



THE

LABOR

STORY

FOREWORD

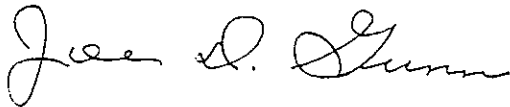
The Texas AFL-CIO is pleased to provide this booklet as a public service for the students of Texas—for the young men and women in our high schools and for the many adults in apprenticeship programs, labor studies courses, community colleges, universities and continuing education courses.

The history of the free trade union movement in America is a proud and colorful one. It is an integral part of our struggle through two centuries to preserve the dignity and worth of every individual as we work together for the common good. Texas, too, has its share of labor history, which does not receive proper attention in our textbooks.

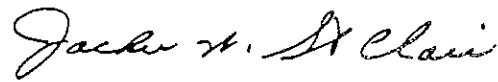
We wish to thank the Labor Studies program at the University of Kentucky for the national labor history in the first section of this publication. The essays on our Texas labor heritage are mostly the result of efforts by Dr. George Green and Dr. James Maroney. Because this publication was first published in 1983, this edition has been updated with the assistance of others, whom we also thank. Photographs are courtesy of the Labor Archives at the University of Texas and the Library of Congress.

We hope the information in this booklet will stimulate a desire among students to learn more about our union cause. To all the working people of Texas who are proud of their union heritage, we dedicate this work.

1990



Joe D. Gunn
President



Jackie St. Clair
Secretary-Treasurer

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BUILDERS OF AMERICA

The American colonies were developed in the eighteenth century by the British government, in a desperate attempt to solve the overpopulation problem which accompanied England's industrial revolution. England was suffering from too many people and too few resources; the colonies offered a solution to both sides of the problem.

Craftsmen, unable to find work in England, were eager to come to the new country, where ever increasing numbers of artisans and craftsmen were needed. The supply of skilled labor could never quite catch up with the demand, partly because so many of the craftsmen who arrived here laid aside their tools and took up farming. The majority of those who did continue to practice their trade settled in the Massachusetts colonies, which left the rest of the country in desperate need of skilled workers. To meet that need, the colonists made use of bound labor and slaves.

Human Beings For Sale

Very few of the laborers who wished to escape from Europe could afford to pay for their passage to America. Most of them bought their ticket to a new life by selling their freedom — an ironic way to enter the Land of the Free. About half of our founding fathers were indentured servants. As such, they comprised the largest single element of the colonial work force. Indentured servants were men, women, and children who signed "articles of indenture" before boarding ship, thereby reducing themselves to the level of slaves, totally without rights, for a certain period of years. Upon arrival in America, they were essentially auctioned off.

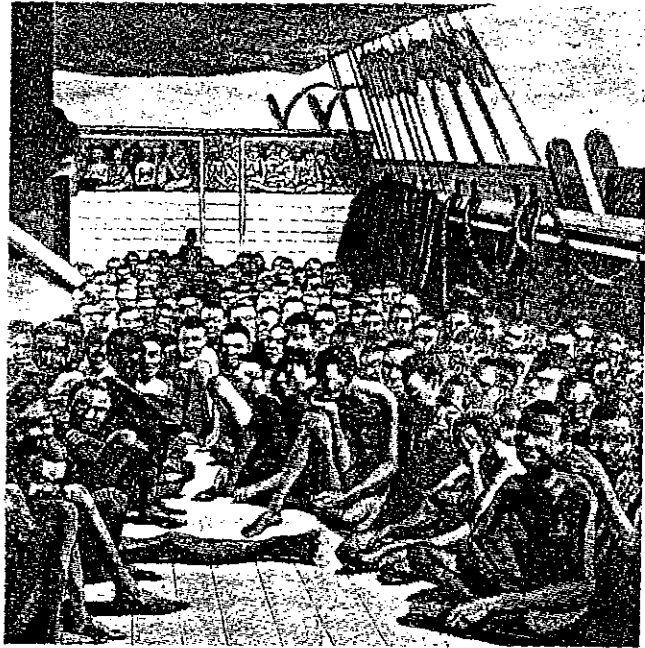


In its desperation to supply workers to the colonies, England adopted the practice of sentencing criminals to work in America, rather than shutting them up in the already overcrowded British prisons.

Along with the indentured servants and convicts came another group of laborers who were called "free-willers" — craftsmen who had paid for their passage on credit. They signed an agreement to work off the cost of transportation, thereby committing themselves to practicing their trade for a certain period of time in the New World.

One step below the bound laborers on the scale of human dignity were the slaves, who made up the main element of

the work force in the Southern colonies. The importation of slaves and the development of the slavery system became a major characteristic of the South. Like bound laborers, slaves were regarded as property and were totally powerless; the big difference was that their term of bondage was forever. Ironically, slaves often received better treatment from their master than did the bound laborers, since it was in the master's best economic interest to keep them healthy.



Life was bitter and hard for our laboring forefathers. They had come looking for the land of opportunity and found only degradation and misery. Many escaped illegally, as for example Benjamin Franklin, who found life as an indentured servant unbearable. Franklin had been working as a printer. Bound laborers and slaves, these workers could do nothing to change the system. However, those who endured the abuses of indentured servitude and eventually worked their way out of that purgatory, emerged as the most militant reformers among laborers. Having experienced firsthand the impact of a system that treated human beings as property, they were determined to overthrow it. But their struggle was long and painful. Indenture was still a fact of life well into the nineteenth century, when another future United States President, Andrew Johnson, ran away from his master.

Colonial Contentment

In Colonial times, reform efforts had to overcome the complacency which had settled down among master workmen and journeymen. For free laborers and for bound laborers who had been lucky enough to find a kind master, the master-journeyman system was quite satisfactory; it provided the chance for advancement that had been lacking in Europe. The needs of the journeymen, moreover, were identical with those of the master. They had the same concerns about craftsmanship, quality of work, competition of cheap or inferior work, and the welfare of members of their craft. If a member died, collections were taken up among masters and journeymen alike to give to the member's widow. There were few disputes over wages or working

conditions as long as the shop remained small — with just a few journeymen and one master. The relationship was much like a family, in which the master acted as father.



Confrontation

The human scene changed as industry changed to keep pace with the burgeoning growth of the colonies. Workshops grew into mills, employing workers not by the handful but by the hundred. The sense of closeness between master and journeymen was lost. Assembly line techniques gradually replaced earlier methods, and the business interests of masters grew farther and farther apart from those of journeymen. Inevitably, workers grew closer to each other and began to form associations and organizations to deal with the problems of wages, hours, and working conditions. Thus it was in the early mills that the seeds for trade unionism were planted.

The first examples of such cooperative efforts among workers took place before the American Revolution. Carpenters, printers, and shoemakers in New York, Boston, and Philadelphia formed temporary organizations to protest the shop owners' decisions to reduce their wages. At this time, such worker efforts were temporary, called into being by a particular dispute. After the problem was settled one way or the other, the organizations disbanded. Such was the case, for example, with the journeymen tailors in New York who called a "turn out" to protest a wage reduction in 1768 — the first officially recorded strike. Similar protests arose among other groups of workers over the issues of wages, minimum rates, enforcement of apprenticeship standards, working conditions, working hours, and the establishment of the "closed shop."

Suppression of Workers

Public reaction to any such attempts by workers to exert pressure on their employer was definitely negative. America was booming; products were in high demand. To the public, as to the employer, production was all that mattered. Attempts by workers to have a say-so in how they lived and worked were generally regarded as a threat to production. Consequently, local governments stifled such uprisings as much as possible. When worker organizations continued to develop and in fact grew more numerous and more outspoken, the employer's attitude, supported by public opinion, moved into the courts. Open suppression of workers' demands and associations became the customary practice.

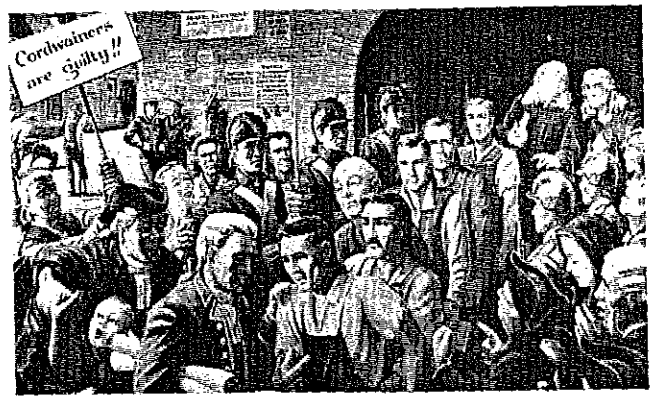
Cordwainers Accused of Conspiracy

The legal sanction of suppression of labor organizations at the beginning of the nineteenth century is best exemplified by the case of the Philadelphia cordwainers (shoemakers) in 1805. Ten years earlier the Philadelphia cordwainers had formed the first original trade union in the United States — the Federal Society of Journeymen Cordwainers. It was the first continuous organization of workers in this country, including in its ranks only journeymen shoemakers. They

made use of strikes and pickets and grew steadily in confidence as they achieved more and more of their goals. The shoemakers were well organized and had successfully established what today is called the closed shop. It was their insistence on the union shop and their use of the strike that brought them before the courts.

In 1805, eight members of the cordwainers society were brought to trial, charged by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania with committing the crime of conspiring to raise their wages. A jury composed of twelve small businessmen brought an indictment against them which accused them of:

- (1) combining, conspiring and agreeing to increase the prices and rates usually paid and allowed to them;
- (2) preventing workmen and journeymen from working except at certain "large prices, and rates set by them for their future work, to the great damage and prejudice of others. . . ."
- (3) unlawfully forming themselves into a club in combination and adopting unlawful and arbitrary by-laws, rules, and orders.



Since the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania did not have a law prohibiting workers from combining to raise their wages, the prosecution applied English Common Law to the case. The trial judge left little doubt as to how he expected the jury to decide, when he told them the cordwainers' strike was "pregnant with public mischief and private injury." Predictably, the jury returned a guilty verdict stating they found "the defendants guilty of a combination to raise their wages." The eight cordwainers were fined and sent to jail until their fines were paid. The decision was to serve as the legal precedent for the suppression of any and all organizational activity among workers for the next forty years.

Public Opinion

At the end of the 18th century and early in the 19th, public opinion supported suppression of workers' associations. The public viewed strikes and other attempts by workers to better their conditions as dangerous threats to production. However, as the new century unfolded, conditions became increasingly unbearable for laborers, and public opinion gradually changed.

As the tendency to replace small shops with big factories continued, working people felt the brunt of the accelerated production. Mill-owners grew more and more abusive to the men, women, and children who worked in the mills under unsafe, unsanitary conditions from dawn to dark, seven days a week. Consequently, despite the legal prejudice against union activities, more and more associations of workers came into being. In some cases, these organizations spread out beyond the limits of one community. In 1834 the first labor federation was formed when the labor bodies from seven cities combined in the National Trades Union. Within



two years, many crafts had organized regionally. Unions were definitely on the rise, and the public mood had changed to support. In fact, when a conspiracy verdict was handed down in 1836 in a New York case involving a society of journeymen tailors, labor leaders were able to get 27,000 people to participate in a public demonstration, in which the judge was burned in effigy. The public outrage expressed at that time led to a turnabout in court policy a few years later.

Unions Declared Legal (sometimes)

The reversal of court policy came about in 1842, in the case of *Commonwealth vs. Hunt* — a case involving the Boston Journeymen Boot Makers Society. This association had grown out of a need to guard against the effects of inflation without commensurate wage increases. The avowed purpose of the society was to maintain a wage rate that would keep pace with changes in the members' cost of living. Membership dues were 12 and a half cents a month, to be used to assist members who had been on strike for at least ten days. Any worker violating the rules of the organization was fined. Moreover, members were not to work with a non-member journeyman in a "society shop" (closed shop) unless the shop did not have a majority of the Society's members at work.

The Boot Makers Society was brought to court when a member of the Society refused to pay fines imposed on him by the organization for working with a non-member. The Society demanded that the employer of the non-complying member discharge him. The employer did so, and the member filed a complaint with Boston's District Attorney, who looked upon the case as an opportunity to make some political hay. After all, here was a workers' organization being sued by one of its own members — a perfect opportunity to put the troublemakers down and pull the District Attorney up in the eyes of the public.

An indictment was secured against Hunt, president, and six members of the Boot Makers Society which charged (1) that the Society was a criminal conspiracy to oppress an impoverished employer and a non-conformist worker, and (2) that the defendants conspired together and agreed not to work for any master who, after notice from the Society to discharge any workman who was not a member, continued to employ him. Following the arguments from the defense and the prosecution, the jurors appeared thoroughly confused. Again, as in the cordwainers' case, the trial judge made it clear to the jury that he expected a guilty verdict; the jury complied. The defense filed exceptions to the judge's charge and to the verdict. Sentencing was withheld until the Supreme Court's ruling was received.

In the meantime, labor leaders and citizens' groups stirred up public support for the Boot Makers and for workers' or-

ganizations in general. By the time the case reached the Massachusetts Supreme Court, that body had to be aware of the new pro-worker climate of public opinion. Accordingly, Chief Justice Shaw handed down a cautiously worded ruling in favor of the Boot Makers — a landmark decision in the history of organized labor.

Chief Justice Shaw concluded that the primary purpose of the Society was to induce workers of their particular craft to become members — an act which could not be considered unlawful, in his opinion. Furthermore, he did not view the refusal by the Society's journeymen to work for any employer who engaged a non-member journeyman as the use of criminal means. In essence, his conclusion was that agreement for common action to achieve a lawful object was not necessarily a criminal conspiracy. He ruled, "the legality of such an association will depend upon the means to be used for its accomplishment."

The Hunt case did not bring an immediate end to all problems faced by workers; it didn't even end suppression by the courts. But at least it conceded that in some cases unions and closed shops might not be unlawful. After many decades of total suppression, trade unions finally won at least a toehold on legality.

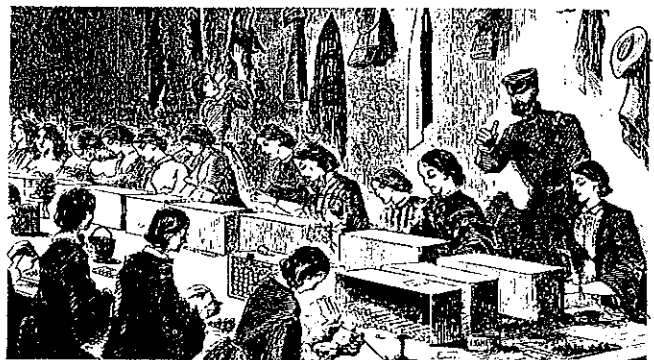
Depression and Dreams

Trade unionism did not have a chance to take advantage of that toehold immediately, however, because the nation fell into a decade-long depression, precipitated by the financial panic of 1837. During the 1840's, when great numbers of workers were unemployed, labor's leaders tended to turn to intellectual schemes of changing the economic structure of the country, rather than using trade union techniques to improve the existing structure. Among the leaders and utopian dreamers of the day were Ely Moore, Mathew Carey, Robert Dale Owen, and William H. Channing.

Civil War

The Civil War provided a boost to the economy, as the production of war goods gave employment to more people and created new industries. Trade unionism grew with the economy. In 1863, approximately 80 local unions existed in the Northern states; by 1864, these same states could count 300 local unions. Moreover, city-wide central councils began to spring up. Thirteen national and international unions formed during the Civil War, some of which have continued to the present, such as the Bricklayers, Cigarmakers, and Plasterers.

By the 1850's, the economy had improved considerably and trade unionism revived. Several national unions were created during this decade, including the Stonecutters, Hat Finishers, Molders, Machinists, and Locomotive Engineers. There were strikes during the 1850's in every known craft and in every part of the country, as worker organizations grew more active. One of their chief demands was that the workday be shortened to 10 hours.



The years following the war were a time of peak production and exhilarating prosperity. New inventions stimulated great improvements in industry and in agriculture. The war had opened the way to an unprecedented surge of industrial growth and expansion. In 1869, East met West, as the Union Pacific and Central Pacific railroads came together in Utah.

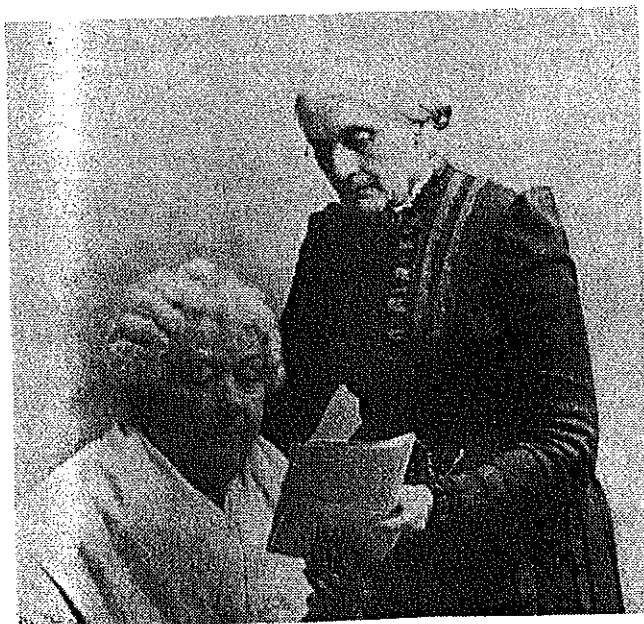


With the entire continental United States connected by rail, American industry could make use of previously inaccessible resources, and could rapidly transport products to a bigger market than ever before. America rushed into the Industrial Revolution.

National Labor Union

During this period of prosperity, trade unionism made great strides forward. The demand for a national federation of trade unions grew ever louder and was finally answered by William Sylvis, of the Molders Union, who formed the National Labor Union in 1866. Sylvis was an inspiring leader; he became the first noteworthy figure in the history of organized labor in the United States.

The National Labor Union was a loose-knit assemblage of the leading national unions of the time, including Molders, Printers, Machinists, Blacksmiths, and Carpenters, along with some state federations, some local unions, and a variety of reformist organizations. Susan B. Anthony was an active member, representing the Working Women's Protective As-



sociation. Such a diverse group was not destined to stay together for very long, but while it survived it accomplished some major reforms. Its first effort was to agitate for an 8-hour workday. The group brought such well-organized energy to bear on Congress that it passed a law establishing an 8-hour workday for employees of the federal government — an impressive first step. The NLU was also principally responsible for the creation of a U.S. Bureau of Labor, even though the bureau wasn't set up until several years later.

William Sylvis led the National Labor Union into politics. He was convinced that organized labor could accomplish nothing unless it became politically active. Sylvis created the National Reform and Labor Party and tried to get labor candidates elected in the 1872 election. At that time, however, labor lacked the strength to make it on its own politically. Sylvis's error in judgment contributed to the demise of the NLU. The organization rapidly disintegrated over political and philosophical disagreements and was completely dead by 1872. In six years it had proven, by its successes, that nationally organized labor was a force to be reckoned with. It had also proven, by its mistakes, that labor was neither sufficiently strong nor sufficiently united to support a separate political party.

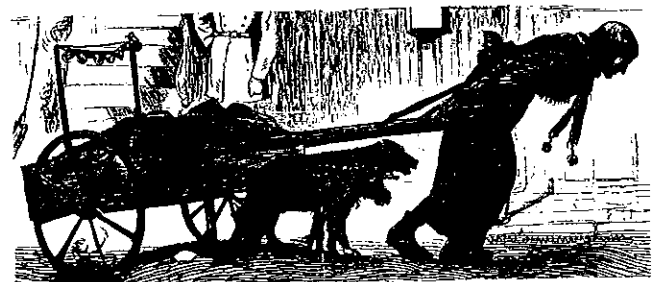
Depression Again

Sylvis's candidates did not get elected in 1872. President Grant was reelected and the economy crashed. The



workingman's plight was worse than ever during the 1870's, but Grant refused to use federal power to improve it. The cries of laboring people and their leaders were ignored by the government, but they were heard by radical reformists. Karl Marx had just published *Das Kapital* in 1867; the "First International" (International Workingman's Association) had been formed soon after. Disenchanted labor leaders in this country naturally looked hopefully towards an organization which promised relief for workers.

The workingman's misery was made more severe during the depression by the mass immigrations which took place at that time. Millions of Europeans came into the country, seeking relief from the depression that hung over their own homeland. Many were brought in by employers in accordance with a law passed in 1864, which encouraged American manufacturers to purchase cheap foreign labor, called "contract labor." The practice amounted to a new form of indenture.

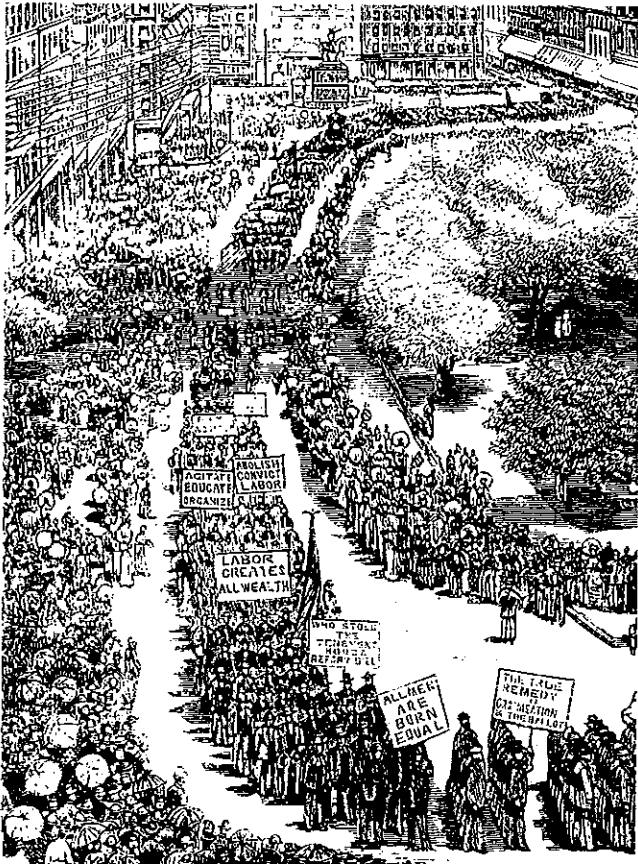


Employers then used the immigrants to break strikes and to pull wages down to a devastating low. European craftsmen, who had been led to believe they were coming to a land of plenty, found instead plenty of poverty and resentment.

Knights of Labor

Throughout the 1870's, a national organization of labor unions known as the Noble Order of the Knights of Labor struggled to remain in existence. It had been formed in 1869 by a man named Uriah Stephens, who barely managed to keep the organization alive. He stepped aside in 1878 and was replaced by Terence Powderly, who emerged as one of the chief figures in the history of organized labor. Under Powderly's leadership in the 1880's, as the nation recovered from the depression, the Knights of Labor grew to a membership of over 700,000. Much of this phenomenal growth was due to the respect and national prominence they gained by successfully taking on the powerful Jay Gould railroad system. However, in March of 1886 Jay Gould deliberately led the Knights into a confrontation for which he was finally prepared; the appalling defeat which the Knights suffered brought on the end of the organization.

The Knights established a national organization that functioned at the regional and local level. Local assemblies were either one trade or a mixture of occupations. All workers, including professionals and housewives, were eligible to join the Knights regardless of skill level, with two notable exceptions — lawyers and bartenders.



Philosophically, the Knights of Labor stood for broad, basic reform of the economic structure of the nation. They wanted to replace free enterprise and capitalism with a cooperatively owned system of business, whereby workers would share in the wealth created by their labor because they would own their own labor. The Knights were obviously greatly influenced by Marxist philosophy.

American Federation of Labor

As the Knights of Labor declined, torn apart from the inside by disputes over basic philosophy and aims, as well as by disagreements over organizational structure, and plummeting from their position of respect in the eyes of the public after Jay Gould defeated them, another federation of labor groups was on the rise — the American Federation of Labor.

The A.F.L. grew out of a small federation of six craft unions (printers, carpenters, iron and steelworkers, molders, cigarmakers and glassworkers) organized in 1881 under the title: Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions (FOTLU). Its leaders were Samuel Gompers and Adolph Strasser, both from the cigarmakers union. The organization was completely overshadowed by the Knights of Labor up until 1886, when Jay Gould defeated the Knights. In that year, FOTLU merged with those craft unions affiliated with the Knights who had by then become disenchanted with the



Knights of Labor. The amalgamation of all the craft unions formed a strong organization which took the name: American Federation of Labor. Samuel Gompers was elected president — a position he was to hold all his life, with the exception of one year.

The American Federation of Labor differed from the Knights in two important ways, both of which contributed to the eventual success of the new federation and to the failure of the Knights.

1. The AFL was exclusive, where the Knights had been all inclusive. That is, the AFL refused to admit any unions other than skilled craft unions, while the Knights had tried to organize both the skilled and unskilled workers in all types of jobs.
2. In contrast to the Knights' ideological aim of restructuring the U.S. monetary system, the AFL practiced and preached "pure and simple" unionism; their main objective was to raise wages and improve working conditions.

Thus the AFL was both more exclusive and more practical than its predecessor. From an initial membership of 138,000, the AFL doubled its size by 1898.

The AFL continued to grow, reaching two million members by the outbreak of World War I. During the war, its ranks rose to a high of four million in 1920. During these years, the federation adhered closely to its goals of raising wages, improving working conditions, and securing the 8-hour workday. Generally speaking, the AFL resisted any tendency to engage in partisan politics and focused its political efforts on those issues which affected workers in a direct way. It followed Samuel Gompers' oft-quoted advice:

“Reward Your Friends and Punish Your Enemies.”

In practice, this amounted to supporting measures and candidates favorable to the interests of workers. In addition, the AFL opposed any independent labor party and refused to follow the European labor unions' practice of supporting candidates on a labor ticket and forming a labor party. Through its structure of state and local labor councils, the AFL was active in state and local politics; several states passed laws regulating child labor and providing protective legislation by 1915. During the next twenty years, the development and growth of the AFL was directly influenced by economic conditions, employer opposition and public attitude. The AFL's policy of excluding the unskilled and semi-skilled workers within the booming manufacturing sectors, such as auto and steel, kept the membership totals down.

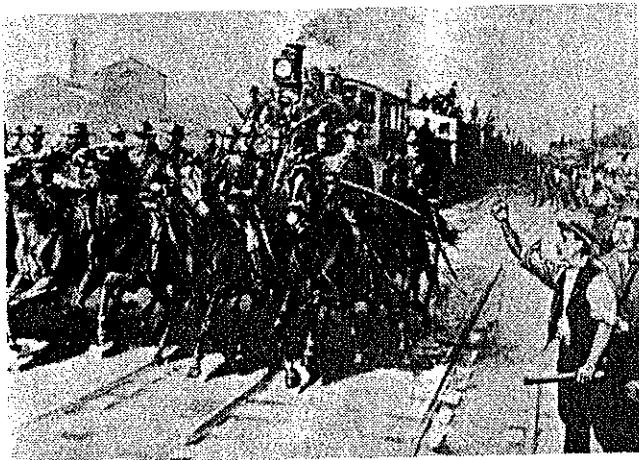
Thus the American Federation of Labor has been the principal federation of trade unions since 1886. During that long stretch of time, it has undergone important changes as an organization, and its members have suffered injustices and abuses fully as severe as those suffered by the indentured servants of colonial times.

Pullman Strike

The forty years from 1890 to 1930 were in many respects the darkest period of history for organized labor. During that period employers made use of new methods for holding unions down — methods that had the stamp of approval of the U.S. court system. The major judicial weapons and techniques used by employers were: (1) the court injunction, (2) the “yellow-dog” contract, (3) the technique of holding union officers personally responsible for damages during strikes and boycotts, and (4) the use of the Sherman Anti-Trust Act.

There are many examples of the use of the court injunction by big business to defeat union efforts to improve the worker's lot, but one of the classic ones is the infamous Pullman Strike, which occurred in 1894.

The Pullman Palace Car Company, established by George Pullman, was in the business of building and reconditioning Pullman sleeping and dining cars. The company's stock was owned by railroad executives, which assured the Pullman Company of a monopolistic market position. The company was located in Pullman, Illinois — a so-called “model company town.” The Pullman employees lived in the company town, and almost every facet of their lives was controlled by the company, which owned all the churches, shops, utilities, hotels, and homes. Thus the Pullman workers were at the mercy of their employer, George Pullman.



The event which precipitated the initial clash between the Pullman employees and George Pullman was Pullman's unilateral decision to cut wages 30 percent, while refusing to lower the rent charged by the company for their housing. He did this at a time when he increased dividends to the stockholders — railroad executives. On May 7, 1894, a grievance committee representing the Pullman employees met with George Pullman and made three requests: (1) that the wage cut be rescinded, (2) that wages be restored to previous levels, and (3) that rent for company housing be lowered. The union committee members were informed that the company was working at a loss; therefore the wage cut would stand. Pullman refused to discuss the rent question, stating that it was a landlord-tenant problem, not an employer-employee issue. Pullman requested the workers not take any action and promised not to take any action against the grievance committee members.

On the following morning, three members of the grievance committee were fired. As soon as the word spread, 2500 employees walked out and an additional 600 quit at noon. The employees notified the company that they were striking over the three requests made to Mr. Pullman. The company retaliated immediately by closing down the entire plant — a lockout of all employees.

The Pullman employees belonged to the American Railway Union — a huge union with 150,000 members, with a powerful and unforgettable leader, Eugene V. Debs. This



union had become so large that the General Managers Association, a group of top railroad executives, was eager for an excuse to destroy it. When the Pullman employees' local requested the support of the national organization, the American Railway Union Convention, after considerable debate, gave Pullman the following ultimatum: unless he agreed within four days to negotiate a settlement with his employees, a sympathy strike would be ordered.

Eugene Debs was reluctant to engage the Railway Union in such a broad test of strength. But, following the convention's mandate, he announced a nationwide boycott of all Pullman Palace cars. The union members would not inspect, switch, or haul a Pullman car on any railroad.

Pullman turned to the General Managers Association for their assistance and they developed a plan for combating the union which proved far more effective than they could have anticipated; it virtually destroyed the entire American Railway Union. The managers' plan was ingeniously simple. They ordered railroad cars carrying U.S. mail to be attached to the Pullman cars, so that when a switchman cut off a Pullman car, the car carrying mail was also cut off. They also ordered the discharge of all employees refusing to haul Pullman cars, thereby forcing the union to call a nationwide strike in support of the discharged members. Thus they turned a Pullman boycott into a general strike against the railroads, which opened the way for Federal Government intervention.

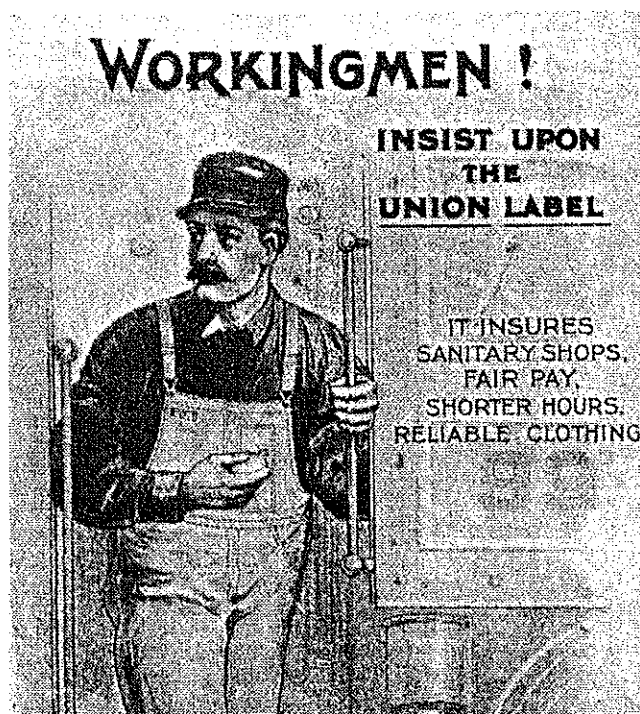
The managers were able to get the United States Marshal to authorize the use of 3600 special deputies to prevent obstruction of the mails and to protect railroad property. These special deputies were described by the Chicago Chief of Police as "thugs, thieves, and ex-convicts." In addition, the managers got the U.S. Attorney General to file a complaint on behalf of the U.S. government charging the Railway Union, Eugene Debs, and 16 other union officers and members with conspiracy to interfere with and restraint of regular transportation, to obstruct transportation of the mails, and by menaces, threats, and intimidation to prevent the employment of persons. The Attorney General secured an injunction against all defendants, restraining them "from in any way or manner interfering with, hindering, obstructing or stopping" any of the business of railroads entering Chicago, or any trains carrying U.S. mails or engaged in interstate commerce. The injunction was issued and the Attorney General convinced President Cleveland that Federal troops were needed to insure compliance by the strikers. The presence of the troops and special marshals precipitated riots, violence and lawlessness. The Illinois Governor dispatched the state militia to assist in restoring order.

Following numerous court battles, the injunction against Debs and the others was upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court, thus setting a precedent which was to be followed for the next 30 years. The injunction became a favorite weapon of management against the American labor movement. The Pullman Strike was a major defeat for labor. The American Railway Union was destroyed. Eugene Debs went to prison for six months for violating the injunction. However, Debs' testimony before Congressional committees was widely reprinted and read by the American public, which resulted in the beginning of a change to a more positive public attitude towards the plight of organized labor.



Damage Suits

One of the earliest tactics utilized by unions to influence their ability to organize a non-union employer was the boycott. The union would ask its members and other potential consumers to avoid buying or using a non-organized employer's goods or services. The use of the boycott had become a very successful union tactic. Thus, during the time



when judicial prejudice was at its worst, employers formed an organization called the American Anti-Boycott Association whose sole purpose was to destroy the use of the boycott by unions. This organization achieved its goal in the case of Loewe versus Lawlor, which began in 1902.

The union involved in this case was the United Hatters of North America. At that time, the hatmaking industry utilized many dangerous chemicals to soften the animal pelts used to make hats. The hatters' union had been successful in organizing workers in the industry as early as the 1830's, because the union fought for and received improved safety conditions for its membership.

The Hatters' union had attempted unsuccessfully to organize the shop of Dietrich Loewe. The union, in its second organizing attempt, was determined to fight it out and win the shop over. After being notified by Loewe that he could not recognize the Hatters' union, the workers at the plant went on strike and the union initiated a boycott of Loewe's hats. Loewe was prepared for both the strike and the boycott. In fact, the Anti-Boycott Association had pledged \$20,000 to Loewe to finance his fight against the union. The leaders of the Association persuaded Loewe to take his battle into the courts.

Prior to filing suit against the union, Loewe investigated records to determine which members of the union lived and owned real estate or had bank accounts in Connecticut. When these individuals were identified, Loewe filed two actions against the union and its membership: the one action charged the union and its members with conspiracy and claimed damage of \$100,000, and was filed in the Connecticut State Courts for Common Law; the other charged the unionists with violating the Sherman Anti-Trust Act and asserted damages of \$240,000. With the suit started, the homes and bank accounts of 240 individual union members residing in Connecticut were attached.

Obviously, this development caused panic within the ranks of organized labor and resulted in a loss of morale among the workers. Through intimidation, the Anti-Boycott Association had demonstrated to unions and their members that they could risk losing their accumulated property if they became or remained a union member.

The court case was fought for thirteen years and finally was decided by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1913. The Supreme Court upheld a lower court which found the union, its members and leaders (Lawlor) guilty of violating the Sherman Anti-Trust Act and required them to pay damages of \$252,130.

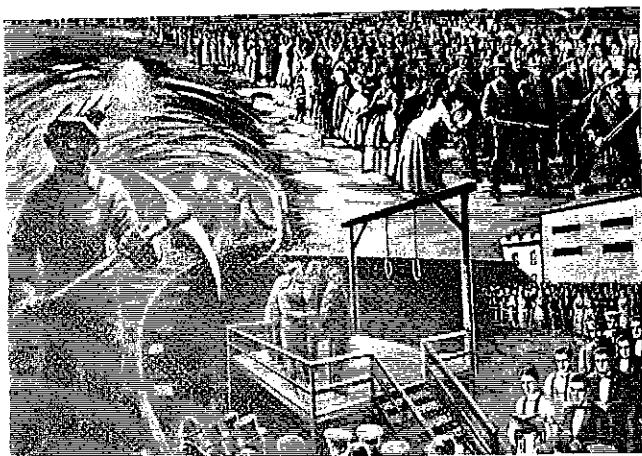
The irony in this decision is that the original purpose of the Sherman Anti-Trust Act was to break business monopolies such as the Standard Oil Company, yet it came to be a weapon used by the powerful to suppress the powerless.

Yellow-Dog Contracts and Blacklists

Another employer device used to destroy unions or at least weaken them was the so-called "yellow-dog" contract. It was a very simple device used to identify and determine whether or not a potential employee was sympathetic towards a union. The following is a sample of this type of contract:

I am employed and work for the Hitchman Coal and Coke Company with the express understanding that I am not a member of the United Mine Workers of America and will not become so while an employee of the Hitchman Coal and Coke Company, and that the Hitchman Coal and Coke Company is run non-union and agrees with me that it will run non-union while I am in its employ.

If at anytime while I am employed by the Hitchman Coal and Coke Company, I want to become connected with the United Mine Workers of America, or any affiliated organization, I agree to withdraw from employment of said company, and agree that while I am in the employ of that company I will not make any effort amongst its employees to bring about the unionizing of that mine against the company's wishes. I have either read the above, or heard same read.



Potential employees who refused to sign the above were not hired and those currently employed by a firm that refused to sign were fired. Obviously, the legality of such a document was questionable. In 1917 John Mitchell, President of the UMWA, pressed this issue before the U.S. Supreme Court. The Court ruled that "yellow-dog" contracts were valid; thereafter, this device became a favorite weapon of management. In addition, following this decision union

organizers attempting to organize signatories of such contracts could be sued for interfering with a legal contract.

Another effective device used by employers during this period was the blacklist — a list of workers within an industry who were in any way associated with union attempts to organize workers in that industry. These lists were maintained and continually updated by industrial spies and sold to all employers within a local, regional, and sometimes, national industry. The worker whose name appeared on the blacklist had no chance of being employed.



Total Prejudice

This forty-year period, 1890-1930, was unquestionably the most severe test for American labor organizations. The period reflects total legal favoritism towards employers. Not only did the courts, supported by public opinion, condone the use of yellow-dog contracts, blacklists, court injunctions and damage suits to thwart every attempt by unions to combat the employer sector, but to make matters worse the so-called "Red scare" took hold of the public imagination. After the Russian Revolution of 1917, employers encouraged the fear that any union activity was a prelude to revolution in this country. Anti-union organizations spent considerable time and money perpetuating this myth. Thus, the attempts of unions to extend the principles of democracy down into the ranks of laborers and their families were branded as threats to the democratic system itself.



Open warfare against organized labor reached its high point during this period. In the "open shop" drives of the 1920's, employers resorted to extreme violence to stamp out union activity. Many of these drives were successful and

many trade unionists were killed in their attempts to secure industrial democracy. Yet, in their very success in suppressing unions, employers inadvertently defeated themselves. They carried their violence too far and incurred adverse publicity which, coupled with the most severe economic depression ever to occur in the United States, ushered in a new political party and a radical change in public attitude towards unions.

New Deal and New Hope

The late 1920's and the early 1930's found the United States in the midst of the most severe economic depression of its history. Union membership had declined as a result of violent employer opposition as exemplified by the "open shop" drives; judicial prejudice, characterized by declaring "yellow-dog" contracts legal and holding unions guilty of restraint of trade in strike or boycott situations; and the economic depression which saw approximately 14 million workers unemployed by 1933. The effects of the depression extended beyond industrial plants and the construction in-



dustry. Small businesses and farmers were wiped out overnight. The vast majority of Americans demanded a change — particularly a change in the attitude of the Federal government, headed by President Herbert Hoover, who refused to recognize the need for drastic solutions to alleviate the effects of the economic depression.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt promised to deal with these problems with seemingly drastic measures and government intervention; his administration was characterized by the "New Deal" approach. The public attitude had changed profoundly. Now public opinion supported government policies and programs that would stimulate the economy, regulate the stock markets, insure individual bank deposits, provide financial support to the farmers and legislation protecting the workers from sweatshop working conditions, low wages, industrial warfare, and anti-labor courts. Moreover, the Supreme Court adopted a position of non-involvement in the industrial affairs between companies and unions.

The Norris-La Guardia Anti-Injunction Act of 1932 provided the unions with relief from the court injunctions that management had formerly been able to obtain easily against organization efforts and prohibited "yellow-dog" contracts. The Norris-La Guardia Act defines a labor dispute as "any controversy concerning terms or conditions of employment, or concerning the association or the representation of persons, in negotiating, fixing, maintaining, changing, or seeking to arrange terms or conditions of employment regardless of whether or not the disputants stand in approximate relations of employer and employee." Prior to this act, the court interpreted the provision of the Sherman Anti-Trust Act and



the Clayton Act, which sought to exclude unions from the Sherman Act, in such a manner that court injunctions would be granted to employers that prohibited almost any union from initiating a boycott or strike. But by virtue of the Norris-La Guardia Act, the government was to remain neutral; that is, the courts and the law were to show no favoritism. Henceforth unions were again able to use the strike as a method of increasing wages. In fact, Roosevelt relied upon an increase in the purchasing power of the people as one means to industrial economic recovery. Moreover, the Act encouraged collective bargaining.

In 1933, at the President's request, Congress passed the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA). The Act encouraged industry to establish codes of fair competition. However, it stated that the codes would have to include three



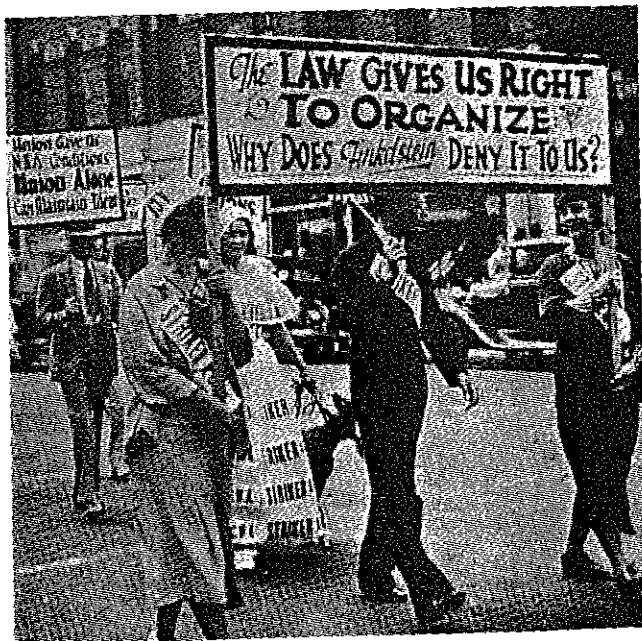
provisions that allowed employees to organize, prohibited employers from forcing employees to join company unions, and insisted that companies comply with conditions of employment to be established by the President. This entire Act was declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in 1935. However, unions began to organize during the two-year interim and membership rolls began to swell — a healthy sign as viewed by the administration. However, there was still no law obligating employers to bargain with union representatives selected by their members.

Recognizing the need for such a law, Senator Robert Wagner of New York introduced legislation into the Senate making collective bargaining a legal process and the law of the land. Wagner, aware of the need to head off attacks on this law and of the possibility that the Supreme Court might declare it unconstitutional, wrote a provision into the bill giving Congress the right to pass legislation dealing with industrial disputes that could affect interstate commerce. His justification was based on the Commerce Clause of the United States Constitution.

The Wagner Act was tested and held to be constitutional. In essence, it provided that workers could form organizations of their own choosing without interference from employers. It defined as "unfair" labor practices all attempts by employers to suppress or oppress labor unions, and it created the National Labor Relations Board, to enforce the Act's provisions. With the Wagner Act, workers finally achieved legal recognition of their right to establish organizations of their own choosing for the purpose of promoting industrial democracy.

Organized labor flourished under the protection of the Wagner Act. From approximately 3 and 1/4 million members in 1932, the ranks of organized labor grew to almost 15 million by 1945.

Other laws passed during this era included the Social Security Act (1935), the Walsh-Healey (Public Contracts) Act (1936), and the Fair Labor Standards (Wage-Hour) Act (1938). All of these had a direct effect on organized labor, particularly the Public Contracts and the Wage-Hour laws. These laws provided regulatory measures in the areas of minimum wages, maximum hours, and the maintenance of basic labor standards for materials or supplies furnished on federal contracts. In addition, they provided improvements in state workmen's compensation laws.



Formation of C.I.O.

Throughout this period of federally legislated improvements for working people, the American Federation of Labor remained the principal federation of labor unions. However, a basic conflict was going on inside the organization over the question of whether workers should be organized on the basis of industry or of craft. Those who held that the basis of organization should be a worker's craft, regardless of where he worked, remained in the AFL. Those who held all workers in a particular industry should belong to one union broke off from the parent organization to form the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO).

For the next twenty years the two union federations existed in parallel, but not in harmony. Competition between the two sparked violence in many factories, as the CIO attempted to organize unskilled workers in plants where some of the skilled workers already belonged to various AFL unions. This open warfare did considerable damage to the public image of unions.



Nevertheless, both the AFL and the CIO increased their membership dramatically during the years of dual unionism. By 1946, the AFL claimed 9 million members and the CIO 5 million. In general, organized labor had much more political strength than ever before and no longer needed preferential treatment under the law; in most places, unions were powerful enough to hold their own in contests with employers. Certainly, some areas of the country, particularly in the South, remained for the most part unorganized, but all of the industrialized centers were by this time heavily organized. The actual strength of this many organized workers remained untested during the period of the Second World War, since the unions had pledged themselves to the war production cause and had virtually pledged not to strike or interfere with production level. Controls over labor-management relations and wages during the war years were under public agencies. At the end of World War II, however, these controls were removed and industrial strife resumed.

Post-War Turmoil

Strikes broke out immediately upon the expiration of the National War Labor Board — the agency which had handled labor's demand for wage increases during the war years. Altogether, 42 large strikes occurred in the eleven months following V-J Day. Each of these 42 strikes involved 10,000 or more workers.

The incidence of postwar work stoppages, affecting the much desired production of consumer goods, signified serious industrial problems and unrest in the public mind. Strike idleness in 1946 was the highest ever recorded. Among the many reasons for the industrial unrest of the post-war period, the following must be considered: (1) considerable employer opposition to unions was revived; (2) collective bargaining was still relatively new in many industries; and (3) many newly formed unions could not maintain discipline under the backlog of wartime grievances, and as a result the union members resorted to militant methods to settle old problems.

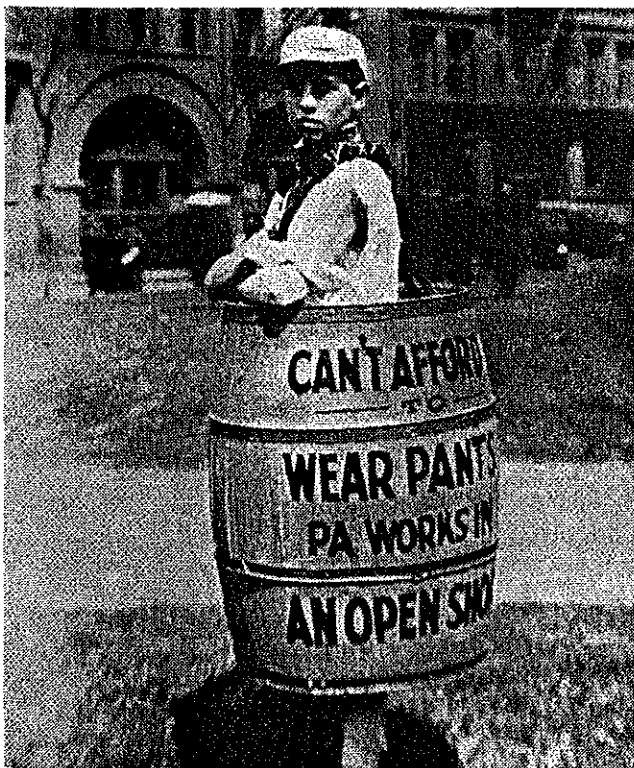
Anti-Union Drive

In this period of turmoil, opponents of the Wagner Act were able to gain much support. The phenomenon which had occurred at the onset of the 19th century was repeated in the middle of the 20th century. It was the fear that union growth would bring about an increase in the cost of domestic goods that brought about the conspiracy verdict in the case of the Philadelphia cordwainers in 1805 and ushered in an era of open suppression of labor organizations. Similarly, the outbreak of union protests and demands at the end of the Second World War alarmed the American public because of the immediate effect on the economy. Again, public opinion supported legislation which would cripple the power of unions; in this case the result was the Taft-Hartley Act.

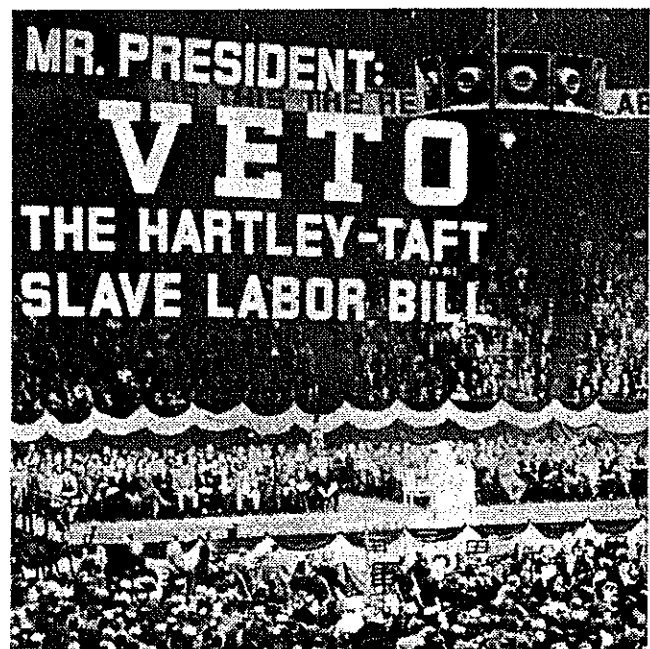
Senator Taft, a conservative leader, demanded change, arguing that although the Wagner Act had been passed to aid unions in maintaining a "balance" of rights and responsibilities between workers and employers, it had gone far beyond that point and the unions had acquired an excess of power. He and Congressman Hartley introduced legislation rewriting the Wagner Act.

Taft-Hartley

Despite the opposition of organized labor, anti-unionists drummed up sufficient support for the Labor-Management Relations Act (Taft-Hartley) to get it passed in 1947. It was enacted by a Republican-Dixiecrat controlled Congress which overrode President Truman's veto.



Under the Taft-Hartley law, some of the provisions that labor and management had obtained or were seeking through the collective bargaining process were outlawed or severely limited. Union security clauses providing for "closed shop" provisions were prohibited. The "union shop" agreement was allowed, except in those states where such agreements were prohibited by state law. This section of the Taft-Hartley Act (14b) is quite unusual; it allows states to pass legislation that takes precedence over federal law. During committee hearings on the bill, union spokesmen claimed that in states where unions were weak or where the legislative branches were controlled by anti-union interests, this provision of the bill would be an open invitation to legislators to pass laws prohibiting the union shop. Indeed, their prediction came to pass in twenty states, where so-called "right-to-work" laws were passed. All twenty of these states are dominated by agricultural-business interests, particularly the Southern and Mid-Western states. Other regulations contained in the Taft-Hartley Act regulated the checkoff of union dues, welfare funds and contract termination arrangements



An attempt was made to establish a new balance between employers and unions by including in the Act a list of "unfair labor practices" applying to unions, along with a list applicable to employers. Union "unfair labor practices" include: (1) engaging in secondary boycotts, (2) stopping work over jurisdictional or interunion disputes, (3) charging excessive initiation fees to keep workers out of a union, and (4) refusal to bargain in good faith. In addition, the Act provides for Presidential intervention in strike situations that may create or threaten emergencies by imperiling the national health or safety. Cooling off periods are a feature of this provision.

The public attitude towards unions had changed drastically since the "New Deal" period. This change was the result of much adverse publicity about the power of unions and their alleged abuse of that power. Certainly some unions had become big and powerful, but the vast majority were not in this category and some were still struggling for their very survival. For many unions, this struggle continues even today.

Union leaders had misjudged the public attitude towards their organizations just prior to the passage of the Taft-Hartley Act. Its passage ushered in a period in which unions

were required to be more responsible to the public. For several years, the unions continued to grow in membership, although at a much slower rate. In the mid-1950's the growth of unionism began to decline both in absolute numbers and as a percentage of the total workforce. Many labor leaders feel that the Taft-Hartley Act was, and still is, responsible for this slowdown in organizing the unorganized. Yet, even recognizing that public opinion now required unions to be responsible for their activities, several large unions continued to violate the democratic privileges of their membership and, in some cases, practiced corruption and racketeering, especially with union funds. The public's attention was focused on unions with the establishment in January, 1957, of a Senate Committee to investigate corrupt influence in labor-management relations.

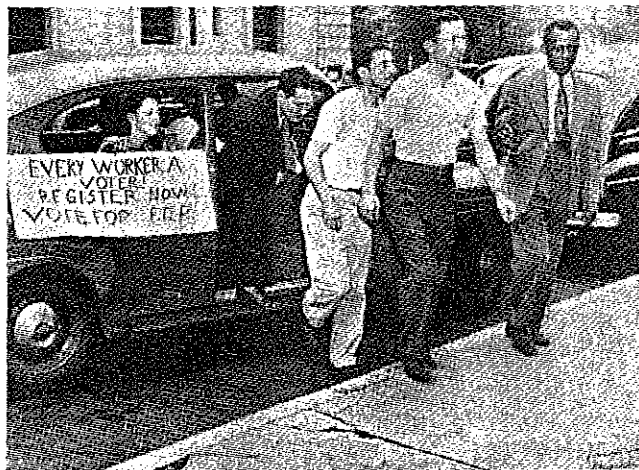
Landrum-Griffin

The Senate committee, referred to as the McClellan committee, which investigated alleged corruption and racketeering within the organized labor movement, dominated the newspaper headlines and television for eighteen months. The hearings disclosed that within a very few unions, out of over 125 labor organizations, the leadership was guilty of abuses. Both the AFL and the CIO, prior to their merger in 1955, attempted to clean their own houses by expelling those unions which were found to be corrupt. But the public demanded more. Thus, in 1959, the Labor-Management Reporting and Disclosure Act, which is known as the Landrum-Griffin Act, was passed.

This Act focused on two broad issues: (1) democracy within labor unions, and (2) corruption and racketeering in these same organizations. Congress had concluded that there was a correlation between internal union abuses and a lack of union democracy. Unions, in general, were displeased with the law but very few have objected to its provisions. It is doubtful that unions have become more democratic as a result of the Landrum-Griffin Act. Those unions that were democratic before the law have remained so. Now, they simply meet the requirements of public reporting and disclosure about their internal affairs.

Labor and Social Responsibility

The history of the treatment of worker organizations in the courts traces the changing image of labor in American society. Each court decision mentioned in this sketch reflects the social, economic, and political environment of a given period in history and provides an index to the prevailing public opinion at that time. There is a slight lag, in that it takes a certain amount of time for a change in public attitudes to be



reflected in the judicial system; however, each step in the development is accurately recorded.

For the most part, organized labor has become cognizant of the need to influence public opinion. Many unions have initiated public relations programs to improve their organizational image. In recent years, unions in general have taken a more active role in the American political arena through the political process. Since 1935, unions have been very con-



spicuous in the public eye. The public, through Congressional legislation, has up until now defined the areas of social responsibility for labor's adherence. It remains to be seen in the 1970's whether or not unions will begin to define their own areas of responsibility and activity. If so, a new era in the development of the American labor movement will begin.



AFL and CIO Problems

At the same time that labor's relationship to the rest of society was changing, structural changes were taking place inside labor organizations. The split in the AFL in the mid-thirties, which had produced the CIO as a parallel federation, was the result of disagreement over one main issue — whether or not to organize unskilled workers in mass production industries. The drive to open up the federation to these great numbers of workers was led by John L. Lewis — one of the most dramatic and prominent figures in labor lore. His blood-and-thunder style is evident in the following quote:



Let him who will, be he economic tyrant or sordid mercenary, 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 dammed or impounded by the erection of temporary barriers of restraint.

John L. Lewis

Lewis was the president of the dissenting unions which broke away from the AFL to form the CIO. Under his enthusiastic leadership, the CIO zealously organized almost every mass-production industry, including the rubber, chemical, automobile, steel, electrical, and textile industries. At the same time, perhaps spurred on by competition with the new federation, the AFL itself grew tremendously from 1935 to 1955 — the time of dual unionism. Moreover, the AFL moved away from its tradition of “pure and simple” trade unionism during this time.

In the years immediately following the Second World War, the CIO experienced severe internal problems, created by the infiltration of Communists, who had been able to entrench themselves in leadership positions during the CIO’s rapid growth. The CIO took steps to rid itself of the Communist element, expelling eleven unions in 1949 and 1950.

The AFL did not have the Communist problem, but it did have serious problems with corruption and racketeering, as has been mentioned. The AFL expelled one corrupt union, in 1953, and later readmitted it after the union had reformed itself. A general housecleaning inside the AFL unions took place during the early 1950’s.

During the 1960’s several changes took place in organized labor. First, President Kennedy gave federal employees the right to form unions. Thousands of federal government employees subsequently joined the ranks of organized labor. Second, many states followed the federal example, bringing thousands of state, county, and city employees into unions. Third, the AFL-CIO and its affiliates began to take a more direct and commanding role in the political arena at all levels of government. Fourth, labor began to deviate further from “pure and simple” labor legislation by supporting social legislation such as the Equal Opportunities Act, Economic Opportunity Act, and Civil Rights bills. In this way, organized labor continued and amplified its expression of social consciousness. President Lyndon Johnson said of this participation by labor in social reform:

“The AFL-CIO has done more good for people than any other group in America in its legislative activities. It doesn’t

just try to do something about wages and hours for its own people. No group in the country works harder in the interest of everyone. It helps young and old and middle aged. It’s interested in education, in housing, in the poverty program and does as much good for millions who have never belonged to a union as for its own members. That is my conception of an organization working in the public interest.”

Lyndon B. Johnson

Merger: AFL-CIO

The AFL and the CIO merged in December, 1955. The move towards joining forces had been under way for some time, but it was made much easier when both organizations experienced a change in leadership. The deaths of William Green, who had long been president of the AFL, and Phillip Murray, president of the CIO, put an end to a longstanding personal antagonism. The choice of George Meany as president of the AFL and of Walter Reuther as president of the CIO, smoothed the way to merger.



The merger brought together in one federation over 16 million workers or between 85 and 90 percent of all U.S. union members. The newly created AFL-CIO retained most of the structural characteristics of the AFL but incorporated several important changes from the CIO. Among these were the Community Services Organization and Industrial Union departments and the establishment of a strong political action structure: the Committee on Political Education (COPE). These changes demonstrate that the AFL-CIO realizes its commitment to its affiliates extend beyond the bargaining table.

Internal problems revolving around the unethical practices of some affiliates caused considerable turmoil in the new federation and although it adopted stringent rules, it had to threaten expulsion or expel several unions. All of these unions were reaffiliated and removed from probationary status after they convinced the AFL-CIO they had done away with corruption, with the exception of the Teamsters Union, which has remained non-affiliated since its expulsion. Union growth began to decline during the 1950’s. This decline supported the claim of labor critics who suggested that organized labor had lost its appeal and usefulness.

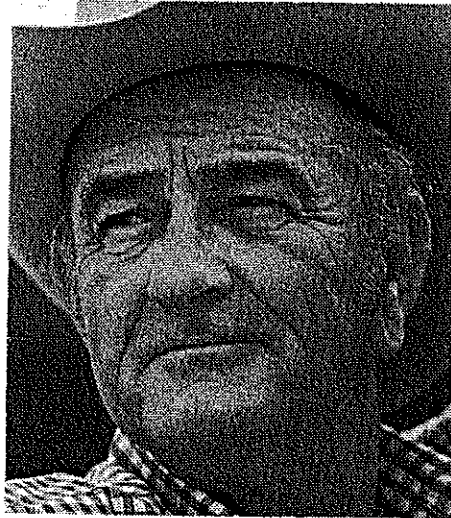
The modern AFL-CIO, and some non-affiliates such as the UAW, have moved into new areas of concern and recognize that organized labor’s commitments and obligations to its membership, and to the whole of American society, does not stop at the plant gate or on the construction site. A movement which began with strikes for higher wages has progressed to the realization that organized labor can and should occupy a viable role in all segments of our society. Today organized labor contributes significantly to the continual rebuilding and improving of American society at all levels.

What Great Leaders Have Said About Unions



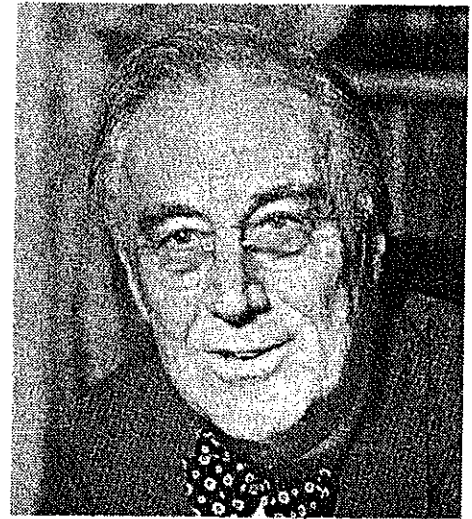
ABRAHAM LINCOLN

"All that serves labor serves the nation. All that harms is treason. . . . If a man tells you he loves America, yet hates labor, he is a liar. . . ."



LYNDON B. JOHNSON

"The AFL-CIO has done more good for more people than any other group in America in its legislative efforts. . . ."



FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT

"If I were a worker in a factory, the first thing I would do would be to join a union."



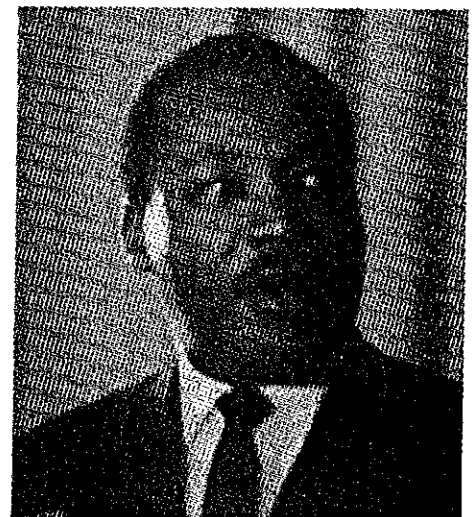
DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER

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CESAR CHAVEZ

"I'm convinced that the truest act of manliness is to sacrifice ourselves for others in a totally non-violent struggle for justice."



MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

"Our needs are identical with labor's needs — decent wages, fair working conditions, livable housing, old-age security, health and welfare measures, conditions in which families can grow, have education for their children and respect in the community."

What Does Labor Want?

*“We want more school houses
and less jails;
more books and less arsenals;
more learning and less vice;
more constant work
and less crime;
more leisure and less greed;
more justice and less revenge;
in fact, more of
the opportunities to
cultivate our better natures. . . .”*

Chicago, Illinois, September, 1893



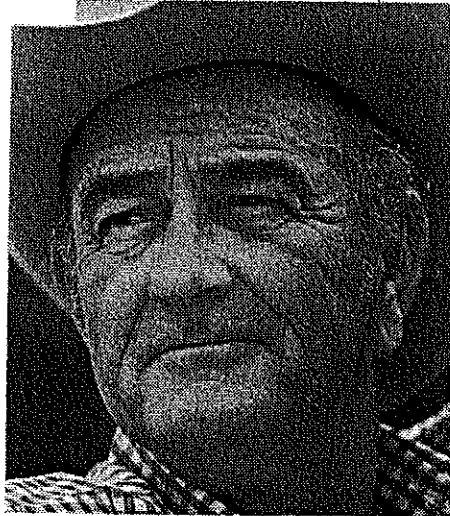
Samuel Gompers
Founding President
American Federation of Labor

What Great Leaders Have Said About Unions



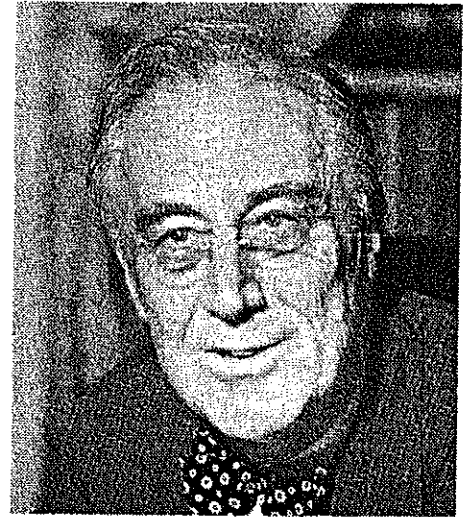
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Texas Labor Archives

Texas coal miners who belonged to the United Mine Workers Union helped make Thurber, in Palo Pinto County, a 100 per cent union town in 1903.

Texas' first labor unions organized just a few years after the arrival of the Anglo pioneers.

When the Texas Typographical Association was founded in April, 1838, it invited all printers in the Republic of Texas to join. The union staged Texas' first strike that autumn and won a 25 per cent wage increase. But there was little evidence of unionism for another generation — until Galveston's printers and carpenters formed locals on the eve of the Civil War. Galveston Carpenters Local 7, established in 1860, is the oldest local union in the United States which has never undergone reorganization.

Texas' early unions were formed among highly skilled or strategically located workers who had some leverage with employers because of a general shortage of skilled workers in Texas in the mid-19th century. Yet gains in wages, benefits and hours were sporadic and localized, and the only legislative advances were the passage of mechanics' lien laws in 1839, 1844, and 1875. Most workers continued to think that they would become farmers or merchants some day. Most also tended to belong to ethnic workingmen's associations which were not true unions. But the identification of many workingmen's associations with the German community, which was largely anti-slavery,

caused many Texans to regard unions as dreaded Yankee innovations.

Many Texans also regarded labor as just a commodity, ranking no higher than property or supplies. When a tallow tank in a Houston beef packing plant exploded, three men were scalded, at least one fatally. The blast also damaged a great deal of machinery. But a *Galveston News* writer noted, September 9, 1870, that the "sympathies of the whole people of Houston are with the enterprising proprietors."

During the 1870s, Texas underwent rapid urbanization and industrialization. Texas workers had 10 and 11 hour working days, six and seven days weeks, subsistence wages, no benefits, and abysmal working conditions. It is not surprising that in Texas, as in the nation, the late 19th century was marked by labor-management unrest.

The labor movement in many states and localities has its own distinctive features, and some aspects of Texas unionism seem almost unique in the nation's labor annals. Black and white workers in Galveston usually competed for jobs until they jointly persuaded most city employers to pay \$2.00 a day in 1877. They joined together again in an 1885 dock strike to force shippers to agree to an equitable division of labor for both races.

The Cowboy Strike

Labor problems even extended to the cattle country of the Panhandle, the site of one of the few cowboy strikes in American history. Corporate ranches paid their cowboys as little as \$30 a month for 12 to 18 hour days and fed them only common rations. More than 300 Texas cowboys went out on strike, April 1, 1883, just before spring roundup, when they presumably had a great bargaining advantage. They wanted higher wages and demanded that good cooks should be paid the same wages as cowboys. The work stoppage apparently lasted a month. Then it collapsed. The effort failed because the strike leader died (of natural causes), and workers used the strike fund for drinking and gambling in Tascosa. After the strike, the workers returned to their old jobs or straggled out of the Panhandle.

It is ironic that the cowboy, the primary American image of super-individualism, is revealed as an oppressed worker. The strikers of 1883 were not part of organized labor. But with the rise of the Knights of Labor in the mid 1880s, scores of cowboys organized into many local assemblies on the West Texas plains. The cowboys, like the miners, farmers, railroad workers and others, occasionally rebelled against the westward march of the corporation.

Knights of Labor

The Knights of labor, the first powerful national labor organization, was largely a product of the depression of the 1870s. The Knights took in all kinds of workers, including skilled, unskilled, farmers, blacks, and most bizarre of all for the time, women. But the Knights excluded doctors, lawyers, bankers, and liquor dealers. The union demanded the eight hour day, industrial safety laws, child labor laws, equal pay for equal work for women, establishment of postal savings banks and abolition of the Southern practice of leasing convict labor. They also wanted government ownership of railroads, telegraphs, and telephones. Equally important, they wanted to



Texas Tech Southwest Collection

Many cowboys, like other Texas workers, joined the Knights of Labor in the 1880's.

put an end to yellow dog contracts, whereby a worker had to swear he would never join in a union in order to get a job.

Texas was important to the Knights. Within three years after formation of the first local assembly in Texas in 1882, the Knights may have organized as many as half the non-farm workers of Texas (as well as many farmers). This was a higher percentage of the workforce than unions have ever recruited since.

The Great Southwest Strike

Railroads were the primary industry in the nation, and a third of the lines in Texas were controlled by the notorious Wall Street tycoon, Jay Gould.

In the winter of 1884-1885, Gould cut wages 10 percent on most of his railroads, though the average wage of less than \$2 a day was already at the poverty level and the work week was seven days. Southwestern and Midwestern workers went out on strike. Most were not union members, but they accepted the

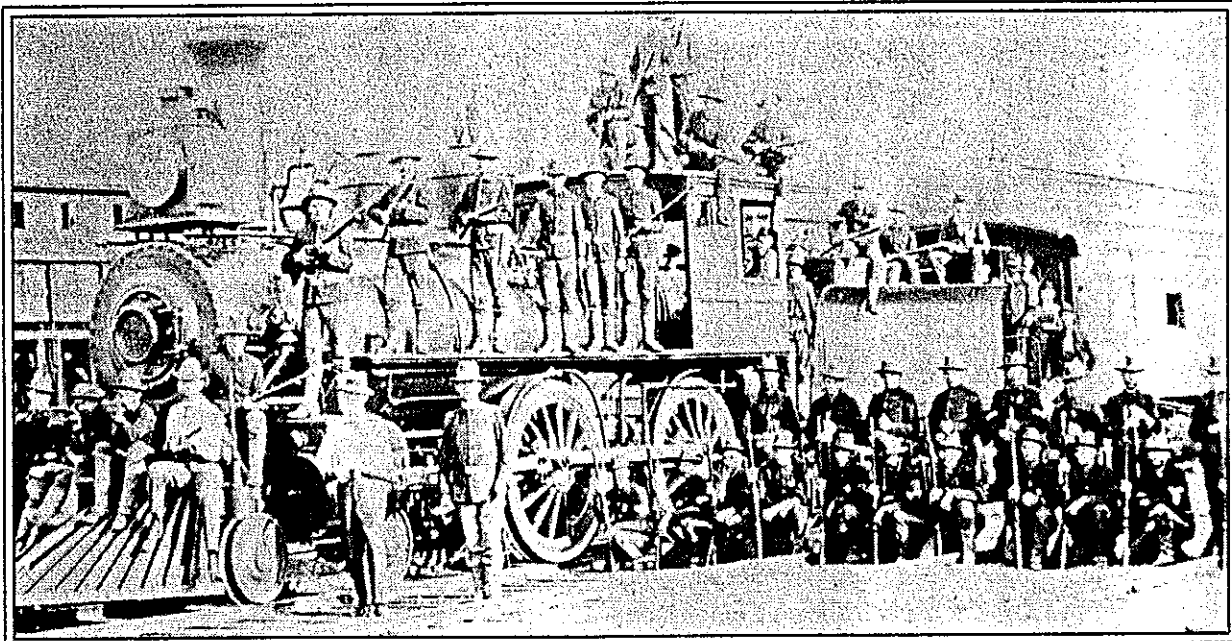
leadership of the Knights of Labor and joined the union by the thousands. Caught off guard by the unity of the workers, Gould finally negotiated with the Knights. He agreed to restore the wage cuts and not to discriminate against employees just because they belonged to the union.

Strikes on the Gould lines catapulted the Knights into undisputed leadership of the nation's labor movement. From July, 1885, to July, 1886, its membership soared from 100,000 to 700,000, nationally.

Jay Gould was determined to destroy the Knights. He refused to recognize the union or to pay the \$1.50 minimum wage for unskilled labor which the union requested. He finally goaded the Knights into action by firing a union leader in Marshall for missing work while attending a union meeting — after the Texas and Pacific had given him permission to do so. The Knights in the Southwest, under the dynamic leadership of Martin Irons, reluctantly accepted the challenge. By March 10, 1886, more than 9,000 employees of all Gould railroads in the Southwest were out on strike — 5,000 of them in Texas.

The peaceful beginnings of the walkout later gave way to violence and the destruction of property. Jim Courtright, a "notorious desperado" who was acting city marshal of Fort Worth as well as a gunman for the Missouri Pacific Railroad, shot down three or four picketers while one of his deputies was killed. After the Battle of Buttermilk Switch, Governor John Ireland ordered the state militia to Fort Worth, where they remained until the danger of disturbances ended. The presence of the Texas militia and more than 200 federal deputies who were also company gunmen had a decided effect on the strike. But it was the virtual absence of a strike fund, the availability of cheap scabs, the presence of corporate spies in all the union assemblies, and corporate control of the courts which also helped insure Gould's victory in less than two months.

The Great Southwest strike, even in its failure, was the catalyst for the birth of the mighty Texas Populist movement. This farmer-labor combine swept Texas and most of the country in the 1890s. The reigning Democratic party in the Lone Star state fought off the "Pops," but in the process adopted some



The Great Southwest Strike against Jay Gould's railroads reached into Texas in 1886, when 5,000 Texas workers joined the strike. Here, Texas Rangers and Gould's private railroad militia guard a locomotive.

of their goals. In 1892 the legislature, under the urging of Governor James Hogg, passed a law declaring that when an employee left the payroll of a railroad, he had to be paid all wages due him within 15 days. The railroad typically did not pay off such men at all, and the men did not have the money to take it to court. The railroads, of course, had the money to take this law to court, and the disposal of the law by the judiciary illustrated Populism's failure to change the political structure of the state. A Texas court held the law unconstitutional, proclaiming, "Unquestionably, so long as men must earn a living for their families and themselves by labor, there must be . . . oppression of the working classes."

The Texas Capitol — A Non-Union Job

Given the anti-labor atmosphere, it is little wonder that in the last quarter of the 19th century only one major non-union project was even slowed down because of union activity — the construction of the State Capitol. Since the stone used to erect the new capitol was quarried by convict labor, courtesy of the state government, the Capitol Syndicate subcontractor could not attract skilled granite cutters who belonged to the union. The stonecutters knew that if they worked with convicts, and taught them the trade as the Capitol Syndicate wanted, the union men eventually would be dismissed. Austin granite cutters asked \$4 a day, the convicts, 65 cents.

Backed by the Austin local, the National Granite Cutters Union warned all its local unions to boycott the Texas job. The national membership sustained the boycott by a vote of 500 to 1. The subcontractor, Gus Wilke, recruited 86 stonecutters in Scotland and shipped them to the U.S., in violation of the Alien Contract law. Twenty-four refused to work as scabs, after they saw the situation here.

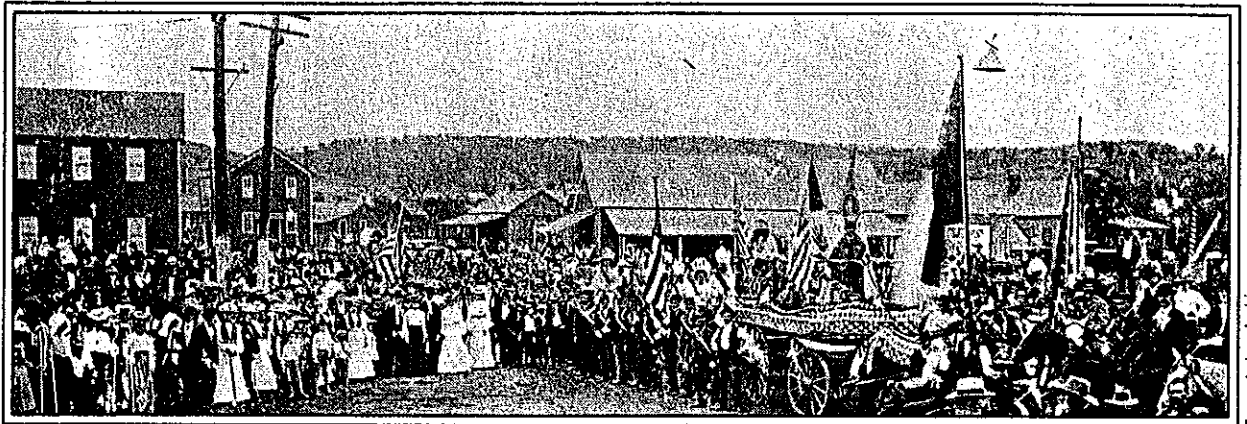
National labor organizations demanded that Wilke be prosecuted, and they raised funds to aid in the first test case of the law. Wilke was found guilty and fined \$62,000. On his last day in office, President Benjamin Harrison, perhaps

influenced by the Syndicate, reduced the fine to \$8,000. Although the boycott was nationally famous, it merely delayed the building of the capitol. The Goddess of Liberty was hoisted to the top, as the final act of construction, in 1888.

— Copyright, 1982 by Dr. George Green



Union granite cutters protested the construction of the Texas Capitol in Austin in the 1880's because the subcontractor used convict labor. The granite cutters wanted \$4 a day. The State Prison System was paid 65 cents per day for each man worked. Although the union was able to slow down construction, the capitol was completed in 1888 — a non-union job.



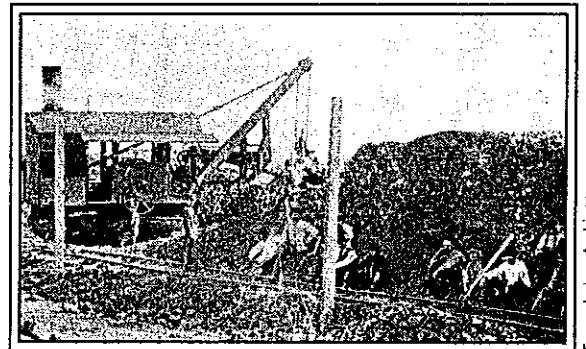
Thurber Celebration

Thurber may be the only town in Texas that has ever been a 100 per cent union shop city.

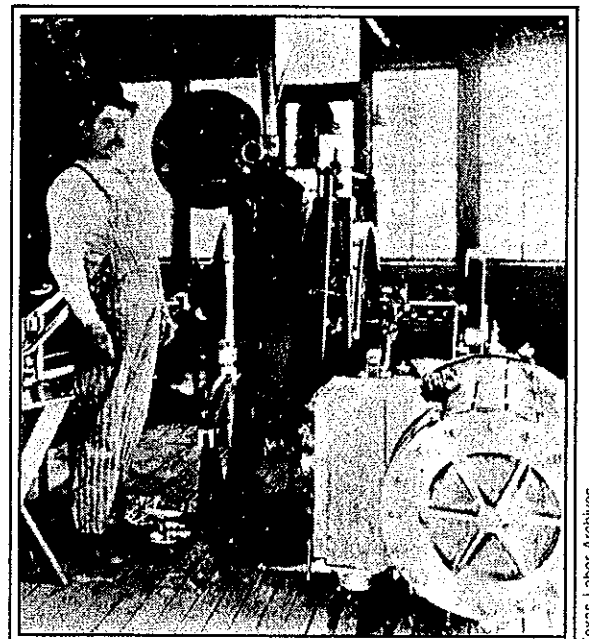
Palo Pinto and Erath counties were the site of coal mining operations in the 1880s. But Thurber, in Palo Pinto County, remained a company-dominated town in spite of Knights of Labor-led revolts in the 1880s and 1890s. When the United Mine Workers moved into Texas, it recruited workers in Thurber. After a successful UMW uprising in 1903, Texas and Pacific Coal Company recognized the union.

The union victory was so complete that State Federation of Labor Secretary C. W. Woodman was able to set up additional local unions of brickmakers, carpenters, clerks, meat cutters and bartenders. Woodman, armed with credentials from Samuel Gompers, even organized all other workers in Thurber by setting up a federal union for the unskilled. Union leaders claimed that Thurber was the only 100 per cent union shop city in the nation.

At the height of union activity and coal mining, the United Mine Workers represented more than 4,000 members in Texas. But the mining operations slowly died out as railroad engines began to burn oil rather than coal. By 1927, the great mining and union era in Thurber was over.



United Mine Workers take a break.



Thurber union-shop worker.



Texas Labor Archives

International Typographical Union (ITU) members celebrate Labor Day in Wichita Falls in 1910. The ITU banner carries a union label. The State Federation of Labor initiated "buy union label" campaigns shortly after it was organized in 1898.

The Texas State Federation of Labor was founded in 1898 — on the eve of the new century.

It was composed of trade unions affiliated with the American Federation of Labor (AFL) which had been founded by Samuel Gompers in 1886. The AFL became the dominant force among unionists, as the Knights of Labor faded away.

The State Federation quickly assumed a role in the Texas progressive reform movement, which included farmers, workers and middle-class business and professional people who were interested in everything from improving municipal government to reforming the education system and regulation of the professions.

Union members frequently spoke out on community issues and social questions. And by and large, they chose to operate within the framework of the existing economic, political and social system.

Texas State Federation of Labor President Max Andrew's reports in 1904 and 1905 indicate not only an acceptance of the capitalistic system, but also a belief that organized labor and industry must work together for the benefit of both. Andrew, who was editor of a Houston labor newspaper, believed that business and labor needed each other and that the existence of organized labor promoted stable working conditions and uniform wages.

Like Samuel Gompers, Andrew advocated a conservative approach to all union policies because he believed the only way for labor to be successful was to win the public's confidence. His cautious and moderate approach attracted followers — both among workers and business and professional people. The McLennan County physicians even tried to form a union to affiliate with the AFL. But the Federation policy did not open membership to professions or employers of labor.

By the turn of the century, reports from Texas AFL-based organizers revealed steady growth in union membership. Unions existed not only in cities like Houston, Galveston, Beaumont, Port Arthur, Dallas, Fort Worth, Waco, Austin,

San Antonio and El Paso, but also in smaller communities like Cleburne, Weatherford, Hillsboro, Corsicana, Midland, Palestine, Temple, Taylor, Denison and Greenville.

Individual locals repeatedly won concessions by the use of short strikes, sometimes accompanied by boycotts. Their demands usually included wage adjustments, shorter hours without reduction in pay and earlier closing hours for retail clerks.

Local strikes generated little opposition from the general public. In fact, union demands sometimes won support from local businesses, politicians and civic groups. In several communities, local businessmen's leagues even solicited labor support for various community projects.

Continued success led to the formation and promotion of central trade councils and federal labor unions. Many of the craft and trade unions participated in local trade councils and the State Federation of Labor.

The Federations — on both state and local levels — encouraged members to vote and take part in politics. Leaders instituted "buy union label" programs and advocated repeal of the poll tax because its cost prevented working people from voting.

NAM Offensive Against Unions

Labor movement success in Texas and elsewhere around the turn of the century led employers to conduct a "mass offensive against unions." Led by the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM), businesses vowed to get rid of the closed shop, advocated by unions.

In 1903, the NAM began a concerted campaign to attack the closed shop as "un-American." The NAM got prominent ministers and educators, such as Harvard University President Charles W. Eliot, to endorse the open shop. Citizens' Alliances designed to promote the open shop appeared in

hundreds of communities. They sought to portray unions as radical and dangerous. These kinds of efforts severely affected the AFL's national membership, which dropped from 1.6 million to 1.45 million from 1904 to 1906.

Organized labor fought back, however. Samuel Gompers' editorials in the *American Federationist* pointed out that employers' associations often used one set of principles in their attack on labor, but applied quite a different set of principles to their own behavior. Gompers pointed out that employers used private detective agencies to infiltrate unions to spy and provoke trouble. Then, employers branded all strikes or any other action they disliked as "radical." Many times, their own agents had provoked the action they deplored publicly as "radical and dangerous."

The objectives and tactics of the Citizens' Alliance-open shop movement also received considerable attention from the Texas State Federation of Labor.

"In a majority of cases, the larger strikes have been forced upon union labor by the trust combinations, and so wide spread have been the troubles that they appear like a premeditated concert of attack by monopolistic capital against union labor," TSFL President Andrew said in 1904.

The open shop crusade in Texas focused in 1903 on the streetcar industry, owned by out-of-state corporations. Encouraged by the success elsewhere of the "employers' mass offensive against unionism," Citizens' Alliances sprang up across the state. Following a similar strategy in a number of Texas cities, employers provoked transit strikes by arbitrarily dismissing workers, refusing arbitration and, indeed, by denying all union demands. These tactics brought about streetcar worker strikes in Beaumont, Waco, El Paso, San Antonio and Houston. The San Antonio and Houston transit companies imported professional strikebreakers from out of state, hired in advance of the strikes. Despite open shop propaganda disseminated by the Citizens' Alliance front, workers had community support in the beginning,

particularly from the daily press and many business and civic leaders. But the long duration and inconvenience of the strikes in Houston and San Antonio, coupled with sporadic violence, alienated middle-class citizens. And, true to form, the Citizens' Alliance called the strikers radicals and anarchists. Nonetheless, the San Antonio and Houston locals still retained considerable community support.

In spite of the open shop offensive in dealing with the streetcar workers, organizers for the American Federation of Labor from all parts of Texas during the period 1904 to 1907 continued to report organizing successes. By 1905, there seemed to be indications of a weakening of the Citizens' Alliances, as some businessmen began to openly support the use of arbitration in labor disputes.

By the end of the initial decade of the century, organized labor in Texas seemed to be prospering.

Railroad Conflict — Again

Texas railroad shop employees joined workers from Mississippi and Kentucky to the West coast in the massive struggle to organize the Harriman and Illinois Central railway systems from 1911 to 1915.

When mighty railroad monopolies emerged from the cutthroat wars of the late nineteenth century, the railroad brotherhoods already existed. They were composed of the highly-skilled and relatively scarce workers who made up independent unions of firemen, engineers, trainmen and conductors. They did not affiliate with the AFL.

However, most railroad shop craftsmen were not as skilled as members of the brotherhoods — nor were they as essential to the smooth operation of the railroads. These workers did affiliate with the AFL, and included such crafts as machinists, sheet-metal workers, tanners, coppersmiths, painters, steamfitters,



San Antonio members of the Plumbers Local Union 142 celebrate Labor Day in front of the Alamo, circa 1900.

boilermakers, blacksmiths, electricians and clerks.

When the railroad monopolies began to impose wage reductions and require piecework in the shops, workers discovered that their individual unions were too weak to oppose the powerful railroad combinations. In self defense, the shopmen adopted the industrial union concept and formed system federations — coalitions of all shopmen of each railroad system, regardless of their craft. The AFL even created a Railway Employee's Department in 1908 to coordinate activities of the various system federations, but it remained largely ineffective.

Shopmen of the Harriman and Illinois Central railway combines formed separate system federations in June, 1911, and demanded recognition of their associations. They wanted to negotiate wages, hours, and working conditions. Frightened by the specter of industrial unions capable of stopping all

railroad traffic in one massive general strike, railroad officials insisted that recognition of the system federations would subject all United States industries to union control.

Management said it would meet with the separate unions of shopmen, but refused to counsel with the federation. As a result, the shopmen voted overwhelmingly to walk out in September, 1911. The nation's daily press strongly endorsed the railroad monopolies' cause and refused to publicize the shopmen's side of the dispute. As the AFL's Railway Employment Department President A. O. Wharton explained before the United States Commission of Industrial Relations in Dallas in 1915, the system federations could not "purchase the publicity that the employer is able to secure by paying for the information to be circulated through the daily press. Our means of communication are practically nil so far as the public is concerned."

Although the strike initially involved more

than 30,000 employees nationally, the railroads had no trouble finding replacements for the strikers — or guards to protect the strikebreakers. Confrontations were inevitable between union pickets and strikebreakers, the latter often aided by police and troops. Violence erupted quickly. Questions were asked later.

Management refused to compromise and the striking workers decided to consolidate their efforts. The machinists took the lead and in April, 1912, formed a Federation of Federations over the various system federations. The AFL Railway Department facilitated a merger at its next convention when it endorsed the new organization's constitution. While the strike officially lasted until the summer of 1915, management determination and superior resources, along with a plentiful scab labor force, combined to defeat the workers' cause. The episode provided an important lesson to all American workingmen willing to learn from the experience. Management federations were too tough for individual unions. Organized labor could hope to complete only by fashioning comparable organizations.

Craft Union Prosperity

In spite of the railroad conflict, organized labor continued to grow. President William L. Hoefgen of the Texas State Federation of Labor reported significant membership gains to the delegates attending the 1912 convention. Many members of organized labor joined together for community work — as well as job improvements. They condemned loan sharks and warned working-class mothers about the "freakish fashions which display shamelessly the physical rather than the innocent charms of young girls."

The period from 1911 to 1918, when progressivism reached its heights, was a time in which skilled Texas craftsmen shared in the fruits of prosperity. Members of trade unions frequently became prominent citizens and their unions won public and corporate acceptance. In some Texas cities, central labor bodies waged

campaigns against "blue laws" which prohibited Sunday operation of motion picture houses and vaudeville shows. They pointed out that Sunday was the only day off for most workers to enjoy such amusements with their families. It also became commonplace for central labor unions to provide relief funds for disaster victims and needy workers.

Legislative Reform

If members of craft unions in the cities enjoyed comparative prosperity and general community acceptance, women and children employed in Texas cotton mills and other factories did not. Texas had from 12 to 16 cotton mills around 1910. They were located in cities such as Houston and Dallas, as well as in the more rural settings of Denison, Bonham and Itasca. The mills generally employed between 80 and 90 workers.

Eva Goldsmith of Houston, president of the state organization of the United Garment Workers' union, appeared before a committee of the state legislature in January, 1913 to testify on behalf of the Lane-Wortham bill to limit the work of women to fifty-four hours per week, with a maximum of 10 hours per day. Her moving account of working mothers who toiled 12 hours or more per day was followed by testimony of mill owners who presented petitions from some of their cotton mill workers who opposed the legislation because they could not afford to work fewer hours for lower pay.

The National Child Labor Investigating Committee reported that Texas mills put adult men on part-time status — or dropped them altogether — in order to hire the women and children at lower pay for longer hours.

These conditions persuaded the legislature to enact the fifty-four hour law. And by 1917, the *Houston Labor Journal* reported that members of the garment workers' union "are among the best paid female wage earners." Furthermore, the union's efforts had virtually eliminated competition from convict-made goods and had reduced the demand for non-union made garments.



Texas Labor Archives

The Ladies Auxiliary of the Painters, Decorators and Paperhangers had their own float in a Dallas Labor Day Parade, circa 1919. Most trade unions had ladies auxiliaries and whole families got involved in the civic and social life that centered around union membership.

Widespread strikes and testimony before legislative committees in this period brought public attention to the unsafe and unhealthy working conditions endured by men and women all across the nation. People were outraged. And the federal government responded. The United States Congress established the Commission on Industrial Relations to determine the causes and cures for industrial ills which claimed American workers as victims.

World War I

The American labor movement got caught up in the patriotic fervor that surrounded the United States involvement in World War I. They cooperated in industrial production, and President Woodrow Wilson encouraged the government to look with favor on union activities. Wilson's program

emphasized harmony between the government, industry and unions.

The harmony was sometimes broken, however. The actions of determined Houston oil producers during a 1917 strike of Texas and Louisiana oil field workers clearly demonstrated that some employers remained adamantly opposed to organized labor — and to the concessions made by Wilson's administration.

Although California oil unions had won the eight-hour and four-dollar day, the oil companies in Texas refused to budge from their 12-hour and three-dollar day. They used martial law and privately armed guards to break the Texas strike.

On the whole however, organized labor expected the overall peacetime harmony to prevail once the War ended. They were wrong. The post-war era brought in anti-labor tactics which included a new open shop movement and a heightened "Red Scare" campaign.

Red Scare and Open Shop Campaigns

By the fall of 1919 employers across Texas and the nation reacted to rising prices and sporadic labor militancy by resurrecting the open shop movement which had never entirely dissipated since the drive of 1903-1908. In 1920, open shop employer associations appeared in Beaumont, San Antonio, Dallas, Sherman, and other Texas cities. Texas, in fact, existed in the heartland of open shop activity and in many areas pressure on merchants and businessmen to conform was irresistible, despite the efforts of AFL unions to disassociate themselves from any taint of radicalism.

Unfortunately for organized labor, the open shop became a symbol for the great Red Scare of 1919-1920. During that time much of the business community seemed to equate unionism and collective bargaining with communism.

In a tension-charged atmosphere bred by the Red Scare, the most dramatic confrontation between organized labor and open shop forces came on Galveston's shipping docks in 1920. The conflict resulted in an open shop victory and the passage of an Open Port Law by the Texas Legislature. The Open Port Law made any interference with the loading, unloading or transporting of commerce in the state illegal. Before the law was declared unconstitutional in 1926, it was used on several occasions, most notably during a national strike of railroad shop workers in Houston in 1922.

The open shop era obviously had a great effect on the organized labor movement in Texas. According to one observer, the Texas State Federation of Labor "hardly functioned at all" during the period 1920 to 1930, when it was dominated to a large extent by William J. Moran of El Paso. Largely limited to preserving the status quo, the State Federation during the 1920s made little attempt to challenge the business philosophy of presidents Warren G. Harding and Calvin Coolidge as expressed in

Texas by governors Pat Neff and Dan Moody. Federation membership, in excess of 50,000 in 1920, stood at slightly more than 25,000 in 1927.

Reflecting the weakened condition of organized labor in the state, the Federation abandoned its earlier efforts in helping organize the unorganized. Moreover, black delegates at central labor councils and at the annual conventions of the State Federation became even more rare than in former years. Some councils refused the requests of black locals for affiliation. John North, a black longshoreman from Houston, denounced such myopic thinking before the Texas State Federation of Labor and complained about the TSFL's lack of interest in organizing blacks. North also suggested that black workers should not be ignored, because employers would fully utilize blacks in a non-union labor force that could totally destroy black unionism in such well-entrenched pockets as longshoring, where black and white locals had shared work in many Gulf ports harmoniously for many years on a fifty-fifty basis.

Some unions of course, survived the long retreat. Others even prospered. A number of craft locals promoted harmonious community relations, often winning support from the local chambers of commerce. In fact many union members joined the chambers and other civic organizations.

Although much hostility to organized labor remained, skilled craftsmen were able to develop excellent relations in the community. They often won commitments from municipal governments and local businesses to use only union labor. And they jealously guarded their established position by regulating union membership and charging large initiation fees. In return, the craft locals provided reasonably steady work, good wages and even sick pay or other fringe benefits.

This base of operations was much too narrow, however, to survive the economic storm that descended on organized labor in 1929.

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"All building trades reported starving slowly."

— **Houston Labor and Trades Council**
November 15, 1931

Already withered by a decade of open shop drives, anti-union laws and a few disastrous lockouts and strikes, the Texas Federation verged on extinction when skilled craftsmen began to lose their jobs in the early 1930s as the Great Depression overtook the nation.

Suddenly, for the first time in some 10 years, state labor conventions were dominated by discussions of organizing new unions and lobbying for reform legislation. As early as 1931, J. W. Parks, president of the state body, called for federal action to force industry to guarantee regular employment. By 1932, the conservative Beaumont painter wanted changes in the nation's basic economic structure and urged that labor "as a class" take militant organized political action.

Skilled craft locals, which had survived the 1920s fairly well, were decimated by the Depression. Jobless workers were unable to pay

their dues and this forced many locals to disaffiliate with the state and city organizations. Many surrendered their international charters and quit trying. Most, however, grimly hung on. Arthur McClurg, a Lubbock steamfitter, found steady work in Austin in the early 1930s on University of Texas buildings. For several years, he and another hand from the Caprock paid the dues for four fictional members in order to maintain the Lubbock local's membership at seven, the necessary minimum for a charter.

Steamfitters on the University of Texas campus joined with the plumbers and typographical locals in Austin to demonstrate how unions could cope with the hard times. They rented a building downtown, installed beds and baths, and provided a free night's lodging and clothes wash to unemployed craftsmen who were seeking work or passing through. Card-carrying plumbers and typographers would also receive a meal ticket good for three meals from the business agents of the two locals. The steamfitters, who felt lucky to have jobs, each kicked in \$5 a week out of the \$44 that they earned (for 44 hours).



The International Ladies Garment Workers carried on several vigorous and successful organizing drives in Texas during the 1930s. These Houston ILGWU members stage a "buy union label" demonstration in 1936.

Texas Labor Archives

Encouraged by New Deal legislation and the pleas of workers, many companies tried to spread out their work, employing their work force as part-timers to avoid layoffs. In Dallas, Southwestern Bell Telephone operators, for instance, worked only three or four days a week for over two years, and in later times company officials liked to brag about how much they had done for the workers during the depression.

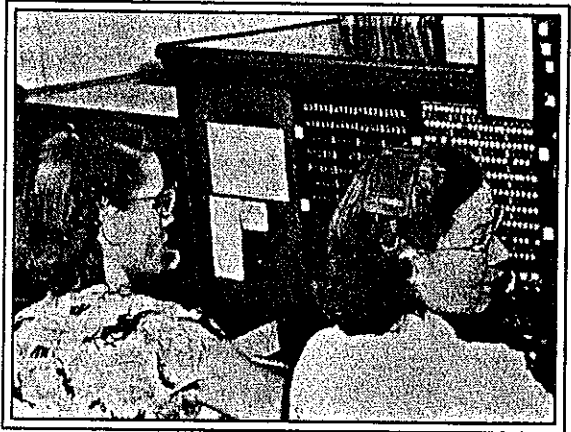
Nelle Wooding, who held various offices in the Communications Workers of America, set the record in better perspective one day by forcing a management official to admit that it did not cost the company any more to spread the work out than to layoff part of the workers.

"Of course it (the cost) was the same. The employees helped each other. It didn't cost the company a penny and you had the advantage of keeping a trained work force at your fingertips. And when the business picked up and you needed those people, you didn't have to employ or train anyone. You just let them work more days. Now I don't want you to ever tell me again you helped us during the Depression. You didn't. We helped each other," she said.

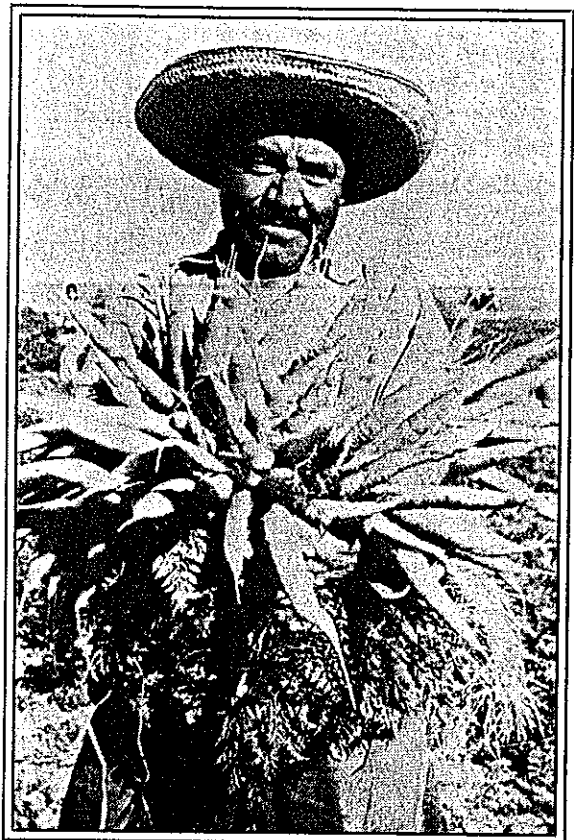
The state Federation leadership of Bill Moran and others was not vigorous enough to survive the Depression. Their power over organized labor was broken with the election of Dallas Typographer Wallace Reilly as executive secretary of the Federation in 1934. Reilly, however, was unable to do much of anything about the TSFL's precarious financial condition.

Lack of funds prohibited placing paid organizers into the field, a move used earlier by the Federation with great success. Even after the Federation's treasury was enlarged in 1937 with the election of Harry Acreman as secretary, the TSFL still declined to use full-time organizers. This left the organization of new unions to paid national AFL organizers and local volunteers.

Nevertheless, in the middle and late 1930s, union membership grew.



CWA members who were Southwestern Bell Telephone operators worked only three or four days a week for two years to spread the work and avoid layoffs during the Depression.



The Texas Agricultural Worker Organizing Committee was established in 1937 to organize new unions in South Texas. It grew out of early efforts by an independent union of Mexican-American workers, The Association of Journaleros.

Union Growth

New Deal programs began to stimulate economic activity after the election of Franklin Roosevelt in 1932. The Public Works Administration alone sponsored 1,750 projects in Texas between 1933 and 1939. Building trades unions, along with thousands of individual workers, reaped the benefits of such programs. The building trades were strong enough to form a state council in 1939.

Other unions also grew. Hard times gave workers the impetus to join unions to better their lives. Individuals sometimes sought out the union and offered to help organize.

The International Longshoremen's Association brought the Sabine District ports of Port Arthur, Beaumont, Orange and Lake Charles under contract.

The International Ladies Garment Workers carried on several vigorous and successful organizing drives.

Oil Field, Gas Well and Refinery Workers revived their organization and formed 53 unions in Texas during 1934.

Firefighters and county and municipal

employee locals sprang up all over the state.

Houston reported the successful formation of locals among the icemen, milkmen, chemical workers, Hughes Tool Company employees, packing-house workers, textile workers, radio technicians, furniture laborers, bakers, glass blowers, and railroad workers.

In San Antonio, a new union of boot and shoe workers was created and negotiated contracts with most shoe repair shops in the city.

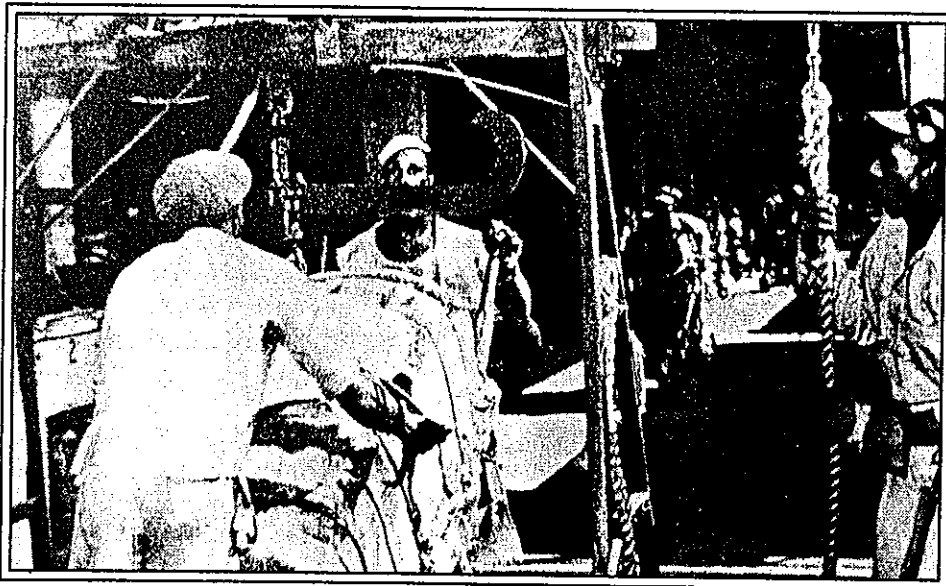
Fort Worth barbers increased their membership by 50 per cent, and the Meat Cutters union by 40 per cent.

The unionists of Sherman reorganized their central labor council after many years of inactivity.

Gypsum Mill Workers organized unions at several large mills on the Texas Plains. In Lubbock, the butchers, cooks, and waiters banded together.

Farm Workers

There were stirrings in agricultural unionism too. The Association of Journaleros, formed in 1933, was an



The International Longshoremen's Association brought the Sabine District ports of Port Arthur, Beaumont, Orange and Lake Charles under contract in the 1930s. These ILA members are loading a bale of cotton.



Texas Labor Archives

Union member Herbert Harris was tarred and feathered during the United Auto Workers organizing attempts at the Ford Plant in Dallas in the late 1930s. The NLRB ordered Ford to cease its acts of violence against workers and to engage in collective bargaining with the UAW. The Dallas plant was finally organized in 1941.

independent union of Mexican-American workers of many occupations. It made its reputation in 1935 by assuming control of a strike of some 1,200 onion workers in Webb County. The strike was a spontaneous protest against wages of six to seven and one-half cents an hour. But the strike was lost because of the workers' inexperience and mass arrests by the Texas Rangers. The Journaleros eventually became the nucleus of the Texas Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee established in 1937 to organize new agricultural unions throughout South Texas. In Corpus Christi, the Committee organized a tenant farmers local, receiving some financial help from union carpenters, plumbers, and oil workers in the area. Packing shed workers and sheep shearers also organized about the same time, separate from the TAWOC. But all three efforts were wrecked by intimidation by local authorities, lack of sustained support by the State Federation and the influx of illegal workers from Mexico.

Legislative Victories

During the governorship of Jimmie Allred, 1935-1939, the State Federation joined with the independent railway unions to reconstruct the Joint Labor Legislative Board, which gave labor a stronger, more united voice in Austin. This device had proven successful in the early history of the TSFL, but had been discontinued in the twenties. Wallace Reilly used the Legislative Board to form a successful labor coalition for legislative action that made the eight-hour law effective, plus a law preventing the sale of prison-made goods that were not clearly marked.

The TSFL also helped pass bills for boiler inspection, creation of the Unemployment Compensation Commission, expanded employment services to all parts of the state, a teacher retirement act and a minimum wage of \$150 per month for firemen. The state organization was also instrumental in defeating three hostile bills: a sales tax, a measure that required prison labor to do all printing for the state government and a bill that outlawed the sit-down strike.

CIO Comes To Texas

The Congress of Industrial Organizations, a division of the AFL, split with the AFL in 1937 and set up massive organizing programs all across the nation.

The only CIO union in Texas at the time was the Oil Workers. The next year, however, thousands of pecan shellers organized under the auspices of the CIO. Their union efforts provided the backdrop for one of Texas' most dramatic labor-management confrontations.

Pecan-factory owner Julis Seligmann of San Antonio outstripped his competitors in the pecan industry by reversing the usual trend toward mechanization. Instead, he hired thousands of low-wage workers. Ventilation, illumination, and sanitation were minimal as some 12,000 Mexican-Americans labored 60 or more hours a week for an average of \$2.50 per week! A 20 per cent wage cut on February 1, 1938, triggered a spontaneous, desperate strike.

In the absence of any well defined leadership, the strike was led for a time by the fiery orator Emma Tenayucca Brooks. Her political views were so controversial that the CIO's Cannery and Agricultural Workers soon took control of the strike and replaced her.

Because the Anglo political establishment of the city perpetuated itself in office by controlling the poverty-stricken, Mexican-American West Side of the city, it certainly did not want any organization arising that might challenge the machine. The Pecan-shellers strike was beginning to do just that. The San Antonio police began to club, tear gas and arrest peaceful picketers. They invaded homes, tearing CIO signs from windows and threatening to jail people if they did not return to work. Those arrested were crammed into cells under highly unsanitary conditions. But after 37 days of strife, both sides allowed an arbitration board to decide the issues. Small pay raises and union recognition

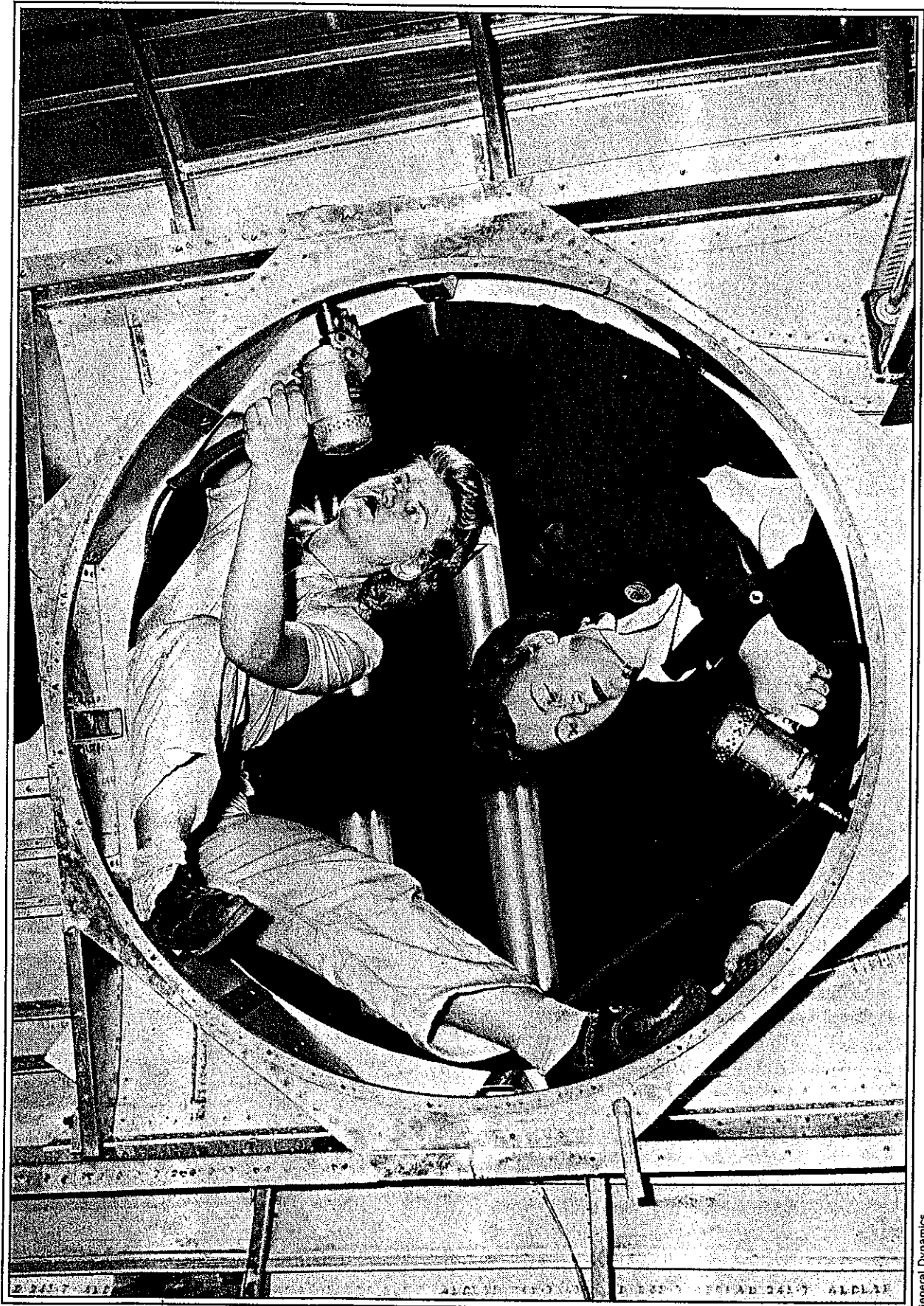
followed. But in October, 1938, the federal minimum wage law took effect. Most sheller plants slashed their work force and mechanized, rather than pay the required 25 cents an hour to a large work force. Wages for the skilled hands who kept their jobs doubled and even tripled, but some 5,000 shellers were terminated immediately and another 5,000 lost their jobs in the next few years. In the entire United States the only major labor force displaced by the passage of the minimum wage law were the pecan shellers.

Another spectacular labor-management confrontation occurred in Dallas. The workers at the Ford assembly plant in Dallas did not attempt to unionize in the late 1930s, even though they were victimized by the speed-up on the assembly line, lack of seniority, absence of benefits, eight hours pay for occasional 12 to 15 hour days and company spies throughout the plant.

One reason for the dearth of unionism was the activities of Ford's "outside squad," which specialized in maiming suspected union sympathizers on the streets of Dallas in broad daylight. Two dozen or so people were slugged in 1937. Also, the city of Dallas was the most notorious anti-union bastion in the nation, ruled by an elite group of businessmen who saw to it that the police did not interfere with the outside squad.

The city's newspapers and local courts consistently played down the violence and rarely identified it with the Ford Company. Nor did they extend much coverage to the NLRB hearings in 1940, which exposed Ford's heinous record. The board ordered Ford to cease its acts of violence against its workers and to engage in collective bargaining with the United Auto Workers. The Dallas Ford local finally organized in 1941.

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General Dynamics

Union Women worked on World War II bombers at General Dynamics, Fort Worth.

Public sentiment and public officials turned against labor in the late 1930s and early 1940s, as Texas politics were taken over by a loosely-knit alliance of oilmen, bankers and lawyers. During their heyday in the 1940s and 1950s these leaders were dedicated to a regressive tax structure, oppression of minorities, avoidance of state services and the use of organized labor as a whipping post.

The first of the establishment governors, W. Lee O'Daniel, on March 13, 1941, dramatically and unexpectedly asked a joint session of the legislature to pass an anti-violence bill to prevent "labor leader racketeers" from crippling Britain's struggle against the Nazis — although not a single man-hour of labor had been lost on any Texas defense job because of strikes or the threat of force to prevent anyone from working. O'Daniel's bill created a felony offense if a picketer used violence to prevent a strikebreaker from entering a plant. But if a strikebreaker slugged a picketer, it was still a misdemeanor.

O'Daniel's bill was ironic because unions made few demands during World War II. The

nation was united in the War effort, and for the first time since the 1920s, jobs were plentiful. Union organizing activity intensified, if anything, because of the thousands of workers who began working in defense and related industries.

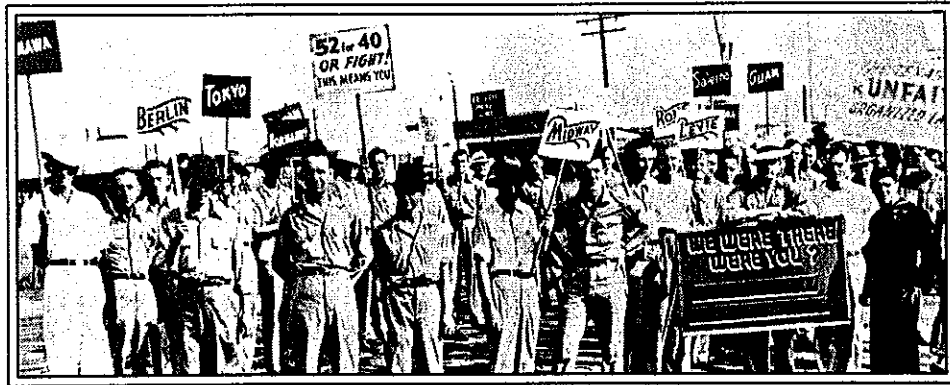
Labor's internal affairs, however, began to play a role in organizing activities during the War.

The division between the AFL and CIO created bitterness and raids upon each other's membership. But it also stimulated organizing activity. William Green and George Meany journeyed to Dallas in 1940 to launch an AFL Southwestern organizing drive before some 1,700 delegates from Texas and neighboring states.

Despite some opposition within various craft unions, several AFL affiliates accepted the idea of organizing on an industrial basis. The Operating Engineers in particular enjoyed considerable success in the oil refineries, gasoline plants and carbon black plants of the Texas Panhandle and elsewhere.



Organized labor threw its full strength behind the World War II industrial effort required to insure American victory. These Texas oil workers express their sentiments quite clearly around 1943.



Texas Labor Archives

After World War II ended, union workers tried desperately to keep up with the rising cost of living and to make up for what they had lost during the War. These OCAW workers asked, "We fought for you, will you fight for us?," as they and other union members walked off their jobs in 1945 and 1946.

After The War

During World War II, wages rose about 15 per cent, prices about 45 per cent and profits, some 250 per cent. After the war ended, workers tried desperately to keep up with the rising cost of living, and to make up for what they had lost during the War.

All over the state and nation, workers walked off their jobs in 1945 and 1946. For the first time in its history, Houston and other cities witnessed massive walkouts of telephone workers and public employees.

Hundreds of workers successfully struck the Waco plant of General Tire and Rubber. General Tire hired a consultant to break the strike, and his first anti-union newspaper advertisement asked why highly paid CIO workers were striking for more money. The advertisement backfired, because unorganized workers who made 50 cents an hour or less discovered that union workers made more money! They flocked to join unions. Employees of three textile plants, a clothing plant, a chemical plant and a cottonseed oil mill came into the CIO within three months.

The CIO generated much opposition among Texas politicians, since it disturbed hundreds of employers, signed up black workers, and agitated for the abolition of the poll tax.

Anti-union sentiment crested in 1947 when the Texas Manufacturers' Association, regional Chambers of Commerce and right-wing extremist groups successfully lobbied for a spate of regulatory laws. The Texas Legislature ob-

liged with a right-to-work law, an anti-checkoff act, an anti-secondary boycott law, a law subjecting unions to antitrust statutes and an anti-mass-picketing act (defining mass picketing as more than two pickets either within 50 feet of the plant entrance or 50 feet of any other picket). The legislative move reached absurdity when a pro-labor member of the house offered an amendment which would have abolished unions, confiscated union members property, sent their families to concentration camps and lined up all union members against a wall and had them shot. The house voted it down sixty-three to eight.

The anti-boycott and anti-picketing laws were whittled down in successful legal challenges by the Mullinax-Wells law firm of Dallas. The most expensive case grew out of a charge by the Brown and Root Construction Company in 1950 against the Federation and scores of other unions and affiliates connected with the Building Trades. Herman Brown charged that illegal picketing, secondary boycotting and efforts to force him to hire only union workers were costing him business and were in violation of Texas laws.

The company succeeded in obtaining injunctions from a district court, which restrained the unions from picketing and boycotting. But after four years of hearings, the Texas courts modified the injunction to permit peaceful picketing in connection with any bona fide dispute.

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One of the hottest elections in Texas history revolved around the role of organized labor — the 1954 Democratic gubernatorial primary.

By 1954, Governor Allen Shivers' administration had been embarrassed by insurance company scandals and the governor's dubious real estate transactions in the Rio Grande Valley, but the governor nevertheless declared for an unprecedented third term.

The liberal challenger, Ralph Yarborough, solidly backed by labor, waged a spirited campaign but soon found himself connected with a communistic labor menace, conjured up by Shivers. A CIO retail workers strike in Port Arthur had evidently been helped by a couple of Communists or ex-Communists whom the CIO had quickly replaced. But the tainted connection enabled Shivers to escalate an ordinary strike situation (ordinary outside Texas and the South) into a so-called Communist conspiracy that threatened to take hold of the state. The governor could then assert that, "While I know my opponent is not a Communist, I feel that he is a captive of certain people who do not approve of being tough on Communists."

The governor also exploited segregationist attitudes, stirred by the Brown decision of the Supreme Court which was handed down in the midst of the Texas primary. Yarborough forced Shivers into a runoff, which no previous incumbent governor had won.

With less than two weeks to go in the runoff, the governor's closest advisor informed him that he still needed a burning issue for the finish. As for segregation, he said, "I don't believe that old dog will hunt again," and the "outside labor bosses" hadn't caught on either. The aide suggested "using the Port Arthur story as a threat to businessmen everywhere," and using "the farm-labor unionization threat, especially in West Texas." This meant switching from opposition to the union because it was "red-controlled," to opposition to "the union, period." The farm-labor gambit was risky because of the governor's personal involvement with ranches that used cheap wetback labor, but

"it's the only thing we have that can be made to appeal to the West Texas (especially South Plains) farmers, who are pretty solidly against you. . . ."

This strategy was followed in the runoff. Teams of Port Arthur businessmen appeared on radio and television around the state, describing their city as a ghost town because of the Union picketing. Mass meetings of merchants were told that their towns would be next, unless Shivers was reelected.

A televised "Port Arthur Story" showed deserted streets in the coastal town. Yarborough claimed, and a Shivers staff man later admitted, that the film was taken at 5:00 a.m. Assisted also by enormous donations from corporate interest groups and by the editorial support of ninety-five of the state's one hundred daily papers, Shivers beat Yarborough 775,088 to 683,132.

East Texas

Some of the other struggles of the 1950s also occurred in the piney woods of East Texas, a part of the rural, small town South where unions were traditionally regarded as radical threats to God, home, and country. Workers in the two big poultry processing plants in Center, in Shelby County, were paid the minimum wage of 75 cents an hour in 1953. Many worked in unsanitary conditions, 10 or 11 hours a day on their feet with no overtime pay. Many had painful, swollen hands, but no one was allowed to switch to a different plant job in order to rest his hands. The plants had no grievance procedure, seniority plans or paid holidays.

The workers asked the Amalgamated Meat Cutters to organize them and voted heavily for the union in the 1953 representation elections. The companies refused to bargain in good faith, prompting the union to launch a boycott of their products. Anticipating problems in marketing their merchandise, the companies speeded up the production line in order to get as far ahead as possible should the boycott become

completely effective. Some of the women passed out on the line.

Suddenly, on April 5, 1954, the workers bolted out in a wildcat action that was soon sanctioned by the Meat Cutters union. Police threats, particularly against black picketers, and a couple of mysterious bombings failed to deter the strikers.

Then the union took note of the numerous odoriferous chickens with growths and pus that the Center plants processed and began a nationwide campaign for compulsory federal poultry inspection. They got the active support of public health officials, conservationists and church groups.

Congressional hearings revealed that a third of all listed cases of food poisoning were traced to poultry, as were several diseases that workers contracted. Three died in a psittacosis outbreak in 1956. Meanwhile, one of Center's poultry plants went out of business and the other yielded to the union, agreeing to a pay raise as well as Center poultry workers' first overtime pay, holidays, vacations and grievance procedure.

In 1957, the clean-up crusade ended when the

poultry products inspection act became law. It established compulsory federal inspection of all poultry shipped in interstate commerce and required the maintenance of sanitary facilities, practices and correct labeling. The Meat Cutters had scored quite a success for the American consumer.

Lone Star Steel

Even East Texas workers who were much better off economically than the chicken processors had to grapple with the region's traditional employer paternalism.

In the 1950s, E. B. Germany, president of the Lone Star Steel Company near Daingerfield, hired a company minister to call on sick workers to see if they were really ill. Germany said he was tired of losing arbitration cases and announced in 1957 that the company would no longer abide by arbitrators' rulings. He got away with it for a time. The union was not able to reassert itself until the late 1960s.



El Paso Meatcutters resort to "horse and buggy" transportation to point out that they worked for "horse and buggy" wages. The Amalgamated Meatcutters and Butcher Workmen went on strike in 1959 for better wages and working conditions.

Texas Labor Archives



Texas Labor Archives

Children of striking Tex-Son workers take to the picket line in San Antonio in 1959 to tell the grievances of the mostly-female ILGWU Tex-Son employees.

Texas AFL-CIO

Texas labor did enjoy two spectacular successes in 1957. The Washington, D.C. announcement of an agreement between the Building and Construction Trades Department and the Industrial Union Department of the AFL-CIO smoothed the way for an overwhelming approval of the merger in Texas. The founding convention of the Texas State AFL-CIO was July 30, 1957.

That same year Ralph Yarborough, with strong labor backing, was sent to the U.S. Senate in a special election. In his tenure of over 13 years, Yarborough not only compiled a staunch labor voting record, but also became a creative innovator of bills that benefited workers and consumers.

Although the AFL-CIO merger in Texas increased the strength of unions, relations with governors and legislatures remained tenuous — especially during the administration of John Connally, 1963-1969.

Hank Brown and Roy Evans, who had been

elected to guide the state AFL-CIO in the rough and tumble Galveston convention in 1961, were unable to arouse Connally's concern that Texas was the last of the 10 largest states without a minimum wage law or that Texas ranked last in compensation for injured workers. In general Connally's relations with workers (and minorities) were symbolized by a confrontation on August 31, 1966.

Mexican-American farm hands were marching from the Rio Grande Valley to Austin to dramatize their pleas for a \$1.25 an hour state minimum wage law. Suddenly, just outside New Braunfels, Connally materialized at the head of a cavalcade of Lincoln Continentals. The governor informed the workers that none of the top state officials would greet them in Austin on Labor Day, since all would be out of town, and added that he would not have met with them even if he were in town.

After warning the farm workers that marches could get out of hand, Connally told them that he certainly would not call a special session of the legislature to pass a minimum wage law.

Then Connally and his entourage drove off. The confrontation, however, only spurred union members to greater political involvement.

The incident symbolized the sometimes rocky road that existed between labor unions and elected political leadership in Texas during the 1960's. Still, the Texas economy was thriving, and workers unionized. By the 1960's, real wages were about 70 percent above pre-World War II levels and fringe benefits often included such unprecedented gains as escalator clauses, life, sickness, and accident insurance, and survivor, pension, and supplementary unemployment payments. Further advances were made in paid holidays, vacations, and standard work weeks.

As these and other benefits came to the attention of public employees, many of whom were paid at levels that qualified them for welfare supplements, they came to the realization that society helps those who help themselves. A breakthrough came for federal employees in 1961 when President Kennedy issued executive order 10988 encouraging them to form unions to cope with working conditions and grievances. Department of Labor wage and hour inspectors, centered in the Dallas-Fort Worth area, were bothered by violations of the standard 40-hour work week and by the whimsical transfers of promoted employees. Management opposed unionization, of course, and utilized the weapons of the modern bureaucracy: months of unanswered letters, harrassment through performance evaluations, case reports returned for clerical errors, creation of more paperwork, removal of all union materials from bulletin boards, promotions on the basis of friendship and refusal to publicize open positions. Through dogged perseverance, American Federation of Government Employees Lodge 2139 was chartered in August 1962.

After the rancorous years with Connally, the political climate improved during the 1970's. Brown, president of the Texas AFL-CIO from 1961 to 1971, Evans (president, 1971-1973), and Harry Hubbard (president, 1973-1989) managed to forge better relations with the two succeeding governors, Preston Smith (1969-1973) and Dolph Briscoe (1973-1979). Labor representatives appeared in far greater numbers as delegates to national Democratic conventions, as members of the State Democratic Executive Committee, and as appointees to the state's industrial accident board, employment commission, and insurance board.

The Texas economy continued to thrive and grow, particularly as a result of the OPEC oil price increases during the early and mid-1970's, which spurred oil production and refining in the state. The movement of business and industry to southern states, including Texas, further boosted the economy. The good times helped unions prosper, too. From 1969 until 1979, membership

in the Texas AFL-CIO increased from 153,000 members to 266,000 members.

In 1979, Texas placed in office the first Republican governor since Reconstruction, Bill Clements. As would be expected, labor unions did not enjoy the kind of relationship with a Republican administration that it had under the Democrats. Still, the state economy was booming, and union membership grew. Texas AFL-CIO membership peaked in 1982 at 300,000 members.

The 1980's fared worse for labor unions in Texas as well as labor unions across the nation. With Republican President Ronald Reagan in the White House, the 1980's proved to become a decade devoted to national deregulation of industries, a "free for all" in the Wall Street financial sector, the dismantling of many important industries through mergers and buyouts and other "get-rich quick" schemes, lower taxes for the wealthy, and decreased attention to social concerns like education, health care, and housing. At the same time, corporations in critical manufacturing industries began to move operations overseas and across the Mexican border, draining the Texas economy of untold manufacturing jobs, many of them union jobs.

Also, in the early 1980's a debilitating oil bust hit Texas as the result of major shifts in global oil markets. Union jobs related to the oil industry disappeared by the thousands.

Between the national economic and labor policies of President Reagan, and the oil bust in Texas, membership in the state labor organization fell off to 253,000 in 1985, and to 215,000 by the end of 1989.

Though improved relations between labor and state government occurred during the administration of Governor Mark White (1983-1987), White was replaced in 1987 when Bill Clements once again became governor. The policies of Governor Clements hurt workers in Texas in areas like worker safety. For instance, Clements oversaw the dilution of the state workers compensation system while in office.

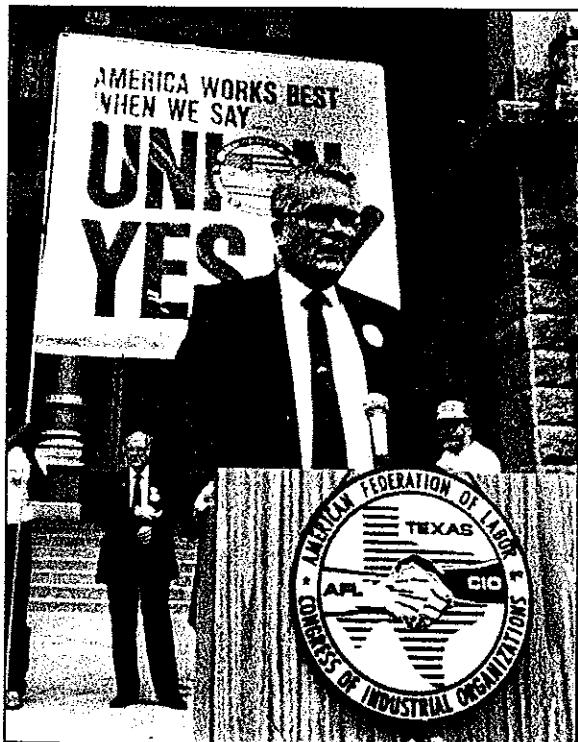
In 1989, Harry Hubbard left office and Joe D. Gunn became president of the Texas AFL-CIO. Gunn, who had served as secretary-treasurer of the state body since 1979, vowed to bring policies and initiatives of the Texas AFL-CIO into line with the changing structure of the national and state economies. More and more union members were coming from newly developing sectors of the economy, such as service industries, a trend that would affect the union movement in Texas for the remainder of the 20th Century.

Editor's Note: This article, except for some additions regarding developments since the 1960's, is taken from the copyright work of Dr. George Green.)

Union workers rally at the State Capitol in 1989 to show solidarity on one of the many issues affecting Texas workers. The Capitol, seat of state government, provides a symbolic and centralized location for workers to express sentiments publicly. Texas AFL-CIO Secretary-Treasurer Jackie St. Clair is seen in right center foreground.



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Texas AFL-CIO President Joe D. Gunn addresses a Texas workers rally outside the State Capitol in Austin during a special legislative session on the state workers compensation system in 1989. Gunn became president of the Texas AFL-CIO in July 1989.

About half a million Texans belong to unions in 1990. Unions affiliated with the AFL-CIO Federation account for about 90 percent of the Texas unionists, with independent unions accounting for the remaining 10 percent.

Union membership, of course, is a function of the demand for workers. Geographically, that means union membership in Texas is most concentrated along the heavily industrialized Gulf Coast. The numbers of union members diminishes as you move westward, just as the population does, because manufacturing and industry drops off, replaced by rural agricultural activity.

Also, the highest percentage of worker organization generally occurs where a pattern of industry-wide bargaining is found—oil and petrochemical manufacturing, for instance, as well as railroads, automobile manufacturing, and telephone communications. These industries tend to be unionized no matter where they are located geographically.

But union members can be found throughout Texas across a broad spectrum of the economy, in many different kinds of occupations. One easy way to divide the categories is to refer to them as the service sector, the construction industry, heavy industry, the auto and aerospace industries, oil and petrochemical manufacturing, other manufacturing, and agricultural farm workers.

An increasing number of union members are employed in the service industries, such as communications, transportation, and government. Throughout Texas, you will find union telephone workers, letter carriers, postal workers, bus drivers, railroaders, and airline employees.

For example, almost all non-supervisory employees of the Bell Telephone companies are union members—almost 33,000 of them in Texas.

A good example of unionism in the transportation industry is the maritime trades along the port cities of the Texas Gulf Coast. The maritime trades, including seafarers, inland boatmen, and longshoremens, are heavily organized, with about 12,000 in Texas.

Government (public sector) employees make up a very large number of union members in the state, and the number is growing. Federal employees at military bases, for the IRS, and for other federal agencies account for 22,000 or so members.

State, county, and city government employees also belong to unions. Although not permitted by state law to sign binding collective bargaining contracts, they still have "working agreements" with governmental bodies. Many such members are employed in sanitation work, hospitals, school maintenance, street repair, and so on. Additionally, many union craftsmen such as electricians are employed either directly or indirectly through contractors by state and local governments. All together, more than 25,000 public workers belong to unions, not counting fire fighters, bus drivers, and teachers.

Among fire fighters in Texas towns and cities, more than 8,500 of them are union members, and the number is increasing. Also, several thousand police officers in Texas cities, including Houston, are organized. All major city bus systems have union drivers, and most of the terminal and maintenance personnel are organized.

Teachers in Texas are "organized" in various ways. Most do not belong to a union; many of them belong to "associations." Still, about 15,000 teachers and educational workers belong to the Texas Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO.

The service sector occupations include union members in some areas that would surprise people. For instance, there are about 1,200 stage and theatre workers in the state, and similar numbers of insurance clerks, office workers, journalists, television and radio artists and broadcasters, and musicians.

Retail clerks and meat cutters who work for major national chain stores also make up a significant number of union workers in Texas. About 32,000 such workers are covered by union contracts.

In the construction industry, about half of large commercial construction is done under union contracts. Large manufacturing facilities and power generating plants are built by union workers, as well as most schools, universities, and public buildings.

The largest unions in the construction industry are the carpenters, electricians, operating engineers, plumbers and pipefitters, laborers, boiler-makers, painters, bricklayers, plasterers, sheet metal workers, roofers, asbestos workers, and lathers and elevator constructors. Together, they account for about 50,000 members.

In heavy industry, both oil refining and steel production are heavily organized, with more than 20,000 members in oil refining and about 7,500 in steel work.

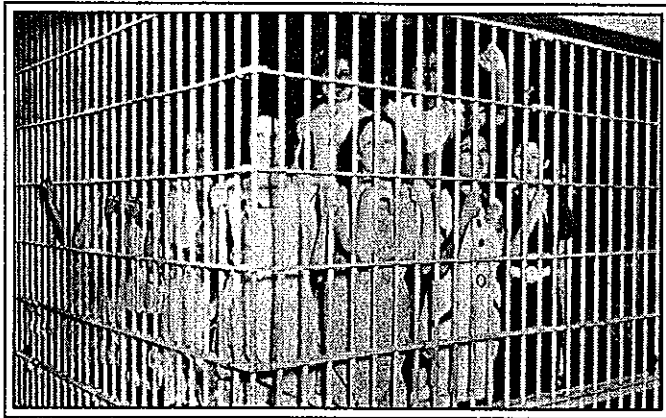
In the auto and aerospace industries, most concentrated in the Dallas-Fort Worth area, about 33,000 workers belong to unions. The workers include members of the machinists, auto workers, and transport workers unions.

The chemical industry, another Texas giant, is about 50 percent organized, while the rubber industry is unionized more completely, from production workers to test-drivers.

A number of other manufacturing and service industries have substantial numbers of union workers, though the percentage of workers organized is less than half. Included in this group are the forest products industry, paper products, food processing, asbestos, plastics, brick, glass, stone, cement, containers, electrical equipment, machinery, and printing.

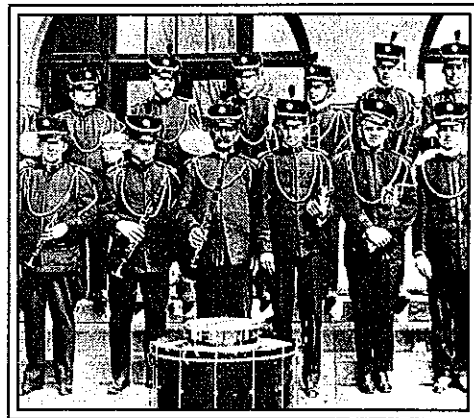
Another important category of unionism in Texas is agricultural farm workers. Union growth in this category, especially in the South Texas region, has been difficult despite many attempts by farm workers over the years. Farm workers in the Rio Grande Valley have not yet succeeded in negotiating union contracts, largely because they are not covered by laws providing for union elections, as other workers are.

As for the future of unionism in Texas, as industry rebounds and as service workers and public sector employees become increasingly aware of the many benefits of unionism, a steady growth in the numbers of union members is expected.



Texas Labor Archives

ILGWU members in jail, Dallas, 1930s



Texas Labor Archives

Fort Worth Musicians, 1916



Texas Labor Archives

CIO Packing House Workers, 1930s



Texas Labor Archives

Dallas Meatcutters, 1915



Brickmasons' State Convention, Galveston, 1909

