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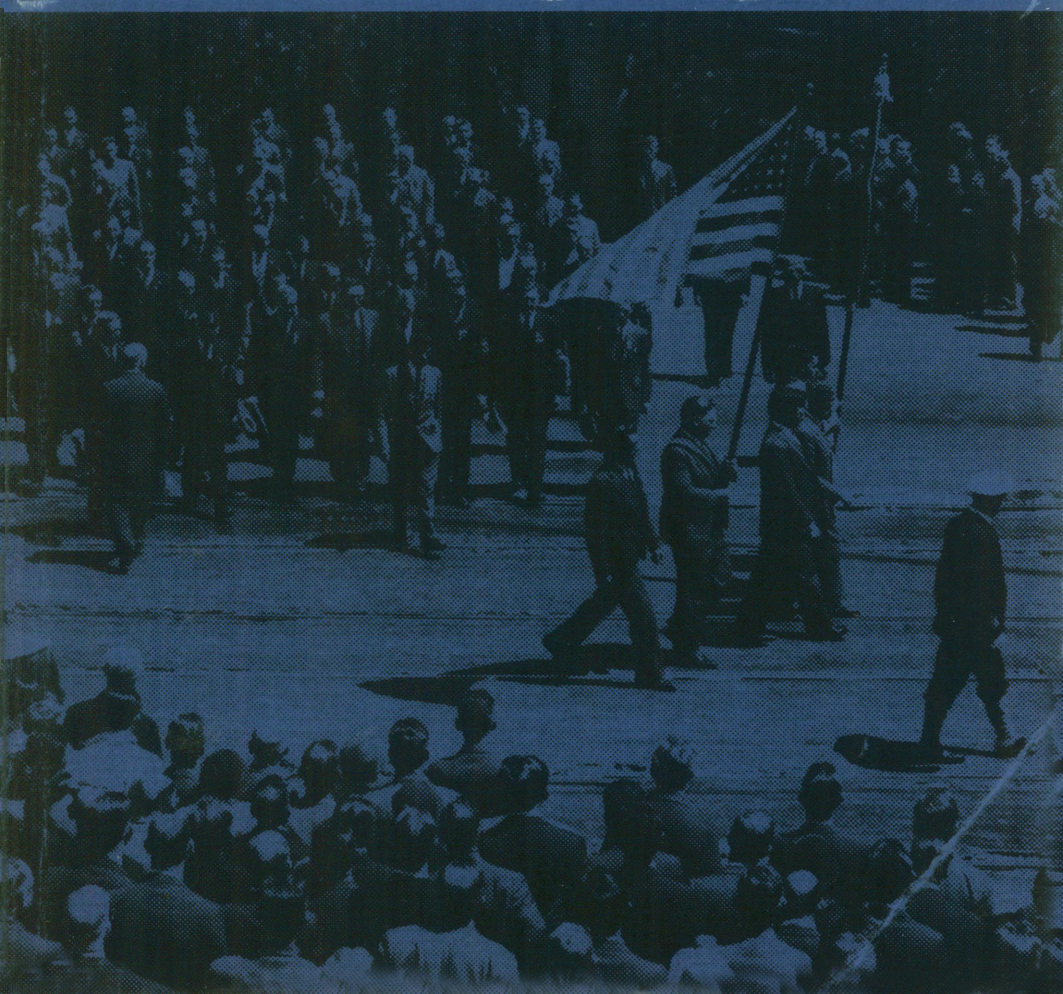
SKY FULL OF STORM:

A BRIEF HISTORY OF CALIFORNIA LABOR

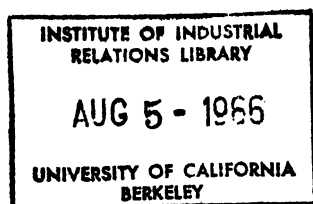
BY DAVID F. SELVIN

CENTER FOR LABOR RESEARCH AND EDUCATION

INSTITUTE OF INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS · UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY



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DAVID F. SELVIN

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY**



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FOREWORD

Over 1,870,000 union members in some 3,865 local unions make up the rank and file of organized labor in California today. They account for more than one out of every ten union members in the United States. The more than 4,000 collective bargaining agreements covering their wages, working conditions, and fringe benefits are considered among the most advanced in the world. They have been negotiated under a variety of labor-management relationships which students of industrial relations have described as some of the most mature and constructive in the nation.

Indeed, with the development of this collective bargaining base in California, organized labor has forged its way into the mainstream of the state's economic and political life. Today, through central labor councils, district bodies and state organizations, organized labor is called upon to represent the interests of working people at virtually every level of community life.

Despite this growth of labor to a position of general acceptance as a constructive force in society, few persons even among union members have been afforded the opportunity to gain some insight into how this came about. The lack of readily available information on the history of California labor has also been keenly felt in our public schools, where students and teachers alike have encountered nearly insurmountable obstacles in their efforts to obtain information about a vital phase of the state's development.

This deficiency, in the face of voluminous research and publications on various aspects of California industrial relations issues and problems, led the Center for Labor Research and Education to persuade David F. Selvin to undertake the very difficult task of reducing California's vivid labor history into an easy-to-read, stimulating, short pamphlet. The Center views *Sky Full of Storm* as a first step toward filling this gap.

David Selvin is a labor journalist with a scholarly background and the sensitivities of a labor historian deeply committed to developing greater understanding among youth and the general public concerning the struggles of working people for a better life. He received his B.S. and M.A. degrees in economics at the University of California in Berkeley and is currently the editor of *San Francisco Labor*, the official publication of the San Francisco Labor Council, AFL-CIO. His work as labor editor has won him ten Awards of Merit in competitions of the International Labor Press Association. He is president of the California Labor Press Association. Mr. Selvin's

published works in labor history include two biographies: *Sam Gompers, Labor's Pioneer*, published by Abelard-Schuman in 1964, and *Eugene Debs, Rebel, Labor Leader, and Prophet*, published by Lothrop, Lee & Shepard earlier this year. He is currently working on a series of biographical sketches of labor leaders to be published in the near future. During 1961-62, Mr. Selvin was a senior Fulbright research scholar at the London School of Economics.

"Sky Full of Storm" makes no pretense at being a history in the traditional sense. It develops a feeling for labor's struggles in California and depicts some of the pressing issues and problems confronting organized labor today. Hopefully it will stimulate further reading into labor history and current issues. The Center for Labor Research and Education, as a new unit of the Institute of Industrial Relations, is pleased to make the pamphlet available to the public, particularly for use in labor education programs and in the public schools.

DONALD VIAL, *Chairman*
Center for Labor Research and Education
Institute of Industrial Relations
University of California, Berkeley

PREFACE

These pages deal with fragments of a hundred and fifteen years of California labor history—a dozen or so episodes that seemed to me to characterize the contending forces, the issues, the developments of their periods. They are by no means the whole story; the gaps are not only numerous but enormous. But these scattered moments tell of a continuing, often violent, clash of powerful forces. They measure some of the high points in the ever-changing ebb and flow of the relations among working men, their employers, and their jobs. In the changing, in the clashing, I have seen the “sky full of storm” (in Burnette G. Haskell’s phrase)—the dark, threatening, brooding clouds, the sudden half-dark that blots out the light, the slowly expanding patches of hopeful blue.

Inevitably, the telling of these episodes has put me deeply in the debt of countless men and women who have explored these same “skies” before me, usually in greater detail and broader scope. My meager space prevents the acknowledgments that should be made. To all who helped me, I offer this inadequate and anonymous word of appreciation.

Most of all, I want to express my gratitude to Professor Emeritus Charles A. Gulick whose warmth and concern illuminated his scholarly lectures on the history and economics of labor for so many generations of students at the University of California—and especially for me.

DAVID F. SELVIN

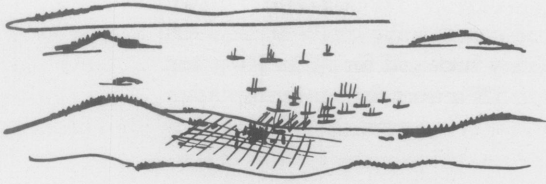
Berkeley, California

"I look out of the window of my mountain cabin and the sky is full of storm . . . Seeing it now, the colony lying dead before me, knowing that its own hands assisted in strangling it, knowing that the guilt of its death rests upon nearly all of its members, myself far from being excepted, the faltering steel that cuts the epitaph chisels as well peccavi. We were not fit to survive and we died. But there is no bribe money in our pockets; and beaten and dragged as we are, we are not ashamed . . . And is there no remedy, then, for the evils that oppress the poor? And is there no surety that the day is coming when justice and right shall reign on earth? I do not know; but I believe, and I hope, and I trust."

—BURNETTE G. HASKELL



ON THE COVER: "Only the shuffle of marching feet and bitter, angry silence"—the funeral for the victims of "Bloody Thursday."



1. *The classical pattern*

THE GOLD RUSH suddenly gave man's labor a unique value. Perhaps never before had ordinary, everyday manual work commanded so many dollars. It would be the better part of a hundred years before it would be worth as much again. The laborer who worked for a dollar or two a day could not be held back from a chance to earn ten times as much. A carpenter in New York earned \$1.74 a day. In San Francisco, no man would turn his hand for less than five dollars; a full day's work cost twenty or thirty dollars or more. In the face of the lure of gold, the labor of some men could not be had for any price.

Gold, said a man who had seen the wild, weird days of 1848-49, "rudely [snapped] asunder the feeble ties of affection and duty. Avarice and the overweening desire to be suddenly rich . . . led to a general migration of every class." Business and work in San Francisco came to a halt. ". . . The field is left half planted," the *Californian* reported, "the house half built, and everything neglected but the manufacture of shovels and pickaxes and the means of transportation to the spot where one man obtained \$128 worth of the real stuff in one day's washing, and the average for all concerned is \$20 per diem."

In the mines a man was his own master. Doctor or lawyer, preacher or plumber, bookkeeper or blacksmith, every man washed the gravel for his own account. Few men, at first virtually none, worked for another man's wages. It was a kind of democracy of hard work. "Physical labor was honorable," Professor Ira B. Cross has pointed out. "Class lines and class distinctions were forgotten and a universal spirit of the mining days permeated virtually every phase of early California life."

Word of the discovery spread quickly. From every corner of the continent and indeed the globe, by land and by sea, men headed for the new Eldorado. San Francisco Bay was soon packed with abandoned ships whose captains and crews had followed their passengers to the gold fields. Some 77,000 arrived in 1849, 82,000 in 1850. San Francisco, "little more than an abandoned mission, a decaying presidio, and a cluster of adobe huts," with no more than 500 souls, became overnight a city of size and substance.

Prices were high. Good board cost \$8 a day or \$30 by the week; a single meal could cost \$5. Heavy boots sold for \$30 to \$40 a pair. Washerwomen demanded \$12 to \$20 a dozen for laundering clothes. At those prices, the more patient sent their washing to the Hawaiian Islands, content to wait several months for its return.

Wages were high, too. A ship's captain found that sailors wanted \$300 a month to man his ship, with "ham, eggs, butter, soft tack and canned meats and all the liberty we want in port." The captain sold his ship and headed for the diggings. Earnings in the gold fields were said to run from \$10 to \$30 a day. In the fall of 1849, in San Francisco and Sacramento, \$12-a-day carpenters struck for \$16—California's first recorded strike. They settled for an immediate raise to \$13, a later increase to \$14. (Among thirty "carpenters" who struck were three preachers, two lawyers, three physicians, six bookkeepers, two blacksmiths, and a shoemaker.)

"There are evidences of such early trade-union activity in San Francisco," labor historian Lucille Eaves commented, "that one is tempted to believe that the craftsmen met each other on the way to California and agreed to unite."

Sailors in 1850 attempted a strike against a pay cut. Disappointed miners filled their jobs and broke their strike. Musicians demanded a wage increase as San Francisco prepared to celebrate California's admission to the Union. The committee in charge flatly refused and held the exercises without music. Teamsters formed an organization to fend off the competition of Australian teamsters. They plunged into politics and won a local ordinance barring aliens from engaging in draying, driving hackney coaches, or rowing passengers between ship and shore. Riggers and stevedores, carpenters, bricklayers, stone-masons—scores of trades formed unions in the course of the decade. Many conducted strikes and some were won, though most were lost. Almost no union survived for very long.

The printers' union, though, somehow managed to hang on. The printers organized when publishers attempted to cut their pay. They fought vigorously, though usually unsuccessfully, to hold their wages against the inexorable deflation that followed the Gold Rush. They faced the city's first employer association. They were confronted by strikebreakers, both local and imported. They were a principal party in unfolding the classical pattern on which San Francisco's—and California's—labor relations were cut for half a century and more.

Their opposite number was the sometimes lordly *Alta California*—the direct descendant of two pre-Gold Rush newspapers, the city's leading and, for a time, only newspaper. New competition, however, pressed in on the senior citizen. One of its younger rivals, the *Alta*

complained, filled its office "with what, in the *patois* of the profession, are termed *rats*, or those who work at a less price than the ruling rate." Lower labor costs, the *Alta* alleged, allowed the rival to reduce its charges for printing and advertising "and the business of other proprietors was made to suffer." The *Alta* summoned a meeting of newspaper proprietors (the West's first employer association) who quickly agreed to cut printers' pay 25 per cent. To make it stick, the publishers hired a new set of hands at the lower rates.

"A great deal of opposition was stirred up," the *Alta* later recalled, "and the new hands alike with the employers were assailed with bitterness and insult." The new hands proved incompetent and the papers were compelled to rehire the old employees at the old rates. To make that stick, a group of the old hands formed the Pacific Typographical Society in November, 1850.

Again in 1851, a convention of "Editors, Publishers and Reporters of the California Press" tried to cut wages. Again, the printers would have none of it. "Having perceived no reduction in the prices of living," they said, "the Society could not accede to this demand." In 1852, however, wages were cut. The *Alta* claimed the cut resulted from its ads for printers to replace its current employees. The Society said merely that it had reconsidered the matter.

The Society instituted a rule requiring the prompt payment of wages. To the annoyance of the *Alta*, it also established a charge for waiting time. Most printers worked by the piece—first \$2, then \$1.50 per thousand ems; a good man could set about 8,000 ems a shift as long as he did not have to stand around and wait for copy. For such "waiting time," the Society set a charge of \$1.25 an hour. The *Alta* refused to pay. The printers said they would be compelled to resign unless the bill for waiting time was met. The proprietor, in anger and haste and "with the air of an Emperor," the union said, accepted their "resignations." The *Alta* could find no replacements, however, and was compelled to take back the old hands.

On October 23, 1853, the journeyman printers of San Francisco were called to a meeting "to take into consideration matters of great importance to the craft generally." The next day's *Herald* printed a report of what was called "the largest meeting of printers ever held in this city." The "matters of great importance" turned out to be an entire crew of nonunion printers, complete with foreman, imported from New York, who had taken over the *Alta* office. Some of these men had been labeled "rats" by the New York Printers' Union; some had worked during a New York newspaper strike. The printers said they raised no objections to men coming to San Francisco "in the usual and legitimate way." But "we as printers and as men—aye, and

as Californians, who have adopted this State as our future residence, are opposed to the importing of men to disgrace industrious men already here . . . the principle already begun by the proprietors of the *Alta California*, if generally carried out by the employers of the State, would prove disastrous to the industrial interests of the State." The printers bluntly denounced the men who had taken over the *Alta* jobs (save two who quit when they found out what they were getting into). They resolved not to work in that office "while the present state of affairs continues . . ."

The *Alta* took only brief notice of the printers' charges: "The members of this rich Association of Printers—men into whose hands our office alone has paid upwards of *one hundred thousand dollars* within the past two years—are now employing their time, means, and influence in an endeavor to interrupt and finally break up the new order of things which has succeeded their reign of oppression." It accused the union men of using every device to persuade the *Alta's* new employees to desert. It promised: "We are resolved to be no longer governed by this tyrannical Society and call upon the intelligent, the right-minded, and the true of the profession to assist us in meeting this combination and resisting its high-handed, insolent, and oppressive rule."

Four days later, the *Alta* recorded in detail the history of its "connection" with the union, its efforts to secure reductions in pay, its objections to "waiting time," and to the rule requiring prompt payment of wages. It charged the printers had dominated the trade and controlled the jobs. "But the half is not told. The half of arrogance, impudence and tyrannous exercise of Society rights, they have been the lords of the printing offices, dictating their own terms, and regulating their own work . . . We bore their tyranny as long as it could be borne, and until we could free ourselves from it . . . We are at last independent of them and shall endeavor to remain so."

On the following Sunday, there were not one but two meetings of printers. One was the Society's last recorded meeting. When it refused to "rat" the *Alta* office, the loyal union printers withdrew. The second meeting had been called "for a thorough organization of the profession." Here was formed the Eureka Typographical Society. In a short time, it would be chartered as Local No. 21 of the National Typographical Union which, with only an occasional gap, has ever since represented San Francisco's printers.

The running battle between the printers and the *Alta* settled no serious issues, not even between themselves. But it bared threads that run the full length of the warp of fifty years and more of labor relations in California. The stubborn resistance of workers to the liquidation of relatively high, Gold Rush-born wage levels has

echoed a thousand times over these years. Employer resistance to union organization and to collective bargaining in any form has renewed itself endlessly. The use of nonunion workers and strike-breakers has been raised to the level of principle by the sponsors—and they have been legion in California—of the anti-union open shop. The thirst of employers for a labor supply both cheap and abundant has seemed always unquenchable.



DENNIS KEARNEY



2. "If not one Jonah, then another"

"STRIKING FOR HIGHER WAGES is now the rage among the working people of San Francisco," the *Bulletin* commented one day in 1863. "Doubtless in many cases the wages paid in the early part of the year, when more men were in the City than could find employment, were unreasonably low. It is only just that workingmen should improve the present occasion, when the rush for distant mines has drained the city of its surplus population, to compel the payment of fair wages for their services . . . But great care should be taken not to overdo the thing . . ."

These were prosperous years in San Francisco. Work was plentiful. Buildings and wharfs were going up on every hand. Fabulous riches uncovered in the newly opened Nevada mines created fresh excitement. Quartz stamping mills, reported a historian, were being ordered "by the wholesale."

By 1863 unions could be counted in at least twenty-two trades—in even more before the good times ran their course. They struck for higher pay and often succeeded, though the employers fought back vigorously. The bakers asked for a \$30 a month increase in pay—from \$55-60 to \$85-90 a month. The employer granted it—until they could import men from Hamburg to take their places. When boiler-makers and molders went on strike, their employers imported strike-breakers from places as distant as Portland, Maine and Boston, Massachusetts. The unions sent reception committees to meet the replacements at Panama and often succeeded in winning them over to the strike. Clerks in dry goods stores started a campaign for early closing; they hoped to get out of the stores by 8 p.m. Bricklayers struck for an hour's lunch. Hotel waiters who walked out for a raise were met with a full-fledged employer organization. Each member was pledged to pay the other employers a substantial penalty if he yielded to union demands.

The tailors went on strike in June, 1863. Looking for help, they called a meeting of "mechanics' societies." Out of it came the state's first central body: the San Francisco Trades' Union. It helped a number of unions in trouble, played a part in the campaign for the eight-hour day, but after three years it disbanded. In 1865, Alexander M. Kenaday was its president. A printer by trade, Kenaday had been

president of the Typographical Union and had founded the first, though a short-lived, union paper. With the backing of the Trades' Union, Kenaday presented the Legislature a 22-foot-long petition, bearing some 11,000 signatures, calling for an eight-hour-day law. The bill initially passed both houses, only to be defeated in the final stage by one vote.

When the Legislature failed to act, the workers carried their campaign to the job. Carpenters gave notice that, starting June 5, 1867, they would work no more than eight hours. Under the leadership of A. M. Winn, a brigadier general in the California militia, the carpenters formed Eight Hour Leagues in many parts of the state to back their drive. Other crafts followed suit. On June 3, 2,066 unionists—the *Alta California* counted them—marched in a “quiet and pleasant” parade to celebrate the eight-hour day. Ship joiners, first of the crafts to inaugurate the shorter day, led the parade; other crafts followed in the order in which they had adopted it. The parade, the *Bulletin* noted, “was orderly and well conducted and not a drunken man was seen in the ranks.”

That winter, the bill for the eight-hour day was reintroduced in the Legislature. Eight Hour Leagues in many parts of the state had questioned candidates on their attitude toward the bill. In turn, they had urged their members to vote for those who favored it. The Eight Hour Leagues banded together in the Mechanics' State Council and the movement spread to many parts of the state. The Legislature passed the bill. Shipowners and other employers formed Ten Hour Leagues to resist the spread of the shorter workday. They advertised in Eastern newspapers for replacements who would work the longer hours. When planing mills threatened to abandon the eight-hour day, carpenters announced they would refuse to put up any work produced under a ten-hour day. The League furnished mills working the eight-hour day a stamp—a union label—to identify their work. In the end the law proved ineffective. Court decisions reduced it to “little more than . . . a recommendation without power of enforcement.” As prosperity in the Sixties gave way to unemployment and wage cuts in the Seventies, the eight-hour day was forced to give way, too. Ten hours again became the standard workday.

Completion of the Central Pacific in 1869 signaled the onset of hard times. It turned loose thousands of construction workers—many thousands of Chinese among them. It brought a fresh flow of immigrants, many of them also penniless and looking for work. It poured Eastern goods into the state's markets. Land values fell, prices dropped, exports decreased, factories closed. Several thousand workers were said to be idle in San Francisco alone, anywhere from 50,000 to 100,000 in the state. One estimate said one man in every five was

out of work. Unions lost strength and many collapsed under the tide of wage cuts and unemployment. Hunger and destitution and desperation mounted day by day.

"Where there is discontent, if there is not one Jonah, another will be found," Henry George reported. "... the presence of the Chinese has largely engrossed the attention of the laboring classes, offering what has seemed to them a sufficient explanation of the fall of wages and difficulty of finding employment." The Chinese immigrant, strange and different in the new world, had been the butt of discontent before. Time after time, state and local laws had tried to drive him from the land. A miner's tax drove him from the mines. He was subjected to a head tax. His shoulder pole was barred from the streets. He was threatened with a legal shearing of his treasured queue. He was taxed if he used a horse to carry laundry and taxed if he did not. Language and culture set him apart. Exploited by his employers, both Chinese and Occidental, his low wages and long hours made him a threat to decent wage levels and working conditions. Now, in these bitter years, he became the target of renewed anger and discontent.

It was not the Chinese alone. People were angered by the railroad monopoly; by the growth of large-scale, machine-worked agriculture that used large gangs of men briefly, then dumped them on the cities; by corruption in government where a term in office could mean a lifetime of wealth. People resented unemployment and pay cuts and long hours. On the day news reached San Francisco of the great railroad strikes that swept the East in 1877, handbills were distributed in all parts of the city advertising a sympathy meeting. The unionists gathered on the sand lots at Larkin and Leavenworth and Market streets, facing the City Hall then under "leisurely" construction. It was a peaceful meeting until someone cried, "On to Chinatown." Rocks and bricks demolished a Chinese washhouse, a fire was set, a liquor store looted. A score of Chinese laundries were wrecked, a mission stoned, a plumbing shop damaged.

Next day, a Committee of Safety was formed, modeled after the Vigilance Committee of 1856 and headed by William T. Coleman, who had been chairman of the 1856 committee. Committee members were armed with pickhandles held on their wrists by leather thongs. That night, with police and militia standing by, they guarded a Mission Street woolen mill threatened by an arson-minded mob. The crowd instead attacked some nearby Chinese laundries. On the third night, rumors were strong that the mob would attempt to burn the Pacific Mail docks, where ships bearing Chinese immigrants customarily docked. Instead, a nearby lumber yard was set afire. Shots were exchanged, men were killed and property extensively damaged.

Order was restored after five days and the pickhandle brigade discharged. The discontent remained.

One of the men who carried a pickhandle was a drayman named Dennis Kearney. He had come to San Francisco in 1868 as mate of a clipper ship and had worked for a time for a steamship company before buying into a drayage firm. For two years he had attended a self-improvement society known as the "Lyceum of Self-Culture." He had achieved some notice for a "bitter vulgarity," for his attacks on all forms of religion, and especially, Henry George noted, for the "venom with which he abused the working classes." He was, George said, "a man of strict temperance, except speech." Until now, he had taken little part in politics.

Kearney was refused membership in the Workingmen's Party of the United States because of his contempt for the working class. He organized his own Workingmen's Trade and Labor Union, but it broke up in a quarrel over the division of campaign contributions. On September 16, 1877 he spoke at a sandlot meeting under the aegis of the newly formed Workingmen's Party of California—the first in a long series of meetings that raised this uneducated drayman to great, if brief, political power.

In his political forays, Kearney often wore a drayman's copper-riveted, leather apron. His thick, knotted fists and jutting jaw underlined his denunciations of the "land monopoly" and the "money power." He charged Congress and the Legislature were manipulated by thieves and land speculators and ruled by bribes. He called the Central Pacific men "thieves" who will "soon feel the power of the workingmen." He threatened lynching if "the condition of things is not ameliorated." He recommended every man get himself a musket and a hundred rounds of ammunition. Most of all, he adopted as his own another man's cry, "The Chinese must go." Kearney had the support of the San Francisco *Chronicle*, then a paper (according to Henry George) "of the most vigorous and unscrupulous kind." But he quickly drew the fire of the authorities. "The functionaries who ran the town," Frank Roney, a prominent union leader, wrote, "became alarmed at Kearney's apparent progress and resolved to nip it in the bud." He and some of his followers were arrested—not once but many times. The supervisors and the Legislature passed special laws in futile efforts to gag him and his protest. His party was able to avoid police interference with its statewide convention only by announcing one meeting place while delegates were secretly told of another.

One newspaper described his party as "the uprising of an illiterate, alien mob of adventurers, agitators, and tramps, too lazy to work and too cowardly to steal, except as coyotes do, in packs in the night."

Kearney, another said, "does what the naked Bushman does—curses, calls names and threatens death."

The party platform charged that the government of the nation had fallen into hands of the capitalists while the rights of the people were ignored. Public lands, it contended, should be held for settlement by individuals—no more than a square mile to a person. Contract prison labor should be abolished. A law should be enacted establishing the eight-hour day. Equal pay for equal work for women. Free, compulsory education, free textbooks for children under 14. Special help for children of the indigent. And, of course, drastic steps to eliminate cheap Chinese labor, "a curse on our land."

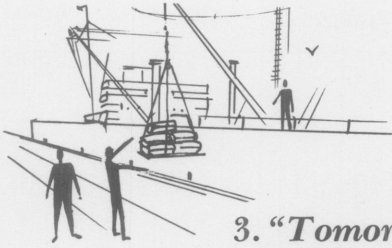
Only the day before its first statewide convention opened, the Workingmen's Party elected a state senator from Alameda County in a special election. It was one of a growing number of electoral victories that fell to the new party, capped when it elected fifty delegates to the State Constitutional convention. Seventy-six seats went to non-partisans but only eleven to Republicans, ten to Democrats, two to independents.

One reporter described the Workingmen's delegates to the Constitutional Convention as "utterly ignorant" men, "desirous of doing something for the laboring classes, without the slightest idea of how to do it." Despite their numbers, they were clearly outmaneuvered by both the farmer delegates and the numerous delegates who reflected corporate and business interests. The convention adopted a number of restrictions on the Chinese proposed by the Workingmen's delegates, though most of them were of questionable constitutionality. It set up the Railroad Commission to fix railroad rates and hear complaints. It rejected most of the other Workingmen's proposals. Nevertheless, the Kearney party saw the results as a victory and Kearney stumped the state to urge approval of the new constitution. Frank Roney, no admirer of Kearney, said "it proved to be no victory at all." Henry George commented that it was "anything but a Workingmen's Constitution," generally sacrificing the interests of the working classes and the capitalists to those of the landowners. "Both good and new," the *Argonaut* said, "but that which is good is not new, and that which is new is not good." The new constitution won, though its victory owed more to the agricultural counties than to the major centers of population.

The Workingmen's Party reached its peak of power in 1879 in a string of startling victories in statewide and San Francisco elections. From that point, however, the party rapidly disintegrated. Kearney was attracted to the Greenback Labor Party and soon the Workingmen's Party was split between Democratic and Greenback factions. In 1881 Kearney himself commented: "There is no Workingmen's

Party now, and it would take a telescope larger than Lick's to find a vestige of the giant that shook not only the state but the nation." It was not represented in the election of 1882. Kearney became a real estate agent, a stockbroker, owner of an employment office. An uncle left him a good deal of money. He died in Alameda in 1907.

The Workingmen's Party left its mark. It was, one reporter said, "peculiarly" a party "that has been kept alive by the mistakes of its opponents." It contributed to the agitation for a new and needed state constitution. If the result was something less than many had hoped, it was perhaps more than some had wanted. The Party won a hearing for working people with the Democratic and Republican Parties. It created the Railroad Commission which, of little use at the start, became of increasing value in regulating the state's utilities. It helped catapult the status of the Chinese into a national question. Most of all, perhaps, it reflected in its angry and incendiary way the problems—and the potential power—of the working people.



3. *"Tomorrow is also a day"*

THE NIGHT OF March 6, 1885 was cold and wet; a heavy fog hung over the Bay. Still, close to three hundred men turned out on Folsom Street Wharf to hear a handful of landlubbers talk about a union for seamen. The shipowners had announced a new pay scale which would pay a man \$25 or less for a month's work. The men met again the next night and the night after. Within a few weeks they had signed up over 700 seafaring men in the new Coast Seamen's Union. Within a few months, they counted over 2,000 on the union's rolls. It was not the first attempt to organize a seamen's union. This time, though, through defeat as well as victory, through lean days and prosperous ones, the union would stick.

All these years the sailor had been abused on shore and exploited at sea. He had been robbed blind by crimps, sold aboard ship for "blood money," kicked and beaten and driven, as Richard Henry Dana put it, "at the will of the master or the whim of a mate." If he refused to work, it was mutiny. If he quit his job, it was desertion. He had no private life ashore—the boarding house masters and their runners saw to that. His life at sea was made up of dingy, airless, cramped forecastles, bad food—prison food was better, one sailor swore—and hard work. He worked twelve or fourteen hours a day in fair weather, around the clock in foul. He had no assurance his ship would stay afloat; inspection for seaworthiness was unknown, safety at sea ignored.

Among the men who inspired that March meeting were a handful of members of the International Workingmen's Association. One was the brilliant, though erratic, Burnette G. Haskell. He had started the newspaper *Truth* in 1882, made it the official organ of the Representative Trades Assembly. He became, by turn, a socialist, a communist-anarchist, leader of a co-operative colony at Kaweah. IWA was suggested by, but not related to, the "first" or "red" international of Karl Marx. Haskell described it as "secret, mysterious, world-wide, quietly honeycombing society . . . the sole practical means of releasing the wealth-producers from the shackles of tyranny." It had a peak membership in California of perhaps 1,800 and faded from sight when Haskell withdrew in the late Eighties.

But Haskell, and others among the landlubbers on that foggy March



ANDREW FURUSETH

night, contributed one important notion. Frank Roney had tried it a few years before in organizing the Seamen's Protective Union; for other reasons, that union lived only a year or two. Now Haskell proposed again that the seamen authorize a shoreside advisory committee to tend the affairs of the union while its members were at sea. It would provide the stability that the seafaring members needed but could not themselves provide. The new union patrolled the waterfront to prevent nonunion men from taking the ships out, and it forced the shipowners to rescind the pay cut. It put a boycott on boardinghouse keepers who shipped nonunion men; in time, it opened its own boarding house and shipping office to defeat the crimps. By the following spring, the union had pushed wages up to \$40 a month on offshore vessels, \$35 on coasting ships.

That spring, when firemen struck the ships of Oceanic Steamship Company, some hundred sailors walked out in sympathy. The shipowners retaliated by setting up their own shipping office and demanding that every seaman carry a "grade" book in place of a union book. The employer book noted dates of services, grade in which a man sailed, comments on his work. Without his book, he could not ship. With his book, if he complained about food or quarters or pay, he was blacklisted. The dispute was violent and several men were killed. On September 30, 1886, the union was forced to give up.

Soon after, the union made Andrew Furuseth its secretary. Andy had been a clerk in an Oslo grocery store before he went to sea at the age of 19. He landed in San Francisco in 1880, shipped on lumber schooners or worked as a fisherman off the California coast. He joined the Coast Seamen's Union in June, 1885. After the Oceanic defeat, Furuseth rebuilt the union, put money in its treasury, pushed up wages. In 1888, he announced he would not serve again. But he returned to office in 1891 and—except for one two-month attempt to get away again—never left until his death in 1938.

In 1891, too, the union merged with the Steamship Sailors Protective Union to form the Sailors Union of the Pacific and soon after opened its own shipping office. When the employers asked for a reduction in pay, the union refused. The shipowners replied by hiring nonunion men wherever they could, through crimps if need be, at less than the union scale. The union put up nonunion men at an out-of-town boarding house at its own expense in an effort to keep them off the ships.

The shipowners hired one G. C. Williams to run their reopened shipping office. (He turned out to be wanted by the police under his real name.) "A dose of cold lead," Williams told a Seattle agent, "has a wonderful effect in quieting disorders." In 1893, depression flooded the waterfront with unemployed men and Williams had little trouble

filling the union men's jobs. Nonunion men were assaulted. The cable on a schooner was sawed. Dynamite was found aboard a British tramp and on tugs. The union denied any knowledge of these or of similar events; it charged the shipowners and crimps—this "Association of Desperate Discontents"—with manufacturing them.

On Christmas Day, in 1893, the son of a well-known boardinghouse keeper, Johnny Curtin, saw a black valise in the doorway. He started to pick it up, then dropped it, crying, "dynamite." Moments later it exploded. Four men were killed, others injured. Police and press assumed the union was responsible, though Furuseth protested that it had nothing to gain from this kind of crime. A week later, the union closed its shipping office. Its members were permitted to ship wherever they could find work.

"Tomorrow is also a day," Furuseth wrote the members of the Sailors' Union. It was a watchword the union would need, not once but many times, in the years ahead.



4. *"Watch your employes and discharge boycotters"*

THE UNIONS, few and weak, were largely ignored in the depressed latter part of the Seventies while the fire-eating Workingmen's Party held working people's attention. Frank Roney, an increasingly prominent union leader, held an important place in its councils until he quarreled with Kearney and left the Party. In 1878 Roney proposed a convention of trade unions that led to the formation of the Representative Assembly of Trades and Labor Unions. It would have nothing to do with political parties or political candidates, the Assembly quickly resolved.

The Assembly became the link between the San Francisco unions and the rising national labor movement. In a major step toward ending their isolation, the San Francisco unions sent Charles F. Burgman, a journeyman tailor, to a convention of trade unions and labor organizations at Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in 1881. There, Burgman had a hand in forming the Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions, immediate predecessor of the American Federation of Labor. In the following year, a number of San Francisco unions and the Assembly itself affiliated with the new national federation.

The Assembly, too, reflected the heat of Kearney's anti-Chinese campaign. It set up, again under Roney's leadership, the League of Deliverance. The League conducted a short but intensive boycott of stores handling Chinese-made merchandise. Out of the anti-Chinese agitation came another useful labor weapon: the union label. The Carpenters' Eight Hour League had set a pattern in 1869 when it offered to supply stamps to identify materials made under eight-hour conditions. The cigar-makers, though they squabbled long and loudly, finally settled on a blue label to differentiate their product from Chinese-made cigars.

The Assembly's activities, aided by good times, encouraged new trades to organize. Strikes for wage increases and shorter hours were frequent. In 1883 employers formed the Merchants' and Manufacturers' Association to resist them. It was not a powerful force but an omen of things to come. A brief depression did far more to quiet union demands.

In 1884, the fading Assembly disappeared completely. But in 1885, in its place was organized the Representative Council of Trades and Labor Federations of the Pacific Coast (later the Federated Trades and Labor Organizations of the Pacific Coast). Roney, blacklisted in the molder's trade, took a job as an assistant city engineer. From his cubbyhole in the City Hall basement he gave much of his time and energy to Federation affairs. In 1886, the Federation organized what was probably the first Labor Day—a celebration of the first year of the Iron Trades Council. Governor Stoneman proclaimed the day a legal holiday and headed a huge parade with some 10,000 workers in line—an impressive demonstration of union strength. The Federation organized new unions, developed techniques for organizing boycotts and for coordinating support for unions on strike.

Employer organizations, at first, had been little more than defensive reactions to their employees' unions. But in the Eighties, they combined to make war, not to negotiate terms. Industry associations were linked in citywide organizations. Less and less the unions faced an individual employer; more and more, organized labor faced organized capital.

The employers chose the moment of defeat of a strike in the iron works in 1886 to form the Engineers' and Iron Founders' Association. The Eating House Keepers' Association attempted to impose its rules on cooks and waiters; only a strike could force their withdrawal. When firemen struck the Oceanic ships, the employers organized into the Ship Owners' Protective Association, as we have already seen. By the end of 1886, employers had formed associations, too, in construction, furniture manufacturing, brewing, and baking, among others.

In 1890, a bitter dispute broke out between the molders and the Engineers' and Iron Founders' Association. The employers demanded lower wages, complaining that they could not meet Eastern competition. They announced that they would ignore apprentice regulations and the ban on piecework, and they fired eleven union men. The molders struck. The employers imported hundreds of strikebreakers from the East in heavily guarded coaches. Union men signed up as strikebreakers and rode the trains in an effort to persuade men to desert. The union paid for return tickets for some two hundred men after they reached San Francisco. The strike lasted for months. It was said to have cost the foundry owners \$5,000,000, the molders more than \$200,000. The badly weakened union barely survived.

In August, 1891, employers of an estimated 40,000 workers formed the Board of Manufacturers and Employers of California. The Board swore it was friendly to labor but it warned of the dangers of "frequent" strikes and boycotts. "We recognize the urge of labor to

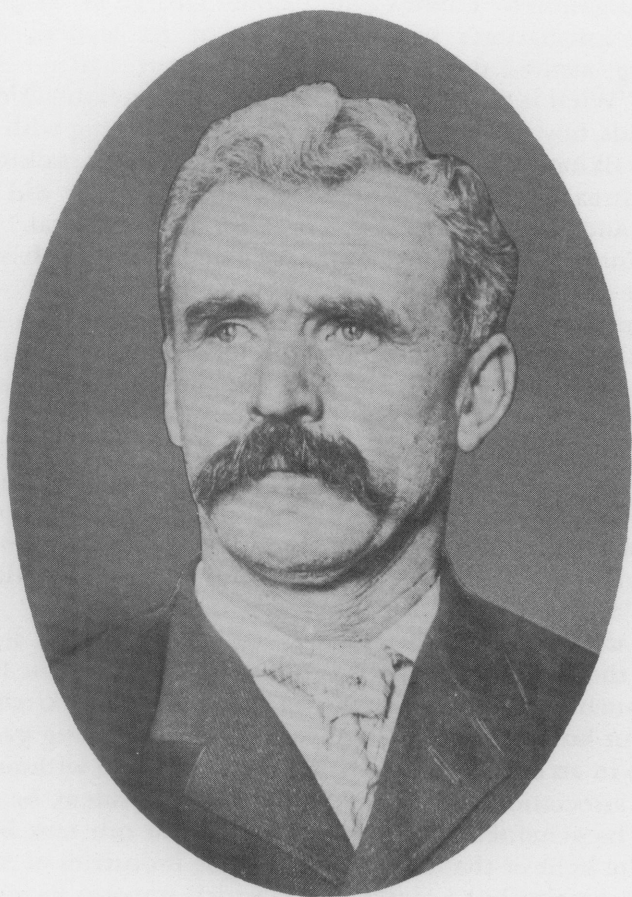
organize . . ." it declared, "but we reserve to ourselves the right to decide as to whom we shall or whom we shall not employ"—the classical employer definition of an open shop.

An investigation by Labor Commissioner George W. Walts underscored the association's viewpoint. One of its leaders, Siegfried Nickelsburg, assured the commissioner his group had no objection to unions. "What it does object to," he said, "is unreasonable, aggressive demands, boycotting among others, and interfering with people's business, walking people's factories without authority, talking to the men and threatening to have them discharged if they did not pay their dues, and interfering with a man's business in general." Another employer introduced a leaflet opposing boycotts. "Watch your employees," it instructed, "and discharge boycotters."

The employers' association forced a general lockout in the shoe industry. Union workers seeking reinstatement were compelled to disavow their union. Seamen had struck against a wage cut and were fighting a losing battle. The association took over the conduct of the fight, exulting: "The . . . Association can look with complacency upon its work during the last two years. One after another the unions have been taught a salutary lesson until out of the hordes of unions only one or two are left of any strength. This Association has taken hold of the shipowners' struggle and it is only a question of time when the Sailors' Union will have gone the way of the rest."

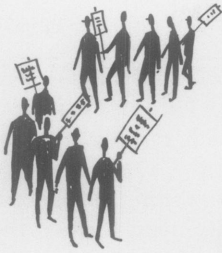
A bitter depression in 1893 had also taken its toll. Not in twenty-five years, the *Coast Seamen's Journal* declared, "has San Francisco witnessed such destitution, misery and suffering." Soup kitchens, free employment bureaus, public woodyards, street sweeping gangs were resorted to in an effort to help the thousands of men without jobs.

On the association's third anniversary, its president happily declared: "The general success of this Association can best be understood by the light of the fact that among the industries of San Francisco there remains but a single union which imposes its rules upon its trade. That union is the Typographical Union. The reason why this union still continues to dictate terms is because the employing printers have never combined to resist its demands." Then, its job apparently done, the association was allowed to lapse.



MICHAEL CASEY

Photo courtesy of San Francisco *Chronicle*.



5. "How not to combat unionism"

THE TURN OF THE CENTURY brought a welcome flush of prosperity to California. Hawaii had only recently been annexed, the Spanish-American War ended, the Philippines were occupied. Gold had been discovered in the Klondike and on the Yukon. New industries were springing up, old ones were flourishing, and the vast markets of the Orient were opening. New railroads and a growing commerce were drawing the rest of the nation nearer.

The San Francisco Labor Council, formed from the remains of the old Federation in 1892, had lost strength for a time, then rocketed upward. It reported fifteen unions in 1897, thirty-four in 1900, ninety in mid-summer a year later. And this, despite the withdrawal of the building crafts to form the San Francisco Building Trades Council. The latter's organ, *Organized Labor*, gibed: "The Labor Council gathered under its wings a most varied collection of eggs and hatched some curious ducklings and labeled them trades unions." The "ducklings" included butchers, stablemen, teamsters, hackmen, hodcarriers, carpet workers, laundry workers, house movers, window-shade workers, among many others. The new unions, as well as the old, succeeded in raising wages and cutting hours of work. "A fact first and most pleasingly apparent," reported Labor Commissioner F. V. Meyers in 1901, "is that . . . the wage-earner of California is, in almost every avocation, better paid than is the wage-earner in any other State in the Union."

In the spring of 1901, influential employers contributed \$1,000 apiece, sometimes more, to a war chest for a renewed fight against unions. They pledged their bond to stay with the new employer association until its job was done. They agreed to transfer all disputes with unions to a powerful, five-man executive committee; no dispute was to be settled without its approval. Membership would be kept secret since many members were merchants and manufacturers of consumer goods, especially vulnerable to boycott and community pressure. The Association would speak only through its attorney, M. F. Michael.

It first showed its hand in a metal polishers' strike in April, 1901. Several employers were ready to grant the union's demand for an eight-hour day until the Association intervened. If they gave in, the

employers were warned, supplies would be cut off. The metal polishers went back to work empty handed three and a half months later.

The Association was in the background, too, when, on May 1, more than a thousand cooks and waiters struck for one day's rest in seven, a ten-hour day, a union shop, and display of the union house card. A few smaller employers settled, but the larger employers formed the Restaurant Keepers Association to fight the union's demands. The cooks and waiters managed to hold out until fall but gained nothing.

Unions in the carriage shops struck on May 8 when their employers, under Association pressure, repudiated a nine-hour day and the union shop. Iron supply houses announced they would sell no supplies to carriage makers who signed a union agreement. In turn, teamsters declared they would do not hauling for supply houses that refused supplies to union shops. The Carriage Makers Association finally renewed its earlier agreement including the shorter workday and the union shop, but refused to put it in writing.

Some two thousand men in the metal trades followed the machinists on strike in June for a nine-hour day. Again, smaller employers yielded but the supply houses saw to it that few of them were able to operate on the shorter shift. The fight dragged to a bitter end in March, 1902. Some of the men returned to work with a shorter day, but most went back under pre-strike conditions.

When bakeries refused to sell bread to union restaurants, several hundred bakers walked out in a sympathetic strike. A threatened strike of meatcutters compelled retail shops to sell meat to union restaurants. An actual strike failed to stop wholesale butchers from refusing to sell meat to retail shops displaying the union house card. The strike was short, the union quickly disrupted.

A few months before this outbreak of strife—in August, 1900—a handful of men met one Saturday night to form a union of teamsters. Among them were Michael Casey and John P. McLaughlin who were to lead the new union through nearly four decades. The firm of McNab and Smith promptly put the union to the test. It called in several drivers, gave them a choice between their jobs and the union. The men chose the union. Next morning, two thirds of the firm's ninety drivers came out on strike. By nightfall, only five were still on the job. The company promptly signed a contract, the teamsters' first. Before a week went by, the union had signed up some 1,200 members.

The Draymen's Association saw the union as a way of equalizing labor costs in their tough, competitive business. It quickly negotiated an agreement with the union, now Local 85 of the Brotherhood of Teamsters. The employers said they would hire only union men and would help no firm that hired any other. They agreed to a twelve-

hour day, overtime pay for working Sundays and holidays and after 6 p.m. The union agreed it would do no work for any firm that was not a member of the Draymen's Association.

The Epworth League, a Methodist church organization, holding a national convention in San Francisco, precipitated the violent battle that set the course of California labor history for at least the next twenty years. The League had awarded the contract for hauling its luggage to the nonunion Morton Special Delivery Company. Its owner asked his brother (owner of the Morton Drayage Company, a union firm) to provide some extra teams. Michael Casey promptly notified the Association that union men would haul no baggage for the nonunion firm—it was, in fact, vigorously anti-union and it was not a member of the Association. Casey reminded the Association, too, that their agreement prohibited union members from working for nonunion firms. More than that, Casey noted, the Association itself had bound its own members not to furnish teams to nonmember draymen.

Morton Drayage ordered its union drivers to haul the Epworth League luggage. They refused and they were fired. Several other members of the Draymen's Association ordered their drivers to handle the "hot" luggage. They, too, refused and they, too, were fired.

Not all the drayage employers were looking for a fight. On July 16, the Association's membership refused to approve an ultimatum demanding that union members handle the League's baggage or face cancellation of their agreement. Then it reversed itself. It handed full authority to its executive committee which promptly went into session with M. F. Michael, spokesman of the Employers' Association. There, it was decided to lock out every teamster who refused to handle League luggage. Reluctant employers were pushed into line by the threat to form a new drayage firm, sponsored by businessmen controlling a major part of the city's drayage business. By July 24, over 1,300 teamsters were locked out. On July 25, Local 85 called the rest out on strike.

Farm hands flocked in from the valleys to take the strikers' places. Negroes were brought in and put to work. College students took jobs and discharged Army teamsters just back from the Philippines climbed up on the box. Mayor Phelan assigned two hundred extra policemen to protect the nonunion teamsters. Regular police and special officers rode "shotgun" on the wagons, guided out-of-town drivers around the city, even helped load and unload. The hoots and jeers of the first few days gave way to stones and fists. Strikers laid hands on the scabs; the police were no more gentle in handling the union men. Union officials complained that their men were hauled in without justification and with unnecessary roughness and energy.

The union men tried to discourage scabbing. They boarded trains bringing scabs to town in an effort to persuade strikebreakers to desert. They asked unions out of town to discourage employer recruiting.

Mayor Phelan's action in putting police guards on the wagons angered union leaders; it put the power of the city government in the balance against them. They were further angered when the Pacific Coast Bottlers Association discharged all union employees and announced it would deal with them henceforth only as individuals. The president of the Labor Council said it had not wanted the trouble, had tried to avert it, but the employers had forced the issue. "Now that the strike is upon us, we will fight it out." The employers planted their feet. "The principle involved in this strike may be surrendered, but it cannot be compromised," they declared at one point. "And a surrender of it would be the beginning of the end of San Francisco's industrial welfare."

Talk of a general strike rumbled up. Leaders turned it down. Too many unions were new and inexperienced, they said; too many could not finance even a day's strike. Perhaps most of all, few of the unions could bring any effective pressure on the key employers. Labor leaders turned instead to the City Front Federation, a vital segment of the city's economy and of union strength. Organized only the year before, this group of shoreside and seafaring unions represented some 13,000 members and had a treasury estimated at about \$250,000. On the night of July 29 the Federation voted to call out its members in sympathy with the locked-out teamsters.

Next morning, sailors and firemen left their ships, the longshoremen walked off the docks. Their strike spread to the Oakland waterfront, to the wheat warehouses at Crockett and Port Costa. Andrew Furuseth, secretary of the Sailors, was elected chairman of the strike committee. "There is no other way of having peace," he told the Sailors, "except by fighting for it."

Repeated efforts to negotiate peace ran into the flat-footed stand of the Employers' Association. It replied, time after time, that it had nothing to arbitrate. Mayor Phelan, the Board of Supervisors, leaders of the Retail Grocers, small business groups received the same, unavailing reply. Recruiting of strikebreakers was intensified and strike violence grew. Nonunion men on the waterfront were attacked. Union leaders denied their members were solely responsible for the violence. Father Peter Yorke, close friend and advisor of Casey and McLaughlin, charged the police with attacking union men. He quoted the Mayor as replying to complaints of police brutality: " 'If they don't want to be clubbed, let them go back to work.' " Nor were union officers content that the president of the Chamber of Commerce

was also president of the Police Commission. When employers were told the wheat would rot unless it soon were moved, they replied, "let it rot." In one of the few instances in which the Association even indicated possible terms of settlement, it said the locked-out and striking teamsters would be taken back if they promised to take no part in future sympathetic strikes. They insisted that any difference between employer and employee must be settled "without interference from the officers or members of any labor organization." It added that it fully recognized the right of labor to organize. "Organize what?" asked Casey, "a smoker?"

The stalemate held tight. Strikers held frequent meetings; in mid-August, some nine thousand men marched silently, four abreast, down Market street, behind a single American flag. Twenty thousand took part in the Labor Day parade. But in September, the cooks and waiters ended their four-month strike in defeat. Oakland longshoremen returned to work. Wheat began moving through Port Costa with nonunion help. Still, goods piled up in the freight yards and idle ships swung at their anchors in the Bay. A boycott was launched against identifiable members of the Employers' Association: The Emporium, Cahn & Nickelsburg, Levi Strauss, John Rapp & Son. The Association launched a counter-boycott against the *Examiner* which was giving vigorous support to the unions.

On October 2, Governor Gage arrived in San Francisco without notice to either unions or employers. He met briefly with Father Yorke, later summoned both the union leaders and the leaders of the Draymen's Association. After a two-hour session, Governor Gage issued a simple, one-paragraph announcement that the "teamsters' strike and all collateral and sympathetic strikes or lockouts originating from the teamsters' strike are at an end." Neither the governor nor the union leaders nor the employers revealed, then or afterward, the exact terms of the settlement.

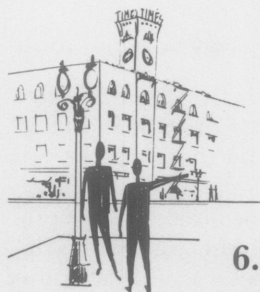
Father Yorke said later that he had suggested the governor declare martial law, binding on employers and unions alike. Whatever the formula, the men returned to work the next day, when and where they were called, under pre-strike conditions and often to work alongside strikebreakers. Teamsters lost their union shop. Other unions were badly mauled. In that sense, it was no union victory. But in the unions' eyes, survival was victory. The employers had set out to weaken or destroy the unions. They had aimed at ending collective bargaining, barring sympathetic strikes and boycotts. They had vowed a fight to the finish. Yet no major purpose of the employers had been achieved.

Quite the contrary. The lockout and strike seem to have cleared the way for the resurgence of unionism that was struggling to get

under way in the years just before. The episode broke down a major barrier to the extension and development of an effective labor movement in San Francisco. It was a violent prologue to nearly two decades in which San Francisco was widely acclaimed as—and probably in fact was—the nation's strongest union town.

In September, even while the fight raged, delegates from seventy unions met to form the first Union Labor Party. The new organization—less a labor party, as it turned out, than an instrument of a shrewd and unscrupulous politician—capitalized on widespread popular resentment against the part played in the strike by the Phelan administration. It elected its candidate for mayor, a handsome musician named Eugene Schmitz, in 1901, again in 1903 and 1905. It had other election successes in those years as well, but none so overwhelming as in 1905 when it elected 18 members of the Board of Supervisors along with the mayor. Under the guidance of their political boss, Abe Ruef, the Union Labor Party politicians apparently set out to sell the city to the highest bidder and divide up the proceeds. Their graft was exposed and the party driven from power. The unions had little part in the policies of the party and most major union figures stayed clear of it. But it reflected, as in a distorted mirror, the underlying reservoir of strength in the city's union movement.

In the years that followed the strike, the unions' continued and growing strength affirmed one union leader's judgment on its outcome: "The City Front Federation . . . vindicated the 'right to organize'." And that of Ray Stannard Baker as well: "There is a kind of fighting which makes the enemy stronger and that was the method of the San Francisco Employers' Association. It was an example of how not to combat unionism."



6. *"Industrial freedom reigns supreme"*

AT SEVEN MINUTES past one o'clock on the morning of October 1, 1910, a suitcase of dynamite exploded in Ink Alley, a narrow passageway linking the stereotyping and press rooms of the Los Angeles *Times*. The blast and fire killed twenty employees and gutted the *Times* building. A banner headline on that morning's four-page *Times* screamed: "UNIONIST BOMBS WRECK THE TIMES." The explosion and its aftermath also wrecked the most promising union organizing campaign Southern California had yet seen. For the next thirty years, the union movement in Los Angeles would be oppressed by a militant, unyielding, anti-union open shop. Less than two years after the tragedy, the *Times* exulted: "The efforts of the misleaders of union labor to make Los Angeles a cringing suppliant at their feet have utterly failed . . . Industrial freedom reigns supreme."

When gold had been discovered up North, the historian Robert Glass Cleland noted, Los Angeles "was a straggling village of questionable reputation . . . 'the noted abode of the lowest drunkards and gamblers of the country'." It had 1,610 residents in 1850, only 11,000 by 1880. Printers organized what was probably the village's first union in 1859 but it lived only a few months. A unit of the Mechanics' League had some small success in establishing the eight-hour day in 1868 but both the League and the shorter workday were soon wiped out. Dennis Kearney himself helped organize Workingmen's Club No. 1 in 1877. It scored some impressive victories at the polls, then, like the party itself, disappeared leaving barely a trace by 1880. The fateful beginning, perhaps, was the organization in 1875 of Typographical Union, Local 174. Its course led inexorably to conflict with Harrison Gray Otis and the *Times*, a bitter, unyielding battle that in time engulfed not merely Southern California's embryonic union movement but the unions of the state and of the nation as well.

Otis was himself a printer. While learning the trade, at the perhaps innocent age of 15, Otis quit a job on the *Rock Island Courier* when its owner refused to unionize his shop. He worked as a journeyman in the Government Printing Office in Washington, D.C., where he joined the Typographical Union. He served in the Civil War, later worked for a time on a Santa Barbara newspaper and in Alaska. He

became editor of the *Times* on August 1, 1882. By 1886, Otis had acquired full control of the *Times* and, comments Carey McWilliams, "the fixed idea that he owned Los Angeles . . . and that he alone was destined to lead it to greatness."

"I am e-TERN-ally right!" he told Pauline Jacobson, a San Francisco reporter. He was convinced that any error in his copy was properly chargeable to the printer, no matter how badly scratched up his original. He apparently never forgave printers for finding no merit in a type case he invented. He saw himself as a military genius, Miss Jacobson observed. His home on Wilshire Boulevard was known as "The Bivouac," his country home at Hollywood, "The Outpost." He was breveted a major-general in the Philippines and, at the *Times*, he issued neither instructions nor directives but "general orders." It was the strike of 1890, apparently, that permanently fixed his attitude toward unions—"the memorable struggle," the *Times* later recalled, "which was to shape the industrial future of a metropolis and to set an example for a whole country."

The newspaper owners that year joined forces to ask the printers to take a reduction of 20 per cent in pay. The union refused. Otis stamped into the composing room, Miss Jacobson quotes an eyewitness as saying, his face purple with rage. "Every——man get out of here," he shouted. "And get out——quick."

Local 174 reached a quick settlement with the *Tribune* and *Express* and, after a time, with the *Herald*. Otis filled his office with members of the strikebreaking Printers' Protective Fraternity and dug in for a fight. The union settled down to a prolonged boycott. Supporters wore buttons proclaiming "I don't read the *Times*." Otis replied, "But you will," and nailed his slogan to the masthead: "For Liberty, Law, Equal Rights and Industrial Freedom." When the boycott made its target the *Time's* largest advertiser, the People's Store, its owner opened the way to a settlement. Otis insisted on a humiliating price: he would hire four union men, but as individuals and not as union members; the boycott must be ended. "From that time on," Miss Jacobson later recorded, "his hatred of unions grew to such proportions that the mere mention threw him into a passion verging on insanity."

The ill-fated strike followed one decisive event—the great tourist boom of the Eighties—and preceded another—the formation of the Merchants' and Manufacturers' Association. Out of this flow of events came the movement that made the open shop a creed, a way of life, in Southern California.

The Santa Fe, the city's second railroad, reached town on its own rails in 1887. Almost at once, it precipitated a rate war with its rival, the Southern Pacific. At one point, a ticket from Kansas City to

Southern California could be had for \$1. Tens of thousands of tourists poured in. Real estate salesmen greeted them with brass bands, free lunches, circus performers, and auction sales. Towns were laid out for two million people; a good many visitors bought lots and stayed, though not two million—at any rate, not then. The boom dried up and millions of dollars of property values vanished.

To some of the newcomers, the way to the future was opening. They joined forces—in what Otis called a "new beginning"—in the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce. Out of the shambles of the collapsed boom they would build a vast agricultural-industrial empire. The more perceptive—later, even the less acute—saw that a large pool of cheap labor would help Los Angeles prosper at the expense of the relatively high wage, increasingly unionized economy of San Francisco. The flood of newcomers who arrived during the railroad rate war, and continued to arrive year after year, helped create the pool. Many were sick, lured by the attractions of the climate; many came and stayed because they or someone in their family found the sunshine good for their catarrh. Some were wealthy in search of retirement; some were involuntarily retired in search of wealth. This aspect of the "new beginning" received encouragement in the formation in 1896 of the Merchants' and Manufacturers' Association. The economy of the region was becoming increasingly dependent on cheap labor—it "required," McWilliams declared, "it absolutely demanded—a non-union, open shop setup." The conjunction of Otis, the Chamber of Commerce, the M&M, and the oddly structured population pointed the way.

Organized labor had gained no more than a tentative foothold since the printers' union had been formed in 1875. Good times followed by bad first encouraged, then frustrated, efforts to organize. The rapid growth of the population; the high proportion of health seekers, retired, and tourists; the growing violence of the opposition of Otis and the *Times* all raised formidable barriers to unionization. Wages between 1890 and 1910 were 20 to 30 per cent and even 40 per cent lower than in San Francisco.

After the turn of the century, the American Federation of Labor as well as the national unions began to take a more active interest in the underdeveloped Los Angeles unions. San Francisco unions, too, awakened to the threat of nonunion, low wage, long-hour competition. The decisive battle was joined in 1910 when metal trades employers in San Francisco handed the unions an ultimatum: their eight-hour workday would not be renewed until the nine- and ten-hour competition in Los Angeles was neutralized. San Francisco metal trades unions, backed by labor councils on both sides of the Bay, the State Federation of Labor and the State Building Trades Council, sent

in organizers and money to lead an intensive organizing campaign. On June 1, 1910, the metal trades unions in Los Angeles, their contract proposals rejected, called a strike in twenty-five shops.

The Merchants' and Manufacturers' Association mobilized a \$350,000 fund to fight the strike, as well as strikes in the breweries and the city's hotels and restaurants. It recruited nonunion workers and strikebreakers, hired detectives to spy on strike leaders. It persuaded the city council to pass an antipicketing ordinance that, in time, became a model of its kind. The new ordinance, coupled with seven anti-union injunctions, resulted in the arrests of nearly five hundred pickets within weeks after its enactment. Subservience of the council to employer demands angered union people. Their interest in political activity freshened and a budding alliance between the unions and the Socialist Party was strengthened.

✓ By the end of September, 1910, the General Campaign Strike Committee had spent over \$80,000 in strike benefits, operating a strike kitchen, providing legal defense for arrested pickets, and organizing. It had 23 new unions to show for it and several thousand new union members. Then on October 1, 1910 the *Times* building was dynamited.

The horrible crime was promptly charged against union leaders. Mayor Alexander refused even to make the customary speech of welcome to the California State Federation of Labor which opened its convention in Los Angeles two days later. Union printers offered their help in getting out the *Times* but they were ignored.

Scores of rewards, ranging up to \$50,000, were offered for information leading to the discovery of the criminals. The district attorney, M&M, and Mayor Alexander all launched investigations. The mayor's detective, the well-known William J. Burns, however, had a headstart. He had already been deep in an investigation of a series of dynamitings growing out of an open-shop war between the National Erectors' Association and the International Association of Bridge and Structural Iron Workers. Burns suspected that the *Times* bombing (as well as a Christmas Day, 1910 dynamiting at the Llewellyn Iron Works) was tied in with this industrial war. His theory was confirmed when he tracked down and arrested Ortie McManigal and James B. McNamara, the first a member of the Iron Workers, the second, the brother of its secretary and a printer. McManigal turned state's evidence and Burns swooped down on the Iron Workers headquarters in Indianapolis, arresting and virtually kidnapping the union's secretary, John J. McNamara.

Across the country, unions and union members rallied to defend the McNamaras. Sam Gompers and the American Federation of Labor took the lead in raising a defense fund that in time came to \$236,000. Clarence Darrow was retained to head their defense. Union men were

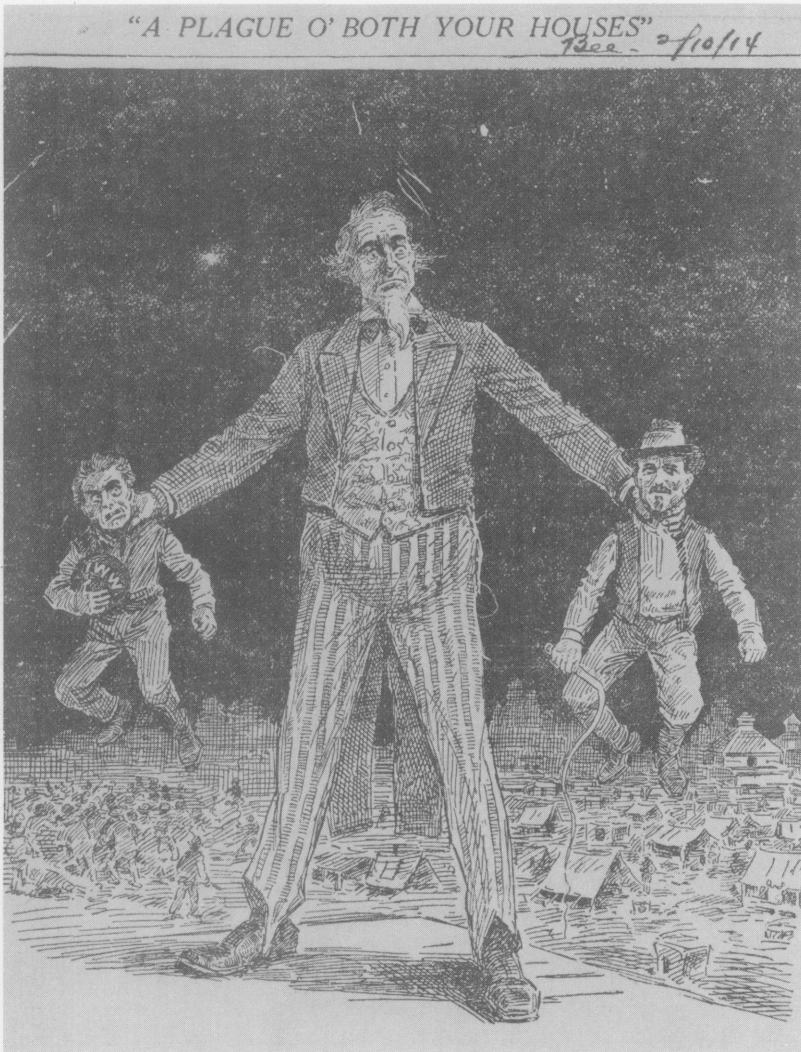
convinced that the McNamaras were innocent, the charges against them false and malicious.

The explosion jarred the unions' campaign in Southern California but did not halt it. By June, 1911, committee expenditures reached \$260,000. A year after the dynamiting, there were 91 unions with over 15,000 members affiliated with the Central Labor Council. The unionists' alliance with the Socialists had borne fruit; their candidate for mayor, Job Harriman, had scored a startling victory in the primary election. Joint candidates ran ahead, too, in city council and board of education races. Hope ran high that the primary victory would be underscored in the finals.

The trial of John J. McNamara opened on October 11. Without warning on December 1, James B. McNamara appeared in court for the first time. A stunned courtroom heard him plead guilty to a charge of murder and John J. McNamara plead guilty to dynamiting the Llewellyn Iron Works. Disillusion crackled across the nation's labor movement. It shattered the support that had been mustered in defense of the two, presumably innocent men. It destroyed the faith of many, not merely in the McNamara case itself, but in the union movement. It humiliated the unions in the face of the righteous, "I told you so" declarations of anti-union employers and newspapers. In Los Angeles, Harriman-for-Mayor buttons fell, someone said, "like leaves off a tree." In the runoff only a few days later, Harriman ran far behind. The usually brilliant Darrow was discredited, both by the stunning reversal in the McNamaras' pleas and by charges that he attempted to bribe a juror. The organizing campaign suffered a crippling blow. The supporting unions ended their assessments after collecting some \$334,000. The metal trades ended their strike with small gains in wages, some reductions in hours but without achieving the eight-hour day. They would be rehired as they were needed, the employers pledged, without discrimination.

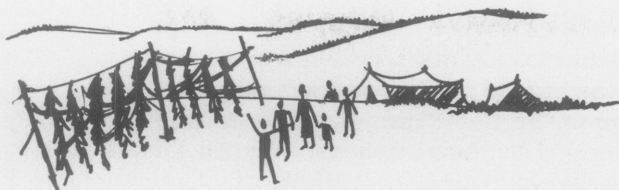
"Yet Los Angeles spits hate," wrote Pauline Jacobson. "The air seems poisoned with it . . . The good men spit hate; so, too, the good women . . . A good man corrupted Los Angeles."

In 1914, John A. Finch, reporting on the hearings of the United States Commission on Industrial Relations in Los Angeles, added it up: ". . . for the last dozen years or more, a militant Merchants' and Manufacturers' Association has crushed every effort to extend and strengthen the labor organizations. As a result, the term 'open shop' is wholly a misnomer. It is as tight a closed-shop as San Francisco—with the lock on the opposite side of the door. Employers on the stand frankly stated that they would not employ union men."



A cartoon from the Sacramento Bee of February 10, 1914, with this caption:

"California has had enough of the I.W.W.—a lawless organization whose aim is disturbance, riot, and sabotage. At the same time, she has had enough of shameful employment conditions, such as those at the Durst hop yards at Wheatland, which led to protest, to violence and to murder; and which have been denounced in a report to the Federal Commission on Industrial Relations by Chairman Frank P. Walsh."



7. *The first Wheatland*

AN ADVERTISEMENT for hop pickers, published in many parts of California, Nevada and Oregon in the summer of 1913, promised: "The going price paid for clean picking. A BONUS to all pickers helping us and doing satisfactory work, to the completion of the season—a period of three or four weeks."

The hop pickers began arriving at the Durst Brothers ranch near Wheatland before July ended. All through the week they poured in. By the weekend, some twenty-eight hundred pickers were camped on a sunbaked, treeless hill. Some rented old, often ragged tents for 75 cents a week. Some lived in topless squares of sacking. Many made their beds under the open sky in piles of straw. At first five toilets, later eight—the number was never certain—served these hundreds of people and quickly became filthy from over-use. In the mornings long lines of women and children waited a half hour or more to use them. No provision had been made for sanitation. Garbage lay in the dirt where it was dropped and sewage from the kitchens ran in an old irrigation ditch. Wells frequently ran dry; waste water often lay in stagnant pools around the pumps.

Dawn each morning found the pickers in the fields. Before the day was out temperatures hit 105. The ranchowners sent a lemonade wagon into the field—a concession operated by a relative of the ranch-owners who sold the drink at five cents a glass. At noon a "stew wagon" appeared—another concession. Pickers complained that neither would sell water unless the picker bought stew or lemonade. There was no other convenient source of water.

In that first week of picking, Durst paid 90 cents a hundred pounds, with a "bonus" of 10 cents if the picker stayed the full season. If not, the "bonus" money reverted to the ranch. Later, an official investigation reported that if there were a "going" rate at the time it was \$1 per hundred pounds "so (the Durst) alleged bonus was in reality a hold-back out of the normal hop-picking wage . . . He had no more right to the 10 cents than he would have had to 50 cents out of the dollar . . . The alleged bonus was intended at the opening of the season to be, and really acted as, a whip to force pickers to stay out the season in order at the end to receive their normal wage." It found that the ranch gained \$100 to \$150 a day from the abandoned "bonus"

money. Earnings in that first week ranged from 78 cents to \$1.90 a day, for it was a light crop and the picking was slow. Pickers complained that there were no "high pole" men to pull down vines within reach of the pickers, and that the ranch insisted on too "clean" picking. No more than half—perhaps 1,500—of the pickers could work at a time. The others hung around the camp or office waiting for field tickets. There were not enough sacks, not enough facilities for weighing the hops—a picker lost money even while waiting to weigh in as the hot sun dried his pickings.

By Saturday, there were angry mutterings in the camp and spasmodic meetings of protest. Out of it came a kind of camp committee, organized by Richard "Blackie" Ford and others. Ford had been a member of the Industrial Workers of the World, as had been some thirty or forty others. On Sunday morning, a committee, heading an impromptu parade of some four or five hundred pickers, met Ralph Durst near the ranch office. The committee handed him the pickers' demands: higher pay, ice water in the field, sanitary toilets, and "high pole" men. They also wanted lemonade made from real lemons, not citric acid. Durst—"a little thin man," Pauline Jacobson reported, "with emaciated neck and hollowed cheeks and small burning eyes"—asked for an hour to think it over. Ford told him to take two if he liked. After an hour, Durst told the committee he would supply additional toilets, see that ice water was brought to the field, make sure the lemonade was made from lemons or limes. He didn't think "high pole" men were needed. He couldn't see his way clear to raising the pay. In the discussion, Durst ordered Ford to leave the grounds, flicked him across the face with a glove. Later a deputy sheriff, on Durst's complaint, attempted to arrest Ford but withdrew when a sizable group of pickers demanded a warrant the officer could not produce.

That afternoon the pickers met again in a protest meeting. There was singing—a Wobbly song, "Mr. Block." Ford made one of several speeches. He reached down, took a baby from its mother's arms and held it up so the crowd could see the scratches from the hop vines on its face. "It's for the life of the kids we're doing this," he shouted.

As he spoke, two cars drove up. Sheriff Voss, District Attorney Mansfield, and a number of deputies got out and moved toward the crowd. The sheriff asked the people to disperse. The district attorney shouted, "keep the peace, keep the peace." A deputy pointed to Ford: "There's your man." The officers moved toward the speaker's platform, the crowd moved in. Suddenly from the edge of the crowd a deputy fired a shotgun blast—"to sober them," he later explained. Shots rang out from all directions. "A hideous racket," a witness recalled, "that sounded as if someone had thrown a box of cartridges

into the fire." Angry men and women chased members of the posse from the scene; the deputy who fired the first shot found refuge in the nearby ranch store. In a few brief moments, the thing was done.

The district attorney of Yuba County, a deputy sheriff, and two "unknown" pickers lay dead. All that night pickers crowded the roads leaving the camp. At dawn, a detachment of state militia reached the tense, but now quiet, town.

The outcry that followed focused first on the I.W.W. It was excoriated and denounced. Members were rounded up and questioned, some were held incommunicado and for unconscionable periods without being charged. A William J. Burns detective was accused of beating a prisoner in an effort to secure a confession. Ford, along with Herman Suhr, William Beck and Harry Bagan were charged with responsibility for the killings. Ford and Suhr were found guilty of second degree murder, Beck and Bagan were acquitted.

Carleton H. Parker, a University of California professor then serving as executive secretary of the state Housing and Immigration Commission, made a detailed investigation. In turn, the U.S. Commission on Industrial Relations became interested. The newspapers focused sharp attention on the miserable conditions and the exploitation of the hop pickers. ". . . The State was made to realize overnight," Parker wrote, "that San Francisco unionism was not the sum total of her labor problem . . . With the dramatic entry of the hop pickers on the stage there began such a widespread and agitated discussion of the condition of the state's casual workers, that the two years will be known in western labor history as the 'period of the migratory worker'."

For half a century, in fact, the migratory worker had been an increasingly important, if usually invisible, figure on the state's agricultural scene. The pattern of land ownership that had developed after the Gold Rush had dictated an unusual kind of agricultural economy—not one of small holdings, multiple crops, and independent farmers in the American tradition, but of large holdings, single crops, increasingly dependent on a large and highly seasonal work force. When the "bonanza" farms made California for a time a major wheat producer, they relied on the harvest "tramps." Wrote Henry George in 1871: "And over our ill-kept, shadeless, dusty roads, where a house is an unwonted landmark, and which run frequently for miles through the same man's land, plod the tramps, with blankets on back, the labourers of the California farmer, looking for work, in its seasons, or toiling back to the city when the ploughing is ended or the wheat crop is gathered."

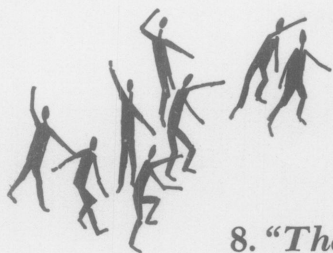
Wheat gave way to fruit orchards and sugar beets and the era of specialization set in—highly intensive development of specialized

crops. The transcontinental railroad, ice plants, and refrigerator cars opened up vast new, though distant, markets and the prospect of ever greater profits. But the development rested in good part on mobile, experienced, temporary—always temporary—help. Not the least of its requirements was that labor come cheap.

At first the Chinese met the growing demand for seasonal labor. Driven from the mines, restricted in the city, frequently harrassed and exploited, the Chinese were welcomed on the large landholdings. They could be hired for the peak season, let go for the rest of the year. A “boss” or “head boy” took care of it, and of the recruiting, the housing, the feeding and paying, too. They were driven from the farms in the Nineties but their places were soon taken by Japanese. Many of the Japanese in time became owners (while the law allowed) or lessors of land; some went to the cities and stayed. Filipinos and Hindus found places, too, in the state’s farm labor force. Later came the Mexicans.

The pattern was set. The availability of seasonal labor and intensive, specialized cultivation went hand in hand, the one impossible without the other. Growing investments and mounting profits (both real and anticipated) made it important that the seasonal labor be as cheap as possible. An increasing social indifference followed. Growers—such as the Durst Bros. ranch—quickly learned that an oversupply effectively drove wage rates down. Abundant and cheap seasonal labor became a major foundation of California agriculture and, in time, an article of faith among its farmers.

What happened at the Durst ranch in Wheatland on that hot August Sunday afternoon momentarily pushed the plight of the migratory farm worker to the fore. There were investigations and resolutions and even some improvements. Whatever the lessons of Wheatland, though, they were soon forgotten. In the years ahead, there would be many more Wheatlands.



8. *"The brooding shades"*

"THEY SAT WITH US last night at the Auditorium, the brooding shades of the Vigilantes." So a San Francisco *Call* reporter described the tone of a Civic Auditorium meeting called to mourn those who had died in the Preparedness Day bombing.

It was both epilogue and prologue, that portentous gathering: Epilogue to a series of swift, violent, stunning events that wracked the city in the summer of 1916; prologue to still another attack on the city's unions.

On June 1, the longshoremen had struck: for higher wages, they said, to make up for rising prices; in violation of their contracts, the employers claimed. Secretary of Labor William B. Wilson upheld the employers' claim, urged the men to go back to work. The teamsters refused to support them. On June 9, the longshoremen went back to work. Violence erupted on the docks. Strikebreakers and union men were mauled and beaten and some were killed. When the employers refused to withdraw the armed guards and the strikebreakers, the longshoremen struck again.

The Chamber of Commerce angrily declared it would insist in the future on the employer's right "to employ union men or nonunion in whole or in part." It called for integrity of contracts, for "law and order." Captain Robert Dollar proposed to a meeting of employers: "When they compel us to send one ambulance to the receiving hospital, we send two of theirs." Frederick J. Koster, president of the Chamber, headed a new "Law and Order Committee" pledged to fulfill the Chamber's fresh commitment to the open shop. Before it was minutes old, the Committee claimed pledges of over \$200,000—a million dollars, "in round figures," before the year's end.

The longshoremen ended their second strike on July 17. Five days later, at six minutes after two o'clock, a bomb exploded at the corner of Market and Steuart streets just as a Preparedness Day parade was about to start. Ten bystanders were killed, some forty wounded. Four days later the Law and Order Committee convened that meeting over which the "shades of the Vigilantes" brooded. Without putting it into so many words, the employers managed to make the bombing a symbol of "labor violence."



Tom Mooney and wife, 1916.

The next day, Tom Mooney and his wife, Rena, Warren Billings, Israel Weinberg and Edward D. Nolan were charged with the Preparedness Day bombing. They were "convenient" suspects. They had been involved in radical activities. They had figured in a variety of labor unrest. Billings had been jailed for possession of dynamite; Mooney had been tried and acquitted on a similar charge.

But Mooney and Billings were convicted of the Preparedness Day bombing; the others were discharged. Billings was sentenced to life imprisonment, and Mooney was sentenced to death. The evidence was supplied by witnesses described as a prostitute, a drug addict, a psychopathic liar, a woman suffering from spiritualistic hallucination. The trial judge later commented: "We must have been slightly crazed by the hysteria of the time to have accepted for a moment the preposterous contention . . . that the alleged dynamiters . . . fully aware that they were being shadowed by private detectives, rode down

a cleared street in the face of an upcoming parade." A swelling protest that finally stretched halfway around the world saved Mooney from death. But, despite repeated exposure of the flimsy and fraudulent case against the two men, it was more than twenty years before Governor Culbert Olson freed them from prison.

Against the background of a summer of violent conflict, the Law and Order Committee put on the ballot in 1916 an anti-picketing ordinance drawn after the Los Angeles model. "There is no such thing as peaceful picketing," Koster cried. "Picketing is an instrument of violence. It is un-American. It hurts the city . . . leads to crime, and does labor no good." Four hundred girls using 175 telephones urged every voter (with a phone) to vote for the ordinance. Most of them did.

The Committee helped defeat a strike of culinary workers. It encouraged open shop groups in surrounding counties and helped win anti-picketing ordinances in the East Bay. But in 1917 its activities virtually stopped. There was a war to fight; even the open shop would have to wait. But, once the war ended, not for long.

In the summer of 1919, the longshoremen again asked for higher wages and, this time, a share in the companies' profits and management. Despite the unusual demand, an agreement was reached—and rejected by the men. On September 15, they walked out. The waterfront employers blamed a "radical element" in the union. They refused to have anything to do with it and, for four months, campaigned vigorously to defeat it. Finally, some of the men—foremen belonging to a group known as the Harmony Club—formed a new union. The employers promptly signed a five-year agreement with it. The Longshoremen's Association of the San Francisco and the Bay District—the "Blue Book" union—was "probably inspired by the employers," according to Paul Eliel, later director of a powerful employer association. He doubted that it was employer-dominated, noting that its delegates sat for several years in the San Francisco Labor Council. In any case, effective unionism on the docks lapsed.

Two years later, as the country suffered under a short, sharp depression, unionism was wiped out on the ships. In the summer of 1921, shipowners demanded a 15 to 25 per cent cut in pay and an even sharper cut in earnings by eliminating overtime and returning to the two-watch system, an increase in working hours from 56 to 84. Their demand was supported by the United States Shipping Board, the government agency responsible for the wartime operation of the merchant fleet and still, in 1921, operating half of active American shipping. When negotiations failed, the Board and the operators imposed a 15 per cent reduction as of May 1. Six unions of officers and unlicensed men went on strike.



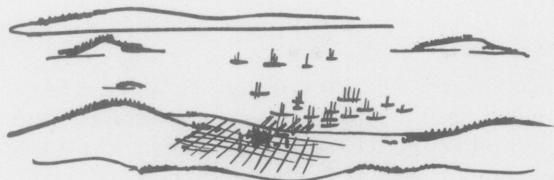
Tom Mooney faces booking sergeant, after arrest on return from Russian River picnic. The man on the left is one of the detectives on the case.

Photo courtesy of *San Francisco Chronicle*.

One of the unions reached an agreement with the Board in early June. The private operators, however, would have nothing to do with it or any of the unions. They proclaimed an open shop on the nation's merchant fleet. Officially the strike continued. In fact, the men began to drift back to the ships. An abundance of strikebreakers—war-trained sailors and unemployed workers—rapidly filled the jobs. By mid-July the strike was called off.

The shipowners established employment bureaus—the familiar shipping offices or “slave markets,” as the men called them. Seamen

were issued continuous employment and discharge books—the hated “grade” books, now labeled “fink” books. Only on the coastal “lumber schooners” was the union kept alive on the West coast. The membership of the International Seamen’s Union plummeted from 115,000 in 1919 to 16,000 in 1923. To Andy Furuseth it was “only one more battle lost . . . We can and shall win again, if you can see the way and have the courage to walk it.”



9. *"His old roar is heard no more"*

PATRICK HENRY MCCARTHY was born in Ireland, of course, on St. Patrick's Day in 1863. He came to the United States as a 17-year-old carpenter's apprentice, worked at his trade in Chicago and St. Louis. There he came to know Peter J. McGuire, later a prominent figure in the American Federation of Labor and the founding father of Labor Day. With him, McCarthy had a part in founding the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners. McCarthy came to San Francisco in 1886 and joined Local 22 of the Brotherhood. He served as its president, later as president of the District Council of Carpenters. In July, 1898, P. H. McCarthy was made president of the two-year-old Building Trades Council, a job he held for the next twenty-four years.

McCarthy withheld his support from the violent waterfront strike of 1901. At the start, he also opposed the Ruef-Schmitz Union Labor Party, although he later endorsed it. After the graft prosecution had driven them from the field, McCarthy took over leadership of the party and was elected mayor in 1909. He tried again—in 1911 and 1915—but was defeated both times.

McCarthy welded the often quarrelsome and competitive building trades unions into a highly effective bargaining instrument. Under his guidance the Council was able to impose on the city's construction industry its own, sometimes rigid and demanding, code. More than any other single development, the Building Trades Council under McCarthy gave San Francisco its reputation as a union-bossed town. Until McCarthy came along, the building trades unions had difficulty in enforcing standard wages and working conditions. Contractors persisted, despite the unions, in individual bargaining that drove wage rates down. The worker frequently paid his own transportation, furnished large tools, paid damages for spoilage. He was subject to pace-setters and hard-driving foremen. He was constantly threatened by ads seeking men to take over his work at lower pay.

The Building Trades Council, however, insisted every man on the job carry a union card—a Building Trades Council card. Stewards and business agents saw to that. Union men handled no materials that had not been prepared by other union men. No strike affecting more than one craft could be called without the Council's consent.

The Council outlawed, not always successfully, jurisdictional strikes. The rules and regulations of the Council were applied uniformly to all crafts and all contractors. In these ways, and others, the Council eliminated competition at the expense of the worker. As far as possible, labor costs were uniform and stable. Under McCarthy, an astute organizer and politician, firm, even domineering, the Council was able to impose its decisions on unions and industry alike.

Building trade wages had held fairly stable between 1907 and 1917 but the wartime rise in prices forced substantial increases. In 1920, faced with demands for increases from seventeen crafts, the employers said "no." Four crafts struck and a general walkout of all building tradesmen threatened. They were faced by the Builders' Exchange, a newcomer employer organization, and the Industrial Relations Committee of the Chamber of Commerce—a reincarnation of the old Law and Order Committee. The employer group made it clear that the contractors would have the full support of the city's bankers and business leaders, significantly including the building materials dealers. Under this pressure, an agreement was reached to submit the dispute to arbitration.

On March 31, 1921 the arbitration board ordered a 7½ per cent cut in the wages of all seventeen crafts. The Building Trades Council protested angrily that the Board had exceeded its authority; it had been asked to rule only on the wage increases proposed the summer before. The Board replied that it had acted on the basis of employer proposals made, without union objection, in the course of the hearings; that economic conditions had in the meantime drastically deteriorated; that the 7½ per cent cut only reflected the "astonishing" decline in living costs.

McCarthy announced that the Council would not accept the award. The Exchange, backed by the Chamber of Commerce, replied with a general lockout. The unions voted a week later to accept the award but the employers were in no mood to compromise. The men could return to work, they said, only under open shop conditions. The Exchange instituted a permit system that allowed contractors to obtain materials and credit only if they signed a pledge to operate under open shop conditions. It opened an employment office and began recruiting nonunion mechanics.

Again the Chamber's Industrial Relations Committee intervened. An organization was needed, it said, to stabilize labor conditions and to handle the community's labor relations. It formed the Industrial Association of San Francisco, backed by businessmen's pledges of a million dollars. The Association joined in the nationwide campaign for the so-called "American Plan," under which—it said—union and nonunion men would be employed without discrimination. No

barriers would be raised to unions as long as they confined themselves to "legitimate and proper channels . . ." "Unrestricted and arbitrary power . . ." they said, "must be definitely circumscribed."

McCarthy and other union leaders urged a settlement on the open-shop basis. A referendum among the building trades members—the first in seventeen years—rejected it. A "rank and file" group came to the fore, called a general strike of building trades workers. It ended three weeks later without gain. The men went back to work where they could, under the "American Plan" and with a 7½ per cent wage cut. It was made clear that the employers would hire or fire without regard to union membership or lack of it. Representatives of the Council would no longer be allowed on the job. In January, 1922, McCarthy resigned. He stayed on for a time as a "general advisor," then left to go into business as a contractor.

The Industrial Association established an "inspection and protection" department, actually a kind of labor spy operation. It cooperated in establishing an employment office for recruiting nonunion workers and a hotel where they could live. It opened training schools for plasterers, bricklayers, plumbers, later for other crafts. It advertised for nonunion craftsmen and brought them to San Francisco under agreements to work under the direction of the Industrial Association. So-called "impartial wage boards" reviewed wages from time to time and on occasion proposed changes.

In 1922, six crafts struck against continuing introduction of non-union men on the jobs. Their strike dragged on over a year without result. In 1926, with the powerful backing of its international union, the Carpenters announced they would no longer work with non-union men. The bitter battle cost the Carpenters at least \$750,000, the Industrial Association even more. The Association brought in over a thousand strikebreakers. It resurrected and enforced the permit system that had been allowed to lapse. In December the strike was called off.

Professor Cross summed it up: "As a result of the effectiveness of the campaign of the Industrial Association, San Francisco became to all intents and purposes an open-shop town . . . Union membership declined, and many of the associations became mere skeletons of their former selves. The results of the efforts and sacrifices of scores of leaders and thousands of union members were swept into the discard." Frederick L. Ryan, in his study of the building trades, noted how San Francisco wage rates, once among the nation's highest, fell behind the rest—the lowest among cities of comparable size. Paul Eliel, who served as director of the Industrial Association's industrial relations department, told how the Association assisted employers in other fields—hotels and restaurants, foundries, machine shops, pattern-

making shops, shipyards, cigar manufacturing, lithographers. "It formed," he said, "an unbroken record of success with every industry which has come to it requesting assistance in order to escape from arbitrary and uneconomic control." In 1930 he wrote: "Today organized labor still functions in San Francisco, but its irresponsible power is broken. In San Francisco, American wage earners and American business men understand each other, deal directly with one another in many trades, and the city is free."

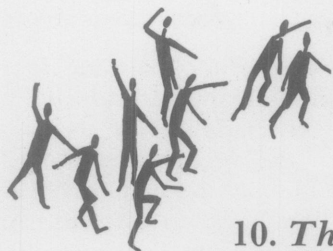
Perhaps the most unbridled crowing came in 1926 from David Warren Ryder, writing in the *American Mercury*: "But when [the unions] downfall came at last, it was a debacle indeed. They made a single dizzy plunge from the loftiest heights to the lowest and darkest depths . . . From 80 to 90 per cent of the manual labor of San Francisco is now done under open shop conditions." He added: "The old gaudy days are gone. The walking delegate—now called a business agent—walks softly and his old roar is heard no more."



One man in this "Bloody Thursday" photograph lived, but the other and a second man nearby, died.



The strikers' memorial to the victims.



10. *The angry silence*

ON THE SIDEWALK someone had chalked in awkward letters: "2 I.L.A. MEN KILLED SHOT IN BACK." Then, as if to frame the spot, the writer had added across the top and bottom, "POLICE MURDER." Here, in a battle between strikers and San Francisco police on Thursday, July 5, 1934, a longshoreman and a cook had died.

Four days later, the strikers, their supporters, men, women, children, some 10,000 in all, mourned their dead. Up Market street, from Steuart street to Civic Center, eight and ten abreast, they marched, shrouded in a tense, oppressive silence. Only the shuffle of marching feet and bitter, angry silence. No police patrolled its flanks; men in the jeans and white cap of longshoremen quietly directed the flow of silent humanity. "A stupendous and reverent procession," one reporter wrote, "that astounded the city."

It came on the sixty-first day of a bitter coastwide strike of over 12,000 longshoremen and uncounted thousands of seamen. It was an angry rebellion against the open shop and the "American Plan," against depression and wage cuts, against rampant unemployment and miserly relief handouts. It was a prelude to a tremendous contagion of organization in the West that swept through the shops and the factories, the mills and mines and forests and fields in the turbulent Thirties.

For fourteen years no longshoreman had worked on the San Francisco waterfront without paying dues to the "Blue Book" union. Yet, the union had put up with "an atrocious system of hiring," ignored the "callous indifference and outright dishonesty" of the gang bosses, allowed unfair and oppressive working conditions on the job. Men still shaped up on the docks every morning, rain or shine, to learn whether there would be work that day. Some paid bribes to get a few hours' work. To buy food for that night's dinner, some were forced to cash—at outrageous discounts—the brass checks they were given after finishing a job. The favored few, the star gangs, worked long and hard, sometimes 24 to 36 hours without stopping. Others were lucky to get a few hours' work now and then. Some feasted, many starved. On the job a man worked at top speed—if he did not, hundreds shaped up every morning who would gladly take the work.

In the early fall of 1933, during the first flush of the New Deal,

with the National Recovery Administration just in the making, four men were fired on the Matson Navigation Company docks—for joining the International Longshoremen's Association, they charged. When Matson refused to reinstate the men, the longshoremen walked out. An NRA complaint board ordered the men reinstated. Thousands of dockers promptly deserted the "Blue Book" to join the ILA.

In February, 1934, a convention of delegates from ILA unions in the major Pacific Coast ports called for union recognition and immediate collective bargaining. It asked for a \$1 an hour wage (only two months before the employers voluntarily had raised the pay from 75 to 85 cents an hour); for a six-hour day, a thirty-hour week; for a union-operated hiring hall. To the union demand for a coast-wide agreement, San Francisco employers said they had no authority to speak for employers in other ports. They flatly rejected a union shop. Negotiations came to a standstill.

A referendum vote approved a strike for March 23. At the last moment, President Franklin Roosevelt asked and got a postponement until a fact-finding commission could look into the dispute. Out of the commission's efforts came the April 3 agreement. The employers agreed to recognize the ILA but reserved the right to deal with other groups of longshoremen as well. They agreed to a jointly operated hiring hall. They insisted that each port's problems must be handled separately. With these guidelines, joint committees began working out the details.

Before April had run its course, though, negotiations again ground to a halt. The employers had only grudgingly edged away from their unchallenged open shop rule. They cultivated every doubt that the union represented the men; they preached distrust of the union and of its leaders. The men were resentful, often bitter. A new strike deadline was set. "No one," said William J. Lewis, ILA district president, "not even President Roosevelt can stop this strike except an agreement on the part of our employers to conform to our demands."

On the morning of May 9, from Puget Sound to San Diego, the longshoremen struck—"for better conditions, a shorter day and a living wage," a union statement said. Employer ads cried, "It is an ill-advised strike. Be reasonable." And: "Longshoremen Wanted. Experience Desirable but Not Necessary. Strike Conditions Prevail."

San Francisco teamsters voted to boycott the docks; Seattle and Los Angeles teamsters followed their lead. As ships tied up in port, their crews walked off and joined the strike. The Sailors Union, the Marine Firemen, the Marine Cooks and Stewards, and subsequently the unions of licensed officers, declared strikes—not in sympathy but in their own interest. On the employer side, the Chamber of Commerce and the Industrial Association had been called in almost from

the start. The Industrial Association was given an active part in negotiations.

On May 24, Joseph P. Ryan, president of the ILA, flew in from New York. Union recognition is the "only vital issue," he said, completely missing the point. Within days, abetted by Assistant Secretary of Labor Edward F. McGrady, he negotiated a settlement. The San Francisco local promptly rejected it and booed its author, to boot. Ryan flew off to the northwest to defend his handiwork. There, too, it was turned down. "I have a different slant on it now," Ryan told reporters. "I don't blame the strikers if they turn it down."

Ryan tried again two weeks later. The employers insisted no agreement was possible if it had to be approved by the rank and file. They asked Ryan if he had authority to negotiate a binding contract without membership ratification; he said he had. The employers gave their spokesman, Thomas G. Plant, full power to act. The two quickly negotiated a new agreement. The Industrial Association guaranteed that the ship owners would perform under the new settlement. The mayor, Michael Casey and Dave Beck of the Teamsters, a couple of Federal mediators, and ILA district officers guaranteed the longshoremen's performance. "All of which," noted the employers' public relations advisor, "is in a way rather ridiculous but seems now to serve the purpose."

As it turned out, it served no purpose. Despite the clear intent that the settlement would be final and binding, mass meetings in the major ports promptly rejected it. Its major fault was that it made no provision for settling the strikes of the other striking maritime unions. That, however, was the whole point of the newly-formed Joint Marine Strike Committee. Speaking for the ten striking unions, the Committee wrote Mayor Rossi that it would "carry on all future negotiations" for a strike settlement. Signed: "H. Bridges, chairman."

Harry—christened Alfred Renton—Bridges was an Australian sailor who had given up the sea in 1922 to go to work on the San Francisco docks. He established himself as a skilled longshoreman and won a place in a star gang, though frequently he was chased off the job for failing to pay his "Blue Book" dues. He joined in an abortive effort to revive the union in 1924; he was active in the successful effort in 1933. He was elected head of the local's strike committee, then of the joint committee. Emergence of the joint committee and of Bridges's leadership marked a substantial shift—in the long run, a decisive shift—in power in the ILA and on the waterfront. It was not yet enough to break the deadlock but events were moving inexorably toward a showdown.

Early in June, the teamsters voted to close a gap in their boycott of the waterfront; they would no longer haul any cargo handled by

strikebreakers. Their action, wrote Paul Eliel, "crippled the waterfront and resulted in such congestion that employers had but two alternatives: To negotiate a settlement or move the freight themselves." The employers explored both alternatives. While Plant and Ryan were working over their proposed settlement, the Industrial Association was renting warehouses, purchasing trucks, setting up a temporary organization to open the port. "Nobody knows," noted the employers' public relations man, "where that will take us." The Ryan-Plant negotiations failed. On June 26, the Industrial Association advised Mayor Rossi it was ready to open the port. The Mayor asked for time. The Association delayed the opening—from June 29 to July 2, then to July 3.

"Stay away from the waterfront," Chief of Police Quinn warned. "The Police Department will have its hands full on Tuesday preventing violence on the waterfront. We do not want any innocent bystanders hurt." He added two hundred men to the force, laid in new supplies of tear gas and riot guns.

Pickets began gathering around Pier 38 early on July 3. Patrol cars and freight cars isolated the area. At 1:27 p.m., the steel doors lifted, eight radio patrol cars emerged, leading an awkward parade of five trucks. Pickets surged forward and police replied with tear gas. Mounted police swung clubs at the pickets' heads; the pickets countered with bricks and stones and fists. All through the afternoon, the police and pickets fought. The trucks made eighteen trips between the docks and the warehouse; then they rested. On the next day, the Fourth of July, the Industrial Association proclaimed the port open.

Early on July 5, the fighting resumed. Along the Embarcadero, up and down Rincon Hill, police charged the pickets and the pickets replied with rocks and bricks. Police met them with gas and gunfire. Not one riot, the *Chronicle* said, but a hundred riots, big and little. Pickets drifted back toward ILA headquarters on Steuart street. Near Mission and Steuart, police fired riot guns into a crowd and two men died: Howard Sperry, a longshoreman, and Nick Bordoise, a cook. Strikers chalked a memorial to the two men on the spot where they had fallen. That afternoon, Governor Merriam ordered the troops into the city. By nightfall, the National Guard patrolled the length of the Embarcadero, machine guns emplaced atop the piers. Four days later, in angry silence, ten thousand marchers mourned the dead.

People asked, "Will there be a general strike?" Edward Vandeleur, president of the Labor Council, replied: "Do you fellows have to see a haystack before you can see which way the straws are blowing?" The Labor Council named a strategy committee to explore the question and bring back a recommendation. Union after union, however,

voted for a general strike without waiting to hear the committee's report. The teamsters met and voted to strike. Mike Casey warned them they could lose strike benefits, their union charter, their contracts. "Nothing" he said later, "could have prevented that vote. In all my thirty years of leading these men, I have never seen them so determined."

The general strike began on the morning of July 16. Commuters walked up Market street on empty streetcar tracks. Trucks and cabs disappeared from the streets. Markets quickly sold out their stocks, service stations closed, saloons and liquor stores shut their doors, just nineteen restaurants remained open—all "By order of the General Strike Committee." AFL President William Green protested the use of troops but he also declared the general strike "unauthorized." Labor Council Secretary John O'Connell replied that it was better that the Council organize and direct it than have it take place haphazardly, without guidance.

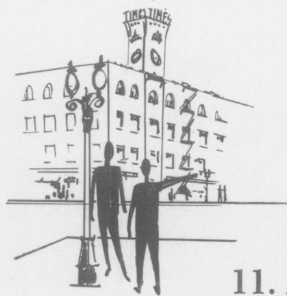
A new kind of violence erupted. Vigilante committees quickly, mysteriously formed and raided headquarters and meeting halls of radical and so-called "radical" groups. They echoed the charges that the employers and the newspapers had been shouting since the strike started. The strike was in the hands of radicals, they said, the "communist agitators" should be replaced by "American" leaders. They charged leaders with fomenting strife, instead of working for settlement of the dispute. This is revolution, they said. Staid citizens with pickhandles and other weapons patrolled cities in the East Bay while halls were raided. Bricks with warnings attached were thrown through the windows of suspected "communists" and "radicals." A librarian was ordered by resolution to draw up for destruction a list of books that "praised communism." A gallows appeared in Hayward with the warning, "Reds Beware." In San Francisco, the raiders were often followed by carloads of police who arrested the beaten and stunned victims of the raid. The Marine Workers Industrial Union, the Communist Party, and *Western Worker* headquarters were among those raided. Hundreds were arrested. "Are you a communist?" one was asked. "Hell, no," came the reply, "I'm a Baptist." One city judge denounced those arrested as enemies of the state. Days later, though, he said the city had acted "like a pack of mad wolves." A study of law enforcement during the strike found the record replete with "unlawful arrests, unlawful searches and seizures, excessive bail, unfair trials, convictions without evidence and in some cases without even 'a day in court,' the denial of counsel, deportation of workers, and other violations of the fundamental rights of American citizens."

On the second day of the general strike, the strategy committee opened more restaurants, eased some of the restrictions. Streetcar men,

threatened with loss of civil service status, returned to work. Restrictions were loosened still further on the third day. On the fourth day, the general strike committee voted to end the strike.

The point had been made. Employers agreed to submit all issues in dispute with the longshoremen to arbitration by the National Longshoremen's Board. The steamship companies agreed to arbitrate wages, hours and working conditions with the maritime unions representing their employees. After 82 days, the strike ended. Seamen held a bonfire of their "fink books" and Andy Furuseth, eighty years old, was there to see them burn. In the end, the National Longshoremen's Board awarded the men a wage increase, a jointly operated hiring hall with a union-designated dispatcher, a basic six-hour day and thirty-hour week.

It was, in a sense, only a truce. The fight for power on the docks and on the ships raged for years. The maritime unions organized the Maritime Federation of the Pacific, fought a second strike in 1936. It broke up soon after under the pressure of differences between Bridges and the Sailors' Union chief, Harry Lundeborg. But the waterfront settlement also set off an incredible period of union organization. Unions spread into the warehouses and the shops, on to construction jobs and into department and variety stores, to hotels and restaurants. Unions came to life that had been little more than charters on the wall of a meeting hall. They recruited new members and won union contracts. The Labor Council told the La Follette committee that union membership doubled between 1933 and 1940. It was equally true in other parts of the state—and across the nation. At the start of the Thirties, Oliver Carlson wrote, "the ranks of organized labor [in California] were few in number and widely scattered . . . Treasuries were depleted. Morale was low. Thousands of members were unemployed." Ten years later, the labor movement was large and powerful, "the largest and most powerful in its history," with nearly half a million in the AFL, 150,000 in the CIO. "Even Los Angeles was no longer the mecca of open-shoppers."



11. *A long, long thirty years*

WHEN THE United States Commission on Industrial Relations visited Los Angeles in 1914, the Machinists' Union testified that its wages were 15 to 20 cents an hour below those in union towns. Building tradesmen were paid \$1 to \$2.50 a day less than in San Francisco, worked nine and ten hours a day instead of eight. The Teamsters' union had set a wage scale of \$2.25 a day; after its disruption, the men worked for \$9 a week. "Under the best possible conditions, and granting the most excellent motives on the part of employers," the Commission commented, "freedom does not exist [under Los Angeles's open shop] either politically, industrially, or socially." Characteristically, the *Times* discounted the Commission's report: "The representatives of the labor unions on the Federal Commission on Industrial Relations knew as much about industrial relations as a salted mackerel knows about the Constitution of the United States. They considered that they performed their duties, or at least earned their salaries, when they fell on their faces before the cockney anarchist Sam Gompers and licked the dust from his feet." (When Gompers visited Los Angeles a year later, the *Times* commented: "Little as Sammy knows of the *Times* he knew enough to hate it . . . We persuade ourselves that had he known us better he would have hated us more.")

A new organizing campaign in 1916, backed by the AFL and the State Federation of Labor, produced gains in union membership. The first World War, too, encouraged unionism though Los Angeles open shop employers resisted government-endorsed collective bargaining in every way they could. Hard times after the war cut back the unions' wartime gains. The Merchants' and Manufacturers' Association yielded little important ground; it fought back with the Better America Foundation, setting its 100 per cent Americanism against what it insisted was red-tinged unionism. Labor won back some ground in 1924 and 1926 with renewed organizing drives, but a door-to-door effort planned for 1929 was cut short by depression and spreading unemployment. The Los Angeles labor movement by 1933, wrote Louis B. and Richard S. Perry, "was barely intact." The Central Labor Council reported per capita payments on 11,139 mem-

bers; the most optimistic count of total union membership in the city probably did not exceed 20,000.

Section 7 (a) of the National Industrial Recovery Act of 1933 spurred union organization in Los Angeles as it did elsewhere in the country. Workers wandered into the Labor Temple looking for unions to join. One observer guessed that six thousand workers joined Los Angeles unions in the first few weeks of July. Teamsters, clothing workers, bakers, butchers, cleaners and dyers, culinary workers, printing craftsmen flooded into unions of their trade. By September, seventeen new local unions had been organized; twelve more were in process. M&M seemed to trim its sails for NRA, but it opened no leeway for bona fide unions. Nothing in the NRA, M&M argued, required an employer to deal with "outside" unions or sign a union contract, nor did anything compel an employee to join a union. Where employee organization could not be completely discouraged, employers sponsored independent company-wide unions. All too often, they proved to be both employer-sponsored and employer-dominated. The lack of power in the NRA compliance agencies assisted, even encouraged, employers to ignore any obligation to recognize and bargain collectively with the unions of their employees.

As a substitute for collective bargaining, M&M expanded its strike-breaking activities. It recruited strikebreakers for the waterfront strike, the meatpacking and Los Angeles Railway strikes. It also, the La Follette committee reported, poured out money to the police force. Employers customarily paid large sums of money for guard duty and supplied large quantities of tear gas. The chief of the police intelligence bureau seems to have made it a practice to take a leave of absence during important strikes and go on the payroll of the struck employer. M&M strikebreakers kept packing plants operating through a six-week strike. Some 3,600 men were recruited to keep the port of Los Angeles open during the longshoremen's and seamen's strike, and the employers paid \$145,000 for police and deputy sheriffs to guard them. (San Francisco waterfront employers vigorously objected to such expenditures, arguing the city should supply the protection without charge, as it did in San Francisco.) The big oil companies—Standard of California, Texas, Shell—along with Chrysler, Southern California Edison, Armour, Firestone, and other major employers, and the city's banks paid the bills. M&M's intensified efforts only slowed the unions' expansion; it failed utterly to halt it. The Perry's estimated that union membership approached 30,000 by the end of 1935.

The passage of the Wagner Act forced M&M to review its policies. As a result, it approved a contract with the Bodell Detective Agency

to supply a regular pool of strikebreakers and guards. It called for "coordination of the work of various law-enforcement agencies with" M&M's activities. (The M&M witnesses had no specific answer when Senator La Follette asked why the new program called for law enforcement agencies to cooperate with M&M rather than the other way around. The committee supplied its own answer: The M&M has "arrogated to itself the determination of what constituted law and order in labor relations in Los Angeles.") It argued the necessity for a living wage and reasonable working conditions to avoid, as one official put it, "a great deal of militant and troublesome unionism." Finally, it called for an intensive effort to convince employers that it would be short-sighted and, in the end, destructive to sign a union agreement.

The new program provoked the resignation of J. Stuart Neary, the association's secretary. Neary said its "militant anti-labor lines" violated the National Labor Relations Act. (M&M leaders said they asked for his resignation because he had lost the confidence of the directors by putting M&M dues payments ahead of labor problems.) The La Follette committee, too, underscored the point: M&M not only resisted but encouraged defiance of the principle of collective bargaining laid down in the Wagner Act. The revised program, in any case, almost at once met—and failed—a crucial test in the drivers' strike at Pacific Freight Lines.

M&M and the Chamber of Commerce had girded for the fight. They had raised money and open-shop pledges from a variety of industry groups. They recruited nonunion employees. When these seemed inadequate to stop the union, the association organized a campaign to persuade employers to throw their shipping business to the struck company. M&M's President Samuel Haskins wrote the oil producers that Pacific Freight needed "every pound of freight that the petroleum industry can give them." Southern Pacific, always an active supporter of M&M and the Chamber of Commerce, protested. It was sympathetic, it said, but it had its own labor problems and it, too, could use the business. The teamsters won the strike and a contract with the Motor Truck Association of Southern California.

That was the year when the Wagner Act was affirmed by the United States Supreme Court. The maritime unions had survived a second major coastwide strike the year before; now union organization was spreading from the docks to the teamsters and into the warehouses and distributive trades. Building trades and culinary unions were pressing hard against the open shop in their industries. By the end of the year, the Newspaper Guild had won recognition at several newspapers and conducted an unexpectedly vigorous strike at the Hollywood *Citizen-News*. Butchers and retail clerks won recognition from

Safeway Stores. In that year, too, the Central Labor Council and the unions affiliated with the then Committee for Industrial Organization parted ways. The latter formed the Los Angeles Industrial Union Council and organizing pushed ahead in auto, aircraft, rubber, and steel plants. Plainly, labor was on the march.

In October, 1937, Byron C. Hanna, president of the Chamber of Commerce, wrote Los Angeles businessmen: "Southern California is faced with a political-economic crisis which, as far as I know, is without precedent in its history . . . Unless an aroused citizenry using every legal and democratic means stops this organization effort, business and industry in Southern California are hopelessly lost." Hanna proposed a committee of "citizens of prestige" to conduct a campaign of "education." It would unite all groups committed to "the preservation of industrial freedom." It would hire guards and investigators "to track down and bring to justice miscreants now maintaining a reign of terror in this community by committing acts of brutality on individuals and acts of vandalism on property." The organization—at first called the Committee for the Preservation of American Ideals, later simply Southern Californians, Inc.—was introduced to the public at an elaborate dinner on December 13, 1937.

Southern Californians, Inc. became, in effect, the "general staff" of the open shop campaign. In the beginning, it shunned the spotlight but organized intensive propaganda activities through other channels. It used its substantial influence to discourage employers from dealing with unions. It mobilized moral and financial support for a variety of anti-union organizations, including M&M, The Neutral Thousands, Associated Farmers, Farmers Transportation Association, and others.

In the summer of 1937, a Washington woman who had organized opposition to a Seattle newspaper strike interested Harry Chandler, publisher of the *Times*, in the possibilities of using women to lead the fight on unions. With his backing, she formed Women of the Pacific, a housewives' group opposing monopolies and unions—the latter, however, monopolizing the group's attentions. Women of the Pacific urged housewives to patronize stores where organizing campaigns or strikes were being opposed. It attempted to counteract efforts of teamsters to gain a contract in the milk distribution industry—the occasion of its only known public meeting. The organization itself failed most spectacularly, perhaps, when it set out on Flag Day to obtain in a single day 186,778 signatures on an initiative petition aimed at restricting union activities.

Meantime, another women's organization came to the fore. First called Women of California, then Women Consumers, it was known best as The Neutral Thousands. Its purpose, a leaflet said, was "to

combat the wave of industrial disaster which threatens to overwhelm our state." Leader of TNT was Mrs. Bessie Ochs who had worked on a Chamber of Commerce committee during the 1936 maritime strike and had been hired to carry the open shop message to women's groups. TNT eventually claimed a membership running into the hundreds of thousands. It said it was financed by their voluntary contributions and emphatically denied any connection with Southern Californians, Inc. Actually, the La Follette committee found that Southern Californians, Inc. and the Chamber of Commerce put up more than nine-tenths of its funds. Its vaunted membership list turned out to have been compiled by a direct mail agency from telephone directories, old mailing lists, lists of women's organizations and such.

Under the slogan, "Truth Not Terror," TNT loosed a barrage of propaganda aimed at the public generally, particularly at the housewife. It produced several series of radio broadcasts designed to document the "terrors" of the union shop. One such program dealing with a teamster strike at a department store, the La Follette committee said, was "an utterly despicable, slanderous attack on all organized labor." In another, TNT offered the testimony of an "anonymous" culinary worker to support the claim of an "independent" union that it was, in fact, independent. In reality, the mysterious worker was a TNT employee who had himself organized the group. A secret, anti-union group of employers paid for the broadcast.

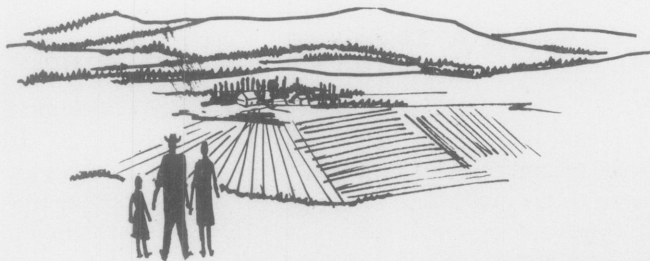
TNT, in fact, maintained a special department to help in organizing "independent" unions—a strategem that brought it into conflict with old-line open-shoppers who objected to employee organization of any kind. When Mrs. Ochs was challenged on the sponsorship of one such group, she denied any connection with Southern Californians, Inc. "There are people still in the world," she replied, "who are moved by an ideal." Said the La Follette committee, "A bold prevarication." Although the records were often missing or sometimes revised, the committee traced TNT independent union activities into some 150 different companies. Southern Californians, Inc. claimed total ignorance of this phase of TNT's activities.

"The most influential business and financial interests in Los Angeles," the U.S. Senate committee reported, "have deliberately attempted to sabotage the national labor policy of collective bargaining . . . These business and industrial leaders determined to nullify it not only by negative but by positive action . . . They engaged in a series of organized conspiracies to destroy labor's civil liberties.

". . . This pattern of organized conspiratorial interference with collective bargaining included the mass application of the common

anti-union devices such as labor espionage, the use of professional strikebreakers, the use of industrial munitions, the blacklist . . ." It utilized, the report went on, "third-party" pressures, all types of propaganda, pressure for enactment of local laws, a constant attempt to "pervert" local law-enforcement to support of anti-union policies, mass production of "company unions." And this was capped by an enormous effort to bring the individual employer into line with "community" labor policy by "inducing" his membership in a trade or industry group whose major purpose was the maintenance of the open shop. The creation and maintenance of such a policy, the committee concluded, far surpassed "for magnitude and versatility" anything the committee had seen in its four-year investigation. But the open shop was not to prevail.

The year 1940, one student of the situation observed, was "the first in which Los Angeles labor exerted a significant influence, by reason of its own strength, on the community's economic and political affairs." By the time war came in 1941, the unions claimed that half—the employers said 40 per cent—of the city workers carried union cards. It had been a long, long, thirty years.



12. *The monotony of misery*

CALIFORNIA'S WIDE RANGE of climate, its endless variety of soil, its long growing seasons had yielded by the Thirties a spectacular array of specialty crops. From beef and wheat, seventy years before, the state's farms had turned to oranges and hops and sugar beets. Year after year, they added still other crops: avocados and carrots, melons and lettuce, nuts and dates and raisins and long-staple cotton. Some crops approached national or even world monopoly, for nowhere else were they produced in important quantities. They leaned heavily on a still developing farm technology. And they demanded large quantities of low cost labor for short bursts of time.

Growing concentration of ownership, control, and operation gave the state's agriculture an increasingly distinctive structure. About ten per cent of the farms, Professor Paul S. Taylor told the La Follette committee in 1939, pocketed over half of the gross farm income, paid two thirds of the state's farm labor wage bill, hired more than two thirds of its farm workers. Such centralization was achieved partly through large corporate, absentee-owned farms. It derived from the pattern of giant landholdings, "baronial if not princely in extent," whose owners seldom worked all or even a major part of their holdings. It grew from multiple operators who farmed six or seven, a dozen or more pieces of land, owning few, renting most of them. In some crops, corporate canners or giant grower cooperatives forged a centralized control by contracting for, often dictating, the crops of scores of smaller farmers. Yet, common to almost every phase was the tempered demand for seasonal labor, cheap and abundant and temporary.

Cash expenditures for farm labor on the average California farm climbed to four times the national average by the end of the Thirties. In some counties—San Joaquin, Kern, Monterey, Imperial—the average farm spent five to ten times the national average. The rising scale of farm production, the uneven seasonal demands for labor, the premium on low cost labor helped create a pool of farm workers who all too often were underpaid, badly housed, ill-clothed, underfed. The record of the system, the La Follette committee concluded, "discloses with monotonous regularity, a shocking degree of human misery."



Migratory mother and child.

As centralization increased, demands for large quantities of seasonal labor mounted. Growers joined forces in area and commodity associations to recruit and direct the armies of farm workers. Through such labor pools, they were able to control competition for labor. They set and maintained wage rates, shared expenses of recruiting, transportation, housing. One observer noted so many, so extensive and all-embracing wage-fixing organizations, he said, that "only illiteracy combined with serious defects of hearing" could prevent any farmer from knowing what wage he was expected to pay. But farm workers were denied the same right of organization that provided the grower with so many benefits. Under these arrangements, the worker was hired by a labor bureau or through a contractor. He and his employer were strangers to each other.

The farm worker, as Carey McWilliams found him, knew insecurity well, knew the likelihood of unemployment. He was familiar with bad housing, with the difficulty of getting a job, with the hardship of "stoop" labor. His employer lived in fear of the weather, of the market for his crop, of a strike by his workers. He wanted the job done and done quickly. The worker knew his job would end when the harvest ended. He would rather see it last another week. The grower looked on the worker as inefficient, happy-go-lucky, worthless. The worker looked on the grower as "a hard-boiled bastard against whom the use of any tactic is justified."

As the deceptive prosperity of the Twenties ended and the depression of the Thirties began, farm wages dropped—from 30 cents an hour to 15 and 12½ cents for field labor. The state minimum wage for women in canneries fell from 33⅓ to 30 to 27 cents an hour. Imperial Valley workers struck in 1930 against earnings of \$1.25 a day. Even the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce commented (well after the fact) that "some of the labor disputes were brought about by the fact that in some agricultural sections ridiculously low prices were quoted for agricultural labor which resulted in these prices being brought up under the threat of strikes or by actual strikes, which lent encouragement to similar operations in other sections." The Thirties became a decade of farm strikes. Between 1930 and 1939, a Senate committee investigation counted 140 farm strikes in California—about half of those that took place in the nation. They involved 127,000 workers or some 71 per cent of the national total.

Strikes broke out, unions were formed, often on the spur of the moment. They were met by violence, violations of civil rights, persecution. Often, too, both the strike and the union vanished almost as quickly as they had cropped up, leaving faint trace of their existence. In the early years of the Thirties, the major organizing force among farm workers was the Trade Union Unity League, the Communist

Party's rival to the American Federation of Labor. The Cannery and Agricultural Workers Industrial Union, for about four years, was the principal instrument of the TUUL's "dual union," revolutionary farm union program.

TUUL organizers were active in Imperial Valley in early 1930 where they led strikes to boost field wages from \$1.25 to \$1.50 a day and packing shed pay from 70 to 80 cents an hour. A series of raids helped disrupt the strike and resulted in 103 arrests. Eight union leaders were subsequently imprisoned under the Criminal Syndicalism law. TUUL organizers were involved, too, in strikes of Santa Clara County cannery workers and pea pickers at Half Moon Bay. In the course of a bitter conflict in Solano County orchards, six union leaders were removed from the Vacaville jail, flogged, their heads shaved, their bodies painted with red enamel.

Communist influence reached a peak in 1933, the CAWIU being active in 25 strikes involving some 38,000 workers. (The year's total came to 37 farm strikes with about 48,000 workers.) Twenty-one strikes achieved some measurable gain; four were written off as lost. In a cherry pickers' strike, the union headquarters was raided by deputies armed with pickhandles and tear gas. So-called vigilantes drove striking grape pickers out of Lodi. Strikes broke out in peaches and grapes and pears. But the workers' protest under Communist leadership reached a dramatic peak in the strike of ten to fifteen thousand cotton pickers in the fall of 1933.

The cotton growers that year fixed a wage of 60 cents per 100 pounds for picking; the year before it had been 40 cents. The union had organized around a demand for \$1 per hundred. As the crop ripened and growers refused to meet the union rate, the pickers struck. They and their families were promptly evicted from grower-owned housing. As a result, thousands of homeless pickers gathered in the small towns of the lower San Joaquin valley. The union rented bare land outside the town of Corcoran and there set up a tent city. It provided sanitary facilities, set up streets, brought in health workers—health laws had often been used as a convenient strikebreaking tool. The tent city served as a base for picket caravans—long lines of rickety old cars—that spread out to ranches where picking was going on. At its peak the union was patrolling more than a hundred miles of picket lines stretching over three counties. Three men were killed in attacks on strikers. In the end, a fact-finding commission headed by Professor Ira B. Cross recommended a rate of 75 cents per hundred pounds. The commission also affirmed the violations of strikers' civil rights and called on authorities to safeguard them. Once the strike ended, though, the union crumbled.

↪ The growers called for intensive use of the Criminal Syndicalism

Act against "Communist agitators." They proposed, too, a statewide farmers' organization to meet future strikes. Out of it—"From Apathy to Action," as the slogans put it—came the Associated Farmers. It was "set up," in its own words, "to investigate the trouble which had been fomented by agitators who were more interested in the overthrow of our American system of government than in the welfare of the workers."

The Associated Farmers, *Fortune* magazine reported, "was dominated by the big growers, packers, utilities, banks, and other absentee landlords who are all-important in the state's farm system." It was, it said, "a strong-arm defense against the menace of Communist agitation." The "menace" almost invariably turned out to be farm workers asking for more pay. The Associated Farmers pledged every member to serve as a deputy sheriff. It organized and drilled them into small armies for duty in labor disputes. It mobilized some fifteen hundred to serve in the bloody Salinas lettuce strike. It turned out 2,200 within a few hours to provide trucks violent passage through cannery workers' picket lines in Stockton. The La Follette committee charged it with "the most flagrant and violent infringements of civil liberties." Its "specialized technique" of espionage, blacklist, and strikebreaking resulted, it said, in "brutality . . . riots . . . bloodshed . . . sheer vigilantism."

Beyond that, the Associated Farmers advocated farmers' boycotts of major cities in an effort to block unionism, especially among teamsters, warehousemen, processing workers handling agricultural products. It mustered political influence to encourage anti-picketing and other restrictive legislation. It opposed any bills that might encourage unionism or collective bargaining or provide some benefits for farm workers.

The La Follette committee questioned its nominal purpose. The "allegedly communistic character," the committee said, of some of the unions and some of the union leaders was emphasized in farm labor disputes to the point where the issue became—not hours or wages or working conditions—but "the form of government and society." Strikebreaking and union-smashing in these terms became a "patriotic crusade." The attitude of so many employers, law-enforcement officials, and local residents was, the report said, "so colored by this factor that the civil rights of strikers, unions, union organizers, outsiders and many of the agricultural laborers in California to speak, assemble, organize into unions and bargain are repeatedly and flagrantly violated."

In the summer of 1934, within a week or so of the "vigilante" raids that marked the final days of the waterfront strike, deputies raided the headquarters of the CAWIU. Fifteen leaders of the union were



Migrant labor camp.

arrested; after a lengthy trial, eight were sent to prison under the Criminal Syndicalism laws (though their convictions were later reversed). The destruction of its headquarters, the arrest and trial of its leaders marked the end of CAWIU's influence. A year later, the Communist Party dissolved the Trade Union Unity League.

Unionism nevertheless gained a foothold more often in the packing sheds and canneries than in the fields. Farm workers clung to old unions or formed new ones. The American Federation of Labor became increasingly active in organizing. Some of these unions came together to form what eventually became the United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing and Allied Workers of America, the CIO's affiliate in the farm labor field. Cannery workers' unions who stuck with the AFL formed the nucleus around which the basic cannery union con-

tract was originally negotiated by the California State Federation of Labor and the principal growers and processors. UCAPAWA challenged the contract, claiming the employers had unlawfully encouraged and helped the AFL union. The National Labor Relations Board, however, set aside the charges and they went without formal answer.

Through these years, one other vital aspect of California agriculture was changing. For the first time in seventy years, the state's crops were being worked by an almost totally domestic, an almost totally white labor force. By the mid-Thirties the change became apparent. "This is not a bindle-stiff movement," a farm paper said. Between 1933 and 1939, according to one estimate, more than 350,000 people entered the state. Coming from farm country, looking for farm work, they spilled over into the state's great valleys to join the army of migrant farm workers.

John Steinbeck described them: "The drouth in the middle west has driven the agricultural populations of Oklahoma, Nebraska, and parts of Kansas and Texas westward. Their lands are destroyed and they can never go back to them.

"Thousands of them are crossing the borders in ancient rattling automobiles, destitute and hungry and homeless . . .

"They are small farmers who have lost their farms or farm hands who lived with the family in the old American way. They have seen their lands wither and die and the top soil blow away.

"And then they have made the crossing and have seen often the death of their children on the way . . . They have weathered the thing, and they can weather much more for their blood is strong . . .

"They have jumped with no transition . . . to a system of agriculture so industrialized that the man who plants a crop does not often see, let alone harvest, the fruit of his planting."

They squatted on river banks or in a grove of trees, built shelters from cardboard or corrugated paper. Or they lived in rotting tents with a tick thrown on the ground for bedding. They lived off what they could afford. If work was available, a family sat down to boiled cabbage and sweet potatoes, carrots and beans and fried dough. But if there was no work, the meal was dandelion greens and boiled potatoes. One family served only fried cornmeal, another ate oatmeal mush.

They were hated, Steinbeck said, because "they are ignorant and dirty people . . . carriers of disease . . . increase the necessity for police and the tax bill for schooling . . . and if they are allowed to organize they can, simply by refusing to work, wipe out the season's crops. They are never received into a community nor into the life of a community . . ."



Pickets calling workers to strike in the 1933 cotton pickers' strike.

"When they need us," a boy told Steinbeck, "they call us migrants, and when we've picked their crop, we're bums and we got to get out."

The government provided decent camps and their residents gained a measure of self-respect and dignity. There were floors in the tents, sanitary toilets, communal laundry tubs. There were showers and nurseries and a health clinic. The workers ran the camp under a kind of tenant government. The camps were inadequate; they provided only a minimal decency for only a small part of the migratory work force. But the growers resented even this much. They were "hotbeds" of radicalism.

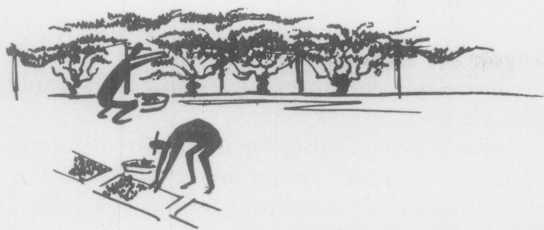
John Steinbeck told the story of these workers unforgettably in *The Grapes of Wrath*. His sometimes incredible story was documented by Carey McWilliams in *Factories in the Fields*. Once again,

twenty years and more after Wheatland, the state's migratory worker and his problems were discovered. McWilliams was convinced that the emergence of a domestic labor force and the growing mechanization of agriculture would lead to more, rather than less, unionism. The manager of the agricultural department of the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce feared just that. White labor, he said, "being American citizens, they are going to demand the so-called American standard of living . . . they are going to be the finest pabulum for unionization for either group—the A.F. of L. or the subversive elements."

In December, 1941, war came to the United States. The defense factories, the aircraft plants, the shipyards, the armed forces took most of the new migrant workforce. Before long, the Mexican worker returned to California's fields. He had worked most of the state's crops in the Twenties, but he had returned (or been returned) to his homeland in the years of the Great Depression. Now, in the early Forties, he again traveled north.



Calling grape workers to join the strike, September, 1965.
Photo by Harvey Richards.



13. *The coming of the bracero*

ERNESTO GALARZA, at various times, has been a harvest hand and a cannery worker, a teacher and a researcher. As well as a student of the farm workers' problems, he has been a participant in the efforts to solve them. He is an author, a University lecturer, and labor organizer. In his *Merchants of Labor*, he measured the state of California agriculture in 1960 in these ways:

"The holding and management of land was increasingly dominated by large units as the small, multiple-crop family farm withered. Corporations set the pace in technology and organization. Wealth production increased enormously. Productivity outran the national average. Competition was successfully met in markets 3,000 miles away. Specialized cropping took over. Field labor was assured through an improving system of administered migration which acted as the cost cushion of the industry."

It was this last development, the so-called bracero system, that became in these last twenty-five years the central issue affecting California farm workers. The system died with its sponsor, Public Law 78, on December 31, 1964. The state's farmers were not easily nor quickly reconciled to its passing, even less to an open labor market. Their anguished cries echoed over the lush green fields and orchards for months afterward. But its passing gave promise, for the first time in generations, of the unionization of farm labor.

The braceros were a response to the heavy draft of manpower for war industries, accentuated by the wartime evacuation of the Japanese. They were imported, the growers and the governments agreed, only to fill shortages, not to displace domestic workers. They were brought in under a long bill of protective conditions as to wages, housing, work guarantees, round trip transportation, subsistence, and such. These were set presumably at levels that would not undercut the conditions or job opportunities of domestic workers. Government-fixed wages held the wage level steady—in some instances, Galarza said, actually rolled wages back. On the whole, wages for the duration held close to 1940 levels. Even these minimum conditions were avoided from 1948 to 1954 by the "wetback" invasion—"perhaps the greatest peacetime invasion," an immigration official com-

mented, "complacently suffered by a country under open, flagrant, contemptuous violation of its laws."

Public Law 78 in 1951 shifted responsibility for importing workers, at Mexico's insistence, to the Federal government. Government agencies recruited workers, operated reception centers, provided transportation and subsistence en route. They also undertook to hold the growers to the promised wages and conditions. The government insisted on formal certification of the shortage of domestic workers—a shortage that appeared to be chronic. It asked, too, for assurances that wages and working conditions of domestic workers would not be adversely affected, and that reasonable efforts had been made to attract domestic workers. The growers paid costs of transportation and subsistence; the general taxpayer got the bill for compliance and general administration. Braceros soon became a common feature on the California farm landscape. They were an important, often major, not infrequently dominant, force in a number of major crops. Their labor was extended to collateral aspects of farming, from cattle feeding and hog raising to cultivation of ornamental plants. They performed the usual "stoop" labor but also such "upright" tasks as pruning and irrigation. They stacked trays and spread fruit in drying yards, operated fork lifts and washing equipment. They were sometimes sent to town to mow lawns and trim hedges.

Growers argued that the added costs of importing braceros made them expensive labor. Some contended the Mexican worker was more productive; unit costs, therefore, were lower, despite the higher gross cost. Galarza argued that the growers, over all, were able to hold wages to lower levels than might otherwise have been possible. The "prevailing" wage was fixed either by the growers or their labor bureaus or on the basis of the wage expected to be paid at the season's start—an expectation that automatically came true. The domestic worker, in a sense, was trapped. His bare wage rate was held at the lowest levels possible and he was often denied all or part of the bracero's "trimmings." Galarza calculated that the average annual earnings of California farm workers in 1950 came to \$1,680 per worker. In 1959, the average was \$1,666. If wage payments to braceros are excluded, there is a slight increase—\$1,630 to \$1,652.

After prolonged debate, and several postponements, Congress in 1963 imposed the death sentence, to be carried out on the last day of 1964. Growers made little effort to anticipate the possible effects of the bracero program's demise and their cries were long and loud when it finally happened. The Labor Department in 1965 cut back the annual flood of braceros to a relative trickle. Crops were harvested without either the losses or the labor shortages that growers had gloomily predicted—and, for the first time in close to thirty

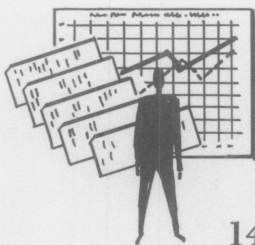


Sacramento, California: "End of the Line" for grape strikers' march, April 10, 1966.

Photo by Harvey Richards.

years, by a work force that was mainly domestic. In September, grape pickers in the Delano area vineyards went on strike. They responded, first, to the call of the AFL-CIO Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee and, soon after, to that of the independent National Farm Workers Association. The former, a tiny remnant of an earlier AFL-CIO organizing effort, drew its strength and tactics from the labor movement. The NFWA, under the leadership of Cesar Chavez, had a kind of community-organization cast; church and civil rights groups provided its core support. AWOC was mainly Filipino, NFWA largely Spanish-speaking. Theirs was an uncomfortable and often awkward alliance, but it held together through a long and cold winter—in the face of stubborn grower resistance, corps of strikebreakers, the indifference, if not the antagonism, of law enforcement agencies. They clung to the goal of union recognition and higher wages. They had been offered \$1.25 an hour and ten cents a basket; they asked \$1.40 an hour and 25 cents a basket.

In the Spring of 1966, a few score of farm workers set out on a three-hundred-mile, twenty-five day march from Delano to Sacramento. Their march started in the atmosphere of a religious fete, but it soon came to reflect something of the slow-burning anger, the insistent demands of farm workers the length of California's rich valleys. Thousands of farm workers and supporters gathered on the State Capitol steps on Easter morning to climax the long march. There, they heard their leaders proudly announce that Schenley Industries, second largest of the Delano grape growers, after seven months of strike, had agreed to recognize the union and negotiate a union contract. Soon after, the DiGiorgio Corporation, largest of the Delano growers and a giant among agricultural giants, offered a formula for union recognition. Farm labor leaders saw too many loopholes in the company's offer, but the door was open. Even this much was an historic achievement. The end, though, was not yet in sight; the showdown, held off for nearly a full turn of the seasons, would come with the grape harvest in 1966. But the grape pickers' strike seemed to mark, as the AFL-CIO executive council noted in its resolution of support, the first real hope since the Thirties for a union of farm workers.



14. *Unions and the work force*

CALIFORNIA'S POPULATION and its work force climbed almost explosively during the years of World War II. Manpower-hungry war industries drew young people of school and college age. Women over 35 went to work in huge numbers. Older men delayed retirement and stayed on the job. Workers who had been unemployable before the war found steady employment. Even more dramatic was the influx of workers from every part of the nation. Nearly three fourths of California's huge population gain during the war decade was the result of immigration. Between 1940 and 1946 the state's labor force increased 40 per cent.

Could the state's peacetime economy provide enough jobs for this fantastically swollen work force and for the returning veteran, too? In the main, it did. Between 1950 and 1964, the state's working population climbed another 74 per cent. After a brief period of adjustment, unemployment fell below prewar levels—though in the early 1960's these levels hung uncomfortably high.

Union membership, too, climbed to incredible heights. In 1950, when the state undertook its first census of union members, it counted 1,354,000. By 1964, the total had grown to 1,824,100—an increase of 469,600 or 35 per cent. At the same time, the number of wage and salary workers (not counting farm labor) had increased 2,485,000 or 74 per cent. Unions had represented about 43 of the state's wage and salary workers in 1950; by mid-1964 they spoke for about 32 per cent.

Manufacturing is the state's most important single source of jobs. In 1950 three of every five wage and salary workers in manufacturing belonged to a union. In 1964, two of every five carried a union card. Between 1958 and 1964, 187,000 new jobs opened up in the state's manufacturing industries but union membership fell by 15,600. The aerospace industry, for example, grew by leaps and bounds, with more workers in California than the nation as a whole, but many of them were in nonproduction jobs. Nearly a million new jobs opened up in nonmanufacturing industries in those same six years; only about one in six of the new jobs was filled by a union member.

The greatest increase in jobs between 1958 and 1964 came in miscellaneous service industries, such as finance, insurance, real estate, business, profession, educational, and related services. Of some



Department store employees in San Francisco meet to act
on a contract proposal.

Photograph by Larry Kenney

300,000 new service industry jobs created between 1958 and 1964, only a few thousand were held by union members. Unions increased the proportion of government employees for whom they spoke in this period, but they bargained for 13 per cent in 1964. In wholesale and retail trade, union membership accounted for 24 per cent of the wage and salary workers in 1958, 22 per cent in 1964. These three industry groups—miscellaneous service, government, and trade—accounted for about three fourths of the new jobs opened up in California in these six years.

In sheer numbers of union members, manufacturing industries led the field in 1964 with 545,000. Construction was next with 371,500, followed by wholesale and retail trade (228,600), transportation and warehousing (185,700), and government (130,400). But when industries are ranked by the proportion of their workers who are union members, the construction industry tops the list with 103 per cent (some workers belonging to unions in more than one craft), transportation and warehousing next with 86 per cent, followed by the entertainment industries with 84 per cent and public utilities, 45 per cent. Eating and drinking places, hotels and other lodging places are 40 per cent organized, manufacturing 39 per cent.

The Los Angeles metropolitan area, as the state's most populous area, had the largest number of union members—803,000 in 1964. Professor Irving Bernstein estimated that it probably had passed the San Francisco Bay Area in numbers at about the end of World War II. The San Francisco area reported 481,000 members, but a much higher proportion of unionization. The following figures provide a rough measure of the extent of unionization in these and in the San Diego and San Jose areas—July, 1954 being the earliest benchmark for which comparable figures are available:

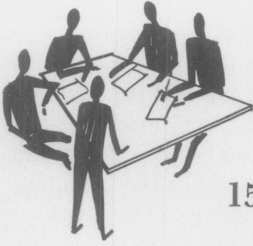
		<i>Ratio of union membership to nonfarm wage and salary employment</i>	
		July, 1954	July, 1964
California	40		32
Metropolitan area:			
San Francisco	52		44
San Jose	49		32
San Diego	40		28
Los Angeles	37		30

Source: Division of Labor Statistics and Research

The employment figures used in these comparisons include executives, supervisory, technical, and other personnel who are not usually members of unions. The union membership figures count workers—unemployed, self-employed, on strike, retired—who are not included

in the employment figures. The ratios, therefore, provide only a crude and approximate measure of unionization. If anything, they tend to understate the degree of organization, since the "organizable" total—likely candidates for union membership—undoubtedly comes to less than 100 per cent. Nor can such figures measure the influence of union-set standards on nonunion wages and conditions, on community standards, or on social legislation. Even so, they clearly reflect the failure of even a persistent and continuing rise in union membership to keep up with the state's expanding employment.

Changes in the structure of the state's industry and its work force have been important factors in this result. The relative importance of manufacturing jobs and "blue-collar" workers in the work force has declined; they have traditionally been the strength of the union movement. White-collar workers (and a still growing number of women) are relatively more prominent in the work force; they have traditionally been more resistant to unionization. Technical industries, such as electronics and aerospace, and service industries, such as finance, insurance, and real estate, have been the source of growing numbers of jobs; they, too, have seldom been accessible to the union movement. California's unions are not alone in this respect; they share these developments with the nation's unions. They share, too, the challenge implicit in these developments to their future effectiveness and influence.



15. *The structure of industrial relations*

TIME WAS when a union decided on a "scale of prices," then simply notified the employers its members would work for no less. If the employer accepted the new scale, the men went to work. If he objected, they set up a picket line—unless the boss fired them before they had a chance. Or an employer would post a notice that, starting on a given date, pay would be reduced or hours lengthened. Or perhaps he hired a few more boys to do men's work. In either case, the victim usually demanded an opportunity to talk about it. From there to discussion, negotiations, compromise was not a very long step. The step from such single-employer negotiations to industry-wide or craft-wide contracts was a longer step, but in California that step, too, has been taken. Multiple-employer or association bargaining units have become increasingly prominent features on the industrial relations landscape.

Local unions, almost from the start, sought to reinforce their bargaining power by associating with other unions in their craft or industry through international unions, with other unions in their area through local trades or labor councils. Efforts to form such local councils date in California from the mid-1860's. In time they gave rise to broad, area-wide councils, such as the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor, the San Francisco Labor Council, the Alameda County Central Labor Council, and many others. These local bodies play an important part in organizing support for individual unions involved in disputes with their employers, in speaking for the local labor movement on community affairs, in mobilizing support for labor political activities. On a statewide level, the AFL unions in 1901 formed the California State Federation of Labor. It merged in 1958 with its CIO opposite number, the California Industrial Union Council. Today, as the California Labor Federation it represents some three quarters of the state's unionists. Its major jobs are in the legislative and political fields but it also furnishes important assistance in the economic or industrial area. These groupings of unions are supplemented, too, by area groupings of craft and industry: local and statewide building trades councils, printing trades councils, culinary workers, retail clerks, etc.

Employers, it is usually said, organized their associations as a "defense" against the stronger, more extensive organization of the unions of their employees. But employers also organized for offensive purposes. San Francisco newspaper publishers in 1851 attempted an organization aimed at forcing a cut in their printers' pay. Other employer organizations have also demanded reductions in pay or longer hours or, not infrequently, an end to the union itself. Some employer organizations, formed to play one part, have played the other, too. In 1900, the Draymen's Association looked to its first agreement with the Teamsters to stabilize labor costs and reduce the area of competition. In 1901 the Association spearheaded the attack on the union.

Now, more often than not, the employer deals with the union of his employees through an employer association. The San Francisco Employers Council had been organized in 1938 to promote industry-wide, multi-employer bargaining—to insure, it said, the employers' right to bargain collectively. Two prominent students of the process, Clark Kerr and Lloyd Fisher, noted that, by 1948, the single-employer contract had become the exception in the San Francisco area, the association agreement or "master" contract, the rule. "Three fourths of the employees covered by labor contracts in the City of San Francisco," they noted, "work under the terms of master agreements." The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics in 1951 found that 71 per cent of the employees covered by Pacific Coast agreements in its files were in multi-employer bargaining units. The California Division of Labor Statistics and Research found in 1955 that 54 per cent of the union contracts in its files were signed by more than one employer. Of these, 58 per cent were signed by associations; the balance were standard contracts applying to an entire craft or industry. These agreements covered about two thirds of the total number of workers covered by the Division's comprehensive contract file. Professor Van Dusen Kennedy has asserted that "Multi-employer bargaining units are a characteristic of Pacific Coast labor relations." He estimates that between two fifths and a half of the bargaining units in the Pacific Coast states, covering two thirds of the employees, are multi-employer units. In the nation as a whole, he thinks, it is likely that only about one sixth of the bargaining units and about one third of the employees are under multi-employer contracts.

The content of bargaining—the wages, working conditions, the rules and regulations governing the job—has undergone an explosive expansion. In the earlier bargaining, the contract was likely to set a standard rate of wages, a standard work day and little more. And it was probably no more than an oral understanding or a scribbled memorandum sealed by a handshake. Today's union contract may

run from a few pages to scores (and even more). Its size is simply a reflection of its vastly expanded scope.

The single standard wage rate has probably been refined into a vast array of pay rates for specified job classifications taking into account a wide range of experience, skill, and other considerations. The standard work day has been surrounded by a series of safeguards, built around the notion of overtime pay—details of when, how, and at what rate overtime is worked.

The typical contract, too, makes provisions for at least some recognition of seniority on the job or in the industry. It establishes a variety of work rules, varying with the trade or industry, but ranging from wash-up time to the provision and laundering of uniforms, from rules for charitable solicitations to coffee breaks.

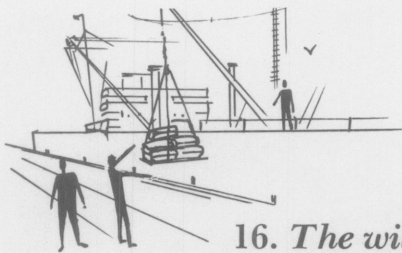
The agreement lays down the structure of a formal relationship with the employer or employer association. Most require employees to become and remain members of the union within a specified period of time after starting on the job—the valued union security provision. Most contracts set up a detailed procedure for the adjustment of employee complaints and of violations of the terms of the agreement—from their initial discussion in the shop to ultimate breaking of a deadlock by an impartial arbitrator. A procedure and timetable for reopening, renewing or terminating the agreement is established and machinery for resolving disputes over the application or interpretation of the contract is provided.

Today's contracts almost invariably provide vacations with pay. In 1964, 94 per cent of the employees under union agreement in California were entitled to a paid vacation. Two thirds of the employees were allowed three weeks, usually after about ten years of service. This figure reflects the recent extension of paid vacations to the building trades through the establishment of vacation funds. Until this came about, building workers often had vacations but seldom with pay. That is still the situation in substantial degree when it comes to paid holidays. Three fourths of the state's union workers are entitled to holidays off with pay—slightly more than half get eight such holidays a year. When construction workers are excluded, however, the proportion of union members who get paid holidays jumps to 92 per cent.

Three of four California workers under union contracts, according to the Division of Labor Statistics and Research, are covered by union-negotiated pension plans, supplementing their federal Social Security retirement. Ninety-five per cent of the workers under union contracts in the state in 1964 were covered by a health and welfare plan. These provide varying amounts of medical and hospital care, extending in a growing number of cases to dental care, prescription

drugs, and psychiatric care. Coverage is frequently provided for the workers' dependents and for continuation of some coverage, at least, on retirement.

The union contract has become an increasingly comprehensive, flexible code governing the worker's relationship with his employer and fixing, more firmly than ever before, the union's place in that relationship. But, as we shall see in the final chapter, newer problems are challenging labor and changing the dimensions of the traditional union contract.



16. *The wilderness of change*

ALMOST FROM THE MOMENT the longshoremen and seamen went back to work in 1934, job action—"quickie" strikes—broke out on the docks. Within days of the initial arbitration award, the employers accused the union of repeated violations. The union countered with charges that the employers were hiring nonunion men, maintaining unsatisfactory job conditions. It insisted on slowing down what it called the "speed-up," and eliminating conditions it considered hazardous. The employers accused the union of deliberate slow-downs, of attempting to increase job opportunities at the employers' expense. The employers charged the "radical" and "communistic" leadership of the union with provoking unrest; its goals were dictated, they argued, by political considerations, not trade union purposes. The union accused the employers of ambitions to return to the days of the "Blue Book" union, the speed-up, discrimination, the blacklist. Schneider and Siegel counted four coastwide strikes, more than twenty major port stoppages, and approximately 1,300 local stoppages between 1934 and 1948. There were some 200 arbitration awards.

In 1948, the longshoremen and the waterfront employers, after a 95-day strike, negotiated the so-called "new look" agreement. The absence of many of the old employer faces for the first time since 1934 was one aspect of the "new look." Another was an apparent determination to live together. Grievance procedures were revised. The mass of arbitration awards resulting from years of guerilla warfare were written into the contract or discarded. The concerns that moved them toward the "new look" in 1948—diminishing cargoes and diminishing jobs—came into sharper focus in their 1957 and 1960 agreements on mechanization and modernization ("M&M").

Men and employers on the docks had been faced in the post-World War II years by a virtual revolution in materials handling. Bulk handling of sugar, for instance, reduced the number of men needed to unload a 10,000-ton freighter from 164 to 25, working a forty-hour week. The use of containers multiplied the cargo one man could handle 13 to 18 times. New ship design, new cargo-handling methods, new machinery, new docks held out the hope of continuing gains in productivity and substantial reductions in labor costs. They also



The San Francisco waterfront, scene of pioneering efforts to cushion the impact of the machine on longshore jobs.

threatened to wipe out longshoremen's jobs and restrict their ability to maintain decent job conditions and improving living standards. The "M&M" agreements simply guaranteed that the men, through their union, would share in the benefits of new longshoring methods.

In one fell swoop, the detailed work rules built up over twenty-five years of work stoppages, "quickie" strikes, hours of negotiations and scores of arbitration decisions were discarded. Gone were the double handling of cargo, the job "witnesses"—men who performed no work but only watched, manning scales, first place of rest, and so on. The employer was free to install any machines or methods he chose. The work, however, must be safe. The work of the individual longshoremen could not be made more "onerous." All work, whether by new methods or old, must be done under the terms of the union contract.

In return, the employers guaranteed that no fully registered longshoreman would be laid off as a result of new work methods. Nor would his earnings ever fall below the straight-time wage for a thirty-five-hour week. Older men in the dock force were encouraged to retire. They would receive a so-called "vesting" benefit in addition to their regular industry pension. Similar benefits would go to men who retired because of disability and to the families of men who died before coming into their share of the benefits. The employers pledged a fund of \$29,000,000 for these purposes over the six-year term of the agreement. In their first three years, the "M&M" funds paid some \$9,000,000 in benefits, though not a single penny from the wage guarantee fund. Instead of shrinking the work force, the union and employers found it necessary to add men—the unexpected result of a large number of retirements coinciding with an expansion in cargoes passing over the docks.

The longshoremen and their employers were among the early explorers of a rocky and puzzling area in the nation's (and the state's) economy, sometimes imprecisely summed up as "automation." They tried to cushion the impact of the machine on longshore jobs; they claimed a share of its benefits for the longshoremen. They were not alone in that wilderness area.

A representative of the Cannery Workers unions told a state commission on automation how their jobs were being shrunk by new methods. These included automatic control of operations, automatic handling of materials and products, and the continuous flow of production from raw materials to finished products. Jobs were eliminated but, as a second result, thousands of workers who should have been finding jobs in the industry had been turned away. A spokesman for the Carpenters' unions estimated that using a computer to schedule work on a big construction job can cut manhours by as much as 25 per cent. Even the milkman has been hit. Milk producers

have extended the storage life of milk, opening the way to less frequent deliveries—and fewer jobs. An insurance company executive noted that his firm had cut its bookkeeping staff from 60 to 40 by using data processing machines. The smaller staff turned out two and one-half times as much work. An employer representative told the commission that the problem is “not really one of unemployment so much as it is of nonemployment.” He explained: “It is one thing to have a job and become unemployed from it, it is another thing not to have a job that you can’t become unemployed from . . .”

Other unions, in growing number, have since joined the longshoremen in seeking roads through this wilderness of change. They have devised countless variations on plans for early notice and advance planning of changes, upgrading, retraining, and transfer of workers, work guarantees, incentives to retire, supplemental unemployment insurance, and severance pay schemes. All, in the main, are directed toward easing the effect of the machine on the presently employed. Few such schemes held out hope to the unemployed, to the newcomers to the work force—high school and college graduates (and dropouts, too)—or to the technologically displaced. With growing insistence, unions urge a higher level of economic activity, spurred and maintained by government policy and program. Private plans for adjustment to advancing technology have a vital place but they seldom create any substantial part of the millions of new jobs that are needed. Job creation, as the state commission’s report noted, is especially critical in California because of the rapid growth of its population and of its work force. In the years just ahead, the state is expected to absorb some 1,700 people a day. It will have to accommodate increased numbers of workers at both ends of the age scale as well as more women and more members of minority groups. In recent years, job expansion has not kept up with the growing number of workers; the state’s unemployment rate has been higher than that of the nation as a whole. Unless this trend is reversed, the state can only fall farther behind in the years ahead.

Through these hundred and fifteen years the conflict has focused on union recognition, on collective bargaining. These issues have been resolved in substantial part and for the moment they are stilled—though at any moment they can be, as they have been before, noisily revived. Barring that, the future will be punctuated with the unresolved questions raised in these postwar years: a place and an equitable share in the economy for the farm worker (and for the poor as a group); the challenge to the union movement implicit in the changing texture of the state’s (and the nation’s) economy; labor’s part, labor’s place in this increasingly complex, increasingly technological society.

SOME NOTES ON FURTHER READING

THE PLACE TO START is with Professor Ira B. Cross's admirable *History of the California Labor Movement*. Professor Cross cut the pattern on which so many later, less understanding, less interesting regional histories were modeled. For many of the early years, his is the only general work available. From that point, Mitchell Slobodek's *Selective Bibliography of California Labor History* charts the course. Slobodek's long years of patient work have resulted in a detailed listing—with many useful and appropriate annotations—of most of what a student of California labor history needs to examine. For a quick (not always accurate) look at the early years, see Lucille Eaves' sketch in *A History of California Labor Legislation*.

Several regional histories offer an over-generous abundance of the stuff from which some day a definitive account may be written. They are laboriously researched and infinitely detailed. Unfortunately they also are often dull and pedestrian. I include Stimson, *Rise of the Labor Movement in Los Angeles*; Perry and Perry, *A History of the Los Angeles Labor Movement*; Knight, *Industrial Relations in the San Francisco Bay Area*.

Among the more general histories, I found a great deal in Carey McWilliams' *California: The Great Exception and Southern California Country*. His *Factories in the Fields*, even though outdated now in parts, is vital to an understanding of migratory workers in the Thirties. The interested reader, too, will want to see John Steinbeck's works dealing with farm labor of the period: *The Grapes of Wrath* and *In Dubious Battle*. His short series of newspaper articles, *Their Blood Is Strong*, lays down a quick, dramatic factual base for his novels. In this area, too, I suggest reading Carleton Parker's slim, but valuable, little volume, *The Casual Laborer*. For this period, the voluminous reports of the U.S. Senate's La Follette committee on industrial relations in California offer a mine of invaluable materials.

Beyond these are a seemingly endless series of theses and dissertations. These are mainly for the specialist but in total they represent an enormous resource to the writer interested in piecing together the general story. A number of recorded recollections, taped "living histories," are available; they are valuable and interesting resources. Their greatest defect is that there are not enough of them, over a long

enough period of time, covering a wide enough range of personalities. If today's (and just yesterday's) labor history is to be unearthed from the mass of documentation that threatens to swamp it, a long-range, collecting program of these recollections seems to me necessary.

Indeed, it would be a happy day, I think, if both the academicians and the labor movement gave a little more attention, a little more concern to completing the record for the generations to come. A labor archive, adequately financed, imaginatively staffed, strikes me as a highly useful area of collaboration.