

Labor movement - U.S.  
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# THE STRUGGLE TO UNITE

A Brief History of the American Labor Movement

Irving Brotslaw



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THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN  
UNIVERSITY EXTENSION DIVISION

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A Brief History of the American Labor Movement

Irving Brotslaw

Madison SCHOOL FOR WORKERS,  
UNIVERSITY EXTENSION DIVISION,  
THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN 1965



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## FOREWORD

In early 1964 the Milwaukee County Labor Council, AFL-CIO, and the School for Workers of The University of Wisconsin Extension Division were exploring the suitability of various subjects for the Council's forthcoming educational institute. As a general rule, the topics around which these institutes are organized are current economic or political issues. In this instance, the author suggested that the subject might be a history of the labor movement, centered around films dealing with various aspects of labor history, the songs of the labor movement, and descriptions of memorable events in American labor history.

The Council agreed to this format, and the institute was held on April 18, 1964, at the Schroeder Hotel in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Approximately 125 area trade unionists attended. The institute had some of the trappings of a "hootenanny," combined with the more serious, albeit dramatic, aspects of labor history.

Using a script which he prepared for the institute, the author served as the narrator. As the narrative developed, a chorus of guitar-wielding high school students from Madison, Wisconsin, led by Professor Norris Tibbetts of the School for Workers staff, sang various labor songs which lent emphasis to the topic being discussed. Films which were descriptive of the events alluded to by the narrator were interspersed with the narrative and the songs. In addition, a group of "readers," who were located backstage, read selected quotations and descriptions of events in labor history, which further added to the development of the narrative. The songs, the films, the readings and the narrative blended together into a smoothly integrated description of American labor history, which was warmly received by the assembled delegates.

At the suggestion of Professor Frederick I. Olson, Associate Dean, University Extension Division, Milwaukee, the script which was used at the institute has been reproduced in this booklet. The original script has undergone certain editorial revisions, but in general this booklet is a reproduction of that script. Because of the limitations of space, the quotations and songs read and sung at the institute have not been reproduced in full in the body of the text, but each of the songs referred to has been reproduced in the Ap-

pendix. Paragraphs describe the content of the films shown at the institute and their connection with the general narrative; relevant photographs and drawings have been introduced into the text.

In reproducing the script, the School for Workers hopes that other groups may be encouraged to produce similar institutes on labor history. It is also hoped that the pamphlet, by itself, will be useful to persons interested in a brief history of the labor movement which captures some of the color and excitement often missing in more standard references on this subject.

The author is deeply indebted to Professor Norris Tibbetts, who was mainly responsible for the compilation of the quotations and songs used in this pamphlet, for his invaluable contributions to the success of the institute for which the original script was developed. The author is also indebted to Dean Olson for his encouragement pertaining to the preparation of this booklet, and to Professor Irving Kreutz, Department of English, The University of Wisconsin Extension Division, for his valuable editorial assistance in preparing the manuscript. A special word of thanks is owed to Edith Fowke and Joe Glazer for permission to reprint songs from the collection which they have compiled, *Songs of Work and Freedom* (Roosevelt University, Chicago, 1960).

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## INTRODUCTION

The theme of this essay is that "it wasn't always thus." Its purpose is to remind the reader that for the workingman the past was often brutal and unkind. Social progress, particularly the acceptance of the union and the institution of collective bargaining, did not come about easily. Attempts to form unions were often bitterly opposed by employers, unfriendly courts, and hostile lawmakers.

The purpose of this compilation of materials is not to dwell on the unpleasant events of past years. Happily, many of the injustices recounted herein have been redressed. But an understanding of the struggles which occurred in order to make the social progress we have enjoyed in recent years is an essential part of being an effective trade unionist. The labor movement has a proud heritage, much of which has been forgotten or isn't known to many of the present generation. It is a heritage worth knowing, and worth learning about, since the modern trade unionist has much about which he can feel justly proud.



## THE MODERN UNITED STATES LABOR MOVEMENT

The United States labor movement, in the 1960's, has 17,000,000 members, 112,000 collective bargaining agreements, 74,000 local unions, 181 international unions, as well as intermediary bodies at the city and state level.<sup>1</sup> The structure of the labor movement is largely related to the industries and crafts within which the various unions operate. The principle of the autonomy of the individual international unions is an important feature of this structure and of the collective bargaining framework within which the various unions organize and bargain.

In terms of bargaining accomplishments, the United States trade union movement has no peers. The wage levels which its members enjoy and the fringe benefits which have been negotiated, including health and welfare and pension plans, supplementary unemployment benefits, extended vacations, and severance pay, are unique contributions of the labor movement to the high standard of living which characterizes American society in the 1960's.

The philosophy of the modern trade union movement in the United States is largely "job centered," and is mainly concerned with bread and butter issues, improving the economic and physical well-being of its members and making sure that workers who produce receive in return for their labor a just share of the wealth they create. It frowns upon "dual unionism"—the existence of more than one union in the same craft or industry—and it has largely rejected the "pie in the sky" outlook which characterized some of its predecessors.

In large measure, this attitude and philosophy is the product of success; the success of job-centered, bread-and-butter unionism, contrasted to the numerous failures experienced by unions which advocated overthrow of the wage system and other features of capitalism. In the sense that it accepts the current method by which production is organized and the political structure by which we govern ourselves, the United States labor movement is probably the most conservative of the labor movements which operate in western nations.

In terms of methodology—how a union gets what it wants—the major tactics used by American trade unions are organization of their respective jurisdictions and the negotiation of collective bargaining agreements which incorporate the terms and conditions under which their members will work. The labor movement is also active in political affairs, but the political philosophy of the labor movement has not changed much basically since the days of Gompers: “Reward your friends, and punish your enemies—through your vote.” Working within this framework, the trade unions have developed a considerable amount of political consciousness on the part of their members, and a degree of expertness in legislative matters which has produced notable accomplishments in the area of social legislation. Although it has also suffered a number of legislative reverses, the modern labor movement has carefully avoided the entanglement of third party or independent political movements, preferring to operate through the existing political parties.

The Industrial Union Department, AFL-CIO, has produced an excellent film, entitled “*This Union Cause*”, which depicts the long, hard struggle of American workers to form an effective union movement. It demonstrates in a brief and concise fashion how the union movement developed, and why it adopted the programs and policies which characterize its present operations. The film, which runs for about 23 minutes, was shown at this point in the April 18, 1964 institute for which this material was developed.

## EARLY ATTEMPTS TO FORM UNIONS IN THE UNITED STATES: 1800 TO 1864

The beginning of the American trade union movement coincides very closely with the industrial revolution, the development of the factory system, and the emergence of the corporation as the means by which production is organized, all of which led to the depersonalization of the work place. In response to these developments, American workers demonstrated an interest in union organization almost from the very beginning of the United States as an independent nation. The frontier still beckoned as an alternative to employment in the shop, but as industrialism spread, workers became increasingly conscious of their status as workers and of the problems which they faced as workers.

As early as 1794, journeymen cordwainers (shoemakers) organized into a union, conducted strikes, and picketed their masters' shops in order to raise wages and improve their working conditions. When, in 1805, the shoemakers struck for higher wages, the union was dealt a stunning blow by a court in Philadelphia, which found the shoemakers guilty of having engaged in a criminal conspiracy to raise wages:

A combination of workmen to raise their wages may be considered in a twofold point of view: one, to benefit themselves; the other, to injure those who do not join. The rule of law condemns both.<sup>2</sup>

Thus was born the doctrine that unions were an illegal conspiracy, a decree which was not reversed until the case of *Commonwealth v. Hunt* in 1842. Faced with these legal and economic barriers to unionism, workers attempted, through political action and through political reform, to correct the social inequities and the social abuses they encountered—partly in an effort to “beat the wage system.” The reformers doubted whether meaningful reform could be achieved within the framework of a capitalist system, or whether trade unions could really improve the lot of wage earners.

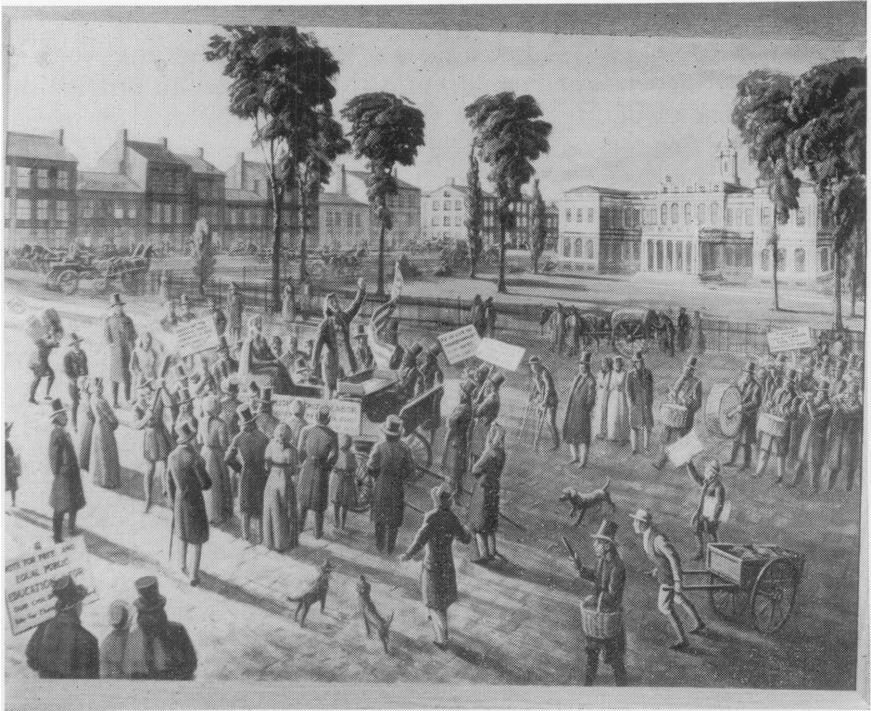
Seeing no hope for the correction of their problems through trade unionism, they turned to producers' cooperatives and to inde-



pendent political parties. But their efforts to accomplish their reforms through these devices met numerous obstacles, and they were generally unsuccessful. The intellectuals who aligned themselves with these movements failed to understand the psychology of the manual workers; they could not understand why workers might be willing to settle just for better wages, hours and working conditions when, in their opinion, the whole capitalist system needed to be discarded. In the second place, many of the issues which the intellectuals and the reformers introduced were adopted by the major political parties, who used them for their own advantage.

But these issues which the reformers raised and publicized were real issues in every sense of the word. Their goals included universal male suffrage with no property qualifications and free, universal public education. In their struggle, they foresaw the relationship between education and economic progress for workers. Their vision was much clearer than that of those who wanted to keep workers in a perpetual state of economic bondage. They fought against the imprisonment of debtors, because so many of the poor and the hum-





*Workingmen's political parties began with the Mechanics' Union of Trade Associations in Philadelphia.*

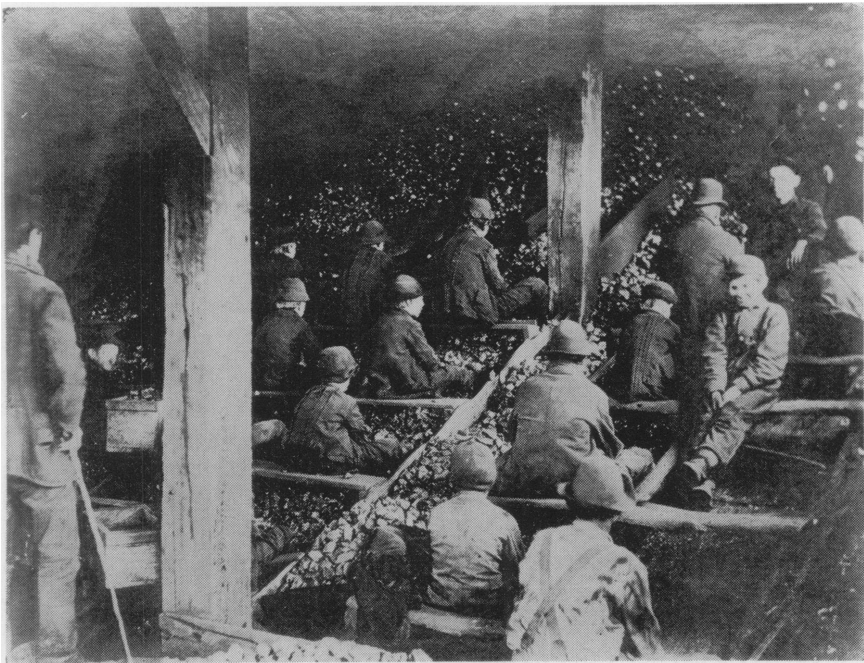
ble were debtors through no fault of their own. They sought to revise a militia system in which "the workers trained and the wealthy paid fines." They fought for the direct election of all public officials and for the regulation of monopolies, especially the banks. And, in particular, they fought for land reform, to make the public lands freely available to those who would settle and work on the land, as opposed to those who would use the public lands for profit and speculation. Their efforts were rewarded by the passage of the Homestead Act of 1862, which opened the public domain to small homesteaders.<sup>3</sup>

Most of all, workers struggled against the tyranny of man against man, the oppression of the weak and the poor, and the degradation of the human spirit. Perhaps the most cruel of the acts which were perpetrated against humanity in the pursuit of profit was the employment of child labor in the mills and mines of the

nation. Employers argued that if the children didn't work they would get into mischief; but all too often parents of the working children had to send their children to work in order to provide the basic necessities of life for the family. A reporter for the *Labor Standard*, a Pennsylvania labor paper, described the use of child labor in the breaker room of the Hickory Colliery, near St. Clair, Pennsylvania, in 1877:

It is a painful sight to see the men going so silently and gloomily about their work, but it is a thousand times worse to see these boys. They work here, in this little black hole, all day and every day, trying to keep cool in summer, trying to keep warm in winter, picking away among the black coals, bending over 'till their little spines are curved, never saying a word all the livelong day.

I stood and watched these boys for a long time, without being seen by them, for their backs are turned toward the entrance door, and the coal makes such a racket that they cannot hear anything a foot from their ears. They were muffled up in old coats and old shawls and old scarfs, and ragged mittens to keep their hands from freezing, and as



*Boys picking coal in a Pennsylvania mine, 1902.*



*Breaker boy who worked in a Pennsylvania coal mine and testified at the trials of the striking miners in 1902-1903.*

they sat and picked and picked, gathering little heaps of broken slate by their sides, they looked like so many black dwarfs rather than like a party of fresh young boys.

These little fellows go to work in this cold, dreary room at seven o'clock in the morning and work till it is too dark to see any longer. For this they get \$1 to \$3 a week. One result of their work is clean, fresh coal, that burns away to ashes in the grate; another result I found in a little miners' graveyard, beside a pretty little church, where more than every other stone bears the name of some little fellow under fifteen years of age.<sup>4</sup>

If reform through political action made little headway during these years, neither were the efforts to form trade unions more successful. Union organization which did occur was restricted mainly to skilled craftsmen, who seemed more willing to accept the idea that their status as workers was permanent, as contrasted to the typical industrial worker, who dreamt mainly of escape from the tedium of the factory system.

The year 1842 marked an important legal landmark in labor history. In the case of *Commonwealth versus Hunt*, which involved the issue of the closed shop and the refusal of Boston bootmakers to work with nonmembers of their union, the Massachusetts Supreme Court ruled that "agreement for a common action to achieve a lawful objective was not necessarily a criminal conspiracy; that the legality of such an association will depend upon the means to be used for its accomplishment."<sup>5</sup>

For the next 90 years, unions were faced with the continuing problem of defending the legality of their actions. The union as such was not illegal, but it had to justify the legality of traditional trade union methods, including strikes, picketing and boycotts. More often than not, unions were forced to plead their cases before hostile or indifferent courts. But out of this difficult period the unions learned several important things. First, they learned to be wary of the intellectuals who would use the labor movement for their own special purposes. Second, reform would be difficult because of the social forces which opposed the goals which workingmen sought.



## SLOW PROGRESS: 1864-1918

The end of the Civil War was followed by rapid industrial expansion and the growth of giant trusts whose collective attitude seemed to be "the public be damned." The financial magnates who sprang into prominence now were openly contemptuous of the workers they employed and violently opposed to any form of union organization among them. Referring to a strike by the Knights of Labor against the Gould Railways in 1886, Jay Gould boasted that "I can hire one-half of the working class to kill the other half." And in a similar vein, George Baer, President of the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad, wrote to a stockholder who had protested certain of Baer's actions during a strike in the anthracite coal mines in 1902:

Dear Mr. Clark:

I have your letter of the sixteenth. I do not know who you are. I see that you are a religious man; but you are evidently biased in favor of the right of workingmen to control a business in which he has no other interest than to secure fair wages. I beg of you not to be discouraged. The rights and interests of the laboring man will be protected and cared for—not by labor agitators, but by the Christian gentlemen to whom God has given control of the property rights of the country. Pray earnestly that the right may triumph, always remembering that the Lord God Omnipotent shall reign and that this reign is one of law and order, not violence and crime.<sup>6</sup>

And in a letter to President Theodore Roosevelt, who was trying to use his office to mediate the strike, Mr. Baer wrote: "They (the strikers) don't suffer; they can't even speak English." But the spirit of unionism persisted, particularly on the railroads. Workers were scornful of those railroaders who would not join unions and observe trade principles. One such man was castigated by Joe Hill, the famous labor balladier, in the song about an engineer named Casey Jones. The song, which is a parody of the original Casey Jones song about the "brave engineer" who died in the famous train wreck, depicts the role played by a strike-breaking engineer of the same name who died "scabbing on the SP (Southern Pacific

Railroad) Line:"

*Casey Jones, got a job in heaven;  
Casey Jones, was doing mighty fine;  
Casey Jones, went scabbing on the angels  
Just like he did to workers on the SP Line.*

The 1870's were characterized by industrial unrest, low wages, long hours, and widespread unemployment. Workers' responses to these conditions were spontaneous, but often disorganized and chaotic. In the coal mines of Pennsylvania, a secret organization known as the Molly Maguires resorted to bloody rioting to get what they wanted. But in the end, 24 of them were convicted on various charges, and ten of them were hanged. The year 1877 saw the great railroad strikes which spread throughout the major U.S. railroad lines, protests against the arrogance of railroad management, and the generally dismal position in which American workers found themselves during this period.<sup>7</sup>

In 1869, a group of workers, looking towards the establishment of a cooperative society, founded the Grand Order of the Knights of Labor. Following the advice implicit in their famous slogan, "an injury to one is an injury to all," the Knights attempted to establish One Big Union, embracing all who made their living from honest labor. Their organization was to be comprised of unskilled workers and minority groups, as well as the distinct craft groups. Their goal was the unity of all labor, in place of individual unions. Like other protest movements which developed later, principally the Industrial Workers of the World, the Knights dreamed of establishing a cooperative economic system to replace capitalism. As described by Wobbly poet Ralph Chaplin there would be a commonwealth of toil, "where the earth is owned by labor and there's joy and peace for all. . . ."

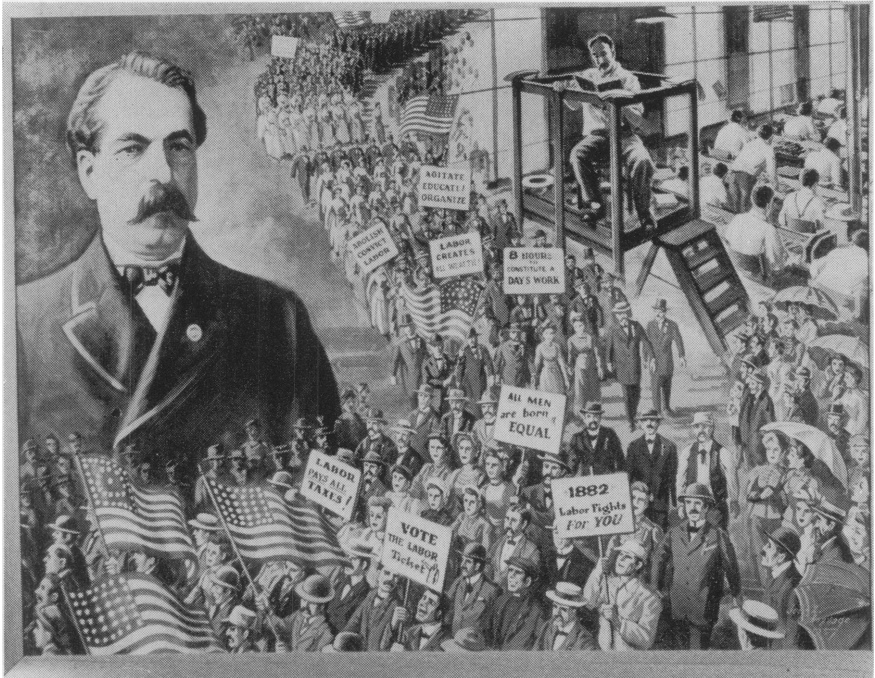
*In the gloom of mighty city, mid the  
    roar of whirling wheels,  
We are toiling on like chattel slaves  
    cf old,  
And our masters hope to keep us ever  
    thus beneath their heels,  
And to coin our very life blood into  
    gold.*

*But we have a glowing dream of how fair  
    the world will seem,  
When each man can live his life secure  
    and free,*

*When the earth is owned by labor and  
there's joy and peace for all,  
In the Commonwealth of Toil that is  
to be.*

The Knights emphasized political reform, the establishment of cooperatives, and similar ventures. But they achieved their greatest successes in the course of several important strikes, particularly one against the Wabash Railroad in 1885. A total of 700,000 workers flocked into the Grand Order, but after losing a series of strikes the Knights, too, faded into oblivion.

In the aftermath of the Knights' collapse and the failure of mass protest movements to improve the lot of the nation's working people, the period witnessed the development of a new union movement, the American Federation of Labor. Founded in 1886, as successor to the Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions, the AFL emphasized trade unions rather than political action. Its basic principles consisted of organization along craft lines, the



*Birth of the AFL.*

autonomy of the international union, adherence to carefully defined jurisdictional lines, wage and job consciousness instead of class consciousness, collective bargaining as the primary means of obtaining immediate objectives with the use of strikes only when attempts to reach collective bargaining agreements had failed. This philosophy, which came to be known as "trade unionism, pure and simple," was neatly defined by Adolph Strasser, President of the International Cigar Makers Union, in testimony before a Senate Committee on Education and Labor in 1883:

Q. You are seeking to improve home matters first?

A. Yes, sir, I look first to the trade I represent; I look first to cigars, to the interests of men who employ me to represent their interests.

Chairman: I was only asking you in regard to your ultimate ends.

Witness: We have no ultimate ends. We are going on from day to day. We are fighting only for immediate objects—objects that can be realized in a few years.

By Mr. Call: Q. You want something better to eat and to wear, and better houses to live in?

A. Yes, we want to dress better and to live better, and become better citizens generally.

The Chairman: I see that you are a little sensitive lest it should be thought that you are a mere theorizer. I do not look upon you in that light at all.

The Witness: Well, we say in our constitution that we are opposed to theorists, and I have to represent the organization here. We are all practical men.<sup>8</sup>

The AFL and the international unions which were affiliated with it advocated standardization of wages, hours and working conditions, in order to take wages out of competition. Supporting the principle of nonpartisanship in politics, its emphasis clearly was upon economic rather than political objectives. Samuel Gompers, the Federation's chief spokesman and its president until his death in 1924, was a dedicated and eloquent spokesman for the AFL philosophy:

The American trade union movement had to work out its own philosophy, technique and language. What has been developed is different from that of any other country. It was my purpose to bring into it the sentiment that was so completely lacking in the British trade unions. I strove to make the American movement practical, deep-rooted in sympathy and sentiment. I refused to concede one single inch of labor activity to any other movement. I held that the trade union was capable of all manner of diverse services and that there





# FEDERATION of LABOR

— DO TH GRANT THIS —

## Certificate of Affiliation

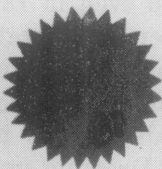
*G. Herman Grossman* *Bernard Braff*  
*Israel Silverman* *Samuel Lalal*  
*Jacob Labovitz* *Joseph Schurly* *Adolph Schweiger*

and to their successors legally qualified to constitute the Union herein named and known under the title of **International Ladies Garment Workers Union** for the purpose of a thorough organization of the trade, and a more perfect Federation of all **TRADES and LABOR UNIONS**. And the Union being duly formed, is empowered and authorized to initiate into its membership any person or persons in accordance with its own laws. And to conduct the business affairs of said Union in compliance with the best interests of the trade and labor in general. The autonomy of the Union is hereby ordained and secured.

Provided, That the said Union do conform to the Constitution, Laws, Rules and Regulations of the **AMERICAN FEDERATION OF LABOR**, and in default thereof, or any part, this Certificate of Affiliation may be suspended or revoked according to the laws of this **FEDERATION**. And should the said **International Ladies Garment Workers Union** be dissolved, suspended or forfeit this Certificate of Affiliation, then the persons to whom this Certificate of Affiliation is granted, or their successors, bind themselves to surrender the same with such other property as shall properly belong to this **FEDERATION**. And further, in consideration of the due performance of the above, the

does hereby bind itself to support the said **International Ladies Garment Workers Union** in the exercise of all its rights, privileges and autonomy as an affiliated Union.

In Witness Whereof, We have subscribed our Names and affixed the **SEAL** of the American Federation of Labor, this *twentieth* day of *June* A. D., One Thousand *Nine Hundred*.



EXECUTIVE  
COUNCIL

*Sam Gompers*  
*John G. Lewis*  
*James Duncan*  
*Wm. Connell*  
*John Mitchell*  
*Max Harris*  
*Alfred J. Todd*  
*John B. Lennon*  
*Frank Morrison*

President.  
 1st Vice-President.  
 2d " "  
 3rd " "  
 4th " "  
 5th " "  
 6th " "  
 Treasurer.  
 Secretary.

was no need of creating separate organizations for different fields of interests—for such separation would only diffuse the power of labor.<sup>9</sup>

At first, the growth of the AFL was slow. Six years after its formation, its total membership amounted to 250,000. Its financial assets were modest. In his autobiography, Sam Gompers tells how the organization's first "headquarters" was established in a little office, about ten by eight, with one door, one small window and a brick floor.

. . . . It was cold in winter and hot in summer. The furniture was make-shift, consisting of a kitchen table brought down from our scanty house furnishings and a box for my chair. My second boy, Henry, who helped me when not in school, and who now takes great pride in the fact that he was the first office boy of the Federation, helped to contrive office furnishings.<sup>10</sup>

Significantly, while other union movements withered and died, the AFL managed to survive in the face of adversity. But the voices of protest could not be stilled, and the country was often beset with the violence which accompanied workers' efforts to form unions to protect their livelihoods. On July 6, 1892, members of the Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel and Tin Workers fought a pitched battle against Pinkerton agents hired by the Carnegie Steel Company to thwart union organization. While this battle was won by the strikers in a great display of solidarity, the strike itself was finally broken by the combined forces of 8,000 state militiamen.

In 1894, another great railroad strike occurred, this time against the paternalistic Pullman Company, in retaliation for layoffs and wage cuts which the company put into effect without reducing the rents charged to workers for the company-owned houses in which they lived. Led by Eugene V. Debs, the strike involved the American Railway Union, newly formed by Debs and other railroad unionists in an attempt to organize railroad workers into an industrial type of union, nationwide in scope.

A man who was to become one of the outstanding figures in the American labor movement, Eugene Debs was known even in 1894 for his platform eloquence, for the inspirational power of his oratory. That year, when his union was also involved in a strike against the Great Northern Railway, in one of his most memorable speeches he appealed to the skilled Railroad Brotherhoods to help the unskilled trackwalkers whom his union represented. Drawing upon eye-witness accounts, Irving Stone describes how Debs rose from his seat, speaking slowly, his hands held out in front of him, fingers

arched, arms flexed:

. . . call them hands. They think it is a derogatory name, but I say it's good; for it is hands that have built this world, toil of millions of pairs of untiring hands.

They are despised, these trackmen, but they have no strength, no power, just as we were despised a few years ago, because we were only hands. But now we're more than hands; we're brains and souls, we're people—and why? Because we knew that we all had to rise or fall together. We made sacrifices, we risked our jobs, our homes, our future, with every man standing shoulder to shoulder with his neighbor. This is the most beautiful thing in the world, not only because of the material gains we've earned, but because we've won something without which we are animals and our span on earth is meaningless.

We fought for brotherhood. That is what makes us men. For every fellow creature we abandon, we cut away from our own stature. If you walk out of this hall tonight, leaving those unfortunate men and their families at the mercy of their employers, you will be closing and freezing your hearts against your companions who need you in their bitter hour. If we destroy brotherhood, what have we left? The food we put in our mouth? The clothes on our back?

I know you mean well. I've shared your food and your bunks in the icy caboose hurtling through the night; I've walked with you through sleet-filled yards when there was no work and your children were hungry. Then you were humble; you were at the mercy of powerful forces with which you could not cope. The trackmen of the West are in that same position tonight; their eyes are turned to you men sitting in this hall, for to them you are all-powerful. If they could pray, they would pray to you, pray that your hearts could be filled with love instead of indifference, with the brotherhood that makes us whole men.<sup>11</sup>

He stopped. His eyes were blurred and he could see nothing of the faces before him. There were several long moments of silence. No one moved. Then a man got up in the front row; then two more at the opposite side of the hall stood. Now from all over the hall, men rose one by one, then in groups. Soon every last man there was on his feet. They were shouting or cheering or crying; Gene Debs could not tell which. "All men are brothers. If only they knew it."<sup>12</sup>

The strikes by Debs' American Railway Union against Pullman and other railroad companies were smashed, mostly with the help of anti-strike injunctions and the intervention of federal troops. But in the coal mines, where 150,000 anthracite miners struck in 1902 against low pay, long hours and inadequate safety regulations, the spirit of trade unionism was tenacious. And as Florence Reece demonstrated in a song commemorating the bitter struggles of

Kentucky coal miners in the 1930's, there was no "middle ground" for embattled strikers. You were either for or against the union; and as her song suggests, the miner had to decide then and there whether to cast his lot with his fellow workers in their effort to establish trade unions in the coal mines:

*Which side are you on,  
Which side are you on?  
Which side are you on, tell me,  
Which side are you on?*

*They say in Harlan County,  
There are no neutrals there,  
You'll either be a union man,  
Or a thug for J. H. Blair.*

By 1904, total union membership had grown to 2 million, but the unions were continually harassed by repressive legislation. The Sherman Act, passed in 1890, and the Clayton Act, passed in 1914, were designed to protect the country from the abuses associated with corporate monopoly practices. Instead, the laws were applied to labor unions—with devastating results. And the employers struck back with a variety of anti-union techniques, including the blacklisting of union men and the use of labor spies, strikebreakers, injunctions and the kind of yellow dog contract which miners employed by the Hitchman Coal and Coke Company in 1908 were forced to sign in order to keep their jobs.

I am employed by 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 any time 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 the 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 wish. I have either read the above, or heard same read.<sup>13</sup>

And still the voice of protest could not be stilled among the ranks of the unskilled, the unorganized, the downtrodden and the dispossessed. The greatest radical challenge of all came in the form of the Industrial Workers of the World, an organization of men who wanted a wider amalgamation of socialist-minded unions of the

aggressive, industrial type. The IWW—the Wobblies as they were soon to be called—was made up of western miners, lumberjacks, migratory harvest hands, and unorganized industrial workers.

The Wobbly era, which lasted from about 1905 until 1917, is probably the most flamboyant, militant and dramatic episode in the history of the American labor movement. The IWW's avowed objective was the formation of "one big union" of all wage earners and, as set forth in the preamble to its constitution, the establishment of a "producers' commonwealth" in place of the capitalist system:

The working class and the employing class have nothing in common. There can be no peace so long as hunger and want are found among millions of working people and the few, who make up the employing class, have all the good things of life.

. . . . It is the historic mission of the working class to do away with capitalism. The army of production must be organized, not only for the everyday struggle with capitalists, but also to carry on production when capitalism shall have been overthrown. By organizing industrially we are forming the structure of the new society within the shell of the old.

Their philosophy and their tactics demanded direct action at the point of production—strikes, sabotage and violence. In the factory farms of the West, in New England textile mills and on the street corners of western towns, they battled—in defense of free speech and for the rights of working men—against many groups which violently opposed their tactics and their ideology. The Wobblies sang about their hopes, about their struggles and about the better life they were fighting for. Joe Hill, their chief song writer, set to rousing music and incantatory verse the IWW idea that "There Is Power in a Union," particularly if the union is industrial in nature, encompassing all workers regardless of the craft or industry in which they labored:

*Would you have freedom from wage slavery,  
Then join in the grand Industrial band;  
Would you from misery and hunger be free,  
Then come! Do your share like a man.*

*There is power, there is power  
In a band of working men,  
When they stand, hand in hand;  
That's a power, that's a power  
That must rule in every land—  
One Industrial Union Grand.*

In 1914, Joe Hill was arrested in Salt Lake City, Utah, on what many thought was a trumped-up charge of murder. Despite worldwide protests and the intervention of President Woodrow Wilson on Hill's behalf, he was finally executed by a five-man firing squad on November 19, 1915. To those who sympathized with the IWW vision of a workers' commonwealth, the death of Joe Hill represented a monstrous conspiracy to silence one of labor's great champions. The legend of Joe Hill spread far and wide, and was commemorated in the song "Joe Hill," by Earl Robinson and Alfred Hayes:

*I dreamed I saw Joe Hill last night,  
Alive as you and me;  
Says I, "But Joe, you're ten years dead,"  
"I never died," says he, "I never died," says he.*

*"Joe Hill ain't dead," he says to me,  
"Joe Hill ain't never died.  
Where working men are out on strike,  
Joe Hill is at their side,  
Joe Hill is at their side."*

In the end, the IWW was beaten by legal repression. It was outlawed in many states which passed criminal syndicalism laws, and during World War I many of its leaders were arrested and imprisoned because of their opposition to the entry of the United States into the war. In one sense, the IWW had been successful. It had demonstrated that industrial workers could be organized. But in a larger sense, perhaps, it failed. It could not convince American workers that labor's historic mission was to do away with capitalism, but at the same time it unfortunately did convince the more conservative elements in American society that radicalism and trade unionism were synonymous and that both should be repressed.

But the suppression of the Wobblies was not accompanied by any attempt to correct the social abuses which they had fought against. The use of child labor continued, wages remained low, and many workers were forced to work in sweatshops under conditions which threatened their health and safety. On March 25, 1911, 154 workers, most of them young women, died in a fire which destroyed one of these sweatshops—the Triangle Shirtwaist Company on the eighth, ninth and tenth floors of a New York City factory building. This company, along with other shirtwaist companies, had defeated the International Ladies Garment Workers Union after a long



strike which ended shortly before the tragedy which shocked the nation's conscience.<sup>14</sup>

But not all of the death and suffering was accidental. At Ludlow, Colorado, in 1914, a strike by the United Mine Workers against the Colorado Fuel and Iron Company, which was owned by the Rockefeller interests, reached a bloody climax when the militia attacked a tent colony in which the Ludlow strikers and their families were living.

After several rounds of indiscriminate machine-gun fire, the tents in which the workers' families were living were soaked in oil and put to the torch. Women and children huddled in pits to escape the raging flames, and in one of them 11 children and two women were later found burned or suffocated to death.<sup>15</sup>

The nation's horror was expressed by William Chenery in the editorial pages of the *Rocky Mountain News*:

The horror of the shambles at Ludlow is overwhelming. Not since the days when pitiless red men wreaked vengeance upon their women and children has this western country been stained with so foul a deed.

The details of the massacre are horrible. Mexico offers no barbarity so base as that of the murder of defenseless women and children by the mine guards in soldiers' clothing. Like whitened sepulchres we boast of American civilization with this infamous thing at our very doors. Huerta murdered Madero, but even Huerta did not shoot an innocent little boy seeking water for his mother who lay ill. Villa is a barbarian, but in maddest excess Villa has not turned machine guns on imprisoned women and children. Where is the outlaw so far beyond the pale of human kindness as to burn the tent over the heads of nursing mothers and helpless little babies?<sup>16</sup>

Because he had written this article, Mr. Chenery was discharged by the owners of the newspaper. But in spite of these setbacks, and the outrage at Ludlow, workers vowed to right the injustices which they had suffered, and to organize the coal fields of Colorado:

*We will win the fight today, boys,  
We'll win the fight today,  
Shouting the battle cry of union;  
We will rally from the coal mines  
We'll battle to the end,  
Shouting the battle cry of union.*

*The union forever, hurrah, boys,  
hurrah!  
Down with the Baldwins, up with  
the law;*



*For we're coming, Colorado, we're  
coming all the way,  
Shouting the battle cry of union.*

And labor had other courageous friends. Perhaps the greatest of its champions was Clarence Darrow. Starting out as a corporation lawyer, he switched sides during the great Pullman strike of 1894, and became the country's most eloquent defender of the poor and the oppressed. In 1906, in the state of Idaho, he successfully defended "Big Bill" Haywood and several other leaders of the Western Federation of Miners against a fake murder charge. In his 11-hour closing speech to the jury, Darrow dramatically insisted that more was at stake than Bill Haywood's life:

I speak for the poor, for the weak, for the weary, for that long line of men who, in darkness and despair, have borne the labors of the human race. Their eyes are upon you twelve men of Idaho tonight. If you kill Haywood your act will be applauded by many. In the railroad offices of our great cities men will applaud your names. If you decree his death, amongst the spiders of Wall Street will go up paeans of praise for these twelve good men and true. In every bank in the world, where men hate Haywood because he fights for the poor and against the accursed system upon which the favored live and grow rich and fat—from all those you will receive blessings and unstinted praise.

But if your verdict should be "not guilty" in this case, there are still those who will reverently bow their heads and thank these twelve men for the life and reputation you have saved. Out on our broad prairies where men toil with their hands, out on the wide ocean where men are tossed and buffeted on the waves, through our mills and factories and down deep under the earth, thousands of men and women and children—men who labor, men who suffer, women and children weary with care and toil—these men and these women and these children will kneel tonight and ask their God to guide your hearts.<sup>17</sup>

During World War I, organized labor, with the exception of the IWW, supported the war effort and received certain concessions from the Wilson Administration in return for this support. Labor was promised the right to organize and to bargain collectively, and where union shop provisions were agreed to, they were to remain in effect. Largely because major companies wanted to keep on earning the large profits associated with war production, and because the federal government was vitally interested in uninterrupted production, organized labor was able to make significant progress. By 1919, between 4 million and 5 million American workers had joined the ranks of organized labor.

From the violence and chaos of the late 19th century, labor had learned that the charge of radicalism was dangerous to their cause, and that class consciousness was hardly characteristic of the American worker. But most important of all, labor had also learned that job control, union discipline, and effective bargaining procedures, instead of political action and political instruments, were the most likely methods by which labor could gain a fair share of the wealth it helped to create.

## THE OPEN SHOP ERA: 1920 to 1933

The organizational gains which the union movement scored during World War I were of brief duration. Following the armistice, and in the wake of the Russian revolution of 1917 and unsuccessful strikes in the steel mills in 1919, the country experienced a great "red scare." It was ready for a "return to normalcy," and normalcy, of course, meant the open shop. Finley Peter Dunne, speaking through his mythical Mr. Dooley, commented with bitter irony on the real meaning of the open shop:

"What's all this that's in the papers about the open shop?" asked Mr. Hennessy.

"Why, don't ye know?" said Mr. Dooley. "Really, I'm surprised at yer ignorance, Hinnissey. What is the open shop? Sure, 'tis where they kape the doors open to accommodate the constant stream of men comin' in to take jobs cheaper than the men that has the jobs. . . . 'Tis like this, Hinnissey: suppose one of these free-born citizens is workin' in an open shop fer the princely wage of one large iron dollar a day of ten hours. Along comes another son-of-a-gun and sez to the boss, 'Oi think Oi could handle the job nicely for ninety cents.'"

"'Sure,'" sez the boss, "and the one dollar man goes out into the cruel world to exercise his inalienable rights as a free-born American citizen and scab on some other poor devil. And so it goes on, Hinnissey. And who gets the benefits? True, it saves the boss money, but he don't care no more for money than he does for his right eye."

"It's all principle with him. He hates to see men robbed of their independence. They must have their independence, regardless of anything else."

"But," said Mr. Hennessey, "these open-shop men ye mention say they are for unions if properly conducted."

"Sure," said Mr. Dooley, "if properly conducted. And there we are: and how would they have them conducted? No strikes, no rules, no contracts, no scales, hardly any wages and damn few members."

Professor Irving Bernstein, writing on the history of the American worker in the years between 1920 and 1933, titled his book *The Lean Years*.<sup>18</sup> And for trade unionists, the years were lean indeed. Employers struck back at them with an arsenal of weapons which

included company unionism, scientific management, paternalism and the "American Plan." All through the 1920's, union strength declined. Productivity and profits shot up rapidly, but wage rates remained almost unchanged.

For the unions there were a few bright spots, like the passage of the Railway Labor Act in 1926, which protected the right of railroad workers to form and join unions. For the most part, however, government was openly hostile towards unions and the rights of workers. After he had obtained a sweeping injunction against a strike by railroad shop workers, Attorney General Daugherty vowed that:

So long and to the extent that I can speak for the Government of the United States, I will use the power of the Government within my control to prevent the labor unions of the country from destroying the open shop.<sup>19</sup>

For many, it was the "golden twenties," but not for workers in the coal mines and in the assembly plants, where employers competed for a larger share of an expanding market for American industry's new products. And it was not a golden era for those who suffered the dislocation associated with technological change.

(At the institute for which this narrative was developed, the film *Valleytown* was shown. This is a good, albeit old, description of the economic and psychological impact of technological unemployment upon a community dependent on one industry.)

The balloon of economic prosperity burst with a terrible roar in October, 1929. By 1930, seven million workers were unemployed. In 1932, the Congress passed the Norris-LaGuardia Act, which guaranteed the right to organize, outlawed the yellow dog contract, and restricted the issuance of injunctions by federal courts in labor disputes. But for the unemployed and the unorganized, the Norris-LaGuardia Act appeared to have scant significance. And the songs which workers sang reflected their gloom and their pessimism. Many of them included references to the "soup line," which invariably accompanied the onset of hard times. In 1945, Joe Glazer rewrote one of the famous soup songs of the depression era. In it, he illustrates the industrial worker's willingness to live on a limited diet while caught up in the throes of economic turmoil:

*Way back in the days of depression,  
I didn't have nothing to eat;  
But that didn't bother me, mister,  
I was fed from my head to my feet—on:*

*Soo-oop, soo-oop,  
They gave me a bowl of soo-oop;  
Soo-oop, soo-oop,  
They gave me a bowl of soup.*

As the depression deepened, the lines of unemployed workers grew longer. Within the union movement, it was plain that labor would continue to be the underdog in the economic arena until the great bulk of American workers, including those in the mass production industries, were organized into trade unions. No longer a question of whether these workers should be organized, the controversy was over how the task should be accomplished.

## THE GREAT UPSURGE: 1932 to 1947

Things were to get worse before they would get better. By 1933, it was estimated that 16 million workers were unemployed, out of a work force of 49 million. Those who held jobs were indeed fortunate. Men were reduced to living in colonies of shanties called "Hoovervilles," while others sold apples on street corners. To many, it seemed as if the whole fabric of our society was in the process of disintegration.

With the New Deal and Franklin Delano Roosevelt came a glimmer of hope. For the first time in many years, the country had a government which seemed to care about the welfare of its citizens and which was willing to undertake certain social experiments to help the country pull itself out of the depression. In rapid succession, Congress passed laws of great significance, including Social Security and the Fair Labor Standards Act. To provide jobs for the unemployed, it established the Works Project Administration and the Civilian Conservation Corps. It established the Federal Housing Administration, the Rural Electrification Administration, the Tennessee Valley Authority, the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, the Security and Exchange Commission and the Agricultural Adjustment Act, to provide stability for the nation's business and agriculture.

Perhaps most significantly, from labor's point of view, Congress passed the Wagner Act. Under the provisions of the law, workers were free to join unions. The government would protect their right to do so. The National Labor Relations Board was created to hear unfair labor practice charges against employers who refused to recognize their employees' rights to organize into unions and to bargain collectively. The NLRB was empowered to conduct representation elections, making it unnecessary for workers to strike in order to achieve recognition of their union by their employer. The fact that orders issued by the NLRB could be enforced in federal courts made the Wagner Act an effective legal instrument.

National policy now favored unions and collective bargaining. In

upholding the constitutionality of the Wagner Act, Chief Justice Charles Evans Hughes, speaking for a majority of the Supreme Court, made this point abundantly clear:

Employees have as clear a right to organize and select their representatives for lawful purposes as the respondent has to organize its business and select its own officers and agents. Discrimination and coercion to prevent the free exercise of the right of employees to self organization and representation is a proper subject for condemnation by competent legislative authority. Long ago we stated the reasons for labor organizations. We said that they were organized out of the necessities of the situation; that a single employee was helpless in dealing with an employer; that he was dependent ordinarily on his daily wage for the maintenance of himself and his family; that if the employer refused to pay him the wages he thought fair, he was nevertheless unable to leave the employ and resist arbitrary and unfair treatment; that union was essential to give laborers opportunity to deal on an equality with their employer. . . .<sup>20</sup>

The law by itself, however, could not organize the millions of workers who stood outside of the labor movement; such organization required the concerted efforts of the unions themselves. But within the labor movement a great debate was raging over the question of craft versus industrial unionism. The leaders of the craft unions, who were dominant in the AFL, had successfully built permanent unions on a craft basis, while numerous attempts to organize along industrial lines had met with repeated failure. Within the AFL, a number of influential leaders argued that organization of mass production workers on an industrial basis could now succeed, where such organization had been almost impossible in previous years.

The greatest champion of industrial unionism within the AFL was John L. Lewis. At the Federation's 1935 convention, he pleaded with the delegates to support his proposal to organize industrially in the mass production industries:

Prepare yourselves by making a contribution to your less fortunate brethren. Heed this cry from Macedonia that comes from hearts of men. Organize the unorganized and in doing this make the AF of L the greatest instrument that has ever been forged to befriend the cause of humanity and champion human rights.

If we fail . . . the workers will believe and know that the AF of L cannot and will not make a contribution toward the obvious need of our present economic conditions. . . . We will be compelled to carry on as best we can in the mining industry, knowing that our terrible adversary, the steel industry, having tasted blood, may at any time

open up and attempt to destroy us. . . . We will accept that decision sadly, for despair will prevail where hope now exists. The enemies of labor will be encouraged and high wassail will prevail at the banquet tables of the mighty if the AF of L refuses to grant the petition of these industries who are fighting for the objectives of labor and to defend the rights of mankind.<sup>21</sup>

But the convention did not act favorably upon Lewis' proposal. In 1935 the Committee for Industrial Organization was formed within the AFL. Later, it was expelled from the Federation, along with the ten unions which had supported the idea of industrial unionism. Thus, the Congress of Industrial Organizations—CIO—was born amidst internal strife. Led by its first president, John L. Lewis, it began to organize with great zeal in the mass production industries which had successfully resisted union organization in the past.

In the rubber industry of Akron, Ohio, following a series of strikes in 1936, the city's entire rubber industry was organized by



*Organizing the industrial workers.*



the United Rubber Workers. New unions were formed, including the United Electrical Workers, the Packinghouse Workers, the United Automobile Workers, the Steel Workers Organizing Committee, and they expanded rapidly. Opposition to the CIO was fierce. Many employers, believing that the Wagner Act would be declared unconstitutional, openly defied the law. The La Follette Committee, investigating industrial espionage and related activities, discovered that many major companies were spending hundreds of thousands of dollars on ammunition to combat unionism among their employees—machine guns, tear gas, rifles and pistols, as well as spies, informers and strikebreakers.

But the fears which CIO seemed to inspire in the hearts of the more timid apparently were not shared by the workers which it organized. Writing to a Detroit newspaper, a CIO member expressed his own feelings:

Boy, oh boy, do I hate this man John L. Lewis and the CIO! Couple of months ago they organized the factory where I work and made everybody join the union. We used to get 60 cents an hour, but after the agreement was signed our new rate was 70 cents an hour with time and a half for Saturdays and Sundays. My raise amounted to 80 cents a day or \$16 a month, and out of this I must pay \$1 a month in dues. Do I hate this man John L. Lewis and his dirty CIO!<sup>22</sup>

In textiles, progress was slow, particularly in the South, where there had been violent opposition to unions. During a 1929 strike of cotton textile workers in Marion, North Carolina, six workers were killed on the picket line by shots fired by the sheriff and his deputies after a discharge of tear gas. The workers were shot in the back while running away from the gun fire, and about 25 more were wounded. When the funeral for the dead strikers was held, no local churchman would officiate at the burial service. It was finally conducted by James Myers of the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America. At the service an old mountain preacher offered this prayer for the slain workers:

O Lord Jesus Christ, here are men in their coffins, blood of my blood, bone of my bone. I trust, O God, that these friends will go to a better place than this mill village or any other place in Carolina.

O God, we know that we are not in high society but we know Jesus Christ loved us. The poor people have their rights too. For the work we do in this world, is that what we get if we demand our rights? Jesus Christ, your son, O God, was a working man. If He were to pass under these trees today He would see these cold bodies lying before us.

O God, mend the broken hearts of these loved ones left behind. Dear God, do feed their children. Drive selfishness and cruelty out of your world. May these weeping wives and little children have a strong arm to lean on. Dear God—what would Jesus do if He were to come to Carolina?<sup>23</sup>

In the coal mines, where unionism had always had a strong foothold, the miner needed no one to remind him of the dangers of his job; the miner is never alone,

. . . for death is all about him. It is over his head with the collapsing roof and his sudden crushing burial; it is in front of him in the pockets of invisible, odorless, tasteless, deadly methane gas released by cutting into the coal face and ignited by his explosives. Then it comes as a blinding flash and oblivion. It is behind him in the long tunnels, where it comes with the reptilian hiss of the rolling wall of smoke and flame as he shakes and screams in agony, knowing that death is coming either by cremation or asphyxiation.

He knows the toll of his underground fraternity, for every morning he goes down under with the odds just a shade more than nine to one in his favor of escaping death or injury. Every day he shoots dice with death. Compare his mortality with that of the armed services. The miner knows that he digs death as well as coal, and the death tonnage is appalling.

He knew some of the 68,842 miners killed from 1910 through 1945, and he knew some of the 2,275,000 injured. He had stood awkward and choked with emotion before some of the 211,468 widows and orphans of these men. He contributed generously to the collections for the impoverished survivors with the chilled feeling that the next collection might be for his widow and children.<sup>24</sup>

Nor did he need anyone to tell him of the need for a strong union, which he organized in the face of strong opposition from the employers, the courts and the militia. The miner knew only too well that his economic position would never be improved by waiting for the benevolence of the employer to assert itself. Merle Travis vividly described the lot of the coal miner in the song later popularized by "Tennessee Ernie" Ford; he points out that hard, back-breaking work and dependence upon the "company store" were the coal miner's constant burden:

*Some people say a man is made out of mud,  
But a poor man's made out of muscle and blood,  
Muscle and blood, and skin and bone,  
A mind that's weak and a back that's strong.  
You load sixteen tons, and what do you get?  
Another day older and deeper in debt.  
St. Peter don't you call me 'cause I can't go,  
I owe my soul to the company store.*

In the steel industry, SWOC—the Steel Workers Organizing Committee—was making great strides towards the complete organization of the basic steel industry. On March 2, 1937, U. S. Steel—the giant of the industry—recognized SWOC as the bargaining representative for its workers. The union train was rolling!

*Oh what is that I see yonder coming,  
Oh what is that I see yonder coming,  
It's that union train a-coming, coming, coming,  
Get on board, get on board.*

But the battle was far from won. Men would still have to fight and die to prove that the Wagner Act meant what it said, that workers had the right to organize into unions of their own choosing. Although the Steel Workers Organizing Committee had been recognized by U. S. Steel, strong opposition to unions still existed in the industry, particularly in "Little Steel." On Memorial Day, 1937, a parade of strikers at the South Chicago plant of Republic Steel Company was attacked by 150 policemen. Newsreel cameramen were present and recorded the attack. According to Paul Anderson, a columnist for the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* who watched the film dozens of times,

A vivid close-up shows the head of the parade being halted by a group of 150 policemen. . . . Suddenly, without apparent warning, there was a terrific roar of pistol shots and the men in the front ranks of the marchers go down like grass before a scythe, as many as a dozen in one heap.

. . . . The ground is strewn with dead and wounded, some isolated individuals are caught, and with business-like precision groups of policemen close in. In several instances from two to four policemen are seen beating one man. One strikes him across the face, using his club as he would a baseball bat. Another crashes it down on top of his head, and still another is whipping him across the back. The one gives the fallen man a final smash on the head, before moving on to the next job.

Ten men died, seven shot in the back and three in the side; none were hit in the front. Thirty more persons, including one woman and three minors, received gunshot wounds. More than sixty marchers were hurt seriously and required hospital care.<sup>25</sup>

But in spite of this kind of violence and intimidation, the unions were making steady, almost spectacular progress. Workers joined unions en masse—in steel, rubber, automobiles, textiles—in all of the mass production industries which until now had been able to stop the unionization of their employees. By 1937, between six and seven million American workers had been organized; skilled and



*Memorial Day—1937.*



unskilled, industrial and craft, black and white. The women joined too. In recognition of the major role which women have played in the trade union movement, in their own right and in support of their husbands' union work, Woodie Guthrie wrote his well-known song about "union maids" who refused to be intimidated by "goons and ginks and company finks," but promised instead to "stick to the union":

*There once was a union maid,  
Who never was afraid  
Of goons and ginks and company finks  
and deputy sheriffs who made the raid;  
She went to the union hall,  
When a meeting it was called,  
And when the legion boys came around,  
She always stood her ground.*

*Oh, you can't scare me, I'm sticking to  
the union,  
I'm sticking to the union,  
I'm sticking to the union;  
Oh, you can't scare me, I'm sticking to  
the union,  
I'm sticking to the union, 'til the day  
I die.*

Perhaps the most formidable battle of all was the contest in the automobile industry, which seemed determined to fight the union to the end. The anti-union policies of the Ford Motor Company in the pre-union era have become legendary. It is said that in some divisions of the company, Ford had as many labor spies as production workers. Keith Sward recounts some of the things Ford workers were subjected to by its famed Service Department, headed by a man named Harry Bennett:

For years after Bennett came to power, it was the proud, undisguised aim of the Service Department to blot out every manifestation of personality or manliness inside the Ford plant. . . . On the night shift they would jolt an incoming worker out of his wits and take the starch out of his system by flashing a light in his face and shouting at him, "Where did you get that badge?" or "Who's your boss?" . . . . Another intimidating practice that came into being under Bennett's rule was the act of "shaking 'em up in the aisles." In this case a workman summoned to the employment office for any reason at all, even one that was totally unrelated to his work, would be shoved and pushed along the aisle by a pair of officious Servicemen, like a felon in the custody of the police. Certain members of Bennett's guard were not averse to administering floggings on company property.



. . . . But the disciplinary whip which caused greater dread than periodic bullying or an occasional show of force at Dearborn was the facility of Ford Service in exploiting fear of the job. This practice at Ford's was the talk of the trade. In an industry which was characterized by chronic job insecurity . . . the operators of Ford Service made matters worse by invoking the right to fire without appeal. Answerable to no one but Bennett, they could override the judgment of factory foremen and superintendents. They asserted such authority on so many occasions that eventually no Ford employee had the least assurance that the quality of his work in the shop was in any way related to his chances of survival on the payroll.<sup>26</sup>

The labor policies of the other two giants of the automobile industry, General Motors and Chrysler, were not much more progressive than those of the Ford Company. The issue of unionism in the auto industry was finally joined at General Motors, in the famous sit-down strikes of 1936-37. Rebelling against the indignities which they had suffered, auto workers in the Flint, Michigan, plant of the GM Fisher Body Company decided to stage a "sit-in" until the company recognized the union.

Governor Murphy of Michigan, hounded and harassed and frustrated in all of his mediation moves, sought to stave off a deadly



*Sitdown strikers hanging effigies out the windows of a General Motors plant, 1936.*

showdown. National Guard officers were coldly discussing methods of clearing the plant; one school of thought favored shooting the strikers out, another recommended pouring vomiting gas through the ventilating system. Finally, GM obtained a court order setting three o'clock on February 3, 1937, as the deadline for the exodus; those who remained would be subject to imprisonment and a fine of \$15 million—the value of the property. There was, moreover, the implicit threat that the court's ruling would be enforced by troops if the strikers held their ground. In Flint, the strikers, remaining grimly in Fisher, wired Murphy their verdict:

Unarmed as we are, the introduction of militia, sheriffs, or police with murderous weapons will mean a blood bath of unarmed workers. . . . We have decided to stay in the plant. We have no illusions about the sacrifices which this decision will entail. We fully expect that if a violent effort is made to oust us many of us will be killed, and we take this means of making it known to our wives, to our chil-

dren, to the people of the State of Michigan and the country, that if this result follows from the attempt to eject us, you are the one who must be held responsible for our deaths.<sup>27</sup>

But no violence occurred. Instead, an agreement was reached whereby GM recognized the United Automobile Workers as the bargaining agent for the corporation's employees.

(At this point in the institute, the movie *Sitdown* was shown. It is a recapitulation of the events which led up to the strike, and it dramatically shows the tension which permeated the situation up to that point where an agreement was reached between the union and the company.)

Following this historic breakthrough, the auto union won a series of important organizing victories. Even Ford, where the most obstinate resistance had been encountered, was organized in 1941, and a union shop agreement was signed, the first of its kind in the automobile industry.

But many problems remained. In spite of the progress which had taken place under the New Deal Administration, 9.5 million workers were unemployed as late as 1939. Within the labor movement, a great schism had developed, and the two federations, the AFL and the CIO, continued as separate, competing bodies. In Europe, war clouds had gathered and had erupted into the bloodiest war mankind has ever experienced.

With the entry of the United States into World War II, organized labor adopted and observed a "no-strike" pledge. Although a few strikes occurred, mainly short and unauthorized, less than one-tenth of one percent of all available working hours were lost because of strikes. Wage increases were limited to 15 percent over the 1941 base, and disputes were referred to the National War Labor Board for settlement. As a result of the successful organizing drives and the increase in employment which goes with war production, union membership continued to grow. By 1945, 14 million workers were enrolled in AFL, CIO, and independent unions.

The successes which labor enjoyed in the 1930's demonstrated that labor needed a favorable legislative climate in which to function, and the Wagner Act and the New Deal Administration had provided just that. In the future, to protect the gains it had made and to make sure that the right to organize would continue to be protected by law, labor would have to look to the political arena as well as to the bargaining table. The experience of the 1930's also demonstrated that it was possible to form permanent, efficient, soundly administered unions of industrial workers, as well as those



in the crafts. There was a place in American industrial society for both kinds of unions, and they would have to work together to prevent a repetition of the hostile climate which had blocked union organization for so many years.

## CONSOLIDATION AND PROGRESS: 1945 to 1964

As the war ended, organized labor faced a number of critical problems, many of which were directly related to the war and to the restrictions which the war had imposed on the normal collective bargaining activities of unions. With the shift from a war economy to a civilian economy, there came the threat of inflation, the fear of unemployment, and the strong desire to negotiate better wages and fringe benefits, objectives which had been suppressed all through the war. After years of deprivation during which they had lacked the protection of union organization, workers demanded a share of the better life which now seemed possible, and they dreamed of a better kind of world in which they could raise their children. One of the most popular labor songs of modern times was written by Joe Glazer in the aftermath of an unsuccessful strike by southern textile workers in support of their demand for a minimum wage of 65 cents an hours. It tells of a textile worker's dream of heaven, where "The mill was made of marble, the machines were made out of gold and nobody ever got tired, and nobody ever grew old":

*I dreamed that I had died,  
And gone to my reward,  
A job in heaven's textile plant  
On a golden boulevard.*

*The mill was made of marble,  
The machines were made out of gold;  
And nobody ever got tired,  
And nobody ever grew old.*

*There was no unemployment in heaven,  
We worked steady all through the year;  
We always had food for the children,  
We never were haunted by fear.*

But the going wasn't always easy. The wage demands made by the unions, to compensate for four years of wage freeze, were bitterly resisted by the companies, even though most of them had

rolled up tremendous profits during the war years. On their part, workers backed up their unions' demands for a decent level of wages, for health and welfare plans, and for old age pensions. In the process, they often had to resort to the picket line to prove how serious they were. In a ditty sung to the tune of "Mademoiselle from Armentières," workers proclaimed their intent to remain on the picket line until their demands were met; in the parlance of the verse, "the bosses are taking it on the chin because the strikers won't give in."

*The bosses are taking it on the chin, parlez-vous,  
The bosses are taking it on the chin, parlez-vous,  
The bosses are taking it on the chin  
Because the strikers won't give in,  
Hinky dinky parlez-vous.*

For the most part, the strikes were successful. Benefits such as pension plans, paid vacations, supplementary unemployment benefits, health and welfare insurance plans—which some "experts" said could not be provided for hourly paid workers—became part of negotiated agreements. But the militant action of the unions to win these benefits produced a reaction in the conservative 80th Congress, which enacted the Taft-Hartley law in 1947. Dubbed the "slave labor act" by organized labor, the law placed a number of restrictions upon unions. The right to join a union was protected, but now the employer could use a wider variety of tactics to convince his employees that they should not join a union. And the employers were quick to catch on to the importance of this section of the Act.

The law said that you could have a union shop unless the individual states passed laws outlawing union security provisions. Before the ink on the bill was dry, most of the southern states had passed so-called "right-to-work" laws prohibiting the negotiation of union shop agreements. In their attempts to pirate industry away from the North, many southern spokesmen pointed with pride to the fact that employers in the South would have relatively little trouble with unions. The mayor of Pelahatchie, Mississippi, was probably more open about this matter than most. In writing to a northern-based company which he was trying to lure to his city, the mayor made it clear as to where his state and town stood:

. . . . Then our wonderful labor, 98% native born, mostly high school graduates, with lower average hourly industrial rates 6¢ to 49¢ below other Southern States, and from 50¢ to 95¢ below Northern States.

You will also get a much higher average man production, some plants even getting double what they got in their Northern plants. This labor is truly American, not inflicted with the "Something for Nothing" idea and works together joyously with Management for the success of both.

Here you will also enjoy savings in power, fuel, utility, tax and other costs. Raw materials are convenient, transportation facilities are good. No one will tell you whom you must employ and all detrimental State laws for industrial operations have been repealed. The closed union shop has just been outlawed in Mississippi.<sup>28</sup>

Not all of the problems which labor faced in the post-war period were the result of external forces. Within the labor movement, the split between the AFL and the CIO, jurisdictional disputes, the threat of racketeering, and communist infiltration continued to plague the unions. But for the most part organized labor was equal to the challenge.

Within the CIO, ten international unions were expelled in 1949-1950 after hearings had demonstrated that communists were playing a significant leadership role within these unions. And labor moved to repair the breach which had developed between industrial and craft unions in the 1930's. Following the deaths of AFL President William Green and CIO President Phillip Murray in 1953, new merger talks between the two federations began. In 1955, the labor movement was reunited into the AFL-CIO. In the preamble to its constitution, the new federation pledged itself to progress:

The establishment of this Federation through the merger of the American Federation of Labor and the Congress of Industrial Organizations is an expression of the hopes and aspirations of the working people of America.

We seek the fulfillment of these hopes and aspirations through democratic processes within the framework of our constitutional government and consistent with our institutions and traditions.

At the collective bargaining table, in the community, in the exercise of the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, we shall responsibly serve the interests of all the American people.

We pledge ourselves to the more effective organization of working men and women; to the securing to them of full recognition and enjoyment of the rights to which they are justly entitled; to the achievement of ever higher standards of living and working conditions; to the attainment of security for all the people; to the enjoyment of the leisure which their skills make possible; and to the strengthening and extension of our way of life and the fundamental freedoms which are the basis of our democratic society.

We shall combat resolutely the forces which seek to undermine the democratic institutions of our nation and to enslave the human

soul. We shall strive always to win full respect for the dignity of the human individual whom our unions serve.

Grateful for the fine traditions of our past, confident of meeting the challenge of the future, we proclaim this constitution.

In the aftermath of the McClellan Committee investigation of union wrongdoing, the AFL-CIO expelled its largest affiliate, the International Brotherhood of Teamsters. Within the Federation itself, a code of ethical practices was adopted, designed to set forth the standards by which unions and union representatives would conduct themselves in their relationship to employers and members. The unions devised new approaches to collective bargaining in the face of new problems like automation and the changing character of the labor force. Not all of the plans and schemes were successful, but such things as supplementary unemployment benefits, pension plans, escalator clauses, extended vacation plans and the like opened a new era in labor-management relations. These successes inspired Frank Tuttle, a member of the United Automobile Workers, to write the following valediction upon becoming the first Chrysler worker to retire on a union-negotiated pension plan on August 1, 1950:

Today, I punched my last clock-card out of the Dodge Forge Plant. I am balancing my account with the union, of which I was a charter member.

I was hired as a millwright at Dodge in 1919, at 85¢ an hour. There was no union then, nor 15 years after that. In 1921, the rate was cut to 70¢; in 1933, after a series of cuts, it was 60¢. In 15 years, a net loss of 25¢ an hour.

Then came the Union. By 1936, the rate rose from 60 to 72¢; in 1937, 95¢; in 1939, \$1.05; 1941, \$1.20. From 1942 to the end of the war, \$1.30. Since then, to the present rate of \$1.83.

Add the value of six paid holidays, vacation pay, increased payments by the Company for unemployment and Social Security, and the value of the recent pension and insurance program, and it comes to an even \$2.00 an hour.

Averaging the increase of \$1.40 over the 17-year period, you have 17 x 70¢ x 2000, equalling just about \$24,000.00, assuming that without the union, wages would not have fallen any more after 14 years constant reduction.

At the end of my service, the union has won for me a life annuity of \$100 a month. My Prudential agent tells me that he can sell me a life annuity of \$100 a month—for \$15,300 cash. And a paid-up life policy of \$1000 for \$650. Adding up those items, we have a total of \$39,950.

I have paid, in dues and assessments, \$225. I have spent \$1,200 worth of working time on picket lines. A total investment of \$1,425.

For every dollar of dues and lost time invested, I have received \$28 back.

This much is simple arithmetic. But who can calculate the added years of usefulness to thousands of us, because the union blocked the plan of the Company to get rid of the "dead wood," to bring in "new blood"—and held down the speed of operations that made it possible for us to continue until we reached our pensions?

Who can appraise the value of the knowledge that when we were laid off, we would be called back in our proper turn? What price the grudgingly conceded decent treatment from supervision, under the watchful eyes of stewards and committeemen?

Above all, what allowance for the abiding conviction that we have been building a better world to work in, that we can leave as an inheritance to our children and grandchildren?

Neither Newton, Steinmetz or Einstein can give you an equation that will measure these things.

## A LOOK AHEAD

The union movement, now 17 million strong, faces new challenges, some of them just as critical as the issues which were disputed on the picket lines and in the sit-down strikes. Because of automation and technological change, union growth has slowed down. Jobs are disappearing in the plants and mines, where union strength has been concentrated; new jobs are being created in the white-collar trades and professions, which so far have resisted union organization. The Congress often seems unsympathetic to union aims and goals, while the effort to organize and bargain effectively is hampered by laws like Taft-Hartley and Landrum-Griffin.

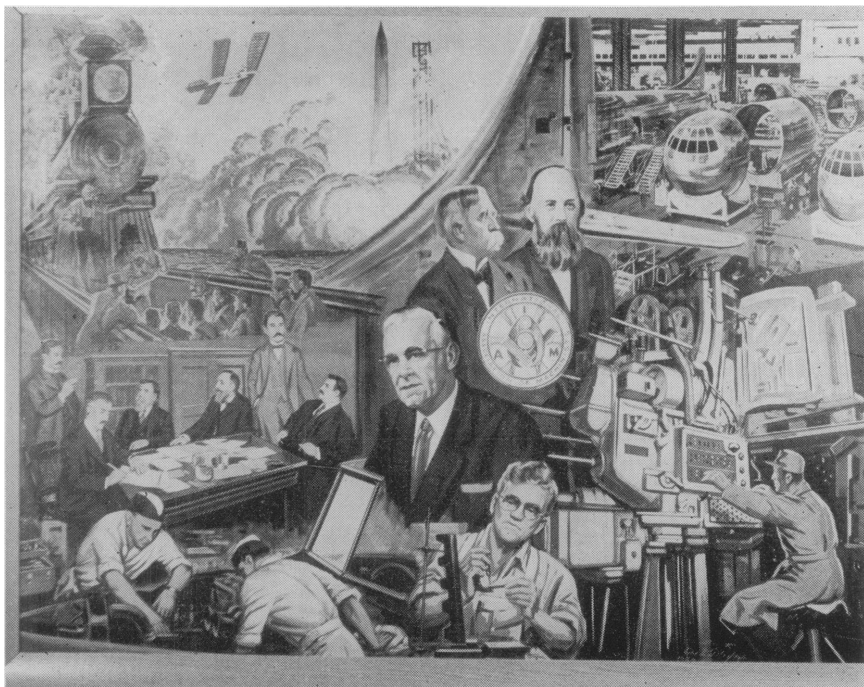
Looking back, American workers can be proud of the contributions which they and the union movement of which they are a part have made to our society. They have helped to make this a more decent and humane place in which to live and work. Unfortunately, labor is given relatively little credit for its accomplishments, but a great deal of criticism for its shortcomings.

(At this point in the April 18, 1964 institute, the film *Land of Promise* was shown. This is an excellent film depicting the gains in living standards which have been accomplished through collective bargaining and through effective trade union political action.)

The challenges which lie ahead will be as great as those which the unions have faced in the past. The problems posed by automation must be solved, and the kind of organizing campaigns which the unions must now undertake will be more difficult than those of the recent past. Unmindful of the past struggles, the new generation of workers are not flocking into the unions; they will have to be convinced of the need for organization, and a lot of hard work will have to go into the effort. But basically the objective will be the same, to build a strong labor movement, capable of meeting the problems and crises of the future.

The events which have been described throughout this essay should remind the reader that the past was often cruel to those who earned their living by toil. But the society in which we now live and

work is a brighter one because of the unstinting devotion of those who refused to accept the status quo, who cared more about the future of their fellow workers than about their own well-being. And the future can be brighter still if the spirit of solidarity can be perpetuated, that spirit which motivated the men and women whose deeds have been described in this brief history of the labor movement. Indeed, the ultimate success of the trade union movement and its endeavors depends upon that continuing solidarity of purpose which has so greatly contributed to the many successes which it has already achieved. This theme runs heavily through the song, "Solidarity Forever"—the "anthem" of the American trade union movement. Sung to the tune of "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," it was written by IWW poet Ralph Chaplin. In his autobiography entitled *Wobbly*, Chaplin said, "I wanted a song to be full of revolutionary fervor and to have a chorus that was ringing and defiant." He accomplished this purpose, particularly in the last line of the chorus, which proclaims "For the Union makes us strong":





*When the union's inspiration through the  
workers' blood shall run,  
There can be no power greater anywhere  
beneath the sun;  
For what force on earth is weaker than  
the feeble strength of one,  
But the union makes us strong.*

*Solidarity forever,  
Solidarity forever,  
Solidarity forever,  
For the union makes us strong.*

## APPENDIX

### A note about the songs. . . .

The words to all of the songs referred to in the text of this brief history of the American labor movement are reproduced here. Some are quite familiar to the present generation of trade unionists while others, more appropriate to earlier periods of American labor history, are not sung frequently. But each of them is a part of the rich heritage of the American labor movement and of the struggles which accompanied the growth of that movement.

Not all of the songs sung at the institute were used in their exact historical context. There is some question, for example, if there really was a railroad engineer named Casey Jones who "died scabbing on the SP Line." The song, "Commonwealth of Toil," which was sung in connection with the part of the narrative relating to the aims and ideals of the Knights of Labor, originated with the Industrial Workers of the World; it was sung at this particular point in the institute to lend musical emphasis to the description of the Knights' long-run objective of establishing a "cooperative society" in place of capitalism.

Many of the "standard" labor songs can be found in song books published by the national AFL-CIO and by affiliated international unions. In addition, there are at least two excellent books which contain descriptive material relating to a wide variety of labor songs, including many not usually found in union-published song books. *Songs of Work and Freedom* by Edith Fowke and Joe Glazer (North Shore Press, Waukegan, Illinois, 1960) is an excellent anthology of labor songs which includes the music for each of the songs and an interesting description of their origins. *Rebel Voices, An I.W.W. Anthology*, edited by Joyce L. Kornbluh (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1964) contains a wealth of background information relating to the songs of the Industrial Workers of the World, several of which were sung at the institute.

The various songs are reproduced with the hope that they will inspire others to sing about and reflect upon a past that was often cruel to those who toiled, and a future which is brighter for working people and their children because of the struggles recounted in these lyrics.

Irving Brotslaw  
Milwaukee, Wisconsin  
December, 1965

## CASEY JONES

(Words: Joe Hill; Tune: "Casey Jones")  
(S.P. refers to Southern Pacific Railroad)

The workers on the S.P. Line to strike  
sent out a call,  
But Casey Jones, the engineer, he  
wouldn't strike at all.  
His boiler it was leaking, and its  
drivers on the bum,  
And his engine and its bearings they  
were all out of plumb.  
  
Casey Jones, kept his junk pile  
running,  
Casey Jones, was working double time,  
Casey Jones, got a wooden medal,  
For being good and faithful on the  
S.P. Line.

The workers said to Casey, "Won't you  
help us win this strike?"  
But Casey said, "Let me alone, you'd  
better take a hike."  
Then someone put a bunch of railroad  
ties across the track,  
And Casey hit the river with an awful  
crack.

Casey Jones, hit the river bottom;  
Casey Jones, broke his blooming spine;  
Casey Jones, was an Angeleno:  
He took a trip to heaven on the  
S.P. Line.

When Casey Jones got up to heaven to  
the Pearly Gate,  
He said, "I'm Casey Jones, the guy that  
pulled the S.P. freight."  
"You're just the man," said Peter,  
"Our musicians went on strike;  
You can get a job a-scabbing any time  
you like.'

Casey Jones, got a job in heaven;  
Casey Jones, was doing mighty fine;  
Casey Jones, went scabbing on the  
angels  
Just like he did to workers on the  
S.P. Line.

*continued*

The angels got together and they said  
it wasn't fair  
For Casey Jones to go around a-scabbing  
everywhere.  
The Angels' Union Number 23, they sure  
were there,  
And they promptly fired Casey down the  
Golden Stair.

Casey Jones, went to Hell a-flying,  
"Casey Jones!" the Devil said.

"Oh, fine!

Casey Jones, get busy shoveling  
sulphur—

That's what you get for scabbing on  
the S.P. Line!"

## BATTLE CRY

(Tune: "Battle Cry of Freedom")

We will win the fight today, boys,  
We'll win the fight today,  
Shouting the battle cry of union;  
We will rally from the coal mines,  
We'll battle to the end,  
Shouting the battle cry of union.

*Chorus:*

The union forever, hurrah, boys,  
hurrah!  
Down with the Baldwins, up with the  
law;  
For we're coming, Colorado, we're  
coming all the way,  
Shouting the battle cry of union.

We have fought them here for years, boys,  
We'll fight them to the end,  
Shouting the battle cry of union,  
We whipped them in the North, boys,  
We'll whip them in the South,  
Shouting the battle cry of union.

The union forever, hurrah, boys,  
hurrah!  
Down with the militia, up with the  
law;  
For we're coming, Colorado, we're  
coming all the way,  
Shouting the battle cry of union.  
  
The union forever, hurrah, boys,  
hurrah!  
Down with the militia, to HELL with  
the LAW;  
We'll rally round the flag, boys,  
we'll rally round the flag,  
Shouting the battle cry of union.

## THE COMMONWEALTH OF TOIL

(Words: Ralph Chaplin; Tune: "Darling Nelly Gray")

In the gloom of mighty cities, mid the  
    roar of whirling wheels,  
We are toiling on like chattel slaves  
    of old.  
And our masters hope to keep us ever  
    thus beneath their heels,  
And to coin our very life blood into  
    gold.

### *Chorus:*

But we have a glowing dream of how fair  
    the world will seem,  
When each man can live his life secure  
    and free,  
When the earth is owned by labor and  
    there's joy and peace for all,  
In the Commonwealth of Toil that is  
    to be.

They would keep us cowed and beaten,  
    cringing meekly at their feet,  
They would stand between each worker  
    and his bread;  
Shall we yield our lives up to them for  
    the bitter crust we eat?  
Shall we only hope for heaven when  
    we're dead?

When our cause is all triumphant and we  
    claim our Mother Earth,  
And the nightmare of the present fades  
    away,  
We shall live with love and laughter,  
    we who now are little worth,  
And we'll not regret the price we had  
    to pay.

## HINKY DINKY PARLEZ VOUS

(Music: "Mademoiselle from Armentières")

The bosses are taking it on the chin,  
parlez-vous  
The bosses are taking it on the chin,  
parlez-vous,  
The bosses are taking it on the chin,  
Because the strikers won't give in,  
Hinky dinky parlez-vous.

The scabs are having a heck of a time,  
parlez-vous,  
The scabs are having a heck of a time,  
parlez-vous,  
The scabs are having a heck of a time,  
Trying to cross the picket line,  
Hinky dinky parlez-vous.

The boss is shaking at the knees,  
parlez-vous,  
The boss is shaking at the knees,  
parlez-vous,  
The boss is shaking at the knees,  
He's shaking in his B V D's,  
Hinky dinky parlez-vous.

We're gonna win the union shop,  
parlez-vous,  
We're gonna win the union shop,  
parlez-vous,  
We're gonna win the union shop,  
And clean the floor with a union mop,  
Hinky dinky parlez-vous.

We're staying on the picket line,  
parlez-vous,  
We're staying on the picket line,  
parlez-vous,  
We're staying on the picket line,  
Until we get the boss to sign,  
Hinky dinky parlez-vous.

## JOE HILL

(Words: Alfred Hayes: Music: Earl Robinson)

I dreamed I saw Joe Hill last night,  
Alive as you and me;  
Says I, "But Joe, you're ten years dead,"  
"I never died," says he, "I never died,"  
says he.

"In Salt Lake, Joe," says I to him,  
Him standing by my bed;  
"They framed you on a murder charge,"  
Says Joe, "But I ain't dead,"  
Says Joe, "But I ain't dead."

"The copper bosses shot you, Joe,  
They shot you, Joe," says I;  
"Takes more than guns to kill a man,"  
Says Joe, "I didn't die;"  
Says Joe, "I didn't die."

"Joe Hill ain't dead," he says to me,  
"Joe Hill ain't never died;  
Where working men are out on strike,  
Joe Hill is at their side,  
Joe Hill is at their side."

"From San Diego up to Maine,  
In every mine and mill;  
Where workers strike and organize,  
It's there you'll find Joe Hill,  
It's there you'll find Joe Hill."

I dreamed I saw Joe Hill last night,  
Alive as you and me;  
Says I, "But Joe, you're ten years dead,"  
"I never died," says he, "I never died,"  
Says he.



## THE MILL WAS MADE OF MARBLE

(Words and Music by Joe Glazer)

### *Chorus:*

The mill was made of marble,  
The machines were made out of gold;  
And nobody ever got tired,  
And nobody ever grew old.

I dreamed that I had died,  
And gone to my reward,  
A job in heaven's textile plant  
On a golden boulevard.

The mill was built in a garden,  
No dust or lint could be found;  
The air was so fresh and so fragrant,  
With flowers and trees all around.

There was no unemployment in heaven,  
We worked steady all through the year;  
We always had food for the children,  
We never were haunted by fear.

When I woke from this dream about heaven,  
I knew that there never could be  
A mill like that one down below here on  
earth,  
For workers like you and like me.

## SIXTEEN TONS

(Words and music by Merle Travis)

Some people say a man is made out of mud,  
But a poor man's made out of muscle and blood,  
Muscle and blood, and skin and bone,  
A mind that's weak and a back that's strong.

### *Chorus*

You load sixteen tons, and what do you get?  
Another day older and deeper in debt.  
St. Peter don't you call me 'cause I can't go,  
I owe my soul to the company store.

I was born one morning when the sun didn't shine,  
I picked up my shovel and I walked to the mine.  
I loaded sixteen tons of number nine coal,  
And the straw boss says, "Well, bless my soul."

I was born one morning in the drizzling rain,  
Fighting and trouble is my middle name,  
I was raised in the cane break by an old mama lion,  
Can't no high-toned woman make me walk the line.

If you see me coming, better step aside;  
A lot of men didn't, and a lot of men died;  
One fist of iron, the other of steel,  
If the right one don't get you then the left one will.

## SOLIDARITY FOREVER

(Words: Ralph Chaplin; Tune: "Battle Hymn of the Republic")

### *Chorus:*

Solidarity forever,  
Solidarity forever,  
Solidarity forever,  
For the union makes us strong.

When the union's inspiration through the  
workers' blood shall run,  
There can be no power greater anywhere  
beneath the sun;  
For what force on earth is weaker than  
the feeble strength of one  
But the union makes us strong.

They have taken untold millions which  
they never toiled to earn  
Yet without our brain and muscle not a  
single wheel would turn;  
We can break their haughty power, gain  
our freedom when we learn  
That the Union makes us strong.

In our hands is placed a power greater  
than their hoarded gold,  
Greater than the might of armies magni-  
fied a thousand fold,  
We can bring to birth a new world from  
the ashes of the old,  
For the union makes us strong.

## THE SOUP SONG

(Words: Joe Glazer; Tune: "My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean")

Way back in the days of depression,  
I didn't have nothing to eat;  
But that didn't bother me, mister,  
I was fed from my head to my feet—on:

*Chorus:*

Soo-oop, soo-oop,  
They gave me a bowl of soo-oop;  
Soo-oop, soo-oop,  
They gave me a bowl of soup.

One day the depression was over,  
I almost was back on my feet;  
But quickly there came a recession,  
So once more I started to eat—

We're striking this mill for a living,  
And one thing on which you can bet,  
Is that if we don't stick together,  
There's only one thing you will get—

## THERE IS POWER IN A UNION

(Tune: "There Is Power in the Blood")

*Chorus:*

There is power, there is power  
In a band of working men,  
When they stand, hand in hand;  
That's a power, that's a power  
That must rule in every land—  
One Industrial Union Grand.

Would you have freedom from wage slavery,  
Then join in the grand Industrial band;  
Would you from mis'ry and hunger be free,  
Then come! Do your share like a man.

Would you have mansions of gold in the  
sky,  
And live in a shack, way in the back?  
Would you have wings up in heaven to  
fly,  
And starve here with rags on your back?

If you've had "nuff" of "the blood of  
the lamb"  
Then join in the grand Industrial band;  
If, for a change, you would have eggs  
and ham,  
Then come, do your share, like a man.

If you like sluggers to beat off your  
head,  
Then don't organize, all unions despise;  
If you want nothing before you are dead,  
Shake hands with your boss and look wise.

Come, all ye workers, from every land,  
Come, join in the grand Industrial band;  
Then we our share of this earth shall  
demand,  
Come on, do your share, like a man.

## UNION MAID

(Words: Woody Guthrie and the Almanac Singers; Tune: "Red Wing")

There once was a union maid,  
Who never was afraid  
Of goons and ginks and company finks  
and deputy sheriffs who made the raid;  
She went to the union hall,  
When a meeting it was called,  
And when the legion boys came round,  
She always stood her ground.

### *Chorus:*

Oh, you can't scare me, I'm sticking to  
the union,  
I'm sticking to the union,  
I'm sticking to the union;  
Oh, you can't scare me, I'm sticking to  
the union,  
I'm sticking to the union till the day  
I die.

This union maid was wise  
To the tricks of company spies,  
She couldn't be fooled by company stools,  
She always organized the guys;  
She always got her way  
When she struck for higher pay,  
She'd show her card to the national  
guard,  
And this is what she'd say:

You girls who want to be free,  
Just take a tip from me,  
Get you a man who's a union man and join  
the ladies' auxiliary;  
Married life ain't hard,  
When you've got a union card,  
A union man has a happy life when he's  
got a union wife.

## UNION TRAIN

(Words: Almanac Singers; Tune: "The Old Ship of Zion")

Oh what is that I see yonder coming,  
Oh what is that I see yonder coming,  
Oh what is that I see yonder coming,  
Get on board, get on board.

It's that union train a-coming . . .

It has saved a many a thousand . . .

It will carry us to freedom . . .

Oh what is that I see yonder coming . . .

It's that union train a-coming . . .

## WHICH SIDE ARE YOU ON?

(Words: Florence Reese; Tune: Old Hymn Tune)

### *Chorus:*

Which side are you on,  
Which side are you on?  
Which side are you on, tell me,  
Which side are you on?

Come all you good workers,  
Good news to you I'll tell,  
Of how the good old union,  
Has come in here to dwell.

My daddy was a miner,  
And I'm a miner's son,  
And I'll stick with the union,  
Til every battle's won.

They say in Harlan County,  
There are no neutrals there,  
You'll either be a union man,  
Or a thug for J. H. Blair.

Oh, workers, can you stand it,  
Oh tell me how you can?  
Will you be a lousy scab,  
Or will you be a man?

Don't scab for the bosses,  
Don't listen to their lies;  
Us poor folks ain't got a chance,  
Unless we organize.



## NOTES

1. U. S. Department of Labor, *BLS Bulletin No. 1395*, Directory of National and International Labor Unions in the United States, 1963, pp. 39, 56.
2. Quoted in Charles O. Gregory, *Labor and the Law*, W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., New York, 1961, p. 24.
3. For a description of the reform movements and their objectives, see Foster Rhea Dulles, *Labor in America*, Thomas Y. Crowell Company, New York, 1960, pp. 35-52.
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