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Chapter Title: Comparison with Bureau of Labor Statistics Estimates of Membership

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TABLE 9. — COMPARATIVE ESTIMATES OF TOTAL CIO MEMBERSHIP, 1949-1955

	Estimate from Table A-2 (1)	Estimate from Per Capita Re- ceipts of CIO (2)	Difference (1) - (2) (3)
1949	4,314,000	3,945,200	368,800
1950	3,712,800	3,470,200	242,600
1951	4,182,900	3,901,900	281,000
1952	4,261,400	4,155,700	105,700
1953	4,837,900	4,384,100	453,800
1954	4,494,400	4,409,500	84,900
1955	4,608,300	4,108,100	500,200

could not be made, however, for inclusion in this paper.

The primary reason for the recent increase in financial sources of information is the Labor-Management Reporting and Disclosure Act of 1959. Under that law, all unions in interstate commerce except those representing government employees and employees of government-owned corporations are required to file financial reports showing, among numerous other items, the receipts from dues.

Under the Taft-Hartley Act (1947), unions wishing to avail themselves of the facilities of the National Labor Relations Board were also required to file financial reports, but these were kept confidential by order of successive Secretaries of Labor. However, after passage of the Labor-Management Reporting and Disclosure Act in 1959, the Secretary of Labor opened these files to the public, and we were enabled to revise and improve many of our figures back to 1948.

Finally, another problem in measuring union membership is the determination of which labor organizations to include. This difficulty applies only to a small number of organizations at this time, but the issue may become more important.

For example, the figures here do not include the membership of the American Nurses Association, a group which has apparently evolved into an agency for collective bargaining. The national endorses bargaining and some of its state units have begun to bargain. Both national and state units also file reports with the Bureau of Labor-Management and Welfare Reports. The membership of the Nurses Association in 1962, estimated from per capita receipts, was 37,000.

Two other large groups which may be moving toward collective bargaining (but are not included in our figures) are the state and local government employee associations. An incomplete survey covering thirty such groups estimated their dues-paying membership at 392,000 as of July 1, 1961.<sup>12</sup>

### III Comparison with Bureau of Labor Statistics Estimates of Membership

The only other estimates of total union membership covering the period since the termination of Wolman's series in 1934 are those of the Bureau of Labor Statistics. These differ from ours in methods of derivation and results.

Two general methods have been used by the BLS. Prior to 1951, the Bureau derived its series by aggregating reports of the AFL and the CIO, to which were added estimates of independent membership derived from a number of sources.<sup>13</sup> Membership by individual union in the BLS series is therefore not available before 1951. Since 1951, the BLS has compiled an annual series on total membership based primarily on replies of individual unions to biennial questionnaires. BLS figures of membership by union became available in 1951 and thereafter in alternate years beginning in 1954.

A comparison in chart 3 and table 10 of our membership series with that of the BLS from 1933 to 1962 reveals that, except in 1933, 1934, 1935, and 1948, the BLS figures are consistently higher. As noted, BLS figures on membership by union which can be examined to account for the wide variations in the two series are available only since 1951. During this period, the

<sup>12</sup> Joseph Krislov, "The Independent Public Employee Association: Characteristics and Functions," *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, XV (July, 1962), 511-512.

<sup>13</sup> See notes to Table E-1 in the *Handbook of Labor Statistics, 1950*, Bulletin 1016, and the *Supplement, 1951* to that handbook. The BLS figures prior to 1935 (extending back to 1897) were derived by combining estimates based upon per capita payments of affiliated unions to the AFL with Wolman's figures for independent unions. Because the per capita payments to AFL generally yield lower estimates than the aggregated reports of individual unions (see section II, above), the BLS series on total membership is lower than Wolman's totals in every year from 1897 to 1922, higher from 1923 to 1932, and lower in 1933 and 1934. Note, however, that the BLS included in the membership of independent unions Wolman's estimates for the Trade Union Unity League, 1929-1934, which Wolman did not include in his totals.

differences in the figures range from nearly 440,000 in 1952 to over 1,700,000 in 1962 (table 10).

TABLE 10.—TWO ESTIMATES OF TOTAL MEMBERSHIP OF AMERICAN TRADE UNIONS, 1933-1962\* (THOUSANDS)

	BLS (1)	NBER (2)	Difference (1) - (2) (3)
1933	2,857	2,973	- 116
1934	3,249	3,609	- 360
1935	3,728	3,753	- 25
1936	4,164	4,107	57
1937	7,218	5,780	1,438
1938	8,265	6,080	2,185
1939	8,980	6,556	2,424
1940	8,944	7,282	1,662
1941	10,489	8,698	1,791
1942	10,762	10,200	562
1943	13,642	11,812	1,830
1944	14,621	12,628	1,993
1945	14,796	12,562	2,234
1946	14,974	13,263	1,711
1947	15,414	14,595	819
1948	15,000	15,020	- 20
1949	15,000	14,695	305
1950	15,000	14,823	177
1951	16,750	15,772	978
1952	16,750	16,310	440
1953	17,860	17,316	544
1954	17,955	16,612	1,343
1955	17,749	16,990	759
1956	18,477	17,383	1,094
1957	18,431	17,687	744
1958	18,081	16,702	1,379
1959	18,169	16,501	1,668
1960	18,117	16,607	1,510
1961	17,328	16,143	1,185
1962	17,630	15,928	1,702

Source: BLS, *Release 60-2402* (Feb. 1960), and *Union Membership, 1962, Summary Release* (Jan. 1964); NBER Table 1.  
\* Membership figures include the members of American unions in dependencies of the United States and Canada.

As table 10 and chart 3 show, not only do the totals differ but also the directions of change often conflict. Thus the BLS figures show decreases in membership in 1955, 1957, and 1960, while ours indicate increases in those years. On the other hand, in 1954, 1959, and 1962, the BLS figure rose while ours declined.

What accounts for these variances? In part, they arise from differences in definition. Basically, the BLS obtained its data from questionnaires which requested the correspondent union to *report the average annual dues-paying membership*, but it is likely that what was reported

was not dues-paying as we have construed the term in this report. (If a union failed to respond, the BLS filled the gap with estimates taken from other sources.) As already noted, since 1950 we have relied primarily on financial reports to obtain dues-paying membership but, like the BLS, used other sources when the necessary information was unavailable.

When the two methods of preparing membership figures are compared for selected unions (chosen because they account for a large proportion of the differences between the two series), the BLS figures are nearly always larger (table 11). It appears that the BLS often obtained membership figures that were rounded upward or inflated for prestige or strategic reasons, or that included members exempted from all or part of their dues because of unemployment, retirement, strikes, or other reasons.<sup>14</sup> Representation figures, which include workers who are not members but are represented in collective bargaining by the union, also appear to be reported to the BLS, and these, too, usually exceed actual membership.

Under the National Labor Relations Act, a union is required to represent all employees in a bargaining unit whether or not they are union members. Twenty states prohibit agreements requiring membership as a condition of employment (right-to-work laws), and in the other thirty there are numerous units which do not contain the union shop. As of 1959, about 20 per cent of workers covered by collective bargaining agreements were not also covered by a union security provision.<sup>15</sup> Consequently, representation figures exceed membership.

On the other hand, membership without union representation is trivial, existing primarily where a union is organizing but has not yet achieved sufficient strength to represent and bargain for the group.

An example of a membership claim which exceeds the dues-paying figure is that reported by the Ladies Garment Workers to the BLS. Typically, the ILG reports its "census" figure as of January 1, rather than an annual average. Moreover, it includes members in addition to

<sup>14</sup> As noted above, our estimates are of the number of full-time dues-paying members.

<sup>15</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Monthly Labor Review* (Dec. 1960), 1349.

TABLE 11.—COMPARATIVE MEMBERSHIP OF SELECTED UNIONS, SELECTED YEARS, 1954-1960 (THOUSANDS)

	1954		1956		1958		1960	
	BLS	NBER	BLS	NBER	BLS	NBER	BLS	NBER
1. Carpenters	804	750	850	836	835	803	800	757
2. Clothing Workers	385	274	385	276	376	269	377	273
3. Communications Workers	300	233	259	251	255	261	260	259
4. Electrical Workers (IUE)	362	282	397	285	278	297	288	291
5. Electrical Workers (IBEW)	630	547	675	624	750	695	771	690
6. Garment Workers, Ladies'	441	387	451	392	443	389	447	393
7. Machinists	864	716	950	771	993	752	898	687
8. Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers	100	70	100	77	100	59	100	54
9. Mine Workers, United *	600	555	600	547	600	431	600	406
10. Steelworkers	1,194	987	1,250	1,004	960	905	1,152	945
11. Textile Workers (Formerly CIO)	293	200	203	197	197	155	192	131
12. Textile Workers (Formerly AFL)	90	50	100	50	46	41	40	40
Total, 12 unions	6,063	5,051	6,220	5,310	5,833	5,057	5,925	4,926
Excess of BLS over NBER figure								
12 unions		1,012		910		776		999
All unions (table 10)		1,343		1,094		1,379		1,510
Per cent accounted for by								
12 unions		75.4		83.2		56.3		66.2

\* Includes District 50.

those paying full-time dues. The Clothing Workers' figures also appear to contain such groups. Similarly, the reports of the Communications Workers until 1956 and the International Union of Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers (IUE) until 1958 were probably representation rather than membership figures. Significantly, in 1958 and 1960, both unions reported figures to the BLS very close to our estimates computed from per capita receipts.

Since our figures are derived with a few exceptions from union per capita receipts, as previously noted, prolonged strikes may reduce a figure to below the actual membership. For example, this may account for the Steelworkers' and IUE's figures for 1952, 1956, and 1959. Thus the steel strike of 1952 may explain part of the decline in the Steelworkers' estimates from 1,003,000 in 1951 to 929,000 in 1952, and the strike of 1959 doubtless accounts for part of the drop from 904,700 in 1958 to 817,900 in 1959. However, the decline of 87,000 in the Steelworkers' membership, 1958-1959, was not large enough to explain the over-all decline in total membership, which slightly exceeded 200,000. Similarly, the sharp rise in the IUE's figures between 1956 and 1957 (from 285,000 to 320,000) may be partially attributed to the termination of a five-month strike at Westinghouse in March 1956.

Differences in coverage account for only minor discrepancies between the series shown in table 10. With the exception of one organization added to the BLS list of national unions in 1960, the Truck Drivers, Chauffeurs and Helpers Union of Chicago and Vicinity (membership for 1960 reported by the BLS as 9,770), both series include the same national and international unions. The new addition came too late for inclusion in our series. On the other hand, our totals include estimates for about fifty local and regional independent unions with a membership of about 140,000, and about half of these are not included in the BLS series.

Organizations excluded by the BLS are those which do not meet its definition of a national union. From time to time, a union qualifies or fails to qualify, and as a result is added to or dropped from the BLS directory. For example, the Industrial Trades Union was reported by the BLS as a national union in its directory covering the year 1951 and then dropped from subsequent directories, although the union continued to function. After 1951, it apparently lost contracts with employers outside the state of Rhode Island (where the union is largely concentrated), and did not meet the BLS definition of a national union.

In contrast, once we obtained information on a union and had some indication that it

continued to function, it was retained in our series. Thus the Industrial Trades Union is included in our series after 1951.

Small discrepancies exist between our series as presented here and those for 1939 and 1953 in *Distribution of Union Membership Among the States, 1939 and 1953*.<sup>16</sup> In Table 1 of that publication, total membership in the United States, excluding Alaska, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, Canal Zone, and Canada, was reported at 6,577,700 in 1939 and 16,217,300 in 1953. If membership in the excluded areas had been included, the figures would have been 6,730,300 in 1939 and 17,147,200 in 1953. The present figures, shown in table 1 of this paper, are 6,555,500 for 1939 and 17,315,600 for 1953.

The reduction of some 175,000 in 1939, or about two per cent of our revised figure, was principally in unions affiliated with the AFL. Total membership in the AFL was recorded at 3,994,500, while the present estimate is 3,878,000, a drop of 116,000. The chief revision was made in the membership of the Carpenters, reducing that union's figure in 1939 from 316,000 (including the Territories and Canada) to 214,800, a reduction of 101,200. The earlier estimate was the figure reported to us in a letter from the union; the later was based on dues receipts.

Our revisions increased the total for 1953 by about 168,000, slightly less than one per cent. Once again, the changes principally affected affiliates of the AFL, but in this instance involved a larger number of unions. For example, the original figure of 100,000 for the Bricklayers was revised on the basis of per capita receipts to 133,500. Similarly, the IBEW was estimated at 547,100 in the earlier report and 568,600 now, while the figure of the Hod Carriers was revised upward from 430,000 to 445,600.

#### IV Need for Improved Statistics on Union Membership

Although statistics on labor organizations are of unquestioned importance, there are not only differences in total membership reported in widely used series but also serious gaps in the data on characteristics of union membership.

Principally, these deficiencies are in the industrial and geographic distribution, and in coverage.

For example, a recent study by H. Gregg Lewis, which endeavored to gauge the impact of unions on interindustry wage structure, was handicapped by the lack of time series on the industrial distribution of union strength. He was forced, he notes, to make his own estimates of extent of unionism by industry from "fragmentary information."<sup>17</sup>

Beginning with 1956, the BLS has published figures biennially of membership by industry, derived primarily from union estimates of the allocation of their membership among industry groups. Since the figures include Canadian members of United States trade unions, comparing them with union membership in the United States would overstate the degree of organization of industry.

Our report on union membership by state for 1939 and 1953 was the first of this type and we have not brought the figures up to date. Subsequently, the BLS began issuing estimates of AFL-CIO membership by state. However, these figures are the unverified claims of state AFL-CIO bodies and, of course, do not include membership of the independents (reported at 3,045,000 by the BLS for 1960). In the absence of a complete and reliable series on union membership by state, it is difficult, if not impossible, to evaluate quantitatively the effect of right-to-work laws on union growth and stability. This is an important public issue in the labor-management field.

Rare and uncertain though the statistics may be on union membership by industry or state, the situation is worse when anyone seeks data cross-classified by industry and state. At present no such figures exist for all states.

In large measure, gaps in total membership and its geographic distribution can be filled in by use of the union financial reports filed with the United States Bureau of Labor-Management and Welfare Reports. While there are nearly 50,000 reports, most of the unions be-

<sup>17</sup> H. Gregg Lewis, "The Effects of Unions on Industrial Wage Differentials," in *Aspects of Labor Economics*, Conference of the Universities-National Bureau Committee for Economic Research (Princeton University Press for National Bureau of Economic Research, 1962), 333.

<sup>16</sup> Occasional Paper 56 (New York: NBER, 1956).