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CHAPTER VII

Centers of Unionism

AMERICAN trade unions, even in the periods of maximum expansion, have included among their members only a relatively small fraction of the organizable employees of the country. The contrast between the growth and extent of labor organization in the United States and in England has long been a subject of wonderment and inquiry. Drawing on a working population less than half that of this country, the English unions had, in 1920, 70 per cent more members than the American, and the English movement has been larger than ours for many years.

The American labor movement, however, has not consisted of numerous small and weak unions evenly distributed over the available fields of employment and of no great significance in any. Organized labor in this country has, on the contrary, been distinguished by striking differences in its position in the industries and employments commonly regarded as susceptible to unionization. The persistent juxtaposition of powerful and weak unions, the phenomenon of thoroughly organized trades and industries with adjacent occupations scarcely touched by organization, and striking geographical differences in the strength of membership have been outstanding features of the labor movement. The strong unions in this country compare favorably in membership and influence with the most powerful labor organizations in other countries. In the last forty years the majority of these have grown

with the rise in employment, have been little affected by ordinary fluctuations in business conditions, and have retreated substantially only in the face of prolonged and severe depression or of more or less permanent decline in employment.

The unions of this class were, before the World War, limited to the transportation, building, printing, and coal mining industries. During the War and the first post-War prosperity unionism spread to the clothing and metal trades, but proved only temporary in the latter. In the decade 1920-30 the same four groups of unions—transportation, building, coal mining, and printing—augmented by the established clothing organizations, constituted the foundation of the American labor movement. Although the coal mining and clothing unions declined during this period they remained among the several strongest groups of organizations. The heavy losses suffered by nearly all unions in these organized industries in consequence of the recent depression and the character of the gains made in 1934 have failed to alter materially the relative position in the entire labor movement of these five groups of unions as a whole although their relations to one another have radically changed since 1932. The extent to which a few groups of unions have dominated organized labor in this country appears from the data in Table 19.

The relative importance of each group in each year, 1897-1934, is shown in the Appendix, Table II. The principles of classification observed when arranging unions in groups are in certain instances necessarily violated. The group of building organizations, for example, includes the entire membership of such unions as the Carpenters and Electrical Workers with membership in manufacturing industries and in railroad shops as well as in building. In the majority of the metal and machinery unions the bulk of

the membership is in manufacturing, while the larger metal unions, like the Machinists and Railway Carmen, are particularly strong in the rail transportation industry. The data for a more refined and more accurate distribution of membership are not available, but the groupings employed reflect accurately enough, if these discrepancies are borne in mind, the relative importance of organized labor in the major categories of industry. If anything, they tend to exaggerate somewhat union strength in manufactures and to minimize it on the railroads.

Except from 1897 to 1899, the mining, building, transportation, clothing and printing unions have constituted more than 60 per cent of the total membership, in good years and bad. In 1929 the proportion exceeded 70 per cent. Throughout most of the period the railroad group has been the largest, usually followed closely by building. By 1910 the clothing unions had passed the printing unions and have retained a superior position ever since. Because the printing unions claim jurisdiction over a small industry that has long been better organized than most, their relative status has suffered from the expansion of organization in the more populous and hitherto less thoroughly organized trades. It is, finally, noteworthy that both the building and transportation unions occupied in 1934 a relatively less prominent place than at any previous time and that the membership of these groups was not in that year much in excess of that of the mining group.

Familiar characteristics of the American political and economic situation help to explain not only the relative weakness of organized labor in this country but also its tendency to concentrate in certain categories of employment. American trade unions have long faced great difficulties in establishing themselves in competitive industries in which business can shift quickly from one part

TABLE 19

MINING, BUILDING, TRANSPORTATION, CLOTHING, PAPER
AND PRINTING UNIONS, MEMBERSHIP EXPRESSED AS
PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL MEMBERSHIP, SELECTED
YEARS, 1897-1934

UNION GROUP	1897	1900	1910	1920	1929	1933	1934
Mining, quarrying and oil	4.7	15.1	12.8	8.7	7.9	11.9	16.0
Building construction	15.1	17.6	21.4	17.6	26.7	19.6	16.7
Transportation and com- munication	26.0	21.8	22.5	24.9	25.9	20.5	17.9
Clothing	3.3	2.9	4.6	7.4	6.3	11.3	11.2
Paper, printing and bookbinding	8.5	5.5	4.2	3.2	4.7	5.1	4.5
Total, above groups	57.6	62.9	65.5	61.8	71.5	68.4	66.3

of the country to another. Many times in the history of labor organizations, unionization of a plant or industrial area has been speedily followed by marked shifts in the localization of industry, by the rise thereafter of unorganized localities, and by the eventual decline of the unionized ones. The whole course of unionism in the manufacturing industries confirms this observation with surprisingly few exceptions. The extent and variety of the continental area of the United States has afforded employers innumerable opportunities to achieve flexibility in costs and operating conditions by moving to new locations and there utilizing hitherto unused supplies of labor. For this reason unions of employees in industries not geographically competitive have on the whole had a larger membership and greater stability than others. They have, also, since 1897 included more than half of all the members of American unions, although the jurisdiction of the strongest does not cover the industries that in this country employ the largest number of workingmen. The data with respect to these unions are presented in Table 20.

The clothing and coal mining unions have since the turn of the century been from time to time exceptions to this generalization. Although the several unions in these industries have shown much less stability than the building, transportation, and printing unions, and have on occasion been nearly wiped out, they have possessed remarkable recuperative powers and for more than two decades now they have succeeded in escaping the fate of the majority of unions in manufacturing industries. The unique position

TABLE 20

BUILDING, TRANSPORTATION, PAPER AND PRINTING,
THEATRE AND MUSIC, TRADE, PUBLIC SERVICE, AND
OTHER SERVICE UNIONS, MEMBERSHIP EXPRESSED
AS PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL MEMBERSHIP, SELECTED
YEARS, 1897-1934

UNION GROUP	1897	1900	1910	1920	1929	1933	1934
Building construction	15.1	17.6	21.4	17.6	26.7	19.6	16.7
Transportation and communication	26.0	21.8	22.5	24.9	25.9	20.5	17.9
Paper, printing and bookbinding	8.5	5.5	4.2	3.2	4.7	5.1	4.5
Theatre and music	1.5	1.1	2.8	2.0	3.9	4.3	3.5
Trade	0.8	2.3	0.7	0.4	0.3	0.2	0.2
Public service	2.5	1.8	2.7	3.2	7.2	10.0	8.3
Other services ¹	0.8	1.3	3.1	2.2	3.2	3.0	3.6
Total, above groups	55.2	51.4	56.4	53.5	71.9	62.7	54.7

¹ Includes hotel and restaurant service, domestic and personal service, and professional service.

occupied by these organizations is in part due to such fortuitous factors as the skill and militancy of the leadership these trades and unions happened to have developed. But in the main it appears to be largely attributable to the relationship that has long prevailed between the coal mining and clothing industries and

the public and the government. In the clothing industries, conditions associated with the sweatshop have for a considerable time been a subject of public interest and concern, and the frequent revolts, organized and unorganized, against the terms of employment of clothing workers have rarely failed to enlist public sympathy and support. The weight of public opinion has frequently been an important, if not decisive, factor in effecting reforms in working conditions and in strengthening organized labor.

Somewhat the same elements have played an equally influential role in determining the status of labor organization in the coal mining industry. But added to these are the sympathy evoked by the hazards of the miner's job and the paralysis of economic life that inevitably follows an effective strike in the industry. The history of labor relations in the coal mining industry, certainly during the last forty years, has been marked by public inquiry and intervention designed to preserve the peace, to improve the standards of work, and to ensure to both employees and industry more stable and profitable conditions. The culmination of these efforts was reached in the thoroughgoing controls set up under the National Industrial Recovery Act and later under the Guffey Act, both of which, as long as they were in effect, promoted the use of collective bargaining and contributed powerfully to the revival of the United Mine Workers. Although these legal protections are now withdrawn, the United Mine Workers has agreements with employers covering well over 90 per cent of the bituminous coal workers and the position of the union is not likely to be questioned until these contracts terminate.

Measured in terms of the number of organizable employees, the unions claiming jurisdiction over workmen in manufacturing have consistently remained the weakest segment of American or-

ganized labor. Omitting the groups with the special characteristics already discussed, i.e., clothing and printing, the rest of the unions in manufacturing constitute, as appears from Table 21, a surprisingly small proportion of the total. They have, furthermore, continually declined in relative importance since 1897, except for the expansion of the metals, machinery and shipbuilding group during the War, and have included since 1920 less than 15 per cent of the membership of all unions. In 1920 and thereafter the percentages exaggerate the membership of this class of unions since the group of metal trades organizations includes several unions—the Machinists, Blacksmiths, Boilermakers, Railway Carmen—many of whose members should properly be classified with the membership of railway unions. It is probably one of the most significant facts concerning union membership in the United States that unions in manufacturing industries should represent so slight a fraction of total membership. While the condition of unions of manufacturing employees is in large measure the result of the powerful forces of geographical competition within this range of industries, special circumstances account for the decline of two groups. In the food, liquor and tobacco group the Federal prohibition law all but destroyed the Brewery Workers Union which has since repeal experienced substantial recovery; and among the glass unions the universal replacement of men by machines has reduced the membership to its present exceedingly low level.

The largest and stablest groups of unions in the American labor movement have until quite recently been composed of craft unions. The relation of craft to industrial unionism in the American labor movement can hardly be determined in a purely statistical manner. The definition of either type of organization is beset

TABLE 21

METAL, TEXTILE, LEATHER AND SHOE, LUMBER, CHEMICAL, CLAY, GLASS AND STONE, AND FOOD, LIQUOR AND TOBACCO UNIONS, MEMBERSHIP EXPRESSED AS PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL MEMBERSHIP, SELECTED YEARS, 1897-1934

UNION GROUP	1897	1900	1910	1920	1929	1933	1934
Metals, machinery and shipbuilding	11.2	9.3	9.2	17.0	6.1	6.1	6.1
Textiles	1.8	0.9	1.0	3.0	1.0	0.5	1.1
Leather and shoes	3.4	1.1	2.2	2.2	1.4	2.6	3.2
Lumber and woodworking	1.2	2.9	1.3	0.5	0.4	0.3	0.3
Chemicals, clay, glass and stone	5.2	3.5	2.8	1.0	1.1	0.9	1.3
Food, liquor and tobacco	10.2	8.0	5.7	3.6	1.9	1.9	2.3
Total, above groups	33.0	25.7	22.2	27.3	11.9	12.2	14.3

with difficulties. Not all industrial unions are equally industrial. The task of organizing and managing an industrial union in coal mining, where the number of separate crafts is limited, is infinitely simpler than in the iron and steel industry where there are highly refined divisions of labor, innumerable subdivisions of crafts, and at the same time sharp differentiation between skilled labor and the semi-skilled and unskilled. For this reason the established craft unions are likely to offer more vigorous opposition to the creation of industrial unions in most manufacturing industries than they did in either coal mining or clothing. Even the rehabilitated Brewery Workers Union, which is one of the oldest industrial unions in the country, was forced recently by the revival of the brewery business to face jurisdictional conflicts with several craft unions.

Whatever the relative merits of these two forms of organization and the outcome of the struggle between them, the membership of craft unions has constituted over many years more than

three-quarters of the total membership of American trade unions. Rough approximations of the actual percentages follow.¹ It should

1914	1920	1929	1933	1934
75	78	83	73	67

be said in explanation of these figures that the drop in 1934 reflects not alone the growth of the industrial unions of miners, and of clothing and shoe workers, but also the failure of the two large groups of craft unions, building and transportation, to participate in the general increase in membership of that year. The coal and clothing unions have reached their maximum potential membership or are close to it. The transportation and building unions, on the other hand, are almost certain to grow again with the expansion of employment in these industries. Unless, therefore, industrial unionism succeeds in penetrating new fields, it is probable that the ratio of industrial to craft membership will before long revert to the levels prevailing prior to 1934.

The condition of the unions comprising the American labor movement, the foregoing discussion should make clear, has been variously influenced by their structure, the economic characteristics of the trades and industries in which they seek members, the attitude of the public and the government towards them, political and social developments, and a multitude of separate and independent factors peculiar often to single organizations. Throughout their history, consequently, groups of unions and individual unions within the groups have pursued highly diverse courses.

¹ The industrial unions whose membership has been subtracted from the total include all mining, clothing and shoe unions, the United Textile Workers, the Amalgamated Textile Workers, the Associated Silk Workers, the Brewery Workers, the Marine and Shipbuilding Workers, the Iron and Steel Workers and the Electrical Industry Employees Union.

Apart from their relations to one another and to organized labor as a whole, some organizations have expanded alike through prosperity and depression, and their relapses have been infrequent and almost imperceptible; others have successively made heavy gains and suffered severe losses but have always retained the nucleus of organization; while still others have failed, even under the most favorable circumstances, to construct the foundations of permanent unionism.

The group of unions least sensitive to the vicissitudes of business has been that of government employees. The unions of employees in public service have steadily increased their membership through prosperity and depression. In 1922 their combined loss was only about 1,000 members, and this was more than made up the following year. These organizations continued to grow after 1923, suffering their next decline only in 1933 when membership dropped nominally. In 1934 the membership of the public service unions was nearly twice that of 1920. The annual membership of the group since 1914 is shown in Table 22 and in Chart 1.

The unions comprising this group are in the main organizations of Federal employees and, of these, the most important and largest are the unions of various classes of postal employees. The membership of the group as presented in Table 22 probably understates both the total membership of public service unions and the amount of its increase in recent years, since many organizations of state and municipal employees for which reliable data are not available are excluded.² The membership of all unions in this group has benefited from the relative immunity of public

² Leonard D. White, *Trends in Public Administration*, Ch. XXI, Recent Social Trends Monograph (McGraw-Hill, 1933).

TABLE 22

UNIONS WITH RELATIVELY STABLE MEMBERSHIP, 1914-1934
PUBLIC SERVICE, PAPER AND PRINTING

YEAR	PUBLIC SERVICE	PAPER, PRINTING AND BOOKBINDING
1914	91,400	111,300
1915	90,500	115,600
1916	96,300	126,100
1917	102,400	137,200
1918	105,200	144,400
1919	137,200	148,000
1920	161,400	164,000
1921	171,800	181,600
1922	170,700	160,500
1923	179,800	150,900
1924	185,000	153,500
1925	192,900	155,700
1926	204,100	157,700
1927	212,500	161,700
1928	224,100	161,900
1929	246,600	162,500
1930	264,100	165,200
1931	275,600	165,500
1932	299,500	160,100
1933	296,300	153,100
1934	298,900	161,700

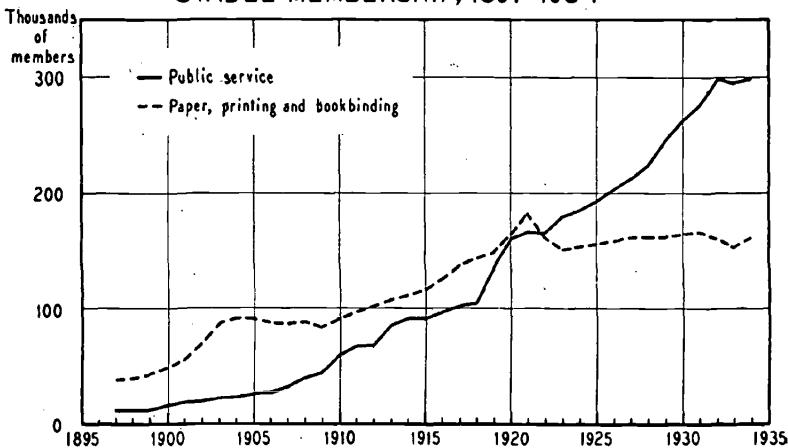
service to unfavorable business conditions in the last several decades and from the development of a more benevolent policy towards the organization of civil servants by the officials of central and local governments.

While no other group of labor organizations in this country has pursued so steady a course as the public service unions, the several organizations of printing employees—the Typographical, Photo Engravers and Printing Pressmens Unions—with jurisdiction over an industry that is in part, at least, reasonably stable in

output and regular in employment have come close to meeting this record. The course of membership of the paper, printing and bookbinding unions is also presented in Table 22 and Chart 1.

In common with all labor organizations the printing and paper unions expanded at an unusual rate during the War years. The membership of this class of union reached its peak in 1921 and

CHART 1
GROUPS OF UNIONS WITH RELATIVELY
STABLE MEMBERSHIP, 1897-1934



declined in 1922 only about 16 per cent. The advance was resumed in 1924 and continued until 1931. By that year these unions had as many members as in 1920 although they were still below their peak of 1921. Their losses during the recent depression were, in comparison with other organizations, slight; and their recovery in 1934 brought them again almost to the level of 1920. Within this group the stablest organizations have been the unions of skilled printing craftsmen; the unions of paper makers have been much more sensitive to changing conditions of business. Since about 1920 the printing unions have had the bulk of their members in newspaper printing offices and have failed to regain

control over employees in the more competitive book and job printing industry. The printing unions proper shared little in the advance in membership from 1933 to 1934; the gain of nearly 9,000 members by the group of paper, printing and bookbinding unions was due almost entirely to the increases in membership of the Paper Makers and Pulp and Paper Mill Workers Unions.

Unions among the skilled employees in the building and rail transportation industries were until this latest depression not only the largest but also among the most stable of American unions. The two groups together have long accounted for a very large proportion of the membership of the entire movement. Even in 1934, after they had suffered severe reverses, their combined membership was 1,249,800, or more than one-third of the membership of all unions. Both groups have since the middle 'nineties been dominated by strictly craft organizations, such as the Locomotive Engineers in transportation and the Bricklayers and Masons in building, which have always constituted an overwhelming majority of their membership. Both also, are composed principally of unions with jurisdiction over the type of industry that is least exposed to the influence on unionism of the geographical competition of industry.

By 1914 the unions in these groups already had more than 1,000,000 members, and by 1920 the number had increased to 2,144,000. Although both groups lost members as a result of the depression of 1921 they still had 1,696,800 members in 1923, and by 1929 their combined membership had risen to 1,811,200. After 1929, they began to lose members heavily until by 1933 they had lost 618,900. Thus while total union membership declined 15 per cent, the group of building construction unions lost 37 per cent and the unions in transportation and communication 32

per cent of their membership. In the face, moreover, of a general recovery of unionism from 1933 to 1934 these two groups together acquired less than 60,000 members. Their annual membership since 1914 is given in Table 23.

The experience of these organizations since the War reflects the influence on union growth of powerful, underlying economic forces. In building, the boom in all sections of the American construction industry resulted in a continuous rise up to 1929 in the membership of the building trades unions above the already relatively high levels of 1923. On the railroads employment declined even during the prosperous 1920's and the membership of the strong railroad unions remained stationary until 1929. Both industries were unusually hard hit by the depression and in neither has the recovery of business since 1933 produced a considerable rise in employment. There is accordingly a close correspondence, as appears from Table 23 and Chart 2, between the membership of the building and railroad unions and the course of building and railroad employment. Between the condition of these unions and of others that have failed to grow since 1933, there is, however, a fundamental distinction: the inability of the railroad and building unions to raise their membership in the last several years is due not to the weakening of unionism in these industries but to the persistence in them of an extraordinarily high rate of unemployment.

Unlike labor organizations in the printing, transportation and building industries and in public service, unions in the mining, clothing and shoe industries, although often strong, have been consistently unstable and their membership has frequently fluctuated within wide limits. These organizations declined over the whole period of the 'twenties and have recorded the most

TABLE 23

BUILDING AND TRANSPORTATION, UNION MEMBERSHIP AND EMPLOYMENT OF WAGE EARNERS, 1914-1934

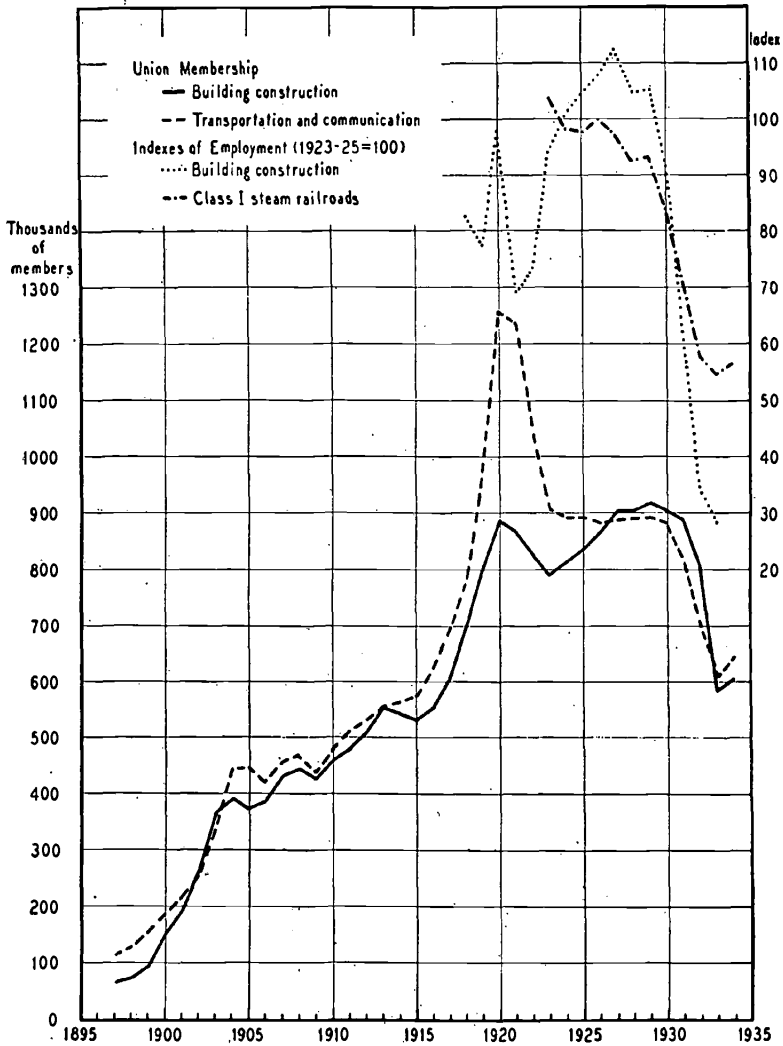
YEAR	UNION MEMBERSHIP		INDEX OF EMPLOYMENT (1923-25 = 100)	
	Building construction	Transportation and communication	Building construction ¹	Class I steam railroads ²
1914	542,000	561,700	...	...
1915	532,700	576,000	...	...
1916	552,900	623,300	...	...
1917	606,500	695,400	...	...
1918	700,600	777,300	82.8	...
1919	801,800	958,800	77.4	...
1920	887,900	1,256,100	98.1	...
1921	869,100	1,239,900	68.6	...
1922	826,300	1,039,000	73.7	...
1923	789,500	907,300	94.1	104.0
1924	814,100	893,200	101.0	98.2
1925	837,000	893,000	104.9	97.8
1926	866,600	884,200	107.9	99.8
1927	902,700	888,700	112.7	97.3
1928	905,000	890,500	105.0	92.7
1929	919,000	892,200	105.1	93.1
1930	904,100	882,400	92.0	83.3
1931	889,500	815,800	59.4	70.6
1932	805,600	698,700	34.8	57.8
1933	582,700	609,300	28.7	54.4
1934	604,600	645,200	...	56.5

¹ Computed from data on the number of wage earners employed in building construction in Ohio, U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Bulletin No. 613*.

² *Monthly Labor Review*, U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

substantial gains since 1933. All are industrial unions and all exist in industries subject to successive and radical changes in the localization of industry. The group of mining unions, 90 per cent of whose membership is in the United Mine Workers, has lost and gained members with the flow of depression and prosperity

CHART 2
UNION MEMBERSHIP AND EMPLOYMENT, 1897-1934



in the industry and with the movement of the coal business from one producing area to another. The fluctuations in the membership of this group are shown in Table 24 and Chart 4.

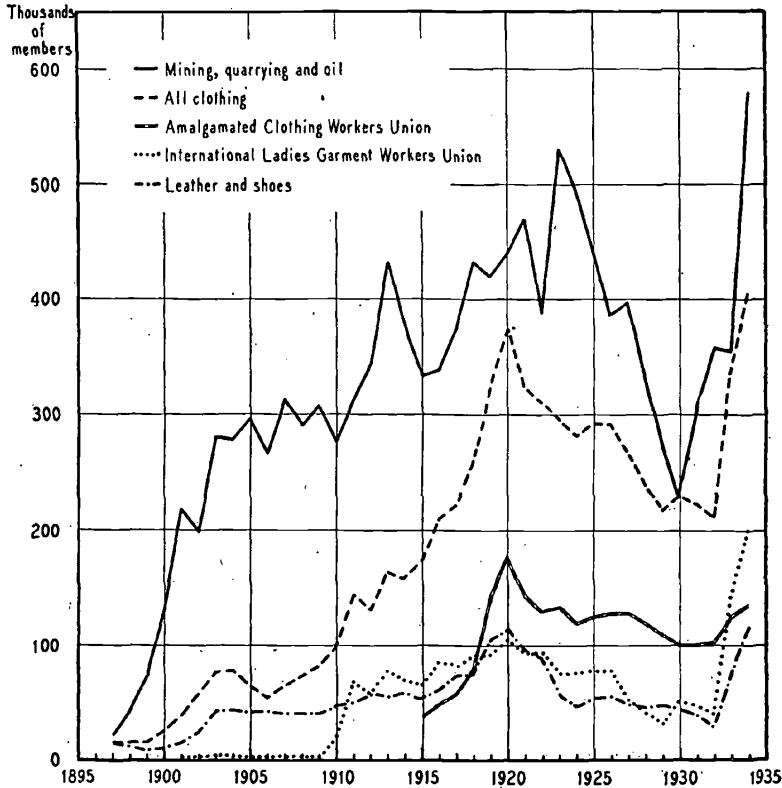
The relation of unionism to the bituminous coal industry is typical of the experience of American unions with the vicissitudes of competitive business. On frequent occasions since 1900 the

TABLE 24
UNIONS WITH RELATIVELY UNSTABLE MEMBERSHIP,
1914-1934
MINING, CLOTHING, LEATHER AND SHOES

YEAR	MINING, QUARRYING AND OIL UNIONS	ALL CLOTHING UNIONS	AMALGAMATED CLOTHING WORKERS	INTER- NATIONAL	LEATHER AND SHOE UNIONS
				LADIES GARMENT WORKERS	
1914	380,200	157,800	.....	69,900	58,000
1915	332,200	173,700	38,000	65,300	52,800
1916	337,600	209,600	48,000	85,100	60,800
1917	373,400	222,400	57,000	82,300	72,800
1918	433,200	257,600	81,000	89,500	74,900
1919	419,100	323,500	144,000	90,500	103,500
1920	438,600	374,500	177,000	105,400	112,900
1921	469,700	323,000	143,000	94,100	96,200
1922	386,600	310,000	130,000	93,900	90,200
1923	529,600	295,200	134,000	75,700	55,900
1924	493,200	281,500	120,000	76,000	46,600
1925	439,400	291,800	125,000	77,300	54,200
1926	385,600	291,600	128,000	78,100	54,900
1927	396,700	266,600	129,000	53,300	49,000
1928	333,400	238,700	120,000	40,000	45,200
1929	270,800	218,100	110,000	32,300	46,600
1930	229,800	229,900	100,000	50,800	44,300
1931	309,200	223,900	100,000	47,500	38,500
1932	356,800	211,000	102,000	40,000	28,700
1933	354,600	336,100	125,000	145,800	76,000
1934	579,100	404,700	135,000	200,000	117,200

coal miners union succeeded in establishing itself in unorganized coal fields and in consummating union agreements with the coal operators. But under the stress of unfavorable economic condi-

CHART 3
GROUPS OF UNIONS WITH RELATIVELY
UNSTABLE MEMBERSHIP, 1897-1934



tions the business moved to areas free to change the rate of wages and standards of working conditions, and the unionized sections either repudiated their union contracts or lost a considerable share of their business. Thus,

“the union made very substantial gains during the World War, only to

lose them during the post-War depression. In 1919, a year when the union was fast approaching the height of its power, it was estimated that approximately 72 per cent of the total supply of bituminous coal was produced under union contracts. Six years later, at the close of 1925, the proportion of the unionized operations had dropped to 40 per cent. In the latter year, the non-union mines accounted for at least 93 per cent of the coal produced in West Virginia, 98 per cent in Kentucky, and 90 per cent in Tennessee. The union's ineffectiveness south of the Ohio River has resulted in a further reduction of organized strength throughout the old established union areas. In the spring of 1927 the compact in the Central Competitive Field and wage contracts in many of the outlying districts were discontinued. Pending a general settlement, local agreements were negotiated between limited numbers of operators in certain areas."³

These measures failed to stem the tide of union decline and disorganization. By 1930 the union had only 221,700 members. Since a large proportion of these were anthracite miners, the United Mine Workers was all but wiped out in the soft coal industry. The spectacular recovery since 1930 is in part a reaction against the low state into which working conditions in this industry had fallen. But it is to a much greater degree the effect of the measures of control over prices and output involved in the code of fair competition of the National Recovery Administration and the provisions of the Guffey Act, which have for a time, at any rate, converted a competitive industry into a regulated one and subjected collective bargaining to governmental control.

Much the same factors explain the history of the clothing unions. Since 1910 the two largest organizations in this industry—the International Ladies Garment Workers and the Amalgamated Clothing Workers—have under militant leadership launched vigorous and often successful organization campaigns against un-

³ Waldo E. Fisher and Anne Bezanson, *Wage-Rates and Working Time in the Bituminous Coal Industry, 1912-1922* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1932), p. 26.

organized firms and districts. From time to time both unions have had the major sections of the men's and women's clothing industries under contract. Under the pressure of competitive conditions new centers of business have rapidly developed, the old, established districts have languished, and the unions have lost much of their membership and control. This was the history of these two organizations after 1920. The Amalgamated lost more than 70,000 members from 1920 to 1930 and the localization of the men's clothing industry was radically changed as employers or the business shifted from union to non-union areas. In the women's clothing industry the combination of non-union competition and an internal conflict between left- and right-wing factions in the union brought the membership of the Ladies Garment Workers in 1929 down to 32,300. As in the United Mine Workers, the turn in membership of these unions preceded the recovery of employment and was due to organizing activities of extraordinary vigor and skill. Movements in the membership of the clothing unions are shown in Table 24 and Chart 3.

The striking feature of the changes in membership within the clothing workers group in the last few years is the steep ascent of the International Ladies Garment Workers. In 1934 it had the largest membership in its history and claimed almost twice as many members as in 1920. This unusual gain arose mainly from the extension of organization into the women's dress industry which had hitherto been hardly organized at all. In this industry, as in less degree in the men's clothing industry, the operations of the National Recovery Administration were the prime factors in effecting unionization. The terms of the codes covering the several parts of the women's clothing industry, the effectiveness of the NRA label, and joint action between the union and a

majority of employers directed towards the regulation of competitive trade practices resulted in a degree of organization that neither business prosperity nor union activity had before been able to accomplish.

The leather and shoe unions have pursued much the same course as the clothing and mining unions. According to the data in Table 24 the membership of this group began to recover in 1933. In 1934 it had more members than in 1920. The increase took place almost entirely in the membership of the shoe unions, since organizations of leather workers are few and small. In the boot and shoe industry national unions independent of the American Federation of Labor and scattered independent local unions have played an important part since the War. During the depression an independent organization sponsored by the Communists collected a substantial number of members in Brooklyn and New York City. In the interest of unity several of the independent unions with membership largely in Massachusetts and the communist unions in New York amalgamated into a new organization known as the United Shoe and Leather Workers, which in 1934 claimed a membership of 53,500. At the same time the old Boot and Shoe Workers Union, affiliated with the American Federation of Labor, reported a substantial increase in membership. The membership of other new independent unions, organized in 1933 and 1934, together with the increases claimed by these two larger organizations, account for the rise from 1932 to 1934 of close to 90,000 in the group of shoe and leather unions.

Of the remaining groups of organizations, the textile and metal and machinery unions are perhaps the most striking examples of the instability of important American unions and of their inability to keep a foothold in geographically competitive industry.

In contrast with the organizations already considered these groups of unions have, except during the several years of War and post-War boom, always included but a small fraction of the organizable employees in the industries subject to their jurisdiction. The textile unions, which lay claim to industries employing perhaps 1,000,000 workers, have never, except during the brief periods of widespread strikes, had more than 150,000 members; and this number, which was the claimed membership of all textile unions in 1920, was probably a considerable overestimate. The number of organized employees decreased steadily after 1920 and fell in 1933 to 16,100—a very low figure indeed in terms of the number of employees in the cotton, silk, wool, and rayon textile industries of this country. Membership for each year, 1914–34, is recorded in Table 25 and Chart 4.

Except during several years around 1920, when an independent national union—the Amalgamated Textile Workers—grew by leaps and bounds and then dissolved in consequence of the depression of 1921, the United Textile Workers has been the largest and most important union in the textile group. The others are small and isolated craft unions, many of which have either been absorbed into the United Textile Workers or have declined with the obsolescence of their crafts. In spite of numerous, spirited efforts to unionize the industry under its jurisdiction, the United Textile Workers has failed to establish a continuing organization. A serious obstacle in its path has been the severe competition for markets among the various textile fabrics and a great movement of the cotton textile industry from the partly organized North to the wholly unorganized South. Between 1921 and 1933 the number of wage earners in the cotton textile mills of New England

TABLE 25

UNIONS WITH SMALL PROPORTION OF POTENTIAL
MEMBERSHIP, 1914-1934

TEXTILES AND METALS

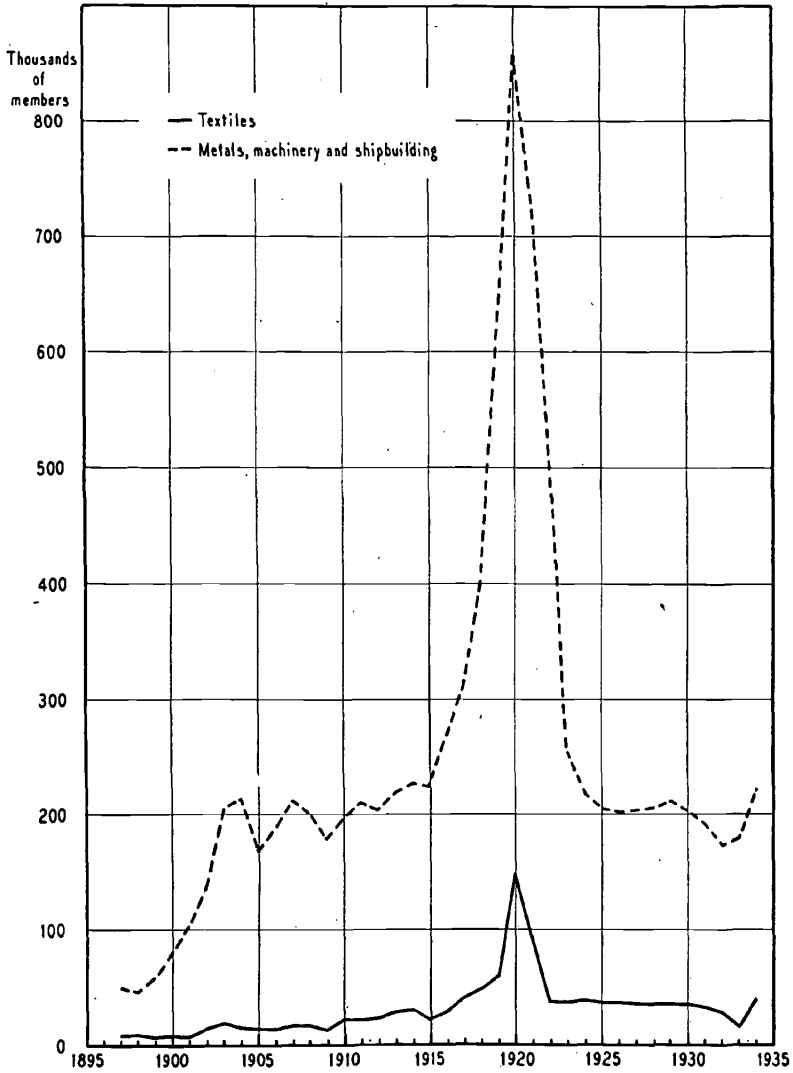
YEAR	TEXTILES	METALS, MACHINERY AND SHIPBUILDING
1914	29,900	225,900
1915	22,400	224,200
1916	28,900	267,100
1917	40,600	309,700
1918	49,400	396,200
1919	59,800	617,500
1920	149,100	858,800
1921	88,200	728,300
1922	36,900	505,800
1923	37,300	257,100
1924	37,600	218,300
1925	36,500	204,800
1926	35,500	201,800
1927	35,200	203,700
1928	35,300	204,900
1929	35,300	211,400
1930	35,300	202,800
1931	34,100	190,600
1932	28,600	173,300
1933	16,100	179,600
1934	39,800	221,800

declined from 186,000 to 91,000, in the South their number increased from 179,000 to 257,000.⁴

Since 1929 the United Textile Workers have made desperate efforts to organize the southern industry and have several times directed organizing campaigns against large textile areas in both the South and North. These activities culminated in the general

⁴ *Report on the Cotton Textile Industry*, Senate Doc. No. 126, 74th Cong., 1st Sess., p. 52.

CHART 4
GROUPS OF UNIONS WITH SMALL PROPORTION
OF POTENTIAL MEMBERSHIP, 1897-1934



strike in the autumn of 1934 during the course of which many mills over the country were shut down and a substantial number of new members joined the union. For the fiscal year ending August 31, 1934 the reported dues-paying membership of the textile unions was 39,800. While this is more than double the membership of the preceding year, it is still small. There is reason to believe, however, that this figure minimizes the present strength of the United Textile Workers. This organization, in addition to being a national union, is also a species of federation and as such is the parent body of two unions—the American Federation of Silk Workers and the American Federation of Hosiery Workers—whose membership is included in this study with that of the United Textile Workers. The silk and hosiery workers claimed in 1934 approximately 10,000 and 45,000 members respectively. Allowing for some exaggeration in these claims it is not improbable that the membership of 79,200 reported by the United Textile Workers for the fiscal year ending August 31, 1935⁵ comes close to reflecting its present strength.

The group of metal, machinery and shipbuilding unions is the most heterogeneous of all. In 1934 it included fifteen separate craft organizations and three industrial unions claiming jurisdiction in nearly all manufacturing industries, on the railroads, in mining, and in many service occupations. In view of the range of its jurisdiction its membership is exceedingly slight. By 1920, under the favorable influence of the expansion of war industries and a friendly public policy towards collective bargaining, the membership of the group rose to 858,800 and it became the third largest group in the American labor movement, with only 30,000

⁵ Report of the A. F. of L. Executive Council to the 55th Annual Convention, October 7, 1935, p. 11.

fewer members than the building trades unions. In the next four years practically all the gain was lost and the group faced a decline in membership that brought it in 1932 well below 200,000. While it gained members in 1933 and 1934, the total membership of the group in 1934 was less than in 1914. Annual membership is shown in Table 25 and Chart 4.

The future position of all these groups of unions is dependent upon the success of current organizing activities in the mass production manufacturing industries of the country and upon the satisfactory composition of jurisdictional disputes between the old national craft organizations and the young 'local federal labor unions' and the new national unions growing out of them. The drive for membership that began in the summer of 1933 has had as its objective the unionization of the hitherto unorganized large manufacturing industries—steel, automobiles, rubber, aluminum, cement and the like. In the prosecution of these campaigns, the directly affiliated 'local federal labor unions' have so far proved the favorite organizing instrument of the American Federation of Labor. With the multiplication in the number of these organizations and the exertion of increasing pressure by them for independent existence and broad jurisdictional rights, the conflict between craft and industrial unions has been brought to a head, and to the extent to which the dispute remains unsettled the chances for the establishment of continuing organization in this class of industry are jeopardized.