but rather more governmental assistance for the CIO and organized labor.

Much had already changed since Lewis had wholeheartedly supported Roosevelt in 1936. For one thing, the CIO had yet to recover from the “Roosevelt depression” of 1937/38. For another, the New Deal had lost momentum as a domestic reform movement. A congressional coalition of Northern Republicans and Southern Democrats thwarted the CIO's favorite legislation, and the president seemed unable or unwilling to do anything about it. For yet another reason, by 1940 Roosevelt was abandoning domestic reform crusades to concentrate on foreign affairs. And Lewis read the president's diplomacy as an effort to involve the United States in the

European war. As the labor movement's most outspoken opponent of American involvement in overseas war, Lewis saw little choice but to break with Roosevelt politically. Thus he now charged the administration with betraying the workers' cause and refusing to give labor representation in either the cabinet or any policy-making government agency. At a United Mine Workers (UMW) convention in January 1940, he dramatically broke all former ties with the president. "Should the Democratic National Committee be coerced or dragooned into renominating him," Lewis told his startled audience, "I am convinced...his candidacy would result in ignominious defeat."

Lewis's alternative to Roosevelt and the Democrats was less than clear. By 1940 he had developed strange political allies. On the one hand, communists now applauded Lewis as labor's savior, the one high union leader who resisted the nation's drift into an "imperialist" war. On the other hand, Lewis associated himself with the isolationist America First Committee and some of the most reactionary industrialists in America. To complicate matters further, in the spring and summer of 1940, Lewis delivered a series of speeches to groups of African Americans, left-wing youths, and senior citizens in which he suggested the need for a new third party. What Lewis might do in the autumn of 1940 puzzled everyone who observed the CIO leader's political machinations.

In any event, Lewis openly opposed the president as the 1940 campaign got under way. The New Deal had completely failed to bring about economic recovery, he declared, and it was in fact entirely responsible for prolonging the Depression. For a time he did not indicate whether opposition to Roosevelt meant support for Wendell Willkie, the Republican nominee, but he resolved such doubts as to where he stood in a radio speech on October 25 that had been carefully timed for full dramatic effect.

"I think the reelection of President Roosevelt for a third term would be a national evil of the first magnitude," Lewis stated. "He no longer hears the cries of the people. I think that the election of Mr. Wendell Willkie is imperative in relation to the country's needs. I commend him to the men and women of labor....It is obvious that President Roosevelt will not be reelected for a third term unless he has the overwhelming support of the men and women of labor. If he is, therefore, reelected, it will mean that the members of the Congress of Industrial Organizations have rejected my advice and recommendation. I will accept the result as being the equivalent of a vote of no confidence and will retire as president of the Congress of Industrial Organizations in November."

Lewis had miscalculated his influence in the labor movement and over working-class voters. Ignoring the warnings of the CIO president, many of his associates came out openly for Roosevelt, and union after union adopted resolutions favoring a third term for FDR. The majority of AFL leaders and unions also endorsed the president, and there can be no question that the votes of wage earners contributed heavily, as they had in his two earlier elections, to Roosevelt's third triumph. The vote in mining

districts, where the leadership of Lewis was generally followed automatically, showed that even some members of the UMW had refused to heed his advice in national politics.

Lewis had lost his bet. In gambling the presidency of the CIO on the willingness of labor's rank and file to follow him, he had not only taken himself completely out of politics but had also sacrificed control of the organization that he had done so much to build. He fulfilled his pledge to retire from the presidency of the CIO at its next convention. Though he was still able to exert a powerful influence in labor councils, it was the close of a chapter in his spectacular career. For all the defiant independence and dramatic posturing that were to mark his later activities, he never recaptured the power and prestige of his days as president of the CIO.

Lewis remained, of course, head of the UMW, and its members continued to follow wherever he led so far as union affairs were concerned. It was a merry chase. Lewis was soon to take them out of the CIO and then in time back into the AFL. The miners could never be sure just where they stood. Lewis made up his own mind and gave short shrift to the ideas of associates or followers. At the end of 1947, the miners were again to find themselves in the labor wilderness when their chieftain walked out of the AFL for the second time with a casual abruptness that was startling even for him. Reporters summoned to the UMW headquarters by Lewis were shown a message scrawled in blue crayon on a two-by-four-inch slip of paper which read: "Green, AFL. We disaffiliate, Lewis. 12/12/47."

The new CIO president in 1940 was Philip Murray, the leader of the Steel Workers' Organizing Committee's campaign in steel and for so many years the able and loyal lieutenant of Lewis in the UMW. His background had a marked similarity to those of Green and Lewis in that his family was of British coal-mining stock. Murray, however, was himself born abroad – in Lanarkshire, Scotland, in 1886 – and did not come to the United States until the age of 16. He then followed the family tradition of entering the mines. Two years later he had his first difficulties with management and lost his job as a result of taking part in a strike. "I've never had a doubt since then," he wrote, "of what I wanted to do with my life."

In 1916 miners elected Murray president of District No. 5 of the UMW and four years later vice president of the international union. He was known as an extremely able administrator and organizer, but perhaps most of all for his faithful support, in good times and bad, of the policies laid down by his chief. He believed firmly in Catholic social-reform precepts and in the middle ground between socialism and unfettered capitalism expressed in Pope Leo XIII's famous encyclical, *Rerum Novarum*. Labor organization and collective bargaining were essential, in his opinion, to secure social justice for workers.

Long invisible in the shadow cast by Lewis, Murray tried to assert his independence as the new president of the CIO. He urged the CIO to support Roosevelt's foreign policy and program of national defense. "The convictions which I recommend," he told

the CIO convention in 1941, “have not come to me as a result of pressure from any group within or without. I am one individual, as you know, who resents the exercise of pressure from individuals or groups. I stand upon my individual integrity as a man.”

After the election of 1940, the country in general swung more strongly behind the program of national defense. The successive measures taken by the Roosevelt administration to extend aid to the Allies, particularly the adoption of lend-lease in 1941, became the all-important issues confronting the nation. The division between isolationists and interventionists grew even more embittered, but the urgent necessity to build up national security could hardly be denied by anyone other than committed pacifists. Mounting war orders from abroad began in 1941 to spur the economic recovery that the New Deal had been unable to achieve. The United States felt itself in imminent danger of being drawn into the war, but it was in the meantime beginning to enjoy an improved economy.

Labor felt the impact of these developments in many ways. Increased production not only brought about a rapid decline in unemployment, but also stimulated wage increases. The growing need for skilled workers in the defense industries added a new characteristic to the labor market, sharply contrasting with the conditions that had prevailed for more than the previous ten years. Between April 1940 and December 1941, total nonagricultural employment rose from 35 million to over 41 million, and wage rates generally increased by roughly 20 percent. In the durable goods industries so basic to the defense program, average earnings quickly climbed from \$29.88 to \$38.62 a week. War had come to the rescue of American industry and the strength of organized labor, as union members and wage earners shared substantially in the mounting profits of wartime business.

Labor was prepared to cooperate fully to make the United States “the great arsenal of democracy,” but, remembering the defeats and setbacks of the 1920s, was also insistent that the benefits attained under the New Deal should not in any way be prejudiced. In addition, unions asserted their right to press forward the campaign to extend union recognition and collective bargaining. And, as the cost of living rapidly rose under wartime conditions, labor demanded further wage increases to maintain its purchasing power. With industry booming and union strength growing, the stage was set for further struggles between management and labor over their respective roles in an expanding economy. The year 1941 was to prove one of the most tumultuous in labor history.

In most instances, the new economic circumstances – full production, scarce labor, and rising profits – prompted unions and management to bargain collectively and to reach mutually acceptable agreements on wages, hours, and working conditions. The so-called Little Steel companies and the United Steelworkers of America (successor to the SWOC) finally came to terms, and none other than Henry Ford completely reversed his antiunion policies to sign a contract unreservedly recognizing the United Automobile Workers and even granting it a closed shop. But such progress in allaying

the causes of industrial strife was soon overshadowed by the outbreak of fresh disputes. There were still industries and employers that viewed unions as unwarranted intrusions on managerial rights and prerogatives.

Almost hysterical fear of the growing strength of the unions led a few companies not only to refuse new wage demands, but also to try in every possible way to clip labor's wings. This group refused further concessions toward union recognition, attacked the closed shop as undemocratic and un-American, and circumvented the legal requirements of collective bargaining wherever they could. They covered their antiunion activity in many instances with a mantle of patriotism by insisting that their objectives were merely to maintain uninterrupted industrial production.

The needs of national defense, indeed, tended to make the public impatient of labor's demands, and widespread internal squabbling in no way helped its cause. The angry recriminations of rival leaders, jurisdictional strikes, and the highly publicized exposure of a few instances of union racketeering and graft weakened public confidence in the responsibility of organized workers in the face of the mounting national emergency. And it was true that some of the new, insurgent unions were unable to maintain discipline among their thousands of freshly recruited members. The long bottled-up resentment toward employers and insistence upon wage increases and other concessions on the part of many workers made industrial peace an elusive goal.

The total number of labor disputes in 1941 topped that of any previous year, with the single exception of 1937. There were strikes in the automobile industry, in the shipyards, in transportation, in the building trades, in textiles, in steel, and in coal mining. Hardly an industry escaped work stoppages, which for a time seriously interfered with production. In all, there were 4,288 strikes involving more than 2 million workers – almost twice the number of disputes and four times the number of workers as in the previous year. Approximately 8.4 percent of the nation's employed industrial wage earners took part in these outbreaks, seeing the loss of 23 million worker-days.

The threat to the defense program posed by these work stoppages led to the creation, in March 1941, of the National Defense Mediation Board (NDMB). This was a tripartite body, representative of labor, management, and the public, with authority to seek the adjustment of disputes in defense industries through either mediation or voluntary arbitration. Its powers did not, however, include enforcement of its decisions, so while it was successful in restoring industrial peace in many instances, it took more drastic action on several notable occasions.



In Commemoration of Sidney Hillman
1887 - 1946
President, Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America
1914 - 1946

Figure 17.1 Union leaders such as Sidney Hillman, president of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America, leveraged worker unrest to achieve better labor policies in defense-related industries. Hillman served as a key adviser to President Roosevelt. (Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University)

A strike on the part of aviation workers at Inglewood, California, led to seizure of a North American Aviation plant by the War Department before a negotiated compromise could be effected, and the Navy Department moved in on a strike of shipyard workers at Kearny, New Jersey, after the Federal Shipbuilding and Dry Dock Company rejected a proposed settlement granting the union maintenance of membership (a provision that would ensure that members enrolled in the union would continue their dues-paying membership for the life of their contract). The climax both of labor disputes and of the troubles of the NDMB came in a coal strike that many people mistakenly thought seriously interrupted production and imperiled the whole defense program.

The major issue at stake for the UMW was the establishment of the union shop in the so-called “captive” coal mines operated by the steel industry. The NDMB had wavered on the validity of incorporating such a demand in union contracts and, when the mining dispute came before it for action in the fall of 1941, it refused to accept the union shop as a basis for a contract. Lewis consequently ignored the NDMB, and in the face of President Roosevelt's plea that as a loyal citizen he should come to the aid of his country, Lewis called a strike in the captive coal mines on October 27, which threatened to deprive the steel industry of coal, and thereby shut it down.

Lewis's aims were simple and reasonable, as Roosevelt knew. Only the mines operated by the steel companies refused to grant the UMW a union-shop contract, although more than 97 percent of the miners already belonged to the union. In fact, the captive-mine owners actually had little interest in defending the minuscule minority among their employees who were nonunion. Rather, their real aim was to preserve the open shop in the steel industry itself, knowing that if they conceded the union shop in the coal mines, they would lose bargaining leverage in the steel mills. For his part, Lewis wanted to win total union security immediately; he remembered how short-lived labor's gains had been when unions failed to win an iron-clad guarantee of union security during World War I. However reasonable Lewis's position might have been, in calling the strike he challenged the president directly. Roosevelt accepted the challenge.

FDR promptly went on the air once the strike had been called. He declared that the country had to have coal, and that national production could not be hampered “by the selfish obstruction of a small but dangerous minority of labor leaders.” Pundits suggested that the president was finally ready to accept the antistrike legislation already being proposed in Congress. In the meantime, Lewis had been negotiating with Myron C. Taylor of the United States Steel Corporation in an attempt to conclude an agreement whereby the union-shop issue would again be reviewed by the NDMB without obliging either party to accept its rulings. Lewis was confident that his demands would now have to be approved because of the country's urgent need for coal, and he called for a temporary truce while the NDMB again took the case under consideration.

It gave its decision on November 10 – nine to two against the union shop. Only the two CIO members dissented from a report that was upheld not only by the representatives of management and the public, but also by those of the AFL (who acted as much out of their own hostility to Lewis and the CIO as from any commitment to principle or cooperation with the government). Although 97 percent of the 53,000 workers in the captive coal mines were already members of the UMW, the NDMB ruled that a union shop was a matter for collective bargaining rather than government order, and that it was unjustifiable for the board to force 1,590 men to join a union against their will.

A principle was at stake, and a showdown between Lewis and the president

appeared to be unavoidable. Lewis refused to modify orders renewing the strike at the expiration of the truce, and the CIO, in spite of internal feuds, backed him up. Its representatives on the NDMB promptly resigned, and a resolution of the CIO convention then in session upheld Lewis's stand. For his part, Roosevelt declared that under no circumstances would the government order a union shop, insisted upon further negotiations between the miners and the steel companies, and, at the same time, made preparations for governmental seizure of the mines should the two sides fail to reach an agreement. Congress was currently debating amendments to the neutrality legislation, and, partly to assure support for his foreign program by congressmen who believed that he was dealing too leniently with labor, the president pledged that, regardless of what Lewis might do, coal would be mined – “the government proposes to see this thing through.”

A week of feverish negotiations ensued while the country clamored for a settlement, but neither the miners nor the steel companies would give in on the union shop. On November 17 the strike resumed. The workers in the captive mines laid down their tools, and soon sympathetic strikes in other areas swelled the total of idle men in the coal pits to some 250,000. The steel industry was hamstrung in the face of a national emergency. It was reported that Roosevelt was finally ready to act, with 50,000 troops ordered to take over the mines, and the situation grew hourly more tense. Then suddenly and unexpectedly, on November 22, Lewis called off the strike. He had accepted a proposal from the president for binding arbitration of the union shop issue by a three-man tribunal – Lewis, Benjamin Fairless, of the United States Steel Corporation, and, as the impartial member, John R. Steelman of the United States Conciliation Service.

Had Lewis capitulated? The secret of his abrupt move was the position of the third man on the tribunal. Steelman was a friend of labor, and known as sympathetic toward the union shop. The miners' chieftain felt certain of what Steelman's decision would be – and events were to prove him wholly justified. Roosevelt expected the same result. From the start of the controversy, the president had urged the captive-mine operators to grant the union shop voluntarily. All he had ever wanted to do was avoid direct presidential responsibility for ordering nonunion miners to sign up with the UMW. Roosevelt had probably expected the NDMB to rule in favor of union security, and was disappointed when it had not done so. The special arbitrational tribunal thus served Roosevelt's purposes. It had the guise of impartiality, included Lewis as well as an executive of the steel industry, and ruled in favor of the union shop. Lewis was mollified, coal would be mined, and the president could evade direct responsibility for the results.

Lewis's victory benefited his union, but it also intensified rising antiunion feeling in Congress and within the business community. Newspaper editorials and the statements of national leaders and public opinion polls all showed a pronounced stiffening of attitudes toward labor. In and out of Congress, labor's opponents demanded new legislation to restrict the power of the unions and safeguard the public

interest against further interruptions to industrial production. The coal strike, and the spectacle of Lewis arrogantly defying the NDMB and the authority of the president, merely brought matters to a head. Antilabor laws of varying severity had already been passed in 22 states, and some 30 bills to curb unions were introduced in Congress.

Against the background of uncertainty over the coal strike and other labor disturbances, including a narrowly averted railroad strike, the House approved one of these antilabor measures on December 3, 1941, by a vote of 252 to 136. It would have banned all strikes in defense industries involving the closed shop or growing out of jurisdictional disputes, and any others unless approved by a majority of workers in government-supervised elections after a thirty-day cooling off period. Green denounced the bill as “an instrument of oppression”; Murray declared that “nothing more subversive to American democracy has ever been prepared.” It appeared probable that its terms would be modified by the Senate, and the president was believed to favor a milder measure, but there was little doubt that some law would be speedily enacted to meet what was generally being called “the national menace” of continued strikes paralyzing defense.

As the tide beat against the labor movement, even the friends of labor, fearing that the upsurge against unions might lead to curtailment of basic rights guaranteed by the Wagner Act, called for greater moderation on the part of both AFL and CIO leaders. “The union movement in this country is no longer an infant requiring protection,” the *New Republic* editorialized. “It has grown up physically, and if it is to conduct itself like a responsible adult it must be controlled by the same social discipline which governs the rest of the community.”

How far the pendulum might have swung against labor can hardly be known. For new events suddenly interposed with dramatic force. On December 7 – the same day that the arbitrational tribunal announced that Lewis had been granted a union shop in the captive coal mines and while the House antistrike bill was pending in the Senate – Japan attacked Pearl Harbor. The United States was at war.

WORLD WAR II

World War II proved as fraught with opportunities and perils for workers and organized labor as had World War I. But because World War II lasted more than twice as long for Americans, was more global in scope, and entailed a mobilization that saw a total domestic production effort, World War II had a more lasting and transformative effect on American workers and their labor movement writ large. It did so in three important ways.

First, it cured the economic miseries of the Great Depression. The Allied military machine needed all that the American economy could produce. Where for a full decade workers had fruitlessly chased jobs, employers now wooed workers. From 1942 through 1945 the highest rate of full employment in American history prevailed. Workers had steady jobs, job security, and rising real incomes.

Second, the war drew increasing numbers of men and women from the secondary to the primary labor market. The millions of able-bodied men conscripted into the armed forces during the epic conflict had to be replaced in the civilian labor force. Three sources provided new workers: white women, African Americans, and Mexicans. Women worked for wages in unprecedented numbers. Despite wartime propaganda and the myths associated with gender-typing, which suggested that wartime women workers were former full-time housewives who, for patriotic reasons, volunteered for factory labor only for the duration of the national emergency, the reality was otherwise. While many former “housewives” did go to work in order to help win the war, not simply to increase family earnings, the great majority of women worked because they had to do so. Millions of these women were not deserting the tidy home, but the low-wage job ghetto. Now a great many American women took higher-paying jobs in the once all-male preserves of steel mills, auto plants (converted during wartime to tank and airplane factories), shipyards, railroads, and machine shops. By the peak of the war, women composed 36 percent of the nation's full-time labor force.



Figure 18.1 Women at work on an assembly line, Douglas Aircraft bomber plant, Long Beach, California. (National Archives and Records Administration)

African Americans provided the other major source of wartime labor, with black women benefiting even more dramatically than white women. During the war blacks largely left low-wage domestic, agricultural, and other menial jobs for more skilled and better-paying defense work. The Great Migration, which had carried about 350,000 southern blacks northward between 1915 and 1918, repeated itself on a far grander scale between 1941 and 1945. This time, between 3 million and 5 million people left the South for the promised land of the North and West.

In 1942, the federal government began to address a growing shortage of farm workers in California and the Southwest by inaugurating the *bracero* program, which imported Mexican “guest” workers on an as-needed basis. Implemented to deal with a war-induced labor shortage, the *bracero* program would endure long into the postwar era. Despite growers' repeated use of *braceros* to undercut wages and weaken union efforts by US farm workers in the 1950s, the program would not be fully eliminated until 1964.

These massive transformations in the labor force did not occur smoothly and easily. Generally, white women had easier entry into better jobs than did black men or black women. But even when it came to white women, male workers, their unions, and their employers insisted that, at best, they should replace men only for the duration of the war, after which they should return to the tending of homes and rearing of children. African Americans of both genders met even more resistance. Old-line, all-white craft unions of the American Federation of Labor (AFL) denied membership to blacks and still tried to keep them out of skilled work. Even in the more tolerant unions of the

Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) and in nonunion factories, white workers threatened to strike if blacks received more skilled jobs. In addition, many employers retained old prejudices, viewing all blacks as fit only for janitorial or other menial labor.

Resistance by employers, AFL unions, and many white CIO members to the employment of blacks as well as Mexican Americans in better-paying and more skilled jobs led A. Philip Randolph and other nonwhite leaders to organize a movement that pressured the federal government to enforce fair hiring practices. In a bold move, Randolph and allies from other black and Mexican American civil rights organizations threatened to hold a mass march on Washington to demand access to jobs. The March on Washington Movement, as it came to be called, worried President Roosevelt, who fretted that the spectacle of such a protest might disrupt national cohesion in the midst of global war, perhaps even lead its enemies to point out America's own racist practices. To assuage the protestors and stop the threatened march on Washington, the president issued Executive Order 8802 establishing a Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC). The FEPC proceeded to hold hearings in all areas of the nation in which nonwhite workers complained of employment discrimination. The committee met persistent opposition from employers, some unions, and especially Southern Democratic members of Congress who remained committed to segregation in society and the economy. Despite such resistance, which in practice limited the ability of the FEPC to promote non-discriminatory hiring practices, the FEPC nevertheless made real progress in bettering employment opportunities for African American and Mexican American workers.

Third, America's involvement in World War II pulled the CIO and mass-production unionism out of the doldrums. In dire organizational trouble on the eve of war, the CIO by the end of 1941 had finally unionized workers at the Ford Motor Company, "Little Steel," and the nation's major meatpacking firms. It had also stabilized shaky affiliates, which had previously won recognition and contracts. The CIO's membership gains became even greater as war production intensified. Corporations blessed with cost-plus contracts could simply pass on the expenses of union contracts to purchasers and preferred not to imperil production and profits by antagonizing their workers. Rarely had union organizers operated in such easy circumstances.

Two factors influenced wartime transformations in the labor force and rendered industrial relations relatively tranquil. Never before had a war united the American people so firmly behind the government. Unlike in World War I, this time few if any workers or union leaders saw the conflict as an imperialist struggle in which capitalists sought to shed workers' blood. Instead, they tended to view World War II precisely as it was billed by the federal government: a crusade to save democracy from fascism – for workers as well as bosses. In addition, during World War II, the federal government was much more prepared to intervene regularly in labor–management relations. To a degree never before equaled, Washington officials and

boards managed the national economy, and in no sector more fully and directly than in the setting of labor policy.

Because labor leaders were well aware of the role the federal government would assume in a wartime economy, they insisted on their right to full representation on the federal agencies created to deal with the crisis. President Roosevelt partly recognized the justice of such demands. In first setting up the Office of Production Management in 1941, he had appointed Sidney Hillman to serve as its codirector along with William S. Knudsen, a General Motors vice president. (Hillman's appointment legitimated the CIO, similar to how Gompers's services during World War I had legitimated the AFL.) The administration subsequently appointed labor representatives to the War Production Board, the Office of Civilian Defense, the Office of Price Administration, the Office of Economic Stabilization, and the War Manpower Commission. Yet giving labor leaders a role in helping to order the wartime economy was not necessarily enough to guard against the ever-present danger of strikes, which might curtail the vital production of essential military supplies.

To this end, President Roosevelt summoned a conference of labor and business leaders just ten days after the attack on Pearl Harbor to plan new measures for industrial cooperation. After prolonged discussion, the conferees agreed upon a three-point program: (i) no strikes or lockouts for the duration of hostilities; (ii) peaceful settlement of all industrial disputes; and, more concretely, (iii) the creation of a tripartite board with labor, management, and the public each represented by four members. This agency – the National War Labor Board – would be empowered to handle all labor controversies that might affect the war effort that otherwise fell short of settlement. In return for assurances that it would have a voice in determining such conditions and terms of employment as might be required by wartime necessity, labor agreed to lay down the strike weapon for the duration of the war.



Figure 18.2 American labor supports the war effort. Philip Murray (left) of the CIO and William Green (right) of the AFL. (Ohio Historical Society)

The immediate consequence of this agreement was a sharp decline in work stoppages throughout the country. In comparison with the 23 million worker-days lost in 1941, the total number for 1942 fell dramatically, to 4.18 million. But as the pressures and tensions of war mounted, this record could not be sustained. Labor leaders charged that workers' interests were being ignored in the controls that the government now exercised over wages and prices. William Green declared that it was on the understanding that collective bargaining would be sustained that labor had foregone the right to strike, and that the course that Washington was following could not be reconciled with its earlier pledges. John L. Lewis was far more belligerent and soon showed that he was ready to defy all governmental authority to protect the interests of the United Mine Workers. In such circumstances, strikes increased notably during 1943, with a total of 13.5 million worker-days lost; while the number of lost days declined somewhat the next year, they rose again as the war drew to an end in 1945.

Nevertheless, on the whole, labor continued to support the war effort conscientiously, and the great majority of unions sought to restrain strike activity. The work time lost to strikes actually averaged only about one tenth of 1 percent of the total working time in industry as a whole and was estimated to be the equivalent of no more than one day per worker for the four war years. Many of the strikes that did occur were unauthorized "wildcat" walkouts. Their grievances intensified by the strain of long hours and other hardships resulting from wartime conditions, workers took matters into their own hands. They laid down their tools or quit their jobs in frustrated protest, but once they had let off steam by asserting themselves they generally went back to

work without serious interruption to production. Longer disruptions were the exception rather than the rule.

As the war finally drew to an end, there was hardly a political or military leader who did not take occasion to pay glowing tribute to the role that labor had played. It was the determination of American workers to preserve their heritage for coming generations, President Roosevelt declared, that had made possible “the greatest production achievement in the world's history.”

The key to labor's wartime history was the National War Labor Board (NWLB), which officially came into being by Executive Order 9017 in January 1942. Its primary function was to take over all unsettled industrial disputes certified by the secretary of labor as likely to “interrupt work which contributes to the effective prosecution of the war.” Its decisions were to be binding in such cases on both management and labor, and since they were made on a tripartite basis, this in effect gave the NWLB's public representatives a determining voice on all issues on which labor and management could not agree.

A first and vital problem that the NWLB faced was the issue of union security, which had wrecked the old Defense Mediation Board. The newly constituted board met this problem successfully with the adoption of the principle of maintenance of membership. There would be no attempted enforcement of either a closed shop or a union shop in contract negotiations, but union members, or those who subsequently joined the union, would be required to keep up their membership for the duration of the contract. Should they fail to maintain good union standing, they were subject to dismissal from their employment. The labor members on the board accepted this compromise without qualification; those representing management acquiesced reluctantly. Once it had been agreed upon, however, the principle of maintenance of membership was consistently upheld throughout the war. It ultimately applied to some 3 million workers, or approximately 20 percent of those covered by collective-bargaining agreements.

The assurances embodied in this program for both union security and individual freedom of action contributed immensely to industrial peace and were greatly responsible for the low level of strikes during 1942. At the end of that year, labor's leaders could boast that the country's workers had maintained “the finest record of continuous, uninterrupted production ever achieved.” Addressing the AFL convention, Roosevelt stated that labor's cooperation spoke for itself – “it is splendid.”

However, the NWLB soon found itself facing an even more troublesome problem than union security. Rising prices, induced by the inevitable inflationary pressures of wartime, led the unions to demand wage increases at least commensurate with the rise in the cost of living; when they threatened to strike if necessary to enforce their claims, something had to be done – and quickly. The NWLB first sought to meet this issue on a union-by-union basis. But when the government, gravely concerned over the effects of a price–wage spiral on the national economy, adopted an overall

stabilization program, it was clear that a more consistent and comprehensive policy would have to be worked out. They needed to arrive at some sort of formula that would at once hold wages as a whole in line and yet allow such increases as were clearly justified by the recent rise in the cost of living.

The NWLB seized the opportunity to work out and apply such a formula when, in July 1942, the employees of the Little Steel companies demanded a wage increase of \$1 a day. After lengthy hearings, the NWLB decided that a rise in wages was in this case justified, but that it should be limited to an equivalent of the increase in living costs between January 1941 – a time of relative price stability – and May 1942, when the government had instituted its stabilization program. According to the reports of the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the cost-of-living index had risen some 15 points during this period, so any wage increase would have to be held to this same percentage over existing levels. The NWLB consequently awarded the workers at Little Steel plants a raise of 44 cents a day, rather than the \$1 they had originally demanded.

The Little Steel formula now became the basic yardstick for the settlement of all wartime wage disputes. The formula had been adopted, however, on the assumption that the new stabilization program had brought to an end “the tragic race between wages and prices,” and that a 15 percent wage increase was therefore fair and equitable. This soon proved to be a false assumption. Prices could not be held in line. The NWLB thus found itself trying to reconcile its formula with a further rise in living costs, which progressively exceeded the figures on which the formula was based.

Moreover, the NWLB's troubles were compounded when passage of the Economic Stabilization Act in October 1942, giving congressional sanction to the government's program, expanded its authority beyond the disputed cases that were its original concern. The NWLB was now obliged by government directive to restrict all wage increases, except where flagrantly substandard conditions existed, to the same 15 percent increase in straight-line hourly wages that had been granted in the steel industry. For the remainder of the war, the NWLB consequently had two distinct functions: settlement of disputed cases and supervision of voluntary wage agreements. In both classifications, the Little Steel formula remained fixed as the official limitation on all wage adjustments.

Organized labor promptly and vigorously protested against this broadening of the application of the Little Steel formula as an arbitrary and unwarranted interference with the process of collective bargaining, one that completely undermined the basis of labor's no-strike pledge. As consumer prices continued to rise, reaching an index figure of 124 by the spring of 1943, these protests became more vehement, and a feeling of angry resentment flared up among the rank and file of industrial workers. They believed that the government was forcing wage earners to bear the brunt of an inflationary price rise from which farmers and other producers were actually profiting. Compelled to take some action, the government chose to try to roll back prices rather than permit further wage increases. While a hold-the-line order issued by President

Roosevelt in April was to prove relatively successful in blocking any further increase in living costs, there was no price rollback. Labor's grievances mounted as the rise in living costs continued to exceed the allowable increase in wages under the Little Steel formula.

These were the circumstances that engendered strikes in 1943. For the most part, as has already been noted, these work stoppages were of brief duration and did not seriously impede essential wartime production. Moreover, the leaders of both the AFL and the CIO, in spite of continuing criticism of the government's wage policy, did everything they could to keep things under control. But quite a different situation developed in the coal industry. John L. Lewis bluntly stated that the NWLB had breached its contract with labor in establishing the Little Steel formula, and that he had no intention whatsoever of submitting to its authority so far as the miners were concerned. Lewis acted as he did because coal miners had suffered much more from the Little Steel formula than other workers, and because higher war production levels had increased greatly the number of mine fatalities and injuries. The miners were growing restive and rebellious by 1943, and Lewis preferred not to lose control of his followers. Thus, in blunt defiance of the federal government and an apoplectic press, Lewis led a series of strikes that provided the most dramatic chapter in labor's wartime history.

The expiration in April 1943 of the annual contract between the United Mine Workers (UMW) and the coal operators initiated this drawn-out controversy. Lewis demanded on behalf of the union a wage increase of \$2 a day and "portal-to-portal pay" for the time that the miners spent traveling underground. Lewis was, as usual, prepared to compromise a part of his original demands. However, when the NWLB, to which the dispute had been referred, treated the UMW's case disdainfully, Lewis removed himself from the hearings and contemptuously attacked the NWLB as "prejudiced" and "malignant." He said that he would not of course call a strike in wartime, but he blandly announced that going forward "the miners were unwilling to trespass upon the property of the coal operators in the absence of a contract."

The members of his union needed no further instructions. They began to quit work even before the final expiration of the old contract, and the country found itself faced with a crisis. Fully aware of the disastrous effects of a stoppage in coal production, Roosevelt gave immediate orders for the seizure of the coal mines and, on May 2, went on the air to appeal to the strikers to return to work.

Placing full responsibility for the breakdown in contract negotiations on the officials of the UMW, Roosevelt declared that every man who stopped mining coal was directly obstructing the war effort, gambling with the lives of American soldiers and sailors, and endangering the security of the entire nation. He expressed his sympathy for the miners, promising that any new agreement would be made retroactive, but insisted that production must continue pending further negotiations. "Tomorrow the Stars and Stripes will fly over the coal mines," the president concluded. "I hope every miner will

be at work under that flag.”

The workers returned to the mines, but they did so on the orders of the president of their union rather than the appeal of the president of the United States. Just twenty minutes before Roosevelt had gone on the air, Lewis had announced a fifteen-day truce (later extended to thirty days) to try to work out a new agreement with Secretary of the Interior Harold L. Ickes, under whose direction the mines were to be placed. Lewis made no concessions or promises of what might happen after the expiration of the truce. He stood firmly by his original demands.

The next six months were a hectic period, alternately punctuated by temporary truces and renewed work stoppages. At one point, the government returned the mines to private operation, but when contract negotiators still made no headway and the miners once again laid down their tools, the government moved in for a second time. Roosevelt now ordered Ickes to conclude a special wage agreement, subject to approval by the NLRB, which would be limited to the duration of the government's operation of the mines.

Throughout this period, Lewis held the reins in a steady yet forceful fashion. He insisted that a national emergency was no excuse for operators to exploit coal miners callously. He declared that the miners' right to higher wages was a matter of simple justice and plain equity. It was a case in which the union president and his rank and file were in total harmony. When Lewis suggested that miners work, they did so. When he suggested that they take off, miners stayed home or went fishing. Knowing full well that they never stayed out of the mines long enough to deplete coal reserves, the miners ignored President Roosevelt's appeals and the press's criticism of their actions. Battered by inflation, killed and maimed by coal mining, convinced of the justice of their goals, and certain in their patriotism – miners had sent more than their share of sons and brothers to war – the coal miners loyally followed Lewis.

Whipping up a mounting tide of national anger, the press criticized Roosevelt for failing somehow to get the coal mines back into steady production, but newspapers leveled their most vehement attacks against John L. Lewis. They charged him with want of patriotism for placing the interests of the miners above those of the country, assailed him for his arrogance, and castigated him in season and out for endangering national security. Even other labor leaders criticized Lewis. At the same time there was a measure of sympathy for the workers, and in some quarters their strike was even welcomed because it dramatized the government's failure to hold down prices. Nonetheless, the CIO's Executive Committee condemned Lewis for his supercilious attitude toward the NLRB and for what it described as “his personal and political vendetta against the President of the United States.”

The situation could not endure indefinitely. After the second seizure of the coal mines, Ickes and Lewis finally hammered out a compromise, one that went far toward meeting the fiery union leader's original demands. On the basis of some increase in the miners' working hours and the inclusion of portal-to-portal time, the new

agreement provided for an increase of \$1.50 per day in the prevailing wage rates. By such expedients it conformed at least nominally to the Little Steel formula, so the NLRB approved it, if reluctantly. Lewis ordered the miners back to work. He had forced the government's hand. If his victory was not quite as complete as he triumphantly claimed, his stubborn, intractable stand had served the miners well.

Lewis's victory put the rest of labor on the defensive. The coal strike had greatly aroused corporate and congressional conservatives. Fearful that other union leaders might follow Lewis's aggressive tactics, they began to seek new legislation to curb labor's power. Other work stoppages in the spring of 1943, which antiunion employers seized upon to illustrate labor's irresponsibility, strengthened this demand, but the coal dispute was the single most important factor in creating the popular mood.

A number of restrictive bills were introduced in Congress in response to the gathering pressure, but the one that acquired the strongest support was a measure jointly sponsored by two conservative Democrats, Representative Howard Smith of Virginia and Senator Tom L. Connally of Texas. In the first instance, it provided definite statutory authority for the NLRB, but it went on to incorporate a series of provisions that in tone and content were decidedly antilabor. The proposed bill empowered the president, whenever governmental mediation in a labor dispute proved unsuccessful, to take control of any plant or industry in which a halt in production threatened the war effort, and thereupon to enforce criminal penalties against any persons who instigated or promoted a strike. It did not place any ban on strikes in those industries in which the government had not felt compelled to intervene. In contradiction to what had heretofore been a complete no-strike policy, the Smith-Connally Bill in such cases sought merely to restrain possible work stoppages by providing for a thirty-day cooling-off period, during which time the National Labor Relations Board was to hold a strike vote among all employees concerned. Finally, among several other minor provisions, the bill sought to prohibit union contributions to political campaign funds.

In the heat of the excitement occasioned by the coal strikes, Congress approved the Smith-Connally Act by decisive majorities in both the Senate and the House. Labor was incensed. Its spokesmen declared that the bill ignored the widespread observance of the no-strike pledge through its criminal provisions and at the same time undermined this voluntary commitment by providing under general circumstances for a strike vote. The AFL's Executive Committee bitterly attacked the bill as "born of hatred and malice on the part of reactionary congressmen"; the CIO's president Philip Murray told his organization at their convention that the country was witnessing "the most vicious and continuous attack on labor's rights in the history of the nation."

Roosevelt vetoed the Smith-Connally Bill. Although he recognized the need to control strikes, he agreed with labor that the provision for a cooling-off period with strike votes ran wholly counter to the no-strike pledge. The proposed law, he stated emphatically, would be conducive to labor unrest rather than industrial peace. In the

temper of the times, Congress paid no attention whatsoever to his arguments and on June 25, 1943, overrode his veto. The *New York Times* described what was officially called the War Labor Disputes Act as “a hasty, ill-considered and confused measure.” Nonetheless, it remained on the statute books for the duration of the war.

Whatever the influence of the new legislation, which was hard to assess, strike activity followed an erratic course in succeeding years. As we have noted, it was to decline in 1944 and then, in spite of the new law, to increase in 1945. The most disturbing situation, apart from that in the coal industry, developed in an area that fell outside the jurisdiction of the Smith-Connally Act or other wartime legislation. This was a threatened strike on the part of railway workers, subject to controls provided in the amended Railway Labor Act of 1926, which created a serious crisis in the fall of 1943.

Following a breakdown of contract negotiations between the unions and the railway operators, Roosevelt appointed an emergency board under the Railway Labor Act's provisions to settle the dispute. Its award, however, went beyond the limits on wage increases incorporated in the Little Steel formula, and the Office of Economic Stabilization consequently disapproved it. The railway unions thereupon prepared to strike.

Faced with an emergency much more dangerous to the war effort than the strikes in the coal fields, Roosevelt promptly intervened in this confused situation and proposed that he should act as an arbitrator between the opposing positions assumed by the emergency board and the Office of Economic Stabilization, with his decision binding on all parties concerned. Although the railroads and most of the railway unions accepted this plan, the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen and Enginemen, the Order of Railway Conductors and Brakemen, and the Switchmen's Union of North America refused to withdraw their strike orders. The president gave instructions for immediate seizure of the railroads. “The war cannot wait and I cannot wait,” he declared. “American lives and victory are at stake.”

Before the strike orders actually went into effect or any direct confrontation had developed between the government and the railway workers, announcement was made of the presidential decision in the conflict between the emergency board and the Office of Economic Stabilization. It upheld the former. In spite of an apparent violation of the Little Steel formula in the wage award, President Roosevelt sustained it on the grounds that wage increases for the railway workers were made in lieu of overtime and vacation pay to which they would otherwise have been entitled. In the light of a settlement going so far toward meeting their original demands, the unions, which had refused presidential arbitration, now reversed their position and withdrew their strike orders. There had been no interruption of service. On January 18, 1944, the government thereupon restored the railways to private operation after only a brief period of nominal control, and no further troubles developed on the transportation front during the remainder of the war.

The NWLB and Labor Politics

The role of the NWLB had been generally ignored or bypassed in the settlement of the labor disputes in both the coal industry and the railroads. Its authority under these circumstances appeared to have been significantly diminished. Nevertheless, it was still charged with settling other disputes and approving wage agreements reached through collective bargaining. But with every passing month it was caught more than ever in the tightening squeeze between its legal responsibilities under the Little Steel formula and the inequity of limiting wage advances to a percentage that had been far outrun by further increases in the cost of living. Moreover, the approval of wage adjustments for coal miners and railroad workers that actually went beyond the Little Steel formula, however disguised as being made in compensation for travel time or in lieu of vacation pay, made the NWLB's position all the more difficult. It somehow had to devise an escape from an impossible dilemma if it were to exercise any sort of influence in maintaining industrial peace.

The NWLB found the answer by authorizing, on an ever-broadening scale, new fringe benefits that substantially supplemented workers' take-home pay without violating any limitation on increases in straight-time hourly rates. In the collective-bargaining agreements coming under its review, it approved provision for holidays and vacations with pay, allowances for travel time and lunch periods, new adjustments for shift differentials, and the establishment of various systems of incentive and bonus payments. It also in effect encouraged insurance and hospitalization benefits for employees by ruling that the establishment of funds for such purposes through collective bargaining was not subject to its supervision or control. As these fringe benefits became more and more widely granted by employers, wage earners were at least partially compensated for the restrictions on wage increases. Labor unrest was substantially allayed.

The fringe benefits that had originated as an alternative to wartime wage increases that would breach the Little Steel formula developed after the war into the foundation of a private, voluntary, social or welfare state for union members who enjoyed such benefits. By and large, such benefits had been won by the CIO unions in mass production, which bargained with many of the nation's largest and most profitable corporations. Other major corporations that had successfully avoided unionization during the 1930s and the war years also conferred comparable benefits on their employees as a strategy of union avoidance. Not to be outdone by their union competitors, AFL affiliates developed their own form of social and economic security for members. Unlike the benefit programs implemented in mass-production enterprises, which were administered by employers or jointly with unions, AFL affiliates developed programs in which employers provided the funds and the union administered the benefits.

Altogether, during the war years, the NWLB imposed settlements in 17,650 dispute cases affecting over 12 million employees, and in 95 percent of these cases

successfully averted any further threat to production. It also approved 415,000 voluntary wage agreements, which involved about 20 million workers. This was a gigantic and time-consuming task, for which there was no parallel in all the history of labor relations, but on the whole the NLRB operated efficiently.

Both management and labor repeatedly criticized the NLRB's policies. Industry complained that it did not uphold the Little Steel formula as rigidly as it should have, and through approving fringe benefits had in effect granted wholly unjustified wage increases. From the opposite tack, labor insisted that the cost of living index, on which the Little Steel formula was based, was both inaccurate and unfair, and that the NLRB's interpretation of the formula had become "a thumb-screw with which to torment the working people of America and their families."

Despite such criticism, the great majority of the NLRB's awards were accepted voluntarily. It had the authority, should a decision in a war industry be disputed, to recommend to the president seizure of the affected plants and the consequent application of direct sanctions to compel compliance with its orders. This proved necessary on only 50 occasions. The president took action 26 times when unions would not cooperate, 23 times when management proved recalcitrant, and once when neither the union nor management would agree to the NLRB's decision.

The most dramatic instance of defiance was the refusal of the Montgomery Ward Company to accept the NLRB's jurisdiction on the ground that the mail-order business did not directly affect the war effort. President Roosevelt promptly ordered the seizure of the company's plants. Before the issue was finally settled, the country was treated to the engaging spectacle of Montgomery Ward's violently antilabor president, Sewell Avery, being carried bodily from his office by two stalwart members of the US Army detachment sent to take over company property.

The full record of the NLRB, for all its difficulties and for all the criticism it aroused, constituted a real success for the unprecedented experiment in tripartite labor arbitration. It decisively helped to maintain labor peace and played an important role in sustaining the government's wage and price stabilization program. Through its sponsorship of maintenance-of-membership agreements to protect union security and its approval of fringe benefits as part of the collective-bargaining process, it also safeguarded labor's basic rights and significantly shaped both the size and orientation of the union movement that would emerge from the war and the labor-relations environment in which it would operate.

As a result, between 1940 and 1945 total union membership rose from just under 9 million to almost 15 million, or from 27 percent to 36 percent of nonagricultural employees. Equally important, the CIO doubled its membership during the war years, although it remained only two-thirds as large as the AFL. During the war, then, labor amassed the base that would make it an influential economic, social, and political force in the postwar world.

Organized labor remained active on the political as well as on the economic front during the war years. The expanding role of governmental agencies and the passage of the Smith-Connally Act drove home with compelling force the indubitable fact that union interests were greatly affected by the measure of sympathy and support that labor could command in Washington. As the presidential campaign of 1944 approached, union leaders launched a determined drive to support President Roosevelt and the election of congressional candidates who might be counted upon to defend the labor cause. While the AFL maintained its traditional nonpartisanship and did not officially endorse the Democratic Party, most of its member unions worked actively for Roosevelt's reelection. Without any such restraining legacy, the CIO not only endorsed a fourth term for Roosevelt by a resolution of its Executive Committee but also formed the nationwide Political Action Committee (PAC) with the avowed purpose of getting out the labor vote in his support.

Under the energetic leadership of Sidney Hillman, the PAC laid plans for a national door-knocking campaign to educate workers in their political responsibilities, publicize the labor records of members of Congress, and encourage voter registration. It also sought hearings at both major parties' conventions, as indeed labor groups had done ever since the days of Gompers, and used all its influence in favor of pro-labor planks in their platforms. Its influence was greatest with the Democrats, and the PAC was falsely reputed to have played an important role in the selection of Roosevelt's running mate, Senator Harry S. Truman of Missouri. While unable to secure the nomination of Henry Wallace, its first choice for the vice-presidential candidacy, the PAC allegedly blocked that of James F. Byrnes of South Carolina, opening the way for Truman. Hillman was the key labor figure in this behind-the-scenes political maneuvering, and his supposed ascendancy was highly dramatized by the published story – denied by all concerned but nonetheless given nationwide publicity – that, in the vice-presidential struggle, Roosevelt had ordered his aides to “clear everything with Sidney.” Actually, Roosevelt and his aides astutely managed the convention and got precisely what they wanted.

During the campaign itself, the PAC not only carried through vigorously its door-to-door canvassing to get out the vote but also published and distributed a great mass of pro-labor literature – millions of copies of pamphlets, leaflets, and fliers. Declaring that the first task facing the nation was complete victory in the war, these pamphlets further outlined a postwar domestic policy for full employment, fair wages, adequate housing, social security, and further protection of the interests of workers, farmers, and veterans. To attain these objectives, labor's campaign literature constantly reiterated, it was essential to elect a president and a Congress fully committed to progressive ideals. The magazine *Time* wryly commented: “Far and wide the slickest political propaganda produced in the US in a generation.”

Such aggressive tactics created great alarm in conservative and antilabor circles. Its opponents condemned the PAC as radical, un-American, and dominated by communists. The president of the Union Pacific Railroad solemnly warned that it was

“a pernicious innovation that has literally snaked its way into American politics,” and Senator John W. Bricker, Republican of Ohio, declared that the PAC was seeking “to dominate our government with radical and communistic schemes.” Sidney Hillman, who had fought communists in his own union, called the smear campaign “lies on the top of lies.”

In cooperation with other pro-labor groups, the PAC undoubtedly helped to swell the majority that once again swept Roosevelt into office. Every survey indicated that labor was probably more united behind a single presidential candidate than ever before. A questionnaire sent to 140 union newspapers indicated that only one of them had supported the Republican candidate, Thomas E. Dewey of New York, and even more revealing, only eleven of them had upheld the AFL's official policy of neutrality.

Wartime Racial Conflict

If wartime strikes somewhat damaged the image and the reality of national unity that prevailed during the war years, far more threatening to such unity were the eruptions of racial conflict that reached a peak in 1943. Blacks were not the only southerners who moved north and west to obtain higher-paying jobs and an improved standard of living. Even more poor white southerners followed the same paths, finding jobs in war production industries. With mass Southern working-class migration came many of the racial resentments and conflicts that marked Southern society. Although the North and West lacked the legal (*de jure*) segregation that blemished the South, those regions long practiced forms of informal (*de facto*) segregation that separated the races in housing, schools, places of worship, and cultural institutions. The realities of war-induced population movements exacerbated racial relations in the North and West. The economic contraction caused by the Great Depression followed by the necessities of war that led to investment primarily in military-related goods production meant that the rapidly increasing populations in war production centers (Detroit, Pittsburgh-Youngstown, Cleveland, Los Angeles, Oakland, and other industrial cities) competed for scarce housing and recreational space. The federal government attempted to build additional temporary wartime housing for defense workers and their dependents but could never build enough to satisfy demand. Nor could the federal government and states and municipalities provide enough recreational facilities to meet the needs of swelling populations. In northern cities where informal modes of segregation had created separate housing and recreational markets, whites and blacks now competed intensively for space. With steady wartime jobs and higher paychecks, white and black workers sought scarce, decent housing as well as places to spend their hard-earned cash. Such competition often raised tensions and even overt conflict between white and black residents. In cities with police forces that were nearly all white, blacks found themselves all too frequently victims of abuse by officers of the law, often charged with disorderly conduct or resisting arrest. Black youths deprived of recreational opportunities and with a lot of time on their hands

used the public streets as their playgrounds, only to be treated as juvenile delinquents should their play grow “unruly.”

In no city did these racial tensions and conflicts emerge as clearly as in Detroit, the automobile production capital of the nation which had become the wartime producer of tanks, armored vehicles, and airplanes. No city drew larger numbers of white and black migrant southerners in the first half of the twentieth century, all of whom competed for housing and recreational spaces with the longer established population. And in no city did racial conflicts over job opportunities, housing, and recreational space grow more embittered. A spate of “hate strikes” erupted in Detroit during the war, as white workers spontaneously walked off their jobs when blacks entered their workplaces. In the summer of 1943 a series of conflicts between white and black youths over Detroit's primary public space for hot-weather recreation, a municipal park on Belle Isle in the Detroit River, spiraled into one of the worst “race riots” in US history. As was the case with similar “riots” in East St. Louis in 1917 and Chicago in 1919, the reality of the events that unfolded as a result of the conflict at Belle Isle saw white mobs wreak havoc on black neighborhoods and their residents. Thirty-four people died in the riot, a conflagration so violent and costly that it forced President Roosevelt, in the midst of a crucial year in a global war, to dispatch regular army troops to Detroit to restore law and order.

On the West Coast, wartime racial tensions took a somewhat different form. There, too, conflicts occurred between whites and blacks over housing, as well as at work and between black residents and an overwhelmingly white police force. But in southern California and its major metropolis, Los Angeles, Mexican Americans and Mexicans – the latter recruited to meet labor scarcity in the fields and other less stable, poorly paid occupations – formed the largest racial minority. In Los Angeles, Mexican American male youths had adopted a style of clothing that had originated elsewhere among African Americans. Wearing longer than conventional suit jackets with wide, padded shoulders and broad lapels over billowing trousers tightly pegged at the cuffs (so-called “zoot suits”) and set off by long gold key or watch chains that their wearers ostentatiously twirled on public street corners, the young men seemed to be challenging wartime demands for uniformity. The so-called zoot suiters apparently upset more conventionally attired Angelenos, none more so than the region's numerous sailors, all dressed uniformly in the same military attire, and the city's police officers, also garbed in uniform. Suddenly in the summer of 1943, whatever the actual cause, sailors began to attack and beat every zoot suit-wearing Mexican American they came upon. As sailors pummeled their victims, Los Angeles police largely stood by or even participated in doling out physical punishment to the youths. If not quite as violent and as costly as the Detroit riot of 1943 and not requiring military intervention, the “zoot suit riots” revealed yet another flaw in the façade of wartime national unity.

Such eruptions of racial conflict in the midst of war signaled the persistence of racism, but they did not reverse the gains won by nonwhite workers. A decade

earlier, in response to the Great Depression's mass unemployment, the parents and older siblings of the zoot suiters had been summarily deported to Mexico, regardless of whether they held US citizenship or not. Before the outbreak of World War II, black workers who had moved north and west dwelled in a segregated society that still tolerated lynchings, denied them the vote, denied their children a proper public education, and separated the races so thoroughly that blacks had virtually no access to common public space. Now, in the centers of wartime production into which they had moved, blacks could vote and at least demand equal access to public education and public space, even if they could not always obtain it.

The Postwar Strike Wave, 1945 and 1946

As the war finally drew to an end in August 1945, the fundamental problem facing the United States was the readjustment of the national economy to the needs of peace without allowing the unemployment rate to spike (and thereby create a depression) or permitting inflation to set off a chain reaction of rising prices and rising wages that might bring about an equally dangerous cycle of boom and bust. Organized labor was convinced that a breakdown in the economy could be avoided only if the government took a strong position in support of full employment and further wage increases in order to sustain national purchasing power and create a vibrant and expanding market for industrial goods. Labor prepared to fight for such a program in the interests of both wage earners and the country as a whole. Underlying all such economic considerations, moreover, was a further issue. After the end of World War I, labor had seen the gains made during the period of hostilities gradually whittled away by the aggressive counterattack of industry in breaking the turbulent strikes of 1919. As the guns fell silent in Europe and the Pacific a quarter-century later, labor determined that there should be no such recurrence of this setback to union security. This time around, labor would militantly defend its rights.

This resolve was strengthened by the immediate consequences of peace. As industry closed its factories in the latter half of 1945 to retool for normal production, employers began widespread layoffs and even workers holding their jobs found their take-home pay reduced with the disappearance of wartime overtime and a return to the forty-hour week. Moreover, prices once again began to rise, and the limited wage adjustments allowed by the still-functioning NWLB were completely inadequate to meet higher living costs. But in answer to union demands for an increase in wages, industry retorted that labor was treating "the economic pool as a grab-bag" and refused any concessions. The lines of battle were being drawn.

President Truman, who had taken office upon the death of President Roosevelt in April 1945, hoped that the issues at stake could be resolved and the reconversion program accelerated by a return to the normal processes of collective bargaining. He was prepared to relax many of the wartime controls over the economy and to transfer the functions of the NWLB to a new tripartite National Wage Stabilization Board.

Moreover, he stated his conviction that unions were entitled to safeguards that would counteract their feeling of insecurity in the postwar era, and that industry could afford reasonable pay concessions without having to raise prices on manufactured goods. "Wage increases are imperative," he said on October 20, 1945, "to cushion the shock to our workers, to sustain adequate purchasing power and to raise national income.... Fortunately there is room in the existing price structure for business as a whole to grant increases in rates."

The country's industrial leaders promptly attacked this statement as an indication that the new administration intended to continue the New Deal's pro-labor stance. In the Senate, Robert A. Taft, Republican of Ohio, declared that President Truman had surrendered to the CIO. Whatever the political implications of Truman's stand, there could be no denying that he had accepted labor's main contentions. His administration appeared ready to act on the premise that the national government had a direct responsibility to try to promote the well-being of millions of industrial workers. But Truman was also emphasizing the vital importance of maintaining national purchasing power, as Roosevelt had before him, for the benefit of the entire country.

The validity of his thesis that wages could be raised without compensating price increases for industry was lent support by governmental reports that showed that corporate profits during the war period had been two-and-a-half times the prewar average and were on their way to the highest levels in history. Business economists, however, flatly denied the accuracy of the surveys. They insisted that higher wages would mean added costs, which could not possibly be absorbed by industry within the existing price structure.

In these circumstances, it soon became apparent that collective bargaining could not be relied upon to settle the mounting number of industrial disputes. Neither management nor labor showed any disposition to work out their problems in a conciliatory spirit. The power struggle underlying the controversy over wages and prices threatened the whole reconversion program. As petitions for strike votes submitted to the National Labor Relations Board under the terms of the Smith-Connally Act steadily rose (the pending total was 800 in October 1945), President Truman, as had President Wilson in similar circumstances back in 1919, turned to a labor-management conference in the hope of bringing the two sides together.

This conference met in Washington on November 5, 1945, to try to formulate "a broad and permanent foundation for industrial peace and progress." The representatives of labor and management duly met, conferred, and then adjourned – without making progress. They accepted the validity of collective bargaining, which was more than labor and management had been able to do in 1919, but they could not agree on any procedures that might break the impasse in current negotiations. The failure of the conference gave new impetus to the rising tide of strikes throughout the country. Even as the discouraged labor and management representatives were packing their bags to leave Washington, it came into full flood.

Machinists and shipyard workers in San Francisco went on strike; building service operators and longshoremen in New York broke off their contract negotiations; truck drivers in the Midwest quit their jobs; in other parts of the country, oil refinery workers, loggers, and glass workers walked out. Picket lines in city after city and strikers carrying placards demanding union security and take-home pay the equivalent of wartime wages brought home vividly to the public the extent and gravity of industrial unrest. By the end of 1945, the strikes began to assume even greater proportions as the major CIO unions launched an all-out effort in the mass-production industries. Some 200,000 employees of General Motors struck in November; two months later, 300,000 meatpackers and 180,000 electrical workers quit their jobs; then, with even more devastating impact on the economy, 750,000 steel workers walked out. At the beginning of the new year there was a staggering total of almost 2 million industrial workers simultaneously on strike.

There was little violence. Instead of a slugging match, a grim endurance contest between the forces of labor and industry ensued. Still, newspaper headlines from coast to coast underscored the mounting gravity of the crisis, and a clamor rose for decisive action to restore industrial peace. For a time steel held the spotlight, the halt in steel production causing the layoff of thousands of workers in other types of plants as one after another felt the harsh effects of spreading economic paralysis.

But of all the immediate postwar strikes, the most revealing and significant was the conflict between the United Automobile Workers (UAW) and General Motors. In this instance, the strike leader, Walter Reuther, the most daring and ambitious among a new generation of labor leaders, made an innovative and imaginative proposal. He insisted that General Motors could increase wages without raising prices and that corporations should not earn excessive profits at the expense of workers and consumers. Reuther called on General Motors to open its financial records to union economists in order to demonstrate the relationship among wages, prices, and profits. The company's high profits, Reuther asserted, enabled it to increase wages while holding prices stable; in fact, the labor leader suggested that General Motors could probably reduce car prices and still earn substantial profits. The UAW thus identified itself as the advocate of the public's interest in stable prices and mass consumer purchasing power.

In response, General Motors maintained that the relationship among wages, prices, and profits fell totally within the prerogatives of management. It refused to open its books to the union and insisted that the rights of property owners to use their assets could not be infringed. To open internal corporate financial records to union or public scrutiny, General Motors executives alleged, would be tantamount to eliminating the basic principles of "free enterprise" capitalism.

These matters stood for more than three months as the union and the company proved unable to reach agreement through voluntary collective bargaining. General Motors, moreover, adamantly opposed bringing the dispute before a presidential fact-

finding board. But it must be noted that General Motors in 1945/46, unlike most corporations in 1919/20, made no effort to operate its struck plants. Nor did it seek to smash the union with which it was locked in combat.

The obduracy of the parties to the General Motors conflict and the rapid spread of strikes to other vital sectors of the economy confronted President Truman with the complete collapse of a postwar labor policy predicated on the resumption of peaceful collective bargaining. While Truman still hoped to keep governmental interference at a minimum, he nonetheless realized that he had to act to restore labor peace and safeguard his economic stabilization program. What he now proposed was a policy providing for a thirty-day cooling-off period before any strike could take place and, in each instance, the submission of the issues in dispute to a presidential fact-finding board. This board would seek to resolve the controversy before it through a formula that would permit wage increases commensurate with the rise in the cost of living and yet hold the line against further inflation.

Neither labor nor management welcomed this plan, but Truman proceeded to set up his fact-finding boards on his own initiative. The board established to investigate the dispute between the United Steelworkers and the steel companies handed down a ruling that became the basis for the settlement of most postwar strikes. Estimating that there had been a 33 percent increase in living costs since 1941, it provided a comparable wage increase for steelworkers, with price relief for companies in need of increased earnings. In plain terms, the award meant an 18.5 cent rise in basic hourly wage rates, and a \$5 per ton advance in the price of steel. From steel the terms of the award spread rapidly to the electrical machinery, meatpacking, and oil-refining industries. In the end, even the UAW accepted the terms of the postwar strike settlement, finally calling off the General Motors strike after a battle of more than 100 days. By mid-March 1946, the postwar strike wave, the most massive in the history of the United States, had almost ended.

But even as the major strikes in the other sectors of the economy were reaching settlement, a new conflict developed in the coal industry. John L. Lewis could hardly be expected to stand aside as the CIO unions made such substantial gains. He not only demanded further wage increases for miners but also the establishment of a general welfare fund to which the operators would contribute 7 cents for each ton of coal mined. When the operators balked, Lewis promptly broke off further negotiations. "Good day, gentlemen," he was reported as saying. "We trust that time, as it shrinks your purse, may modify your niggardly and antisocial purposes." On April 1, 1946, some 400,000 miners were once again "on vacation" in the small, drab coal towns of Pennsylvania and West Virginia, Kentucky and Alabama, Illinois and Iowa.

The coal strike continued intermittently for the rest of the year, with Lewis in customary fashion defying the operators, the government, and the public. Once again government took over the mines under the terms of what Lewis called "the infamous Smith-Connally statute," but soon after a highly favorable agreement had been

reached with Secretary of the Interior Julius A. Krug, Lewis declared its provisions inadequate. When Krug refused to consider their proposed revisions to the agreement, the strike resumed.

In these circumstances the government applied for a federal injunction to restrain all strike activity. Judge T. Alan Goldsborough of the federal district court in Washington, characterizing the strike as “an evil, demoniac, monstrous thing,” granted the government's request. Lewis refused to acquiesce in what he called “the ugly recrudescence of government by injunction” and ignored the court's orders. He was thereupon cited for contempt and, after a formal trial, found guilty. The UMW was fined \$3.5 million and Lewis himself \$10,000.

The case was carried up to the Supreme Court, which, in a five-to-four decision, sustained Judge Goldsborough on the ground that, in spite of the provisions of the Norris-La Guardia Act, the government could indeed obtain an injunction when a strike threatened national welfare and security. Lewis had for once suffered a sharp reverse. He agreed to call off the strike, the Supreme Court reduced the fine against the UMW to \$700,000, and the miners returned to their jobs. Nevertheless, the union's power had by no means been broken. When the mines were returned to private operation on the expiration of the Smith-Connally Act in June 1947, Lewis succeeded in winning a new contract that met virtually all his demands both in respect to wages and contributions to the welfare fund.

A further major strike was narrowly averted in May 1946 following a breakdown in wage negotiations between management and workers on the nation's railways. The elaborate machinery of the Railway Labor Act failed to bring about a settlement, and the government once again had recourse to a special emergency board. It finally hammered out a settlement acceptable to the carriers and most of the unions, but the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen and the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers – 300,000 strong – refused to go along and sent out strike orders.

In this new emergency, President Truman promptly seized the railroads, and, when the trainmen and engineers began to quit work, Truman went on the air on May 24 to deliver an uncompromising ultimatum. Unless all employees returned to their jobs the next day, the government would operate the railroads and provide the protection of the country's armed forces “to every man who heeds the call of his country in this hour of need.” When there was no move to call off the strike on the expiration of the deadline, he went before Congress and, at a tense and expectant session, asked specific authority not only to apply for an injunction, but for further powers to deprive the strikers of their seniority rights and to draft them into the armed forces should they continue on their course.

As the President reached the dramatic climax in this speech, he was suddenly interrupted. A clerk handed him a message, and, in the hushed silence, he quietly announced: “Word has just been received that the rail strike has been settled on the terms proposed by the President.” Almost hysterical cheers greeted this

announcement, but when they finally died down, Truman deliberately went on with his prepared text. The legislation he sought was still necessary, he stated, in order fully to resolve the crisis.

The House promptly responded to the president's appeal, but with the strike now over, the Senate let the bill die in committee. The whole atmosphere was one of anticlimax. In both congressional and popular debate, however, Truman found himself strongly attacked for proposing such an unprecedented and forceful measure. He was not only assailed by labor and liberal spokesmen, but, in an ironic reversal of their usual positions, conservatives led by Senator Taft attacked the president's plan as unfair to the railway workers and a violation of their civil liberties.

In union circles, opposition could hardly have been more vehement. In spite of everything he had done to uphold labor's cause in the earlier disputes of a tumultuous year, Truman found himself universally condemned for his attitude during the railway crisis. He was accused of having turned completely against the unions and, at the CIO national convention, was scornfully labeled "the Number One strikebreaker of the American bankers and railroads."

A New Industrial Relations System

The record of the twelve-month period since the end of the war had been a shattering one: 4,630 work stoppages and a total of 5 million strikers piling up 120 million days of idleness. Nevertheless, the economy had successfully withstood the heavy battering. Instead of the feared depression and consequent unemployment, the reconversion program was forging ahead, and at the close of the year the civilian labor force had risen to an all-time high of 55 million workers.

For workers and the labor movement, the aftermath of World War II proved fundamentally different from that of World War I. Not only did economic expansion, inflation, and relatively full employment distinguish 1945/46 from the economic contraction, deflation, and unemployment that marked the period between 1919 and 1921, but the emergence of stable trade unions in the mass-production industries and peaceful collective bargaining had become essential to the smooth functioning of the economy. If organized labor did not fulfill all of the promises raised by its wartime aspirations, neither did it shrink back to its prewar state.

Indeed, at first, many observers thought that labor had become a new power in the land. The Harvard economist Sumner Slichter wrote that "the United States is gradually shifting from a capitalistic community to a laboristic one – that is, to a community in which employees rather than businessmen are the strongest single influence." Corporate executives complained that "efforts are continuing on the part of certain unions to extend the scope of collective bargaining to include matters and functions that are clearly the responsibility of management." And a labor leader asserted that it was the unions' responsibility to regulate the employer "at every point

where his action affects the welfare of the men.”

In fact, the resolution of the strike wave of 1945/46 blasted such fears and hopes. All along the line, especially in the General Motors strike, employers held firm on the issue of managerial prerogatives. Having lost much of their shop-floor discipline as a result of wartime labor shortages, corporate managers now sought to reassert their control over labor. The agreements of 1946 set the basic terms of what soon became the governing labor–capital detente. Workers received higher wages, and unions received institutional security in return for respecting the rights of management. Union leaders, moreover, promised to discipline unruly workers who violated the armistice between labor and capital.

The system of industrial relations initiated during the New Deal, perfected during World War II, and legitimated in 1946 would hold sway for a quarter century. During that time, as the American economy dominated the globe, capital accumulation grew, productivity rose, corporate profits waxed, and higher productivity and profits encouraged corporations to negotiate union contracts that guaranteed ever-rising real standards of living for covered workers. It was a remarkable achievement after decades of workers' struggles for dignity, security, and a voice in the workplace. But both the scope of this new system and its lifespan would prove limited.

RETRENCHMENT, COLD WAR, AND CONSOLIDATION, 1946 TO 1955

While organized labor survived the reconversion period with its wartime gains intact and most workers held steady jobs with good wages, their successes cloaked real weaknesses. The postwar strike wave intensified a powerful antiunion drive that had originated in the late 1930s, resulted in the passage of the wartime Smith-Connally Act, and had developed a new vigor in 1946/47. The corporate community and its conservative congressional allies unleashed a propaganda campaign that portrayed organized labor as a selfish special interest that ill-served the public, and public opinion polls reflected the success of that campaign. A majority of those polled consistently reported distaste for union militancy and fear of irresponsible labor leaders.

The antiunion drive coalesced in 1946 around the demand for the amendment of the Wagner Act of 1935. It was now claimed that the basic character of New Deal labor legislation had granted unions too much power, that it even enabled organized labor to dominate the economy. By outlawing unfair management practices only, the union critics contended, the Wagner Act left labor free to engage in all kinds of improper and coercive behavior. The end result of the mounting agitation to redress the balance of power, which conservatives argued had gone too far to the side of labor, was the enactment in June 1947 of the Taft-Hartley Act.

Before Taft-Hartley became law, Congress had tried to enact an earlier bill introduced by Representative Francis Case that clearly revealed that body's diminished sympathy for labor. The House had first passed the bill during the strikes of early 1946. As they were settled under Truman's program, further action lagged. With the subsequent crises in coal and on the railroads, however, the Senate hurriedly fell in line and approved the Case Bill. This measure set up the Federal Mediation Board, giving it some powers that had belonged to the Secretary of Labor, prescribed a sixty-day cooling-off period before any strike could be called, and decreed the loss of all Wagner Act rights for workers who quit their jobs during a cooling-off period. It also banned secondary boycotts and jurisdictional strikes, and authorized the use of injunctions to prevent violent or obstructive picketing.

This was a draconian measure that hit hard at labor's historic right to strike, which Truman promptly vetoed. He argued that it dealt with the symptoms rather than the causes of industrial unrest and urged Congress to take a more thorough look at the whole problem. What was really needed, he stated, was a long-range program that would face up to the unresolved issues of labor relations and, at the same time, continue to safeguard the basic principle of union security.

The antilabor forces in Congress could not muster the votes to override the president's veto, but they refused to let restrictive legislation go by the board. The midterm elections of 1946 strengthened their hand. The Republicans won decisive control of Congress, and they interpreted their landslide victory as a direct popular mandate to take drastic action on the labor issue in spite of President Truman's position. Some 30 states by then had adopted various forms of restrictive legislation and, in such circumstances, it was hardly surprising that Congress should hasten to fall into line. The leaders of both the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) assailed what they termed a "deliberate and monstrous movement...to cripple if not destroy, the labor movement," but they were unable to rally the support, either in Congress or in the country as a whole, to combat the antilabor trend.

The Taft-Hartley Act had a stormy passage through Congress. The more severe provisions first incorporated in the measure by the House were partly liberalized by the Senate, but in its final form the bill definitely reflected the conservative reaction against the power unions had accumulated over the previous decade. Truman vetoed it as he had the Case Bill. He condemned it as primarily designed to weaken unions, declared that it would encourage rather than discourage strikes, and deplored what he said would be its effect in making government "an unwanted participant at every bargaining table." The bill's provisions, he concluded, were "shocking – bad for labor, bad for management, bad for the country."

Truman's opposition to the bill was to prove unavailing. Vehemently attacking the president for his pro-labor sympathies, the bill's proponents charged that he had completely misrepresented its provisions. They succeeded in winning the necessary support in both the House and the Senate to override his veto, and the Taft-Hartley Act duly became the law of the land. In fact, some scholars believe that Truman vetoed Taft-Hartley to maintain labor's loyalty to the Democratic Party, knowing full well that Congress would override his veto.

It was a long and immensely complicated measure, the declared purpose of which was to restore that equality of bargaining power between employers and employees that supposedly had been sacrificed in the Wagner Act. The rights guaranteed labor in that earlier law were, however, matched by specific safeguards for the rights of management. Employers were guaranteed full freedom of expression to promote their views on union organization, short of threats of reprisal or promises of benefits, and they were authorized to call for elections to determine the appropriate bargaining units in wage negotiations. At the same time, the Taft-Hartley Act declared it an unfair labor practice for unions in any way to attempt to coerce employers, engage in either secondary boycotts or jurisdictional strikes, or, in their turn, to refuse to bargain collectively.

The Taft-Hartley Act also incorporated a number of provisions that directly affected union security. It expressly banned the closed shop, required highly complicated

voting procedures for the establishment of the union shop, and perhaps most significantly, left the door open to even more severe antiunion legislation by the states. In Section 14(b), it permitted the states to ban the union shop, thereby bypassing federal legislation. This provision made possible so-called state “right-to-work” laws, which were to hamper further union organization more directly than anything in the Taft-Hartley Act itself.

There were further restrictions. Unions were required to give sixty-day notice for the termination or modification of any agreement and could be sued in federal courts for breach of contract. They were not allowed to make contributions to or otherwise expend any of their funds on political campaigns. Their officers were required to file affidavits affirming that they were not members of the Communist Party or of any organization supporting it.

In Title II, the Taft-Hartley Act broke entirely new ground with an elaborate formula for dealing with any strikes that created a national emergency. It gave the president the authority, after making an investigation through a special board of inquiry, to apply for what in effect constituted an eighty-day injunction against any strike found to imperil national health or safety. Should negotiations during this period still fail to solve the controversy, the president was to submit a report to Congress “with such recommendations as he may see fit for consideration and appropriate action.” Finally, Taft-Hartley made a number of significant administrative changes in existing legislation. It provided for the enlargement of the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), with the appointment of a new general counsel, and established an independent Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service with authority to step into any labor dispute that threatened a substantial interruption of interstate commerce.

The debate over the bill had been impassioned. The temper of the House was revealed in the report of its Committee on Education and Labor, which declared that, as a result of union activity, the individual worker's “mind, his soul, and his very life have been subjected to a tyranny more despotic than anyone could think possible in a free country.” The committee would have abolished the NLRB, eliminated the requirement of management obligation in collective bargaining, and required a vote of all workers involved before a strike could be called. The position of the Senate Committee on Labor and Public Welfare was more moderate. It recommended that the social gains that employees had received under previous legislation should be maintained and that Congress should seek to remedy existing inequities between employers and employees by precise and carefully drawn legislation. The views of the Senate committee were more nearly to prevail, partly through common sense and partly to assure a majority that could override Truman's expected veto. In the meantime, however, representatives of industry and of labor fought out their own battle in the public forum.

The full strength of employer associations, spearheaded by the National Association of Manufacturers, was thrown behind enactment of a stiff bill. Although its criticisms

of the NLRB in the late 1930s had led it to develop some of the restrictive clauses now incorporated into the Taft-Hartley Act, the AFL now joined the CIO in opposing the legislation. Both industry and labor sent their spokesmen to the congressional hearings, inserted full-page advertisements in the country's newspapers, and bought radio time to air their views. While the Act's proponents maintained that the proposed legislation went no further than to equalize bargaining power, its opponents characterized it as a vindictive attack on unionism instigated by those who wished to do away with collective bargaining altogether.

In light of the prevailing political situation, labor's position was weak. In refusing to compromise in respect to the proposed legislation and seeking to hold reactionary employers wholly responsible for the drive to modify pro-labor provisions of the Wagner Act, both the AFL and the CIO misjudged congressional realities. And in refusing to suggest any alternative measure to meet the alleged inadequacies of the Wagner Act, they reinforced the widespread view in Congress that organized labor had become increasingly irresponsible in the exercise of monopolistic power.

Antiunion sentiment notwithstanding, there still remained much latent support for the labor cause. Some three months after the final passage of the Taft-Hartley Act, public opinion polls showed that 53 percent of those questioned who knew of its enactment believed that it should be repealed or revised. But the campaign to block antilabor legislation had been started too late and had been too uncompromising to overcome the momentum of the antiunion reaction that had been building up since 1938. In unjustified self-assurance, union leadership had failed to adjust itself to new times and new circumstances, and consequently had suffered a severe setback.

Labor, Taft-Hartley, and Politics

The passage of the Taft-Hartley Act did not by any means bring to an end the impassioned controversy over its merits. While neither the hopes of its adherents nor the fears of its critics were in practice to be fully realized, it remained a bone of embittered contention among the pro-labor and antilabor forces in the country. Congress faced no more sensitive political issue in the whole range of domestic legislation. As the 1948 presidential campaign approached, neither party was able to ignore it. The Republicans cautiously called for continuing study to improve labor-management legislation; the Democrats more forthrightly pledged Taft-Hartley's immediate repeal.

Truman's unexpected and dramatic reelection raised high labor's hopes that repeal would actually be effected. They were disappointed. A conservative coalition of Republicans and Southern Democrats remained in control of Congress, and it had little sympathy with organized labor. One amendment to the law was, however, adopted. The required elections for the union shop had in every case shown such overwhelming workers' support (an average of 87 percent among those voting) that it

was henceforth provided that such agreements could be concluded without employee polls. Otherwise, every move to revise or repeal the law was beaten back.

Labor continued to attack Taft-Hartley as a “slave labor” bill, although that charge seemed overstated to most Americans. There was little question that certain of its provisions, and most notably Section 14(b) with its encouragement of state “right-to-work” laws, impeded union organization in the South and perhaps some other parts of the country, but union membership actually grew during the next few years. In addition, the proportion of the nation's workers whose terms of employment were governed by collective bargaining agreements rose steadily for the next several years after the act's passage.

Where Taft-Hartley proved most disappointing and ineffective was in the application of its provisions for settling strikes that endangered public welfare. Title II, which labor condemned as reestablishing “the abhorrent principle of government by injunctions,” afforded no real solution to the problems that such strikes created. In succeeding years, its provisions were invoked only with great reluctance and often served to confuse rather than to clarify the issues in dispute.

The first major strike that led President Truman to take action under the law's injunction proceedings occurred in the perennially restless coal fields. In spite of the settlement reached in 1947, intermittent work stoppages continued, and a new controversy developed between the miners and the operators when the ever-aggressive John L. Lewis charged that the latter had “dishonored” their contract with respect to the health and welfare fund. This dispute was finally ironed out, but two years later the miners' chieftain again began to agitate in favor of higher wages. His new technique was to avoid the charge of directly calling a strike but to bring comparable pressure on the operators by periodically ordering out the miners in a series of so-called “memorial” work stoppages protesting the high rate of deaths and injuries in the coal mines.



Figure 19.1 John L. Lewis surveys the damage after a mine disaster in West Frankfurt, Illinois. (State Historical Society of Wisconsin)

As these work stoppages went on, Truman finally felt compelled under public pressure to invoke Title II of Taft-Hartley and, on February 6, 1950, he obtained a temporary injunction against any further strikes. When officials of the United Mine Workers (UMW) sent out instructions ordering the miners back to work, they were largely ignored. The government then instituted contempt proceedings against the UMW on the ground that the orders calling off the strike had been given only “token compliance.” A federal court refused, however, to sustain these proceedings. It asserted that the government had not proved its charge of lack of good faith in the union's issuance of its orders.

To end this impasse, Truman turned rather desperately to Congress for authority – as in wartime – to seize the coal mines. While Congress hesitated, a new agreement was finally reached in March 1950 between the UMW and the operators, and work stoppages came to an end without the necessity of further governmental intervention.

This experience with Taft-Hartley had proved, to say the least, inconclusive.

The next major strike that might have invoked Taft-Hartley's emergency provision took place in the context of the Korean War, which the US entered after North Korea attacked South Korea in June 1950. Two years into the war, in 1952, a strike disrupted the steel industry, arousing a measure of public concern comparable only to the strike crises during World War II. There could be no disputing the fact that a breakdown in steel production created a national emergency.

This time, wages and hours had been brought under governmental control as a result of the Korean hostilities, and when negotiations for a new contract between the United Steelworkers (USW) and the industry broke down at the end of 1951, the dispute was referred to a new Wage Stabilization Board. The USW agreed to hold any strike activity in abeyance until the board made its report; when it did so some three months later, the union agreed to accept its recommendations. However, the steel industry denounced the report for advocating recognition of the union shop and refused to accept the proposed wage settlement unless it was allowed to compensate by raising the price of steel. When the director of the Office of Economic Stabilization refused the price increase, the industry rejected the settlement as a whole and the USW thereupon made ready to strike.

There was an immediate and widespread demand that Truman seek an injunction under the Taft-Hartley Act, but he bluntly refused to do so. He took the position that the steelworkers had already refrained from striking for three months while the Wage Stabilization Board was making its investigations, and to enjoin them further was unwarranted. Instead of an injunction, he took the drastic step on April 8, 1952, of seizing the steel plants on his own authority as the only way to maintain production vital to the war effort. "I feel sure," he stated, "that the Constitution does not require me to endanger our national safety by letting all the steel mills close down at this particular time."

His action created a storm of protest. While the steelworkers remained on the job, the industry promptly took the matter to the courts. The legal issue was fought out against a confused background of preliminary injunctions against government operation, temporary stays of court orders, and a final appeal to the Supreme Court. On June 2, 1952, it ruled that the seizure of the mills was an unconstitutional exercise of executive authority. Once the president returned the mills to private operation, the steel workers – 560,000 strong – resumed their strike and brought production to a complete halt.

As the popular controversy over Truman's refusal to invoke the Taft-Hartley Act and his arbitrary seizure of the steel mills continued to rage throughout the country, the USW and the industry renewed their contract negotiations. They did not, however, come to terms until July 26. The settlement the two sides reached generally conformed to that originally proposed by the Wage Stabilization Board, but in the meantime the strike had cost the industry \$350 million and the workers \$50 million in

wages. More important, the strike had not only crippled the steel industry itself, but it had also caused the shutdown of many steel-using plants and brought automobile assembly lines to a temporary halt. It also had seriously endangered the flow of essential military materials to Korea, and only the gradual cessation of hostilities had prevented an even graver crisis.

President Dwight D. Eisenhower, who succeeded Truman in 1953, proved less reticent about invoking Taft-Hartley's provisions when a strike by the International Longshoremen's Association against the New York Shipping Association closed the port of New York in October 1953. This dispute over wages and hiring practices became even more complicated than the strikes in coal or in steel. With the work stoppage tying up all shipping in New York, the AFL expelled the union on charges of racketeering and chartered a new longshoremen's organization; the state authorities of New York and New Jersey intervened in the interests of law and order; and a Senate investigating committee angrily reported that the waterfront had become "a lawless frontier." Eisenhower finally invoked the emergency provisions of the Taft-Hartley Act, but in spite of a federal injunction, a series of wildcat strikes continued as a result of the bitter fight between the old and new longshoremen's unions.

Elections under the auspices of the NLRB ultimately confirmed the right of the original union, in spite of all the charges that had been brought against it, to represent the longshoremen in bargaining with the shipping industry. Negotiations were then resumed and a settlement reached that barred both strikes and lockouts for a two-year period. Something like peace temporarily descended on the embattled waterfront, but once again governmental intervention under Taft-Hartley had proved to be wholly unsatisfactory.

Other major strikes also sparked calls for the invocation of the Taft-Hartley Act. Communications workers, textile workers, automobile workers, and construction workers, among others, engaged in relatively brief work stoppages; railway workers staged a series of "sickouts" in 1951, which led to government threats to dismiss all employees who did not stay on the job; and the next year the coal miners had still another strike. The furor over these job actions led most to ignore that fact that the number of work stoppages was declining. The annual total of worker-days lost in the years 1947–1951 averaged 40 million, in comparison with 116 million in 1946.

The controversy over Taft-Hartley and the headlines concerning a handful of so-called national-emergency strikes cloaked even more significant developments in the arena of labor–capital relations. For one thing, when times were good and the labor market tight, unions continued to grow. They reached their relative membership peak at the end of the Korean War in 1954, when 18 million workers, or 35 percent of the nonagricultural labor force, belonged to unions. In the South, where Taft-Hartley probably had a more restrictive impact on labor than it did elsewhere, union membership grew proportionately more rapidly. Still more important, an entirely new pattern of labor–management collective-bargaining agreements had begun to appear,

nowhere more significantly than in the automobile industry.

Beginning with the contract between the United Automobile Workers (UAW) and General Motors in 1948, and continuing in a series of contracts signed in the 1950s and later, the automobile companies and the union pioneered a new relationship. Interestingly, several of the innovations were a result of company, not union, initiatives. The evolving labor–management contract in automobiles encompassed steadily rising real wages and industrial stability. The companies agreed to grant workers annual productivity wage increases and contractual cost-of-living adjustments to protect them against price inflation. At the end of the 1950s, the contract came to include supplementary unemployment benefits – a form of short-term guaranteed annual wage. The companies also provided their employees with healthcare protection, defined benefit retirement plans (in which the employer committed to fund retirement at a predictable level based on a worker's length of service and average pay) to supplement Social Security, and a combination of paid holidays and annual vacations. In return, the union consented to long-term contracts (two to five years in length) which enabled management to plan for the future more safely, and the UAW policed the agreement by disciplining unruly workers who engaged in unsanctioned wildcat strikes.

In short, in return for promising peaceful workplace relations, unions and their members won a rising real standard of living. As wage increases became the chief goal of the postwar union movement, money took precedence over labor's older demand for industrial democracy. As long as it granted higher real wages, management held a relatively free hand in controlling the labor process. As historian David Brody has written: “The common tendency was toward an ever greater extension of the contractual net” in which the “companies and unions revealed what was...the common intent of their encompassing contractual relationship – the containment of spontaneous and independent shopfloor activity.”

The creation of a private welfare system to supplement the nation's rudimentary welfare state, an effort that had originated during the war years, proceeded rapidly in the first decade of relative peace. Unionized workers in basic industry enjoyed a range of benefits for the first time. These included generous health benefits paid totally by employers – in real economic terms, of course, the cost of the benefit was part of the worker's basic monetary compensation, but since it did not appear as part of the worker's wage or salary, it amounted to income-tax-free money, while under federal tax law, employers could write off the cost of such benefits against their profits. Health benefits often covered dental and vision expenses as well as visits to the doctor and hospital charges. Many unionized workers also won defined benefit pensions more generous than Social Security and protected against price inflation by automatic cost-of-living adjustments before Social Security provided such protection. Others also won educational benefits, including college tuition payments, for members and their families; fully paid vacation time, specified holidays, and even personal days; and, like the annual productivity wage increases and cost-of-living payments

built into the UAW contracts, an ever-rising real annual income. Large nonunion enterprises such as IBM, Eastman Kodak, and DuPont, among others, offered comparable benefits to their employees in order to maintain their largely union-free status.

This ever-widening private welfare system was one of the primary aims of the original New Deal: a society of consumers with the income adequate to purchase the economy's mass-produced goods and thus to maintain a full-employment economy. Increasingly workers protected by union contracts or employed by nonunion firms that provided comparable wages and benefits were able to forsake renting for home ownership, the cities for the suburbs, party-line telephones for private lines, and to acquire such newly available consumer goods as televisions (rapidly converting from black and white to color), clothes washers and dryers, dishwashers, and a cornucopia of similar "luxuries." Not so fortunate were those workers who lacked union membership, found employment in more competitive sectors of the economy, who were in their majority nonwhite and non-male, and who relied on the parsimonious public welfare system that failed to provide health care and offered relatively meager Social Security benefits, no laws demanding paid vacations, holidays, or personal days, and minimum wage laws that may have enabled their beneficiaries to sustain themselves but not to share fully in the pleasures of a mass-consumer society.

Organized labor's advance on the economic front did not lead it to ignore the less favorable battleground of politics. It had learned a bitter lesson in the passage of the Taft-Hartley Act. The campaign for the repeal of this measure continued unabated and, on a broader front, it made every effort to promote new social legislation. "Labor has long recognized," CIO president Philip Murray declared, "that the gains which it wins through economic action can be protected, implemented and extended only if it develops a progressive program of legislation and secures its enactment through effective participation in the political life of the nation."

The Republican victory at the polls in 1952 dashed hopes for the repeal of Taft-Hartley, although its revision still seemed possible. In a message to Congress on February 2, 1953, President Eisenhower stated that experience had shown the need for corrective measures in existing legislation. Moreover, he appointed Martin P. Durkin, former president of the United Association of Journeymen Plumbers and Steamfitters, as his labor secretary (it was said that the cabinet was made up of nine millionaires and a plumber!) and this appeared to be a further augury for the advancement of labor's interests.

Yet nothing was done. Durkin drew up 19 proposed amendments to Taft-Hartley and, in the belief that he had the president's approval for them, gave out the draft of a message for their submission to Congress. Eisenhower denied, however, that he had promised his support. Resenting what he interpreted as repudiation of an agreed-upon policy, Durkin thereupon resigned from the cabinet. Although the president tried

to justify his policy and reassure labor of his continuing sympathy, union leaders were convinced that the conservative elements surrounding him had forced him to go back on his promises. Eisenhower was to declare at the AFL convention in September 1953 that he had “a very great comprehension of what organized labor had done for this country,” but such vague rhetorical phrases hardly compensated for his failure to back up his own secretary of labor in support of remedial legislation.

The leadership of both the AFL and the CIO realized anew in these circumstances that labor would have to build up its political strength to avoid passage of further restrictive legislation. The AFL had already established a League for Political Education paralleling the CIO's Political Action Committee. The two organizations had done yeoman work in the 1952 election. Even though their efforts proved unsuccessful, now they were prepared to cooperate fully in exerting all possible pressure on Congress in organized labor's interest.

Their lobbying activities helped to bring about an expansion in the Social Security program. It was extended to cover an increasing number of workers in respect to old-age and survivors' insurance benefits, and the monthly payments on such accounts were substantially increased. In 1955 Congress also raised the minimum-wage levels established under the Fair Labor Standards Act from 75 cents to \$1 an hour. On another front, although unsuccessful for another decade, union lobbies worked consistently for the old-age health program, which became known as Medicare.

The Purge of Labor's Left Wing

Organized labor's political interests were not limited to social-welfare legislation. It participated actively and sometimes enthusiastically in the politics of the Cold War and the domestic Red Scare. As the global confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union increasingly became the central issue of postwar American life, the labor movement could not escape its ramifications. In fact, few Americans proved more militantly anticommunist than labor leaders, especially those within the older AFL unions.

Both the AFL and the CIO fully supported the foreign policies of Truman and Eisenhower. They endorsed the Truman Doctrine of containing Soviet power by providing military and economic aid to Greece and Turkey; favored the Marshall Plan for rebuilding Europe; approved American participation in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO); and defended Truman's “police action” in Korea. They also took funds from the CIA and used them to combat left-wing influences in the labor movements of West Germany, France, Italy, Latin America, and in various Third World countries. Labor's leaders stood in the vanguard of those emphasizing the gravity of the communist threat and repeatedly called for more effective common action in combating it.

Writing in the *American Federationist* in January 1948, George Meany, then

secretary-treasurer of the AFL, emphasized that in order to win the peace so essential for American security, the United States should make every effort to keep its sister democracies free. He declared that the Marshall Plan was the best means of halting the surge of totalitarianism in Europe and argued that its annual cost would be no more than the nation had spent in a single sixteen-day period during World War II. He supported NATO even more emphatically. "In this grave hour," he stated, "the people of America can be fully assured that in American labor the cause of democracy at home and abroad has a devoted, determined, and dynamic champion."

Within the ranks of the CIO, both Philip Murray and Walter Reuther, who had become president of the UAW in 1946, were equally forthright in pledging labor's vigorous support for the foreign policies of the Truman administration. An article in the *C.I.O. News* singled out for praise Truman's Point Four Program of technical assistance for underdeveloped countries. In providing help for other people, it noted, Point Four would also create additional jobs for American workers. On one occasion, Reuther called for more effective social action "to back the country's defense and foreign aid programs."

After the outbreak of the Korean War, both national labor federations adopted resolutions supporting the defense of South Korea. By then, the CIO had already broken all ties with communism and purged its ranks of alleged communists. It withdrew its representatives from the World Federation of Trade Unions, postwar competitor to the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), which at its founding included representatives from trade unions in the Soviet Union and other communist states in Eastern Europe. Instead, CIO leaders played their part in the eventual formation of the ICFTU. At home, the CIO disqualified communists from official positions and expelled unions that it claimed followed the Soviet line.

The CIO, to be sure, had enjoyed a mutually beneficial relationship with left-wingers since its founding in 1935. No irremediable problems had arisen between the organization's top leaders and its left-wingers prior to 1947/48. Communists served loyally and effectively in the CIO national office, and those affiliated unions led by the left bargained with employers and served their members no differently from other unions.

What came to separate the left from the remainder of the CIO were political and foreign policy issues. The labor left, as a rule, opposed the Truman Doctrine and its offshoots, the Marshall Plan and NATO. The communist-led unions supported policies that flowed from the World War II grand alliance in which the Soviet Union acted as a valued ally of the United States. Their leaders saw actions such as the Truman Doctrine, the Marshall Plan, and NATO as aggressive steps against a former ally, policies that would lead back to war. Since the CIO left's policies coincided with those of Stalin's Soviet Union, critics condemned their leaders for following the "Soviet line" rather than supporting the United States.

Had the Left limited itself to rhetoric and foreign policy declarations, the CIO majority

might have tolerated its dissent. But in the presidential election of 1948 the left-wing of the CIO broke with labor's majority over politics. Instead of rallying behind Truman and the Democrats, the left-wing unions joined the campaign of Henry Wallace and his Progressive Party. To Philip Murray and other CIO leaders, this action, which threatened to divide the labor vote and imperil Truman's reelection, betrayed labor's vital interests and required a strong response. Thus at its annual convention in 1949, the CIO revised its constitution to make communists ineligible for executive office and to provide for expulsion by a two-thirds vote of any affiliate following the "communist line."

A year later, the CIO expelled 11 unions, which composed almost one-fifth of its total membership. Aside from the United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers (UE) and the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union, most of the expelled unions were small. But the CIO chartered new unions to replace those expelled, and in the electrical industry a bitter jurisdictional struggle ensued between the UE and the CIO's newly chartered International Union of Electrical Workers. The CIO's president, Murray, hoped the expulsion of the so-called communist-led unions would slake the ravenous thirst of domestic Red-hunters. Characterizing the communist-dominated unions as "a small but noisy clique" within the ranks of the CIO, he declared that the overwhelming majority of its membership had no sympathy whatsoever with communism.

In expelling that "noisy clique," Murray removed a CIO minority that had been most insistent and loud in demanding equal rights for nonwhite and female workers and union members, and proposing ambitious public programs for full employment, health and retirement benefits, and greater educational opportunity for working people. Whether allowing the communist-led unions to remain in the CIO would have altered the future path of the labor movement remains debatable. Whether it was possible for the CIO to have done so at the outbreak of the Cold War and during the peak of the Red Scare associated with a junior senator from Wisconsin, Joseph McCarthy, seems more doubtful.

A United Labor Movement

Throughout these years, which were at once marked by further economic advances and the setback on the political front caused by passage of the Taft-Hartley Act, the forces of American labor remained divided. Of the estimated total of something over 17 million union members in the mid-1950s, the AFL claimed 9 million, the CIO some 6 million, and approximately 2.5 million belonged to the UMW, the Railroad Brotherhoods, and other independent unions. There were repeated efforts to establish an organic unity among these divisive elements, and a number of committees were set up to discuss the complicated issues involved. In spite of general agreement that "the economic, social and industrial interest of labor can best be served through the establishment of a united labor movement," no one came

forward with a satisfactory formula for bringing it about.

The original conflict between the AFL and the CIO over industrial unionism had subsided. Both federations had long since recognized that industrial unions had their place alongside, rather than in opposition to, craft unions. There had also been increasing cooperation in many places of labor activity, most notably the creation of the United Labor Policy Committee during the Korean War, and the unions generally worked together on such political issues as their continuing battle against Taft-Hartley. It was perhaps the persistence of old rivalries among the leaders of the AFL and the CIO as much as anything else that brought every move toward an effective merger to a dead end.

In 1952, a change of leadership in both federations gave fresh impetus to the reunification movement. Within the brief span of twelve days in November of that year, William Green, president of the AFL for nearly thirty years, and Philip Murray, president of the CIO since the resignation of John L. Lewis, both died with dramatic unexpectedness. Their sudden passing from the scene confronted both the AFL and the CIO with the difficult task of choosing new leaders who could face up to the pressing problems of the 1950s. At the same time, handing over responsibility to men who had not played major roles in the original split between the AFL and the CIO provided a unique opportunity for bringing old and outworn rivalries to an end.

After a sharp struggle among contending factions, the CIO elected to its presidency Walter Reuther, the brilliant, hard-hitting, dynamic head of the UAW. Having begun as an apprentice die and tool maker, he had played an important part in the organization of his union during the 1930s – at one time being brutally beaten up by the “brass-knuckle-men” of the Ford Motor Company's service department – and had risen to the UAW presidency in 1946. He was a skillful organizer, a persistent, stubborn negotiator in his relations with management, and highly articulate in presenting his views to the public.

In appearance, Reuther looked nothing like the public image of a hard-fighting labor leader. He dressed conservatively and acted circumspectly. Neither a smoker nor a drinker, he was little given to social diversions. Throughout his whole career, he had worked at the job with a concentrated, single-minded energy that largely accounted for his gradual emergence as one of labor's strongest, as well as most ambitious, leaders.

His ideas of labor's role in society were broad and comprehensive, and carried him far beyond the immediate problems of business unionism. Reuther's thoughts owed something to socialist theory, an inheritance of sorts from his German immigrant working-class father, but his approach to politics grew increasingly pragmatic. By 1952, he came to believe firmly that labor should work within the existing party structure, which in the circumstances of the time meant support for the Democrats, though he occasionally raised the specter of a third party. Although he and his brother Victor had worked in the Soviet Union in the early 1930s and at the time referred

favorably to the socialist experiment and evinced sympathy for the communist cause if not party membership, Reuther by 1946 was as strongly anticommunist as other labor leaders. Indeed, he rose to the presidency of the UAW partly by Red baiting, and he drove communists out of his union. On this score he had the support of the socialist faction in the union with whom he maintained cordial relations. Yet his imagination led him to envisage social goals for labor that went far beyond its traditional objectives.

“The kind of labor movement we want,” he once stated, “is not committed to a nickel-in-the-pay-envelope philosophy. We are building a labor movement, not to patch up the world so men can starve less often and less frequently, but a labor movement that will remake the world so that the working people will get the benefit of their labor.” There was never any question of Reuther's complete devotion to labor's cause. At once idealistic and eminently practical, a veteran in union warfare and an experienced leader, he was in every way a logical candidate for the post first held by Lewis.

The AFL chose as its new leader a man of quite a different stripe: George Meany, its secretary-treasurer. Relatively unknown outside union ranks, he had built a long career of activity within the organized labor movement ever since his early days as an apprentice plumber. He first became a union business agent and then went on to serve as secretary of the New York Building Trades Council and president of the New York State Federation of Labor before taking over as secretary-treasurer of the AFL in 1939. A large, heavily built man, weighing some 228 pounds, he was once described as “a cross between a bulldog and a bull.” He looked like the old-fashioned, conventional labor leader of an earlier era and was generally pictured either smoking a big cigar or chewing determinedly on an unlighted one. In his contacts with other union leaders and the representatives of management, Meany was aggressively outspoken, sometimes truculent. “Blunt as the plumber's wrench,” a labor writer characterized his public addresses. He could be as tough as circumstances demanded. But he hardly conformed to type in the breadth of his interests. Fond of dancing, a fair pianist, he was also an avid golfer.

Throughout his career, Meany had always been active politically – not always conforming to the more conservative position of the AFL – and had fought hard for every cause he favored. He believed that unions should enter more actively into community affairs and seek to exercise their influence on the local level as well as on state and national issues. He was also a consistent rhetorical opponent of racial or religious discrimination in union membership, and, again in contrast to many of his colleagues, believed strongly in labor's need to play an active role in politics. Yet he did little to promote equal rights in AFL unions and frequently found himself in conflict with A. Philip Randolph, the leader of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and the most prominent spokesperson for black workers and union members.

The new heads of both federations, along with most of their associates, personified the steady professionalization and bureaucratization of the labor movement. In the

postwar world, union officials increasingly earned high salaries, received substantial monetary perquisites, and held office for long terms. Labor leadership was now truly a career, not a calling. More often than in the past, labor leaders had post-secondary school educations, and several had earned law degrees. Meany, more than Reuther, still represented the old-style labor leader with relatively meager formal education and slight to no interest in matters intellectual and cultural. Still, like most other of his fellow contemporary labor leaders, Meany met regularly with corporate executives and high federal officials, and he lived far removed from the rank and file. But we must not exaggerate the distance between postwar labor leaders and their predecessors. Recall that Samuel Gompers's alter ego in the AFL, Matthew Woll, was a lawyer, and that in the 1920s John L. Lewis on his passport listed his occupation as "labor executive."

Nevertheless, as their backgrounds and temperaments suggested, Reuther and Meany were determined to do everything they could to build up the strength of organized labor. They were prepared to institute new organizing campaigns among the unorganized – Meany perhaps more rhetorically than literally – and seek every opportunity to marshal the political support of union members behind further progressive legislation. To this end, they were also committed to the cause of labor unity and ready to break new ground in trying to settle the differences that had divided the AFL and the CIO for nearly two decades. A first step was their conclusion, in June 1953, of a two-year no-raiding agreement among the constituent unions of the two federations, in which unions pledged not to try to steal members from each other's organizations. The next year, both the AFL and the CIO conventions duly ratified the agreement. Union piracy and jurisdictional strikes had long been recognized as a disruptive force within labor ranks and perhaps the greatest continuing obstacle to reunification. But it was Meany and Reuther who had both the vision and the authority to tackle the issue directly and to point the way toward a settlement that held out some promise of ending costly and futile interunion warfare.

By 1955, 80 affiliated unions of the AFL and 33 CIO unions had accepted the agreement's terms. While it was to prove impossible – at the time and in later years – to eradicate jurisdictional conflict among unions entirely, its frequency was sharply reduced and a better atmosphere was created among rival unions.

In the meantime, the two federations had also set up a Joint Unity Committee, headed by their new presidents, which undertook to explore ways to effect a merger. Its deliberations were kept secret, and outside official labor circles little was known as to what progress the committee might be making. The underlying politics were extremely complicated. The long history of earlier discussions did not inspire any great optimism over the new Joint Unity Committee's ability to surmount the many obstacles in its path.

It was consequently with great dramatic impact that the committee announced, on February 9, 1955, that full agreement had been reached for the merger of the AFL

and the CIO into a unified federation. In a joint statement, Meany and Reuther further declared that in the new AFL-CIO, the identity of each affiliated national or international union would be preserved, the no-raiding agreement would be continued on a voluntary basis, and special departments within the old AFL would remain, although supplemented by a new Industrial Union Department. In this way, the agreement awarded explicit recognition to both craft and industrial unions within the ranks of organized labor, and every encouragement to promoting the most effective forms of organization among American workers as a whole.

The program for the new federation, in addition to plans for greater efforts to organize the unorganized, embraced a new approach to the three greatest internal problems plaguing the labor movement: corruption, racial discrimination, and alleged communist influence. The AFL negotiators promised to heed the CIO position on labor racketeering and racial discrimination. Indeed, CIO support enabled Meany to promise a sustained campaign against criminal influences in the labor movement and to insist that unions accept members regardless of race. Meantime, the CIO deferred to Meany's militant anticommunism by consenting to a declaration that promised to protect the labor movement from "the undermining efforts of the Communist agencies and all others who are opposed to the basic principles of our democracy and of free and democratic unionism."



Figure 19.2 George Meany (left) and Walter Reuther (right) clasping hands at the merger of the AFL and CIO. (Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University)

As befitted the party to the merger with by far the larger membership and treasury, the AFL obtained both the presidency and the secretary-treasurership. After ratification of the merger agreement at meetings of the two organizations, a first convention of the AFL-CIO, held in early December 1955, thereupon elected George Meany president and William Schnitzler secretary-treasurer, with Walter Reuther serving as vice-president in charge of the Industrial Union Department.

AFL-CIO: A “Sleepy Monopoly”

In their historic statement announcing the final agreement for the consolidation, Meany and Reuther jointly declared: “We feel confident that the merger of the two union groups which we represent will be a boon to our nation and its people in this tense period. We are happy that, in our way, we have been able to bring about unity

of the labor movement at a time when the unity of all American people is most urgently needed in the face of the Communist threat to world peace and civilization.”

Shortly after these developments, Meany wrote a significant article in *Fortune* that outlined organized labor's goals and aspirations. It revealed the continuity in the development of the labor movement and the persistence of the hardheaded pragmatism that Samuel Gompers had brought to it. Meany emphasized the need for further improvement in the status of industrial workers and the consequent importance of further economic and political activity on their behalf. He made no suggestion of a labor party, but he did declare emphatically that, because of an ever-increasing stake in governmental policies, “we shall remain in politics.” Summarizing labor's traditional position, he then wrote: “We do not seek to recast American society in any particular doctrinaire or ideological image. We seek an ever rising standard of living. Sam Gompers once put the matter succinctly. When asked what the labor movement wanted, he answered, ‘More.’ If by a better standard of living we mean not only more money but more leisure and richer cultural life, the answer remains, ‘More.’” Largely through the efforts of the national and international unions, Meany declared, American wage earners had since 1900 doubled their standard of living while their working time had been reduced by one-third. He looked forward confidently, he told his readers, to further progress within the framework of that system of free enterprise that had made possible labor's favorable status in American society.

In a sense, then, the merger of the AFL and the CIO, instead of symbolizing the great strength of labor united, reflected, in the words of the labor economist, Richard Lester, the triumph of a “sleepy monopoly.” Relatively long-term labor–management contracts, union security clauses, and the direct check-off of union dues from the paycheck by employers gave labor leaders a vested interest in developing harmonious relations with capital. Excessive demands might lead to conflict, and strikes threatened equally the survival of union and corporate “executives.” Like typical bureaucrats, union officials preferred ease and convenience in administering their institutions rather than innovative breakthroughs. Increasingly, labor leaders came to see their primary obligation as preserving and protecting their own particular organizations. Serving larger, more idealistic social purposes became secondary.

TURBULENT YEARS, 1955 TO 1972

The creation of the AFL-CIO from the merger of the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) in 1955 promised to improve prospects for the further growth and development of unionism. The leaders of the new federation believed that once it had united, labor would put its house in order and resolve its nagging internal problems. They envisioned a doubling of union membership within ten years and a consequent increase in both economic and political power that would strengthen the security of all industrial workers. They also believed that it would at last be possible to bring about either the repeal of the Taft-Hartley Act or substantial modification to its restrictive provisions, encourage recruitment from the ranks of nonunionized workers, and broaden the scope of collective-bargaining agreements.

These bright expectations were not realized. The problems facing organized labor proved to be far more intractable than they appeared to be in 1955, and over the horizon were new developments that impeded the progress so confidently anticipated. As the national economy continued to grow, subject only to shallow recessions in the mid- and late 1950s, workers, especially those in unionized sectors, won higher real wages and expanded fringe benefits. The union-management bargain, consummated in the late 1940s, persisted over the next two decades. At the same time, however, workers and their unions faced the specter of possible unemployment due to technological advance and automation. Moreover, the organized labor movement itself experienced a relative decline in membership and potential power, which before the end of the 1950s created an atmosphere of deep pessimism in labor circles.

The Onset of Organized Labor's Decline

The merger of the AFL and the CIO disappointed the expectations of many of the advocates of labor unity. During its first decade, the merged federation proved largely unsuccessful at organizing the unorganized. The fastest-growing sector of the labor force, the white-collar service and professional occupations, remained largely impervious to unionism. Organized labor proved equally unable to unionize workers in low-wage, labor-intensive, competitive trades. Millions of blacks, other nonwhites, and women toiled on the nation's farms and in its homes, restaurants, laundries, and garment sweatshops without union protection. They earned minimal wages at best (often below federal or state mandated minimums because they were in categories of work legislatively excluded from coverage) under exploitative conditions and without job security.

A dual labor market characterized the American economy by the end of the 1950s. In one part, mostly white, male workers earned good wages, held stable jobs, and had the protection of strong unions. In the other, women and nonwhites earned only 50 to 60 percent as much in wages, lacked job security, and had no unions to defend their interests. In fact, many unions still proved resistant to opening their doors to these groups.

No sooner was the AFL-CIO formed than a steady numerical decline began for the labor movement. The peak of union membership was in fact reached in 1954, with an overall total of almost 18 million, or over 35 percent of nonagricultural employment. Eight years later, this total had fallen to 16.8 million or, in percentage terms, only some 30 percent of the larger labor force and the lowest figure since 1952. This decline continued over succeeding years. The contrast with the hopes in 1955 that union membership would double in a decade could hardly have been more glaring. The labor movement appeared to have lost its momentum. In 1960, Walter Reuther, president of the United Automobile Workers (UAW), bluntly declared: "We are going backward." He was right. The total size of the workforce continued to grow, making the proportion of union members an even smaller part of the whole.

Many factors accounted for what was, from labor's point of view, such an unhappy situation. The AFL-CIO encountered unexpected obstacles in developing the new organizing campaign in which its leadership had such confidence. In a number of industries, partly due to prosperity and the more generous wage policies followed by employers, there was simply little interest in unionization. Outright opposition remained strong in such geographical areas as the South, and organizers were hampered by state "right-to-work" laws. In many instances, labor leaders themselves, both at the top and at local levels, appeared to have lost the zeal that had marked their organizing activity in the past. It appeared to be impossible to awaken the enthusiasm or inspire the action that had first given such vitality to the campaign to organize the unorganized.

Over and beyond all such considerations, however, were the changes that had taken place by mid-century in the structure of the civilian labor force. More than anything else, they accounted for the drop in union membership and the seemingly insuperable obstacles that organized labor faced in seeking to combat it. The number of blue-collar workers, who provided the bulk of union membership, was declining in contrast to a steady rise in the number of nonunionized white-collar workers. Simply put, the labor pool from which the unions traditionally drew their members was steadily shrinking.

More specifically, since the end of World War II, the proportion of the nation's workers engaged in mining, manufacturing, and transportation had fallen, while that of employees in wholesale and retail trade, the service industries, and government had increased. Technological advance, making possible increased industrial production with fewer workers, accounted for the one phenomenon, and a popular demand for

expanded services, both private and public, explained the latter. The effect on the relative proportions of blue-collar and white-collar workers in the total labor force was statistically reflected between 1947 and 1963 in the former's decline from 40.7 percent to 36.4 percent of the total, and in the latter's rise from 45.3 per cent to 57 percent.

As a consequence, membership in such basic industrial unions as those of the steelworkers, automobile workers, and miners fell, and there were at first no compensating gains in the relatively weak unions that represented retail clerks, department-store and office workers, and government employees. An exception was the vigorous growth of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, Chauffeurs, Warehousemen and Helpers of America, the country's largest union, but the overall picture was clear. Unless labor could more successfully organize white-collar workers and service workers, the trend toward declining union membership that had begun in 1957 seemed likely to continue.

The disappointments that labor suffered so far as union membership was concerned were paralleled in the field of political action. The AFL-CIO was militantly determined to marshal the full support of labor behind all candidates for public office who showed sympathy for union aims and aspirations. To this end it established a new Committee on Political Education (COPE). While this committee reaffirmed labor's traditional attitude in stating that it would maintain "a strictly nonpartisan attitude," it was hardly surprising that in practice this meant, as in almost every year since 1936, virtually all-out support for the Democratic ticket in national elections. COPE campaigned vigorously for Adlai E. Stevenson in 1956, and again for John F. Kennedy in 1960, and it generally supported Democratic candidates for Congress. In the light of congressional gains by liberals in these years (in spite of the reelection of Eisenhower in 1956), efforts were thereupon renewed through the most intense lobbying activities to secure a repeal of Taft-Hartley and to promote further legislation favorable to labor and the nation's workers. Such efforts were unsuccessful.

The only political achievement that could be credited to organized labor during this period was that of holding the line against the further proliferation of state "right-to-work" laws. In 1955, 17 states had such laws that barred not only the closed shop but also the union shop. They were largely in the South or Mountain West, but conservative business interests mounted an intensive campaign to win over some of the more heavily industrialized states. While labor continued to feel that the only resolution of this issue was repeal of Section 14(b) of the Taft-Hartley Act, it conducted a hard-hitting war against any further state legislation. In only two instances did it fail to defeat proposed new "right-to-work" laws, and in 1958 it decisively threw back antiunion forces in California, Ohio, Colorado, Idaho, and Washington.

In the meantime, however, labor had suffered a reverse in the field of national legislation that the AFL-CIO roundly denounced as the "the most severe setback in

more than a decade.” The background for this new law was the dramatic disclosure of corruption and racketeering in a number of unions and the congressional reaction to labor's apparent inability to clean its own house.

Corruption and Deepening Conflict

The problem of corruption in organized labor had a long history, one that could be traced back at least as far as the disclosures of extortion and other improper activities on the part of local union officials made before the United States Industrial Commission in 1899. Then, as half a century later, the unions most deeply implicated were those involving construction workers, dock workers, truck drivers, laundry and dry-cleaning employees, and other service workers. The opportunities for racketeering had always been much greater in such unions than in those embracing workers in productive industry since racketeering frequently predated unionization in these sectors, and, just as in politics, corruption could never be totally stamped out.

The AFL had never proved totally successful in cleansing those of its affiliates that were most susceptible to corruption and racketeering. Because of its deeply held principle of complete union autonomy, the AFL avoided direct intervention in the internal affairs of its affiliates. But as governmental agencies became more concerned with criminal influences in the labor movement, the AFL had no choice but to act more forcefully. Thus in 1953, the AFL expelled the International Longshoremen's Association in response to dramatic revelations of racketeering on the New York–New Jersey waterfront.

The merger of the AFL and the CIO added impetus to labor's anticorruption crusade. Almost immediately, the AFL-CIO established an Ethical Practices Committee charged with drawing up and seeking to enforce rules of conduct aimed against racketeering and corruption by union officials.

Yet organized labor's voluntary attempts to root out corruption were insufficient to ward off congressional investigation of union behavior. In 1957, the Senate established a Select Committee on Improper Activities in the Labor or Management Field, which was headed by Senator John McClellan of Arkansas and had as its vigorous chief counsel a youthful Robert F. Kennedy (whose brother Senator John F. Kennedy served on the committee). This committee promptly instituted a series of nationally televised public hearings that were to shock and alarm the entire country. The evidence spread upon the public record revealed a larger degree of dictatorial union leadership, which violated every democratic principle, and more corruption, racketeering, and gangsterism on the part of union officials than even labor's severest critics had suspected. Witness after witness testified to rigged elections, the misuse of union funds, embezzlement, and theft. It was true that these disclosures involved only a handful of unions, but they nevertheless cast suspicion on the entire labor movement and placed its leaders on the defensive.

The Teamsters, whose strength was centered in the trucking industry, emerged as one of the chief targets of the congressional investigation. Probing deeply into its internal affairs, the McClellan Committee brought out innumerable cases of political chicanery in locals, extortion on the part of union officials in their dealings with employers, and close associations (particularly in New York) with known gangsters. Racketeering was rife, with inevitable terrorism and violence. Even more sensationally, the hearings disclosed that corruption extended to the top leadership. The Teamsters' president, David Beck, was running the union very much as he chose and had diverted union funds to his own private purposes. Self-assured and arrogant, completely disdainful of the Senate committee's powers, Beck repeatedly refused to answer the questions asked him. The evidence brought out against him nevertheless forced him to give up the presidency of his union and led to his indictment – and ultimate conviction – on charges of tax evasion and grand larceny.

Beck's downfall did not, however, lead to any significant cleanup in the Teamsters' affairs. He was succeeded in office by James R. Hoffa, whose rise in union ranks since his early organization of a warehouseman's union in 1932 had brought him to the Teamsters' vice-presidency. An able, efficient organizer, Hoffa's career had nonetheless been marked, according to testimony before the McClellan Committee, by undercover business relationships with the firms with which his union was negotiating and other private dealings with companies handling its health and welfare funds.

It soon became apparent that the new union president was, if anything, even more determined than Beck had been to defy any interference in how he ran things. After a group of union officials had unsuccessfully contested Hoffa's election as illegal, the McClellan Committee sought to oust him on charges that he was the source of a “cancer” that spread continuing corruption and gangsterism throughout his union. But when Hoffa's case was taken to the courts and a federal district judge appointed a board of monitors to supervise temporarily the conduct of the Teamsters' affairs, Hoffa fought back with every possible legal device and continued to hold his office.

A bitter feud thereupon developed between the Teamsters' chief and the Department of Justice, which was accentuated when Robert Kennedy became attorney general in 1961. The former counsel of the McClellan Committee continued to try to break Hoffa's power through repeated prosecutions for malfeasance and corruption. But Hoffa, who developed a reputation as a tough negotiator on behalf of his members, was reelected to his presidency in 1961, and successfully combated every legal move made against him until he was finally sent to prison for fraud and jury tampering in 1967. (A string of successors as Teamster president – Frank Fitzsimmons, Roy Williams, and Jackie Presser – were no cleaner. When, after his release from prison, Hoffa tried to challenge Fitzsimmons for the Teamsters' presidency in 1975, Hoffa himself fell victim to the criminal elements who exerted influence within the union. He disappeared without a trace. His body was never found and the mystery of exactly who was responsible for his probable murder remained unsolved.)



Figure 20.1 Teamster leaders James R. Hoffa (left) and Frank Fitzsimmons, who succeeded Hoffa as the Teamsters' president, in Detroit, 1966. (Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University)

The hearings involving the Teamsters were the most sensational of those held by the McClellan Committee, but only a little less so were the disclosures of corruption in a number of small unions. The Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees Union, the Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers International Union (BCTGM), the Laundry and Dry Cleaners Union (a branch of the Teamsters), the International Union of Operating Engineers, the Allied Industrial Workers of America, and the United Textile Workers of America all came under attack. Union witnesses reported cases of the misuse of union funds, of collusion between union officials and employers, extortion, and violence. Once more there was spread upon the record evidence of a relationship between union officials and underworld elements which victimized employees, employers, and the public alike.

As this evidence came to light, the Ethical Practices Committee of the AFL-CIO was galvanized into new action. It called the unions accused of such improper activities to

account and placed them on probation, so far as their membership in the federation was concerned, until they met prescribed terms for internal reform. When the Teamsters, the BCTGM, and the Laundry and Dry Cleaners Union failed to clean house, the AFL-CIO officially expelled them in an effort to demonstrate that responsible labor leadership deserved public confidence.

In spite of such moves on the part of the AFL-CIO, the first report of the McClellan Committee insisted that its disclosures of union corruption called for governmental action. President Eisenhower agreed. On his urging, Congress began to consider various proposals to stop “corruption, racketeering and abuse of power in labor–management relations.” There was widespread support for some measure along these lines, but congressional debate soon opened up the broader question of legislation affecting the unions' legal rights with a demand for tightening the provisions of the Taft-Hartley Act rather than liberalizing them.

The upshot of the struggle in Congress between the friends and foes of organized labor was the passage of the Landrum-Griffin Act, which Eisenhower signed on September 14, 1959. The first sections of the new law dealt with the issue of corruption and incorporated a bill of rights for union members. These provisions embodied specific safeguards for democratic procedures in the conduct of union affairs, protected union funds with the imposition of fines and prison sentences for any official guilty of their misuse, made any forceful interference with the rights of union members a federal offense, and prohibited persons convicted of certain crimes, and also members of the Communist Party, from serving as union officials for five years after their release from prison or after termination of party membership.

The Landrum-Griffin Act, however, also went beyond the Taft-Hartley Act by severely tightening a number of its provisions governing union activities. It broadened the existing ban on secondary boycotts to prevent a union from bringing any pressure to bear on an employer to make them cease doing business with another employer. It placed a new curb on picketing to outlaw any action whereby a union sought to coerce a company in which a rival union was lawfully recognized. And most seriously from labor's point of view, the new legislation stated that in the so-called “no-man's-land” – those cases in which disputes were judged too unimportant or localized for consideration by the National Labor Relations Board – the states could assume jurisdiction. This latter provision strongly militated against further union organization in the South, where only 2 million out of a possible 12 million workers were organized, because of the wide prevalence in the region of “right-to-work” laws and politicians unfriendly to labor.

As was the case with Taft-Hartley, the Landrum-Griffin Act satisfied neither the fondest wishes of its advocates nor the worst fears of its critics. Unions did not collapse, nor did the more autocratic ones become perfect democracies. In the mid- and late 1960s, when the economy boomed and the labor market tightened, unions increased their membership substantially, especially in the South. What the passage

of Landrum-Griffin did demonstrate, however, was government's deeper, direct involvement in the field of labor relations. For the first time, federal power claimed a direct responsibility for internal union affairs.

The struggle over union corruption and labor legislation also showed the limits of AFL-CIO political influence. Despite the fact that corruption in the labor movement was limited to only a small number of unions, the AFL-CIO failed to stop federal legislation that affected the internal affairs of every union in the nation. Having discarded all dreams of independent political action by the 1950s, the AFL-CIO now found itself as much a captive as a captain of the Democratic Party. Organized labor's almost total integration into the Democratic Party structure still left it at the mercy of the Southern Democratic-Republican congressional coalition, which ruled Congress on many issues vital to unions during most of the period from 1945 to 1982.

While the political battle over union corruption waxed and waned, most unions and corporations continued to negotiate mutually acceptable agreements, without strikes or with only brief ritualistic ones. One major exception broke the rule of harmonious labor-management relations – the great steel strike of 1959 – and its protracted duration and results disclosed much about the real state of labor relations in modern America.

It was perhaps natural that this contest should take place within the steel industry. The strike recalled those major conflicts of the past – Homestead in 1892, the steel strike of 1919, the Little Steel strike of 1937 – in which labor had fought so bitterly for its rights against the entrenched power of the country's largest industry. And in 1959, as in these earlier strikes, the forces of all organized labor and those of all industry believed that their interests were deeply involved in the outcome of the struggle – this time a grim endurance contest rather than a flare-up of violence and intimidation.

The real nature of the conflict was not apparent at first. The negotiation of a new contract between the United Steelworkers (USW) and the steel industry appeared to be no more than another chapter in the endless bargaining over wages, and it was generally believed that the ultimate outcome would be the sort of compromise settlement that had marked every postwar contract: a further increase in steel wages followed by another markup in steel prices.

The industry's position, as developed in the early stages of the negotiations, revealed an apparent determination this time to call a halt to any further increase in wages. Its spokesmen insisted that this was the only way to control inflation. The union, on the other hand, declared that the workers were entitled to higher pay in the light of both increased productivity and higher living expenses, and stoutly maintained that the profits of the steel companies made a reasonable wage increase possible without raising steel prices. Agreement on this issue was difficult enough in itself, and it only gradually became apparent that more was at stake. But when industry also demanded modification of the existing work rules, the union stiffened its resistance all along the line. It refused any concessions on what was a more vital issue than wages.

The steelworkers sought to retain what control they had over work rules in the face of rapid technological change. The steel companies strove to win a free hand in introducing and controlling new methods of production. Jobs, more than wages and fringes, were at stake in this confrontation between labor and capital.

In these circumstances, the contract negotiations broke off in mid-July, and steelworkers throughout the country walked out on strike. Subsequent attempts to reconcile the divergent positions of labor and industry failed with monotonous regularity; as the strike dragged on for seemingly endless weeks and steel supplies reached near exhaustion, the nation's entire economy began to falter even more dangerously than in 1952. In these circumstances, the Eisenhower administration had no choice but to act. On October 9, 1959, President Eisenhower invoked the emergency provisions of the Taft-Hartley Act. Declaring that the continuing strike imperiled national health and safety, he appointed a special board of inquiry, and when it duly reported that it could discover no basis for the strike's settlement, he ordered the Department of Justice to seek an injunction against the USW. A federal district court granted the government's plea, and although the union appealed on the ground that the strike had not in fact created a national emergency, the Supreme Court sustained the lower court's decision by an eight-to-one vote on November 7. The strikers thereupon returned to work, but the officers of the USW bitterly attacked the administration for strikebreaking and, without conceding a point, appeared to be fully prepared to resume the strike when the injunction had run its course.

The deadlock appeared to be insurmountable. The real stumbling block, on which neither side was willing to give way, remained the dispute over work rules and their possible relationship to automation: the union wanted assurances that the introduction of new technologies would not trigger wholesale reorganization of the workplace and cost workers their jobs. As the year drew to an end, the prospect of a renewal of the strike, with even more serious consequences for the economy, became likely. Still, the union's lines held firm with the workers' determination to renew the strike strengthened by the industry's obdurate stand on the work rules. For a time the latter's front seemed to waver when the Kaiser Company withdrew from the corporate coalition and reached an independent agreement with the USW, but corporate solidarity was soon reestablished. The industry's spokesmen reiterated their insistence upon changes in work rules as a necessary condition for any contract.

Then, on January 5, 1960, came the announcement of a sudden and dramatic breakthrough. In the face of steadily mounting economic and political pressure, and its fear that if the strike were renewed government would force an unsatisfactory settlement, the steel industry backed down. It came to terms with the USW and signed a new agreement. It provided for increased pension and insurance payments, with a subsequent wage rise, but most important it incorporated maintenance of the existing work rules. David McDonald, president of the USW, declared the new contract as the best one the union had ever concluded.

The victory won by the USW in the face of such stubborn opposition on the part of management was far more significant in its implications for future union controls over work rules than for its wage increases. And it was an important victory for organized labor as a whole since it had been won in the face of the resistance of industry as a whole. Labor had successfully reasserted its compelling economic power to protect the interests of union members. But the struggle between workers' desire to maintain traditional work rules and management's urge to introduce labor-saving technology did not end in 1960. In the future, labor would lose more often than it would win on this front.

Despite the steelworkers' victory, the future seemed fraught with peril for organized labor as the 1950s drew to a close. No wonder that delegates to the AFL-CIO convention of 1959 moved in an atmosphere thick with gloom. Everywhere the talk was of a conservative corporate and congressional campaign to weaken or destroy the entire labor movement. Also looming over the horizon was the deepening problem of how organized labor would combat the threat of technological innovation. Automation made job security a grave issue in a productive economy that failed to provide work for all.

As the Eisenhower era ended, permanent unemployment seemed to be a fixture of the American economy. At the end of the 1950s, and in 1960/61, recession caused unemployment to rise as high as 6.8 percent of the civilian labor force. Even after the new Democratic president, John F. Kennedy, put forth a combination of large corporate and smaller personal income tax cuts that produced an economic boom, the rate of unemployment stayed historically high. Thus, in December 1964, Lyndon B. Johnson, who succeeded Kennedy as president after the latter's assassination, declared: "The number one priority today is more jobs. This is our dominant domestic problem and we have to face it head-on."

Automation and Alienation

What made the job problem even more severe was its direct relation to two of the most significant developments of the 1960s: the widespread introduction of automation into industry and the revolution in race relations. However much experts debated over the long-range impact of automation and whether it increased or decreased total opportunities for employment, it clearly reduced the need for workers in several basic industries and transformed the structure of the labor force. By 1963, the automobile companies produced more vehicles than they had in 1955 with 17 percent fewer workers. In the steel industry, half as many workers could meet the production levels of 1946/47 in the more automated mills. In 1964, President Johnson predicted that, by the end of the 1970s, the United States would be able to match the industrial output of the 1960s with 22 million fewer workers. "The worker's great worry these days," wrote A. H. Raskin, the nation's leading labor journalist, "is that he will be cast onto the slag heap by a robot." A story told about the automobile industry

illustrated Raskin's point. Harlow Curtice, president of General Motors, took Walter Reuther for a tour of a new automated automobile plant. Turning to the union leader, Curtice said, "Walter, in the future the UAW will not be able to call the machines out on strike." To which Reuther responded, "Will the machines be able to buy your automobiles?"

Some of the major strikes and labor-management agreements of the 1960s illustrated clearly the impact of technological innovations on workers and unions. Containerization revolutionized the loading and unloading of ships, drastically reducing the need for dockside labor. As a consequence, the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union of the Pacific Coast and the International Longshoremen's Association of the Atlantic and Gulf coasts found themselves locked in conflict with the shipping companies. After a series of strikes and Taft-Hartley injunctions, both unions reached settlements that accepted containerization in return for guarantees of annual earnings, if not jobs, for most current union members. Moreover, as longshoremen retired or died, natural attrition would steadily shrink the ranks of dockers and union members. A similar settlement ended a decades-old dispute on the nation's railroads. Ever since the introduction of diesel engines in the 1920s, firemen occupied a superfluous job. But traditional union contracts and state full-crew laws protected the jobs of firemen and other redundant crewmen. Finally, in the 1960s, after a threatened national strike and the appointment of a presidential fact-finding commission, the dispute was resolved. The presidential commission's recommendations, which were enforced by Lyndon Johnson, did away with firemen on diesel locomotives as well as other unneeded crewmen. Again the unions won job protection for most current members at the expense of allowing attrition to reduce employment on the railroads.

Printers in the newspaper business suffered a similar fate. Long among the most traditional, skilled, secure, and status-encrusted workers, printers in the 1960s could not stymie technological innovation. New computers, which transferred reporters' stories and other copy directly from word processors to tape-controlled electronic typesetting systems, eliminated the need for the printer's skills. Some newspapers used the new technology to break the union. Others, like the *New York Times*, after experiencing two long and costly strikes, reached an agreement with the printers' union that effectively made the craft a dying trade. Again, in return for securing the jobs or the income of current regular full-time printers, the union conceded the *Times* and other newspapers the right to introduce the new computer-based technology. Having become superfluous, the remaining printers had little to do until they chose to retire or accept a cash payment for quitting, knowing that no new printers would replace them in the future.

As longshoremen, railroad firemen, and printers became dying occupations, jobs expanded in other sectors of the economy. But the expansion of white-collar employment did not help the victims of automation. The white-collar service and trades category of employment included an incredibly diverse array of occupations.

Less skilled and educated men and women could find employment as fast-food restaurant workers, hairdressers, waitresses, sanitation workers, car washers, and domestics. Those jobs, however, spelled low wages, miserable working conditions, and insecurity of employment. The private and public sector white-collar jobs that paid best and provided decent conditions and job security were reserved for people with advanced formal education. "Automation has now created an abyss between those with training and education and those without," wrote the socialist intellectual Michael Harrington. "So a man can be sentenced to life at the bottom of the economy without even becoming a certified, statistical tragedy."

For people of color, all those problems were compounded. First, nonwhite workers were heavily concentrated among the ranks of the semiskilled and unskilled, whose opportunities in the new job universe were most constricted. Second, those nonwhites who had more skilled or secure, hence better-paying, jobs were concentrated in precisely those industries affected by technological innovation. Third, the unemployment rate for nonwhites constantly held at twice the level of that for white workers. "The two-to-one ratio," wrote the sociologist Daniel Patrick Moynihan in 1965, "is now frozen into the economy." Commenting on the plight of nonwhite workers, A. Philip Randolph, head of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and the nation's most eminent black labor leader, observed, "black workers face a virtually unsolvable problem." Indeed black teenagers endured unemployment rates of 30 to 40 percent, and this at the moment of the civil rights revolution and its transformation of American race relations.

Among the major beneficiaries of the expansion of the labor force were female workers. By 1964, women constituted 34 percent of the labor force as compared to 20 percent in 1947, and their proportion would rise steadily every year thereafter. Most strikingly, the greatest increase in waged work occurred among older married women, precisely those who in the past had remained at home. But the vast majority of women workers tended to be employed outside the highly unionized, high-wage job world of basic industry. Locked in the female-dominated "pink-collar job ghetto," women workers in these years typically earned only 59 percent as much as male workers. In fact, the better educated a woman was, the less she earned relative to a similarly educated man. That ratio also seemed to be "frozen into the economy."

In fact, the whole dual labor market appeared impermeable to change. Nonwhites, women, and teenagers all competed for the same unstable, low-wage, nonunion jobs, with women, as a group, making the most "progress." For too long all these low-wage workers toiled away in what Michael Harrington described as "the other America" – a part of the nation invisible to its more affluent and contented citizens.

Among the so-called affluent and contented were said to be the vast majority of union members in the primary labor market. By the mid-1950s their real wages had advanced 50 percent over prewar levels, and by the late 1960s had risen almost another 50 percent. Fringe benefits added to the feeling of security and comfort.

More workers than ever before covered by union contracts now received life, sickness, and accident insurance, survivor benefits, improved pensions, and supplementary unemployment benefits. The contract between the UAW and General Motors of 1964 included benefits for psychiatric treatment, tuition for job-related education, severance pay, and incentives for early retirement. An increasing number of contracts provided for paid holidays (as many as ten per year for UAW members) and paid vacations, the latter depending on the length of service, but ranging up to four weeks annually. By the mid-1960s, economists estimated that 85 percent of workers had an average of 20 paid days off a year.

As early as 1959, the Department of Labor had reported that the “wage earner's way of life is well-nigh indistinguishable from that of his salaried co-citizens. Their homes, their cars, their babysitters, the style of clothes their wives and children wear, the food they eat...their days off – all of these are alike and are becoming more nearly identical.” Five years later, an article in the *Saturday Review of Literature* echoed the same theme: “The working class as a proportionately large and socially identifiable segment of our society is all but disappearing – the generic middle class now includes skilled and semiskilled laborers.”

A poll conducted by the AFL-CIO in 1968 provided some confirmation for such assertions. The poll reported that 45 percent of union families earned between \$7,500 and \$15,000 annually, and that another 32 percent were in the \$5,000–\$7,500 range. Nearly half lived in comfortable suburbs, and most cited taxes and prices – typical middle-class concerns – not jobs and wages, as their primary political worries. George Meany added his own gloss to these findings in a Labor Day interview with the *New York Times* in 1969. Speaking with pride about the accomplishments of the labor movement, Meany agreed with a reporter that, “Labor, to some extent, has become middle class.” “When you become a person who has a home and has property,” he added, “to some extent you become conservative. And, I would say to that extent, labor has become conservative. I don't think there is any question of that.”

But even before this image of the worker as a satisfied bourgeois citizen indistinguishable from other Americans became commonplace, the novelist and social critic Harvey Swados criticized the notion that the worker “is just like the rest of us – fat, satisfied, smug, a little restless but hardly distinguishable from...fellow members of the middle class – whom he earns like, votes like...dreams like.” Swados used his own personal experiences as an automobile assembly-line worker during the 1950s to remind people that hand and muscle work remained absolutely subordinate to mind and desk work, that dealing with people conferred much more prestige and satisfaction than manipulating things. He described fellow workers whose attitudes toward the job were compounded of hatred, shame, and resignation, who knew that they did endless, filthy, and mindless work for less money than so-called professionals. As one worker told him: “I curse the day I ever started, now I'm stuck; any man with brains that stays here ought to have his head examined. This is no place for an intelligent human being.”

No wonder that at the end of their shifts so many workers fled as rapidly as they could to their homes, many of which were now detached, single-family suburban dwellings thanks to the income gains unions had won. There they could enjoy such things as basement workshops, backyard vegetable-flower gardens, and the satisfaction of real creation, or a less active form of pleasure in such things as color television and the other appliances available in a mass-consumer society, or power-boating, golfing, or barbecuing during leisure time. That these suburbs tended to be overwhelmingly white enclaves, whose patterns of racial exclusion were underwritten by postwar federal housing policies, only exacerbated the sense of alienation felt by nonwhites in declining industrial cities such as Detroit, which steadily lost population after 1950.

Yet, as sociological study after study showed, working-class suburbs were different from more traditional middle- and upper-class ones. Blue-collar marriages built on more clearly defined male and female sociocultural roles and less on the affective relations so important among middle-class suburban husbands and wives. Workers were less likely than middle-class suburbanites to belong to civic clubs, instead preferring more traditional fraternal associations. Workers also preferred to spend most of their leisure time in a family setting and to entertain mostly within the family. Finally, most workers brought union loyalties and Democratic voting preferences with them to the suburbs.

Labor, Civil Rights, and the Great Society

However many workers in the mid-1960s behaved like middle-class citizens or aspired to such status, millions of others – especially workers of color – were trapped in dead-end jobs or mired in real poverty. These were the people Harrington described in *The Other America* (1962), the ones for whom John F. Kennedy provided federal work programs, and for whom Lyndon B. Johnson declared his “war on poverty.” Disproportionately nonwhite, female, or aged, they were less likely to enjoy the direct protection of unions and were most in need of governmental assistance. Ironically, it was for precisely this sector of the population, and not for its own institutional needs, that the AFL-CIO accomplished the most politically.

In the congressional struggles over Kennedy's “New Frontier” and Johnson's “Great Society” programs, the AFL-CIO proved the most effective lobbying voice for “the other America.” In 1961, Congress broadened the coverage of the Fair Labor Standards Act and raised the minimum wage to \$1.25 an hour (\$10.09 in 2016 dollars). This was a triumph for organized labor, although a worker fully employed at the minimum wage would still earn only \$2,600 annually (\$20,994 in 2016 dollars), a figure well below the government-defined minimum subsistence level. Consequently, the AFL-CIO continued to put pressure on Congress for expanded Social Security coverage, a progressively higher minimum wage, and health-care protection for all Americans. It also sought legislation to ameliorate unemployment through a reduced

work week, government-sponsored job-training programs, and countercyclical public works.

Both presidents Kennedy and Johnson tried to repay politically the trade unionists who had worked so hard for their elections in 1960 and 1964. The Democratic chief executives strongly endorsed extended Social Security benefits and higher minimum wages. Moreover, in 1962, Congress passed the Manpower Development and Training Act to help workers who lost their jobs as a result of automation. Johnson's "war on poverty" met organized labor's aims even more fully.

The concrete results of the Johnson program were written in new legislation that ranged from aid to education to urban development, from civil rights to health care and immigration. The generously funded Economic Opportunity Act set up such new projects as a Job Corps for young people, work-training assistance, and varied urban and rural community action programs. In 1965, Congress made available more money for social welfare in general than ever before in its history. The adoption of Medicare (which provided health insurance to Americans of retirement age), and Medicaid (which provided access to health care for the poor) provided coverage to more Americans than had ever before received it – and promoted the growth of the health-care industry as an increasingly important employer. All this benefited union members whose high wages and improved social status would prove unsustainable if unemployment and poverty were allowed to undermine economic security. Meanwhile, passage of the 1965 Hart-Celler Immigration and Nationality Act with AFL-CIO support removed the quota systems that had governed American immigration policy since the 1920s, opening the door to a new wave of immigration that would transform the nation demographically by the end of the twentieth century.

As one observer wrote, labor was "the largest single organized force in this country pushing for progressive social legislation." On few issues was this truer and more paradoxical than in the battle over civil rights legislation. Itself a laggard internally and institutionally on the "race question," the AFL-CIO had refused to participate in the famous 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom (even as individual unions such as Walter Reuther's UAW played a prominent role), had long tolerated racially discriminatory practices by its affiliates, and was slow to accommodate the specific needs of its African American members. Yet the AFL-CIO nonetheless proved itself unstinting in lobbying for the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Right Act of 1965. Indeed, when faced with the choice of prioritizing the elimination of Section 14(b) of the Taft-Hartley Act ("the right-to-work" clause) or legislation that guaranteed equal voting rights (one person, one vote), the labor federation chose the latter, championing the principle of democracy above narrow trade union interests.

Internally, however, the race issue divided the AFL-CIO. As early as 1955 it had established a civil rights committee to eliminate racial discrimination among its affiliates. But its control over international unions and their locals was limited, and Meany was also personally loath to act on such matters. Thus some skilled trades

excluded blacks from membership, and in the South a dual system of seniority often governed promotion and wages. The failure of the AFL-CIO to act more decisively prompted A. Philip Randolph in 1960 to form the Negro American Labor Council in order to keep “the conscience of the AFL-CIO disturbed.”

The rise of black consciousness and militancy in the 1960s further roiled the labor movement. Herbert Hill, the labor adviser of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, clashed with Meany at the convention of 1962 over the AFL-CIO's racial practices. Randolph, too, often found himself at odds with Meany. The overwhelmingly white building trades unions were constantly targeted by the street protests of civil rights militants and were under governmental orders to recruit more minority members. In 1968, the New York City teachers' union led a strike that put it in conflict with a part of the city's black community, which was seeking greater community control over predominantly African American schools in an area of Brooklyn called Ocean Hill-Brownsville. And in Detroit, where black workers formed a large and vital sector in the automobile industry, militants among them created revolutionary factions within the UAW – including DRUM (Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement) and FRUM (Ford Revolutionary Union Movement). These black militants were as determined to fight UAW leaders as take on General Motors, Chrysler, or Ford. Even where revolutionary aspirations were not operative, black trade unionists were galvanized by the civil rights struggle and determined to increase their influence within their organizations. This impetus led to the creation in 1972 of a network of black trade union leaders and members called the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists.

Rising racial consciousness set the context for one of the most remarkable union breakthroughs of the 1960s. The Mexican American (or Chicano) and Filipino workers who toiled in California's “factories in the fields” took advantage of a window of opportunity created by the end of the *bracero* program in 1964, which removed the threat of guest workers that had been used to subvert previous organizing efforts, and for first time in their lives built a successful union. Finding a leader in Cesar Chavez, himself a Mexican American of farmworker origins, the California farmworkers formed the United Farm Workers' Organizing Committee (later the United Farm Workers of America) to carry on their struggle with the state's grape growers. With dedicated organizers such as the Chicana Dolores Huerta and the Filipino Larry Itliong, funds from the AFL-CIO, assistance provided by the UAW, and moral support from such politicians as Senator Robert F. Kennedy and many Catholic prelates and priests, the farmworkers pursued *la causa* (the cause) and *la huelga* (the strike). Because conventional strikes and picketing tactics were difficult to employ in the countryside, Chavez's union perfected a consumer boycott of California grapes (ironically, because farmworkers were not subject to the protections or restraints of the National Labor Relations Act, they had more freedom in the use of boycotts than did industrial workers). So successful was the boycott strategy that in 1967 California grape growers began to sign contracts with the farm workers – a

triumph won by no previous organization of such workers. Buoyed by his union's success in the vineyards, Chavez in 1969/70 pushed ahead to demand contracts from other California commercial farmers, especially lettuce growers, who were also subjected to a consumer boycott. But by then the farmworkers' organizing campaign had been slowed, partly as a result of jurisdictional conflict with the Teamsters and partly as a consequence of internal organizational disarray.



Figure 20.2 Cesar Chavez, the first successful organizer of farmworkers.
(Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University)



Figure 20.3 Chavez's union colleague, Dolores Huerta, on a car roof signaling workers to strike, near Delano, California. (United Farm Workers of America)

The increased militancy of African Americans and the farmworkers' breakthrough notwithstanding, organized labor suffered from a continued inability to organize workers as rapidly as the labor force grew, or to penetrate substantially the dynamically growing sales, service, and public employment sectors. Between 1960 and 1965, total union membership remained relatively stable but continued its decline as a proportion of the civilian labor force, dropping to 25 percent, the lowest level since 1950. Only about 10 percent of the workers who fell into the white-collar category (2.3 million out of about 22 million) belonged to unions.

The Rise of Public Employee Unionism

The situation would have been worse for labor in these years had not the expansion of government and the rise of a civil rights consciousness set the context for the greatest expansion of trade unionism in the post-World War II era: the emergence of public sector unions. Teachers, nurses, and social-service professionals began to act like traditional trade unionists in the years between 1955 and 1975, and many of them helped transform their hitherto ineffective professional associations into potent labor

unions. Altogether, public-worker unions and employee associations increased their membership from about 400,000 to more than 4 million during this period. By 1978, they represented 36 percent of all state and local public employees. Among the eight unions with the largest gains in membership between 1968 and 1978, the most successful were the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), with 650,000 new members, a growth of 180 percent, and the American Federation of Teachers, whose membership tripled from 165,000 to 500,000. Nor were these the only growing public sector unions. By 1980, the independent National Education Association, which represented teachers and bargained like a trade union, claimed 1.8 million members, making it larger than any union in the AFL-CIO.

These gains had resulted as much from changes in public policy and the solidity of the labor–Democratic Party alliance as from transformations in the labor market. Certainly, the rise of public employee unionism grew from the expansion of government on all levels, federal and especially state and municipal. It benefited even more from the fact that Democratic allies of labor held power in Congress and in the statehouses and city halls of the nation's largest states and metropolitan centers. Equally important, public employment had for years been a beachhead and secure place of employment for African Americans and women denied equal opportunity in the private marketplace. The emerging civil rights and feminist movements engendered an especially potent rights consciousness among women and minority public employees, who demanded the right to unionize and within their unions the right to run for office. Not only did public employee unions tend to have more female and minority members than those in more traditional sectors of the economy, but more of them held union office.

The first clear indications of how public employment would open doors to union penetration came in 1959, when Wisconsin enacted a law providing for collective bargaining for public workers, and in 1962, when President Kennedy issued Executive Order 10988, validating the right of federal employees to bargain collectively (a move that caused the ranks of the American Federation of Government Employees to soar). In 1958, the mayor of New York City, Robert F. Wagner Jr. (son of the author of the Wagner Act), had issued his own Executive Order 49, which enabled municipal employees to bargain collectively with the agencies that employed them. Afterward, District Council No. 37 of AFSCME grew into one of the largest and most influential unions in the city. Wagner's successor as mayor, John Lindsay, a reform-minded Republican, treated the municipal unions and their leaders as legitimate players in city affairs.

The rising power of municipal employee unions led to heightened militancy among their members and even to strikes, which remained illegal for public employees in most political jurisdictions. Only a few states and municipalities allowed their employees to walk off the job legally. Elsewhere, public officials had to invent a means to enable public employees to exercise their collective power without resorting to strikes and the draconian punishment that often ensued. New York State, which

had more unionized public employees than any other jurisdiction, came up with one answer in 1967. That year the state legislature enacted the Taylor Law, named after its drafter, the noted labor arbitrator and mediator George W. Taylor. The law legitimated collective bargaining by recognized trade unions; it outlawed strikes by public employees and specified relatively temperate punishment for violators; and it created a Public Employee Relations Board to resolve disputes when employers and employees reached impasse. Public employee unionism thrived in New York State and wherever like regimes were established. But in those regions of the nation where private-sector unionism had never flourished – mostly Southern, Plains, and Mountain states – and “right-to-work” laws had been enacted as allowed by Section 14(b) of Taft-Hartley, the political order favored business interests and refused to tolerate public employee unionism.

The growth of public employee unionism had another noticeable impact on the behavior of union members and leaders. Because women were so heavily concentrated in public employment, as noted above, they increasingly served as union officers. Trade unions had been traditionally committed to the principle of “equal pay for equal work,” a concept that linked wages to job classification, not the race, gender, or age of the employee. In practice, however, men and women rarely occupied the same job classifications. Also, as a matter of practice, those jobs typified as female tended to carry lower wage rates than those characterized as male, and because the jobs assigned each gender group were different, the “equal pay for equal work” principle proved of little use to those who wanted to challenge inequities. Public employee unions heavily influenced by their female membership and female officers thus began to promote the concept of “comparable worth,” the idea that however different jobs might seem to be, they did not necessarily justify substantially different wage rates. The argument suggested that the value of a female stenographer might be comparable to that of a male electrician, and hence deserving of a comparable wage. Using the concept of “comparable worth,” public employee unions pushed their employers to restudy differential wage rates and to eliminate discrepancies based on gender and not on utility. Women unionists also demanded that their unions pay more attention to such family matters as day care and time off to meet pressing domestic obligations. From public employee unions, these issues spread to unions in the private sector and into debates over public policy about government-mandated work regulations and social benefits.

Public employee unionism also held important implications for African Americans, who in the postwar years had found public employment more open to workers of color and less subject to racial discrimination. Public sector unionism tapped into the civil rights consciousness of the 1960s as it mobilized hundred of thousands of African Americans into unions that helped empower them and elevate their standards of living. The most dramatic public sector strike of the 1960s – a walkout by black sanitation workers in Memphis, Tennessee, in 1968 – was as much a civil rights struggle as a union fight. Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. went to Memphis to support the

sanitation workers, seeing in their strike the kernel of a new movement for racial and economic justice that he hoped would transform the nation. Revulsion against his murder there on April 4, 1968, helped further galvanize opinion in favor of public sector collective bargaining.

War and Division

For a time – from 1965 to 1970 – organized labor reversed somewhat the pattern of its relative decline in membership, thanks in part to the surge of public sector members and to an economy stoked by spending related to the Vietnam War and the Johnson administration's loose fiscal and monetary policies. Unemployment declined, the demand for skilled labor exceeded the supply, and trade unions operated in the most favorable situation since the end of the Korean War. Unions consequently added more than two million members to their ranks in these years. Significantly, however, the rise in membership only kept pace with the increase in the size of the labor force. As the 1960s ended, organized labor's relative size and strength remained where it had been at the start of the decade, but the union movement at the end of the 1960s was once again divided – this time as a result of the war in Vietnam, which the United States entered in 1965.

Initially, the AFL-CIO, like the most of the country, seemed united on US involvement in the war in Vietnam. In October 1965, the organization's executive council reaffirmed its total support for President Johnson's policies there. Even as the war grew into the single most contentious issue in American domestic affairs by 1968, the AFL-CIO remained committed to the war effort. No matter how many Democrats, Republicans, current and former American diplomats, and businesspeople decried US policy in Southeast Asia, George Meany held firm to Lyndon B. Johnson's foreign policy and the containment of communism. No matter how unpopular the war became at home and how much it sowed the seeds of violence domestically, the AFL-CIO chief refused to change his mind about Vietnam. The gap between old-guard labor's view of world affairs and that of other Americans increasingly disillusioned by the war was revealed graphically by events on Wall Street in the spring of 1970. There, unionized building trades workers, wearing hard hats and carrying American flags, shouted patriotic slogans and clubbed and beat antiwar demonstrators in the so-called “hard hat riots.”

The refusal of the AFL-CIO to modify its strident anticommunism and its inability to organize the most rapidly growing sector of the labor force brought tensions to the surface within the movement as a growing minority of union leaders began to question the war. In February 1967, Walter Reuther, long dissatisfied with his marginal position in the AFL-CIO and increasingly skeptical of the war, decided to take the UAW out of the federation. In a letter released in February 1967, Reuther charged: “The AFL-CIO, in policy and program, too often continues to live with the past. It advances few new ideas and lacks the necessary vitality, vision, and imagination and social invention

to make it equal to the challenging problems of a changing world. It is sad but nevertheless true that the AFL-CIO is becoming increasingly the comfortable, complacent custodian of the status quo.” The UAW leader promised that his union would fight for more democracy in the labor movement, finance and support a more aggressive organizing campaign, lobby for an expanded welfare state, and “resist communism and all forms of totalitarianism that would enslave the human spirit.”

To accomplish his stated goals, Reuther invited the Teamsters, which had been expelled from the AFL-CIO a decade earlier due to its toleration of corruption, to join with the UAW in an Alliance for Labor Action (ALA), allying the nation's two largest unions. It was a strange alliance of convenience that brought together one of the most democratic unions and one of the most autocratic, a practitioner of reform unionism with an exponent of business unionism, the most Democratic-leaning of labor organizations with one of the most Republican, one of the cleanest unions and one with a long history of racketeering, and an increasingly antiwar union with one that continued to staunchly support US involvement in Vietnam. This is perhaps why the ALA amounted to little before it unraveled in the year following Reuther's death on May 9, 1970, in an airplane crash.

Antiwar voices grew within the labor movement after the election of the Republican Richard M. Nixon to the presidency in 1968 over Hubert Humphrey (who won the support of the vast majority of AFL-CIO unions). But the AFL-CIO's official position of continued support for the war in Vietnam alienated the youthful members of the New Left, who were critical of US anticommunist foreign policy. Sensing an opening, the Nixon administration worked aggressively to win the support of the pro-war faction of the labor movement with a policy of achieving “peace with honor” in Vietnam. Nixon's strategy worked. When the AFL-CIO refused to endorse the Democratic challenger Senator George McGovern of South Dakota against Nixon in the presidential election of 1972 (much to the consternation of antiwar union leaders such as Jerry Wurf of AFSCME), it proved to be the final straw for many young antiwar activists. To them, the cigar-chomping George Meany symbolized a movement that had long ago sold labor out and become part of “the establishment.”

There was some truth in this critique. As the 1970s began, US workers and their unions seemed firmly integrated into a corporate welfare state. A variety of federal programs set minimum wages, stabilized incomes, provided job security, offered Social Security to the aged, infirm, and dependent, and redistributed a small share of the national income to the truly needy. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration, a new federal agency created in 1970 with a strong push from labor, was beginning to police workplace safety. The major unions, meantime, negotiated long-term contracts with binding no-strike clauses that provided stability for large enterprises and income gains for workers. As the Harvard economist John Kenneth Galbraith noted in 1967, workers and their unions had become cooperative members of “the new industrial state” – a junior but vital part of the ruling “technostructure.”

Yet as the next decades would reveal, labor's place in the economic and political order was not nearly as secure as Galbraith – and labor's leaders – had believed.

21

THE GREAT REVERSAL: WORKERS AND UNIONS, 1973 TO 1994

For 25 years after World War II, the western nations and Japan enjoyed a wave of economic expansion and prosperity unparalleled in the history of modern capitalism. This boom enabled the United States to create an “affluent society,” and it enabled trade unions in the basic industries to provide their members with steadily rising real wages, expanding fringe benefits, and job security. Economic growth, moreover, created the resources with which postwar federal administrations from Eisenhower through Nixon expanded welfare benefits and transferred some of the surplus accumulated by the successful to the poor and unfortunate. By the end of the 1960s, the combination of economic prosperity and federal transfer payments had pulled millions of Americans above the poverty line.

The surge of economic expansion and prosperity ended in the 1970s. Throughout the advanced industrial world, the United States included, supply outpaced demand, inflation replaced price stability, and mass unemployment again became a reality. Throughout the 1980s, only Japan among the leading industrial nations, and Austria and Sweden among smaller ones, seemed able to maintain high productivity and relatively full employment. The United States, for example, entered the 1980s plagued by a combination of double-digit inflation, declining industrial productivity, and the highest level of unemployment since the Great Depression.

Sweeping changes in the nation's social, economic, and political landscapes threatened US workers and their labor movement with a crisis of unprecedented proportions in the last quarter of the twentieth century. Union membership plunged, politics shifted in a conservative direction, and workers experienced increasing insecurity. What happened?

Economic Crisis and Its Aftermath

No simple summary of facts can explain the economic crisis and reorganization that took place in the United States in the years after 1973. Nonetheless, a few features stand out. The 1970s opened with a burst of inflation fueled by war spending, which President Nixon tried to combat through mandated price and wage controls in the summer of 1971. For a time the controls worked; but a year later, Nixon lifted the controls and prices resurged. This new round of inflation was aggravated by the first “energy crisis,” which followed hard on the heels of the 1973 war in the Middle East between Israel and the Arab nations. Using US support of alleged Israeli aggression against the Arab states as a pretext, the exporting states (predominantly Persian Gulf

Arab nations) used their cartel, the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), to embargo oil shipments to the United States. Then OPEC spiked the price of crude oil, steadily raising it more than 1,000 percent. These moves also drove up the price of everything dependent on petroleum – from public and private transportation to home heating, lighting, and food. When Gerald Ford replaced Nixon as president in 1974 after the latter resigned from office as a result of the Watergate scandal, he made the fight against inflation his top priority. But he did so by dampening economic growth, thus inducing a recession. In 1975, the unemployment level exceeded 8 percent, and for the first time in years the number of families classified as living in poverty actually increased. Even fully employed workers experienced declines in real take-home pay as prices soared and Social Security and other payroll taxes rose.

A dangerous synergy emerged. On the one hand, inflation diluted earning power as price rises outpaced wage increases. On the other hand, public policies implemented to restrain inflation spurred unemployment and imperiled the earning ability of those workers with the least bargaining power in the labor market. The phenomenon of “stagflation” – simultaneous increases in inflation and unemployment – took hold. By the end of the 1970s, the real purchasing power of family income had declined, and economists warned that Americans were likely to see their standard of living reduced during the 1980s if these trends persisted.

Such worries led Ford's successor in the White House, the Democrat Jimmy Carter, who eked out a victory against Ford in the election of 1976, to appoint inflation hawk Paul Volcker as chair of the Federal Reserve Board in 1977. Volcker chose to combat the double-digit inflation and interest rates of the late 1970s through monetary policies guaranteed to slow the economy and force it into deep recession. Ironically, these policies helped Republican Ronald Reagan defeat Carter in 1980 with the promise that he would spur renewed economic growth. But during its first two years, the Reagan administration stepped up the effort to quell inflation by cutting social spending, which only saw the recession deepen. By December 1981, unemployment had reached 10.8 percent nationally – the highest since the Great Depression – and in such states as Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Alabama, which were heavily dependent on the deeply troubled automobile, steel, and mining industries, the rates of joblessness were much higher. The figure for African Americans soared above 18 percent; for black teenagers it approached 50 percent.

Between 1983 and 1988, unemployment fell and fewer Americans were jobless, but economic security did not return with the rebound. Wages and incomes failed to rise sufficiently for most workers to improve their real standards of living even when they were employed full time. The earnings of high-school dropouts fell 15 percent, and even graduates of secondary schools experienced a loss of 9 percent in earnings. Indeed, according to a report prepared by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, among ten industrial or recently industrializing nations between the years 1985 and 1988, only in the United States did workers experience a loss in their rate of compensation. Many

American families could only tread water economically or enjoy minimal improvements in living standards by having multiple wage earners in the same household. As the “living wage” or “family wage” (a wage sufficient to support the traditionally male, primary wage earner and his family) went from an elusive ideal to a historical relic, the two–wage-earner household increasingly became the norm. Consequently, many husbands worked on more than one job, and wives reentered the paid labor force more quickly after childbirth, further straining family life. In households without multiple wage earners, especially those headed by single women, child poverty soared as wages for working women continued to trail those of men. Some reports suggested that a quarter of all American children lived at or below the poverty level, with those in single-headed households at most risk.

Restructuring the Labor Force

A good share of the stagnation in wages and family income resulted from measurable changes in the character and composition of the American labor force. Between the 1940s and 1970s, those workers who had experienced the greatest rise in real standards of living had been concentrated in the unionized mass-production industries or the skilled trades, where union members had exceptional bargaining power in the labor market. Even nonunion employers who competed for the same sources of labor had to meet union standards or risk losing their best employees or having to deal with a discontented workforce. During the 1970s and 1980s, however, it was precisely those sectors of the economy and the unions situated in them that suffered the heaviest job and membership losses.

A combination of domestic economic stagnation and global competition for markets at home and abroad accelerated the factors restructuring the American labor force. Such industries as automobiles, steel, rubber, and textiles, to name only a few, faced global overcapacity. Higher-quality, lower-priced, high–value-added products from East Asian competitors, especially Japan, and European industrial nations captured markets from American mass-production enterprises. In order to survive in the competitive world marketplace, American corporations had to introduce technological innovations that substituted capital (automated machinery and computerized robots) for human labor. Hence employment in the basic mass-production industries contracted steadily.

The process introduced a new word to the vocabulary, *deindustrialization*. Across a broad swath of the United States, mostly from the Great Lakes to the Mountain West but including parts of the South such as Birmingham-Bessemer, Alabama, and the textile towns of the Piedmont, steel mills, automobile assembly plants, and textile mills shut down, leaving host communities bereft of their primary source of jobs – once-thriving towns now characterized as parts of a “rust-belt.” Between 1973 and 1995, the steel industry shed over 400,000 jobs, total employment falling from 600,000 to 169,000. In Lackawanna, New York, just outside Buffalo, the community's raison

d'être, its Bethlehem steel mill, cut employment from 21,500 to 12,000 between 1965 and 1973; in 1977 Bethlehem cut another 3,500 jobs, and in 1983 it shut nearly the entire mill, a process it would complete as the decade ended. In November 1979, US Steel announced that it was closing 15 mills in 8 states, with the heaviest job losses coming in western Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Alabama. Then, as the corporation shut its mills in Youngstown, Ohio; Fairfield, Alabama; and Homestead, Pennsylvania – the site of the great lockout and strike of 1892 – 13,000 more steelworkers were let go. Another 100,000 steelworkers lost their jobs during 1981/82, as more mills closed.

A similar fate befell the American automobile industry in cities such as Flint, Michigan, the site of labor's greatest single triumph of the 1930s, the "Great Sit-Down Strike" that paralyzed General Motors (GM). Home to some of GM's key plants and primarily a single-company city, Flint fell victim to GM's shrinking share of the automobile market. In 1978, the company employed 76,000 workers there; twenty years later, in 1998, that number had fallen to 35,000, and GM had not stopped shedding jobs. Within a year, the company closed its Buick City complex, the last assembly plant in Flint. The site, which had employed 28,000 workers in the mid-1980s, had only 1,000 full-time and 200 part-time workers at the time of its closing. In two decades, GM had eliminated 50,000 jobs in Flint, leaving behind a depressed city with masses of unemployed workers and shuttered storefronts, the subject of Michael Moore's prize-winning documentary film, *Roger and Me* (1989).

Some 1,500 miles to the west, a comparable tragedy played out for the citizens of Anaconda, Montana. Another one-industry, company town, Anaconda once boasted a copper smelter and refinery that had provided jobs for thousands of its residents, all of whom were union members – first in the International Union of Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers and later the United Steelworkers. In 1980, the Anaconda Copper Company banked its furnaces, razed its smokestacks, discharged its workforce, and transformed the enormous slag heaps that surrounded the smelter-refinery into a Jack Nicklaus-designed golf course.

In relatively low-value-added industries such as textiles, garments, shoes, and computer parts, developing nations – most prominently those in East and South Asia but also in Mexico and Central America – attracted foreign capital with their abundant supplies of cheap labor and low costs of production. As the United States enthusiastically promoted free trade policies globally through the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT, the predecessor of the World Trade Organization, or WTO), domestic manufacturers and capitalists moved their production facilities abroad to capitalize on cheap labor or invested directly in overseas enterprises that exported their products to the United States. This expansion of world trade – a central component of what came to be called "globalization" – decimated the domestic shoe industry; it crippled the production of mass-market garments in the United States; it threatened employment in the Southern textile industry; and it practically eliminated the domestic production of mass-market audio and video products. One result of the competitive pressures induced by low-wage overseas

labor was the reemergence and growth of old-style garment industry sweatshops in New York City and Los Angeles, both of which drew on a steady influx of legal and illegal immigrants from Asia and Central America. At one time the textile and clothing industries had harbored three of the larger trade unions in the nation – the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, the Textile Workers' Union of America, and the Amalgamated Clothing Workers – each of which boasted 300,000 plus members; by the end of the 1990s, the newly merged union of these three bodies, the Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees (UNITE), claimed a total of 220,000 members.

Only in the clerical, retail, and service sectors, which had yet to be threatened by comparable global competition, did employment expand. Not surprisingly, then, in July 1982, for the first time in US history, total employment in the consumer, financial, and service sectors surpassed the job total in primary production – manufacturing, mining, and construction. In the three-plus decades after World War II, employment in the white-collar sector tripled to account for more than 27 percent of non-farm payroll jobs, while primary sector blue-collar employment fell from 41 percent to less than 27 percent. By 1981, such fast-food enterprises as McDonald's and Burger King employed more workers than either the automobile or steel industries. The forces of global economic competition continued to shrink the active labor force in basic industry throughout the last two decades of the twentieth century, as the number of employees in the clerical and service trades steadily rose.

The dramatic restructuring of the American economy did not, however, undo segmentation in the labor force or its basis in racial and gender differentials. White males still dominated the shrinking sector of high-wage, union-protected, private sector jobs. As the labor market remained slack throughout the 1980s, African American and Hispanic American males saw their earnings fall to 73 percent and 71 percent, respectively, of white men's average earnings. Women, by contrast, experienced a relative rise in comparative earning power with regard to race. White women saw their wages rise to 67 percent of white men's earnings; African American women to 83 percent of what African American men made; and Hispanic American women to 78 percent of their male counterparts. Women benefited absolutely from the concentration of their employment in the only expanding sectors of the economy and relatively from the decline in the earnings of male workers. Still, women, whatever their race, remained concentrated in the lowest paying, least-unionized sectors of the economy, while men of color no longer could rely on employment opportunities in the high-wage, unionized, mass-production sector.

A new wave of immigrants stimulated by changes in US immigration law also played a part in transforming the labor force. Until 1960, the vast majority of newcomers to the United States had originated in Europe. Between 1961 and 1971, owing to the elimination of nationality quotas by the Hart-Celler Act in 1965, half of all new immigrants came from Latin America and East and South Asia. Over the next two decades, 80 percent of all immigrants came from Latin America and Asia. By 1986,

17 percent of the nation's total population and an even higher percentage of the labor force were nonwhite. Added to the legal immigrants from Latin American nations and from Asia were millions of undocumented newcomers, predominantly from Mexico, Central America, and Haiti. These "illegal workers" filled the need of employers for cheap field and domestic labor in the Southwest and along the East Coast, where they were often joined by legal "guest workers" brought in with temporary H2 work visas from nations such as Jamaica. The deportability of both guest workers and undocumented immigrants made them vulnerable to mistreatment and exploitation. Their presence, in turn, engendered resentment among some white and African American workers who blamed the newcomers for falling wages and rising unemployment. Partly to deal with such resentment but also to regulate the flow of undocumented migrants across the border with Mexico, Congress in 1986 passed the Immigration Reform and Control Act, which regularized the status of such immigrants by offering them amnesty from deportation and the chance to qualify for US citizenship. Because the law also imposed fines on employers who knowingly employed illegal immigrants, it ensured that such hiring would continue to operate in the shadows where undocumented workers lacked legal protections.

Immigration, both legal and illegal, continued unabated into the 1990s, barely affected by the 1986 law. In the course of the 1990s alone the immigrant population of the United States rose from 19.8 million to 31.1 million. Whereas the human stream from Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean once had been concentrated in the fields, orchards, and citrus groves of the Southwest and along the coasts of the East and West, immigrants increasingly took non-field jobs in the nation's heartland. Meatpacking and chicken-processing plants in Iowa, Nebraska, Colorado, Minnesota, Arkansas, North Carolina, and Mississippi hired large numbers of Latino/a and Asian workers. Wherever employers sought cheap labor for highly competitive industries such as meatpacking, they turned to recent arrivals from Latin America and Asia.

The security and rewards of US workers were also increasingly affected by foreign workers who remained in their homelands. For most of the modern industrial era, certainly from the late eighteenth century through the 1960s, cheap labor had moved around the globe to satisfy the appetite of capital for workers. From the 1960s onward, American businesses, as described above, moved abroad to find cheaper labor in the *maquiladoras* (assembly plants) across the Mexican border. By the 1990s, East Asian assembly lines, especially those in China, were producing goods for a host of American companies that had once manufactured their products in the United States.

African Americans were the group hardest hit by the economic restructuring of these years. The Great Migration had brought millions of African Americans northward to manufacturing jobs in cities such as Detroit. Manufacturing job opportunities began declining even in the 1950s due to automation and the relocation of jobs to white suburbs, but the deindustrialization of the 1970s hit black communities with special force. Between 1973 and 1994, the rate of black unemployment was always at least

60 percent higher than that for whites. The introduction of draconian drug sentencing and policing policies in these years worsened matters, especially for black men, who were jailed in disproportionately higher numbers for drug offenses. Once saddled with arrest records in this era of mass incarceration, these men found it even more difficult to break into the job market.

The Rise of Conservative Politics and Neoliberal Policy

The political universe also shifted to the disadvantage of the labor movement in these years. Ever since its founding in 1955, the AFL-CIO had worked with and through the Democratic Party to advance welfare legislation and protect labor's interests. After 1968, that political alliance grew increasingly frayed at the edges. Nixon and the Republican Party merged the themes of race, crime, and welfare dependency to woo white workers who identified themselves more as consumers than producers, more as taxpayers than welfare recipients. Even when Democrats returned to power with the election of Jimmy Carter as president in 1976, organized labor's gains were few. Suburban Democrats in Congress increasingly represented constituents who disliked taxes, detested welfare expenditures, and frowned on legislative favors for such "special interests" as minorities and organized labor. All this led the *AFL-CIO News* to describe the results of the first Congress in ten years under a Democratic administration as "not a monument to forward-looking legislation but a tombstone."

In fact, the Democratic Party experienced a decisive internal struggle during the Carter years. The party's electoral success depended on its three most vital constituencies – union members, women, and racial minorities – constituencies whose membership overlapped. Those in the administration charged with designing political and social policies favored initiatives aimed at cementing the loyalties of these constituencies: increases in the minimum wage, well-funded job-training programs, welfare reforms that would reduce poverty, especially among female-headed households, and reforms in labor law that would enable unions to organize workers more readily. In his heart, Carter sympathized with such programs and their objectives. In practice, however, he adopted policies that threatened labor and minorities because he concluded that the primary problem that bedeviled his administration resulted from raging inflation and surging interest rates. His advisers believed that women could be partly satisfied with cost-free symbolic measures that endorsed equal rights; what unions and minorities wanted – job creation, job training, and improved welfare benefits – cost money, and the president's economic advisers insisted that inflation could be tamed only if Carter disciplined labor. Alfred Kahn, a Cornell University economist and Carter's czar of the war against inflation, said, "I'd love the Teamsters to be worse off; I'd love the automobile workers to be worse off." Kahn believed he was "helping the unemployed who have been exploited by the UAW [United Automobile Workers]," and he and Charles Schultze, Carter's chair of the Council of Economic Advisers, advised the president to put labor in its place. The

country will never solve its problems, they warned, if the president listened to such liberals as his vice president, Walter Mondale, his secretary of labor, Ray Marshall, and his social policy adviser, Stuart Eizenstat.

Carter, the first president compelled to come to grips with the conjunction of economic globalization, capital hypermobility, and a new information-communications economy at a time of rampant inflation and declining union power, chose to heed the advice of his economic consultants and the financial-industrial interests whose language they spoke. Carter could converse comfortably with his economic advisers as well as with his fellow Southerners, Marshall and Eizenstat. But a cultural gap made communication with George Meany, a rough-spoken Northerner of Irish Catholic lineage, all but impossible. The gospel of freer markets and the deregulation of federally regulated sectors of the economy became hallmarks of the Carter administration. The essence of such neoliberal policies was captured in the words of Secretary of Labor Ray Marshall: "When Adam Smith's invisible hand moves in the labor market, it's all thumbs....My own experience is that the one who's likely to get neglected in a market-oriented society like ours is the worker." And this is precisely what happened to workers and union members in the over-the-road trucking industry and the airlines, as the Carter administration loosened federal regulation of both in order to encourage greater competition.

For the AFL-CIO, however, most of the Carter administration's aborted pro-worker policies were secondary to its desire to achieve congressional passage of reforms in national labor law. Moreover, these were reforms that Carter could support, despite Kahn's and Schultze's fulminations against union monopolists, because they appeared to require no increase in expenditures. The AFL-CIO merely asked for reforms in the administration of the National Labor Relations Act, which would have stiffened the penalties imposed on employers for unfair labor practices and made union representation election procedures speedier and more equitable. Truly, as union leaders asserted, "Labor law reform would not have organized a single worker or put unions at any new kind of advantage," yet employers fought with unprecedented solidarity to defeat the reforms. What George Meany characterized as "a heavily-financed, well orchestrated coalition between big business and right-wing extremists" produced a victory for labor's foes when a filibuster prevented the bill from coming to a vote in the Senate.

In the aftermath of the defeat of the labor law reform bill, on July 19, 1978, Douglas Fraser, president of the UAW, resigned from the prestigious Labor-Management Group – a roundtable of business and labor leaders. In a widely publicized open letter, Fraser accused business leaders of breaking the unwritten compact that had bound labor and management together since the end of World War II. "I believe," Fraser wrote, "that leaders of the business community...have chosen to wage a one-sided class war today in this country." Fraser proved equally denunciatory of Democrats of the Kahn variety, who embraced a brand of politics not much different from Republicans.

In fact, the defeat of labor law reform exposed the declining influence of organized labor within the Democratic Party. As Carter's political advisers observed, unions represented a declining percentage of the labor force, especially in the rapidly growing South and West, whose congressional representation had increased. Democratic leaders knew, moreover, that union leaders seldom spoke for a united membership. Pollsters reported that many union members also wanted government off their backs and out of their pockets, and thus opposed government programs to benefit low-income people. To make matters worse, Meany and labor officials who carried his favor too often remained at odds with feminist and minority interest groups in the Democratic Party. Instead of coalescing to lobby for policies beneficial to working people regardless of race or gender, the AFL-CIO often resisted affirmative action and racial and gender preferences, leaving control of politics to the advocates of freer markets, deregulation, and anti-union policies.

Nonetheless, organized labor allied once again with the Democratic Party and endorsed Jimmy Carter's reelection in 1980 – this time to no avail. Carter was defeated by the only former trade union leader ever to win the presidency. Ronald Reagan, the former movie actor and governor of California, had once led the Screen Actors Guild. In 1980, Reagan roused the enthusiasm of the business community, and tapped into the fears of white wage earners whose incomes had been stagnating, and who believed they had worked hard, paid their taxes, and obeyed the law but still were falling behind. Going even further than Nixon had in his appeal to race-conscious white voters, Reagan made a symbolic campaign appearance in Philadelphia, Mississippi, the site of perhaps the worst single incident of anti-civil rights violence in the 1960s (the murder of civil rights workers James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner), in which the Republican candidate signaled his sympathy for white Southerners who helped transform that once-Democratic region into “Reagan country.”

Reagan's first priorities were cutting taxes, deregulating industries, and increasing defense spending. Although he did not enter office seeking a confrontation with unions, his first decisive action in labor affairs in the summer of 1981 dealt a powerful blow to labor. Reagan used his presidential powers to crush an illegal strike by the Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization (PATCO), a union which represented employees of the Federal Aviation Administration. PATCO had broken with the AFL-CIO to endorse Reagan's election in 1980, but decided to strike after concluding that the administration's final contract offer fell too far short of the improved wages and working conditions they deserved. The president defined the strikers as outlaws, obtained court injunctions against them, and arrested, chained, and imprisoned a number of PATCO leaders. Having broken the strike, he announced that the strikers would never be rehired to their former positions or pardoned for their behavior. PATCO was decertified as a legitimate bargaining agent and broken.

The PATCO strike and its heavy-handed resolution by the Reagan administration proved as ominous for the future of organized labor as it was dramatic. The 12,000

air traffic controllers who walked off their jobs on August 3, 1981, in defiance of federal law and the sworn oaths they had taken as federal employees, were in many ways unlike the prototypical trade unionists of those years as represented in the media and the popular imagination. They were mostly suburb-dwelling, white, male, military veterans, more conservative than most of their union brothers and sisters. Nonetheless, their firing, of which most of the public approved, resonated and indicated to all of organized labor that a new, less union-friendly era in industrial relations had begun.



Figure 21.1 A solidarity rally for PATCO strikers, Houston, Texas, 1981, asks why Reagan supports Polish workers who strike against their communist government while firing US air traffic controllers for striking. (Scott Van Osdol)

To protest the “Reagan revolution,” the AFL-CIO took an unprecedented step. It called for a mass demonstration by trade unions and their allies in Washington on September 19, 1981. What soon came to be called “Solidarity Day,” a demonstration whose planning had begun in May, drew between 350,000 and 500,000 people to the nation's capital to protest the Reagan administration's domestic policies. The demonstration united young and old, white and nonwhite, male and female. Even the conservative and cautious building trades unions joined the protest, helping make it

perhaps the largest mass march in US history to that time.

The march produced no significant change in Reagan's policies. As those policies induced recession and deepened unemployment in an effort to extinguish inflation, the AFL-CIO and its affiliates concentrated on defeating Republican candidates in the election of 1982. Unions helped Democrats gain 26 seats in the House that fall, mostly among “liberals” sympathetic to labor, and the party did well in gubernatorial elections in the most populous industrial states. But the AFL-CIO's joy over its political success in 1982 proved short lived. Together with its friends and allies, the labor federation played a decisive role in winning the 1984 Democratic presidential nomination for Walter Mondale, only to see the candidate steamrolled by Reagan's landslide reelection. Once again, Reagan appealed with consummate skill to white workers worried about the demands of nonwhites; to hardworking blue-collar types convinced that their tax dollars had been squandered on “welfare parasites”; and to powerful strains of masculinity, nationalism, and patriotism latent within the white working class. Again, a majority of white union members and their families delivered their votes to Reagan (although Mondale won the vote of union households overall by a 54–46 margin). Equally important, Republicans succeeded during the campaign in identifying organized labor as a selfish special interest whose programs came at the expense of the majority of citizens. This seemed especially true to many voters in the case of public employees whose unions had gained substantial wage and salary increases, accomplishments that allegedly raised state and municipal tax rates and caused the New York City fiscal crisis of 1975/76.

Returned to office in 1984 with a clear mandate, Reagan continued the policies that fostered a form of economic growth that exacerbated inequality. By the end of his second term, despite substantial declines in unemployment and increases in total family income, the distribution of income and wealth in the United States had become more unequal than it had been for more than sixty years.

Reagan's landslide reelection, and the elevation of his vice president, George H. W. Bush, to the presidency in the election of 1988 helped move the Democratic Party further to the right. As “moderate” Democrats drifted into the Democratic Leadership Council (DLC), a caucus that urged the party to distance itself from the priorities of organized labor, voting rates among low-income voters fell. Among those workers who continued to vote, what might be characterized as consumer-taxpayer and racial issues grew more salient than class-producer issues. The politics of low taxes, price stability, and race operated against the interests of organized labor and to the advantage of more conservative influences in both political parties.

A similar long-term shift in judicial interpretations of labor law and in appointments to the federal judiciary also spelled trouble for labor. Ever since the 1940s, the federal judiciary had been reinterpreting New Deal labor law in a manner that curtailed the rights of workers as individuals and unions as institutions. A series of Supreme Court decisions from the late 1960s through the 1970s practically outlawed strikes where

union contracts and/or arbitration machinery existed. These decisions breathed new life into the labor injunction, which the Norris-La Guardia Act of 1932 had banned. Other decisions again brought union practices under antitrust legislation or common law restraint-of-trade violations. On occasion, workers and unions won favorable decisions, such as when the Supreme Court found the J. P. Stevens textile company guilty of violating federal labor law. Overall, however, especially as presidents Nixon, Reagan, and Bush reshaped the composition of the federal judiciary through the power of appointment, legal doctrine steadily diminished the rights of organized labor and the power of workers to act collectively.

The Reagan administration also implemented a similar reversal of precedents and policies by the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB). Originally established by the Wagner Act of 1935 to protect the rights of workers to unionize and bargain collectively, the NLRB saw its ability to promote trade unionism diluted by changes that the Taft-Hartley Act of 1947 made to its structure, composition, and policies. Between 1947 and 1981, however, NLRB members generally considered their mandate as the protection of the right of workers to organize and the defense of the principle of collective bargaining. During Democratic administrations, the NLRB tended to be more responsive to union claims, while it was more responsive to business demands during Republican administrations. Reagan, by contrast, appointed to the board members who were blatantly antiunion and pro-corporate. Donald Dotson, whom he appointed as chair, even insisted that the Wagner Act never intended to validate independent trade unionism or collective bargaining between employers and union representatives. Under Dotson's leadership, the NLRB acted more to subvert workers' ability to unionize and bargain collectively than to promote the collective rights of working people.

Private sector employers moved aggressively to take advantage of the policy shift. An antiunion consulting industry that had developed slowly after World War II burgeoned between the mid-1970s and mid-1980s. During this period the number of union-avoidance firms rose from roughly 100 to nearly 1,000. Such agencies, which included antiunion law firms, management consultants, private security firms, and strikebreaking companies, advised clients on strategies that would prevent unions from forming or weaken them where they had taken root. The meager penalties for violating workers' rights to organize in the United States often made it cost effective for employers to fire employees illegally in order to discourage union formation.

The ability to strike, which had once been an effective weapon for workers, was turned against them in the 1980s as employers emulated Reagan's hard line against PATCO and broke strike after strike. Copper miners employed by Phelps-Dodge lost a long strike against their employer that erupted in 1983 when the company demanded contract concessions. The company used replacement workers protected by the Arizona state authorities to operate the mines during the walkout, forcing the miners to give in. When packinghouse workers organized in Local P-9 of the United Food and Commercial Workers International Union refused to accept a pay cut

demanded by the Hormel Company, they walked out and waged a bitter two-year struggle (1985 to 1986) in which they evinced indomitable resolve and won considerable community support. But the Hormel strikers were defeated decisively by a recalcitrant employer who hired strikebreakers and international union officials who acquiesced in P-9's loss in order to preserve the union's standing in other Hormel plants. Greyhound bus drivers experienced a similarly dispiriting loss when their employer provoked a strike in 1990, then immediately hired replacement workers. A union consultant remarked regarding these trends in 1985, "Management is feeling very feisty and confident these days about their ability to exert their muscle and break a union, with no fear of the consequences."

A brief respite from these trends seemed possible in 1992. That year the AFL-CIO helped elect a Democratic president, William Jefferson "Bill" Clinton in an election that saw the Republicans ranks split between Reagan's successor, President George H. W. Bush, and the independent candidacy of Texas billionaire Ross Perot.

Although he was a former leader of the moderate DLC caucus, Clinton tried to address labor's most pressing problems during his years in office. His administration introduced in Congress a bill that forbade the employment of permanent replacement workers during strikes. It also endorsed a rise in the federal minimum wage. He appointed pro-union advocates William Gould and Robert Reich as chair of the NLRB and secretary of labor respectively. The new president also created a special commission to recommend reforms in labor law, appointing as its chair John Dunlop, a Harvard University industrial relations specialist who had served several Republican administrations.

The Dunlop Commission, like most of Clinton's labor initiatives, failed. In 1994, the commission issued a report that proposed several changes to the Wagner Act. These changes would have loosened restrictions on joint worker-management advisory teams, as business leaders wanted, while at the same time making it easier for workers to unionize, as labor demanded. The attempted compromise was stillborn. Almost immediately, corporations criticized Dunlop's report as too pro-union, and the AFL-CIO condemned it for recommending forms of company unionism in the guise of joint management-employee work teams. The Dunlop Commission's failure made clear that a labor-management compromise was impossible at the end of the twentieth century. Sensing that the tide was shifting their way, employers had no incentive to compromise with a weakening labor movement.

However much Clinton may have favored initiatives beneficial to workers, he failed to get them through Congress or put into practice. A coalition of Senate Republicans and conservative Democrats, largely from the South and Mountain West, filibustered the bill to outlaw permanent replacement workers and resisted efforts to restore the minimum wage to the level it had reached prior to its dilution by the high inflation of the late 1970s and 1980s. A Republican takeover of the House of Representatives in the 1994 midterm election killed what little hope remained for the administration to

enact pro-labor initiatives or health care reform, which had been a priority for the president and his first lady (Hillary Rodham Clinton chaired the president's committee on national health reform).

The same forces that sidetracked striker replacement legislation and health care reform rendered it all but impossible for the NLRB chair, William Gould, to enforce workers' right to unionize, make the right to bargain collectively a reality and not a charade, or protect union members against employer discrimination. Gould's proposals generated a crescendo of criticism by management spokespersons, congressional Republicans, and federal judges, who together thwarted his efforts. Dispirited, Gould announced his resignation in the summer of 1998.

While labor's agenda withered on the vine, Clinton embraced the central tenets of neoliberalism, including deregulation and smaller government, free trade, and globalization. Clinton succeeded in winning congressional approval in 1993 (over the passionate objections of the AFL-CIO and a majority of Democratic congresspersons) for the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which put low-wage Mexican workers into competition with US and Canadian workers, and Mexican farmers in competition with huge and mechanized US and Canadian farms. Although the administration secured a side agreement to NAFTA that sought to protect labor and environmental rights (over Republican objections), it ultimately offered scant protection to US and Canadian workers or Mexican farmers. Thereafter, jobs continued to flow southward across the border while Mexicans displaced from that country's more marginal farms, as well as by an economic crisis in the mid-1990s, flowed northward seeking work in the United States.

Clinton also ended federal welfare policies that dated to the New Deal, signing the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) Act in 1996. This legislation placed limits on material assistance to able-bodied adults (and their dependent children) and forced more people off welfare rolls and into the job market. In the short run, the law worked in conjunction with an economic boom in the late 1990s to reduce welfare rolls. In an effort to help low-wage workers, the Clinton administration also expanded a Nixon-era innovation, the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), which supplemented the incomes of poor working parents with federal payments. The EITC was a boon to low-income workers (and their employers, who saw no need to pay living wages), but did nothing to create jobs for the chronically underemployed.

Finally, Clinton embraced the politics of deregulation that had been ascendant since the 1970s. The Telecommunications Act of 1996 and the Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act (the Financial Services Modernization Act) of 1999 triggered the reorganization of the telecommunications, banking, and financial services industries, abetting the rise of giant new corporate entities whose influence over the economy was unprecedented, and which were generally hostile to unionism.

For a brief time, Clinton's macroeconomic policies seemed to produce a substantial net gain for nearly all working people. The 1990s saw the most rapid growth in

productivity, employment, and earnings since the 1960s. As labor markets tightened and unemployment diminished, employers recruited workers by offering higher wages. In regions with the tightest labor markets, it became common for employers to offer even inexperienced, first-time employees wages higher than the state or federal statutory minimum. As a consequence, between 1995 and 2000, median family income rose by 2.2 percent annually, far in excess of the 0.4 percent annual growth rate between 1973 and 1995. Better yet, the disadvantaged gained the most relatively. Racial minorities, younger families, and single mothers benefited most from tight labor markets. In those years, median family income rose for African American and Hispanic families by 16 and 25 percent, respectively, as compared to 11 percent for white families.

Unfortunately, a significant part of the increase in earnings and incomes in the 1990s derived from spending more time on the job, not from rising wages. Large numbers of full-time employees worked more hours, sometimes voluntarily, but most often at the behest of employers – in the face of payroll taxes and fringe benefits, it was usually more economical to pay a time-and-a-half premium for overtime than to hire a new employee. In the nonunion service sector it became increasingly common for employers to engage in “wage theft” – refusing to pay legally mandated overtime wages – and for workers to tolerate this practice in the interest of keeping their jobs in an uncertain labor market.

In most families, the so-called bread winner(s) increased the number of hours worked for wages. In half of all families, two parents worked outside the home; a quarter of all families were, however, headed by a single parent, typically a mother. By the mid-1990s, US workers put in even more hours annually than the Japanese, who had long been at the top internationally for the number of hours spent on the job. On average, Americans worked six-and-a-half weeks a year more than British workers, who toiled the most hours among Europeans, and twelve-and-a-half weeks a year more than Germans. Increased work hours for men and women, husbands and wives, in the absence of paid family leave and affordable quality day care for children, created higher stress in many households.

Such stress was often intensified by the desire of working-class families to participate fully in the blessings of the “American consumer cornucopia,” a desire that could only be fulfilled by going – and in many cases deeply – into debt, whether through bloated credit card bills or home equity loans, the latter seeing working families borrow against the value of their chief asset. By 2001, personal debt levels had reached historical highs. Overall household debt was 10 percent higher than the total disposable income of all households, and the number of personal bankruptcies multiplied throughout the decade. According to a report prepared by the Economic Policy Institute, “For most households rising debt, not a rising stock market, was the real story of the 1990s.”

Clearly, the benefits of the 1990s boom were not equally distributed. In 1989 a typical

CEO earned 72 times as much as a median worker; by 2000, that same CEO earned more than 300 times as much as the same worker and three times as much as corporate officers abroad. Across the nation, wealth grew even more concentrated and more unequally distributed than earnings and incomes. The great “bull market” of the 1990s showered handsome returns primarily on a small minority of Americans who owned the bulk of the nation's common stocks. Less than half of all households held stock in any form, including pension plans and 401(k)s, in 2000, and among those who possessed stock in any form, 64 percent held portfolios valued at \$5,000 or less. Wages remained the primary source of sustenance for nearly all working people and their families, many of whom continued to live “paycheck to paycheck.”

The Emerging Crisis of Unionism

Unions found it difficult to respond to the economic and political shifts of these years. Union growth by public employees slowed, and as workers in the private sector continued to lose ground, organized labor's share of the workforce fell further. It was in manufacturing, the traditional stronghold of the labor movement since the 1930s, that unions suffered their worst losses during the 1970s. Between 1974 and 1978 alone, unions in manufacturing lost more than 1 million members (from 9,144,000 to 8,119,000), a loss of more than 11 percent.

Equally threatening to the future of the labor movement was the inability of unionism to keep pace with the growth of the labor force in the nonmanufacturing sector, where the bulk of job growth occurred. While employment in nonmanufacturing rose 37 percent in the decade between 1968 and 1978, its union membership increased only 13 percent, resulting in a net decline, from 24.6 percent to 20.3 percent. Many of the workers in that sector, earning the minimum wage, tended to enter and leave the job market rapidly and were scattered in so many small isolated locations that the cost of organizing them appeared to exceed the potential benefits. Many in this sector were women, who often found their concerns neglected by a male-dominated union movement, and some were people who through family origins, culture, and education identified more with management than labor.

Another ominous sign for organized labor was its inability to recruit among workers in the healthiest sector of manufacturing – the high technology firms. These enterprises had long practiced what came to be called during the 1980s alternative industrial relations systems. Indeed, as the research of Sanford Jacoby has demonstrated, even during the turbulent years of the New Deal and World War II, many American industrial enterprises successfully practiced a form of labor relations that kept them union-free. These companies sought to guarantee their employees job security through noncontractual forms of seniority and internal job ladders. Typically, they paid their workers wages comparable to union levels. They also provided a wide array of fringe benefits, everything from health-care insurance and attractive retirement benefits to country clubs and company-financed higher education. Such enterprises,

particularly in the high-technology sector, practiced a corporate culture that extolled teamwork, cooperation between workers and managers, and identification of all employees as members of a common professional or managerial family.

Beginning slowly in the mid-1970s and accelerating rapidly at the end of the decade, the decline of trade unionism proceeded apace. The public fiscal crisis of the mid-1970s fueled resentment against high taxes and highly paid unionized public employees, a combination linked in the public mind. New York City's near bankruptcy in 1975/76 and popular rebellions against taxes in California (1978) and Massachusetts (1980), which limited the state's power to tax, started a trend toward retrenchment in public employment and resistance to pay increases to fund wages and benefits for such employees. This trend was punctuated by PATCO's defeat (in 1981), after which public sector unionism's once expansive growth and militancy stalled. Its losses no longer masked by growth in the public sector, overall union membership began to fall absolutely as well as relatively. Between 1980 and 1982 alone, total union membership fell by almost 3 million (22,366,000 to 19,763,000) and to only 17.7 percent of the total labor force (22.1 percent of the nonagricultural labor force). Worse for labor, the economic recovery of 1984 to 1986 failed to add members to union ranks as ordinarily happened in times of business expansion. Instead, as the 1980s passed into the 1990s, every major sector of the economy experienced losses in union membership, especially former union strongholds: the automobile, steel, electrical goods, and clothing industries.

As the 1990s began, other indicators revealed the severe plight of trade unionism in the United States. The number of strikes, especially those involving large numbers of workers, declined precipitately. During the 1960s and 1970s, an average of 286 major work stoppages took place annually; by the 1990s the average dropped to 34 per year. This drop largely reflected worker and union awareness of management's willingness to hire permanent replacement workers when employees walked out, a policy that grew increasingly effective in a loose labor market and a political milieu in which politicians and jurists lauded the power of free choice in a free society. Indeed, President Reagan's employment of replacement workers during the PATCO walkout signaled to employers in the private sector that they were now free to do the same. As the century came to an end, the strike, a tactic that had allowed US workers to counterbalance the power of their employers since at least the 1830s, was no longer a readily available tool.

Unions also found themselves far less successful in winning NLRB representation elections and instead more often found their bargaining units increasingly decertified by employer-initiated elections. From the NLRB's founding in 1935 until the passage of the Taft-Hartley Act in 1947, unions won 75 percent of all NLRB elections. Until 1973, they continued to win half; after 1973, the trend line moved inexorably against unions. By the 1990s, unions chose only to contest those elections in which they had a strong prospect of victory, leading to a decline of union representation elections nationwide.

Such trends damaged the ability of unions to bargain collectively, and forced unions to make concession after concession. The recession of 1981/82 resulted in contracts that actually reduced real wages on the order of 7 percent to 8.5 percent. Many contracts negotiated between 1982 and 1985 implemented two-tiered wage agreements that paid new hires lower wages, conceded greater power over work rules and job assignments to employers, relinquished a number of paid holidays and personal days, and tolerated reductions in medical and retirement benefits. In 1984/85, for the first time in decades, the rate of wage increases granted nonunion employees exceeded those negotiated by unions. Moreover, after 1985, unions increasingly surrendered cost-of-living allowance wage rises, accepted annual bonuses in lieu of increases in the base wage or salary, and negotiated contracts in which wage increases lagged inflation.

The postwar labor–management bargain was turned on its head. After World War II, unions agreed not to challenge management prerogatives in return for increasing wages and benefits. In the 1980s, unionized employers agreed not to overturn collective bargaining as long as unions agreed to accept cuts and loosen hard-won work rules.

Little wonder then that minority and women workers increasingly concluded that they could gain more by exercising their rights under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 under the jurisdiction of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission than they could by attempting to form unions under the jurisdiction of the NLRB. Employers who violated workers' civil rights were subject to sterner penalties (including treble damages) than those who violated their union rights (where employers who fired workers for unionizing were required only to pay back wages less whatever a fired worker might have earned by taking another job).

Not only did Title VII litigation frequently offer aggrieved workers more equitable and satisfactory redress than did union action, but the law allowed them to challenge labor market monopolies built by unions, particularly those in the building trades, which restricted membership on the basis of race and gender. It also undid the contractual seniority systems developed by many unions that in practice benefited older white, male workers to the disadvantage of racial minorities and women. Often civil and women's rights organizations as well as the litigants whom they represented found themselves in conflict with trade unions. Unfortunately, in many economic sectors where litigation finally eliminated the barriers that closed superior job classifications to minorities and women, the actual number of such positions began to diminish. In steel, for example, just as skilled jobs opened for black workers, steel mills began to close. Yet, over time, the legal right to protection from employment discrimination and to take legal action spread by law from minorities and women to the aged and disabled. Although individual action through litigation was no panacea, it increasingly offered smoother avenues for redress of worker grievances than did collective action through unions – another indication of organized labor's weakening influence.

The retirement of the aged George Meany in 1979 offered the labor movement a chance to address its increasing marginalization. Meany's replacement as president of the AFL-CIO, Lane Kirkland, was determined to reverse labor's decline. Although he was Meany's handpicked successor, Kirkland seemed a different sort of person. At first glance he appeared more the contemporary professional executive than the old-fashioned, hard-bitten labor boss. Where Meany reeked of cigars, brusque words, and stale ideas, Kirkland exuded polish, spoke smoothly, and enjoyed the play of ideas. Where Meany had been the child of poor, big-city, working-class parents, Kirkland came from a comfortable South Carolina family, graduated from the United States Merchant Marine Academy, and earned an MS from Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service. Kirkland realized that the labor movement had to appeal more strongly to white-collar professional employees, that it had to find more room in the leadership for nonwhites, and that it had to work harder to attract the fastest growing sector of the labor force: women. Kirkland also realized that labor unity was more essential than ever before, and he immediately invited both the UAW and the Teamsters to re-affiliate with the AFL-CIO. In the case of the UAW, Kirkland's plea fell on sympathetic ears. At the AFL-CIO convention of 1981, the automobile workers resumed full membership. Before the decade ended, moreover, both the Teamsters (in 1988) and the United Mine Workers (1989) re-affiliated with the AFL-CIO.



Figure 21.2 AFL-CIO president Lane Kirkland at Dartmouth College, 1982. (AFL-CIO)

Kirkland's receptivity to the organization of white-collar employees, nonwhites, Hispanics (including large numbers of illegal immigrants), and especially women was

timely. As women came to compose 40 percent of the total labor force, and more than 50 percent of all women sought full-time waged work, their importance to the labor movement grew ever more decisive. In the decades between 1958 and 1978, for example, the number of women in unions doubled, from 3.3 million to 6.6 million members, and the proportion of women in the labor movement rose from 18 to 27 percent overall. And for the first time a woman, Joyce Miller, of the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union (ACTWU) and the Coalition of Labor Union Women, won a seat on the AFL-CIO executive council.

Kirkland also sought to open the AFL-CIO to new ideas. Members of the executive council met privately and informally with historians, sociologists, economists, and industrial relations experts seeking advice about how to improve labor's image and organize nonunion workers. More formally, in 1983, the AFL-CIO appointed a Committee on the Evolution of Work, composed of union officials and academics. The committee focused on the factors that had created a refashioned labor force and the tactics that could best attract nontraditional workers. In 1985, it published a report, *The Changing Situation of Workers and their Unions*, which called on the affiliates of the AFL-CIO to devise different methods to organize a labor force that had grown more educated and more diverse. The report concluded that traditional, adversarial, collective-bargaining arrangements dismayed many contemporary workers. Unions had to remember that many workers, especially white-collar, professional, and technical employees, wanted to be involved with management in planning the labor process and the flow of work, and that the customary union–management contract, which bound both sides tightly in a web of rules, might better be replaced by more flexible and elastic arrangements of power sharing. And, finally, the report called on the AFL-CIO and its affiliates to create new forms of associate membership for workers, who sympathized with the spirit and goals of unionism but who worked in blatantly nonunion enterprises or in firms that offered their employees alternatives to conventional collective bargaining.

However well-intentioned these recommendations, they had little impact. In the years following the 1985 report, unions continued to lose members and represent a smaller proportion of the total labor force. However, one significant organizational innovation did emerge from this period. In 1987 in Miami, a group of unions, led by Larry Cohen of the Communications Workers of America, founded Jobs with Justice, a coalition of unions and community organizations that organized groups across community lines around campaigns of broad interest to working people. In time the group would grow to have 45 local affiliates in 25 states. But unions generally failed to adapt to the tactics of antiunion management. Corporations and their managers proved much more successful than labor leaders in adapting their values and strategies to an external environment of global economic competition.

In practice, then, Lane Kirkland's AFL-CIO behaved no differently than had George Meany's. It remained uncomfortable with the new social movements spawned by people of color, feminists, gays, and environmentalists. Labor leaders evoked a clique

of middle-aged white males congealed into the large, impersonal union bureaucracies they had created to win concessions from the gargantuan corporate enterprises with which they bargained. The style of unionism that labor leaders had practiced in the heyday of American mass-production industry and global economic dominance seemed anachronistic in the emerging era of specialized batch-production industry and worldwide competition for markets.

Just as union leaders found it increasingly difficult to recruit new members from enterprises that practiced sophisticated human-resource management techniques, sought the cooperation of their employees in planning work, or simply resisted unionization outright, they also discovered widespread alienation among their existing memberships. Rank-and-file union members increasingly saw their union leaders as more distant and autocratic than their bosses at work. In some cases, workers needed protection as much against union bosses as corporate bosses, a reality well evidenced in the history and practices of the Teamsters' union. Just as the AFL style of business unionism suited the needs of skilled workers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and the CIO style of industrial unionism fitted the mass-production workers of the mid-twentieth century, only a new form of unionism could address the concerns of the changing labor force of the late twentieth century. But no new model was at hand. As unions continued to hemorrhage members in the early 1990s, support for Kirkland's leadership of the AFL-CIO began to erode.

Harbingers of Deepening Crisis: Mass Production and Transportation

The experiences of many trade unions in the 1980s and early 1990s lent credence to the charges levied by Kirkland's critics. In the auto industry, unions proved unable to resist the growth of nonunion competitors, while in one-time union strongholds, such as the airline and trucking industries, deregulation undermined union power.

Autoworkers had helped set the standard for collective bargaining in the 1940s and 1950s, and collective bargaining had been integrated into the management of the industry. In 1978, one auto executive had observed that, "if the UAW did not 'police' the contract...GM plants would be chaotic." But the union proved unable to establish such a relationship with the Japanese automobile firms, Toyota, Nissan, and Honda, which had captured nearly one-third of the domestic American market by 1991. To meet Japanese competition, US firms had to eliminate excess capacity and lower production costs. That meant inducing the UAW to accept concessions. The contracts negotiated between the automobile companies and the UAW in the 1980s replaced regular increases in the base wage with annual bonuses related to gross profits, eliminated or modified cost-of-living increases, reduced paid personal leave days and annual paid holidays, redefined job categories to make work assignments and responsibilities more flexible, and introduced forms of employee group participation in

the production process in order to foster a “team” approach like that used by Japanese manufacturers.

These contractual revisions preserved the union's place in the automobile industry, but they also cleared the way for layoffs, losses of UAW membership, and increased managerial control of the work process. GM, and especially Ford and Chrysler, shifted away from manufacturing parts and accessories in their own unionized facilities to subcontracting them to smaller, lower-cost, nonunion enterprises. Because the new style of collective bargaining in the automobile industry purchased union security at the price of jobs and benefits for workers, some insurgents in the UAW at the end of the 1980s formed a “New Directions” movement, which demanded greater militancy by the union and a more antagonistic approach to employers.

Whether the New Directions activists could have produced a different outcome had they come to power within the UAW is unclear. By 1990, nonunion competition meant not only cars imported into the United States but also automobiles manufactured in the nation with the labor of American workers. All the major Japanese companies and some of the lesser ones had established assembly plants in the United States by 1990, as had the German manufacturers Mercedes-Benz and BMW by the mid-1990s. Nearly all the foreign firms operated on a nonunion basis. Only in those cases in which Japanese firms formed a direct partnership with one of the “Big Three” (GM, Ford, and Chrysler) – as was the case with Mitsubishi and Chrysler, Mazda and Ford with lesser Japanese companies, and Toyota and GM in the case of the New United Motor Manufacturing, Inc. in Fremont, California – was the UAW tolerated.

The UAW was unsuccessful in organizing the transplants, most of which were located intentionally in “right-to-work” states. It became commonplace for major foreign firms in the United States, which recognized and bargained with unions in their home nations, to refuse to bargain collectively with their American employees. Meanwhile, autoworkers hired by the transplants embraced their jobs as by far the best paying work available in their areas and feared that unionization might drive their employers away.

The ability of the transplants to operate on a nonunion basis threatened the UAW's future in American automobile firms. These plants had a younger, better-educated, and more carefully screened labor force than their American competitors. This meant higher per capita productivity and lower costs for health and retirement benefits. Because the transplants had less excess capacity than their American competitors, they guaranteed employees job security in return for the ability to use labor more flexibly. Finally, the ability of these firms to produce cars on a nonunion basis rendered it more difficult for the UAW to use the strike threat when negotiating with American companies. Were the militants in the New Directions faction able to shut down plants through aggressive strikes, how would they preserve what remained of Ford's, GM's, and Chrysler's share of the American market from further penetration by the transplanted manufacturers?

Union concessions helped make the Big Three increasingly profitable by the late 1990s, as did a boom in sales of trucks and sport utility vehicles made by these manufacturers. This boom created enough confidence in the union that GM workers shut down their employer in the summer of 1998 in a dispute centered in Flint, Michigan, over concessions the company demanded in order to put its costs in line with those of Chrysler and Ford. But while the union refused to give in during a strike that cost \$3 billion in profits and more than \$1 billion in wages, it was unable to halt GM's larger restructuring plans. No sooner was the strike settled than GM resumed the pattern of corporate reorganization that had caused it by shutting the Buick assembly plant in Flint.

The economic recovery and expansion of the late 1990s produced few real benefits for the UAW. The union, which numbered at its peak nearly 1.5 million members, in 2001/2 counted 671,853 members. Although employment in the industry rose by 100,000, union membership fell by 50,000 and union density (the percentage of workers represented by unions in the industry) fell from 61 percent in 1990 to 48 percent in 1999. In addition, automobile industry employment continued to shift to the South, which by 1999 accounted for 26 percent of all workers in the industry, as compared to 17 percent nine years earlier. Tellingly, union density remained much lower in the South than in the Midwest.

Deregulation of the domestic transportation industry in the United States, meanwhile, produced trauma for workers and unions in that sector. Airline deregulation in 1978 opened the path for competition from new nonunion enterprises that undermined wages and benefits in the industry. Here the leader was one Frank Lorenzo, who from his base of operations in lower-cost, nonunion Texas Air, challenged his larger unionized competitors for market share. Lorenzo also acquired two larger unionized airlines, Continental and Eastern, which he determined to make nonunion. At Continental, his stewardship precipitated a strike that plunged the airline into bankruptcy, a reality that Lorenzo then used to break all union contracts. Lorenzo's control of Eastern Air Lines produced a similar result, in this case driving the company into bankruptcy, federal receivership, and by 1991 total dissolution. The inroads of nonunion competition compelled unions at such traditional, old-line airlines as TWA, Pan American, and United to negotiate concessionary contracts under which new hires received lower salaries and veteran employees surrendered a part of their fringe benefits. Concessions by their unions, however, could not save TWA and Pan American from failure. As the number of "legacy" carriers shrank, a host of low-cost, low-fare, nonunion airlines also competed for air travelers but usually failed economically. The one exception to that rule was the success of Southwest Airlines, the most stable and profitable of the low-fare airlines from its origins in the 1960s to the present, and the one new carrier that bargained with unions, with employees and employers embracing a common company culture and committing themselves to shared goals.

Prior to trucking deregulation in 1980, the Teamsters had been the most successful

union at organizing new members. Once the Interstate Commerce Commission implemented the Carter administration's policies and deregulated trucking, the industry lay open to new forms of competition that weakened the Teamsters. Nonunion operations grew at the expense of their unionized competitors. Small, independent trucking firms and individual drivers acting as subcontractors took business away from higher-cost, national union firms. In 1982 and 1985, the Teamsters agreed to contracts that reduced wages for new hires by 30 percent, eliminated the annual cost-of-living allowance, and minimized other fringe benefits drivers had long taken for granted. In the case of the Teamsters, as had also been true for the UAW, concessionary bargaining failed to save union jobs. As Teamster membership in the trucking industry began to decline, the union looked for members in other sectors, including government service, defining itself increasingly as a general union.

By the mid-1990s it was clear that the system of labor relations constructed between the mid-1930s and the mid-1950s, in which collective bargaining had emerged as a major force shaping the economy and politics, was crumbling before the forces of economic transformation, resurgent antiunionism, globalization, and neoliberalism. Once-powerful unions such as the UAW and the Teamsters were in retreat. Public sector organizing had tapered off, and organized labor's political clout was waning even among its allies in the Democratic Party. The approach of a new millennium brought with it an increasing sense of insecurity for both union leaders and average workers who struggled to come to terms with the rapidly changing economy.

WORKERS AND UNIONS AT THE MILLENNIUM

As the twentieth century drew to a close, the problems facing workers and the labor movement seemed to be multiplying. Long-term income stagnation, briefly counteracted during the Clinton boom of the late 1990s, stubbornly returned. Job insecurity persisted. Although the labor force participation of women rose, they were still unable to close the wage gap with men – in 2009, women earned approximately 80 percent of men's weekly earnings. To keep pace with rising expenses, working families turned increasingly to credit cards and home equity loans. The labor movement seemed unable to do much to alter these patterns. Not only had unions suffered a great reversal of fortune since 1973, but the problems labor confronted at the dawn of the twenty-first century seemed to replicate problems the movement had faced at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Organized labor's situation had seemingly come full circle as the new millennium dawned. Private sector union membership dipped below 10 percent. A growing number of immigrant workers redefined the demographics of the workforce but remained largely unorganized. Labor's political agenda seemed stalled and courts proved unfriendly. An economic restructuring underway since the 1970s, much like the one that unfolded a century earlier, was transforming the economy in profound ways. Globalization, deregulation, the introduction of new technologies, new forms of management, and new corporate structures together served to destabilize working-class life and concentrate wealth increasingly in the top income brackets.

Rising Resistance and Its Limitations

As the situation deteriorated for unions, they demonstrated a greater willingness to fight back. In some cases, they won heroic battles with individual companies. Yet in industry after industry, isolated victories were not enough to reverse long-term antiunion trends.

The coal industry provided a case in point. In 1988/89, the United Mine Workers (UMW) successfully fought an attempt by Pittston Coal to run its operations nonunion in southwestern Virginia and to withdraw from its obligations to the union health fund. Under the leadership of its new, young president, Rich Trumka, a miner with a law degree, the UMW adopted the tactics of civil disobedience used by the civil rights and peace movements with considerable success. When Pittston attempted to operate with permanent replacement workers, the UMW threw up mass picket lines, challenged legal injunctions and state troopers – in one instance they seized company property – built a firm base of local community support, and elicited sympathy and

solidarity from elsewhere in the labor movement. In the end, Pittston conceded to the union, but this did not halt the steady de-unionization of the coal industry. Nonunion operators proliferated, led by Massey Energy, which had repudiated the agreement between the UMW and the Bituminous Coal Operators Association after a vicious two-year strike commencing in 1984 in Logan County, West Virginia. Thanks to the growth of Massey and others that followed its model, only 25 percent of coal miners were unionized by 2010.

A similar story played out in the newspaper industry. In 1990, newspaper unions mobilized considerable community support to repulse an effort by the New York *Daily News* to undermine their contract. But that effort was soon overshadowed by a disastrous and precedent-setting defeat in Detroit, where the Gannett and Knight Ridder newspaper chains together eliminated unionism from that city's major dailies, the *Detroit News* and the *Detroit Free Press*. Despite forging an alliance among all the unions in the industry – reporters, printers, pressman, deliverers – and striking for nearly two years (1995 to 1997), Detroit's newspaper union members were unable to stop the publishers from hiring replacement workers and from printing and distributing daily and Sunday newspapers (they did, however, succeed in reducing the papers' circulation by a third). The Detroit dispute revealed the inadequacies of labor law to protect workers in an increasingly antiunion environment. Even after the NLRB ruled unanimously in 1998 that the newspapers had failed to bargain in good faith and hence had no legal right to hire replacement workers, the publishers continued their legal appeals, and the unions were forced into offering an unconditional surrender. As the implications of the Detroit battle became clear, across the industry management went on the offensive and unions undertook a full-scale retreat.

The story in airlines was not much different. In 1998, the pilots at Northwest Airlines won a hard-fought strike to reclaim a greater share of airline profits after having sacrificed earlier in the decade to help the company stave off bankruptcy. When Northwest refused to restore wages and benefits in response to the airline's new-found profitability, the pilots struck. After a month-long strike in which President Clinton refused to intervene, the company agreed to many of the pilots' demands. But that victory did not resonate broadly in an industry that on the whole continued to struggle with the instability that had characterized it since its deregulation in the Carter years. The continued growth of low-cost regional carriers exerted continuous downward pressure on wages and pension benefits in the airlines. When an independent union of airline mechanics struck at Northwest Airlines in 2005 in protest against a proposed 26 percent wage reduction, the airline hired replacement workers and broke the walkout. Across the industry, unions remained on the defensive even as airline profitability rebounded.

While increased militancy proved unable to tip the balance of power back in the direction of unions in these key industries, two developments infused the movement with new optimism in the 1990s. After struggling under the burden of corrupt influences for decades, the Teamsters union elected a new leadership, and the

Service Employees International Union (SEIU) developed a successful model for organizing low-wage immigrant janitors, previously considered unorganizable.

The transformation of the Teamsters was made possible by Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU), an insurgent movement of Teamster members that began in mid-1970s in response to union malfeasance. The TDU gained momentum in the 1980s when the union negotiated concessionary contracts and the Department of Justice began proceedings to place the Teamsters under a federal court trusteeship due to persistent corruption. In an effort to stave off court action, the Teamsters re-affiliated with the AFL-CIO in 1987. That move did not prevent a federal judge from placing the union under his direct jurisdiction in 1989, requiring more open and democratic governance procedures, and mandating the first direct membership election for international office. In 1991, a TDU-backed reformer, Ron Carey, president of a local of United Parcel Service (UPS) employees in the New York region with a reputation for honesty, together with his entire slate won election by a clear majority of voting Teamster union members.

Unfortunately for his supporters, Carey never consolidated control over the decentralized Teamsters. His leadership was opposed by elements of the old guard, who coalesced around James P. Hoffa, the lawyer son of Jimmy Hoffa. In an effort to solidify his position in preparation for his reelection in 1996, Carey acted the militant in negotiating a new national contract for over-the-road truckers that year, a display of old-fashioned Teamster power that helped him to defeat Hoffa in a hotly contested race. But, as later events revealed, Carey's reelection campaign had violated union rules and the terms of the federal guardianship in order to defeat Hoffa. When the courts demanded a re-run of the disputed election, Carey again played the militant in the summer of 1997, leading a nationwide strike by UPS employees that elicited popular support and ended triumphantly for the union. The union won a commitment from UPS to restore good, full-time jobs and eliminate part-time and contingent employment. Labor's advocates hailed it as a harbinger of a revitalized labor movement ready to replace concessions with militancy, a sign that trade unions would act aggressively to organize new members and advance the interests of workers.

Appearances proved to be deceiving. When a federal investigation revealed that Carey's union advisers had used illegal money-laundering tactics in his race against Hoffa, the federal guardian mandated a new election in which Carey would be barred from running (indeed, the guardian subsequently expelled Carey for life from the union). In December 1998, James P. Hoffa easily defeated the reform faction's candidate. Hoffa immediately restored greater power to regional and local Teamster union leaders. Although the levels of corruption that once marked the Teamsters did not return as Hoffa's critics predicted, the soaring hopes engendered by Carey's 1991 victory did not return either.

The surprising success of SEIU in organizing immigrant janitors provided a more enduring source of hope. In the 1980s, the building service industry underwent an

enormous change as commercial buildings that had once employed their own janitors brought in outside contractors to handle the work. As they competed intensely for business, janitorial service contractors in big cities sought to cut costs by hiring immigrants, many of whom lacked legal residency in the United States. The transformation of janitorial work was swift. In the space of two years in the mid-1980s, the average janitor in Los Angeles went from earning \$7 per hour with health benefits to earning \$4.50 without benefits. The president of SEIU, John Sweeney, had run the union's most powerful affiliate, Local 32BJ, in New York City before succeeding to the presidency of the national union in 1980. He decided to try to rebuild SEIU membership among janitors. In 1984, Sweeney appointed Andrew L. (Andy) Stern, who came out of SEIU's public sector organization in Pennsylvania, as the union's director of organizing; Stern, in turn, assembled dozens of young organizers. The most successful of that group of young organizers was Stephen Lerner, who had begun his organizing career with the United Farm Workers in the 1970s.

With Sweeney's support, Stern, Lerner and their colleagues invested considerable resources in organizing janitors. The first breakthrough came in Denver in 1987. Unlike the short-lived union victories in coal, newspapers, and airlines in this period, this win led to others. Two things made the Justice for Janitors campaign distinctive. First, it bypassed individual janitorial service companies whose cutthroat competition with each other increased their aversion to unionization. Instead, the union pressured the wealthy corporate owners of the commercial properties who hired the janitorial service companies to encourage their contractors to accept the union's demands. Second, the campaign mobilized African American and especially immigrant janitors in noisy demonstrations and acts of civil disobedience that dramatized the plight of these poor workers, embarrassed building owners, and garnered public support. A breakthrough followed in Los Angeles in 1990 after a series of demonstrations that culminated in a march in downtown Los Angeles in which police officers brutally clubbed demonstrators. The campaign then moved to Washington, DC, where it won a contract covering 70 percent of the city's janitors after numerous demonstrations that included blocking a bridge during rush hour. All told, the campaign won 27 master contracts in cities around the country, covering a quarter of a million workers and making SEIU the union movement's most successful organizer.

A Change of Direction for Labor

SEIU's success in conjunction with the deepening crisis of the broader union movement brought about an unprecedented event in the mid-1990s: the leadership of the AFL-CIO was voted out. As dissatisfaction mounted among many trade unionists with Lane Kirkland's inability to steer the AFL-CIO in new directions, Kirkland's critics challenged the president and his stewardship of the labor movement. Centered mainly in the old CIO mass-production unions and the newer public employee and service

worker unions, the AFL-CIO insurgents advocated a new labor movement that devoted more of its resources to unionizing the unorganized than to administering a stagnant movement; one that organized workers through militant direct action, extralegal if necessary, rather than relying on federal and state laws that had failed labor; and one that opened labor's doors wide to the new movements that represented women workers, people of color, and the masses of legal and illegal immigrant workers. When Republicans recaptured the House of Representatives for the first time in nearly 50 years in the mid-term elections of 1994, the insurgents' patience ran out.

As the insurgents gathered support within the AFL-CIO in 1995, Kirkland decided it wiser to retire voluntarily before the federation's convention than to fight his challengers. In doing so, he sought to anoint his own successor, Thomas Donahue, a long-time AFL-CIO official, then the second-ranking national officer. Donahue tried to pacify the insurgents, agreeing with much of their program, but they had already built their own coalition slate. For president, they chose John Sweeney of SEIU, one of the few AFL-CIO affiliates that had been able to gain members through innovative organizing tactics and that also represented substantial numbers of women and minority workers. For the other two top positions, they selected Rich Trumka of the UMW, an advocate of more militant industrial action and more independent labor politics, and Linda Chavez-Thompson of the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), who exemplified the rising influence of women, Hispanics, and public sector workers within the movement. Promising to add more women, minorities, and representatives of less traditional unions to the executive council and pledging a rebirth of social unionism, the insurgents elected their slate at the 1995 AFL-CIO convention.



Figure 22.1 John Sweeney, of the Service Employees International Union, who served as president of the AFL-CIO from 1995 to 2009. (AFL-CIO)



Figure 22.2 Linda Chavez-Thompson, of the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees, who served as executive vice president of the AFL-CIO under Sweeney, symbolizing the growing importance of public sector workers and Latinos to the US labor movement. (AFL-CIO)

Sweeney's election that October inaugurated a rapprochement between organized labor and elements of the American Left from which it had been estranged since the Vietnam era, including many left-leaning academics. Sympathetic academics sponsored teach-ins at college and university campuses across the nation at which speakers advocated a new crusade for social justice to unite the Sweeney-led AFL-CIO with the adherents of diverse community-based social movements. In return, AFL-CIO officials invited academic leftists, who formerly had been outspoken critics of the institutional labor movement, to their Washington headquarters to discuss how to revitalize a moribund labor movement.

Sweeney's AFL-CIO also developed alliances with college students through a program called Union Summer, which introduced students to union organizing. Veterans of that program soon inaugurated campaigns for living wages for campus workers and against sweatshop production of sporting goods bearing university logos. Anti-sweatshop movements that sprang up at Harvard, Wesleyan, Virginia, Columbia-Barnard, and Georgetown among others led to the founding of a vibrant new organization, the United Students Against Sweatshops (USAS), in 1999. USAS pressure in turn helped bring about the creation of the Worker Rights Consortium in 2001. This entity, funded by dues paid by member colleges and universities (the number of which rose to 182 by 2014), conducted inspections of overseas manufacturing plants that produced logo-bearing items in order to certify that they met minimum labor standards.

Even more significant was that the Sweeney administration engineered an important shift in the union movement's position on immigration. Since the days of the Knights of Labor, and its support for Chinese exclusion, US unions – even those led and largely populated by immigrants – had tended to favor restrictive immigration policies in the fear that new immigrants might depress wages and disrupt union organization. Such had been the position of Cesar Chavez's United Farm Workers, which during its heyday relentlessly campaigned for the expulsion of illegal immigrants from the fields. By the late 1990s, however, two developments changed organized labor's calculus: unions lost faith in the government's ability to regulate immigration effectively; and immigrants demonstrated – through campaigns like Justice for Janitors – that they wanted to organize. In 2000, the AFL-CIO executive council called for reforms that would grant legal status and provide a path to citizenship for undocumented workers and comprehensively reform what had become a broken immigration system.



Figure 22.3 Mexican immigrant Manuel Morales of East Los Angeles marches in a massive May Day march in downtown Los Angeles, on May 1, 2006, calling for immigration reform. LA unions helped lead the protest. (Julio Cortez, JulyThePhotoGuy.com)

Finally, Sweeney's election encouraged some to advocate a more independent brand of labor politics. Dismayed by an overtly antiunion Republican Party and a Democratic Party that increasingly embraced free trade and deregulation, more militant trade unionists and independent leftists created the New Party and the Labor Party in order

to offer voters an alternative in national politics. The New Party gathered most of its supporters among leftwing academics, militant environmentalists (Greens), and community-based activists, while the Labor Party drew most of its members from among the more militant and leftist trade unions such as the Oil, Chemical, and Atomic Workers International Union, the United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers, and the UMW. This group met in Pittsburgh in November 1998 at a convention intended to create a permanent and institutionalized working-class political party. Neither the New Party nor the Labor Party made much headway, however, in convincing unions or workers to switch their political loyalties. In addition, third-party activism was soon diverted by unexpected events.

Economic Troubles, Political Setbacks, and War

The new millennium ushered in a series of shocks. The economic expansion and the great bull market in stocks that marked the Clinton years drew to an end.

Unemployment rose and Republicans reclaimed the White House in the controversial election of 2000, and both houses of Congress in the ensuing election of 2002. During the election of 2000, the AFL-CIO and most of its affiliated unions campaigned assiduously for the Democrat Al Gore, Clinton's vice president. With labor's help, Gore came from behind in most polls to win a popular majority of nearly half a million votes nationally. However, this majority did not help him carry some key states (including Florida, whose disputed process ended up in the Supreme Court), and he was defeated by the Republican governor of Texas, George W. Bush, in the electoral college.

As Bush took office, neither the policies of his administration nor broader economic conditions favored unions. As early as the late summer of 2000, the economy was slowing and wages had begun to lag prices, partly as a result of OPEC's decision to limit production and raise oil prices. Few, however, could imagine how bad conditions would soon become. Throughout the first two thirds of 2001, the economy stagnated and unemployment rose; still, the Bush administration evinced little love for the union movement. Only the most slender Democratic control of the Senate stood between the Bush administration and its antilabor preferences. But this was insufficient to obstruct an administration tax-reform bill that showered its benefits overwhelmingly on the top 10 percent of taxpayers, especially the top 1 percent.

Then came September 11, 2001, when four commercial jet liners were hijacked by terrorists of Middle East origin. Two of the airplanes crashed into the World Trade Center towers in New York City's lower Manhattan. The twin towers, monuments to global trade and the reign of capital, collapsed upon themselves, their steel beams and supports melting away in a fiery cauldron fed by jet fuel. Nearly 3,000 people perished in this terrorist attack, their deaths a testament to the diversity of the city in which they worked. The victims included immigrant service workers and multi-millionaire financiers; dedicated civil servants and bond dealers and stockbrokers;

women as well as men; and municipal firefighters and police who bravely responded to the disaster only to lose their own lives while trying to save others. That same morning the third hijacked plane crashed into the Pentagon, and the fourth, the hijackers having been overwhelmed by a brave group of passengers, fell to earth in a Pennsylvania field, claiming the lives of all on board but missing its intended target, most likely the Capitol or the White House.

The reverberations of the terrorist attacks of what soon became known in common parlance as “9/11” resonated well beyond the immediate destruction of two skyscrapers, considerable damage to the Pentagon building, and the loss of thousands of innocent lives. It also proved a shock to an already weak US economy. For the New York metropolitan area alone, it meant the loss of hundreds of thousands of jobs and incalculable costs for rehabilitation and renovation. For President Bush and his party it meant the opportunity, as well as the need, to shift attention and resources away from domestic economic problems to focus instead on the “war on terrorism.” That war saw American troops invade Afghanistan in 2001 and – after Bush and his advisers claimed that Iraq was stockpiling weapons of mass destruction – Iraq in 2003.

Unlike past wars, the “war on terror” did little to stimulate the economy. On the heels of the terrorist attack, the stock market tumbled. A “dot-com” bubble had already burst in 2000, having been filled to overflowing with hot air pumped into it by the promoters of an allegedly “new economy” of post-industrial, high-technology enterprises. Many of the most highly praised and promoted dot-com companies proved to be empty shells, their profits having derived from internal financial manipulations that rewarded chief executives lavishly but generated no material returns for stockholders. But soon large, much longer-established companies began failing as well. Like falling dominoes, first Enron, then Adelphi Communications, then MCI/World Com collapsed, their top executives exposed as cheats and, in several cases, arrested and indicted for violations of federal law. The airline industry in particular suffered, as travelers canceled trips owing to anxiety about further terrorism and long delays caused by newly tightened airport security checks. By the end of 2002, two major airlines, United and US Airways, were in bankruptcy, and nearly all the carriers discharged large numbers of personnel. Both bankrupt airlines shed union employees, obtained concessions from union members still on the job, and, in the case of United, obtained a bankruptcy court ruling that annulled a large part of its union contracts. Well into early 2003, other enterprises continued to shed workers and unemployment rose steadily.

For a moment, it had seemed unionism might be revived amid feelings of national unity following 9/11. Old-style male, blue-collar trade unionists became heroes in the ruins of the World Trade Center towers. The media and even the president lionized the New York City firefighters, each and every one a union member, who bravely sacrificed their lives to save fellow citizens. Equally featured in the limelight as heroes were the structural iron workers and other construction trades' employees, again

union members nearly to a person, who toiled around the clock in the smoke, soot, and stink of the collapsed towers to clean up the site on which the twin towers once stood, which became known as "Ground Zero." For a time it appeared that unionism and public service, unionism and altruism, unionism and bravery were synonymous. No longer were union members reflexively condemned as parasites at the public trough, selfish monopolists who enriched themselves at the expense of less fortunately placed citizens, a special interest that subverted the national interest.

But that moment quickly faded. Soon after 9/11, federal judges and the Bush administration resumed efforts to undercut the power of unions to organize and represent workers. Employers too kept up their fight against unionization, many choosing to violate labor law and fire workers who tried to lead organizing drives. In the words of a Human Rights Watch report: "An employer determined to get rid of a union activist knows that all that awaits, after years of litigation if the employer persists in appeals, is a reinstatement order the worker is likely to decline and modest back-pay award. For many employers, it is a small price to pay to destroy a workers' organizing effort by firing its leaders." Like Reagan, George W. Bush appointed to the NLRB individuals antipathetic to unionism and nominated federal judges of a similar persuasion, a process guaranteed to make a bad situation worse for the union movement. In 2004, for example, the NLRB ruled that graduate assistants at private universities could not be classed as employees who enjoyed the right to organize and bargain collectively, thus undercutting a significant source of union activism on campuses.

President Bush also used the panic about national security in the aftermath of 9/11 to curb unionism. In creating a new Department of Homeland Security (which merged existing departments and agencies including 177,000 federal employees), the president demanded the right to waive civil service rules and collective bargaining rights, a demand that Congress conceded. The administration also tried to bar unions from a new federal agency, the Transportation Security Administration (TSA), which was created to administer security at the nation's airports by employing theretofore privately employed security screeners as federal civil servants. When the 56,000 federalized airport screeners began to unionize, the head of TSA ruled that collective bargaining was not feasible at the TSA because "fighting terrorism demands a flexible work force," which "is not compatible with the duty to bargain with trade unions." AFL-CIO president John Sweeney charged that the Bush administration "used the war as a weapon to deny rights to the very workers it relies on to win the war." Despite Sweeney's fulminations, the union ban stood during Bush's presidency.

Other policies pursued by the Bush administration further weakened unions in the public and private sectors. It aggressively subcontracted federal administrative and maintenance services to private agencies that submitted the lowest bids. The private subcontractors typically operated without unions and paid their employees less than comparable government employees earned, while also offering far less generous health and retirement benefits. Bush hoped to privatize as many as 800,000 federal

jobs in this way. His appointment of Elaine Chao as secretary of labor further illustrated his disdain for organized labor and collective bargaining. Chao, a former member of numerous corporate boards, and the spouse of Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (Republican, Kentucky), a resolutely antiunion senator, appointed former corporate managers to key positions. Together, the new members of the Department of Labor pursued policies that furthered corporate interests rather than the needs of workers and unions. Under Chao's watch, the department allowed the functions of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration to atrophy, failed to pursue employers who violated federal wage and hour requirements, and subjected unions to far more vigorous supervision and reporting requirements than employers.

War expenditures during the world wars and the conflicts in Korea and Vietnam stimulated production, tightened labor markets, increased work hours, and raised wages, incomes, and union membership figures. But the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq departed from this pattern. Instead of tightening, labor markets loosened; wages and incomes for the majority of workers stagnated or fell; and union membership continued to decline both relatively and absolutely. In previous wars, the government raised taxes and called upon citizens to economize and save. The Bush administration instead cut taxes, most generously for the wealthiest, and urged citizens to shop and consume as a way of keeping the economy strong. During the twentieth-century wars, mass immigration ended and domestic industrial production soared. In the twenty-first century, millions of immigrants and migrants entered the United States and industrial production globalized as the nation increasingly imported manufactured products from abroad.

Improvising in Difficult Times

In such a situation, workers struggled and unions found it difficult to make headway. Yet there were still places where citizens and officeholders sympathized with labor's cause and sectors of the economy – such as transportation – in which unionized workers retained real power. The International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU), which dropped the reference to “men” from its name in 1997, had been a power on the Pacific Coast since 1934. Through good times and bad, despite technological transformations in how waterfront work was done, the ILWU had defended its members well. As the new millennium opened, another wave of technological change threatened the security of waterfront workers. When shippers and the union failed to agree on how to manage this change, the ILWU ordered its members to “work to rule” in 2002 (following every work process specified in the written contract, many of which impeded the smooth flow of work). The union defied employers and shrugged off the intervention of President Bush, ultimately winning the protections it sought.

Stymied by the conservative turn in national politics and unfavorable trends in the private sector, unions and their allies made considerable progress in political fights

waged at the state and local levels. One promising development was the fight for “living wage” ordinances. As former recipients of welfare entered the paid labor force under threat of losing their former benefits, it became clearer than ever that wages in much of the private sector failed to provide full-time workers with an income adequate to sustain themselves and their families. Federal and state minimum-wage standards also fell below the level required to sustain a decent standard of living. This reality gave birth to a “living wage” movement whose advocates lobbied for city and county legislatures to pass ordinances that required all public contractors to pay their employees a living wage tailored to the local cost of living, and more if the job lacked health benefits. The first living-wage ordinance was passed in Baltimore in 1994. By the end of 2001, 76 communities had enacted living-wage ordinances, mandating minimum wages of between \$8.25 and \$10.50 an hour. Although these ordinances often applied only to businesses that did business with city governments, they began to focus attention on income stagnation and the plight of low-wage workers.

At the state and county level, meanwhile, unions found creative ways to organize poorly paid home health-care workers. Homecare workers typically worked for small agencies or were hired individually to take care of ill and aged clients in their homes, with the costs of care covered by Medicare or Medicaid funds. The fragmented nature of their industry had made it impossible to organize them as a unit. But SEIU and AFSCME perfected a model in which states either created or empowered counties to create public agencies that would oversee homecare provision and act as employers for the purpose of bargaining collectively with the homecare workers, who in turn would be granted the right to unionize. The first big breakthrough for this model occurred in California in 1999, when 74,000 homecare workers in Los Angeles County selected SEIU as their bargaining agent after the union pushed through enabling legislation at the state and county level. SEIU achieved a similar breakthrough in Illinois in 2003. By then, AFSCME was also pursuing this strategy, and several more states cleared the way for the organization of homecare workers. The union contracts won by these low-wage workers raised pay, improved benefits, and elevated care standards – they also boosted the membership of these two unions while others continued to lose members.

In general, health care remained an area of strength for unions in part due to the growing union movement among nurses. The expansion of for-profit health care and a shortage of trained nurses introduced tensions in health care facilities as nurses' work schedules and responsibilities became more onerous. Nurses, who organized as much to protect standards of care for their patients as to improve their own working conditions, provided a source of militancy and energy to the labor movement, joining statewide or regional nurses associations. The nurses' movement hit a significant road bump in 2006 when the Bush-appointed NLRB issued decisions in three cases known collectively as the “Kentucky River Trilogy,” which ruled that some nurses must be classed as “supervisors” ineligible for union representation due to the level of authority they exercised on the job. But nurses continued to organize. In 2009, several

state associations combined to form the nation's largest union of nurses, National Nurses United.

Despite these pockets of progress, the mainstream labor movement continued to atrophy. Union membership rates overall dipped to 11.9 percent of the non-farm workforce in 2010. Losses were most pronounced in the private sector. While more than 35 percent of government workers were union members in 2010, only 8 percent of private sector employees claimed that status. The movement was also hemmed in geographically. Half of all union members lived in only six states – New York, California, Illinois, Michigan, Ohio, and Pennsylvania; Southern, high plains, and Rocky Mountain states had proportionately the fewest union members, with the two Carolinas at the lowest rung with barely more than 3 percent of their workers in unions. Structural changes in the economy and an increasingly ineffectual regulatory regime exacerbated these trends.

Walmart, the “Fissured Workplace,” and Weakened Regulation

Fueled by rising wages and relatively stable employment, and bolstered by union power in key economic sectors as well as public policies that fostered rising wages, a mass-consumption economy – sometimes labeled “Fordism” – had characterized the United States at the peak of its age of affluence (1948 to 1973). Such companies as General Motors (GM), Ford, General Electric, IBM, US Steel, Sears Roebuck, and their prototypes, and such unions as the United Automobile Workers (UAW) and the Teamsters provided the jobs and negotiated the contracts that underwrote a good life for millions of workers. They also carried their high wages, fringe benefits, and union contracts to regions of the country previously characterized by low wages, an absence of benefits, and employment insecurity. In the South and Southwest, automobile, steel, rubber, oil, chemical, and packinghouse workers, along with truck drivers, became the beneficiaries of union contracts: their wages rose, and their living standards became comparable to those of workers in the nation's former industrial heartland to the north and east. As we have seen, the age of stable employment, high wages, a rising standard of living, and union power collapsed in the 1970s.

The economic regime that came to replace Fordism at the end of the twentieth century was exemplified best by the enterprise that became the largest single employer of labor in the United States, Walmart, which by 2008 employed more than 1 million “associates” (its term for waged employees). Unlike the great corporations of the previous century that manufactured and distributed durable producer and consumer goods, or like national retailers such as Sears, which for more than a century sold manufactured goods produced domestically, Walmart manufactured nothing and by 2008 obtained most of the goods that lined its well-stocked shelves from producers overseas, predominately in East Asia. Unlike GM or IBM, Goodyear

Rubber or Eastman Kodak, enterprises that bargained with unions or kept them out by offering their workers comparable terms of employment, Walmart did not recognize or bargain with unions, offer high wages and generous benefits, or provide dissatisfied employees with a voice at work. The only option available to the dissatisfied Walmart worker was exit.

In effect, Walmart reversed the pattern that GM had established half a century earlier. After the end of World War II, GM recognized the UAW as the bargaining agent for all the employees in its northern plants and built a stable relationship with its workers based on the union shop. It brought the same pattern into its plants in Georgia and Texas, and elsewhere in the South and Southwest. The major rubber companies, steel enterprises, meatpackers, and oil-chemical firms did likewise. If such enterprises carried the values of Detroit, Akron, Pittsburgh, and even New York south, Walmart brought the values of rural Arkansas, where it was founded by Sam Walton in 1962, to the entire nation.

Walmart's rise was marked by its fusion of rural Southern values with hypermodern, computer-modeled techniques of inventory control, mass distribution, and logistics, which allowed it to deliver "always low prices" to consumers. The Walmart model was incubated in union-free rural Arkansas, where low wages, stingy employee benefits, and an autocratic regime of labor relations prevailed. Its retailing methods encompassed constant inventory control, company-owned distribution and transport operations, and a never-ending search for the lowest-cost providers of the goods that stocked the company's retail outlets. The firm could span the globe in its search for low-cost suppliers because containerization caused the costs of oceanic shipping and cargo-handling to plummet. Walmart's insistent demand that its suppliers, which by the end of the twentieth century came to be concentrated in East Asia, especially China, provide manufactured goods at the lowest price led producers to compete with each other in undercutting wage rates and working conditions, wherever they were based.

Wherever in the United States it operated, Walmart tended to depress wage rates and worsen working conditions. When Walmart expanded its operations and opened "superstores" that sold foods as well as hard and soft consumer goods, it stole market share away from unionized grocery chain stores that provided employees with decent wages and adequate benefits. A union-free Walmart influenced its managers to compel workers to labor off the clock (unpaid work time), not pay workers premium wages for overtime as required by law, set arbitrary and unreasonable work schedules for employees, and underpay women. To make sure that its employees did not fall prey to unions or seek collective action, the company subjected all new hires to antiunion propaganda films and talks on company premises and time, and it had special action teams always ready to descend on Walmart outlets where union threats arose. Workers at Walmart's competitors in California learned what this meant in 2006 when unionized supermarkets there sought to meet the challenge from Walmart's new "superstores" by lowering their employees' wages and reducing their

benefits. The result was a protracted statewide strike that affected most of California's unionized supermarkets; the strike ended only when the United Food and Commercial Workers International Union agreed to a new contract that lowered wages and benefits substantially for new hires as well as reduced the wages and benefits of current employees.

True, as many economists claimed, Walmart's low prices benefited low-income consumers and raised the real standard of living for many of them. But at what cost? Do the low prices that Walmart promises its patrons compensate for the low wages and adverse working conditions it provides its own employees or the pressure that it exerts on its suppliers and competitors always to reduce their own costs of production by lowering wages or intensifying work?

The practices of one of Walmart's more successful competitors in the low-cost, mass-retail sector, Costco, proved that successful retailing need not follow the Walmart model. Costco, a firm with northern, urban origins and currently based in Seattle, offers hourly employees good wages, employs a larger proportion of its work force full-time and hence with full benefits, and bargains with unions. As a result, Costco experiences less labor turnover and more sales dollars generated per employee than Walmart. Yet Walmart's enormous size (more than 4,000 stores in the United States by 2010) dwarfed Costco's (with fewer than 600 stores) and its influence on the economy and the practices of other employers was incomparable as unions increasingly receded from the private sector, new hires received lower wages, companies reduced or eliminated health benefits, and defined benefit pensions disappeared.

Walmart's rise was not the only important structural development evident in the new millennium. An equally significant transformation of the relationship between employers and workers emerged through a phenomenon that the labor scholar David Weil termed the "fissured workplace." Weil and other observers noted that the spread of new corporate structures characterized by subcontracting and franchising, as well as by long-distance supply chains perfected by the likes of Walmart, fragmented labor markets and made them more difficult to either organize or regulate. Beginning in the 1970s and 1980s, vertically integrated corporations began to pursue enhanced shareholder value by streamlining, selling off pieces of their corporations and subcontracting work previously done in an integrated firm to outside suppliers and service providers. Many of these subcontractors in turn subcontracted work to others. At each level of subcontracting, competition for work ratcheted costs (and thus wages and benefits) downward.

Especially when subcontracted supply chains spanned the globe, their adverse impact on labor standards could be pronounced. This was evident in the international garment industry, where sweatshop conditions in Bangladesh became notorious after a factory fire killed 124 workers in 2012 and a building collapse took the lives of more than 1,100 others in 2013. Some of the garments produced in these locations had

been destined for US retail shops. Still, the profits made possible by “offshoring” remained irresistible for US employers. The most profitable company of the new millennium, Apple Inc., illustrated why. The computer company, co-founded in 1976 by Steve Jobs, had moved into production of mobile devices, beginning with the iPod digital music player in 2001, and expanding with the introduction of the iPhone in 2007 and the iPad tablet in 2010. Although the devices were designed in the United States by an American-based company, Chinese subcontractors assembled them using parts produced by other subcontractors worldwide. This model was wildly successful and allowed Apple's profits to set records (\$18 billion in the first quarter of 2015 alone), but it produced relatively few jobs in the United States and aroused considerable controversy when the poor working conditions of those who assembled Apple products overseas became widely known.

In addition to outsourcing, the spread of franchising as a business model raised concerns. Franchising first became a significant phenomenon in the fast-food industry. The McDonald's Corporation was built up by entrepreneur Ray Kroc, who opened his first hamburger outlet in 1955 as a franchisee of Richard and Maurice McDonald, who operated a small chain of hamburger stands in southern California. After subsequently acquiring the chain from the brothers, Kroc began to sell franchises to others. Franchise owners agreed to abide by McDonald's strict code respecting the construction, appearance, and operation of their restaurants, including requirements that they purchase food and supplies only from the company or company-approved suppliers. While franchisees benefited from the visibility and familiarity of the franchisor's brand, their own profit margins were much thinner in the competitive fast-food market. To make a significant profit, it was vital for the franchise owners to keep wages down. As more than 14,000 McDonald's outlets opened in the United States, its model came to dominate the burgeoning fast-food industry and helped account for the poor wages and working conditions of its workers across the industry. Although McDonald's became one of the most profitable companies of its time, it refused to take responsibility for the wages paid by its franchisees. As intensified competition in the fast-food industry helped keep wages low, the fragmentation of restaurant ownership among thousands of franchisees made traditional union organization or collective bargaining impractical. As the franchise model spread beyond fast food to industries such as hotels, janitorial and maintenance businesses, and others by the end of the twentieth century, it created similarly adverse effects on wages and working conditions.

The conversion of some workers to temporary or “independent contractor” status further eroded the employer–employee framework. The “temp” industry developed after World War II as companies like Kelly Girl and Manpower marketed women as temporary fill-in workers, mostly for office jobs. As these temp agencies grew, they expanded their range of services and began offering temporary workers to help staff all sorts of jobs. Some companies came to rely on a permanent supply of temporary workers (“permatemps”) as their “periphery” labor force, taking them on or laying

them off as business conditions demanded. Temp workers were paid by their agencies, not directly by the employer in whose workplace they operated. They invariably earned lower wages and fewer benefits than the “core” employees whom they worked next to day after day. At Nissan's auto assembly plant in Canton, Mississippi, the company hired workers as “temps” at substantially lower wages with a five-year probation period before they became eligible for hiring onto the permanent workforce.

Independent contracting offered employers similar cost savings, for it allowed them to avoid paying payroll taxes for workers or abiding by wage and hour laws. The FedEx delivery company (originally Federal Express), founded in Little Rock, Arkansas, in 1971, was a pioneer of this method. As it expanded, FedEx built a delivery fleet whose drivers were classified as independent contractors. They rented or bought their delivery trucks and uniforms and were paid by FedEx for the deliveries they made, not for the number of hours they worked. Some employers sought to deliberately “misclassify” workers as independent contractors in order to avoid labor laws.

The proliferation of subcontracting, franchising, independent contracting, and other innovations coincided with cutbacks in the enforcement of US labor standards. Understaffed regulatory agencies found it impossible to adequately investigate violations of workplace safety or intentional misclassification. Although conventional wisdom holds that the United States is a postindustrial society in which the great mass of workers serve others, enter data into computers, and manipulate financial instruments, millions of workers continued to engage in arduous, dirty, and dangerous physical labor. Not all relatively low–value-added manufacturing jobs, which too often imperil the health and safety of workers, were moved across the border or overseas. Women who sewed garments in poorly ventilated and dingy shops in New York and Los Angeles largely came from Taiwan, mainland China, Vietnam, and Thailand. Meatpackers who slaughtered beef and hogs in Iowa hailed from Guatemala and Nicaragua. Laborers who clambered across building sites came from rural Mexico. Regulators stretched thin by budget cuts proved unable to defend the rights and health of these and other workers.

In 2009, the Department of Labor spent less in inflation-adjusted dollars to enforce wage, hour, and workplace safety laws than it had spent in 1979, even though the size of the workforce had grown by 50 percent over that time. Research demonstrated that workers in highly subcontracted and franchised industries were at a greater likelihood of having their rights violated, but there was little chance that investigators would visit their workplaces. In the hotel industry, the annual probability of an investigation in any given workplace was less than 1 percent; in food establishments it was even lower. While some employers took advantage of the scarcity of investigators, others such as McWane, one of the world's largest producers of cast-iron water and sewer pipes, took advantage of the system's inadequate penalties. McWane compiled the worst safety record in an industry

(foundries) with the highest injury rate between 1999 and 2003, amassing four times as many penalties as any of its major competitors. The penalties did not prevent over 4,000 workers from being injured and 9 from being killed while working for McWane during this period. Of course, the most vulnerable workers – especially undocumented immigrants, women, and people of color – tended to suffer most from erosion of workplace protections.

Dissension, Schism, and Political Breakthrough

Organized labor's deteriorating position led to growing restiveness in the union movement following George W. Bush's reelection in 2004. Convinced that labor could not advance unless Bush and the Republicans were removed from power, the AFL-CIO poured money and personnel into the election of 2004. The effort failed abysmally. Not only were Bush and the Republicans returned to power with greater majorities, but a narrow majority of white union members voted Republican. Such results only further emboldened the Bush administration, which intensified efforts to tighten union regulation and ease restraints on antiunion behavior by corporations, policies legitimated by a more conservative federal judiciary.

Ten years after the insurgents inside AFL-CIO had achieved success by electing John Sweeney and his reform slate to power, the organization seemed as impotent as it had been in the Kirkland years. The Sweeney administration moderated the anticommunist foreign policy of the Meany-Kirkland era, proved itself more open to positive relationships with overseas labor federations and unions, and pushed affiliated unions to organize workers, yet union density continued to decline and wages stagnated while productivity rose.

Just as the Republican victory in 1994 had set in motion a rebellion that drove Lane Kirkland from the leadership of the AFL-CIO, Bush's 2004 reelection helped crystallize an insurgency against Sweeney's leadership. Leaders of several large unions called for a restructuring of the AFL-CIO. The loudest voices demanding change came from Andy Stern, who had taken leadership of SEIU after Sweeney's elevation to the AFL-CIO presidency, and Bruce Raynor and John Wilhelm, the leaders of Unite Here – a union formed in 2004 from the merger of the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees and the Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees – which itself had been formed from an earlier merger of the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers and the International Ladies' Garment Workers. All three of these leaders were graduates of Ivy League colleges, and their prominence indicated how much the typical profiles of union leaders had changed since the days of Samuel Gompers.

Their attack on Sweeney's leadership was hard hitting. Although Sweeney had urged affiliates to organize more aggressively, seek new members among low-wage immigrant and nonwhite workers in economic sectors unaffected by foreign

competition, and participate in community-based coalition organizing campaigns, the dissidents claimed that he and his supporters were not doing enough. Stern, Raynor, and Wilhelm insisted that AFL-CIO affiliates invest a larger share of their treasuries in organizing, adopt more innovative methods, amalgamate into larger unions with jurisdiction over broad sectors of the economy, and streamline the AFL-CIO's ruling executive council to give the bigger unions (like theirs) more influence. Stern and his allies also wanted the aging Sweeney to retire from office to allow younger, more inventive leaders to rise to power.

When Sweeney and his allies rejected the wishes of Stern, Raynor, and Wilhelm, the three insurgents bolted from the AFL-CIO on the eve of its fiftieth anniversary convention in 2005. The three men seemed bent on reenacting the roles played by John L. Lewis, Sidney Hillman, and David Dubinsky in 1935 and creating a twenty-first-century version of the CIO. In place of a committee on industrial organization, they offered in 2005 the Change to Win (CtW) coalition. They attracted five other affiliates to their cause – the Teamsters, the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners (UBC), the United Food and Commercial Workers International Union (UFCW), the Laborers' International Union, and the United Farm Workers (UFW) – bringing with them nearly 6 million members, fully a third of the AFL-CIO's total membership.

In many ways, CtW was a strange coalition. While Stern's SEIU had enjoyed recent success in adding members, Raynor's and Wilhelm's Unite Here had seen membership decimated in its core clothing and textile sectors, and lacked notable success in its hotel, hospitality, and restaurant sector. For its part, the UFCW had lost the mass of its membership in agricultural processing, negotiated concessionary contracts for remaining members, and found itself on the defensive against Walmart's penetration of the grocery supermarket sector. The Teamsters had long suffered from the spread of deregulation in over-the-road trucking and the proliferation of independent contracting among long-haul truckers and FedEx local deliverers. The UBC exemplified old-style AFL unionism and had a long history of antagonistic relations with AFL-CIO affiliates as well as their union cousins in the AFL-CIO's Building and Construction Trades Department. Finally, the tiny UFW, the farmworkers' union made famous by Chavez in the 1960s, by this time seemed but a ghost of itself.

In addition, CtW lacked a shared culture or the defined mission that had characterized the CIO. SEIU, Unite Here, and the UFW shared traditions of progressive politics and an affinity with the more liberal wing of the Democratic Party, but the Teamsters and the UBC shared few progressive preferences, and the latter tended to support Republicans. Even more problematic were the circumstances that gave birth to CtW. Lewis created the CIO at a high point of worker militancy and at the apogee of the New Deal, just as the nation was emerging from the worst years of the Great Depression; CtW was launched at a time of worker quiescence and conservative Republican dominance and, as it turned out, on the eve of the Great Recession. Could CtW have been born at a less propitious moment?

CtW nonetheless advanced some promising ideas. Most ambitiously, it formed a Strategic Organizing Center to coordinate campaigns by its affiliates to unionize port truckers on the West Coast and Walmart workers around the country. But these efforts produced no breakthroughs, and CtW proved no more successful in triggering a labor upsurge than the Sweeney-led AFL-CIO had been. Fortunately for labor, the secession by those in CtW did not reprise the civil war within labor that had erupted between the AFL and CIO in the late 1930s. The leaders of AFL-CIO did not declare war on CtW, and the rival federations generally refrained from undercutting each other. In fact, state and local affiliates of the AFL-CIO and CtW cooperated in city centrals and state federations, especially on political action. Competition between the federations might have spurred some AFL-CIO affiliates to organize more aggressively, but it was hard to discern many positive results for workers that flowed from CtW's formation. At the end of 2006, a full year after the founding of CtW, union membership declined by another 300,000.



Figure 22.4 SEIU president Andy Stern, Chicago, November 16, 2009, four years after having helped found Change to Win. (David Sachs/SEIU)

Although the AFL-CIO and CtW made scant progress organizing workers, they experienced considerable success in international diplomacy and domestic politics. Its Cold War orientation long discarded, the union movement reached out as never before to labor organizations across the world. As Bruce Raynor, president of Unite Here, noted: “For many years I didn’t see the point of international affairs, but we’ve learned a lot in the past few years. What’s happening to unions in this country can’t be separated from what’s happening to unions everywhere else. We’re going to rise or fall together.” Thus his union became active in assisting garment and textile

workers in Central America and the Caribbean to organize unions and begin bargaining with their employers, often subcontractors for American corporations. Andy Stern visited China, sought to build a relationship with the Chinese All-Workers Union, opened offices in Mexico and Europe, and committed SEIU to several international labor campaigns. The United Electrical Workers supported Mexican electrical workers in building a union independent of the party-based organization that in the past subordinated workers' interests to those of Mexico's politicians. The Teamsters developed a progressive international program in response to the forces of globalization that were changing the transport industry. And in the summer of 2008, the United Steelworkers consummated an amalgamation with the largest British and Irish union, Unite, to form a trans-Atlantic organization called Workers Uniting.

By 2006, the movement also experienced political victories as dissatisfaction with the economic policies of the Bush administration and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan intensified. Unlike the 1960s and 1970s, when the war in Vietnam divided unionists between hawks and doves, union leaders coalesced in their antipathy to Bush's foreign and domestic policies. In the midterm elections of 2006 they achieved measurable success, as Democrats recaptured control of the House of Representatives and cobbled together a bare majority in the Senate. One reason for labor's political success was an innovative policy that the AFL-CIO implemented in 2003. Unable to unionize workers amenable to organization because of employer resistance and labor laws that handcuffed unions, the AFL-CIO provided such workers an alternative to traditional unionism with Working America, a mass organization for workers sympathetic to unions but unable to form one. An army of canvassers who knocked on doors in politically important swing states like Ohio built the organization's membership. For a small annual dues payment, Working America provided members a regular channel of information about unions, economics, and politics. By 2006 it claimed more than 2 million members, a force large enough, if mobilized, to influence election results, as it did in 2006.

Having won Democratic majorities in Congress, both labor blocs united to lobby for three pieces of labor legislation, a rise in the minimum wage, comprehensive immigration reform, and passage of the Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA). They achieved success on the minimum wage. But despite the inauguration of large protests by immigrants each May 1, beginning in 2006, the push for immigration reform bogged down as business, labor, and key political leaders failed to reach a consensus on what provisions an immigration bill ought to contain. Efforts to pass EFCA ran into a stone wall of business opposition. EFCA aimed at eliminating the primary tactics of employer resistance to unionism. First, the bill would allow workers to choose to unionize either through elections ordered and supervised by the NLRB or through a "card check" process, which would allow the NLRB to certify a union as the bargaining agent for workers once a majority in a given workplace signed union representation cards. The latter alternative offered workers, if they so chose, the opportunity to escape protracted elections during which employers waged incessant

and sometimes coercive combat against union representation. Second, EFCA required that bargaining impasses during the negotiation of a first collective bargaining contract would be resolved through binding arbitration. Additionally, it mandated substantial financial penalties in place of the weak ones that the NLRB levied on employers found guilty of violating labor law. In response, employers' associations funded an aggressive public relations and lobbying campaign against the bill, and Republicans in the Senate promised to filibuster against its passage.

By the end of 2007, labor leaders were convinced that unions could not make substantial progress without a change in labor law and a new administration in power in Washington, DC. Moreover, as wages stagnated and the distribution of wealth and income grew even more unequal, dissatisfaction swelled among the voting-age population. Health benefits vanished for a growing number of workers, and those who retained health insurance had to bear a larger share of its cost. The erosion of defined benefit pensions continued apace, leaving more employees with less generous individual retirement investment accounts in their place – IRAs and 401(k)s. The times favored a political shift.

Both the AFL-CIO and CtW poured money and peopower into the 2008 presidential primaries and general election. As the Democratic primary unfolded, unionists divided their support among three candidates, all sitting senators and all on record as supporters of EFCA: Hillary Rodham Clinton of New York; John Edwards of North Carolina; and Barack Hussein Obama of Illinois. Obama, the youngest of the three, had the best record of opposition to the unpopular war in Iraq and benefited from the support of the largest union in the nation with the most fully developed political apparatus, SEIU. Unite Here also favored Obama. After Edwards dropped out of the race following a series of early primary losses, Obama bested Clinton for a majority of pledged convention delegates and thus assured himself the Democratic presidential nomination. The decision having been made, the unions united as one behind Obama.

Labor's choice in the national election was overdetermined by the behavior of the Republicans. For eight years, the Bush White House had opposed virtually every union initiative. On issues of salience to unions that arose in Congress, labor could look to the votes of less than a handful of House and Senate Republicans. The Republican presidential ticket offered more of the same. John McCain, the presidential candidate, had built an antiunion voting record during nearly three decades in the Senate, and he ran a campaign that appealed to his party's hard-right, antiunion base. Although the husband of his running mate, Governor Sarah Palin of Alaska, held a union card, the ticket made no effort to court union voters.

The election took place in the midst of the worst economic crisis since the stock market crash of 1929, the new crisis striking a severe blow to millions of working families. The real estate and financial bubbles that had gone unchecked during the hyper-deregulation of the Bush years burst with a vengeance. Millions of homeowners

found themselves unable to meet payments on their adjustable-rate mortgages, which lenders had extended to them at very low “teaser” rates that had now skyrocketed. As hundreds of thousands of such homeowners faced foreclosure, housing prices tumbled. Even holders of conventional mortgages who had purchased homes at inflated prices suddenly found themselves in “underwater” mortgages (owing more than their homes were worth). In addition, many homeowners had taken out home equity loans based on the pre-bust market value of their homes, and now they also found themselves with a total indebtedness in excess of the value of their real estate. They, too, faced foreclosure or simply walked away from their mortgages – and their houses. As a result of a collapsing real estate market, housing construction and renovation ground to a halt, throwing many thousands of people out of work.

Subprime mortgages and other forms of innovative debt had been “securitized” into complicated financial instruments that domestic and foreign banks and financial institutions purchased and swapped with one another carelessly. As the assets that underlay these “mortgage-backed securities” deteriorated, the value of the bonds plummeted. Suddenly, one bank after another found itself in financial peril, with mounting losses and capital reserves insufficient to meet their obligations. Such financial giants as AIG (American International Group), Bear Stearns, Lehman Brothers, Merrill Lynch, Wachovia, and such aggressive mortgage issuers as Washington Mutual and Countrywide failed or were taken over by other financial institutions such as Bank of America and Goldman Sachs. The financial crisis born in the US real estate market and financial institutions spread across the globe because the innovative bonds and the Ponzi scheme-like insurance instruments that guaranteed them had been peddled worldwide. Gridlock seized domestic and foreign financial institutions, drying up business and consumer credit. For a time banks would not even lend to each other. With credit frozen, production and consumption fell, further reducing employment and income. Things grew so bad that, in the midst of the 2008 presidential campaign, Congress reluctantly enacted a \$700 billion package of financial aid for the nation's struggling financial institutions. Yet the rescue package was implemented so ineptly that credit remained nearly frozen, mortgage foreclosures persisted, and the economy slid into deep recession.

The financial crisis foretold the election results. Obama won a resounding popular and electoral vote majority. He was the first Democratic candidate to win an absolute popular majority since Lyndon B. Johnson in 1964. Union support proved decisive in carrying Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Indiana for Obama, and likely assured his victory in Wisconsin, Iowa, and Minnesota. Union members aged 65 and over voted by a 46-point margin for Obama. He won by 23 points among white non-college graduates belonging to a union, even as he lost by 18 points among all white non-college voters. The 2.5 million members of the AFL-CIO's Working America voted much the same as union members. In the election, the Democrats also added nine Senate seats and more than twenty House seats. Labor now had reason to expect, after eight years of Bush, labor law reform, a more union-friendly NLRB, sympathetic federal judges, and

an ambitious countercyclical federal spending program.

Between the Democratic victory on November 4 and Obama's inauguration on January 20, 2009, however, the economy continued to worsen – and dramatically so. Nearly 600,000 jobs disappeared in January 2009, an equal number in February, and nearly 700,000 more in March. So, despite having played an instrumental role in electing the nation's first African American president, the labor movement had little opportunity to celebrate. Worse was yet to come.

A PRECARIOUS MOMENT

The Great Depression devastated the US economy and transformed the nation's politics in the 1930s. That catastrophe created conditions allowing for the New Deal, the revival of trade unionism, and its spread into the nation's mass-production industries through the activism of the CIO. The “Great Recession,” as the economic downturn that began in 2007/8 came to be called, had no analogous effect. While the Great Depression struck a nation that was still a rising economic power with an expanding industrial infrastructure, and while it hit corporations that were still integrating horizontally and vertically as well as seeking to retain the loyalty of their workers and reduce labor turnover, the Great Recession hit an America whose industrial infrastructure was rapidly declining and whose corporations were shedding responsibility for their workers' long-term welfare and seeking a more flexible labor force. Thus the Great Recession struck the US economy, its workers, and unions with exceptional force. Rather than leading to a “New New Deal,” as some progressives hoped, the economic downturn constrained the Obama administration's policy options, and instead of triggering a wave of labor militancy and the emergence of a revived union movement, it only deepened the crisis that afflicted the unions.

The impact of the Great Recession on workers was profound. Unemployment rose steadily during Barack Obama's first months in office, hitting 10 percent by October 2009. But this figure barely hinted at the levels of economic suffering that working people and their families experienced in the depths of the Great Recession. The amount of time the average unemployed worker spent fruitlessly searching for a job began to stretch out to a span of many months. By 2010, 6.6 million Americans reported being out of work for at least 27 weeks. Even those who retained jobs saw their employers reduce their work hours. Some 9.2 million workers reported in March 2010 that they could only find part-time employment. And, repeating the pattern of past downturns, the Great Recession hit African Americans and Latinos particularly hard. African American unemployment peaked at 16.9 percent and Latino unemployment at 13.1 percent.

Bailouts, Job Insecurity, and Lowered Labor Standards

The Great Recession nearly bankrupted two of the three unionized American automakers, General Motors (GM) and Chrysler. As employment shriveled, sales of automobiles plummeted, especially over-sized, gas-guzzling vehicles – from eight-person SUVs to flashy, high-end trucks like Cadillac Escalades and Hummers – that GM had built in excess during the years before the crash to generate high unit profits. GM claimed that it would fail within months without federal aid. Were GM and

Chrysler to declare bankruptcy or go out of business, not only would more than 100,000 of their employees be without jobs, but the parts manufacturers, automobile dealers, and other industry subsidiaries would be without customers or suppliers, and their employees would be left with grim job prospects. Making this argument during the last months of the George W. Bush administration, GM and the United Automobile Workers (UAW) turned to Congress for assistance, asking for a \$25 billion bridge loan. This request met with sharp resistance from Republican senators from the Southern states where foreign automotive transplants ranging from Mercedes-Benz and BMW to Nissan and Kia had set up shop. As a precondition of dispensing federal aid to the automakers, these senators demanded that the UAW renegotiate its contracts, giving up wages and benefits to bring them in line with what the transplants offered their workers. The UAW refused. Noting that the government asked little of the insurance giant AIG before bailing it out, the president of the United Steelworkers, Leo Gerard, summarized the situation acerbically: "Washington will bail out those who shower before work, but not those who shower afterwards."

Yet the automakers and their unions survived. Before leaving office, President Bush, unwilling to allow GM and Chrysler to fall into bankruptcy, agreed to make available more than \$14 billion from a \$700 billion rescue package for financial institutions as a bridge loan for the two domestic companies. When President Obama took office in January 2009, he assembled a more comprehensive bailout package that saw the federal government temporarily buy a stake in each company, preserve union contracts, and exact a number of conditions – including requiring the UAW to make concessions on wages and benefits in return for shares of the companies' stock. Bondholders as well had no choice but to accept nearly worthless common stock in lieu of their bonds. As it restructured, Chrysler entered a marriage with the Italian automobile firm Fiat, a union intended to enable the reorganized company to manufacture smaller, more fuel-efficient vehicles. In effect, the UAW and Fiat became the majority shareholders in Chrysler, which eliminated nearly one-third of its franchised dealers in order to align consumer demand more closely with supply. The Obama administration took an even firmer line with GM, demanding that the company replace its CEO and submit to a presidentially appointed oversight board. GM did concede much of its authority to federal overseers and most of its common stock to the government and union; like Chrysler, it also closed many of its dealerships, but it went even further in its reorganization by selling its Saab and Hummer vehicle lines and ending the production of its Saturn and Pontiac ones. Even that proved insufficient to reduce GM's production capacity to match decreased consumer demand for its vehicles, necessitating the permanent closure of numerous assembly and parts plants, eliminating thousands of jobs from the industry. In a key part of their restructuring, GM and Ford relieved themselves of future retiree health benefit expenses by negotiating with the UAW to create company-endowed health benefit trusts that the union would administer.



Figure 23.1 Members of the United Automobile Workers in Canton, Michigan, watch reports about the fate of General Motors, June 2, 2009. (Fabrizio Constantini/New York Times/Redux)

In the end, the government's intervention preserved GM and Chrysler, saving as many as one million jobs (including those of auto-parts makers) by some estimates. The government eventually sold the last of its stakes in GM and Chrysler in 2013, by which time both had returned to profitability. However, the auto industry had been transformed by the crisis. It was clear that GM would never again be the once dominant national and global corporate enterprise that it had been during its halcyon years. It was also clear that the greatly diminished number of unionized US automobile workers had lost the wages and benefits they had won during the heyday of UAW power. Under contract provisions, GM hired new workers in a “second tier,” the top wage of which was capped at \$19.28 an hour in 2015, while the union's longer term “first tier” workers' hourly wages were almost \$10 per hour higher. By 2015, unionized autoworkers enjoyed real incomes that, on average, were 23 percent less than they had been in 2003. At the same time, however, compensation for auto industry executives grew 50 percent faster between 2009 and 2015 than did the wages of unionized autoworkers. With the auto industry boasting record profits in 2015, the UAW finally negotiated contracts that promised to eventually close the pay gap that had developed between the industry's two-tiered labor force, but that gap was set to close gradually over an eight-year period. In a sign of growing restiveness among the UAW's members, the 2015 GM–UAW contract was approved only after UAW leaders overrode the objections of the union's skilled trades workers.

Although the two-tiered pay scale was a particularly glaring example of tougher times for labor, the auto industry was not the only economic sector to witness a decline in

labor standards in the wake of the Great Recession. Across the United States workers felt increased pressure on their wages and benefits even after the economy began to rebound, in part because jobs were so slow in returning. In the fall of 2014, six years after the collapse, there were still 1 million fewer jobs than there had been at the beginning of 2008. Nearly half of all workers laid off during the downturn who were able to find new jobs reported that their pay and status were lower. Wage growth remained sluggish even when jobs returned, and wages lagged productivity growth. The job insecurity that workers endured gave employers the upper hand in defining the terms of work. Those who lacked the ability to move on to more promising employment, or the faith that collective action could improve their situations, reluctantly acquiesced to their daily working life. One sardonic political cartoon captured the mindset of many. It showed a harried white-collar worker sitting at a desk in his cubicle and observing to a co-worker in the next cubicle: "I'd really hate this job if I wasn't so worried about losing it."

Another way in which workers experienced declining standards was in the pattern of hours that they worked. Many employers, especially in the retail sector, began adopting systems of "just-in-time scheduling." These systems allowed employers to arrange schedules so as to have on hand no more than the number of workers necessary to handle their business at any given time. Aided by computer programs and data analysis made possible by the introduction of the universal product code (bar code) that was scanned at the checkout counter, businesses could track and analyze buying patterns and forecast last-minute changes that might indicate when the services of some workers would not be needed and when more workers should be brought in. Retail workers employed by large chains practicing this system found that their schedules could vary from day to day, that they might be required to work split shifts in which they would take time off during the slack time of the day, and that they had to remain "on call" to come in when needed if they wanted to keep their jobs. Such scheduling practices proved particularly onerous for workers with families or those who hoped to further their education in a part-time degree program.

Another instance of declining standards was evident in rising retirement insecurity. Millions of workers faced less secure retirements in the years after the Great Recession. Social Security continued to offer protection against inflation but rarely provided its beneficiaries an income sufficient to sustain the standard of living to which they had grown accustomed. Employment-based defined benefit pensions had been the traditional means to offer workers a comfortable retirement, but they had never covered more than half of the workforce, and employers eliminated company pensions or converted defined benefit plans into defined contribution plans that lowered fiduciary costs but failed to provide security of income. Only a shrinking minority of union members employed by large corporations retained defined benefit pensions, and the full payment of these obligations became increasingly doubtful as such plans, which are regulated by the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974, were inadequately funded by employers and experienced a spike in defaults.

Toward an Unequal Society

In the opening years of the new century, nearly everybody who worked for wages suffered some form of material loss. Those who failed to graduate high school, a cohort heavily concentrated among nonwhites and poorer rural residents, especially suffered in the labor market. High school graduates also found themselves disadvantaged in the labor market as compared to those with higher education or graduate degrees. Only the latter enjoyed rising real incomes. Most working-class families and households kept their heads above water only by including multiple wage earners, and more women worked full-time or sought full-time employment than ever before. Even for those workers whose real incomes rose, expenses ate away at their standard of living. The soaring costs of health insurance led smaller employers to eliminate such benefits and larger enterprises to demand that employees bear a larger share of the expense.

In the fall of 2008, right before the start of the Great Recession, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) published the results of a three-year study of wage disparity and economic inequality among the world's most developed nations. It concluded that the United States had the highest inequality and poverty among nations in the OECD after Mexico and Turkey, and that the gap had increased rapidly after the year 2000. The report added that the top 10 percent of the population earned an average of \$93,000 annually, the highest level in the OECD, while the poorest 10 percent earned \$5,800, nearly 20 percent lower than the overall OECD average. Such acute economic inequality and its widening in the United States resulted in less social mobility than in any other OECD member nation, including the United Kingdom, notorious for its allegedly sharp class distinctions.

The Great Recession dramatically worsened this trend toward inequality. By 2014, key indicators seemed to suggest that the nation's economic health was improving. In 2014, the US gross domestic product grew by 2.4 percent – the strongest year since the downturn. By May 2015, the US economy had experienced 62 straight months of job growth. The stock market hit record highs in the spring of 2015. But these figures had little to do with the realities faced by most working Americans. They instead reflected surging inequalities of income and wealth.

Nothing demonstrated these inequalities more starkly than the contrasting experiences of the nation's most vulnerable workers and that of its top 1 percent of income earners. African American workers were particularly hard hit by the Great Recession due to patterns of inequality that preceded the collapse. Between 2000 and 2013, the number of African Americans in unions declined by 16 percent. The loss was especially noticeable in labor market sectors where African Americans had commanded the best wages and benefits: the automobile and steel industries, as well as federal employment. Every sector of the labor market seemed to conspire against the employment of black workers. Perhaps it was only natural that black employment and union membership would decline in those industries losing market share, such as

automobiles and other consumer durables. But the decline was accentuated by trends in the advancing service trades, health, hospitality, and information, where employers increasingly turned to new immigrants or to white women. The rapidly expanding service call centers moved to small towns and suburbs where few African Americans lived or could travel to easily. Black workers also suffered disproportionately from the outsourcing of federal employment that affected sectors largely staffed by African Americans: laundry services, grounds maintenance, food services, and security guards. Little wonder, then, that black median weekly wages fell more rapidly than white wages. A good part of that differential rose from the gap between union and nonunion wages, a union wage advantage that explained why, in nearly all surveys among workers, African Americans desired union membership more than other groups.

The effects of the Great Recession also deepened inequalities as plunging housing values undermined the most important asset most working families owned, dragging down median household net worth by nearly 39 percent between 2007 and 2010. African American and Hispanic households were hit harder than white households, and the situation of the former continued to deteriorate even as the recovery got underway. The median income of minority households (African Americans, Hispanics, and other nonwhites combined) fell 9 percent during the “recovery” years between 2010 and 2013, compared with a decrease of 1 percent for white households. Median net worth of black households dropped another 33 percent between 2010 and 2013; for Hispanics, the drop was 14 percent. Meanwhile, blacks were more likely than whites to take out student loans in an effort to get bachelors' or associates' degrees that might improve their job market prospects. By 2015 student debt reached record levels, and delinquency rates also were rising.

As minority workers suffered and most white wage and salary earners struggled simply to maintain their accustomed standard of living, the top 1 percent of Americans waxed fat. Approximately 95 percent of income gains between 2009 and 2012 went to the top 1 percent of income earners. Because much of their income came from investments, business ownership, and a rising stock market, they were the primary beneficiaries of financialization, a process that was reshaping the US economy. Substantially lowered marginal tax rates paid by the wealthiest Americans – rates cut by Reagan in the 1980s and by George W. Bush in 2001 – reduced taxes on income derived from dividends and capital gains, which disproportionately increased the after-tax net income of the “one-percenters.”

The Obama Presidency's Mixed Legacy

While the Obama administration soon brought stability to a chaotic financial system in the aftermath of the crash of 2008, its ability to manage the impact of the Great Recession as a whole was severely tested. The economic crisis would have been bad enough were only the United States affected, but like the Great Depression of

the 1930s, the economic crisis of the early twenty-first century stretched worldwide. Indeed, because national economies were more intertwined than ever before in a global economy, the US crisis spread financial failure, declining productivity, and rising unemployment around the globe, causing the collapse of a government in Iceland, social turbulence and riots in the Baltic states, mass strikes in France, and rising unrest everywhere. Facing what it feared might become a worldwide economic crash and seeking to restore confidence in the markets, the Obama administration leaned heavily on advisers close to Wall Street, such as Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner and economist Larry Summers. It rejected calls by reformers to prosecute bankers whose financial deals had helped lead to the crash. To the contrary, the Obama administration proved almost as generous to financial circles as had its predecessors, expending billions more on rescuing big banks and insurance companies on generally generous terms.

Yet the Obama presidency did offer some rewards to its union friends. For the first time in eight years, AFL-CIO officials and other labor leaders were welcome in the White House and the corridors of federal power. Obama named California congresswoman Hilda Solis, the daughter of immigrant union members and a strong union supporter, secretary of labor. She was succeeded in that office in 2013 by Tom Perez, a civil rights lawyer and son of Dominican immigrants. The president himself observed that he did not view the labor movement as part of the problem. "To me, it's part of the solution," he said. "You cannot have a strong middle class without a strong labor movement." The administration and its Democratic allies in Congress enacted legislation to eliminate gender wage discrimination in employment, and passed an economic stimulus bill worth more than \$700 billion in an effort to generate employment (not a single Republican in the House voted for the stimulus bill, and only three Republicans in the Senate did so). The stimulus bill illustrated the limits of Obama's power even in this moment of national emergency. In order to get the bill through the Senate with enough votes to prevent a filibuster, Obama was forced to increase the share of tax cuts and decrease the share of outright federal expenditures in the proposed legislation, ultimately rendering it less effective as a stimulus according to labor-oriented economists.



Figure 23.2 President Barack Obama addresses the AFL-CIO, September 15, 2009. (Bill Burke/Page One)

The constraints on Obama's power were evident in two key fights waged in his first term on issues dear to labor: the successful effort to enact the Affordable Care Act and the failed bid to enact the Employee Free Choice Act. Obama made health-care reform his top priority and promised to give all citizens access to affordable health insurance. Nearly 47 million Americans were without health insurance by 2008, and for millions of others with barebones insurance policies, personal bankruptcy was only one health crisis away.

While many liberal and trade union advocates wanted Obama to ensure that workers would have a public option of buying into Medicare, the administration went with a plan first devised by conservatives, a version of which had been enacted under Republican governor Mitt Romney in Massachusetts in 2006. Obama's Affordable Care Act (ACA), which passed in 2010 over strident Republican opposition, included several key features: a personal mandate requiring uninsured individuals to buy health insurance on exchanges run by the state or the federal government; an employer mandate demanding that businesses employing more than 50 workers offer insurance to those who worked 30 hours or more per week; minimum standards for insurers; and subsidies going to low-income people to buy insurance. In an effort to restrain health care cost inflation, the act also included a tax on so-called "gold-plated" health plans, which offered extensive coverage and either low or no co-pays. Most of these generous health plans had been won over the years by unions in collective bargaining, often in exchange for accepting lower pay increases. Unions objected to a bill that would in effect penalize their members' hard-won benefits, but the administration pushed the bill through nonetheless (with the support of key unions that did not offer

such benefits, such as the Service Employees International Union). In 2012, the Supreme Court upheld the law's constitutionality, while striking down a key component that would have required states to allow for the expansion of Medicaid in their jurisdictions as one mechanism for enrolling the low-income uninsured.

After a rocky rollout in 2013, the ACA showed signs of promise. Millions of Americans gained access to health insurance for the first time, and the percentage of those uninsured fell from 18 percent before the ACA to 12 percent one year into the act's implementation. The ACA seemed destined to reduce one critical component of the constant insecurity that haunted working families in a changing and unstable economy. But by 2016 there were signs of trouble with the ACA. The previously uninsured who sought coverage under its provisions proved to be sicker than the average American, which was not surprising since many had gone for years without adequate medical care. Some private insurance companies who covered the newly insured under the ACA soon began to increase premiums and deductibles substantially in order to maintain their profits, while other companies left the market entirely. Without access to a public option such as Medicare, those who depended on the ACA were hostage to the dictates of the nation's dysfunctional system of health-insurance-for-profit. Fixing the ACA through legislation proved impossible owing to partisan gridlock. Although the ACA model had Republican origins, Republican leaders were determined that it not succeed and that its failure be tied to President Obama.

If the ACA encountered increasing problems by 2016, the effort to pass the Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA) was stillborn. This bill's most important and controversial feature was its "card-check recognition" provision, which sought to streamline the process of union organization by allowing workers to bypass contested elections in their workplaces if a majority of them signed union authorization cards. With the business community in nearly total opposition to EFCA and funding a multimillion-dollar public relations campaign against its passage, and with congressional Republicans united in their opposition to it, the bill's prospects seemed doubtful, even at the height of Obama's influence during his first two years in office. Key Democratic senators in Republican-leaning states refrained from openly supporting the bill. When strong EFCA supporter Senator Ted Kennedy of Massachusetts succumbed to cancer in August 2009, forcing a special election that allowed Republicans to take control of his seat in January 2010, the Democrats lost their filibuster-proof majority in the Senate. Republicans made clear that they would not tolerate a vote on EFCA, effectively shelving the bill for the foreseeable future.

The failure of EFCA proved to be only the opening round in a string of disasters for labor and the Democrats in 2010. In the midterm elections of that year, Republicans capitalized on the unease middle-of-the-road voters felt with Obama's perceived "take-over" of the auto industry, his approach to health-care reform, and his "bailout" of Wall Street firms, and the party stormed back into control of the House of Representatives and a number of key governorships and statehouses. Republican governors such as Chris Christie in New Jersey, Scott Walker in Wisconsin, Rick

Snyder in Michigan, and John Kasich in Ohio promptly aligned themselves with polices intended to weaken unions.

While Republicans largely had been able to neutralize the Obama administration's initiatives by 2012, they proved unable to remove Obama from office. With antiunion forces bidding for control of the White House, energized by the Supreme Court's 2010 decision in the case of *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*, which struck down limits on independent campaign spending, organized labor knew Obama would face a formidable challenge. Labor thus put aside its quibbles with the administration and united more firmly behind Obama in 2012 than it had ever united behind a Democratic incumbent. The Republican nominee, Mitt Romney, formerly a moderate governor of Massachusetts, swerved hard to the right to energize his party's base, justifying labor's total commitment to Obama's reelection. Romney, the wealthy son of a former auto executive (and Michigan governor), made his own fortune as a private-equity investor, reorganizing and downsizing companies and then selling them at great profit. By 2012, he seemed the personification of the superrich "one percent" who had reaped profits from the economic changes of the past three decades even as working families saw their incomes drop and their insecurities rise. In an atmosphere partly shaped by the "Occupy Wall Street" protests that erupted in the fall of 2011, in which a diverse array of protestors highlighted the growing wealth disparities in the country, Romney suffered from his image as a titan of finance. He only reinforced this unflattering image when he was surreptitiously recorded disparaging the "47 percent" of the American people whom he viewed as lazy moochers "dependent upon government."

Come November, Obama defeated Romney, gaining 51 percent of the popular vote (and becoming the first Democrat since Roosevelt to win back-to-back elections with a popular majority). The vote was strongly skewed along class lines, with Obama winning the votes of those who earned under \$50,000 by a 60–38 margin, and Romney taking the votes of those who earned over \$100,000 by a 54–44 spread. Unions played an important role in Obama's victory. Although union members constituted only 13 percent of all workers, they turned out to vote in disproportionate numbers, becoming 18 percent of the electorate, and delivering votes to Obama by a 58–40 split. Celebrations of Obama's reelection were nonetheless muted. Republicans maintained control of the House, which guaranteed that Obama's second term would be consumed with defending its programs, not further advancing a progressive agenda.

Having worked hard to reelect Obama, organized labor achieved only mixed results from his second term. The president did, however, deliver on some key issues. He came out in support of raising the minimum wage to \$10.10 per hour, and he signed an executive order in 2014 requiring federal contractors to pay their workers at least that much. He also appointed strong supporters of collective bargaining to the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), which had operated without its full complement of five members between 2008 and 2013 due to Republican filibusters of

appointees. The NLRB, in turn, tried to compensate for the inability of Congress to agree on labor law reform by streamlining the process that governed union elections so that they would be less encumbered by red tape and appeals. But Obama could not get Congress to take up his challenge to raise the minimum wage, and the NLRB's new rules were immediately challenged in court. Whether those rules if put into force could stem the continued erosion of the institution of collective bargaining was unclear in any event.

But the greatest disappointments in Obama's second term came from his inability to advance immigration reform and by his relentless advocacy, despite the strenuous objections of his allies in organized labor, of a free-trade pact among Pacific Rim nations. Immigration reform was a high priority for both unions and for Obama. In April 2009, the AFL-CIO, Change to Win unions and the independent National Education Association had agreed to join forces to urge reforms in immigration law that would open a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants. During Obama's first term, immigration reform was shunted to the side, as the state of the economy attracted his attention. There was renewed hope for meaningful immigration reform immediately after the 2012 election, when Republican leaders worried that their party was losing touch with Hispanic voters (who had gone heavily for Obama). But the Republican majority in the House of Representatives remained too divided on the issue to bring legislation to a vote. In the 2014 midterm elections, the Republican majority was swelled by the addition of more anti-immigration members, which tabled the immigration issue indefinitely.

While his labor allies could not fault Obama for the failure of immigration reform, they could not help but to see his stand on trade policy as a betrayal. Obama had criticized the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) when he ran for the Democratic nomination in 2008, but, like every postwar president, once in office he advocated lowering trade barriers. Obama's goal was to tie both European and the Pacific Rim nations (excepting China) more closely to the US economy through two new multilateral agreements, the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) and the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), respectively. The TPP, which would link the US economy more closely to low-wage Pacific Rim economies such as Malaysia and Vietnam, especially worried organized labor, which feared that it would lead to the export of more US jobs. Like his predecessors, Obama brushed aside labor's objections and sought "fast track" authority, which would allow his negotiators to finalize the terms of the TPP in secret and force Congress to hold a straight-up-or-down vote on the resulting deal, without an opportunity to amend it. Although the majority of his own party opposed him on this, Obama continued to advocate this approach. Organized labor found itself in what by then had become a familiar position: although unions continued to provide crucial electoral support to Democrats, the party's leaders regularly snubbed labor on issues of great import, and yet the disgruntled unions continued to stick with the Democratic Party, fearing that Republican rule would mean ruin and knowing that any break with the Democrats

would only boost Republican chances.

A Renewed Assault on Unions and Collective Bargaining

The Republican takeover of statehouses and Congress in 2010 opened the door to a renewed attack on unionism, especially in the public sector, where it had been most shielded from the unfavorable economic and political winds of the previous three decades. While union density overall dropped below 12 percent, in the public sector it remained above 35 percent. Still, a confluence of three developments set up a situation in which public sector unions were suddenly vulnerable. The first was the Great Recession, which dramatically increased both worker insecurity and government budget deficits. The second was the enfeeblement of the private sector movement. The last time a major economic crisis emerged, in the mid-1970s, private sector union density was more than three times higher than it was during the Great Recession. Public sector unions now had many fewer private sector union allies. Finally, a huge political shift had occurred since the Reagan era. While public sector collective bargaining had once enjoyed a significant measure of bipartisan support, by the Obama era it was a one-party affair. Republicans rarely sought union support, and as unions increasingly allied with Democrats, Republicans had even greater incentive to weaken them. Many Republicans concluded that public sector unions were merely adjuncts to the Democratic Party.

These developments created conditions that allowed governors such as Chris Christie in New Jersey and Scott Walker in Wisconsin to single out public employee unions as a favored target, arguing that the generous pay and pensions they had won were bankrupting their states, and in the case of New Jersey, undermining efforts to improve the state's schools. Such attacks on public sector unions and their members were not new, but in the aftermath of the Great Recession they gained traction. Walker experienced the most success with this model. In 2011 he pushed Act 10 through the Wisconsin legislature, which stripped most public employees in the state of their rights to bargain collectively, ignoring the protests of thousands of Wisconsinites who had occupied their statehouse during the effort to pass the bill. Republican governor John Kasich of Ohio signed a similar bill, but in a referendum Ohio voters rejected it. The Ohio victory for labor did not, however, alter the situation in Wisconsin. Even when organized labor forced Walker into a recall election in 2012, Walker prevailed, keeping his office. Union density in Wisconsin eroded sharply in the aftermath of Act 10 as the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees and other public sector unions lost as much as one-third of their membership in the state.

Austerity policies implemented during and after the Great Recession only worsened matters for public sector workers, again hitting African Americans hardest. Blacks were 30 percent more likely than whites and twice as likely as Hispanics to work in the public sector. Government jobs had long provided a reliable entryway into

economic security for black workers. When nearly 2 million public sector jobs vanished as federal stimulus dollars ran out and local and state governments cut back in 2011 and after, African Americans suffered most.

Public schools became a key battleground in the new attack on public sector collective bargaining. Teachers had played a key role in the rise of public sector unionism in the 1960s and 1970s. But since the Reagan administration's 1983 report, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*, a growing bipartisan coalition had emerged which advocated reforms that would undercut teacher unionism, including the creation of publicly financed “charter schools” operating outside of the rules that governed general public schools, as well as “merit pay” for teachers tied to the scores their students received on standardized tests. By the turn of the century, powerful foundations financed by the likes of Bill Gates, the founder of Microsoft, Eli Broad, a real estate and insurance billionaire, and the Walton family (the most prominent stockholders in Walmart) were promoting this “school reform” agenda, and for-profit schools, known as education management organizations (EMOs), began to sprout. Sixty-five percent of the charter schools in Michigan were operated by EMOs by 2015. Teachers' unions resisted these efforts, arguing that urban public schools were struggling not because of union work rules but rather because they were caught in an endless cycle of poverty and inadequate public funding. Nonetheless, many Democrats joined the vast majority of Republicans in embracing the “reform” initiatives, and much to the chagrin of the union movement, the Obama administration appointed a secretary of education, Arne Duncan, who had himself helped start a charter school. While Republicans relentlessly assailed teachers' unions as a major cause of America's “failing schools,” a significant number of Democrats seemingly accepted this premise even though their rhetoric was less strident. The growing controversy around teachers' unions in turn helped to stoke the backlash against public sector bargaining in general.

Antilabor forces soon widened their attack on public sector unions into a broader assault on unions in the states and in the courts. In December 2012, Republican legislators enacted a bill making Michigan, the historic epicenter of the 1930s industrial union upsurge, a “right-to-work” state. After winning a second term in 2014, Scott Walker followed Michigan's example. He signed a bill making Wisconsin the nation's twenty-fifth “right-to-work” state, and West Virginia became the twenty-sixth in 2016. As similar initiatives gathered steam in other states, the Supreme Court also dealt a blow to the labor movement through its 2014 decision in the case of *Harris v. Quinn*. In that decision, the court ruled by a 5–4 vote that Illinois home health-care workers represented by the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) could not be required to pay fees to cover the costs of union representation. The author of that decision, Associate Justice Samuel Alito, a George W. Bush appointee, made clear his belief that no public sector workers should be required to pay “agency fees” or “fair share fees” to the unions that represent them. Alito suggested that public sector collective bargaining is inherently political, making any requirement that workers pay

for the costs of bargaining an infringement on their First Amendment rights. In January 2016 the Supreme Court considered the case of *Friedrichs v. California Teachers Association*, which might have allowed Alito to apply his reasoning in *Harris* to all public sector workplaces, eliminating agency fees altogether and costing unions tens of millions in revenue. Justice Antonin Scalia's death one month later, however, meant that the status quo would remain in place at least until after the 2016 presidential election.

Death Throes or Birth Pangs?

Unquestionably, organized labor's crisis was deepening. In nearly every year between 2000 and 2015, unions lost more members than they added. Overall union membership dropped from 16.3 million to 14.8 million over the course of this period, and union density declined from 13.4 percent to 11.1 percent overall (and a mere 6.7 percent in the private sector), reminiscent of 1920s figures. The Great Recession and disappointment with Obama's response to it heightened the sense of urgency within the labor movement, leading to new splits and alignments, raising doubts about the future of collective bargaining, and pushing unions to ally with and promote alternative methods of organization that some began to call "alternative labor" or "alt-labor."

Change to Win (CtW), launched with such great promise in 2005, began to unravel as a significant entity in 2009, in part because of the politics that swirled around its leading union, SEIU. Controversy erupted when SEIU's president, Andy Stern, appeared to intervene in an internal squabble between John Wilhelm and Bruce Raynor over the future direction of Unite Here, the union whose merger they had arranged and whose leadership they shared. Wilhelm controlled the larger number of Unite Here's members, but Raynor controlled the larger share of union funds and its profitable bank, the Amalgamated Bank (which had been launched in 1923 by Sidney Hillman's Amalgamated Clothing Workers). That squabble saw Raynor, who was wooed by Stern, depart from Unite Here to affiliate with SEIU. Wilhelm then denounced Stern and Raynor and pulled Unite Here out of CtW, returning it to the AFL-CIO. A year later the Laborers' International Union also returned to the AFL-CIO, and in 2013 the United Food and Commercial Workers did the same. Thereafter only SEIU and the Teamsters remained as significant affiliates of CtW.

Controversy surrounding Stern was exacerbated when internal strife erupted within SEIU. In 2008, one of its largest locals, United Healthcare Workers West (SEIU-UHW), based in California, resisted the national union's effort to centralize health-care bargaining. Stern and his union's executive board removed the elected officers of the SEIU-UHW, placed the local in trusteeship, and reorganized its structure in 2009. The deposed leaders responded by establishing their own independent union for health industry employees, the National Union of Healthcare Workers (NUHW). The NUHW and SEIU-UHW then fought bitterly over who should represent workers in California hospitals and nursing homes. SEIU won most of these contests, but the fight

tarnished Stern's reputation. Only when he abruptly announced his retirement as president of the SEIU in 2010, and the leader of the union's health-care division, Mary Kay Henry, defeated his handpicked successor in the struggle to succeed him, did the troubled waters surrounding SEIU begin to calm.

The AFL-CIO went through a much less tumultuous leadership change in 2009, when the aging John Sweeney stepped down as president and was replaced by Richard Trumka, who ran on a ticket with Secretary-Treasurer Liz Shuler (from the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers) and Executive Vice President Arlene Holt Baker (an African American and former officer in the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees). Trumka, former president of the United Mine Workers, exemplified both old-style proletarian unionism and more contemporary fashions in union leadership. The son of a coal miner and himself a former underground mine worker, Trumka earned an undergraduate degree at Pennsylvania State University and a law degree at the Villanova University School of Law. The triumvirate of Trumka, Shuler, and Baker exemplified a solidarity built on diversity within the labor movement. Trumka brought to the presidency the heritage of male, blue-collar industrial unionism; Shuler added the influence of older-style craft unionism and its newer embrace of women; and Holt Baker represented the rising influence of public employees and minorities.



Figure 23.3 The AFL-CIO's leadership: President Richard Trumka, Secretary-Treasurer Liz Shuler, and Executive Vice President Tefere Gebre (who succeeded Arlene Holt Baker in that office) at the AFL-CIO's 2013 convention. (AFL-CIO)

But the most interesting developments in workers' organization and mobilization did not come from within the AFL-CIO and did not resemble traditional trade unionism, but rather emerged from a variety of alternative worker organizations that labor activists began to refer to collectively as "alt-labor." The most thoroughly developed model of new worker organization was the worker center. The first worker centers were organized in the late 1970s and early 1980s by African Americans in the Carolinas, and immigrants in New York City's Chinatown and in El Paso, Texas. A second wave began in the late 1980s and early 1990 among Latino/a and Southeast Asian immigrants, who developed organizations such as the *Centro de Derechos Laborales* (known as the Workplace Project) in suburban Long Island, and the Korean Immigrant Workers Alliance, both founded in 1992. Centers that developed in these first two waves offered social services and legal advice, and orchestrated local campaigns against wage theft and discrimination. By the early 2000s, new worker centers were emerging that focused on workers in specific industries such as the Restaurant Opportunities Center, which became a national worker center with branches in multiple cities. By 2015, there were over 200 worker centers around the country. Although they were overwhelmingly independent, stand-alone entities, Interfaith Worker Justice, founded in 1998 by Kim Bobo, had built a national network of 28 worker centers in 18 states.

Worker centers, in turn, influenced the growth of a network of other worker organizations, including the National Day Laborers Organizing Network (NDLON), founded in 2001, which organized immigrant day laborers; the National Guest Workers Alliance (NGWA), established in 2006, which advocated on behalf of H2 visa workers in the United States; and the National Domestic Workers Alliance (NDWA), founded in 2007. These worker organizations adapted to conditions unfavorable to unionization. Traditional collective bargaining was difficult to envision for day laborers, who might have a different employer each day, or for domestic workers, whose employers were as numerous as the workers themselves, but collective action could and often did win improvements in these workers' lives. NDLON groups were able to set up day-laborer cooperatives in some cities; the NGWA exposed US employers who exploited guest workers; and the NDWA helped secure passage of a domestic workers bill of rights in New York State.

In addition to the NGWA, NDWA, and NDLON, a range of alt-labor organizations pioneered new ways to represent and bargain for workers. The Freelancers Union (set up in 2001) signed up dues-paying members who worked in a variety of jobs, especially in the entertainment and media industries, offering them access to a group health insurance plan, legal advice, and more. The Coalition of Immokalee Workers founded in 1993, a group organized by Florida tomato pickers, took advantage of the exclusion of agricultural workers from federal labor law to boycott fast-food restaurants like Taco Bell that used Florida tomatoes (a secondary boycott that would have been illegal for a union to undertake). They maintained their boycott until growers agreed to a human-rights based code of conduct and a system in which

buyers paid an additional penny per pound for tomatoes to fund wage increases. The National Taxi Workers Alliance (NTWA), founded in New York City in 1998, pioneered a system in which cabbies, usually “independent operators,” who lease their vehicles or driving permits, and who are therefore not covered by most labor laws, nonetheless came together to collectively demand improvements in fare structure and other reforms.

An encouraging feature of these efforts was their ability to reach immigrants and develop new leaders with immigrant backgrounds. Among the key leaders of alt-labor groups were Pablo Alvarado of NDLO, a native of El Salvador, Bhairavi Desai of NTWA and Saket Soni of NGWA, natives of India, Ai-jen Poo of NDWA, a US-born child of Taiwanese parents, and Sarita Gupta, born in the United Kingdom, who took over Jobs with Justice in 2012 and closely aligned it with the alt-labor groups.

Two issues proved challenging for alt-labor groups: funding and function. Most remained dependent on outside support (especially from philanthropic foundations); and all struggled to find the kind of financial self-sufficiency that characterized unions and could be used to devise a functional new model of collective bargaining appropriate to their industries. Although the NTWA and the Coalition of Immokalee Workers had developed some collective-bargaining-like innovations, by 2015 neither group had yet developed a practical full-scale vision for how to bargain effectively on behalf of working people in the new economy within the legal and political constraints that handicapped all worker-organizing efforts. Nor had any other alt-labor group solved that puzzle.

The sudden rise of an “on-demand” or “gig” economy only complicated matters. Smartphone “apps” such as Uber (founded in 2009), which matched private car drivers with people seeking rides, threatened to upend the taxi industry and undermine the NTWA. Lodging broker Airbnb (set up in 2008), meanwhile, posed a similar competitive and disruptive challenge to unionized hotels. And new internet-based programs such as Amazon Mechanical Turk (established in 2005) or TaskRabbit (founded in 2008) made anyone a potential freelancer doing odd jobs, eroding the stability the Freelancers Union hoped to bring to such workers. Following the economist Guy Standing, those forced to navigate this casualized labor market were dubbed the “precariat.”

As alt-labor groups struggled to meet their challenges, the traditional labor movement itself grew more diverse. The movement began officially embracing the cause of gays and lesbians when Pride at Work was founded as an AFL-CIO caucus for LGBTQ workers in 1994. Over time, gays and lesbians rose to leadership positions in prominent unions such as the SEIU, whose president, Mary Kay Henry, had been a founder of her union's Lavender Caucus. Mexican immigrant Eliseo Medina, who got his start as an organizer for Cesar Chavez, rose to the vice-presidency of SEIU and became a leader of the immigration reform movement. In 1992, the Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance formed; in the years after, workers of Asian descent played

increasingly prominent roles in their unions. And at the AFL-CIO convention of 2013, in which alt-labor groups were invited to play a prominent role as guests, the outgoing vice president of the AFL-CIO, Arlene Holt Baker, was replaced by the Ethiopian-born Tefere Gebre.



Figure 23.4 SEIU president Mary Kay Henry with members of her union, 2015. (SEIU)



Figure 23.5 A “Fight for 15” demonstration in Kansas City, Missouri, 2015. (SEIU)

Inspired in part by the alt-labor movement, traditional unions undertook some grand experiments in the aftermath of the Great Recession. In 2011, SEIU launched Fight for a Fair Economy, an intensive effort to combine community and labor organizing to mobilize people in a number of cities hard hit by the economic downturn. Within two years the movement evolved into an effort to mobilize low-wage fast-food workers. By 2013, SEIU was supporting fast-food workers who engaged in rolling one-day strikes to dramatize their low pay. These workers demanded “Fifteen and a Union” – a \$15 per hour wage and union recognition. Soon the movement became known as the “Fight for 15.” It drew special energy from young African Americans who blended their Fight for 15 activism with their participation in the “Black Lives Matter” protests of police brutality. Simultaneously, the United Food and Commercial Workers International Union (UFCW) helped launch an association of Walmart workers in 2011 called the Organization United for Respect at Walmart (OUR Walmart). The group began recruiting Walmart members, aggregating their grievances, and organizing protests intended to get the company's attention, including one-day strikes and mass pickets outside Walmart stores on “Black Friday,” the day after Thanksgiving when Walmart had its largest sales.

Both Fight for 15 and OUR Walmart played a significant role in helping workers. By staging demonstrations in hundreds of cities across the country, they moved the issue of low pay to the center of national discussions and forced both Walmart and McDonald's to announce wage increases in 2015. And although their strikes were largely symbolic, they began resurrecting the strike as a tool for workers at a time

when traditional strikes had almost disappeared as a significant feature of US labor relations. Yet despite their considerable successes, these movements showed no signs of birthing self-sustaining unions with dues-paying members in big-box retail stores or fast-food outlets, which led to growing concerns within the unions about how long they could fund such expensive experiments. By 2015, the UFCW cut its funding for OUR Walmart, and it was unclear how long SEIU could continue to escalate the Fight for 15 movement.

Seven years into the Great Depression, organized labor, supported by sympathetic government policies and propelled by the enthusiasm of industrial workers, successfully launched the CIO. Seven years after the onset of the Great Recession, no analogous breakthrough had occurred.

Yet those who hoped for a revival of the union movement did find cause for optimism in the ferment evident across labor in response to its deepening crisis. In particular, many were encouraged by a significant strike victory won by Chicago teachers in 2012. In that effort, the Chicago Teachers Union, whose leadership had been taken over by activists determined to confront the expanding neoliberal agenda in education, squared off against Mayor Rahm Emanuel, who supported the “education reform” agenda (and who had previously served as President Obama's chief of staff). In preparation for the strike, the union built strong community alliances, helped shed light on the cozy relationship between the mayor and antiunion employers, and uncovered details of financial mismanagement of the school system stemming from long-established practices that benefited Wall Street and banks more than the public interest. Striking at the start of the school year, the union won great public support as it pledged to fight for “the schools Chicago's children deserve.” The mayor backed down and granted the union's demands. Although the fight did not signal a sea-change in Chicago politics – in 2013, the mayor announced a huge round of school closings and the number of charter schools expanded further – it demonstrated a spirit that reminded some older laborites of a time in the receding past when organized workers constituted a social and political force powerful enough to help democratize a nation and build a broadly shared prosperity.

The Chicago struggle inspired other union activists around the country who were determined to turn the declining fortunes of organized labor around. Drawing on the Chicago model, public sector unionists in other settings, including St. Paul, Minnesota, and Los Angeles, established an initiative called Bargaining for the Common Good. They aligned the concerns of public sector workers with those of community members who depended on public services, brought representatives of the public with them to the bargaining table, and used collective bargaining to expose the ways in which financialization and privatization were undermining the public sector and worsening the lives of both public employees and the people they served.

Whether initiatives of this sort would grow was uncertain as 2016 began. But as unions turned their attention to the presidential campaign of that year, one thing

seemed clear: labor was poised precariously between a decades-old model of organization that was under relentless attack, increasingly isolated and impotent, and a newer, as yet inchoate, model that was struggling to be born.

EPILOGUE: AN UNCHARTED PATH

The rights of US workers were in a precarious state in the early twenty-first century. They had never won in statutory or fundamental law their rights to earn living wages, enjoy adequate health care, or count on a secure retirement – as workers in several other economically advanced nations had. Whatever rights workers exercised on the job depended instead on union contracts that covered an ever shrinking percentage of workplaces, on outdated labor laws whose revision had proven politically impossible, on the balance of power in state and national legislatures, the makeup of the judiciary, and the policies of the president of the United States, whose appointments to the Supreme Court, the National Labor Relations Board, and other key posts could either significantly expand or contract workplace rights. To a great extent then, union activists knew that the rights workers would be able to exercise on the job hinged in the future on the presidential election of 2016.

From the outset it was clear that 2016 would be an election year like no other. Insurgencies fed by economic anxieties rocked both the Republican and Democratic parties. Donald J. Trump, a flamboyant real estate developer and celebrity who had spent most of his life as a Democrat, quickly emerged as the unlikely frontrunner in a crowded field of 16 aspirants for the Republican nomination. Senator Bernie Sanders of Vermont, a curmudgeonly democratic socialist who had won office as an independent, made a surprisingly strong bid for the Democratic nomination. Trump and Sanders sounded some similar themes. Both sought to rally support from working-class voters who felt left behind by recent economic trends. Both spoke to the growing unease voters felt about Wall Street malfeasance, stagnant wages, and jobs lost to trade liberalization. And both attacked the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) that President Obama was preparing to send to Congress.

There the similarities between these insurgencies ended. While Sanders called for taxing the rich, raising the minimum wage to \$15 an hour, breaking up big banks, and strengthening collective bargaining rights, Trump called for tax cuts, economic deregulation, and draconian immigration policies that would deport those who had entered the country illegally. He promised to “build a wall” across the length of the US–Mexico border, single out Muslim immigrants for special scrutiny, revoke the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), shelve the TPP, and replace Obama's Affordable Care Act, whose premiums had begun rising, with a better alternative. Taking positions that were frequently at odds with Republican Party doctrine, Trump shocked a large field of experienced politicians and won his party's nomination in a rout.

Sanders was unable to duplicate Trump's feat, in part because most union leaders joined civil rights advocates and immigration reform activists in preferring a more centrist candidate whom they believed would be more likely to appeal to voters in the

general election. They overwhelmingly supported former first lady, US senator, and secretary of state Hillary Clinton. Union support proved especially important to Clinton's efforts to secure the Democratic nomination. Although Sanders gained the endorsements of the Communications Workers of America and National Nurses United, Clinton outflanked Sanders, winning the endorsements of most labor leaders. Early support from the nation's largest unions, including the American Federation of Teachers and the Service Employees International Union, helped her contain the Sanders threat. And, when she moved to the left to join Sanders in condemning the TPP, a pact she had initially supported, she sealed her advantage. With nearly the entirety of the Democratic Party leadership united behind her and with Sanders unable to make significant inroads with African American and Latino/a voters, Clinton went on to win the Democratic nomination in comfortable fashion.

Once Clinton's nomination was assured, Sanders threw his support behind her, as did the AFL-CIO, which had refrained from choosing sides until a victor was clear. Sanders and a united labor movement vowed to help Clinton beat Trump and become the first woman to serve as US president. Unions poured over \$110 million into the campaign – twice as much as they had spent in 2008.

The battle for working-class votes turned out to be the decisive skirmish of a bitterly divisive contest that was marred by Trump's racially and sexually inflammatory language and an ongoing controversy surrounding Clinton's use of a private e-mail server as secretary of state. Promising to “make America great again,” Trump pledged to bring back jobs in the nation's steel and auto industries. Believing her advantage was secure in traditionally Democratic states such as Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Wisconsin, Clinton sought to mobilize nonwhite working-class voters in an effort to win the swing states of Florida, Arizona, and North Carolina. Yet Clinton failed to carry any of those states, while Trump surprised Clinton by winning Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Wisconsin. Although Clinton won the national popular vote, these “rust belt” states gave Trump the electoral college victory.

It was an especially painful loss for the labor movement, for white working-class voters in three states with proud union histories provided Trump with his margin of victory. Trump won Pennsylvania, once a stronghold of the United Mine Workers, Michigan, where sit-down strikers once advanced industrial unionism through the United Automobile Workers, and Wisconsin, the birthplace of public sector unionism's American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees. Although Clinton won the votes of union households by a 51–43 margin nationally, union membership in these critical states had eroded during Obama's presidency. Wisconsin lost 176,000 union members between 2008 and 2016, and Trump won the state by 23,000 votes; Pennsylvania lost 100,000 union members over the same period, and Trump won that state by 45,000 votes; Michigan lost 150,000 members, and Trump won there by 11,000. With union voters providing a smaller share of the electorate in these crucial states, nonunion working-class whites, especially those in small towns that had been devastated by the economic changes of the previous three decades – including those

who had twice before voted for Obama – overwhelmingly opted for Trump. Evidently they had lost faith in Clinton's conventional policy prescriptions and decided that Trump's florid promises of returning the country to prosperity indicated that he at least grasped the precarious state of their lives.

As the Trump administration prepared to take office, the standing of organized labor was more uncertain than it had been at any time since the depths of the Great Depression. The union movement had survived that earlier crisis, reinvented itself during the New Deal era, and emerged to become the most significant force in democratizing American life, advancing human rights, and raising living standards. Since the mid-1970s, however, unions had seen many of their gains eroded by the transformation of the economy and the militant opposition of business and its political allies. Now, as they struggled to adapt to the twenty-first century landscape, union leaders suddenly found themselves facing potentially devastating changes in law and policy implemented by an administration whose election they had opposed. Whether this turn of events would consign organized labor to increasing irrelevancy or embolden and energize those who were determined to revive the labor movement was, at best, unclear.

This tenuous situation was not unprecedented. From the beginning, US workers had found that their ability to build institutions powerful enough to challenge the political and economic might of capital had been constrained by circumstances beyond their control. Whether these circumstances improve or not in the near term, one thing seems certain. As they have done since their nation's founding, workers in the United States are likely to continue to find good reason to organize and build solidarity. As their forebears did, they will likely continue to experiment with new ways to act collectively in order to realize hopes and dreams they cannot achieve alone, to humanize and bring justice to their working lives, to improve the quality of their nation's democracy, and to influence the course of its history. Whatever form this impulse toward solidarity takes in coming years, more than two centuries of history suggests that the impulse itself will endure.

FURTHER READING

General

The last published bibliographical guide to labor history remains Maurice Neufeld, Daniel J. Leab, and Dorothy Swanson, *American Working-Class History: A Representative Bibliography* (New York, 1983), which must now be supplemented by online library resources such as JSTOR. The two most useful reference works for this volume were: Melvyn Dubofsky (ed.), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of American Business, Labor, and Economic History*, 2 vols. (New York, 2013) and Eric Arnesen (ed.), *Encyclopedia of US Labor and Working-Class History*, 3 vols. (New York, 2006).

Classic sources for general labor history remain John R. Commons *et al.*, *History of Labor in the United States*, 4 vols. (New York, 1918–1935), and *A Documentary History of American Industrial Society*, 10 vols. (New York, 1958 edn); Philip Taft has written several books that continue the Commons's tradition, including *The A.F. of L. in the Time of Gompers* (New York, 1957), *The A.F. of L. from the Death of Gompers to the Merger* (New York, 1959), and *Organized Labor in American History* (New York, 1964).

For a multi-volume Marxist history, see Philip S. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States*, 10 vols. (New York, 1947–1991). Other general histories of labor in the United States include Bruce Laurie, *Artisans into Laborers: Labor in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York, 1989); James R. Green, *The World of the Worker: Labor in Twentieth-Century America* (New York, 1980); Robert H. Zieger and Timothy J. Minchin, *American Workers, American Unions: The Twentieth and Early Twenty-First Centuries* (Baltimore, 2014); and Randi Storch, *Working Hard for the American Dream: Workers and Their Unions, World War I to the Present* (Malden, MA, 2013). Surveys written for a popular audience include Priscilla Murolo and A. B. Chitty, *From the Folks Who Brought You the Weekend: A Short, Illustrated History of Labor in the United States* (New York, 2001) and Philip Dray, *There Is Power in a Union: The Epic Story of Labor in America* (New York, 2011). Jacqueline Jones, *American Work: Four Centuries of Black and White Labor* (New York, 1998), covers the long sweep of working-class history. And Nelson Lichtenstein, *State of the Union: A Century of American Labor* (Princeton, NJ, 2002) adds an interpretive overview of the twentieth-century story.

Two older books that remain worth reading for their insights about ideological issues in the development of the American labor movement are Selig Perlman, *A Theory of the Labor Movement* (New York, 1928) and Frank Tannenbaum, *A Philosophy of Labor* (Cambridge, MA, 1955).

The following collections of essays and articles offer an introduction to the innovative and stimulating scholarship that developed in the 1960s and has since continued: Herbert G. Gutman, *Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America* (New York, 1975) and *Power and Culture: Essays on the American Working Class*, ed. Ira Berlin (New York, 1987); David Montgomery, *Workers' Control in America* (New York, 1979); David Brody, *Workers in Industrial America* (New York, 1993 edn) and *In Labor's Cause: Main Themes on the History of the American Worker* (New York, 1993); Michael Frisch and Daniel Walkowitz (eds.), *Working-Class America* (Urbana, IL, 1983); Daniel J. Leab (ed.), *The Labor History Reader* (Urbana, IL, 1985). These books provide helpful analysis on the development of the field over time: J. Carroll Moody and Alice Kessler-Harris (eds.), *Perspectives on American Labor History: The Problems of Synthesis* (DeKalb, IL, 1989); Melvyn Dubofsky, *Hard Work: The Making of Labor History* (Urbana, IL, 2000); and Nelson Lichtenstein, *A Contest of Ideas: Capital, Politics and Labor* (Urbana, IL, 2013).

Women, Gender, Sexuality

Few subjects have excited as much interest among scholars as the impact of gender and the process through which men as well as women defined their respective roles and related to each other. A good place to start is with the works of Alice Kessler-Harris, especially: *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States* (New York, 1982) and *A Woman's Wage: Historical Meanings and Social Consequences* (Lexington, KY, 1990). The best of the more general histories and essay collections include: Meredith Tax, *The Rising of the Women* (New York, 1980); Philip S. Foner, *Women and the American Labor Movement*, 2 vols. (New York, 1979–1980); Lynn W. Weiner, *From Working Girl to Working Mother, 1820–1980* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1984); Ruth Milkman (ed.), *Women, Work, and Protest: A Century of Women's Labor History* (Boston, 1985); Milton Cantor and Bruce Laurie (eds.), *Class, Sex, and the Woman Worker* (Westport, CT, 1977); Joan Jensen and Sue Davidson (eds.), *A Needle, A Bobbin, A Strike: Women Needleworkers in America* (Philadelphia, 1984). For a book that integrates women's and African American history, Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family from Slavery to the Present* (New York, 1985). Ava Baron has edited a fine collection of essays, *Work Engendered: Toward a New History of American Labor* (Ithaca, NY, 1991), which sheds much light on the subject. Julia Kirk Blackwelder, *Now Hiring: The Feminization of Work in the United States, 1900–1995* (College Station, TX, 1997), provides an overview of the shifting place of women in the labor market and at work throughout the twentieth century. A superb study that seeks to demonstrate that gendered concepts of wages and welfare shaped the making of public policy in the twentieth-century United States is Alice Kessler-Harris, *In Pursuit of Equity: Women, Men, and the Quest for Economic Citizenship in 20th-Century America* (New York, 2001). Eileen Boris, *Home to Work: Motherhood and the Politics of Industrial Work in the United States* (New York, 1994), uses gender

analysis to explain both the attack on “homework” and its persistence as a form of female employment.

A group of more specialized studies has examined the subject in specific communities and trades and in different historical eras. The following are among the best of such studies: Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789–1860* (New York, 1980); Thomas Dublin, *Women at Work: The Transformation of Work and Community in Lowell, Massachusetts, 1826–1860* (New York, 1979) and *Transforming Women's Work: New England Industrial Lives in the Industrial Revolution* (Ithaca, NY, 1994); Mary H. Blewett, *Men, Women, and Work: Class, Gender, and Protest in the New England Shoe Industry, 1780–1910* (Urbana, IL, 1988); Susan Levine, *Labor's True Woman: Carpet Weavers, Industrialization, and Labor Reform in the Gilded Age* (Philadelphia, 1984); Cindy S. Aron, *Ladies and Gentlemen of the Civil Service: Middle-Class Workers in Victorian America* (New York, 1987); Stephen H. Norwood, *Labor's Flaming Youth: Telephone Operators and Worker Militancy, 1878–1923* (Urbana, IL, 1990); Dolores Janiewski, *Sisterhood Denied: Race, Gender and Class in a New South Community* (Philadelphia, 1985); Susan A. Glenn, *Daughters of the Shtetl: Life and Labor in the Immigrant Generation* (Ithaca, NY, 1990); Susan P. Benson, *Counter Cultures: Saleswomen, Managers, and Customers in American Department Stores, 1890–1940* (Urbana, IL, 1986); Kathy A. Piess, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia, 1986); Patricia A. Cooper, *Once a Cigar Maker: Men, Women, and Work Culture in American Cigar Factories, 1870–1919* (Urbana, IL, 1987); Nancy S. Dye, *As Equals and as Sisters: Feminism, Unionism, and the Women's Trade Union League of New York* (Columbia, MO, 1980); Marjory W. Davies, *Woman's Place Is at the Typewriter: Office Work and Office Workers, 1870–1930* (Philadelphia, 1982); Ileen DeVault, *Sons and Daughters of Labor: Class and Clerical Work in Turn-of-the-Century Pittsburgh* (Ithaca, NY, 1990), and *United Apart: Gender and the Rise of Craft Unionism* (Ithaca, NY, 2004); Barbara Melosh, *The Physician's Hand: Work, Culture and Conflict in American Nursing* (Philadelphia, 1982); Judith Sealander, *As Minority Becomes Majority: Federal Reaction to the Phenomenon of Women in the Work Force, 1920–1963* (Westport, CT, 1983); Vicki L. Ruiz, *Cannery Women, Cannery Lives: Mexican Women, Unionization, and the California Food Processing Industry, 1930–1950* (Albuquerque, 1987); Ruth Milkman, *Gender at Work: The Dynamics of Job Segregation by Sex during World War II* (Urbana, IL, 1987); and Nancy Gabin, *Feminism in the Labor Movement: Women and the United Automobile Workers, 1935–1975* (Ithaca, NY, 1990).

Among other specialized studies of the subject, Elizabeth Faue, *Community of Suffering and Struggle: Women, Men, and the Labor Movement in Minneapolis, 1915–1945* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1991), does just what its title suggests. Dorothy Sue Cobble, *Dishing it Out: Waitresses and their Unions in the Twentieth Century* (Urbana, IL, 1991), explores how women used gender to build unions. Ardis Cameron, *Radicals of the Worst Sort: Laboring Women in Lawrence,*

Massachusetts, 1860–1912 (Urbana, IL, 1993), probes how women's culture affected female workers in that textile city. Carol Turbin, *Working Women of the Collar City: Gender, Class, and Community in Troy, 1864–86* (Urbana, IL, 1992), is another book whose title describes its content. Wendy Gamber, *The Female Economy: The Millinery and Dressmaking Trades, 1860–1930* (Urbana, IL, 1997), examines women employers and entrepreneurs as well as workers. And Annelise Orleck, *Common Sense and a Little Fire: Women and Working Class Politics in the United States, 1900–1965* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1995), provides a collective portrait of four women labor activists. Tera W. Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War* (Cambridge, MA, 1997), simultaneously explores the impact of race and gender on female domestic workers in Southern cities. Other books that consider the complex relationships between gender and race in working-class life include: Vanessa May, *Unprotected Labor: Household Workers, Politics, and Middle-Class Reform in New York, 1870–1940* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2011); Venus Green, *Race on the Line: Gender, Labor, and Technology in the Bell System, 1880–1980* (Durham, NC, 2001); Beth Tompkins Bates, *Pullman Porters and the Rise of Protest Politics in Black America, 1925–1945* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2001); Xialan Bao, *Holding Up More than Half the Sky: Chinese Women Garment Workers in New York City, 1948–92* (Urbana, IL, 2001); and Deborah Fink, *Cutting into the Meatpacking Line: Workers and Change in the Rural Midwest* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1998).

Other specialized studies that examine how gender shaped the lives, careers, and institutions of working women include the following: Nancy A. Hewitt, *Southern Discomfort: Women's Activism in Tampa, Florida, 1880s–1920s* (Urbana, IL, 2001); Sonya Michel, *Children's Interests/Mothers' Rights: The Shaping of America's Child Care Policy* (New Haven, CT, 1999); Jo Anne E. Argersinger, *Making the Amalgamated: Gender, Ethnicity, and Class in the Baltimore Clothing Industry, 1899–1939* (Baltimore, 1999); Elizabeth Jameson, *All That Glitters: Class, Conflict, and Community in Cripple Creek* (Urbana, IL, 1998); Kathleen A. Laughlin, *Women's Work and Public Policy: A History of the Women's Bureau, US Department of Labor, 1945–1970* (Boston, 2000); Ann Schofield, *To Do & To Be: Portraits of Four Women Activists, 1893–1986* (Boston, 1997); Nan Enstad, *Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure: Working Women, Popular Culture, and Labor Politics at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (New York, 1999); Landon R. Y. Storrs, *Civilizing Capitalism: The National Consumer's League, Women's Activism, and Labor Standards in the New Deal Era* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2000); Daniel J. Walkowitz, *Working with Class: Social Workers and the Politics of Middle-Class Identity* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1999); Laurie Mercier, *Anaconda: Labor, Community, and Culture in Montana's Smelter City* (Urbana, IL, 2001); Sharon E. Wood, *The Freedom of the Streets: Work, Citizenship, and Sexuality in a Gilded Age City* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2005); and Dennis Deslippe, *Rights, Not Roses: Unions and the Rise of Working-Class Feminism, 1945–1980* (Urbana, IL, 2000). Stephen H. Norwood, *Strikebreaking & Intimidation: Mercenaries and Masculinity in Twentieth-Century America* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2002) seeks to prove

that concepts of masculinity and manliness were root causes of strikebreaking; and Cherie Register, *Packinghouse Daughter: A Memoir* (Minneapolis, 2000) tells a wonderful story about coming of age as a young woman in a Midwestern working-class family.

The two best studies of women, unions, and labor market opportunities in the late twentieth century are Dorothy Sue Cobble, *The Other Women's Movement: Workplace Justice and Social Rights in Modern America* (Princeton, NJ, 2004) and Nancy McLean, *Freedom is not Enough: The Opening of the American Workplace* (Cambridge, MA, 2006), a book that also deals with African Americans and other minorities. Miriam Frank, *Out in the Union: A Labor History of Queer America* (Philadelphia, 2014) offers the best introduction to the history of LGBT activism within unions.

Race and Ethnicity

As scholarship on this subject has moved away from ascribing unchangeable characteristics (essentialism) to different sorts of peoples toward the concept known today as “social construction” (the historically determined and contingent basis of such distinctions), the conventional lines between race and ethnicity have dissolved. Studies of race in labor history, for example, have moved away from a stress on African American workers to examine the construction and meaning of “whiteness” as well as the histories of other nonwhite working people. David Roediger has pioneered what might be characterized as studies of “whiteness”: *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York, 1991), and his collection of essays, *Toward the Abolition of Whiteness* (New York, 1994). In a more recent book coauthored with Elizabeth D. Esch, Roediger explored “whiteness-as-management”: *The Production of Difference: Race and the Management of Labor in US History* (New York, 2014). An interesting but idiosyncratic collection of essays by Robin D. G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York, 1996), also bears careful reading.

The setting of agricultural labor provides an important arena for the consideration of racial dynamics. Among the most important books is Sven Beckert's magisterial *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (New York, 2014), which puts the development of cotton culture in the largest frame. Neil Foley, *The White Scourge: Mexicans, Blacks, and Poor Whites in Texas Cotton Culture* (Berkeley, CA, 1997), treats interracial and class relations among agricultural workers and their employers in a region where such relations were tripartite rather than bipolar (white, black, and brown). Devra Weber covers Mexican and Anglo workers in California's cotton fields in *Dark Sweat, White Gold: California Farm Workers, Cotton, and the New Deal* (Berkeley, CA, 1994). Read Moon-Ho Jung, *Coolies and Cane: Race, Labor, and Sugar in the Age of Emancipation* (Baltimore, 2006) to discover the shifting relationship among African American and Asian workers in the sugar fields.

Among the better and older books that followed more conventional lines in examining the history of African American workers, race, and the labor movement are the following: William H. Harris, *The Harder We Run: Black Workers since the Civil War* (New York, 1982); Julius Jacobson (ed.), *The Negro and the American Labor Movement* (New York, 1965); and Philip S. Foner, *Organized Labor and the Black Worker, 1619–1971* (New York, 1974). They have been superseded, however, by Robert H. Zieger, *For Jobs and Freedom: Race and Labor in America since 1865* (Lexington, KY, 2007). For a study that takes a far dimmer view of the labor movement and that accuses it of discriminating against African Americans, see Paul D. Moreno, *Black Americans and Organized Labor: A New History* (Baton Rouge, LA, 2006).

Among the better, if somewhat older, more specialized studies of the subject, one might consult the following: Joe W. Trotter Jr., *Black Milwaukee: The Making of an Industrial Proletariat, 1915–1945* (Urbana, IL, 1985) and *Coal, Class, and Color: Blacks in Southern West Virginia, 1915–1932* (Urbana, IL, 1990); Peter J. Rachleff, *Black Labor in the New South: Richmond, Virginia, 1865–1890* (Philadelphia, 1984); Peter Gottlieb, *Making their Own Way: Southern Blacks' Migration to Pittsburgh, 1916–30* (Urbana, IL, 1987); and James R. Grossman, *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration* (Chicago, 1989). Three books examine more unique aspects of the African American experience in the South: Thomas C. Buchanan, *Black Life on the Mississippi: Slaves, Free Blacks & the Western Steamboat World* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2004) is one of the few recent studies of slave and free labor in the antebellum South; William P. Jones, *The Tribe of Black Ulysses: African American Lumber Workers in the Jim Crow South* (Urbana, IL, 2005) does what the title suggests; Scott R. Nelson, *Steel Drivin' Man: John Henry, the Untold Story of an American Legend* (New York, 2006) explores the origins of the famous folk song and uncovers neglected aspects of African American labor in the Reconstruction South.

Historians have persisted in writing about the shifting relationships between white and black workers and their employers, with their sharpest focus on the South. Three books treat that subject in the Birmingham-Bessemer district of Alabama, two for coal miners and one for iron and steel workers: Daniel Letwin, *The Challenge of Interracial Unionism: Alabama Coal Miners, 1878–1921* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1998); Brian Kelly, *Race, Class, and Power in the Alabama Coal Fields, 1908–1921* (Urbana, IL, 2001); and Henry M. McKiven, *Iron and Steel: Class, Race, and Community in Birmingham, Alabama, 1875–1920* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1995). Ruth Needleman takes up the story of black steelworkers in the North in *Black Freedom Fighters in Steel: The Struggle for Democratic Unionism* (Ithaca, NY, 2003). Eric Arnesen's pioneering *Waterfront Workers of New Orleans: Race, Class, and Politics, 1863–1923* (New York, 1991) helped trigger the rethinking of black labor history. Two books probe how race issues played out in the lives and politics of South Carolina's and Georgia's white textile mill workers: Bryant Simon, *A Fabric of Defeat: The*

Politics of South Carolina Millhands, 1910–1948 (Chapel Hill, NC, 1998) and Michelle Brattain, *The Politics of Whiteness: Race, Workers, and Culture in the Modern South* (Princeton, NJ, 2001). Robert R. Korstad looks at the biracial efforts to organize tobacco workers in North Carolina, where anticommunism helped undermine progress made during World War II, in *Civil Rights Unionism: Tobacco Workers & the Struggle for Democracy in the Mid-Twentieth-Century South* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2003). Michael K. Honey has published a revealing oral history collection about the struggles of African American workers to build trade unions in Memphis, Tennessee: *Black Workers Remember: An Oral History of Segregation, Unionism, and the Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley, CA, 1999); in *Going Down Jericho Road: The Memphis Strike, Martin Luther King's Last Campaign* (New York, 2007), he examines the role of Martin Luther King in the 1968 Memphis sanitation workers' strike. Laurie Beth Green's *Battling the Plantation Mentality: Memphis and the Black Freedom Struggle* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2007) tells the backstory of the sanitation strike. William P. Jones, *The March on Washington: Jobs, Freedom, and the Forgotten History of Civil Rights* (New York, 2013), limns the relationship between the civil rights and labor movements.

Books that look at race on a more national stage or outside the South include: August Meier and Elliot Rudwick, *Black Detroit and the Rise of the UAW* (New York, 1979); Eric Arnesen, *Brotherhoods of Color: Black Railroad Workers and the Struggle for Equality* (Cambridge, MA, 2001); Roger Horowitz, *Negro and White Unite: A Social History of Industrial Unionism in Meatpacking, 1930–1990* (Urbana, IL, 1997) and Rick Halpern, *Down on the Killing Floor: Black and White Workers in Chicago's Packinghouses, 1904–1954* (Urbana, IL, 1997), describe industrial relations and union organizing in a key industry. Bruce Nelson, *Divided We Stand: American Workers and the Struggle for Black Equality* (Princeton, NJ, 2001), explores racial tensions in CIO unions. Racial politics and labor issues in key cities are dealt with in Heather Ann Thompson, *Whose Detroit? Politics, Labor and Race in a Modern American City* (Ithaca, NY, 2001); Kimberley L. Phillips, *Alabama North: African-American Migrants, Community, and Working-Class Activism in Cleveland, 1915–45* (Urbana, IL, 1999); Martha Biondi, *To Stand and Fight: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Postwar New York City* (Cambridge, MA, 2003); Lisa Levenstein, *A Movement without Marches: African American Women and the Politics of Poverty in Postwar Philadelphia* (Baltimore, 2009); and Clarence Lang, *Grassroots at the Gateway: Class Politics and Black Freedom Struggle in St. Louis, 1936–75* (Ann Arbor, MI, 2009).

Among the best studies of other groups of nonwhite workers are the following: Dorothy Fujita-Rony, *American Workers, Colonial Power: Philippine Seattle and the Transpacific West, 1919–1941* (Berkeley, CA, 2002); Yuji Ichioka, *The Issei: The World of First-Generation Japanese Immigrants, 1885–1924* (Berkeley, CA, 1988); Sucheng Chan, *This Bittersweet Soil: The Chinese in California Agriculture* (Berkeley, CA, 1986); Chris Friday, *Organizing Asian American Labor: The Pacific*

Coast Salmon Industry, 1870–1942 (Philadelphia, 1994); Renqui Yu, *To Save China, To Save Ourselves: The Chinese Hand Laundry Alliance of New York* (Philadelphia, 1992). For a study that absolves white workers for acting as the force behind the Chinese exclusion laws, see Andrew Gyory, *Closing the Gate: Race, Politics, and the Chinese Exclusion Act* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1998).

The following are among the best studies of working people of Hispanic (mostly Mexican) origin in the Southwest and elsewhere: Sarah Deutsch, *No Separate Refuge: Culture, Class, and Gender on an Anglo-Hispanic Frontier in the American Southwest, 1880–1940* (New York, 1987); Emilio Zamora, *The World of the Mexican Worker in Texas* (College Station, TX, 1993); Dennis Valdez, *El Norte: Agricultural Workers in the Great Lakes Region, 1917–1970* (Austin, TX, 1991); Camille Guerin-Gonzales, *Mexican Workers and American Dreams: Immigration, Repatriation, and California Farm Labor, 1900–1939* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1994); Zaragosa Vargas, *Proletarians of the North: A History of Mexican Industrial Workers in Detroit and the Midwest, 1917–1933* (Berkeley, CA, 1993) and *Labor Rights Are Civil Rights: Mexican American Workers in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton, NJ, 2004); Douglas Monroy, *Rebirth: Mexican Los Angeles from the Great Migration to the Great Depression* (Berkeley, CA, 1999); Matt Garcia, *A World of Its Own: Race, Labor, and Citrus in the Making of Greater Los Angeles, 1900–1970* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2002); Elizabeth Escobedo, *From Coveralls to Zoot Suits: The Lives of Mexican American Women on the World War II Home Front* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2013); Monica Perales, *Smelertown: Making and Remembering a Southwest Border Community* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2010); Katherine Benton-Cohen, *Borderline Americans: Racial Division and Labor War in the Arizona Borderlands* (Cambridge, MA, 2011); and Cindy Hahamovitch, *The Fruits of their Labor: Atlantic Coast Farm Workers and the Making of Migrant Poverty, 1870–1945* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1997).

Leon Fink examines the struggles of Central American immigrants in *The Maya of Morganton: Work and Community in the Nuevo New South* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2003); Cindy Hahamovitch's *No Man's Land: Jamaican Guestworkers in America and the Global History of Deportable Labor* (Princeton, NJ, 2011) provides a case study of the importance of “deportable labor” to US agriculture. The plight of domestic workers gets a nuanced ethnographic treatment in Pierette Hondagneu-Sotelo, *Doméstica: Immigrant Workers Cleaning and Caring in the Shadows of Affluence* (Berkeley, CA, 2006), while Roger Waldinger and Michael I. Lichter, *How the Other Half Works: Immigration and the Social Organization of Labor* (Berkeley, CA, 2003), documents the impact of immigrants on the labor market.

For studies of ethnicity among white workers, see James R. Barrett, *The Irish Way: Becoming American in the Multiethnic City* (New York, 2012); Daniel Katz, *All Together Different: Yiddish Socialists, Garment Workers, and the Labor Roots of Multiculturalism* (New York, 2011); Victor Greene, *The Slavic Community on Strike: Immigrant Labor in Pennsylvania Anthracite* (South Bend, IN, 1968); John Bodnar, *Immigration and Industrialization: Ethnicity in an American Milltown* (Westport, CT,

1977); Gerd Korman, *Industrialization, Immigrants, and Americanizers: The View from Milwaukee* (Madison, WI, 1967); Tamara Hareven, *Family Time and Industrial Time: The Relationship between Family and Work in a New England Industrial Community* (New York, 1982); and Ewa Morawska, *For Bread and Butter: The Life-Worlds of East Central Europeans in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, 1890–1940* (New York, 1985). David Roediger applies his “whiteness” analysis to immigrants in *Working Toward Whiteness: How America's Immigrants Became White: The Strange Journey from Ellis Island to the Suburbs* (New York, 2005).

For studies that complicate the meaning of ethnicity in working-class history, see Gunther Peck, *Reinventing Free Labor: Padrones and Immigrant Workers in the North American West, 1880–1930* (New York, 2000); Robert Bruno, *Steelworker Alley: How Class Works in Youngstown* (Ithaca, NY, 1999), which examines ethnicity as much as class; and Kevin Kenny, *Making Sense of the Molly Maguires* (New York, 1998).

Law, Politics, and Public Policy

The impact of the law, politics, and public policy on workers and the labor movement has received much attention in the last two decades. The following are among the best studies of law and labor: Christopher Tomlins, *Law, Labor, and Ideology in the Early American Republic* (New York, 1993); Victoria C. Hattam, *Labor Visions and State Power: The Origins of Business Unionism in the United States* (Princeton, NJ, 1993); Karen Orren, *Belated Feudalism: Labor, the Law, and Liberal Development in the United States* (New York, 1991); and Vivien Hart, *Bound by Our Constitution: Women, Workers, and the Minimum Wage* (Princeton, NJ, 1994). David E. Bernstein, in *Only One Place of Redress: African Americans, Labor Regulations, and the Courts from Reconstruction to the New Deal* (Durham, NC, 2001), argues that, during the period of “Lochner-era jurisprudence,” judges and the law did more to promote employment opportunities for African American workers than unions or legislation; and William B. Gould, *Labored Relations: Law, Politics, and the NLRB – A Memoir* (Cambridge, MA, 2001) offers an insider's view of how federal labor policy actually works. For a more specialized treatment of law's impact on workers, read Jonathan F. Witt, *The Accidental Republic: Crippled Workingmen, Destitute Widows and the Remaking of American Labor Law* (Princeton, NJ, 2005).

Three somewhat older books are still worth reading: James B. Atleson, *Values and Assumptions in American Labor Law* (Amherst, MA, 1983); William E. Forbath, *Law and the Shaping of the American Labor Movement* (Cambridge, MA, 1991); and Christopher L. Tomlins, *The State and the Unions: Labor Relations, Law, and the Organized Labor Movement in America, 1880–1960* (New York, 1985).

Another group of significant books examine the larger arenas of politics and public policy as well as the law. Among the most important are: Melvyn Dubofsky, *The State*

and Labor in Modern America (Chapel Hill, NC, 1994); David Montgomery, *Citizen Worker: The Experience of Workers in the United States with Democracy and the Free Market during the Nineteenth Century* (New York, 1993); James Gross, *Broken Promise: The Subversion of United States Labor Relations Policy, 1947–1995* (Philadelphia, 1995); Jeffrey Haydu, *Making American Industry Safe for Democracy: Comparative Perspectives on the State and Employee Representation in the Era of World War I* (Urbana, IL, 1997); Joseph A. McCartin, *Labor's Great War: The Struggle for Industrial Democracy and the Origins of Modern American Labor Relations, 1912–1921* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1997); David Plotke, *Building a Democratic Political Order: Reshaping American Liberalism in the 1930s and 1940s* (New York, 1996); Kevin Boyle, *The UAW and the Heyday of American Liberalism, 1945–1968* (Ithaca, NY, 1995); Julie Greene, *Pure and Simple Politics: The American Federation of Labor, and Political Activism, 1881–1917* (New York, 1998); Richard Schneirov, *Labor and Urban Politics: Class Conflict and the Origins of Modern Liberalism in Chicago, 1864–97* (Urbana, IL, 1998); Richard Schneirov et al., *The Pullman Strike and the Crisis of the 1890s: Essays on Labor and Politics* (Urbana, IL, 1999); Taylor E. Dark, *The Democrats and the Unions: An Enduring Alliance* (Ithaca, NY, 1999); Kevin Boyle (ed.), *Organized Labor and American Politics: The Labor–Liberal Alliance* (Albany, 1998); Gerald Friedman, *State-Making and Labor Movements: France and the United States, 1876–1914* (Ithaca, NY, 1998); James D. Schmidt, *Industrial Violence and the Legal Origins of Child Labor* (New York, 2010); Catherine L. Fisk, *Working Knowledge: Employee Innovation and the Rise of Corporate Intellectual Property, 1800–1930* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2009); and Ruth Ann O'Brien's two books, *Workers' Paradox: The Republican Origins of New Deal Labor Policy, 1886–1935* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1998) and *Crippled Justice: The History of Modern Disability Policy in the Workplace* (Chicago, 2001). An interesting examination comparing the United States to Australia has been written by a British scholar, Robin Archer, *Why Is There No Labor Party in the United States?* (Princeton, NJ, 2008). For a sweeping and comparative overview of the subject, see David B. Robertson, *Capital, Labor, & State: The Battle for American Labor Markets from the Civil War to the New Deal* (Lanham, MD, 2000).

Public sector unionism is gaining more scholarly attention as it has attracted a greater focus owing to its political controversy. Helpful studies include: Joseph E. Slater, *Public Workers, Government Employee Unions, the Law, and the State, 1900–1962* (Ithaca, NY, 2004); Marjorie Murphy, *Blackboard Unions: The AFT and the NEA, 1900–1980* (Ithaca, NY, 1991); Dennis Gaffney, *Teachers United: The Rise of New York State United Teachers* (Albany, NY, 2007); and Francis Ryan, *AFSCME's Philadelphia Story: Municipal Workers and Urban Power in the Twentieth Century* (Philadelphia, 2010). Daniel DiSalvo, *Government against Itself: Public Union Power and Its Consequences* (New York, 2015), is perhaps the most scholarly book attacking public sector unions.

A number of books have begun to probe the growing mismatch between the needs of

workers and declining utility of labor laws created in the industrial era. These include: Jean-Christian Vinel, *The Employee: A Political History* (Philadelphia, 2013); Katherine V. W. Stone, *From Widgets to Digits: Employment Regulation for the Changing Workplace* (New York, 2004); and Charles J. Morris, *The Blue Eagle at Work: Reclaiming Democratic Rights in the American Workplace* (Ithaca, NY, 2004). Labor lawyer Thomas Geoghegan gives the view of a quirky practitioner in *Only One Thing Can Save Us: Why America Needs a New Kind of Labor Movement* (New York, 2014).

A subspecies of this genre looks at the relationship between deindustrialization and public policy as well as other aspects of the decline of blue-collar basic industries. Among the best of such books are: Ruth Milkman, *Farewell to the Factory: Auto Workers in the Late Twentieth Century* (Berkeley, CA, 1997), which explains how global competition eliminated jobs in the US automobile industry. Kim Moody offers a more general and journalistic description of the negative impact of the global marketplace on American workers and their overseas brothers and sisters in *Workers in a Lean World* (New York, 1997). A multiple prize-winning book by the historian Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton, NJ, 1996), analyzes how developments in the immediate post-World War II decades set the foundation for the decline of trade unions, job opportunities in mass-production industry, and earnings at the end of the century. Other more recent studies worth mentioning are: Chad Broughton, *Boom, Bust, Exodus: The Rust Belt, the Maquilas, and a Tale of Two Cities* (New York, 2015); Erik Loomis, *Out of Sight: The Long and Disturbing Story of Corporations Outsourcing Catastrophe* (New York, 2015); Judith Stein, *Running Steel, Running America: Race, Economic Policy, and the Decline of Liberalism* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1998); Jefferson R. Cowie, *Capital Moves: RCA's Seventy-Year Quest for Cheap Labor* (Ithaca, NY, 1999); Jefferson R. Cowie and Joseph Heathcott (eds.), *Beyond the Ruins: The Meanings of Deindustrialization* (Ithaca, NY, 2003); William Hartford, *Where Is Our Responsibility? Unions and Economic Change in the New England Textile Industry, 1870–1960* (Amherst, MA, 1996); John Russo and Sherry Linkon, *Steeltown USA.: Work and Memory in Youngstown* (Lawrence, KS, 2002); and Thomas Dublin, *When the Mines Closed: Stories of Struggles in Hard Times* (Ithaca, NY, 1998). Even better is Thomas Dublin and Walter Licht, *The Face of Decline: The Pennsylvania Anthracite Region in the Twentieth Century* (Ithaca, NY, 2005).

Southern Workers

A number of recent books have done much to fill in previous gaps in our knowledge of workers in the modern South. Two sets of essays edited by Robert H. Zieger have been particularly important: *Organized Labor in the Twentieth-Century South* (Knoxville, TN, 1991) and *Southern Labor in Transition, 1940–1995* (Knoxville, TN, 1997). Three other books clearly delineate the character and lives of twentieth-

century textile workers and their encounters with the labor movement: Douglas Flamming, *Creating the Modern South: Millhands & Managers in Dalton, Georgia, 1884–1984* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1992); Daniel Clark, *Like Night and Day: Unionization in a Southern Mill Town* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1997); and Timothy Minchin, *What Do We Need a Union For? The TWUA in the South, 1945–1955* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1997). Minchin has also written two books that describe how the civil rights movement and civil rights law promoted African American employment in two of the South's major industries: *Hiring the Black Worker: The Racial Integration of the Southern Textile Industry, 1960–1980* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1999), and *The Color of Work: The Struggle for Civil Rights in the Southern Paper Industry, 1945–1980* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2001). Two books that examine the history of coercive labor in the region are Alex Lichtenstein, *Twice the Work of Free Labor: The Political Economy of Convict Labor in the New South* (London, 1996); and Talitha LeFlouria, *Chained in Silence: Black Women and Convict Labor in the New South* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2015). The best general history of unionism in the modern South is Minchin's *Fighting Against the Odds: A History of Southern Labor since World War II* (Gainesville, FL, 2005). Two recent books have put the issue of religion and culture at the center of Southern labor history: Elizabeth Fones-Wolf and Ken Fones-Wolf, *Struggle for the Soul of the Postwar South: White Evangelical Protestants and Operation Dixie* (Urbana, IL, 2015); and Jared Roll, *Spirit of Rebellion: Labor and Religion in the New Cotton South* (Urbana, IL, 2010). George C. Waldrep also makes religion central to his analysis in *Southern Workers and the Search for Community: Spartanburg, South Carolina* (Urbana, IL, 2000). Three other books examine how Southern workers resisted the demands of their employers through direct action: Cliff Kuhn, *Contesting the New South Order: The 1914–1915 Strike at Atlanta's Fulton Mills* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2001); Karin A. Shapiro, *A New South Rebellion: The Battle against Convict Labor in the Tennessee Coalfields, 1871–1896* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1998); and Janet Irons, *Testing the New Deal: The General Textile Strike of 1934 in the American South* (Urbana, IL, 2000). A book that elegantly traces Southern workers' movement outside the region of their birth is James N. Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora: How the Great Migrations of Black and White Southerners Transformed America* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2005).

The Pre-Modern Era: To the 1870s

For the colonial and revolutionary eras, one should consult Marcus Jernegan, *Laboring and Dependent Classes in Colonial America, 1707–1783* (New York, 1960); David Galenson, *White Servitude in Colonial America: An Economic Analysis* (New York, 1981); Richard B. Morris, *Government and Labor in Early America* (New York, 1946); Gary B. Nash, *The Urban Crucible: Social Change, Political Consciousness, and the Coming of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, MA, 1979); Graham Hodges, *New York City Cartmen, 1607–1850* (New York, 1986); Charles G. Steffen, *The Mechanics of Baltimore: Workers and Politics in the Age of*

Revolution, 1763–1812 (Urbana, IL, 1984); Marcus Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates, and the Anglo-American Maritime World* (New York, 1987), as well as Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston, 2000); Billy G. Smith, *The “Lower Sort”: Philadelphia’s Laboring People* (Ithaca, NY, 1990); Kathleen M. Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1996); and John B. Selfa, *Forging America: Ironworkers, Adventurers, and the Industrious Revolution* (Ithaca, NY, 2004).

For workers in the new nation and the era of early industrialization, the following books provide the best introduction: Seth Rockman, *Scraping By: Wage Labor, Slavery, and Survival in Early Baltimore* (Baltimore, 2009); Howard Rock, *Artisans of the New Republic: The Tradesmen of New York City in the Age of Jefferson* (New York, 1979); Edward Pessen, *Most Uncommon Jacksonians: The Radical Leaders of the Early Labor Movement* (Albany, NY, 1967); Bruce Laurie, *Working People of Philadelphia, 1800–1850* (Philadelphia, 1980), and *Beyond Garrison: Anti-Slavery and Social Reform* (Cambridge, MA, 2005); Alan Dawley, *Class and Community: The Industrial Revolution in Lynn* (Cambridge, MA, 1976); Paul G. Faler, *Mechanics and Manufacturers in the Early Industrial Revolution: Lynn, Massachusetts, 1780–1860* (Albany, NY, 1981); Susan Hirsch, *Roots of the American Working Class: The Industrialization of Crafts in Newark, 1800–1860* (Philadelphia, 1978); Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788–1850* (New York, 1984); Richard B. Stott, *Workers in the Metropolis: Class, Ethnicity, and Youth in Antebellum New York City* (Ithaca, NY, 1990); Steven J. Ross, *Workers on the Edge: Work, Leisure, and Politics in Industrializing Cincinnati, 1788–1890* (New York, 1985); Jonathan Prude, *The Coming of the Industrial Order: Town and Factory Life in Rural Massachusetts, 1810–1860* (New York, 1983); Mark Lause, *Some Degree of Power: Preindustrial American Printing Trades, 1778–1815* (Little Rock, AR, 1991) and *Free Labor: The Civil War and the Making of an American Working Class* (Urbana, IL, 2015); and David A. Zonderman, *Uneasy Allies: Working for Labor Reform in Nineteenth-Century Boston* (Amherst, MA, 2011) and *Aspirations and Anxieties: New England Workers and the Mechanized Factory System, 1815–1850* (New York, 1992); Mark Lause, *Young America: Land, Labor, and the Republican Community* (Urbana, IL, 2005).

Other books probe interesting aspects of antebellum working-class life. Peter Way, *Common Labour: Workers and the Digging of North American Canals, 1780–1860* (New York, 1993), explores the life and culture of the immigrant Irish workers who built major public works; William R. Sutton, *Journeyman for Jesus: Evangelical Artisans Confront Capitalism in Jacksonian Baltimore* (University Park, PA, 1998); Michele Gillespie, *Free Labor in an Unfree World: White Artisans in Slaveholding Georgia, 1789–1860* (Athens, GA, 2000); Jamie Bronstein, *Land Reform and Working-Class Experience in Britain and the United States, 1800–1862* (Stanford,

CA, 1999); and Robert A. Margo, *Wages and Labor Markets in the United States, 1820–1860* (Chicago, 2000) offer econometric studies of the material conditions of workers.

On the era of the Civil War and Reconstruction, the following books should be consulted: David Montgomery, *Beyond Equality: Labor and the Radical Republicans, 1862–1872* (Urbana, IL, 1981); Jonathan Grossman, *William Sylvius: Pioneer of American Labor* (New York, 1945); Daniel Walkowitz, *Worker City, Company Town: Iron and Cotton Worker Protest in Troy and Cohoes, New York, 1855–1884* (Urbana, IL, 1978); Iver Bernstein, *The New York City Draft Riots* (New York, 1990); and Grace Palladino, *Another Civil War: Labor, Capital, and the State in the Anthracite Regions of Pennsylvania, 1840–1868* (Urbana, IL, 1990). John C. Rodrigue, *Reconstruction in the Cane Fields: From Slavery to Free Labor in Louisiana's Sugar Parishes, 1862–1880* (Baton Rouge, LA, 2001), is an excellent study of the transition to a free labor system.

The Era of the Knights of Labor and the American Federation of Labor: The 1870s to 1919

The best introduction to the period remains David Montgomery, *The Fall of the House of Labor: The Workplace, the State, and American Labor Activism, 1865–1925* (New York, 1987). Norman Ware's older history of the struggle between the Knights of Labor and the AFL, *The Labor Movement in the United States, 1860–1895* (New York, 1929), remains a useful account of the first half of the period. A far briefer, more modern synthesis can be found in Melvyn Dubofsky, *Industrialism and the American Worker, 1865–1920*, 3rd edn (Wheeling, IL, 1996). The most complete history of the emergence of stable craft unions remains Lloyd Ulman, *The Rise of the National Trade Union* (Cambridge, MA, 1955). Fine but specialized studies of the Knights of Labor and class relations include Melton A. McLaurin, *The Knights of Labor in the South* (Westport, CT, 1978); Leon Fink, *Workingmen's Democracy: The Knights of Labor and American Politics* (Urbana, IL, 1983); Richard Oestreicher, *Solidarity and Fragmentation: Working People and Class Consciousness in Detroit, 1875–1900* (Urbana, IL, 1986); and Roy Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours for What We Will: Workers and Leisure in an Industrial City, 1870–1920* (New York, 1983). Three books offer perspectives on the premier mass-worker organization of the late nineteenth century, the Knights of Labor: Kim Voss, *The Making of American Exceptionalism: The Knights of Labor and Class Formation in the Nineteenth Century* (Ithaca, NY, 1993); and Robert E. Weir, *Beyond Labor's Veil: The Culture of the Knights of Labor* (Pittsburgh, 1996) and *Knights Unhorsed: Internal Conflict in a Gilded Age Social Movement* (Detroit, 2000).

Two books by Daniel Nelson analyze management strategies in this period: *Managers and Workers: The Origins of the New Factory System in the United States, 1880–*

1920 (Madison, WI, 1975) and *Frederick W. Taylor and Scientific Management* (Madison, WI, 1980). For perhaps the best single book on the labor policies of employers, one should read Sanford Jacoby, *Employing Bureaucracy: Management, Unions, and the Transformation of Work in American Industry, 1900–1945* (New York, 1985). Two books that treat the efforts of public officials and corporate leaders to implement welfare reforms for workers are James Weinstein, *The Corporate Ideal in the Liberal State* (Boston, 1968); and Stuart Brandes, *American Welfare Capitalism, 1880–1940* (Chicago, 1976). For more recent and stronger studies of such developments, consult Shelton Stromquist, *Reinventing the People: The Progressive Movement, the Class Problem, and the Origins of Modern Liberalism* (Urbana, IL, 2006); Jeffrey Haydu, *Citizen Employers: Business Communities and Labor in Cincinnati and San Francisco, 1870–1916* (Ithaca, NY, 2008); Richard Greenwald, *The Triangle Fire, the Protocols of Peace, and Industrial Democracy in Progressive Era New York* (Philadelphia, 2005); and Rosanne Currarino, *The Labor Question in America: Economic Democracy in the Gilded Age* (Urbana, IL, 2011). For a more dramatic, narrative history of the Triangle Fire, one written by a journalist, see David Von Drehle, *Triangle: The Fire that Changed America* (New York, 2003).

For the upheaval that erupted in the aftermath of World War I, consult David Brody, *Labor in Crisis: the Steel Strike of 1919* (Urbana, IL, 1987); David Goldberg, *A Tale of Three Cities: Labor Organization in Paterson, Passaic, and Lawrence, 1916–1921* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1989); and most especially, Beverly Gage, *The Day Wall Street Exploded* (New York, 2009), a brilliant narrative of violence and bombings in the United States from Haymarket in 1886 to the bomb that exploded on Wall Street in 1921 and of the efforts of police departments and the federal government to find the perpetrators, punish them, and suppress radicalism, especially in its anarchist form.

The Interwar Years, 1919 to 1939

Irving Bernstein's two volumes still offer the most complete treatment of the entire era: *The Lean Years: A History of the American Worker, 1920–1933* (Boston, 1960) and *Turbulent Years: A History of the American Worker, 1933–1941* (Boston, 1969). General trends in the labor movement during these years can be followed in Melvyn Dubofsky and Warren Van Tine, *John L. Lewis: A Biography* (New York, 1977; abr. edn, Urbana, IL, 1986). Among the best sources for the social and everyday history of working people during the 1920s and 1930s are Robert and Helen Lynd, *Middletown* (New York, 1929) and *Middletown in Transition* (New York, 1937); and E. W. Bakke's two books, *Citizens without Work* (New Haven, CT, 1940) and *The Unemployed Worker* (New Haven, CT, 1940). Another excellent contemporary collection of essays on labor in the 1920s is J. B. S. Hardman, *American Labor Dynamics* (New York, 1928). For a more scholarly look at labor and politics in the prosperity decade, read Robert H. Zieger, *Republicans and Labor, 1919–1929*

(Lexington, KY, 1969). A fine account of the most significant labor conflict of the 1920s is Colin J. Davis, *Power at Odds: The 1922 National Railroad Shopmen's Strike* (Urbana, IL, 1997).

Two books that examine the industrial union movement born in the 1930s stand out: Robert H. Zieger, *The CIO, 1935–1955* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1995); and Nelson Lichtenstein, *The Most Dangerous Man in Detroit: Walter Reuther and the Fate of American Labor* (New York, 1995). Among older books that treat the same subject, the best remain: James O. Morris, *Conflict with the AFL: A Study of Craft versus Industrial Unionism, 1901–1938* (Ithaca, NY, 1958); Walter Galenson, *The CIO Challenge to the AFL: A History of the American Labor Movement, 1935–1941* (Cambridge, MA, 1960); Sidney Fine, *The Automobile under the Blue Eagle* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1963) and *Sit-Down: The General Motors Strike of 1936–1937* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1969); Bruce Nelson, *Workers on the Waterfront: Seamen, Longshoremen, and Unionism in the 1930s* (Urbana, IL, 1988); James Gross, *The Making of the National Labor Relations Board* (Albany, NY, 1974) and *The Reshaping of the National Labor Relations Board* (Albany, NY, 1981); Jerold S. Auerbach, *Labor and Liberty: The LaFollette Committee and the New Deal* (Indianapolis, 1966); James A Hodges, *New Deal Labor Policy and the Southern Cotton Textile Industry, 1933–1941* (Knoxville, TN, 1986); and Stanley Vittoz, *New Deal Labor Policy and the American Industrial Economy* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1987). Three other quite fine books that cover aspects of the labor upheaval of the 1930s are: Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919–1939* (New York, 1990); Gary Gerstle, *Working-Class Americanism: The Politics of Labor in a Textile City, 1914–1960* (New York, 1989); and James Gregory, *The Dust Bowl Migration and Okie Culture in California* (New York, 1989). A more ponderous volume, which nonetheless contains important insights, is Eric Lief Davin, *Crucible of Freedom: Workers' Democracy in the Industrial Heartland, 1914–1960* (Lanham, MD, 2011).

A particularly interesting book that includes some fine photographs explores the history of New Deal photographer-reformers who filmed farm workers in California and Southern agriculture is Richard Street, *Everyone Had Cameras: Photographers and Farm Workers in California, 1850–2000* (Minneapolis, 2009).

The Maturation of the American Labor Movement

Two books treat the impact of World War II on trade unions and how the crisis enabled unions to grow and gain strength: Nelson Lichtenstein, *Labor's War at Home: The CIO under the No-Strike Pledge* (New York, 1982); and Andrew Kersten, *Labor's Home Front: The American Federation of Labor during World War II* (New York, 2006). John Barnard, *American Vanguard: The United Auto Workers during the Reuther Years, 1935–1970* (Detroit, 2004), examines perhaps the most successful union during the movement's halcyon years. Joshua Freeman, *Working-*

Class New York: Life and Labor since World War II (New York, 2000), describes the city in which the labor movement enjoyed its greatest success during the postwar years. Meg Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politics: Economic Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton, NJ, 2005), treats labor's role in defending the rights of consumers. Elizabeth Fones-Wolf explains how unions tried to use the radio to strengthen their appeal in the postwar years in *Waves of Opposition: Labor and the Struggle for Democratic Radio* (Urbana, IL, 2006).

Several books, however, take a more jaundiced view of the labor movement at its peak of membership and power. Among them are Richard Lester, *As Unions Mature* (New York, 1956); Paul Jacobs, *The State of the Unions* (New York, 1963); Paul E. Sultan, *The Disenchanted Unionist* (New York, 1964); Sidney Lens, *The Crisis of American Labor* (New York, 1959); B. J. Widick, *Labor Today: The Triumphs and Failures of Unionism in the United States* (New York, 1964); and William Serrin, *The Company and the Union: The "Civilized" Relations of the General Motors Corporation and the United Automobile Workers* (New York, 1970).

For a closer look at postwar workers rather than the institutions of labor, one might turn to Richard Sennett and Jonathan Cobb, *The Hidden Injuries of Class* (New York, 1972); Robert Blauner, *Alienation and Freedom* (Chicago, 1964); William Kornblum, *Blue-Collar Community* (Chicago, 1974); Bennett Berger, *Working-Class Suburb: A Study of Auto Workers in Suburbia* (Berkeley, CA, 1960); Stanley Aronowitz, *False Promises: The Making of American Working-Class Consciousness* (New York, 1973); Irving Howe (ed.), *The World of the Blue-Collar Worker* (New York, 1972); Lillian Rubin, *Worlds of Pain: Life in a Working-Class Family* (New York, 1976); and the insightful interviews gathered by Studs Terkel in *Working* (New York, 1972); for a more general and statistical overview, see Andrew Levinson, *The Working-Class Majority* (New York, 1974); and, finally, for a more recent and more historical perspective on working-class culture, see Lisa Fine, *The Story of Reo Joe: Work, Kin, and Community in Autotown* (Philadelphia, 2004).

The Cold War's impact on labor, and the unions' role in that conflict, has been the subject of a variety of studies of varying quality. Two early and conventional studies from an anticommunist perspective are David J. Saposs, *Communism in American Unions* (New York, 1959); and Max M. Kampelman, *The Communist Party vs. the C.I.O.* (New York, 1957). A group of more judicious studies includes Bert Cochran, *Labor and Communism: The Conflict that Shaped American Unions* (Princeton, NJ, 1977); Harvey Levenstein, *Communism, Anticommunism, and the CIO* (Westport, CT, 1981); and Roger Keeran, *The Communist Party and the Auto Workers' Unions* (Bloomington, IN, 1980), a far more favorable portrait of communist policy than usual. John Hoerr examines the role of the Catholic Church in the conflict in *Harry, Tom, and Father Rice: Accusation and Betrayal in America's Cold War* (Pittsburgh, 2005). Two books present sharply conflicting versions of American labor's role in the Cold War abroad: Ronald Radosh, *American Labor and United States Foreign Policy* (New York, 1969) blisters the labor movement's foreign policy; Roy Godson, *American*

Labor and European Politics: The AFL as a Transnational Force (New York, 1976), defends the AFL-CIO. For a more recent study critical of AFL and CIO interventions in Italy, see Ronald Filipelli, *American Labor and Postwar Italy, 1943–1953: A Study of Cold War Politics* (Stanford, CA, 1989). Edmond F. Wehrle has written a judicious examination of the AFL-CIO's quixotic attempt to intervene in the Southeast Asian quagmire: *Between A River and A Mountain: The AFL-CIO and the Vietnam War* (Ann Arbor, MI, 2005).

Decline and Crisis: The Labor Movement since the 1970s

One of the best ways to understand the protracted and steady decline of the labor movement in size and influence is by examining the history and development of the business counterattack against trade unions. A good book to begin with is Sanford Jacoby, *Modern Manors: Welfare Capitalism since the New Deal* (Princeton, NJ, 1997), which shows how even during the New Deal and World War II years several large corporations kept unions at bay. Sidney Fine, “*Without Blare of Trumpets*”: *Walter Drew, the National Erectors' Association, and the Open Shop Movement, 1903–1957* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1995), does much to explain the historical roots of antiunionism in the United States, as do two books by Howell J. Harris: *The Right to Manage: Industrial Relations Policies of American Business in the 1940s* (Madison, WI, 1982) and *Bloodless Victories: The Rise and Fall of the Open Shop in the Philadelphia Metal Trades* (New York, 2000). Elizabeth Fones-Wolf describes a corporate public relations campaign in *Selling Free Enterprise: The Business Assault on Labor* (Urbana, IL, 1994). Thomas Geoghegan, *Which Side Are You On? Trying to Be For Labor When it's Flat on its Back* (New York, 1992), tells a similar story. Two fine studies of citywide antiunionism are William Millikan, *A Union against Unions: The Minneapolis Citizens Alliance and its Fight Against Organized Labor* (St. Paul, MN, 2001); and Tula Connell, *Conservative Counterrevolution: Challenging Liberalism in 1950s Milwaukee* (Urbana, IL, 2016). Kimberly Phillips-Fein traces the rise of conservative political opposition to labor power and influence in *Invisible Hands: The Making of the Conservative Movement from the New Deal to Reagan* (New York, 2009).

Books that examine the nation's changing political economy and its adverse impact on workers and unions are: Judith Stein, *Pivotal Decade: How the United States Traded Factories for Finance in the Seventies* (New Haven, CT, 2010); Elizabeth Tandy Shermer, *Sunbelt Capitalism: Phoenix and the Transformation of American Politics* (Philadelphia, 2013); Marc Levinson, *The Box: How the Shipping Container Made the World Smaller and the World Economy Bigger* (Princeton, NJ, 2006); and Shane Hamilton, *Trucking Country: The Road to America's Wal-Mart Economy* (Princeton, NJ, 2008). Jefferson R. Cowie's *Stayin' Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (New York, 2010) shows how the 1970s constituted a turning point in the history of American labor. Among the best volumes dealing with the rising

influence of business over politics and the organization of work in this period are: Nelson Lichtenstein (ed.), *American Capitalism: Social Thought and Political Economy in the Twentieth Century* (Philadelphia, 2006); Nelson Lichtenstein and Elizabeth Tandy Shermer (eds.), *The Right and Labor in America: Politics, Ideology, and Imagination* (Philadelphia, 2012); and Kim Phillips-Fein and Julian E. Zelizer (eds.), *What's Good for Business: Business and American Politics since World War II* (New York, 2012).

Two sweeping syntheses describe the larger economy in the early twenty-first century: Paul Krugman, *The Conscience of a Liberal* (New York, 2007); and Robert Reich, *Supercapitalism: The Transformation of Business, Democracy, and Everyday Life* (New York, 2007). Three essential books describe the Walmart model and its influence: Nelson Lichtenstein (ed.), *Wal-Mart: The Face of Twenty-First-Century Capitalism* (New York, 2009); Nelson Lichtenstein, *The Retail Revolution: How Wal-Mart Created a Brave New World of Business* (New York, 2010); and Bethany Moreton, *To Serve God and Wal-Mart: The Making of Christian Free Enterprise* (Cambridge, MA, 2009). David Weil's *The Fissured Workplace: Why Work Became So Bad for So Many and What Can Be Done to Improve It* (Cambridge, MA, 2014) analyzes the impact of supply chains, franchises, and subcontracting on workers, while Erin Hatton's *The Temp Economy: From Kelly Girls to Permatemps in Postwar America* (Philadelphia, 2011) shows how temp agencies helped change employer–employee relations. A volume published periodically in recent years by the Economic Policy Institute, Lawrence Mishel et al., *The State of Working America* (Ithaca, NY, 2012), offers full data on employment, wage rates, annual earnings, and cost of living. Peter Edelman, *So Rich, So Poor: Why It's So Hard to End Poverty in America* (New York, 2012), examines the failure of public policy to eliminate poverty and need as well as to provide full employment.

A number of books shed light on workers' experiences coping with a workplace and job market that have become less favorable. Barbara Ehrenreich presents a first-hand journalistic account of the plight of contemporary low-wage workers in *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America* (New York, 2001). Even better on that subject because low-wage and exploited workers frequently speak for themselves in its pages is Steven Greenhouse, *The Big Squeeze: Tough Times for the American Worker* (New York, 2008). Louis Uchitelle looks at the experience of Americans laid off before the Great Recession in *The Disposable American: Layoffs and Their Consequences* (New York, 2006), while George Packer digs deeply in the post-recession experience of workers in *The Unwinding: An Inner History of the New America* (New York, 2013). Guy Standing explores the travails of the casualized workers in *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class* (London, 2011).

Among books that take a more favorable view of unions or describe union success, the following stand out: Richard B. Freeman and James L. Medoff, *What Do Unions Do?* (New York, 1984); Paul C. Weiler, *Governing the Workplace: The Future of Labor and Employment Law* (Cambridge, MA, 1990), which suggests how changes in

labor law can protect workers and promote unionization; Leon Fink and Brian Greenberg, *Upheaval in the Quiet Zone: A History of the Hospital Workers' Union, Local 1199* (Urbana, IL, 1989) deal with a union that had success; John P. Hoerr, *We Can't Eat Prestige: The Women Who Organized Harvard* (Philadelphia, 1997) and Paul Johnston, *Success While Others Fail: Social Movement Unionism and the Public Workplace* (Ithaca, NY, 1994) examine other successful unionizing campaigns. Ruth Milkman analyzes the resiliency and creativity of unions in Los Angeles in *LA Story: Immigrant Workers and the Future of the US Labor Movement* (New York, 2006). Tom Juravich and Kate Bronfenbrenner describe a rare 1990s victory for industrial unionism in *Ravenswood: The Steelworkers' Victory and the Revival of American Labor* (Ithaca, NY, 1999). Stephanie Luce, *Fighting for a Living Wage* (Ithaca, NY, 2004) and Robert Pollin et al., *A Measure of Fairness: The Economics of Living Wages and Minimum Wages in the United States* (Ithaca, NY, 2008) deal with another arena in which labor has enjoyed some success.

Special Studies

There are many studies dealing with various aspects of the history of workers and the labor movement. The following represent a highly selective sampling. One area drawing recent scholarly attention concerns the interactions between US labor systems and American imperialism. A good overview of the field can be found in Daniel Bender and Jana Lipman (eds.), *Making the Empire Work: Labor and United States Imperialism* (New York, 2015). Two of the best individual works are Julie Greene, *The Canal Builders: Making America's Empire at the Panama Canal* (New York, 2009); and Jana Lipman, *Guantánamo: A Working-Class History between Empire and Revolution* (Berkeley, CA, 2008). Similarly, a number of prominent studies have taken a global or comparative approach to US labor history. Beverly Silver, *Forces of Labor: Workers' Movements and Globalization Since 1870* (New York, 2003) and Stephanie Luce, *Labor Movements: Global Perspectives* (Malden, MA, 2014) are good places to start for a global perspective. Among the best comparative studies are: Andrew G. Lawrence, *Employer and Worker Collective Action: A Comparative Study of Germany, South Africa, and the United States* (New York, 2014); John H. M. Laslett, *Colliers Across the Sea: A Comparative Study of Class Formation in Scotland and the American Midwest, 1830–1924* (Urbana, IL, 2000); and Colin J. Davis, *Waterfront Revolts: New York and London Dockworkers, 1946–61* (Urbana, IL, 2003).

Scholars are just beginning to investigate the intersection of food history and labor history and relations between labor and environmentalism. For an introduction to the overlap of food and labor, see: "Food and Work in the Americas," a special issue of *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas*, 12:1/2 (2015); and Steve Striffler, *Chicken: The Dangerous Transformation of America's Favorite Food* (New Haven, CT, 2005). Two books that introduce the topic of labor and environmentalism

are Brian K. Obach, *Labor and the Environmental Movement: The Quest for Common Ground* (Cambridge, MA, 2004) and Timothy Minchin, *Forging a Common Bond: Labor and Environmental Activism during the BASF Lockout* (Tallahassee, FL, 2002).

The experience of joblessness gets attention in a number of fine books, including: Frank Tobias Higbie, *Indispensable Outcasts: Hobo Workers & Community in the American Midwest, 1880–1930* (Urbana, IL, 2003); Alexander Keyssar, *Out of Work: The First Century of Unemployment in Massachusetts* (New York, 1986); and Peter R. Shergold, *Working-Class Life: The “American Standard of Living” in Comparative Perspective, 1899–1913* (Pittsburgh, 1982).

For particular aspects of labor political action, see J. David Greenstone, *Labor in American Politics* (New York, 1969); James C. Foster, *The Union Politic: The CIO Political Action Committee* (Columbia, MO, 1975); and Gary M. Fink, *Labor’s Search for Political Order: The Political Behavior of the Missouri Labor Movement, 1890–1940* (Columbia, MO, 1973). On ideological conflicts, see Milton Derber, *The American Idea of Industrial Democracy, 1865–1965* (Urbana, IL, 1970). For a more recent look at the same subject, see the collection of essays edited by Howell John Harris and Nelson Lichtenstein, *Industrial Democracy in America: The Ambiguous Promise* (New York, 1993).

Several especially interesting books have been written about occupational health and safety. Start with these works of Alan Derickson, the leading scholar of the subject: *Workers’ Health, Workers’ Democracy: The Western Miners’ Struggle, 1891–1925* (Ithaca, NY, 1988); *Black Lung: Anatomy of a Public Health Disaster* (Ithaca, NY, 1998); and *Dangerously Sleepy: Overworked Americans and the Cult of Manly Wakefulness* (Philadelphia, 2013). Among the most interesting additions to this literature are: Gerald Markowitz and David Rosner, *Deadly Dust: Silicosis and the Politics of Occupational Disease in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton, NJ, 1991); Claudia Clark, *Radium Girls: Women and Industrial Health Reform, 1910–1935* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1997); and Christopher C. Sellers, *Hazards of the Job: From Industrial Disease to Environmental Health Science* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1997). On a topic related to industrial accidents and workers’ health, Price Fishback and Shawn E. Kantor, in *A Prelude to the Welfare State: The Origins of Workers’ Compensation* (Chicago, 2000), offer an econometric analysis of the subject.

In a different vein, Walter Licht describes how workers actually obtained jobs in a single community in *Getting Work: Philadelphia, 1840–1950* (Cambridge, MA, 1992). Bruce Kaufman treats the origins, evolution, and transformation of the academic and policy field known as industrial relations in his *The Origins and Evolution of the Field of Industrial Relations in the United States* (Ithaca, NY, 1992). A book that explores imaginatively the concept of an “American standard of living” is Lawrence B. Glickman, *A Living Wage: American Workers and the Making of Consumer Society* (Ithaca, NY, 1997). An equally revealing study of a city in which workers and unions

achieved much influence is Mary L. Wingerd, *Claiming the City: Politics, Faith, and the Power of Place in St. Paul* (Ithaca, NY, 2001). Two books probe immigration from different angles: Bruno Ramirez, *Crossing the 49th Parallel: Migration from Canada to the United States, 1900–1930* (Ithaca, NY, 2001), sheds light on a little-noted aspect of immigration to the United States; and Vernon M. Briggs Jr., *Immigration and American Unionism* (Ithaca, NY, 2001), argues that post-1965 mass immigration has undermined the material standards of US-born workers and weakened their unions. Finally, Michael Zweig, *The Working-Class Majority: America's Best Kept Secret* (Ithaca, NY, 2000), insists that as the new millennium opened most Americans still worked for wages.

For the story of corruption in the labor movement it would be helpful to examine Robert F. Kennedy, *The Enemy Within* (New York, 1960); John Hutchinson, *The Imperfect Union: A History of Corruption in American Trade Unions* (New York, 1970); Andrew Wender Cohen, *The Racketeer's Progress: Chicago and the Struggle for the Modern American Economy* (Cambridge, MA, 2004); and James B. Jacobs, *Mobsters, Unions, and Feds: The Mafia and the American Labor Movement* (New York, 2006).

A series of books probes a subject less examined recently: occupational, social, and geographical mobility among workers. The best in this vein are: Stephen Thernstrom, *Poverty and Progress: Social Mobility in a Nineteenth-Century City* (Cambridge, MA, 1964) and *The Other Bostonians: Poverty and Progress in an American Metropolis* (Cambridge, MA, 1973); Clyde and Sally Griffen, *Natives and Newcomers: The Ordering of Opportunity in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Poughkeepsie* (Cambridge, MA, 1978); Thomas Kessner, *The Golden Door: Italian and Jewish Immigrant Mobility in New York City, 1880–1915* (New York, 1977); and John Bodnar et al., *Lives of Their Own: Blacks, Italians, and Poles in Pittsburgh, 1900–1960* (Urbana, IL, 1982).

Biography and Autobiography

Biography and autobiography offer the means to examine more personal aspects of labor history. Brief sketches of hundreds of labor leaders can be found in Gary Fink (ed.), *Biographical Dictionary of American Labor Leaders* (Westport, CT, 1984). Melvyn Dubofsky and Warren Van Tine have edited a collection of essays that treat a diverse group of labor leaders: *Labor Leaders in America* (Urbana, IL, 1987). Terence V. Powderly wrote two autobiographies: *Thirty Years of Labor* (Columbus, OH, 1889) and *The Path I Trod* (New York, 1940). Craig Phelan has written a new biography of Terence V. Powderly, *Grand Master Workman: Terence Powderly and the Knights of Labor* (Westport, CT, 2000). Stuart B. Kaufman began the project to edit the papers of Samuel Gompers and carried it successfully through the first six volumes, *The Samuel Gompers Papers* (Urbana, IL, 1986–1997); after Kaufman's death, Peter Albert assumed the editorship and carried the project to completion with the final seven volumes (Urbana, IL, 1999–2013). Samuel Gompers wrote a lengthy

autobiography, *Seventy Years of Life and Labor* (New York, 1927), which Nick Salvatore edited and abridged in a new version (Ithaca, NY, 1986). Bernard Mandel wrote the most complete biography of the longtime AFL president, *Samuel Gompers* (Yellow Springs, OH, 1963). A sprightly, shorter treatment is Harold Livesay, *Samuel Gompers and Organized Labor in America* (Boston, 1978). Craig Phelan has written the biography of John Mitchell, *Divided Loyalties: The Public and Private Lives of Labor Leader John Mitchell* (Albany, NY, 1994). A readable, dramatic narrative of the life of Eugene V. Debs can be found in Ray Ginger, *The Bending Cross: A Biography of Eugene V. Debs* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1949). A more recent, scholarly, and accurate biography is Nick Salvatore, *Eugene V. Debs: Citizen and Socialist* (Urbana, IL, 1982). Two autobiographies written by radical labor leaders are William D. Haywood, *Bill Haywood's Book* (New York, 1929) and Ralph Chaplin, *Wobbly: The Rough and Tumble Story of an American Radical* (Chicago, 1948). Hutchins Hapgood's lively biography of early twentieth-century labor agitator Anton Johanssen is back in print, edited by James R. Barrett, *The Spirit of Labor* (Urbana, IL, 2004). Peter Carlson has written a lively journalistic version of Haywood's life: *Roughneck: The Life and Times of Big Bill Haywood* (New York, 1983). Melvyn Dubofsky has written a briefer version of the same life, "*Big Bill*" *Haywood* (Manchester, England, 1987). And Ellen Rosen has written a biography of her father, E. F. Doree, a longtime IWW activist and leader, *A Wobbly Life* (Detroit, 2004). For informative biographies of two leaders of the US Left who were shaped by early involvement with the IWW, see James R. Barrett, *William Z. Foster and the Tragedy of American Radicalism* (Urbana, IL, 2011); and Bryan D. Palmer, *James P. Cannon and the Origins of the American Revolutionary Left, 1890–1928* (Urbana, IL, 2010).

Among the better biographies of more recent labor leaders are Saul Alinsky, *John L. Lewis: An Unauthorized Biography* (New York, 1949); Melvyn Dubofsky and Warren Van Tine, *John L. Lewis: A Biography* (New York, 1977; abr. edn, Urbana, IL, 1986) is more thorough, accurate, and documented; Robert H. Zieger, *John L. Lewis: Labor Leader* (Boston, 1988) is briefer. Steven Fraser, *Labor Will Rule: Sidney Hillman and the Rise of American Labor* (New York, 1991) is now the standard book on its subject; for the life of Hillman's counterpart in the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, see Robert D. Parmet, *The Master of Seventh Avenue: David Dubinsky and the American Labor Movement* (New York, 2006). John Barnard's *Walter Reuther and the Rise of the United Auto Workers* (Boston, 1983) replaced previous biographies of that union official, but it, in turn, has been surpassed by Nelson Lichtenstein, *The Most Dangerous Man in Detroit: Walter Reuther and the Fate of American Labor* (New York, 1995). Ralph and Estelle James wrote the first, and still in some ways best, biography of Jimmy Hoffa, *Hoffa and the Teamsters* (Princeton, NJ, 1965); two more recent, but not necessarily better, biographies of the Teamster leader are: Arthur A. Sloane, *Hoffa* (Cambridge, MA, 1991); and Thaddeus Russell, *Out of the Jungle: Jimmy Hoffa and the Remaking of the American Working Class* (New York, 2001). Two excellent biographies of the most famous African American labor leader are: Jervis Anderson, *A. Philip Randolph: A Biographical*

Portrait (New York, 1972); and Paula F. Pfeffer, *A. Philip Randolph: Pioneer of the Civil Rights Movement* (Baton Rouge, LA, 1990). Charles Larrowe's *Harry Bridges: The Rise and Fall of Radical Labor in the United States* (New York, 1972) remains the book to read about the Pacific Coast waterfront labor leader. Joseph Goulden, *Meany* (New York, 1972), presents an admiring picture of the longtime AFL-CIO president. For the story of an interesting but minor figure in the labor movement, see Robert Bussel, *From Harvard to the Ranks of Labor: Powers Hapgood and the American Working Class* (University Park, PA, 1999). Karen Pasterello has restored to life the wife of Sidney Hillman and a labor leader in her own right in *A Power Among Them: Bessie Abramowitz Hillman and the Making of the Amlagamated Clothing Workers* (Urbana, IL, 2008). Richard Griswold Del Castillo and Richard A. Garcia have recreated the life of a farmworker leader in *Cesar Chavez: A Triumph of Spirit* (Norman, OK, 1995). Among recent biographies, one truly shines: Elliott J. Gorn, *Mother Jones: The Most Dangerous Woman in America* (New York, 2001), a brilliant reconstruction of a shadowy life. Finally, Paul Buhle has written a dyspeptic group biography of three leaders of the AFL-CIO in his *Taking Care of Business: Samuel Gompers, George Meany, Lane Kirkland and the Tragedy of American Labor* (New York, 1999).

Three excellent autobiographies by labor figures prominent in the 1930s are: Len DeCaux, *Labor Radical* (Boston, 1970); Wyndham Mortimer, *Organize!* (Boston, 1971); and Nell Irvin Painter (ed.), *Hosea Hudson: His Life as a Negro Communist in the South* (Cambridge, MA, 1979).

Radicalism and Strikes

The story of radicalism and strikes has been narrated in such general studies as Louis Adamic, *Dynamite* (New York, 1931) and Samuel Yellen, *American Labor Struggles* (New York, 1936). Recent books are more nuanced and scholarly. For a collection of essays covering most aspects of the relationship between the Left and labor, see Seymour Martin Lipset and John H. M. Laslett, *Failure of a Dream: Essays in the History of American Socialism* (Berkeley, CA, 1984). An excellent book focused on the relationship between the Socialist Party of America and the trade unions is John H. M. Laslett, *Labor and the Left* (New York, 1970). More general studies that examine labor and the Left include Daniel Bell, *Marxian Socialism in the United States* (Princeton, NJ, 1967); James R. Green, *Grass-Roots Socialism: Radical Movements in the Southwest, 1895–1943* (Baton Rouge, LA, 1978); Carlos A. Schwantes, *Radical Heritage: Labor, Socialism, and Reform in Washington State and British Columbia, 1885–1917* (Seattle, 1979); Rosemary Feuer, *Radical Unionism in the Midwest, 1900–1950* (Urbana, IL, 2006). For a scathing critique of the old American left, see Aileen Kraditor, *The Radical Persuasion* (Baton Rouge, LA, 1981); and for a more sympathetic recent treatment, Michael Kazin, *American Dreamers: How the Left Changed a Nation* (New York,

2011). Two other significant books dealing with radicalism and unions are Judith Stepan-Norris and Maurice Zeitlin, *Left Out: Reds and America's Industrial Unions* (New York, 2003), a study of the CIO's left-wing unions; and James J. Lorence, *The Suppression of Salt of the Earth: How Hollywood, Big Labor, and Politicians Blacklisted a Movie in Cold War America* (Albuquerque, 1999).

The story of the most romantic of radical labor organizations, the IWW, is covered in the following: Melvyn Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All: A History of the IWW* (New York, 1969; abr. edn., Urbana, IL, 2000); Joseph R. Conlin, *Bread and Roses Too: Studies of the Wobblies* (Westport, CT, 1969) and ed., *At the Point of Production: The Local History of the IWW* (Westport, CT, 1981); and Patrick Renshaw, *The Wobblies* (Garden City, NY, 1967). For a perceptive study of one of the IWW's most famous struggles, see Steve Golin, *The Fragile Bridge: Paterson Silk Strike, 1913* (Philadelphia, 1988); and for a fascinating collection of IWW documents, Joyce Kornbluh (ed.), *Rebel Voices: An IWW Anthology* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1964). Other books that treat various aspects of IWW history include Nigel Sellars, *Oil, Wheat, & Wobblies: The Industrial Workers of the World in Oklahoma, 1905–1930* (Norman, OK, 1998); Howard Kimeldorf, *Battling for American Labor: Wobblies, Craft Workers, and the Making of the Union Movement* (Berkeley, CA, 1999); Michael M. Topp, *Those Without a Country: The Political Culture of Italian American Syndicalists* (Minneapolis, 2001); and Peter Cole, *Wobblies on the Waterfront: Interracial Unionism in Progressive Era Philadelphia* (Urbana, IL, 2007).

For tales of strikes and violence, see Jeremy Brecher, *Strike!* (rev. edn., Oakland, CA, 2014); James R. Green, *The Devil is Here in These Hills: West Virginia's Coal Miners and Their Battle for Freedom* (New York, 2015); Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones, *Violence and Reform in American History* (New York, 1978); Wayne G. Broehl Jr., *The Molly Maguires* (Cambridge, MA, 1964); Robert V. Bruce, *1877: Year of Violence* (Indianapolis, 1959); Donald L. McMurray, *The Great Burlington Strike of 1888* (Cambridge, MA, 1956); Paul Avrich, *The Haymarket Tragedy* (Princeton, NJ, 1984); and for a more general and popular narrative of the same event, read James R. Green, *Death in the Haymarket: A Story of Chicago, The First Labor Movement, and the Bombing that Divided Gilded Age America* (New York, 2007); Paul Krause, *The Battle for Homestead, 1880–1892: Politics, Culture, and Steel* (Pittsburgh, 1992); for a moving, prize-winning study of one of the nation's most violent and costly labor conflicts, see Thomas G. Andrews, *Killing for Coal: America's Deadliest Labor War* (Cambridge, MA, 2009). Further studies of labor unrest include Graham Adams Jr., *Age of Industrial Violence, 1910–1915* (New York, 1966); John Hevener, *Which Side Are You On? The Harlan County Coal Miners, 1931–1939* (Urbana, IL, 1978); David A. Corbin, *Life, Work, and Rebellion in the Coal Fields: The Southern West Virginia Coal Miners, 1880–1922* (Urbana, IL, 1981); John A. Salmond, *The General Textile Strike of 1934: From Maine to Alabama* (Columbia, MO, 2002); and for essays about separate strikes of note, consult Dana Frank, Robin D. G. Kelley, and Howard Zinn, *Three Strikes: Miners, Musicians, Salesgirls, and the Fighting Spirit of*

Labor's Last Century (Boston, 2001). For a more general and theoretical treatment of the subject, see Josiah Bartlett Lambert, *"If the Workers Took a Notion": The Right to Strike and American Political Development* (Ithaca, NY, 2005).

Several books tell the story of notable strike defeats and explain the declining use of the strike. Joseph A. McCartin's *Collision Course: Ronald Reagan, the Air Traffic Controllers and the Strike that Changed America* (New York, 2011) does so for the 1981 PATCO strike. In *Copper Crucible: How the Arizona Miners' Strike of 1983 Recast Labor–Management Relations in America* (Ithaca, NY, 1995), Jonathan D. Rosenblum describes how a powerful corporation used the law and state power to defeat its unionized workers. Julius G. Getman's *The Betrayal of Local 14* (Ithaca, NY, 1998); Peter Rachleff's *Hard-Pressed in the Heartland: The Hormel Strike and the Future of the Labor Movement* (Boston, 1999); and Steven K. Ashby and C.J. Hawking's *Staley: The Fight for a New American Labor Movement* (Urbana, IL, 2009) tell similar stories involving Maine paper workers, Iowa meatpackers, and Illinois agricultural processors. Chris Rhomberg, *The Broken Table: The Detroit Newspaper Strike and the State of American Labor* (New York, 2012), explains why strikes no longer provide much leverage in bargaining. Joe Burns, *Strike Back: Using the Militant Tactics of Labor's Past to Reignite Public Sector Unionism Today* (Brooklyn, 2014) argues for the necessity of resurrecting the strike if labor is to be revived.

Individual Unions and Industries

The histories of individual unions and their industries can provide a rewarding approach to labor history. Among the best books in that genre are two classics by David Brody: *Steelworkers in America: The Non-union Era* (Cambridge, MA, 1960) and *The Butcher Workmen: A Study in Unionization* (Cambridge, MA, 1964). Others include Robert Christie, *Empire in Wood: A History of the Carpenters' Union* (Ithaca, NY, 1956); Daniel J. Leab, *A Union of Individuals: The Formation of the Newspaper Guild, 1933–1936* (New York, 1970); Martin Segal, *The Rise of the United Association: National Unionism in the Pipe Trades* (Cambridge, MA, 1970); Thomas R. Brooks, *Communications Workers of America: The Story of a Union* (New York, 1977); Richard Lingenfelter, *The Hardrock Miners: A History of Mining Labor in the American West, 1863–1893* (Berkeley, CA, 1979); Mark Wyman, *Hard Rock Epic: Western Miners and the Industrial Revolution, 1860–1910* (Berkeley, CA, 1979); Steven Brill, *The Teamsters* (New York, 1978); Robert Ozanne, *A Century of Labor–Management Relations at McCormick and International Harvester* (Madison, WI, 1967); Mark Perlman, *The Machinists: A New Study in American Trade Unionism* (Cambridge, MA, 1967); David Bensman, *The Practice of Solidarity: American Hat Finishers in the Nineteenth Century* (Urbana, IL, 1985); Daniel Nelson, *American Rubber Workers, 1900–1941* (Princeton, NJ, 1988); Gerald Zahavi, *Workers, Managers, and Welfare Capitalism: The Shoeworkers and Tanners of Endicott-*

Johnson, 1890–1950 (Urbana, IL, 1988); Jacquelyn D. Hall et al., *Like a Family: The Making of a Southern Cotton Mill World* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1987); James R. Barrett, *Work and Community in the Jungle: Chicago's Packinghouse Workers, 1894–1922* (Urbana, IL, 1987); Wilson J. Warren, *Tied to the Great Packing Machine: The Midwest and Meatpacking* (Iowa City, 2006); Robert H. Zieger, *Rebuilding the Pulp and Paper Workers' Union, 1933–1941* (Knoxville, TN, 1984); Stephen Meyer III, *The Five-Dollar Day: Labor Management and Social Control in the Ford Motor Company, 1908–1921* (Albany, NY, 1981); Ronald W. Schatz, *The Electrical Workers: A History of Labor at General Electric and Westinghouse, 1923–1960* (Urbana, IL, 1983); Michael Kazin, *Barons of Labor: The San Francisco Building Trades and Union Power in the Progressive Era* (Urbana, IL, 1987); Walter Licht, *Working for the Railroad: The Organization of Work in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton, NJ, 1983); Shelton Stromquist, *A Generation of Boomers: The Pattern of Railroad Labor Conflict in Nineteenth-Century America* (Urbana, IL, 1987); William Harris, *Keeping the Faith: A. Philip Randolph, Milton Webster, and the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters* (Urbana, IL, 1977); Dick Meister and Ann Loftis, *A Long Time Coming: The Struggle to Unionize America's Farm Workers* (New York, 1977); and Cletus E. Daniel, *Bitter Harvest: A History of California Farm Workers, 1870–1941* (Ithaca, NY, 1981). For the most detailed and complete history of agricultural workers in California, see Richard Street, *Beasts of the Field: A Narrative History of California Farm Workers, 1769–1913* (Stanford, CA, 2004); David Katzman, *Seven Days a Week: Women and Domestic Service in Industrializing America* (New York, 1978); Daniel Sutherland, *Americans and Their Servants: Domestic Service in the United States from 1800 to 1920* (Baton Rouge, LA, 1981); Ray Marshall, *Labor in the South* (Cambridge, MA, 1967); Philip Taft, *Organizing Dixie: Alabama Workers in the Industrial Era* (Westport, CT, 1981); and Liesl Orenic, *On the Ground: Labor Struggle in the American Airline Industry* (Urbana, 2011).

Among the unions that have received the most extensive revisionist treatment in recent years are the United Farm Workers and the Teamsters. Matthew Garcia's *From the Jaws of Victory: The Triumph and Tragedy of Cesar Chavez and the Farm Worker Movement* (Berkeley, CA, 2012), Miriam Pawel's *The Union of Their Dreams: Power, Hope, and Struggle in Cesar Chavez's Farm Worker Movement* (New York 2009), and Frank Bardacke's *Trampling Out the Vintage: Cesar Chavez and the Two Souls of the United Farm Workers* (London, 2011) all offer critical readings of the UFW and Cesar Chavez in particular. Marshall Ganz, who once organized for Chavez, focuses on what the UFW accomplished in its early years in *Why David Sometimes Wins: Leadership, Organization, and Strategy in the California Farm Worker Movement* (New York, 2009). David Witwer's *Corruption and Reform in the Teamsters Union* (Urbana, IL, 2003) and his *Shadow of the Racketeer: Scandal in Organized Labor* (Urbana, IL, 2009) delineate some of the causes and effects of Teamster corruption (with the latter book looking at other unions as well); Robert Bruno recounts a successful effort to clean up one local in *Reforming the Chicago Teamsters: The Story of Local 705* (DeKalb, 2003); and

Robert Bussel rescues two influential progressive Teamster leaders from obscurity with *Fighting for Total Person Unionism: Harold Gibbons, Ernest Calloway, and Working-Class Citizenship* (Urbana, IL, 2015).

Among other recent books that cover the history of unions and more conventional aspects of labor history, the following are worth mention: Clete Daniel, *Culture of Misfortune: An Interpretive History of Textile Unionism in the United States* (Ithaca, NY, 2001); James D. Rose, *Duquesne and the Rise of Steel Unionism* (Urbana, IL, 2001); James P. Kraft, *Stage to Studio: Musicians and the Sound Revolution, 1890–1950* (Baltimore, 1996); Gerald Horne, *Class Struggle in Hollywood, 1930–1950: Moguls, Mobsters, Stars, Reds, & Trade Unionists* (Austin, 2001); Mary H. Blewett, *Constant Turmoil: The Politics of Industrial Life in Nineteenth-Century New England* (Amherst, MA, 2000); David O. Stowell, *Streets, Railroads, and the Great Strike of 1877* (Chicago, 1999); David Palmer, *Organizing the Shipyards: Union Strategy in Three Northeastern Ports, 1935–1945* (Ithaca, NY, 1998); and Kenneth Fones-Wolf, *Glass Towns: Industry, Labor, and Political Economy in Appalachia, 1890–1930s* (Urbana, IL, 2007).

Labor in Literature and Culture

Literature has figured in American labor history from its earliest and has offered especially illuminating insights into the human dimensions of labor history. Labor reformer George Lippard published what was perhaps the country's first labor novel, *The Quaker City (or The Monks of Monk Hall)* (1845), which is now available in a reprint (Amherst, MA, 1995). The Knights of Labor resorted to novels to spread their message. Two such novels are reprinted in Mary G. Grimes (ed.), *Knights in Fiction: Two Labor Novels of the 1880s* (Urbana, IL, 1986). Among the best of the early novels on labor are two works: Upton Sinclair, *The Jungle* (New York, 1906), reprinted by the University of Illinois Press in 1989 and edited by the historian James Barrett; and Ernest Poole, *The Harbor* (New York, 1915). Three novels that capture well the pre-World War II immigrant experience are Thomas Bell, *Out of this Furnace* (New York, 1941; repr. Pittsburgh, 1976), a story that treats three generations of Slovak-American steelworkers; Anna Yeziarska, *Bread Givers* (New York, 1925; repr. New York, 1975), about Jewish immigrant workers and their families; and Pietro di Donato, *Christ in Concrete* (New York, 1939; repr. New York, 1975), which tells the story of an Italian construction worker and his family. William Attaway's *Blood on the Forge* (New York, 1941; repr. New York, 2005) tells the tale of black steelworkers, and provides a critical counterpoint to Thomas Bell's book. Another notable novel treating Jewish immigrant garment workers in New York is Meredith Tax, *Rivington Street* (New York, 1982). Enlightening fictional treatments of the 1920s and 1930s are Jack Conroy, *The Disinherited* (New York, 1933); Albert Halper, *The Foundry* (New York, 1934); Ruth McKenney, *Industrial Valley* (New York, 1939); John Steinbeck, *In Dubious Battle* (New York, 1936). For World War II and after, the following might be

read: Harriette Arnow, *The Dollmaker* (New York, 1972), a study of Appalachian migrants in wartime Detroit told from a woman's perspective; Chester Himes, *If He Hollers, Let Him Go* (New York, 1945), the story of African American shipyard workers in wartime Los Angeles; K. B. Gilden, *Between the Hills and the Sea* (New York, 1971), a tale of the Cold War in the Connecticut labor movement; and Harvey Swados, *On the Line* (Boston, 1957), fictional sketches of 1950s automobile assembly-line workers. A neglected novel, Robert Houston's *Bisbee '17* (New York, 1979), explores one of the more violent and dramatic episodes in American labor history, while Denise Giardina's *Storming Heaven* (New York, 1988) recounts the 1921 West Virginia miner's strike. Helena Maria Viramontes' *Under the Feet of Jesus* (New York, 1995) tells the story of a Chicana farmworker.

American labor has been the subject of much interest to poets over the years as well. A good place to start would be with the work of America's foremost Yiddish labor poet: Morris Rosenfeld, *Songs of Labor and Other Poems* (Boston, 1914), now available as an e-book. A survey of Depression-era poetry can be found in *You Work Tomorrow: An Anthology of American Labor Poetry, 1929–41* (Ann Arbor, MI, 2007), and Philip Levine, *What Work Is: Poems* (New York, 1991), contains pieces inspired by this poet laureate's experience on an auto assembly line.

For a survey of labor in film, see Tom Zaniello, *Working Stiffs, Union Maids, Reds, and Riffraff: An Expanded Guide to Films about Labor* (Ithaca, NY, 2003). And for an introduction to the role that music played in organizing, see Michael K. Honey, *Sharecropper's Troubadour: John L. Handcox, the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union, and the African American Song Tradition* (New York, 2013).

Recent History and Prospects

A number of books have advanced analyses of organized labor's struggles since 2000. Among the most interesting works are: Steve Early, *The Civil Wars in US Labor: Birth of a New Workers' Movement or Death Throes of the Old?* (Chicago, 2011) and *Save Our Unions: Dispatches from a Movement in Distress* (New York, 2013); Bill Fletcher Jr. and Fernando Gapasin, *Solidarity Divided: The Crisis in Organized Labor and a New Path toward Social Justice* (Berkeley, CA, 2008); Julius Getman, *Restoring the Power of Unions: It Takes a Movement* (New Haven, CT, 2010); Jane McAlevey and Bob Ostertag, *Raising Expectations (and Raising Hell): My Decade Fighting for the Labor Movement* (London, 2012); Thomas Juravich, *At the Altar of the Bottom Line: The Degradation of Work in the 21st Century* (Amherst, MA, 2013); and Jake Rosenfeld, *What Unions No Longer Do* (Cambridge, MA, 2014). Rick Fantasia and Kim Voss, *Hard Work: Remaking the American Labor Movement* (Berkeley, CA, 2004), suggest how unions can rebuild their vitality and strength. Andrew Battista, *The Revival of Labor Liberalism* (Urbana, IL, 2008), describes labor's successes and failures in building alliances with community reform organizations.

The foundational work on the leading “alt-labor” organizational form is Janice Fine, *Worker Centers: Organizing Communities at the Edge of the Dream* (Ithaca, NY, 2006). Ruth Milkman has done more than anyone to document experiments that have brought old labor and alt-labor together; see her *New Labor in New York: Precarious Workers and the Future of the Labor Movement* (Ithaca, NY, 2014) coedited with Ed Ott, and *Working for Justice: The LA Model of Organizing and Advocacy* (Ithaca, NY, 2010), coedited with Joshua Bloom and Victor Narro. The best treatment of one of organized labor's most recent success stories and most hotly contested battlegrounds is Eileen Boris and Jennifer Klein, *Caring for America: Home Health Workers in the Shadow of the Welfare State* (New York, 2012). Books that provide insights into recent organizing experiments include Vanessa Tait, *Poor Workers' Unions: Rebuilding Labor from Below* (Boston, 2008), Immanuel Ness (ed.), *New Forms of Worker Organization: The Syndicalist and Autonomist Restoration of Class-Struggle Unionism* (Oakland, CA, 2015), and Fran Quigley, *If We Can Win Here: The New Front Lines of the Labor Movement* (Ithaca, NY, 2015).

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Green, William:

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International Confederation of Free Trade Unions
International Fur and Leather Workers Union
International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU)
International Longshoremen and Warehousemen's Union (ILWU)
International Longshoremen's Association
International Printing Pressmen and Assistants' Union
International Typographical Union
International Union of Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers
International Union of Operating Engineers
International Union of Ship Carpenters and Caulkers
International Woodworkers of America
International Workingmen's Association
International Working People's Association
Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC)
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Ireland, John, Archbishop
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Knudsen, William S.

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La Follette Seamen's Act

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National Domestic Workers Alliance (NDWA)

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National Guest Workers Alliance (NWGA)

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Political Action Committee (CIO)

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Richmond Times Dispatch

Rights of Man to Property, The (Skidmore)

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Rivington, James

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Stephens, Uriah S.

Stern, Andrew (Andy)

Stevenson, Adlai E.

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Summers, Larry

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Teamsters, International Brotherhood of:

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Union Pacific Railroad, strike against

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Unite Here

United Automobile Workers (UAW):

GM strike (Flint); post-WWII strike; and GM contract in 1948; reaffiliation with AFL-CIO; militants in; and Japanese automobile companies; dispute with GM in 1998; in 2000 to present; lower wages for; contract challenges for

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United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners (UBC)

United Brotherhood of Railway Employees

United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers (UE, United Electrical Workers)

United Farm Workers of America (UFW)

United Food and Commercial Workers International Union (UFCW)

United Garment Workers

United Hatters

United Healthcare Workers West (UHW)

United Labor Policy Committee

United Metal Workers

United Mine Workers (UMW):

and early coal strikes; in progressive period; and 1919 strike; in 1920s; under New Deal; affiliation with the CIO; strikes in 1941–1950; membership of; in 1980s to present

United Parcel Service (UPS)

United States Bank

United States Chamber of Commerce

United States Steel Corporation (US Steel)

United Steel Workers of America (USW)

United Students Against Sweatshops (USAS)

United Textile Workers

U.S. Airways

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Van Buren, Martin

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Vietnam War

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Virginia Company

Virginia Gazette

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Wagner, Robert F.

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Wagner Act, see [National Labor Relations Act](#)

Walker, Scott

Wallace, Henry A.

Wall Street Journal

Walmart:

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Walsh, Frank P.

Walsh-Healey Public Contracts Act

Walton, Sam

Ware, Norman J.

War Labor Board, see [National War Labor Board](#)

War Labor Conference Board

War Labor Disputes Act, see [Smith-Connally Act](#)

War Manpower Commission

War Production Board

Washington, D.C., marches on

Washington Mutual

Washington Post

Washington Star

Webster, Daniel

Weekly Miner

Weil, David

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Whitman, Walt

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Wilkerson, James H.

Willard, Daniel

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Winthrop, John

Wobblies, see [Industrial Workers of the World \(IWW, Wobblies\)](#)

Woll, Matthew

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Women's Trade Union League

Wood, Leonard

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Working Man's Advocate (Chicago)

Working Man's Advocate (New York)

Working Men's Party

Workingmen's Party of New York

Works Progress Administration

World Federation of Trade Unions

World Trade Center towers

World Trade Organization (WTO)

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World War II:

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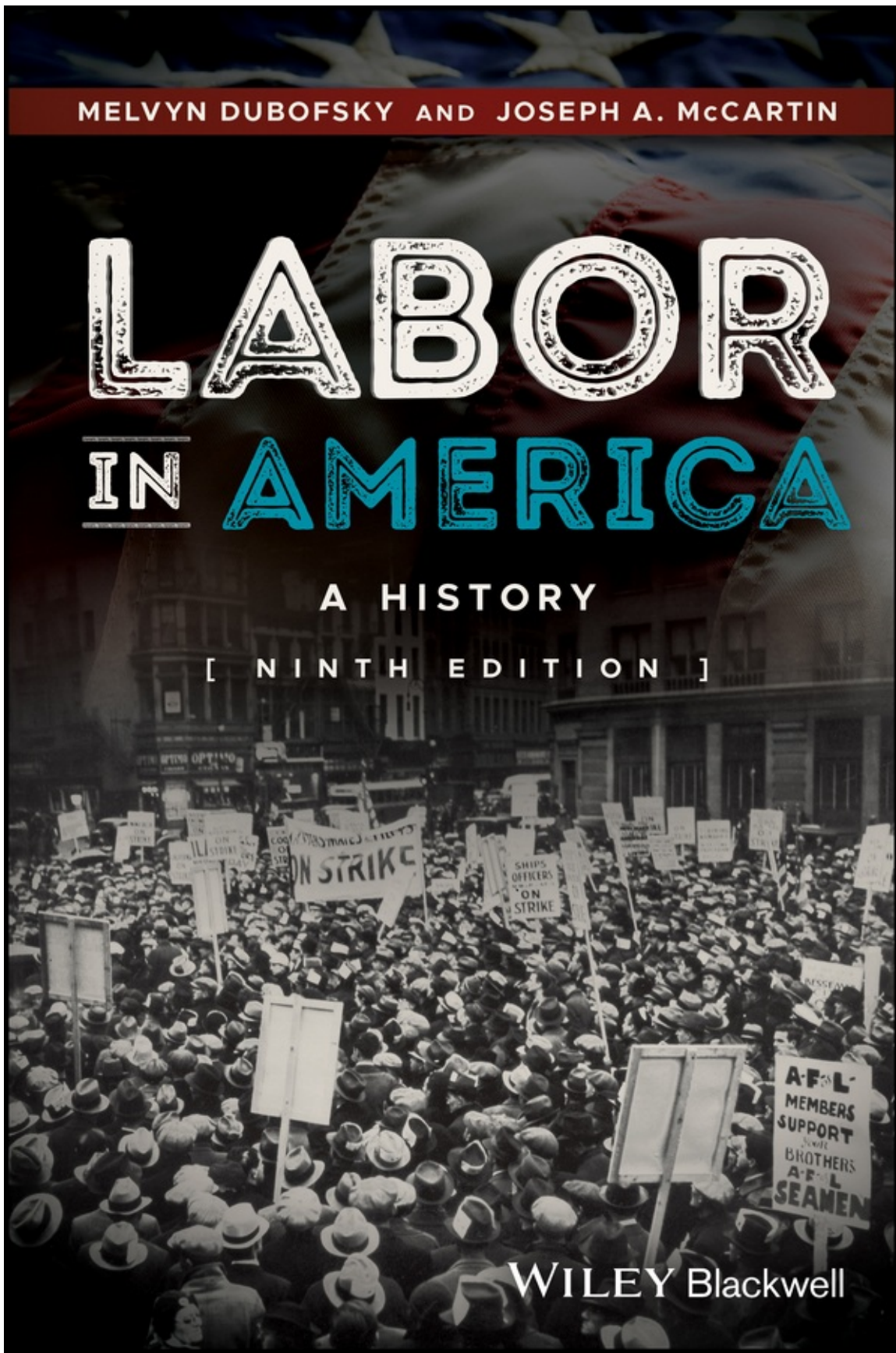
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